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THE PERCEIVED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND JOB ATTITUDES IN HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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This paper contributes to leadership knowledge in the field of child welfare by studying the relationship between agency leadership and caseworker job attitudes. This qualitative study included three focus groups with administrators and caseworkers to explore perceived leadership practices and caseworker job attitudes. Qualitative findings revealed a divergent perception of leadership practices between caseworkers and administrators, while providing specific content representative of both strengths and limitations of agency leadership. Lastly, frontline workers exclusively also perceived a relationship between certain leadership practices and job satisfaction. Findings lead to a number of organizational implications.

INTRODUCTION

Child welfare systems are complex bureaucratic entities generally structured within a larger organizational umbrella that provide services through programs to various individuals, families and children. These programs encounter organizational dynamics that are fraught with a multitude of challenges. Excessive workloads (Guterman & Jayaratne, 1994) accompanied by low wages and poor working conditions with diminished sense of accomplishment (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991) and ongoing exposure of personal risk to assault (Regehr, Chau, Leslie & Howe, 2002) are varying stressors encountered by child welfare workers. Workers also face ethical dissonance in balancing best interest of children, concerns of parents, and legal intent. Additional burdens on workers stem from social, political (Adoption and Safe Families Act, 1997 – P.L. No. 105-89), and legal (Angela R. v. Clinton, No. LRC-91-415, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Arkansas, filed July 8, 1991, David C. v. Leavitt, No. 93-C-206W, filed Feb. 25, 1993) pressures and restraints. Organizational performance and systemic direction are primarily dictated by a large bureaucratic system with elaborate policies, intricate regulations, and varying special interests.

Even the most productive and effective child welfare leaders face tremendous challenges in the systems they direct. Leadership and administrative bodies encounter a series of organizational limitations including low employee salaries, unpredictable risk of violence to employees, staff shortages, high caseloads, administrative burdens, inadequate supervision and training, lethargic opportunities for professional growth, and additional struggles that impact and contribute to the lack of organizational performance (McGowan & Meezan, 1983). Unaddressed systemic barriers influence job attitudes and contribute to unintended outcomes of low employee morale and job dissatisfaction, frequent employee turnover, poor consumer satisfaction and declining client outcomes, and impact on overall service delivery (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Jimmieson & Griffin, 1998; Johnson & McIntye, 1998; Nunno, 1997;

Parkin & Green, 1997; Schmit & Allschied, 1995; Silver & Manning, 1997; Wagar, 1997).

Several studies (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Jimmieson & Griffin, 1998; Johnson & McIntye, 1998; Nunno, 1997; Parkin & Green, 1997; Schmit & Allschied, 1995; Silver & Manning, 1997; Wagar, 1997) have explored the plight and current organizational experience of human service workers. Employees in human service agencies working and managing human capital encounter numerous struggles of limited resources, political and constituent bureaucratic influence, organizational and personal stress, frequent turnover of staff and management, employee burnout, and additional elements that challenge employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In addition to organizational challenges, human service workers, specifically child welfare workers, are engaged in life saving decision-making and responsibilities that prove to be life changing not only for the client but also for themselves. Shapiro, Burkey, Dorman and Welker (1996) describe employee decision-making as joined with the burden of assessing abuse and neglect cases while deciding on direction and fate of victims with limited social, psychological and financial resources. Additional high stress responsibilities include confronting alleged perpetrators regarding abuse allegations while implementing case planning methods that have short- and long-term consequences on families and especially the victims. Because assessments can reflect the difference between life and death, child welfare workers maintain a heightened awareness of victim trauma and their highly influential professional roles (McCann & Pearlman, 1990).

Volumes can be devoted to negative consequences as a result of systemic challenges. The high turnover rates of 60% among human service workers (Geurtz, Schaufeli & De Jonge, 1998) and the range between 27 to 49% of employees in child welfare services in the State of Utah (Harris & Middleton, 2000) are figures that represent a systemic funnel requiring large allotments of funds to recruit and train new workers. Reports on child welfare cost of hiring and retraining new workers because of staff turnover was

estimated in Georgia to have reached over \$70 million annually (Brooke, 1999). A study by Graef and Hill (2000) utilized a combination of the agency's human resource database and interviewed personnel directly involved in the administrative processes in order to calculate for one year the specific cost elements directly related to child protective service (CPS) turnover. Findings described a generous estimate of \$10,000 per vacancy was allocated to cover separation, replacement and training.

