

Abstract

During the last decades we have witnessed a substantial rise in both research and occupation in the field of human services. The present paper seeks to offer a definition of human services as a generic profession. Followed by a brief discussion of human service definitions as both an organizational phenomenon and a field of knowledge, we will present the social need in human service as a generic profession, one of which the core focus is the encounter between organization and client. We will then offer a definition of the profession, and discuss its practical derivatives as well as its implications on the knowledge, skills and values as they should be assimilated and gain expression in the human services training programs and curriculums. Finally, the discussion will deal with the significant challenges awaiting the process of consolidating the new profession - in light of the offered definition - in the academia, training programs and the job market.

Key words: Human services; Generic profession; Organizations; program development; Institutionalization.

Organizing Services, Humanizing Organizations: Towards a definition of Human Services as a generic profession

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The field of human services has in recent decades drawn increased attention in practice, in theory, and in research. This is manifested in several ways:

1. First, in the increase in the number of human services organizations, the purviews they encompass, and the variety of service providers. Almost all human needs, including housing, employment, schooling, higher education, welfare, culture, and recreation are supplied today by formal organizations. As a result, there is a need for diverse types of organizations – in the private, public, and third sectors – in order to provide a wide range of solutions and methods. Accordingly, the number of people employed by these organizations and actually dealing with human services has multiplied (Woodside & McClam, 2009).
2. Second, in the scholarly and theoretic occupation with service organizations and the concept of service, which has transformed human services into a growing and developing field. Against this backdrop we can discern, for example, a profusion of attempts to define and conceptualize human services, as well as an increase in the number of research studies and journals dealing with the various aspects of service (Zins, 2001; Butin, 2006, 2010).
3. Third, in the establishment of academic courses specifically dealing with providing human services. Today, three academic bodies in Israel offer bachelor's degrees in human services and one offers a master's degree, a growing trend. Even though there are many differences in the scopes of the various curriculums, which makes it difficult to precisely define the concept, the academic institutionalization of the discipline is certainly relevant and appropriate in light of the heterogeneous services offered in the field (Butin, 2010; Zins, 2001).

A survey of the various definitions put forth for human services shows that most theoreticians focus on human services as an organizational phenomena, while slightly fewer consider it a field of knowledge. This article is a result of a decade of experience and reflection during the tenure of the authors at the Human Services Department of the Yezreel Valley College in Israel, and subscribes to the perspective of human services as a generic profession, i.e., one that has a defined mission as well as a defined set of knowledge, skills, and values that can be employed in a wide variety of service fields and organizational frameworks. The goal of this article is to present a definition of the human services profession as a generic profession, and to discuss the practical meaning of the definition and its implications on the knowledge, skills, and values that should be part of the training program. By way of introduction, we will briefly review definitions of human services as an organizational phenomenon, and as a field of knowledge.

Human services as an organizational phenomenon

Through the years, scholars; theoreticians; and professional bodies have interpreted human services as an organizational phenomenon. Their various definitions can be categorized along two axes. The first is based on the nature of the interaction between the organization and the client, the second axis refers to the purpose of the organization. As for the first axis – the more direct and active the interaction, the narrower the definition; that is, it applies to fewer organizations, as we shall see below.

The most inclusive definition is that of the Library of Congress: “The various policies, programs, services, and facilities to meet basic human needs relating to the quality of life, such as education, health, welfare” (Library of Congress: 2558). According to this definition, human services organizations facilitate the fulfillment of human needs, even if there is no human interaction, so that even facilities (for example, a playground) or laws (for example, one preventing family violence) can be considered human services.

A narrower approach is defined in the ERIC Digest (ED253673): Human services are “fields of public service in which human interaction is part of the provision of the services” (Houston, 1990: 120). According to this approach, human services are defined by the degree of human interaction they entail. Clearly, any organization that fits this definition would also be considered a human services provider according to the Library of Congress, but the opposite does not hold true. For example, a playground would be considered a human service according to the Library of Congress definition, but not according to the ERIC Digest definition.

