

**Improving the Recruitment and Retention of Human Service
Professionals in Public Child Welfare: *Toward
a Professional Workforce in Workplaces Supportive of Professionalism***

Hal A. Lawson*

The University at Albany, The State University of New York

Introduction: The Need for a Fresh Perspective

Child welfare is a special kind of work. Workers who perform it competently and with distinction have special knowledge, skills, values, and sensitivities. They often save lives. At the least, they enhance the safety, security, and overall well being of children, adults, and entire families. This work can be dangerous. It's also controversial. In fact, society's members may stigmatize the work and stereotype the workers. Workers must cope with these realities as they negotiate the demands of countless rules and regulations that determine and influence what's done, how, when, and where.

Unfortunately, child welfare workers are not recognized universally as specialized professionals. This recognition and reward problem is especially apparent in states and systems with mixed workforces, i.e., workers representing diverse backgrounds.

Some staff are social workers in the strictest sense. They possess social work degrees and licenses. Social work leaders also advocate for a stronger presence and more leadership roles for their members. The national movement organized in support of social workers is called "reprofessionalization"--referencing a time when true social workers enjoyed a monopoly over child welfare practice.

While some states have maintained strict requirements for social workers, others have relaxed them. These states employ workers with higher education degrees from other fields. Although these other workers lack social work education and licenses, outsiders tend to call them "social workers." In fact, some of these workers actively call themselves social workers because they want and need to be viewed as special--as child welfare professionals. When they announce themselves as social workers, they quickly gain a professional identity and reputation, a valuable asset that child welfare jobs and systems don't provide automatically.

Recruitment and Retention Problems

Research indicates that this confusion, or conflation, of true social workers with non-social workers poses problems for recruitment and retention. For example, true social workers, especially those with M.S.W. degrees, may be less inclined to choose public child welfare as their field of practice. Moreover, some social workers who resign from child welfare refer to this professional confusion; they simply cannot tolerate it.

* With special thanks to Gail Haulenbeek, New York Office of Child and Family Services, for her critique and suggestions.

This issue regarding the professional status of public child welfare workers is not merely a social work problem. Research indicates that workers without social work degrees and licenses also leave because their needs for professional status are not met in public child welfare systems. These other workers often have degrees in psychology, child and family studies, education, and other human service fields. Like social workers, they want and need jobs, working conditions, and organizational systems that support professional norms, standards, and practices. When they leave, or when they express their intention to leave, they cite the absence of professionalism and organizational supports for professionalism as one of the reasons.

In brief, the professional status of child welfare workers and the extent to which child welfare systems are supportive of professionalism are two keys to improved recruitment and retention. And, there are other reasons why professional issues are important.

Other Problems

Beyond recruitment and retention, the professionalism of workers is vital to performance improvements, including the ability of districts and agencies to meet the performance accountability requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act. For example, a professionalized workforce is needed to implement research-supported, evidence-based practices. More concretely, workers must know how to use data, weigh evidence, and evaluate cases to determine which intervention fits the presenting needs and problems of children, adults, and families. These related determinations require a through grounding in research and relevant theory.

A highly educated workforce also is a prerequisite for innovative, complex interventions needed to meet the multiple, co-occurring needs of the most challenging families. More concretely, interprofessional and inter-agency coordination and collaboration are difficult to develop and sustain without a highly educated, professional workforce.

Furthermore, it's unlikely that child welfare agencies will become high performing, learning organizations without a professionalized workforce and workplaces that are supportive of professionalism. For example, data-based decision-making systems, results-oriented accountability systems, and improvement team planning for total quality improvement depend on professional workers in a professionalized workplace.

Thus, workforce professionalism, broadly defined to include non-social workers and true social workers, is a critical issue, and it's inseparable from another issue--workplaces supportive of professionalism. These two issues recommend an important planning theme: *A Professional Workforce in Workplaces Supportive of Professionalism.*

Purpose and Progression

This discussion brief "unpacks" this theme as it focuses on improved recruitment and retention. It provides concrete, practical ideas and suggestions about things to look for and expect; and what to plan for and assess.

