

Tumbler in Tidal Wave: The Professional Stance of Social Workers under Managerialism

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Abstract

Since the concept of Managerialism has been introduced to the social welfare services in Hong Kong, the ecology of social welfare sector has changed drastically. The operation of most organizations adopts a business inclined practice to run their services under the new competitive environment. Consequently, management that is originally supposed to be an auxiliary servant to facilitate the delivery of services has eventually become the master to be served. Most social workers working under such climate find it difficult to exercise their professional functions as they are demanded to fulfill a great deal of managerial duties. Worse off, some appear to have lost their professional identity. This paper is to reveal the struggles of social workers under Managerialism and explore strategies for social workers to live with Managerialism in a way without losing their professional stance through conducting a qualitative research in Hong Kong. The result of this research identifies eight strategies: “reasserting the professional identity”, “realizing the social work values”, “discerning the first and foremost tasks”, “actualizing professional integrity”, “evoking team solidarity”, “exercising personal influence”, “performing collaborative resistance”, and “practicing self-reflection”. Since the core of social work is the social work values and to sustain such values demands social workers having a solid professional stance, the suggested strategies derived from this research can be served as a reference for social workers to withstand the assault from the tidal wave of Managerialism and stand firm again on their professional stance, like a tumbler!

Keywords: Managerialism, Professional identity, Professional integrity, Professional stance, Social work values

1. Introduction

In 90's, the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Hong Kong increased a lot for responding to the various services needs of the society. However, such an expansion implied that the government's financial burden became heavier as she shouldered a large part of subsidization for the NGOs. In fact, according to Coopers and Lybrand (1995), the total amount of subvention expenditure had increased by 545% in ten years from 1986 to 1996. Hence, Mr. Chen Zuo Er, the former deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, warned that it would lead to "passengers killed from car crashing"(Note 1) in the near future if the expenditure of government kept increasing in such a speed and, threateningly, the passengers would be the six millions Hong Kong citizens! Thereafter, the government was alerted to watch closely the operation of NGOs and started emphasizing cost effectiveness, service performance, customer-focused practice and public accountability. Coincidentally, the wave of Managerialism was surging from the West in late 90's (Leung, 2002; Yuen & Ho, 2007). Therefore, NGOs started placing more importance on corporate governance and organization management than ever before. In fact, the relationship between government and NGOs had changed from "partnership" to "funding body and service provider" after the subvention system reform lunched in 2000. This implies that the government started exercising greater control over the NGOs through introducing different administrative measures, such as Service Performance Monitoring System (SPMS), Lump Sum Grant (LSG), Funding and Service Agreements (FSA), Service Quality Standards (SQS), Enhanced Productivity Program (EPP), contracting out, and competitive bidding, etc. As Painter (1998) points out, "The budget process, recast in a program output format, is the major management tool for imposing control. And efficiency and effectiveness reviews are part of the armory of central monitoring" (p. 40).

Since the wave of Managerialism lashed against the social welfare services after the government introduced the market values and business management practices to the NGOs, the organizations were subjugated to a renewed mandate of managerial control (Tse, 2008) and started stressing on effective management with aims at striving for outstanding performance and good brand-name of organization so as to encounter the new competitive culture and environment within the same industry (Cooper, 2010; Leung, 2002). Since then, most organizations started having their "business plan" and social workers in management position had changed their title to "manager". Actually, such a terminology change does not only imply the change of job nature, but also the professional role and attitude. Under such new work culture, these "managers" see their service targets no longer as clients in the community but customers in the market. They start placing importance on management knowledge rather than professional knowledge. Some even compromise the human services values of care and concern with cash and contract (Tsui & Cheung, 2004; Valle & Lyons, 1996). Gradually, social workers start doing a great deal of managerial work and result in losing their professional stance in the mist of chasing records, figures, money, performance, and brand-name of organization (Harlow, 2000; Ife, 1997; Stanford, 2011; Tsui & Cheung,

2004; Yuen & Ho, 2007).

Based on the concerns raised above, this research is going to tackle two questions:

- 1) *How do social workers feel towards the various changes brought about by Managerialism?*
- 2) *How do social workers live with Managerialism without losing their professional stance?*

With the settlement of the research questions, it will lead to the objective of this research:

To explore the strategies for social workers to live with Managerialism in a way without losing their professional stance.

Since social work profession is a moral practice driven by its professional beliefs, values and missions, which cannot be compromised, once such a foundation stone being shaken means the profession in nature would be spoiled and collapsed sooner or later (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001; Johnson, 1989; Levy, 1973; Perlman, 1976; Reamer, 2013; Vigilante 1974; Whan, 1986). Social workers not engaging in their proper works but continuously being occupied by managerial duties is a first alarming signal that the profession is rocking (Harlow, 2000; Ife, 1997). Hence, the alertness of such a situation to social workers is so important to the profession indeed. This research is deemed significant particularly in the following three aspects:

- (i) It has revealed the struggles and tensions inside the self of social workers under Managerialism;
- (ii) It has suggested some strategies for social workers to live with Managerialism in order to safeguard their professional stance; and
- (iii) It has aroused hope for strengthening social workers to restore their minimizing professional commitment under Managerialism.

