

3 the principle of normalization as a human management model: evolution of a definition

A reformulation of the normalization principle

Until about 1969, the term 'normalization' had never been heard by most workers in human service areas. Today, it is a captivating watchword standing for a whole new ideology of human management.

To the best of my knowledge, the concept of normalization owes its first promulgation to Bank-Mikkelsen, head of the Danish Mental Retardation Service, who phrased it in terms of his own field, as follows: 'letting the mentally retarded obtain an existence as close to the normal as possible.' Bank-Mikkelsen (1969) was instrumental in having this principle written into the 1959 Danish law governing services to the mentally retarded.

However, it was not until 1969 that the principle was systematically stated and elaborated in the literature by Nirje (1969b), who was then executive director of the Swedish Association for Retarded Children. This elaboration was contained in a chapter of the monograph *Changing Patterns in Residential Services for the Mentally Retarded* (Kugel & Wolfensberger, 1969), sponsored by the President's Committee on Mental Retardation. This systematic description was not only the first one in English¹, but even had to be translated into Swedish in order to become the first major treatise on the topic in the Scandinavian literature. In this 1969 chapter, Nirje phrased the principle as follows: 'making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream of society' (p. 181).

Although the normalization principle had not yet been systematically presented in the Scandinavian literature until 1970, its significance had been widely recognized before that, and in 1967, a new, far-reaching Swedish law governing provisions and services for the mentally retarded was developed from it and became effective in 1968 (Swedish Code of Statutes, 1967 (4), dated December 15, 1967). Parts of this law were presented and discussed in the above-mentioned chapter by Nirje (1969b).

Nirje's chapter was mostly concerned with the implications of the normalization principle to the design and operation of residences for the retarded; however, the relevance of the principle beyond residential aspects, and even beyond mental retardation to deviancy and human management in general, was clearly recognized and stated. In a synthesizing chapter in the same book, Dybwad (1969) pointed to the principle as a major emergent human management concept, while also elaborating further on some of its implications to the location, design, staffing, and operation of residential services.

¹ The first major statement of the normalization principle in the British literature was contained in a three-article symposium in the December 1970 issue of the *Journal of Mental Subnormality* (Gunzberg, 1970; Nirje, 1970; Zarfes, 1970).

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For purposes of a North American audience, and for broadest adaptability to human management in general, I propose that the definition of the normalization principle can be further refined as follows: 'Utilization of means which are as culturally normative as possible, in order to establish and/or maintain personal behaviors and characteristics which are as culturally normative as possible.'

From the proposed reformulation it is immediately apparent that the normalization principle is culture-specific, because cultures vary in their norms. For instance, normalization does not necessarily mean that human services should resemble Scandinavian services. It does mean that as much as possible, human management means should be typical of our own culture; and that a (potentially) deviant person should be enabled to emit behaviors and an appearance appropriate (normative) within that culture for persons of similar characteristics, such as age and sex. The term 'normative' is intended to have statistical rather than moral connotations, and could be equated with 'typical' or 'conventional'. The phrase 'as culturally normative as possible' implies ultimately an empirical process of determining what and how much is possible.

Since deviancy is, by definition, in the eyes of the beholder, it is only realistic to attend not only to the limitations in a person's repertoire of potential behavior, but to attend as much or even more to those characteristics and behaviors which mark a person as deviant in the sight of others. For instance, wearing a hearing aid may be a greater obstacle to finding and keeping a job than being hard of hearing (Kolstoe, 1961).

It is for this reason that the proposed reformulation implies both a process and a goal, although it does not necessarily imply a promise that a person who is being subjected to normalizing measures and processes will remain or become normal. It does imply that in as many aspects of a person's functioning as possible, the human manager will aspire to elicit and maintain behaviors and appearances that come as close to being normative as circumstances and the person's behavioral potential permit; and that great stress is placed upon the fact that some human management means will be preferable to others. Indeed, sometimes a technique of less immediate potency may be preferable to a more potent one, because the latter may reinforce the perceived deviance of the person, and may be more debilitating than normalizing in the long run.

The distinction between 'elicitation' and 'establishment' of normative behavior on the one hand, and 'maintenance' on the other hand, has a number of implications. For instance, the term 'maintenance' underlines not only the importance of supporting behavior that is normative (or as normative as possible) in a person who previously behaved in a deviant (or more deviant) manner, but also the necessity of assisting some persons who have never been perceived as deviant from coming to be so perceived.

The normalization principle can be viewed as being neutral as to whether a specific deviant person or group *should* be normalized. That decision must be based on criteria and values which exist independent of the normalization principle. Here it is useful to recall that our society considers it appropriate that normalizing measures be *offered* in some circumstances, and *imposed* in others.

The normalization principle as stated is deceptively simple. Many individuals will agree to it wholeheartedly while lacking awareness of even the most immediate and major corollaries and implications. Indeed, many human managers endorse the principle readily while engaging in practices quite opposed to it – without being aware of this discordance until the implications are spelled out. Then a manager may find himself in a very painful dilemma, endorsing simultaneously a principle, as well as practices opposed to it.

In the next chapter, some of the major corollaries and implications of the normalization principle will be elaborated. The reader may find himself just as surprised by some of these as this writer was.