

Beyond Caseload: What Workload Studies Can Tell Us About Enduring Issues in the Workplace

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Workload analyses often can reveal how social workers perform their jobs beyond a count of cases or the number of staff per office. For instance, a workload study potentially can answer the question, “Do rural workers spend more time in travel than urban workers?” and “How much time do I really waste waiting for my computer to do something?” Often, the subjects of a workload study are as interested in these issues as they are in the nuts and bolts of caseload recalculation or staffing changes.

This interest should not be surprising. After all, issues related to travel time, waiting time, and administrative time are an important part of social workers’ workdays. And, as in many professions, social workers develop naïve theories about how things operate. Workload studies provide the means to validate (or invalidate) these theories. More important, data on these issues can challenge agency administrators to alter workload or caseload. For example, if it really is true that rural workers spend more time behind the wheel than their colleagues, it may be appropriate to adjust their workload and caseload accordingly.

The following is a review of some of these enduring issues. Studies described all had a similar methodology: Data were collected over a period of weeks using self-reporting by

social workers. Each study used a “100% workload study” approach, which has two important facets. First, everyone in the agency who met the criteria for inclusion was asked to participate, making the study a virtual census of all employees rather than a sampling of a handful. Second, all participants recorded all of their work time in a day, whether they worked on a weekday or weekend, during regular working hours or late evening. These two base guidelines ensured a comprehensive view of workload, which made an analysis of these issues possible.

Identification of the Enduring Issues

In measuring workload, the first step is to determine the nature of work (services and the tasks performed to deliver services). During this process, which can include focus groups, committee meetings, and informal fact finding, simmering issues about the nature of workload and naïve theories often are expressed.

The results of this survey can be considered typical of social work in general, although this discussion is not designed to be comprehensive. Some issues may have more or less importance in certain locations compared with others, and some issues may not be relevant at all. The most important aspect of this survey is to recognize that these issues exist and that they should be taken seriously.

Workload Language

The language used in a workload study is always a concern and might qualify as an enduring issue itself. This language has two main purposes: to provide information to help workload study participants complete the study, and to communicate the study results to various audiences. Several terms have been used to define workload. In the studies presented here, we used the terms *units of*

service and *tasks*. Generally, units of service represent the broad categories of work such as “CPS Investigation” or the provision of out-of-home services for children. Tasks usually are reserved to describe specific, shorter-term activities, such as telephone calls, home visits, filing, and preparing forms. Tasks make up an actual day’s work, and units of service describe why tasks are performed.

Occasionally, the terminology used to describe broad categories of work has to be reframed to reflect ongoing definitions and prevent confusion among study participants. For example, in one jurisdiction it was discovered that the term *unit of service* referred to a work unit of staff by a supervisor. The term *services* was substituted for units of service in this case.

A classic example of how language can be an issue is in the definition of administrative time. Over the years we have become accustomed to referring to time not associated with providing services to clients as “non-case-related” rather than as “administrative.” Even so, in a recent study, the term *non-case-related* was not considered sufficiently descriptive, so the term *Case Support Work and Leave* was adopted instead.

Non-Case-Related Time Versus Casework

One common area of interest among social workers and their administration is non-case-related time, which is time spent “on the clock” and not providing services to clients. Administrators might be tempted to suggest that this time is wasted and should be reduced as much as possible, but non-case-related time often is used for activities that are directly related to the functioning of the agency. Non-case-related time therefore could be viewed as time a worker provides services to an agency, as opposed to time he or she provides services

Table 1
Ratio of Case Service Time to Non-Case Time
in Three Workload Studies

| | California, Statewide | Arizona, Statewide | Monterey County TANF |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Case Service Time | 67% | 65% | 65% |
| Non-Case Time | 33% | 35% | 35% |

to clients. Still, an enduring issue in social work, as it often is in any area of public and private service, is “How much non-case-related time is necessary?”

The American Humane Association (AHA) analyzed administrative versus case-service time in studies of Child Protective Services (CPS) workload for Arizona and California (AHA, 1999 & 2000) and Los Angeles County (AHA, 2002), and in a study of the workload of employment and training workers (e.g., temporary assistance to needy family [TANF] workers) for Monterey County, California (AHA, 2001).

