Motivation and Leadership in Social Work Management: A Review of Theories and Related Studies

ELIZABETH A. FISHER
Department of Social Work, Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, USA

Social work managers are confronted with the responsibilities of leading employees and motivating them to succeed. Managers may yield better results when they couple their practice wisdom with a theoretical foundation. This conceptual paper may help social work administrators and educators by providing an overview of relevant theories of motivation and leadership and how they apply to social work. The theories that are introduced include Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Herzberg’s two-factor or motivator-hygiene theory, McClelland’s trichotomy of needs, McGregor’s Theory X – Theory Y, Likert’s System 1 – System 4, Blake and Mouton’s managerial grid, Hersey and Blanchard’s situational leadership, and Atwater and Bass’s transformational leadership.

KEYWORDS leadership, motivation, theory

Social work managers are often charged with motivating employees to perform well in their jobs. While management skills may suffice for task-related issues, motivation and organizational innovation requires leadership (Shin & McClomb, 1998; Pearlmutter, 1998). Some managers have learned to lead successfully based on their practice wisdom and personal experience, but as a group social work administrators may rely too heavily on these two facets. Classic studies of leadership have demonstrated that managers who conform to the tenets of one leadership theory or another, versus none at all, achieve more in their own eyes and those of their workers (Hall & Donnell, 1979). While this suggests that it is important for managers to know and...
apply leadership theories, the topics are not often covered outside of social work classrooms or beyond textbook readings (Latting, 1991). Part of the reason for this may be that many leadership positions in social service agencies are held by professionals from other fields and therefore studied by academics in other fields. The call for attention to social work leadership has been echoing for several years (Wimpfheimer, 2004; Perlmutter, 2006).

The goal of this paper is to apply and update classic theories of motivation and leadership to the social work field, using practical illustrations. While social work management textbooks present some of this information, the purpose is to introduce social workers to foundation theories, illustrate their application, and allow readers to consider the theory that will match their own style. Educators may find this article useful to students as an introduction to management theories before moving into more comprehensive readings and discussions or as an update of the empirical literature. The tables that follow the narrative offer a snapshot of how to apply these theories to practice.

Motivational theories are first discussed and divided into two categories, content theories and process theories. Content theories are those related to specific motivating factors or needs. Process theories describe the interactions between needs, behaviors, and rewards (Lewis, Lewis, Packard, & Souflee, 2001). The three content theories described include Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Herzberg’s two-factor or motivator-hygiene theory, and McClelland’s trichotomy of needs. Several leadership theories are then introduced, including McGregor’s Theory X – Theory Y, Likert’s system 1 – system 4, Blake and Mouton’s managerial grid, Hersey and Blanchard’s situational leadership, and Atwater and Bass’s transformational leadership.

**MOTIVATION THEORIES IN SOCIAL WORK MANAGEMENT**

Theories of motivation are important for social work managers. One of the tasks of a manager is to promote productivity among workers, which requires motivation. Social work administrators often supervise people who arrived in the human services field for different reasons and with various educational backgrounds. In order to encourage staff, managers must understand what motivates people, beyond the traditional notion that social workers “just want to help people.” Table 1 summarizes several content and process theories of motivation that are described in this section.

**Content Theories of Motivation**

**MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS**

Perhaps one of the most well-known theories of motivation is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. While this theory is often taught in social work human behavior
### TABLE 1 Motivational Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>What motivates workers</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Implications for social work managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs</td>
<td>There are five levels of needs – physiological, security, social, ego, and self-actualization. Workers will be motivated by the needs that correspond with the level that they are currently at. The lower level needs will not motivate them (unless the situation changes).</td>
<td>A worker who is operating at the social needs level will be motivated by opportunities to connect with co-workers and work as a team. Salary, benefits, and job security are no longer primary motivators for this employee.</td>
<td>Managers should be aware of the level that workers are operating at so they can offer opportunities to fulfill needs at the appropriate level, thus motivating employees to achieve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herzberg's Two-Factor theory</td>
<td>There are two types of needs that motivate workers – hygiene and motivator. Hygiene factors include things like salary, benefits, policies, working conditions, and relationships and are best for preventing job dissatisfaction. Motivator factors are best for promoting achievement and satisfaction with work and include things like recognition, accomplishment and responsibility.</td>
<td>A manager at a public child welfare agency carefully considers the job functions of her employees and looks for ways to increase positive working conditions (hygiene factor) and opportunities for workers to diversify their work and be recognized for success (motivator factors).</td>
<td>Managers must give attention to both factors, even though in social work it is often difficult to meet hygiene needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClelland's Trichotomy of Needs</td>
<td>People are motivated by three needs – power affiliation, and achievement. Although everyone is motivated somewhat by all three, most workers will be motivated most strongly by one of the three.</td>
<td>Knowing that her employee is most strongly motivated by a need for power, a social work manager provides an opportunity for that employee to direct a team meeting.</td>
<td>It is important for social work managers to understand which type of need motivates their employees and offer opportunities to fulfill these needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
classes in relation to work with clients and their social environments, it can also be applied to motivating social workers in their agency environment. The basic premise of the theory revolves around a pyramid, or hierarchy, of needs. The needs at the bottom of the pyramid must be met before higher level needs can be met (Lewis et al., 2001). Social work managers may apply this theory by identifying the level of needs for each employee and understanding that people will be motivated by the factors that exist at this level. The specific levels of needs begin with physiological, then security needs, social needs, ego needs, and finally self-actualization (Weinbach, 1998).