Federal agencies, associations and philanthropies have joined with initiatives to diagnose and address the plight of child welfare organizations. The turn of the millennium introduced renewed perspective on approaches and research agendas led by the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA). The General Accounting Office (GAO) also explored challenges in the retention and recruitment of workers and supervisors, providing numerous recommendations for developing an ongoing research agenda. The Annie E. Casey Foundation undertook this renewed research agenda to scan organizational struggles at the frontline of human service organizations. Descriptive research trends indicated that organizational climate and working conditions of frontline staff contribute to performance that increases client outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child welfare systems continue to be under political and public scrutiny as they ricochet through controversy, disputes, social and political pressure. Service provision, delivery methods, the quality and quantity of services, are continually evolving to meet diverse and growing child and family needs, while straining to maintain compliance with legislative regulations. In response to regulations and emerging class action suits, child welfare organizations have initiated major infrastructure and systemic changes, development, and training to better address the complexities of social and system problems. In spite of advancing legislative initiatives, federal regulations, and advocacy movements, minimal energy is mobilized to identify varying features of organizational indicators that contribute to positive service outcomes (Hoagwood, 1997). Indicators linked to organizational outcomes often take the form of organizational culture and leadership. These organizational indicators are often overlooked by researchers and overshadowed by intense focus on elements of practice models and clinical program evaluation.

Lee and Wagner (1993) attributed child welfare organizational struggles to an intense focus on training aimed primarily at clinical practice to the detriment of organizational development. Recent child welfare research (Markiewicz, 1996; Voigt & Tregeable, 1997) is increasingly recognizing the magnitude of organizational characteristics that impact staff performance. These studies identify the complexity of problems, emotional stress,

tensions between bureaucratic organizational infrastructures and professional practices as potential stressors for child welfare workers.

Factors that impact organization performance have been neglected along with the conceptual importance of leadership. Early organizational studies (McClelland, 1975; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982) indicated a positive relationship between subordinate attitudes and effective leadership practices. Researchers exploring organizational culture discovered that it is the role and responsibility of leaders to create positive organizational cultures (Schein, 1985). Human service leadership studies that followed (Brilliant, 1986; Glisson, 1989; Patti, 1987) concluded that the primary purpose of leadership was to impact the organizational climate in order to empower, excite, and inspire workers to the vision and mission of their organization. This research depicts the profession of social work as neglecting or nearly abandoning the construct of leadership and its key role in establishing the foundation and direction of the profession.

With the premise that leaders influence attitudinal dimensions of organizational life necessary for organizational performance, Glisson (1989) explored various dimensions of leadership and their relationships to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. He found that leadership dimensions of maturity, power, and intelligence have a strong relationship to employee job satisfaction and commitment. His findings complement earlier work by McClelland, indicating that specific leadership traits and behaviors impact organizational effort and membership in an organization. This relationship amplifies the importance of leadership within human organizations that experience high rates of burnout, low morale, public and political scrutiny, and role discomfort or dissonance stemming from stressful interactions with clients and having to make life-saving decisions. Glisson and Hemmelgarn's earlier work (1988) discovered that leadership behavior and styles within child welfare organizations were invaluable predictors of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Leadership behaviors contributing to positive office climates influencing worker performance are correlated with improved psychosocial functioning of children. The inverse result of deterioration in quality of services is found when caseworkers or administrators are dissatisfied with their jobs and foster caustic organizational climates.

Leadership in human service organizations can also serve as a buffer against organizational stressors. Himle, Jayaratne and Thyne (1989) found that leadership behaviors that provide emotional support to staff buffer or moderate worker stress and anxiety, as well as reduce role conflict and turnover. Findings also show that the supervisory practice of providing informational support buffers against depression and irritation linked to role conflict and general work-related stress.

The dimension of motivation and its relationship to job performance has gained attention and momentum in human

services. Early job attitude studies in child welfare organizations (Jayaratne & Chess, 1982) match Herzberg's (1959) two-factor motivation research in discovering that opportunity for growth and professional challenge in human services represent intrinsic motivators that impact job satisfaction. Promotional opportunities and financial rewards are variables related to job dissatisfaction but not directly linked to turnover in line workers (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984).

Workers also have to balance the opportunities for job and personal growth with other obligations and stressors. The momentum of job attitude research in human services has also lead to development of job attitude measures. Shapiro, Burkey, Dorman, and Welker (1996) developed and pilot tested a job satisfaction questionnaire with child welfare workers. The factors identified in the questionnaire overlapped and complemented earlier factors identified by Vinokur-Kaplan (1991). Both studies indicated that items relating to self-actualization, working conditions, varying job-related affect and professional growth were factors in job satisfaction. An earlier national study by Jayartne and Chess (1984) on job satisfaction in human services found that child welfare worker satisfaction is influenced by value and role conflict or comfort reflective of moral decisions in removing children from their families or returning them to abusive families. Satisfaction was further hindered by the lack of challenge that did not allow opportunity for growth. Promotional opportunities representing professional growth had greater predictability of job satisfaction.

