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## MODEL OF SOFT SKILLS FORMATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE CONDITIONS OF AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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**Abstract.** The article analyzes the holistic process of forming soft skills of future social workers in higher education institutions; summarizes scientific and methodological developments in the formation of soft skills of students; defines the structural and functional model of soft skills formation in future social workers in the context of professional training; characterizes the set of basic structural blocks of the structural and functional model of soft skills formation of future social workers, namely target, content, theoretical and methodological. The content of each of the blocks identified in the model is briefly described. The factors that cause the problematic nature of building a model for the formation of soft skills are indicated. The characteristic features of professional training of social workers in higher education institutions are indicated. It is noted that the unity of all structural blocks in the structural and functional model of soft skills formation ensures the integrity of the professional training of future social workers in the educational process of higher education institutions. The article will be useful for students and teachers who are interested in the professional development of social workers.

**Key words:** social work, professional education, higher education institution, professional skills, social worker, soft skills.

**Introduction.** The development of soft skills remains a relevant topic of modern research. Implementation of social change and solving priority problems of the social sphere is ensured by a combination of theory and practical experience of social work professionals at all levels. Higher education institutions are faced with the problem of forming a new type of social worker who can accept challenges and effectively solve complex problems. Therefore, the basis of our study is the modeling of the process of forming soft skills in future social workers as a mechanism for improving the effectiveness of its formation in the conditions of professional training.

**The purpose** of the study is to determine the structural and functional model of soft skills formation in future social workers in the context of professional training.

**The main tasks** are to summarize scientific and methodological developments in the formation of students' soft skills, design a structural and functional model, and characterize the set of its main structural blocks.

**Material and methods of the study.** The modeling of the formation of soft skills of future social workers was carried out in several steps, namely: an interdisciplinary analysis of the chosen topic was performed; the object, subject, tasks and purpose of the study were determined; the scientific and methodological literature on the formation of soft skills was studied; approaches to the problem of forming soft skills in the professional training of future social workers were analyzed. The factors that cause the problematic nature of building a model of soft skills formation are identified. The content, methods, forms and means of organizing the process of professional training and formation of soft skills in future social workers are singled out and combined into a single whole. The scientific and methodological data on the formation of soft skills in students are summarized, and a structural and functional model of the formation of soft skills in future social workers in the context of professional

training in higher education institutions is developed. The structural blocks of the functional model are characterized: target, content, theoretical and methodological, organizational and methodological, and control and result. The research tools included studying and analyzing the documentation of the educational programs «Social Work» and «Social Pedagogy»: curriculum, standard and work programs, educational and methodological complexes of the educational program, reports and results of research, social and educational and social project activities of students - future social workers.

**Results and discussion.** Building a multidisciplinary model for the formation of soft skills of future social workers is a complex process, as it needs to combine the multidimensionality of the formation of soft skills and the specifics of professional training of social workers. According to Karpenko, the model of professional training should be based on specific aspects of professional activity, namely: «functional, personal, subject or content» (Karpenko, 2007:154). When modeling the formation of soft skills, the following features should be considered:

- soft skills are acquired, uncertified, difficult to track, social and psychological skills that a future specialist acquires through training and self-improvement and uses to carry out successful professional activities;
- soft skills are measured by quantitative indicators, the level of their formation is checked by visual demonstration;
- the right hemisphere of the brain is responsible for the development of soft skills;
- soft skills are variable and situational;
- soft skills are designed to help professionals find the best way to perform tasks that are not described in their job description;
- skills include stress tolerance, conflict management, creativity, critical thinking, goal setting, leadership, motivation, emotional intelligence, communication, decision-making, planning;
- are personal qualities that contribute to effective and harmonious interaction with other people;
- are the use of different models of behavior;
- skills are closely related to a person's character rather than professional knowledge;
- soft skills include social, intellectual, communication, volitional and other competencies.

