Empowering Staff and Clients: Comparing Preferences for Management Models by the Professional Degrees Held by Organization Administrators

Donna Hardina and Salvador Montana

In this article, findings from a national survey of social service managers are described. Respondents were asked to identify theories and models of management that influenced their administrative activities. The results indicate that many of the respondents used an empowerment-oriented approach to management. Respondents were more likely to engage in management activities that focused on empowering staff than in activities intended to increase client involvement in the political process or organizational decision making. However, when the responses of participants with MSW degrees were compared with those of non-social workers, findings indicate that social workers are more likely to engage in workplace activities that facilitate the political empowerment of clients.

KEY WORDS: empowerment; management practice; participatory management; theories of management

As defined by Gutiérrez, Parsons, and Cox (1998), empowerment practice in social work can occur in interactions between clients and workers, among members of self-help groups, and in actions taken by social service organizations to involve staff and clientele in decision making. Empowerment strategies are considered to be most effective when they originate from the values and actions of organization leaders and are embedded in the organization’s decision-making structure (Linhorst, Eckert, & Hamilton, 2005; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). However, many social service administrators adopt management approaches that incorporate principles associated with for-profit businesses: cost containment, finding low-wage alternatives to paying good salaries, and concentrating decision-making authority in a handful of top managers (Anthony & Young, 2003; Bobic & Davis, 2003). These activities often conflict with the promotion of social work values such as social justice and client self-determination (Linhorst et al., 2005).

Only a handful of research studies have actually examined management practices used by social workers (Hoefer, 1995; McNutt, 1995). Consequently, very little is known about whether social workers actually apply empowerment theories and principles in management practice or whether social workers are more likely than other nonprofit managers to apply empowerment approaches and principles. In this article, we report on findings from a national online survey of nonprofit and public managers. Members of several professional organizations associated with nonprofit management were asked to describe their own approaches to management. Respondents were also asked whether, and to what degree, their organizations engaged in activities designed to empower organization staff and clients. These responses were then analyzed to determine whether management approaches adopted by social work managers varied from those used by graduates of other types of master’s programs offering content on nonprofit management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The empowerment approach to management is one of a number of models of administrative practice that are commonly used by nonprofit or public managers of social service organizations such as management by objectives (MBO), total quality management (TQM), Theory X, and the human relations model (Austin, 2002; Kettner, 2002; Netting & O’Connor, 2003). Models include theoretical assumptions, values, or perspectives about how indi-
vidual managers should carry out their roles, activities, and specific skills sets to achieve their intended outcomes (Hardina, 2002). The empowerment model of management practice and the outcomes that this approach is intended to produce are well explicated in the management literature in business, social psychology, public administration, and social work (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1995; Petter, Byrnes, Choi, Fegan, & Miller, 2002; Shera & Page, 1995). Although there is limited research on whether empowerment-oriented management is used by nonprofit and public managers, previous studies have examined whether management education or type of graduate degree (business, social work, public administration, or nonprofit management) influence what types of management activities are undertaken by nonprofit and public sector administrators.

The Empowerment Model and Skills for Nonprofit and Public Organization Managers

The term “empowerment” is often linked to participatory management (Pine, Warsh, & Maluccio, 1998). Although it is used to describe efforts to expand decision-making roles for nonadministrative staff members in social service organizations, empowerment was originally associated with efforts to include clients in social service decision making. Client participation as a formal process had its origins in efforts to directly involve consumers in the management of social service organization during the War on Poverty in the 1960s (Arnstein, 1969).

Although the War on Poverty was deemed unsuccessful, many people in the social service sector remained committed to the principles associated with client participation in organization decision making (Rose, 2000). Barbara Solomon (1976) defined empowerment as “a process whereby persons who belong to a stigmatized social category throughout their lives can be assisted to develop and increase skills in the exercise of interpersonal influence and the performance of valued social roles” (p. 6). Early work by Jayaratne (1978) and others (Parsons & Cox, 1989; Schatz & Bane, 1991) on family decision-making styles and techniques among families and youths involved with human service organizations highlighted the capacity of families to acquire knowledge and skills to better understand and resolve their own problems. Building on this earlier work, many child welfare-serving organizations now subscribe to the principles of family group decision making and its many variants that seek to empower families to resolve their own problems by mobilizing family and community supports and resources (Berzin, Cohen, Thomas, & Dawson, 2008; Weigensberg, Barth, & Guo, 2009).

