

# Workplace Attitudes, Experiences, and Job Satisfaction of Social Work Administrators in Nonprofit and Public Agencies: 1981 and 1989

Diane Vinokur-Kaplan  
*University of Michigan*

*This article profiles workplace attitudes, experiences, and job satisfaction of social work administrators employed in nonprofit and public agencies during the dramatic social service changes of the 1980s. Secondary analysis of national, cross-sectional surveys of National Association of Social Work members in 1981 and 1989 reveal changes over time and by nonprofit versus public agency auspices regarding sense of professional competencies, working conditions, job stressors, and sense of professional support. Job satisfaction of managers in both sectors is significantly predicted in a multiple regression by a sense of challenge, promotion opportunities, and lack of value conflict in the work they do. The findings also reveal greater concrete rewards but declining promotion opportunities among the nonprofit administrators and a greater sense of challenge but declining income among public agency administrators. The findings suggest several directions for social work education and management training.*

During the retrenchment of the 1980s, human service administrators worked in stressful, uncertain environments, coping with major financial, political, and managerial strains (See Fabricant & Burghardt, 1992; Salamon, 1995). Yet a study of social work administrators in 1981 and 1985 found them to be "alive, happy, and prospering" in general (Chess, Norlin, & Jayaratne, 1987), reporting relatively high levels of job satisfaction and low intentions to change positions. This article probes further into the workplace attitudes of such administrators and extends the analysis to 1989 to see if the continuing strains

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of the retrenchment demoralized them. Because there continued to be a shift in the types of human service activities conducted by the public and nonprofit sectors, it also compares data on these administrators according to the nonprofit or public auspices of their employment. The result is a more finely grained portrait of the generally continued buoyancy of this group of managers in both sectors during the decade. However, this analysis also pinpoints continuing workplace deficits and issues in each sector that detract from their job satisfaction and that raise questions for the future about social work administration retention and recruitment.

Professional social workers have long been associated with human services, either dominating the service field (e.g., child welfare and family services) or staffing social services departments in such host organizations as schools and hospitals. Historically, they have assumed management positions in human service organizations, either by rising through the ranks, from direct services to supervision to management, or, especially since the 1970s, by graduating with an advanced social work degree concentrating on social administration (Jansson, 1987; Patti, 1983, Chap. 1, "The Emergence of Administration in Social Work").

But beginning with the Nixon administration, social work has been an embattled profession. Professional social workers have been replaced in major social policy-making positions, and many job classifications once dominated by trained social workers have become either declassified or deprofessionalized (Gummer & Edwards, 1988). In the case of management positions, they also faced increasing competition from other professions, such as business, public health, and public administration, which in some cases, were seen as more sympathetic to current policy initiatives (Faherty, 1987; Gummer & Edwards, 1988). Thus, in addition to all their other pressures, such social work administrators could feel their professional legitimacy threatened (Neugeboren, 1987a). This research presents a fresh retrospective on a particular professional group, long established and prevalent in nonprofit and public services, which appeared to persevere at that difficult time, despite its many sources of beleaguerment.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL AUSPICES AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Few studies of employee well-being have looked empirically at whether organizational auspices have an important influence on workplace attitudes and well-being. Yet, as Mirvis and Hackett (1983) point out:

The nature of an organization's mission—to make a profit, to serve the citizenry, or to educate, entertain, and cure privately but without profit—

permeates its culture and identity. It serves both as a selector and a socializer, attracting particular segments of the work force and motivating and satisfying them with particular rewards. (p. 3)

This dimension is especially timely since the capacity of nonprofits to retain and recruit professionals—including social work managers—has begun to be questioned in light of several recent trends: (a) the relatively lower wages and fringe benefits in the nonprofit sector (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983; Preston, 1989, 1990); (b) competition from for-profit firms that have entered traditionally nonprofit personal social services (Salamon, 1993); (c) greater interest among and opportunity for recent college graduates to enter business (cf. Mirvis, 1992, p. 24); (d) the decline of some structural and cultural barriers for women, who predominate in the voluntary sector and who may now enter the for-profit sector (Preston, 1990), further encouraged by the fact that between 1973 and 1985, “opportunities and wages for women [were] steadily improving in the for-profit sector, while they [were] not changing visibly in the nonprofit sector” (Preston, 1990, p. 26); and (e) the loosening up of the for-profit sector to emphasize more employee enrichment and involvement, while the nonprofit sector is tightening up through increased monitoring by funding sources and emphasis on efficiency (Elkin & Molitor, 1984; Mirvis & Hackett, 1983, p. 11).

