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Organizational Leadership and Its Impact On Social Workers’ Job Satisfaction: A National Study

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ABSTRACT. This article reports the results of a national study focusing on leader behavior and job satisfaction of BSW and MSW social workers employed in social service agencies. A stratified, systematic, randomly selected sample of 2,500 social workers who are members of NASW in the United States was surveyed through the use of a mailed questionnaire. The final sample was composed of 833 practicing MSW and BSW social workers. A key finding is that organizational leadership impacts job satisfaction. Academic programs need to expand their curricula to address leadership development and offer separate courses on leadership to prepare students for organizational leadership roles.

KEYWORDS. Organizational leadership, social work leadership, social work job satisfaction
INTRODUCTION

The current trend in leadership theory appears to be shifting from leadership by management to leadership by empowerment, with the intent of creating workplaces of learning that foster dignity and respect (Lu, 2004; Kotter, 1990; Senge, 1990; Weisbord, 1987). Most of the current leadership materials discuss the importance of leadership in the workplace. However, research on the impact that organizational leadership has on the employees in the workplace and their job satisfaction is minimal. Nevertheless, leaders play a significant role in the workplace and can have a powerful effect on the way an organization operates. It is also clear that leaders are often unaware of how their leadership practices impact employees and the organization as a whole.

Despite current trends in the development of worker empowerment, many workers are unhappy with their jobs and workplaces. This unhappiness occurs in the profession of social work as well as other professions. Because of the stressful type of work they perform, social workers are candidates for burnout or emotional exhaustion, which has often been associated with job dissatisfaction (Arches, 1991; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Siefert, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1991; Söderfeldt, Söderfeldt, & Warg, 1995). Past studies linked the lack of job satisfaction to occupational stress, potential burnout, retention of employees, absenteeism, job productivity, and organizational commitment, but the behavior of employees’ leaders can also have a large effect (Butler, 1990; Butler & Cantrell, 1997; Koeske & Koeske, 1989; Packard & Kauppi, 1999; Storey & Billingham, 2001; Um & Harrison; 1998; Vinokur-Kaplan, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1994). This study examines the impact of leader behavior on employees’ job satisfaction.

Organizational Leadership

Whether or not the term leadership is distinct from management, the literature on leadership suggests a variety of definitions of leaders (Bass, 1990; Clark, Clark, & Campbell, 1992; Yukl, 1998, 2002), depending on the goals and purpose of the research. In this study, leadership will be used to include behavior, personal traits, roles, relationships, interaction patterns, follower perceptions, and influence on organizational culture and goals (Judge et al., 2002; Kleinman, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 1990; Northouse, 2004; Prentice, 2004; Yukl, 1998, 2002).

When an employee enters the workplace, that employee has an expectation and perception of his or her supervisor and the leadership
characteristics that individual demonstrates. Often one’s perception after some experience no longer correlates with one’s original expectation. In their research on what characteristics employees expect and admire in leaders, Kouzes and Posner (1987, 1995) interviewed managers throughout the country asking what characteristics they wanted and admired in their leaders. A content analysis of the 225 values or traits identified as the most important were being honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 22). Although a person’s overall happiness in life cannot be the responsibility of one’s employer, a leader’s behavior in the workplace can contribute to an employee’s job satisfaction. According to Kouzes and Posner (1990), “Successful leadership depends far more upon the follower’s perception of the leader’s abilities than upon the leader’s own perception” (p. 29). In summarizing her review of the literature on leadership, McNeese-Smith (1991) concluded that leadership is a crucial component in creating productive organizations as well as in satisfying the needs of employees. As employees’ needs are addressed and met, productivity may improve as a result of enhanced employee commitment. In short, leader behavior can influence employee job satisfaction.

**Impact of Leader Behavior on Employee Job Satisfaction**

Most surveys on job stress, morale, and burnout have included some measure of job satisfaction (Koeske et al., 1994). Studies in the area of burnout among social workers indicate that factors in the organization that contribute to burnout include a low degree of social support, autonomy, role confusion, challenge, value conflict, and depersonalization (Arches, 1991; Koeske & Koeske, 1989; Siefert, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1991; Söderfeldt, Söderfeldt, & Warg, 1995; Um & Harrison, 1998).