Empowerment-oriented strategies for involving low-income service recipients in organization decision making, self-advocacy, and program evaluation were intended to help individuals see themselves as having the power to resolve their own problems and to influence political change (Rose & Black, 1985). Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) specifically linked empowerment to citizen or client participation, arguing that inclusion of community residents in organization decision making and social change activities had therapeutic effects: helping participants develop leadership skills, reducing feelings of oppression, and increasing each individual’s sense of personal self-efficacy.

In contemporary management practice, the term empowerment came to encompass both nonprofit and for-profit management approaches. Empowerment-oriented management is thought to improve the quality of service, increase worker productivity, stimulate innovation, and improve interpersonal relationships between staff members and administrators (Gutiérrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995; Lawler et al., 1995). The for-profit business literature largely emphasizes management approaches designed to “flatten organization hierarchies,” to transfer some decision-making authority to staff members who do not ordinarily carry management responsibility (Spreitzer, 1995). These approaches focus on reducing the number of supervisory staff, creating workplace teams to improve information sharing and organization cohesiveness, placing the responsibility for quality control on members of various work units, and encouraging worker advocacy for improved services to paying customers (Bowen & Lawler, 1995; Corsun & Enz, 1999; Dailey & Bishop, 2003).

The social work and social psychology literature focuses on one outcome not explicated in the business literature: the political empowerment of community residents or clients who are involved in social action (Parsons, 1999; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). Studies have confirmed that efforts by community-based organizations to increase participation in social action and politics among local residents and clientele is highly associated with increases in their political power and ability
to influence community change (Itzhaky & York, 2002; Speer & Hughey, 1995; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Increased political power and the ability to link clientele with other neighborhood organizations also enhance an organization’s ability to generate the resources needed to provide services and the capacity to lobby for social change (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). Consequently, Saegert and Winkel (1996) argued that additional measures of the impact of the empowerment approach to management should include individual and group engagement in social action, the development of interpersonal ties, and linkages between individuals and organizations.

Nonprofit and Public Management Skills: Variations by Graduate Degrees or Profession

One of the primary assumptions inherent in empowerment practice is that only in instances in which staff members feel empowered will they proactively share decision-making power with the people they serve (Barte, Couchonnal, Canda, & Staker, 2002; Boehm & Staples, 2002). The research literature on staff empowerment in organizations has identified the support of organization managers as critical in the effective implementation of this approach (Lawler et al., 1995; Shera & Page, 1995). The empowerment-oriented manager should “promote meaningful client participation by sharing decision-making power and respectfully considering and acting on client preferences” (Linhorst et al., 2005, p. 28). The role of the manager may be especially important in the provision of social services to clientele. Poertner (2006) examined recent literature that explored the relationship between management behavior and client outcomes in the provision of social work services. He found many studies that confirmed a link between management strategies that emphasize positive interaction between social work managers and workers, inspirational leadership, and problem-solving approaches and such outcomes as service effectiveness and consumer satisfaction with services.

Poertner’s (2006) analysis did not explicitly compare the effectiveness of various management approaches in providing quality services or examine whether there are differences in the effectiveness of supervision provided by people with different types of management training or professional degrees. However, several studies have examined whether there are differences in management approaches or emphasis on different types of skills among MSW, MBA, MPA, and free-standing nonprofit management program graduates.

For example, Hoefer (1995, 2003) conducted two studies that examined the perceptions of social work and public administration instructors and nonprofit and government managers about the importance of specific job skills and their perceptions about which graduate degrees (social work, public administration, business, or no degree needed) offered the best preparation for human service administration. Rankings of the importance of management skills were consistent among the four groups surveyed. Commitment to clients, professionalism, and written and oral communication were rated at the highest level. However, there was substantial disagreement among the four groups of respondents in terms of their preferences for job applicants with specific types of degrees. Instructors in MSW and MPA programs felt their own degrees were best. However, when the data were examined for the sample as a whole (both managers and instructors regardless of discipline), MBA and MPA degrees were perceived to be best for top-level managers, whereas MSW degrees were perceived to be best for middle or entry-level managers.