However, there is one significant point that must be clarified here because it is the standpoint to establish the argument of this paper. This research does not adopt a critical perspective to address the issue. What I focus is a micro view that I merely studied some individual social workers' situation under the impacts of Managerialism and tried to explore some strategies for social workers to live with Managerialism. Actually, this is a situation that most social workers are facing and struggling everyday in their job. I do not think they all have a radical mind and intention to go for radical movement but most of them would keep in their profession working and making contributions silently. Hence, one of the contributions of this research is that it was done for such a silent majority.

2. Literatures Review

2.1 The Adoption of Managerialism in Hong Kong

Managerialism is a set of beliefs and practices, particularly applying in the commercial field, that assuming better management will resolve a wide range of economic and social problems, and will facilitate the works to be done more effective and efficient. In this paper,

Managerialism refers to putting the emphasis on an enhanced and empowered management role within social welfare sector and in the meantime adopting the market values and business management practices of the commercial organizations (Alford, 1993; Considine & Painter, 1997; Davis, 1997; Hough, 1999; Ife, 1997; Leung 2002; Morgan & Payne, 2002; Roose *et al.*, 2012; Tsui & Cheung, 2004; Yuen & Ho, 2007).

Actually, Hong Kong government has already explained her rationale and guiding principles for social welfare policy in a consultation paper entitled “Long-term Social Welfare Planning in Hong Kong” in July 2011, in which the concept “market driven” was introduced and stressed. Such a rationale can be traced back to the strategic objectives set by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for the consultant Coopers & Lybrand to review the subvention system in 1994:

- (i) enhancing accountability in the use of public funds through the introduction of more sophisticated and stringent service monitoring;
- (ii) shifting emphasis from input control to output and outcome and allowing NGOs the flexibility to deploy resources to meeting evolving priorities and changing community needs;
- (iii) facilitating the process of service re-prioritization and reengineering and ensuring value for money (Social Welfare Department (SWD), 2001).

The tool developed for achieving this is the Service Performance Monitoring System (SPMS) comprising the Funding and Service Agreements (FSA), the Service Quality Standards (SQS), the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) mode of subvention and a process of competitive bidding in allocating new services (Social Welfare Department (SWD), 2001). As seen, all these measures are operated under the framework of Managerialism (Heung, 2001). Tse (2010) observes that the government purposefully directs the social welfare services towards marketization so as to enhance public accountability and cost-effectiveness in the delivery of welfare services.

2.2 The Problems Brought about from Managerialism towards Social Workers

Tsui and Cheung (2004) observe that professional autonomy is not respected in the age of Managerialism (p. 438). In fact, social workers working in such an executive-led environment nowadays are under oppression as they find themselves being marginalized and powerless (Young, 1990). Valle and Lyons (1996) have conducted a study to explore social workers' perceptions towards the changes in the practice of social work. The result indicates that most of the informants felt a deep sense of alienation from the new managerial culture (pp. 63-71). In Hong Kong, in order to reduce the financial burden under the new subvention reform, organizations tend to employ time-bound contract staff and might not keep the experienced staff, who have a higher salary for their seniority but ironically become the burden of the organizations. Therefore, the continuous outflow of experienced workers has frustrated the professional development in the field (Fighting for Social Welfare Alliance, 2004; HKCS, 2008; HKCTU, 2007; HKSWA, 2009; Lam & Tam, 2009; Law, 2000; Tse, 2010). Furthermore, under Managerialism, social workers are required to do a great deal of

managerial works (Heung, 2001; Tsui & Cheung, 2004; Valle & Lyons, 1996). Actually, the Review Report on the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System has revealed such a problem:

Some service users have expressed concerns about the turnover of social workers and their heavy workload...heavy workload may mean that workers cannot afford to give service users the care and attention they need. They are worried that if the situation worsens, service quality may suffer (Lump Sum Grant Independent Review Committee, 2008, p. 89).

Hence, Mok (2011) warns that social work is in crisis:

Managerialism contradict social work values; private profit is higher than human need; larger workload, increase use of contract staff, loss of professional autonomy, job performance quantified, mechanized technicians, pathological perspectives and ignore macro factors. Some called this “deskilling of social work” that leads to job dissatisfaction, burnout, no quality working relationship with users, but more crisis intervention.

2.3 The Contradiction of “Managerialism” and “Professional Stance of Social Workers”

To differentiate “Managerialism” and “professional stance of social workers”, the following table attempts to illustrate the differences between them.

