

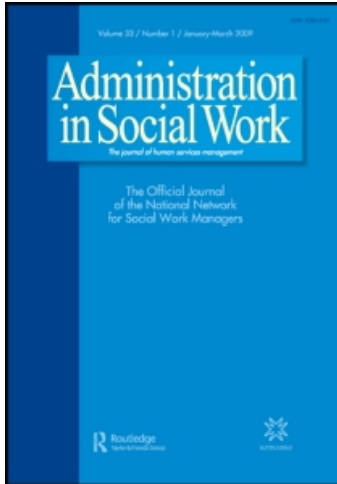
This article was downloaded by: [EBSCOHost EJS Content Distribution - Current]

On: 8 December 2009

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 916903244]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Administration in Social Work

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t792303969>

## Leadership and Management Competencies Defined by Practicing Social Work Managers

Shelly Wimpfheimer <sup>ab</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Youth and Family Services, YMCA of Greater New York, New York, NY, USA <sup>b</sup> National Network of Social Work Managers,

**To cite this Article** Wimpfheimer, Shelly(2004) 'Leadership and Management Competencies Defined by Practicing Social Work Managers', *Administration in Social Work*, 28: 1, 45 – 56

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1300/J147v28n01\_04

**URL:** [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J147v28n01\\_04](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J147v28n01_04)

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Leadership and Management Competencies Defined by Practicing Social Work Managers: An Overview of Standards Developed by the National Network for Social Work Managers

Shelly Wimpfheimer, DSW

**ABSTRACT.** The National Network for Social Work Managers, a professional membership organization established in the mid-'80s as a resource for social workers involved in agency management, has developed a set of tools designed to improve management skills and ultimately the quality of service delivery in agencies. This article reviews these tools, focusing on the ten competencies needed to run a well-functioning, high quality organization. In addition, it will briefly introduce the reader to the Certified Social Work Manager (CSWM) credential, the only nationally recognized credential for specialists in social work management, as well as the Network's management practice standards. Although the primary purpose of this article is to introduce readers to these new contributions to the field of social work management, it also hopes to stir interest in the academic and practice communities in working collaboratively to develop additional new materials in the area of quality leadership by social work managers. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

---

Shelly Wimpfheimer is Vice President, Youth and Family Services, YMCA of Greater New York, 333 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10001, and is Past President, National Network of Social Work Managers.

Administration in Social Work, Vol. 28(1) 2004  
<http://www.haworthpress.com/web/ASW>

© 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.  
Digital Object Identifier: 10.1300/J147v28n01\_04

**KEYWORDS.** Management competencies, National Network for Social Work Managers, credentialing, Certified Social Work Manager, management practice standards

Successful management of social service agencies involves a skill set that is quite extensive and complex. The strong manager must be an expert in many fields and must be able to make decisions that are based on knowledge that is varied and multi-faceted.

In the case of traditional social work agencies, managers often ascend through the ranks of the organization after having worked as direct service workers and supervisors. Sometimes they have received training as managers; but most times they have not. If they are fortunate, they have had good role models and good supervision and are oriented toward doing management tasks. However, in many instances these neophytes to management are expected to know what to do and how to do it with little training and support.

In the last thirty years, leaders in social work education have recognized the need for formal preparation in social service agency management, resulting in an increase in the number of graduate programs for social work managers around the country. These programs have focused on teaching specific skills that are required to guide the operation of an organization. Coursework in these programs focuses on planning, program development, financial management, and other topics more commonly associated with "the business side" of running an agency. It is important to note, however, that the number of people in this area of specialization is still far smaller than those in any of the other social work practice concentrations.

During the mid-'80s a small group of social work management pioneers, working in non-profit and government agencies, decided to establish an organization specifically for social work managers. Recognizing that no such group existed, they hoped to provide a place for colleagues with similar professional experience to gather, share ideas, discuss strategies for improving their practice and generally serve as a support network for each other. This was the birth of the National Network for Social Work Managers (NNSWM). These leaders defined the mission of the Network as "strengthening America's social organizations by enhancing, encouraging and equipping social work manager excellence. They aimed to do this by making the Network the foremost leadership corps for people-centered management with a further goal of merging high-performance management techniques with social work experience and people-centered values" (NNSWM, 1994, p. 4).

