
Preface

Surviving and thriving in the workplace is a universal concern that transcends professions, industries, and sectors. The need to adjust to the culture and demands of the workplace confronts most new social workers. Even for the more experienced practitioner, the organizational environment poses challenges that often are perceived as frustrating and beyond the realm of strategic intervention.

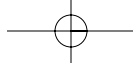
This book is intended as a supplemental text for foundation practice courses at the BSW and MSW level and focuses on issues related to the organizational context of practice. Successful adjustment to and work within human service organizations requires knowledge about how they operate and what role the social worker can play within them. New professionals entering practice are likely to face a host of organizational issues that directly bear on practice but for which there has been little concrete preparation. Even more seasoned social workers who take on new roles or begin employment in a different agency may find that the adjustment to a new organizational setting is challenging.

Social work education integrates a vast amount of content to assist students to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills for practice. Thus, themes related to values and ethics, social justice, human behavior and the social environment, and social welfare policy and services are woven throughout this book, as each influences the nature of practice within the organizational setting. Specific chapters of this book may also be used as supplemental readings for courses that specifically focus on these interrelated curriculum areas.

Social work students concentrating in community organizing or administration as part of the advanced social work curriculum may also find this volume to be of interest and utility. As students address practice issues in greater depth, breadth, and specificity, they may find that their perspective on human service organizations changes. This text also provides advanced students an opportunity to explore the organizational context of practice. Public and private human service managers and human service practitioners would also find this book useful in conducting in-service training and orienting new staff to the agency setting.

The Workplace

One might think that human service organizations, whose mission it is to assist in the growth and development of individuals, families, and communities, would provide a people-oriented workplace, different from that of business.



xiv Preface

This is not necessarily the case, because human service organizations are businesses, too. Common sense might also hold that the people skills possessed by social workers, who compose the dominant workforce of human service organizations, would positively influence the work environment. Furthermore, assumptions might lean toward the view that these people skills could be applied to address workplace issues.

The fact is that social workers are seldom fully prepared for the realities of the workplace. They are often disappointed and disillusioned. No empirical data exist to support an argument that social workers encounter more disillusionment within their work settings than do professionals of other disciplines. However, three differences are readily apparent. First, human service organizations are committed to furthering, in some specific way, human well-being. The missions of these organizations are anchored in a set of principles and values that have as their core the promotion of the public welfare. Second, social work is a profession that has traditionally been organizationally based. The values and ethics of the profession are expected to be mirrored in and consistent with those of the organization. Finally, the professional staff of human service organizations—predominantly social workers—are held to a *Code of Ethics* (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 1996) that acknowledges the organizational base of practice and sets forth obligations to the employing organization.

Learning about Organizations

There is substantial literature about organizational processes, most of which has been prepared for use in the political, social, and behavioral sciences. Thus, the focus is frequently on the theoretical understanding of organizational dynamics, often without attention to the practical application of theory to everyday organizational life. There are also a substantial number of works on management practice, to which social work has made a significant contribution (see, for example, Slavin, 1985; Gummer, 1990; Hasenfeld, 1992; Edwards, Yankey, & Altpeter, 1998; Patti, 2000). In general, this literature has focused on the knowledge and skills necessary for management, or “macro” practice. Such works tend to view organizations through the lens of management rather than from the practitioner’s perspective. This book, however, is focused on the organizational issues and concerns of the professionals working within the organizations, not of those at the top.

The organization can and should be approached as a dynamic in the equation of effective practice that needs to be analyzed and understood. How social workers practice, what they do, the resources available to them, the technologies they use, and the barriers they face in providing quality services are all influenced by the organizational setting in which they work. To practice effectively, social workers must understand their organizations. They must be able to intervene through systematic problem solving to address impediments to the delivery of services and to enhance the quality of the services that are provided.

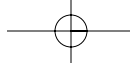
This book is oriented to the practical aspects of work within human service organizations. It seeks to inform social work students and new practitioners about the dynamics of the agencies in which they work. It further seeks to help them intervene within the organization itself to bring about change. The basic premise—and challenge—is that social workers can and must influence their work environments in positive ways. The issues discussed range from the larger sociopolitical context in which organizations function to the day-to-day annoyances that characterize every workplace. Issues both large and small have an impact on the climate and culture of all organizations and, ultimately, on the ability of social workers to carry out their work effectively.

