Meeting the Continuing Education Needs of Social Workers Managers A Professional Development Seminar

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Meeting the Continuing Education Needs of Social Work Managers

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The need to identify management competencies for social workers comes at a time when there is well established recognition that what was begun in the 1930s as the modern welfare state has evolved into a major human services industry. No longer is government the primary provider of human services; the growth of the private sector and for-profit human services corporations has been in response to the significant infusion of monies allocated for such services. Along with the steady growth of dollars spent for human services, there has been a steady growth in the number of individuals entering the social work profession. While the majority of students (80%) in graduate social work programs are prepared in clinical practice, it is estimated that at least half of all graduates will enter management careers (Teare & Sheaffor, 1995). Major changes in the human services industry over the next decade will challenge social workers to ensure agency effectiveness and to position their organizations for success. Without the essential organizational and administrative tools to meet these challenges, social work managers will find it increasingly difficult to perform their jobs adequately (Patti, 1987; Hasenfeld, 1989; Menefee & Thompson, 1994). Certain writers question the efficacy on the part of social work education programs to continue to emphasize direct practice at the graduate level (Bernard, 1995; Raymond & Atherton, 1991; Tears & Sheaffor, 1995). There is the added argument that all social workers need to be prepared for supervisory and/or management practice (Bernard, 1995; Raymond & Atherton, 1991; Strom & Gingrich, 1993).

While there had been a relatively small but significant body of literature dealing with social work management issues, there has been little empirical research explication the skills and competencies required to manage ever changing human services organizations. The recent resurgence of literature on managerial and leadership effectiveness in the business sector is a testament to the importance of keeping pace with rapid societal changes as they reshape organizations and those who manage them. To be effective, managers must have the skills and abilities to create and sustain vision, develop cultures that empower workers and their organizations, and effectively manage interorganizational and intraorganizational relations. Similarly, major changes, such as privatization, managed care, and devolution, have profoundly impacted human services organizations. Therefore, it is the intent of this study to identify, form practitioners' perspectives, those competencies necessary for effective management practice. The discussion will include a review of the relevant social work management literature, the study's methodology and findings, and a model of continuing social work management education currently being implemented at the University of Maryland.

The Role of Administration in Social Work

Concerns about agency and service delivery problems had their earliest formal recognition with the first meetings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections beginning in 1874. Not only were concerns articulated with regard to the need for training of workers in direct practice, but they needed administrative skills as well. Initially, schools provided courses which included administration as part of their overall curricula. With World War I and the Depression, significant changes began to occur which increased the demands for workers with administrative expertise (Skidmore, 1990). A social work leader, Bertha Reynolds, observed during her work in the 1930s that administration was in fact inseparable from

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good social work, and that there were problems related to the lack of training of social workers beyond direct practice in that:

Advance in the practice of social work was held back because caseworkers were pushed into supervision because of seniority or need of increase in salary, without new training for the new responsibilities of teaching (1964, p. 189).

In 1949, Gordon Hamilton argued for increased emphasis in the preparation of social work administrators, noting that such skills were not based on innate or native attributes alone:

"It has been amply demonstrated that neither the businessman nor the caseworker becomes a good administrative setup to be perpetuated while he holds that the problem be solved by everyone being nice to each other. Administration is a highly skilled technical process at its best, using the basic philosophy and skill of democratic social work." (p. 85)

Even to this day, there has been considerable commentary as to how social work administration has been victim to a long-standing de-emphasis as to its importance and relevance in social work education (Neugeboren, 1987; Skidmore, 1990; Street, 1933). As stated earlier, the majority of students prepared for such roles comprise less than ten percent of students pursuing graduate social work education. Various reasons account for this: general lack of acceptance of bias on the part of the profession itself, the majority of whom have been trained in direct practice; little emphasis on social work management in the social work literature; and lack of professional support by NASW and the Council on Social Work Education (Neugeboren, 1987). Moreover, while there has been professional bias against graduate training of social work managers, many administrative positions have been claimed by individuals outside the profession (Keys & Capaiuolo, 1987). At the same time, individuals having been prepared for direct practice find themselves moving rather quickly into supervisory and management roles with limited knowledge and

skills related to the demands of their organizations.

While there has been a growing body of literature regarding social work management practice (Austin, D., 1983: Austin, M., 1984; Haynes & Minkelstein, 1991; Hyde, 1989; Menefee & Thompson, 1994; Patti, 1985, 1987; Patti & Ezell, 1988; Perlmutter, 1990), there had been relatively little research done which explicates those competencies necessary for social work management practice. The present study identifies those competencies and skills necessary for management practice and presents a model for continuing social work management education.

