



Toward the Development of a Research-Based Employee Selection Protocol: Implications for Child Welfare Supervision, Administration, and Professional Development

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Toward the Development of a Research-Based Employee Selection Protocol: Implications for Child Welfare Supervision, Administration, and Professional Development

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Introduction

The majority of child welfare employee turnover nationally (American Public Human Services Association [APHSA], 2005; U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2003) and in the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) (Ellett, Ellett, and Rugutt, 2003), occurs during the first two years of employment. As well, public child welfare agencies spend the vast majority of funds for training and professional development on new employees. While child welfare employee turnover peaked at 60% in the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) in 2004, it was approximately 30% at the beginning of the project described in this article (October, 2005). High rates of employee turnover in child welfare include considerable lost investments of human and financial capital. To help ameliorate this situation, and following the recommendations of a statewide study of factors contributing to employee retention and turnover in Georgia (Ellett et al., 2003), the Georgia DFCS and the School of Social Work at the University of Georgia are creating a system that enhances the selection of new employees that have the minimally essential knowledge, skills, abilities and values (KSAVs) to be successful in child welfare work. This system is based on the belief that a selection process that is more standardized, more thorough, and more job-related than existing employee hiring procedures can

strengthen employee retention and further decrease employee turnover in the Georgia DFCS. This article builds upon the results and recommendations of prior research in child welfare in Georgia (Ellett et al., 2003) and addresses the development and initial piloting of a new, comprehensive, child welfare Employee Selection Protocol (ESP).

Purpose

The purpose of this article is to: (a) describe the development of components of a new child welfare Employee Selection Protocol (ESP); (b) situate the ESP within the context of concerns about strengthening child welfare employee retention, professional development and supervision, and improving professional organizational culture and services to children and families; and (c) describe the initial results of piloting and evaluating components of the new ESP.

Development of the Employee Selection Protocol

Selection Protocol Components and Procedures

The model for the (ESP) for new DFCS child welfare employees consists of three core components. Each of these components is one of a series of sequenced STEPS that will be completed by a job applicant and DFCS before an initial employment decision is made. These STEPS and a set of associated procedures are described in the sections that follow.

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STEP I: Orientation and Pre-Screening of Applicants (Self-Selection)

The first component of the new DFCS Employee Selection Protocol (ESP) is designed to provide information to potential applicants about the *world of work in child welfare*. This component will be required of all applicants as a first step in the formal application process. This STEP includes a written overview of the new DFCS child welfare ESP. For each potential job applicant, three things must be accomplished to complete STEP I:

- (1) Read an online document that provides additional details about work in child welfare in Georgia and general information such as salary and benefits, use of personal automobiles to make home visits and to transport clients, the involuntary nature of clients served who are often affected by mental illness, substance abuse, developmental disabilities and/or incarceration, required after hours work (on call duties), and criminal record checks and drug screens of employees.
- (2) View a 20 minute job preview video of Georgia DFCS employees specifically developed for the ESP that includes presentations and discussions among new and experienced child welfare workers and supervisors about the realities and difficulties, as well as the personal and professional rewards, of working with children and families in need.
- (3) Complete and receive feedback on an online, job-related self-assessment of personal dispositions needed for successful child welfare practice that includes a series of research-based, targeted questions that measure an individual's self perceptions relative to professional commitment to child welfare and personal dispositions needed for successful child welfare practice. These items include for example: *I am not actively seeking employment outside the field of public child welfare;* and *I am willing to be on call for work during evenings and on weekends if necessary, even though overtime pay is*

generally not allowed. The self-assessment consists of 15 statements rated using a 4-point Likert type Scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree.

After completing this assessment online, applicants score their answers for immediate feedback about their self-assessed suitability for child welfare practice. Depending upon the self-assessment numerical score, the applicant reads a recommendation about suitability for employment in the Georgia DFCS and whether to continue to pursue a formal application in the ESP at STEP II.

