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Positive Organizational Change by and for the Working Poor

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In this chapter, we focus on positive organizational change by and for the working poor. Such change may be initiated informally by employees and/or their managers; it may be enacted through formal organizational policy or informal norms; or it may be the result of organizational reactions to larger societal forces. Regardless of its source we consider organizational change to be positive to the extent that it is both beneficial to employees and sustainable by employers. Positive organizational change thus results in increased well-being for lower wage employees, involving workplace practice or policy that can be supported and embedded over the long term.

Over the past decade, we have conducted research projects focused on opportunities (or lack thereof) as well as positive interventions for structuring organizational policies and workplace practices to address the needs of the working poor (e.g., Hammer, Kossek, Bodner, & Zimmerman, 2011; Kossek & Hammer, 2008; Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009; Mittal, Rosen, & Leana, 2009). Each project has addressed somewhat different research questions but all conclude that a multilevel approach is needed to better understand how the condition of poverty can affect career progression, job attachment, and in-role and extra-role performance at work (Leana, Mittal, & Stiehl, 2010), as well as work-family relationships and the need for workplace flexibility (Kossek et al., 2008). For example, Kossek and Hammer's recent research with grocery store clerks shows that

training *supervisors* to increase support to manage work-life conflict can have beneficial effects on low-wage *workers'* job attitudes, job attachment, and overall health (Hammer et al., 2011; Kossek & Hammer, 2008). Leana's research with low-wage childcare workers similarly shows the effects of *group-level* factors such as teamwork and collaboration on *individual-level* work attachment and performance (Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009). Thus, our central argument is that change efforts designed to target only one level of change to foster organizational integration (often "correcting" individual-level deficiencies in human capital or performance) will not produce lasting change.

As we will illustrate in later descriptions of this research, organizational change that is both positive and sustainable is a complex undertaking requiring cooperation across organizational levels and often presenting challenges to existing organizational norms. Our goals in this chapter are threefold. First, we describe why managing the working poor has become an increasingly important issue, and one that is not addressed adequately in existing organizational theory or management practice. Here we profile the working poor in the United States, describe their employment, and discuss why they are often managed so poorly at work. Second, using data and examples from our own ongoing research projects, we examine "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches to positive organizational change that can benefit the working poor. We contrast these with more traditional "stepping-stone" models of change. Third, we offer foundational principles for future positive organizational change theory development, research, and practice. Our main tenet is that to benefit the working poor, positive organizational change must be undertaken using multilevel (i.e., targeting both individual and workplace contextual social systems) and multipronged (i.e., avoiding oversimplified uni-dimensional change tactics) approaches. Moreover, such change often entails proactive efforts to make visible the assumptions, preferences, and ongoing practices of various stakeholders that are typically invisible and often deliberately so.

BEGINNING CAVEATS

At the outset, we wish to make explicit two boundary conditions in our discussion. First, our focus is on internal organizational dynamics and,

thus, we do not address relevant public policy ameliorations such as raising the minimum wage. At the same time, raising wages and benefits for workers—whether done voluntarily by employers or driven by collective action or public mandates—are the most direct and efficient means of benefiting the working poor. Our focus on alternative policies and practices is not meant to usurp or serve as a substitute for these necessary changes. Second, we limit our discussion to the working poor in the United States. In doing so, we do not discount poverty's significance in other areas of the world, nor impose geographic limitations on practices to remediate its detrimental effects. Instead, we confine our discussion to U.S. workers because our research has been conducted primarily with samples in the United States. We recognize that employment practices are influenced by the cultural context in which they are embedded (Heyman, 2009; Romero-Stone & Stone, 2009) and, thus, confine our discussion to those contexts to which we can generalize with some confidence. With this in mind, we begin with a description of the working poor and the kinds of employing organizations that hire them.

WHO ARE THE WORKING POOR IN THE UNITED STATES?

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines the working poor as the proportion of employed persons living below or close to the economic poverty levels for their country (OECD, 2002). The federal poverty threshold is the most common measure for counting the poor in the United States. This is a tiered scale that determines a household's poverty status based on income and family size (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).[1] Households whose income falls below 100%

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[1] The federal poverty level in the United States is based on an estimate first used in the mid-1960s which is based on the cost of food and family size based on the assumption that a household uses about one-third of its income for food consumption. The poverty threshold listed by the U.S. Census Bureau for a household of four with two dependent children was $21,834 in 2008, which translates to an hourly wage of about $10.50 for one full-time employee (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Households with one adult employed full-time earning the federal minimum wage ($6.55 per hour) would fall below this poverty threshold, and even if two adults are working full-time, year-round at the 2008 federal minimum wage, their combined income would still fall within 125% of the poverty threshold.

of the poverty threshold are considered poor by all assessors and U.S. government agencies (e.g., Social Security Administration) although others (e.g., National Research Council) count those earning less than 200% of the poverty threshold (Ackerman, 2006; Neumark, 2004). In the United States, the working poor are disproportionately female, racial minorities, and recent immigrants (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2007).

