

SOWK3310 Social Welfare Administration

Plans effectively with service users:

Taking distinctive characteristics of human service organizations into account

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Planning refers to the process of formulating strategies and actions to achieve certain desirable goals for the service users and organizations. In planning, future situations are being anticipated and projected to facilitate the determination of the courses of action articulating particular objectives (Kvedaravicius, 2006). In some sense, planning could be interpreted as rational decision making for the future behaviors of an organization. While the importance of user participation in planning is in increasing trend, this article firstly discusses the nature planning and its significance to human service organizations in the contemporary welfare service environment, then illustrates the importance and inadequacy of user involvement in planning, and finally propose suggestions for human service organizations to perform the user participation in planning most effectively.

Nature and significance of planning

The nature of planning in management is identified into 4Ps: primacy, purposiveness, prediction and pervasiveness. Planning is a primary management function with the highest priority in the management process (Yan, 2007). With the establishment of objectives which demand all group efforts, planning precedes and acts as the foundation for other management functions perform in an organization despite the fact that all functions are interdependent in the system of action. The product of planning underlies clear direction for the organizational practice and development as well as the controlling tactics which reassure the action path.

As mentioned, establishment of objectives is the core concern in planning. This demonstrates the purposive nature of planning. Planning in human service organization always start with the environmental screening, in another word, the assessment of community needs and visions of desire future state (Lewis, Lewis and Packard, 2007). Social problems as well as the solutions to the problem are identified in the planning; if there is currently use strategies

for tackling the social problems, their inadequacies, namely the service gaps of human service organization, are to be recognized. Analysis of community needs and opportunities specifically provides clear vision for developing the organizational goals with the purpose of promoting social change or maintain status quo (Brody and Nair, 2014).

Meanwhile, Knootz, O'Donnell and Weihrich (1984) emphasized that plans "can forecast which actions will tend toward the ultimate objective" and "which are merely irrelevant" (p.157). The predictive nature of planning is basically found on its analysis of internal and external risk factors, which also highlight rationality as the key for making predictions in planning (Long, Tice and Morrison, 2006; Bryson, 1994). To be rational, SWOT analysis, as known as resources audit and situational analysis, are often used for examining internal strengths and weakness as well as external opportunities and threats (Brody and Nair, 2014). A matrix is formulated for managers to generate strategies using strengthens to take advantage of opportunities and minimize threats while improve weaknesses by taking advantage of opportunities and to avoid threats (Bryson, 1994). Employing evidence-based predictions echoes to the feasibility of organisational vision and mission by illustrating a more holistic picture for planning.

Pervasiveness is possibly the most critical nature of planning. It implies that all managers of an organization have shared responsibility of planning despite the variations in latitude of discretion (Mukherjee and Basu, 2005). More personnel involved in planning manifests different approaches and styles of planning due to different concerns of managers. The large crew contributes to the complexity and prudence of planning function which are the common limitations observed in planning.

Planning is essential for the operation of human service organizations in contemporary welfare service environment. The ever-changing social environment creates uncertainty for service needs (Brody and Nair, 2014) which poses potential turbulences in human service provision. Nevertheless, the prospect of social changes is foretold from the predictive nature of planning which minimizes the influence of environmental uncertainty to the organization (Liao, 2010). It does not necessary mean to maintain the status quo in the society, however, to map the coping tactics for offsetting uncertainties or even actively address social changes for clientele's good are the ultimate significances of planning. Continuous cycle of planning, controlling, feedback and adjustment on the plan is required for ensuring the right path of service provision.

Moreover, human service organization is also a kind of business relies on financial sources for its operation. Governmental lump-sum and private funders' funding are the major financial supports for human service organizations since the implementation of Lump Sum Grant Subvention System (LSGSS) in 2001 (Social Welfare Advisory Committee, 2011). Both of them quest for aligning organizational and program planning with achievement of social good wills identified by the government and the funders respectively. For this notion, human service organizations are expected to have strategic planning which demonstrates both efficiency, the balance between inputs and outputs (Martin and Kettner, 1996), and effectiveness of their services. In short, unsatisfactory or ineffective planning may, to a large extent, result in losing financial assistant. While researches showed that well planning positively associated with effective outcomes and efficiency (Liao, 2010), the significant of planning has been boosted for human service organizations in sustaining their development.