The social work manager can consider the types of motivators apparent at each level of the hierarchy. Food, clothing, and shelter are motivators at the physiological level. Security needs include motivators of protection from loss or threats, including job security. Affiliation and acceptance are important motivators at the social needs level. At the ego needs level, self-esteem,
status, and recognition are substantial motivators. At the highest level of needs, self-actualization, an employee will be motivated by opportunities to use their talents, be creative, and achieve their fullest potential (Weinbach, 1998).

These levels of needs are the cornerstones of motivating employees. Managers must understand that employees will be motivated by unmet needs and that once a need is satisfied, it is no longer a motivator. For instance, if a social worker feels that she is well paid and secure in her job position, the first two levels of needs (physiological and security) will not serve as effective motivators. The manager will need to motivate based on higher level needs, such as those at the social level (Weinbach, 1998). Further, people may move up or down on the pyramid of needs. When job security becomes an issue due to budget cutbacks or other limitations, a worker at the social needs level may suddenly become motivated by security needs. Administrators must also be aware that their employees may all be operating at different levels of needs and take this into consideration in their style of management (Lewis et al., 2001).

Latting (1991) warns social work administrators against misinterpreting how Maslow’s theory might influence their management style. Although most social workers enter the field out of a desire to help others (which can be construed as a higher order need), the lower order needs are also important to satisfy. Some social work managers may be quick to focus on the higher order needs because they are easier to satisfy in human service agencies due to limited financial resources. Although the profession has accepted and studied many of Maslow’s tenets in social work practice with clients, the theory has yet to be tested empirically in social work management practice.

HERZBERG’S TWO-FACTOR OR MOTIVATOR-HYGIENE THEORY

The basic premise of this theory relies on the distinction between hygiene and motivator factors. Hygiene factors are related to the work environment and they are usually tied to dissatisfaction with work. Examples of hygiene factors include salary, policies, security, relationship with supervisor and coworkers, and working conditions. In other words, low salary, poor relationships, and working conditions are connected to dissatisfaction. On the other hand, motivator factors are related to personal growth and self-actualization and they are tied to satisfaction with work. Motivator factors include the nature of the job itself, recognition, accomplishment, and responsibility (Lewis et al., 2001). When they are present, satisfaction with work is more evident.

Herzberg (1962) argued that people are motivated by self-actualization more often than might be considered in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and he believed in providing more self-actualization opportunities for workers.
This theory may be especially relevant to the motivational needs of social workers because it is not the hygiene factors that draw social workers to the field. However, managers must be aware that it is not effective to focus only on motivator factors because many social work agencies have more difficulty providing hygiene factors due to budget restrictions and high caseloads. Good supervision requires attention to both hygiene and motivator factors (Herzberg; Latting, 1991).

Two types of management that work within Herzberg's theory include job enrichment and job enlargement. Job enrichment includes providing as many motivator factors as possible, such as providing staff the opportunity to work through a whole client case rather than dividing tasks up according to department (i.e., intake, case management, intensive, etc.); publicly acknowledging social work staff that complete timely reports; or including exemplary staff biographies in agency newsletters. Job enlargement is necessary when job enrichment is not possible, as might be the case with repetitive or mechanical jobs. Job enlargement provides employees with as much variety as possible, even if the tasks are repetitive (Weinbach, 1998).

