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Innovative Models of Social Activity and Their Adaptation to Social Work

Modelos innovadores de la actividad social y su adaptación al trabajo social

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Content

ABSTRACT:

This study investigates innovations and innovative processes in social activity and their subsequent adaptation to modern social work, with a view to improving the performance of social worker and the quality of social services provided to the population and certain categories and groups of citizens, who find themselves in difficult life situations. The success of innovative activities depends on many factors, which this study classifies. Experts distinguish two components in the structure of innovation: the technological process of innovation and the functional process of the use of its potential. The conclusion is that social workers should have knowledge and skills of using social innovations and motivation for positive changes due to the reform-oriented modern Russian social development and the modernization of the social service system. Currently, all spheres of the society are exposed to innovative processes. Therefore, knowledge of historical, theoretical, and practical issues related to social innovation is of great importance for the improvement of social work.

Keywords: innovation; development models; society adaptation; social work; social service.

RESUMEN:

Este estudio investiga innovaciones y procesos innovadores en la actividad social y su posterior adaptación al trabajo social moderno, con vistas a mejorar el desempeño del trabajador social y la calidad de los servicios sociales prestados a la población ya ciertas categorías y grupos de ciudadanos que se encuentran En situaciones difíciles de la vida. El éxito de las actividades innovadoras depende de muchos factores, que este estudio clasifica. Los expertos distinguen dos componentes en la estructura de la innovación: el proceso tecnológico de la innovación y el proceso funcional de la utilización de su potencial. La conclusión es que los trabajadores sociales deben tener conocimientos y habilidades de uso de las innovaciones sociales y la motivación para los cambios positivos debido a la reforma orientada al desarrollo social ruso moderno y la modernización del sistema de servicios sociales. Actualmente, todas las esferas de la sociedad están expuestas a procesos innovadores. Por lo tanto, el conocimiento de temas históricos, teóricos y prácticos relacionados con la innovación social es de gran importancia para la mejora del trabajo social.

Palabras Clave: innovación; Modelos de desarrollo; Adaptación de la sociedad; trabajo Social; servicio social.

1. Introduction

Radical social and economic changes in the society have created and established new social attitudes, new social policies, and a special attitude to innovations in the social sphere (Ramon, & Sarri, 1996; Prigozhin, 2012; Dmitriev, Usmanov, & Shchepitkova, 2013). At the same time, innovation process should be regarded as changes that are implemented after scientific research or discovery, which are qualitatively different from their previous counterpart. Innovation is a special field of theory and practice, a system of actions on the part of a social subject that is improving the qualities of a socio-cultural object, which allows the agent to acquire the necessary resources and rewards him or her with a positive reputation (Dudchenko, 2015).

The success of innovation – the implementation of innovations and management by means of innovation – depends on many factors.

Firstly, specialists in the social sphere have to be highly competent. They should have scientific knowledge about the application of social innovations and have practical skills.

Secondly, the possibility of realizing the vast innovative potential that young people bring to the table is also an important factor. Its significance has yet to be realized by the society. Therefore, it is necessary to form a public opinion of young people as of carriers of innovative thinking and action.

Thirdly, large-scale implementation of innovations requires careful consideration of legal, socioeconomic, and organizational issues.

By taking these factors into account, it is possible to improve the process of introduction of innovations in social work. Modern social organizations and institutions should adapt to the changing realities and anticipate the trends of future changes in accordance with modernization trend in CIS countries, including Russia (Grigoryev, Guslyakova, & Gusova, 2006). As these problems are solved, various social innovations are designed and implemented. Researchers generally call them social innovations.

Social innovations, i.e. innovations that are organized socially or are new phenomena in social work, which form at a certain stage of development of the society in the context of changing social conditions and which trigger effective positive transformations in the social sphere, have a number of features that distinguish them from sociological, technological, and other types of innovations (Plotinsky, 2012; Cajaiba-Santana, 2014, pp. 42-51; Moulaert, 2013). The first type is a result of collective creativity; material and technological innovations are designed by specific authors. In addition, return on social innovations is somewhat delayed – their effect is not immediate or specific, which is often the case with material and technological innovations. Social innovations are premised on the external environment; their scope of application depends on the group and personal qualities of people involved in their implementation under a large variety of social life phenomena.