Haas and Robinson (1998) surveyed executive directors of nonprofit organizations about what degree they preferred their management employees to hold. The sample was drawn from a United Way directory of nonprofits serving a large urban county. Fifty percent of the respondent organizations provided social services, health care, or advocacy services; the other 50 percent of the organizations provided education or recreational services or were related to the arts or religion. The executive directors surveyed ranked MSW degrees lower than graduate degrees in nonprofit management, business, and public administration. The directors of large organizations preferred the MBA degree; the directors of organizations that receive large amounts of government funding preferred MPAs. The researchers found a slight preference for MSWs among directors of substance abuse or job training agencies compared with directors of other types of nonprofit social service, religious, arts, or recreation-related organizations.

Mirabella and Wish (2000) also conducted research to compare the perceptions of nonprofit managers and instructors as to the best type of degree
for managers. They selected 10 business, stand-alone nonprofit management, social work, and public administration programs with nonprofit management curriculum. In each setting, they conducted focus groups and surveys with students, employers, alumni, and instructors. The researchers also conducted a comparison study of the curriculum in each type of program. They found that the curriculums for MBA, MPA, and nonprofit management programs tended to focus on internal management issues such as finances and human resources, whereas social work programs were more likely to focus on the importance of maintaining external relations, advocacy, fundraising, and community leadership. When asked to indicate what type of program offered better preparation for careers in nonprofit management, respondents recommended the type of program with which they were affiliated. Mirabella and Wish concluded that the major difference between social work and other nonprofit programs has to do with the values articulated in the social work curriculum and the advocacy focus of the profession.

These studies suggest that if empowerment-oriented activities are undertaken by nonprofit managers there may be some variation by professional degree. The assumption examined in this article is that social workers, if they engage in these activities at all, will be more likely to engage in organizational activities that focus on external relationships or client advocacy than will managers who hold MBA, MPA, or other degrees. As Mirabella and Wish (2000) also suggested, MBAs and other nonprofit degree holders may be more attuned to internal relations and, consequently, be more likely to engage in activities oriented toward decentralizing staff decision making and transferring some decision-making authority to nonadministrative staff.

**METHOD**

To examine the use of theories and management models used by social service managers and whether management activities are consistent with these approaches, we conducted an online survey (Hardina, in press). Members of the National Network for Social Work Managers (NNSWM), the Association for Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Associations (ARNOVA), and the Association for Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA) were invited to participate in a national study of nonprofit managers. Using these organizations as a sampling frame, the total number of potential respondents was 1,708: 1,180 from ARNOVA, 316 from NNSWM, and 212 from ACOSA (personal communication with D. Banerjee, Membership Services, NNSWM, Chicago, June 29, 2009; personal communication with B. Butterfield, Membership and Records, ACOSA, Chicago, July 20, 2009; personal communication with R. Lohmann, professor, University of West Virginia, ARNOVA—L. Listserv coordinator, Morgantown WV, July 6, 2009).

Survey Monkey, a Web-based, online service, was used to construct and administer the survey. Respondents were invited to complete either a survey for nonprofit or public managers or a survey for instructors in nonprofit management programs. Online surveys have a number of advantages as well as limitations. They are easy to administer, are low cost, save time, and allow the researcher access to virtual communities and membership organizations with e-mail lists or active Listservs (Rubin & Babbie, 2008; Wright, 2005). However, the major limitation of such surveys is that it is difficult to establish how respondents drawn from these groups differ from nonrespondents or how members of these organizations differ from the general population of people with similar interests or backgrounds. Consequently, it may be difficult to establish the generalizability of findings.