Table 1 shows the ratio of case service time to non-case time for CPS workers in California and Arizona, and TANF workers in Monterey County. These results show a good deal of convergence around a general “one-third rule” for human services: At least one third of case-carrying staff time is spent on non-case-related duties. But that general rule tells us only how much administrative time to expect, not necessarily its composition. For instance, in the California CPS study, 45% of the total non-case time was leave or vacation time, and the leave time for the Monterey County TANF study made up 31% of the total non-case time. These data were not available for Arizona. Leave, whether paid or unpaid, is part of “the cost of doing business” for any organization, but differences may be pronounced in what percentage of staff are

on leave at any given time and how that affects the amount of time available for case work.

Variations in non-case time also may exist from location to location within the same agency or locale. In Arizona, a state-based system, differences in administrative time varied from 30.4% in one district to 40.9% in another. In that study it was difficult to know why these variations existed; however, it could be due to the geographic or demographic differences between clients and locations. Some districts in Arizona are large and rural, and others, including Phoenix and Tucson, are more of a mix between rural, urban, and suburban areas.

An analysis of the California CPS results for Los Angeles County alone indicates that the county’s amount of non-case time for case-carrying staff was lower (29%) than for the state as a whole. (California is a state-funded, county-based system.) This likely was due to the existence of case aides, which are available in Los Angeles County but are not available in every county in California.

Differences between staff members also may be important. In the Monterey County TANF study, it was assumed that benefits workers with greater tenure would have less non-case time recorded than those with less tenure, since experienced staff would be more efficient in the disposal of non-case-related duties. The opposite proved true: The amount of non-case time increased with

tenure. Key contacts explained that supervisors often rely on their more experienced workers to perform some supervisory functions, thus reducing the amount of time available to provide case services.

When determining caseload, a traditional 40-hour workweek includes non-case duties. Therefore, it is necessary to calculate the time available for staff to provide services to clients minus the time to perform non-case functions to determine appropriate caseloads. Still, non-case time and the variations between locations and workers is rarely discussed, except as a source of contention.

Travel and Setting: Urban, Rural, and “Profoundly Rural”

As mentioned, differences can exist in how social work duties are performed based on setting. Inner cities obviously are different from agricultural counties, which, in turn, are different from, for example, relatively empty stretches of the Southwest that contain massive Native American reservations and federally controlled lands. These areas might be described as “profoundly rural.”

Another enduring issue of social work workload is the difference in travel time based on location. Urban social workers often must wait in traffic for hours or try to find addresses that seem to not exist, whereas rural social workers experience long hours behind the wheel between client contacts and the daily chore of commuting to offices in remote areas.

In the statewide California study, this issue was pronounced, which is not surprising considering that California likely is the most diverse state in terms of topography and population. For every worker who considered his or her travel time to be excessive, there

Table 2
Travel Time (in hours) by County Size, California Workload Study

| County Type | Large | Medium | Small | Very Small |
|---|-------|--------|-------|------------|
| Average Number of Hours of Travel for 2 Weeks | 7.20 | 6.72 | 8.00 | 7.08 |

Table 3
Court vs. Non-Court Tasks, California Workload Study

| | Median Time in 2-Week Study (hh:mm) | % of Total Time Recorded |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Non-Court Tasks | 83:14 | 87.72% |
| Court-Related Tasks | 8:15 | 8.69% |
| Court Waiting Time | 1:40 | 1.76% |

was another who thought that others' long commutes would be a "wash" and would even out with other conditions. These competing naïve theories of travel could be tested through the workload study data.

We looked at travel time broken down into four types of California counties: Large, Medium, Small, and Very Small. These designations were determined by the California Department of Social Services based on the number of case-carrying staff working in those counties. The values ranged from fewer than 10 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in the Very Small Counties to more than 100 FTEs in the Large Counties.

Table 2 shows the average number of travel hours in the 2-week study period reported by workers in the four county types. The results validated the "wash" hypothesis: Differences in distance and traffic seemed to be even with the amount of travel time recorded. Table 2 shows there are differences in travel time, but these differences are small. The largest difference in travel time (Medium County versus Small County) still represents only 1 hour and 15 minutes of additional travel in a 2-week period.

Although travel is a topic that often

comes up when comparing rural and urban social workers, other less obvious issues also may be of interest to workers and supervisors. For instance, workers in rural areas may not have direct access to the computer network used to record investigations and services. In California, some workers in rural areas had laptop computers with a dial-up connection to the state's system rather than the usual system of high-speed access in a networked office. Another issue that can influence workload based on location includes the availability (or lack thereof) of support staff in rural areas.