Table 1. The Contradiction of “Managerialism” and “Professional Stance of Social Workers” (Modified from the source: Considine & Painter, 1997, p. 146)

	Managerialism	Professional Stance of Social Workers
Definition	Putting the emphasis on an enhanced and empowered management role within public organizations and in the meantime adopting the market values and business management practices of commercial organizations in private sectors, and have it applied to public sectors.	Social workers uphold their professional values and missions, which always guide their decision-making and behaviors, so as to actualize their professional function.
Value	Market Value: Maximizing organization interests and market share by using all strategies to defeat the rivals through competition. Individuals are treated as a means to serve the organizational goal.	Social Work Value: Upholding human worth and dignity, and social justice. Individuals are the ultimate targets to be served.
Organization Vision	Giving emphasis to the achievements of organization itself, e.g. enhancing organizational reputation to earn	Giving emphasis to the well being of the clientele, e.g. providing quality services to meet clients’ needs.

	market share through providing services.	
Features	Customer-led; Task-oriented; Management focused; Stressing on competition Stressing on public accountability and audit Stressing on multi-skills Stressing on procedures and guidelines Stressing on efficiency, effective and achievement (performance)	Client-centered; People-oriented; Service focused; Stressing on partnership and collaboration Stressing on professional integrity and virtue Stressing on professional knowledge and skills Stressing on experience and practice wisdom Stressing on the practice of moral values and professional mission
People Relationship	Officer-in-charge: Manager People within organization: Employees People to serve: Customers; Consumers People of the same industry: Competitors	Officer-in-charge: Social Worker People within organization: Teammates People to serve: Clients; Service Users People of the same industry: Partners

2.4 The Turning Point of Social Workers' Professional Stance being Assaulted by Managerialism

When the waves of Managerialism lash against social workers, there would be two possible outcomes. One is the social workers' professional stance being shaken and diverted to the managerial concerns. The other is the social workers' professional stance being held firm and the social workers would persevere in their professional identity. The following diagram is to illustrate the two possible situations. However, one point deserving to be mentioned here is, as seen from the diagram, the waves of Managerialism and the social work commitment seems going to the same direction but, in fact, they are serving different goal and objectives (Please see Table 1 above).

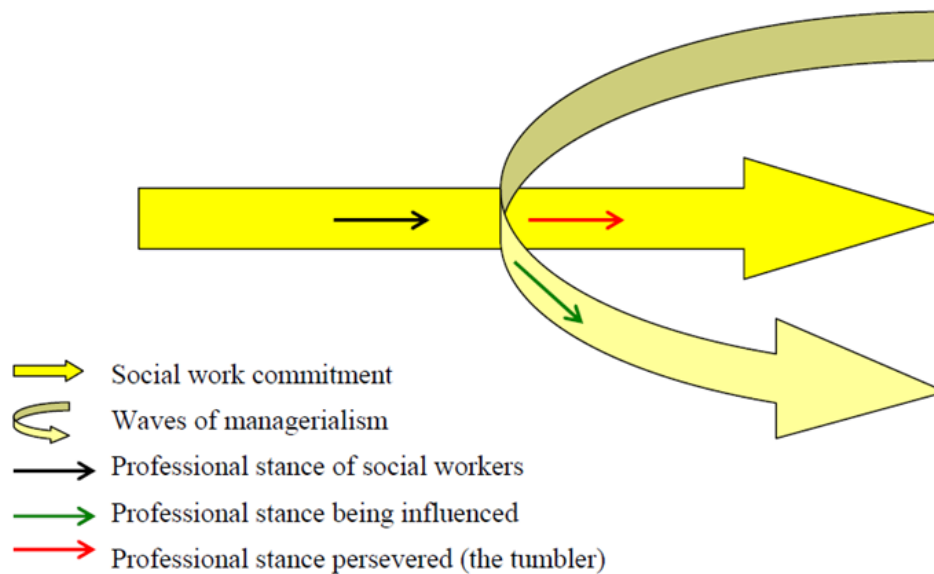


Figure 1. The Turning Point of Social Workers' Professional Stance being Assaulted by Managerialism

3. Methodology

3.1 Methods of Information Collection

This is a qualitative research that adopts semi-standardized in-depth interviewing to collect information. According to Berg (2007), "Semi-standardized interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers allowed freedom to digress, i.e., the interviewers allow probing far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions" (p. 89 & p. 95). Since this is a method more or less structured, it guarantees that I can secure the viewpoints from different informants through standardized questions for information comparison. On the other hand, I may obtain useful information from the digressive but insightful answers if flexibility is allowed.

3.2 Sampling

For interpretive studies, informants are selected based on considerations that they can best inform us about the issues we want to inquire. Hence, the method of purposeful sampling is adopted. Actually, I have gone through two phases of inquiry and the selection criteria are different.

