



Assessing Elements of Employee Retention in Child Welfare

4 CE Hours

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Learning objectives

- ◆ Understand why turnover of child welfare workers is a problem.
- ◆ Identify and understand turnover and retention issues related to the general workplace.
- ◆ Review what literature and past research tells us about how case manager retention impacts the children and families we serve.
- ◆ Identify and understand the elements that impact employee retention within the child welfare field.
- ◆ Explore workplace retention theories and the decision-making process.
- ◆ Identify what potential steps child welfare leaders may take in order to improve retention rates.

Overview

Children who have been exposed to various forms of abuse or neglect often receive supervision and services through the child welfare system. Nationwide studies have indicated that dependency case managers directly responsible for the daily monitoring and guidance of cases for children and their families typically remain in their position an average of two years, and sometimes their length of employment is considerably less (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2006).

In general, whenever a case transfers between workers, often as the result of resignation, permanency for the children of the case is delayed by six months (Child Welfare League of America, 2010). Poor retention rates of dependency case managers also result in high costs to the child welfare agency in the form of hiring, training and development of the agency. In the general business world, it is estimated that an organization loses an average of \$1 million for every 10 professional employees who terminate employment (Fitz-enz, 1997), and it has been estimated that the cost of case manager turnover among three child welfare agencies can equate to a \$1.4 million loss within an 18-month time frame alone (Pecora, 2006).

Past research indicates that common causes of turnover in the human service field include high workloads and inadequate salaries, lack of training and support, stress, and the inability to maintain a work-life balance (Flower, McDonald, & Sumski, 2005). In addition, advancement in technology of recent years has increased workloads, and the struggling economy has left case management organizations unable to provide salary increases and monetary incentives (Westbrook, Ellis, & Ellett, 2006).

Employee retention in general is a concern for any organization. Worker turnover results in financial loss as well as loss of quality, productivity and organizational knowledge (Galbreath, 2005). Hiring and training costs are often mirrored by the impact on morale that remaining workers feel when they must

assume responsibilities of exiting workers until the position is filled (Flower, et al., 2005). Staff turnover costs money and drains resources from program development and service areas, and it also drains organizational knowledge. While technology continues to advance, it cannot compare to the knowledge, wisdom and experience of veteran workers (Ramiall, 2004).

The concern of employee turnover is heightened when the purpose of the agency is one of ensuring safety, permanency and the well-being of children. More concerning is the impact of case manager turnover on the quality outcomes for children served within the system. These include delays in permanency, more risk to the safety of children, and an unstable ability to ensure well-being of children (Child Welfare League of America, 2010). Children who experience multiple case managers caused by turnover issues within the agency are more prone to experience longer lengths of stay within the foster care system, higher number of placements, decreased levels of consistency of services, and longer time frames to achieve permanency through either reunification with a parent, guardianship to a relative or non-relative, or adoption (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2010).

The quality of any child welfare system is dependent upon the individuals who provide services to children and families and the front-line staff who manage and direct service delivery. Nationally, the challenge of building a stable and effective workforce continues to be an increasing focus for child welfare agencies. Employee turnover, hiring freezes, and the lack of qualified applicants are known to be consistent barriers to effective service delivery (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2010).

Past research has addressed the issue of child welfare workforce turnover from several different angles. Because the potential for contributing factors is so high, each study has focused on different elements and findings, but the common

theme of the impact that employee turnover has on the child welfare system and the effects on children and their families exists across studies.

A change in the case manager assigned to a child often causes delays for the new worker in understanding the elements of the case and as a result, permanency is often delayed; educational needs are not always given the attention they deserve; and unfortunately, in the eyes of children, it is another example of an individual in their lives leaving them and not following through with what they said they would do (Flower et al., 2005).

Common themes have emerged over the past decade of research pertaining to retention of child welfare staff. In review of why workers chose to voluntarily terminate employment within child welfare agencies:

- Approximately 60 percent indicated reasons of retirement, plans to stay at home, return to school and undisclosed personal reasons.
- Another 15 percent reported reasons of stress, burnout and workload, while 14 percent cited inadequate compensation and another 14 percent claimed they left for alternate employment.
- Other studies showed high percentages of case managers left because of feelings of inadequate support and supervision, inability to attend training because of high workloads, lack of a career ladder, and stress on the job caused by threats or actual violence (Pecora, 2006; Jacquet, Clark, Morazes, & Withers, 2007).

The role of the dependency case manager is a demanding one. Navigating complex judicial systems and available resources, the case manager is expected to be an expert on all child-related topics, effectively monitor parental completion of case plan tasks, respond professionally to all involved parties, ensure timely completion of law-enforced time-framed tasks, and ensure safety, stability and permanency for children (Flower, et al., 2005). For many in this role, maintaining balance among the various aspects of their personal and professional lives is an important topic, which presents an opportunity to consider the ideas of various workforce retention theories that will be discussed further within this material.

Key definitions

Burnout: The experience of long-term exhaustion and diminished interest.

Community-based care: Community-based care is a comprehensive redesign of the child welfare system that has occurred in several states. It combines the outsourcing of foster care and related services to competent service agencies with an increased local community ownership of service delivery and design. This innovative statewide reform increases accountability, resource development and system performance.

Dependency case management: The provision and oversight of services for children exposed to abuse or neglect.

Department of Children and Families (DCF): The governing state-run department responsible for the oversight of child

Welfare services. Though the name of this department varies from state to state, this term is used to describe this department, regardless of state, throughout the study.

Within the last decade, child welfare worker retention and turnover rates have received increased attention through research studies (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2010). It's important to know that the majority of existing research on the retention of case managers has been quantitative, with the end result being that results have become numbers and are often grouped into broader categories that represent what the true issues are. However, little attention has been given to the qualitative approach to understanding the perception of case managers and how various elements of job requirements of this position contribute to levels of job dissatisfaction. It is possible that drilling down to the individual elements of the position may be more beneficial than simply looking at the broader scope.

Many studies (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2003; Leung, 2010) focused on the general topic of the state of the child welfare workforce and its impact on quality outcomes for children. Other studies (Barbee, Antle, Sullivan, Huebner, Fox, & Hall, 2009; Cahalane, 2010; Faller, Grabarek, & Ortega, 2010; Child Welfare League of America, 2010) included in the review provided insight on factors considered to be impacting the longevity of dependency case managers. We will take a closer look at results of past research on the effect of turnover on permanency for children, the impact of enhanced training for case managers, various factors of the workplace experience, responsibilities of the position, the impact of support and supervision for case managers, and private versus public agency employment.

Overall, retention in child welfare agencies has been linked to the following primary factors:

- Recruitment-selection efforts.
- Education and training.
- Organizational factors.
- Personal factors.
- Level and quality of supervision (including task assistance and emotional and social support) and interpersonal interaction.
- Workload.
- Stress and burnout.

Lead agency: An agency contracted by the state to oversee child welfare services in a given area, which in turn contracts with local community agencies to provide direct services.

System of care: A coordinated network of community-based services and supports that are organized to meet the needs of children and families.

Permanency: Long-term, permanent and legal placement of a child with a parent, relative, guardian or adoptive parent.

Employee retention in the general workplace

The retention of workforce is an important issue for any business. Turnover of workers results in additional costs to the organization and can impact the quality of work product. It is estimated that an organization loses an average of \$1 million for every 10 professional employees who terminate their

employment (Fitz-enz, 1997). Studies have shown that factors such as workload, stress, support and supervision, education and training, advancement opportunities, and burnout may contribute to employees' longevity (Ramail, 2004).

Workload

The workload of any given position is dependent upon the type of organization, field of business and the roles and responsibilities assumed by the position. However, the constant is that increased workload and time management issues can impact the level of retention for the individual and the agency. In addition, whether adequate training has been provided for the employee to successfully do the job affects a person's ability to maintain workload levels.

A national survey conducted in 2010 by Express Employment Professionals found "staggering" results. Express surveyed more than 100 business owners, managers and other personnel, and of those surveyed, 79.4 percent said their workload had increased in the past year, 13.7 percent said their workload had stayed the same and 6 percent said it had decreased. Comparing stress levels to that of past years, 48 percent reported their

stress level had increased, while 27.5 percent reported it to be the same and 24.5 said it had decreased (Lee, 2011).

Additionally in 2010, a national survey of 9,400 business leaders showed overwhelming statistics. It showed 49 percent felt higher stress than they did the year before, and 68 percent said their workload had increased. Companies are trending toward moving to a more flexible workforce populated by temporary workers, contractors and freelancers ((Lee, 2011). Temporary workers can help ease stress as employers attempt to cut labor without sacrificing productivity, he said. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2010) the number of workers placed by temporary-staffing agencies has risen since September 2010 by 404,000, making up 68 percent of the 593,000 jobs added by employers.

Stress

Stress factors in the workplace may lead employees to feel they might be happier elsewhere, either in a different organization or in a different field altogether, because they think the stress levels they are experiencing do not exist in other fields (Shim, 2010). Stress can come in many forms.

