

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. By positive organizational change, in this chapter we mean organizational change that 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, In Press; Kossek & Hammer, 2008; Leana, Appelbaum & Shevchuk, 2009; Mittal, Rosen & Leana, 2009). Each project has addressed somewhat different research questions but all conclude that a multi-level 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

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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, in press; 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 more deeply 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. In attempting to shed light on positive organizational change by and for the working poor, our goals in this chapter are three-fold. 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 U.S., describe their employment, and discuss why they are often managed so poorly at work. Second, using data and examples from our own on-going 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 multi-level (i.e., targeting both individual and workplace contextual social systems) and multi-pronged approaches (i.e. avoiding over- simplified uni-dimensional change tactics). Moreover, such change often entails proactive efforts to make visible the assumptions, preferences and on-going 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 U.S. We recognize that employment practices are influenced by the cultural context in which they are embedded (Romero-Stone & Stone, 2009; Heyman, 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 U.S.?

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).² Households whose income falls below 100% of the poverty threshold are considered poor by all assessors and U.S. government agencies (e.g., Social Security Administration). Many poverty experts, however, argue that this is too restrictive a definition, and count the working poor (e.g., National Research Council) as those earning less than 200% of the poverty threshold (Ackerman, 2006; Neumark, 2004). This latter, more inclusive, definition takes into consideration the fact that a growing segment of the U.S. population in the labor market do not earn enough to “maintain a minimum conventional standard of living in their community” or to “avoid poverty during temporary periods of unemployment” (Craypo & Cormier, 2000: 31). In the U.S., 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 and 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

² The federal poverty level in the U.S. 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 US 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.

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. For example, even among 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 discuss below, 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.

In summary, we define the working poor as individuals who: (1) have a history of poverty; and (2) are currently economically deprived even though they are fully participating in the labor force.

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. Disciplines ranging from economics to medicine have identified systematic differences between individuals who are living in an impoverished environment and those who are not.

Health. Poverty has received a great deal of attention in medical journals for its impact on an individual's physical health. People living in low-income households have higher rates of morbidity and mortality and report poorer overall health than those in non-poverty households (Taylor & Repetti, 1997; Adler & Ostrove, 1993; Williams & Collins, 1995). Indeed, recent studies have found a widening gap in longevity between the highest and lowest income brackets in the U.S. (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 socio-economic 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 screenings that reduce the risk of developing a serious illness. 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 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 behaviors and, even if an individual escapes poverty later in life, he may still retain the pattern of poor health behaviors learned earlier. Fourth, since there are fewer residential options available to them, the poor are more likely to live in unsafe neighborhoods (Durden, Hill & Angel, 2007; Anderson &

Armstead, 1995). 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. In addition, Cohen, Farley and Mason (2003) found that in neighborhoods with deteriorating physical structures (i.e., broken windows or deteriorating buildings) and/or high crime rates (i.e., theft, drugs or violence), people engage in less outdoor activity, perhaps due to the heightened danger of leaving home.

Family Patterns. For many of the same reasons cited above, poverty has a strong effect on the development and function of the family and on individual lifestyle. Research has examined issues ranging from family management and parenting practices (Furstenberg, et al., 1999; Devine, et al., 2006) to violence in the home (Tolman & Raphael, 2000). Such studies show that marriage rates are lower, out-of-wedlock birthrates are higher, and teen pregnancy is more prevalent among the poor (Small & Newman, 2001; Wilson, 1987). In poorer neighborhoods, there is also a higher incidence of single parents raising their families alone (Tigges, Browne & Green, 1998), and children in such households tend to receive less parental attention and oversight (Bradley, et al, 2001).

Development. 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). There is a higher rate of depressive symptoms among young adults who were raised in single parent homes (Barrett & Turner, 2005), and younger 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) than children in middle SES households,

sometimes leading to dampened cognitive development (Farah, Noble & Hurt, 2005). Further, Jackson, et al. (2000) report a significant association between the financial strains of mothers and the problem behaviors of their children such as fighting at school, oppositional behavior, and bullying.

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. In the next section we describe such occupations.

Employers of the Working Poor

In terms of occupations and industries, the working poor tend to cluster into jobs that are structured around short-term monetary incentive systems (albeit substandard ones) such as cleaning, retail sales and direct care of children and the elderly (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2009). In contrast, 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).

Many of the working poor are employed in organizations that use low wages as a basic component of their business model. Lambert (2008) argues that employers “pass the buck” or the economic market risks onto the employees instead of the firm. Here, 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 best example of this comes from WalMart, the mega retailer that is the largest employer in the U.S. and whose business model is based on low prices and low costs for the customer, which translates into low wages for employees.

