## **Chapter 1**

# THE CHANGING NATURE OF HUMAN SERVICES AND SUPERVISION

KAREN M. HOPKINS

MICHAEL J. AUSTIN

emographic, economic, political, technological, social, cultural, and programmatic forces are changing human services and human service organizations in the 21st century (Cohen & Cohen, 2000). The delivery of human services has been dramatically affected and, in some cases, threatened by significant legislative initiatives, modernization of organizational structures, interagency collaboration and mergers, increased service demands, heightened competition among agencies for resources and skilled workers, increased emphasis on performance outcomes to promote cost-effective and cost-efficient services, and work-life interference and burnout (Bruce & Austin, 2000; Hopkins & Hyde, 2002; Martin, 2000; Menefee, 2000; Munson, 1997; Patti, 2000; Perlmutter, Bailey, & Netting, 2001; Shin & McClomb, 1998). Scholars and practitioners agree that social problems have become more complex and intractable, making them more difficult to address in an environment of cost containment strategies.

Sowers & Ellis (2001) argue that the three primary issues affecting direct practice in the human services are diversity, technology, and managed care. The growth of populations of color, immigrants, the elderly, and people with disabilities presents unique challenges to human service agencies, including changing

the types of services offered, retraining of staff, and overcoming obstacles to communication and collaboration. Technological advances that have brought about changes in how information is collected, stored, and provided offer yet another challenge for human services in developing and negotiating standardized, shared client databases. Finally, changes brought about by managed care or behavioral health organizations have had a profound effect on how human service practitioners deliver services.

Other researchers have also noted the significant impact of managed care on human service delivery. For example, Munson (1997) reports that managed cost organizations (in contrast to managed care organizations) have emerged as the "chief administrators of mental health services" and that practitioners will, increasingly, need to adopt a market orientation. Indeed, in a study of the current work experiences of direct service practitioners across fields of practice, Franklin (2001) found that (a) practitioners work in a "market-driven, business-oriented, service delivery system" (p. 235); (b) the human service industry has "restructured" itself to be more "multidisciplinary, inter-professional and profit-driven" (p. 236); and (c) practitioners need to demonstrate that they can "effectively and efficiently resolve human problems"

(p. 237). Munson (1997) argues that practitioners are typically not oriented to "business models of service delivery," and this places them at a disadvantage when they need to "integrate financial and clinical decision making" (p. 480). Franklin (2001) notes that human service practitioners need a combination of clinical and administrative skills to effectively function in the current human service marketplace. Further, there is evidence that organizations are increasingly seeking employees who are self-motivated, self-responsible, and creative problem solvers (Olson, 2000). Organizations are reshaping themselves to be more entrepreneurial and to empower those employees who are closest to the clients or consumers with decisionmaking authority (Pritchett, 1999). To meet the challenges of today's human service industry, agencies need to balance effectiveness, efficiency, and innovation, as well as engaging in interdisciplinary, culturally competent, and self-reflective practice (Bruce & Austin, 2000; Hopkins & Hyde, 2002; Martin, 2000; Menefee, 2000; Nagda, Harding, & Holley, 1999; Patti, 2000; Preskill & Torres, 1999; Shin & McClomb, 1998). Human service agencies must be open to learning about themselves and developing new skills and knowledge if they are to become more flexible and responsive to their service environment (Carnochan & Austin, 2001).

### THE RATIONALE FOR LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS AND LEARNING CULTURES

Successful organizations are believed to be those that routinely create new knowledge, disperse it throughout the organization, and incorporate it in new practices and services. These successful organizations are called learning organizations: Daily activities are viewed as learning and growth opportunities for continual improvement. Human service agencies can grow and change only through learning, experimentation, practice, innovation, and risk. Innovation is seen as one way for human service agencies to address, with the delivery of high-quality services, the changing needs of a diverse client population. Innovation can thrive in learning organizations, where processes are continually reviewed with the idea of What can we learn from this? (Olson, 2000) and What can we do better or differently?

