**Lecture Notes for Chapter 14: The Changing Workplace**

People’s employment status defines their position in society and their standard of living or the level of wealth, material goods, housing, services and education available to them. Being gainfully employed also brings self-esteem, respect from others, friendships, socialization, and a daily routine. For most people, the family and the workplace are the two major domains of everyday interaction. Because social work uses a systems/ecological approach to issues of human needs, social workers are positioned to advocate for better working conditions in the context of family life. Introducing policies, programs and procedures that enhance the workplace will improve family life while simultaneously increasing productivity and profitability for the work organization.

History of Work

In less developed societies, work is linked to survival. Work also has a societal function, serving to organize people in small groups. Our society places a great deal of value on the **work ethic:** the moral belief of the necessity and benefit of work. The work ethic is often associated with the character of an individual and the perceptions others have of a person. It is expected all people who are capable should work and if they do not, they are viewed as “unworthy” or “nondeserving” of government support.

* Traditional Societies
  + Division of labor - The organization of work by task and responsibility, traditionally divided by gender and age.
* Agricultural Era: 1630–1760
  + The main occupations in the American colonies were based in subsistence agriculture in rural contexts. As the nation expanded, agricultural occupations associated with lumber, food, cotton, and dairies grew to meet the demands of a developing nation and a growing population.
  + The social welfare system in place during this time reflected the centrality of the family in maintaining social and economical stability. When a family experienced difficulty, the typical Colonial response was one of the following:
    - farming out members of the family to labor for others in return for food and shelter
    - indenturingworkers from the family to another farm or business for a specified period of time
    - apprenticingselected family members to expert craftsmen to learn a trade like shoemaking or blacksmithing
* Industrial Revolution: 1760–1840
  + Water and steam power, iron making and machine tools elevated the living standards of ordinary people while the United States gained worldwide presence as an industrialized nation. Family life changed as people left their homes and searched for work.
  + Included the introduction of wage laborers who sold their work hours to a factory, mining operation or business owner in order to earn a salary. They were often required to follow strict rules and live in deplorable conditions.
  + Integral to the rise of wage labor was Francis Cabot Lowell’s power loom that synchronized weaving with spinning and changed a labor-intensive method of textile production to an automated weaving system. Young girls could do the work of the mechanized mill system. They were called Lowell Mill Girls and lived in dormitories or boarding houses supervised by matrons.
  + In response to working conditions and the inequality of incomes ,workers united in action and demanded reforms.
    - Equal and universal free education
    - Public lands for settlements
    - No more abuse of child labor and apprentices
    - Restrictions on competitive prison labor
    - Better working conditions for women
    - Establishment of a ten-hour day without any deceases in wages
    - Governmental control of currency
    - The right to organize
    - Jobs for the unemployed in public works programs
* Urbanization: 1860–1950
  + One of the defining features of the Industrial Revolution was the development of cities, vast urban areas with roads, public transportation, railroads, and waterways. Prior to industrial growth approximately 80% of people lived in rural areas.
  + Hiring unskilled workers on a daily basis, laying off workers during slow periods of production, and seasonal work contributed to unsteady employment and transiency among the working class.
  + Welfare capitalism - business owners introduced policies and programs that became associated with the welfare movement. There were two basic goals: support for a diverse workforce that would maintain the established the values and goals of management; and discourage workers from union membership.
  + Human relationship school of management - emerged with the decline of the welfare movement. It emerged from a set of studies conducted at the Western Electric Hawthorne Works in Chicago. Researchers were interested in the impact of physical factors like light or temperature on production rates but found that the attention they paid to the workers during the studies was in itself motivating.
* Information Age: 1960–Present
  + Employee Assistance Programs – developed in response to the stresses of work associated with disrupted employment, competition, and changing markets.
  + Address issues that negatively impact job performance, work attendance and collegial relationships, as well as personal problems, such as domestic violence, parenting, and mental illness.
  + Social workers provide the majority of EAP services. Trained in an ecological perspective, EAP social workers view the person-in-the-environment,which includes relevant individuals, groups and communities. The goal is to assess environmental stressors that may be contributing to a problem and intervening to bring balance into the work and life of the employee.

Current Social Trends Related to Work

* Increase in non-work responsibilities – more women in work force.
* More people work at home - One third of Americans are freelancers (17 million people), contractors and consultants, and most of them work at home instead of in a traditional office setting. By about 2020 there will be more of these non-payroll workers than full-time employees.
* Workforce ages – Baby Boomers retiring, Millennials moving up. Challenge will be ensuring continuity as people with deep knowledge of the company’s business leave and new ones come in.
* Gender pay gap starts to close – The gap is smaller for younger workers than it is for workers overall.
* Career growth delayed - Due to the weak economy, many recent college grads took internships to gain work experience when they couldn’t find jobs, delaying work force entry. Median income level used to be achieved by age 26, now it is age 30.
* Global markets become more integrated - Global commerce will experience significant growth in the next decades, as developing nations and emerging markets benefit from a new generation of businesses and consumers. Issues of diversity will be important.
* Job searches are continuous - Fifty years ago, Americans tended to find a good job and stay with that employer for most of their working life. Today people have, on average, about eleven jobs between the ages of 18 and 34.