It focuses broadly on all human service professions, including social work, psychology, child and family studies, and education because the child welfare workforce is diverse. It emphasizes commonalities and similarities among the various, specialized professions represented by the child welfare workforce. And, it provides a generic approach to planning for a professional workforce in workplaces supportive of professionalism.

The progression is as follows. The analysis begins with an overview of the idea of a profession. A few implications for recruitment and retention follow. After key improvement priorities are identified, a preliminary inventory of the professionals' expectations, wants, and needs is provided. This inventory includes examples of practical assessment questions child welfare leaders may address in planning for a professional workforce in workplaces supportive of professionalism.

Understanding Profession and Professionalism

A profession is a special kind of occupation. In contrast to other occupations, human service professions such as social work, psychology, and education enjoy several important features. These features are manifest in their structures, especially their professional education programs and professional associations, as well as in their routine operations.

Thanks to these structures, both novice and veteran members of the profession view themselves as special. For example, they advocate for professional norms, standards, and practices, and they expect their workplaces to support them.

Professionalization refers to the process by which a group of like workers strives to be considered a profession. *Professionalism* refers to the orientations and actions of individual members. *Professional status* refers to the benefits and rewards members gain from their professionalism and professionalization.

The Importance of University-based Professional Education Programs

Membership in a profession and its accompanying benefits (e.g., eligibility for certain kinds of jobs) depend on the completion of specialized, accredited university degree programs. These professional education programs lay the foundation for becoming, and being, a professional.

Notably, aspirant professionals are expected to learn and internalize the profession's norms and standards. Norms and standards may be expressed in a formal code of ethics, and they include the commitment to serve others, the obligation to use relevant theory and research in practice, and adherence to the profession's defining

values, principles, and sensitivities. Aspirants also are expected to learn, internalize, and use the profession's body of knowledge, especially its preferred interventions and helping strategies. Because becoming and being a professional is, in essence, a special way of communicating, aspirants must learn its preferred vocabularies. Additionally, aspirants are expected to experience an identity transformation, also known as a professional induction. In other words, membership in the profession defines, not just their jobs, but who they are and how they behave. These professional identities are unified and integrated to the extent that Mary or John, the person, is inseparable from the John or Mary, the professional.

Finally, aspirants are expected to learn and internalize the profession's claims about its jurisdictions and boundaries. These claims are self-promoting and self-serving. They focus on the unique, important features of the profession's members in relation to the kinds of work and jobs it claims as its own. This boundary-related and jurisdictional knowledge includes the profession's relations with other professions and their respective jurisdictional and boundary claims.

Other Structural Features

Other special features of professions emphasize their differences with other kinds of occupations. Examples include peer-governed evaluation systems, expectations and requirements for continuing professional development, membership in one or more professional associations, and special credentials (e.g., licenses, certificates), and state-regulated job monopolies. These monopolies are special protections and restrictions granted to a profession in recognition of its special authority, and it provides exclusive rights to practice in certain sectors.

Selected Implications

In brief, while each profession is unique, members of the human service professions have a great deal in common. Obviously, one thing they have in common is little or no formal preparation for the formal demands of public child welfare jobs and work. State and local training programs are designed to fill this void, and ideally they build on the knowledge, skills, values, and sensitivities new recruits possess.

Both before and after this training, child welfare workers who have completed professional education programs, share a special view of themselves, each other, their work, society's members, and their careers. Above all, their work and their jobs comprise central life interests and identities. For example, their work is not just what they do; it's who they are. And, this means that their work spills over into their personal lives. When the work is rewarding, it's life-enhancing. When it's not, worker well being suffers. This delicate, important balance helps explain why some workers stay and others leave.

In this perspective, public child welfare leaders aiming to recruit and retain a professionalized workforce face two important questions.

