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SOCIAL WORKERS' SATISFACTIONS: METHODOLOGICAL NOTES AND SUBSTANTIVE FINDINGS

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Abstract

The use of instruments derived from industrial research to investigate the work satisfactions of social workers can lead to distortion of results. Responses from ninety-one social workers in nine agencies indicates sources of satisfactions and dissatisfactions not present in industrial settings, and -- in contradistinction to the "dual-factor" or "bipolarity" theory -- both satisfactions and dissatisfactions arising from the same source in some cases.

The most important factors affecting workers' satisfactions were the ability to achieve results, their relationships with clients, their relationship with members of multidisciplinary staffs, and presence or absence of sufficient time and resources.

The "higher order" needs -- recognition, responsibility, and advancement -- found in industrial research do not appear in these responses.

There are implications for social work education in these findings.

Introduction

The service sector of the economy, inclu-
ding social work, has shown little research
interest in workers' feelings, motivations and
satisfactions, as compared to the industrial
sector. Whereas industry became concerned
with workers feelings almost fifty years ago
-- primarily as a presumed influence on prod-
uctivity -- and has continually broadened that
concern, only recently has the service sector,
particularly the human services, and especial-
ly social work, expressed research interest in
workers' feelings, attitudes, and work pat-
terns -- an interest basically spurred by
concern about burnout. One result of this
relative neglect has been that researchers in
the services must, perforce, use methodology
and instruments devised in and for industrial
settings, with predictable resultant distor-
tions.

This article will summarize the forces
which influenced industrial relations research
and the directions which it took; report on an
exploratory study in social work which empha-
sizes the inapplicablility of current indus-
trial research methods for the services; and
discuss the substantive findings of that study.

Sources and Directions in Industrial
Relations Research

Industrial relations research had its
roots in the "scientific management" school of
Taylor, (1) around the turn of the century,
which saw workers basically as tools to be
manipulated. this viewpoint was challenged by
the reported findings of the Hawthorne
studies,(2) which emphasized the importance of
workers' feelings -- and importance which,
incidentally, has itself been challenged. (3)
Nevertheless, the basic findings of the
Hawthorne experiments -- which came to be
known as the "human relations" school of

industrial research -- were extended by Herzberg and his associates, (4) who sought the sources of workers' satisfactions and dissatisfactions by asking them to think of days on which they were particularly satisfied or dissatisfied at work, and to enunciate the reasons.

Herzberg found that satisfactions and dissatisfactions were not the obverse of one another; that they come from different sets of sources. satisfaction can be increased of decreased without affecting satisfaction, and dissatisfaction can be removed without increasing satisfaction. This came to be known variously as the "bi-polarity," or "two-factor", or "dual-factor" theory. Herzberg further found that satisfactions come from the work itself, and are the fulfillment of "higher order" needs, in Maslow's (5) terms, while dissatisfaction stem from the conditions surrounding the work.

Based on sources of satisfaction reported by Herzberg and his replicators -- which, it should be remembered, were responses by thousands of industrial workers to open-ended unstructured questions -- industrial relations research began to refine these sources, i. e., to relate different sources to demographic factors, or structural factors, or to personality variables; as well as dissecting the given sources in sub-categories, such as external/internal, equity/equality, attribution, valence-instrumentilty-expectancy, goal achievement, and other so-called process theories. (6)

Almost ten years ago Locke (7) identified over three thousand such studies in the literature, and there are those who believe that there are at least an equal number of unpublished studies.(8) This is in sharp contrast to the total of 684 studies of all aspects of social work appearing in social work journals

between 1956 and 1984, (9) of which only a handful were concerned with social workers' satisfaction. Jayarante and Chess studied satisfaction directly (10), while others studied them as part of other phenomena: attrition (11), turnover (12), Stress (13), and careers (14).

It should be noted that the Herzberg methodology and finding have not gone uncriticized, (15) but the great bulk of industrial relations research is based squarely on the satisfaction which Herzberg elicited with his open-ended questions.

One result of the plethora of research set off by Herzberg is a set of instruments with reliability coefficients and validity indices which have bee published in a number of places. (16) It is to these scales, or to parts of them, that social workers perforce must turn as they seek for recognized instruments with which to conduct research into the work patterns and satisfaction of social workers. However, since these instruments were derived from the expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction of industrial workers, there is reason to question their applicability and their validity as they apply to service workers in general and to social workers in particular.

Consequently, as part of a larger study designed to explore the impact of social workers' satisfaction on the quality of their relationship with clients, it was decided to include Herzberg-type open-ended questions, to allow the social worker respondents to express the sources of their satisfaction and dissatisfaction, without making a priori assumptions about them.