More recent studies (Shapiro, Dorman, Burkey, & Welker, 1999) continue to indicate that in spite of negative frontline worker perceptions of the legal and child protective systems, job satisfaction of frontline workers in child welfare is influenced by opportunities to independently work on challenging problems without the intrusion of bureaucratic forces and burdensome agency policies. Satisfied frontline workers were also found to have had a balance or firm boundary between work and non-work roles.

Leadership in the human services involves an inclusive but wide ranging responsibility to operating multiple complex systems involving management as it relates to personnel motivation, production and productivity, resource mobilization, planning and organizational development, and multiple facets that are led and influenced by the human service organizational culture. Glisson's (1989) large scale study of leadership dimensions and worker attitudes in 47 workgroups of 319 individuals representing 22 human service organizations indicated that leaders impacted a worker's commitment and membership within organization by appealing and connecting to the values of the follower. Rank and Hutchison (2000) qualitatively explored the direction of the human service industry through a theoretical framework that focused on the role of leadership in the profession and found that both practitioners and educators define the role of leadership to be grounded in principles of values, advocacy, empowerment, and communication. An

unavoidable and reoccurring theme in their study was the sense that leadership is a neglected area of emphasis and that further investigation is needed to explore practices of human service leaders and how leadership practices impact organization.

In light of this theoretical abyss, the goal of this study was to describe leadership and job attitudes at the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) in a Mountain West State, and explore how leadership practices shape organizational culture (Schein, 1992). The construct of transformational leadership is explored within child welfare as a practice that most closely resembles values of the profession and practices required to address complex organizational dynamics (Rank & Hutchison, 2000). In addition, transformational leadership practices are recognized as contributors to developing supportive organizational culture that enables workers to influence workforce surroundings (Bass, 1985). Transformational leaders recognize the potential of followers and pursue opportunities, methods, and situations to satisfy higher order needs (Maslow, 1954) in order to engage the full capacity of followers and receive the greatest organizational return (Burns, 1978). Relationships from transformational behaviors instill an organizational culture that encourages exploration and risk taking with the goal of mobilizing an organization to develop and accept a renewed vision, direction, and transformation (Tichy & Ulrich, 1984).

This study implemented transformational leadership factors developed by Kouzes and Posner (2002) to qualitatively explore and describe transformational leadership of administrators and job attitudes of caseworkers in DCFS. The leadership practices developed by Kouzes and Posner closely resemble the leadership practices found in child welfare literature (Himle, Jayaratne & Thyness, 1989; Glisson, 1989) and described by national social work leaders (Rank, & Hutchison, 2000). The authors generated transformational leadership practices from in-depth interviews and case study analysis. Findings identified five distinct leadership factors categorized within practices of (1) challenging the process, (2) inspiring a shared vision, (3) enabling others to act, (4) modeling the way, and (5) encouraging the heart.

Challenging the process is a leadership practice that involves commitment to discovering challenging opportunities to change, grow, and innovate. It is within this practice that leaders take calculated risks, experiment and learn from mistakes. Tichy and Ulrich (1984) found that organizations stagnate when ignoring triggers of change and opportunities to grow. The second practice of inspiring a shared vision requires enlisting subordinates in a shared vision for an ultimate cause by appealing to personal and professional values, interests, hopes and goals. Inspiring a shared vision provides an opportunity for caseworkers to directly associate job tasks with the greater vision of the organization that develops ownership and influences job satisfaction (Butler, 1990). Enabling others to act is a

leadership practice of cultivating collaboration by encouraging cooperative goals and mutual trust found in collective participation. This practice requires the leader to empower subordinates and initiate opportunities for participation in planning and decision-making to develop professional identification, personal growth, ownership of performance, and cooperative culture. Samantrai (1992) found that inflexible job assignments and poor relationships with supervisors were key indicators that differentiated retention and turnover in child welfare organizations. The fourth leadership practice of modeling the way involves coaching subordinates to achieve incremental small wins that promote a feeling of progress and commitment. The final practice of encouraging the heart requires leaders to communicate individual recognition for success and celebrate significant goal achievement and professional milestones.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

Although only a few child welfare organizations are discovering and implementing organizational change that impacts service outcomes, emerging discoveries indicate that organizational performance is influenced and dictated by organizational leadership, culture, and job satisfaction of frontline workers providing direct services.

The objectives and specific research questions to be investigated are:

1. What is the frontline and administrative perception of DCFS leadership practices?
2. What is the perceived relationship between perceived leadership practices and job satisfaction at DCFS?

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory qualitative design was appropriate to achieve the intent and objectives of the study given that the field of child welfare leadership research is relatively uncharted. Three focus groups were organized to gather qualitative data and to further address the objectives and questions of the study.