Social innovations are classified differently.

In terms of the level and range of social innovations (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2015, pp. 1333-1357; Manzini, & Coad, 2015), we distinguish global innovations, which focus on solving common human problems, and regional or local innovations, which represent narrower interests of regional or local importance.

In terms of social life (Manzini, 2014, pp. 57-66; Popescu, & Gheorghe, 2015, pp. 77-82), we distinguish social, political, and economic innovations, innovations in the cultural and spiritual sphere, and innovations in social structures and institutions.

In terms of scope (Fujisawa et al., 2015, pp. 1-13; Borzaga, & Bodini, 2014, pp. 411-421), we distinguish single social innovations that apply to one object and diffuse ones that apply to many objects.

In terms of the structure of the social sphere in general (Martin, & Upham, 2016, pp. 204-213; Mehmood, & Parra, 2013), the components whereof include education, management, employment, pensions, culture, sports, etc., we distinguish pedagogical, educational, legal, managerial, and social innovations.

Sources of social innovations (Chesbrough, & Minin, 2014, pp. 169-188; Baker, & Mehmood, 2015, pp. 321-334) include changes in the external environment, social problems that cannot be solved through conventional methods, and changes in the demands of the society. Unresolved social problems give impetus to the development of new means and regulations in the social sphere.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the development and mechanisms of application of social innovations.

To that end, the following issues should be considered:

- the effect of innovation on the social sphere;
- forms of innovative methods;
- program-based innovation principles.

2. Materials and Methods

In solving the set problems, we used a set of such complementary research methods as analysis of special philosophical, psychological, and scientific-methodological literature on the subject matter, general theoretical methods of analysis, synthesis, and theoretical modeling.

On the philosophical level, social innovations develop as innovations in social practice, contributing to the resolution of contradictions that arise in a heterogeneous and unstable society under intensifying social mobility, when many traditional forms and methods of social guarantees fail.

Society develops through renewal, creating prerequisites for new unorthodox components in the social sphere and innovative ways of social activity. Innovations are a form of social development (Ramon, & Sarri, 1996). In this regard, it is necessary to consider the content of innovation.

The innovative process, i.e. the process of idea generation, development, experimental approbation, distribution, and use, includes innovative activity that aims to use scientific knowledge and practical experience to create new or improved products, manufacturing technologies, and social services. Innovative processes reflect the essence of social changes. They characterize the source of development of the society. These processes are discrete and usually cyclical. They are related to the innovation life cycle, which does not preserve that which already exists, but transforms it and gives it different qualities with the inevitable risk of failure and revision or replacement of obsolete regulations. This is one of the fundamental socio-cultural prerequisites for development of social practice, its enrichment with new cognitive, technological, aesthetic, and other forms of human experience. The innovation process is predetermined by the dual nature of innovation. On the one hand, it is a direct experience formed within a specific type of activity (research, production, household, etc.). On the other hand, it is a new experience, a reproduced element of social practice, a phenomenon and representation of culture. The innovation process can take on a form of pragmatization of a new spiritual product, which transforms it into practical activity standards.

Experts distinguish two components in the structure of innovation (Prigozhin, 2012; Dmitriev, Usmanov, & Shchepitkova, 2013): the technological process of innovation and the functional process of the use of its potential.

The innovation process is divided into several phases, which have several stages:

- applied research;
- technical developments;
- primary development;

- spread;
- application.

Innovation process can be simple (unexpanded), simple (inter-organizational), and extended.

Extended innovation processes include the following six phases:

- creation;
- trade or supply;
- application;
- spread;
- extended reproduction;
- cessation of innovation development.

The innovation cycle denotes the period from the development to the application, the duration whereof can vary depending on many factors that may slow down the process. Such bottlenecks involve socio-economic and psychological factors.

The first group includes shortage of funding, obvious shortage of professionally trained personnel, and prospects of job cuts and unemployment throughout the development of each specific innovation process.