#### SOCIAL WORK ADMINISTRATORS IN NONPROFIT AND PUBLIC AGENCIES

As background, overall employment in the independent sector grew generally over the period between 1977 and 1990, increasing “57 percent, from 5.5 million to 8.7 million, and as a proportion of total employment from 7 percent to 8 percent (Table 3.3)” (Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Toppe, & Noga, 1992, p. 114). Yet managers represent a very small part of the sector’s workforce; analysis of surveys estimate the percentage of managers in the white-collar nonprofit labor market at 13% in 1977 and 15% in 1980 (Preston, 1990, Table 1, p. 16).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 378,299 social workers employed in 1988, with 58% employed in services (mostly in social service, health, and education) and 42% employed in government, almost all in state and local government (Ginsberg, 1990, Table 13, pp. 270-271). Among members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in 1986-1987, roughly 40% each were employed in nonprofit agencies and in public services, respectively, with 20% working in private, for-profit organizations (National Association of Social Workers, 1987, Table 8); the overall percentage of those primarily in management and administrative positions was quite steady, close to 20% in 1982 and 1987 (Williams & Hopps, 1990, p. 296), but declining

in 1988 to 16.8% and in 1991 to 15.4% (Gibelman & Schervish, 1993, p. 32, Table 2.7).

Social service administrators play key roles in attainment of agency goals to serve those in need, and strongly influence the performance and morale of their staff (cf. Rapp & Poertner, 1992; Weinbach, 1990; Weiner, 1990). Indeed, Kramer (1987) noted their particular importance: Unlike for-profit organizations, "large or small, . . . most voluntary agencies are unusually dependent on the quality of their executive leadership and, therefore, more subject to idiosyncratic rather than structural factors" (p. 244). Similarly, public agency administrators also spend more time on political management, when compared to their for-profit sector counterparts, given the differences in organizational structures, multiple stakeholders, incentives, and concern for the public good (see Starling, 1993, pp. 18-25).

Social work administration texts (such as Patti, 1983) have not dwelt on such sectoral differences as the basis and sources of funding (with the great emphasis in nonprofits on fund-raising and volunteer management); the legal standing; the different task environments and stakeholders (including boards in nonprofits and the distinct roles of government, civil service, and citizens groups in the public sector); and the different legal constraints governing them, including those pertaining to managing personnel (Cole, 1994).

During the 1980s, each sector's role changed even more in light of changing funding and service delivery patterns. In broad strokes, the federal government continued to retrench, and public agency administrators increasingly focused on managing the remaining publicly accountable bureaucracies, initiating programs and overseeing contracts with nonprofit service providers. In contrast, nonprofit administrators often focused more on the development, provision and maintenance of such services, and on additional fund-raising on their behalf (cf. Austin, 1988; Fabricant & Burghardt, 1992; Ferris, 1993; Gibelman & Demone, 1989; Grønbjerg, 1993; Smith & Lipsky, 1993), with accountability to boards and various funders and attention to managing volunteers, as well as paid staff.

In this changing environment, social work managers in public agencies required new specialized skills in cutback management, contractual arrangements, and the consolidation and closing of facilities. Similarly, social work managers in the nonprofit sector required specialized skills in vendorship, volunteer supervision, fund-raising and for-profit subsidiaries, facilities management, and other skills not previously emphasized in their education (Bernstein, 1991; Perlmutter & Adams, 1990; Saxton, 1988; Sherraden, 1990; Wedel, 1991).

In both sectors, however, social work administration became what Gummer and Edwards (1988) dubbed "a beleaguered profession" (p. 13), in which social workers imbued with intense dedication to their clients were, in the conservative 1980s, required "to implement policies that run counter to their conceptions of desirable social programs" (pp. 14-15).

## PREVIOUS STUDIES OF JOB SATISFACTION AMONG SOCIAL WORKERS

Locke (1976, p. 1300) defines job satisfaction as the positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (in Glisson & Durick, 1988, p. 64). Empirical studies of job satisfaction in human service organizations in general have reported low levels of satisfaction when compared to other types of organizations (see Glisson & Durick, 1988, p. 69; McNeely, 1992). Yet, interestingly, Jayaratne and Chess (1983b) found that social work administrators in 1981 reported high job satisfaction and were not often seeking to leave their current positions. A similar study in 1985 found these administrators to still be "alive, happy, and prospering" (Chess, Norlin, & Jayaratne, 1987).

I was unable to identify a study of American social workers that systematically compared the job satisfaction and workplace attitudes of human service administrators working under these two auspices; past studies either aggregate workers in all auspices (public, nonprofit, for-profit) together (e.g., Arches, 1991; Chess et al., 1987) or are confined to one sector (e.g., McNeely's [1992] studies of workers in public welfare agencies).

Moreover, this study contrasts with some of the few previous studies that compare attitudes and behavior of employees working in different sectors. Some have looked at small, specialized groups of professionals, such as engineers (Preston, 1993) and lawyers (Weisbrod, 1983), who have some representatives in the nonprofit sector but also have long histories and dominance in the for-profit sector; in contrast, social workers are concentrated in the nonprofit and public sectors. This study also differs from other studies of the quality of employment in the nonprofit sector (Mirvis, 1992; Mirvis & Hackett, 1983), which compared an aggregate of managerial, professional, clerical, and service job holders across the three sectors (see Mirvis, 1992, p. 28). In contrast, this study is limited to professional managers concentrated in human services and possessing a particular professional background.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study measures social work administrators' own sense of professional competence in performing their jobs and their attitudes toward possible deficits in their working conditions; the latter includes both current external rewards (salary, comfort) and more internal rewards (challenge) and future rewards (promotion opportunities). This study also probes job stressors these administrators may encounter in their particular positions (role ambiguity, role conflict, and workload) and two types of professional support—social support from coworkers and lack of professional value conflicts.