Sample

This study implemented a sample of convenience with voluntary participants from any of five DCFS regions in a Mountain West State. DCFS frontline workers and administrators were invited to participate in focus groups through a specific DCFS intranet email. The voluntary participants coordinated their time with regional directors and gathered at a regional site for a sixty to ninety minute focus group. The invitation yielded three focus groups. One focus group represented 10 mid-level supervisors and administrators who provided information on DCFS leadership practices. Two other focus groups represented the

caseworker population, 6 of which represented the rural state region while 10 caseworkers represented the urban regions.

Instrumentation

Focus group questions were specific yet iterative to allow focus groups to explore the qualitative depth of leadership. Questions explored perceptions of leadership at both the micro and macro levels of the organization. Participants were asked to share about their perceptions of leadership emergent in their own regional work teams but also at the larger state agency level. Rural and urban caseworkers were asked to explain elements of their job that are most and least satisfying to them. The contextual question and prompts that explored and expanded the relationship between perceived leadership practices and job attitudes required caseworkers to explain when they are most effective at their job.

On the other hand, administrators were asked to explain how they gain maximum performance from the caseworkers they supervise and to explain how their role influences job attitudes. As with caseworkers, the contextual questions that prompted discussion about the relationship between leadership and job attitudes required supervisors to explain what they liked or disliked about their leadership role. In addition supervisors were also asked to retrospectively reflect on their leadership and explain if they would chose this same role if they had to do it all over again. This qualitative approach presented opportunities to explore reasons for leadership behaviors and how they influenced subordinate job attitudes, and uncover poorly understood interactions or relationships between variables (Drew, Hardman & Hart, 1996). The focus groups also permitted observation and interactions that allowed access to substantive content of verbally expressed views, opinions, experiences, and attitudes (Berg, 2004).

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative approaches have played a valuable role in the study of leadership and job attitudes (Parry & Meindl, 2002). They are partially responsible for paradigm shifts in understanding and provide critical insight into varying dimensions that might have otherwise been missed by direct positivistic approaches. Analysis of qualitative data implemented a constant comparative method of analysis, requiring constant gathering of more data between focus groups, analyzing, comparing analysis to past analysis, and continuing the process in order to clarify emerging theoretical relationship among variables (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This emerging content is more likely to resemble the "reality" than is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation. Implementing an inductive approach allows the researcher to be immersed within data in order to discover

dimensions or themes that seem meaningful to the expression of each message (Abrahamson, 1983, p. 286).

Inductive categories were established using several procedures (Denzin, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967):

1. Processing files were created to represent each qualitative question and response in reference to leadership practices and factors of job satisfaction.
2. Open coding is one of the most basic procedures of the grounded theory method. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described open coding as a process of exposing thoughts, ideas, and meanings by breaking down data into discrete parts that allow close examination and comparison of similarities and differences. This open method allowed new emerging themes suggested by focus group participants. New content representing themes was added to complement the original coding scheme.

Qualitative methods provided an opportunity to explore complex layers of leadership and their symbolic attributes, and further expose hidden messages often overlooked in quantitative approaches. In addition, both abstract constructs of leadership and job attitudes were given a voice through the expressed views of caseworkers at DCFS.

Soundness of Study

Several measures were implemented to address the authenticity and balanced representation of perspectives shared by participants. Triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of focus groups was implemented in order to learn about the perception of leadership from both frontline workers and mid-level managers who held positional leadership. These two juxtaposing perspectives allow the comparison and corroboration of findings from two different sources that enhances the trustworthiness of interpretation and verification of emerging themes. In addition, a number of member checking techniques were implemented to increase the credibility of the interview schedule and interpretation of findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider this technique to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p.134). Member checking was first established by piloting the focus group questions with a similar group of child welfare workers. This process informed the relevance of questions and contributed to refinement and specificity of interview questions. A second approach to member checking was established through a process of paraphrasing content throughout focus group sessions. Paraphrasing allows the participants to examine that which is being immediately analyzed and interpreted by the focus group moderator and further informs the process as to its accuracy and authenticity. Informal feedback that derives from paraphrasing sessions also contributes to a

richer, unplanned and unscripted iterative journey that may not occur without the involvement of the participant.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To break the tyranny of an old and struggling culture, organizations need to rely on leadership practices that inspire and motivate workers toward goal achievement and self-actualization (Schein, 1992). Schein found that thriving organizations develop a fit between organization, worker attitudes, and existing layers of influence. This premise informs the intent of this study and supports the approach of exploring perceived DCFS leadership practices and their relationship with job satisfaction.

Qualitative data were analyzed through open coding. Straus and Corbin (1998) describe open coding not only as one of the most basic procedures of qualitative research, but also as a process of exposing thoughts, ideas, and meaning by breaking down data into discrete parts that allow close examination and comparison of similarities and differences. This open method allowed for emerging themes suggested by focus group participants.