The highest level of interaction is provided by Hasenfeld (1983), who differentiates between human service organizations and other organizations, and conceptualizes them as those organizations “whose principal function is to protect, maintain, or enhance the personal well-being of individuals by defining, shaping, or altering their personal attributes” (Hasenfeld, 1983: 1). According to this definition, it is not enough for an organization to provide for needs or to entail human interaction: human services organizations are unique in that their “raw material” is people. Again, each organization that fits Hasenfeld's definition for a human services provider will also fit the ERIC Digest definition, but not every organization the ERIC Digest defines as a human services provider would be considered such by Hasenfeld. For

example, the customer services department of a cellular phone provider would be considered a human services provider by the ERIC Digest because human interaction is part of the service it provides; Hasenfeld would disagree because the company's raw material is cellular telephones and not people.

The second axis along which the various definitions can be classified is the purpose of the organization. Here we can differentiate between two approaches: the first sees the purpose of human services organizations as the fulfillment of basic human needs. For example, the definition of the Library of Congress mentioned above relates to attaining basic human needs for improved quality of life in education, health, welfare, etc. and the definition put forth by the two major organizations in this professional field in the USA relates to social and personal problems of individuals and groups caused by the failure to attain basic human needs (*The Human Service Worker*, 1998). In contrast, the purpose of human services has been defined as advancing happiness and welfare. According to this definition, human services not only deal with basic needs, but aspire to maximize welfare, happiness, and quality of life. For example, O'Looney claims that human services "are designed to address human happiness at their core" (1996, 13) and Hasenfeld (1983) refers to improvement, defense and/or advancement of the welfare or functioning of people.

Despite the many differences, by defining human services as an organizational phenomenon, the considerable knowledge accumulated about organizations serving people has brought about a coming of age in the recognition of human services as a distinct field of knowledge.

Human services as a field of knowledge

Defining human services as a field of knowledge also relates to recognition of the uniqueness of the field and is an important impetus to its continued existence – whether by expanding knowledge and research in the field, teaching academics to accept that it is their primary academic expertise and identity, or influencing social reality. The most prominent definition of human services as a field of knowledge is provided by the Council for Standards in Human Services Education (CSHSE): "The field of Human Services is broadly defined, uniquely approaching the objective of meeting human needs through an interdisciplinary knowledge base, focusing on prevention as well as remediation of problems, and maintaining a commitment to improving the overall quality of life of service populations" (CSHSE Website, 2009). This definition emphasizes two important aspects of human services. The first is that it is interdisciplinary: it draws from many other fields (for instance, psychology, sociology, social work, organizational behavior, law, education, anthropology). The second is the challenge of combining this knowledge with an important and decisive social mission – commitment to improving the general quality of life of the target population.

Our main contention in the present article is that the knowledge that has accumulated within service organizations, on the one hand, and the existing social reality, on the other, obligate us to make further advances in the human services field. This flows out of recognition that human services are not only an organizational phenomena or an important academic discipline, but a profession with a defined purview of action and social relevance.

Human services as a generic profession

Approaching human services as a generic profession appears in the literature in the writings of Woodside & McClam (2009) as well as the National Organization for Human Services (NOHS). In both, the focus of professional activities is described as improvement in the service process in order to satisfy unfulfilled human needs.

The main difference between these approaches and the one presented in this article is that the former focus on the needs of the client, while we suggest it is more suitable to focus on the *interaction* between organizations and people, as will be discussed below.

One of the conventions that arises when discussing human services (whether as an organizational phenomena, an area of knowledge, or a profession) is that *we live in a society in which the lion's share of human needs are supplied by organizations* (Bell, 1973; Cook, Goh, & Chung, 1999; Woodside & McClam, 2009). It has therefore become more and more difficult to separate the quality of service received by individuals from the general quality of life, and even life expectancy. Under these conditions, it is important to recognize the generic aspect of human service organizations, i.e., that their organizational structures and processes should eventually meet and provide for human needs. This core is common to different organizational phenomena as they concern the population (the elderly, children, women, the handicapped), the type of organization and its characteristics (private, public, third sector, big, small), domain (housing, employment, education, health) and social context, to name a few examples (Leonard & Yurchyshyna, 2010; Zins, 2001).

