

USING THE STRENGTH AND SKILLS OF THE WORKER IN DEFINING JOB AND WORK LOAD *

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It is interesting to note that over the past ten years there has been an increasing search in the field of social work to develop adequate job definitions and criteria of adequate job loads. The problem has become more pressing in view of the limited number of trained personnel available to man our group work agencies. It becomes increasingly apparent that we must use our trained personnel more wisely.

It is the purpose of this paper to attempt to discuss the task of making the best use of the limited professional staff available to social group work. This problem causes us to look more closely at our professional goals, the ways in which we are using the members of our staff, and the responsibilities we wish the workers to undertake.

Initially we became interested in job analyses, job definitions and job classifications, in an attempt to set up adequate standards of personnel practice and to delineate what it is that group workers do in the field. There was, and still is, an important reason for our better understanding of what we do step by step, and function by function. Unfortunately, in the past, too many of our efforts in

this direction were tied up with principles of labor relationships rather than with principles of social group work.

Job Definition by Actual Experience

One of the original works on job content of a social group worker was a pragmatic study done in 1929 by Margarette Williamson called *The Social Worker in Group Work*. This study was done as a part of a series by the American Association of Social Work on job analysis. In the introduction, Frances Taussig, Chairman of the Job Analysis Committee of the AASW, stated: "This survey of 'group work' positions in the field of social work attempts, in conformity with the objective of the job analysis series of the American Association of Social Workers, to present a composite picture of certain type-jobs as they are actually carried on in a variety of agencies and localities. It takes the form of a listing of duties and responsibilities, relationships, qualifications and conditions of work, as these revealed themselves in the process of interviews with workers, and is supplemented by other sources of information."

The study was intended "as a manual of instruction," not as a standard of working conditions. However, it was pointed out that "the administrator and Board member might find it suggestive

from the standpoint of personnel practice."

Here we see one leaf of our problem, the fact that job analysis in social group work grew out of what was currently being done, and not from estimates of the means necessary to accomplishing social work goals. It is significant that while the goals and objectives of our agencies have changed, many of the job descriptions outlined in the studies still exist in the field of social group work. As Jewish communal workers, it would be interesting to note the purpose of the Jewish Center as stated in *The Jewish Center*, Vol. 1, October, 1922:

1. The Center will furnish the place and facilities for educational and recreational activities for men and women in their leisure time.
2. It will furnish facilities for recreation, physical training, vocational, Jewish and other education for boys and girls.
3. It will be a Jewish town hall—a common meeting place for all elements and groups of Jews.
4. It will establish an information bureau designed to meet the needs and desires of its constituency.
5. It will be a center for the Americanization and socialization of the foreign born.

It will be noted that there has been a significant change in our professional purpose and goal. However, this has not been reflected in what we see our workers doing in the field.

The problem of the pragmatic job definition is still with us even in more recent examinations. Harleigh B. Trecker, in an article in *The Group*, June, 1952, comes somewhat closer to relating quantity and content to quality of the job. In determining job load, he takes into account the setting, the differences in groups, different goals for groups, and the variation in the worker's skills. He points out that all of these factors affect how much a worker can do, not, however, what a worker does in relation to the over-all social work goals.

This is only one trap that we fall into. I call it the "pragmatic" or "operational" trap. In describing what we *actually* do in our various settings, we come close to losing sight of what we *should* do as social workers. It is partly for this reason that at this state in the development of group work, questions are again arising as to whether social work training is necessary for group work jobs.

A second trap is the one related to personnel practice and job analyses. It is my feeling that we have borrowed a little too heavily from personnel management. I have no quarrel with the use of personnel tools, but I do quarrel with the limited philosophy well described in a *Commerce Report* by Ralph W. Ells, Chief Economist, Allen-Bradley Co., Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Mr. Ells points out that job analysis is:

1. The determination of the duties, responsibilities and working conditions of each job, and
2. The determination of the basic abilities and knowledges required to handle such duties and responsibilities under existing working conditions.

The first part Mr. Ells calls the fact finding process, the second, the analysis. The second part he sees as an essentially analytical process. The job analysis reviews the total responsibilities and working conditions of jobs and translates them into abilities and knowledge which become common denominators or basic rating factors to be used in the classifying and grading of jobs (in the economic or production sense).

From the point of view of social work, I feel that analysis is an important part of both parts of a job description. It is essential that we start to look at job descriptions in terms of the social work goals of the jobs. There may be many ways in which we can achieve our goals for our membership, requiring a flexible approach which will take into account the

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personality and skill of the individual worker, as well as the job that is to be done. Before pursuing this further, I would like to present for analysis a series of job descriptions and classification from different sources in the field of social group work.

The first is a recent set of classifications done by the National Jewish Welfare Board in an effort to pull together the various job titles based on different responsibilities and duties within the Jewish center field:

CLASSIFICATION GROUP II

Group Worker—Presently listed by agencies under the following job titles: Group Worker; Division Head; Division Supervisor; Group Work Supervisor; Joint Program Supervisor

Under general supervision—works with or organizes groups of children, youth or adults as the leader of informal program activities or directs their activity through part-time or volunteer group leaders. Helps to determine the needs and interest of the group members. Interviews and supervises intake on individuals applying in his division or area of program. Develops the program of these groups in consonance with the agency's philosophy, objectives and goals.