Method

Procedure

A two-phase survey research design was used to gather data from social workers engage in management practice. The first phase was completed between May and July, 1992. It consisted of small group social service agencies throughout the state of Tennessee. Subjects were part of a purposive sample chosen to represent a general cross section of managers based upon individual, job, and organizational demographics. During the interviews, participants were asked to identify and prioritize the various tasks they performed in their managerial roles. These interviews yielded over two thousand item statements of managerial tasks. Tasks were combined into thirty-five conceptually similar grouping of competencies and configured into a four part questionnaire, entitled "The Survey of Social Workers in Management Roles." The second phase entailed administering the questionnaire to the entire membership of the National Association of Social Work Managers, between October, 1992 and February, 1993. The survey consisted of four parts. Part One listed the administrative competencies and their definitions. Respondents were asked to describe how often they performed each competency on a scale of one to ten, ranging from "never" to "daily." Examples of competencies included strategic planning, financial management, communications, advocacy, financial

management, policy practice, etc. Part Two consisted of 163 skills organized and listed by competency area. Subjects were asked to respond to each skill by indicating how important it was on a five-point scale from "very important" to "not at all important." Part Three listed and defined eight critical performance areas often used to measure agency effectiveness. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which their agencies assigned priority to each of these performance areas, from "no priority" to "highest priority." Part Four of the questionnaire consisted of background information on each respondent, their managerial position, organizational affiliation, salary, and geographic area their agencies served.

A complete listing of the current members of the National Network of Social Work Managers was obtained and used as the sampling frame for a national sample. Self-addressed, postage paid questionnaires were mailed to 344 members with a request for return with a two week period from date of receipt. Respondents not returning the questionnaire were mailed a reminder postcard. By the end of the data collection stage, 206 respondents (60%) had completed and returned the questionnaire were mailed a reminder postcard. Of those returned, twenty-two were disqualified because respondents did not occupy managerial roles. Therefore, 184 surveys were used in the study representing a useable return rate of 53%.

Subjects

The sample is primarily female (66%), Caucasian (88%), and married (68%), with the average age of 45 years. The median annual salary range Is $40,000 to $50,000 per year. Over 60% of the respondents reported to be earning salaries over $40,000 per year. Eighty-four percent of the subjects have a Master's degree--42% had their degrees in direct practice, 47% specialized in administration/management, and 11% specialized in community practice. Subjects reported an average of ten years of direct practice experience and twelve years

of supervisory experience. Over half the sample (53%) reported to be working in top administrative positions; thirty-nine percent were in middle management and eight percent were in first-line supervisory positions. The majority of men (65%) reported to be in top management positions; only one-third of all women reported to be in similar positions.

Results

An exploratory factor analysis was used to identify those underlying factors that best represented the interrelationships between the thirty-five management competencies identified in the survey. A detailed description of the steps followed in the analysis is presented elsewhere (Menefee & Thompson, 1994). A twelve-factory model was selected from several alternative models by considering both the conceptual and empirical merits of each. Each of the twelve core competencies and the threshold competencies they represent are represented in Figure 1 on the following page.

Means and standard deviations were computed for each of the above management dimensions. Two ranks were assigned t each dimension, based upon its mean frequency, and were averaged to obtain a joint rank for each dimension. These results are reported in Table 1. The rankings indicate that communication, supervising, boundary spanning, futuring, facilitating, and teaming are among the most important management activities identified by this particular group of social work managers. While the functions of aligning staff resources, evaluating, policy practice, managing and leveraging resources, and advocating, are lesser priorities, these functions are still as valued as important activities but performed somewhat less frequently than the other management functions.

The research findings complement the arguments made by earlier writers that social work managers perform a wide range of tasks which require both technical and interpersonal skills. (Perlmutter, 1990.) Additionally, the findings suggest that the role of social work manager has been

Factor	Core Competency	Threshold Competencies
	Figure1 – Core and Threshold Competencies	
1	Boundary Spanning	Managing Relationships Networking Influencing
2	Futuring	Reading the environment Strategic planning Innovation
3	Facilitating	Empowering Developing Modeling
4	Managing Resources	Managing finances Managing physical & material resources Marketing & public relations Managing information
5	Teaming	Managing meetings Coalition building Team building
6	Evaluation	Assessing needs Evaluation effectiveness
7	Mentoring	Coordinating Supporting Consulting/Advising
8	Aligning	Organizing & delegating Staffing
9	Advocating	Representing Lobbying
10	Leveraging Resources	Contracting Developing & allocating resources
11	Communicating	Exchanging information
12	Policy Practice	Developing/interpreting/complying

transformed substantially, due largely to the major changes occurring in our society generally, and the human services industry, specifically (Menefee & Thompson, 1994). These forces have resulted in social work managers shifting their primary management activities from those of the internal operations of their agencies to the multi-agency context of human services delivery systems. The tasks of boundary spanning, futuring, facilitation, and communicating, are all necessary skills to the management of inter- and intraorganizational relationships; as a result, social work managers are having to work to position their agencies and personnel strategically in a world which is increasingly competitive and driven by forces such as privatization, managed care, globalization, and cultural diversity. Such skills and competencies require that social

work managers "think and do" macropractice within a highly charged political context. The demands of the field are such that schools of social work will be challenged by their tendencies to "hold on the past" in the preparation of individuals for direct practice, when demands of the field are for graduate trained practitioners of human services management.

