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## What Can Child Welfare Leaders Do to Improve Job Satisfaction?

Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development

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## What Can Child Welfare Leaders Do to Improve Job Satisfaction?

There is a saying, “a happy worker is a productive worker” and research suggests there is a modest relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. But what can child welfare leaders do to create a satisfied, productive workforce when the work is stressful, complex, and challenging? There is a lot of evidence on what employers should be aware of among worker characteristics and the work environment that is related to higher employee job satisfaction. For example, employees who [thrive](#) at work are less likely to experience stress and burnout. Positive experiences related to coworkers, supervisors, and the organization show strong connections to employees’ likelihood of thriving at work. There is a [scale](#) available to child welfare leaders to measure thriving at work.



The Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (QIC-WD) is testing some strategies that might have a positive impact on job satisfaction and the work environment, but additional research is necessary to develop and test formal interventions to know for sure. This QIC-Tip draws on some of the research summarized in the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development’s (QIC-WD) [Umbrella Summaries](#) (synopses of published meta-analyses of workforce topics) that can inform child welfare agency leaders concerned about job satisfaction among workers.

**Build psychological capital among workers.** People who are higher in [psychological capital](#) (PsyCap) are likely to report lower stress and lower intentions to leave the organization. PsyCap is a composite of four positive psychological resources—efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience—that are strongly related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, psychological well-being, and organizational citizenship behaviors and moderately related to job performance. Employers can consider using the PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ) as a pre- and post-intervention measure. Potential interventions are described in this [book](#), which also includes the PCQ in the appendix; however, more research is needed to test strategies to improve PsyCap and to test whether improving PsyCap improves work outcomes.

**Create an environment where workers feel psychologically safe and supported.** Individual-level [psychological safety](#) (the belief that one’s workplace is safe for interpersonal risk taking) may be a condition necessary for people to feel attached to and engaged in their work. It is strongly predictive of work engagement, job satisfaction, and commitment. The Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services (DMCPS), in partnership with the QIC-WD, implemented [ARC, an intervention designed to bring worker voice to agency decision making](#). ARC has been shown to improve job satisfaction. Anecdotal reports from DMCPS ARC participants indicate that they developed psychological safety within their teams as part of the ARC process.

Employee [perceptions of organizational support](#) (POS) are important in the workplace. Positive POS indicates that employees feel that their employer values their contributions and opinions, cares about their well-being, and strongly considers their goals and values. POS is strongly connected to lower burnout and stress and to higher organizational

commitment and job satisfaction. It is modestly connected to higher job performance. Finally, POS is strongly associated with lower intentions to leave and moderately associated with actual turnover. How can a leader influence POS? Although there is little evidence as to what actually *causes* POS, the strongest potential influences for high POS include people-oriented leadership, fair procedures and treatment, fulfillment of obligations to employees, autonomy, and opportunities to participate in decision-making.

**Develop quality relationships with each worker.** According to [research](#), leader-member exchange (LMX) refers to the quality of relationship exchange formed between a leader (e.g., supervisor, manager, administrator) and their subordinate. Leaders may be able to foster high-quality LMX through behaviors like transformational leadership, contingent rewards, and having positive expectations of followers. LMX can be measured with the [LMX-7](#) or [LMX-MDM](#) scales.

**Create social opportunities for workers.** [Job embeddedness](#) refers to the extent to which employees are connected to their jobs through a social web, both on the job and at home. It is positively associated with job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, and job performance. Research on job embeddedness thus far has focused on assessing factors that are merely associated with embeddedness, not on testing strategies for improving it or on examining whether improving it affects outcomes like turnover. Suggested (but untested) strategies for improving it can include work parties, informal gatherings, good opportunities and benefits, use of teams and committees, a good fit between a person's skills and the job, flexible scheduling, and access to community attractions.

**Provide personal resource building, job resource building, leadership training, and/or health promotion interventions to improve [employee engagement](#).** Employee engagement, or general attitudes and behaviors related to high personal investment in one's work, is positively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and it is a relatively strong predictor of job performance, including both task performance and contextual performance. [Evidence](#) is beginning to emerge about interventions to improve employee engagement such as personal resource building (e.g., activities to improve skills, self-efficacy, and awareness of resource), job resource building (e.g., activities to improve autonomy, social support, and feedback), leadership training, and health promotion (e.g., mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy, yoga, and aerobics). Leaders can assess employee engagement using either the 17- or 9-item version of the [Utrecht Work Engagement Scale](#), which assesses engagement through three factors: vigor (high energy levels and persistence), dedication (enthusiasm and inspiration), and absorption (high concentration and engrossment).

**Hire workers who are committed to the work of your public agency.** [Public service motivation](#) (PSM) or commitment is about a person's desire or interest to serve the public and it is related to interest in working in the public sector, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, and tenure. There is preliminary evidence that having good human resource practices is modestly associated with higher PSM. These include practices such as job enrichment, participation, professional development opportunities, flexible working hours, and fairness in rewards. Oklahoma's Department of Human Services worked with the QIC-WD to [standardize their child welfare hiring process](#) to assess whether candidates are a good fit for the job, and they included PSM in the measures that were tested for potential use in the hiring process.

**Consider person-job (P-J) fit as a management activity.** According to [research](#), P-J fit occurs when there is a good match "between a person's characteristics and those of the job or tasks that are performed at work." Human resources professionals can use the four measures within the [Perceived Person-Environment Fit Scale \(PPEFS\)](#) to support managers and the workforce.