A total of 213 surveys were received, 119 for the managers survey and 94 for the instructors survey, a 14.0 percent response rate, if these potential respondents received the surveys. Some of the e-mail addresses were inaccurate and “bounced” back to us. During the course of the study, we also received an additional list of instructors in nonprofit management programs from Roseanne Mirabella, associate professor, Department of Political Science at Seton Hall University. The list was part of a comprehensive database of nongovernmental organization-related studies programs developed by Dr. Mirabella and funded by the Kellogg Foundation (Mirabella, 2007). We sent approximately 200 additional surveys to members of that list, expecting that these potential participants would be most likely to respond to the instructors survey. Some of these names may have duplicated those on previous lists. We also encountered another unexpected difficulty with the survey; some respondents did not simply complete the survey themselves, they forwarded the survey to colleagues, employees, and friends, expanding the parameter of the study to individuals who were not members of the three
organizations originally included in the sample. Therefore, it is impossible to calculate an accurate response rate for this study.

Some respondents provided answers for a portion of the survey but did not complete it. These surveys were deleted from the analysis. This article reports on 78 completed surveys from the managers survey. Participants were asked to select their own theoretical approaches to management and the models of practice they used from a list of management theories and models. In addition, they were asked to indicate whether, and to what degree, their organization used management practices consistent with empowerment-oriented approaches to management. A list of empowerment-related activities was compiled from available literature that explicates specific management activities associated with the empowerment approach (Gutiérrez et al., 1998; Hardina, Middleton, Montana, & Simpson, 2006; Lawler et al., 1995; Shera & Page, 1995; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). Responses were then analyzed to determine whether social workers were more likely to engage in empowerment-oriented management activities than members of other professions such as public administration or business. For this exploratory-descriptive study, a factor analysis was also conducted to determine whether the 26 management activities associated with empowerment-oriented management practice could be grouped together to reveal some underlying concepts. A final analysis was conducted to see if there was an association between type of professional degree and each of these concepts.

RESULTS
Most of the respondents were upper-level managers in nonprofit social service organizations and held MSWs. Respondents reported using a variety of practice theories and models in day-to-day practice. Model and theory preferences differed by professional degree. Social workers were more likely than non–social workers to use theories and management models associated with empowerment and other participatory approaches to management. When the frequency at which respondents engaged in management activities associated with the empowerment approach was examined, findings indicated that these managers were more likely to take action to empower staff members rather than organization clientele. However, social work managers were more likely than non–social workers to engage in activities that increase the political power of people served by their organizations.

Demographic Profile of Respondents
Seventy-eight (78) respondents completed the survey. Sixty-eight (68) respondents held master’s degrees, with 60 percent indicating degrees in social work, 9 percent having degrees in nonprofit management, and 6 percent having degrees in business. Twenty-five percent of the respondents reported having degrees in other fields, including sociology, counseling, psychology, law, education, and divinity. The majority of respondents were white (81.3 percent) and female (64.0 percent); 80.8 percent were employed in nonprofit organizations at the time of the study, followed next by public organizations (15.4 percent). Respondents were most likely to hold upper management positions such as assistant, associate, or executive director (39.7 percent) or were program managers (25.6 percent). Other respondents described themselves as having upper management positions such as vice president, manager, or director, with oversight for projects such as organization or program development (17.6 percent) or held mid-management positions such as department head, assistant program director, coordinator, or supervisor (8.8 percent).

A majority of respondents (69.2 percent) had been in their positions for three or more years, and a majority of respondents (62.9 percent) worked in organizations with budgets over 1 million dollars per year. Fifty-four percent (54.8 percent) of participants reported that their organizations employed 51 or more staff members. Respondents were most likely to be employed in social service agencies (30.8 percent), health or mental health services (16.7 percent), education (15.4 percent), and child welfare (9.0 percent). The remaining respondents worked for different types of organizations. Two or more respondents were employed in advocacy, grantsmanship and/or technical assistance, community development, research, and membership organizations; two respondents worked in community centers.