To provide guidance and assistance, where necessary, to the groups or their leaders in program planning or understanding of group situations.

To develop plans for the coordination of his program with total program.

To recruit, train, as necessary, and supervise the leaders of the groups under his direction.

To maintain records and make necessary reports regarding the operation of his area of responsibility.

To attend supervisory and staff conferences.

To suggest necessary budget plan for his program and administer the expenditure of his portion of program.

To be responsible for related community and administrative functions.

To share in the supervision of building facilities.

To assume special summer assignments, generally in agency day or country camp program.

This is only one of the classifications for professional group workers. It is noteworthy that the classification describes what is currently practiced in a Jewish Community Center field and that nowhere is the description related to the goals of practice. Here again we have a personnel system with no help towards the solution of our problem.

The following is a description of a field director in girl scouting. This as a position usually filled by a professional social worker.

A field director works under the supervision of the executive director in a council with no geographic subdivision. Usually her work is focused on helping leaders, as in visiting troops and giving group leadership courses. She may also have responsibilities for the camping program.

Here again you will find no relationship to the goals of the organization.

The final statement comes from the YWCA which attempts in some way to coordinate the goals, the responsibilities and the qualifications. This is perhaps the nearest-to-adequate description, neglecting, however, what the individual worker might bring, or might not bring, to the situation:

Director of Teen-Age Program: The teen-age program director is responsible for the YWCA's program for youth of junior and senior high school age. This program is designed to help young people find fun and fellowship; to develop through thoughtful discussion, mature attitudes toward personal and family relationships, work, health, and social responsibility and a deepening conviction about the Christian way of life. Teen-age program includes clubs, interest and hobby groups, camping, conferences, canteens and co-ed recreation. Groups meet in the YWCA, in schools, and in other community centers.

How we might better use the relationship between the goals of our program and the skills of the worker in order that both the agency and the worker profit from the job to be done is the point on which I wish to elaborate.

I don't mean to imply that we do away with job descriptions or classifications, but rather that we use them as a more flexible tool. It seems to me that we expect the worker to be the more flexible and we accept the job description to be more rigid.

Flexibility in Job Requirements

If we recognize the years of training and the learning requirements of a fully trained, competent group worker, it would seem that we might better reverse ourselves and be more flexible with respect to job analysis. Many workers bring unique qualities to the job which can be better used if we are flexible in our requirements. It is at this point that we can introduce some of our own social work principles.

First there is the matter of relationships. A new worker begins to relate to an agency at his initial interview. It is during this contact that we discuss with the worker the job available. Perhaps we should re-focus this interview in terms of what it is the worker would like to give within the framework of the agency setting. There have been a number of instances in which I found that the rigid job descriptions included in our hiring letters were more of a handicap than an aid in establishing a good relationship. While the worker understood what the agency expected of him, there was no longer the freedom to share information and experiences, or to examine possible changes stemming from the worker's own skills, abilities and interests. It sometimes takes as long as six months for the supervisor to become aware of the areas of worker competence, inexperience, and incompetence because of the rigid structure that has been set up around the job, and because of the commitment on both sides that a particular job is to be done. This is in spite of our elaborate system of written evaluations from previous jobs. All of us who have used letters of refer-

ence or worker profiles are aware of the tremendous amount that is left unsaid. It is my hope that in the future the maturity of the field will demand that the actual evaluation which was developed between supervisor and worker will be made available to the new employer. The condensed, cut-down, worked-over evaluation geared towards selling an agency a worker is a difficult and impossible document to evaluate.

The second matter to be considered is the worker's state of readiness to assume some of the responsibilities which we have discussed as part of the job. Very often a new worker moves into those administrative responsibilities which to him represent status and advancement but for which he is least prepared. This is where the bulk of his time and frustration is placed. It is possible that the worker may have a great number of program skills and skills in working directly with membership which we do not even see and which is not being used effectively. If the worker does not gain such satisfactions, the supervisor cannot help him through his strengths to gain additional satisfaction in attacking new problems.

Perhaps the most obvious instance of the above is encountered in the situation of the worker who has been out of school for two years and is taking his first divisional or supervisory job. I am sure many of you have met or employed such a prototype. A graduate of a school of social work, during his training, he had led between 5 and 6 groups (this may be, and very often is, the total extent of supervised group leadership experience and in many instances of any kind of leadership experience). He then is employed either in a small agency in which the bulk of his experience is supervisory and administrative or in a large agency where the bulk of his experience may be direct leadership. After two years of work experience, he is looking for a new job with advancement. What does ad-

vancement consist of? Primarily, supervision. The worker takes a job in an agency either as a division head or group work supervisor. In reality, he has had little or no experience with supervision. Our job definitions state that the bulk of his responsibility is now in the area of program administration and supervision. Mind you, he does not yet know group work! The concepts which he had learned in school have not even been adequately tried out. Group work is in his head, not in his muscles! We take this worker in our agency and the bulk of his job is to him a frustration, one in which there is little or no achievement. I, myself, have fallen into this pit so often I am black and blue from getting out of it. I have asked myself after re-doing job descriptions at the 6-month period where I have been forced to help workers examine what it is they really want to, and can, do comfortably within the structure of the agency, and this only after what I would consider an unsatisfying experience.

