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THE SERVICE ORIENTATIONS
OF SOCIAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATORS:
TOWARDS A NORMATIVE
MODEL

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Abstract

The service orientations of 28 administrators of social service agencies are examined as part of a normative model of service delivery. Six service issues are identified, and their interrelationship is described and examined. The service orientation issues include: effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness to constituency interests, agency autonomy, community involvement, and services integration. In part, the results show that, as a group, the executives rank effectiveness (or the setting and achievement of programmatic goals) as of greatest concern. Community involvement and responsiveness follow in importance. Efficiency ranks fourth and autonomy, fifth. Services integration is of least concern. Service orientation is examined in relation to five personal characteristics of the executives and four agency attributes. Important correlates of service orientation are the age, experience, and education of the executives, agency size, and the number of agency funding sources.

Implications for training and education of future social service administrators are discussed. Suggestions for further development of a normative model of social service delivery are offered.

Although claims are often made that the values, goals, and commitments of administrators in the not-for-profit, social service arena are distinctive from those of administrators in the for-profit, business realm, little research has been done either to test this assertion or to document the actual orientations of social service administrators. Before valid tests of this claim can be made, more research is needed on the service provision orientations of human service administrators. Rainey's (forthcoming) comparison of public-sector and business-sector administrators shows a greater commitment in the former to service and altruistic rewards. His analysis remains, however, at a general level and fails to contribute to a full understanding of the particular aspects of a "service orientation."

The aim of the present research is to provide descriptive data on six dimensions of service orientation among the chief executive officers (CEOs) of twenty-eight (28) general social service agencies. (General social service agencies are defined as typically voluntary in funding, small in size, and locally controlled and funded; cf. Kahn, 1973.) Our intent is to present a normative model of social service delivery which builds upon the extant literature. The model identifies multiple aspects of service with which social service administrators are assumed to be concerned (Patti, 1982; Trecker, 1971). Additionally, five attributes of the administrators and four agency characteristics are examined in relation to the service orientation model.

A Normative Model of Social Service Orientation

A normative model of service orientation was developed for conceptual and data collection purposes (Anthony, 1965; Suchman, 1967; Zani, 1970; Trecker, 1971; Service, Mantel, and Reisman, 1972; O'Brien, 1974; Head, 1975; LaMendola, 1976; Sutherland, 1977; Keen and Morton, 1978; Morris and Lescohier, 1978; Martin, 1980; Glisson and Martin, 1980; and Patti,

1982). Six distinctive aspects of service were identified: effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness, service integration, autonomy, and community contribution. These factors, defined below, are viewed as encompassing the primary service mandates of social service agencies and thus the primary service concerns of social service administrators (in particular, see Trecker, 1971; and Patti, 1983). Prior to collection of the data, it was expected that some dimensions of service would have greater importance than others and that some would actually be in conflict with others.

Effectiveness is defined here as the importance of establishing and accomplishing programmatic service goals. This issue was included on the basis of its prevalence in the literature (Goodman and Pennings, 1977; Martin 1981) and its relevance to an agency's realization of intended service aims. Effectiveness is the core of service provision and is expected to represent a major concern (Suchman, 1967). Efficiency refers to the importance of minimizing operational monetary costs in pursuing agency goals. Funding sources place considerable emphasis on efficiency in social service administration (Martin, 1980). Despite its emphasis on effort rather than effect, efficiency has become an issue in the recent "accountability" movement and, while not popular, is an everyday reality for social service executive.

Responsiveness concerns the extent to which the satisfaction of various persons or groups are valued by social service administrators (Trecker, 1971). These persons or groups include funding sources, other agencies, the agency's Board, neighborhood or service area, volunteers in the program, program staff, clients of the program, and the general public. Given the permeable boundaries of the typical social service agency and its vulnerability to external as well as internal constituency pressures (Martin, 1980), it is hypothesized that executive directors are concerned with responsiveness. Community contribution consists of the extent to which the achievement of community-oriented goals is valued (Trecker, 1971). This issue taps the executive's concerns with the involvement of various constituencies (eg., United Way, Board, consumers, volunteers) in the operation of the program. Trecker's (1971) emphasis on both responsiveness and community contribution as major tasks of the social service executive underscores the

diverse interests with which the latter are confronted and with which they must deal.