Although the research findings are inconsistent regarding the correlation between supervisors’ leader behavior and employees’ job satisfaction, studies continue to examine the impact leadership has on workers’ job satisfaction (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Ironson et al., 1989). The workplace issues found to be impacted by leadership were work motivation, organizational commitment, productivity, and job satisfaction.

Because research in this area is inconclusive and contradictory, it is difficult to determine a causal effect between leadership and job satisfaction. Nevertheless, studies have indicated a relationship between leadership, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Gellis, 2001; Glisson, 1989; Kays, 1993; Malka, 1989; Packard, 1989).
For social workers, a supervisor’s demonstration of the transformational leadership style with participatory decision-making was associated with employees’ organizational performance, commitment, and job satisfaction (Fuller et al., 1999; Gellis, 2001; Mary, 2005). Studies conducted with human service agencies were based on specific work settings, types of work, workloads, and clientele. Social workers’ concerns and issues of job satisfaction may differ from those of employees in other agencies. Nevertheless, there appears to be a general conclusion that leadership is a key factor in organizations and can impact employees’ job satisfaction. Given these issues, this study attempts to address two important questions related to leadership in human service organizations: (1) Is there a difference between social workers’ expectations of their supervisor’s leadership behavior and their perceptions of their supervisor’s actual leadership behavior, and (2) does the difference between what social workers expect from their leaders’ behavior and the perceived leaders’ actual behavior affect job satisfaction?

**METHODS**

**Sample**

A quantitative descriptive survey was used to assess social workers’ expectations and perceptions of leader behavior and job satisfaction. The research methodology was approved to be appropriate for human subjects by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Southern Indiana and Spalding University.

A stratified, systematic, randomly selected sample of 2,500 social workers in the United States was surveyed using a mailed questionnaire. The initial mailing included the questionnaire, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, and a return envelope with address and stamp. A reminder postcard followed two weeks later. The sample was stratified based on state of residence, gender, area of practice (clinical practice, administration, supervision, or other) and academic degree. Only MSW and BSW social workers were selected for the sample. The stratification ensured all states were represented and the appropriate proportions for gender, area of practice, and academic degrees were represented. The 1999 membership list of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), which is the primary professional organization for social workers, was used to draw the sample. Eight hundred and thirty-three
Individuals returned the survey for a response rate of 33%: a) 22.5% (n = 164) were males, and 77.5% (n = 564) were females; b) 1.8% were BSWs, 91.5% MSWs, and 6.7% designated themselves as “other”; c) 90.1% were Caucasian, 4.4% African American, 1.5% Asian, and 4.0% were from other ethnic backgrounds. Overall, the sample represented in this study was very similar to the demographics of the total membership of the National Association of Social Workers, which consists of 79% females and 21% males. With regards to nationality, the total membership of the NASW is 89% Caucasian. With regards to academic degree, the total membership of the NASW consists of 91% MSW and 3% BSW (O’Neil, 2001).

**Instruments**

Social workers’ expectation of leader behavior and perception of leadership behavior in the workplace were measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)-Observer (Kouzes & Posner, 1997a, 1997b). The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)-Observer consists of 30 statements that use a 10-point frequency scale, ranging from 1 (almost never) to 10 (almost always). The 30 statements describe leadership behaviors and are categorized into the five leadership practices of challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. Each of the five practices encompasses six statements from the 30-item inventory.

Kouzes and Posner (1997a, 1997b) report the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)-Observer is internally reliable, with each of the six statements in the various practice categories highly correlated with each other. The LPI has face and predictive validity, meaning that the results are significantly correlated with various performance measures and can be used to make predictions about leadership effectiveness (Kouzes & Posner, 1997b, p.7). In addition, each of the five scales or leadership practices is statistically independent and measure five different practices. Since Kouzes and Posner developed and validated the LPI using samples from the business world, we decided to conduct an exploratory factor analysis to determine if a five factor (scale) model was appropriate for the sample of social work professionals used for this study. A principal components procedure was used to extract the initial factors, and this was followed by a promax rotation to identify the final factors. This process did not confirm a five-factor model for the LPI. The initial results suggested that there were three factors, but the review of the correlations
(.70 to .73) between the three factors suggested that the LPI may only be one factor scale, as is suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). The internal consistency reliability coefficient for this single factor was a very respectable .977. The one-factor LPI was used in the data analysis for this study.