1. Do you want to recruit human service professionals, especially social workers?
2. Are your systems supportive of professionalism? More specially, is there a good fit--a high degree of congruence and coherence--among the person, the job, the work, the organization, and its surrounding environments?

When there's a good fit and professionals experience high degrees of congruence, recruitment, retention, overall workforce development, and workplace optimization are facilitated. In contrast, if these systems are not supportive of professionalism, an entirely different set of challenges arises. For example, recruitment challenges will mount, and the retention of professionals will become an enduring problem. Shortly after newcomers are trained and assigned cases, many leave. Unfortunately, this is the state of affairs in too many public child welfare systems.

Anticipating Four Improvement Priorities

Leaders of public child welfare thus have an interesting and important opportunity related to the recruitment, retention, and support of human service professionals. They have the opportunity to reconfigure, as needed, aspects of public child welfare jobs, work, and organizations, including relations with other systems in local communities.

Optimizing Workplaces in Concert with Workforce Development

Recruitment and retention improvements hinge on a basic need: To optimize the fit among workers, the organization, and the organization's environments. This optimizing process should proceed with a clear mission: To improve results for all of the stakeholders, beginning with client systems and including caseworkers, supervisors, and managers.

Figure 1 (attached) provides a simple view of this opportunity to improve "the fit" for a professionalized workforce. In this view, *workplace optimization is inseparable from workforce development*. In other words, getting, keeping, and effectively deploying good people depends fundamentally on the development of better jobs and workplace environments. This is a key improvement priority, and it's related to three others.

The Recruitment Priority

The second improvement priority is recruitment dynamics and mechanisms. The question is, are the qualities and characteristics listed in this inventory announced, emphasized, and used when new workers are recruited and selected? For example, the organization's recruiters and leaders send messages like this one. "We want and need special people to do complex, meaningful, and important work; and we're picky about who we recruit, hire, and retain." Of course, the civil service system weighs heavily in actual selection processes, but this recruitment priority remains.

Organizational Initiation and Induction Systems: The Third Priority

The third improvement priority merits a separate brief. It is what some analysts call "the organizational initiation-induction system." This is the system, including formal and informal processes and mechanisms, through which newcomers "learn the ropes." These dynamics and mechanisms (e.g., agency training, orientation programs, mentoring systems) are critical. Their importance becomes apparent when newcomers receive "sink or swim" socialization experiences, i.e., they alone determine whether they flounder, survive, or flourish.

Their importance also becomes apparent when newcomers experience reality shocks. Deceptive recruitment may be implicated here, especially when the job, the work, and the organization have been "sugarcoated."

More often, the main problem is a workplace that does not welcome professionals and does not support professionalism. Contrasting approaches highlight its importance.

One approach is welcoming. Here, newly hired professionals are welcomed for who they are and what they bring, especially for their professional knowledge, sensitivities, skills and abilities. In other words, the organization sends this message: "We want you just as you are, and that's why we hired you. We'll build on what you are and bring as we provide the child welfare knowledge, skills, values, and sensitivities you don't have." The importance of this welcoming approach (called "investiture") is apparent when it's contrasted with the opposite approach (called "divestiture).

In this opposite approach, newcomers are stripped of their lofty expectations, ideals, and professional identities. Here, standards of professionalism and the content of professional education are de-valued and discredited as "too academic and not practical." In other words, the organization sends this message: "What you've learned and what you've become are not appropriate, feasible, or effective here. We're glad we hired you, but now we must strip away your idealism, help you unlearn what you acquired in universities, and prepare you for the job(s) we offer."

The Fourth Priority: Embedded Professionalism

Everyday life in the organization, especially routine operations, working conditions, and taken-for-granted rules and structures, comprise the fourth improvement priority. For example, are the standards of professionalism embedded in jobs, work expectations, supervision, evaluation mechanisms, accountability structures, rules, and policies? And, are professionals encouraged and rewarded when they offer suggestions for improvements and pilot innovations?