Services integration refers to the extent to which cooperation with other agencies (e.g., for purposes of coordinating services) is valued by social service administrators. Questions on this issue deal with the importance of coordinating and/or exchanging staff and/or services with other agencies in the local area. As is well known, services integration was a popular concept in the decade of the seventies (Morris and Lescohier, 1978; Imershein, et al., 1980) and many agency executives experienced continuous pressure from funding sources, Boards, and constituencies to encourage, undertake, and support "integrated services."

Autonomy is defined as the importance of the agency's independence in day-to-day operations; that is, the agency's ability to make its own decisions and set its own criteria without interference. Stockfisch (1970) reports that autonomy is the single most important concern of administrators in governmental agencies. Previous studies of social service agencies have failed to include questions about autonomy due, in part, to a failure to take the agency executive's point of view.

Table 1 provides summary definitions of the six issues and presents a sample item used in the measurement of each.

METHODOLOGY

Sample. A proportionate random sample of twenty-eight (28) social service agencies was selected from a list of all family and neighborhood agencies in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area in 1975. Family service agencies were defined as those which list family counseling as a primary service. Neighborhood service agencies were defined as those which are physically located in the neighborhood they serve and which provide at least two different kinds of service (eg., crisis counseling and recreation). The strata for the sampling procedure were as follows: Minneapolis Family Service, Minneapolis Neighborhood Service, St. Paul Family Service, and St. Paul Neighborhood Service. From each stratum, agencies were selected randomly with replacement. Seventeen were selected from Minneapolis (8 family service; 9 neighborhood) and 11 from St. Paul (5 family service;

6 neighborhood).

For each agency chosen, the executive director was contacted and interviewed. Among items covered in the interview were the administrator's demographic characteristics (eg., age, education, administrative experience), agency information (eg., number of staff, budget size, primary and secondary funding sources, etc.), and a self-report on the importance of the six service orientation issues.

Measurement of Service Orientation. Agency executives were asked to complete a questionnaire and card sort to ascertain the importance attached to the service orientation issues when making decisions regarding the service functions of the agency. Table 1 presents the issues and a brief description of each scale as presented to the directors. A sample item is shown for each issue and illustrates the fact that the directors were requested to rate each item along a continuum from 1 (most important) to 6 (not at all important). Prior to data analysis, the responses were recoded so that high scores indicate high valuation of the item. (That is, one was recoded to six; two to five; etc. A response of "nine" was considered a missing value to indicate the intention of the respondent that the item was not applicable.)

(Table 1 -- here)

Reliability. Given the small sample size of only 28 cases, traditional reliability analysis is inappropriate. As shown in Table 1, however, items were deleted from each scale in order to maximize inter-item correlations and to minimize the number of extremely low correlations in each. The results in Table 1 indicate an acceptable, if moderate, level of inter-item correlations for the six issues (i.e., from a high of .50 for the effectiveness factor to a low of .29 for responsiveness). For elaboration of the procedures followed here, the reader is referred to LaMendola (1976).

Director and agency parameters. As noted earlier, data on director and agency characteristics are included in the analysis as correlates of the service orientation issues (See Table 3). All but four of the executives are male (86 percent), thus the sample is skewed on gender. The mean age of the

executives is 44.4 years (s.d. = 10.5). On the average, the executives have been in their current posts for 5.7 years (s.d. = 5.2) and have a mean of 10.4 years (s.d. = 8.7) of administrative experience. The average education level is 16.4 years (s.d. = 2.4) with three directors having Ph.D.'s and six having only a high school diploma.

The agencies which the executives directed have an average number of full-time-equivalent staff of 30 (s.d. = 46.5) with a mean annual budget of \$521,436.00 (s.d. = \$902,970.00). The largest annual budget is \$3,400,000 and the smallest, \$2,500. The modal budget size is \$50,000 (N = 5). Sixteen of the 28 agencies (or 57 percent) have multiple sources of funding. Of the 12 with only one source, six are funded by taxes, two by churches, and four are voluntary. As noted earlier, thirteen of the 28 agencies are of the family service type and fifteen, of the neighborhood type.