Many of the problems that organizations experience are either ones that "are unique to a given situation" (Dixon, 2000) or ones that the organization has

repeatedly experienced over time (Hopkins & Hyde, 2002). In either situation, organizations need to "learn their way out of their problems" (Dixon, 2000). When employees start sharing information, ideas, and knowledge gained, they create a learning culture through the sharing, even if the organization has not yet developed a fully collaborative culture. This is especially important for workers who are decentralized or geographically dispersed in neighborhood-based offices and not colocated with a supervisor who coordinates work. Organizational members need to create new processes of interaction and "collective learning" (Dixon, 2000). Human service managers and supervisors need to challenge themselves, and then their employees, through purposeful communication and dialogue, to open themselves up to learning, examining the big picture, thinking creatively and strategically about the future, and developing and testing innovative ideas (Hopkins & Hyde, 2002). Through these processes, a learning culture can emerge over time.

If learning cultures and organizations are key to being innovative and relevant in the 21st century, then why have not more human service organizations embraced organizational learning practices? One of the primary reasons appears to be the availability of time, resources, and leadership. Another reason may be the reality that the process of learning can take people out of their "comfort zone" and create a level of anxiety that makes them reluctant to try something new (Coutu, 2002). Many organizations pay lip service to the idea of transformational learning but "rarely get to the point where they are eagerly challenging deeply held assumptions about [an organization's] strategies and processes and, in response, thinking and acting in fundamentally altered ways" (Coutu, 2002, p. 2). Many human service managers need to respond to difficult internal and external challenges with effective, systemic solutions (Hopkins & Hyde, 2002). Often real learning does not take place until there is an organizational crisis or internal or external threat, and that can be too late for some organizations.

According to Edgar Schein (Coutu, 2002), anxiety is necessary for learning to happen, but organizations can minimize anxiety by developing an understanding among staff for the need to learn and by creating a safer environment for learning through "training, coaching, group support, feedback, positive incentives, and so on" (p. 6). Organizations that, traditionally, have been characterized as rigid and bureaucratic can benefit substantially from establishing a learning culture. Many of these organizations are trying to figure out

how to shift their culture from one of control and routine to a culture that values worker initiatives and contribution. Workers are encouraged, if not expected, to be more responsible for their work, to be team builders, to be more innovative, and to help the agency continually improve its services and effectiveness (Hopkins, 2002). When human service professionals are supported and developed within a learning culture, they are often better able to help their clients learn and develop solutions to their problems (this "parallel process" is explored in several chapters in this book). "An organization that is learning and developing right from the top of the organization to the bottom is far more likely to be meeting the needs of its clients because it is also meeting the needs of its staff" (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000, p. 176). Developing the knowledge and skills of staff goes hand in hand with retaining staff (Olson, 2000). In today's human service environment, the development of staff within a learning culture can be the key to the retention of talented employees.

Research shows that it is more common to see learning and subsequent improvement or change taking place in individuals or small groups or teams than as a coordinated effort across the organization (Schein, in Coutu, 2002). In most situations, "organizational learning is not a single process performed by the entire organization in a uniform fashion" but rather various organizational units engaging in different forms of learning "and at different levels of intensity" (Lipshitz & Popper, 2000, p. 357). Most case studies of successful learning organizations show that learning most often begins with a small group or team (i.e., one supervisor and a work group or unit) that develops a learning culture and gradually spreads this culture across and up the organization (Cohen & Austin, 1994; Dixon, 2000; Lipshitz & Popper, 2000; Schein, in Coutu, 2002). In an era of more empowered work groups or teams, individual performance will also be evaluated by the work group's collective performance (Pritchett, 1999). Thus, supervisors are in a key position to facilitate transformational learning by initiating or fostering unit or team learning, even without top management commitment. According to Schein, organizational learning does not happen until "leaders become learners themselves" and become models for others to follow.