Social workers’ job satisfaction was measured using the Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS) developed by Koeske et al. (1994). The Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS) consists of 16 items measured on an 11-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 11 (very satisfied). Koeske et al. (1994) report that the 16 job satisfaction items have a three-factor structure that reflects the intrinsic qualities of the work role, satisfaction with supervision and agency operation, and the extrinsic elements of promotion and salary. They report the overall Job Satisfaction Scale’s reliability has ranged from .83 to .91 in various studies. They note the subscales of the JSS reliabilities have ranged from .78 to .90 (p. 27).

In this study an additional question “on satisfaction with leadership behavior of one’s supervisor” was added as part of the job satisfaction instrument. Although the Job Satisfaction Scale is concerned with aspects of one’s job other than a leader’s behavior, it is important to this study to recognize leader behavior as possibly contributing to job satisfaction and therefore this additional item was added.

As with the LPI, a factor analysis was done to confirm the factorial structure based on our respondents. The principal components method was again used to extract the initial factors, and this was followed by a promax rotation to identify the final factors in the now 17-item scale. These analyses confirmed that there were three factors present in the scale and that they were identical to those reported by Koeske et al. (1994). We also found that only three items from the JSS loaded on the final factor, and the reliability for this three-item scale was .59. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) suggest that a three-item factor that has low reliability should not be retained as a factor. Based on this recommendation, an additional factor analysis was done, forcing a two-factor model. The results of this factor analysis confirmed the data could accommodate a two-factor model with all items having loadings of .35 or above. The items from the third factor identified in the initial analysis loaded on the first factor in the subsequent analysis. This factor had 11 items and was reflective of the content noted in Koeske et al.’s (1994) subscale that addressed satisfaction with supervision and agency operations. The second six-item factor was reflective of their subscale, which addressed the intrinsic qualities of a worker’s job satisfaction. This includes issues such
as the “opportunity to help people” and the “ability to work with clients.” The reliability coefficient for the full JSS was found to be .90. The newly created 11-item subscale addressing supervision and agency operations had a reliability of .88, and the intrinsic subscale’s reliability was .86. This revised JSS was used in the data analyses in this study.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-14), a software package used for behavioral research. Paired t-tests and Pearson correlations were used to test the various research questions. The effect sizes were also computed to highlight the magnitude of differences between the expected and actual leadership behaviors. Due to the multiple statistical tests, a Bonferroni corrected p value of .003 was used for the study. This was done to reduce the likelihood that any statistical differences that were found were due to chance.

**RESULTS**

The questions addressed in this research were: (1) Is there a difference between social workers’ expectations of their supervisor’s leadership behaviors and their perceptions of their supervisor’s actual leadership behaviors, and (2) does that difference affect social workers’ job satisfaction?

**Leadership Behavior Reflected in Survey**

As noted previously, social workers’ expectation of leader behavior and perception of leadership behavior in the workplace were measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)-Observer (Kouzes & Posner, 1997a, 1997b). To determine the applicability of the leadership instrument used in the study for social workers, the respondents were asked whether the scale addressed the leadership behaviors of their supervisor. Ninety point four percent (N = 576) of the respondents indicated that the scale reflected the leadership behavior of their supervisor.

**Research Question 1**

Is there a difference between social workers’ ideal expectations and their perceptions of leaders’ actual behavior?
Utilizing the LPI instrument, the respondents were asked to assess the expected and perceived leadership behaviors of their supervisors in the workplace. These data were collected by having the respondent completing the LPI two times, once to indicate how they expected their leader to perform and again for how they perceived their leader to perform in reference to the 30 items on the scale.

A paired, two-tailed t-test was used to ascertain if there was a statistical difference between what the respondents ideally expect from their supervisors and what the respondents perceived as actual leadership behaviors in the workplace. The t-tested results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the expected and perceived scores. Respondents’ reported statistically higher expected scores on the LPI (M = 256.62, SD = 30.28) than their reports of the actual leadership scores for supervisors (M = 190.84, SD = 59.43), t(618) = 27.25, p = .000 (two-tailed test).

The t-test analysis was followed with a computation of a Cohen’s d effect size to help determine the magnitude of the difference between the expected and actual leadership scores. The effect size for the differences between the mean scores was 1.40, which is based on Cohen’s (1988) standard.

**Research Question 2**

Does the difference between what social workers expect from their leaders’ behavior and the perceived leaders’ actual behavior affect job satisfaction?