In a recent paper about the working poor, Leana, Mittal, & Stiehl (2010) distinguish full-time U.S. workers along two dimensions: (1) Does the individual have a history of economic deprivation (i.e., did he grow up in poverty)? and (2) Are his current wages sufficiently low that he is now economically deprived? According to Leana et al. (2010), members of the working poor would answer both of these questions in the affirmative. They argue that a history of economic deprivation is what distinguishes workers who are currently earning low wages from those who are categorized as the working poor. Thus, the "working poor" are a subset of "low-wage workers" since both groups are characterized by their small earnings and continuing employment. The working poor, however, are further bounded by a past history of poverty, leading to dampened expectations of ameliorating their situation. Even those who escape poverty and are currently earning middle to high wages (those Leana et al., 2010, label "aspirants") can still see their current identity in terms of past poverty. Sennett (1998) and others vividly describe how such individuals find it difficult to be comfortable in their current advantaged positions because of their experience with past economic hardship. As we will discuss, building the ranks of "aspirants" is an explicit goal of "stepping-stone" models—an approach to positive change for the working poor favored by many economists.

LIVING IN POVERTY

Leana et al. (2010) describe poverty as a "strong situation," or a context in which situational attributes tend to overpower individual differences, minimizing the effects of factors like personality on behavior, and narrowing the set of behaviors the individual deems appropriate in a given environment. The evidence supporting poverty as a strong situation can

be found in its effects on several aspects of life, including health, family, and individual development.

People living in low-income households have higher rates of morbidity and mortality and report poorer overall health than those in non-poverty households (Adler & Ostrove, 1993; Taylor & Repetti, 1997; Williams & Collins, 1995). Indeed, recent studies have found a widening gap in longevity between the highest and lowest income brackets in the United States (Singh & Siahpush, 2006). Those living in poverty have a higher incidence of mental health problems as well, and report lower levels of emotional well-being. Hudson's (2005) seven-year study of linkages between socioeconomic status and mental illness found that economic stressors related to unemployment and lack of affordable housing are more predictive of mental illness than the reverse.

There are several explanations for these disparities in health and longevity. First, residents of low income areas have more limited access to health services (Macintyre et al., 1993; Williams, 1990; Wyke et al., 1992), making them less likely to receive preventative health care. Second, the working poor may lack the resources (i.e., time, money) to access and pursue superior medical treatments or technologies (Singh & Siahpush, 2006). Third, a number of studies have shown that low socioeconomic status (SES) is associated with a decreased level of physical activity, an increased propensity to consume a high fat diet, and a decreased knowledge about healthy behaviors (Adler & Ostrove, 1993; Williams & Collins, 1995). The lack of resources (e.g., money to purchase healthy food or a gym membership, or the time to exercise or cook meals at home) limits healthy behavior. Fourth, since there are fewer residential options available to them, the poor may live in unsafe neighborhoods (Anderson & Armstead, 1995; Durden, Hill, & Angel, 2007). Taylor and Repetti (1997) argue that impoverished neighborhoods are characterized by a number of factors that are detrimental to health, including higher crime rates, sub-standard transportation and recreation facilities, greater exposure to physical hazards such as air and water pollutants, more crowding, and exposure to constant noise.

For many of the same reasons cited earlier, poverty has a strong effect on the development and function of children and families. Research has shown that marriage rates are lower, out-of-wedlock birthrates are higher, and teen pregnancy is more prevalent among the poor (Devine et al., 2006; Furstenberg et al., 1999; Small & Newman, 2001; Wilson,

1987). Growing up in poverty is associated with a higher incidence of mental health problems and trouble at school (Barrett & Turner, 2005; Farah, Noble, & Hurt, 2005; Jackson et al., 2000). Young children in low SES households are less likely to receive cognitive stimulation (e.g., they may have less access to zoos and museums and own fewer toys and books), sometimes leading to dampened cognitive development (Farah, Noble, & Hurt, 2005).

In summary, the working poor make up a sizable and growing portion of the U.S. workforce. Research from a variety of disciplines provides compelling evidence that poverty is a strong situation that can affect important aspects of an individual's life, including physical and mental health, family structure, and individual development. At the same time, the jobs in which the working poor tend to be employed are typically constraining and may exacerbate the hardships of poverty and pose obstacles to individuals attempting to escape it.

