

STUDIJNÍ TEXT

The Realist Program Theory of a Social Worker's Approach to Clients Included Management of Dilemma

Abstract

The practice of social work is made up of a variety of environments, the heart of the approach being aggregated specific actions that lead to change in the life of clients. The current state of theory does not allow for a sufficient understanding of changes in the life situations of social workers' clients. A natural part of social workers' work with clients is making difficult decisions. Although dilemma theory has the potential to be relevant to social workers, it suffers from conceptual shortcomings. Realist evaluation allows knowledge to be produced using a tight coupling of theory and empirics and reproduced using a tight coupling of the phenomenon, its generative mechanism, and context. With respect to realist programme theory, research questions are formulated focusing on the consequences of social worker interventions. It is a new perspective that allows for the evaluation of how and why social workers intervene and the impact on clients' life situations when workers encounter difficult decisions that arise in the context of conflicting work conditions. The model can stimulate more complex reflection and develop social work theory.

Teaser text

The current state of theory does not allow for a sufficient understanding of changes in the life situations of social workers' clients. A natural part of social workers' work with clients is making difficult decisions. Although difficult decisions theory has the potential to be relevant to social workers, it suffers from conceptual shortcomings. Realist evaluation allows knowledge to be produced using a tight coupling of theory and empirics. With respect to realist programme theory, research questions are formulated focusing on the consequences of social worker interventions. It is a new perspective that allows for the evaluation of how and why social workers intervene and the impact on clients' life situations when workers encounter difficult decisions that arise in the context of conflicting work conditions. The model can stimulate more complex reflection and develop social work theory.

Keywords: interaction, mechanism, retrodution

1 Introduction

The aim of the paper is to answer the research question: 'What is a realist program theory of a social worker's approach with considering the management of dilemma?' According to Cheetham et al. (1992) social work is associated with different research paradigms, strategies, and practices. Johnsson and Svensson (2005) commented that although social work is always open to further development through the adoption of theories from other disciplines, its primary task must be the development of its own theories.

2 Theory

Authors such as Payne (2020), Musil (2013), Bartlett (1970), Biestek (1954) state that the primary concern of social work is the interactions between people and their social environment and social work seeks to achieve a mutually acceptable response from the

participants in the interaction. Hennessey (2011) emphasise that the essence of social work is the implementation of assistance in a network of interpersonal relationships, which can take a variety of forms, and the task of social work is to pay attention to those relationships that are (also potentially) problematic. A natural part of social workers' work with clients are difficult decisions (Lipsky, 1980; Musil, 2004). As mentioned, for example, by Millstein et al. (1994), Evans and Harris (2006), Papadaki and Papadaki (2008), Evans (2016), and Otava (2017), although dilemma theory has the potential to be relevant to social workers, it suffers from conceptual shortcomings. Payne (2020), Cheetham et al. (1992), or Kjørstad (2019) point out that there is still a noticeable lack of knowledge and models on the impact of social workers' interventions on clients' life situations. At the same time, there is a noticeable concern about the impossibility of their generalization and transferability, as social workers' approaches seem to be highly individualized with respect to the uniqueness of clients, the complexity of the problems of target groups, services, organizations, etc. (Kjørstad, 2019). According to some research (Ash, 2022; Dohnalová & Trbola, 2020; Gómez-García et al., 2022), dilemma analysis is not easy.

According to a number of authors, a possible way out of these predicaments is the use of evaluation (Blom & Morén, 2012; Cheetham, 1992; Patton, 1994; Payne, 2020; Rubin & Babbie, 2017; Vo & Archibald, 2018). For Fournier (2005), doing evaluation means identifying, documenting, and analysing interventions in social phenomena that are implemented with the aim of changing and/or preserving these phenomena. According to Kazi (2003) or Pawson and Tilley (2011), knowledge scarcity and transferability problems can be addressed using the concepts of realist evaluation, which allows knowledge to be produced using a tight coupling of theory and empirics and reproduced using a tight coupling of the phenomenon, its generative mechanism and context. To organize, describe and manage evaluations, sets of resources and activities focused on one or more objectives are used in programs (Chen, 2015; Newcomer et al., 2010). Programs are conceptualized in more detail using program theory and improve the generalizability of evaluation results, progressing the social science theory, and achieving consensus in programme planning (Conrad & Miller, 1987). If program theory includes explicit statements of underlying assumptions about how a program should work, then the potential for the usefulness of a programme (Newcomer et al., 2010) is significant. For Patton (1994), programme theory is an expression of the actors' approach. For Katz et al. (2021), social work practice is composed of a variety of environments, the heart of the approach being aggregated specific actions that lead to change in life's clients.