Over the years, these leaders have maintained the belief that although social work managers share many of the same values and attitudes as their colleagues

working in direct practice, their work as managers has led them to have a unique perspective on what is involved in providing good services to clients. In addition to their perspective differing from that of other social workers, these managers often do not see eye-to-eye with managers trained in public administration, Non-Profit Management, and business administration programs.

For more than a decade after its founding, members of the Board of Directors of the Network engaged in intense discussions about many issues associated with agency management, including what unique contributions a person with social work training could make to any social service setting. The group was quite concerned that no standards for good practice existed and that the competencies needed to function well as a manager were still undefined and unexpressed in a formal way. In 1997, believing that the creation of these standards was well within the purview of an organization such as the Network, a committee chaired by Dr. Tom Scullion was formed to study these competencies and recommend their adoption to the Board of Directors of the Network. That same year the proposed competencies were approved. In the years since 1997, the competencies have undergone review and modification, with the most recent edition approved by the Network Board of Directors in January 2002.

Recognizing and defining the competencies needed by managers is a first step toward improving service delivery. These competencies can be used in many ways including the following examples: (1) as an aid to boards of directors in hiring management staff; (2) to support the appraisal process for current managers; (3) as a way of defining the professional development needs of managers; and (4) as a tool for managers to refine their own skills.

Simultaneously under discussion by the Network's Board of Directors was whether to establish a national credential recognizing the training and experience of social work managers. Discussions with NASW leadership revealed that there were no plans for creating such a credential, leaving the way clear for the Network to establish one for national use. It was anticipated that once the competencies were developed, the Network would then have the foundational work done for creating the Certified Social Work Manager (CSWM) credential.

With the completion of the competencies, the Network formed the Academy of the National Network for Social Work Managers (the Academy), a group chaired by Professor Creasie Finney Hairston (Dean, Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois), and comprised of social work managers from academia, agency, and private practice. The Network provides staffing for the Academy. The major responsibilities of the Academy are the development and implementation of the CSWM program and the review and approval of applications.

The Academy recommended the following minimum requirements for applicants for the CSWM. The Board of Directors approved these requirements in 1997 (NNSWM, 2003).

- A BSW or MSW (social work) degree
- At least five years of management experience
- Membership in the National Network for Social Work Managers
- Demonstrated competency in 12 core areas
- Attainment of a score of 100 points in an application to be submitted
- Approval by the members of the Academy

Following the development of the process, the credential was advertised to members of the Network, and subsequently more widely, and qualified candidates were invited to submit their credentials. Currently, members of the Academy and the staff of the Network review and grant the Certified Social Work Manager (CSWM) credential to social work managers meeting the above criteria, from all states, with the exception of North Carolina.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the management competencies and the CSWM credential, the Network has also developed “management practice standards” (NNSWM, 2003). The Network, as always, used an open, deliberative, multi-draft process to develop the standards. There are a total of 46 standards in the following categories: knowledge base; personal skills; ethical standards/social work values; and technical skills and experience. Due to space limitations, a more extensive discussion of the standards is planned for a future article. This article focuses on the social work management competencies developed by the Network and critical to the CSWM credential.

### ***PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL WORK MANAGEMENT***

There is a total of ten competencies; the competencies are divided into the two categories of “external relations” and “internal relations” (see Figure 1 for a complete list of the competencies). This section of the paper describes and explains each competency, placing emphasis on why each is important.

#### ***Competency #1: Contemporary Social and Public Policy Issues***

Irrespective of the age of the agency, it is essential that its leadership remains knowledgeable and current on the many contemporary social and public policy issues that impact the agency. Even agencies with great longevity must work

FIGURE 1. Management Competencies of the National Network for Social Work Managers

**External Relations**

- Contemporary social and public policy issues
- Advocacy
- Public/community relations and marketing
- Governance

**Internal Relations**

- Planning
- Program development and management
- Financial development
- Evaluation
- Human resource management
- Staff development

continuously to understand the newest thinking related to their field(s) of practice. As an example, agencies that have operated childcare services for many years are dealing with very different issues now than in the past. They must be knowledgeable about such contemporary matters as nontraditional family configurations, adoption and foster care rules and regulations, legal issues regarding child custody, to name a few.