Almost half (49.4 percent) of respondents identified their organization as devoted to the provision of services, and another 33.8 percent of respondents identified their organization as devoted both to advocacy and provision of services. Only 3.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked for advocacy organizations, and 13.0 percent stated that
their organizations were neither social service nor advocacy oriented. When type of organization was analyzed by graduate degree, social workers were significantly more likely than non-MSWs to be employed by health and social service organizations (70.7 percent and 44.4 percent, respectively). This difference is statistically significant \( \chi^2(1, N = 68) = 4.70, p = .03 \).

Management Theories and Models Used by Respondents

To examine whether management practices in social service organizations are consistent with contemporary management literature, respondents were given a list of theories commonly cited in the nonprofit management and social work administration literature. Source material for the list included textbooks on social service management by Austin (2002), Kettner (2002), Lohmann and Lohmann (2002), and Netting and O’Connor (2003). Respondents were asked whether they used each of the 21 theories in their day-to-day practice as managers. The theories most often identified by respondents \( (N = 78) \) were systems theory (74.4 percent), empowerment theory (59.0 percent), organization culture/sense-making (51.3 percent), and social learning theory (37.2 percent).

Respondents were also asked whether they used an overall approach or model of management practice in their daily work activities. Respondents indicated that the models used most often were participatory management (57.7 percent), MBO (43.6 percent), TQM (39.7 percent), and the empowerment model (38.5 percent).

Tests of association were used to determine the relationship between the four most identified models by all participants; respondents who selected the participatory model were also likely to select the empowerment model. The association between these two models was statistically significant \( \chi^2(1, N = 78) = 9.93, p = .002 \). However, no relationship was found between the use of participatory management and the TQM model \( \chi^2(1, N = 78) = .779, p = .37 \). No association was found between the participatory model and MBO \( \chi^2(1, N = 78) = 0.56, p = .46 \). No significant relationships were found between the empowerment model and TQM \( \chi^2(1, N = 78) = .001, p = .97 \) or empowerment and MBO \( \chi^2(1, N = 78) = .950, p = .33 \).

Differences in the Use of Theories and Models, by Professional Degree

Differences in respondent selection of management theories and models used most often were also examined to see if these varied by the respondent’s professional graduate degree (see Table 1). Among the 68 respondents who held master’s degrees, 70.7 percent of the MSWs selected empowerment theory, compared with 44.4 percent of the non-MSWs; MSWs were also more likely to select systems theory and organization culture/sense-making theories. Non-MSWs (40.7 percent) were slightly more likely to use social learning theory than MSWs (36.6 percent).

When management models used, by professional degrees, were compared, distinct differences between MSWs and non-MSWs were found: 76.0 percent of the MSWs selected the empowerment model, compared with 24.0 percent of the non-MSWs. Social workers were also more likely to select TQM and participatory management than non-MSWs (see Table 2). However, MSWs (41.5 percent) and non-MSWs (40.7 percent) were about equally as likely to use MBO.

When tests of statistical significance were used to examine the degree of association between graduate degree and the four most identified theories and also for the four most identified models of management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>MSWs Frequency (%) (n = 41)</th>
<th>Non-MSWs Frequency (%) (n = 27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systems theory</td>
<td>34 (82.9)</td>
<td>18 (66.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment theory</td>
<td>29 (70.7)</td>
<td>12 (44.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization culture/sense making</td>
<td>23 (56.1)</td>
<td>14 (51.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social learning theory</td>
<td>15 (36.6)</td>
<td>11 (40.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
practice, MSW respondents were significantly more likely to select empowerment as a theory [$\chi^2 (1, N = 68) = 4.699, p = .03$] than non-MSWs and were also more likely to select empowerment as a model of management practice [$\chi^2 (1, N = 68) = 4.074, p = .04$). However, no significant differences between MSWs and non-MSWs for other identified theories or models of practice were found.

### Management Activities Used by Respondents

To find out whether the organizations that employed respondents actually used participatory and empowerment management methods, respondents were asked to assign a ranking for each item in a list of management practices commonly associated with participatory and empowerment-oriented management. This list included management activities designed to include staff members and clients in organization decision making, actions that increase interorganizational linkages with other organizations and groups, and activities that increase the political power of organizational participants. The list of activities was generated from recent literature on empowerment in organizations (Gutiérrez et al., 1998; Hardina et al., 2006; Lawler et al., 1995; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Shera & Page, 1995).