HERZBERG'S THEORY AND EMPIRICAL LITERATURE IN SOCIAL WORK MANAGEMENT

Sluyter and Mukherjee (1986) utilized Herzberg's theory to develop a job satisfaction instrument for residential-care employees. They developed this scale because they believed the scales developed for job satisfaction in the business world were not as applicable to human service organizations. The scale included 24 items related to six hygiene factors and six motivator factors. The tool they developed could help administrators understand their employees' specific hygiene and motivator needs in relation to job satisfaction and whether these needs are being met. The results of their study validated their instrument, the Job Satisfaction Survey, as a potential means for measuring job satisfaction among residential-care employees.

McCLELLAND’S TRICHOTOMY OF NEEDS

McClelland hypothesized that people are motivated by three needs—for power, for affiliation, and for achievement (Weinbach, 1998). McClelland's needs are not a hierarchy as in Maslow's theory. Workers are influenced by all three of these needs, but are usually strongly motivated by one of the three types. Effective managers need to be aware of which type of need most strongly motivates their individual workers (Lewis et al., 2001; Weinbach).

Workers who are primarily motivated by power will perform better when given opportunities for control and influence over others and often have outspoken personalities. Two types of power may be influential—personalized
and socialized. Personalized power motivates people to increase individual power, without regard to organizational goals. Socialized power includes influencing others for the improvement of the organization (Lewis et al., 2001). Opportunities to lead teams, such as those needed for special event planning, can help satisfy the need for power. Those who are motivated by affiliation needs will perform best when given opportunities to feel accepted and avoid rejection. These workers are usually friendly, nonjudgmental, and uncomfortable with conflict. A social worker with an affiliation need may be motivated most effectively by ensuring they feel included in social gatherings. Workers who are achievement needing are motivated by the possibility of success and fear failure. Although highly self-motivated, they may have unattainable ideals so it would be important for managers to help this type of social worker acknowledge small successes with clients (Weinbach, 1998).

Process Theories of Motivation

Equity or Social Comparison Theories of Motivation

According to equity theory, employees compare their own efforts to both internal standards and others’ standards. This comparison serves as the basis of motivation (Weiner, 1991). Employees are likely to look toward their peers for direction on how to do their jobs. This may be especially true in social work agencies, where the environment is often described as turbulent. Attention should be given to how workers relate to each other in addition to policies and instructions that guide employees’ practice (Latting, 1991).

Open salary scales and performance structures permit workers to compare and can be important in managing effectively, but social work managers may have a difficult time disclosing this information. This may be due to the profession’s emphasis on individual value (rather than pre-set performance criteria) and a hesitancy to publicize the power (i.e., salary) differentials between management and line staff (Latting, 1991).

Goals and Objectives as Motivational Theory

Weiner (1991) describes goal setting theory as, “employees and organizations both set goals that influence individual and organizational behavior. The degree to which these two sets of goals are congruent determines the level of effort by employees to achieve organizational goals” (p. 304). Management by objectives (MBO) is a model based on goal-setting theory and is sometimes used in nonprofit administration. MBO begins with setting organizational goals and then tailoring these goals to each level of the organization, by department, team, and/or worker. Ideally, these smaller level goals help to contribute to reaching the overarching organizational
goals. Introducing MBO to an agency requires careful planning with stakeholders in order to ensure buy-in (Lewis et al., 2001).

Latting (1991) identifies several challenges to incorporating MBO into nonprofit administration. First, some managers do not develop appropriate measures of performance before implementing a goal-setting approach. Second, some managers may get too wrapped up in the “structures, process, and paperwork” of the approach (p. 59). Finally, managers may punish staff if they do not meet their goals, even when these goals are set high on purpose. These challenges are surmountable with intentional planning and thoughtfulness.

Perhaps one of the most cited authors on management who has also contributed specifically to nonprofit management is Peter F. Drucker. His work can be applied to both motivating employees and models of leadership. His 1990 book, Managing the Non-Profit Organization, sets forth several key principles. He introduces the importance of the organizational mission and the leader’s role in fulfilling the mission. Drucker also discusses strategies for marketing, innovation, and fund development. Performance measurement is discussed, as well as the relationships the leader has with the staff, board, volunteers, and community. Finally, Drucker discusses leadership development.