Well-informed managers keep abreast of all of the newest thinking, the related technology and other technical advances in the field in which they work. It is their responsibility to insure that their staff is well informed and that clients receive the benefit of the most current thinking. In addition, it is their responsibility to serve as experts and spokespeople on matters of concern to their various constituencies, including board members, the media, the community at large, and other professionals.

***Competency #2: Advocacy***

Advocacy is the ability and knowledge to take a position on an issue and make one's position known, either publicly or privately on the topic. Advocacy is one of the underpinnings of social work practice. No matter what the arena of social work practice or one's role or function in an agency, advocacy for an individual or an issue is an integral part of the work.

Managers who are effective advocates are able to tell the story of the agency and its mission in an intelligent, convincing, and compassionate way. They are able to inspire staff and volunteers, the community, funders, and/or government officials to think favorably about the work of the agency and to join in the effort to support its work, either financially or otherwise.

### ***Competency #3: Public/Community Relations and Marketing***

Public and community relations and marketing have long been associated with the for-profit world and managers in these arenas have toiled to promote and seek visibility for their products. Social work managers working in more traditional settings have not seen their work as producing a “product” and therefore they have lagged behind in developing the competencies needed to promote their services. Experience has taught us, however, that this avoidance is ill-advised and that it is extremely important for social services providers to inform the public about the various services (products) that are available.

Viewing a service to people as a product has, until recent times, been seen as unethical or simply inappropriate by social workers who are also managers. To many it feels dirty and disrespectful and contrary to the values of our profession. As a matter of fact, most social work managers have elected to take a more passive approach to advertising their services, often leading to their agencies being underutilized and under-funded.

It is safe to say that with greater visibility and recognition, the public can better know the services of the agency. Managers feel the pressure to supervise their operations more closely, to insure that both consumers and competitors feel positively about them. This external scrutiny is actually very good for the agency, as it forces more stringent quality control. But there is also another side to the equation in that greater scrutiny also produces greater anxiety for programs/agencies struggling to maintain high quality.

In some communities, agencies with similar missions see themselves as competitors. Each is trying to serve a larger number of clients, with more diverse, high quality services. They are often vying for the same funding, either from private individuals, corporations, foundations, or through government grants. Funders care about agency reputation and the extent to which the agency has proven itself to be a good participant in the life of the community. They often get this knowledge from public relations and marketing efforts that they learn about through regular communications channels such as newspapers and television, as well as word of mouth reports. These are domains that are only now becoming familiar to most agencies and managers must scramble to acquire the skills to talk about themselves and present their agency’s case to the community at large.

In the end, clients are likely to benefit most by this competition as they may become educated consumers and select the program that best meets their needs.

### ***Competency #4: Governance***

Taylor, Chait, and Holland (2001) have identified the three goals of governance as the following:

1. To add value in ways that advance the organization's vision and mission.
2. To maximize the rate of return to organizational stakeholders.
3. To hold the organization's values, assets, and purpose in public trust.

The goals are accomplished through the combined efforts of the management of the agency and the volunteers that are responsible for governance, the board of directors. Understanding how an agency is "governed" is an essential skill of an effective manager. Most critical in the private non-profit agency, the senior management of an agency must be clear on the appropriate roles and responsibilities of members of the board of directors and the various committees that support the work of the Board and the agency. As the paid staff of the board of directors, managers must strike a balance between providing guidance to the board and taking direction from it—not an easy task to achieve.

Since members of boards of directors are volunteers, there is much work that needs to be done to prepare them for doing the "work" of a board. Managers often incorrectly assume that board members know what is expected of them and are sufficiently informed to know what they should be doing to assist and support the agency. Misconceptions about the responsibilities of board members abound, especially since these tasks have shifted markedly over the last decade. Managers need to be clear about the responsibilities of their volunteers and must be able to communicate them with clarity and diplomacy.

### ***Competency #5: Planning***

Strong performance by an agency does not happen serendipitously. Careful planning by staff and board help chart the future of well-run agencies. Good managers are watching the activities both within and outside of the agency to determine future direction. Establishing and maintaining internal systems for quality control and data collection, analyzing data, anticipating trends, considering social changes, improving technology, and planning for resource acquisition are but a few of the ingredients necessary to operate an agency successfully.