Defining an academic profession that places the point of encounter between human service organizations and their clients at the focal point of its professional activities is based on the recognition, on one hand, of the centrality of these organizations in society (as we explained above), and on the other, the problematical nature of the encounter between organizational phenomena and human needs, as we will present below.

The literature describes the tension that exists between the organizational sphere and the private human sphere, as well as its possible repercussions on an organization's employees, its clients, and the society in which the encounter takes place. A lengthy discussion of this issue is well beyond of the scope of the present article, but is presented in Barnetz & Vardi (2014). In view of the fact that it is relevant to the perception of the profession as put forth in this article, we will present a concise description of this tension and its repercussions.

Code words such as efficiency, formality, rationality, decisiveness, anonymity, standardization, specificity, benefit, supervision, and control are used in the literature to describe the organizational sphere. The human sphere, on the other hand, can be characterized by such qualities as informality, passion, intimacy, freedom, aimlessness, uniqueness, belonging, praxis, and its holistic nature (see, for example, Baker, 1974; Haigh, 2005; Shenhav, 1999; Thompson, 1998; van Ryn & Fu, 2003). When the organizational milieu disregards the qualities characterizing the human sphere, a heavy price is liable to be exacted from its employees and clients, as well as from the organization itself. For example, organizations frequently

conduct themselves in accordance with their internal imperatives, which may be at odds with the needs of their clients (Mayes & Allen, 1977). They are also likely to change at a speed and direction inconsistent with changes in the needs of their clients (Shenhav, 1999), provide uniform services to fulfill the disparate needs of their clients, provide anonymous and mechanical treatment of intimate and human needs (Haigh, 2005; Koons et al., 1998), treat clients for specific issues they present without taking into consideration the holistic nature of human beings (Baker, 1974; Lloyd & Rosman, 2005), and become sites fostering controlling relations and oppression in which there is a significant divide between how the organizations and their employees perceive their clients, and the self-perceptions of the clients themselves (Goffman, 1961; Luck, Elifson & Sterk, 2004).

In the light of this arguments, It would be tempting to present the encounter between the organization and the human sphere as a meeting of opposites, but it would be too superficial a description and only shows one side of the coin. In our society, there is significant interdependence between the two spheres. People cannot exist without the compensation and services that service organizations provide, while at the same time, service organizations cannot exist without the constant input of its human employees and clients.

Defining the human services profession as one that deals with the encounter between the organization and the client reflects the belief that this complex arena can become a professional and academic challenge, one of continuous professional activity with relevance both to society and to humankind. In other words, we see a societal need for human services workers who are capable of understanding; observing; and analyzing the organization as a phenomenon, but also capable of understanding people; focusing on human needs; and identifying cultural, gender-oriented, status-related, and other such needs, and keeping them the focus of their activities in the organization. There is a rather wide variety of human service professions, the result of societal changes in recent decades and the consequent establishment of new professions. Some of those professions focus on the client: eg. Social work, Nursing, Education, etc. On the other hand, a variety of professions have been established that focus on the organization: organizational behavioral psychology, business administration, consultancies, etc.

Considering Human services as a generic profession focusing on the encounter between the organizational sphere and the individual should address Illich's warnings regarding professionalism. Illich (1977a;1977b) have warned against some dangers embedded in professionalism and institutionalization, which might give rise to counter-productive trends such as: transforming human beings and their creative abilities into objects; transforming human needs into products; impairing human's and communities' ability to solve problems in and by themselves; downgrading and disrespecting of unprofessional knowledge and practices; and creating a close-circuit professional language that places barriers between organizations and clients.

Focusing on the encounter between the organization and the client, between the organizational sphere and the individual one - at the basis of

human service definition, training program, knowledge building and practice, has the power to moderate the counter-productive trends mentioned above. We offer the following definition for human services as a generic profession:

Human services is a profession that focuses on the continuous enhancement of correspondence between the wants and needs of the client and the resources of the organization.

Figure 1 below illustrates how the human services worker functions as a "sensor" connecting the organizational and the individual spheres.