A self-assessment tool is available for social work administrators based on Drucker’s principles of management (Drucker, 1999). Participants who complete the workbook answer questions about what the mission is, who the customers are, what the customers’ value, what the organization’s results are, and what the goals and plan of the organization are. Drucker has continued his work in nonprofit management with the establishment of the Leader to Leader Institute (formerly the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management). The institute works from the premise that all three sectors (public government sector, private business sector, and social service sector) must remain vital and effective. The institute provides services around three main objectives: supporting social service leaders, aiding in collaboration across sectors, and providing resources for leaders (Leader to Leader Institute, 2002).

Motivation is one side of the relationship between managers and workers. Social work managers need to understand what motivates employees, but they must also understand how to lead in order to inspire motivation. Developing a leadership style is critical. Social work administrators should attempt to choose a theory that suits and be intentional in how they lead. The following section will help social workers in this pursuit.

LEADERSHIP THEORIES IN SOCIAL WORK MANAGEMENT

Discussions about leadership in social work have been recently revitalized by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and its Leadership Initiative.
CSWE has recognized the need for leadership development both inside of and external to social work education (Sheafor, 2006). When the organization commissioned an exploratory study to investigate leadership content in social work curriculum only 74 syllabi were received from 36 different institutions, representing 6.8% of all accredited social work programs (Lazzari, 2007). Of the syllabi received, most were from MSW programs with a macro concentration. The author recommends further study of leadership in the social work curriculum and new models of developing social work leaders.

Bargal and Schmid (1989) provide social workers with an insight to some of the trends in leadership research outside of the social work arena. They identified several themes in leadership, including: “the leader as a creator of vision and a strategic architect” (p. 40); “the leader as the creator (and changer) of organizational culture” (p. 41); “leadership and followership” (p. 42); and “transactional and transformational styles of leadership” (p. 43). The authors applied these trends in leadership to three typical internal functions of social work administrators (goal setting, motivation and development of human resources, and maintenance and administration) and two of the external functions (resource mobilization and achievement of legitimacy). The authors conclude by saying that the more recent research and trends in leadership that emphasize the multiple complexities of organizations, the ability to learn to be a leader, and the interdisciplinary approach to leadership may help social workers in the realities of the human service field.

Rank and Hutchison (2000) provided some empirical evidence regarding social work leadership in their exploratory study of social work leaders. They investigated the perceptions of leadership in practice and academic arenas through telephone interviews with deans and directors of accredited social work programs and NASW chapter executive directors and presidents.

Results of the study indicated that respondents included five elements in their conceptual definitions of leadership: proaction (thinking ahead), values and ethics, empowerment, vision, and communication. Most respondents (77%) believed that social work leadership is different than other professions for five common reasons: “commitment to the NASW Code of Ethics, a systemic perspective, a participatory leadership style, altruism, and concern about the public image of the profession” (Rank & Hutchison, 2000, p. 493).

When asked about the skills that respondents believed were necessary for leaders, nine general areas were identified: community development skills; communication and interpersonal skills; analytic skills; technological skills; political skills; visioning skills; ethical reasoning skills; risk-taking skills; and cultural competence/diversity skills. Respondents identified four main themes as a mission for leaders in 21st century social work: political advocacy, a clear definition for the profession itself and for the public, social reconstruction, and vision. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that there should be leadership
development at the bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral levels of social work education.

Overall, this study provides evidence that social work leaders see leadership development as essential for social workers and the profession as a whole, and that this area may be overlooked. The authors recommend future research regarding “outcomes of social work leaders and their styles of leadership” (p. 500).

Glisson (1989) found that social workers evaluate leaders on maturity, power, and intelligence. Further, he found that there is a strong relationship between these three dimensions and both organizational commitment and job satisfaction of social workers. This finding gives further credence to the importance of leadership and worker performance. Glisson reports that leadership development is missing in the social work curricula.

In the next section, several theories of leadership are described. For a summary of these leadership theories and brief, practical illustrations, see Table 2.

McGregor’s Theory X – Theory Y

Douglas McGregor developed the ideas of Theory X and Theory Y based on the assumption that managers’ styles depend on what they believe motivates human behavior. A social work manager may believe that people are motivated by the concepts of Theory X or Theory Y, and then the manager’s actions are in accordance. In reality, most people fluctuate somewhere between the two theories (Weinbach, 1998).

Those who subscribe to Theory X believe that humans have distaste for work in general and are not responsible by nature. The only motivations to work are based on self-interest or coercive methods. A manager who believes people operate in this manner is more likely to use rewards and punishments as motivators and create many rules and procedures for compliance. These types of managers are always looking for mistakes because they do not trust subordinates. It is a “we versus they” environment (Weinbach, 1998).