Interpersonal communications and relationships alone can exist in several variations depending on the roles of the individuals and the requirements that each person is focused on meeting. Goals and barriers will vary across levels of employment. What exists as a primary goal for a manager may not be the primary goal of the administrative support staff, of the quality assurance staff and the levels of operational staff. Even if the overall goal or agency mission is the same for everyone, there are different

pieces of the bigger picture goal that are more important to certain people than others within the work population. This alone can create significant stress levels for all individuals involved. (Moseley, Jeffers, & Paterson, 2008)

Stress in the workplace can also be caused by a series of other elements. It can result from the access – or the lack of it – to existing technological devices available or to the efficiency of the technology. Stress can also arise from change in policy and procedure and lack of clarification, a change in organizational structure or responsibilities, interactions with clients or the public, and increased workload because of exiting coworkers (Westbrook et al., 2006).

Support and supervision

Quality supervision includes understanding the responsibilities and demands of workers' jobs, fair distribution of workload among team members, flexibility, availability, active listening, respect for workers, providing a strong knowledge base of the job, setting high but attainable expectations, and providing instrumental and emotional support and praise (Westbrook et al., 2006). Positive leadership has been linked to outcomes such as employees who report high levels of positive interpersonal working relationships, teamwork, retention, and health and well-being (Schoo, 2008).

Such information should be an eye-opener for managers when considering the level of training they are providing to their supervisors. Managers may convey agency mission and values, but it is the supervisors who are in daily contact with their teams. Therefore, employee retention may increase when

supervisors support a motive to change and share the vision or bigger picture of the organization (Schoo, 2008).

Quality supervision does not have to occur solely in a one-on-one supervision format. Group supervision and staff meetings also allow an opportunity for support, communication, leadership and teamwork. Some organizations have developed meetings that allow workers to share the good things that happen each month, with additional discussion of what resources may be lacking to adequately meet the needs of their job requirements (Fessele, 2008). Innovative meetings such as these offer an opportunity for workers to increase their sense of team and maintain a vested interest in the personal successes, as well as the success of the organization.

Education and training

In a study conducted by Strolin-Goltzman, Auerbach, McGowan, and McCarthy (2008), significant findings were noted on the correlation between type of educational degree and location as well as the existence of local incentives for employees. Findings indicate that there were higher numbers of caseworkers with social work degrees in urban and suburban settings than in rural settings. Additionally, the study indicates a higher degree of intention to leave in the rural and urban groups than those employed in suburban areas.

Other significant factors in retention include whether employees feel they are appropriately compensated for the amount of work they perform. Inadequate salaries and high workloads are common issues that often result in high turnover in the human service field (Westbrook et al., 2006).

Training for not only employees but also those in leadership roles is another method of ensuring that workers on all levels feel confident in their job duties. Leadership is the consistent factor as a prerequisite to change in the workplace (Wolfson, Bernabeo, Leas, Sofaer, Pawlson, & Pillittere, 2009).

Further, the process of inductive reasoning may be not only beneficial for managers attempting to address issues in the workplace, but also important within the training process itself, potentially leading to increased fluid intelligence performance and better academic learning of the training material or curriculum (Klauer & Phye, 2008).

Another element of training that may lead to increased retention rates is the process of mentoring. In addition to quality supervision, peer mentoring by coworkers not only assists in new staff development and promotion of social networking within the agency, but also offers an opportunity for the mentor to feel an increased sense of self-worth and accomplishment, taking responsibility for others' learning processes and sharing in their accomplishments (Hartje, Evans, Killian, & Brown, 2008). This process fosters a sense of community within an inner circle team or unit and can then impact the outer circle, encompassing the entire agency with a team-based approach (Moseley et al., 2008).

Advancement opportunities

Workers also report that their own likelihood to remain with their current employer is a result of opportunities for advancement and ability to transfer into alternate areas or programs to learn and participate in other elements of their field (Westbrook et al., 2006). Successful managers often employ a strategy that includes asking staffers regularly about their career aspirations and plans to achieve them and then challenging them by assigning specialized roles,

special projects and opportunities for advanced training to further develop their skills (Gillham & Ristevski, 2007).

However, it is then important for organizations to offer opportunities for official advancement into specific promotional positions. While this is a goal for many managers, budget and structure related issues can create a barrier, which in turn works against them in efforts of retention.

Initial hiring process

The initial presentation of the job during the hiring process is important to employee retention. Not only does the interviewer attempt to assess whether the candidate is the right fit for the position, but the candidate also considers whether the position is the right fit for him or her. If the position is presented in a manner that does not reflect the actual work experience, employees are

more likely to leave sooner, either because of the undisclosed demands of the job or the perception that the organization did not share accurate information. Equally important is the accuracy of the physical job description, which is often reviewed and signed at the point of initial hire (Faller et al., 2010).

Burnout



Many employees experience what is considered to be burnout, a term often used to refer to the experience of long-term exhaustion and diminished interest. A personal definition of burnout is the process of

becoming less effective because of workload responsibilities, work environment or length of time conducting the same tasks. Additionally, feelings of burnout may increase if sense of accomplishment is no longer part of one's work experience.

Dr. Mary Byrne (2006) conducted a study that assessed the resilience of 467 publicly employed child protective social workers, comparing a group using a strengths-based service

planning approach with those who used a traditional protective services approach. Within the study, levels of self-efficacy, compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue, burnout, personal competence and personal adaptability measured resilience. What particularly stands out from this research is the data and analysis as related to burnout, which finds:

- Burnout was significantly related to being in a direct service role, having a higher caseload and recent trauma.
- Lower caseloads appeared to moderate the effects of burnout.
- Burnout was significantly and inversely related to age (younger), to years employed in DSS (less years employment), and to lacking a graduate level degree.
- Trauma was a highly significant moderator directly on burnout: Those reporting recent personal trauma revealed higher indicators of burnout. (Byrne, 2006)

A variation of burnout is commonly referred to as compassion fatigue. Individuals working in the human services field in roles such as a nurse, social worker or case manager can feel emotionally exhausted by contact with others and the level of empathy involved, negative feelings toward the recipients of their services, or reduced personal accomplishment with a tendency to minimize their self-evaluation of their own work (Westbrook et al., 2006).

In the human service field of child welfare, where the intrinsic value of wanting to make a difference plays an important role in employee retention (Goodwin, 2009), compassion fatigue is often linked to professionals who are required to participate in complex tasks combined with existing policy and procedures (Warman & Jackson, 2007). They are expected to fill the role of the expert in all things child-related and have demands coming at them from all parties in the dependency system as they try to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of the child.

Work-life balance is an important element to combat burnout. Employees often have to juggle numerous elements of

their personal and professional lives to meet the needs and requirements of both, while retaining their own efforts toward personal goals (Fessele, 2008). Family related issues such as day care schedules not meeting their needs, day cares that are closed while the employee's office remains open, and the unpredictable times when children become ill and must be taken home from school or day care or see a doctor are examples of situations that lead to worker stress and difficulty maintaining the responsibilities of family versus employment.

Recognizing the importance of work-life balance, an innovative approach was developed by Swedish American Health System in Rockford, Ill., which created a concierge service for its nursing staff. This program offered assistance to workers by running errands, servicing their cars or waiting for a repair person to arrive at their home. It also included travel planning, dry cleaning and other services that provided freedom for workers from having to take time off of work or spend their day off to accomplish personal tasks (Fessele, 2008).

The impact of employee turnover on quality of care for children

To address retention issues in the child welfare system, it's important to understand the elements that impact workers. However, we must keep in mind that the primary reason turnover and retention issues in child welfare are concerning is that it has negative effects on the children served by the agency.

The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute is a collaboration of agencies and universities dedicated to the research and assessment of workforce selection and child welfare outcomes. The following reflect several concerns of how case manager turnover and high workloads affect children:

- Every time children experience a change in case manager assigned to them, a case is delayed an average of six months to obtaining permanency for the child.
- Educational, medical, dental and mental health needs are delayed, or knowledge about them is lost.
- The timeliness of investigations is negatively affected.
- There are a higher number of foster care placements.
- Barriers to parental reunification increase, as does the time needed to achieve reunification.

The federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) have set clear, measurable case outcome standards for placement stability, maltreatment recurrence, reunification and foster care permanency. They also evaluate several service delivery process measures of timely investigation response or completion, the development of appropriate case plans, occurrence of medical-dental-mental health evaluations, and the overall quality of services provided.

The reviews have been used in several national studies on the impact of case manager turnover on case outcomes:

- The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) examined the relationship between CFSR review findings from 27 states and their agencies' staff turnover rates. High

agency turnover rate was associated with failure to meet established standards for investigation response, timely investigation completion, worker contact with children and families, maltreatment recurrence and timely permanency.

- A later study conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation also identified a link between agency performance and workforce capacity.
- The Council on Crime and Delinquency also conducted a study that said families served by counties that had lower turnover rates had significantly lower maltreatment recurrence rates and were more likely to have approved, current case plans as well as up-to-date child medical exams.

With each of the potential results of turnover that impact children negatively, there is potential for the child to experience additional trauma. In a system that has become more sensitive to actions that result in additional trauma for children, child welfare agencies have made efforts to reduce the number of placements for children and keep siblings together in family or group care settings. For every time a child has a change in caregiver, it is another loss for the child, resulting in feelings of disempowerment and helplessness. Each time a case manager leaves his or her role and the child's case is transferred to a new worker, the child experiences yet another loss. So aside from delays in the critical elements related to well-being, children can experience multiple people walking out on their life, a break in trust and some form of additional trauma on top of the trauma of abuse, neglect or abandonment they've already experienced.