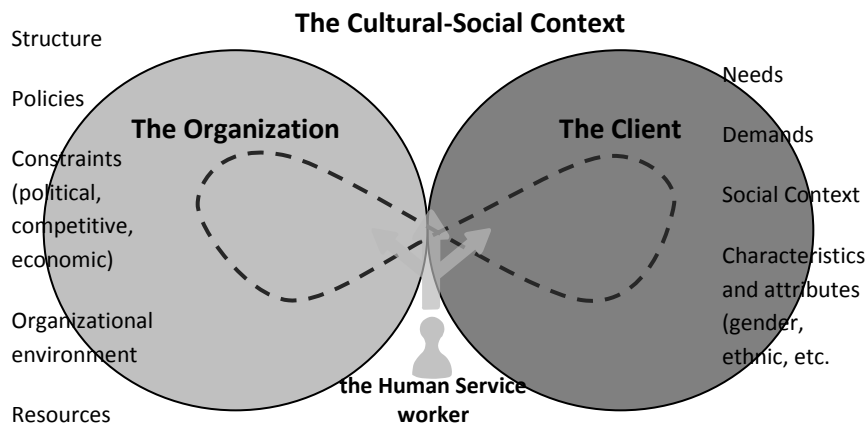


Figure 1. The Role of the human services professional

Human services professionals work within an organization and have an appreciation and understanding of its structure; the environment in which it works; its policies; and the political, budgetary, and competitive constraints under which it functions. At the same time, they must have an understanding of human needs and know how to approach people as individuals and as part of their communities within the existing social context. Both of these roles must be carried out in an effort to match the activities of the organization with the needs and desires of the client. This encounter takes place within a certain cultural and societal context that must be taken into consideration by the human service professional.

The role of human services professionals can be described in cyclical terms, as illustrated below:

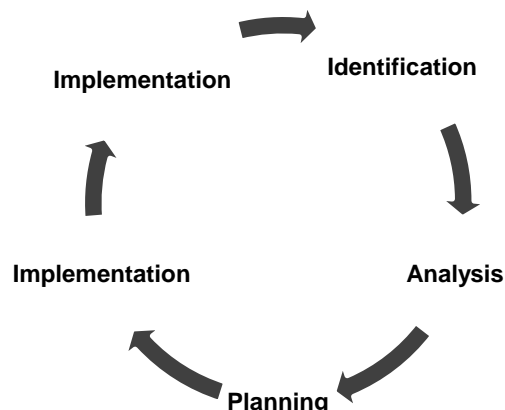


Figure 2. The cyclical nature of the role of human services professionals

Current trends in decision-making (NDM - Naturalistic Decision Making, Bazerman & Chugh, 2005; Klein, 2008) emphasize that in practice, experienced professionals reach decisions in a flexible and context-driven manner, and not necessarily according to rational hierarchical steps, as the above model suggests. While agreeing with this claim, we are yet offering this model as a framework for analysis and comprehension in order to describe the practice as presented above, i.e., according to the definition of the human services profession, and as a way to discuss the knowledge, skills, and values that are requisite for this profession.

1. Identification – Human services professionals recognize that a gap exists between the policies and operations of organizations and the wants and needs of their clients. The initial challenge to develop and maintain awareness of the gap is not an easy one. On one hand, the organizational culture interprets, explains, and justifies its actions while concealing the gaps, at least to its employees, who are shielded by the culture of the organization; on the other, distress and dissonance are widespread among individuals who are aware of the gaps but are loyal to and feel they are part of the organization (Abraham, 1999). Generally, individuals have a natural tendency to minimize dissonance when they believe there is no way to narrow the gap or change a situation. Accordingly, human services workers must be taught to both identify the gaps (develop diagnostic skills) and withstand internal and external pressure that may be applied upon them. Heightening awareness of the need for critical thinking, even while remaining loyal to and identifying with the organization, is a step in this direction (Aziz, 2008).