3.2.1 First phase

In order to obtain views from different roles and positions of social workers, Patton's (2005) 'heterogeneous sampling' has been employed. It is a purposive sampling technique used to capture a wide range of perspectives relating to the subject matter that researcher is interested. For this research, they are the different informants with different posts and different working

experiences from different organizations. Thus, six informants from three categories, namely social work administrators, experienced frontline social workers, and junior frontline social workers, with each category having two members, were recruited for interviewing in this phase.

3.2.2 Second phase

This phase targeted on the social workers who would be affected most under Managerialism. Therefore, I adopt Patton's (2005) 'typical case sampling' to recruit the informants. It is a purposive sampling technique used when researcher is interested in the typicality of the units (e.g., people, events, contexts, etc.). In this research, the units concerned are people and context, i.e., the social workers working under the organizations that uphold Managerialism indicated in their vision statement by focusing on organization itself rather than the clients. Eventually, five NGOs were identified and social workers working there were recruited as the targets of this phase.

3.3 Methods of Information Analysis

This research adopted thematic analysis to analyse the information. According to Grbich (2007), thematic analysis is a process of information reduction for meaningful groupings. It focuses not only on the repeated words or phrases, but also emphasizes the special patterns interweaving within information. Themes are patterns across information sets that are important to the description of an issue or a phenomenon and are associated to the research questions. This approach insists that information should speak for itself.

In this research, I first picked up the important information closely related to the research questions from the transcriptions and highlighted (coded) with different symbols. The coded segments were then grouped and placed in a table with headings (themes) added on column by column so as to categorize the contents, which in fact molding the depiction of each heading (theme). Actually, that was an inductive process. That is to say, the themes identified were strongly linked to the information in line with the principle of information-driven (i.e., as mentioned above, "information should speak for itself"). Finally, I compared and integrated the themes in order to generate a meaning to the issue being studied and that should be the answer to the research questions.

3.4 Credibility

This research adopted "*triangulation*" and "*active search for disconfirming evidences*" to maintain the trustworthiness and credibility of information collected.

3.4.1 Triangulation

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2006), triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates credibility of information through a process of cross verification from two or more sources. In this research, both "data triangulation" and "investigator triangulation" were adopted. Regarding the "data triangulation", I went through two phases of information collection by interviewing social workers with different background and some typical cases coming from different NGOs respectively. Regarding the "investigator triangulation", the interpretations of

information and thematization had been gone through a process of tetra-checking, including researcher's checking (Thomson, 2014), informants' checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), peers debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and research supervisor's, playing a role as a critical reader, checking.

3.4.2 Active search for disconfirming evidences

According to Antin, Constantine, and Hunt (2015), "The search for disconfirming evidence, or negative cases, is often considered a valuable strategy for assessing the credibility or validity of qualitative research claims" (p.1). Hence, in order to minimize my personal bias, I not only did not avoid the responses that were against my original viewpoint from the interviews, but even actively search for disconfirming evidences by probing deeply into the contradictions. For example, among the 11 informants interviewed, Jane was an exceptional case who totally stood on the side of management and in the meantime diluted the professional role of a social worker. Actually, during the process, I did not suppress Jane's counter argument but instead, encouraged her to free flow her ideas so as to get a true picture of the issue for my analysis.

3.5 Limitations of this Research

3.5.1 Single Method of Information Collection

This research only adopted in-depth interviewing as the method to collect information from informants. However, one single method limits the effect of triangulation. To remedy the situation, this research had employed "data triangulation" by interviewing different target groups to collect information for comparison and "investigator triangulation" by going through a process of tetra-checking to examine the interpretations of information.

3.5.2 Limited Scope of Exploration for This Research

The development of Managerialism in Hong Kong is, in fact, a structural issue with political and economic concerns behind. This research did not provide any strategy to withstand Managerialism from a perspective of structural intervention. To further explore in this area, it might need to conduct a second stage study to tackle such concerns.

4. Findings

4.1 Social Workers' Feelings towards Managerialism

I totally interviewed 11 informants in this research. However, all of them only expressed their negative feelings towards Managerialism.