Research Question 1: Caseworker and Administrative Perceptions of Leadership Behavior

Leadership was nominally defined as anyone in the organization who has direct supervisory, management, development and policy development responsibilities. The perception of DCFS leadership practices was explored with both caseworker and administrative focus groups.

Qualitative findings indicate distinct similarities of thought and perception between caseworkers and those in leadership positions with a few noticeable disparities in perceptions about leadership practices. Both rural and urban caseworker focus groups had similar perceptions of both immediate and overall leadership at DCFS. Their perceptions varied based on individual experiences with supervisors and regional directors. Emerging themes represented both perceived leadership strengths and limitations. Caseworker focus groups also shared perceptions of overall DCFS leadership limitations.

One regional administrative and supervisor focus group discussed and evaluated their own leadership practices and also the overall leadership practice of DCFS. Themes that emerged from the administrative focus group closely resembled themes from the caseworker focus groups on both dimensions of supervisory strengths and overall DCFS leadership limitations.

Rural and urban caseworkers shared similar perceptions of supervisory and regional leadership. Caseworkers are very amenable of supervisors that have firsthand experience on the frontlines, as they are able to adapt and structure current office operations to address the needs of casework within their geographic area. Caseworkers thrive in team cultures that embrace their participation in decision-making

and direction. In addition, successful supervisors and regional directors were described as individuals providing opportunities for professional growth and expertise.

CASEWORKER: I also like somebody “that’s been there and done that,” you know, so they know where you are coming from...

CASEWORKER: Our regional director goes out of his way to talk to you, and I think that’s awesome. I think somebody like that shows leadership...and communicates not only when there are problems in the office.

Developing human relationships was considered to be an effective method to learning and understanding the strengths and limitations of new or well-seasoned caseworkers. This knowledge is critical in assigning work and developing opportunities for mentorship and growth. Genuine relationships were often centered on clear boundaries and expectations between caseworkers and supervisors, in addition to providing independence to make decisions and manage cases.

SUPERVISOR: finding those subtleties for each worker, and knowing their strengths and their needs to a point where you probably...may know them a little bit better than they know themselves in some cases, and working towards those strengths and also working towards building up the weak areas...matching their strengths with a particular family that allows them to succeed...to simply increase their confidence.

SUPERVISOR: I love the interaction with the caseworkers, and being able to problem-solve with them, and watch them grow and there’s so much pride. It’s almost a parental role, for me, I guess. They’re my favorite people and I want to see them be successful in all that they do.

CASEWORKER: She’s not bossy or pushy. She expects the work to be done, and treats us like we’re adults, not little kids. And it’s like...she defends you, too! We’re on the same level with her. She doesn’t look down on us, and she expects a lot from us. She wants her office to “kick butt.” She wants us to be good. She has high hopes for us and we typically meet those demands. All she wants is for the work to be done.

CASEWORKER: It’s being treated like an adult. “This is your job and I expect you to do your job. When you don’t do your job, this is the consequence,” and then sit back and say, “Okay do your job. I’m here for you. If you need my help,

you come and ask for my help, but I’m not going to stand over your shoulder and make sure that you do your job.”

A key commonality in caseworker and administrative perceptions was the need and appreciation for growth through mentorship. Mentorship was perceived as a vital leadership practice contributing to increase of professional knowledge, confidence, professional growth, worker retention, and casework efficacy. Mentorship provided opportunities to validate caseworker skills and develop weak areas of practice.

Supervisors additionally empowered caseworkers not only with mentorship but also through provision of resources to accomplish job tasks.

SUPERVISOR: I think, too, the thing that we do is kind of mediate and moderate casework direction. Some caseworkers confront more, and others are more passive, and so we kind of help them stay on an even keel by providing an outside objective view to a case. When they work very closely with families, they tend to be swayed or biased a little bit in one direction or another, and so we kind of help keep them on an even keel.

SUPERVISOR: ...so it’s helping the workers deal with their loss and feeling like a failure that they didn’t get their kid home, or you know, that the adoption was just as positive of an outcome as returning them to a stable home.

SUPERVISOR: I think helping them find resources and things for families. A lot of times they don’t think about all of the different options that are out in the community, so you can bring up ideas and different things that they can do in the cases they go on. That kind of helps the overall case outcome. We have the names of people and relationships with other people in the community who work with this agency...sometimes we’re able to bridge gaps if there is a problem, whereas a worker might be hesitant or not able to recognize what resources are available.

Caseworkers as well as supervisors/regional administrators shared a common perception of leadership practices by DCFS State administrators. Groups share the perception that DCFS State leadership is disconnected from casework practices, current trends and complexities of social problems, changing family dynamics, and available community resources. The perceived disconnect to frontline practice is also rooted in questioning the relevance and purpose of policies and procedures.