There is a real tension between managing for today and planning for the future. Managers, especially those from small agencies with limited resources, of-



ten find it difficult to reconcile why they should be thinking about the future when they are struggling mightily to manage the present. However, research has shown that strategic planning has helped agencies to maintain program quality. This approach to planning also makes agencies more attractive to funding sources that tend to look favorably on agencies that are thinking about and planning for the future and who are not totally focused on the small details of the present.

Managers must learn to balance the demands of managing all of the day-to-day details of agency life while also being involved with strategic planning. It is up to them to strongly urge their boards of directors (if the boards themselves are not so inclined) to engage in an orderly planning process, to anticipate the future of the agency. Once again, the manager must take the lead in this effort and should not assume that the board has the skills or knowledge necessary to embark upon such a planning process.

### ***Competency #6: Program Development and Management***

Innovative and well-managed programs are the backbone of successful agencies. They are the products that leadership can point to with pride as examples of how well the agency knows its business and how credible the agency is as a professional institution.

It would be ideal if all program development could occur as a result of an orderly planning process, but unfortunately that is not always the case. Programs may come about as a result of a strategic plan but they also may develop as a result of a community need or, in other cases, because of available funding.

Managers must be sure that they are convinced of the need for the program. They must be tuned into the needs of their community. They must make sure that the program is consistent with the agency's mission. Without this focus the agency may end up operating unrelated programs that are difficult to manage with existing resources. They must be able to talk about the program substantively and feel committed to ensuring its continued funding for as long as necessary or possible. Program development and management are not for the "uncommitted" as it takes a considerable amount of time to get a program going and stabilized (my estimate is a minimum of 3 years).

Managers need to understand the importance of program quality—what it takes for a program to be good—what qualifications and skills the staff must have to deliver the service in a high quality way. They need to be able to identify reasonable outcomes and must be able to help staff arrive at a design that will lead to clients achieving them. Managers may have to rely on the skills and abilities of specialists to design the specific interventions in a program, but they must re-

main vigilant about all of the systems that must be developed to insure program effectiveness and efficiency.

### ***Competency #7: Financial Development***

Managing the finances of an organization is a competency that is often challenging for people with other social work management skills. It is clear, however, that an organization cannot be effectively managed without strong fiscal oversight. Examples of the responsibilities of managers include: the keeping of financial records, preparing accurate and meaningful financial statements, budgeting and anticipating financial problems, safeguarding and managing the organization's financial assets, and complying with federal and state reporting requirements (Gross & Warshauer, 1979).

Every agency must have resources, either through paid or volunteer staff, to perform the essential financial management functions. Managers must develop the skills and resources to recognize important financial markers, and be prepared to ask any and all questions that appear necessary to insure the financial integrity of the agency/unit. For managers of non-profit agencies, an important partner in this work is the treasurer of the board of directors who is the designated board member who oversees all of these functions.

The size and complexity of the agency's resources does determine, to a considerable extent, the amount of skill that a manager must have to oversee the fiscal management. Agencies with few revenue sources and minimal capital investments are likely to be less complex while those with varied revenue sources (e.g., private contributions, government grants, and fees), as well as agency occupied or owned real estate, require somewhat more sophisticated systems.

The competent manager must be able to accurately assess the financial needs of the agency and secure the needed expertise through hiring competent and trustworthy staff or recruiting skilled volunteers to complement their own skills in this area.

### ***Competency #8: Evaluation***

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the programs/services that an agency operates is an important ingredient to effective management. The manager needs to recognize the importance of program evaluation, how to select a good person or group to conduct an evaluation, how to frame the important questions to be studied, and how to use the data to bring about improvements in service delivery.

It is not necessary for a manager to have sophisticated skills at conducting evaluations; these competencies can be secured from other professionals. However, managers must be able to take the results of an evaluation and make important management decisions related to the information that is given to them. As an example, if an evaluation is conducted of a counseling program and the results reveal that client attendance has dropped substantially over the last year, the manager must be open and willing to examine the possible causes for this change. Alternatively, if they learn through the evaluation that a particular unit has had better outcome results than other units, they may wish to use that unit as a model for others to maximize their effectiveness or efficiency.

Agencies that are unwilling to examine services they are offering run the risk of becoming ineffective and possibly irrelevant to client needs.