This book is about how supervisors engage with their staff in continuous learning. It describes how they are crucial to the successful learning organization as they orient staff "toward purposeful knowledge creation" (Nonaka, 1998). However, this approach to supervision requires a major shift in the way supervision is viewed in today's human service environment. Learning is an organizational process like other processes, such as communicating, performing, growing, and downsizing; still, learning environments need to be created, nurtured, regularly assessed, and protected (Garvin, 2000). Supervisors, as unit managers or team leaders, can play a critical role in developing an organizational climate conducive to learning and transferring knowledge to and from others in the organization. "If we are to create learning professions . . . then supervision needs to become the learning 'lungs' that assist the professional body in its learning, development, and cultural evolution" (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000, p. 179). The next section summarizes the changing nature of supervision in human service organizations.

#### THE CHANGING ROLE OF SUPERVISION

If the nature of direct service work is changing, then how are human service supervisors affected? Most of the literature on management focuses on what is required or expected of upper managers rather than first-line supervisors. However, many of the issues related to upper management are relevant to line supervisors. For example, according to Cohen and Cohen (2000), middle and upper managers need to be more savvy about the various internal and external forces that affect organizational effectiveness. Menefee (2000) notes the need for a "greater and wider range of management skills," especially in relation to visioning and risk taking (p. 248). Rank and Hutchison (2000) advocate for managers to be "leaders" through "building community, communicating, and performing comprehensive analysis of social, political, and cultural events" (p. 500). These expectations of upper managers filter down to line supervisors, especially as supervisors are increasingly expected to take on more organizational responsibility as upper managers spend time raising funds, marketing the agency, and developing collaborative networks (Bergmann, Hurson, & Russ-Eft, 1999). Herein lies the challenge for many supervisors who may be more comfortable handling direct service issues than administrative or organizational tasks.

Patti (2000) suggests that practitioners in administrative positions may be inadequately prepared in their graduate and postgraduate training to fully understand, let alone negotiate, their organizational terrain.

Many current human service supervisors and managers began their careers as direct service workers, and they have had little supervisory training or mentoring. Although they are in a unique position to bring the clinical practice perspective into their supervisory practice, some supervisors may feel ill prepared and experience difficulty in helping staff understand the organizational context of service delivery. Borman, Hanson, Oppler, Pulakos, and White (1993) discovered that ability plays a stronger role than experience in the acquisition of supervisory knowledge (i.e., knowing how to handle a wide variety of difficult supervisory situations), and yet both ability and experience are necessary for proficiency in most supervisory tasks. Therefore, if practitioners move into supervisory positions with an inadequate understanding of macro (organizational, political, and systems) practice skills and without opportunities for training, their supervisory effectiveness may be significantly reduced. According to Bruce and Austin (2000),

Without an understanding of the big picture, supervisors may be less able to meet the expectations of top management, hold their workers accountable for changes in agency goals, and find it difficult to participate as first line managers in modifying service delivery systems or allocating resources. (pp. 23-24)

Over time, textbooks on supervision in human service organizations have reflected an array of issues that confront agencies and supervisors. Bruce and Austin (2000) analyzed the major texts on supervision from the past 30 years and identified several recurring themes: (a) administrative oversight and control related to monitoring worker behavior, managing service delivery, and protecting clients; (b) training and education, both in the agency setting and university education programs; (c) provision of therapeutic support to workers through interpersonal supervisory assistance and reduction of organizational barriers; (d) professional growth and autonomy; and (e) increased demand for accountability for limited financial resources. Although these themes represent important aspects of supervision, much of what has been written reflects either a micro (clinical) or macro approach to supervision (Bruce & Austin, 2000). However, in today's human service organizations, supervision involves a continuum of skills ranging from micro to macro in the context of a dynamic political and multicultural organizational environment. For example, a supervisor who oversees a unit of direct service staff is most likely juggling tasks related to the direct supervision of cases, personnel concerns of a diverse staff, program development and marketing of community-based services, and financial issues such as client and third-party billing and grantsmanship.