Employers of the Working Poor

Many of the working poor are employed in organizations that use low wages as a basic component of their business model. Payroll is a major portion of total costs and reductions in payroll expenses can be a significant source of competitive advantage in industries such as retail sales, fast food, hospitality, and carework. The working poor tend to cluster into jobs that are structured around short-term monetary incentive systems (albeit substandard ones) while higher-paying jobs tend to offer a broader array of both intrinsic (e.g., job autonomy, interesting work) and extrinsic (e.g., promotion opportunities, flexible hours) rewards. Moreover, many higher-paying jobs offer incentives with both short-term and long-term payoffs (e.g., training and development, pension plans, career tracks), whereas incentives in low-wage jobs tend to be short-term and immediate (e.g., hourly pay).

A sizable number of working poor are former or current welfare recipients who join organizations that offer low-skilled jobs as a way to enter the labor force. The U.S. policy on poverty eradication has been redesigned over the past 15 years to emphasize a philosophy of "welfare to work." Burtless (2001) notes that U.S. public policy uses a supply side approach to encourage employers to hire difficult-to-employ workers. That is, policies are designed so as *not* to impose economic market constraints on

employers that might make it unattractive to hire the working poor. For example, U.S. payroll taxes, and employer regulations on working hours, benefits, and the minimum wage remain very low by OECD standards. The consequence of this trend is that growing numbers of U.S. employers are hiring low-wage workers for jobs at the bottom of the organization and income hierarchy. Thus, the U.S. government's support for the working poor is to encourage labor market "equality" by removing barriers to working for the unemployed, such as focusing on child care or training and then providing time-limited public supports, educational training, or food stamps. Once an individual is able to gain access to the labor market and get a job, even a low paying one, her earned income often disqualifies her for key supports for housing or education. This laser focus of labor market participation ultimately works against the individual's ability to escape poverty, even while working full time.

Management Practices and Roles

There are several indicators suggesting that the working poor are not being managed well by the organizations that employ them. Turnover rates tend to be high, although low-wage workers often leave one poorly paid job to go to another that pays similar wages. The working poor also are likely to have higher stress rates, poorer health, and depressive symptoms in part due to having to manage more stressful working conditions than the general population (Iverson & Armstrong, 2007). Studies indicate that low-paid workers are more likely to experience job insecurity, job bullying, sexual harassment, irregular hours, long or insecure hours, burnout, fatigue, and negative work-life spillover (Broom et al., 2006; Masterman-Smith & Pocock, 2008). They are also much less likely to have control over work schedules and working time and how their jobs are done (Presser & Cox, 1997), creating challenges of either not getting enough hours of work to meet basic family financial needs and qualify for healthcare and other benefits, or having too many hours such as being forced to work overtime, being "on call," or having unpredictable hours such as in retail where management can call them in or send them home on short notice depending on how busy the store is at the moment (Lambert, 2008). This instability makes it difficult to plan for child care or meet other social and family needs that higher-paid employees have less difficulty juggling.

Further, many of the working poor have little or no paid sick leave or vacation time. Discipline policies are sometimes written to penalize workers for absenteeism even if the reason is legitimate (e.g., family illness). Because of this many work even when they are sick or they do not take any vacation time (Masterman-Smith & Popcock, 2008). Even if they have vacation time (typically unpaid), they may have little control over when they can take it. For example, they may be forced to take an unpaid holiday during the off-season or get very limited time off at holidays, as that is typically the busy season in retail, hospitality, and food service industries.

Front-line managers of the working poor also are often quite different in terms of the nature of their work than the managers typically described in the management literature. Overall, these managers are more like higher-level employees than traditional managers. Many, especially retail managers, may actually still be hourly workers themselves, earning only slightly more per hour than the people they supervise. Another unique aspect of management work in retail and food services is that the manager is often expected to "roll up his sleeves" and perform the jobs of the low-wage workers they supervise, especially during busy periods or if a worker is absent. This may make interpersonal relations and job interdependence between workers and managers even more important as a work context feature, and lead to crossover of stress.

Evidence backs this up. A study of hotel managers found that if a worker's manager had high work-family conflict, the worker was more likely to experience higher work-family conflict as well (O'Neill, Harrison, Cleveland, Almeida, Stawski, & Crouter, 2009; National Work-Family and Health Network, 2010). Worse, poor management may literally be making some workers sick. In one recent study of employees in long-term care settings, workers who had inflexible bosses were significantly more likely to be at risk for cardiovascular disease (Berkman, Buxton, Ertel, & Okechukwu, 2010). Often management is also under-resourced in terms of staffing and penalized if workers are paid overtime, which means workers either subtly or forcibly work "off the clock" (which is illegal) or experience extreme pressure to get their work done within the regular schedule, even if workloads rise. Not only is employee churn higher in such jobs, but management churn is high as well, leading to unstable systems at all levels, making it simply more difficult to sustain change or improve working conditions because there is little institutional memory.