4.1.1 Demoralized (dejected):

Obviously, resource cutting was a cause making the informants demoralized as they had already made their contributions to the organization but did not have a fair treatment or remuneration. Cathy shared her dejected feeling and viewpoint, "*Not merely low morale, I start query the meaning of social work. I find it very strange suddenly. My experiences become my burden! My seniority would not be considered as all organizations intend to save*

up their resources as far as possible under the new subvention policy. Hence, I have no chance to change my job unless I accept a job with a lower pay with a big difference in amount from \$5 000 to \$10 000. That is to say, both my morale and personal values are being attacked.” Since measure of employing contract staff had become popular after the implementation of the subvention reform, different pay for same post happened very common within the field. This caused dissension among staff members on one hand, leading to demoralization on the other hand. As Doris pointed out, “*Because of the condition of paying differently in the same post, colleagues feel unfair and the morale is deeply affected then.*”

4.1.2 Helpless (frustrated, deplorable):

Most informants found themselves helpless and frustrated because they could not do anything when facing those unfavorable situations under Managerialism. For example, Amy spelt out, “*The case load has already been increased and in that there are many in crisis. Can we really put aside the crisis cases to handle the paper work! This is also an originating source of frustration to staff members.*” Fiona even pointed out a deplorable situation, “*If you only do the casework, or just do the duties of social work, it’s difficult to make the organization recognize you. In fact, no one concerns whether you do casework or not.*” Under the overwhelming managerial climate, informants found themselves very helpless. Helen said, “*We are difficult to express our feelings. Our voice is so weak.*” Ivy expressed, “*We only find ourselves very helpless. But, in fact, our boss may also find himself helpless!*”

4.1.3 Pressurized:

As seen, the formation of informants’ pressure originated from the demanding workload and accountability that created great psychological and physical burdens. For example, Amy pointed out one of the sources of pressure, “*They are talking about the percentage of client satisfaction rate. This, to a certain extent, creates pressure to staff members.*” Doris noted that staff left for the heavy workload. “*I find the turnover rate become serious these years. For example, I can see that many social workers find it hard to handle the enormous workload and choose to resign from the job.*” Ivy even used a vivid example to illustrate the pressure forming from the competitive bidding of services, “*Like giving birth to a baby, each service needs to give birth to a baby. That is to say, to bid a project. That’s why we were always involved in writing bidding proposals in the recent ten to twenty years. If the elderly service next to you gave birth to twin boys but you had miscarriage (i.e., your bidding failed), you really had pressure! So, once there are services inviting bidding proposal, we must join.*”

4.1.4 Toilsome (fatigued):

Informants found the heavy workload making them very toilsome and fatigued. Doris even used “out of breath” to describe her colleagues’ feeling, “*I certainly know they [the management] want to increase the income through the value added programs. But the paces are too fast. I think some colleagues are feeling out of breath and very toilsome.*” Ivy pointed out the hardship of dealing with the demands derived from the subvention reform, “*In recent years we feel fatigued to entertain the SQS, SPMS, and etc.*” And Jane also reflected the plight of her colleagues, “*The workload becomes heavy and colleagues feel very toilsome!*”

4.1.5 Angry (indignant, resentful):

As observed from the expressions of the informants, the originating sources of angry feelings were mainly from the nitpicking standards making staff feel not being trusted. As Amy pointed out, *“Too much standards being demanded to fulfill make colleagues feel not being trusted.”* Fiona also expressed her anger against the complicated guideline and instructions derived from SQS, *“I hate SQS that created many guidelines and instructions bounding us and frustrating the development of new ideas.”* Besides, the heavy workload made staff feel exhausted and unfair. Doris explained, *“Because the job is too demanding and the workload is too heavy, I saw some left with anger and resentment!”* And Cathy brought out another core problem, *“If salary is cut but workload is increased, I think everyone will be indignant.”*

It is particularly noteworthy that such negative feelings are not a single case but actually a phenomenon of collective emotion or shared moods within the field. The prolonged negative feelings would not be only harmful to individuals physically and psychologically that might lead to stress, exhaustion and burnout, but also would be detrimental to the services sector as well as the profession. It is because such a collective emotion lingering over the field would frustrate the profession to actualize its full function and it even causes further negative impacts to the services.

4.2 The Strategies for Social Workers to Live with Managerialism without Losing their Professional Stance

Having gone through the in-depth interviews with all 11 informants and completed the thematization of information collected, I eventually found them saturated with eight themes, which revealed the strategies for the informants to live with Managerialism without losing their professional stance. They included:

- 4.2.1 Reasserting the professional identity;
- 4.2.2 Realizing the social work values;
- 4.2.3 Discerning the first and foremost tasks;
- 4.2.4 Actualizing professional integrity;
- 4.2.5 Evoking team solidarity;
- 4.2.6 Exercising personal influence;
- 4.2.7 Performing collaborative resistance; and
- 4.2.8 Practicing self-reflection.

Actually, not all informants possessed all these strategies and not all informants could maintain their professional stance as seen in this research. Such an outcome was just derived from both the expressions of different informants and the interpretation of my observation from the collected information. However, the different pieces of expressions with my observation could still make up a full picture to reveal the answer of this research question for this study. Following this train of thought, the better way to maintain the professional stance

for social workers under Managerialism is to possess the combination of all these eight strategies.

