Besluitvorming in hulpverleningsinstellingen
Dijk, J.

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SUMMARY

DECISION MAKING IN SOCIAL AGENCIES

The purpose of this study is to construct a model for description, diagnosis and improvement of decision making in social agencies. The model is based upon three criteria:

a) effectiveness, b) efficiency and c) participation in decision making.

The model contains a set of specific criteria for testing and diagnosing decision making. The model is operationalized in specific questions and research methods.

Research has been done in three social agencies. In this thesis the research process and the results of two case studies are presented. The evaluation of the case studies leads to conclusions about the theoretical and methodological issues and to recommendations to improve the structure and processes of decision making in social agencies.

Theoretical discourse

In this thesis organizational 'decision making' is defined as "a process of transfer and interpretation of information as a base for deliberation and bargaining between participants which lead to decisions". In chapter 2 a review is given of theoretical approaches to organizational decision making.

Most attention is paid to a) the phase-theorem (Witte, 1972; Mintzberg et al., 1976 and Koopman, 1980) b) power and political theories (Pettigrew, 1973; Preffer, 1981) and c) non-decision theories (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972).

These perspectives and theories do not exclude each other. Their utility for research of decision making is dependent on several factors: the characteristics of organizations, decision areas and participants. These recent studies give more insight into the utility and validity of empirically based theories of decision making under conditions of ambiguity and equivocality.
A central question is whether this knowledge can be used for organizing and managing decision making processes. Butler et al. (1979) have tried to develop a model for matching characteristics of decisions with strategies. In the theoretical model for decision making in social agencies the same approach is used.

The environment and organization of social agencies

The growth of social agencies, the increasing influence of professionals and the complexity of the environment have led to organizational problems in many agencies.

From 1974 until now the Dutch government has tried to make revisions of the law and regulations in order to reach a more democratic and efficient functioning of these organizations.

In 1977 an inter-departmental committee gave an advice about the participation of personnel, clients and representatives of the community in the board and administration of social agencies.

In 1984 new legislation was proposed. In the proposals little attention was given to the question of the efficiency and the effectiveness of decision making in social agencies: the political 'topic' is the question of participation. This view can be criticized because social agencies have to do with several external and internal demands and problems. These demands require effective and efficient procedures for decision making.

A model for structuring decision making in social agencies

The theoretical model is built upon the following elements:

1. A social agency can be understood as a 'problem solving system'. This system has to cope with several problems, concerning:
   a) the relationship with the environment, b) the operational core, c) the structuring of the organization.
   In the model some indications for problem-solving capacity are formulated.

2. Decision making is an important factor for 'problem-solving'.
   In order to judge decision making three criteria are used: a) effectiveness, b) efficiency and c) participation.
   These criteria are operationalized by means of specific indicators.

3. The structuring and organization have to meet demands with respect to: In chapter 4 an 'ideal' criteria and demands. In chapter 5 an 'ideal'

Operationalization and research

Chapter 5 is devoted to the operationalization of the model into items for research. Two orientations for data collection of the parties involved are described.

The description and judgment of the parties (members of the board, staff) is carried out by means of interviews (semi-structured).

The validity and reliability of the scales is high.

Information about the structure concerning a) strategic, b) operational has been collected by a technique of measurement. The results of the statistical analysis of decision making at the two orientations for data collection, including some qualitative data from the interviews it was possible to judge the decision making of both organizations.

Process and results of research

After a pilot study the model was applied in two agencies: an agency on alcoholic and drug-addicted people, and a social agency for the elderly. In chapter 6 information is given concerning the environment of both organizations. The procedure for data collection included interviews with members of the board, directors, clients, personnel of the organization, etc. The procedure for data collection was applied in both organizations.
The structuring and organization of decision making in social agencies have to meet demands which are based upon the above mentioned criteria. In chapter 4 an 'ideal' model is constructed which is based upon these criteria and demands. In this model a difference is made between strategic, organizational and operational decisions.

Operationalization and research methods

Chapter 5 is devoted to the operationalization of the theoretical notions into items for research. In order to judge and diagnose decision making two orientations for data gathering are used: a) description and judgement of the parties involved, b) description and judgement of the researcher.

The description and judgement (evaluation) of the parties involved (members of the board, staff and management) is collected by 1. interviews (semi-structured) and 2) questionnaires. These instruments have been developed by the research-group.

The validity and reliability of the questionnaires have been tested. The results of the statistical analyses show that the reliability of the scales is high.

Information about the structuring and processes of decision making concerning a) strategic, b) operational and c) organizational problems is collected by a technique of analyses of minutes and documentation. On the basis of this technique, supplemented by information gathered by interviews it was possible to get a complete description of processes of decision making at the organizational level. The criteria of the model have been used to judge effectiveness, efficiency and participation.

Process and results of research: two case studies

After a pilot study the model and the research methods have been applied in two agencies: an agency for social work and a centre for social work on alcoholic and drug-addicts.

In chapter 6 information is given about the characteristics of the agencies (history, the environment, the organizational structure and size, etc.). The procedure for collecting data and analyses was the same for both organizations.
The main results of research are:

1. In both organizations there is a strong tendency by the professional for 'collegial administration'. As a consequence, processes of decision making are not specialized or segmented. Strategic, organizational and operational problems are discussed at all levels and groups within the organization.

2. Processes of decision making concerning issues which affect the interests of professionals, are characterized by inertia. This is due to the tendency to reach consensus among participants.

3. There is no participation of clients (or representatives of clients) in the decision and policy making of the agencies. Clients do not participate in concrete activities or programmes, nor in administration.

4. There are differences between the diagnosis and judgement of the two organizations. The degree of efficiency and effectiveness of decision making differs. This is due to factors such as quality of information, procedures for decision making and confidence between workers, management and board.

Evaluation of the model and the research methods

The model yields a description of the two agencies and the processes and characteristics of decision making. Some shortcomings have been noted with respect to:

- The classes (categories) of problems and decisions.
  - The difference between strategic, organizational and operational decision is not always clear. Due to this ambiguity it is not always possible to use the criteria effectively.
- The model is partial. Much attention is paid to the structuring of processes of decision making (structural rationality). Less attention is paid to information processing.
- The criteria need more specification, particularly the relation between 'participation' and 'efficiency'.

More attention has to be paid to the 'cultural' factors in social agencies (the attitudes of the professionals, the informal interaction and the quality of management).
The validity of the research methods is good. There are some questions about the 'efficiency' of the analyses of minutes and documentation. Gathering information with this method costs much time and it is worth looking for a less time consuming method.

Decision making in social agencies revisited

Legislation and rules for subsidization require inter-organizational networks of welfare and health care services. In Holland the decentralization of welfare policy leads to regionalization of health care services and local welfare planning. It is argued that at the level of regions there should be a well balanced distribution of influence between the various parties involved: government, institutions, citizens and clients. At this level the government has the function of strategic planning. Institutions have to participate in this process of planning by delivering information about the characteristics of demands, new developments, etc. An awareness of interdependence between services is evoked by changing requirements with respect to the quality and the management of the services.

In the last chapter attention is paid to an experiment in Almere. In this region primary care agencies are organized as an integration of welfare and health care services. In this concept a distinction is made between 'operational units' (primary care agencies) and 'administration units'. Participation in decision making of professionals, clients, etc. can be segmented and specialized in this structure. At the operational level professionals, clients and volunteers can participate in developing and executing programs. At the administrative level clients (citizens) can form a union. This is an optimal form of democracy in these kind of organizations.