

## Leadership Competency in Human Services Organizations From Social Work Administration Perspective

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**Abstract.** Leadership is the ability possessed by a person to be able to influence individuals and groups, so that being a leader is not enough to just rely on talent or experience, but leaders must have competencies that are able to encourage success in achieving organizational goals in providing social services. The writing of this article aims to describe leadership competencies according to the perspective of social work administration in human service organizations. This study is based on literature studies on various credible and up-to-date reference sources consisting of 27 scientific articles and 4 books. This article underscores the importance of competence for a social work administrator (leader), which includes knowledge, professional attitudes, and actions. The results of other studies found that not only the three aspects, but there are additional competencies such as values, traits and emotional intelligence. This competency is something that is absolutely owned by a leader, and is able to assist leaders in facing future challenges. In addition, leadership competencies can be used as a self-assessment for leaders in social work practice to improve the performance of human service organizations effectively and efficiently.

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### INTRODUCTION

Human services organizations are organizations that focus on providing services for the needs of social welfare services, have an important role and have a social mission based on human values, solidarity, and generosity without thinking about material benefits. Human service organizations basically have a function to protect, maintain and improve individual well-being through understanding, shaping or changing personal attributes. Furman et al., (2021) explain that some organizations focus on a particular set of services, such as mental health services, child protection, and family and community services.

Skidmore in Maryatun & Nulhaqim, (2021) reveals that of course in a human service organization can not be separated from the existence of management, decision making, human relations, communication, and perception. For the most part, in human service organizations there are social workers who participate in running the organization to provide quality services to beneficiaries. Social work knowledge, competencies and values, needs, norms and

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organizational culture are dynamic forces that assist social work practice in the context of human service organizations (Knott & Scragg, 2016; Timms, 2018 in Furman et al., (2021) ).

Having skills in the form of adequate competence is one of the supporters of a leader in achieving organizational success and goals. Based on the opinion of Boje and Dennehey, (1999) in Letchfield et al., (2008) leadership is considered as a concept that is socially constructed according to what is felt by people working in an organization. A leader also has leadership traits such as influencing relationships, compliance relationships from subordinates, and having a commitment to managing all organizational activities (Ismail et al., 2014) . Manz and Henry Sims as quoted in Gothard & Austin, (2013) said that if someone wants to be an effective leader, that person must be able to learn to lead himself. This can help leaders to advance to become leaders in nonprofit organizations. In addition, the success of an organization is always associated with a dominant leader position in regulating organizational processes (Pramudyo, 2013) .

Previous research conducted by Cohen & Hyde, (2014); The Nonprofit Leadership Alliance , (2011) in Hopkins et al., (2014) underlines that many leaders of nonprofit organizations are aware of the limitations of their leadership abilities and want new approaches and competencies to help improve organizational performance. A set of acceptable and complex competencies can have an influence on the successful management of human service organizations (Wimpfheimer, 2004) . An administrator needs to have social values and have professional competencies related to social work as well as knowledge of human service organizations (Čižikienė & Urmanavicius, 2021) . Meanwhile , Nunez et al., (2018) describe leadership competencies that a leader should have, namely developing self-awareness; understand cultural stereotypes; increase self-confidence; creating a vision; able to think globally; provide support to members; have effective communication competence; able to use organizational resources effectively; and able to provide motivation.

Studies on leadership competencies have been carried out, but most of the research focuses on the context of leadership competencies in business organizations and public organizations ( Mumford et al., 2017; Nunez et al., 2018; Kubátová & Kročil, 2022; Hayati & Sari, 2007). ) . Furthermore, studies on leadership capacity development in non-profit organizations are still dominated by research from abroad ( Austin et al., 2011 ; Theus et al., 2019 ; Haley-Lock & Kruzich, 2008 ; Hopkins et al., 2014 ; Hess & Bacigalupo, 2013). Meanwhile, a study conducted by Gunawan & Nulhaqim, (2021) , emphasized that a leader should be able to broaden knowledge and insight into the dynamics of the social service organization environment they lead. This study is expected to be able to describe leadership competencies in human

service organizations, especially when associated with the social work profession working in the realm of human service organizations.