SUMMARY

The preceding review has a number of implications for theorizing about the working poor. First, while employers in the United States may hire the working poor, there is limited incentive for employers to move them out of poverty. Second, while the organizations' literature often assumes that work is inherently motivating, beneficial, and leads to career opportunities, many of the working poor cannot expect that the act of working itself—even if full-time—will lead to a better life. Third, it is not typical for U.S. employers to invest in the working poor in terms of training, career development, or other human resource initiatives to foster a long-term employment relationship, and in fact the working poor often serve as an economic buffer for fluctuations in demand for services. Fourth, most traditional human resource systems such as training, rewards, and scheduling as currently enacted may have limited relevance or linkages to help the working poor, as the assumption is that the employees will not stay, or if they do they will have limited opportunities for advancement.

Approaches to Organizational Change By and For the Working Poor

Having discussed the challenges of the working poor, we now discuss three approaches to address these challenges, each grounded in a distinct theory of change and human dynamics at work: (1) "stepping-stone" approaches to change focused on human capital development and the use of internal labor markets; (2) management-led "top-down" relational approaches grounded in theories of the benefits of increasing positive social and organizational support to reduce work-family conflicts; and (3) "bottom-up" job crafting initiated informally by workers either alone or in collaboration to make the job a better fit for their skills, preferences, and perceptions regarding how to do their work most effectively.

"Stepping-Stone" Approaches to Strengthen Human Capital

The goal of "stepping-stone" models is to offer opportunities for individual workers in low-wage, low-skill jobs to work their way into better-paying higher-skill jobs, often within the same organization and almost always

within the same industry. Such models draw on labor economics theories of human capital development whereby workers are encouraged to invest in their own skill development both for themselves and for the benefit of their employer, who can utilize such skills and thus justify paying higher wages to the worker. Examples of "stepping-stone" models can be found in care work, where lower-skilled nursing assistants (certified nursing assistants, or CNAs) are encouraged to take classes (often on their own time and at their own expense) to qualify to be licensed practical nurses (LPNs) so that they can earn higher wages and in return take on more of the healthcare (rather than personal care) responsibilities of caring for patients.

While appealing on their face, particularly to economists and some policymakers, there are several potential problems with "stepping-stone" models for the working poor. First, to be a worthwhile investment for organizations, they require that the employer maintain a significant internal labor market system so that employees who acquire more human capital can move to higher-level positions within the organization. Such internal labor markets were the hallmark of the post-World War II corporation, and assume long-term commitments by both employers and employees, and a system of training and advancement up an internal job ladder. But as Osterman (1999) and others have demonstrated, over the past 40 years such internal career systems have been abandoned by most organizations in favor of more open markets where neither employee nor employer expect to have long-term employment with the same organization. At the same time, the costs of any investments in human capital development are increasingly being shifted from the employer to the employee (Lambert, 2008)—a particularly high hurdle for the working poor.

A second fundamental problem with "stepping-stone" approaches is that even if internal career ladders are available and individuals can thus benefit from investing in developing their human capital, such approaches do nothing to address the fundamental deficiencies in the job being abandoned. Instead, the job is seen as something to escape, only to be filled by the next person at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. Thus, there is little real organizational change and certainly no improvement in work conditions, supervision, etc. Instead, there is only a rotation of the individuals sufficiently unfortunate to have to take the jobs as a starting point or, worse, be stuck in them over time because they do not have the resources (e.g., time, tuition money) to move to something better.

Finally, and related to the last point, many workers do not want to "move up" into other jobs but would be happy staying with their current jobs if only they paid better and the conditions were more tolerable. Mittal et al. (2009) found that most of the direct care workers they interviewed in nursing homes did not want to become nurses because they enjoyed the hands-on care they provided to patients and did not want to lose the personal connection they found so fulfilling in their work. At the same time, they realized that the only way to make a living wage was to move into a job they saw as far less motivating and engaging. For many, the trade-off was not worth it—particularly when combined with the expense of extra education—so they stayed in their current job, resigning themselves to its low wages, lack of respect, and challenging work. Thus, the "stepping-stone" approach does not entail real organizational change, and for many workers there is little positive about the opportunities it creates.

"Management-Led" Relational Approaches

The second approach is management-led, top-down change that crosses levels and is aimed at improving relations between supervisors and workers through relational change. This approach draws on theories of organizational support, which maintain that employees form positive social exchanges with organizations that are supportive of them (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001), which can be content general (e.g., my workplace or my supervisor supports me on the job) or content specific social support (e.g., my workplace or my supervisor supports my work-family needs [e.g., Allen, 2001; Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011]). When employees develop positive perceptions of supervisor and organizational support they feel cared for and appreciate, and/or are able to get direct (e.g., HR policies, schedule changes) or indirect (e.g., emotional help, such as listening) help with problems from their direct manager and the organization in general (Kossek et al., 2011). Such support is a critical job that can reduce negative psychological effects such as burnout from poor working conditions (Kossek et al., 2011). The goal is to change management culture and enactment of HR to be more supportive and adaptive to workers' needs on and off the job.

