PREREQUISITES FOR THE APPLICATION OF INNOVATIVE METHODS IN SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract. *This article analyzes that when solving social problems, most welfare states choose a social security system model in which social service organizations provide professional services and help ensure the well-being of residents in the community. Social challenges require changes and new solutions in the activities of organizations providing social services, which can help solve emerging social problems by offering service recipients new forms of social services. The purpose of the article is to reveal the prerequisites for the application of innovative methods for the solution of social problems and the implementation of the application of new managerial practices in organizations providing social services. Applied research methods - analysis of scientific literature, interviews of social workers, analysis and interpretation of research results. The article provides a review of the scientific literature and research data that reveal the desire of social workers to apply modern technologies in social work, which help to discover new work methods and managerial practices in the social services sector. The pursuit of innovation in organizations providing social services ensures a favorable atmosphere for the creativity of employees and service recipients and provides an opportunity for the continuous improvement of employees in the organization.*
Keywords*: innovations, organizations providing social services, social services.*

Introduction

Each organization has its characteristics: conception, process, culture, practice, and capabilities. From these characteristics, it is recognized that it is an organization, regardless of whether it operates in the public or private sector. A crucial element of an organization is innovation, without which new developments will not be implemented, new challenges will not be raised, ideas will not be generated, and the organization will not be modern and contemporary, lacking novelty. Organizations providing social services, addressing social issues and seeking to ensure community welfare, strive to provide professional social services by choosing a model of social protection system. Research conducted by (Birdi, Leach, & Magadley, 2016) shows that individual factors greatly influence idea generation, while internal and external factors influence its implementation. Spencer's set of leadership competencies influences the implementation and

generation of ideas: external environmental factors, followed by support and external environmental endorsement (Spencer, 2003). Demircioglu suggests that organizational innovativeness involves an idea, a new product, a new method, a new service, a new process (Demircioglu , 2016).

The most widely used definition of „innovation" was proposed by J.Schumpeter 1934 (2008) (Croitoru (2012), which is „*the commercialization of all new combinations based on the application of new materials, a new supply source, a new production method, a new product, a new market, or a new organizational approach*." Schumpeter identified five types of innovations: new or improved products, new production methods, new markets, new sources of production factors, and new organizational methods. Schumpeter's definition indicates that innovations depend not only on new inventions but also on the organization of implementation processes at the organizational level. Numerous studies have been conducted to successfully define the innovation process, and classical innovation research is related to product and process innovations (Salter & Alexy, 2014). In scientific literature, innovations are associated with novelty – a new phenomenon and activity in implementing innovations. Kotler (2011) suggests that an organization implementing innovations must define and assign roles to specific individuals and, having set goals, resources, and deadlines, allow them to interact freely in the creative process. Mumford and Gustafson (1988) argue that „*the innovation process begins with individuals' creativity, so the generation of new ideas is a cognitive process within the individual, albeit stimulated by the interaction process.*" It can be said that the individual is the main driving force capable of initiating new, innovative processes within the organization, thus the leadership position is particularly relevant when implementing a quality management system in the SPT organization, considering the rapidly changing society and organization (Souba, 2014). According to West and Richter (2008), implementing innovations requires changing existing structures, routines, and environments, which can lead to resistance and conflicts within the organization. Therefore, the manager must understand that the implementation process is a continuous effort requiring new decisions in management. The authors identify several important factors that help both the manager and the group to commit to the vision, participate in decision-making, manage conflicts, support innovations, ensure safety and trust, and be flexible. Kautz and Larsen (2000), based on Rogers (1983), argue that individuals (adopters) must go through five stages when implementing innovations: knowledge (understanding how the innovation works), persuasion (forming an opinion about the innovation being implemented), decision (making the decision to implement it), implementation (finding means and ways to implement the innovation), and confirmation (determining and confirming that the implemented innovation is appropriate or aiming to further improve it). This comprehensive implementation process, according to Shalley and Zhou (2008), involves

continuous problem-solving, which identifies and implements new problems, with the result being changes at various levels, directed towards the goal. Amabile (2011) and Mueller (2020), creativity can encompass individuals, teams, and entire organizations and can be analyzed at the levels of individuals, groups, and the organization as a whole. Amabile (2011) identifies areas encompassing creativity: important skills (competencies required in the social services sector: knowledge, experience, intellect, insights, skills), important processes (work styles, personality characteristics), and task motivation (goal setting, striving, and implementing a vision). Zhou (2003) states that managers can enhance and sustain employee creativity by utilizing everyday leadership behavior. Amabile (1988) highlights environmental factors within organizations that inhibit creativity, including criticism and rejection of new ideas, organizational issues, emphasis on status and power, and conservative and autocratic leadership styles.