RESULTS

(1) Relative rank-order of decision issues.

Table 2 presents the descriptive and zero-order correlation data for the service orientation issues. As a group, the agency directors are most concerned with their programs' effectiveness and least concerned with integrating services with other agencies.

(Table 2 -- here)

After effectiveness, the executives are concerned with their agency's contribution to the community and responsiveness to various persons and groups with whom it interacts (see mean and median data in Table 2).

Efficiency ranks fourth and autonomy, fifth, for executives in the sample. Given current emphases on "accountability" in an age of dwindling resources, the relatively low rating of efficiency by the executives is noteworthy. Though "moderately important", it is viewed as less fundamental than effectiveness in achieving programmatic goals, contributing to the community, and responsiveness to constituency interests. Autonomy ranks fifth overall, although its modal and mean scores place it high in importance, second only to effectiveness. Later results throw light on this. Autonomy is not a universal concern,

but those executives with multiple funding sources find it problematic (see Table 3). This suggests that executives value autonomy in decision-making but that only those whose autonomy is threatened perceive it as a central issue.

(2) The Service Orientation Issues. The correlation data in Table 2 address the interrelationships of the six issues. First, we note the positive and, for the most part, significant associations of the issues with each other. This suggests that the six service issues are neither mutually exclusive nor negatively associated. Results indicate that accomplishments aimed at realizing one issue are perceived as contributing to the realization of others as well. These data provide an important insight into the nature of human service organizations, suggesting that while some issues are valued more highly than others, social service administrators feel able to maintain their integrity and avoid being pulled apart by the pursuit of mutually exclusive goals.

The service issue in Table 2 most strongly correlated with all others is that of community contribution (with a mean inter-factor correlation of .61). The high associations of community contribution with autonomy (.72), effectiveness (.71), and service integration (.70) suggest that realization of community service goals are perceived as complimentary to the realization of internal service goals, coordination with other agencies, and having sufficient autonomy to set standards and goals without undue outside interference.

It is interesting to note that efficiency is more highly associated with effectiveness ($r = .58$) than with any other issue. Efficiency is apparently perceived as compatible with and possibly even facilitative of effectiveness. As suggested by Martin (1980), efficiency is a fundamentally valued goal in developed, western societies with the result that opposing it is contradictory to cultural ideals. It is doubtful that any agency executive who claims unconcern for "the most value for the dollar" would last very long in the politicized arena in which human service organizations exist (Walmsley and Zald, 1973). Interestingly, responsiveness to constituency satisfaction and integration of agency services (eg., staff, planning, etc.) are only weakly associated with efficiency.

(3) Service orientation and executive director characteristics. Table 3 shows the correlations of the service issues with five executive director characteristics and four agency attributes. Noting director characteristics first, male and female executives appear similar in their assessments of the six issues. Female executives are somewhat more likely (than males) to emphasize effectiveness whereas males place slightly greater emphasis on services integration.

Table 3 -- here

In regards to age, older executives value all decision issues more so than younger ones. This is most pronounced in regards to efficiency, effectiveness, and autonomy. Executives who have longer tenure in their current posts and those with greater administrative experience value efficiency more so than executives with shorter tenure or less administrative experience. As might be expected, older executives are also those with the most administrative experience ($r = .79$).

An unexpected finding in Table 3 is that executives who are more highly educated place less emphasis (than less educated ones) on five of the six service issues. Executives who are less highly educated, that is, place greater value on responsiveness, services integration, autonomy and community contribution. Only in regards to concerns with efficiency are the more and less well educated executives undifferentiated. This result runs contrary to common sense expectations that more highly educated directors would place greater emphasis on each service issue.

(4) Service orientation and agency attributes. The agency characteristics present equally interesting results. Organizational size, as measured by number of staff and budget size (cf. Martin and Anderson, 1978; and Martin, 1979), is generally unrelated to an executive's service orientation. An exception to this involves efficiency. Directors of larger agencies are more concerned than directors of smaller ones with the efficiency of operations in meeting programmatic and service goals. This observation is consistent with previous work by Glisson and Martin (1980) which found

larger human service organizations to be more efficient.