When young people experience multiple changes in relationships, they tend not to trust and reduce or stop communicating. They feel a sense of "what's the point of telling my story again to another person who's going to leave me?" Not wanting to be hurt again or relive traumatic events by retelling their story, they put up a wall to avoid becoming open and vulnerable.

More on trauma

Exposure to trauma causes the brain to develop in a way that will help the child survive in a dangerous world. It helps to be on constant alert for danger and quick to react to threats (which often results in the response of fight, flight or freeze). However,

the stress hormones produced during trauma also interfere with the development of higher brain functions.

Becoming a more trauma-sensitive child welfare system includes taking action to reduce turnover in case managers, given the impact it has on children.

The impact of trauma	
In young children, ages 0-5	
Key developmental tasks	Trauma's impact
Development of visual and auditory perception. Sensitivity to noise.	Recognition of and response to emotional cues. Avoidance of contact.
Attachment to primary caregiver.	Confusion of what's dangerous and who and where to go to for protection. Fear of being separated from familiar.
In school-aged children, ages 6-12	
Key developmental tasks	Trauma's impact
Manage fears, anxieties and aggression.	Emotional swings.
Sustain attention for learning and problem solving.	Learning problems.
Control impulses.	Specific anxieties and fears.
Manage physical responses to danger.	Reversion to younger behaviors.
In adolescents, ages 13-21	
Key developmental tasks	Trauma's impact
Think abstractly.	Difficulty imagining or planning.
Anticipate and consider consequences of actions.	Over- or underestimating danger.
Accurately judge danger and safety.	Inappropriate aggression.
Modify and control behavior to meet long-term goals.	Reckless and/or destructive behavior.

Retention issues specific to child welfare agencies

While many of the same themes apply, the field of child welfare in general and the issue of employee retention specifically for dependency case managers are unique from other employment experiences. Ensuring child safety and well-being can alone be a stressful burden while state and federal laws that mandate

a variety of tasks on strict time frames add to the demands of the position. Turnover impacts not only the quality of service provided to children and their families, but also can have a negative impact financially and in human terms on an agency (National Council on Crime & Delinquency, 2006).

Workload

The number of cases assigned to one individual in addition to the complexity and dynamics of those cases can lead to turnover of case managers, who may feel they are overworked or not sufficiently compensated financially for the work they perform (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2003). National studies that span all variations of child welfare agencies overseeing dependency services show a correlation between salary of caseworkers and supervisors to turnover rate, noting that agencies with higher salary levels, agencies that did not require case managers to work overtime, and agencies whose workers were not responsible for on-call responsibilities had lower turnover rates (National Council on Crime & Delinquency, 2006).

Worker shortage, high caseload size and retention go hand-in-hand in the child welfare system. When a caseworker leaves, the number of clients is distributed among fewer workers,

resulting in high caseloads for everyone. In response to the concerns about the shortage of child welfare workers in California, the state passed Senate Bill (SB) 2030 that required an evaluation of workloads of child welfare staff and budgeting issues. The resulting study (state of California, 2003) found that caseloads for California child welfare workers were twice those of recommended levels.

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) recommends no more than 15 ongoing "cases" (typically referring to total number of children) per social worker. This recommendation has decreased by one or two children annually for the last several years. The Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research (2005) review of retention and turnover in child welfare concluded that reasonable workload was among the predictors of retention. Other studies have resulted in

similar findings (Curry, McCarragher, & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2005; United States General Accounting Office, 2003; North Carolina Division of Social Services, 1999). However, it is not uncommon for case managers to be averaging caseload sizes of 20-40 children, despite efforts to reduce caseload sizes to the national best practice recommendation of 15.

The increase in workload ties into the importance of another element tied to retention that is explored later in this section, which is the amount and quality of supervision and support that case managers receive from their direct supervisor.

Increases in the number of case managers assigned to individual cases occurring because of turnover have been correlated to lessening the chance of permanency for the child (Flower et al., 2005). In a study conducted in 2003-2004, 679 children involved in the dependency system of Milwaukee, Wis., saw delays in permanency directly correlated to a change in worker. Of those 679 children, those who only had one worker achieved permanency in 74.5 percent of the cases within the given time frame. As the number of case managers increased, the percentage of children achieving permanency substantially dropped. Children who had two workers achieved permanency in only 17.5 percent of the cases. Those with three workers were 5.2 percent and those with six or seven workers within the calendar year resulted in 0.1 percent. (Flower et al., 2005)

Depending on the specific demographic of the child welfare agency and contractual obligations, some expectations and requirements of case managers may vary. However, in many instances, case managers are held accountable for numerous efforts related to the permanency, safety and well-being of children. Responsibilities often include:

- Child's needs:
 - Emotional.
 - Medical.
 - Dental.
 - Normalcy.
 - Mental health.
 - Educational.
- Initiatives:
 - Family engagement.
 - Trauma informed care.
 - Reduction in residential placement.
- Parents' needs:
 - Referrals.
 - Communication with providers.
- Daily crisis intervention:
 - Mandatory trainings:
 - Internal.
 - External.
- Documentation and reporting systems:
 - Incident and accident reports.
 - Statewide databases.
 - Providers.
 - Partnering agencies.
- Various staffings.
- Communication and partnership with caregivers:
 - Foster parents.
 - Relative and non-relative placements.
 - Residential staff.

- Court system:
 - Documentation and reports.
 - Judges and court orders
 - Guardian ad litem.
 - Attorneys.
 - Attending hearings.
- Following state law and internal and external policies and procedures.
- Responding to funding agency requests:
 - Quality management.
 - Specialists.
 - Leadership.
- Responding to internal agency requests:
 - Direct supervisor.
 - Manager or director.
 - Agency leadership.
 - Quality management.
- External personal demands:
 - Personal finances (salary and benefits of the agency).
 - Personal health (benefits of the agency).
 - Time for own family.
 - Time for self.

It's easy to see how the workload for this position can quickly become overwhelming, and in many situations, child welfare case managers are expected by the state and the public to be experts in each of these facets of the field. This list reflects what case managers are responsible for on a typical single case. Imagine how complex time management and prioritization becomes when this is multiplied by 15 or 20 to reflect the number of cases being managed by one individual.

Now consider that two or three additional cases are given to this same worker because a fellow case manager has ended employment with the agency. Not only do the cases come with these same responsibilities, but the worker must now catch up on information and activities of the case that occurred before it was given to them.

As workload and caseload increases, the estimated time required to serve clients increases drastically. Many agencies operate under state laws that require more frequent face-to-face visits with children in their current place of residence based upon either a determination of a higher risk level assessment, recent reunification, or for the duration of the time the child is officially in "shelter status," which is affected by the length of time it takes for the legal system to process the case and determine whether to adjudicate on parental custody.

Given this scenario, there are workers who are functioning with children on their caseload who have either just come into the system and require weekly visits, are in a higher-risk living situation, or have recently been reunified. For example, at any given time, a worker may have 30 children on his or her caseload. If 10 of them require weekly visits, the weekly visits alone account for a minimum of 20 hours of their workweek. Because the frequency of worker contacts with parents and children has been determined to have a significant impact on placement stability and elements of the child's well-being, high caseloads and high workloads are contributing to the decrease

in the child welfare system's most valuable resource: time with the assigned worker (Wagner et al., 2009).

These findings likely do not come as a major surprise to most child welfare professionals. They recognize that effective case management requires frequent client contact and a significant

Stress



While there are many contributing elements to stress, and employees are likely to experience elements of the job differently and be able to cope with elements of stress differently, several common themes are represented in past

research. High caseloads have been cited as the No. 1 cause of stress for dependency case managers, and many states have implemented changes to lower average caseload size of workers (Child Welfare League of America, 2010).

Despite recent successes in lowering caseload size, many case managers have reported that actual workload has not decreased and in some cases has increased. This is often attributed to the addition of new requirements linked to advancements in technology, delays with being able to complete new technology-based requirements caused by computer problems,

What is resiliency?

Resiliency is the ability for a family or youth to bounce back from stress or adversity. For families, resiliency is the ability of a family to develop and maintain healthy functioning and successfully adapt to life's challenges and risks.

Resiliency is very important, but it is not enough. Ultimately, we want more for our families and youth than survival; we want them to thrive, that is, to flourish in society. We want families to be loving, caring and compassionate toward one another and their neighbors. They need opportunities to be successful and be civic-minded.

Is work-life balance possible?