Given the dour atmosphere suggested by most past literature (e.g., Neugeboren, 1987b), I anticipated that social work administrators in both the non-profit and public sectors would have had lower levels of job satisfaction as the decade proceeded, as a result of continued stress, strain, and conflict. Similarly, I assumed that their working conditions, professional competencies, and professional support would deteriorate, both in terms of social support and support of their professional values; moreover, their job deficits and stressors would ascend because of continuing fiscal pressures across the decade.

Specifically, I examined how strongly the variables are related to job satisfaction in both sectors as follows:

1. Demographic characteristics: Variables such as age are expected to positively, albeit moderately, correlate with job satisfaction, based on past studies of human service practitioners (Vinokur-Kaplan, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1994), and other employee groups (Jayaratne, 1993).
2. Professional competencies: Mastery and knowledge are expected to be strongly and positively related to job satisfaction, following Jayaratne and Chess (1986).
3. Working conditions: These variables will all be positively correlated to job satisfaction, with those that enhance one's professional career (promotion opportunities, challenge) more strongly related than those that are more concrete (financial rewards, comfort) (Jayaratne & Chess, 1983a; Vinokur-Kaplan et al., 1994).
4. Job stressors: Role ambiguity will be strongly related to job satisfaction (following Glisson & Durick, 1988), and role conflict and workload will be moderately correlated with job satisfaction (see Jayaratne & Chess, 1984).
5. Professional support: Social support of coworkers will be moderately correlated with job satisfaction, and professional value conflict will strongly (and negatively) correlate with job satisfaction (see Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Jayaratne, Tripodi, & Chess, 1983).

## METHOD

Data are reported from two surveys using separate national random samples of NASW members in 1981 and 1989, both conducted by Jayaratne and Chess (1984). Thus respondents do not provide matched, longitudinal data, but rather cross sections of social work administrators. These samples were drawn from the NASW's computerized membership file, limited to those regular/full members who resided in the United States. It is acknowledged that "although NASW is the largest organization of professional social workers, its membership constitutes an undetermined proportion of the total social work population in the United States [including those] who meet the criteria for eligibility but do not join" (Gibelman & Schervish, 1993, p. 4).

The 1981 study received 853 responses from the sample population of 1,173, yielding a response rate of 72.7%. The 1989 study received 883 responses from the sample population of 1,500, yielding a response rate of 58.9%. The data presented are limited to those NASW members who designated administration as their primary method of practice in their present work, held a master's degree in social work or a Ph.D./DSW, and worked full-time (35 hours or more per week) in the United States. They represent 190 administrators in 1981, and 126 administrators in 1989, for a total of 316 respondents. Their 29.5% representation within the 1981 total national sample exceeds the 18% of NASW members listing management as their primary function at the beginning of the decade (Williams & Hopps, 1990, p. 296); in 1989, the 17.9% of the sample is nearly identical with the working NASW membership in 1988—17.7% (Gibelman & Schervish, 1993, Table 5.7, p. 90). (This analysis eliminates an additional oversample of child welfare personnel collected in 1981 and reported in Jayaratne & Chess [1985] and Guterman [1992].)

## MEASURES

Measures employed in this study have been used extensively in past survey research on stress, strain, and job satisfaction in the workplace (cf. Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison, & Pinneau, 1975; Jayaratne & Chess, 1982-1983; Quinn & Shepard, 1974; Quinn & Staines, 1979). The alpha coefficients, indicating the reliability of indexes, were calculated on the entire 1989 sample. To ease interpretation, all items and scales have been arranged so that a higher score indicates a greater amount of the concept being measured (i.e., more satisfaction and more role ambiguity are each represented by higher scores).

### Dependent Variable

A single item, "All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job?" (1 = *not at all satisfied* to 4 = *very satisfied*) is a modified version of the scale used by Quinn & Staines (1979) and has been included for the last decade in studies of social workers (Jayaratne & Chess, 1983a; Vinokur-Kaplan et al., 1994).

### Independent Variables

**Demographic Characteristics.** Respondents were asked their age, gender, years in position, and years elapsed since they obtained their highest educational degree.

**Respondent's Professional Competency and Preparation.** Two items from Chess et al. (1987) measure the respondents' knowledge of subject matter and mastery of practice methods for their jobs during the past year as a means to reflect professional competence (1 = *low* to 5 = *high*).

**Working Conditions.** These variables reflect aspects of work more controlled by the agency and its policies than those aspects related to the demands of a particular job, and all are rated 1 = *not at all true* to 4 = *very true*. They are (a) financial rewards (alpha = .48), a three-item index measuring the extent to which a worker perceives pay, security, and fringe benefits to be good; (b) comfort (alpha = .67), a seven-item index combining aspects of travel, scheduling, and workplace pressure—for example, “travel is convenient” and “the hours are good”; (c) promotion opportunities (alpha = .74), a three-item index including “The chances of promotion are good”; and (d) challenge (alpha = .77), a six-item index measuring the quality and challenge of the work performed by the respondent—for example, “I have the opportunity to develop own abilities” and “My work is interesting.”