In other words, the organization sends this message: "We want to support and retain you because we cannot succeed and improve our performance without the benefit of your expert knowledge, skills, values, and sensitivities. We want and need your

commitments, including your commitment to steward our organization, and we will do everything we can to engage and empower you."

An Inventory of Professionals' Expectations, Norms, Needs, and Aspirations

What, specifically, do professionals expect, want, need, and deserve? Sixteen special features are listed below. These features are derived from theory and research on professionals' efficacy, effectiveness, and overall well being, including the central place their work and their jobs occupy in their lives. They are not rank-ordered.

Although these features are presented separately to facilitate planning and analysis, they are interdependent. Together they comprise a coherent whole representing a comprehensive view of professionalism; this whole is more than the sum of the parts.

Questions for assessment and planning follow each feature. These questions do not exhaust the possibilities. Users of this inventory are encouraged to develop others.

- **Performing Meaningful, Valuable Work, Including Jobs and Roles that Ensure Success and Well Being:** The job and roles are intrinsically rewarding and enhance well being because the work is meaningful and valuable; and because professionals are successful. Professionals thus gain meaning, purpose, direction, and coherence in their lives, and, as a result, they are engaged in, and committed to, their work.

Examples of Assessment Questions:

1. Has the agency operationally defined success and effectiveness?
 2. Are jobs and roles designed to identify and reward success?
 3. Do jobs and roles need to be reconfigured to increase the probability of success?
 4. Do successful workers get "rewarded" by receiving more cases, including more difficult cases?
 5. Are jobs and roles designed to emphasize the importance, meaning, and value of the work?
 6. Do workers feel safe when they visit children, youth, and families?
 7. Do managers and supervisors emphasize the intrinsic benefits of the work (e.g., saving lives, preserving and supporting families)?
 8. Are jobs and roles health-enhancing for workers?
 9. Are jobs and roles designed to encourage and reward active engagement?
 10. Are jobs and roles designed to encourage and reward commitments to the job? To clients? To the agency? To the profession?
- **Enjoying a Unified, Genuine Identity:** The job and the organization promote, support, and reward an integrated identity in which Jane or John the person and the worker are fused. There's no need to "put on airs" and pretend on the job. In other words, there is no need to put on "identity disguises" and "identity masks" on the job and in the workplace. This unified, genuine (authentic) identity includes a positive sense of self (a personal identity) and a positive social identity provided by co-

workers and the agency. In other words, personal, professional, and organizational identities are intertwined in positive, desirable ways. The worker thus experiences coherence across multiple domains. One result is "an authentic self." This authenticity reduces the need for stress-inducing, emotional labor and impression management; and, it prevents depersonalization and cynicism, both of which cause burnout.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. What is the agency's desired identity? Does its mission promote this identity? Does the agency communicate effectively its identity and mission to external publics?
2. Does the public view workers as professionals?
3. Does the agency treat workers as professionals?
4. Are professional memberships and affiliations and activities encouraged, supported, and rewarded?
5. Are professionals provided with career development options, opportunities, supports, and resources in support of their "possible selves," i.e., the kind of professional and person they want to become?
6. When workers receive advanced degrees in social work, are they promoted to supervisory and managerial positions?
7. Do workers spend time and energy creating a favorable impression, while hiding their true feelings and genuine selves?"

- **Experiencing Challenging, Intrinsically Rewarding Work.** The job and its demands challenge professionals—without threatening them. Work-related challenges enable continuous, embedded professional development and learning. These manageable challenges, continuous professional development, and achievements make the work and the intrinsically rewarding, encouraging retention.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Do supervisors and managers regularly assess whether workers are sufficiently challenged? Do they also assess whether workers are threatened, even overwhelmed by the challenges they perceive?
 2. Are workers with advanced degrees (e.g., MSWs) sufficiently challenged in their jobs, especially when they follow agency rules and guidelines to the letter?
 3. Do workers emphasize the intrinsic benefits they derive from their work?
 4. Do supervisors and managers emphasize these intrinsic benefits when they recruit workers? When they evaluate and reward them?
 5. Does the agency have in place mechanisms whereby work-related challenges provide timely opportunities for embedded professional development?
- **Enjoying a Fit Between Life and Work:** The job and its demands are compatible with, and supportive of, personal needs, demands, and aspirations. This life-work coherence promotes a positive sense of self, prevents some kinds of stress, enables