3 Research Design

The research method proposes a way for the researcher to relate to the world, a way of trying to understand the world better (Sayer, 2003). According to Danermark et al. (2005), one can participate in the discussion by rethinking established concepts and theories in previously published texts. Discussions can bring new content to ideas and point to social phenomena that have not been conceptualised in a previously imagined way. Therefore, clarifying different concepts, their content, and their relation to other concepts - is an important research task in itself. According to Sayer (2003), abstract theoretical research is concerned with the set and possible courses of action of social objects, and actual events are treated only as possible outcomes. Deeper analysis aimed at building a new and/or more accurate explanation of reality can be supported by initial knowledge of the theory under investigation

(Fletcher, 2017). With their help, he or she tests the empirical material by searching for and analysing the characteristics of phenomena that correspond to the chosen concepts. Thus, the researcher begins and ends with theoretical concepts, but is enriched with new knowledge. Here, conceptualization stands out as a central scientific activity and takes place under different but reflected assumptions (Danermark, 2005).

4 Analysis

4.1 Three concepts for analysis

Based on the above theory, I will now state three concepts that will be further analysed using the proposed methodology. First. Musil (2004), drawing on Lipsky (1980), argues that social workers belong to a group of public service social workers who must cope with the uncertainty of the conditions of their work when providing services to clients which lead social workers to dilemmas. Musil and Nečasová (2008) formulated a hypothetical model of dilemma formation in which incongruent working conditions and the ideal of social workers are at the beginning, on the basis of which a conflict of expectations is subsequently constructed, and by interpreting it, a difficult decision is made, by accepting responsibility for the difficult decision, a dilemma is created, which social workers try to manage in certain ways. Social workers find themselves on a balance beam when making decisions - the more they try to lean towards one, the more the elimination of the other increases, while the tension of ambiguity increases (Laan, 1998; Musil, 2004). The dilemma is thus characterized by ambivalence in decision making and corresponds to the social worker's inability to decide between two undesirable options (Banks, 2005; Musil, 2004).

Second. Important typology associated with difficult decision making was also presented by Ng et al. (2020). They paid attention to the 'bystander's dilemma' and its social context (Paull et al., 2012, Darley and Latané, 1968). Attention was drawn to the question of how to explain the actions of employees who intervene after encountering workplace bullying and those who do not intervene or even join the perpetrator. Conceived in this way, the research topic corresponds to what Musil (2004) calls the 'dilemma of intervening or not intervening'.

Third. The task of realist research is to discover and clarify social reality through the configuration of 'Context + Mechanism = Outcome,' i.e., 'what operates (m), in what context (c) and with what outcome (o)' (Kazi, 2003). According to Pawson and Tilley (2011), at the same time a configuration expresses both the dynamics of the interactions between its parts and the dynamics each individual part may have. Configurations can be constructed at different levels and between levels of social phenomena. It is up to the actor who composes configurations to choose, with sensitivity to the arguments, those that are expedient with respect to its goals. The central tool of critical realist inquiry is retrodution. For phenomena, the question 'what must be true for this to be the case' is placed before abstracting potential causal mechanisms and seeking empirical evidence for the abstractions (Bhaskar, 1986).

4.2 Characteristics of the Outcomes

The outcomes are the intended and/or unintended consequences of context-activated mechanisms (Pawson, 2011). According to Kazi (2003), they are phenomena because of the

interactions of different parts at different levels of society, and according to the critical realist perspective, cannot be explained by simply linking them to other phenomena. Deciphering the emergence of a system of outcomes may not be straightforward, but Danemark et al. (2005) argue that by realist analysing it is possible to debate the outcomes even from different settings. Science should try to find practically adequate theories, i.e., those that can work, describe, and explain phenomes - in different contexts and are consistent with other knowledge and practices (Sayer, 2003). According to Pawson and Tilley (2011), because outcomes can take many forms, they should be traced to the range of mechanisms and contexts that lead to them. Beyond this, the outcomes create a new context for the activity of (new) mechanisms that trigger (new) outcomes.