Modeling the development of soft skills of future social workers should take into account the specifics of their professional duties and professionally important soft skills groups (OECD, 2009; OECD, 2019):

- communication skills (public speaking, presentation, personal brand, self-presentation, negotiation, conflict management, storytelling, interpersonal communication, business ethics, professional ethics, intercultural competence, networking);
- management skills (leadership, team building, motivation, project management, organization/organization, goal setting, result orientation, planning, time management/resource management, social activism, mentoring/facilitation, control);
- personal effectiveness skills (emotional intelligence, empathy, solving difficult situations, life-long development, stress resistance, quick response, effectiveness under risk, client focus, creativity, reframing, initiative, innovation);
- information processing skills (flexibility of thinking, critical thinking, data search/analysis/synthesis, media literacy, observation, prudence, analytical thinking, logical reasoning, monitoring, trends in the professional field, processing of large amounts of information, establishing relationships);
- strategic skills (tactical thinking, strategic thinking, decision-making, ingenuity, image, alternatives, priority, systemic thinking, structural thinking, research thinking, problem-oriented thinking).

It is difficult to define a single model for the development of soft skills in future social workers, as it is necessary to consider the specifics of the research of each author.

The problematic nature of building a model for developing soft skills in students is due to several factors:

– ideas on the possibilities of soft skills development can be found in numerous English-language popular science publications: in personal blogs of foreign educators, business consultants, HR specialists or on the websites of educational institutions (Mosquera, Teaching English: website; British Council: website), but there are few scientifically based works on soft skills development of social workers;

– when developing soft skills in higher education institutions, attention is focused on the success of state and non-governmental social institutions;

– the phenomenon of soft skills can be considered using different scientific approaches;

– effective soft skills development requires the search for new opportunities and resources that ensure the training of social workers based on universal values, client orientation, flexibility and competence;

– formation of social worker's sociocultural values, professionally important knowledge, skills and abilities, and professional and personal qualities that underlie the formation of specialists' readiness for professional activity in the social sphere;

– formation of a competent specialist of a new type who can respond effectively to social changes.

This range of problems makes it possible to identify and combine the content, methods, forms and means of organizing the process of professional training and soft skills development of future social workers into a single whole.

The holistic process of forming soft skills in future social workers involves directing professional training to the development and improvement of the seven-component structure of soft skills by the following indicators: a desire to work in the social sphere and help people; awareness of oneself as an agent of change in the community and a commitment to a positive outcome; the desire to achieve goals and solve professional problems; understanding of the importance of developing soft skills, the ability to acquire them and the ability to develop them throughout life; knowledge of socially significant problems of social work; application of innovative technologies, methods and resources of social work; ability to emotional intelligence and empathy; ability to solve complex situations and to respond quickly and effectively; confidence in own practical skills and competence; ability to negotiate and manage conflicts; knowledge of and adherence to business and professional ethics; ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures and nationalities; ability to build an effective team to achieve a single result; effective planning and organization of professional activities; result orientation; ability to formulate and achieve goals; ability to think under time pressure and psycho-emotional stress; ability to make decisions and find alternatives; application of structural and systemic thinking; attentiveness and observation; application of analytical and logical thinking; ability to establish relationships.

In the methodological plane, professional training in the context of a higher education institution has characteristic features, namely: orientation of social worker's professional training to changes in the field of social work based on a combination of the principles of personal, activity and resource-environmental approaches; saturation of educational and professional programs with a selective component with a focus on the development of soft skills in students; use of means, forms and methods of non-formal education to increase the effectiveness of soft skills formation in higher education institutions. Thus, in the methodological context of soft skills formation, we are based on the idea that in a specially organized process of training future social workers, the conditions for its effective functioning should be ensured, namely: orientation to changes in the field of social work, operating with knowledge and resources of social work, ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of professional activity, using communication tools in the performance of professional duties, management for the effectiveness of social work, co Summarizing the scientific and methodological data on the formation of soft skills in students, we have developed a structural and functional model of the formation of soft skills in future social workers in the context of professional training in higher education institutions,

