OCCUPATIONAL SOCIAL WORK

Bradley Googins
Joline Godfrey

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Bradley Googins, Ph.D.
Boston University
School of Social Work

Joline Godfrey, M.S.W.
Polaroid Corporation

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FOREWORD

Most textbooks induce sleep with circumspect accounts of the accepted wisdom in a given field. That is, they offer information so bland and unimaginative that students tune-out (and turn on rock videos for a little relief). This occurs because the purpose of most textbooks is to present a batch of theoretical information and useless facts that students can memorize and feedback at exam time. Hold your hats, this book is different.

First, it is about *real problems*. What could be more real (and important) than helping people to deal with the personal problems created in society and in the family that are brought into the workplace (like alcoholism, drug addiction, chronic depression and alienation)? And what could be more real (and important) than helping people to cope with the personal problems that result from the interaction between their tasks and their personalities? Dealing with those levels of real issues is the primary task of the occupational social worker, according to Bradley Googins and Joline Godfrey, the authors of this remarkable text.

Second, the book is not a narrow, provincial or conservative view of the profession. Instead, it seeks to enlarge the scope of social work by including not just the psychological issues that have been the traditional focus of the field, but setting the individual employee in the broader context of the organization and society. The authors show that an effective social worker can improve not only the employee's quality of life, but can have impact on

the performance of the organization in which the individual works, and on the community in which the individual lives. Moreover, the social worker can change the organization, making it both more humane and more effective.

Thus, third, this lively book is about *change*. In the authors' view, the occupational social worker is not a "life adjustment counselor" who seeks to get workers to conform to intolerable working conditions, but a change agent whose goal it is to have healthy people working in healthy organizations. In short, the authors recognize that you can't have effective, motivated, committed and loyal workers in organizations that are run like sweatshops, prisons or boot camps.

Moreover, the authors know of what they write. Googins is a respected member of academia who grounds everything in these pages in sound scholarship. Godfrey is a successful business executive (in addition to being a trained social worker). She has put into practice everything that is prescribed in these pages, having done so both in the context of a very large, established corporation (Polaroid), and in a small, growing business that she herself created (Odysseum).

What I find so exciting about this book, then, is not just that it reflects the state-of-the-art in the fields of social work, occupational psychology, and business management, but that it creates the prospect that the occupational social worker can have real impact on real problems. The authors urge social workers to get out of their offices, and into the workplaces of their clients. In short, they treat occupational social work as a serious profession. And that's the way it should be treated. Read this book and you will want to get right to work helping people and organizations to perform more efficiently, effectively, productively, and humanely. In my experience, society needs tens of thousands of the kind of occupational social workers that Googins and Godfrey seek to train. May I urge you, then, to follow the authors' advice and get on with the challenge at hand!

James O'Toole

Professor of Management
School of Management
University of Southern California

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A book such as this which reflects the early stages of development of a field is subject to the cruelest fate of all: the passing of time. Since the early drafts, and indeed since the manuscript has been completed, the field of occupational social work has continued to grow and evolve in a manner unimagined just a few years ago. But such are the inherent dangers of trying to capture the essence of a quickly changing field.

Precisely because of these rapidly changing forces, we tried to draw on those in occupational social work who are on the front lines and consequently have the best feel for the currents and directions of occupational social work. We especially would like to thank Ruth Antoniades, Peggy Berry, Bruce Davidson, Dawn Harlor, Jim Lakis, Joan Lancourt, David Mercer, Jonathan Milton and Jim Wells among others who generally gave of their time while we picked their brains and examined their practice roles. Ellin Reisner deserves a special place for her enthusiastic support, creative ideas, and countless hours of interviewing. Dr. Paul Kurzman was also most generous in offering to read the drafts.