## **METHODS**

This article aims to describe leadership competencies in human service organizations that characterize social work administration practices. This study is a literature study as a research approach. Article writing is carried out by reviewing 30 reference sources consisting of various sources of books, reports and scientific articles obtained from credible and up-to-date sources by curating to select articles that are relevant to predetermined research topics, including scientific articles related to leadership, competence leadership, human service organization. The literature sources used were obtained from the Publish or Perish database, Google Scholar, Research gate, Administration in Social Work Journal, Elsevier, and British Journal of Social Work. The results from various literatures will be used to examine leadership competencies in human service organizations.

The discussion in this paper begins by describing leadership in human service organizations, where the leader is the spearhead in the success of an organization in achieving its goals. The discussion continues by describing the factors that drive someone to be interested in an administrative position in a human services organization. Furthermore, describing leadership competencies, starting with a general discussion related to leadership competencies, further examining in detail the competencies that can be used by leaders as social work administrators who are involved in human service organizations. To complete the arguments according to the experts that have been put forward, a review of various literatures and the results of previous studies that are relevant to the topic of discussion has been carried out.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Leadership**

The classic definition of leadership given by a well-known organizational theorist, Richard Cyrt (1990) in Watson & Hoefer, (2014) defines leadership as the ability to make organizational participants focus their attention on issues that are considered important by the leader. Referring to the opinion of Bargal, (2000) cited by Hughes & Wearing, (2007) describes organizational leadership which is mostly centered on how a leader can influence organizational processes, enable group cohesion and achieve organizational goals. Leadership in nonprofits is not about giving orders to members or staff, it's about influencing others. Where the position and abilities of a leader are important in leading an organization or institution, it implies that staff members are

able to follow the actions and directions of a leader for the continuity of achieving organizational goals.

Following the opinion of Gunastri, (2012) leadership when viewed from an interpersonal influence that is able to take advantage of two things consisting of situation and meaning, namely process and property. In more detail, the process is explained as a non-coercive influence, which is able to direct and coordinate activities directed at achieving organizational goals, while property is defined as leadership having qualities, characteristics and attributes that can affect the success of staff members and the organization. Thus, leadership refers to the capacity to influence relationships with others, thereby leading to mobilization to follow the path taken by the leader.

Continuing Watson & Hoefer, (2014) there are two leadership approaches, namely 1). Transformational leadership (Transformational leadership style) , offers the opportunity for followers to achieve great things by making major changes in the organization and themselves. Transformational leaders create a shared vision with staff members and move forward to make that vision a reality. Usually transformational leaders are charismatic, inspirational, intellectually stimulating, people oriented and give individual attention to others. 2). Servant leadership style, a leadership approach in which the leader chooses himself to lead by serving others. The purpose of this leadership is to serve others well first and gain power or influence later. Both approaches are needed to deal with changes that will occur in the future in the organization, and this approach is able to support the achievement of the goals and vision of the organization.

### **Factors that cause a person to become a Leader**

Today, the need for creative leaders is very important in social work. Innovative and creative leaders are needed in order to help people better understand social relationships, social needs and be able to provide assistance to function better in interactional situations. According to Skidmore, (1994) there are various efforts that have been made to determine these factors, including: 1). Prestige and status, being an administrator or executive in a social service agency certainly offers a better status offer. 2). Higher salaries, administrators usually get a higher salary than their members. 3). Desire to achieve, encouragement from within humans who always want to act and get achievements, where every individual has the drive to achieve goals. This means that by becoming a leader, you will get many opportunities to take action. 4). Desire to change and improve policies and services, when a social worker becomes an administrator, he or she has the opportunity to change policies and improve services. 5). Reach for power, many of the social workers want to be directly involved in planning and decision making that affect the delivery of social services. 6). Stepping-stone, by achieving the best position on every ladder in the

organization. 7). Opportunity for creativity, the opportunity to gain new experiences with methods and procedures that are already available to make changes that are beneficial to the beneficiaries. 8). Neurotic needs, several studies have shown that leaders change positions to meet neurotic needs. 9). Service, giving of self, wants to use the abilities possessed to be able to help others.

Some of the factors described above are the reason why everyone including social workers is interested in becoming an administrator (leader) in a human services organization. This, of course, is necessary with careful thought, so as to be able to become a proper and influential leader, and not a powerful leader. Successful leadership is leadership that is able to read the situation at hand and use it appropriately.