Waiting Time

Anyone who grapples to understand workload issues will appreciate the special frustrations of waiting for things to occur. For CPS workers, court waiting time and computer waiting time are of special concern.

Court Waiting Time

Social workers are required to make court appearances. Although court dockets are prepared well in advance, the actual time that a court appearance takes place is notorious for not proceeding as scheduled.

In the California study, we included specific task definitions related to time spent purely waiting. Table 3 outlines the results of an analysis of court waiting time and shows the median time spent on court tasks, non-court tasks, and the more specific code of "court waiting time." This analysis used time submitted by primary, case-carrying social workers. Court waiting time turned out to be shorter than workers might have guessed – less than 2% of the total time captured in the 2-week study was spent waiting for court. However, one must keep in mind that although specific court waiting time was short (representing 42 minutes in a 40-hour workweek), it made up 20% of all court time, which included preparing documents, testifying, and performing other court functions.

The bottom line for court waiting time might be best demonstrated by the following: When preparing for court, any case-carrying social worker must budget one fifth of his or her total time merely to waiting.

Computers and Waiting Time

Personal computers and networks have become commonplace in the modern workplace. Many employees may believe that computers, because of technical problems, actually are more of a burden than an aid. As we prepared for the California study, it became apparent that this impression should be dealt with by measuring computer-related waiting time.

California CPS workers use a statewide computer network called the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). During the California study, we asked workers to code computer waiting time using two separate codes: CWS/CMS-related waiting, and all non-network, computer-related waiting.

Table 4
Total Computer Time in Relation to Computer Waiting Time, California Workload Study

| | Median Time in 2-Week Study (hh:mm) | % of Total Time Recorded | % of Computer Time Recorded |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Computer Time Total | 31:33 | 33.26% | |
| Non CWS/CMS Wait Time | 1:28 | 1.56% | 4.68% |

Table 5
Total Computer Time in Relation to “Non-Case” Computer Activities, California Workload Study

| | Median Time in 2-Week Study (hh:mm) | % of Total Time Recorded | % of Computer Time Recorded |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Computer Time Total | 31:33 | 33.26% | |
| CWS/CMS Wait Time | 1:44 | 1.84% | 5.54% |
| Non CWS/CMS Wait Time | 1:28 | 1.56% | 4.68% |
| Help Desk | 1:44 | 1.84% | 5.53% |
| ATS (Application Support, Troubleshooting, Training) | 2:01 | 2.13% | 6.42% |
| Wait Time, Help Desk, & ATS Sum | 6:59 | 7.37% | 22.16% |

Computer use represents a significant portion of case-carrying social workers’ workweeks. One third of all time recorded during the workload study was spent at the computer.

In general, waiting time for computers under both codes was short. As shown in Table 4, in a typical 40-hour workweek, case-carrying social workers spend an average of 44 minutes on CWS/CMS-related waiting, and 37 minutes on other computer-related problems.

In relation to computers, waiting time is only part of the story. In addition to time spent waiting for a locked-up computer to reboot or for a save command to execute are a myriad of other computer-related activities that can become workplace issues. Two codes were used

in the workload study to capture time related to these activities: time spent on Application Training and Support (ATS), a program designed to train employees in the use of CWS/CMS, and time spent interacting with the Help Desk. Median times for these activities, as well as the time related to “computer issue” tasks, appear in Table 5.

Although the time spent on any one of these activities in the 2-week workload study is relatively short, it adds up. The 7.37% of total time spent on these tasks represents almost 3 hours per week of a 40-hour workweek spent on activities related to the computer but not related to casework.

When examining these results, some questions arise. First, how much waiting time is too much? From a broad “systems” perspective,

the 44 minutes spent waiting on the computer per 40-hour workweek may seem to be small and, therefore, not a problem. But to the social worker who experiences this waiting period, it may not be trivial at all, especially if the 44 minutes is experienced all at once.

And this brings up an important point: The results of the California study should be viewed as an illustration of an issue, rather than an attempt to point out a problem. One may claim that filling out computer forms in CWS/CMS is slow, but the question is “Slow compared to what?” Determining waiting time for other systems may not illustrate anything useful, given that different network systems tend to behave in different ways. Quantifying how long social workers spend waiting or attending to other “computer issues” may help information systems managers set performance standards, but the essential question of “How much time is too much?” remains subjective.