The purpose of STEP I in the ESP is to fully inform potential applicants for child welfare positions in Georgia about the contexts surrounding work in child welfare *before they make the decision to proceed to STEP II in the Employee Selection Protocol (ESP)*. At this point in the application process, we suspect that some potential applicants not well suited for child welfare work, will make the decision not to move forward with the ESP process (Martin, 1996; Wanous, 1992).

Alternatively, there is some evidence that information about the child welfare job context helps applicants visualize and rehearse how they would work within this difficult environment and develop coping mechanisms (Breugh, 1983). Completing Step I activities is also considered important in the ESP because a degree in social work is not required for work in child welfare in Georgia and most DFCS child welfare employees (80%) do not have a social work degree (Ellett, et. al., 2003; Ellis, 2005).

The written overview of DFCS child welfare work and the self-assessment have been piloted to date with 63 BSW and MSW Title IV-E child welfare stipend applicants. Both DFCS employees and non-DFCS employees were asked to complete a survey. Nearly all had read the overview and took the self-assessment. Without exception, these individuals reported that these ESP activities provide a realistic overview of child welfare work in DFCS and a sense of clients and their needs, as well as provide enough information about job benefits,

compensation, and other job-related information. These individuals found the self-assessment activity particularly helpful in making a decision about personal suitability for a career in child welfare. One DFCS employee thought the self-assessment was "the best part" and shared it with child welfare administrators in a large urban county who endorsed it as an important pre-employment requirement of all DFCS job applicants. Interestingly, the few individuals who did not read the web text overview or take the self-assessment, failed to demonstrate sufficient interest in a career in child welfare in their written applications and interviews and were not selected for the IV-E Child Welfare Education Program. According to Wanous (1992), the energy expended to apply for a job increases commitment.

The research on *Realistic Job Preview* (RJP) videos reports the RJP's lower turnover rates (Harvey, 1990; Premack & Wanous, 1985), increase selecting out of the job by candidates (Martin, 1996; Wanous, 1989 & 1992), increase job satisfaction (Breaugh, 1983) and have the strongest effects in employment decisions in situations that have the highest employee turnover and the lowest pay (Premack & Wanous, 1985). Therefore, the decision was made to include a RJP video as a required component of the ESP. Nominations of experienced, knowledgeable, caseworkers and supervisors were received from DFCS regional offices, and 40 staff members were interviewed by phone. Twelve individuals reflecting cross sections by age, gender, geographical location, and race were selected for videotaping. The video is approximately 20 minutes in length and has been viewed and approved by the ESP Advisory Work Group, and field-tested with newly hired DFCS employees in an urban county who strongly endorsed its use.

STEP II: Formal Application

The second STEP in the ESP is for the DFCS employee applicant to submit a formal letter of application that includes a description of motivation and career goals related to working in public

child welfare, and the personal characteristics and/or experiences that particularly distinguish the applicant from other applicants, and that merit selection for a public child welfare position at Georgia DFCS. Applicants are also required to submit a resume that includes education, work experiences, and the names and contact information for at least three professional references, as well as official college transcript(s) of all courses completed and to verify an undergraduate or graduate degree. The letter provides DFCS a writing sample and information along with the resume that are reviewed and a decision is then be made (by DFCS) as to whether the applicant can proceed to STEP III in the ESP process. Applicants with demonstrated writing skills, relevant work and/or volunteer experiences, and social work or related degrees (e.g., psychology, sociology, education, counseling) can move forward to STEP III. However, in some cases, either because of lack of providing complete information or an inadequate writing sample, an applicant may not be selected by DFCS to move to the third step in the ESP. A description of STEP III procedures follows.

