

BOOK REVIEW

The Organisational Context of Human Service Practice

Elizabeth Ozanne and David Rose
Palgrave Macmillan, South Yarra, Australia 2013
ISBN: 9781420256390, 290pp. Paperback. AUD price unavailable

Ozanne and Rose have provided a significant new resource in human services organisational theory and management. This management text is focussed on human services organisations (HSOs) covering organisational and management theory and applying this to human services in the public, private and third sectors. It provides an overview of management theory as well as new challenges facing HSOs. These include an examination of technology, organisational structures, new and old challenges for the workforce and promoting evaluation of performance and programmes. The text is grounded in the Australian human services experience but is relevant to other jurisdictions (such as New Zealand) which have many common elements including aspects of structure, legislation and impact of changes such as new public management. Significantly, the language of the book is from a human services perspective. Associate Professor Elizabeth Ozanne and Dr David Rose are staff members at the University of Melbourne.

The structure of the book is clear. The Preface states the book is divided into two sections. Chapters One to Six work towards developing an understanding of HSOs, organisational theory, the environment and internal factors such as leadership and culture. The second section, Chapters Seven to Ten, looks at clients, staff, change and outcome evaluation. The concluding chapter considers key themes from the text and questions for HSOs and their staff. Each chapter commences with a summary of the key points and within each chapter there are a series of learning activities. The chapters end with a summary of the material covered and, finally, review questions. This approach lends itself well to the book being used in the classroom as a set text. Its structure would also lend itself to distance education. The book has an excellent index and list of references.

Each chapter covers a distinct area of organisational theory and practice. The book begins with the changing context of human services practice thus providing a good basis for the text. It then provides a good overview of organisational theory in general by covering the environment of HSOs, setting of HSO direction, the role of technology, HSO structure, clients, key human resource issues, organisational change and lastly HSO performance

and outcomes. Each of these topics is thoroughly presented and explores contemporary trends as well as looking to the future.

The audience and purpose for the book are clear. Ozanne and Rose are aiming to provide a text helping human services workers (HSWs), including social workers, to “better integrate an organisational perspective into their practice”. In particular, they note the need for this given that new graduates move quickly into the first levels of management. They carefully define the role of the human service worker as working directly with clients and explore the need for HSWs to understand the context of organisations in order to both influence organisations and to understand how organisations influence practice.

The authors reference Hasenfeld (1983) and build on this work to bring in changes for the 21st century. Of particular note is the work on the organisational environment and how changes in the external environment influence the shape and structure of HSOs. They describe organisations clearly and explain new trends in the HSO sector such as new, for-profit, non-government organisations and hybrid organisations. Clear discussions on the impact of change – such as the ageing demographic – for clients and workforce, globalisation, information technology and responses to risk are well set out and insightful. The influence of new public management is explored from historical development to current examples.

The second section gives an excellent overview on clients. It defines and explores the nature of being a client, clients becoming partners and the role of the client voice. The role of power is explored in the client–HSO relationship and the reasons why clients do and do not seek intervention, and whether intervention is voluntary or regulated. The role of consumer and consumer rights is thoroughly considered through examples of services such as mental health and elder care. An examination of the benefits and criticism of co-production is introduced: clients and organisations working together in a reciprocal relationship. Finally the barriers to consumer involvement are outlined with some challenges for the future. This section has a chapter on “workforce” which, in addition to describing practice roles, challenges the HSW to consider carefully the organisation they are going to work for – both the nature of the organisation and the role they will play. Examples of the challenges faced by staff are outlined highlighting the ambiguity of practice. The operating of teams and some of the conflicts faced by them are well explored along with self-care. This chapter is of particular relevance to the new HSW and those in the early years of practice. The examples are excellent and would be very helpful in a classroom setting. Change is well covered in the next chapter with both the theory and practical examples. The last of these chapters covers performance and evaluation. This is helpful as, while it acknowledges the impact of control from a new management perspective, it asserts the need for quality, performance management and programme evaluation. The historical background of quality management is explored and is related to accreditation processes. It offers an introduction to triple bottom line reporting, balanced scorecards, and program evaluation and logic models.

The book ends with a set of reflective questions for practitioners and managers. These provide a “scorecard” for organisational performance to help ensure staff understand the

role and influence of organisations so that they can, in turn, influence the organisation and perhaps be agents for change themselves through this understanding. This section provides the opportunity to reflect by considering the wider organisation and its environment and the client groups served, while working with immediate demand.

Key elements of organisational theory in HSOs are well covered and these could be further supplemented by a generic textbook in a tertiary education setting. The authors do not aim to explore financial management, for example.

This book provides an excellent resource for those teaching and studying human services management and organisational theory. At undergraduate level, students will possibly need to be in the fourth year of a Bachelor's degree so they have some experience to assist them to understand both the theory and the examples. The book would be a useful resource for postgraduate students studying HSOs and management. Specific chapters in the book inform key areas which would be useful material in specific areas such as the workforce or clients. In particular, the book provides an Australian-based perspective that will also be of relevance in other countries.

Lareen Cooper

Senior Lecturer

Massey University

Palmerston North, New Zealand

Reference

Hasenfeld, Y. (1983). *Human service organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NY: Prentice-Hall.