

**HOWE, D.: Social Workers and Their Practice in
Welfare Bureaucracies
str. 122-140**

Social Workers and their Practice in Welfare Bureaucracies

DAVID HOWE
University of East Anglia

Gower

9 Controlling the meaning of welfare work

The previous three chapters identified a number of concepts which can be used to understand the organisation of workers and their work in the personal social services:

1. Control over the nature and definition of the work.
2. Control over the content of work.
3. Control over the organisation of work and workers.
4. The power that derives from such control.
5. The potential conflict that exists between the occupational groups competing to achieve control over the content of practice.

These ideas and concepts offer the prospect of a common explanatory base to a range of phenomena, including the distribution and differentiation of social workers and their practice and the response patterns within particular cases. The explanation, as it is developed, begins to encompass ideas concerning the nature of social work and its organisation. In this way, links are made within the same conceptual schema between (i) the work, (ii) the occupational groups that tackle the work and (iii) the relationship between these groups including their organisation.

What takes place in the politics of occupational control is not entirely divorced from what takes place in a fieldworker's practice. Examining social work case practice with reference

only to 'professional' social work concepts frustrates the making of wider links between social work practice and the organisation of social workers. Instead of seeing the organisation of social workers as an unfortunate constraint on practice, the organisation of social workers can be seen as a higher level form arising out of the same conceptual ingredients that occur at the 'micro level' of individual practice. Explicit in such an explanation is the view that social work and those who 'claim' it as their 'professional' concern are not the sole arbiters of what is 'best' or 'right' in the name of social work. Rather, definitions of practice emerge out of the competing views of different occupational and interest groups (cf Glastonbury et al. 1980, p.26).

This view of welfare occupations and their work suggests that social work practice does not have inherent qualities that allow universal definitions to be made, that social work has no essential nature just waiting to be expressed by that occupational group which believes itself to be in a position to pronounce on the true nature of the job. Fieldworkers and welfare managers represent two occupational groups which have employed different strategies to establish control over the work done and so have things seen their way in the light of their concerns. Out of the relationship between these alternative strategies and their different 'technological' bases arises the design of work, the division of labour, the style of technology used, the structure of the organisation and the definition of the 'raw material' (clients, their needs and their problems).

SEQUENCE OF INTERPRETATION

It is within the work carried out on individual cases (Chapter 5) that the basic elements which characterise the relationship between occupational control and the content of practice are discovered. The identification of this basic relationship not only helps explain the distribution of types of response present in particular cases, but also can be used to account for a broader range of phenomena, including the 'activity profiles' (Chapter 4) and the general distribution of fieldworkers and their work (Chapter 2). The explanations offered in Chapter 3 are now superseded and subsumed by the more encompassing theoretical accounts described in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. The interpretation of the results is presented in the following order:

1. Types of response in particular kinds of cases (interpreting the results of Chapter 5).
2. The pattern of responses and their evolution within and between cases (continuing the interpretation of

the results of Chapter 5).

3. The distribution of activities amongst fieldworkers and client groups (interpreting the results of Chapter 4).
4. The distribution and differentiation of fieldworkers and their client groups (interpreting the results of Chapter 2).

1. TYPES OF RESPONSE IN PARTICULAR KINDS OF CASES

In their handling of particular cases, fieldworkers perceive and understand their work and then respond in a variety of ways. The freedoms and constraints experienced or recognised in these acts of perception, understanding and response tell us something about the amount of control fieldworkers appear to enjoy or lack over their work. The perceptions and understandings reached are stimulated either by professional and personal theories about practice or by organisational and administrative requirements. Control over the content of a piece of practice is therefore rooted in either professional assertions or managerial designs. Control, from the social workers' point of view, may be more or less available along two dimensions:

- (i) Control over the 'raw material' itself; that is the extent to which the worker's skills and occupational technology can have a predictable effect on clients and their problems.
- (ii) Control over the way clients are perceived and understood and the responses offered in the light of these; that is the extent to which the social worker's responses are prescribed and shaped by either the individual worker ('professional' control) or others, particularly managers, either directly (centralised management control) or indirectly (formalised management control).