**Job Stressors.** These variables focus on particular demands encountered in a particular job and include (a) role ambiguity (alpha = .83), a four-item index asking respondents to rate, “How often . . . are you clear on your job responsibilities?” “Can you predict what others expect?” “Are your work objectives well defined?” and “Are you clear about what others expect of you?” using a 5-point frequency scale; (b) role conflict (alpha = .71), asking respondents to indicate, using a 4-point scale, how true the following four aspects of role conflict were for their jobs: have enough time, too much work to do everything well, not satisfying everyone at same time, and upset some people while satisfying others; and (c) workload (alpha = .83), asking respondents to use a 5-point scale of frequency to rate the following four items regarding their jobs: How often does your job require you to work very hard? How often does your job require you to work very fast? How often is there a great deal to be done? and How often does your job leave you with little time to get things done?

**Professional Support.** These items portray an important aspect of the workplace’s context of social support and its support of professional values: (a) social support of coworkers (alpha = .87), respondents who indicated that there is a group of people at their workplace that they think of as coworkers answered four items (1 = *not at all true* to 4 = *very true*), for example, they are “warm and friendly when you are troubled about something,” and (b) perceived value conflict, a single item, measures the degree to which respondents feel that their professional values conflict with what they have to do on the job (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984) (1 = *rarely* to 5 = *very often*).

In addition, the auspices of the respondent’s agency were ascertained in 1981 by the respondents indicating whether the agency in which they were currently working was a private or public agency. In 1989, the question was expanded to include various auspices, but only those who indicated either “public” or “private nonprofit agency” were included, thus excluding respondents employed in private practice, for-profit agencies, or other auspices.



## RESULTS

Of 316 administrators in this study, 46% of the 1981 cohort and 43% of the 1989 cohort worked in nonprofit agencies, and their remaining counterparts worked in public agencies.

### DESCRIPTION OF VARIABLES

The four groups created by cross tabulating auspices (public/nonprofit) by year (1981, 1989) were analyzed using two-way analysis of variance when the level of measurement permitted.

#### Demographics

**Gender and Race.** Both sectors witnessed a higher percentage of women in administrative positions over the decade. In nonprofit organizations, the percentage of women administrators increased from 40.2% in 1981 to 59.3% in 1989 ( $\chi^2 = 4.84$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and similarly so in public agencies, rising from 48.0% to 63.4% ( $\chi^2 = 3.96$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These findings may reflect the feminization of NASW membership as a whole (see Gibelman & Schervish, 1993, p. 129). Representation of people of color increased somewhat among administrators in nonprofit agencies, from 11.6% in 1981 to 18.5% in 1989 ( $\chi^2 = 1.29$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $ns$ ) and declined in public agencies, from 17.2% to 6.9%, respectively ( $\chi^2 = 3.89$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Setting of Practice.** Overall, administrators were most likely to work in settings that provide services in mental health (22.1% in 1981 and 25.5% in 1989), child welfare (11.0% and 10.5%), health care (13.7% and 11.3%), family services (10.5% and 12.1%), and other settings (36.8% and 30.6%). The distribution among settings remained quite steady in the public sector ( $\chi^2 = 6.47$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $ns$ ), but nonprofit settings had some shifts ( $\chi^2 = 16.9$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Most notably, in 1981, 19.5% of the nonprofit administrators were in mental health settings, but this percentage grew to 34.6% in 1989, possibly reflecting the expansion of such federally funded institutional services (see Austin, 1988, p. 148).

**Income.** The average yearly income of nonprofit social work administrators escalated significantly during the decade ( $\chi^2$  of three income categories = 68.73,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while that of administrators in public agencies actually fell ( $\chi^2 = 38.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Specifically, in 1981 the average salaries of both nonprofit and public agency administrators were estimated to be quite close, in the upper \$20,000s—\$25,673 and \$27,850, respectively. By 1989, the average income of the nonprofit managers increased to \$41,241, representing an 18% increase in their inflation-adjusted income, while public agency administra-

tors earned \$35,021, thus actually losing 13% of their inflation-adjusted income. This change is evident also by comparing the percentage of administrators earning more than \$35,000 in 1989—76% of those in nonprofit agencies compared to 44% in public agencies. (By comparison, the median income of all social work managers belonging to NASW in 1987 was \$32,250 and the mean was \$35,200 [National Association of Social Workers, 1987, Table 10, p. 8], suggesting high reliability for these findings.)

### Workplace Hierarchy and Contacts

Historically, the nonprofit sector is noted for the greater autonomy encountered by its employees (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983). In 1981, 78.2% of the nonprofit managers and 89.5% of the public agency managers indicated that they had a supervisor ( $\chi^2 = 4.33$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting at least one aspect of such relative autonomy existed moreso in the nonprofit sector. This situation persisted in 1989, when only 69% of the nonprofit administrators, compared to 91% of the public agency administrators, indicated they had a supervisor ( $\chi^2 = 8.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Over this decade, the great majority of administrators in both sectors had a group of coworkers from whom they could potentially receive support (89.9% in 1981 and 91.9% in 1989).