Sources of Social Workers' Satisfactions

Methodology

The Sample:

Since one of the hypotheses in the larger
study was that varying amounts of social wor-
kers' satisfaction would exhibit themselves
primarily in workers' relationships with
clients (rather than in provision of resources
or changes in procedures), agencies were
sought in which the major method of treatment
consisted of client-social worker relation-
ships. Nine public agencies meeting this
requirement were identified in Jerusalem.
These included a mental health out-patient
department; a substance-abuse service; three
hospitals' a service for women in distress;
two local personal social service departments;
and the social work department of an indus-
trial concern. The total sample included all
the social workers in these settings -- nine-
ty-one in number -- with the exception of a
few who were unavailable. Their ages ranged
from 22 to 65, with the median being 31.
Years of professional experience ranged from
one to 13, with a median of 6. Educational
levels included BSWs, MSWs, and Ph.Ds. Ninety
percent of the sample were female. Given the
restricted locality from which this sample was
drawn, and the particular kind of agency to
which the sample was confined, it is clear
that this sample should not be considered
representative of all social workers in Is-
rael, and certainly not of those elsewhere.

The Instrument:

The Herzberg-type questions were the final
two of a forty-two question form, and consis-
ted of the following, in Hebrew:

"Think of a normal day at work when
you felt quite satisfied. What was
the source of your satisfaction?"

"Think of a normal day at work when

you were quite dissatisfied. What was the source of your dissatisfaction?"

Data-handling:

The responses to these two questions were categorized by independent judges. The number of times each category was mentioned, and by how many people, and as a satisfier or dissatisfier, was computed and graphed. Due to the nature of the sample and the nature of the questions, tests of statistical significance were considered irrelevant, and consequently were not used. (17)

Findings:

Sources of worker satisfaction/dissatisfaction

One of the salient findings of this study is the fact that when given the opportunity through open-ended questions to identify the sources of their work satisfaction and dissatisfaction, social workers named factors in a large part different from those found in industrial and indirect service settings (Table 1). Although some respondents mentioned more satisfaction/dissatisfaction sources than did others, the great majority of the sources mentioned were unique to the human services, or had different meanings than did the same items in industrial settings.

Social workers mentioned thirteen sources of satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and of these, nine were not mentioned by industrial and indirect service workers queried by Herzberg. In addition, as will be noted below, there is question concerning the content of the common response, "achievement." If sources consisting of less than ten percent of the total responses (regardless of whether they denoted satisfiers or dissatisfiers) are omitted (Table 2), then four of the five sources given

by social workers are different from those given by other types of workers.

It should be noted that Herzberg considered only the responses, and not the number of respondents. Since each respondent could, and usually did, give more than one response, it is of some importance to also consider how many respondents mentioned each item. This information is contained in Table 3. When only those items mentioned by 50% or more of the respondents (in contradistinction to the number of responses) are considered, then there remains only one item which is common to industry and to social work, subject to the same reservation concerning "achievement" mentioned above. Thus, whether judging by the number of responses or the number of respondents, the important sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction reported by social workers are almost totally different from those which make up the bulk of industrial relations research studies.

For example, the importance or relationships with clients, alluded to in 15% of the total responses and by 62% of the respondents, not only never arose in the ten studies quoted by Herzberg, (18) but is almost never included in studies of work satisfaction generally. Examination of almost five hundred worker-satisfaction scales (19) indicates only one response even remotely connecting workers' satisfactions with clients. This lists "respect from customers" as a satisfier. (20) Nothing else is even distantly related to relationship with clients.

The same is true of satisfaction and dissatisfaction arising from relations with multidisciplinary staffs. This was mentioned in 13% of the responses, and by 74% of the sample, but is nowhere included in the 500 scales mentioned above, nor in any industrial research studies in the literature.

Similarly, while 10% of the social wor-
kers' responses and 55% of the sample spoke
about the availability or lack of availability
of time and resources, this factor is comple-
tely absent in industrial research studies.

While the factor "variety of work" given
in 10% of the responses and by 48% of the
sample could conceivably be subsumed under
Herzberg's category "the work itself," the
latter usually contains repetitiveness as only
a part of a reaction that is often explained
to include a sense of self-fulfillment from
proper use of one's knowledge and skills' or
the feeling of working on something useful or
valuable for society; or pleasure arising from
the activity itself. Since social workers did
not specify any of these items, nor the work
itself as a totality, it is the factor or
variety which makes this response unique.