Theory Y puts forth a very different view. Work is natural for humans and it is something that they generally want to do. Theory Y espouses that humans are creative, can solve problems, and are more motivated by self-actualization needs than rewards or punishments. A manager working from this premise trusts and believes in subordinates and attempts to create a “we and they” environment where growth and creativity are possible (Weinbach, 1998).

By nature, social worker managers probably lean more towards Theory Y because it is more congruent with how they are trained to view clients. However, there has been no empirical research to determine if the core
**TABLE 2** Leadership Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Basic tenets of the theory or model</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McGregor’s Theory X – Theory Y</td>
<td>Managers generally believe that workers either have a natural inclination to dislike work (Theory X) or natural inclination to be creative and productive (Theory Y).</td>
<td>The director of the local child welfare agency takes a moment to assess whether she believes people operate under Theory X or Theory Y and then compares this to what is actually going on in her department. She realizes that although she did not think people liked coming to work, there is evidence to the contrary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert’s System 1 – System 4</td>
<td>Organizations fall under one of four types (System 1, 2, 3, or 4). The lowest producing organizations are typically System 1 (traditional bureaucracies) and the highest producing and goal for all organizations is System 4. System 4 leaders work with their employees to solve problems.</td>
<td>A social work manager completes Likert’s tool for assessing her organization and realizes they are operating at about a System 2 level. She then is able to see where the largest weaknesses are and work to move towards a System 3, and eventually System 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake &amp; Mouton’s Managerial Grid</td>
<td>Using a grid system, managers can self-rate their performance in relation to task and relationship behaviors, yielding a two-number score (i.e. 1,9). Employees can then also rate the manager and the results can be compared. Blake and Mouton provide descriptions of the types of leaders to understand more.</td>
<td>The social services director at a large nursing home rates herself on task and relationship behaviors using the managerial grid. She finds that her self-rating yields a score of 5,5. This score connotes that she places equal emphasis on tasks and relationships and perhaps does not push her employees to work harder than would be within their comfort range. Her employees complete the same assessment and she finds that she has an overall score of 7,3, which indicates that they believe she is more task oriented than relationship oriented. She presents these results to employees so they can discuss how to be more effective working together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hersey &amp; Blanchard’s Situational Leadership</td>
<td>Workers’ willingness and ability are assessed in order for the leader to understand which of 4 styles of leadership will work best. The most mature workers (high on willingness and ability) are best managed with a delegating style while the least mature (low on willingness and ability) are best managed with a telling style. Selling and participating styles are best for those workers average in maturity.</td>
<td>The house manager of a home for adolescent girls takes a moment after performance reviews to consider the maturity level of each of her five social workers. After assessing their maturity level, she reviews the types of leadership that are most effective with each and begins to try to incorporate this style in her management approach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
principles that social workers follow with clients are transferred to their work as managers. The utility of Theory X and Theory Y is that it allows managers to assess their underlying assumptions so that they can compare their beliefs to what actually seems to be happening in their workplace. It is more important to assess what is really going on and what truly motivates employees than to manage based on perhaps false assumptions (Weinbach, 1998).

Likert’s System 1 – System 4

Rensis Likert (1967) developed a model of understanding leadership and the performance characteristics of organizations. To utilize his model, administrators and subordinates complete a Likert-type scale that rates the leadership processes used and the character of motivational forces, communication processes, interaction-influence processes, decision-making processes, goal setting, and control processes. Based on how these different aspects are rated, an organization might be characterized as System 1, System 2, System 3, or System 4. Respondents consider two types of departments or units in the organization for their ratings—the highest performing and the lowest performing. The respondent can then look at where the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Basic tenets of the theory or model</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atwater &amp; Bass’ Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>Effective leadership is based on the four I’s: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and inspirational motivation,</td>
<td>Realizing that she was operating from a reward and punishment system that was not working, the leader of a team to develop an outcomes measurement framework reviews the tenets of transformational leadership and begins trying to incorporate some of these relationship building techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senge’s Learning Organizations</td>
<td>Learning organizations are continually self reflective and are created by careful attention to five key components: systems thinking, personal mastery, identifying and assessing mental models, building a shared vision, and team learning. These types of organizations may be the most open to change and adaptable in a sometimes turbulent social services environment.</td>
<td>The director of the local department of aging sees change coming in the agency because of several reforms to Medicare benefits. She has been attempting to learn more about how to create a learning organization and feels that now is the time to share these ideas with her employees and develop a plan for becoming more adaptable to change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
highest performing groups fall on the scale and where the lowest performing groups fall.