2. Analysis – During the second phase, human services professionals must be capable of analyzing the gap, that is; analyzing and understanding the organization's policies vis-à-vis its clients, as well as the relevant needs and attributes of the clients. This phase implies that human services professionals must possess an extensive knowledge base. Analyzing organization-client gaps requires examining the organizational process as well as the organization's client base, and using the results to identify and understand their human needs. At the conclusion of this phase, human services professionals must form a comprehensive picture of the services provided by their organization.

3. Planning – The planning and implementation phases are the practical side of the role played by human services professionals. During this stage they must be capable of planning a realistic program that, within the context of the organization, will narrow the gaps identified and analyzed during the first two phases. This involves finding ways to continuously search for substantive improvements, even if they are small and modest, that will act as the basis for further ones.

4. Implementation – During the implementation phase the worker must act to implement the plan that was formed during the previous phase, and to try to improve cooperation between the organization and its clients. This step involves putting a variety of organizational and interpersonal skills into play,

including negotiation and persuasion, presentation, implementation, training, conflict resolution, and organizational communication.

5. *Evaluation* – Before the human services circle can be closed, human services professionals must evaluate the results of their interventions. This serves not only to complete the cycle, but ensures its continuation in the organization. The evaluation is structured according to clear, defined criteria that are decided upon in advance; it thus guarantees and promotes identification of additional gaps, perpetuating an organizational commitment to client-centered service norms. Evaluation depends on developing both quantitative and qualitative empirical indexes that can be measured and analyzed within the context of the daily activities of the organization. The definitions of the profession and the description of the cyclical nature of the practice of human services, both depicted above, constitute the basis for defining the knowledge, skills, and values they must possess in order to succeed in their missions. These, in turn, must constitute the foundations upon which academic training programs for human services professionals are founded.

Knowledge, skills, and values involved in the human services profession

The human services profession, like other practical professions, is based on three fundamental components, as follows:

1. **Knowledge** – Knowledge provides human services professionals with the ability to understand and analyze situations, as well as choose between possible courses of action. Integral to the definition of the human services profession as outlined above, human services professionals must possess extensive knowledge in three tangential domains: the organization, the client, and the interaction between the two.

Knowledge about organizations – Because human services professionals work within organizations, it is essential they be familiar with them. Their professionalism is manifested by their ability to integrate as successfully as possible into organizational processes and contribute to their improvement. To do so, human services professionals must undergo training that includes a rich and varied background in organizational behavior, culture, and environment; power and politics in organizations; economic and legal aspects of human services operations; emotions in organizations; management methods; and team and multi-professional team management, to name a few. The assumption is that even though organizations may have diverse goals; populations; and spheres of operation, and be differentiated according to type; structure; and social contexts, they share common characteristics that can be organized according to theoretic and research spheres of knowledge, which must necessarily be included in the human services curriculum.

Knowledge about the world of the client – Human services professionals are concerned with questions relevant to how organizational structures and processes deal with the needs and desires of their clients. It is therefore important to equip professionals with knowledge that will help them identify

human needs through awareness of the complex contexts (gender, cultural, class, economic, community) in which they exist. To do so, human services professionals must be knowledgeable about human needs and quality of life, developmental processes, and the human life cycle. They must also be familiar with concepts such as respect, exploitation, oppression, ethnic relations, ethnic identities, gender relations, gender identification, family, and community.

Knowledge about the interaction between organizations and clients – This refers to bodies of knowledge that provide students with the tools to evaluate the compatibility between organizational policies and the needs of its clients, and improve it. Students must learn about perception gaps between providers and recipients of services, levels of client contact, and models for organization-client relations (for example, see Bitran & Hoech, 1990). Likewise, they must learn about planning and initiating projects, service processes management, quality of service, organizational chains of service, and processes and indexes for quality control in human services, to name a few.

It should be noted that the body of knowledge dealing with organization-client interaction is limited compared to those relating to the organization and the client as separate entities, which borrow from tangential disciplines. Since *interaction* between the organization and the client is the core of human services, there is considerable room to enrich both research and theory in this area. In other words, human services as an academic discipline and a practical profession must be nurtured by a continuous process of research and theoretic conceptualization that focuses on the point of interaction between organization and client. We will expand on this point in the summary section when discussing the possible contributions of the profession to the world of theory and research.