As noted above, an additional question, leadership behavior of supervisor, was added as part of the Job Satisfaction Scale with permission of the scale authors. The respondents rated each of the 16 items of the Job Satisfaction Scale as to how it pertained to aspects of their work, including the added item of their supervisor’s leadership behavior.

The revised Job Satisfaction Scale items measure the dimensions of intrinsic qualities of the work role, such as working with clients, opportunities for helping people, and feelings of success as a professional, and organizational dimensions including quality of supervision, amount of authority given to do their job, and clarity of guidelines for doing their job. The respondents had higher mean scores for job satisfaction items regarding the intrinsic factors than for the organizational factor items, except for the organizational dimension of the amount of authority given to do a job.
Scores for each of the items of the Job Satisfaction Scale were analyzed (Table 1) to determine respondent’s level of satisfaction on the 16 items as well as the added dimension of the leadership behavior of their supervisor. The mean scores could range from 1, “very dissatisfied”, to 11, meaning “very satisfied.” Of all the items in the Job Satisfaction Scale, the respondents had the highest satisfaction with “working with their clients” (M = 9.06). The next highest areas of job satisfaction were satisfaction with their field of specialization (M = 8.98), opportunities for helping people (M = 8.77), amount of client contact (M = 8.56), challenge of their job (M = 8.12), success as a social worker (M = 8.68), and relationship with fellow workers (M = 8.51). The lowest scores, indicating areas of dissatisfaction, were opportunities for promotion (M = 5.30) and program funding (M = 5.82). The respondents’ mean scores for areas pertaining to leadership behavior, quality of supervision, and recognition by the supervisor ranged from 6.06 to 6.83. Respondents had similar mean scores for salary and benefits (M = 6.93), and clarity of guidelines for their jobs (M = 6.95). The respondents were a little more satisfied with opportunities for acquiring new skills (M = 7.26) and involvement in decision-making (M = 7.29), but were not as satisfied as they were with their identities as professionals who work with clients (M = 9.06).

**TABLE 1. Job satisfaction of respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M*</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with Clients</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>9.06</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field of specialization you are in</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your feeling of success as a social worker</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>8.68</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for really helping people</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of client contact</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>8.56</td>
<td>2.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of authority you have been given to do your job.</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal relations with fellow workers</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>8.51</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The challenge your job provides you</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>8.12</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for involvement in decision making</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chances for acquiring new skills</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>7.26</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of guidelines for doing your job</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your salary and benefits</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The recognition given your work by your supervisor</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership behavior of your supervisor**</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of supervision you receive</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of funding for programs</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for promotion</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Scores range from 1–11.

**Added item.**
A Pearson correlation was computed to determine if there was an association between Job Satisfaction Scale items and the mean difference between total expected and actual leadership practices scores (Table 2). Since the statistical significance of multiple (17) r values were being computed, the p value for significance was set at the Bonferroni corrected value of .003 for statistical significance rather than .05.

Based on these analyses, we found that 13 of the 17 items from the revised JSS were statistically associated with the mean differences in leadership expectations and behaviors. All aspects of job satisfaction, except for working with clients, field of specialization, and amount of client contact, were negatively correlated with the difference between the total mean scores of expected and actual leadership practices. These results suggest that the greater the difference between expected and actual leadership practices, the more dissatisfied the social work respondents were with their jobs. It appears that the aspects that account for the most

**TABLE 2. Correlation of job satisfaction items with differences in leadership behaviors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>P Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Working with clients</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>9.06</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>+.011</td>
<td>.793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Field of specialization you are in</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>-.100</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Your feeling of success as a social work</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>8.68</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>-.166**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Opportunities for really helping people</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>-.106</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Amount of client contact</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>8.56</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>-.078</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The amount of authority you have been given to do your job.</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>-.348**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Interpersonal relations with fellow workers</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>8.51</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>-.242**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The challenge your job provides you</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>8.12</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>-.293**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Opportunity for involvement in decision making</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>7.29</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>-.498**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Chances for acquiring new skills</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>7.26</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>-.442**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Clarity of guidelines for doing your job</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>-.370**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Your salary and benefits</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>-.118**</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The recognition given your work by your supervisor</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>-.645**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Leadership behavior of your supervisor</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>-.754**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The quality of supervision you receive</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>-.653**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Amount of funding for programs</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>-.207**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Opportunities for promotion</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>-.315**</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **Correlation between item and the difference between expected and actual. Bonferroni corrected p value = .003.
variation in the difference between scores involved leadership administration, namely leadership behavior of supervisors, recognition of work by supervisors, and quality of supervision received, which had Pearson r values of −.754, −.645, and −.653, respectively (Table 2).