Only in the case of "achievement," or
"achieving results," given in 19% of the res-
ponses and by 85% of the respondents, is there
overlap between industrial studies and the one
reported here. Herzberg defines achievement
as "successful completion of a job, solutions
to problems, vindication, and seeing the re-
sults of one's work." Whether social workers
meant the same thing is open to question,
since achieving results in their terms probab-
ly means being of help to the client. How-
ever, enough similarity exists in the respon-
ses as given to consider this as the same item
in both industrial and service settings.

Satisfaction vis-a-vis Dissatisfaction

The second salient finding in this study
is the listing by social workers of some fac-
tors as both satisfiers and dissatisfiers. It
is of the essence in Herzberg's bi-polarity
findings and conclusions that one set of fac-
tors gives rise to satisfaction, while another

set of factors is the source of dissatisfaction. In this study, however, of The thirteen items mentioned by ten percent of more of the respondents, only four ("variety," "relations with colleagues," "bureaucratic pressures," and "salary") had as much as 75% of the responses on one side or the other (Table 3). Conversely, nine of the thirteen were both satisfiers and dissatisfiers, by this formula. further, as regards five of them, the same respondents listed them as both satisfiers and dissatisfiers, in rations ranging from 16% to 41% (Table 3). This is a clear contradiction of the theory on which the great bulk of studies based on Herzberg's findings are founded.

Social Workers Satisfactions

In addition to the finding that the sources of satisfaction in social work differ in large part from those in industry, and that the qualities of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not as distinct in social work as they are in other settings, this study also gave social workers an opportunity to enunciate the sources of the satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This section discusses their responses.

Eighty-five percent of the social workers interviewed reported receiving satisfaction from their ability to achieve results by and for their clients, or dissatisfaction from inability to do the same. This is in line with Fisch's (21) finding that one of social workers' reasons for leaving their jobs is their inability to function for their clients' benefits as they feel they should. Since in many industrial settings efforts to increase workers' satisfaction are through the previously mentioned job enlargement, job enrichment, and other variations of "process theory," (22) these findings indicate that increasing social workers' satisfaction requires a very diff-

erent focus.   Insofar as they are enabled to
help their clients more successfully through
provision of more time and resources, through
more training, through changes in policy and
administration, or through other means, their
own work satisfactions sill be increased.
This, incidentally, supports some rather re-
cent findings in industrial research that
rather than satisfactions leading to more,
harder, or better work, such work may itself
create satisfactions for workers. (23).

Certain client characteristics -- their
unwillingness to help themselves, and their
inordinate demands on the time and energy of
the worker. (24) changing this aspect is much
less under the control of agencies, and even
of workers themselves. To the extent that
social work education leads students to think
of clients as invariably wanting a good rela-
tionship with the worker, and greatfull for
help given, this stereotype is susceptible to
change. However, it should be noted that this
item contained slightly more satisfiers than
dissatisfiers -- contact with clients can be a
source of satisfaction. Moreover, 41% of
those mentioning this item were selective,
seeing it as a source of satisfactions in some
cases, and dissatisfactions in others.

Where relationship with multidisciplinary
staffs is concerned, this is probably not
unique to social workers, since members of
other human service professions work together
with a varigated staff. Handless, for exam-
ple, studied the relationship of nurses to
doctors, among other things. (25) In the
agencies studied in the present research there
was a high proportion of interdisciplinary
relationships -- with probation officers,
homemakers, nurses, doctors, psychiatrists,
psychologists, and others. Since relations
with outside agencies were reported on separa-
tely, these multiprofessional teams seem to be
within the agencies studied, and thus the

relationships -- positive or negative -- are on-going and stable. The findings suggest, therefore, that there are some agencies where the relationship is good and others where it is not. The existence of the former would seem to suggest that the latter are amenable to purposeful change efforts.

Although the availability of time and resources was mentioned in total by 55% of the respondents, and 75% of those mentioning it found it to be a dissatisfier, yet 25% found this to be a satisfier. The used terms like "having time to do a good job," or "being able to meet time schedules." That the majority were dissatisfied, however, supports Dressel's finding that this is primarily a source of dissatisfaction. (26) This area too, is at least theoretically amenable to change, although it is probable that had agencies been able to provide more time and/or resources, they would have dome so.

Although no other factors were mentioned by as much as 50% of the sample, 10% of the responses mentioned the variety of the work. As discussed previously, it is not clear from the responses exactly what aspect of variety is meant, or most important -- clients, problems, methods, or activities. This area warrants further investigation.