An example of this approach comes from a recent study conducted by the National Work-Family and Health Network, which implements work interventions to improve worker health and productivity, while reducing

work-family conflict. This study developed, implemented, and evaluated a training program designed to increase supervisor support for work-family issues in twelve stores with several hundred grocery store workers and managers in Michigan (Hammer et al., 2011; Kossek & Hammer, 2008).

Retail Work

The retail industry is a very prevalent organizational context in the United States as about two-thirds of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States is from retail consumption (BLS, 2011). According to Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2010) estimates, retail employees held about 4.5 million jobs in 2008, spanning industries from clothing to warehouse clubs to grocery. Nearly one-third (30%) of retail employees work part-time and thus do not qualify for health care benefits, or if they can be purchased, the benefits are very expensive and often have costly co-payments. The average workweek for non-managerial retail employees is 29.4 hours, compared with 33.6 hours for workers in all industries, and the median hourly wages of wage-and-salary retail sales-persons, including commissions, were $9.86 in 2008 (BLS, 2010). Retail jobs typically involve more dispersed and variable work schedule patterns than other occupations. Stores can and often are open or being stocked 24-7, and employees are needed to cover many shifts from early morning to evenings, nights, weekends, and holidays. Schedules also are highly unpredictable, largely because employers can transfer the risk of fluctuations in demand for products and services onto the low-wage workers (Lambert, 2008).

Although many retail employees work inside with air conditioning and clean environments, work can often be very hectic, especially during peak retail hours. Interacting with customers can be stressful, involve emotional labor, and even subject the worker to bullying and aggression from customers. Some loss of personal identity is also an aspect of being a retail worker, particularly when working for larger brands. The BLS (2010) notes that most retail employees are required to wear some form of uniform or clothing with store branding that identifies them as a store employee. Retail workers often have to follow de-individualizing scripts ranging from how to interact with the public to how to clock in and out of work. Not surprisingly, turnover in retail is quite high, sometimes up to 100 to 200 percent a year.

"Top-Down" Intervention

To develop a change intervention aimed at improving conditions for low-wage retail workers, the researchers first developed a measure of positive supervisor support for work and family. The work-family literature for professionals and managers often focuses on formal corporate work-family policies such as flextime or telework. Yet many retail organizations such as grocery stores do not have a lot of formal work-family policies like flextime, let alone a work-life manager. In addition, some of the most popular work-life programs like telework are not applicable to hourly retail workers who have to do face-to-face work most of their time. So much of the work-life support research needed to be customized to be more informal and relational between employees and their supervisors, who are the key linking pin in enacting positive work-family policy. If a manager is viewed as work-family supportive, then workers are more likely to view the employer as work-family supportive which in turn leads to lower work-family conflict (Kossek et al., 2011).

The researchers conducted focus groups in an East Coast grocery chain to identify what supervisory behaviors would be considered family supportive (Hammer, Kossek, Zimmerman, & Daniels, 2007). The research team wanted to design a positive intervention to identify how to increase social support for work and family, and identified four behaviors that created a global scale of family supportive supervisory behaviors (FSSB) (Hammer, Kossek, Yragui, Bodner, & Hansen, 2009). The first behavior identified was emotional support, such as being available to ask about or listen to workers' personal work-family needs. The researchers found that many managers were not viewed as approachable to the low-wage workers they supervised, making it difficult for interpersonal issues to be positively discussed. The second behavior was positive work-family role modeling. The managers themselves worked long hours and if they did not model positive work-family self care, it was likely to create a culture where workers felt they could not ask for personal help. The third behavior was instrumental support for schedule conflicts. Schedule conflicts are inevitable for all workers, and especially low-income workers with precarious child care and more life problems such as cars that break down, domestic violence, and other issues (Kossek, Huber-Yoder, Castellino, & Lerner, 1997). Supervisors who helped employees solve problems were viewed as more supportive. The fourth behavior was creative work-family

management where supervisors were open to trying new ways of working that helped meet business needs at the same time that employees' work-life needs were met.

To evaluate the intervention longitudinally, baseline data on worker health, work attitudes such as job satisfaction and work-family conflict, and background data on demographics were collected from over 300 workers and managers in 12 stores. Biodata on blood pressure and sleep using actigraphy watches were collected on a subsample of employees. A small group of spouses and children were also surveyed. Nine months later the research team went to six randomly assigned stores to implement the intervention, which consisted of one-on-one laptop training on FSSB with the managers participating in role plays and a debriefing session, and asking managers to volunteer to self-monitor their behavior on the job for several weeks to support transfer of FSSB (Hammer et al., 2011; Kossek & Hammer, 1998). The research team went back 1-2 months later to all 12 stores to measure health and work attitudinal change.