Psychological factors are based on various psychological barriers related to information or worldview (insufficient awareness of the essence and purpose of innovation or attitude to innovations as to a short-term campaign). The reasons that restrain the innovation process include closed-minded thinking and a lack of initiative and creative approaches to solving problems in the social sphere.

Scientists are developing special programs, the purpose whereof is to provide socio-psychological support of innovations (Plotinsky, 2010). Their main elements are as follows: a critical attitude to future innovations and reasoning in their favor; substantiation of expected results; study of the employees' opinions, with a view to identifying the supporters and opponents of innovation and finding the correct approach to each person; approval of plans for the implementation of innovations with regard to public judgments and attitudes.

These programs are being used to develop a *mechanism* that should weaken inhibiting factors by stimulating the creativity of workers:

- creation of an environment for maintaining a creative atmosphere in the organization;
- stimulation of innovative activity of young workers;
- regular innovation contests;
- financial and moral support of creative workers (state titles and prizes, referral to internships at foreign centers, etc.).

The *innovator* is the social foundation and the subject of social innovations. We propose to divide them based on the following characteristics:

- *type of innovative activity* – creators (authors of the idea and its popularizers) and implementers (authors of the technological process behind the development and implementation);
- *main specialty* – professional and amateur innovators;
- *number of participants* – group and individual innovators;
- *subject of innovation activity* – innovators – developers of new products, technologies, methods of activity, new social norms and relations.

Special implementation services are required to organize effective work with innovators and innovations. Personnel that satisfy a number of requirements are of great importance in this situation. Firstly, special training is required that involves knowledge of socio-psychological and economic aspects of innovation, as well as the ability to handle changing information. Secondly, intuition and a broad-based knowledge play a special role. Essential traits include motivation to help the innovator and the ability to put his or her interests before one's own.

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3. Results and Discussion

In recent years, innovators have developed modern methods of alcoholism treatment (social medicine), new methods for stimulating labor activity (production), and new training methods (pedagogy) that combine conventional classical modes with innovative education (Dudchenko, 2015; Grigoryev, Guslyakova, & Gusova, 2006). Innovation not only passes on social experience of one generation to another, but also contributes to the development of the personality of an active social subject that is capable of adapting to new conditions. All these novelties, technologies, and methods are the subject of social innovation.

A new branch of knowledge – *social innovation study* – has developed significantly due to the fact that many organizations and socially oriented companies are constantly compelled to adapt to ever-changing circumstances and develop conventional or search for fundamentally new ways of solving social problems. Social innovation study focuses on the theory and practice of social innovations.

Innovative social technologies are methods and techniques of creation and implementation of innovations in the society and realization of initiatives that lead to qualitative changes in various spheres of social life and promote rational use of materials and other resources in the society. Innovative technologies exist in *two forms*: in the form of programs and documents and in the form of real social processes that develop under the framework of these programs.

In order to use new methods and technologies to solve specific problems, it is necessary to modify and adapt them to the peculiarities of management, traditions, scales and levels of social systems. This, in turn, creates and develops innovative methods based on new ideas and principles that discover new opportunities for solving complex problems at all levels of the social system.

The innovative method has developed in various forms, namely:

- innovative games as a research and development method;
- game programs that provide ways and means of engaging group mental activities to solve problems;
- socio-technical games based on the activity of social technologists;
- matrices that combine innovative methods and fundamental technologies of research, training, and practice.

Humans strive to bring certain order to the surrounding world using available images and programs. This process is called ontological synthesis and it is the foundation and mechanism of effective actions.

Crises in the life of social systems are resolved by means that have been developed within the framework of an innovative methodology that is aimed at developing means of searching for and implementing new technologies. *Program-based innovation of social systems is one such method. It is based on a number of fundamental principles*:

- *the principle of orientation on the renewal and transformation of the entire organization* and its connection with the environment, since changes of only certain parts and components of the system cannot be effective enough for the entire system;
- *the principle of the "ultimate goal":* strategic goals developed for the organization by its representatives should as high as possible;
- *the principle of "pulsing innovation":* a program of innovative lectures that is held with short breaks and involves intensive interaction between the consultants and members of the organization during the lecture;
- *the principle of "cumulative motivation":* analysis and evaluation of previous innovations. This will help motivate representatives of the social system for further positive changes, since the consolidation of results gives confidence in case of success on the one hand, but can cause dissatisfaction in the absence of success on the other hand;
- *the principle of "integrative programming":* development of a real strategy with regard to the actual results of each stage and their correlation with the concept of renewal;
- *the principle of "innovation core development":* change of the organization through change of its employees via initiation of their need for such a change; the innovative team of the organization is "nurtured" over the course of the program. The team is preparing to serve as carriers of innovative

methodologies that is capable of implementing them in practice.