2. **Skills** – Human services professionals must not only be capable of carrying out analysis and evaluation, but also be able to influence situations they play a part in. It is therefore imperative that during professional training they learn skills, which is a different process than absorbing knowledge. Here the focus is on a practicum under the supervision of practitioners and seminars dedicated to learning and practicing skills. We believe that a human services professional must have competency in four types of skills: personal, interpersonal, organizational and communal.

Figure 3 below illustrates these skills.

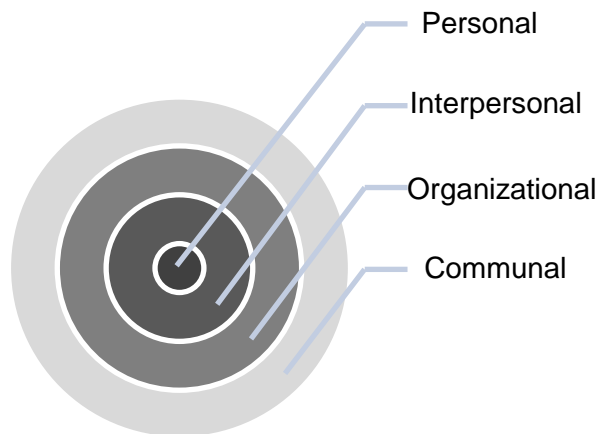


Figure 3. Skills required by human services professionals

Personal skills – We suggest working under the assumption that no single model for a human services professional exists, since the primary tool of human services professionals is them themselves. We believe all students preparing themselves for the profession should discover and nurture their unique attributes and capabilities and use them to develop their own personal styles. Accordingly, human services training must include practice as well as theory (that is, knowledge). It should be based on continuous self-exploration that will allow the students to experiment, discover, and develop their personal skills and style, which they can take with them to their organizations. Such personal skills include personal style, impression management, defining goals and objectives, self-knowledge, and values.

"In order to be successful, you've got to know your own formula, your own ingredients, what makes you, **you**..."(KRS-One, 2001).

ii. *Interpersonal skills* – a major part of the daily work of human services professionals, whether within the organization or with clients, includes interpersonal communication. Awareness of patterns of interpersonal communication and continual improvement in these patterns should be an important part of their training. Accordingly, students must learn and practice interviewing, negotiation, assertiveness, labeling and stereotyping processes, conflict management and other techniques.

Organizational skills – Human services professionals must be able to integrate into the operations of the organizations they work for and improve them. It is therefore important they study and practice skills like organizational evaluation; project building; information management; teamwork; coping with "difficult" clients; recruitment and management of volunteers; marketing programs and services; and implementation of needs surveys, which will increase their ability to make an impact on organizational behavior. Similar to our claims regarding knowing about organizations, it is important that human services professionals be capable of learning about and practicing not only competencies relating to improving the efficiency of the organization, but those relating to the social dissolution and power narratives (for example, how to listen to and speak for the client and how to create and maintain personal interactions).

Communal skills - considering service organizations as open systems (Bertalanffy, 1967), that exist in given social and communal settings with which they are continuously engaged in reciprocal relationship, raises the need for human service professionals to possess the skills necessary for building and sustaining co operations between the organization and its surroundings- including communities and other service organizations. This should include knowledge about the community (traditions, rules, cultures, pressing political issues etc.), awareness to diverse social realities (Krumer-Nevo, Weiss- Gal & Levin, 2011), cultural sensitivity skills, as well as skills concerning networking and co operation building (Manring, 2007).

Values

Values training is a crucial component of the professional training of human services professionals because they are expected to guide and dominate the knowledge and skills of the profession. Values are a beacon by which to steer their actions, especial during situations of uncertainty, crisis, and conflict.

The National Council for Human Services has set out detailed standards regarding the obligations of human services professionals in six content worlds: towards the client, the community/society, colleagues, the profession itself, the employing organization, and themselves (NOSCHE, 1996; Zins, 2001).