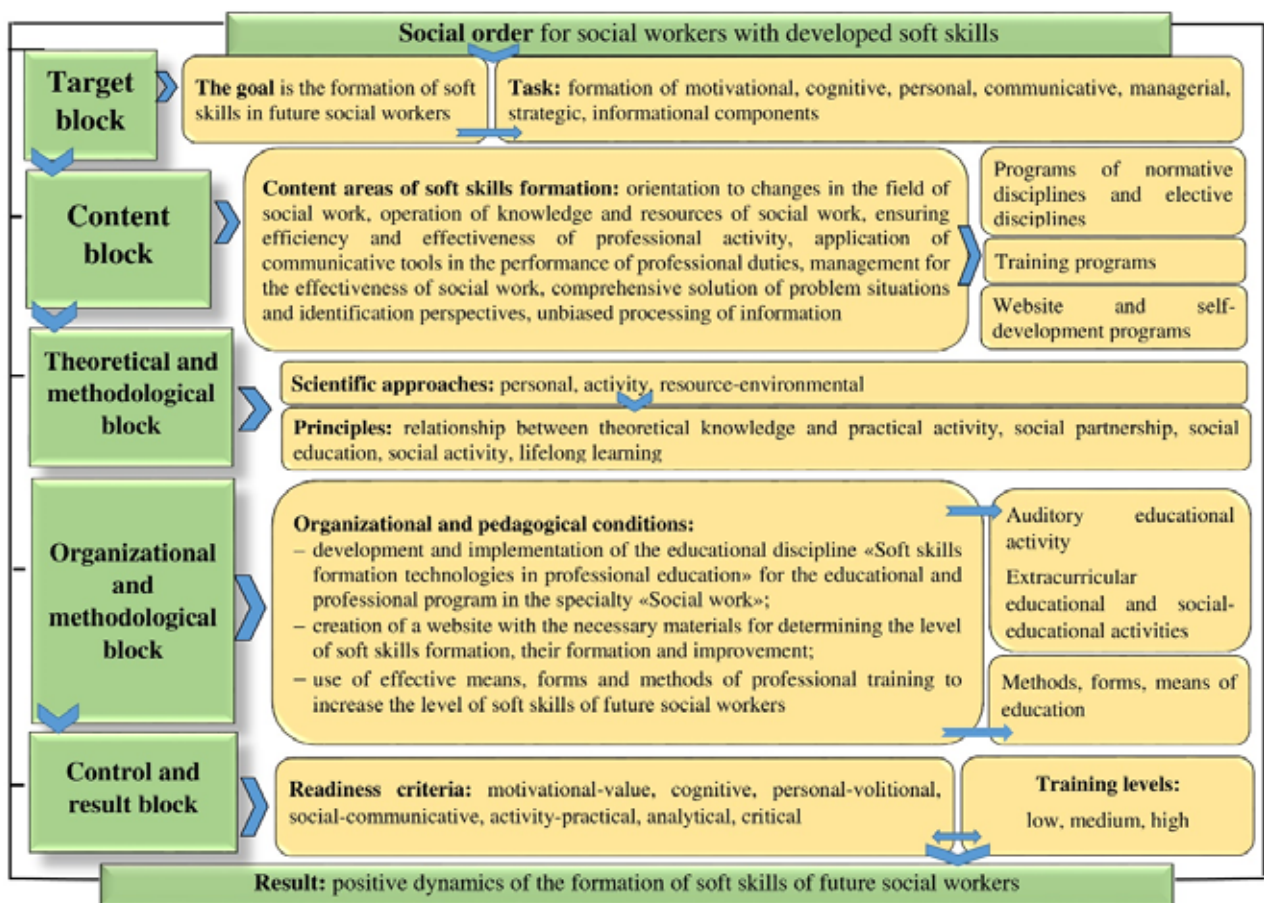
which is characterized by integrity and consists of specific structural blocks that actively interact and influence each other (Karpenko, 2016: 303).