CASEWORKER: I'm sure they are telling our Regional Director what we need to do, so that's impacting us. But as far as them up there, it's not really like we see them, or even know that they're a real person. We see their names on e-mail and that kind of stuff.

CASEWORKER: Sometimes I think it's the Administrations job to come up with new forms, and that is all they do, is they think up of new forms...forms that don't really make much difference. They're not going to change a family. They're not going to help a family, but "Gosh dang it! Here is your form!"

Focus group participants discussed that the lack of participative leadership and inclusion of caseworkers and supervisors in policy development, decision-making, and direction of the agency disengages frontline workers from the vision and objectives of the agency. In addition, agency objectives, policies, and models inevitably lose credibility and efficacy when they are imposed on the individuals that have to apply them and enforced through disciplinary action rather than performance programs.

CASEWORKER: I don't know if I should be saying this, but it is very...it's really discouraging and demoralizing to see that you try really hard to make a change, and you work really hard at it, and I know that I'm not the only one, but we don't feel valued...like we're not worth anything, and they'll make you feel grateful that you have a job.

CASEWORKER: ...I think what they're talking about is lack of appreciation from the State...from the "higher-ups" just like, "We're here. We're doing the hard job."

Lastly, supervisors and regional administrators felt that State agency administrators enforce policies, regulations and procedures by using intimidating methods of "corrective action." Personal connection and encounters with State administrators were descried to occur during times of corrective action. Although Administrative support, interest, and presence was appreciated, their lack of collaborative approach with supervisors and regional administrators on workforce issues was perceived as directive and more of a burden. Supervisors and regional administrators prefer that State administrators collaborate with them and allow them to adapt workforce interventions to fit specific situations, individuals, and teams.

SUPERVISOR/REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR: Recently we've had Administration come down and say, "You have to put this worker on corrective action," which is destroying the relationship, or

whatever I may have been working with that worker on. They came down and said, "I don't care. We're not going to...this is just how it's going to be." We take the hit with that with the team, and our team has to sit there, and they're dissatisfied with us, and then it's back to rebuilding that trust again." You're being told...forced to do it.

SUPERVISOR/REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR: We may be working on some other type of plan that's possibly more subtle and more in tune with whatever...more about their needs, one piece of their work not the whole. I mean, they're shining on some things, but need to work on that, but it's not through corrective action.

SUPERVISOR/REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR: It's kind of like whacking them all (laughter). If you don't get your head up there your fine...they, (State administrators) don't see the day-to-day work that I see...

Research Question 2: Perceived Relationship between Leadership Practices and Job Satisfaction

Qualitative interviews to explore this question confirmed many of the themes developed through the previous research question - with additional findings of (a) empowerment, (b) human relationships, and (c) teamwork. Caseworkers discussed the importance of empowerment in sustaining hope and endurance on the job. Caseworkers thrived in conditions that presented clear and consistent expectations with opportunities for professional growth and challenge. Office conditions that provided flexibility and independence also encouraged caseworkers to be independent thinkers, problem solvers, and innovators with available resources. Developing human relationships with caseworkers was a leadership practice often developed through collaborative and cooperative organizational cultures. Caseworkers expressed feeling more included and connected to the vision and direction of the regional office when involved in the planning and decision-making process. Collaborative approaches were often paired with developing and nurturing human relationships within the workforce that increased team cohesiveness and overall "camaraderie."

CASEWORKER: He (regional director) comes down and goes out of his way to talk to you, and I think that's awesome. I think somebody like that, you know, can show leadership, if he can also communicate and, you know, talk to everybody, not just like the Supervisors, and not just the...you know, how the problems in the office are going...everybody, you know, he can talk to everybody.

ADMINISTRATOR: Helping that first year worker feel confident with decisions that they make with these families, and that it's ok to make mistakes, and you know, it's not black and white.

Supervisors also expressed the need for a human relations leadership approach to develop and maintain cohesive, stable, and productive teams. A human relations model allowed leaders to learn strengths and limitation of caseworkers that informed mentorship, job development and training approaches. In-depth knowledge of workforce dynamics allowed supervisors to adapt job growth to the capacity of the worker. Supervisors also impacted job satisfaction by matching new caseworker professional capacity, personality styles and confidence levels with cases that offered development through small incremental wins.

SUPERVISOR: It's kind of like...you know, being a parent in a lot of ways, but when your workers are really successful and they're doing a great job, you just...you're on top of the world, and you know when they call you up, and if they say, "I've got this personal problem. I've got something going on I want to talk to you about," it makes you feel really good, because you know you've established that kind of personal relationship that they'll talk to you.

SUPERVISOR: I think my favorite part of this job is I like to supervise, and I like the team that I have not. It feels to me like...at least in our...office, that we have some good flow with each other...relationships with each other, and I think we need to all work on that. But, for me right now, it feels like we have a good bond, people understand what I'm doing, can support me, and I am able to do some things...