These principles allow forming alternative systems and relations that contain mechanisms for preventing the emergence of crises and conflicts rather than dealing with critical situations themselves.

The ability to affect social processes is comes from a series of factors (Grigoryev, Guslyakova, & Gusova, 2006): availability of all-round information on these processes, availability of social regulation tools, and development of effective organizational mechanisms for each specific case. Thus, only specialists that have information about this object and practical knowledge of what is going on can engage in innovative development in the social and organizational spheres. These specialties have become popular, especially in recent years: "social technologist", "social engineer", "social designer", etc. These specialists develop practitioners and teach them innovative social technologies.

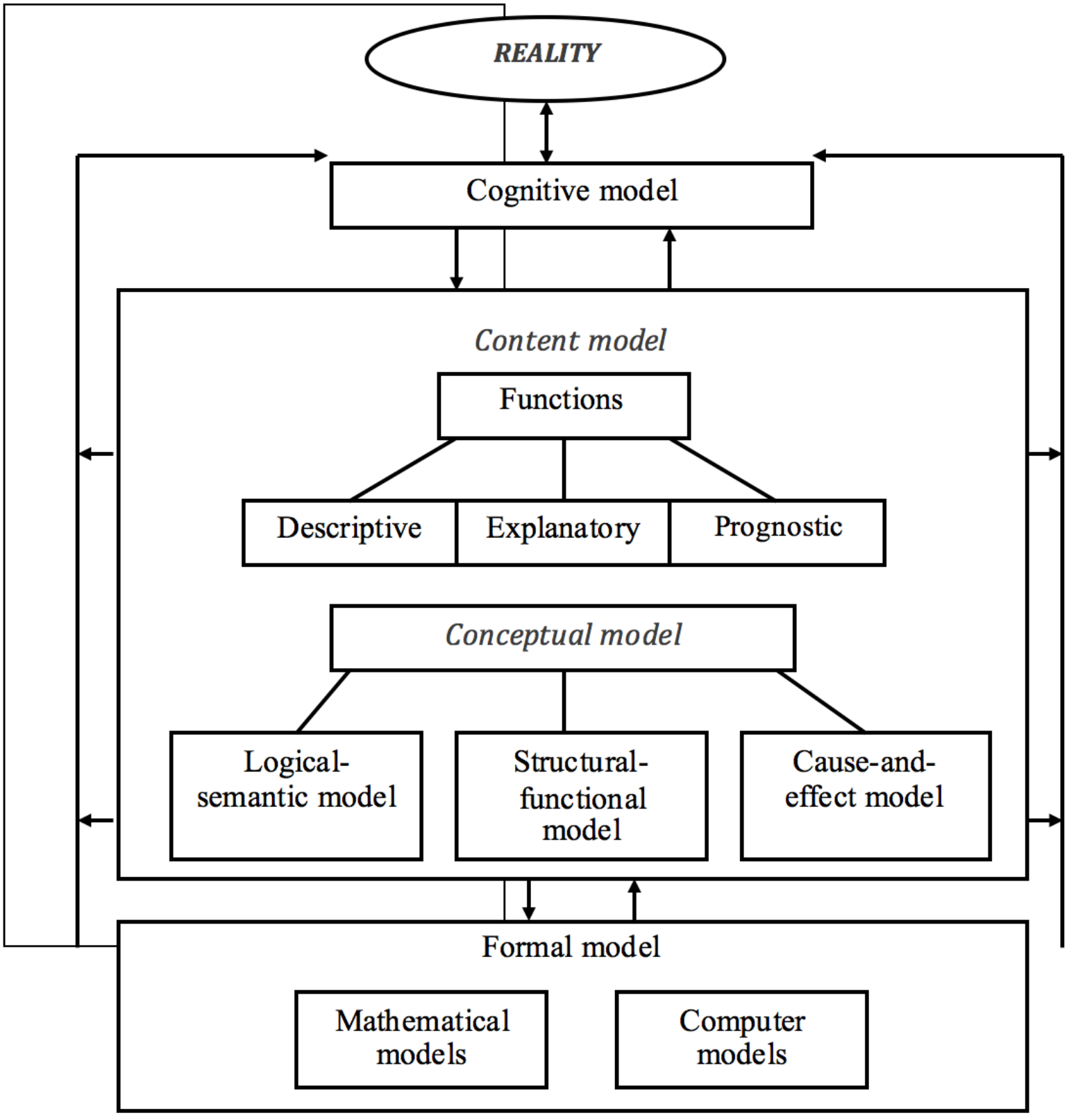
Innovations in social services are the subject of scientific research, carried out in various directions both in Russia and abroad: research of programs, experimental social innovations, research in the field of creation of methods and models.