The structural-functional model of soft skills development in future social workers (Figure 1) contains the following structural blocks: target, content, theoretical and methodological, organizational and methodological, and control and result.

In order to more thoroughly match the designed structural and functional model to certain requirements of professional training, we will focus on the substantive characteristics of each structural block (target, content, theoretical and methodological, organizational and methodological, and control and result) and analyze their consistency with the essential properties of the formation of soft skills in future social workers in the context of professional training.

In this regard, it is advisable to highlight the content of the structural blocks of the designed model, which are the basis for the formation of soft skills in future social workers in the context of professional training. We consider it expedient to briefly describe the content of each of the blocks identified in the model.

The target block reflects the orientation of the professional training of social workers to the compliance with the social services commissioning, considering the mechanism of social interaction between the state and higher education institutions to train a social worker with formed soft skills. The purpose of implementing the structural and functional model is to develop soft skills in future social workers in the context of professional training. The target orientation of the professional training of social workers in higher education institutions correlates with the tasks of forming soft skills of



**Figure 1. Structural and functional model of soft skills development in future social workers in the context of professional training**

students, in particular the formation and development of motivational, cognitive, personal, communicative, managerial, strategic, and informational components.

The content block reflects the main characteristics of the areas of soft skills development (orientation to changes in the field of social work, operating with knowledge and resources of social work, ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of professional activities, using communication tools in the performance of professional duties, management for the effectiveness of social work, complex problem-solving and determining prospects, impartial processing of information), implemented in the content of educational normative and website and self-development programs.

Theoretical and methodological blocks. To achieve the goals and test the tasks of forming soft skills in future social workers, it is important to formulate them in accordance with scientifically based approaches: personal, activity, and resource-environmental.

It is necessary to observe and consider the priority of the following general scientific and specific principles (the relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical activity, social partnership, social education, social activity, lifelong learning), which serve as guidelines for determining the strategy for developing soft skills of future social workers (Pavliuk; Liakh; Bezpalko; Klishevych, 2017):

- the principle of interconnection of theoretical knowledge and practical activity provides the opportunity for future specialists to apply the acquired knowledge in practical professional activities. The implementation of the principle of the relationship between theory and practice involves combining, expanding and enriching classroom and extracurricular educational and social and educational activities;

- the principle of social partnership indicates the need to consider the equality and cooperation of representatives of all subjects of the educational process and social partnership, the process of forming soft skills; provides conditions for cooperation for a wide exchange of practical experience of the object and subject of the educational process on the implementation of joint activities, projects, and solving common problems that lead to positive results;

- the principle of social education involves increasing the effectiveness of the process of forming soft skills based on the value orientations of students to produce global and positive changes in society. This principle plays a special role in the social and educational activities of students, as it defines all the components of professional training that affect the professional self-realization of a future social work specialist;

- the principle of social activity affirms the organization of professional training of future social workers, which stimulates students to professional and personal self-development, their initiative and efficiency in performing socially significant tasks in various spheres of society; the formation of soft skills is ensured by a high level of student activity, their ability to use knowledge, to independently manage them in professional activities; social activity of the student is considered as the highest value, which requires the desire to acquire and master the pinnacle of their professional experience;

- the principle of lifelong learning is «ensuring the content and coordination of learning activities at different stages of education, which is a continuation of the previous ones; forming the need and ability of the individual to self-learn; optimizing the system of retraining and professional development of employees; creating integrated curricula and programs; introducing and developing distance education» (Markozova, 2016). This principle emphasizes the need to create an environment of formal and non-formal education to actualize the creative growth of students through the use of active and interactive forms, methods and means, student-oriented in the formation of soft skills; accordingly, the principle enables the development of mentoring and coaching.