4.2.1 Reasserting the professional identity

As observed, within the 11 informants interviewed, almost all had a clear social work identity. For example, Ella said clearly, *“Perhaps I’ve already clearly identified my role as a social worker, I seldom actively attend to the managerial tasks.”* Fiona also showed a clear professional role as she emphasized, *“I am a social worker actualizing the mission of social work.”* Ken said resolutely, *“I am actually a social worker, not only an administrative staff.”* Actually, all such expressions are reflecting informants’ attitude towards social work stance. Reamer (1991) asserts, *“No other human service profession can match the depth of social work’s simultaneous commitment to individual well-being, structural change, and social action on behalf of vulnerable populations”* (p. 100). Therefore, upholding a clear professional identity is the first and most important part for social workers to pay heed to. If social workers do not take their professional identity serious and easily give way to Managerialism, all their professional beliefs, values, and missions are merely some hollow words, let alone preserve in their professional stance.

4.2.2 Realizing the social work values

Amy regarded *“keeping company with client”* as a core social work value and thus she would place clients’ needs in the first priority. *“I think ‘keeping company with clients is one of the social work values...I insist that casework is the first, that is to say, clients’ needs must be placed in the first priority.”* Ken echoed such a viewpoint, *“The first thing I think important is to make our services reach service users’ needs as well as facilitating their participation...You have to stand firm to one thing. When you are doing management, you need to ensure that the things you do are for the sake of service. This is the most important.”* Actually, social work practice is not only a matter of technical operation, but more important is a moral practice supported by a set of substantial moral values (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001; Johnson, 1989; Levy, 1973; Perlman, 1976; Reamer, 2013; Vigilante 1974; Whan, 1986). This should be always the standpoint and orientation of social workers that steers their practice on the right track, especially when encountering dilemmas induced from external environment, such as the wave of Managerialism.

4.2.3 Discerning the first and foremost tasks

Fiona has a high sensitivity to differentiate what her major duties should be and what should not be. As she said decisively, *“Social workers should spend time on their service users but now we pay plenty of time on the paper work!”* In fact, doing paper work may not be a devil thing. The question is how come it increases to a level affecting the services. Focusing on services or focusing on managerial tasks might lead to a totally different outcome and meaning of work. No wonder Amy said, it was a matter of choice. *“I think this is a matter of choice that which one should place first, clients (persons) or works (tasks). It does need a priority between them.”* According to Reamer (2013), *“Discernment is one of the core professional virtues of social workers”* (p. 32). Actually, under the managerial environment

nowadays, such ability is deemed important. Otherwise, social workers would easily go with the tide and consequently get lost.

4.2.4 Actualizing professional integrity

Doris demonstrated her professional integrity by declining the promotion to a managerial post but rather keeping her role as a social worker, *“I prefer to stay in the present position as a frontline worker. I had told my supervisor I would quit the job if the organization urged me to promote.”* Ken remained faithful to the social work principles and realized his moral courage by voicing out any doings violating the principles. *“I don’t care about my preferment. I will voice out if I find there is wrongdoing.”* Banks (2010) defines professional integrity as a core quality of social work profession supporting the practitioners to withstand the external assault attacking the profession. It can be realized through moral values being upheld by social workers in spite of difficult situations and predicaments in which the social workers will not give up or compromise. Therefore, integrity demands social workers not only commit to such moral values, but also have the capacity to execute the moral judgment when facing hardships and dilemmas. Hence, professional integrity is the practice of moral volition and courage.

4.2.5 Evoking team solidarity

Jane considered that working within a team as a whole is so important because team members with same professional background and beliefs can easily show understanding and would give mutual supports and encouragements. *“I believe team spirit is very important. If we have enough mutual understanding and commitment, we can do anything with our joint effort.”* Katzenbach and Smith (1993) point out that teamwork represents a set of values that encourage behaviors of mutual supports for a common goal. That is actually what Cathy said, *“There is mutual influence in between colleagues. It is desirable if all team members commit to the work for the sake of service. Otherwise, if there is no peer support, you will fight a lone battle then and eventually you will also be assimilated.”* Pearce and Herbig (2004) observe, *“if team members are committed to the goals and values of their team and have emotional attachments to the team and its members, it seems likely that they would engage in behaviors that would be beneficial to the team”* (p. 298). Hence, Ella gave a concise and precise conclusion, *“Partners are so important! We are a team having a shared vision that strengthens and enhances services actualization.”*

4.2.6 Exercising personal influence

As Gary said, *“I still have certain influential power in the agency. Hence, I would rather execute my influential power to create a new environment or even turn around to influence the upper management’s decision making.”* Ken, as a senior social work administrator, had a very clear vision and thus always made influences to his colleagues directly, *“I always conveyed a clear message to my colleagues that they should not only do the basic duties but need to respond to clients’ needs.”* Johnson (1989) defines influence as *“general acts of producing an effect on another person, group, or organization through exercises of a personal or organizational capacity”* (p. 437). To social workers, the capacity is to cohere peers’

strengths so as to form a collective power to influence the management of organization and the government as well. That is to say, social workers have to bring influence to others in order to let them know social workers' concerns and stance. Actually, exercising influence to get persons' understanding and acceptance to social work values is also a way to persevere in the professional stance of a social worker.