The results showed that for workers who were high in work-family conflict at time 1, if their supervisor was trained they had lower depressive symptoms, higher job satisfaction, lower work-family conflict, and were more likely to follow safety procedures at time 2. The study did have one unintended consequence. While the researchers found that this approach had strong, positive health and productivity effects for workers who had high work-family conflict, having one's supervisor trained had the unintended consequences of reducing job satisfaction for individuals who had initially had lower work-family conflict (Hammer et al., 2011). This finding suggests that managing positive organizational change is complex and may have unintended consequences, and that recursive and cross group relational dynamics must be managed. Improving one part of the system for low-wage workers high in work-family conflict as in this example can have mixed consequences for other low-wage groups such as workers who did not need work-family support at this time.

The intervention to increase FSSB was largely a relational cultural change. It improved social interaction between workers and managers but did not result in structural change to the overall scheduling system, which was controlled by corporate headquarters. Each store was tightly scrutinized on how labor costs were allocated, and keeping overtime to a minimum was the goal. This computer scheduling system was developed at a centralized location and allocated labor cost hours to each store

based on store trends and availability. The centralized scheduling system was not affected by FSSB relational training. Thus, it was perhaps a constraint to implementing structural change to support the working poor. So even though relations between managers and workers needing support were enhanced, the larger scheduling systems were not adaptive enough to accommodate all workers, resulting in some workers having their work hours increased to allow more flexibility for others. It may be that both cultural (relational change) and structural (i.e., the automated schedule system) support to reinforce cross-level change are needed to ensure positive change (Kossek, Hammer, & Lewis, 2010).

"Bottom-Up" Job Crafting Approaches

Organizational change that is bottom-up originates with the employees themselves rather than with their managers or through organization-wide policies. Such change is best captured in Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) description of "job crafting"—the active role that workers play in altering the boundaries of their jobs and shaping ongoing work practice in order to make the job a better fit to their own preferences, competencies, and perceptions of how the job ought to be done. Such change comprises actions to alter work processes and the boundaries of the job that are developed and sustained *by* workers rather than *for* them. Job crafting is initiated by employees rather than managers, and such activities are not found in the written job description or necessarily condoned by management. Instead, the change is informal, idiosyncratic, and often deliberately kept invisible in terms of documented practice.

Employees engage in job crafting for a variety of reasons, but Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) focus on its cognitive benefits. By changing job tasks, relationships, and boundaries, job crafters can enhance the meaning of the work they do and the sense of positive identity from work in terms of their association with an organization and/or occupation. Thus, hospital janitors can expand their self-initiated job responsibilities to include not just keeping patients' rooms clean, but also soothing patients who are lonely or in pain, and welcoming visiting family members. In these ways, the boundaries of the job are expanded to make the work more personally meaningful to the individual worker, as well as contributing to the larger organizational mission of healing (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

As indicated previously, low-wage work is often highly regimented and closely monitored. In these regards, there appears to be little room for job crafting. Yet recent work by Leana et al. (2009) shows how low-wage workers who provide care to others (in this case, childcare workers) proactively craft their jobs to expand their scope, meaning, and interpersonal relationships. In the process, the workers gain benefits for themselves in terms of their own attachment to, and satisfaction with the work, as well as for the organization in the form of enhanced job performance. Thus, such job crafting is a form of "bottom-up" change that is positive and potentially self-reinforcing in carework.

Carework

England, Budig, and Folbre (2002, p. 445) and England (2010) define carework as occupations in which workers provide face-to-face services which are meant to develop the capabilities of the recipient, or meet physical or emotional needs that care receivers cannot meet themselves. Examples of low-wage carework include childcare workers, home health aides, nursing assistants, and personal care aides. Approximately five million workers in the United States were employed in these occupations in 2008 according to BLS estimates.[2] By 2018, the direct care workforce is expected to grow by 40% and become the second largest occupational grouping in the United States (BLS Employment Projections Program, 2008-2018). Nearly all care workers are female (90% in personal and health care; 97% in childcare), roughly half are minorities, and approximately 20% are non-native born (BLS, 2008; Smith & Baughman, 2007).

Care workers comprise a significant portion of the working poor in the United States. Among personal and health care aides, the median hourly wage was $10.42 in 2008 (vs. $15.57 for all U.S. workers) and only about half of such workers receive employer-based healthcare coverage. Among childcare workers, median hourly wages are lower ($9.12) and only about a quarter receive employer-based healthcare. Forty-four percent of care workers live in households earning below 200% of the poverty threshold, and 40% receive public assistance such as food stamps or Medicaid payments (PHI Facts 3, 2010).

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[2] Although this number is probably low because of underreporting of income by independent contractors and/or those employed directly by families.

Like retail sales, carework is demanding. Emotional labor is an inherent part of the job and providing care for pay is what Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) label "dirty work"—jobs that involve physical and/or social taint. Some parts of carework are closely monitored and regulated (e.g., the frequency with which a patient is bathed in a nursing home), while other aspects of the job involve a great deal of discretion (e.g., the extent to which bathing is done in a manner that respects a patient's privacy and personal dignity). Scheduling changes are frequent, and rotating shift work and mandatory overtime are common.