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 employers are hiring low-wage workers for jobs at the bottom of the organization and income hierarchy.

The divergence of the U.S. welfare policy from other industrialized nations has also increased the likelihood of employers hiring low wage workers. In most industrialized countries, there is a focus on reducing inequality by taking a group-based approach to expanding the safety net for all, and reducing the overall level of poverty in society. In these countries the portion of the overall population that would be considered living in or near poverty is lower than in the U.S. For example, using 2003-2004 OECD data, only 6.4% of full-time employees would be considered low paid in Sweden, while at 23.4% the U.S. has among the highest in industrialized nations (Masterman-Smith & Pocock, 2008). Nations such as Sweden, Italy, and Denmark have

much more generous overall social policies such as much longer time exemptions for mothers with young children to have to seek full time employment, often subsidizing full time schooling (even college) for mothers with young children, and sometimes paying double the minimum wage than in the U.S. Other countries such as the UK and Australia mandate a much more active employer role in developing human resource policies to support the family needs of all workers regardless of income, that are critical supports for the working poor.

In contrast, the U.S. policy approach to poverty elimination has much more modest government safety-net programs, and goals are geared toward encouraging the welfare recipient to participate in the labor market and get off the public welfare rolls, which are time limited. 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, available to nonworking individuals living in poverty. This end goal of labor market participation (a vocational focus) ultimately works against the individual's ability to escape poverty, even while working full time.

Management Practices and Roles. Since so much of U.S. public policy regarding poverty alleviation is dependent on private-sector initiatives, it is important to understand workplace conditions and practices here. 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. Mittal, et al. (2009) describe this phenomenon in care work where issues like

lack of respect and inflexible work processes were cited more frequently than low pay as the reason behind worker turnover.

The working poor 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 (Masterman-Smith & Pocock, 2008; Broom et al, 2006). Low paid workers have greater challenges in part due to the way management and employing organizations have structured the work. For example, the working poor are much less likely to have control over work schedules and working time and how their jobs are done (Presser and Cox, 1997), which has long been linked to well being, job and life satisfaction (Karasek, 1976), and the ability to successfully participate in non-work roles.

Having low autonomy also puts one at higher risk for insecure hours of work and lack of control over working time. The working poor in particular face challenges of either not getting enough hours of work to meet basic family financial needs and qualify for healthcare and other benefits, or they have 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, doctor’s visits, attend school meetings, or meet other social and family needs that higher-paid employees have less difficulty juggling. Some individuals try to countervail the problem of insufficient hours by taking on extra shifts or a second job in order to make ends meet. Or some workers, especially women, will trade down to lower-paid jobs as a way to get more flexibility and control over working time in order to meet

family needs (Pocock, Elton, Preston, Charlesworth, MacDonald, & Baird, 2008). Indeed, the working poor are disproportionately women and single parents so such concerns are prevalent.

Immigrant workers may face particular challenges too, such as acculturative stress (Berry & Sam, 1997), which is a stress reaction to events related to the experience of acculturation. They may work long hours in low-wage jobs when they first arrive to the U.S., which is exacerbated by the need to learn to adapt new values and a new language of an unfamiliar culture. Many are living far from their families and have little or no social support in the U.S. Many also face the added strain of having to earn money to send back home and go for long periods without being able to see their parents, children or other family members.

Further, many of the working poor have little or no access to 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 low wage workers 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. Lack of time off also makes it difficult for workers to attend school to advance their skills or gain the higher education or credentials needed to move up in their careers. Child care may be low quality, unlicensed, and involve complex dynamics with family members that may have negative crossover dynamics between care providers and working mothers (Kossek, Pichler, Meece & Barratt, 2008).

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 fill in and actually 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, 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 cardio-vascular disease (Berkman, Buxton, Ertel, Okechukwu, in press). Management is also often under-resourced in terms of not being staffed with the number of people they need, or being 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. The management system is also more unstable, as not only is employee churn higher but management churn is high as well as these are difficult management jobs. This leads 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 U.S. may hire the working poor, there is limited incentive for employers to move them out of poverty. Second, while the management and 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. With these low expectations, being employed may not necessarily enable the working poor to move from poverty to a better life without some kind of organizational intervention. 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 HR 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 chance to be promoted. Or worse yet, many human resource practices are based on the assumption that not all employees possess knowledge or skills of equal strategic importance to the firm and therefore should receive little or no employer investment in human resource development (Lepak & Snell, 1999).