Significance of user participation in planning

Apart from traditional sense of planning by managers, user participation in planning has undoubtedly become a call for human service organizations. Leung (2011) stated that user participation has turned into indication of service quality which its demonstration is imperative for the continuation of funding support. From Hong Kong example of the Service Performance Monitoring System (SPMS), it has brought customer-focused welfare services to light which stressed on involving services users in the schedule of planning and performance monitoring (Social Welfare Department, 2012). Literally, user participation corresponds with the social work virtue of self-determination (Social Workers Registration Board, 2010) which acknowledges the importance of users' autonomy in decision making about the goals services available for them. It also represents the value of human service organizations in respecting the inherent dignity and worth of the service users, emphasized by the National Association of Social Workers (2017). Service users are believed to be rational principals and agents who contribute to the enhancement in organizational accountability when their rights to voice and needs are addressed in planning (Ranson and Stewart, 1994; Harris, 1999) while their service-recipients experience may help draw strategies for a more person-centered service provision. This illustrates the generic significance of user participation in organizational planning.

However, although human service organizations in contemporary welfare service environment are supposed to make effort to foster user participation in their performance of service planning, many organizations are observed to have shallow deep involvement of users. Leung's study (2011) found that in Hong Kong "the mode of user participation in the welfare service sector does not go beyond the consumerist notion of consultation" in the ladder of participation. Eight rungs of citizen participation which represent the degree of power redistribution was identified by Arnstein (1969) from her experience with federal social

programs as examples. The first two rungs, manipulation and therapy, are regards as non-participation, follow by the three degrees of tokenism (informing, consultation, placation) and three degree of citizen power, namely partnership, delegated power and citizen control. Consultation refers to a participatory mode that participants cannot authorize the decision-making power even though they have a voice and are heard; in short, it represents an advisory process. Despite the fact that no logical progression is portrayed from one level to another nor one building to another (Connor, 1988), tokenism of consultation simply suggests the symbolic effort made by the organizations to be inclusive for service users in organizational management. Officials in such organizations would have the right to accept or reject the views expressed by the service users (Connor, 1988). Even worse, they would have possibility to manipulate the users' participation in terms of their opinions (Harrison and Mort, 1998) which means they may "play the user card" when they are in agreement with the user group but challenge users' legitimacy and representation when they disagree with the service users (Barnes, Harrison, Mort and Shardlow, 1999; Harrison and Mort, 1998; Leung, 2011). The perfunctory user participation in planning may induce a false picture of service needs and pseudo social environment, and hence leads to ineffective planning for management.

Inadequacy of user participation in planning

To grasp the insufficient user participation in planning, the reasons for such phenomenon should be taken into account. Three causes, from cultural, organizational and individual strata, were identified for explaining the situation of users' involvement in planning process.

In the cultural stratum, neoliberalist ideology is widespread in the current social welfare agenda where privatization and contracting out of social services is in trend (Social Welfare

Department, 2018; Tse, 2010). For instance, the Hong Kong government introduced competitive bidding, on a price and quality basis, in welfare services while re-engineered the elderly home help teams into separate meal and home care service contracts (Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services, 2001). The ideology delivers a message for human service organizations that the main locus of planning shall be business planning which emphasizes efficiency (Tsui and Cheung, 2004) rather than effectiveness of service. For this notion, planning in human service organization is seen as a total different function to its original significance of promoting better social conditions or changes, scilicet function of social action/advocacy. Whereas social action and advocacy concern about solidarity participation of the concerned population (Rothman, 2007), the binary differentiation (*what is the binary differentiation referring to?*) resulted in negligence of user participation in planning.