Work-life balance does not necessarily mean an equal balance. Trying to schedule an equal number of hours for each of your various work and personal activities is usually unrewarding and unrealistic. Life is and should be more fluid than that. However, the right balance for you today will probably be different for you tomorrow. The appropriate balance for you when you are single will be different when you are married or if you have children, and considerably different when you start a new career or position versus when you are nearing retirement. Therefore, it's important that we recognize that there is no perfect, one-size-fits-all balance you should be striving for. The best work-life balance is different for each of us because we all have different priorities and different lives.

amount of worker time. When a large percentage of positions are vacant or filled with new and inexperienced staff, workforce capacity is diminished and commitments to clients, the most basic of which is routine worker contact, cannot be met. And if it is met, what is the level of quality of the visit because of time constraints?

new reporting procedures, expectations of various involved parties, courtrooms and duplication of documentation (Florida Department of Children and Families Child Welfare Leadership Program, 2008).

Studies have also shown that public agency workers were generally more satisfied with benefits, opportunities for advancement and the overall nature of their work, as opposed to private agency workers who were more satisfied with their interactions and relationships with their co-workers and suggested that private agency workers reported a higher level of intent to leave, with the No. 1 indicator being their dissatisfaction with their level of pay (Auerback, McGowen, Ausberger, Strolin-Goltzman, & Schudrich, 2010).

In child welfare, the topic of resiliency in children and families is a large focus, though little attention is given to the need for resiliency in child welfare workers to ensure their longevity and support a healthy work life balance.

We want youth to experience positive relationships with peers and adults who foster their positive development. In addition, we want youth to have opportunities for development of skills and competencies, thereby increasing their likelihood of success.

For individuals, resiliency is the ability of individuals to do well despite facing adversity in their lives. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance can be a key element for child welfare case managers in their ability to be resilient. Employees have to juggle numerous elements of their personal and professional lives to meet the needs and requirements of both, while retaining their own efforts toward personal goals.

However, at the core of an effective work-life balance definition are two key everyday concepts that are relevant to each of us. They are: 1) achievement and 2) enjoyment. Yet, the concepts are almost deceptive in their simplicity. Achievement and enjoyment answer the big question "Why?"

Why do you want ... a better income ... a new house ... the kids to go through college ... to do a good job today ... to come to work at all?

Most of us already have a good grasp on the meaning of achievement. But let's explore the concept of enjoyment a little more. As part of a relevant work-life balance definition, enjoyment does not just mean "ha-ha" happiness. It means pride, satisfaction, happiness, celebration, love, a sense of well being ... all the joys of living.

Meaningful daily achievement and enjoyment apply in each of the primary four life quadrants: work, family, friends and self. Achievement and enjoyment are the front and back of the coin of value in life. You can't have one without the other, no more than you can have a coin with only one side. Trying to live a one-sided life is why so many "successful" people are not happy or not nearly as happy as they should be.

You cannot get the full value from life without both achievement and enjoyment. Focusing on them both everyday helps you avoid the "as soon as ..." trap, the life-dulling habit of planning to get around to the joys of life and accomplishment "as soon as. ..."

"Work-life effectiveness" is a term that some in the field have lobbied to use instead of work-life balance. The belief is that senior executives will buy into the term more easily. But whether you call it work-life effectiveness, life-work effectiveness or work-life balance, being overly concerned with terminology is a mistake. While the perception may be that some higher-ups on the corporate ladder respond better to "effectiveness," studies have shown that "balance" is the more appealing term to the managers and individual contributors that work-life programs are designed to impact. Much more important than what you call your work-life program is what it achieves. Senior executives respond to results.

Past work-life programs have focused their strategy, often entirely, on "what the organization can do for the employee" in terms of policies, benefits and procedures. Great strides have been made in such areas as employee assistance programs, flexibility in the work place, and telecommuting. But many organizations have passed the point of diminishing returns in

Support and supervision

A cross-sectional study conducted by Travis and Mor Barak (2010) tested a theory-driven, conceptual model that assessed 359 child welfare workers, focusing on how or whether they voiced their concerns or displayed characteristics of disengaging psychologically, and those who chose to leave their jobs. Using path analysis results, they suggested that workers who felt they had more of a "voice" in the workplace and who used opportunities to speak up about their concerns were less likely to disengage psychologically. Further, findings suggest that workers who felt they received appropriate levels of support from their supervisor and the organization were less likely leave the job.

While the results indicate that active participation in and the ability to raise concerns and be involved in resolving an issue is important to retention, the impact of the level of supervision and support received remains an area that requires more analysis. What is it that workers perceive to be an appropriate level of support? Are there certain areas or tasks that workers feel they need additional guidance about from their supervisors?

Child welfare includes many responsibilities that change on a case-by-case basis, and the dependency case manager is expected to be an expert in all things related to the child. If workers feel

adding bells and whistles to programs of this type while doing nothing to teach employees to help themselves.

Changing the concept's name from work-life balance to work-life effectiveness does not help this problem – the only solution is to expand your program to include the other critical half of a successful work-life strategy: teaching employees to help themselves.

Whether you call it, the goals are the same:

- To immediately and consistently create more value and balance everyday for the individual.
- To drive personal commitment and accountability to the organization.
- To drive productivity.

We need to focus on the tools that are necessary to achieve the best results possible. By educating managers and employees with skills to help themselves create their own best life-work effectiveness, the employer can see breakthrough returns on investment and a lasting positive impact on the entire organization.

The Swedish American Health System's concierge service, noted above, is an example of innovative approaches. While implementing such a program in the field of child welfare would be a major stretch financially for most organizations, leaders must determine the true cost-benefit and whether it would offset their costs of employee turnover. Additionally, such employee-focused efforts may be subject to considerable public scrutiny based upon the use of limited state and federal funds that in the eyes of the public would not go to directly serving children. This leaves an opportunity for exploring grants to fund such an effort – however, most funders and donors prefer to see a more tangible effort that has a direct impact on children.

they are not receiving the support they need, another element enters the discussion of retention: Are supervisors receiving the appropriate amount of training and do they have the level of experience and expertise to fill a supervisory role?



The American Public Human Services Association (2005) suggests that retention is primarily based upon the quality of the relationship between workers and their direct supervisors. There are times when individuals are promoted to supervisory positions in child welfare based upon their knowledge of the system and its policies and procedures or because they have more seniority than their co-workers. However, these are not strong indicators that the person has quality supervisory, management and leadership skills, which makes the importance of quality supervisory training imperative to maintaining a strong workforce.

Training and education

Providing child welfare workers with appropriate and adequate training is a systematic element that has been looked at closely in several states. In Kentucky, the Public Child Welfare Certification Program has been assessed by 11 universities in partnership with Health and Family Services' Community-Based Services, Protection and Permanency Division. Workers who were participants in the certification program were twice as likely as non-certification participants to place children with relatives and adoptive homes instead of residential settings or emergency shelters. Certification participants were also more likely to have an established permanency goal in place. Individuals who did not complete the program were more likely to have children on their caseload with longer lengths of stay in care and subsequently more changes of placement between foster homes (Barbee et al., 2009).

In the same Kentucky statewide research, of the certification program graduates, 15 left the agency after a two-year period following completion. Workers cited the following reasons for leaving: inadequate supervision; unsupportive coworkers; and a stressful work environment because of bureaucracy, inadequate resources and insufficient time to fulfill the policy requirements for caseloads assigned to them. (Barbee et al., 2009)

Many states are currently making changes in training and certification requirements for child welfare workers. A shift from a compliance-based focus to a more competency-based approach has begun in several areas. Additionally, as turnover has been given more attention and agencies and states have begun to recognize the barriers to filling vacancies in a timely manner to keep caseloads at a manageable level, several states are evaluating the length of time versus the quality of the training provided to new hires.

Advancement opportunities

While not a large focus of existing research on child welfare worker retention, some case managers have cited lack of advancement opportunities as a reason for leaving or considering employment elsewhere (Westbrook, et al., 2006). Some expressed feelings of being underutilized, while others said their motivation to advance into leadership positions was stifled by the structure of the agency (Flower et al., 2005). While promotions result in change of case manager for an assigned youth, they also offer agencies the opportunity to build organizational knowledge through succession planning efforts.

Some child welfare agencies have used positions that exist between the level of the direct line staff and supervisors to either fill the role of a specialist position or to act as a lead worker or mentor for case managers. However, when budgets decrease, these are typically the first positions to be either eliminated or realigned.

Retention rates are also typically higher at the supervisory level. As a result, with fewer supervisors moving into alternate positions or exiting employment, the frequency of supervisory positions becoming available also limits the number of opportunities for workers.

Initial hiring process



Workers who say they signed on for the job initially because of their commitment to the mission of the agency were more satisfied and less inclined to leave. Researchers also indicate that there is a correlation of how the job is presented in interviews and orientation and whether the duties and responsibilities are what the worker expected to whether the worker chooses to remain with the agency (Chernesky & Israel, 2010).

This topic is receiving more attention in child welfare, because if the job of the case manager is sugar-coated in initial conversations, such as phone screens or interviews, when workers complete training and begin working as a case manager, they will soon see that reality is much different than what was presented to them when they completed training. This can cause a trust issue immediately

between the employee and the organization as well as the supervisor or manager who initially explained the job to them.

While supervisors may be afraid of scaring off potential employees, stories of experiences on the job that might be a deal breaker for candidates should be disclosed. Knowing that part of their job is to ensure that children are seen frequently in their home or place of residence, no matter what the hour of day, may affect their personal life schedule. And knowing that child welfare workers do sometimes have to go into roach-infested homes might serve as a self-select-out process for some applicants, which ultimately may save the agency the time and money it invests in a newly hired employee.