STEP III: Completion of On-Site Assessment Activities and Structured Interview

The third step (required) in the ESP is for DFCS invited applicants to participate in assessment activities and the required structured interview at a regional or urban county DFCS office. The assessment activities and structured interview are designed to assess and make inferences about the extent to which the applicant demonstrates adequate levels of *minimally essential*, generic knowledge, skills, abilities and values (KSAVs) viewed as necessary for successful practice in child welfare. A draft list of 33 KSAVs that new employees should possess at entry was developed after reviewing competencies, behavioral anchors, and a list of KSAs developed by the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (Bernotavicz, 2005). Some items were developed to address personal characteristics that have been repeatedly shown to be

significantly and positively correlated with employees' intentions to remain employed in child welfare such as professional commitment to child welfare, human caring, and self-efficacy beliefs about child welfare work (Ellett, 2000; Ellett et al, 2003; Ellis, 2005; Westbrook, 2006). The draft list of KSAVs was reviewed and approved by the ESP Advisory Work Group.

The KSAVs were included in a survey that was completed statewide by 98 experienced supervisors, field program specialists and administrators who rated each item for criticality to child welfare work as well as frequency of on-the-job performance. The Criticality Scale was designed to assess the extent to which failure to perform a KSAV on the job would result in harm to clients. This scale ranged from 1 = No Harm to 5 = Extreme Harm. The Frequency Scale was designed to assess how often a particular KSAV was performed on the job. The Frequency scale ranged from 1 = Once or Twice Per Year to 5 = Repeatedly Throughout the Day. Table 1 presents the results of the KSAV verification survey and includes descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for each item. The items are ranked from the highest to the lowest mean score for the Criticality Scale ratings. As can be seen in the table, in general, the KSAVs rated highest for criticality tended to also have the highest ratings for frequency. The results of this survey provide initial *job-related validity* evidence for the list of KSAVs around which the assessment activities and structured interview questions are being developed.

On-Site Assessments

Applicants are asked to complete one or two assessment activities designed for STEP III in the ESP. Work task analyses, using *in-basket assessment procedures* are completed to assess organizational and time management skills, personal judgment, analytical reasoning, and knowledge of human behavior and the environment. A topical writing sample is also completed to assess written

communication skills and to cross check and verify the originality of the writing sample submitted at Step II (Formal Application) in the ESP process.

One of the on-site exercises will require the applicant to complete two *in-basket* activities (see Appendix A for an example). The in-basket activities present the applicant with several realistic, work-related scenarios that need to be prioritized by the applicant from the most to the least urgent/important to address. After ranking each work task in the scenario, applicants write a brief rationale that explains why a particular task was ranked as the highest work priority and why a particular task was ranked as the lowest work priority. Eleven in-baskets were developed so that employee assessors on selection teams can randomly mix two scenarios administered to each applicant.

To validate the in-basket activities, five different sets of 2-3 different in-basket activities were administered to 12-13 DFCS employees per set to rank the tasks for each in-basket and to provide a rationale for the highest and lowest ranked tasks. These individuals were also asked the following two questions:

1. Would you expect a new DFCS job applicant to be able to differentiate (rank) the tasks in these scenarios from most urgent/important to address to least urgent/important to address and to also provide a brief rationale for the most and least urgent/important task? Please briefly explain why (or why not).
2. Do you think this kind of assessment exercise can provide useful information for the selection of qualified applicants for child welfare positions in DFCS? Please briefly explain why (or why not).

The majority of respondents (65.5%) thought that applicants should be able to rank the 5 tasks and the vast majority (92%) believed this assessment activity would provide information about applicants' organizational and time management skills, writing skills, personal judgments, and analytical reasoning. Many

Table 1: Georgia Employee Selection Protocol KSAV Criticality and Frequency Survey Results

