Chapter 11
Supervision of Ethics in Social Work Practice: A Reconstruction of Ethics Expertise

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ABSTRACT

The chapter aims at arguing the necessity and academic functioning of the supervision of ethics—as a model embodied in ethical expertise. Starting with 2012, the model of ethics expertise in the social welfare practice—the supervision of ethics—was continuously developed. Based on the previous approaches of supervision of ethics, the process is understood as having the following main functions: the Gatekeeping in construction of ethics policies, the mediation in achieving a reflective balance in the organization, the administrative and deliberative function, the construction of ethical climate in organizations and monitoring of ethical conformity and counselling of ethics, ethical advising and support. This model brings together practices from all other forms of ethics expertise, additionally exercising its gatekeeper role in the transfer of political theories on public good through the implementing programs and practices thereof, and making the professional values compatible with the organisational ones.

INTRODUCTION

We aim to bring into focus the necessity and the academic function of the supervision of ethics – as a model embodied in ethical expertise. Starting with 2012, the model of ethics expertise in the social welfare practice – the supervision of ethics – was continually developed. Based on the previous approaches of the supervision of ethics, the process is understood to have the following main functions: the function of ethics policies gatekeeping; the mediation function in achieving a reflective balance in the organisation on the interests of each party involved; the function of ethics construction in organisations; the function of ethical conformity monitoring; the function of ethical auditing; the function of the counselling of ethics, support and consultancy; the function of administration and deliberation.

The paper intends to bring about the reconstruction of ethical expertise by discussing the new model functions as a suitable model of a knowledge-based society. We will initiate its reconstruction by differentiating the ethical values of an organisation into the constitutive ethical values and the operational values. The constitutive values are correlated with the organisation's mission, while the operational values are correlated with the policies of the organisation, its products and services.

BACKGROUND: GROUNDS OF ETHICS EXPERTISE

The literature on ethics expertise starts by defining it consistently from an epistemological and pragmatic point of view. Since there is only a small amount of developed scientific literature on the ethics expertise in the area of social work (Reamer, 1987; 2001; 2012; Sandu & Caras (Frunză), 2014), an attempt to reconstruct it can be based on the ethics expertise in medical practice (Iltis & Sheehan, 2016; Rasmussen, 2005; Rasmussen, 2016; (Frunză, 2011) Schicktanz et al. (2012); Singer, 1972; Weinstein, 1994,).

The ethics expert is defined as being the person who has the capacity to decide between what is right or wrong in a specific field and, for such a decision to be made, this person must also be familiar with the concepts and moral arguments and also devote time to gathering information regarding the moral philosophy and reflect upon the moral concepts. These actions could lead to grounded conclusions on an ethical issue, stronger than that of a person who is not familiar with the moral concepts or who does not spend enough time studying and understanding them (Singer, 1972, pp. 116-117).

Recent opinion on ethics expertise (Iltis & Sheehan, 2016) refers to the ethics expert as being the one who knows what needs to be done. This knowledge of what needs to be done must include both the “common truth” on the moral values
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