

## Conceptual Framework

**Recruitment and selection issues.** Scant attention has been paid to systematic strategies for recruiting and selecting child welfare staff. County and state agencies are tied to state personnel systems that are often cumbersome and inefficient (Bernotavicz & Locke, 2000). Many supervisors and managers have little understanding of—or interest in—translating the complexities of child welfare work into a competency-based selection process that would match the best candidate with the job. Industrial/organizational psychology offers skills and tools that could help agencies deal with their workforce needs (Graef & Potter, 2002). Marketing, job analyses, selection testing and competency-based interviewing approaches are effective recruitment and selection strategies.

Many competent workers remain in child welfare in spite of these negative aspects, and the reasons for their retention—commitment to the wellbeing of children and to society, desire to help, personal fulfillment—can be effective in a marketing campaign (Ahluwalia et al., 2001; Network for Excellence in Human Services, et al., n.d.).

**Retention issues.** Once the right workers are recruited, selected and hired, some of the retention battle is won. Some issues related directly to worker turnover and retention, however, are largely unrelated to recruitment and selection. These retention issues tend to be associated with organizational climate and supervision. For example, workers who clearly understand the agency's mission and feel valued as contributors to that mission are more likely to remain in their jobs (Keefe, 2003; Rycraft, 1994). Other organizational climate variables are clear expectations and measurable performance objectives (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003), recognition and rewards for performance (Child Welfare Training Institute, 1997) and respect for individual staff (Landsman, 2001). These characteristics create a positive climate that affects not only retention rates, but also contributes to positive outcomes for children's services (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). Workers tend to leave the agency prematurely when their knowledge and skills are underutilized (Harrison, 1995) and they have limited professional discretion and participatory decision making (Hopkins et al., 1999; Ellett & Millar, 2001). Further, worker safety is an organizational issue affecting retention (AFSCME, 1998).

The concept of *learning organization* has existed in the corporate world for decades (Senge, 1990). Its tenets (systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision and team learning) hold promise for improving public organizational climates and, specifically, workforce retention (Alwon & Reitz, 2000). These tenets—albeit under different names—have been touted in the social sciences literature as retention related. They include communication and team work (Alwon & Reitz, 2000), opportunities for professional growth and education (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; Child Welfare Training Institute, 1997; Cyphers, 2001), cooperative learning and internal career ladders (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Landsman, 2001; Lewandowski, 1998) and personal feelings of accomplishment (Dickinson & Perry, 2002).

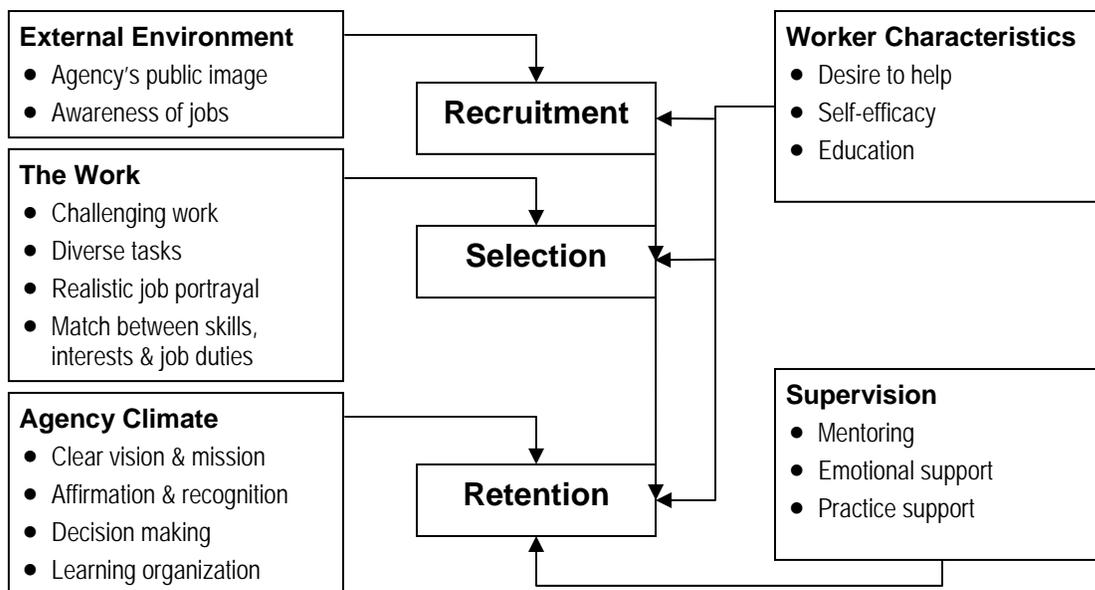
The most examined issue affecting retention is supervision—both quality and quantity. Important dimensions include the affective role of supervisors—providing support, expressing approval and concern, and being warm and friendly in response to worker problems (Martin et al., 2003)—as well as the degree to which supervisors affect workers' practice skills (Rycraft, 1994). Since many workers remain on the job to help children (Cicero-Reese & Black, 1998) or

make a difference in peoples' lives (Light, 2003), supervisors' abilities to provide work-related support are critical in retention (Dickinson & Perry, 2002). Thus, supervisors who foster on-the-job learning through such organizational learning activities as peer mentoring, supervisory coaching and encouraging continued professional growth contribute to the retention of workers in their units (Landsman, 2001; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998).

Articles describe retention issues related to compensation and benefits (Rycraft, 1994), work/family balance (Ellett & Ellett, 19960), work overload (Alwon & Reitz, 2002), and burnout (Dickinson & Perry, 2002). These factors are less amenable to training or, in the case of burnout, are disputable influences (Crolley-Simic & Ellett, 2003) and will not be the focus of this project.

**Conceptual Framework.** Attention to recruitment, selection and retention—all three—is necessary in order to have a significant impact on the child welfare workforce. As presented below in Figure 1, these three outcomes are sequentially related and yet influenced by distinct dimensions. Factors related to the external environment directly impact the ability of the agency to recruit a favorable pool of candidates for child welfare positions. The nature of the work is a category of issues that affect the ability of managers and supervisors to select qualified child welfare staff. And retention of competent and committed child welfare workers is influenced by the agency climate and supervisory characteristics. Individual worker characteristics influence all three outcomes: recruitment, selection and retention.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Influences on Recruitment, Selection and Retention**



In order to develop an effective training curriculum, we used research and practice experience to specify those skills and behaviors that will change as a result of the training. For example, the agency's external environment includes public perceptions (agency's public image and community awareness of child welfare jobs) that can be influenced by the skills and behaviors of managers and supervisors. When supervisors and managers learn how to structure procedures to select and hire qualified candidates, they will be more skilled at applying research information

that shows how committed workers resonate to the realities of child welfare work, including its challenges, diversity, and match with staff skills and interests. Managers and supervisors can learn and apply skills for changing the agency's climate by communicating the agency's mission, affirming staff and involving them in decision making and creating a learning organization. We will also focus on specific supervisory behaviors related to retention that can change through training: work-focused mentoring and providing emotional and practice support. Finally, cultivating workers' desires to help, providing opportunities that increase their self-efficacy, and supporting staff educational opportunities—as well as recruiting professional social workers—are supervisory and management behaviors that affect recruitment, selection and retention. The development of this resources and curriculum model not only begins with concepts supported by research and practice, but it will end with evidence of the effectiveness of this integrated approach in improving supervisor and manager skills for the effective recruitment, selection and retention of child welfare staff.

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