Survey Item	Criticality		Frequency	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Maintain a commitment to protect children and preserve families	4.68	0.80	4.77	0.55
2. Understand the need for, and the importance of maintaining confidentiality	4.59	0.81	4.75	0.50
3. Demonstrate evidence of child welfare knowledge and/or experience	4.40	0.80	4.69	0.55
4. Evaluate the effects and consequences of different courses of action	4.30	0.82	4.22	0.84
5. Organize and synthesize information to develop appropriate courses of action	4.28	0.85	4.42	0.75
6. Display non-judgmental attitudes and accept others different from self	4.24	0.93	4.44	0.81
7. Communicate respect and tolerance for others	4.22	0.96	4.83	0.45
8. Adjust to multiple demands, shifting priorities, ambiguities, and rapid changes	4.20	0.90	4.53	0.72
9. Demonstrate patience, empathy, warmth and genuineness with others	4.20	0.92	4.67	0.51
10. Identify and differentiate important from unimportant information	4.19	0.89	4.44	0.79
11. Understand the importance of working collaboratively with clients and colleagues	4.18	0.95	4.42	0.79
12. Manage time efficiently	4.16	0.95	4.60	0.75
13. Maintain a commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of others	4.15	1.04	4.40	0.87
14. Demonstrate sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others	4.15	0.89	4.45	0.68
15. Understand personal strengths and limitations	4.14	0.90	4.35	0.83
16. Value and understand the importance of relationships with others	4.13	0.90	4.55	0.61
17. Relate well with others	4.11	0.93	4.74	0.51
18. Listen attentively to the comments and concerns of others in discussions	4.09	0.90	4.42	0.69
19. Use appropriate personal coping and stress management skills	4.06	0.90	4.37	0.77
20. Maintain self confidence but realism about personal capabilities to accomplish job tasks	3.96	0.95	4.27	0.83
21. Demonstrate persistence in overcoming barriers to accomplish job tasks	3.94	0.93	4.21	0.91
22. Weigh the importance of information and prioritize work tasks and courses of action in a logical and efficient manner	3.93	0.96	4.49	0.71
23. See relationships among facts, concepts, and generalizations	3.83	0.89	4.09	0.85
24. Use clear, understandable, and grammatically correct written communication	3.80	1.03	4.38	0.67
25. Be self reflective, open to new ideas, and learn from others	3.78	0.93	4.03	1.00
26. Sequence and link work tasks in a logical order to work goals and outcomes	3.77	0.87	4.17	0.77
27. Use clear, understandable, and grammatically correct verbal communication	3.76	1.07	4.53	0.68
28. Use non-verbal communications in a way that enhances verbal communications	3.75	1.00	4.22	0.83
29. Assess and evaluate the importance of information and work tasks	3.75	1.03	4.34	0.72
30. Accept and adapt to various work environments and situations	3.74	0.96	4.06	0.94
31. Recognize relationships among cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements of the job	3.68	0.82	3.89	0.96
32. Maintain a commitment to child welfare as a profession and long-term career	3.57	1.21	3.54	1.38
33. Use requisite computer skills	3.41	1.14	4.54	0.68

commented that they would like to see this activity become part of the hiring process to better “weed out” individuals who are not suited for child welfare work (Ellett & Ellett, 2006).

Structured Interview

While there are some advantages to non-structured, open-ended interviews (e.g., stimulating more interviewee participation and talk), the research on interviewing and the extent to which interview procedures predict actual, on-the-job performance is rather clear. Structured interviews have much greater predictive power relative to job performance criteria than non-structured interviews. The use of structured rather than unstructured interviews also accommodates concern for standardization, equity, and fairness in this ESP activity.

The ESP structured interview procedure will use trained, experienced, DFCS professionals as interviewers. Because of concerns about the potential effects of a number of variables in the interview process (e.g., halo or pitchfork effects, social desirability of an applicant's responses, note taking skills of interviewers) a trained team of three child welfare professionals is used with the ESP to interview each new applicant and to triangulate their responses using a set of interview response guidelines. Because of concerns about potential bias and with equity in administration of procedures across an applicant pool, all interviewers will be thoroughly trained and certified in implementing the structured interview procedure, *and* in scoring the results of the interview with a set of scoring guidelines.

In the ESP, structured interviews are held after assessment activities are completed, including preparing written rationales. The ESP Advisory Work Group recommended that assessment activities be completed before the interview so that the candidate has to orally explain the in-basket decisions as well. These procedures provide additional information for the selection team to assess the candidates' analytical, and written and oral communication skills before a hiring decision is made.