Aside from the shift in supervision from a primarily micro orientation to a perspective that combines micro and macro skills, supervision has gradually shifted from the practice of controlling and directing workers to facilitating and collaborating with workers, thus creating supportive organizational climates (Culbert, 1996; Lambert & Hopkins, 1995; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Walton, 1992). There has been significant research on organizational climate in the business management literature, but only recently has this topic received attention in human service organizations. Creating a supportive organizational climate is deemed critical in human services for a number of reasons. Fast-paced and often demanding work environments have contributed to a growing number of workers reporting burnout, stress-related illnesses, depression, substance abuse, and other personal and family problems (Banta & Tennant, 1989; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Hopkins, 1997; Soderfeldt, Soderfeldt, & Warg, 1995). A study examining the critical events that occur in supervision revealed that the incidents often involved worker-client relationship issues, competence, emotional awareness, autonomy, and personal issues, most of which necessitated supportive responses from the supervisor (Ellis, 1991). Further, the methods used by supervisors to address the concerns of workers are similar to those used by workers to address client problems and needs—in essence, a parallel process (Gutierrez, GlenMaye, & Delois, 1995; Shulman, 1993).

In the area of children's services, a positive organizational climate (i.e., attitudes shared by employees about their work environment) is a major predictor of positive service outcomes and service quality (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). In addition, the degree to which workers perceive the organization to be supportive is significantly related to those citizenship behaviors (extrarole activities not formally required by the job) that benefit both the organization and clients (Hopkins, 2002).

Yet despite evidence that creating a supportive environment can benefit workers, clients, and the organization, one of the continuing challenges for human service agencies is low staff morale related to a perceived lack of power and lack of supervisor support (Hopkins & Hyde, 2002; Latting & Blanchard, 1997).

For example, although empowerment-based social work practice encourages client participation in making choices that ultimately give clients a sense of dignity and control over their situations (Cowger, 1994), there is evidence that workers, unlike clients, are often not encouraged to participate in decisions that affect the agency and the social workers' own practice (Cohen & Austin, 1997; Packard, 1993; Ramsdell, 1994; Weinbach, 1998). Hyde and Hopkins (2001) found that social service workers tended to believe that clients were significantly more likely than themselves to be empowered and treated with dignity within their agencies. Although clients may be treated as important people in the agency, organizational practices may lead workers to feel devalued or unimportant. Thus, human service agencies need to facilitate the empowerment of their staff by promoting collaborative team efforts, staff development, supportive supervision, and systems of reward and recognition (Bargal, 2000; Cohen & Austin, 1997; Iglehart, 2000; Shera & Page, 1995).

Finally, the role of supervisors has also changed as a result of flatter organizational structures characterized by fewer levels of management, greater use of information through computer technology, and work carried out by teams and task forces that cut across departments (Drucker, 1998). With a greater emphasis on both semiautonomous task force teams and information technology, supervisors as middle managers are now expected to be leaders, collaborators, coaches, and mentors rather than authoritative "bosses" (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Block, 1987; Culbert, 1996; Drucker, 1998; Olson, 2000; Senge, 1990; Settoon et al., 1996; Walton, 1992).

Supervision practiced as collaboration implies that supervisors and line staff are working together toward some common aim. Collaboration within the work unit or setting is important to a change process such as transforming the work culture or service outcomes. Collaboration involves valuing everyone's participation, hearing all perspectives, encouraging all views, and building consensus (Netting & O'Connor, 2003). As collaborators, supervisors seek to promote effective communication with staff, demonstrate a desire to work together, and act in the best interests of staff (Lewis, Lewis, Packard, & Souflee, 2001; Netting & O'Connor, 2003). A study of high-performing nonprofit organizations identified a model of collaboration between management and line staff in more than half of the organizations. The collaborative process involved encouraging staff to work in teams and giving them the freedom to explore interconnections in their

work (Light, 2002). Teams have been identified as the essential "unit of learning" in organizations that are building learning cultures (Easterby-Smith, Burgoyne, & Araujo, 1999). Supervisors are key to working with staff to develop strong problem-solving collaborative relationships.