The code of ethics draws an image of professionals who keep themselves abreast of advances in knowledge and skills; are aware of what is happening in the community; are willing to contribute to influencing it; act responsibly and appropriately towards colleagues, clients, employers; and are sensitive to the variety of ways culture, class, and gender can influence their professional behavior. Without diminishing the importance of the code of ethics, we place considerable importance on several basic professional clusters of values that are an important part of the profession, even if elusive and difficult to implement during the training process.

Respect for the individual and love of people; belief in the uniqueness of each individual. In this regard, the cognitive and practical elements involved in respect are crucial but not sufficient; rather, it is the emotional component that we call love that is indispensable if we are to emphasize that human services practice is not only a professional process, but above all, a genuine human encounter. This encounter gains significance within the belief in, and recognition of, the uniqueness of each individual.

Equality. Though our belief in equality is intrinsic, it may get lost among the cultural and societal messages that surround us and the organizational practices that emphasize the standardization of workers and clients. The training process must hone belief in the uniqueness of each individual and make it a basis for action. One of the main ways to teach students to recognize the uniqueness of their clients is to make them aware of their own uniqueness during training.

Cultural, gender, class, and age sensitivity; opposition to discrimination and oppression; commitment to social solidarity and concern for humanity.

This group of values opposes all forms of oppression. Human services can be a part of an oppressive social system, but can also be remediative and oppose oppression. As a result, beliefs and values that oppose oppression and emphasize equality and sensitivity have the power to mitigate deep-seated and ingrained societal tendencies. We believe these values can make human service professionals agents of social change. A training program should strengthen the recognition that real social solidarity is in the interest of each of us as part of society, and all instances of oppression are necessarily a blow to solidarity.

Commitment to critical and multifaceted thinking. Curiosity, willingness for self-exploration, searching for and filtering information, abstaining from dogmatism.

Stage 1 in figure 2 above refers to identification that demands critical thinking. A human services professional should appreciate that any situation can be seen from several perspectives, i.e., that of the client, the organization, the worker, the society or the self – and that each can be perceived within a variety of theoretical orientations. This can help us avoid dogmatism, which is the worst enemy of critical thinking (Popper, 1971).

Commitment to efficient, professional, and up-to-date service. The organization is a valuable and necessary tool for providing human services, one worthy of being treated seriously, responsibly, and with loyalty. With that, as can be seen in many organizational theories, organizations tend to develop a strong stake in self-preservation and perceive themselves as an end in themselves.

Continuously maintaining the balance between efficiency and professionalism, between recognizing the uniqueness of the individual and the struggle against oppression within an organization, and all that that conveys – is the real moral challenge to human services professionals.

In discussing values, it is important to ask if and how values can be taught within the framework of human services training. Can love of humanity be taught, and if so, how? Can aversion to all types of oppression be taught? Our answer is that though teaching values is more complex than teaching knowledge or skills, human services curriculums can and must do so, through at least five channels:

First, through **discussion** – when values are discussed, awareness increases, as so does the likelihood that the values be adopted. Second, through developing curriculums that include a significant measure of **critical theory and practice**, which will equip the student with the ability to identify and analyze oppression and injustice that are not obvious to the eye. Third, through **personal contact** – values can be best passed on to and absorbed by subordinates in the intra-subjective space. Human services curriculums must be based, at least partly, on significant personal contact between teachers and students, allowing contact between the I (or the frame of reference) of the teacher and that of the student. Fourth, through **encounters with mentors, employees, and clients** - during practicums spent in human services organizations; and fifth, through specific **courses** dealing with values and professional ethics.

Summary

The aim of this article is to define human services as a generic profession whose core focus is the encounter between organizations and clients. It presented a definition and a description of the profession; and later showed how they are tangibly manifested in its integral elements – knowledge, skills, and values.