"Bottom-Up" Change Initiated by Workers

Leana et al. (2009) argue that job crafting is an inherent part of carework and recently reported on job crafting among childcare workers. Childcare work is improvisational as classroom staff work to meet the often unpredictable needs of young children. It is also inherently collaborative in most childcare centers due to state licensing requirements which mandate staff-child ratios that require more than one teacher and teacher aide in a classroom. Thus, work in center-based childcare programs is performed interdependently with teams of teachers and teacher aides jointly attending to the education and needs of children in their care. Consequently, there are ample opportunities for childcare workers to collaboratively define their tasks and carry out their work in a way that addresses children's changing needs. Achieving high quality is complex in this situation, and attention to improvisational work process and collaboration is at the heart of high quality care.

To better understand worker-initiated social change, we studied 62 childcare centers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania to examine the potential benefits of teacher job crafting in preschool classrooms. We interviewed childcare center directors, surveyed 232 classroom teachers and aides, and commissioned independent performance assessments in all centers to examine the factors that contribute to high quality care. Like other recent studies of childcare workers, we found that teacher education and experience—that is, the "human capital" of the workforce—did not explain differences among classrooms in the quality of care. Instead, something more was at work. We found that interaction and improvisation among childcare staff (what Leana & Van Buren, 1999, and others have labeled "social capital") are far more important elements in affecting classroom

quality. Moreover, the effects of such collaboration on quality were greatest for those teachers and aides with less experience on the job.

While the effects of collaborative job crafting were quite positive for children, as well as the center as a whole, such behavior was not rewarded by center directors, nor did workers necessarily bring it to the attention of their managers. Instead, job crafting was initiated and sustained by the workers themselves without the encouragement or, in most cases, the awareness of management. A reasonable question, then, is why workers would do this. Here our findings are illuminating in that childcare workers who reported engaging in the most job crafting with their peers also reported higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Leana et al., 2009). Further analysis of the data also indicated that job crafters reported lower levels of emotional distress and higher levels of attachment to the children in their care (Rawat, 2010). Thus, "bottom-up" change initiated by workers was beneficial to themselves, the children, and families that received care, and the center as a whole.

These findings have implications for positive social change in organizations and for managers. The aspects of quality that tend to receive the most attention from managers and policy makers are teacher education and qualifications, teacher-child ratios, and class size. Our research suggests that other—usually unobserved—job process characteristics also have important effects on the quality of childcare, and are amenable to action by management and policy makers. For example, professional development of childcare workers could be expanded to include training in teamwork and joint improvisation in order to promote effective collaboration among staff in childcare classrooms. Further, center managers could support such activities through promoting strong ties among workers and rewarding job crafting overtly rather than making it an "underground" activity that workers tend to hide from management.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Regardless of whether change in organizations is initiated for ("top-down") or by ("bottom-up") the working poor, as these examples suggest, increased systemic disconnects and paradoxes may occur across levels and

between visible/formal and invisible/informal systems. As Kossek's study of grocery store workers demonstrates, organizational stratification gaps that exist between existing formal policies and rules made at the *organizational* level that are enacted at a *supervisory level* and hinder an *individual* worker's ability to manage non-work needs may be increasingly exposed. Kossek (2006) also argues that the work-life benefits offered by many organizations (e.g., dependent care spending accounts that allow one to set aside pretax dollars for work-life expenses) are far more useful to high- or middle-income than low-income workers.

Tensions are also created among practices that are highly visible—even touted by management—and those that operate far less visibly when they are initiated by low-income workers. Because a low-income worker also tends to be low in the organization hierarchy, he may be socialized to expect management to formally initiate change from the top, and be wary of implicitly challenging the hierarchy by publicly deviating from formal practice. Instead, less visible accommodations may be made either by the individual worker (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), the work group (Leana et al., 2009), or through "off the books" collaboration between the worker and his supervisor (Kossek & Hammer, 2008).

Yet in order for positive social change to be systematized and sustained, such "under the radar" practices must become visibly incorporated into the organization's accepted systems of norms, policies, and rewards. This may require a re-socialization of managers and workers to give greater voice in how organizational policies and practices are initiated and enacted. Such shifts may challenge the hegemony of existing organizational assumptions and, at least in the short term, create social tensions and mixed messages. In our own research, we are continually reminded of such paradoxes. Management may express a desire for low-income workers to take more responsibility and initiative for job-related duties, but when workers in turn require more discretion and flexibility to do so, management is reluctant to make such changes as these could mean a redistribution of decision-making power and resources across levels as well. Similarly, when workers seek flexibility for family needs, managers offer sympathy but little support for systemic changes that could reduce ongoing work-family conflict.