Work-Related Issues

* Unemployment
  + Frictional unemployment: part of the normal labor cycle and considered unavoidable. Frictional unemployment is triggered when people leave their place of employment or are fired from their job.
  + Structural unemployment: caused largely by conditions in the economy that mismatch available jobs and potential workers.
  + Cyclical unemployment:when businesses downsize and lay off workers because of a decrease in demand for goods and services.
* Underemployment - People who are employed but are frustrated in their ability to do a job commensurate with their skills and availability.
* Minimum Wage - The lowest hourly rate wage that employers may legally pay their workers. Even when working 40 hours per week, workers paid the minimum wage are earning only $15,080, which is below the poverty line of $15,130.
* Gender Inequality - Women are primarily in low paying positions: hair stylists, house cleaners, cooks, child-care workers, nurses, and teachers. Women with full-time employment are paid about three-fourths the salary of full-time working men. Women represent less than 20% of federal and state elective offices.
* Occupational Health Hazards - Illnesses, diseases, and disorders, whether physical or emotional, that are a result of work, and affect a person’s earning ability. To ensure the health and safety in the workplace, legislation and inspection standards for workplaces have been enacted.

Social Welfare and the Changing Workplace

* Social Insurance Programs - Employers and workers share the risks associated with employment by paying premiums through deductions from their earnings.
  + Unemployment Insurance - provides benefits to eligible workers who are unemployed through no fault of their own.
  + Workers’ Compensation - provides most employees who are injured on the job the right to medical care for any injury, and in many cases, monetary payments to compensate for resulting temporary or permanent disabilities.
  + Social Security – provides retirement benefits for workers who contribute to the federal social insurance program. Approximately 94% of all workers participate in the program. Deductions for the program are taken directly from a worker’s paycheck.
* Social Welfare Policies – Policies based on the idea that women, members of minority groups, and people with challenging conditions have civil rights that guarantee their opportunities in employment without prejudice and discrimination.
  + Affirmative Action - [equal opportunity employment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equal_opportunity_employment) measures that federal contractors and subcontractors are legally required to adopt. These measures are intended to prevent discrimination against employees or applicants for employment on the basis of "color, religion, sex, or national origin".
  + Americans with Disabilities Act - supports people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodation, communications, and governmental activities. It covers employers with 15 or more employees, including state and local governments.
    - Reasonable accommodation - adjustments or modifications provided by an employer to enable people with disabilities to enjoy equal employment opportunities.
      * Making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by persons with impairments.
      * Restructuring jobs, modifying work schedules, and reassigning people with impairments to vacant positions.
      * Acquiring or modifying equipment or devices, adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, or policies, and providing qualified readers or interpreters.

Diversity and the Changing Workplace

Environment of work - The environment of work supports the social advancement of some workers while others are marginalized. Traditionally, people with minority status—especially on the basis of race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation—have been deficient in class, status, and power. Thus they have held labor positions that require harder, dirtier, more dangerous work and offer less privilege and prestige. In turn, the lowly character of the work they do lowers their social status. Because of their status, such people are excluded from specializations in labor that would enhance their financial status and overall standard of living. It is a vicious circle.

* Age - Older people are subject to many stereotypes. Older workers are thought to be less healthy, clumsier, more prone to absenteeism, more accident prone, and slower in task performance. Research has shown these myths to be untrue. In fact, older workers tend to be highly productive, dependable, and cooperative. To provide older adults with a productive, meaningful role in society, it is suggested that they be encouraged to work as long as they are productive and have an interest in working to maintain their standard of living.
* Class - Alienation refers to the cognitive separation of people from each other and from the control of their work. It can lead to the exploitation of workers, resulting in inequality in the distribution of work and its rewards. Exploitation in a work context is seen when individuals gain little from their work but those who supervise them gain much.
* Gender - The position of women (and some men) in the workplace would be enhanced if access to affordable, convenient child care or elder care services were provided either on-site or through a consortium with other employers.
* Sexual Orientation - There are 21 states with laws protecting LGBT workers from discrimination. The majority of the largest employers (5000 + employees) now provide benefits to same sex partners and spouses of employees.
* Intersections of Diversity - Women of color are disproportionately employed in low income jobs in retail, services, child care and janitorial services.

Advocacy and the Changing Workplace

* Social and Economic Justice - The working conditions of women, older people, people of color, working class people, and LGBT people contradicts the notion of a just workplace, in which workers have resources and benefits through equal distribution. Social workers can help by advocating for systematic change in order to shift this sort of inequity from a personal problem to societal one. Such advocacy can take the form of referring people to programs and benefits, developing social welfare policy, union organizing, and writing editorials and other documents for public education.
* Supportive Environment - The work environment can set the stage for discriminatory actions and prejudicial attitudes. Often the line between employment protections from discrimination and protections from harassment is not clearly defined. Anti-discrimination policies typically emphasize the responsibility of the employer and anti-harassment policies emphasize the responsibility of employees.
* Human Needs and Rights - According to the Dynamic Advocacy Model human rights can be divided into three categories: 1) civil and political rights; 2) social and economic rights; and 3) collective rights. In the world of work it is civil rights that ensure fair treatment, as guaranteed by the nation’s constitution.
* Political Access - Social workers can educate people about their rights as employees and about the resources that should be available to them if they are not employed. Employee rights cover everything from salary levels to appropriate physical work environments and benefits including child care, sick days and mental health services.

Your Career in the World of Work

* Social workers are involved in the majority of workplaces through: direct practice to individuals, families and groups; service systems including housing, health and education; policy development at the local, state and federal level; advocacy in unions, associations, or membership affiliations; offices of human services; insurance offices; schools; correctional and mental facilities, and service agencies across all levels of government.
* The combination of benefits, environment, location, and salary make for a healthy and rewarding workplace.
* A social work career in the world of work involves embracing people's individuality and needs as a matter of basic human dignity and civil rights.