Likert (1967) found that although the highest producing groups' scores varied, most of the lowest producing groups were categorized under System 1. System 1 organizations are more like rigid, inflexible, traditional bureaucratic organizations, while System 4 organizations are more likely to be flexible. The goal of System 1 organizations should be to become more like System 4 organizations, which requires leadership direction. However, the process will first include movement through Systems 2 and 3. System 1 leaders incorporate more of a telling command. System 2 leaders utilize selling techniques to engage workers. System 3 leaders consult with employees. Finally, System 4 leaders join with employees. The most satisfied employees are found in System 4 organizations.

Blake and Mouton’s Managerial Grid

The managerial grid is a model developed during the 1950s for understanding how managers lead. As the title suggests, it is based on a grid, with two axes. The horizontal axis represents the degree to which managers are concerned with production or results. The vertical axis represents the degree to which managers are concerned for people. Managers score between 1 and 9 on each axis, which produces a combination score. One represents the least concern and 9 represents the maximum concern. For example, a manager may have a score of 1,9 or 5,5 (notice they are not added together, but remain separate scores). The first number (i.e., 1) represents the concern for production and the second number (i.e., 9) is concern for people. (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

Blake and Mouton (1964) provided descriptions of some of the more common managerial styles. For example, the 9,1 leader is more of a task-master and attempts to minimize the human side of work (feelings and attitudes). On the other hand, a 1,9 leader wants to make a comfortable work environment for people, only pushing them to work as hard as it is comfortable. The 5,5 leader does not go to either extreme and realizes that some push for production is necessary, but only enough that will keep people generally satisfied. This type of leader manages from a perspective of steady progress and will manage work based on traditionally yielded satisfactory results. The 9,9 style is perhaps the ideal. This type of leader does not assume that there is a conflict between organizational and worker needs. The style of management is creative and works with subordinates to find the best solution to problems.

The usefulness of the managerial grid relates to understanding more about how a leader perceives herself and how her subordinates see her. The leader can rank her style according to the grid and subordinates can do the same, offering an opportunity to compare what the leader thinks she is
doing with what subordinates perceive she is doing. However, it does not provide much direction in how to develop as a leader (Weinbach, 1998). The managerial grid approach to management suggests that equal emphasis on task and relationship factors are important, regardless of the employee.

Latting (1986) describes Blake and Mouton’s grid as congruent with social work principles because of its emphasis on the interaction between both task and relationship behavior, reminiscent of social work’s emphasis on the interaction between people and their environments. Emphasis on tasks and relationships and their interactions can result in a desired behavior. Emphasis on the person and her or his environment and their interaction can result in desired behavior.

Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership

Hersey and Blanchard (1972) proposed that leadership is not the result of genetic traits or acquired abilities. Instead, effective leadership requires behaviors that match the situation. This theory of leadership goes against traditional grains of believing that leadership is based on certain personality traits and is not readily learned. Situational leadership calls on managers to utilize the most effective style, depending on the situation or employee. Whether a leader should be more focused on tasks or relationships depends on the situation and readiness of the subordinates (Lewis et al., 2001).

The first step in situational leadership includes understanding the level of the worker’s maturity. Maturity can be defined as “the worker’s willingness and ability to assume responsibility for the task at hand” (Latting, 1986, p. 16). The two key factors then are willingness and ability. The employee’s maturity level is assessed and then the manager chooses the best managerial style for the situation. The four styles (first identified by Blake and Mouton, 1964) include telling, selling, participating, and delegating.

These four styles are applied depending on the maturity of the worker. Immature workers, who lack willingness and ability, are best dealt with in a telling manner with strong direction and a high emphasis on tasks and a lower emphasis on relationships. Workers who have the willingness but lack the ability are best directed by selling types of management, which included high task and relationship behaviors. For workers who have ability, but lack willingness, a participating style is necessary. This style emphasizes relationships, but places less emphasis on task behaviors. Finally, the most mature workers, who have both the skills and are willing, will best be managed with a delegating style. This style includes a low emphasis on both task and relationship behaviors (Latting, 1986). Situational leadership models vary the amount of emphasis placed on task and relationship factors based on the employee’s situation and maturity level.