A second question these results may raise is “Would something else be better or faster?” Personal communications with social workers during the study suggested that the “paper and pencil” method of recording information was quicker; however, there are no data on how work was done in the past. Workload studies can describe only how things currently are, not how things might be or might have been.

Waiting Time and “Multitasking”

Child protective services workers, like most professionals, do not simply stop working when presented with an unexpected slowdown. Instead, social workers find something else to do while waiting – they multitask. Multitasking is a special issue for those who study workload, given that one can measure only one activity in a specific moment. In situations of doing-while-waiting, researchers are bound to measure what is

Table 6
Case Time Increases Due to
Number of Children per Family Case, Arizona Workload Study

| Case Type | Number of Children | % of Total Casework Time | % of Time-per-Case Increase | Average Amount of Time-per-Case Increase (hh:mm) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Basic Investigation | One Child | 6.74% | 12.91% | :55 |
| | More than One | 7.61% | | |
| Investigation with Placement | One Child | 15.43% | 16.44% | 2:37 |
| | More than One | 17.97% | | |
| Court-Ordered/Private Investigation | One Child | 12.90% | 11.91% | 1:38 |
| | More than One | 14.44% | | |
| In-Home Services with Dependency | One Child | 6.85% | 24.07% | 1:44 |
| | More than One | 8.49% | | |
| In-Home Services/Non-Court Related | One Child | 5.62% | 25.46% | 1:31 |
| | More than One | 7.05% | | |
| Independent Living Subsidy | One Child | 5.16% | 181.12% | 9:55 |
| | More than One | 14.51% | | |
| Shelter Care | One Child | 10.52% | 95.22% | 10:38 |
| | More than One | 20.55% | | |
| Unlicensed Relative Care | One Child | 6.51% | 43.62% | 3:00 |
| | More than One | 9.36% | | |
| Licensed Foster Home Care | One Child | 7.19% | 61.39% | 4:41 |
| | More than One | 11.60% | | |
| Unlicensed Non-Relative Care | One Child | 4.52% | 211.83% | 10:09 |
| | More than One | 14.08% | | |
| Group Home/Residential Care | One Child | 8.23% | 42.17% | 3:41 |
| | More than One | 11.70% | | |
| Title 19 Out-of-Home | One Child | 8.91% | 112.90% | 10:40 |
| | More than One | 18.97% | | |
| Certified Adoption Placement | One Child | 6.73% | 31.09% | 2:12 |
| | More than One | 8.82% | | |
| Family Resource Development | One Child | 3.72% | 392.83% | 15:30 |
| | More than One | 18.32% | | |
| ICPC/Courtesy Supervision | One Child | 3.94% | 55.20% | 2:18 |
| | More than One | 6.11% | | |
| Runaway | One Child | 4.95% | 39.90% | 2:05 |
| | More than One | 6.92% | | |

being done rather than what is being waited for. As a result, the time related to waiting may be hidden. This could explain the relatively low court waiting time values found in this study. Social workers routinely wait to appear in court and know to bring other work with them to fill the time. What isn't measured is the workers' frustration of waiting and filling time with other work, or whether it is possible to work well on one thing while waiting for something else.

Special Characteristics of Cases

Ask a social worker if all cases are the same in terms of time and commitment of resources, and the answer undoubtedly will be "no." For example, in-home services and placement cases will be fundamentally different, given that a different type of service is being provided. Beyond this, there are other important differences that administrators need to consider to improve resource allocation. The impact of these special case characteristics often can be measured in a workload study.

Special facets of cases can be many and varied. They can include pilot projects that change service delivery for some cases but not others, characteristics of children or families being served that influence how long it takes to complete activities, or variations in location. The following special characteristics are not meant to be a comprehensive list, but only examples that have resonated across multiple studies.