ongoing self-enhancement and well being, and fosters commitments to the job, the profession, and the agency.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Are jobs and roles designed to prevent work overloads and their accompanying problems (e.g., fatigue, lack of effectiveness, burnout)?
2. Are jobs and roles designed to support professionals' family systems?
3. Are jobs and roles designed to meet the "off work" needs of women? Of men? Of veteran workers? Of new workers?
4. Does the agency provide flex time and comp time arrangements to help workers manage life-work demands?
5. Does the agency focus some of its retention planning and resources on workers' family systems?

- **Benefiting From Positive Affect, Human Caring, and Trusting Relationships.** Job and role requirements, the climate of the workplace, and organizational rules, policies, and procedures promote and support emotional well being. Cemented by trusting relationships, a sense of mutual respect and a sense of human caring are pervasive. Rules and policies are fair, non-discriminatory and non-repressive, and it's safe and appropriate to discuss feelings and emotional reactions. Above all, everyone in the organization is on alert for toxic emotions that can spread, and all share responsibility for preventing them.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Do professionals view agency policies, rules, and procedures as fair, just, and non-discriminatory?
2. Do people at all levels of the agency trust each other?
3. Do professionals representing diverse backgrounds feel welcomed, supported, valued, and rewarded?
4. Do clients experience positive, inclusive, fair, just, non-repressive, and non-discriminatory treatment?
5. Is the workplace environment relatively free of threats, paranoia, and defensive behavior?
6. To what extent do people in the agency trust and respect each other?
7. To what extent do workers experience depersonalization? Do clients?

- **Enjoying a Sense of Professional Community with Social Support Networks:** Co-workers, supervisors, and managers actively make connections with each other and provide each other with social supports. Four kinds of social supports are especially important: task centered; interpersonal; informational; and feedback-oriented. They enhance workers' well being. They prevent burnout. And, they alleviate problems stemming from stressful jobs and trauma.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Do job, roles, and workplace environments encourage, support, and reward regular, formal connections among workers?
2. Do managers, supervisors, and co-workers provide social supports for each other?
3. Does the organization promote and reward a sense of community among workers? Social support networks among workers?
4. Do new professionals experience "sink or swim socialization?"
5. Must both veteran and new professionals "fend for themselves" when they have problems, confront challenges, and need new resources?
6. Are professionals at all levels of the organization encouraged and rewarded to seek and secure performance feedback from co-workers?
7. Do the job and the organization encourage and reward the development of "communities of practice" in the workplace?

- **Benefiting from Explicit, Coherent, and Justifiable Purpose(s), Principles, and Values:** Professionals throughout the organization know about, agree with, and strive to achieve, the same basic purpose(s), principles, and values. Because these purposes, principles, and values reflect the preferences of the workforce, they engender commitments to the work, the profession, and the agency. Together they comprise organization-wide transparency and mutual understanding; everyone understands "the big picture."

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Is there widespread agreement about the purposes of the organization? About the core values? About key principles?
2. Do agency leaders actively enlist workers at all levels in the development of core purposes, values, and principles?
3. Are jobs and roles "doable?"
4. Are jobs and roles mostly free of ambiguity, contradiction, and inherent conflicts?
5. Are decision-making processes and criteria transparent and consistent with the organization's purposes?
6. To what extent are routine practices consistent with the organization's announced purposes and priorities?
7. Are workers loyal to their clients and to their profession, but not to their agency?
8. Do the agency's values and principles promote social and economic justice for workers? For clients?