Over the last decade, the management literature has shifted from focusing solely on leadership at the top levels of the organization to emphasizing "leadership" in line or middle management. There is a growing body of work stressing the importance of supervisors becoming transformational leaders (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Basu & Green, 1995; Bergmann et al., 1999; Collins, 2001; Lipshitz & Popper, 2000; Preskill & Torres, 1999). Transformational leadership is associated with high performance standards, learning, team building, collaborating, commitment, and innovative behavior among staff. These behaviors are believed to have a positive impact on service quality (Morrison, 1996). Bass and Avolio (1994) were among the first to introduce the concept of transformational leadership and its application to supervisors, not just upper managers. Transformational leadership is demonstrated when leaders stimulate interest among colleagues and followers to view their work from new perspectives, generate awareness of the mission or vision of the team and organization, assist colleagues and followers to develop to higher levels of ability and potential, and motivate colleagues and followers to look beyond their own interests toward those that will benefit the group.

Bass and Avolio (1994) developed four core dimensions of transformational leadership, referred to as the "Four I's."

- Idealized influence. Supervisors demonstrate high standards of ethical and moral conduct and become role models for workers, who want to emulate the supervisors.
- Inspirational motivation. Supervisors motivate those around them by providing meaningful and challenging work and creating clearly communicated expectations that workers want to meet.
- Intellectual stimulation. Supervisors encourage workers to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways.
- Individualized consideration. Supervisors pay attention to each worker's needs for achievement and growth by acting as coach or mentor, providing constructive feedback regarding work performance, and creating learning opportunities within a supportive climate.

These Four I's of transformational leadership are especially relevant to learning organizations because supervisory leadership behaviors can facilitate the learning process for workers as they apply their learning to professional practice. Learning is based on coaching, support, and feedback from supervisors in a collaborative, informal, and risk-taking environment (Preskill & Torres, 1999).

The concept of the supervisor as an inspirational innovator is evident in several leadership models. For example, in Rapp and Poertner's (1992) client-centered model, supervisors and managers are called on to collaborate with staff and clients in being change and action oriented, even when faced with chronic barriers to improvement. A client-centered supervisor or manager has a "healthy disrespect for the impossible" that is associated with the following five characteristics: (a) a perception of self as responsible for and capable of meeting the needs of clients; (b) flexibility and invention; (c) problem-solving skills that capitalize on viewing problems as challenges and partializing solutions; (d) blending disparate agendas through attentive listening, personal interaction, and persuasion; and (e) persistence. Perhaps most important, the client-centered model also advocates for supervisors and managers to "learn for a living" by continually seeking input and feedback on programs from a variety of internal and external constituents, by experimenting, and by applying "lessons learned" to improving existing services and developing innovative services.

In summary, the changes in human service delivery and organizational structures have changed the nature of supervisory practice. The new expectations for human service supervisors include a client-centered, transformational leadership style. This type of leadership requires an ability to create a supportive, collaborative, and empowering organizational climate that fosters learning, problem solving, risk taking, and innovation. For supervisors to become effective clientcentered transformational leaders, it is more important to begin by transforming how one thinks about and views work, relationships with workers, and the organization than by focusing on the specific mechanics of such a leadership style. Incorporating learning activities into daily routines takes practice and is likely to bring success and failure, the two key elements of effective learning experiences.

Even in organizations that may not yet perceive themselves to be learning organizations, supervisors can be addressing such questions as *What do we need*  to know? What are we trying to learn? Where should we be going? (Nonaka, 1998). Supervisors with a strong learning orientation can start by collaborating with their own unit as a "learning unit," an approach involving continuous teaching and monitoring of knowledge transfer by sharing with others successes and failures, strengths and limitations, and one's own learning agenda and by consulting with others who have expertise (Garvin, 2000). By recognizing their positional power as middle managers and persisting in the face of obstacles, supervisors have the capacity to be agents of change and builders of learning cultures and organizations (Nonaka, 1998).

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