The organizational and methodological block should ensure the orderliness of classroom and extracurricular educational and social and educational activities of students to achieve the goals and objectives, be reproducible in the existing organizational and pedagogical conditions of social workers'

training. This component of the structural and functional model of soft skills formation provides an appropriate choice of methods, forms and means of educational and social and educational activities in accordance with the designed organizational and pedagogical conditions of professional training of social workers. We consider the following to be effective teaching methods: training, social projects, discussions, case studies, branding, creative methods of motivation, and creating situations of success. Among the forms of organizing training, we distinguish traditional and interactive ones (informational lectures, trainings, workshops, educational programs and projects, discussion meetings, art therapy, coaching, mentoring, intellectual quests, workshops, and master classes). The main means of training are massive open educational online platforms, social networks, information technology, and communication tools for training future social workers (Savelchuk, 2019).

Thanks to certain strategies of professional self-realization of specialists and mechanisms of formation of social work as a professional activity, there is a possibility of systematic use of forms, methods and means of professional training of future social workers to form soft skills, which is manifested through the multi variance of ways of organizing the educational process in higher education and non-formal education. When modeling the organizational and methodological block of the structural and functional model of soft skills formation, consider the following organizational and pedagogical conditions: content of the discipline «Technologies of soft skills formation in vocational education» and its introduction into the educational and professional program in the specialty «Social Work» to provide students with knowledge of soft skills and means, forms and methods of their formation and development; creation of a website for students with the necessary materials to determine the level of soft skills formation, their forms and methods of professional training of social workers to improve the level of soft skills of students in classroom and extracurricular activities.

The content of the professional training of future social workers, considering the development of soft skills, should be carried out in higher education institutions in specially designed educational and professional programs «Social Work», which is provided by the appropriate content of various types of classroom and extracurricular educational and social and educational activities.

Identification of organizational and pedagogical conditions for the formation of soft skills, which provides, on the one hand, the best and optimal choice of methods, forms and means of classroom and extracurricular educational and social and educational activities; and on the other hand, the implementation of these methods, forms and means of professional training will have flexibility and variability for the conscious formation of soft skills in future social workers.

The control and result block of the model we have designed should provide an assessment of the study of the process of forming soft skills in future social workers in the context of professional training. It is necessary to comply with the components of soft skills (motivational, cognitive, personal, communicative, managerial, strategic, informational), criteria (motivational and value, knowledge, personal and volitional, social and communicative, activity-practical, analytical, critical), levels of formation (low (minimal), medium (episodic and situational), high (permanent and sustainable)), result (positive dynamics of the formation of soft skills of future social workers). Thus, the effective block of the process of forming soft skills of future social workers synthesizes the real indicators of its effectiveness, reflecting the degree of achievement of the goals, and significant changes that characterize the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the functioning of the professional training process. The content essence of the resultant block is to increase the level of soft skills of future social workers.

The unity of all structural blocks in the structural and functional model of soft skills development ensures the integrity of the professional training of future social workers in the educational process of higher education institutions. We believe that its implementation will improve the quality of professional training in the field of social work, since the dynamic nature of its implementation leads to a different level of formation of all indicators of soft skills in future social workers.

**Conclusions.** In general, the substantiated structural and functional model of soft skills development of future social workers in the context of professional training reflects the integrity, consistency, interaction and logical interconnection of functioning between the components of all components of the structures. This model is open, constantly evolving and can be supplemented with new elements if necessary. The purpose of our model for the development of soft skills of future social workers in higher education institutions is to focus on improving the organizational and pedagogical conditions of professional training to ensure the effective development of soft skills in future social workers. In particular, regarding to the existence of a relationship between goals and results, it is noted that «the goals of professional activity in the social sphere are manifested in changes, shifts, development of a person, his or her ideas, understanding of situations, his or her practical skills and abilities acquired in purposeful activity» (Karpenko, 2016:302).

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