Also, a significantly larger proportion of public sector administrators were providing direct service at the end of the decade (35.7% in 1981 and 52.8% in 1989,  $\chi^2 = 4.93$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ), whereas a significantly smaller proportion of nonprofit administrators were doing so at the end of the decade (54.7% in 1981 and 26.4% in 1989,  $\chi^2 = 10.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This trend may indicate not only public agency downsizing but also a continuation of a tendency prevalent in the 1970s during which “professional social workers were transferred from management and policy positions to service units or other positions in which they would have limited influence on policy” (Walz & Groze, 1991; cited in Gibelman & Schervish, 1993, p. 134; also see Gummer & Edwards, 1988).

Table 1 compares the means of 15 variables by auspices and years. Those variables displaying statistically significant direct and interactive effects are so indicated in columns headed Effects. Significant direct effects by nonprofit versus public auspices are revealed on two variables and by year—1981 versus 1989—on three variables; however, nine—or nearly two thirds—of the variables revealed significant interaction effects, thus suggesting some particular trends occurring within each auspice in 1981 and 1989, respectively.

*Age and Years Since Last Degree Received.* Administrators’ average age of 45–46 was quite steady. However, such administrators have become significantly more “veteran,” as shown by when they received their last educational degree—year effect:  $F(1, 307) = 5.88$ ,  $p < .05$ . Among nonprofits, the average number of years grew notably, from 12.9 years in 1981 to 17.4 in 1989, and in public agencies, from 12.9 to 13.5 years.

**Table 1. Comparison of Administrators in Nonprofit and Public Agencies: Auspices by Year**

	Nonprofit M		Public M		Main Effect: Auspices		Main Effect: Year		Interaction Effect: Auspices x Year		Statistically Significant F tests
	1981	1989	1981	1989	Auspices	Year	Auspices	Year	Auspices x Year		
Job satisfaction (1-4) <sup>a</sup>	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.4							F(1, 303) = 6.71**
Demographics											
Age (26-71)	44.5	47.1	45.7	44.8							<i>ns</i>
Years in position (0-36)	5.4	7.3	4.7	5.0							F(1, 312) = 4.36*
Hours worked per week (35-80)	46.1	43.9	43.5	46.0							F(1, 312) = 7.90**
Years since the last degree received (0-45)	12.9	17.4	12.9	13.5							F(1, 307) = 5.88*
Professional competencies											
Mastery of practice methods (1-5)	4.1	4.3	4.2	4.2							
Knowledge of subject matter (1-5)	4.2	4.5	4.3	4.5							F(1, 304) = 6.30**
Working conditions											
Financial rewards (1-4)	2.9	3.2	3.2	3.0							F(1, 303) = 13.29***
Comfort (1-4)	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.6							
Promotion opportunities (1-4)	2.5	2.2	2.3	2.6							F(1, 283) = 10.03**
Challenge (1-4)	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.5							F(1, 304) = 4.63*
Job stressors											F(1, 304) = 23.18***
Role ambiguity (1-5)	1.9	1.9	2.1	1.7							F(1, 306) = 4.93*
Role conflict (1-4)	3.0	2.8	2.9	2.8							F(1, 306) = 5.47*
Workload (1-5)	4.2	4.0	4.1	4.3							F(1, 307) = 8.30***
Professional support											
Social support of coworkers (1-4)	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.4							F(1, 280) = 10.36***
Value conflict (1-5)	3.6	3.4	3.5	3.9							F(1, 311) = 5.21*

Note: • signifies where a statistically significant effect was found of the type indicated in the column heading.

a. Numbers in parentheses represent range on each variable.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

**Work Experience and Workweek.** The average number of years these administrators had been in their same positions in 1981 and in 1989 were 5.4 and 7.9 years, respectively, for those in nonprofits, and 4.7 and 5.0 years, respectively, among those in public agencies—auspices effect:  $F(1, 312) = 4.36, p < .05$ . But each auspice had wide ranges (less than a year to 36 years). The average workweek revealed a significant interaction effect, with nonprofit administrators decreasing their workweek (46.1 to 43.9 hours) across the decade, and public agency administrators increasing theirs (43.5 to 46.0 hours),  $F(1, 312) = 7.90, p < .01$ .

## JOB SATISFACTION AND WORKPLACE ATTITUDES

Contrary to my initial prediction, job satisfaction scores overall were quite high and stable. Moreover, a significant interaction effect was found,  $F(1, 303) = 6.71, p < .01$ , with job satisfaction decreasing slightly over the decade among those in nonprofit agencies (3.3 to 3.2 on a 4-point scale) and increasing more noticeably among public agency administrators (3.1 to 3.4).

Change over time within each auspice regarding levels of professional competencies, working conditions, stressors, and professional support are discussed below.