- **Balancing Self-determination, Personal Initiative, Accountability, and Interdependent Relationships.** The job and the organization are designed to support and reward professionals who "take the initiative" within the structure provided by the rules and regulations that are not negotiable. Three components must be balanced here. (1) Personal expectations and needs for some autonomy, discretionary power, flexibility, skill variety, and creativity; (2) Personal accountability requirements in relation to regulatory standards, including specified tasks such as paperwork

completed; and (3) Professionals' inherent dependence on other persons, including other workers and client systems, for their success.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Is personal initiative promoted, supported, and rewarded? For example, do workers have the flexibility to be creative and innovative in their jobs?
2. Is self-regulatory behavior among professionals encouraged, supported, and rewarded? That is, are they encouraged and coached to set goals, self-monitor, and both learn and improve from practice?
3. Do caseworkers regularly complain that supervisors and managers are constantly "looking over their shoulders" and "second-guessing" them?
4. Do supervisors and caseworkers state openly that their superiors don't trust them?
5. Does leadership actively solicit and implement professionals' input on their job descriptions and requirements? Agency rules, policies, and procedures? Accountability mechanisms? Relations with co-workers?
6. Are workers expected to implement scripted service plans and not exercise any discretion?
7. Do workers throughout the organization understand the "rhyme and reason" underlying jobs and departments, especially their interdependence?
8. What are professionals expected to do when they encounter new problems and complex situations that the agency's rules, policies, and procedures don't cover?

- **Demonstrating Research-supported, Evidence-based Competence:** Job descriptions and routine practices enable professionals to do the correct things, in the right way, at the proper times, with the right people, in the right places, for justifiable reasons, and with the desired results. Both individuals and groups have "a can do" perspective in relation to their jobs, goals, and careers, and this efficacy orientation is contagious.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Does the agency place a premium on research-supported and evidenced-based services? For example, are these services emphasized in local training?
2. Does the organization have a repository of relevant research-supported and evidence-based interventions and strategies?
3. Is there a pervasive "can do" attitude among caseworkers, supervisors, and managers? Or, are there workers who feel they can't be successful?
4. Are the opportunities, supports, and rewards for retrieving, translating, and using research?
5. Are caseworkers and supervisors evaluated on the basis of their competent performance?
6. Do the evaluation standards match the actual requirements of their jobs?
7. Are workers at all levels encouraged, supported, and rewarded for reflective and reflexive practice, i.e., formal debriefing to gain new knowledge, enhance learning, and improve workers' competence?

8. Are new caseworkers and supervisors permitted to be beginners and provided coaching, mentoring, and related developmental supports?

- **Benefiting from Effective, Appropriate Incentives and Rewards:** There are compelling reasons and motives for doing the work, and there are economic, social-cultural, and psychological rewards that sustain it.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Are rewards tied to performance and accountability requirements?
2. Are rewards administered equitably and fairly?
3. Are achievements celebrated?
4. Are extraordinary performances publicized and rewarded?

- **Enjoying Access to Resources:** Professionals and the people they serve need adequate resources. When these resources are provided, professionals' well being and sense of competence improve as people in need are served effectively.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Do the available resources match the requirements for successful service delivery?
2. Do all workers have access to various kinds of resources?
3. Is every caseworker able to access the resources offered by other systems--e.g., the courts, schools, juvenile justice, etc.?
4. Do all workers have access to aides for clerical work, transportation, and follow-up visits to families?
5. Is it OK for a worker to ask another worker to accompany him/her on a home visit to ensure safety?

- **Capitalizing on Opportunities, Supports, and Rewards for Reflective Practice.** Individuals and special work groups called communities of practice regularly engaged in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, and they share the new knowledge and skills that reflection generates. Through individual and collaborative reflection, practice develops expertise, benefiting clients, new workers, and the organization. Because reflective practice is so important, veteran mentors and staff developers are employed as coaches for new workers, enabling them to become knowledgeable and skillful in reflective practice.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Do workers' jobs and roles provide the time and supports for them to "hear themselves think?" Or, are they so overwhelmed that they rush from one task to another?