Writing this book has helped us to clarify the goals of the occupational social worker: to achieve balance in the provision of equality, liberty, justice, and excellence at work for workers, shareholders, host communities and consumers. Our analysis of these goals and desire to achieve them have been influenced by many people, including our families, who first showed us the

powerful, positive influence work can be in the life process. Polaroid Corporation provided a laboratory setting in which ideas and theories could be tested. For the patience and tolerance of Leo Miller, John Harlor, Gerald Sudbey, I.M. Booth and the late Bill Rebelsky, we are grateful. We also thank Jim O'Toole, Bob Schrank, Barbara Toffler, and Chuck Powers for their support and guidance.

At Boston University support on all levels was extraordinary. Dean Hubie Jones could not have been more supportive, and on more than one occasion provided the time, resources and encouragement without which an undertaking such as this never finds the light of day. Clerical assistance of Mary Gill, Susan Bahrawy and research assistants Serena Shapiro and Kathleen Jordan have our eternal gratitude for their countless hours. In Sherborn, Ridgely and Nicholas were often resentful of lost hours together, but always supportive.

Finally, despite all this help, support, encouragement and caring, the two of us stand alone with the book. We hope it is useful and enjoyable, despite its limitations, and will be a contribution to the exciting world of occupational social work.

Bradley Googins
Joline Godfrey

Boston, Massachusetts

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OCCUPATIONAL SOCIAL WORK
An Overview

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, a new set of innovations has evolved throughout public and private institutions and unions in the form of human services in the workplace. The programs in themselves are not new, nor do they address issues and problems unrecognized: alcoholism, drug abuse, stress, marital problems, retirement, relocation, emotional illness, and change. It is the *setting* in which these problems are recognized and dealt with that is revolutionary. The line between the production goals of the corporation and the human and social needs of the employee has traditionally been a demarcation well defined and rigorously maintained. The concerns of work and the problems of individual employees and their families, it has been felt, are best viewed as separate worlds—a bit like our national thinking about separation of church and state. The proliferation of human service programs and the emergence of the social work profession in this setting signals not only a softening of the distinctions between these two worlds but an acknowledgment of a false dichotomy. Work and family, or the personal and social lives of employees, do not constitute separate and unrelated spheres. The changing demographics of the larger society (single parents, dual career families, "baby boomers" entering the work place) along with ultural and value shifts of the past twenty years have presaged new needs and behaviors for workers. These developments have stimulated new responses in the workplace and on behalf of workers.

The Rise of Occupational Social Work

Until a few years ago, the concept and practice of occupational social work were virtually ignored by all but a handful of social workers. Although there is a history of social intervention in the workplace (antecedents of modern day social work practice in industrial settings could be found over a century ago), only within the past decade has any systematic practice emerged. In this brief period, a new client population has been identified, a field of practice has developed, and a new group of practitioners has taken its place as a specialty within the profession.

The rise of occupational social work, particularly in the past two to three years, is unprecedented. Seven years ago less than fifty practitioners could be identified. Today this number has swelled into the thousands. But it is not just this dramatic influx of practitioners that is notable; cultural and environmental shifts at work have been equally dramatic over the past decade, constituting imperatives for change that have brought the social work profession into new frontiers. Opportunities unimaginable a decade ago are opening up prospects for new and creative forms of practice. Social workers now counsel employees on a wide range of personal, family, and social problems; present policy positions on community relations to corporate executives; mediate disputes; develop and conduct stress management programs; and assist corporations on issues such as layoffs and retirement. These and other interventions stand as a monument to the responsiveness of the social work profession and its ability to identify and tackle new problem areas and population groups whose needs have previously been ignored or underserved.

The social work profession has strategically positioned itself to meet the growing range of human problems that affect the American work force. Employee assistance programs abound; traditional community health and human service agencies have begun to work with local businesses and industries; personnel and human resource departments, as a matter of course, examine the human factor within the work environment. Social workers have forged their way in assuming roles in training, social corporate responsibility, labor counseling, and health promotion and prevention, creating innovative programs and meeting the psychosocial needs of the work world.