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 support and organizational climate 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, and often incentives, 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 (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, best captured in the tale of the boy who begins his career in the mailroom but through talent and pluck rises to become the CEO. On a less grandiose scale, internal labor market systems 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 don’t have the resources (e.g., time, tuition money) to move to something better.

Finally, and related to the last point, many workers don’t 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. For example, 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 didn’t 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 quit doing the job they wanted to do and instead move into a

job they saw as far less motivating and engaging. For many, the trade-off wasn't worth it – particularly when combined with the time and expense of extra education – so they stayed in the nursing assistant job but resigned themselves to its low wages, lack of respect, and challenging work conditions. 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 maintains that employees form positive social exchanges with organizations that are supportive of them (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch & Rhoades, 2001). Based on these exchanges, employees develop perceptions of perceived organizational and supervisor support that 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, in press).

When employees develop positive perceptions of supervisor and organizational support they: (1) feel cared for and appreciated; and/or (2) are able to get direct (e.g. HR policies, schedule changes) or indirect (e.g. emotional help, such as listening) help with social problems from their direct manager and the organization in general (Kossek et al, in press). Such support is a critical job resource that makes the role for which support if provided be experienced more positively.

Given that low-income jobs are stressful and low-income families face additional work-life stresses (e.g. poor housing , unsafe neighborhoods, poor schools, transportation problems in

getting to work) compared to families of higher SES, actions from the top of the organization to increase leadership awareness of, and emotional support for, low income workers' work-life needs provides a valuable psychological resource that can reduce negative psychological effects such as burnout from poor working conditions (Kossek, et al, in press). 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 quasi-experimental field study that is part of the National Work Family Health Network, which implements organizational 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 (Kossek and Hammer, 2008; Hammer et al, in press). Before describing the intervention, it is useful to provide a brief overview of the retail industry and the nature of work in retail sales.

Retail Work. The retail industry is a very prevalent organizational context in the U.S. as about two-thirds of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the U.S. is from retail consumption (retail industry, 2110). According to BLS estimates, retail employees held about 4.5 million jobs in 2008, spanning industries from clothing to warehouse clubs to grocery. Because stores are located in virtually every community across the U.S., employment is distributed geographically in a very similar manner to the U.S. population.

Nearly one third (30%) of retail employees work part-time. This means most of these jobs do not qualify for health care benefits, or if they can be purchased, the benefits are very expensive and often have costly co-payments with less coverage than a mid-level professional

might have. 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 salespersons, including commissions, were \$9.86 in 2008 with the middle 50 percent earning between \$8.26 and \$13.35 an hour (BLS, 2010).

Retail jobs such as in grocery stores typically involve more dispersed and variable work schedule patterns than other occupations. Stores can and often are open or being stocked 24-7. Employees are needed to cover many shifts from early morning to evenings, nights, weekends and holidays. Schedules also are highly unpredictable, largely because employers transfer the risk of fluctuations in demand for products and services onto the low wage workers (Lambert, 2008). In a longitudinal study of retail workers, Henly and Lambert (2009) examined the unpredictability of retail employees' work schedules, which they defined as the degree to which individuals have limited notice of work schedule assignments in advance and the extent to which they can assume they will get regular days, shifts or hours worked. They found that the more predictable the schedule, the lower the work-family conflict and stress. Workers with more predictability were also more easily able to structure non-work time such as doctor's appointments, child care or school involvement.

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. Part of one's job requirements is to manage emotions, particularly when dealing with the public, to provide a smiling face and positive customer service even when the worker is tired or a customer is rude. Besides unpredictable hours, low pay, handling sometimes challenging customers and difficulty qualifying for benefits, 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, in press.)

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, that is, the 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.

Besides developing a measure of positive change assessed with training specific to the needs of low-income hourly workers in retail, another issue the researchers noted was even though the organization had some web-based training programs for grocery managers, there was only one computer in many stores and the computers were more often used for other purposes than training, or worse yet were broken. It also was likely the training had to be done on company time which was a deterrent to using the company tools as most managers were busy supervising or filling in for workers' jobs on the floor, and were often too pressed for time. The researchers noted how difficult it was to get managers off the floor for training. Conducting the focus groups prior to designing the intervention allowed the researchers to customize a training

program that would take less time to deliver and also deal with variation in manager comfort with working with computers.

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 assign stores to implement the intervention, which consisted of one-on-one laptop training on FSSB with the managers, participating in role plays and a debrief session, and asking managers to volunteer to self-monitor their behavior on the job for several weeks to support transfer of FSSB (Kossek & Hammer, 1998; Hammer et al, in press). 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, in press). This finding suggests that managing positive organizational change is complex, 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 automated and controlled by corporate headquarters. Often 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 corporate 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 on-going work practice in order to make the job a better fit to her own preferences, competencies, and perceptions of how the job ought to be done. Such change comprises actions to change 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 nor 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 to include soothing patients who are lonely or in pain, and welcoming family members who come to visit. 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 its 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. Before describing such change, it is useful to briefly review the nature of carework.