In organizational stratum, professionalism in the human service organization imposes professional skepticism and pessimism on users' competence. Austin (2002) claims that "production of human services depends heavily on service specialists who are members of organized professions" (p.45), shows stress on the authority of bureaucratic administration, the professionalization of decision making and the reliance on expert knowledge systems (Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2016). In view of professionals, the deficient perspective of practice is yielded in the idiosyncrasy of human services. Leung (2011) discovered that the orthodox "deserving" and "astray" division in evaluation of service users is still prevailing in the contemporary human service organizations. Similar perception on both deserving and astray clientele is drawn: the incapability in making organizational decisions. Reservation of the practitioners is observed in believing service users have full competence to make rational decisions, assuming the users' personal interests may take precedence over public interest

(Leung et al, 2013). Professional is somehow interpreting a sense of objectivity in management. While human service professions remain affirmative on having respectful attitude towards service users' involvement, it may not associate with concession to their views due to the fact that professional hegemony is hardly forbidden (Leung, 2011).

In individual stratum, unsatisfactory user participation in planning may be induced by lack of participatory incentives for service users. Previous studies have lied evidence for the positive relationship between users' length of stay in service and degree of inclusion in organization decision making (Leung, 2011). In another word, the longer the service users stay, the higher possibility that they will participate in organizational planning. Although tokenism is criticized, user participation in organizational management which bears decision-making power is more likely to be observed from dependent clientele, for example, people with disabilities and the elderly, who have prolonged service consumption. It is reasonable to believe that the longer staying in the service would lead to accumulation of vast service experience, hence, service users' participation in planning is legitimized (Leung, 2011). However, the finding is based on the presumption that service users have developed sense of belongingness or ownership to the human service organizations. In views that contemporary service users are popularly framed as "customer" in the market (Leung, 2002; Tsui and Cheung, 2004), where natural citizen entitlement of rights of participation is undervalued by the market situation (Adams, 1996; Clarke and Newman, 1997), added with the influence of pathological welfare model which urges short-term service engagement, most of the service users fail to stimulate their sense of ownership to the service organizations. Besides, professionalism causes the subordinate relationship between service provider and service users. Exemplified by the experience of service users in Community Oriented Mutual Economy project, even though co-delivery mode of participation (Social Work Department,

2014) is exercise in ways that users can assist in shop-keeping, liaising and routine function of the service unit, their opinions are often voiced without proper following-up responses.

The recurrent irresponsible articulation of users' involvement hinders users' further participation in co-management and co-governance, which refer to decision making regarding implementation of services and strategic planning for service provision and organizational development respectively (Social Work Department, 2014). In return, a vicious cycle of non-participatory service planning is produced.

Suggestions for effective performance of user participation in planning

Sorkin, Ferris, and Hudak (1984) proposed that effective organization of the strategic planning process is contingent on the involvement of service users. In Julian and Lyons (1992) suggestion of evaluative criteria for strategic planning, user participation in planning, which is vital for stakeholder involvement, emphasis on strategic thinking, building consensus and exercise of collective power, are highlighted in among the seven criteria. This implies that user participation in planning is indispensable for attaining effective function of planning. More than that, distinctive characteristics of human service organizations ought to be taken into consideration for performance of effective planning.

In regard to the mentioned problems obstructing effective planning which substantial user participation is treasured, three layers of interventions are recommended as following.

For individual layer, a board of executive committee consists a proportion of representatives of service users should be added into formal organizational structure. Noted with the unavailability of financial benefits as incentives for user participation (Austin, 2002; Weinbach and Taylor, 2011), users' motivations to participate in organizational planning shall

be transcribed in alternative approach which visibility in leadership positions is a proper form of reward (Austin, 2002). Election system shall be implemented for selection of the representatives not only ensuring representation of the user committee, but also acknowledging the spirit of democracy which is coherent with social work empowerment value (Hardina, 2005; Tsui and Cheung, 2000). Hence, reputation and leadership could be treated as motivational factors for improving user participation in planning. Moreover, management training for users in advance of the implementation of representative system is needed so as to increase the accountability of users' voice and decision-making confidence (Leung et al, 2013). In fact, there is undeniable constituency conflicts in every human service organizations (Weinbach and Taylor, 2011) which refer to the difficulties in balancing public benefits and private benefits. In light of that, the elected representative system may help strike a balance between service specialists concerns and service users' interests. Furthermore, the suggested system matches with the delegated power as well as partnership along the ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969). This indicates the organizational and managers' trustful relationship with the service users and respect to their entitlement, which may contribute as psychological motivator for users' inclusion in planning (Leung, 2011).