The amount of control experienced or credited to social workers allows us to say something about their occupation and the nature of its practice. The results of the taped interviews (Chapter 5) might now be interpreted around whether or not the two dimensions of control are present or absent in particular areas of fieldwork practice. Thus the following positions are theoretically available to fieldworkers:

1. The fieldworker experiences personal control over the content of her work ('professional' control) including:
 - (i) the 'raw materials', that is the people, events and circumstances that make up cases;
 - (ii) the responses made in working with a case (non-programmed and so at the worker's discretion).

2. The fieldworker does not experience personal control over the content of her work including:
 - (i) the behaviour of the 'raw materials';
 - (ii) the responses made in working with a case because of either organisational constraints of structure, design, rules and resources (formalised management control), or explicit directives by managers (centralised management control).

The recognition of strengths and weaknesses in the amount of control held by fieldworkers over the elements of practice offers a clear insight into the occupational standing of social workers. If control is weak over both the 'raw materials' and the responses made in practice, social workers are unlikely to have work defined to suit their occupational skills or to develop organisations which confer control and power on their occupation. Mapping the contours of control in practice reveals where the balance of power lies between the worker and the managers of her agency. The results of Chapter 5 do just this, and it now remains to describe the occupational relief as it exists between field social workers and their managers in more pronounced terms.

The results show that the two major dimensions of control over the content of practice generally were weak in the case of field social workers. The occupational skills and techniques of the worker, although attempted frequently as non-programmed responses, generally failed to bring people and their situations under sufficient control. In the event of such failure, the more restricted strategies of managers and administrators were employed. The use of formal procedures and statutory devices allowed situations to be viewed more narrowly and in this narrow sense, control could be achieved more easily. The responses, though, are not of the worker's own manufacture. Formally programmed responses had a high occurrence across all client groups, suggesting that managerial control was prevalent and pervasive. The effect of such weakness is that fieldworkers are subjected to control from elsewhere - either by the momentum of case evolution (the 'raw material' goes its own way) and/or through the determination of responses by managers effected through the division of labour, resource provision, procedure and directives. There might also be an element of 'managers knowing best' - a form of collective disillusion with the claims of professionalism, an organisational recognition that formal procedures are the proven 'best way' of making a minimally acceptable response.

There is, of course, a close relationship between the weakness of social workers' expertise and the strong control exerted by managers. In terms of asserting the claim to control

and define the nature of the work, managers and social workers represent two different occupational strategies. Each makes use of a different technological base. Indeed the techniques, as means, are used to different ends. The 'professional' end and means have had less success in welfare work than those employed by managers. As Pearson (1975, p.56) puts it, the social worker 'even at the most basic level of performance - immediate client response ... cannot say confidently that if he does A he will 'cause' B to follow'. In similar vein, one of my respondents reflected:

I don't actually think I bring about particular changes; through what I do I mean, like stopping Gary pinching things. I mean, I try. I go through all the recommended motions and he may stop or he may not. So far he hasn't! I just hang in.

And in work with the elderly, Goldberg and Warburton observed (1979, p.94): 'In over two-thirds of the cases for whom a continuance of domiciliary services and occasional surveillance was prescribed, unanticipated events outside the control of social workers intervened before the next review.'

The effect of management-based techniques gaining control is not just that control by social workers is reduced but that the content of the work is prescribed both explicitly (through authority-based directives) and implicitly (by managerial design and structure). Explicit and implicit controls occur across all areas of work, but actual mixes and distributions vary most between work with children and their families on the one hand and work with the old and frail on the other.

Direct and usually explicit managerial involvement in field-work practice was most common in child care and family work. This was particularly so when the behaviour and circumstances of individuals were clearly related to the statutory responsibilities of the agency. In critical situations the worker's discretion was curtailed with more direct reference being made to statute, policy, procedure and managerial authority. Discretion, particularly over the methods used, was greatest in situations where the outcome was not critically the concern of the agency or where matters, as currently understood, were not likely to present the organisation with too much uncertainty in terms of its responsibilities. As one fieldworker put it, referring to his use of family therapy as a technique of working:

My Area Officer doesn't care about the way I do it, so long as I do it, so long as I'm in there and can say I'm in there.