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a difference between social workers’ expectations and perceptions of their supervisor’s behavior, and whether that difference affects social workers’ job satisfaction. Our analysis found that there were statistically significant differences between what social workers expected from their supervisors compared to what they perceived their supervisors provided, as measured by the total score for the LPI. For all statistical comparisons, the expectation scores were higher than the perceived leadership scores, thus suggesting there is a difference between what social workers expect and what they perceive from their leaders in the workplace.

Fourteen of the 16 items from the JSS were found to have statistically significant correlations with the mean difference score for perceived and expected LPI scores. These correlations suggest that as the difference between expected and perceived leadership increases, there is a corresponding lower level of reported job satisfaction. The highest individual items correlations were found for the JSS item “the quality of supervision received” (r = −.653) and the added item of “satisfaction with the leadership behavior of one’s supervisor” (r = −.754). In sum, we found that there is a statistically significant difference between social workers’ perceived and expected leadership, and this difference is associated with their job satisfaction.

**Implications**

Although the literature reveals minimum research specific to leadership behavior and job satisfaction for social workers, the results of this study suggest several implications for the social work profession, social work supervisor/leaders, and social work curricula. Although no agreement exists on an overall universal model or theory of effective leadership for all organizations, the fact that leadership continues to be studied, discussed, and written about attests to the importance leadership has for employees and organizations.
Leadership implies follower-ship. A constructive relationship between the leader and employee can positively impact the employee regarding productivity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Social work supervisors need to be aware of their followers’ expectations and perceptions of leadership in their organizations.

The best criterion for studying effective leadership in relation to its impact on follower-ship is to understand it from the perspective of the employee rather than merely from leader self-evaluation. Employee job satisfaction includes extrinsic and intrinsic satisfaction. These factors affecting job satisfaction include pay, benefits, and opportunity for promotion; a supportive and empowering work environment; clarity of job roles; recognition; participative decision-making; and resources that allow employees to work with clients with positive outcomes. Leadership can impact and influence many of these factors.

The literature demonstrates that most of the studies conducted in the area of effective leadership, job satisfaction, leader-member exchange, and other areas pertinent to this topic, including organizational commitment and organizational citizenship, derive mainly from the areas of business management and social and organizational psychology rather than from social work. Additional research in the social work field is necessary to address the role and impact of leadership in the work place and to differentiate social work leadership skills from management skills. Although these roles and skills are often interchangeable, leadership functions may be different than management functions (Konczak, Steely, & Trusty, 2001; Kotter, 1990; Zaleznik, 1992). Research needs to ascertain if, in fact, there are differences in the functions and roles of leaders and managers, and whether one is more effective in impacting social workers’ job satisfaction in an organization.

Many still debate whether there are differences in the roles of management and leadership. Some view management as dealing with bureaucratic activities, whereas leadership deals with the interpersonal relationships in organizations. Others believe these roles are interchangeable and that leaders are often placed in both a management and leadership role (Bass, 1990; Bennis, 1989; Kotter, 1990; Yukl, 1994, 1998, 2002; Zaleznik, 1992). From reviewing the literature, it is the authors’ position that leadership and management are distinct activities. It is recommended that future researchers be cognizant of these issues and that leadership be treated and studied as a separate entity.
Limitations

The study results and implications noted above must be considered within the context of its limitations. The major limitations of this study concern: (1) the sample population, (2) the use of questionnaires, (3) respondents’ subjective responses to instruments, and (4) the use of LPI-Observer with social workers.

This study was limited to those social workers who are members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). It would be difficult to determine how many social workers are not members of the NASW. The membership of NASW consists of predominantly Caucasian females who have a master’s degree in social work (MSW). Therefore, the results are representative of this particular group and do not reflect issues pertaining to diversity and ethnicity.

Questionnaires are often used with large sample populations. However, surveys can be subject to bias and error due to subjective and differing interpretations of the questions by the respondents. Practices of leaders with some employees may be different from that with others, depending on the leaders’ relationships with their employees (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hall & Lord, 1995; Smith, 1992; Yukl, 1998, 2002).