### **Competencies that need to be possessed in order to be a good Leader**

In the 21st century there is an increasing interest in social work leadership (Mary, 2005) . Leadership in social work has a shorter history of development when compared to other disciplines such as psychology, business and public organizations (Luo, 2021) . It is true that social work administrators borrow ideas and experiences from other disciplines to support their understanding of leadership, particularly in human service organizations. According to Mizhari & Berger (2005) in Stone et al., (2014) that leadership in the social work profession is becoming more important in response to social, cultural, economic and political forces capable of shaping social services. Thus, the meaning of leadership is someone who is able to set direction, standards, and vision for an organization.

According to Tood W & Julie M, (2019) social workers as administrators, namely leaders, can use the self-efficacy that has been gained from direct practical experience in the field and competencies to lead a team that is able to produce an innovative change in the organization, and this is often the case. consistent with the characteristics of an effective leader. Goleman (2011) suggests that an effective leader is someone who has a fairly high emotional intelligence including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Various abilities can be a supporting factor for leaders to demonstrate their practical skills and be able to encourage increased collaboration among team members who are members of human service organizations.

The term competence should need to be refined, not only regarding skills and abilities but also knowledge, behavior, traits, attributes, attitudes, values, experience and emotional intelligence which are considered as leadership competencies. (Packard, 2014) . These skills are to be able to carry out the duties of a leader effectively and efficiently (Norhasanah, 2021) . The

categories of managerial competence proposed by Hayati & Sari, (2007) quoted from Yukl (1998: 214), include: 1). Technical skills (technical skills), namely in the form of knowledge related to methods, processes, procedures and techniques in carrying out managerial activities; 2). Interpersonal skills, abilities possessed by humans in the form of communication, accountability, and trust; 3). Conceptual competence (conceptual skills) , namely general analytical skills, think logically and have concepts.

The leadership competence possessed by the leader is an important factor in managerial efficiency. Where if an organization can formulate effective skills practices and techniques then individual effectiveness in the organization will develop. Furthermore, according to Mumford et al., (2017) there are nine different competencies that seem to be able to contribute to the leader's performance including problem definition, cause/goals analysis; constraint analysis; planning, forecasting, creative thinking, idea evaluation, wisdom, sense making/visions. Competencies that are specifically possessed are able to make leaders able to define important issues that are happening, able to analyze the causes of problems and set relevant goals, leaders are able to identify obstacles that can affect each solution properly, and leaders can interpret alternative approaches and ideas. new ideas to overcome unwanted potential.

Various previous competencies are general competencies that should be mastered by a leader, both in non-profit and for-profit organizations. However, this study focuses on leadership competence in the perspective of social work administration. According to The Network for Social Work Management , (2018) there are several competencies with performance indicators needed by a leader to successfully implement a human service organization including a). Interpersonal skills that support the survival and effective functioning of human service organizations; b). Analytical and critical thinking skills that can drive the growth of human service organizations; c). Have a professional demeanor, by setting an appropriate example to motivate staff members to act professionally; d). Maintain good relationship with internal and external stakeholders; e). Have good communication skills, by ensuring all written and oral communication can be well articulated; f). Have cross-cultural understanding, by fostering tolerance and mutual respect for differences in the organizational environment; g). Can advocate for social justice both at national and international levels; h). Able to facilitate innovative change, by supporting innovative practices to improve social services.

Furthermore, Skidmore, (1994) explains that leadership competencies in social service organizations need to have a competency framework that includes knowledge, professional attitudes and skills. However, there is no perfect leader, but by having all three competency

frameworks and understanding the administrative process, it means that there is a high probability that the organization's operations will be effective in providing social services to beneficiaries. It has been briefly described previously regarding Skidmore's view, (1994) regarding leadership competence according to the perspective of social work administration, that there are three aspects, as follows:

a. Knowledge of the social work administrator

A leader in providing social services is required to be able to apply the knowledge possessed, which has been proven to be true, such as knowing the goals, policies, services and resources of the institution; Having a basic knowledge of the dynamics of human behavior, this becomes a strong basis for understanding oneself, understanding staff and clients; Have knowledge of community resources, especially those related to the organization they lead; Understand social work methods used in social service organizations; Knowing the principles, processes and management techniques, is fundamental in advancing the welfare of the organization through the use of management principles and techniques; Knowing professional associations in social work, the existence of these associations makes a great contribution to the progress and health of the organization; know the types and patterns of organizations that can lead to changes in the human service organization for the better; Knowing how the organization works, including the strengths and limitations of the organization being led; Have knowledge about evaluating social service institutions in an effort to provide effective social services.