Faller et al. (2010) suggested that private child welfare agency workers were found to be more likely to have taken the job because it was the only job available. Public agency workers were more likely to have taken the job because of the pay, benefits, job security, opportunities for advancement and variety of tasks, resulting in lower turnover rates for public child welfare agencies. Overall, more than 80 percent of both public and private agency workers selected "to help children and families" as a reason to work in child welfare.

Burnout

MSW graduates in Pennsylvania who completed the Children's Organizational Climate Survey (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998), expressed responses that indicated the top three factors contributing to retention are job satisfaction, organizational commitment and cooperation. The top three factors believed by participants to be significant in determining their departure were emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and personal achievement (Cahalane, 2010).

Organizational culture and organizational climate are significant factors in determining intention to leave. Case managers have reported that incentives to reward achievements and the experience of emotional exhaustion were elements they consider significant factors in their level of commitment (Lee, Rehner, & Forster, 2010).

Additionally, data collected from public agency databases and a survey completed by 621 public child welfare employees across a mid-Atlantic state indicated that employees say stress caused by emotional exhaustion, role overload and role conflict contributed more than any other factors to job withdrawal, job search behavior and exit from the agency (Hopkins, Chen-Callow, Kim, & Hwang, 2010).

Case managers are tasked everyday with the duty to make decisions that are rationally thought-out and well informed. Regrettably, exhausting emotional investments, cultural differences, lack of information and wide ranges of alternative choices can compromise decision quality. Coupled with lack of support, control and autonomy, this causes some case managers to make hasty decisions and to set oversimplified goals for clients in an effort to avoid having to invest any more energy in finding the most appropriate route for the clients. This poor decision-making can affect a case manager's effectiveness and efficiency and even the client's fate (Proctor, 2002).

For example, a case manager must decide whether appropriate services are approved or denied; case are opened, continued or closed; and whether children are returned home, remain in alternative care or even adopted out to appropriate caregivers. Unfortunately, overwhelming stressors can overshadow these immense decisions on behalf of the clients and make surviving each day the main focus of a case manager instead of the services and personal attention a client truly needs to bring about lasting change and reunification.

The question then remains: Why do some case managers handle these stressors more effectively than other case managers?

The answer to this question seems to lay in the fortitude of individuals to handle stress and adapt to a stimulus known as coping (Rowe, 2006). Rowe pointed out that stress might not be a completely negative experience; in fact, the ability to handle a series of stressful events may help a person emerge more resilient or competent than a person who encounters less stress. The impact of stress on a person seems to depend on which type of coping technique he or she uses.

Problem-focused coping strategies, also known as active, control or engaging coping strategies, involve a direct,

constructive and active focus on solving the problem or stressful experience perceived as threatening, harmful or challenging while maintaining a positive view that a problem can be overcome (Jenaro et al., 2007; Rowe, 2006; Westbrook et al., 2006). According to several studies (Ellett, 2007; Ellis, & Ellett, 2006; Jenaro et al., 2007; Maslach, 2003; Maslach & Leiter, 1999; Van Voorhis & Hostetter, 2006; Rowe, 2006; Westbrook et al., 2006) this coping technique, linked to lower levels of burnout and higher levels of job satisfaction, is thought to be employed by individuals with:

- High levels of self-efficacy, a belief that they possess the abilities and skills necessary to effect a desired change and greater levels of hardiness.
- A belief that stress should be viewed as a challenge or learning experience from which to grow.
- Healthy lifestyle habits including exercise, healthy diets and less incidence of illness, all factors in the ability to resist the negative effects of stress.

According to Rowe (2006) and Wagner, Van Reyk and Spence (2001), people who employ active coping techniques demonstrate the following behaviors:

- They actively seek advice, assistance and support from within the work environment (supervisors, administrators and co-workers/peers) and within their extended social structure (spouses, significant others, friends and family members).
- They can separate personal and work responsibilities.
- They recognize the limits of personal interventions on overall outcomes.
- They leave work-related stress at work.
- They engage in stress-relieving activities.

Emotional exhaustion, also known as the stress dimension, and depersonalization and cynicism are thought to be reactions to high workloads and social conflict, which develop simultaneously. Reduced personal accomplishment, or inefficacy, on the other hand, is thought to develop because of a lack of resources to deal with the workload and social conflicts (Maslach, 2003). Several studies (Abu-Bader, 2000; Daley, 1979; Janero et al., 2007; Haj-Yahia et al., 2000; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Ogresta et al., 2008) have been able to show strong relationships linking stress, job satisfaction, burnout and turnover intentions.

According to Koeske, Kirk and Koeske (1993), burnout is very common because human service professionals work in a client-centered field, which requires emotional involvement with each family to facilitate the goal of positive change. Unfortunately, creating an emotional buy-in with clients can be very exhausting, especially if case managers start to bring their clients' stress into their own lives (Koeske et al., 1993). With this in mind, it is not surprising that past research has shown that the greater the level of the mental illness a client possesses, the higher the level of burnout their case manager may experience (Acker, 1999).

This is because case managers generally are able to derive success and progress with clients by gaining feedback and witnessing improvements in client lifestyles and processes.

Unfortunately, this is not the case when clients are severely mentally ill and less able to achieve steady progress because of regressive and inappropriate behaviors and slow or minimal improvements that are typical for clients with mental illness (Acker, 1999). This lack of feedback results in a sense of failure in case managers and burnout, which can manifest itself in increased absenteeism and turnover intentions and decreased morale (Abu-Bader, 2000).

Additional burnout manifestations, also linked to stress and low job satisfaction, can affect:

- Job performance through absenteeism, turnover intentions, actual turnover, lowered output, success at work, job satisfaction and commitment to the company.
- Physiological health through bouts of insomnia, flu symptoms, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, fatigue and increased use of alcohol and drugs.
- Psychological health through decreasing self-esteem, anxiety, depression, withdrawal behaviors, rigid adherence to rules, decreased attentiveness, decreased patience, increased tendency to fault the clients for their problems, relationship strains and problems, irritability, lack of cooperation, uncomfortable social climate, impaired cognition, memory and attention and pessimism and even poor decision making, all of which are known to affect client service (Abu-Bader, 2000; Arches, 1991; Jayaratne et al., 1986; Maslach, 2001; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; McGee, 1989; Rowe, 2006).

Employees who begin to show the signs of burnout, according to several studies (Borritz et al., 2006; Dollard et al., 2000; Jenaro et al., 2007; Ogresta et al., 2008; Maslach et al., 2001; Soderfeldt, Soderfeldt, & Warg, 1995), generally have high levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (cynicism) and job-related stress usually attributed to timelines, salaries, rewards and recognition, perceived fairness, job stability, social support at work, poor supervision, advancement opportunities, feedback, role conflicts, emotional demands, job autonomy, job challenge, role ambiguity, workload and control.

Salaries, benefits and compensation

Based upon data from 12 child welfare agencies, The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2006) reported a correlation between the salary of caseworkers and supervisors to the turnover rate, noting that agencies with higher salary levels where workers did not have to work overtime or be on-call had lower turnover. Suggesting that higher turnover rates lead to lack of efficiency in case planning and higher rates of maltreatment for children, its recommendation is that “given the cost of turnover, both financially and in human terms, an increased investment in staff resources could lead to better protection of children and perhaps save money in the long run.”

In 2008, the Florida Department of Children and Families Child Welfare Leadership Program developed an online satisfaction survey, designed for case managers and case management supervisors to address retention-related issues. Overall, 66 percent of participants reported that they are happy

With the knowledge that these areas of complaint exist, Leiter and Maslach (2001) and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) identified the following six areas of work life that are considered important for workers to avoid burnout: workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values – the known factors of job satisfaction. It is known, through previously reviewed literature, that less experienced, younger, single case managers with external loci of control, high levels of neuroticism, low levels of hardiness (emotional, passive or avoidant coping skills) and low self-esteem are at risk to have high levels of stress and burnout and low levels of job satisfaction. However, it is discord within the identified six areas of work life that are thought to push these individuals to a point where the only perceived sense of relief is leaving the position (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). It is important for organizations to address issues within these areas through improving quality supervision in order to reduce or prevent burnout whenever possible (Westbrook et al., 2006).

Unfortunately, most organizations still tend to blame employees for being burnt-out and attempt to change them by offering to allow them to change positions and by teaching behavior modification, self-efficacy building, stress-relieving and coping techniques even though burnout has been shown in numerous studies to be linked to organizations and situations, not the personal factors characteristics of the afflicted individuals. (Ellett, 2007; Gardner, Rose, Mason, Tyler, & Cushway, 2005; Koeske et al., 1993; Landsman, 2007; Leiter & Maslach, 2001; Maslach, 2003; Maslach & Leiter, 1999; Maslach et al., 2001; Morris, 2005; Rowe, 2006; Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001; Weaver, Chang, Clark, & Rhee, 2007)

Maslach (2003) points out that the paradox of using individual-focused strategies in lieu of organizational-focused strategies is due to the concepts of individual responsibility and causality, which assume that it is easier and cheaper to change a person versus an entire organization. Unfortunately, as the final step in the progression towards turnover shows, organizations are losing much more than they are saving when burnout leads to actual turnover.

with their work experience. However, the standout elements that had high levels of dissatisfaction were related to salary, advancement opportunities and the availability to receive overtime pay. Although 58 percent agreed that continuous training opportunities are available to staff, a significant 32 percent stated that training opportunities to increase their leadership skills were not offered.