**Professional Competencies.** Overall, respondents reported quite high and steady evaluation of their mastery of practice methods in their recent work (4.1 in 1981 and 4.2 in 1989 on a 5-point scale), and no differences by auspice, year, or interaction effect were found. Administrators in both sectors felt their knowledge of subject matter for their practice significantly increased over time (public  $M = 4.3$  and  $4.5$  and nonprofit  $M = 4.2$  and  $4.5$ , in 1981 and 1989, respectively),  $F(1, 304) = 6.30, p < .01$ , with no interaction effect found for auspices by year.

**Working Conditions.** Among the four indexes measuring working conditions, no significant changes by year were found from 1981 to 1989; however, further analysis including auspices revealed significant interaction effects on nearly every one. On *good financial rewards*, scores increased among the nonprofit administrators and decreased among public agency administrators across the decade,  $F(1, 303) = 13.29, p < .001$ , following the actual salary trends mentioned above. However, in disaggregating the three components of financial rewards, there are no main or interaction effects regarding good pay, but job security declined in the public agencies (3.3 in 1981 and 3.0 in 1989) and ascended in nonprofits (3.0 in 1981 and 3.3 in 1989),  $F(1, 311) = 10.22, p < .01$ , and a similar interactive pattern emerges regarding good fringe benefits (public  $M$  1981 = 3.2, 1989 = 3.1; nonprofit  $M$  1981 = 3.0 and 1989 = 3.3),  $F(1, 305) = 7.91, p < .01$ . Respondents did not feel they enjoyed comfortable

working conditions (2.6 to 2.7 on a 4-point scale), regardless of year, auspice, or both.

Regarding the more intrinsic rewards of their jobs, the administrators felt it was somewhat true that their positions provided them with challenge, but this feeling was significantly stronger overall among public auspices administrators (3.33) when compared to nonprofit administrators (3.26),  $F(1, 304) = 4.63, p < .05$ . Moreover, challenge increased over time among public auspices administrators ( $M_s = 3.2$  and  $3.5$ , respectively), but decreased among nonprofit administrators ( $M_s = 3.4$  and  $3.1$ , respectively), producing a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 304) = 23.18, p < .001$ .

Overall, these administrators generally felt it was less than "somewhat true" that there were promotion opportunities in both study years. However, opportunities for promotion increased over time among public auspices administrators ( $M_s = 2.3$  and  $2.6$ , respectively) but declined among nonprofit auspices administrators ( $M_s = 2.5$  and  $2.2$ , respectively), producing a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 283) = 10.03, p < .01$ .

**Job Stressors.** Role ambiguity was quite low and declined modestly but significantly over the decade, from 2.0 on a 5-point scale in 1981 to 1.8 in 1989—year effect:  $F(1, 306) = 4.93, p < .05$ . This decline was most noticeable among the public auspices administrators (2.1 in 1981 and 1.7 in 1989), with no decline in scores found among the nonprofit administrators (1.9 in both years), producing a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 306) = 5.47, p < .05$ . Role conflict was moderate and declined insignificantly, from 3.0 to 2.8 among nonprofit managers in 1981 and 1989, and similarly from 2.9 to 2.8 among public agency managers.

With regard to workload burden, small, but statistically significant interactions were found, with profiles of nonprofit workload averages declining (4.2 and 4.0, respectively) and public workload averages increasing (4.1 and 4.3, respectively), producing a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 307) = 8.30, p < .001$ , and reflecting the previously noted findings about actual hours worked per week.

**Professional Support.** Although the overall level of social support of co-workers was fairly high, over the decade such support decreased among nonprofit managers ( $M = 3.4$  in 1981,  $3.1$  in 1989) and increased among public auspices administrators ( $M = 3.2$  in 1981,  $3.4$  in 1989), producing a significant interaction effect,  $F(1, 280) = 10.36, p < .001$ . Respondents overall felt a fairly high level of professional value conflict (3.6 in 1981 to 3.7 in 1989 on a 5-point scale), but value conflict declined among nonprofit managers ( $M = 3.6$  in 1981 and  $3.4$  in 1989) and ascended considerably among public auspices administrators across the decade ( $M_s = 3.5$  and  $3.9$ , respectively), producing a significant interaction effect of year by auspices,  $F(1, 311) = 5.21, p < .05$ .

## STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON CORRELATES OF JOB SATISFACTION

Which of the variables above have the strongest influence on administrators' job satisfaction? First, all the designated independent variables were entered into a stepwise multiple regression equation with job satisfaction as the dependent variable. Following the entry of the variable with the largest correlation with the dependent variable of job satisfaction into the regression equation, subsequent variables were evaluated for their partial correlations with job satisfaction; only those whose probability associated with the  $F$  test  $\leq .05$  were included (see Norusis, M. J./SPSS, Inc., 1990, pp. B99-B104). The variables above were also analyzed separately by auspices, year, and the four combinations of auspices by year. The resulting multiple regressions and standardized beta weights are presented in Table 2.