Assessment Decision Making

In the current development of the ESP, if an applicant does not meet the established performance expectations for one or more of the Step III activities, the applicant will be considered to be in a *provisional status* for a designated time period (perhaps from six to eight weeks). After the provisional period passes, and *upon invitation* by DFCS, the applicant can again attempt the assessment activities not yet satisfactorily completed by participating in additional on-site assessment(s). Thus, the proposed ESP decision-making model is a *criterion-referenced, banking model* that allows the candidate to bank any required activity on which the candidate meets expectations. This proposed model is currently under policy review by the ESP Advisory Work Group. The model specifies that when an assessment activity is *banked*, the activity does not have to be attempted again in the ESP model. If for example, there are four core ESP assessment activities at Step III including the writing sample and interview, and if a candidate meets established expectations on only two activities, the candidate would subsequently only complete assessments for the remaining two activities on which expectations have not yet been met. When all Step III ESP interview and assessment activity expectations have been met, the applicant may then be considered as a *candidate for selection and employment* in the Employee Selection Protocol model. Final selection for employment is made by DFCS.

The final decision about offering an applicant a child welfare position in Georgia using the new ESP is a *juried process* in which each member of a panel of three trained assessors considers all information submitted by the applicant and assessment task and interview results to make a decision to either offer employment or not offer employment. The final, juried decision requires agreement by at least two members of the three-member ESP assessment

Discussion and Implications

One emphasis in this article is given to the importance of developing Realistic Job Preview

(RJP) systems and self-assessment tasks that allow applicants to self select out before applying for employment in child welfare. Such systems can change the role and tasks of supervisors as they work on mentoring new employees and on the continuous professional development of those they supervise. An argument is made that careful assessment-based employee selection procedures can more efficiently prevent ill-equipped and disinterested applicants from joining the child welfare workforce (Marin, 1996; Wanous, 1989 & 1992). In such systems, supervisory roles would change with less emphasis on working with ill-prepared and unqualified employees, and more emphasis on the continuous professional development of supervisees with predictably stronger intentions to remain employed. If this argument is credible, the *holding power* of child welfare organizations in Georgia should be strengthened and retention rates of employees should increase as well.

There are several implications of the new ESP for: (a) selecting more qualified child welfare employees using an ESP framework grounded in core (minimally essential) KSAVs expected of new employees; (b) collecting assessment information for planning continuous professional development for new employees; and (c) identifying on-the-job experiences that supervisors can provide for new employees based upon a results profile generated from the ESP.

Child welfare supervisors and administrators typically interview and hire child welfare employees. In some instances, due to uncovered caseloads, employment decisions are based on an applicant's availability rather than upon the applicant's qualifications and KSAVs for the actual work within child welfare (*hiring anybody instead of somebody*) (Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, in press). The unintended consequence of this practice has resulted in hiring individuals who misunderstand the actual work of child welfare, the multiple and complex problems of children and families in need, the emotional stress and strain of the job, after hours work, use of one's personal vehicle, etc. Once new

child welfare employees realize the work is not as they envisioned, they resign or actively seek employment elsewhere. Turnover nationally is estimated between 20-40%, and 75-85% of this turnover is attributed to organizational factors (i.e., noncompetitive compensation, few promotional opportunities, poor supervision, and heavy workloads) (APHS, 2005; Cyphers, 2001; Ellett et al., 2003; U.S.GAO, 2003). Thus, it seems important ethically to provide job applicants with accurate and realistic information about what the difficult and taxing work in child welfare entails. A major reason for employees quitting within the first 6-12 months is that the job does not match the work expected of them (Harvey, 1990).

From another perspective, employee retention can be enhanced by selecting employees with appropriate KSAVs and working closely with new (and experienced) employees to strengthen personal and organizational characteristics such as self-efficacy, professional commitment, work morale, professional organizational culture (Ellett et al., 2003; also see Ellett, Collins-Camargo, & Ellett article in this issue; Westbrook, Ellis, & Ellett, in press). Professional child welfare employees who are able to work effectively with most clients find it personally rewarding and remain employed in child welfare if their workloads are manageable and they receive supportive, professional supervision within a quality administrative context (Ellett, et al., 2003; Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, in press).