The role of leadership is important in the implementation process because, as indicated by Oke, Munshi, and Walumbwa (2009), leadership is a social process consisting of the following components: firstly, it occurs within a group; secondly, the leader influences the behavior of their followers; thirdly, organizational goals are pursued together. This study focuses particularly on understanding formal leadership among managers when examining the implementation of quality management systems in organizations providing social services. Davila, Epstein, Shelton (2012) define the roles of managers in this process, which include supporting strategic planning, providing long-term perspective and evaluating organizational alignment; managers involve departmental leaders and managers in the process and empower them to carry out key project stages; they collaborate with external partners; they draw conclusions and make important decisions regarding changes; managers also manage and maintain a balance among all system elements.

Matthews and Brueggemann (2015) suggest that leaders must exhibit innovative behavior and thinking, problem-solving skills, continuous improvement in knowledge, creativity, fostering a culture of quality, innovation diffusion, entrepreneurship, strategy implementation, effective leadership, and systemic thinking when implementing innovations. Successful leadership should encompass individual traits and competencies, team support and endorsement, managerial skills, effective guidance, and leadership. Many scholars, such as Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, Hu (2014) and Kang, Solomon, Choi (2015), argue that leaders demonstrating transformational leadership create and apply innovative ideas in leading their organizations, motivate their followers in various ways, and seek new motivational methods to achieve set goals. Specifically, transformational leaders have a significant and positive impact (Nguyen et al., 2017) on engaging and encouraging their followers to participate in implementing innovative processes. The leadership process within SPT organizations is a fundamental element of managing an effective organizational structure,

implementing management systems, and achieving organizational goals and objectives; therefore, leaders must be able to harness creativity within their organizations to foster initiative and innovation (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1995; Kiel, Hendry, Nicholson, 2006; Agbor, 2008; Little, Gooty, Williams, 2016). Effective leadership is important not only at the organizational level (Henry, 2012) but also in changing attitudes toward the social services sector in society. Leadership is not needed if there are no new challenges (Bridgeforth, 2005). Satalkina, L., & Steiner, G. (2022) argue that considering future pathways, we view social innovations as an integral part of holistic intervention, operating across one societal dimension and making a systemic impact on sustainable societal development. Lepik, Urmanavičienė (2022) state that one of the main characteristics of social entrepreneurship is innovation creation. The authors emphasize that "*social mission is a highly valued aspect of social entrepreneurship, which is undoubtedly considered a necessary condition for social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is primarily about creating social value, promoting social well-being, solving social problems, and addressing social needs*" (Lepik, Urmanavičienė, 2022). Perceptions of social innovation are quite diverse and varied, often conflicting with perceptions of business innovation, as the latter typically aim for profit, while the goals of social innovations may encompass societal well-being, providing opportunities for vulnerable and sensitive social groups, social cohesion, sustainable development, and alternative perspectives on market economics (Labanauskas, 2017).

Research methodology

This article addresses the problematic question of the study: What motivates social workers in social service organizations to apply innovative work methods? How can the implementation process of EQUASS help in finding solutions to new social problems and implementing new managerial practices?

The aim of the article is to uncover the application of innovative work methods in organizations providing social services.

Research object: Conditions for the application of innovative methods in social service organizations.

Research methods: include analysis of scientific academic literature analysis, document analysis, qualitative research type was chosen for the study (Židžiūnaitė, Sabaliauskas, 2017). In the study, the method of a semi-structured interview, quality (content) analysis, summarizing method were used.

Participants of the empirical research: social workers employed in social service organizations implementing innovative work methods and aspiring to or having EQUASS certification.