Latting (1986) describes situational leadership as important because of its emphasis on assessing the employee’s stage of development and then
selecting a leadership style. This may be reminiscent of social work’s practice strategy of making individual assessments and then choosing intervention plans based on the situation.

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE EMPIRICAL SOCIAL WORK MANAGEMENT LITERATURE

Situational leadership has been empirically tested in social service agencies in two studies (Hastings & York, 1985; York, 1996). In the earlier study by Hastings and York, 172 employees in three county social service departments were surveyed in North Carolina in 1979. They were surveyed regarding whether task-oriented supervision is more appropriate than person-oriented supervision for employees low on maturity and vice versa for those high on maturity. Their findings did not support these assumptions. Both task-oriented supervision and person-oriented supervision had similar effects on performance for all levels of maturity.

York (1996) examined “the extent to which the propositions of the situational leadership model are embraced by social workers, and to determine whether adherence to this model varies with leadership position or work performance” (p. 6). A total of 101 NASW members from two states completed questionnaires. The questionnaires were aimed at gathering information about task behavior, support behavior, work performance, and demographic data. Task behavior and support behavior were assessed by proposing hypothetical situations to which the respondents provided answers to questions.

The findings, for the most part, did not support the hypotheses. First, the author hypothesized that managers would have scores that indicated higher compliance with the situational leadership model than clinicians. However, there was only one significant difference and, although weak, it was in the reverse direction, with clinicians scoring higher. Overall, managers and clinicians did not differ in their adherence to a situational leadership model. The researcher also hypothesized that those respondents who had higher work performance ratings would also have higher scores for compliance to the situational leadership model. However, this was also not significant (York, 1996).

The study did yield some interesting data regarding social workers and situational leadership. Overall, social workers place emphasis on support of workers, no matter the situation. Also, they generally follow the tenets of the model related to task responsibility. So it seems that social workers agree that subordinates with high task maturity should be delegated more task responsibility and vice versa for those with low maturity. However, rather than providing varying degrees of support, social workers believe that support should be provided in all situations. The author states, “It seems that the situational leadership model is merely a shell with a few common sense propositions that are supported and a few that are not” (York, 1996, p. 24). The author recommends further research.
Atwater and Bass’s Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership goes beyond the traditional transactional leadership style that emphasizes exchanges among leaders and followers, the requirements and conditions for rewards, and agreements between leaders and followers (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Burns (1978, as cited in Packard, 2003) was the first to distinguish between transactional and transformational leadership (as cited in Packard, 2003). Transactional leadership is based on rewards (e.g., a positive performance review) in return for meeting the established conditions (e.g., turn in all of the client data on time; Packard). Transformational leadership goes beyond the idea that workers are motivated by rewards and punishments by considering other motivators for effective performance. These ideas are conveyed through four central principles to transformational leadership, also known as the four I’s. The four I’s of transformational leadership include idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, and inspirational motivation (Bass, 1985).

Idealized influence can be thought of as charisma or the leader’s ability to generate enthusiasm and draw people together around a vision through self-confidence and emotional appeal (Bass & Avolio, 1997 as cited in Gellis, 2001). Part of idealized influence includes being a role model and acting in a way that incites admiration in followers, such as taking responsibility for actions, being passionate about organizational goals, and being personally involved (Packard, 2003).

A leader can demonstrate intellectual stimulation through creative and innovative problem solving with team members. The ability to get to know team members and treat them with respect and concern is key to the concept of individual consideration (Bass, 1985). It also includes coaching and mentoring. Team leaders need to regularly talk to the members about their goals, create new opportunities that match members’ goals, and monitor progress. This may also include knowing the type of leadership that will be most effective with individual members. Some may respond better occasionally to a transactional style with rewards, while others may work best under leaders who are highly interpersonal and work more as equals (Packard, 2003).

Finally, inspirational motivation moves team members toward action by building their confidence levels and generating belief in a cause (Bass, 1985). This can include drawing members around what the organization will look like in the future and setting high expectations. Enthusiasm and encouragement are also important. Transformational leaders might work best by asking questions to promote motivation, rather than always providing answers (Packard, 2003).