4.2.7 Performing collaborative resistance

In this research, I found some informants appeared resistance in their practice of work. Amy said, *"I insist that casework is the first...I would even put aside the administration works to fulfill clients' needs first...After all, we are doing human services, the superficial paper work for accountability can be delayed indeed...For the statistical works, frankly speaking, sometimes we might not treat it seriously as we do not have sufficient time to do it accurately."* Ken acted even much aggressive as he expressed, *"Staff members' creativity would be buried under the guidelines and procedures. And the quality of service might be affected too if everyone only attends to follow rules and regulations. I would not let such things happen and...I'd made an earthshaking change by loosening all guidelines and procedures and allowing sufficient spaces and flexibilities for my staff members to input their ideas and creativity."* As seen, such kind of resistance is also powerful to make an impact on Managerialism reversely. Although Managerialism has already penetrated and distorted the social work practice, most social workers still try hard to strike a balance between professional commitment and managerial demands. Actually, social workers can even adopt a postcolonial perspective by counter-penetrating and counter-distorting Managerialism in the process of hybridization embodied by social workers in their daily practice of work as well as mimicking a business manager by a social work administrator (Kwan, 2014). As Bhabha (1994) points out, such hybridization and mimicry are the source of resistance, especially in face of an omnipotent colonizer (in this case, Managerialism). And the ambivalence generated in hybridization returned in the process of mimicry would result in the destabilization and deconstruction of the dominant discourse. According to Kwan (2014), this postcolonial perspective suggests that even if a social work administrator docilely collaborates with Managerialism, we may still find a kind of resistance in such "collaboration".

4.2.8 Practicing self-reflection

Betty considered doing self-reflection from time to time was necessary, *"I think I need to do self-reflection continuously. I must have a clear mind that knowing what I'm doing and what I'm doing for."* Ken reminded social workers to keep doing reflection for preventing them from losing their professional identity, *"You should bear in mind that you are working in a social service agency. You need to review from time to time what you are doing, especially when your organization adopting a business concept, you need to pay special attention to this!"* Furman *et al.* (2008) point out that the perceived importance of self-reflection is becoming increasingly important in helping professions. As observed, informants also found keeping self-reflection was an essence in the social work practice nowadays as it could enhance their self-alertness when working in an executive-led environment. Such alertness

prevented them from losing their professional identity.

5. Discussion

5.1 Subversions: The Impacts on Social Work Profession

Obviously, the tidal wave of Managerialism has already subverted the social work profession at least in three aspects, including the professional relationship with clients, the professional practice of work, and the professional goal.

5.1.1 The Professional Relationship with Clients

As Helen reflected, *“Now, service users’ expectations are very high. They will tell you they are customers!”* And in the business sector, customers are always right (Tsui & Cheung, 2004; Yuen & Ho, 2007). Such subversion of professional-client relationship distorts the helping process that social workers are expected to act as a “businessman” or “salesman” to satisfy customer’s demands. The ethical implication of a professional relationship, in which care is the essence guided by social work values, is diluted. And the dominant position of such “customers” would greatly influence the professionals and even affect their decision-making or judgment and result in diluting the professional function.

5.1.2 The Professional Practice of Work

Managerialism tends to put everything objective, quantified, standardized, indexing, proceduralized, and operationalized but such “rational products” not only increase the workload and pressure on social workers, but also frustrate their spontaneity, creativity, enthusiasm. As Banks (2013) points out, “In a managerialist culture, more concern may be placed on reaching predetermined targets and following prescribed procedures than that practitioners remain true to the values of their profession” (p. 21). Jane’s expression in the interview echoed such a viewpoint, *“Audit in every aspect becomes stronger and stricter. Every step, every procedure, every level is monitored carefully and all need to follow the set criteria in detail as mentioned in the manual.”* As observed, social workers are also demanded to follow the prescribed procedures in their practice of work and professional autonomy becomes irrelevant in such a situation. Social workers are thus mechanized as parts of a machine accounting for the proceduralized operation. Professional judgment is no longer as important as before but already regulated under the set rules and guidelines. The harmfulness of this doing is that social workers would unconsciously shift their focus to responding to the procedures of works but not accounting for the care of clients.