For Musil (2013), the basic condition for social work practice is understanding the interactions between people and the subjects of their social environment. Better put, understanding the chain of mutual actions and reactions between clients and the subjects of their life situations is important. Interaction develops at different levels, and the level of the level is determined by the definition of the interactants/actors. An 'acting agent' can be a part of oneself, an individual, a group, and a complex social system, and collectively we speak of social interaction actors. Rogan, La France, 2003, Folger et al., 2021 say that problematic interaction is the dynamic human behaviour of interdependent parties who perceive incompatibility desires, goals, personal comforts, or communication preferences, and the possibility of interference from others because of this incompatibility. Regardless of whether incompatibility exists, if the parties believe incompatibility exists, then conditions are ripe for conflict. Conflicts are constituted and sustained by the behaviours of the parties involved and their reactions to one another, particularly verbal and non-verbal communication. The parties' behaviours are both reactive and predictive. Participants react to each other's last move in anticipation of their next. This predictive element involves interpreting the other's motives and can make it quite difficult to understand the thinking of parties in conflict. It can also produce an infinite spiral, as I try to predict what you will predict that I will predict about your predictions about my predictions, and so on. According to Navrátil (1998), Musil (2004), the set of interactions of actors is their life situation. Social work stands at the point of conflict between actors in a life situation and aims to help make interactions acceptable.

4.3 Characteristics of the Mechanism

Mechanisms are those phenomena that are triggered by context and produce outcomes (Pawson, 2011). Kazi (2003) defined mechanisms as factors in clients' conditions that influence outcomes by enabling them (i.e., helping to achieve them) or by preventing them (i.e., preventing their achievement). According to Danemark et al. (2005), even explaining social phenomena by uncovering the causal mechanisms by which the phenomena were caused is a fundamental role of research. The development and application of abstract theories about underlying social structures and mechanisms form an indispensable part of explanatory social science. For example, Kazi (2003), Astbury, Leeuw (2010) and Kjørstad (2019) see in describing mechanisms the ability to look inside, to open the black box, of intervening social processes that are situated between the circumstances of interventions and their effects, and that a comprehensive understanding of how programs work cannot do without opening the black box of intervention.

Musil and Nečasová (2008) and Otava (2020) state that social workers attempt to manage dilemmas in three ways. The first is 'to remain with the dilemma', which is characterized by maintaining tension in decision making and thus the manifest form of the dilemma. Second, it is 'to bypass the dilemma', which is characterized by the displacement of decision-making tension, and thus the latent form of the dilemma. The third is 'to cancel the dilemma', which is characterized by the removal of the dilemma and the absent form of the dilemma.

According to these authors, the method 'to remain the dilemma' is characterized by maintaining ad hoc behaviour with clients in accordance with the professional ideal of the social worker, maintaining the disparity between the internal ideal and the external working condition, and maintaining the experience of uncertain decision-making in a manifest form. Persistence can be distinguished in two sub-modes. Firstly, from what the authors Musil and Nečasová (2008), and Otava (2020) state, persistence can be established by idealizing the conflict associated with a difficult decision, where the negative experience is accepted as valuable with the absence of a tendency to change it. Second, Kjørstad's (2005) findings suggest that persistence can be formulated by controlling conflict associated with a difficult decision, where the negative experience is accepted but at the same time is considered controllable, and there is a tendency to control it. On this, Kjørstad (2005) states that social workers can accept difficult decisions and react ad hoc spontaneously and intuitively to different individuals and situations. Their ideal is the art of combining normative and conventional morality, giving a wide repertoire of situational solutions.

Another method 'to bypass the dilemma', which can take two forms. Typical of the bypassing modification of the worker's internal ideal is the displacement of the conflicting internal ideal by creating a modification of it compatible with the external working condition, changing the treatment of clients in accordance with the modified ideal, preserving the external working condition and its conflict with the ideal, displacing the experience of uncertain decision-making into a latent form. The circumvention of modifications of the external working condition is characterized by displacing the conflicting working condition by creating a modification of it compatible with the internal ideal, preserving behaviour with clients in accordance with the internal ideal, preserving the internal ideal and its conflict with the external working condition, displacing the experience of uncertain decision-making into a latent form. (Musil & Nečasová, 2008)