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL WORK MANAGEMENT LITERATURE

Research on transformational leadership has been limited to only a few studies in the social service literature (Arches, 1997; Gellis, 2001; Mary,
Motivation and Leadership in Social Work Administration

Gellis found that transformational leadership factors were positively related to the willingness of social workers to engage in requested activities, satisfaction with their leader, and perceptions of leader effectiveness. Arches found that effective social service supervisors were using principles of transformational leadership, even if they were not identifying it as such. Mary surveyed members of The National Network for Social Work Managers and the Association of Community Organization and Social Administration (ACOSA). She asked respondents to think of a leader they had worked with and rate them on the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Her results showed that leaders were generally transformational in nature, and transformational leadership qualities were correlated with successful leader outcomes including effectiveness, extra effort, and satisfaction with the leader. Also, successful leader outcomes were more often associated with democratically styled organizations.

Transformational leadership has been discussed in some articles and books related to social service management (Austin & Hopkins, 2004; Bargal & Schmid, 1989; Fisher, 2005; Lewis et al., 2001). Despite the lack of empirical evidence, the tenets of transformational leadership are conceptually congruent with many social work principles. Packard (2003) points out that transformational leadership principles are compatible with social work principles of valuing individuals and empowerment. Arches’ (1997) description of transformational leadership describes these values: “Transformational leadership is empowering and participatory as it promotes input into decision-making, delegation of tasks, and responsibility, and it fosters local leadership” (p. 114). Further, social work’s emphasis on understanding systems is congruent with transformational leadership. This type of leadership recognizes organizations as systems and understands that leaders cannot be studied or considered independent of their organizations. The followers, or group members, must be part of the process of studying and understanding leadership styles (Arches). Bargal and Schmid (1989) argued that, “The model of transformational leadership, whereby followers are motivated through their exposure to intriguing ideas and intellectual discourse, could certainly be adopted in human service organizations” (p. 49), especially those organizations intent on or in need of change.

Learning Organizations

Senge (1990) discusses the idea of the learning organization and the transformative nature of leaders. There are five basic tenets, and the most basic of these includes systems thinking. Social work is readily adaptable to this mode of thinking given its focus on systems thinking with clients and their environments at all levels of practice.

The second principle of the learning organization includes personal mastery. By personal mastery, Senge (1990) is referring to proficiency and
continual learning. These individual characteristics can be connected to the organization because an effective learning organization includes members who engage in personal mastery and are able to connect their own personal learning to organizational learning.

A third component of a learning organization includes identifying and assessing mental models. These mental models are “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (Senge, 1990, p. 8). In social work, an example of a mental model in a public child welfare agency might include an underlying assumption that clients do not want intervention. These mental models can be identified at both the individual and organizational levels.

The fourth aspect of a learning organization includes building a shared vision. This goes beyond the leader’s sole vision. A learning organization and the leaders in it work hard to build a vision that people can share, rather than putting forth personal visions or agendas. Dictated visions do not work (Senge, 1990).

The final assumption in Senge’s (1990) model is team learning. Teams are working effectively when not only the team is succeeding, but the individual members also are “growing more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise” (p. 10). One of the keys to a successful team effort includes dialogue, which includes identifying and assessing assumptions, and understanding the natural defenses that occur in team situations. It goes beyond discussion, which can connote a winner and loser in the conversation. Just as personal mastery is a building block for organizational mastery, team learning is a stepping stone for organizational learning.

Learning Organizations and Empirical Social Work Management Literature

Senge’s five principles of a learning organization have been applied to at least one public social service setting. Carnochan and Austin (2002) conducted an exploratory, qualitative study using interviews of 10 agency directors to identify challenges to implementing welfare reform and the values that guided the change process. They then utilized Senge’s principles as a framework to understand their findings. Although the directors may not have been cognitively aware of it, they were following many of the principles of moving their agencies towards becoming learning organizations. The authors conclude by noting that even though continual reflection and learning may be useful in promoting flexibility, they are yet unsure whether the learning organization model is entirely appropriate for public agencies. The researchers call for more research on the subject, especially to evaluate if this model proves to be best for the clients who are served.
CONCLUSION

The theories presented in this paper have been empirically tested in the business management arena, but in most cases need more application and testing in the social work field. Further research in motivation and leadership for social work management seems pressing and is highly recommended.

Given the recommendations and findings that managers are more effective when working from a theory base, it seems important that social work managers receive the necessary education to understand models of motivation and leadership. This paper is one attempt to synthesize some of the major theories, empirical literature, and implications that may be applicable to social work management and research. Social work administrators are encouraged to be intentional in their efforts to learn about motivation and leadership through continued education, practical testing of their practices, and publication of their results.

REFERENCES