5.1.3 The Professional Goal

Under the competitive environment, reputation and brand-name of organization are emphasized. Hence, professional practitioners are focusing on performance of tasks and attaining outputs and outcomes (Banks, 2013). As Betty observed, *“Social workers are not only doing casework now, but also running a business and being demanded to meet certain levels of profit attainment. We have to chase after such sales targets as we run to catch up certain service standards! Perhaps this is what we call ‘target oriented’.”* And Gary complained, *“What our bosses concern are how many people and mass media the programs*

are attracting. Their horizon is always only focused on whether the programs are vivid and dramatic enough but seldom evaluate how much benefit is gained by the service users.” Actually, such goal displacement is quite popular within the field and this tells us one thing that the tidal wave of Managerialism has already successfully diverted the path originally leading to professional goal. That is the situation showed in Figure 1 “The Turning Point of Social Workers’ Professional Stance being Assaulted by Managerialism”.

5.2 Challenge: An Ordeal of Professional Integrity

Managerialism is a structural problem that individual finds it hard to withstand. Working under such a distorted environment, Valle and Lyons (1996) find that social workers feel a deep sense of alienation. In this research, I also found that most informants struggle in the predicament. Fiona pointed out a deplorable situation, “If you only do the casework, or just do the duties of social work, it’s difficult to make the organization recognize you. In fact, no one concerns whether you do casework or not.” Gary felt tired and perplexed as striking a good balance between managerial concerns and professional concerns were not easy. “I don’t know if I can strike a good balance, or failing to ingratiate one side or the other. Sometime I feel perplexed indeed.” That is why Painter (1998) points out social workers’ struggles and difficulties, as they need to consider and make balance among financial, technical, political, ethical, and social matters and concerns in their job duty. Under such struggles and tensions, it is really a challenge that social workers not trade off their professional stance when their professional integrity is continuously being assaulted by Managerialism.

5.3 Tumbler: The Rise of Defeated Heroes

As revealed from this research, social workers working in the executive-led environment are really difficult and perplexed, especially when they keep encountering and struggling in the predicament of moral dilemmas under the impacts of Managerialism. Therefore, even though they lose in the tug of war, they are still the defeated heroes as they still keep themselves involving in the game. As Banks (2013) points out, “If social workers are to be able to remain in their jobs, rather than quit the jobs in order to preserve in their professional integrity, then they require not just a commitment to a set of professional values, but courage and a sense of solidarity” (p. 32).

5.4 Hope Is Here: The Way out from Predicament

This research generated eight strategies for social workers to live with Managerialism in a way without losing their professional stance. I think they are really some useful hints for social workers in their practice under a managerial environment. However, such strategies still need to be further materialized by building in tact and methods. Nevertheless, such an established prototype can serve as an initial discovery leading to further exploration of different forms of strategies through other studies. Hence, the strategies suggested in this research can arouse hope for social workers who are struggling in Managerialism in their daily work but now there is light ahead leading them out the predicament. Therefore, the strategies generated from this research are able to fill up the practice gap for social workers indeed.

6. Conclusion

Under the age of Managerialism, NGOs in social welfare sector uphold it fanatically by saying that we have to keep abreast of the time and most commercial or business practices are worth taking as a reference for the development of our organization in the rapid changing environment nowadays. Furthermore, business and social welfare services are not mutual excluded at all but, instead, they can be complementary as long as we can make a good balance between them.

Actually, I heard the above arguments many times from the senior management of different NGOs indeed. I do not object this point of view at all but how to make a good balance between business and social welfare services, or say, managerial concerns and professional concerns is still a crucial question needing to be answered. If we cannot clarify what the “time” really is and who we are, I wonder if we are going to *keep abreast of the time* or to *go with the tide*! My argument is that before talking about the balance, to maintain a professional stance is deemed necessary. The stance is so important because it prevents us from losing our identity and simultaneously provides us with a direction for striding forward on a right track. Otherwise, if the so-called “balance” is only a struggle between the two concerns, we shall eventually get lost. One day if we, as a social worker, find ourselves shifting our works from people-oriented to task-oriented, such as handling paper works more than handling clients’ problems, facing computer more than facing clients, fulfilling administrative procedures more than fulfilling clients’ needs, and putting exhaustive effort to meet the service quality standard but not really care about the service quality, I think this is an alarming signal telling us we start losing our professional identity and stance.

The core of social work is the social work values! And to keep and propagate social work values demands social workers having a solid professional stance. To hold firm to the professional stance, especially under the dilemmas brought about by Managerialism, this research suggests eight possible strategies for readers’ reference. They include: “reasserting the professional identity”, “realizing the social work values”, “discerning the first and foremost tasks”, “actualizing professional integrity”, “evoking team solidarity”, “exercising personal influence”, “performing collaborative resistance”, and “practicing self-reflection”. Certainly, these are not the golden rules, but can be served as a reference for social workers to withstand the assault from the tidal wave of Managerialism and stand firm again on their professional stance, like a tumbler!

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Note 1. The original Chinese term Mr. Chen Zuo Er used was “車毀人亡”.

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