Respondents were asked to rank these items on a scale of 0 (none) to 4 (always). Of the 26 items on the list, the three highest rankings were given to these items: “Clearly articulates a shared vision for the organization” ($M = 2.9, SD = 0.9$), “Links clients, local residents, and other program beneficiaries to other programs and institutions” ($M = 2.85, SD = 1.20$), and “Promotes team-building and collaboration among staff” ($M = 2.84, SD = 0.98$).

A total of 15 items ranked between 2 and 3 (in the moderate range) were activities commonly used to empower organization staff members, address diversity of workforce, and provide assistance with improving client skills (see Table 3). Almost all of the items that focused on client involvement in organizational leadership and decision making, external organizing, or politics were ranked below 2, at the low end of the scale. The three lowest ranked items were “Engages in voter education activities” ($M = 1.00, SD = 1.26$), “Engages in voter registration” ($M = 1.13, SD = 1.48$), and “Encourages clients or other program beneficiaries to become political activists” ($M = 1.30, SD = 1.28$).

### Factor Analysis: Underlying Dimensions Associated with Empowerment-oriented Management

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal components (PCA) was conducted to assess whether any of the 26 items, indicating participatory and empowerment-oriented management activities, grouped together well to reveal some underlying factors. Springer, Abell, and Hudson (2002) recommended an EFA approach when the literature offers little support for the psychometric properties of the concept. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) stated that EFA is associated with theory development and used for exploring an operational definition of a concept using observed variable items. PCA is the preferred choice for extracting an empirical summary of the data set.

Findings from the factor analysis are presented in Table 4, and the results suggest three factors. Four variables items loaded onto factor 1, four variables items loaded onto factor 2, and three variables items loaded onto factor 3. Interpretation of factors can be risky, but factor 1 reveals activities related to client political participation encouraged by organizational members. Factor two reveals client organizational participation and decision making sought by...
organizational members. Factor 3 reflects activities related to how the job is performed and work conditions within the organization (see Table 4).

Differences between MSW and non-MSW participants for these three factors using t tests were examined. Statistically significant differences between these two groups were found for factor 1, client political activity. Participants with MSWs (M = 4.60, SD = 3.51) were more likely to encourage or support political activities among organizational clients than non-MSW participants (M = 2.60, SD = 2.73), [t(59) = -2.3, p = .01]. No significant differences were found between MSWs and non-MSWs for factors 2 or 3.

**DISCUSSION**

These data suggest that MSWs in this survey identify with empowerment theory to a greater degree than did non-MSWs; MSWs are more inclined to select management models of practice that incorporate empowerment principles and practices. MSWs are more likely than other nonprofit managers to support client political activities. Furthermore, the data indicate that MSWs may possess a broader conceptualization of the concept of empowerment, which includes client efforts to alter their sociopolitical environments, and are congruent with the findings from the content analysis of nonprofit management syllabi conducted by Mirabella and Wish (2000).

Given the broad interpretations given in much of the management literature to the concept of “empowerment,” the factor analysis presented in this article advances current theoretical conceptualizations associated with empowerment-oriented approaches to management. The 26 management activities identified in the empowerment literature.