Carework. England, Budig and Folbre (2002: 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 care work include childcare workers, home health aides, nursing assistants, and personal care aides. Approximately five million workers in the U.S. were employed in these occupations in 2008 according to BLS estimates.³ By 2018, the direct care workforce is expected to grow by 40% and become the second largest occupational grouping in the U.S. (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 U.S. 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).

A slim majority of health and personal aides are employed in home and community-based settings rather than institutional settings like nursing homes or hospice facilities. These workers are not organizational members in a traditional sense but instead act as independent providers, moving from job to job, and being compensated directly by those receiving care.

Others work through intermediaries such as employment agencies that arrange placements for

³ Although this number is probably low because of under-reporting of income by independent contractors and/or those employed directly by families.

workers. Still others are employed directly by such agencies and are assigned to various households and organizational settings by the intermediary, which in turn serves in the role of employer, offering regular pay and benefits packages in exchange for hours worked. A little less than half of direct care workers in the U.S. are employed by nursing homes and other health care center and thus report to a standing facility each workday and have a traditional employer/employee arrangement. Among childcare workers, this percentage is higher with approximately 88% working for center-based providers (Smith & Baughman, 2007), although the number of home-based childcare workers or independent childcare service providers is estimated to be much higher than BLS estimates because of under-reporting by workers and families.

Like retail sales, care work 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” – work that involves physical and/or social taint. Some parts of care work 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 is 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 is inherently improvisational work 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 conducted a large-scale study in New Jersey and Pennsylvania to examine the potential benefits of teacher job crafting in preschool classrooms. We interviewed over fifty childcare center directors, and conducted numerous focus groups with childcare teachers and aides. We also surveyed 232 classroom teachers and aides and commissioned independent performance assessments in 62 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 – i.e., the “human capital” of the workforce – did not explain differences between 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. Specifically, a one standard deviation increase in collaborative job crafting was associated with a 7% increase in quality of care among more experienced teachers but a 17% increase in quality of care among teachers with less experience in the field.

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 important 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, class size and teacher compensation. 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 between 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. Most commonly, management expresses 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 re-distribution 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 on-going 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 (Kossek, Huber-Yoder, Lerner & Castellino, 1997). And a worker may be reluctant to call attention to herself by requesting individual accommodations to attend classes, care for children, or go to the doctor if she believes she can be labeled as a “trouble-maker” for requesting flexible hours. As a consequence, workplace systems such as scheduling may be automated in ways that don’t account for such needs and instead allocate sufficient work hours to earn a living and health benefits only to workers who *don’t* ask for exceptions.

In summary, based on insights from our own field studies of social change in work settings that have led to sustainable positive outcomes for low income workers, we have argued that *positive* organizational change approaches must: (1) involve positive multi-level relationships in ways that either facilitate collaboration and/or change cross-level relationships in positive ways; and (2) enhance the transparency of and linkage between what are often invisible implicit assumptions, to facilitate positive visible practices and systems.

In addition to multi-level change that is visible, we offer two other observations regarding over-arching change principals that we found from our work in this area. An additional principle is that 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 elementary education classroom 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 “un-stick” 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 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 the supportive behaviors on the job resulted in improved job satisfaction, job attachment and physical health for working poor individuals who were higher in work-family conflict prior to the intervention (Hammer et al, In press; Kossek and Hammer, 2008). Simple things like coaching managers to say hello, ask about family needs and be a little flexible had huge payoffs in terms of work-family conflict reduction over time for those experiencing higher work-family stresses. 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. Hammer, Kossek, Anger, Bodner & Zimmerman’s (in press) study showed a disordinal interaction for the effect of the intervention on employee job satisfaction, turnover intentions and physical health. While positive effects on these measures were found over time for those low income workers who had higher family to work conflict, negative training results were found for individuals with low family-to-work conflict. 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 and contrasts the effectiveness of stepping stone, top-down and bottom up and multi-level approaches to workplace change strategies by and for the working poor. Studies might be done to replicate the ideas in this paper and demonstrate across contexts whether multi-level 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 type of job, the organizational context and the specific needs of the working poor. Younger individuals might need targeted supports focuses on child care, education and language skills. Older workers might require help with health maintenance or how to update skills such as learning how to use a computer. Recent immigrants might need training that is customized to integrate language and workforce socialization 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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