For the sample as a whole, the model accounted for 49% of the variance in job satisfaction (based on the adjusted  $R^2$ ), and there is little difference between the obtained and adjusted  $R^2$ . The most salient beta weights predicting job satisfaction in the total sample are challenge ( $\beta = .41, p < .001$ ), promotion opportunities ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ), and value conflict ( $\beta = -.15, p < .001$ ), followed by role conflict ( $\beta = -.10, p < .05$ ) and social support of coworkers ( $\beta = .10, p < .05$ ). These results are similar to previous multiple regression analyses of full-time employed social workers holding various positions (Jayaratne & Chess, 1983b, 1984).

Moreover, the multiple regression coefficients ( $R$ ) and the amounts of variance explained ( $R^2$ ) in job satisfaction are quite similar by year and by auspices (adjusted  $R^2$ 's range from .46 to .56), with the exception of public 1981 data, in which  $R^2$  (adjusted) is only .39. Thus this subset of six variables quite consistently explains nearly half the variance in job satisfaction for these social work administrators, with all multiple correlation coefficients significant at  $p < .001$ .

The most important predictors of job satisfaction are two working conditions: challenge and promotion opportunities. Although these two variables are strong predictors at the beginning and end of the decade, it is noteworthy that in the nonprofit sector, there is fairly continuous challenge,  $\beta_{(1981)} = .47, p < .001$ ;  $\beta_{(1989)} = .40, p < .001$ , whereas in the public sector there is a considerable decline in its salience for job satisfaction,  $\beta_{(1981)} = .52, p < .001$  and  $\beta_{(1989)} = .32, p < .01$ . Also, promotion opportunities decline in salience in both sectors over time, from  $\beta_{(\text{nonprofit})} = .18, p < .05$  and  $\beta_{(\text{public})} = .23, p < .01$  in 1981 to insignificant beta weights in 1989.

Financial rewards decline overall in salience over time,  $\beta_{(1981)} = .15, p < .01$ ;  $\beta_{(1989)} = ns$ , but are significant predictors of job satisfaction in the nonprofit cases in 1981 ( $\beta = .26, p < .01$ ) and in public agency cases in 1989 ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ). The two indicators of professional support included in the model initially appear as modest predictors in the sample as a whole (coworker social

**Table 2. Significant Regression Beta Weights From Stepwise Regression of 15 Predictors of Job Satisfaction of Social Work Administrators in Nonprofit and Public Agencies: By Year, Auspices, and Year  $\times$  Auspices**

	Auspices $\times$ Year								
	Total	Year		Auspices		Nonprofit		Public	
		(n = 259)	1981 (n = 190)	1989 (n = 126)	Nonprofit (n = 141)	Public (n = 175)	1981 (n = 87)	1989 (n = 54)	1981 (n = 103)
Demographics									
Age									
Years in position									
Hours worked per week									
Years since the last degree received									
Professional competencies									
Mastery of practice methods									
Knowledge of subject matter									
Working conditions									
Financial rewards	.11**	.15**		.14*		.26**			-.21**
Comfort									.30***
Promotion opportunities	.18***	.21**	.20**	.18*	.23**	.18*		.23**	
Challenge	.41***	.51***	.32***	.39***	.42***	.47***	.40***	.52***	.32**
Job stressors									
Role ambiguity									
Role conflict	-.10*		-.17**						
Workload									
Professional support	.10*		.18*	.16*			.36***		
Social support of coworkers	-.15***		-.23***	-.14*			-.29**		-.44***
Value conflict									
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted (all $p < .001$ )	.49***	.47***	.51***	.51***	.46***	.56***	.49***	.39***	.53***
R adjusted	.70***	.69***	.71***	.71***	.68***	.75***	.70***	.62***	.73***

Note: To maximize number of cases for analysis, means were imputed to cases of missing data.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

support,  $\beta = .10, p < .05$ ) and value conflict ( $\beta = -.15, p < .001$ ). The social support of coworkers is especially salient in 1989 ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ), under nonprofit auspices ( $\beta = .16, p < .05$ ), and most strongly among 1989 nonprofit administrators ( $\beta = .36, p < .001$ ). The salience of value conflict ascends over time. It is a significant predictor of job satisfaction in 1989 ( $\beta = -.23, p < .001$ ), but not in 1981; in both auspices overall (nonprofit  $\beta = -.14, p < .05$ ; public  $\beta = -.17, p < .01$ ), and most strongly in 1989 among nonprofit managers ( $\beta = -.29, p < .01$ ) and public agency managers ( $\beta = -.44, p < .001$ ).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The generalizability of the findings is constrained to professional social workers, thus excluding human service administrators with other management degrees or backgrounds (cf. Faherty, 1987). Moreover, in that this study is based on a sample of a professional membership organization, there is little control on other characteristics of the workplace of each member, such as agency size and agency age, that could further influence job satisfaction (for instance, see Glisson & Durick, 1988). The analysis does show some difference between the experiences of social work managers working in the two different sectors profiled over this decade.

