National **Child Welfare**
Workforce
Institute

Learning, Leading, Changing

Organizational Leadership

Elpers, K., & Westhuis, D. J. (2008). Organizational leadership and its impact on social workers' job satisfaction: A national study. *Administration in Social Work, 32*(3), 26-43.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This journal article offers the findings of a national qualitative research study regarding organizational leadership and its impact on job satisfaction. The study focused on social service agency workers with an MSW or BSW, and explored differences between worker expectations of leadership and actual perceptions of leader behaviors, seeking to determine if this difference affects workers' job satisfaction.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Leadership is defined by behaviors, traits, roles, relationships, interaction patterns, and influence on organizational goals and culture.

Five leadership practices were measured in this study's qualitative survey (see figure).

Job satisfaction was measured by intrinsic qualities (working with clients, opportunities to help, and feelings of success) and organizational qualities (quality of supervision, amount of independence, and clarity of guidelines). Factors that also influenced job satisfaction included pay, benefits, workplace environment, opportunity for advancement, participation in decision making, recognition, and access to resources.

5 Leadership Practices

- Challenging the process
- Inspiring a shared vision
- Enabling others to act
- Modeling the way
- Encouraging the heart

There were significant differences between social workers' expectations and perceptions of leadership, which influenced job satisfaction: workers expected more from their leaders than they felt that they actually received.

Leadership behaviors and practices influenced worker motivation, organizational commitment, productivity, and job satisfaction.

*Limitations exist in sampling and data collection including; limited sample population; lack of diverse sample; questionnaires subject to bias and differing interpretations; and original purpose of survey being for management and business.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

- Leaders must acknowledge the influence of their behavior on workers' job satisfaction and productivity.
- Educational programs and training courses should include leadership development to better prepare students and social workers for leadership roles.
- Leaders should be more aware of workers' expectations and perceptions of leadership, and strive to better understand their own leadership skills and behaviors from their workers' perspectives.
- Further research is needed to differentiate social work and management leadership skills.