Research results and their discussion

The literature review and research data presented in the article reveal social workers' desire to use modern technologies in social work, which helps identify new work methods and management practices in the social services sector. The aim to innovate social services in providing organizations fosters a favorable atmosphere for employees and service recipients, promoting their creativity and providing opportunities for continuous employee development within the organization. During the study, social workers indicated that their decision to adopt new management practices was driven by creativity and a desire for improvement, aiming to implement new practices that would lead to high-quality services and operational outcomes. They described the implementation process as a creative outcome, propelled by innovation and creativity, and suggested that the EQUASS implementation process could help identify new solutions to social problems and facilitate the implementation of new management practices. Social workers identified the following categories: Aspiration for innovation; Novel approaches to solving social problems; Implementation of new practices within the organization. "More specifically, the research data indicate that the aspiration for innovation among social workers is related to their attitude towards presented theoretical concepts. Creativity in social work stimulates organizational changes, demonstrating that *'the implementation process is closely related to the creativity of social workers'* (E_1). This creativity drives innovation at the organizational level and changes in the external environment.

Social workers, by showcasing their creative potential through behavior, can encourage and support collaboration and the creativity of colleagues. Additionally, *'the creativity of a leader and their individual qualities influence the application of new management practices and the resolution of social problems'* (E_2). According to Amabile and Mueller (2008), *'creativity encourages people to work creatively and collaborate to implement innovations'* (E_1). *„Expanding its possibilities, an organization can change the external environment by employing new methods of solving social problems"* (E_3). Social workers note that *„the EQUASS system helps find ways to address social issues, meet service recipients' expectations, and explore new solutions, especially when working with young service recipients who crave interesting work formats"* (E_4). It is also emphasized that *'EQUASS principles allow for the adaptation and resolution of problematic and conflict situations, as this helps understand and serve from the perspective of service recipients'* (E_5)."

According to informants, the improvement of social services is associated with new ideas. *"Usually, a new idea is born, we try it out, we search for it ourselves and go to prove and present it, and say let's do it, improve it... our services," (E_1)* and is understood as an action or activity that is carried out with consideration of the set goal, new requirements, or standards: *"We will all improve*

here to achieve the goal, I took on several training sessions and executed them, we discussed with employees about improving social services," (E_2). *"This shows the institution's desire to improve, to provide quality services, to move forward, because facing challenges, we learn from them,"* (E-4), and the directions for improvement are planned when it is possible to rely on certain experiences, necessary skills, and abilities: *"We have already established how to measure it, show others how we work qualitatively,"* (E-9). During the improvement process, restructuring and changes are made by implementing new work methods: *"The institution has implemented several innovative working methods, especially for people with disabilities (camera Maus), symbol method, color music, canine therapy, dance-movement therapy, sensory room, etc., we are moving towards improving social services,"* (E-7). Social workers assume that in the process of improvement, the experience of service providers is important in evaluating the competence of employees: *"The challenge is that the client will have the right to evaluate the employee"* (E_8), *"EQUASS clearly emphasized the empowerment of service recipients and quality of life, that should be a priority and the leader should emphasize it in his organization"* (E-10), thus the attitudes of service recipients change because when implementing EQUASS services, the service user is involved in the evaluation process: *"that the service recipient will have the right to evaluate the employee, how will the dance therapy service user evaluate me here, because often the employee is not sure that he will be evaluated well, it really encourages the improvement of social services"* (E_8).

Application of new management practices in the organization. Research participants, discussing innovative factors, highlighted that EQUASS helps to implement new management practices in the organization: *"Employees need interesting forms of work, it was just interesting, the idea itself was interesting"* (E-10), *"for us to find out what is happening in the world, so that we could apply all innovations in our work"* (E-10), it was necessary to find new tools and overcome challenges: *"and this means that remote work is still a challenge... and during remote work, we just had to find the best tools to work"* (E-9), *"Innovation in the organization, because the attitude of the team changes and you have to work with the whole team according to EQUASS criteria, comply with them and apply them"* (E_1), *"It is especially about the principle of attitude and participation, because we have already had meetings with employees about changes, we discussed a lot and wanted to change certain forms and documents, and certain practices change..."* (E_2). It is important to note the respondents' opinion that EQUASS ensures organizations the opportunity to change and improve: *"The organization must change, improve"* (E-7), *"For organizations, this is clearly an innovation"* (E_1), *"Changes force you to change your thinking, to apply new management practices"* (E_8). According to informants, EQUASS helped to discover new ways of motivating employees and apply them in their organization: *"So we start thinking differently... and we give days off, work from*

