

Service Delivery

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INTRODUCTION

Service delivery is a major feature of the social sector which “includes entities and initiatives devoted to advancing human dignity and social justice. Social sector organizations (SSOs) are formed to primarily improve the human condition and effect social change at local, national, and global levels” (Aqeel Tirmizi & Vogelsang, 2017, p. 2). Students preparing to enter the social sector usually have service delivery as one of their main targets, many of them wanting to make a change in the world. It is, therefore, appropriate that most of these students would be following a course within the Faculty for Social Wellbeing since the Faculty’s description, to be found on its webpage (Faculty for Social Wellbeing, n.d.) explains that each of its departments “contributes towards the welfare of society...” and that they “are animated by the same utilitarian spirit and led by the same values of solidarity, empathy, social justice, empowerment, inclusion, rehabilitation, prevention and positive intervention”.

The unifying strength and purpose which this description emits positions the Faculty as one of the major stakeholders of social service delivery in the country, with all the responsibility that this entails, and creates a dual role for it. On the one hand, the Faculty is the institution which contributes to efficient and effective service delivery by preparing competent professionals to work in the field. On the other hand, it is one of the main institutions involved in the generation of research around social issues. Both these roles are essential to service delivery in different ways.

HUMAN SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

The first contribution of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing to service delivery is the preparation of competent human services professionals. Although this is generally acknowledged as a major task of the Faculty, it is not an easy one since practice for... social care staff is emotionally and ethically demanding. Complexity and uncertainty frequently surround the social and health issues about which they must make fine judgements. Staff must strike a unique balance in each case between person-centred working and the requirements set by job roles and organizational boundaries... Staff often act in a context where needs are urgent, possibly life- or development- threatening, and presented with strong feelings (Kline & Preston-Shoot, 2012, p. 58).

The question then becomes how to mould students into professionals who can carry this responsibility appropriately and prepare them for the challenges which this entails. The Faculty takes this role very seriously and is aware that the process requires more than academic preparation. It also entails accompanying students on a journey of self-awareness, mentoring them, helping them face the demands of practical placements, being available for them when they need to share their fears and doubts and exposing them to experiences of practitioners from the field. The determinant of success in this process, which would accompany the student’s academic progress, is whether practitioners would want the student as a colleague, once he or she graduates. Only an affirmative answer can attest to the Faculty’s achievement in this area.

Students usually come to the Faculty with hopes and dreams of the contribution they would like to make to society. Very often, the courses they undertake transform them both professionally and personally. This

transformation is important because to be involved in human service delivery requires personal preparation, as well as sustenance once professional status has been attained. Hence the insistence on supervision by a number of the Faculty's professions. Some of the students find the changes required of them impossible to surmount and decide that involvement in the social field is not for them. However, those who complete the task of becoming human services professionals successfully usually integrate this aspect within their professional identity. Many do this with great commitment and are able to enhance service delivery greatly through their contribution.

THE SOCIAL PILLARS

The Faculty's second role when contributing to service delivery, the generation of research around social issues is, perhaps, a more contentious one. While the Faculty would readily see this as a major component of its workload and the mainstay of its academic existence, its integration with service delivery is not always so clear for practitioners. Unfortunately, these two social pillars are sometimes seen as separate, with hardly any links between them. This is regrettable for a number of reasons. First of all, today's global society increasingly demands accountability and insists that services are evidence-based, with an efficient and effective use made of scarce resources. To meet this requirement, service providers can make use of the "evidence" produced by the Faculty and blend it with their practice wisdom, in itself a form of evidence. This would ensure a service delivery which is grounded in what works and which meets accountability demands in a much better way.

Another regret is that practitioners often view academics as removed from reality and living in an ivory castle. This may make them resistant to the knowledge generated within the Faculty, judging it to be inapplicable. However, the truth is that many academics are still involved in the field in one way or another, while others are coming from years of practice. Breaking down the resistance to academics on the part of practitioners would enrich both service delivery and social research. At the same time, it is important that, in the generation of research, academics involve practitioners and include their perspective, to ensure that the research carried out reflects reality and that the data generated is applicable to service delivery, at its different levels.

Service delivery and academia need to maintain strong links between them. These links already exist in a number of cases, with the two areas making strong contributions to each other. However, in other situations, resistance is sometimes created and blocks the two areas from being open to each other. The casualty of this is service delivery and, consequently, the vulnerable members of society to whom the services which fall under the Faculty's remit are delivered. If service delivery is to be maintained as the Faculty's ultimate goal, as it should be, and if the Faculty believes that vulnerable members of society deserve the best, then this will serve as a beacon for it to continue to develop its students and programmes while reaching out to service providers and involving them in its operations. In this way, practitioners will be more receptive to supplementing their experience by academically generated knowledge, leading to service delivery which is more holistic, based on what works and making effective and efficient use of available resources.

REFERENCES

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