Discussion

In an earlier article, Menefee and Thompson (1994) discuss the major changes occurring in the field of human services and consequently, the evolving role of the social work manager. Such roles are increasingly complex ones and require social work managers to be able to manage internal and external relationships, to anticipate and adapt

Table 1 – Means, Standard Deviations, and Relative Rankings for Each Management Dimension by Reported Frequency of Use and Perceived Importance

	Frequency			Importance			Rankings		
Dimension	Mean	Std. Dev.		Mean	St. Dev.		Freq	Impt	Joint
Boundary Spanning	8.10	1.42		3.96	.65		5	3	3.5
Futuring	7.03	2.05		4.25	.48		7	1	3.5
Facilitating	8.61	1.51		3.65	.66		3	7	5.5
Managing Resources	6.71	1.80		3.03	.78		8	12	10
Teaming	8.16	1.38		3.77	.74		4	6	5.5
Evaluating	6.51	2.09		3.49	.79		9	9	8
Supervising	8.97	1.22		3.80	.63		2	4.5	2
Aligning	7.71	2.09		3.80	.71		6	4.5	7
Advocating	5.17	1.84		3.16	.80		12	10	12
Leveraging Resources	6.14	2.20		3.13	1.08		10	11	11
Communicating	9.54	1.13		4.06	.67		1	2	1
Policy Practice	6.01	2.79		3.62	.89		11	8	9

to change, to expand and develop agency resource bases, and to think about and implement new organizational paradigms. The study's findings confirm that social work managers need unique skills to keep up with changes in the field. Due to the increasing complexity in the human services industry, along with increase demands for accountability, such skills may be difficult to acquire on job or while moving from direct practice into management. While schools of social work need to place added priority on recruiting and preparing social workers for management practice, There is an important role to be played in the area of continuing social work education. Anticipating that most social work students will continue to enter direct practice, post-master's continuing education can serve as and effective vehicle for meeting management training needs.

In 1995, the office of Continuing Professional Education at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, appointed a task group of faculty and agency leaders to explore the need for a post-Master's level practitioner training in human services management. The needs assessment and deliberations of the task group led to the development of a 674- contact hour Certificate Program in Human Services Management. The findings from this study provided important guideposts for the development of curriculum in the certificate program.

In the Fall of 1997, twenty-five individuals had begun the year-long Certificate Program in Human Services Management. The curriculum is presented in Figure 2.

Participants in the certificate program must meet the following requirements: hold MSW or the equivalent; have two years management experience; are currently in a management position; and have basic computing skills. Curriculum content is presented by a faculty of twelve individuals. Individuals completing all aspects of the program receive certificates of completion.

The practice-driven approach of identifying social work management competencies and utiliz-

ing them in a continuing education program of study has served as and effective means of identifying and meeting current management practice needs. Social work programs may want to consider the option of providing similar post-master's continuing education opportunities which respond to the needs of clinical graduates who increasingly are moving into management positions. Also, with advances in distance education and computer technology, schools of social work may want to join in regional and/or national partnerships in developing jointly sponsored programs, taking advantage of unique faculty and practitioner expertise and increasing opportunities for professional networking.

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**Figure 2 – Overview of Human Services Management
Institute Curriculum**

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1.   Introductory Seminar (2 one-day and 1 half-day session over 3-month period - 16 Continuing Education Credits - CECs)

| * Modern organizational theory |
| * Social, economic, and political trends and impacts |
| * Issues in leader ship |
| * Information technology tools for management |

2.   Continuing Education Workshops (6 required workshops - 42 CECs)

| * Strategic Administration: Planning, Managing and Leading for the Future |
| * Effective Supervision: Leadership Styles and Management Techniques |
| * De-mystifying Financial Management: Principles and Practices for the Social Services |
| * Resource Empowerment for Human Services Organizations: Developing your Fundraising Capacity |
| * Program Evaluation Fundamentals: Measuring Results and Making your Case |
| * Marketing and the Human Services Organization: Doing "Well" with Doing "Good" |

3.   Concluding Seminar (2 one-day and 1 half-day session over 3-month period)

| * Diversity |
| * Advocacy and influencing policy |
| * Ethics |
| * Collaboration |
| * Case preparations, presentations, and analysis |

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