In these cases, although allowed to behave in ways based on their own technology and expertise, fieldworkers essentially were indicating to the department that they were involved and alert to what was happening. That the departments, in some cases at least, did not mind how the workers conducted the manner of their involvement is captured in the rueful remarks of this young and recently qualified woman:

I was told by our Area Officer that I couldn't go on the course (week long family therapy workshop). I'm really interested in family work and see it ... well as a really useful way of handling many of my cases, you know. He said he was sorry, but really if I wanted to specialise in that type of work I would be better off in a specialist agency of some kind. It was a luxury that we couldn't afford at area team level. I ask you!

If clients did begin to exhibit features which the organisation felt to be of direct relevance to its operations, the discretionary control allowed social workers was withdrawn. The case was then placed within the tighter framework of managerial authority and design. So, for example, when teenagers committed offences or parents were suspected of being a danger to their children, the responses of the fieldworker obeyed either procedural guidelines or the directives of managers. Cooper (in Glastonbury et al. 1980, p.78) observed that in one SSD, when making child care decisions 'at least four tiers in the department were recorded as involved' with a tendency to view decision making as concentrated in the hands of the committee and management. In critical areas of child care the worker loses control over the content of her own practice and follows the practice designs of other people.

Parton (1979 and 1981) has considered similar influences at work in child care practice with cases of suspected non-accidental injury. He examines the growing concern and anxiety surrounding the recognition of child abuse. He relates the establishment of child abuse as a problem and the 'moral panic' it has engendered 'to certain influential economic interests and the changing ideological and material base of British society' (1981, p.394). In the 1970s the family, as an institution, was felt to be 'at risk', a 'victim' of 1960s permissiveness. The feeling that 'something should be done' developed. Parton quotes (1981, p.393) an article from the Sunday Times, 11th November 1973, which argues that baby battering 'rightly horrifies the public and it is a category where society is failing to do its duty ... the tragedy of Maria Colwell deserves attention because her death dramatises a national scandal.' Rather than see families as 'neglectful' or 'inadequate' as tended to be the case in the 1950s and 1960s,

they came to be seen as violent and deviant allowing formal social control to be the proper reaction in which intervention was more likely to be coercive and authoritative. The way the problem was being conceptualised and the way priorities were set, increasingly influenced the DHSS and the advice it gave SSDs. In turn this affected the working definitions and practices of managers and fieldworkers.

In this climate, both deviant families and the permissive practices of social workers could be controlled and disciplined. 'The moral panic related to child abuse has been inextricably interrelated with debates about the nature and direction of social work and the accountability of social workers ... It is now the major concern of the practitioners and their employing departments' (Parton 1981, p.406). 'Social workers became forced into a more coercive relationship with a large number of families. Their practice, as Holman (1976) has argued, has legitimately been encouraged to be more punitive, interventive and 'rescue' minded. Parton (1981, p.407) quotes Jordan on the changing role of the social worker:

It is much more linked to the task of investigating and acting upon allegations of neglect and ill-treatment of children, which after all was one of the duties of the local authority social worker; this now suddenly looms much larger and sets the tone of all other work with 'at risk' children - 'at risk' comes to mean 'at risk from parents' rather than 'at risk of coming into care' ... social workers are increasingly exhorted to act as rescuers, saving children from wicked or feckless parents.

Social work practice in child care and family work is not left simply to the professional discretion of the worker. The worker's understanding of individual cases and the responses she makes are outcomes of 'wider social processes', structural developments and the role of the state (Parton 1981, pp.409-410). 'The panic over child abuse has biased departmental priorities, caseloads and professional practice in terms of child and family problems. Such a bias now seems to be accepted as natural by those in the field' (Parton 1981, p.409).

The net result of increased surveillance and direct control of certain families according to Parton is 'that the removal of a child from its parents is now seen far more as a first rather than a last resort' (1983, p.392). Between March 1972 and March 1976 there was nearly a fourfold increase in the number of Place of Safety Orders taken (204 to 759). And whereas only one newborn child was compulsorily placed in care out of 81 departments who returned evidence in 1970, the same departments reported 42 such removals in 1978 (Parton 1981, pp.392-393).