Supervisors who developed and inspired teamwork impacted job satisfaction through methods of cooperation and shared decision-making. Collaborative case consultation provided caseworkers the opportunity to develop clinical intervention skills in a non-threatening or hurried setting. Heterogeneous teams also offered dynamic perspectives on difficult cases that allowed caseworkers to develop better-informed efficacious service plans.

SUPERVISOR: I love the interaction with the kids...I mean, the caseworkers, and being able to problem-solve with them, and watch them grow and there's so much pride. It's almost a parental role, for me, I guess. They're my favorite people and I want to see them be successful in all that they do.

CASEWORKER: The leadership that works for me is somebody that...has clear expectations of what they want you to do. Not a "performance evaluation" that is generic, but their expectation on your job, your cases, you know, your office, what they want you to do, and to be able to come in and say, "You know what? I don't think things are going that great. How are we going to resolve this problem? How can we, you know, work together..."

Leading through teams provides opportunities for teachable moments. Gaining skill capacity increases worker competence and confidence that essentially empowers the worker to independently manage multiple cases while maintaining job satisfaction. Many of these elements are reflective of job satisfaction literature that emphasizes professional development and growth, creativity and ingenuity, and an overall emotional connection with people through work – themes that parallel features of Self-Actualization described by Maslow (1970).

SUPERVISOR: I like to go out with workers, because I think it helps them...especially when they're new, if you kind of mentor and model what needs to happen, but then let them do their own thing and observe how they're doing and then talk to them about it. I think it still keeps you in the game a little bit.

SUPERVISOR: ...our seasoned workers, they're the ones accustomed to doing it one way and the only way, so it's good to go out and encourage them to try something different, either by role playing, mentoring, or whatever...you know?

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Frontline and Administrative Perception of DCFS Leadership Practices

A recent examination of leadership within the profession of social work surveyed leaders associated with the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and National Association of Social Workers (NASW) on their perception of effective leadership in human service organizations (Rank & Hutchison, 2000). Several social work leadership themes emerged from the point of view of deans and directors of social work programs and university presidents. NASW leaders and professional social work educators described social work leadership as a "proactive process that empowers individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities." Social work leaders were also perceived in comparison to leaders of other professions as committed to (1) the NASW code of ethics (2) a systemic perspective (3) a participatory leadership style, (4) altruism

(5) and concern that the professional image accurately and respectfully distinguished itself from other disciplines. Their conclusion was that leadership development is a key component to the growth and direction of the profession.

These elements closely resemble transformational leadership approaches introduced by Bass (1985) and further deconstructed by authors like Kouzes and Posner (2002) as leadership practices of encouraging the heart, enabling others to act, inspiring a shared vision, modeling the way, and challenging the process – factors that represent many of the overarching themes found in this study. Disparities in leadership perceptions between caseworkers and administrators were explored and vividly discovered within the focus group setting. Perceptions shared between urban and rural caseworkers were based on personal work experience with varying supervisors and regional administrators.

Perceived leadership strengths by caseworkers. Themes that represented leadership strengths emphasized a human relations leadership approach that integrated professional relationships with caseworkers to understand their strengths and limitations, empowering and including caseworkers in organizational decision making, and providing opportunities for professional growth. Empowering workers and providing opportunities for growth closely mirror the description of social work leadership provided by NASW and CSWE leaders (Rank & Hutchison, 2000).

Perceived leadership limitations by caseworkers. Caseworkers perceived overall DCFS leadership as isolated and disengaged from frontline reality, implementing a non-participative or non-inclusive approach in agency visioning, decision-making and business operations. Perceived limitations of regional and overall DCFS leadership in this study counters the value of participative leadership approaches highlighted by professionals and educators as key social work values (Rank & Hutchison, 2000).

Perceived leadership strengths by supervisors and regional administrators. This study interviewed ten DCFS supervisors and regional administrators within a focus group setting. Focus group questions were structured to explore their personal leadership style and perception of overall DCFS leadership practices. Supervisors and regional administrators evaluated their own leadership practices and attributed many of the same leadership strengths perceived by caseworkers. Self-evaluated leadership strengths similar to perceptions of caseworkers focused on leadership practices that develop opportunities for growth, empowered worker participation within a collaborative team culture while providing independence and flexibility on job duties. Supervisors and regional administrators also described mentoring in order to discover and develop caseworker

capacity. Mentoring allowed supervisors to match cases with the capacity of caseworkers and develop opportunities for “small wins” that encouraged and validated performance.

Perceived DCFS leadership limitations by supervisors and regional administrators. There were also commonalities between caseworkers’ and supervisors’ perceptions of overall DCFS leadership practices. Supervisors and regional administrators described DCFS leadership as centralization, an outdated administrative model, excluding regional offices or caseworkers from policy development and decision-making. In addition, leadership is perceived as non-participative, punitive, and heavily focused on recognizing deficiency rather than performance. Caseworkers and supervisors express feeling disconnected from agency vision, direction, and practices that impact frontline services.