All of this has not evolved without conflict and opposition. The introduction of social workers into the mainstream of a mixed capitalist system has raised considerable concern within the profession itself. For some, the social change goals embedded in the social work profession cannot coexist within the framework of American work organizations. For others, the dangers of being co-opted by the perceived values and goals of business and industry negate potential gains. Still other practitioners view the movement into the work world as a retreat from the public sector, embattled by the new federalism. In each of these perspectives, a distinct clash of values exists,

pitting those who define workers and the workplace as an underserved and ignored population against those who fear that the embrace of such a field of practice runs contrary to the values of the profession itself. Although this conflict is as old as Porter Lee's early debate within the profession on cause versus function (1932), it has again surfaced as the occupational social work movement becomes a significant force.

DEFINITION

Exactly what constitutes the nature and boundaries of occupational social work continues to be elusive. Whereas the population seems easily identified, the client is difficult to determine. Though counseling troubled employees is closely akin to other social work roles, assisting a corporation in defining its social responsibility is not. While conducting employee assistance programs is a typical activity, developing a program on ethics for a company is not. The wide range of roles, functions, and programs that has developed continues to expand the scope of the field and contribute to the absence of a program typology, legitimate boundaries, and a definition encompassing the dimensions of the field.

In coming to a definition, consideration must be given to why and to what end social workers would operate in the world of work. On the most basic level, the work world is an arena for practice in which human and social needs arise. From this perspective occupational social work is no different from similar activities in schools, hospitals, neighborhoods, and numerous other settings. What differentiates the work arena is the novelty of this practice, its apparent clash with traditional social work values, and the relative ignorance of the profession of the milieu, i.e., work organizations and culture.

One way to understand the nature of human services at work is to question why the workplace would value human services. Unless there were some intrinsic value in having social workers provide services at the work site, businesses, industries, and unions would not find it in their self-interest to sanction these activities. Vinet and Jones (1981, pp. 22–23), in their survey of occupational social workers, reported two major factors which these social workers cited as key sanctions in work organizations. First were social problems already identified by:

> precipating events (violence, strikes, high turnover, high costs of recruitment, and low productivity) that may have been symptoms of problems that enhanced receptivity to social service programs;
>
> the top management conclusion that company survival during a recession rested on a manager's ability to motivate workers toward greater productivity;
>
> a key company leader's improved functioning as a result of counseling for personal, psychological, or alcohol-related problems;

legal or social mandates for services;

ignoring social conditions which lead to greater outside interference, more regulations, and increased "costs";

negotiating benefits for social services with unions.

Second was a valuing of employees in the corporate philosophy and culture.

These factors provide a background for understanding the role and function of human services in the workplace. While they do not specify what social workers can do, they do give information as to what the organization needs and why. In many instances, social work attempts to meet client needs by discerning the client's perceived problems and needs within a prescribed value framework. In the workplace, "starting where the client is" encompasses an understanding and acceptance of the organizational and the individual employee's needs. A systems perspective in the mode of family therapy is perhaps the most cogent analogy. This defines the needs of the system (organization and employee) as the starting points of social work practice in the workplace.

Throughout this book the term "field" is used to indicate practice parameters. Defining the activities as a field of practice, as in the field of occupational social work, implies a specialization or an area of interest. This terminology is often applied in professional circles such as law and medicine. In the instance of workplace practice it can only be used in the loosest of terms. This is not a clearly identifiable field, only a rapidly evolving practice that in time may well take on the more comprehensive characteristics of a field. At the present time the state of development is very rudimentary. What *it* is, is far from circumscribed, again complicating definition.