A workload study conducted for the Arizona Department of Economic Security explored several case characteristics that could influence services (AHA, 1999). These special characteristics had a potential to affect workload, given that Arizona determines caseload based on a case weighting system. (An example of case weighting related to court

Table 7
Influence of Case Characteristics on Time to Provide Services,
Monterey County TANF Study

| Characteristic | % of Time-per-Case Increase | Average Amount of Time-per-Case Increase (hh:mm) |
|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Mandatory California Welfare Employment Services | 15.38% | 0:11 |
| CAL-Works-Case Tracking | 26.53% | 0:20 |
| Transportation Required | 19.49% | 0:15 |
| Child Care Required | 14.98% | 0:11 |
| Non-English Translation | 6.79% | 0:05 |
| Ancillary Services Required | 17.97% | 0:14 |
| Combined Citizen/Non-Citizen Household | 20.77% | 0:16 |
| Sponsored Resident Alien Applicant | 39.21% | 0:30 |
| Disabled Client | 1.75% | 0:01 |
| High-Profile Case | 25.60% | 0:20 |
| Mental Health | 20.61% | 0:16 |

workload can be found on page 32 in this issue.) In case weighting, each case is given a multiplier, and a full caseload is reached when the sum of all cases, multiplied by their weight, reaches a predetermined value. In Arizona, certain characteristics were examined with the idea that if they proved to increase the time commitment of workers, the weight value of a case with each characteristic would be increased.

One characteristic was the influence of the number of children in a household on the provision of services. Table 6 shows a comparison of the time used to provide services to single-child households versus multiple-child households. Multiple-child households require more time per case (represented as the percent of total case time required for that case) in comparison to single-child households. This holds true for all case types specified in the workload study, including basic investigation and multiple types of out-of-home care. The measured magnitude of the increase from single-child to

multiple-child households went from a nearly 12% increase in time required to a nearly 400% increase. As a result of this analysis, it was proposed that each case with multiple children (regardless of case type) be given an additional weight when determining caseload.

Of course, Table 6 indicates that the influence of multiple children on the amount of time required to complete case activities is not uniform for all types of cases. By the same token, a case characteristic can influence some workers and not others, depending on the kind of casework being completed. For example, in Monterey County, we examined the casework of TANF workers. In this case, special case characteristics included both facets of the family's life (i.e., a combined citizen and non-citizen household) and of policies that apply to the family (e.g., Mandatory Child Welfare Employment [CWES], welfare-to-work). Results showed that many of the case characteristics measured in the study did affect the amount of time required to complete case-related services. This increase is illustrated in Table 7.

Not surprisingly, different case characteristics had a different effect on the time required to complete case services. This difference was more pronounced when breaking down case time by type of worker. In welfare services for Monterey County, different work is done by intake benefits workers, who determine the eligibility of families for benefits; ongoing benefits workers, who handle ongoing provision of benefits; and CWES workers, who counsel welfare recipients in their search for a job or job training.

As shown in Table 8, some case characteristics affected some workers more than others. For instance, the impact of the CAL-Works-Case Tracking program is felt entirely by intake benefits workers. By the same token, a combined citizen/non-citizen household only increases the case time of CWES workers. High-profile cases increase case time for all three types of workers.

For a workload study to adequately measure the way work is performed, special characteristics cannot be overlooked. Determining which characteristics are important, though, can be difficult. In any agency, there easily can be more potential facets of a case than can be adequately measured. At some level, every case is unique, with some combination of special characteristics. One must balance the need to be thorough with the need to provide data that can be generalized to the widest possible numbers of cases in the system. Gathering information about a handful of cases within a pilot program likely will not help administrators make sound caseload and staffing decisions.

Listening to staff discuss which characteristics are relevant to their cases always is a good first step. Tapping into these

Table 8
Influence of Case Characteristics on Time to Provide Services,
Monterey County TANF Study

| Characteristic | Benefits: Intake | Benefits: Ongoing | CWES |
|--|------------------|-------------------|---------|
| Mandatory California Welfare Employment Services | 29.44% | 3.02% | -2.21% |
| CAL-Works-Case Tracking | 148.94% | -8.25% | 11.05% |
| Transportation Required | 19.70% | -12.25% | -4.75% |
| Child Care Required | 44.80% | 13.72% | -8.57% |
| Non-English Translation | 17.70% | -1.25% | -21.50% |
| Ancillary Services Required | 44.80% | 7.37% | -3.64% |
| Combined Citizen/Non-Citizen Household | -9.64% | -3.67% | 14.45% |
| Sponsored Resident Alien Applicant | 82.61% | 31.54% | -0.16% |
| Disabled Client | 62.88% | -12.79% | 29.67% |
| High-Profile Case | 11.43% | 17.61% | 54.47% |
| Mental Health | 46.97% | 36.04% | 36.04% |

naïve theories of work can lead to an appropriate list of case characteristics for a workload study. It also can help determine which workers are affected by the case characteristic. Not all case characteristics affect everyone equally.