The most time consuming and draining task of child welfare supervisors, if done well, is on-the-job-training of new employees. It takes approximately two years for new child welfare employees to learn policy, law, and community resources, and to acquire the KSAVs to work effectively and independently without close supervision (Louisiana Office of Community Services Job Task Force, 2000). When turnover is high, supervisors may not invest as much time and effort in the *revolving door* of new employees, knowing many that are recently hired are not likely to stay. In Georgia, recent data show that the *revolving door* is a reality.

For example, in the Metro Atlanta area from 5/16/2005 to 9/1/2005, turnover of newly hired employees was 28% based upon trainees who failed to report for the first day of work or who left employment, or who were terminated by DFCS during the three-month training/certification period. Nineteen percent of this group stated they *didn't know it (work) was going to be like this*. During this time period, DFCS also terminated employment of an additional 9% of new hires (Lerner, 2006).

Studies of child welfare employees clearly identify the importance of quality supervision and administration to employee retention (Collins, 1994; Collins-Camargo, 2005; Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Ellett, 2000; Ellett et al., 2003; Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, Dews, in press; Rycraft, 1994; Westbrook, 2006). Likewise poor supervision and administration are important factors in child welfare employees' decisions to leave (Ellett 1995; Ellett, et al., 2003; Kern, McFadden, Baumann, & Law, 1993; Samantrai, 1992; U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003; Westbrook et al., in press). In addition to the salary and benefits provided to employees who subsequently leave, there are additional costs (Graef & Hill, 2000; Martin, 1996) of: (a) recruitment; (b) salary and time to review applicant materials, scheduling of job interviews, carrying out interviews; and make hiring decisions; (c) administrative costs to add employees to the payroll; (d) costs of formal training materials; (e) time and salary of trainers; (f) time and salary of supervisors and mentors; (g) lost professional expertise with experienced employees; and (h) most importantly lost continuity in planning and delivering client services.

Most states do not require a social work degree for child welfare positions. Thus, most child welfare staff with non-social work and even non-social work related degrees that cannot find employment in their chosen field of study are hired. These individuals typically remain on the job market before and during their child welfare employment and can

become a considerable drain on the employing agency's limited resources. These employment issues have been well documented in non-social work contexts (Breugh, 1983; Martin, 1996). In Georgia, and in many other states as well, a degree in social work is not a requirement for employment in child welfare. There is a continuing debate about whether a degree in social work is important for effective practice in child welfare (Ellett, 2006; Perry, 2006). Until credentialing of child welfare staff includes this requirement, the ESP may serve to identify individuals that do not have a degree in social work, yet who possess some of the core KSAVs considered important for success on the job and for employee retention as well.

In many states Civil Service or Merit Systems determine qualifications for public child welfare employees. In such systems, those that set the minimum qualifications for child welfare positions typically do not understand the complexities of the work or the importance of relevant professional degrees. Thus, the ESP is important in Georgia because it designed, in part to assure that those offered child welfare positions meet minimally essential, job-related expectations.

Some of our future concerns with the developing ESP in Georgia include standards (performance expectations) setting for various assessment activities, fidelity of implementation; and evaluation of the utility of this new set of employee selection procedures and requirements for child welfare staff. To date, piloting elements of the ESP throughout its development has offered the opportunity to make adjustments prior to actual implementation. Assessment guidelines will be used for making employee selection recommendations to the Georgia DFCS. A Child Welfare Employee Selection Manual is also under development to train selection teams statewide in a centralized (regional) hiring system.