In the typology of *innovative models*, their classification is based on the language in which they are formulated:

- content model – natural language;
- formal model – one or several formal languages.

The natural science community often regards modeling as a purely mathematical tool, the humanitarian sphere often uses conceptual models (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Types of models



Any model is a model of an object, a fragment of reality (the top level in the above scheme). By observing the object, a person (or any cognitive system) reproduces in the mind a certain mental image of the object, which we call a *cognitive model*. One could also use the term "mental" model.

By forming a cognitive model, the subject seeks to answer specific questions. Therefore, everything unnecessary is cut off from the infinitely complex reality in order to create a brief description of the object. The cognitive model of an object is based on the "worldview" of the subject – the features of his or her perception, attitudes, values, and interests.

The content model is the next stage of modeling. It enables acquiring new information about the behavior of the object and figuring out relations and patterns that cannot be detected with other methods of analysis.

In terms of their functions, content models are subdivided into descriptive, explanatory, and prognostic (Dmitriev, Usmanov, & Shchepitkova, 2013).

Any description of an object can be regarded as a descriptive model. Explanatory models are used to figure out why something is happening. Prognostic models should describe the future

behavior of the object and tell which changes cause particular effects on the studied object. Prognostic models do not have to include explanatory models. It is possible to obtain a favorable prediction via empirical generalizations using only the data of descriptive models.

A conceptual model is a content model that is based on theoretical concepts and constructs of a certain subject area of knowledge. In a more general sense, the conceptual model is a content model that is based on a particular concept or point of view. The formulation of a conceptual model often involves the achievement of a certain level of abstraction in the transition from the preliminary description of an object to its formal model.

Conceptual models manifest themselves either in a purely verbal form or in a mixed verbal-visual representation. There are three types of conceptual models: logical-semantic, structural-functional, and cause-and-effect.

The elements of the logical-semantic model are all statements and facts included in the verbal description of an object. Such a model is analyzed by means of logic with the involvement of certain subject area knowledge.

During the creation of structural-functional models, the object is usually regarded as an integral system that which should be broken down into parts, components, elements, and subsystems. System parts are connected by structural relationships that describe subordination and the logical and temporal sequence of problem solving. Structural-functional links should be visualized in the form of various graphs, charts, and diagrams. Such diagrams are useful for analyzing the supporting role and purpose of individual subsystems in relation to the whole and for assessing the interdependence of separate elements.

Cause-and-effect models are often used to explain and predict the behavior of an object. Unlike structural-functional models, they focus primarily on describing the dynamics of studied processes. Herein, time is not always taken into account explicitly. The fact is that the cause-and-effect relationships between the elements of the model imply the development of processes and events in time. Elements of such models may involve notions, categories, concepts, constructs, indicators, and variables that describe the behavior of studied object. The element of cause-and-effect content models should be considered a factor (from Latin factor – a doer, maker, performer) – a reason, a driving force of the studied processes and phenomena (Gulina, 2010; Chertopolokh, 2014). The term "factor" reminds the researcher that the following operations are required after the object is divided into parts and components: identification of the main relationships; determination of how changes in certain factors affect other components of the model; understanding of how the mechanism works in general and whether it describes the dynamics of studied parameters adequately.