### ***Competency #9: Human Resources Management***

Most social work managers pride themselves on being extremely sensitive and empathic to other people, even those who work as subordinates. Many of us feel that we have a strong intuitive sense about people and that we will be able to use our “clinical” skills to manage behaviors that may or may not be appropriate to the workplace. Although these “softer skills” are important to effective management, when carried to an extreme they can get in the way of managing an efficient and effective organization.

Social work managers report that they often have ambivalent feelings about dealing with employees who have performance or conduct problems at work. They sometimes find themselves avoiding confrontation and overlooking inappropriate conduct. They know that this is not good for the organization but they are reluctant to upset the employee or deal with any of the potentially unpleasant reactions that they may get for taking a strong position with an employee.

The appropriate management of personnel is a skill that can and must be learned by all managers, and social work managers are no exception. A well functioning organization requires a workforce that is skilled in their particular areas of focus and one that works cooperatively toward delivering on the stated mission. The individual needs of an employee do not take precedence over the needs of the organization. The competent manager is continuously challenged to balance the individual needs of a staff member with the building and maintenance of a productive and efficient workforce in the agency.

### ***Competency #10: Staff Development***

Competent staff is essential to quality service delivery, but quality staff does not come easily or cheaply. Managers must be able to assess the professional development needs of their staff and must be able to select appropriate opportuni-

ties to help them acquire the skills needed to do the job. As an example, a youth agency serving an increasing number of delinquent boys may find it necessary to add a behaviorist approach to its treatment repertoire but may not have people on staff with this type of training. How agency management addresses this staff development need will depend on a careful assessment of the extent of the need and the available resources.

Staff development for management staff is an area that is frequently overlooked. Often professional staff members with specific expertise excel in their jobs, and management decides to promote them into a supervisory or management position. The people selected may not have any management training or experience and may find the new assignment to be a bad match with their interests and abilities. Managers must remember that staff development must be done for managers with all levels of experience so that high quality coordination, supervision, and administration of agency functions are achieved.

Budgeting for professional development is an essential part of planning for the agency's future. Managers must make sure that there are sufficient funds available to cover the cost of quality training.

### CONCLUSION

For quality practice to take place in agencies today, all of the competencies discussed above are required by agency managers. They are an integral part of the day-to-day and long-term management of organizations involved in providing human services of any kind. There are many other "realities" in the life of a manager that develop with on-the-job experience. Through hands-on experience both the new and experienced managers are constantly engaged in:

- Understanding their *roles as managers* in organizations, not only what the specific tasks are but also what the organization expects of its managers.
- Understanding the *organization's style of operation*—for example, are professionals expected to operate relatively independently or are they expected to rely heavily on the direction of their supervisors; what is the climate of the agency—is it relaxed or somewhat formal?
- Understanding how the organization is seen in its *inter-agency environment*—is the style collegial or competitive?
- Understanding the *values and priorities* of the agency—is the agency more "results" oriented or "process" oriented; who or what comes first in the priorities of the agency?
- Understanding the *fiscal condition* of the agency—is it relatively stable financially or does it struggle to survive?

- Understanding the *informal structure* of the agency—do units of the agency work well together or are they independent or competitive with each other?

There is much work to be done in the future to further refine the competencies and standards associated with good management practice. The process of learning and documenting these critical aspects of social work management is in its infancy. Further discussion and writing by faculty and the practice community are necessary to insure that in the future more highly skilled and well-trained professional social work managers fill key positions in agencies and organizations throughout the country.

#### NOTE

1. The state of North Carolina already has a credential for social work managers called the CSWM.

#### REFERENCES

- Gross, M. J. Jr., & Warshauer, W. Jr. (1979). *Financial accounting guide for nonprofit organizations* (3rd ed.). NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- National Network for Social Work Managers. (1994). *Platform statement*. Author.
- National Network for Social Work Managers. (2002). *Leadership and management practice standards*. Retrieved April 6, 2003, from <<http://www.socialworkmanager.org/Standards.htm>>.
- National Network for Social Work Managers. (2003). *Application: Certified social work managers*. Retrieved April 5, 2003, from <<http://www.socialworkmanager.org/certapp.htm>>.
- Taylor, B. E., Chait, R. P., & Holland, T. P. (2001, April). *Building blocks of governance*. Paper presented at the YMCA of Greater New York Trustee Seminar, New York, NY.