The comments section of that study rendered interesting results as well. When the 579 participants were asked what would increase retention rates, the two highest answers were increased salary and decrease workloads, followed by 99 comments that stressed the need for increased appreciation and recognition in the workplace, and 40 comments that stressed the need for training for advancement opportunities. (Florida DCF Child Welfare Leadership Program, 2008).

Type of degree

In a study conducted by Strolin-Goltzman, Auerbach, McGowan, & McCarthy (2008), significant findings were noted on the correlation between type of educational degree, location and the existence of local incentives for employees. The study used ANOVA and logistic regression models. Findings indicate there were higher numbers of caseworkers with social work degrees in urban and suburban settings than in rural settings. Additionally, the study indicates a higher degree of intention to

leave within the rural and urban groups (63.1 percent and 60.4 percent, respectively) compared with less than 50 percent of suburban responders indicating this intention.

Another significant factor in retention is whether employees feel they are appropriately compensated for the amount of work they perform. Inadequate salaries and high workloads are common issues that often result in high turnover in the human service field (Westbrook, Ellis, & EILett, 2006).

Leadership and intrinsic motivation

Arguably the most important aspect of success for a child welfare organization is the understanding and sharing of the big picture that places all we do into one vision for everyone. However, the challenge for any organization is getting all of its employees to see this vision, especially considering the many cultural backgrounds that exist among an agency's employees.

Some employees are intrinsically motivated to perform quality work, and those individuals inject a strong work ethic into their roles and achievements. These individuals are often driven by the opportunity for choice and self-determination (Ivengar & Lepper, 1999). Others require assistance in

understanding their roles and what they are working toward besides a paycheck and benefits.

According to Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins (1989), individuals may at times work with a high level of efficiency and be committed to their organizations while at the same time performing behaviors that are inconsistent with the success of their organization. The case manager who must balance the wide variety of job responsibilities is often likely to inadvertently overlook certain tasks because of time constraints, stress levels or lack of guidance or training. However, if they are acting with a motivation to ensure the No. 1 priority of child safety, the achievement of individual and organizational goals will fall into place.

WORKPLACE RETENTION-BASED THEORIES TO CONSIDER

Job demand-control theory (also known as the job strain model)

The job demand-control theory (Karasek, 1979) focuses on the stressors or negative work characteristics and the psychosocial work factor of social support. It emphasizes the importance of decision latitude in helping workers deal with high job demands.

Job demands represent the psychological stressors in the work environment. These include factors such as interruption rate, time pressures, conflicting demands, reaction time required, pace of work, proportion of work performed under pressure, amount of work, degree of concentration and work slowdowns caused by the need to wait for others.

Decision latitude refers to employees' control over their tasks and how those tasks are executed. It consists of both skill

discretion and decision authority. Skill discretion describes the degree to which the job involves a variety of tasks, low levels of repetitiveness, occasions for creativity and opportunities to learn new things and develop special abilities. Decision authority describes both employees' ability to make decisions about their own jobs and their ability to influence their own work teams and more general company policies.

This theory or model has been often used to analyze how stressors in the workplace impact health-related outcomes and divides jobs into four categories: high-strain jobs, passive jobs, active jobs and low-strain jobs.

Balance theory

Developed by Michael J. Smith (1989), balance theory was designed to gain insight about job and organizational design, job stress, human factors and ergonomics from a qualitative approach. The primary outcomes of interest in the balance theory include job satisfaction, stress and worker health, safety and well-being (Carayon, 2009). Through discussions with employees, qualitative efforts have allowed employees to voice how they experience the psychosocial, cognitive and physical loads created by the work system and how it impacts them as individuals. Whereas job demand-control theory focuses

on stress, balance theory takes into consideration all of the elements of the workplace to which workers are exposed.

This theory categorizes the elements of the work system as:

- Individual.
- Tasks.
- Tools and techniques.
- Physical environment.
- Organizational conditions.

Empowerment theory

Some previous studies have focused on the personal factors that lead a worker to exit employment from an agency. However, one could argue that this approach views the worker as the source of the problem. An alternate approach to assessing retention issues is by using an ecological framework. This process begins with the understanding that the entire work environment impacts a worker's decision to stay or leave. It suggests that the problem of turnover in child welfare is rooted in the environment and its layers of systems that impact the worker.

General systems theory

General systems theory suggests that group systems strive to achieve four main tasks:

- Integration (working together).
- Pattern maintenance (adhering to policy and procedure).
- Goal attainment (task achievement).
- Adaptation (ability to adjust to change).

These tasks are achieved through:

- Group activities.
- Interactions and communication.
- Shared sentiments and emotional feelings.
- Norms about behavior within a group.

This theory supports the idea that things can change dynamically within an organization when change occurs in

Job embeddedness theory

Most of these models have focused on the factors related to employee dissatisfaction as the main approach to understanding and preventing turnover (T. W. Lee, Mitchell, Sablinsky, Burton, & Holtom, 2004). However, a recently advanced model – the job embeddedness model – focuses on the factors that make an individual more likely to stay in the job, in addition to those likely to make an employee leave.

According to Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, et al. (2001), Embeddedness suggests that there are numerous strands that connect an employee and his or her family in a social, psychological and financial web that includes work and non-work friends, groups, the community and the physical environment in which he or she lives.

Existing retention efforts

Aside from identifying elements that result in employee turnover, it is equally important to identify why workers are staying. As a result of research, case management agencies have implemented changes to increase retention rates. Many areas through the United States have successfully reduced the size of workers' caseloads in an effort to make the tasks of the job more manageable (Jacquet et al., 2007). Others have focused on the quality of training provided (Flower et al., 2005) as well as the quality of supervision and support that case managers receive (Child Welfare League of America, 2010).

Workers in agencies that experienced low turnover rates have reported high levels of support and appropriate levels

of supervision from their supervisors as well as a high sense of pride in the work they perform and the positive impact their work has (Potter et al., 2009). In using qualitative methods, researchers have been able to discuss effective accomplishments as well, focusing on the importance of:

any of these realms. In child welfare turnover, examples of this include when group members within the system are impacted when a worker leaves and when the functioning of the larger system is impacted by the workforce turnover.

In order to maintain the goal of child safety, the organization must offer the appropriate resources and rewards and must maintain an appropriate balance of these in order to maintain a balanced and functioning system. Unfortunately, as child welfare workers leave, new workers are hired to replace them who require training and experience that does not match that of the worker they've replaced. This explains some of the negative impact on the quality of service provided to children when case management changes.

Job embeddedness can be work-related (e.g., positive relationships with supervisor and coworkers, good health benefits) or non-work related (e.g., spouse works in the same area, parents live in the same community). These work and non-work domains can be further divided into three types of attachment – fit, links and sacrifice – thus forming six dimensions of job embeddedness.

These six dimensions are organization fit (fit with an organization), community fit (fit with a community), organization links (connections with people in the organization), community links (connections with people in the community), organization sacrifice (what the individual gives up when leaving the organization) and community sacrifice (what the individual gives up when leaving the community).

of supervision from their supervisors as well as a high sense of pride in the work they perform and the positive impact their work has (Potter et al., 2009). In using qualitative methods, researchers have been able to discuss effective accomplishments as well, focusing on the importance of:

- Streamlining the hiring process to minimize the impact of vacancies.
- Developing realistic job preview videos and accurate job descriptions.
- Enhancing training opportunities.
- Implementing rewards and recognition programs.
- Implementing alternative work schedules.

Streamlining the hiring process

Some agencies have taken a closer look at their hiring process to identify where opportunities for delays were and have begun to implement changes. One of the most efficient and effective forms of streamlining the hiring process is to participate in continual interviewing. Agencies often wait until positions are vacant to begin interviewing, resulting in a process that is always running behind and not meeting staffing needs.

When an employee submits a two-week notice, it can take a week for the job posting to run in the newspaper or on the Internet, another week to get the applicant in for an interview, and anywhere from two weeks to 30 days for an agency to receive the necessary background screen results. This means the job is unfilled for a considerable amount of time before the agency can even get the worker hired and into a training cycle and working in the field. Having a continual interviewing and hiring process allows agencies to be proactive in finding the right candidates and filling positions more quickly.

Developing realistic job previews

Organizations have become more attentive to the information they provide to prospective new hires. Many have begun using the terminology of realistic job previews (RJPs), which includes structured observations; meetings with current staff; videotapes, photograph albums or scrapbooks; booklets or brochures; web-based multimedia presentations; group job previews; and internships or volunteer programs.

The goal of realistic job previews is to present undistorted information to job applicants about the job and the organization before a job offer has been made. This means the organization should select the format that will best convey the information in the most affordable and practical manner, given current resources and needs. For small organizations, for example, it is recommended that a hybrid approach might combine an industry-specific, professionally produced videotape and a site-specific scrapbook.