The social relevance of human services as a profession is based on the assumption that the behavior of an organization affects society. Accordingly, we have attempted to induce the slow, gradual, and steady movement of the organization in the direction of the client and improve the complex interaction between the organizational and the human spheres. In the process of further advancing the human services profession as presented in this article, it is important to give thought to a number of challenges:

Practical experience as a part of the training process – We have argued here that practical experience is an indispensable part of training for the profession. The uniqueness and complexity of the practicum in training for a career in human services, as such is portrayed in the present article, should be emphasized: On one hand, society is home to a very wide variety of organizations, populations, and organizational cultures (commercial, public, third-sector, local municipality, aid, and protest), as well as a wide range of activities, needs, and content domains (e.g., health, education, employment, housing etc.). However, while this may provide space for cross-fertilization and expanding perspectives, such a varied and heterogeneous reality makes preservation of the core principles of human services presented in this article more difficult. The practicum system must take into account all manner of organizational languages and discuss them, while at the same time devising a new language, the language of human services, and introducing it into the process.

Professional Identity – Oen and Cooper (1998) argue that professional identity requires uniform perceptions of a job, a concrete definition of the field of operation, and agreement on the competencies required for success. According to Cutler (2005), such a professional identity is linked to the ability of individuals to belong to and identify with their professions; its importance is tied, among other factors, to commitment, passion, and motivation for joining the profession (Ohlen & Segesten, 1998). The challenge in developing a professional identity in human services is intensified by the fact that it is, first of all, a new and little known profession, and second, as previously noted, a generic profession that manifests itself through diverse activities. The challenge to teachers and curriculums is to draw the profession in colors that are stark enough that the common core of the field is clear, without blurring its variety and diversity.

Schein (1978) spotlights the social aspect of professional identity when he asserts that it is strengthened by acceptance by others, and weakened by their rejection of it. Consequently, there is importance not only in consolidating professional identity among students of the profession, but also in institutionalizing and advancing the profession in the eyes of society.

Institutionalization and advancement of the profession in the job market – One crucial test of a profession is the ability of its graduates to integrate into the job market. This test becomes especially complex when the profession is new and unfamiliar. The challenge of advancement in the job market is actually a combination of several challenges: first, organizations and employers must be aware of the new profession and the benefits they can derive from it; second, employers must not only be aware of the existence of the profession, but of where it can fit into their organization. We feel that human services professionals can make the greatest contribution to all types of human services organizations at the middle-management level, since this level is characterized by flexibility; by being sufficiently close to the field and the frontline of the organization; and by possessing a wider perspective and the ability to influence the organization.

We believe the practicum to be of utmost importance in advancing both professional identity and the institutionalization of the profession. The interaction of human services students with practitioners and clients in organizations can help the students combine actual and personal substance with the definitions and theories they are taught in the classroom. At the same time it exposes employers, employees, and clients to the field of human services and its possible contribution to their organizations.

Academia – Consolidating the human services profession requires that an academic body of knowledge be established and implemented. As previously mentioned, the body of knowledge dealing with the interaction between organization and client is relatively small compared to that dealing with the two as separate entities. We argue that the definition of the profession as defined in this article supplies a theoretic and research base for the formulation of novel research questions that combine bodies of knowledge that are today being implemented separately. For example, there is much in the literature dealing with the interaction between clients living in poverty and welfare organizations (Luck, Elifson, & Sterk, 2004; Lloyd & Rosman, 2005), but little that includes or makes an attempt to conceptualize and comprehensively study the interaction between clients living in poverty and a wide variety of service organizations (local municipalities, banks, workforce companies, and health organizations, etc.). Examining the provision of services to the poor both from their perspective and that of the service provider can result in an important improvement in the behavior of service organizations towards such clients, and consequently, impact the status of the poor in society. Such research is an academic challenge for human services professionals.

In conclusion, the term “service” is currently experiencing revitalization, though not always for the right reasons. For the authors, the basic meaning of service is the way in which people, working within organizations, provide for the needs of other people. From this perspective, it can be argued that the humanization of society implies the humanization of organizations, which will only take place when people (whether managers or frontline workers) in the organization make a continuous effort to acknowledge the human being both in themselves and in the individual – whether worker, employer, colleague, or client – facing them.

The perspective on the human services profession as presented in this article is therefore an entreaty to train professionals who will seek to fulfill Maimonides's plea in his famous Physician's Prayer: "Deem me worthy of seeing in the sufferer who seeks my advice - a human being, whether rich or poor, friend or foe, good man or bad; show me only the human being."

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