2. Does the organization place a priority on the so-called 15% factor—whereby workers are expected to spend at least 15% of their time reflecting on the knowledge they have and getting the knowledge they need?
 3. Does the organization promote and support communities of practice involving like workers and their supervisors?
 4. Does the organization promote and support veteran mentors who coach new workers and initiate them into communities of practice?
 5. Is practice de-privatized, making it safe for individuals and groups to engage in reflection, solve problems together, and teach and learn from each other?
- **Contributing to a Climate of Innovation with Shared Problem-solving.** The organization and the immediate work group provide safe, secure environments for sharing and testing new ideas, strategies, interventions, and models; solving complex problems; and detecting and correcting mistakes and systematic errors.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Is innovation prized in our agency? If so, how do we recognize and reward it? If not, why not? And, what are the consequences of not emphasizing it?
 2. Is innovation blunted because workers fear that they'll lose their jobs?
 3. Are work teams and groups for shared problem solving organized, supported, and rewarded?
 4. How does the organization detect and correct errors and flaws, i.e., discrepancies between intentions and results? Are there incentives and rewards for this work?
 5. Are some well known problems “off limits” for discussion? And, is the undiscussability of these problems also undiscussable?
- **Enjoying Continuing Professional Development and Career Supports:** Everyone in the organization is supported and rewarded in their desires to "remain current," and persons aspiring to promotion receive professional development supports.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Are professional development resources and supports adequate and equitable?
 2. Has the agency maximized possibilities for workplace-embedded professional development?
 3. What untapped professional development opportunities and mechanisms can be accessed in this time of budget limitations?
 4. Has the agency provided incentives, supports, and rewards for caseworkers seeking advanced degrees, especially in social work?
 5. Has the agency taken advantage of partnerships with nearby colleges and universities? With nearby agencies?
- **Balancing Collegial Relations with Bureaucratic Accountability:** Accountability requirements and mechanisms are widely understood, and the agency has the benefit of having the right people in the right jobs at the right times. As a result, differences

in formal power and authority are minimized in everyday interactions, encouraging collegial relations among workers at all levels and resulting in effective communications and the development of informal, cross-role networks.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Does the agency manage to assign the right people to the right jobs? Or, are there mismatches, including ones involving involuntary transfers?
 2. Where competing priorities exist, does the agency have effective mechanisms for rank-ordering them and resolving conflicts?
 3. Do managers and supervisors know how to monitor and evaluate professional performances?
 4. Do managers and supervisors know how to compare performances and workers in order to reach a standard of judgment?
 5. Do commissioners, managers, and supervisors build a climate of shared responsibility and accountability?
- **Stewarding the Organization.** Workers at all levels are committed to the organization because they are genuinely involved in charting its directions, influencing its operations, and determining the roles they occupy and develop. Managers and supervisors emphasize empowerment- and commitment-oriented leadership and management strategies instead of coercive, compliance-oriented strategies. Workers at all levels feel valued. In brief, organizational support is high, and workers support their organizations.

Examples of Assessment Questions

1. Do managers regularly convene workers to solicit their views and needs? And, do they follow up in a timely manner, implementing recommended improvements?
2. Do managers rely on coercion, threats, and punishments to get workers to comply with job requirements and regulatory demands?
3. Do caseworkers accept shared responsibility for meeting workplace needs and solving workplace problems? Do they feel empowered to suggest and make changes?
4. Do caseworkers and supervisors perceive that managers value them, their work, and their well being?
5. Is decision-making authority entirely, or mostly, located at the top of the organization? Are most decisions top-down, requiring compliance and obedience without any genuine involvement?
6. Does the agency mobilize all of the relevant workers for mutual supports and debriefing when a worker or a child dies?