Several states, including Nebraska, Delaware, Michigan, New York and North Carolina, have developed videos to provide a realistic job preview of the position of child welfare caseworker. Preliminary research from the Michigan video indicates that the realistic depiction of the job led about 10 percent of prospective recruits to abandon the application process, caused about 20 percent to give more intentional, honest thought to their ability to handle the challenges, and left 70 percent still interested and feeling better prepared (Robison, 2006).

Quality supervision includes understanding the responsibilities and demands of workers' jobs, fair distribution of workload among team members, flexibility, availability, active listening, respect for workers, providing a strong knowledge base of the job, setting high but attainable expectations, and providing instrumental and emotional support and praise. Positive leadership has been linked to outcomes such as employees reporting high

Another effort that many agencies have made is to shorten the delays that can be experienced waiting for background screening results. In the past, the most agencies sent applicants to the local police or sheriff's department for fingerprinting, which would process local, state and federal background screening. The results of all those checks went back to the department that did the fingerprinting, which finally would send the results to the child welfare agency. Only after that could the applicant be determined for eligible for hire.

Many agencies have developed working relationships with local law enforcement agencies that allow them to fingerprint the applicant on site at the time of the interview and hand-deliver the prints to law enforcement. In many cases, if prints are "walked-in," they receive same-day results for local law checks. Some agencies also have purchased a live scan fingerprint machine that processes prints electronically, sends them electronically to state and federal law enforcement agencies for screens and have received results at a much fast rate (anywhere from within two days of electronic submission to two weeks).

levels of positive interpersonal working relationships, teamwork, retention, better health and well-being (Schoo, 2008).

Such information should be an eye opener for managers when considering the level of training they are providing to their supervisors. Managers may convey mission and values, but it is supervisors who are in daily contact with their teams. Therefore, employee retention may increase when a supervisor supports a motive to change and shares the vision or bigger picture of the organization.

Quality supervision does not have to occur solely in a one-on-one supervision format. Group supervision or all-staff meetings also allow an opportunity for support, communication, leadership and teamwork. Some organizations have developed meetings that allow workers to share the good things that happen each month as well as discussion of what resources may be lacking to adequately meet the needs of their job requirements (Fessele, 2008). Innovative meetings such as these offer an opportunity for workers to increase their sense of team and maintain a vested interest in the success of the organization as well as their personal success.

Workers also report that their own likelihood to remain with their current employer is a result of opportunities for advancement and ability to transfer into alternate areas or programs to learn and participate in other elements of their field. As noted earlier in this course, successful managers often employ a strategy that includes asking their staff regularly about their career aspirations and plans to achieve them, and then assigning them specialized roles, special projects and opportunities for advanced training to further develop their skills (Gillham & Ristevski, 2007). However, it is then important for organizations to offer opportunities for official advancement into specific promotional positions. While this is a goal for many managers, budget and structure issues can create a barrier, which in turn works against them in effort of retention.

We must remember, though, that many workers express a sense of reward from the work they do, a level of altruism, obligation to help others and personal commitment to their line of work. It

is possible that organizations can tap into these already existing factors to support retention by using certain tools and techniques.

Enhanced training opportunities

Some past research has proposed that employees who are able to use the full breadth of their knowledge and skills while the dealing with the specific responsibilities they must fulfill to work with their clients are the most likely to be satisfied with their jobs. Another study's finding revealed that autonomy – the ability to make decisions without micromanaging – and freedom from bureaucratic red tape and funding and budget-focused decisions are the best predictors of increased job satisfaction and decreased burnout (Arches, 1991).

In addition to indicating that autonomy and control are predictors of job satisfaction, Wagner et al. (2001) found that direct work with clients was also considered a significant predictor.

Lambert, Cluse-Tolar, Pasupuleti, Hall and Jenkins (2005) claimed that the most significant predictors of job satisfaction within their study were procedural justice – defined as processes and procedures that determine the rewards and punishments employees will receive depending upon their behaviors – and distributive justice, defined as fairness of the allocation of actual rewards and punishments received by each employee.

Training for those in leadership roles as well as employees is another method of ensuring that workers on all levels feel confident in their job duties. Leadership is the consistent factor as a prerequisite to change in the workplace (Wolfson et al., 2009). Further, while the process of inductive reasoning is beneficial for managers attempting to address issues in the workplace, it also is important within the training process itself, and can lead to increased fluid intelligence performance and better learning of the training material.

Another element of training that may lead to increased retention rates is the process of mentoring. In addition to quality supervision, peer mentoring by coworkers helps with new staff development and promotes social networking within the agency. It also offers an opportunity for the mentor to feel an increased sense of self-worth and accomplishment, taking responsibility for another's learning process and sharing in his or her accomplishments. (Hartje et al., 2007). This process also fosters a sense of community within the inner circle team or unit and can then affect the outer circle, encompassing the entire agency with a team-based approach (Moseley & Paterson, 2008).

Recognition and rewards

Recognition in the workplace has also been linked to increased retention. Organizations typically spend a lot of money on the quality assurance of systems and structure, with a focus on policy and procedure and little to no money on the quality assurance of relationships within the workplace. Bonuses and monetary incentives based on achievement of outcome measures are viewed positively by child welfare workers. While this is a possibility for some agencies, budgetary constraints experienced by other agencies truly makes this a difficult option.

Recognition of the worker or team can be accomplished in non-monetary ways and can be delivered on an individual basis or in a large group setting. With the advancements of technology, many organizations send messages of recognition by e-mail. Other agencies take an even more personal approach to recognition. An example is sending a hand-written note of thanks to the employee at home and another one to the person's supervisor. Some agencies have incorporated certain recognition programs such as "FISH!" which focuses on having fun in the workplace and making someone's day.

Some additional examples of recognition in various forms include:

- Large employee appreciation events and activities:
 - Employee appreciation week.
 - Employee picnics.
 - Employee group activities (bowling, movie night, sports teams, for example).
- Official recognitions:
 - Awards and certificates.
 - Acknowledgement letters.
 - Public recognition in team meetings or all staff meetings.
- The "little" things that matter:
 - Kudos e-mails.
 - Thank-you notes – even on a sticky note!
 - Taking a personal interest in your employee.
 - Reducing stress with humor.
 - Giving compliments.

Alternative work schedules

Historically, child welfare agencies have wanted their case managers to either be in the field seeing and interacting with children and families, in court proceedings, or in the office so that they are available to assist in daily operations as well as complete their necessary documentation. However, with the advancement of technology, many case managers operate with laptop computers with air card Internet connections and cell

phones that carry data plans so they are accessible by phone and e-mail at any time of the day. This has allowed agencies to implement either full or some form of telecommuting. For some, it has benefitted the agency in cost of office space. For case managers, it has allowed more flexibility to maintain their own work-life balance.

This process works when an organization is able to let go of the ways of the past and step outside of its comfort zone to trust that workers are truly working their minimum number of required hours. It also involves the need to monitor workers' performance based on productivity displayed and deadlines met in addition to the quality of work performance. However, in many cases, this type of monitoring is already occurring both outside and within the office building.

Deductive and inductive reasoning in employee retention efforts

The impact of employee turnover is most noticeable in its effects on children and child welfare case managers. But it also is an issue that managers and leadership of agencies must face and act upon, often with difficult decisions.

Managers often rely on data and trends reports from quality assurance specialists in the workplace to obtain knowledge on the areas of focus for the agency. Through data collection, often in the form of employee satisfaction surveys and exit interviews, managers can look at retention issues in what could be considered a snapshot in time. They can view elements that are important to them as well as elements that appear to be important to the people they employ.

Once a manager is in possession of such a report, he or she is faced with the task of determining what to do with this information. It is one thing to view the data, another to be aware of the issues within the work environment, and yet another thing to take that information and implement a functional effort to counter any negative elements that may be driving employees away.

Through this process, managers may find themselves working their way through cognitive practices known as deductive and inductive reasoning.

What is deductive reasoning?

Deductive reasoning is commonly referred to as the process of reasoning that takes place when one or more generalized

Strategy and decision-making

The perceptual process of staff retention issues takes managers through both deductive and inductive reasoning. Managers can easily interpret stimuli, attention, selection, organization, interpretation, retrieval and behavior differently, leading to different perceptions and results. During the process, managers must sift between the concepts of clarifying meaning versus making meaning from the information they are given and perceived observations (Horton, 2009).

Interpretation of data and the processes of reasoning and decision-making all play a significant role in how managers develop strategy and are fundamental to strategic management. But strategy research has provided surprisingly few answers on how to best approach this process, leaving us with an imperfect understanding of how to make this a functional process on the micro-level for organizations that differ from one another in many ways.

In addition, culture plays a significant role as well in the direction that managers take in the reasoning process. According to Grosse and Simpson (2007), Anglo-American managers tend to be

Overall, the awareness of issues within the child welfare system has helped those in leadership positions implement change to impact the concern of turnover, though managers often struggle to execute what they believe to be best practice for retention efforts because of limited funding and resources (Westbrook et al., 2006), which leaves a perception that more efforts can still be made.

statements of information are used to reach a logical conclusion (Ayalon & Even 2008). This process is based upon logical propositions, often used to categorize people, principles or rules.