In organizational layer, practitioners' awareness on strength perspective should be enhanced. The moral decisions and mixed-goods benefits feature the unavoidable environmental dependency and production variability of human service organization (Austin, 2002). This unequivocally shows that the effective service planning and its implementation can bring along positive individual and social influence whilst ineffective planning where false social picture is drawn can be destructive. As a prevention for the unfavourable consequences, integrated organizational expectations could be sketched from experience-based planning approach. Experience-based planning is different from gathering opinions from service users

by its bottom-up nature in planning (Bate and Robert, 2007). It emphasizes on capturing narrative experience of frontline service practitioners as well as service users instead of power-inclined opinions in decision-making process. Mutual understanding between users and practitioners is to be developed upon eliminating unwarranted assumptions through narratives of experience (Point of Care Foundation, 2017). Service users', including the stray group's, full competence of sharing their experience is recognized because they hold autonomy of their experience. By utilizing users' and practitioners' experience of service delivery, genuine social effects of the service planning can be obtained which facilitate the reliability and effectiveness of organizational planning. For example, the ex-substance abusers may recite and contextualize their experience in drug rehabilitation services to identify what service elements triggered the particular experience, both positive and negative. In this approach, co-production with service users could inform the space of improvement in service planning for compassing the accurate direction to achieve the ultimate goal of the human service organization.

In macro social level, advocacy for empowerment should be taken as the common mission of all human service organizations. The aim of enhancing user participation in planning is for better service delivery and problem-solving decisions; the most significant representation of an effective planning is the elimination of unfavourable social problem. Noticing the moral dilemma of human service organizations that "if the problems address were ever eradicated, financial support would be withdrawn" (Tsui and Cheung, 2009: p. 150), alternative glasses should be put on in viewing the eradication of social problems. In fact, the service user withdrawal from the service does not necessary mean the termination of service cycle. In contrast, they are resourceful assets which contains full potential of empowerment.

Transformation from service recipients to service providers, as known as agents who

promoting better social environment, should be precious. While empowering approach requests for involvement of both clientele and staff in organizational decision making (Hardina, 2005; Hardina, Middleton, Montana and Simpson, 2007), recruiting user participation in planning provides a notable platform for empowering service users. This measure is a cultural approach in contending with the neoliberalist ideology.

Conclusion

All in all, apart from the fact that planning established the foundation for other management functions, planning essentially help cope with ever-changing social environment and sustain the lifespan of a human service organization. Therefore, attention should be paid on to the significance of effective planning. Meanwhile, with greater significance of user participation in decision making and performance monitoring, human service organizations are striving to have better articulation of clientele involvement in its planning process. I proposed three layers of interventions tackling the evaluated insufficiencies of user participation in planning.

Making reforms and improvements on the basis of current inadequacies take time and appreciable amount of inputs. Nevertheless, if human service organizations successfully obtained general consensus by mobilizing user participation and empower their service users, long-term benefits from the political influence of its members, achieving greater influence in the community and the ability to lobby for additional resources are foreseeable (Checkoway and Zimmerman, 1992; Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1998).

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<i>Assessment area</i>	<i>Assessment standard</i>	<i>Grade</i>
<i>Knowledge (40%)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Able to employ relevant concepts and theoretical knowledge to formulate the discussion</i> - <i>Demonstrate accurate understanding of relevant concepts and theoretical knowledge</i> 	<i>A</i>
<i>Analytic vigor (40%)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Able to make critical appraisal of theoretical knowledge and its application</i> - <i>Able to connect theoretical knowledge with past experiences and encounters to enrich understanding of management practices in welfare context</i> - <i>Able to make strong and logical arguments in the discussion</i> 	<i>A</i>
<i>Writing quality (20%)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Able to maintain logical flow in the discussion</i> - <i>Demonstrate proficiency in language use</i> - <i>Appropriate and extensive use of literature</i> 	<i>A</i>
<i>Total:</i>		<i>A</i>

This is a very well-written and original paper, drawing on extensive literature to lay out your argument systematically. I enjoy reading it.

Very well done. Congratulations!!

Terry