In addition to the need for positive organizational change to be approached from multiple levels, programs and interventions aimed at the working poor are further complicated by the tendency of some workers to

hide their own innovations, or at least not draw attention to them, because of fear of being judged as deviant (Leana et al., 2009). Hazel Markus and her colleagues show that working-class and middle-class workers hold different beliefs about what constitutes "good" or appropriate action by individuals (e.g., Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007). In their research, middle-class students and adults were more likely to value independence and uniqueness in the choices they make while those from less advantaged backgrounds were likely to make choices based on a desire to be similar to others and not "stand out from the crowd" (Snibbe & Markus, 2005). Similarly, managers who make informal accommodations to help low-income workers address issues such as work-family conflicts (which may be more frequent and severe for low-wage workers due to a lack of back-up resources) may not wish to draw attention to such exceptions. And a worker may be reluctant to call attention to herself by requesting individual accommodations to attend classes or care for children if she believes she can be labeled as a "troublemaker" for requesting flexible hours. As a consequence, workplace systems such as scheduling may be automated in ways that do not account for such needs and instead allocate sufficient work hours to earn a living and health benefits only to workers who *do not* ask for exceptions.

In addition to multilevel change that is visible, we offer two other observations regarding over-arching change principals that we found from our work in this area. First, change must be contextualized, and is adaptive change as opposed to technical change. Lasting positive organizational change is a process that must be customized to the occupation, industry context, and labor markets. What worked in childcare centers, for example on job crafting, would look different in retail where the work is less inherently improvisational. Indeed, Leana et al. (2009) argue for the importance of context even within educational settings. Many practitioners seek to improve early childhood education by incorporating the K-5 model into childcare classrooms. But our study of childcare suggests that this may not be appropriate because of the inherently improvisational and collaborative nature of childcare work—factors that do not necessarily characterize K-5 settings which typically have only one teacher per classroom. In K-5 classrooms, job crafting may be beneficial for the teacher and her students, but this is likely to be individual rather than collaborative crafting. In childcare classrooms, conversely, Leana et al. (2009) report that while collaborative crafting is associated with

enhanced job satisfaction, they found that teachers who reported more individual job crafting reported *lower* levels of satisfaction. Thus, contextual effects may be quite pronounced even within settings (e.g., preschool classrooms vs. first-grade classrooms) that appear to have much in common.

A final principle is that small changes or interventions can move and "unstick" a seemingly intransigent system for large positive effects for those most in need of change, although sometimes not without facing some system resistance from other employee groups. Referring again to the NIH National Work-Family and Health Network grocery example, the researchers found that simply training managers on basic work-life issues for a few hours, identifying what it meant to be supportive, asking them to set a goal, and try to enact supportive behaviors resulted in improved job satisfaction, job attachment, and physical health for working poor individuals who had higher work-family conflict. Simple things like coaching managers to ask about family needs and be a little flexible had huge payoffs in terms of work-family conflict reduction over time. Yet attempts to "unstick" the system to improve the well-being of the workforce segment higher in work-family conflict did face some short-term backlash from employees who were also among the working poor but were not experiencing high work-family stress. This suggests a short-term negative repercussion for longer-term gain in family support.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH ON POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

Future research is needed that compares the effectiveness of stepping-stone, top-down, and bottom-up approaches to workplace change strategies by and for the working poor. Studies might be done to replicate the ideas in this chapter and demonstrate across contexts whether multilevel strategies truly are more effective than others. It also would be important to understand whether some segments, occupations, and organizational contexts require certain kinds of change strategies to be sustainable. For example, perhaps in an over-bounded bureaucratic system (e.g., one that is that is highly regulated such as nursing homes), it may be that top-down change is needed to increase management support for individuals lower

in the hierarchy in order for "invisible" job crafting to be legitimated and visibly incorporated into the work.

Research might also be conducted to see how the effectiveness of these strategies is moderated by the specific needs of the working poor. Younger individuals might need targeted support focusing on childcare, education, and language skills. Older workers might require help with health maintenance or updating skills such as learning how to use a computer. Recent immigrants might need language training with on the job skills such as how to read instructions (Kossek et al., 1997). We hope this chapter spurs future research to identify comparative effectiveness studies of organizational change, as well as delve into how to customize organizational change strategies for the needs of different segments of the working poor.

CONCLUSION

Organizations can change in ways that offer sustainable assistance to the working poor. Here we provide two examples of such change—one initiated by managers and the other by employees. As we have noted throughout, for such changes to be effective they must take into account multiple levels of the organization, as well as endeavor to make visible the often-covert behavior of employees who take it upon themselves to improve their jobs and their ability to perform well in them. In addition, for any change to be sustainable, it must be contextualized, taking into account both the nature of the work and the nature of the workers. Finally, we observe that small changes can have large effects and can become the impetus for broader system changes that are both beneficial and sustainable over time.

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