Examination of DHSS returns reveals a 27% increase in the number of children for whom parental rights have been assumed between 1976 and 1979, the number growing from 14,500 to 18,400. By 1980, some 41% of the children in voluntary care in England and Wales were subject to parental rights resolutions. Social work practice clearly does not operate in a social, political or occupational vacuum.

Implicit methods of control were met in practice with all client groups. However, work with the old and the handicapped was particularly liable to indirect methods of control and prescription. Again, fieldworkers in situ had considerable discretion over the manner of their responses. Their actions were not determined in exact detail. Nevertheless, the worker's perception of clients and the way their needs were recognised and understood was set within the framework laid down by the organisation and its managers. Clients were viewed as individuals whose needs could be recognised and met in terms of the resources available; they were approached for information which would determine their eligibility for existing services.

Lee (1982, p.30), describing social workers' adoption of managerially designed systems of practice and accountability, sees the work increasingly subject to 'technicalisation and routine de-skilling'. Bamford (1982, p.38), in his book addressed to managers in social work, notes the use of 'Operational Priority Systems' in SSDs which 'give managers additional means of controlling the flow of work' as well as viewing available responses from the perspectives of the agency. One of my interviewees, a qualified social worker, found her work prescribed and her outlooks limited in a case involving a young man who was physically handicapped even though she believed she could see other needs and methods of working:

The agency ... doesn't allow you a lot of time to do a lot of personal counselling in cases like this. You're more of a resource system, a getter and provider of a limited range of resources and this is how I'm supposed basically to tackle this case. But really, if I could I would like to do some counselling with Peter's mother.

A telephone survey conducted by Neill (1982) looked at the procedures and criteria related to Part III applications in the 33 local authorities throughout the GLC area in the autumn of 1977. Although there were variations in the way Part III applications were defined, the study indicates a relationship between case practice, the decision making process and 'the powerful and important needs and politics of organisations' (p.241). The part that managers played in determining eligibility and priority were seen both in the provision of resources

What about the managers and social workers who are not

(the number of Part III beds available) and the tendency for final decisions to be taken centrally in many authorities:

In two-thirds (21) of authorities, two systems of classification were in operation. Priority applicants were first selected by referring social workers in consultation with their senior colleagues in area office or hospital. These selected 'priority' applicants were then further screened by a central management person or panel ... In ten of the remaining boroughs all Part 3 applicants were classified at the central office, and priority applicants then selected by a panel or an individual. (Neill 1982, p.237)

There was a pressure on social workers to define their clients' situations in crisis terms in order to gain Part III places. Scarcity of resources, in this case, affected the assessments made. It also led to the organisation needing to control decisions by taking them centrally.

The results of Neill's research and other studies, suggest a common pattern in which clients are measured, using departmental formulae, to see to what extent they fit available services. The forms to be filled control and guide perceptions and responses. In this sense, social workers adopt a procrustean style of practice in which the basic design of services, including the routes to them and the gateways met on the way, is constructed by managers interpreting the legislation. Black et al. (1983) reached similar conclusions: in the provision of practical services 'delivery systems were overbureaucratised, governed less by individual needs than routinised procedure' (p.219) and 'for elderly people, problems were redefined to fit the available solutions of existing practical services' (p.222). In these ways managers control the content of many areas of fieldwork practice. It is further reflected in the division of labour in which there is an implicit acknowledgement that work with the old and handicapped contains a relatively high and unambiguous prescriptive component. Unqualified workers predominate in this area of work. Indeed the origins of social work assistants and welfare aides lie in the recruitment policies of SSDs in the early 1970s with managers seeking a growth in the number of workers to handle the old and disabled (Hey 1979).

2. THE DISTRIBUTION, OCCURRENCE AND EVOLUTION OF RESPONSES

The dissolution of independent 'professional' types of control, which assert a social work technology, into responses which reflect managerially inspired understandings receives further confirmation when the direction of dissolution is considered. If managerial technologies receive their characteristics and ultimately their strength from interpreting and administering

statutes and society's expectations of personal service work, then two principal directions of dissolution might be anticipated:

(i) Child care legislation addresses itself to standards of behaviour exhibited by children and their parents. The work of SSDs involves surveillance, monitoring and controlling the welfare and conduct of children. The work is not described in terms of 'curing' or 'mending' faulty behaviour, but rather in terms of establishing guidelines and procedures about what responses should occur when certain behaviours are identified. Thus the responses in this area of work occur along a spectrum: independent responses within the worker's control dissolving into formally programmed and ultimately, in some cases, centrally controlled responses. It is to programmed responses that social workers turn or are directed when the conduct of clients brings them clearly into statutory focus in spite of the technical efforts of the 'professional' social worker.