Case Study Approach

Case studies are used throughout the book to highlight how the organizational setting influences practice in concrete ways. Case studies bring material to life; they illustrate the principles and facts under discussion, add vitality to the presentation, and allow students and practitioners to identify with the material. The case materials lend real voices to the types of situations and problems encountered on a day-to-day basis.

The case studies are drawn from a number of sources. The daily newspapers, such as the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, for example, offer columns about workplace issues; some of the themes addressed in these columns have been selectively used to illustrate situations that confront employees across a variety of settings. The author has also drawn from her own experience as a manager, board member, and practitioner to construct the case studies. Colleagues and doctoral students, primarily but not exclusively at Yeshiva University, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, were generous in providing materials and case situations from their work settings. This assistance also resulted in a disproportionate use of case illustrations from the Northeast and, especially, metropolitan New York. The adage “write what you know about” applies here. However, the social services field has been subject to the same nationalization and globalization as have other spheres of our economic and social environment. Agencies in the northeastern corridor often belong to the same alliances or national networks as agencies in other parts of the United States. The social problems addressed by human service agencies also cut across geography and regional distinctions.

Although the materials provided by individuals and obtained through public sources form the basis for the case studies, editorial license was exercised throughout to ensure confidentiality and adapt the cases to exemplify “typical” situations that arise in the organizational setting of social work practice. Thus, none of the cases illustrates, per se, real occurrences in any one agency. Samples of agency policies and procedures, similarly, are drawn from actual documents but have been modified to ensure their broadest applicability. On the other hand, when mission statements are provided and attributed to a specific agency by name, no editorial changes have been made.



xvi Preface

The chapters are sequenced in what can be termed an inductive manner. The reader is first introduced to human service organizations as the historic and current base of most social work practice. The different types of human service organizations and their distinguishing characteristics are highlighted in these early chapters, along with clarification about the roles and responsibilities of key players within and external to the organizations. As the reader becomes more familiar with the purposes and operating modes of human service organizations as the setting in which social work practice is carried out, attention then turns to the less tangible environments of organizations and how the formal and informal climate affects attitudes and work.

The *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1996) is used throughout this book as a frame of reference. The *Code of Ethics* both acknowledges that social work is an organizationally based profession and, in its specific provisions, highlights some of the potential ethical conflicts that can arise between professional practice and the organizational context in which such practice is carried out. Some of the case vignettes point to the ethical dilemmas that can emerge when the interests or ways of doing business of the organization are in opposition to the dictates of good practice and the best interests of the clients served.

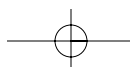
Building on this foundation about organizations and how they work, social work principles and practices are used as a base to guide professional interventions oriented to the agency itself. As an open system, the organization is typically receptive to the input of key players in its environment. Such key players go beyond funding bodies and consumer groups. Social workers, too, are key players, as it is their work that promotes or inhibits achievement of the organization's goals and objectives.

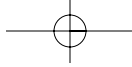
To facilitate the learning process from a pedagogical framework, each chapter concludes with a summary of key points covered, followed by discussion questions. Because of the complexity of organizations and how they work, this book does not purport to provide an in-depth exploration of organizational dynamics. A list of additional readings on each subject covered is provided, and readers are encouraged to use these resources in areas of individual interest.

Acknowledgments

A special thank you goes to the students of Wurzweiler School of Social Work for their contributions of ideas and their questioning of why things are as they are. Writing is sometimes characterized as a lonely endeavor. The ongoing exchange with students and academic and agency colleagues made the preparation of this book feel like an open exchange.

My appreciation is also extended to Dr. Sheldon R. Gelman, Dean, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, who read every word of the first draft of this book and offered concrete suggestions as well as gentle prodding to get it done and out. A thank you also goes to Dr. Tom Meenaghan, who also read an earlier version of the book and offered a different perspective about how it might be





Preface xvii

made more useful to social work students and to new practitioners. Finally, this book is dedicated to my father, William Gibelman, who throughout his eighty-eight-year life consistently valued learning, thinking, and writing. He taught me these values, which have played a significant role in defining who I am and what I do.

References

- Edwards, R.L., Yankey, J.A., & Altpeter, M.A. (1998). *Skills for effective management of non-profit organizations*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Gummer, B. (1990). *The politics of social administration: Managing organizational politics in social agencies*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Hasenfeld, Y. (Ed.). (1992). *Human services as complex organizations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (1996). *Code of ethics*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Patti, R.J. (Ed.). (2000). *The handbook of social welfare management*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Slavin, S. (Ed.). (1985). *Social administration: the management of the social services*. New York: Haworth Press.