Method 'to cancel the dilemma' was conceptualized by Musil and Nečasová (2008) and Otava (2020) in three forms: 'change of conditions', 'change of ideal', and 'change of conditions and ideal'. Disturbance by changing the internal ideal is characterized by a change in dealing with clients according to the new ideal, removing the incongruence between the professional ideal and working conditions by changing the original professional ideal, and removing the experience of uncertain decision making. Disruption by changing the ideal is a mechanism in which workers recognize rules with which their beliefs are inconsistent, making changes at their own individual level. Disturbance by changing external condition is characterized by maintaining the negotiation with clients, eliminating the incongruence of the occupational ideal with the external working condition by changing the condition, and eliminating the experience of uncertain decision making. Disruption by changing a conflicting work condition is a mechanism in which social workers focus on the broader circumstances of clients' life situations and promote change at a nonindividual level. Laan (1998) suggests that to change working conditions, social workers may need to change their ideal in order to maintain a more

general ideal. Disturbance by changing the internal ideal and the external condition is characterized by a change in dealing with clients according to the new ideal and the new condition, the removal of the incongruence between the professional internal ideal and the external working condition, the change of the original ideal and the original condition, and the removal of the experience of uncertain decision making. Disruption by changing the external condition and the internal ideal is a mechanism in which social workers change their existing ideas and enforce change on a nonindividual level. (Musil & Nečasová, 2008; Otava, 2020)

Using Morris' (1971) review of role conflict and the characteristics of ways of managing self-role conflict given by Levinson (1959), it can be said that there is still an exit strategy. According to Getzels and Gupta (1954), self-role conflict arises because there is never an absolute match between the expectations and conditions of the organization on the one hand and the personal values and needs of the worker in the organization on the other. The worker experiences a contradiction that Levinson (1959) calls the role dilemma and the worker's strategy of disruption by escape, and it is typically the behaviour that leads to leaving the organization.

Ng et al. (2020) distinguished two dimensions of context-triggered action. The first dimension is formed by the range between the 'active-passive' poles and describes the extent to which an action is proactive rather than avoidant. The second dimension is formed by the range between the poles 'constructive-destructive' and describes the extent to which the behaviour has a more positive than negative effect on the bullied. From the two dimensions, Ng et al. (2020) inferred four possible types of bystander behaviour. First, the actions that fall into the 'active-constructive' quadrant are mindful responses by workers interested in intervening, such as offering to help the victim or directly punishing the perpetrator. Those behaviours that fall into the 'passive-constructive' quadrant are constructive in the sense that they acknowledge that bullying is unethical, but passive in the sense that they do not try to influence the process of aggression, for example sympathism with the victim. Acting from the 'active-destructive' quadrant involves overtly supporting or encouraging perpetrators, for example, creating situations in which bullying can occur. Activating from the 'passive destructive' quadrant involves ignoring or avoiding the bullying situation and making difficult choices, intentionally or unintentionally.

4.4 Characteristics of the Context

Pawson and Tilley (2011) conceptualize context as the features of the conditions under which a particular phenomenon occurs or does not occur. According to Kazi (2003), context is the factors associated with human service practice. By their nature, they are prior phenomena, states of phenomena, preceding (preexisting) generative phenomena, they are those structures in people's life situations that take a longer time to change, compared to mechanisms (Kazi, 2003). According to Houston (2001), part of social work using a realist perspective is the analysis of the structures that constrain or enable its performance. Similarly, Blom and Morén (2010) point out that contextual indicators of social work need to be monitored and analysed given the open nature of society.

The models of Musil and Nečasová (2008) and Ng et al. (2020) agree that those facing a difficult situation assess key aspects of the situation to decide how they should respond.

According to these authors, the evaluation of situations is contextually conditioned, and workers rely on individual and social anchors. Furthermore, workers are active participants in difficult situations and have their own expression in decision-making reactions. Both models also recognize the key role of interactions between individuals and their social environment in targeting the behaviour of individuals, groups, and networks. According to Musil and Nečasová (2008) and Ng et al. (2020), workers are active actors. The decision-making process is an internally dynamic one, during which, in order for a difficult decision to arise, workers must assess the circumstances as conflicting and serious enough to be worth paying attention to. Musil, Nečasová (2008) emphasize the role of the moral ideal in shaping reactions to difficult decisions, or moral sensitivity as described by Fleck-Henderson (1991). Ng et al. (2020) in this sense point out the role of indicators of unethical situation or perception of the seriousness of the situation. Musil (2004) and Ng et al. (2020) point out that events and their circumstances are ambiguous, and this inherent ambiguity allows individuals to form multiple subjective interpretations to understand their environment and act accordingly.