The negative, though non-significant, association of the two size indicators with the community contribution factor suggests that directors of smaller agencies are somewhat more concerned than those of larger ones with the involvement of community groups in their programs. This holds somewhat for responsiveness as well. Only in these areas do present results on organizational size support previous research on the presumed "negative" effects of larger size in human service organizations (e.g., see Glisson and Martin, 1980; and Martin and Segal, 1977).

The data in Table 3 underscore the importance of number of funding sources for understanding the service orientations of agency executives. When their agency receives funds from multiple as opposed to single sources, executives are considerably more concerned with their program's autonomy and, to a lesser extent, its effectiveness and efficiency. This suggests the well-known truism that "strings are attached to money" and confirms the assumption that accountability demands, while fostering concern with program effectiveness and efficiency, are generally perceived as threats to agency autonomy and self-direction (cf. Meyer, 1975).

Results in Table 3 show that executives of family service agencies are slightly, though not significantly, less concerned than directors of neighborhood service agencies with services integration and contribution to the community. These differences may reflect differences in the service mandates of the two types of agencies. As noted earlier, family service agencies have a mandate to provide family counseling as a primary service. Family counseling services are typically provided by professionally educated staff and the involvement of indigenous workers in the service arm of the program may be minimal. In such programs, policies may dictate that only professionals are qualified to provide service. Neighborhood service agencies, in contrast, have multiple mandates (e.g., to provide crisis counseling, employments referrals, recreation services), are located in the particular geographic areas they serve, and are more likely to provide services in which non-professional people can participate. The more intimate involvement of a

neighborhood service agency in and with its locality can be expected to lead to greater concern with the agency's community involvement and, at the same time, efforts to link its programs to those of other agencies. Present data suggest, not surprisingly, that administration of a neighborhood service agency is more externally or "environmentally" oriented than that of a family service agency.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study contributes to an understanding of the service orientations of executives in the social services. On a substantive level, present data indicate that social service executives are fundamentally concerned with the setting and accomplishment of program service goals. In addition, they are strongly concerned with responsiveness to, and involvement of their agencies in, the local community. Concerns with efficiency, while moderately strong, do not override or exclude other issues. Autonomy appears to vary by agency situation and mandate. Directors of agencies with multiple funding sources show greater interest than other directors in maintaining agency autonomy. Of all issues, services integration is of least concern to the executives.

An important aspect of our findings is that the six issues are all positively associated with each other. Efforts to meet objectives associated with one criterion are complementary, rather than contradictory, to efforts aimed at realization of the others. The strong correlation between effectiveness and efficiency, in particular, suggests that social service executives are committed to meeting identified service goals at the minimum feasible cost. Such a finding should reassure governmental and political officials who claim insufficient attention is paid by social service administrators to efficiency aims and concerns (Martin, 1980).

Our failure to find differences between male and female executives may reassure those who worry about the administrative orientations of female versus male chief executive officers (cf. Permuter and Alexander, 1978). As suggested by Kanter (1977), opportunity structures rather than gender influence the claimed differential "leadership" behavior of females versus males in organizational contexts. Greater concerns of the older executives with effectiveness, efficiency,

and autonomy may reflect the results of on-the-job learning in the social services arena. If so, opportunities for older and younger executives to share perspectives and experiences might be beneficial to those in both age groups.

Without more information, it is difficult to understand why the more highly educated executives place less emphasis on four of the six service issues than less educated executives do. Those with advanced degrees were perhaps trained for direct service provision and are less interested in a broad array of service goals. This seems unlikely, however, since the ability to obtain and sustain executive-level positions requires attention to organizational concerns such as responsiveness, community involvement, autonomy, and services integration. To understand this phenomenon, we could benefit from research on the content of advanced educational training for social service executives. If DSW and Ph.D. programs are unwittingly teaching students to down play community involvement, responsiveness, autonomy, and services integration, re-orientation of educational and training programs may be required.