From a *market perspective* (employee supply and demand), there is always a concern, given high turnover rates among child welfare administrators,

about the size of the pool of applicants and who will do this important work. This perspective is somewhat of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, raising requirements and standards for employment in the context of a low supply of applicants can be problematic (i.e., if applicants are selected out, what is the effect on caseload demands?). On the other hand, raising requirements and standards for employment in the context of a surplus of applicants (that Georgia currently has) can potentially enhance the quality of the workforce and strengthen employee retention. Child welfare agencies are embedded in the constant tension of supply and demand and other market issues (e.g., salary) and the ESP being developed in Georgia has to be sensitive to these issues.

However, our experience and perspective is that better selection of qualified, professionally committed employees, and supportive supervision and mentoring of new employees, will yield higher employee retention rates, and will ultimately result in a more professionally qualified and stable workforce to deliver more equitable and quality services to children and families in need.

Costs are always a concern in implementing new initiatives in child welfare. Given the current procedures for selecting new employees in child welfare in Georgia, our estimate is that fewer individuals

will be selected for interviews in the new ESP than with current procedures because they have been informed about the realities of the work via web-based information. If this is the case, then the Georgia DFCS will be in the position to implement the ESP with a group of job applicants who have a stronger personal and professional commitment to, and knowledge of child welfare than those in the past. Our estimates of costs to implement the new ESP predict that the value added, over the costs of current employee selection procedures, is not significantly greater, and indeed, in the long term, may cost less because of the effects of the ESP on strengthening employee retention.

From the administrative perspective, selecting more qualified and better-suited employees should enhance the cost effectiveness of the organization (e.g., decrease losses in human, technical, and financial investments in new employee training due to high turnover) (Graef & Hill, 2000; Martin, 1996). As well, strengthening supervisory *investments in qualified employees* can strengthen and improve professional organizational culture, which in turn strengthens the holding power of the organization and employee retention rates (Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook & Dews, in press; Landsman, 2001), and more importantly, societal and organizational outcomes as well (Collins-Camargo, 2005).

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Appendix A

Sample In-Basket Exercise

A set of realistic job-related scenarios is included in this survey. Your task is to read the items in each scenario and to use your professional judgment and experience to *rank each item in terms of its priority as a work task for safety, permanence, and child and family well-being*. Which task is the most urgent/important to address as a work priority, which is the next most urgent/important, and so on. The most urgent/important should be assigned a 1 the next most urgent/important assigned a 2, the least urgent/important should be assigned a 5.

After ranking each work task in the scenario, write a brief rationale *using complete sentences* that explains why you ranked the task as the highest work priority (i.e., a 1), and why you ranked the particular task as the lowest priority (i.e., a 5). You should take no more than *10 minutes* to complete this task.

IN-BASKET SCENARIO # 1

- | RANKING | TASKS |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| _____ | A. Make arrangements for the Harrison children to have a visit with their parents. They entered foster care last week. By policy, they need to visit with their parents within one week of entering foster care. To arrange this visit you must schedule it with the children's foster parents and biological parents, and reserve the office visitation room for the appropriate date and time |
| _____ | B. A report from the local hospital regarding a nine year old boy in the emergency room with suspicious bruising on the face and torso and a fractured arm. |
| _____ | C. Make copies of your documentation on a recent investigation you completed in which you found a father had sexually abused his two nine year old daughters and fax them to the local district attorneys office for review for possible criminal prosecution of the father |
| _____ | D. Complete paperwork needed to refer the members of the Garcia family to a local psychiatrist for evaluations. The Garcia family case was recently assigned to you because Mr. and Ms. Garcia were recently diagnosed as having schizophrenia and major depression (respectively). They are currently both doing well on their new medications but need to be evaluated to determine the level of risk of them discontinuing their treatments |
| _____ | E. A message to return a call to Mr. and Ms. Carter, parents in your caseload with a one month old infant. The message states that they need immediate assistance with their heating bill as they received notice last week that their gas would be turned off if the bill is not paid in full by the close of business today, lows tonight expected to be in the 20s. |

Provide a brief rationale why you ranked the most urgent/important task as the highest work priority.

Provide a brief rationale why you ranked the least urgent/important task as the lowest work priority.