5 Answer to research question for this paper

At this point the question 'What is a realist program theory of a social worker's approach with considering the management of dilemma?' will be answered. Musil (2004), Musil and Nečasová (2008) and Otava (2020) elaborated a reaction to a difficult decision on (only) the 'active-passive' axis, as Ng et al. (2020) might say. Therefore, now the concepts of 'dilemma management' will be considered and combined with 'bystander behaviour' types. The aim of the paper is to answer the question 'What is a realist program theory of social workers approach, with considering dilemma?' A realist program theory of the social worker's approach to the dilemma is that the existing conflict of the social worker's ideal creates a need for the social worker to master mechanisms that impact interactions in clients' life situations. The mechanisms identified were: remain by active constructive, bypass by active constructive, cancel by active constructive, exit by active constructive; remain by passive constructive, bypass by passive constructive, cancel by passive constructive, exit by passive constructive; remain by passive constructive, bypass by passive constructive, cancel by passive constructive, exit by passive constructive; remain by passive destructive, bypass by passive destructive, cancel by passive destructive, exit by passive destructive; remain by active constructive, bypass by active constructive, cancel by active constructive, exit by active constructive.

6 Research questions for future research

Given the lack of information on the impact of managing dilemmas on clients' life situations and on basis of identified mechanisms questions will be formulated to allow further exploration of the topic, Questions have been given priority over hypotheses as they allow for greater flexibility in research (Punch, 2014; Robson, 2002). The logic of the main research question and sub questions is chosen. This approach allows focusing attention on the main concept and organizing it through its sub-conceptualizations (Punch, 2014). In this case, using 4 types of acting and 4 types of managing. Questions will be formulated regarding the realist paradigm in retroductive configuration 'outcome-mechanism-context.' According to Bhaskar (2008), things tend to act in certain ways, and the task of science is to look for the tendencies in which causality takes place. Questions are formulated in the tendency 'client's life situation - intervention as a response to conflict - conflict between conditions'.

Proposal for central question: 'What are the client's interactions in the life situation after the social worker intervenes, triggered by a conflict in his or her work conditions?.'

Proposal for sub questions for manage by Active constructive

Sub question 1a: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation when the social worker intervenes active constructive for the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition remaining?'

Sub question 1b: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes active constructive for bypassing the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Sub question 1c: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes active constructive for cancelling the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Sub question 1d: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes actively constructively for exiting the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Proposal for sub questions for manage by Passive constructive

Sub question 2a: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation when the social worker intervenes passive constructive for the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition remaining?'

Sub question 2b: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes passive constructive for bypassing the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Sub question 2c: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes passive constructive for cancelling the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Sub question 2d: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes passive constructive for exiting the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Proposal for sub questions for manage by Passive destructive

Sub question 3a: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation when the social worker intervenes passive destructive for the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition remaining?'

Sub question 3b: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes passive destructive for bypassing the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Sub question 3c: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes passive destructive for cancelling the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Sub question 3d: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes passive destructive for exiting the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Proposal for sub questions for manage by Active destructive

Sub question 4a: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation when the social worker intervenes active destructive for the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition remaining?'

Sub question 4b: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes active destructive for bypassing the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Sub question 4c: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes active destructive for cancelling the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

Sub question 4d: 'What are the client's interactions in a life situation if the social worker intervenes active destructive for exiting the dilemma between his/her moral ideal and the next work condition?'

7 Conclusion

For example, Brooks (2005) argues that a fundamental dilemma from the beginning of social work has been the tension between providing services to oppressed populations and organizing the oppressed to challenge the power structure. The language of the debate has changed over the years from wholesale versus retail social work (Richmond, 1930) or cause versus function (Lee, 1937), to service versus organizing (Bobo et al., 2001) or case versus conditions in society (Musil, 2004). The authors pay attention to various aspects of the dilemma. For example, the transition from which, to which, pole of the dilemma can be made more easily or habitually (Brooks, 2005). Or what a particular difficult decision looks like (Musil, 2004). But neither of these analyses the impact on the clients' life situation. They do not consider the consequences associated with dilemmas and only take the client into account implicitly, as the subject "involved". The questions raised in this text therefore seem to be truly relevant to the research of everyday practice of the social workers, which, on the other hand, is mentioned by the authors. They consider it as the object of their interest.

The current state of theory does not allow for a sufficient understanding of changes in the life situations of social workers' clients. The aim of the paper is to answer the question 'What is a realist program theory of social workers approach, with considering dilemma?'. The answer is given by program theory in a realistic 'context-mechanism-outcome' configuration. This article offers a new model of social workers' approach to their clients that includes the dilemmas that social workers must manage. By employing a critical realist perspective, the model allows for consideration of the specific contexts and mechanisms that lead to change. Thus, it is a new perspective that allows for the evaluation of how and why social workers intervene and the impact on clients' life situations when workers encounter difficult decisions that arise in the context of conflicting work conditions. The model can stimulate more complex reflection and develop social work theory.

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