The primary contribution of the present analysis has been to provide descriptive data on the service orientations of social service administrators. Subsequent research which could build on and extend these results include the following: (1) modification and extension of the present model, based on the recent theoretical work by Patti (1982, 1983); (2) validation and testing of the present model (and its utility) through gathering and analyzing data on a larger and more diverse sample of social service administrators; and (3) comparative research on social service versus business sector administrators, to gain a better understanding of the claimed "service ethic" of public service managers (cf. Rainey, forthcoming).

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Table 1 -- Service issues, sample items, inter-item correlations, and percentage of correlations falling below $r = .20$.

Service issue (and brief definitions)	Sample Item	No. of items	Inter-item correl.	% correls. below $r = .20$
<u>Effectiveness</u> : importance of establishment of programmatic service goals	"Setting program goals prior to program implementation is _____." ^a	6	.50	0.0
<u>Efficiency</u> : importance of operation of the program at least monetary cost, without regard to goal accomplishment	"Program staff monetary cost compared to the total number of staff contact hours per person served is _____."	5	.36	10.0
<u>Responsiveness</u> : extent to which satisfaction or interests of various persons or groups are taken into account	"Satisfaction of volunteers who work in the program is _____."	6	.29	13.3
<u>Services Integration</u> : extent to which cooperation with other agencies is taken into account	"Program planning with local agency executives is _____."	6	.37	6.7
<u>Autonomy</u> : importance of independence of the agency in day-to-day operations, i.e., its ability to make its own decisions and set its own criteria without outside interference.	"The power of the agency to measure program performance by agency standards is _____."	5	.43	0.0
<u>Community contribution</u> : extent to which the achievement of community-oriented goals is taken into account	"Consideration of the program as a link in the community continuum of services is _____."	5	.41	10.0

^aAgency executives were asked to rate each item on the following scale: 1 = most important; 2 = very important; 3 = moderately important; 4 = somewhat important; 5 = slightly important; 6 = not at all important; and 9 = not applicable. Responses were recoded for the analysis (see Methods section).

Table 2 --- Measures of central tendency and zero-order correlations for six Decision Factors as assessed by agency executives (N=28)

Decision factors	Mean	Md.	Mode	Mean Rank	Effic.	Respon.	Serv-ices integ.	Auton.	Comm. con.
Effectiveness	5.08 ^a (0.75)*	5.02	5.00	5.2 ^b	.58	.50	.60	.63	.71
Efficiency	4.20 (1.02)	4.25	4.20	3.0	--	.00 ^c	.25 ^c	.46	.41
Responsive-ness	4.33 (0.93)	4.59	4.62	3.3	--	--	.50	.44	.52
Integration	3.62 (1.08)	3.69	3.38	2.0	--	--	--	.56	.70
Autonomy	3.91 (1.17)	4.21	4.66	3.4	--	--	--	--	.72
Community contribution	4.56 (1.10)	4.63	4.40	3.0	--	--	--	--	--

^aOn a six-point scale, where 6 = of greatest importance in decision-making; 1 = of no importance.

^bFrom card sort results; see Lallendola (1976).

^cThese correlations are the only ones in Table 2 which fall short of significance at the .05 level or better.

* (standard deviation)

Table 3 -- Correlations of the Decision Factors with Five Personal and Five Agency Characteristics (N=28)

Director and Agency Characteristics	Decision Factors					Comm. Contrib.
	Effect.	Effic.	Respon.	Serv-ices Integ.	Auton.	
Sex of director (1=male; 0=female)	-.21	.04	.13	.21	.00	-.11
Age of director	.34 ^b	.44 ^a	.22	.04	.33 ^b	.15
Tenure of director	.11	.37 ^b	-.13	.06	-.05	-.08
Years administrative experience	.18	.49 ^a	-.21	.00	.05	.03
Years of education completed	-.21	.01	-.34 ^b	-.37 ^b	-.37 ^b	-.35 ^b
Number full-time equivalent staff	.00	.32 ^a	-.11	.12	-.01	-.20
Size of annual budget	.09	.30 ^c	-.04	.18	.10	-.14
Funding sources (1=multiple; 0=single)	.36 ^b	.27 ^c	-.07	-.03	.49 ^a	.21
Type of agency (1=family; 0=neighborhood)	-.11	.13	.02	-.28	-.16	-.27

^a .437 = p < .01

^b .317 = p < .05

^c .240 = p < .10