The cause-and-effect mechanism of a phenomenon is often studied separately from all the unnecessary factors, taking into account only the factors, the interaction whereof enables understanding the structure and predicting the behavior of the studied object.

During its development, study, and improvement of the content model, the cognitive model is constantly modified and complicated. In the humanities, the modeling cycle usually ends with this stage, but in certain cases, the model can be formalized to such an extent that it becomes possible to develop and study the formal model of an object.

In social sciences, *formal models* hold a decent, but relatively modest spot in the lower part of the scheme. Formal models enable comprehending the essence of the studied social phenomena and revealing its main interrelations and patterns. Formal means of analysis allow studying the behavior of a model and obtaining new unobvious results. In any case, the results of formal modeling are used to specify the content model and, most importantly, the cognitive model.

In social sciences, cognitive factors are the leading factors due to the fact that cognitive models are an integral part of social reality. Moreover, they shape and design reality itself to a great extent.

In any case, the mechanism is a model of the studied object. Thus, this term is not obligatory, but it is often useful.

The final stage of development of a content model is problem setting. It is worth bearing in mind that problem setting is sometimes regarded as the initial stage of development of the model, which involves preliminary specification and elaboration of the main research tasks. Two options are possible after problem setting: one could examine the model at the content level or further formalize the description of the object and proceed to formal research methods.

The formulation of goals, to which the studied object should aspire and the determination of major factors and limitations of the model is the most essential part of problem setting. To set limitations means to determine the list of possible actions and the acceptable and unacceptable states of the object. Limitations may prevent the object from achieving the goals.

A good content model requires experience, intuition, knowledge, and improvisation.

The study of a formal model of an object can be useful for the development of a content model, since it helps to clarify formulations, identify missing elements, and remove excessive ones. However, the development of the model is only the first part of the modeling process; the second part is the study of the model (operation and experimentation).

The evolutionary research model is the main model in the social sphere, which can be applied to various methods of studying the development of social work technologies. The model involves evolutionary research phase (analysis, development, improvement, and evaluation) and a utilization phase (spread and implementation).

The analysis phase implies the identification and actualization of the problem. This is followed by a review of solution techniques and a practical assessment of the proposed development methods. The successful completion of this stage is the making of a decision as regards to whether or not the innovation is possible (rational).

The development phase consists of the following stages: determination of the goals and area of the innovation and the need for the innovation; determination of the problems that emerge during development; collection and processing of information; search for and selection of alternative solutions; connection of the development components; improvement of innovations in real conditions; solution of procedural issues related to its application or description of how it should be used. The success of each stage increases the probability of the innovation solving the problems of the social service, for the solution whereof it was designed.

The improvement phase is a process of studying the innovation and its tests, verifying its adequacy, and improving or redoing it (if necessary). Main attention is paid to the development plan that defines the scope of work, the subject and sequence of operations, and the conditions for trials and tests. This phase ends the stage of evolutionary research.

The evaluation phase is the starting point for further development of the innovation. The phase lays the foundation for its spread and implementation. At the same time, its cost, efficiency, and capacity are evaluated in normal operating conditions. If the evaluation phase yields mostly positive results, this means that the research has created a ready-to-use innovation.

The spread and implementation phases involved the preparation of all necessary materials, the spread of innovations among potential users, and implementation.

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4. Conclusion

In general, evolutionary research provides conditions for creating a useful methodology in addition to the common research methods and requires special training of social workers.

Social workers should have knowledge and skills of using social innovations and motivation for positive changes due to the reform-oriented modern Russian social development and the modernization of the social service system. Currently, all spheres of the society are exposed to innovative processes. Therefore, knowledge of historical, theoretical, and practical issues

related to social innovation is of great importance for the improvement of social work.

The results of this study can serve as a theoretical source for the development of practical models of social innovation.

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