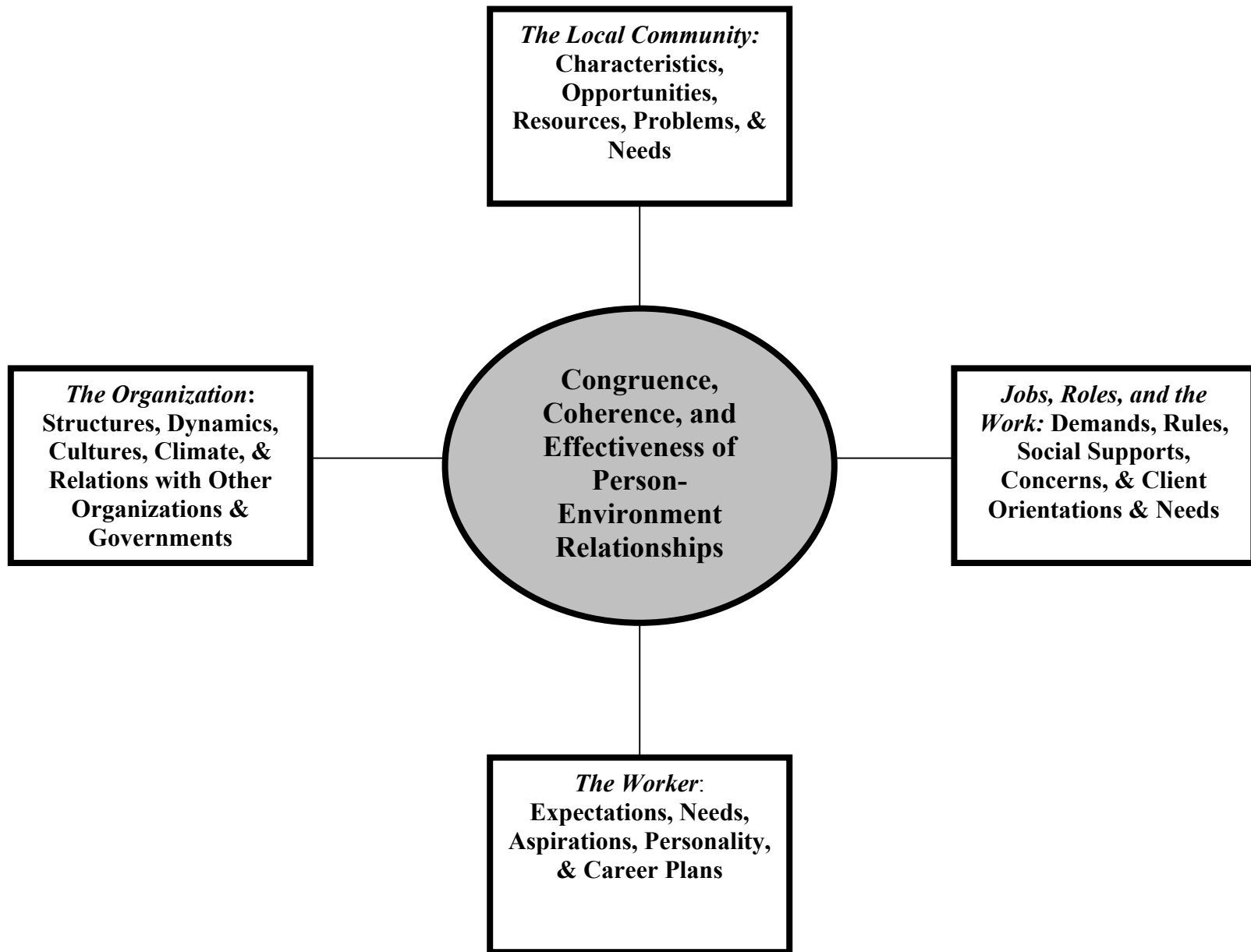


Figure 1. Interacting Components in a Person-in-Environment Framework for Workforce Development and Workplace Optimization