Even the label attached to practitioners who operate in this sphere is up in the air. The term *industrial social work* is avoided in this text for two reasons. First, *industrial* is a term derived from the European practice of social work in industry, which has limited relevance to today's work organizations. In addition, the move toward a postindustrial economy is well underway, and the use of the phrase "industrial social work" is fast becoming an anachronism. Second, social workers are not the sole practitioners found in workplace human service positions. While social work is the only profession to articulate a field of practice, many other professionals, quasi-professionals, and paraprofessionals occupy similar positions in companies. Because the field is in the process of becoming, no universally accepted standards have yet been adopted, and no profession or group, social work included, can lay claim either to a developed professional body of expertise or to the market itself. This is not the case in Europe, which will be described in a later chapter, where industrial social work has developed into a more defined and universally accepted practice. For these reasons, we have relied on

the broader term *human services in the workplace*, although the specific practice by social workers will be referred to as *occupational social work.*

Finally, for the purpose of reference, if not argument, a concrete definition of occupational social work is proposed: *...a field of practice in which social workers attend to the human and social needs of the work community by designing and executing appropriate interventions to insure healthier individuals and environments.*

Predecessors of current activities—welfare capitalism, the social betterment movement, and occupational alcoholism—have all left their imprints and contributed to the present state of human services in the workplace. The 1980s represent another stage of development for the American workplace in its attempt to balance employee needs and production goals. The emergence of human services for employees is part of a larger complex of forces concerned with the new values of the work force, a changed demographic, increased competition from abroad, and diminution of the welfare function played by government. All of these factors have become prominent at the work site over the past decade and continue to reshape and redefine the nature and function of work, workers, and work organizations. The rise of human services, consequently, is in part defined and shaped by these collateral factors, all of which have either forced or persuaded the work organization to incorporate human services as an integral part of its institutional system. What was once relegated to public and voluntary agencies now is being assimilated into corporations and unions in the form of entitlements thought to establish healthy and productive employees and environments.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

As suggested earlier, human service activities that have developed over the decade under the *rubric* of occupational social work are difficult to codify, in large part due to the differences that exist among these activities. These differences are reflected by settings (unions versus corporate), functions (counseling versus policy development), and the level of intervention (macro versus micro). Nevertheless, it is possible to describe some of the type of activities that have evolved. Below is a sampler of occupational social work interventions. This is not an attempt to provide an exhaustive typology, but rather to point to the variation in programmatic functions that fall under the heading of occupational social work.

Counseling Programs

Counseling programs dominate occupational social work much as they do the social work profession itself. Early counseling programs tended to be

singly focused and issue-oriented, often alcohol-related. "It seems that in the initial stage, social services are provided in the workplace to deal with one or two specific problems such as alcoholism or drug abuse. Management...may think that the solution is to employ a counselor to deal with these particular problems" (Ozawa, 1980).

In fact, counseling as a primary method of initial organizational entry has proved highly functional to relationship building and contract setting between the service provider and the workplace. Potential consumers of the services (employees), buyers of the services (management and/or unions), and social work professionals have an opportunity to establish norms, expectations, credibility, and respect around identified issues (e.g., alcoholism, retirement counseling, stress). While a comprehensive survey of social services offered by Fortune 500 companies has yet to be conducted, many existing programs have had their beginnings in single-issue service programs. As these programs have taken hold, broader, more comprehensive counseling programs have evolved. It should be emphasized that this form of workplace social service, i.e., counseling around a single problem area, is often a critical phase in the introduction of the social worker and the work setting to one another. The next stage of growth is a result of both the social character of the profession and the needs of the workplace.

Multiservice Programs

The 1979 Report on the Conference on Social Work Practice in Labor and Industrial Settings noted that

> ...companies want the professional who is comfortable and sophisticated in advocating for their workers in the broader community. In addition to clinical skills they want a professional person who can represent their interests in a system-sensitive way in a society upon which they are dependent— for political sanction, customers, and a work force. Trade unions, likewise, want a helping professional who can document membership needs and be firmly committed to being an agent of change. Being a skillful service provider is always necessary, but rarely sufficient (Akabas et al., 1979, p. 34).

This statement is borne out in the multiservice programs that have evolved in companies like Digital Equipment Corporation, New England Telephone Company, Polaroid, Western Electric, and Northern States Power Company. The range of services offered by these companies, as well as by some unions, implies opportunities for both micro and macro interventions. With idiosyncratic variations, these companies offer under one umbrella a constellation of services including but not limited to:

COUNSELING

Group and individual
Referral and follow-up