Overall, there appears to be a fairly high level of job satisfaction and little difference in such attitudes at the beginning and end of the decade. This finding suggests an extension of Chess et al.'s (1987) article, which concluded that social work administrators overall continued to be "alive and happy" and, in the case of the nonprofit sector, "prospering," in the second part of this difficult decade, as well as the first. Moreover, additional data, not presented above, revealed a low likelihood of their seeking a new job in the next year ( $M = 1.5$  in 1981 and  $1.7$  in 1989 on a 3-point scale), a trend that was still in effect in 1991 among NASW members in general who worked in nonprofit and public agencies (Vinokur-Kaplan et al., 1994). Thus massive demoralization and exodus to the for-profit sector or other careers were not evident in either sector.

There are several explanations for these findings. First, all respondents are professionally trained social workers, identifying with their profession through membership in the national organization. Thus stresses they encounter regarding their performance and their legitimacy may be buffered by the support they receive from their reference group and through their own professional identity, skills, and networking.

Second, because they are professional social workers, they may not be eager to seek positions in proprietary agencies. Indeed, nonprofit employees in general surveyed in 1977 were found to have a stronger nonmonetary orientation than those working in the other two sectors, underscoring the notion of selfless service (Mirvis, 1992, p. 25). Thus their comparisons of their own situations was probably limited to others in human services, and not to



positions in other fields. Third, economic problems were pervasive throughout the 1980s, so although social service could be considered difficult, "things were tough all over." Moreover, because these employees are already in mid-career, they may be strongly vested—socially, psychologically, and through pension funds—to their current positions. Finally, they, perhaps like university administrators, may be the survivors of the retrenchment—somehow able to still have their relatively high status positions and some job security, even when their own staffs might be reduced (personal communication, C. Milofsky, August 8, 1995), and thus they are staying put as long as they are able.

The differences in the sectors are also noteworthy. On the one hand, although I expected more stressed, dissatisfied managers in the nonprofit sector, several aspects of their workplace are seen as less stressful (and certainly more remunerative) than those in the public sector. Possibly some nonprofit managers have benefited by being in health and mental health, both growth areas of the service economy. Moreover, by the end of the decade, they may have become quite adept at managing the contracts and managing the sponsors on whom they depend. For instance, Bernstein's (1991) study of nonprofit managers found some of the most successful were ones who approached service contracting as a game they had learned to play, while still trying to serve their clients as best they could. On the other hand, those in the public sector may have sought (or been assigned to) direct services with clients, a condition they might see as more compatible with their values, as opposed to having to fight out policy battles with their ideological opposites.

But this analysis cautions against unguarded optimism regarding recruitment and continued retention and commitment among these social work administrators, especially with regard to the nonprofit sector. Their level of job satisfaction did *not* increase, despite improvements in concrete rewards, and their opportunities for promotion and sense of challenge were perceived to be declining. Moreover, within their agencies, their sense of social support from coworkers was declining, and their sense of value conflict, while declining, remained substantial. This pattern is especially worrisome in that the positive conditions that declined over time and the negative conditions that persevered are precisely those with the greatest impact on job satisfaction—namely, challenge, promotions, social support, and value conflict.

Moreover, the retention of current professionals should not be taken for granted given that a 1990 study of the quality of employment in the nonprofit sector found that "people working in nonprofits . . . are not more psychologically committed to their organizations than are people in the other sectors [of business and government]" (Mirvis, 1992, abstract). Thus the higher remuneration and more stable populations served by business might attract current and potential nonprofit social work employees who previously lacked access to jobs in the for-profit sector (e.g., see Jayaratne, Davis-Sacks, & Chess, 1991; Vinokur-Kaplan et al., 1994) and ultimately decrease the availability of quality

leadership in agencies that serve people in need who lack financial resources or other societal support.

With regard to further training for such professionals, one important unmet component is dealing with value conflicts and professional identity. As previously noted, social work administrators in the 1980s worked in an increasingly inhospitable environment (Gummer & Edwards, 1988, p. 13), not only in terms of professional and financial competition but also because they had to implement policies that, increasingly, ran counter to their conceptions of desirable social programs (pp. 14-15). Moreover, their declassification on the state and local level and their replacement in national policy positions by those more in harmony with conservative social policies led them to experience a growing sense of frustration, impotence, and futility in their jobs (Gummer & Edwards, 1988, p. 15; Perlmutter, 1983; Richan, 1984). In the same vein, although this study's administrators describe themselves as professionally competent in practice and knowledge, they are beset by both value conflict and role conflict that detract from their job satisfaction.

Finally, nonprofit administrators are becoming more specialized managers. The plethora of nonprofit training programs, management support organizations, and professional literature (e.g., Herman & Associates, 1994) attests to their complex needs beyond generic management skills and possibly reflects the many years that have passed since they obtained their last degree. In this light, social workers' role and capacity in leading these services is already being debated (e.g., Blakemore, 1994; Kettner & Martin, 1994; Netting & McMurtry, 1994; Padgett & Berg, 1994). Indeed, if social workers are to be adequately prepared for today's and tomorrow's administrative practice in nonprofit organizations (and perhaps to reclaim their past, pivotal role in public policy and service), then schools of social work and their continuing education programs need to continue to strengthen not only the value base but also the level of skills and knowledge needed for the distinctive training needs of such managers.

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