home, remotely" (E_2), *"We have created an initiative group of employees so that employees can raise various ideas among themselves and implement them, as a collective we try to go out once a month to motivate the employee to work as much as possible"* (E_4). Social workers indicate that this is also a challenge for them because employee motivation at work becomes a challenge, it is necessary to see each employee and respond to their needs, apply new motivational measures, as often organizational leaders have limited financial resources, therefore they are looking for ways to evaluate and reward employees for their efforts: *"This motivation is really a big challenge for the manager... you need to find ways to motivate employees, the manager cannot be as before"* (E-4), *"I also tried to encourage employees with bonuses and joint trips (we travel to the sea for a few days), to find ways to see everyone"* (E-5), *"we have birthdays and we always come up with something, we have to come up with something, involve, thank"* (E_4).

The study revealed that the ambition of social workers for innovation is based on the application of new ideas and knowledge in their organization. Most respondents indicated that the application of innovations is driven by their desire to improve and unleash their creative abilities. Therefore, the personal interest and "burning" goal of social workers engage employees in the implementation process. The ability of a social worker to assess individual employee efforts motivates them to change their attitudes towards work and commit to achieving organizational goals. Social worker leadership has a significant impact on fostering creativity at the organizational level. It was also found that leadership influences directing employees' creative potential towards service improvement and implementing new management practices. Therefore, the creativity of leaders directed towards QMS implementation and execution ensures successful EQUASS implementation (Čižikienė, 2020). Based on the findings of Gudžinskienė, Gečienė (2018), it appears that the quality of social services in Lithuanian social care institutions is remarkably high, despite Lithuania's relatively low GDP percentage allocated to social assistance. This suggests remarkable achievements in social support and positions Lithuania as a potentially exemplary model for other EU countries to follow. Kubiliūtė, Neverauskienė (2023) taking into account the aspects of the definition of social innovation, it was decided that the definition of social innovation should emphasize the following key directions: novelty, responsiveness to social needs, sustainability of social changes, and transformation of social relationships. Social innovations are defined as the creation of new ideas, products, services, or methods, as well as the use of existing ideas, products, provision of services, or application of methods in a new or different way to address social and economic issues and more effectively meet social needs. The most important dimensions of social innovations include meeting human needs, social interaction and inclusion, as well as increased opportunities for socio-political activity and access to resources. Although there

are plenty of good ideas, the impact of social innovations is still insufficient, so it is necessary to promote experimentation and the creation, implementation, and development of new innovations using appropriate means. Competent intermediaries, effective incentives, and networks are needed to accelerate and facilitate learning.

Conclusions

The literature review and research data presented in the article reveal social workers' desire to use modern technologies in social work, which helps identify new work methods and management practices in the social services sector. The aim to innovate social services in providing organizations fosters a favorable atmosphere for employees and service recipients, promoting their creativity and providing opportunities for continuous employee development within the organization. Innovativeness is perceived as the potential of human resources' possessed characteristics to create and stimulate changes within an organization, applying employees' skills and motivating them to utilize those skills for the creation of common good, not only at the organizational level. Social workers identified the following categories: Aspiration for innovation; Novel approaches to solving social problems; Implementation of new practices within the organization.

In analyzing the motivations behind social workers' decisions to implement new management practices in their work, research participants indicated that their decision to adopt new management practices was driven by creativity and a desire for improvement, aiming to implement practices that would enable the provision of quality services, taking into account the individual needs of service recipients. Participants described the implementation process of the quality management system as the application of innovative work methods in social work and confirmed that the EQUASS implementation process helps to identify new solutions to social problems and facilitates the implementation of new management practices within the organization.

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The ability of a social worker to assess individual employee efforts motivates them to change their attitudes towards work and commit to achieving organizational goals. Social worker leadership has a significant impact on fostering creativity at the organizational level. It was also found that leadership influences directing employees' creative potential towards service improvement and implementing new management practices. Therefore, the creativity of leaders directed towards QMS implementation and execution ensures successful EQUASS implementation.

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