Further, it is noteworthy that neither supervision, administration, nor bureaucratic pressures constituted 10% of the responses, or were mentioned by 50% of the respondents. Supervision, however, was clearly a satisfier for most of those mentioning it, just as bureaucratic pressures were unanimously seen as dissatisfiers, with administration -- including staff meetings and in-service training -- about equally divided. If all of these are combined into an overall supervision/administration category, they amount to 16% of the responses, and are somewhat on the dissatis-

fier side.

Relations with other services are clearly dissatisfiers, while relations with colleagues are satisfiers. Salary was mentioned in only 2% of the responses, but was in every case a dissatisfier.

Finally, the "higher order" needs postulated by Herzberg, including recognition, responsibility, and advancement, do not appear in social workers' responses. The first two may be embedded, so to speak, in the job, with self-recognition or recognition by clients replacing the need for outside recognition, and responsibility being inherent in the many decisions made in the course of social work practice, as well as in the relative freedom given social workers to conduct practice within a framework of judgements and decisions. The lack of "advancement" as a factor may be an artifact of the Israeli situation, where job descriptions and ranks are legally determined in public agencies, and promotion is usually either through a collective work agreement, or on the basis of seniority.

Summarizing this section, it is clear that many of the sources of satisfaction given importance in industrial relations studies do not appear in social work, or do not become determinants of satisfaction among social workers.

Summary

In this study of practicing social workers, open-ended questions were asked about the sources of their satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The methodology proved useful in that it resulted in identification of satisfaction sources not found in industrial or indirect-service research; in the absence of several sources customarily found there; and in differences concerning the distinction between

satisfactions and dissatisfactions. Social
workers saw achieving results; relations with
clients; and relations with multidisciplinary
staffs as sources of both satisfactions and
dissatisfactions, while the variety of work
was a clear satisfier, and lack of time and
resources a dissatisfier. No other factors
were mentioned in ten percent of the respon-
ses, or by fifty percent of the respondents.

Many of the sources of social workers'
satisfactions seem amenable to influence or
manipulation in a planful manner. However,
more investigation seems indicated into the
content of workers' relationships with
clients; the exact meaning of "achieving re-
sults;" the components of variety in social
work; and the dynamics of multidisciplinary
staff relations.

As research into work patterns in the
services continues, it seems important that
exploratory, hypothesis-seeking studies be
undertaken, rather than adopting the assum-
ptions, hypotheses, findings, methodology, and
instruments developed in and for industrial
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Table 1.

Sources of Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction
(total responses)

Industrial Workers	Social Workers

Similar

Industrial Workers	Social Workers
Achievement	Achieving results
Supervision -- technical	Supervision
Supervision -- relations	
Company policy/administration	Administration
Salary	Salary

Dissimilar

Industrial Workers	Social Workers
Recognition	Relations with Clients
Work itself	Relations Multi-disciplinary staff
Responsibility	Variety of work
Advancement	Relations other services
Working conditions	Relations colleagues
	Bureaucratic pressures
	Participation in decisions
	Relations clients families

Table 2

Sources of satisfaction/Dissatisfaction
(constituting ten percent or more of total
responses)

Industrial Workers	Social Workers
	Similar
Achievement	Achieving results

Dissimilar	
Work itself	
Recognition	
Responsibility	
Advancement	Variety of work
	Relations with
	clients
	Relations Multi-
	disciplinary
	Availability of
	time/resources

Table 3

Social Workers' Satisfactions/Dissatisfactions as Responses to Herzberg-type Questions

N = 91 respondents
524 responses

item	respondents mentioning item		respondents listing as both satis-fier and dissatis-fier		DISSATISFIERS number of responses SATISFIERS	Total responses	
	#	%	#	%	50 40 30 20 10 0 10 20 30 40 50	#	%
	77	85	18	23	41 achieving results 54	95	18
	56	62	24	41	37 relations clients 43	80	15
	67	74	-	-	32 relations mulitdis. 35	67	13
	44	48	8	18	9 variety of work 43	52	10
	50	55	-	-	37 avail. time/resources 13	50	10

item	respondents mentioning		respondents listing as both satis- fier and dissatis- fier		DISSATISFIERS SATISFIERS number of responses 50 40 30 20 10 0 10 20 30 40 50	Total responses	
	#	%	#	%		#	%
	34	37	8	24	27 relations other services 15 --------+---	42	08
	31	34	7	16	9 supervision 22 -+-------	31	06
	27	30	-	-	2 rel. coll. 25 -+-------	27	05
	23	25	-	-	12 admin 11 ---+---	23	04
	19	24	-	-	19 bur. press. ---+---	19	04
	16	18	-	-	5 part dec 11 -+----	16	03
	12	13	-	-	3 rel fam 9 -+--	12	02
	10	11	-	-	10 salary ---+	10	02