Respondents were asked to identify those leadership practices that they expected to see in their workplaces compared to those leadership practices they actually perceived in the workplace. Since the respondents were already employed at their agencies, it was hindsight to ask them to compare their prior expectations with their later perceptions of actual practices.

Questionnaires developed for one type of group do not always address the issues of other populations. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)-Observer, initially developed through research in the area of business and management, has been expanded to include church, government, student, and community leaders. This instrument has been used with both for-profit and nonprofit groups (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). In this study, the results indicated that the vast majority of the respondents did believe that the LPI-Observer addressed the behaviors of their leaders in the workplace.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this study support the need for continued research in the areas of leadership practices and job satisfaction. Future studies pertaining to leadership and job satisfaction should include quantitative and qualitative methods of study.
Although the leader behavior descriptive questionnaire has been used widely as a research tool to study leadership, other research approaches have been conducted that include descriptive studies, field studies, laboratory experiments, case histories, critical incidents, focus groups, and individual interviews (Yukl, 1998, 2002). One cannot conclude that leadership is the only variable impacting performance and job satisfaction. Many other intervening variables also play a role. Studies have shown there are occasions when leadership affects performance and job satisfaction, and other instances when it does not. Yukl (2002) explains why any study of leadership attempting to show causality or a relationship to job satisfaction is complex. He suggests this is due to the difficulty of explaining and measuring all the intervening variables contributing to the outcomes.

Because this research used a descriptive, quantitative study to assess perceptions of leaders’ practices in the workplace, a qualitative study, similar to the work of Kouzes and Posner (1995), could be conducted with social workers to ascertain what they expect from their leaders in the workplace. Results from qualitative studies utilizing focus groups, individual interviews, or critical incidents could be compared to survey studies on leadership styles, behaviors, and practices.

Other future research could be conducted within the workplace with the leader and social workers completing the Leadership Practices Inventory-Self and LPI-Observer to assess whether social workers’ perceptions of their leaders’ practices are similar to or different from the leaders’ perception. In-service training for leaders and employees could be conducted to ascertain expectations and perceptions of leader practices, and whether these behaviors are practiced in the workplace. A longitudinal research study could assess social workers’ perception of leader behavior and job satisfaction, and whether these perceptions change over time along with workers’ job satisfaction.

In summary, this study emphasized the association between social workers’ expectations and perceptions of leader behavior and their job satisfaction. It is the authors’ hope that this study will raise the consciousness of leaders in human services to the importance of understanding how their behaviors can influence their employees’ job satisfaction in the workplace. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting body for social work post-secondary education, emphasizes that social work education should embody issues of social justice and the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of the individual and the environment (Reamer, 1992). Graduates of undergraduate and graduate
schools of social work are primarily prepared to work in clinical practice, although some graduate schools have course content in the areas of management, administration, and supervision, with leadership issues intertwined. Articles in Administration in Social Work have underscored the necessity of leadership for motivating staff, creating organizational culture and vision, and understanding the leader-follower relationship concerning the needs and personalities of the employee, and the use of leadership behaviors that foster participatory management (Austin, 1989; Bargal & Schmid, 1989; Glisson, 1989; Malka, 1989). Nevertheless, while course content concerning human behavior, group dynamics, social work practice methods, and policy can be transferable to leadership roles, social workers are often placed in leadership roles with little formal preparation in this area.

Leadership development needs to be addressed in social work education to reflect changing societal needs. Brilliant (1986) emphasized the importance of leadership development for social workers in preparation for the work environment. In a survey of leaders in the NASW, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), and social work education programs, participants were asked to assess their perception of social work leadership. Rank and Hutchison (2000) concluded that “The majority of the participants expressed a sense that leadership has been an overlooked area of development within the profession” (p. 499).

Human service organizations, like industry, are increasingly implementing total quality management as their management focus (Martin, 1993). This concept of management, with an emphasis on customer satisfaction, team building, organizational communication, and staff training, requires leadership that engages employees rather than merely manages them. The social work educational issues of social justice, empowerment, and environmental effects on workers in their organizations need to be studied. Finally, social work as a profession needs to address the importance of the leadership role in the workplace and the necessity for leadership development as a key component of the social work curriculum and profession.

REFERENCES