Perceived DCFS leadership differs from the philosophy and practices envisioned by NASW and CSWE social work professionals. Rank and Hutchison (2002) found that policy and social work education leaders believe effective leadership in human service organization is proactive and ethical, empowering workers through vision and communication. Caseworkers and mid-level administrators in this study did not identify a similar leadership profile of DCFS administrators. Although the large agency offers opportunity to implement a systemic and inclusive perspective to developing and guiding agency operations, proactive leadership is centralized, controlled, and delivered from the upper tier of agency administration without inclusion of caseworkers and supervisors. These operational limitations diminish opportunities to implement transformational leadership practices and limit the capacity of DCFS to respond to complexity of social problems, maintain vitality, and navigate direction of the organization.

Struggle with agency leadership is not isolated to this particular State. A recent Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2004) report to Congressional Committees revealed workforce challenges at the District of Columbia’s Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). Caseworkers and supervisors reported human capital management issues that hindered job performance and contributed to low morale. Professionals reported lack of resources, poor communication and supervision, and the lack of a program to recognize and reward good performance. As in this study, caseworkers at CFSA felt that administration did not consistently communicate with them about issues impacting the agency and did not keep them informed of changing policies and procedures. Caseworkers across both studies lacked feedback about their job performance and clear indication of professional growth opportunities. A major recommendation delivered to CFSA by GAO was to specifically address the human capital issues of its caseworkers.

Perceived Relationship between Leadership Practices and Job Satisfaction at DCFS

The relationship between leadership and job satisfaction was explored with both caseworkers and regional administrator focus groups. This relationship was explored based on earlier findings that leadership practices are related to subordinate attitudes (McClelland, 1975; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982) and that developing positive organizational culture is the role and responsibility of leaders (Schein, 1985). In this study, leadership practices that empowered caseworkers through human relationships and teamwork were perceived to have the greatest impact on morale and service delivery. Caseworkers experienced professional growth when supervisors provided resources to address challenging problems and caseworker independence to innovate solutions. Human relations approaches created opportunities for mid-level leaders to develop understanding of caseworker capacity and design job opportunities to reflect the strengths of workers. Understanding caseworker limitations also informed leaders in developing growth opportunities that matched the caseworkers' professional trajectory.

Developing and fostering teamwork was another leadership practice that created an organizational setting of collaboration and cooperation. Consulting on case intervention within the team setting provided additional opportunities to develop comprehensive and more successful service plans. Leaders who promoted team camaraderie also developed a buffer against job stress. Himle, Jayaratne and Thyness (1989) found that leadership behaviors providing emotional support to staff buffer or moderate worker stress and anxiety, reduce role conflict, and turnover. In addition, they discovered that supervisory informational support buffered against caseworker depression and irritation linked to role-conflict and general work-related stress.

Lastly, the overall importance of the leadership and job satisfaction relationship is rooted in Glisson and Hemmelgarn's earlier work (1988) that discovered leadership behaviors in child welfare organizations to be invaluable predictors of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Their study isolated leadership behaviors as contributing to positive office climates influencing caseworker performance was correlated with improved psychosocial functioning of children and better case outcomes.

SUMMARY

The need to study and explore leadership practices in human service organizations is gaining more attention as studies and reports reveal that leaders develop organizations, inspire the workforce, and shape agency culture towards sustainability and performance. This study described the perceptions of DCFS leadership practices and their relationship with job attitudes.

Qualitative data revealed that upper level DCFS leadership was perceived as disconnected from caseworkers and frontline practice. Caseworkers and regional administrators did, however, share common perceptions of regional leadership. Many of the perceptions revealed both leadership strengths and limitations. Leadership strengths represented practices that developed feasible opportunities for growth within team cultures through provision of resources and mentoring opportunities. Transformational leadership practices at the regional level also empowered caseworkers to be self-directive in designing performance plans with encouragement throughout the socialization process. The findings highlight a tremendous opportunity to align organizational practices with the needs of constituents resulting in the ability to make a difference in the lives of marginalized populations. The following quote demonstrates this, as persistence and a dynamic approach can lead to development of Human Service Organizations and empowerment of the populations they serve.

"It's been nearly two years since I've been working with this family, and finally...finally a few things clicked. I went to their house and I have never seen that house as clean as it was. I about fell over! I mean, finally, things are clicking into place and things are changing and they are finally taking things to heart. It took years, and worker after worker and finally...who knows what it was? Nothing major happened, but all of a sudden it clicked...sometimes that's what it takes and it may feel like forever." (Excerpt from rural caseworker focus group)

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