To obviate such recurrent problems, the following course of action is suggested:

- (1) We not solidify job descriptions with workers prior to hiring them.
- (2) We describe in terms of our goals what it is we would like to accomplish with certain groups, or divisions or age ranges.
- (3) Within these defined goals, and after an initial orientation period of perhaps a month or two for the worker, we determine with him how he can best function.

If such a course were followed with many of our professional workers, there would be more diversified job descriptions than currently exist and these job descriptions would have grown out of the experience of the worker and the agency, together.

Dual Supervision

One other method of using our supervisory staff more efficiently has come to mind from the area of social case work—the possibility of two types of supervision—the administrative and the educational. The practice in social work over a long period of years has been that of one supervisor in both these areas. Recently social casework has been experimenting with separation of the two functions, a study of which was presented at this very conference by Mrs. Rose Brodsky of the Jewish Community Services of Long Island. This may have some meaning for us in group work. Training in administrative skills can be obtained in places other than social work and it may be possible for us to get administrators on a divisional level who have some understanding of the community and a knowledge of administration. If we are able to place some of these people in administrative division head responsibilities, some of the administrative tasks can be taken away from our professionally trained division heads who can then have more time to fulfill their professional roles as social workers. This could be one area of relief for supervisors as well as agency administrators who are currently over-loaded. Many of the untrained workers in group work, particularly those who come from the field of teaching, have excellent administrative skills and are able to maintain good community relations while being inadequate as supervisors of group leaders. If we can structure our agencies in such a way as to make use of their administrative skill, it would help the field to be more effective by freeing social workers' time to perform direct professional functions.

This would mean a drastic change in usual patterns of over-all agency administration, and I know of no part of group work where this has been tried. However, with more careful analysis and the

exercise of more thought, such a venture might be a partial answer to staff shortage and could free move trained group work skills for direct professional practice.

The question of feasibility suggests itself. Certainly it would appear the easier to attempt it in a large agency where there may be several workers whose individual strengths and weaknesses supplement each other. However, what about the small agency of one or two professionals on staff? One of the long standing problems of the small agency has been that it does not compete successfully with larger agencies for the more experienced and skilled workers who are best able to handle diversified programs. I have no practical answer to this problem, although theoretically it would appear more appropriate for well-trained workers who can do multi-functional jobs to be attracted to the small agency where diversified and mature skill is necessary, while the large agencies, which can offer a beginning worker the training and experience he needs, function as a training center.

The Worker and Direct Professional Practice

Presuming the new worker is being introduced into an agency with four or more professional workers, one problem we will have to solve is the system of grading payment and responsibility. It has been said for years that it is not the administrator who should be getting the highest salary and the most status but that status and salary should be more evenly distributed on all levels. In some instances we have been able to achieve such distribution by acknowledging skills and years of service through salary increments, rather than through changes in job so that it is possible in some agencies for a person who works on a divisional level to be earning as much as division heads. This

system, I am sure, must and will be extended. It should help us, then, to use the people that we have more wisely. I would recommend the following method of job descriptions:

(1) We discuss openings in terms of number of members and ages of the members to be served and we set our job goals not in relation to definitions but in relation to individual membership;

(2) We work out with our workers during the hiring process and the orientation period how the members could best be served with the skills and experience the worker brings.

From this point of view, it is possible that the administrative details of the division would become more obvious to the worker, so that keeping of family records, attendance records or statistics, records of intake interviews, group intake, and group formations would be more indigenous to the job and not just tacked on for so-called professional reasons. These are tools to be used in the everyday job and grow out of the needs of the worker as he does the job. It is also possible that the worker can see the role he can play as a direct leader if provided with a role in which he can gain further confidence as well as satisfaction and in which he can do a job for which he actually has been trained in our professional schools.

The worker who actually knows the children, the area, the school, and the agency becomes a more competent supervisor insofar as the goals that he sees for these members are closer to him. The agency program, then, is built on the worker's skill and on the worker's investment in a job. This contrasts with the worker's being handed a readymade program for which he becomes the supervisor and assumes inherited responsibilities which may or may not be at his functioning level. When we introduce a new worker, we also introduce a new program based on the worker's skill. If we keep

DEFINING JOB AND WORK LOAD

in mind the social work goals of the agency, it does not matter that the "new" program may be interest-orientated, or may be division-orientated rather than small-group-orientated. Our overriding social work purpose to help

individual members grow may be acknowledged or achieved in many ways and through many programs. When the worker is building on his own strength, his own comfort and competence and the professional program grow apace.