b. Attitudes of the administrator

A competent leader has a professional attitude, as for the professional attitudes that leaders need to have in order to support the success of a human service organization, including: Being able to respect every member of staff; the attitude of accepting staff members without distinguishing them from other members; Helping staff members to be able to upgrade themselves and their abilities; Have an attitude that is aware of the importance of values; Have an open minded attitude that is accepting constructive input and suggestions; shows an optimistic attitude towards the human service organization that all activities will go well.

c. Action (Administrator in action)

In addition to having professional knowledge and attitudes, a competent leader needs to be good at skills, including Accepting, being able to accept staff members as unique individuals with weaknesses and strengths they have; Caring, having concern for others, by respecting and trusting staff members; Creating, being able to be a creative person who is able to establish innovative policies, methods and procedures that can improve services; Democratizing, social



work administrators recognize that engaging staff members through participation can make social service organizations better; Trusting, having implicit trust in a staff member of a human services organization; Approving, leaders realize that building the morale of staff members through proper approval and recognition is not only beneficial for staff but also for the sustainability of the organization; Planning, able to make good planning with effective planning can bring the desired results of a social service organization.

Organizing, able to understand the organization that can regulate the running of an effective institutional structure; Setting priorities, able to determine priorities by understanding various goals and objectives, comparing and weighing the importance of goals and making the right decisions both short and long term; Delegating, doing delegation by giving duties and authority to staff members; Decision making, the leader compiles facts, looks carefully at alternatives, anticipates possible outcomes, and makes the best choice; Communicating, being ears and eyes means being able to communicate well with everyone; and Motivating, effective social work administrators have the ability to motivate and even inspire staff members in using their talents and in carrying out organizational functions.

It is important to reiterate that the competence possessed by a social worker administrator as a leader is significant. Stone et al., (2014) explained that institutional leaders have made various efforts in earnest to be able to position themselves as having knowledge, professional attitudes and actions that can help improve the quality of organizational performance. In addition, social worker leaders are creative, innovative, and inspiring figures, furthermore they are more inclusive and selfless than leaders in business organizations and public institutions in general (Sullivan, 2016; Brilliant, 2001 in Luo, 2021). Nevertheless, leaders play an active role in understanding staff members and have a role in taking action to address problems that occur in social service organizations. Through abilities and skills, making leaders have an important task to take full responsibility for the achievement of goals, namely building a better organizational climate and service.

There is a debate in the social work administration literature, it is argued that in social services whether an administrator requires different competencies from management in other types of organizations. Described by Gummer, 1990; Hasenfeld, 2000; Patti, 2000 in Wuenschel, (2008) several authors argue that social service institutions have certain characteristics that distinguish them from other organizations, where an administrator as the manager of social service institutions must have unique skills including being able to overcome difficult moral



choices; accommodate various external constituencies; advocate for stigmatized populations; collaborate with other institutions; and collaborate with professionals from other disciplines.

Based on the previous literature review, it shows that this competency can be used as a framework to describe the skills needed and used as a leadership performance appraisal tool, of course it can identify criteria in selecting and developing leadership in human service organizations so that an administrator is able to face challenges that arise in the future.

## CONCLUSION

Leadership is someone who has the task of coordinating and providing direction to members who are members of the organization to achieve goals, and has an important role in maintaining the accountability of human service organizations. There are various advantages to being a leader, including having the authority to regulate the organization towards the planned changes, gaining prestige in the form of better status or recognition from the environment, obtaining income with a fairly high value, offering many opportunities to take action in formulating organizational policies, improve existing services in human service organizations, have the power to influence members to carry out organizational activities in a positive direction, have high creativity. In addition, the human service organization requires a leader who has competence in carrying out his functions and responsibilities as a leader. Competence is an absolute or important requirement for administrator success. The various competencies described above are generally competencies required by all leaders in the organization. However, in human service organizations there are slight differences that make it more unique from the perspective of social work administration. These competencies can be used as an assessment for leaders and managers in developing better human service organizations, and it is believed that the competencies possessed by administrators are able to drive the success of an organization. Thus, leadership competencies consisting of knowledge, professional attitudes and actions are needed to face future challenges in order to be successful in managing human service organizations.

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