What is inductive reasoning?

Inductive reasoning is considered the process of reasoning where specific facts or observations are used to reach a likely conclusion that may explain the facts (Klauer & Phye, 2008). This is often seen as the cause-and-effect form of reasoning. But it is not without perils. For example, a person may see that all of her coworkers in the field of child welfare are female. Further, the person observes that each of these workers has a cell phone. Using inductive reasoning, the person may conclude that if someone works in the child welfare field, that person must be a female who likes talking on a cell phone. This conclusion, however, is incorrect, because it uses observations of a limited sample and makes an incorrect inference that "if A, then B." This kind of reasoning is commonly seen in hypothesis testing and can only provide a probable conclusion.

Managers may be aware that workload, stress or burnout exist in the workplace, but struggle with formulating answers or strategies to battle the impact these issues have on their workers. Therefore, the process of awareness, reasoning and decision-making become a major factor for managers and workers alike. As managers, if we don't know what we don't know, it is difficult to formulate any type of logical conclusion to help develop functional procedures to combat employee turnover.

more action-oriented, while Latin American managers tend to be reflection-oriented in their problem-solving styles.

A manager who uses deductive reasoning to address employee retention issues is likely to use existing statements of knowledge and the categorization of employees to reach a certain conclusion. For example, this type of manager may be more likely to approach an issue or barrier to effective retention from his or her internal sense of the issue as it affects supervisors, versus what that issue truly means to direct line staff.

Managers who use inductive reasoning to understand and address retention might observe that their employees are unhappy at certain critical junctures of employment, such as when deadlines for when reports or projects are due. If the organization experiences staff turnover just following such deadlines, the manager may infer that because of the increased stress levels from the lack of time management or demands of the project, people want to eliminate this stress in their lives by seeking out alternate employment.

Future steps

Currently, there is a gap in the research on the topic, because very few studies have focused on the qualitative exploration and discussion of case manager retention. Both the population and the significant factors of previous research have often been condensed into larger and broader-scope categories with little attention given to the actual comments and concerns of case managers who reflect what they are truly experiencing.

While it is important that we understand that case manager turnover is related to stress, workload and overall job satisfaction, agencies should consider exploring what it is about the role of case managers that contributes to their level of stress and job satisfaction, what elements of their responsibilities contribute to their workload, and how they think those elements will affect their length of employment in their current position.

Child welfare agencies may benefit from conducting focus groups that use open-ended questions, allowing case managers the opportunity to answer questions in detail about their work experience, instead of using a traditional Likert-scale satisfaction survey.

Some qualitative questions to consider:

- “Are there elements of the job or agency that you feel contribute to retention of case managers?”
- “What elements (both positive and negative) of your own level of job satisfaction may affect your intent to remain in or leave your current role?”

Limiting the negative impact of turnover on children and families

While the NASW Code of Ethics states that “social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients,” the effects of workforce turnover can greatly impact some aspects of the expectation.

The following suggestions for case managers, child welfare trainers, and local and state administrators may improve youth and family engagement and the development of working relationships that can facilitate systems change:

- Child welfare workers can develop case plans with their clients, solicit their clients’ opinions and perceptions on what services would be most appropriate, be honest with them about their options, and provide them with support to independently make important life decisions.

Summary

A national average length of employment of two years for case managers working in the field of child welfare combined with the negative effects of worker turnover on quality services and timely outcomes for children involved in the system makes it imperative that child welfare agencies take a closer look at what is affecting their turnover and retention rates.

Child welfare systems work differently from state to state and sometimes county by county. Some agencies providing case management services are run by the state or county operations

- “How do elements of work-related requirements or the structure of the work environment affect your personal life?”
- “How do certain elements of the job contribute to your level of stress, burnout or compassion fatigue?”
- “How do you feel the manner in which the job was presented to you during the initial hiring process has affected your work experience?”
- “How does your assigned caseload size affect your perception of longevity in your current position, and what do you feel is a manageable number of children to be assigned?”

Additional consideration should be given to the element of on-call responsibilities. Because this often is organizational based within the system of care or government entity overseeing child welfare, this discussion may need to involve several parties to truly implement any form of change in contractual expectations. However, some research has shown the impact of on-call responsibilities on the retention of case managers as well as other on other elements of workers’ lives, such as the work-life balance (effectiveness). Given that, on-call and after-hours responsibilities are areas that deserve more focus.

A stronger understanding of these elements, including more detailed knowledge and understanding of existing employee experiences, perceptions and interpretations, may help agencies with their retention efforts, hiring processes and ultimately, may result in higher retention rates for dependency case managers.

- Child welfare trainers can use youth as resources to facilitate training in youth culture.
- Administrators at the state and local levels can solicit youths’ opinions on the causes of and solutions to system-wide problems.
- Local agencies can seek the participation of youth during the selection and recruitment of child welfare case managers.
- Social work researchers can collaborate with foster care youth leaders to develop participatory research designs that investigate the effects of workforce retention on other measures of child well-being, such as permanency, bonding and educational goals and achievement.

and others are privately managed. Benefits, salaries, training, support and supervision procedures may vary as a result.

Further, the individual systems of care vary because of judges and legal systems and the family supportive resources available within the area. Some agencies require workers to rotate on-call responsibilities, while others contract separate on-call providers for after-hour emergencies. Each of these elements offers a variety of experiences for child welfare workers in any given area, resulting in retention studies with varying findings. This makes it difficult for agencies to consider any best practices for

implementation, because what might work for one agency in one area might not render the same results in another.

What's important is that child welfare agencies explore their own work environments, culture, and climate and identify both why workers are leaving and why workers are staying. However, because common themes have emerged over the years, it is important for leaders to be aware of what information is already out there and can be used as a foundation for ensuring a functional and stable child welfare system.

All child welfare agencies have an external focus in their mission to provide the safety, permanence and well-being of children. Most also recognize that this mission cannot be achieved in the absence of a committed and qualified workforce. However, few organizations have recognized the critical importance of strategic human resource management and elevated it to the level of the agency mission. In fact, to be successful, any organization needs to recognize the importance of balancing two purposes: the external or service mission of the organization and the internal purpose related to the human resource management or maintenance of the organization.

The goals of strategic human resource management are to:

- Balance organizational realities and personal needs of employees.
- Link individual's professional goals and competences to the organization's mission and goals.
- Make human resource concerns part of the strategy formulation, implementation and feedback processes (Miner & Crane, 1995).

Lastly, while it's important to understand what elements can impact retention and to implement change that keeps workers satisfied with their role of helping children and families, it's important to first find the right fit for the position.

There are many resources available to identify the competencies of child welfare caseworkers. Job analysis provides necessary

but insufficient information in deciding whether an applicant is best qualified for the job in question. Competency-based recruiting systems stress the need to identify competencies that are most likely to predict long-term success on the job and that are difficult to develop through either training or experience. Spenser & Spenser (1993) capture this basic human resource management concept in their advice: "You can teach a turkey to climb a tree, but it's easier to hire a squirrel."

Berman and Motowidlo (1992) further argue that selection criteria should embrace a domain of organizational behavior broader than just tasks. They also should include contextual activities, such as pro-social organizational behavior including putting in extra effort on the job, persistence, cooperation with others, following organizational rules and procedures, and supporting organizational objectives.

The potential for positive social change implications from additional qualitative research and internal agency reviews is possible from both the professional application and literary contributions within the field of child welfare.

Additional qualitative research and internal agency reviews will offer child welfare leaders additional insight into the perceptions of case managers, which they may use to improve the work environment for their staff and thus potentially decrease employee turnover. In turn, doing so could decrease the costs of turnover; improve performance outcomes involving the safety, well-being and permanency for children involved in the dependency system; and improve other job elements that could make the position itself more attractive to quality workers.

The hope is that those who are good at and enjoy their jobs will see longevity in the position as a positive. With employees who have longer lengths of employment, more years of experience in the field and more effective skills developed through training, the organization benefits by increasing its organizational knowledge, strategic planning, succession planning and advancements in quality assurance efforts.

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ASSESSING ELEMENTS OF EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN CHILD WELFARE

Final Examination Questions

Select the best answer for each question and then proceed to SocialWork.EliteCME.com to complete your final examination.

- When a child welfare case manager resigns and a new worker is assigned, it results in:
 - An average of 6-month delay to achieve permanency for the child.
 - Another loss and additional trauma for the child.
 - Delays and lost knowledge of educational, medical, dental and mental health needs.
 - All of the above.
- The primary reason child welfare workers resign from their position is:
 - Salary.
 - Lack of advancement opportunities.
 - Stress.
 - Lack of support and supervision.
- The workforce retention theory that focuses on why workers stay rather than why they leave is the:
 - Job demand-control theory.
 - Balance theory.
 - Empowerment theory.
 - Job embeddedness theory.
- Existing retention efforts include all of the following EXCEPT :
 - Streamlining the hiring process.
 - Developing realistic job previews.
 - Banning alternative schedules.
 - Implementing rewards and recognition programs.
- The national average for length of employment for a child welfare case manager is:
 - One year.
 - Two years.
 - Three years.
 - Five years.

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