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**Table 3: Participation in Empowerment-oriented Management Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Activity</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly articulates a shared vision for the organization</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links clients, local residents, and other program beneficiaries to other programs and institutions</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes team-building and collaboration among staff members</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivers culturally appropriate services</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes steps to recruit and retain a diverse workforce</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives workers more autonomy to make decisions that affect their work</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages staff to advocate for improvements in service delivery and client resources</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishes linkages with informal community networks to recruit clients and volunteers</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides opportunities for the involvement of staff members who are not managers in organizational decision making</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages clients or other program beneficiaries to advocate for themselves</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively tries to increase job satisfaction by improving workplace conditions, salaries, and fringe benefits</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves nonmanagement staff in the design and evaluation of programs</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes clients or program beneficiaries in organizational decision making</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in social action to improve government policies and services that will benefit clients or other program beneficiaries</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides opportunities for clients and other program beneficiaries to acquire leadership skills</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves clients and other program beneficiaries in the design and evaluation of services</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates the formation of client self-help groups</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves clients or other program beneficiaries in lobbying for legislation</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes clients or other program beneficiaries on task groups and intraorganizational teams</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has an advisory board that includes clients or other program beneficiaries</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruits clients or other program beneficiaries to serve on the board of directors</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a cultural competency plan</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducts research to identify culturally appropriate policies and services</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages clients or other program beneficiaries to become political activists</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registers clients to vote</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages in voter education activities</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scale measures frequency with which respondent’s organization engages in each activity. Scores on the scale are 0 (never), 1 (once in a while), 2 (sometimes), 3 (fairly often), and 4 (always).
and included in the survey loaded onto three distinct factors:

1. activities that increase the empowerment of staff, such as team building, enhanced autonomy to make decisions, and efforts to increase job satisfaction;
2. activities that increase client participation in board membership, such as membership on advisory committees, membership on boards, membership in task groups, and participation in program design and evaluation; and
3. activities that increase the political power of organization clientele, such as voter registration and actions taken to involve clients in lobbying and political activism.

Although evidence that social service managers are using some components of empowerment-oriented management was found, there are some obvious limitations associated with this study. For a national study, the sample was small. The majority of respondents were social workers, white, and female, making the responses quite different from those we would expect from graduates of nonprofit programs in other types of graduate schools or members of other demographic groups. In addition, the use of chi-square analysis may not have permitted us to identify interaction effects associated with the sample, such as the impact of demographic characteristics or place of employment (social service versus non-social service organizations) on the respondent’s choice of management models and practices.

In addition to these limitations, the use of an online survey presented some challenges. Members of the three organizations from which the sampling frame was drawn are not representative of nonprofit administrators in the United States. Some of the e-mail addresses were duplicative or no longer used. There was no way of knowing how respondents differed from those association members who did not participate in the survey. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot be generalized.

Even with these limitations, our findings make clear that although many social work managers do engage in these activities, actions taken to involve clients in organization decision making occur less often than efforts to empower staff members. A small number of respondents also engaged in activities to increase the political power of the people served by social service organizations.

**CONCLUSION**

Social workers who have provided the theoretical foundation for empowerment practice—such as Solomon (1976), Rose and Black (1985), and Gutiérrez et al. (1998)—have argued that enhancing the political power of clients, especially those who are members of marginalized groups, is a critical

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**Table 4: Factor Loading for Varimax Orthogonal Three-Factor Solution (N = 63)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Engages in voter education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Engages in voter registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Encourages clients or other program beneficiaries to become political activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Involves clients in other program in lobbying for legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Recruits clients or other program beneficiaries to serve on the board of directors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Includes clients or other program beneficiaries on task groups and intra-organization teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Involves clients and other program beneficiaries in the design and evaluation of programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Has an advisory board that includes clients or other program beneficiaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gives workers more autonomy to make decisions that affect their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Actively tries to increase job satisfaction by improving workplace conditions, salaries, and fringe benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Promotes team-building and collaboration among staff members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \( \alpha = .86 \) for the entire measure.
component of this practice model. Involvement in political activism increases an individual’s sense of self-efficacy and feelings of control over his or her personal environment. Political power is necessary if people are to improve living conditions in their communities (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004).

The implication of this study for social work is that the social work profession’s client orientation and emphasis on advocacy and social change make social service management on the part of social workers different and distinct from that of other professions. Consequently, schools of social work should continue to incorporate empowerment-oriented principles, skills, and activities into a nonprofit and public management curriculum. However, when disseminating this management model in the classroom, instructors must take care to include content that promotes the political empowerment of the people served by social service organizations to ensure that both staff members and clientele gain power and the ability to influence organization decision making and public policy. This curriculum should include an emphasis on voter education and registration and other techniques and strategies that encourage individuals to participate in the life of their communities and advocate for social change.

REFERENCES


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