Finally, there is the issue of magnitude of impact. How much of an increase in work is required before administrators determine that cases with a certain characteristic must be handled differently? High-profile cases affected all three types of TANF workers in Monterey County: intake benefits, ongoing benefits, and CWES workers. The impact, though, was different for each type of employee. High-profile cases represented an average increase in the amount of time required to complete casework for intake benefits workers of 9 minutes per case, and an increase of 20 minutes per case for benefits ongoing workers. CWES workers, on the other hand, were affected much more, with high-profile cases increasing their work time by more than 1 hour per case.

The Cost of Turnover

It is not uncommon for agencies to be concerned about the consequences of turnover on workload. There are two obvious consequences of losing staff – the increased workload burden on remaining staff, and the reduced workload of new staff. A common perception is that trainee or probationary workers represent a “cost” to the agency. Although most CPS managers recognize that this is not an avoidable cost, it is exacerbated by high turnover, which replaces more seasoned workers with workers who may be less efficient in the short term.

Workload studies can identify turnover cost beyond the obvious cost of training by quantifying a loss of efficiency and the cost of having probationary workers carry a modified (lower) caseload. From a methodological perspective, one approach to a workload study is to restrict the collection and analysis of data to staff with a reasonable amount of tenure. The expectation then is that any

standards that result from the study will be based on the workload of experienced workers. This was the study design for the workload study in Arizona. This approach also is common when using structured estimation study procedures that rely on focus groups for data collection.

Although determining the standards for the agency are achieved this way, the design of the study may prevent a full exploration of the workload requirements for new staff. Depending on the circumstances, including probationary workers in data collection so that their work can be analyzed separately from more experienced workers may be beneficial. A study that identifies both new and experienced workers is feasible to conduct. In a state or jurisdiction in which turnover is a concern, paying attention to the workloads of new staff may be essential.

New Staff

New staff can affect workloads in two ways. First, new staff may need more time to process cases. Second, new staff often are required to spend more time on non-case-related activities. From the standpoint of case-related activities, it is not always clear whether inexperienced staff take more or less time per case than experienced workers. Although results of data analysis on this topic are mixed, in many states, new workers are assigned fewer cases than their more experienced colleagues, thus the primary impact of having new workers is in the area of non-case-related time. It must be recognized, however, that some forms of non-case-related time – in particular accumulated leave time and special assignments – sometimes result in experienced workers actually having more non-case-related time in comparison to new workers. One area where

there are clear differences is the amount of non-case-related time required for training.

For example, in the California study, it was determined that new workers, those with 6 or fewer months of experience, devoted almost 19% of their non-case-related time (about 11 hours per month) to training and staff development activities. This compares to roughly 6% of non-case-related time devoted to staff development by more experienced workers. In this case, a new standard for the training of new workers was being implemented, which would increase the time for training for new staff from 11 hours to 53 hours per month to ensure that new staff are adequately prepared for their jobs. The increase in time to meet the standard was significant and clearly affects the actual amount of the workday that would be available to new staff for case-related time.

In the presence of these demands on new workers' time, it is essential for administrators and managers to consider how to adjust for non-case-related training and staff development. One method is to adjust the available non-case-related time for jurisdictions or subjurisdictions, depending on the proportion of staff that are new. This method allows for somewhat larger or smaller allocations of staff resources in parts of a state or region that experience relatively low or relatively high turnover rates.

Summary

The usual understanding of workload in social services often begins and ends with an attention to staffing requirements and caseload. After all, this is the bottom line: How many staff members are needed to handle a certain volume of cases? This attention to the bottom line, however, may obscure other important workplace issues,

including how organizations can be improved.

By focusing on some common issues in workload, our goal is to identify the workplace features that agencies share, such as the ability to communicate complex ideas, the need to identify sources and types of non-case-related activities, differences in staff location and experience, waiting time, case characteristics, and the importance of training and staff development. These are important workplace issues, and it may be possible to develop generalizations about these features. In turn, these generalizations might be of value as agencies continue to struggle with the work issues and the nature of quality work in Human Services.

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