(ii) Work with the old and handicapped rests on legislation which, in general terms, describes the services and resources these client groups might expect from local authorities. From the outset most workers adopt a 'service' outlook. This is set within a managerially designed framework of procedures, resources and responses.

In both major areas of practice - work with children and work with the old and handicapped - control shifted in favour of managers, though the overall complexion of control strategies differed in each case. Implicit control mechanisms allow routine, unreflective responses to occur for which there is no organisational need to employ independently skilled workers. Control is at its most potent when it is subtle and implicit, when workers do not even recognise that there might be other ways of understanding the work. In these situations there is no need for managers to display power overtly. This form of control ('ideological hegemony') is most prevalent in work with the old and handicapped.

Control in child care work is more visible and apparent. Behaviours are judged, laws invoked and procedures applied. Management and statutory determination are 'on the surface', partly because the work cannot be straightforwardly routinised and partly because the workers are required to assess the evidence on behalf of the agency which obliges the administration to reveal its hand by the overt invocation of legal standards, controls and directives. The fact that child care and family work appears more likely to contain examples of uncertainty which stubbornly remain outside the technical powers of both workers and managers (persistent offenders, absconders,

families in chronic poverty, foster homes which break down) is a point which has to be borne in mind when considering the distribution and differentiation of workers and their practices. If neither occupational group's strategy can effect sufficient control over case practice, neither group can entirely determine the practice and occupational organisation of the other.

As argued, explicit control is a weaker power base than those founded on normative consensus. To the extent that power is weaker, there is some potential for workers to assert their own occupational control base. In certain situations, social workers recognise that they have an alternative view and understanding of the work. Even so, in SSDs the balance of control, even in the less predictable area of child care, lies with the managers although social workers have been able to explore pockets of freedom. The irony is that this less complete form of control in child care matters not only generates more examples of explicit disagreements between occupational groups but it also witnesses the overt use of power in the form of managerial directives. Managerial authority thus appears most blatant in those areas of work which are least under the detailed control of managers.

Conclusions on the types of responses appearing in case practice

Worker's control over:

'Raw materials'	Critical case responses	
+	+	Strong professional control/High worker discretion
-	+	Weak professional control/High worker discretion
+	-	Weak managerial control/Low worker discretion
-	-	Strong managerial control/Low worker discretion

Figure 9.1 Four occupational levels of control over the content of practice

Figure 9.1 summarises the positions theoretically available to field social workers. When the worker is able to control critical case responses and has high discretion over the content of practice, professional control is high. In the case of

fieldwork practice in SSDs, the workers characteristically had little control over critical case responses and experienced low powers of discretion. This is not the stuff of professional control. And although managerial control was not uniformly strong, it nevertheless held the balance of power throughout all client group categories and was at its most subtle and pervasive in work with the old and disabled.

The meaning that different types of client group have for organisations and the responses expected in the light of these meanings are determined by managers as they interpret the agency's brief and role in the community. The effect of such control is to influence the content of fieldwork practice in far reaching and penetrating ways. As Smith and Ames (1976, p.52) remark, 'the way in which a department as a whole operates does crucially constrain both the way in which decisions are taken and the outcome of these decisions within area teams'.

3. ACTIVITY AND PROBLEM PROFILES

Statistical profiles were tabled for the range and type of problems and activities associated with different types of fieldworker and client group (see Chapter 4). Problem and activity profiles were found to be (i) different between client groups, but (ii) similar for different kinds of fieldworker working with the same client group. In the conclusions to these results, this state of affairs was taken to indicate that the characteristics of the client group determined the type of work carried out irrespective of the kind of fieldworker. Fieldworkers appeared not to control the content of client group practice.

However, at this stage of interpretation, the introduction of the concepts culled from the sociological literature allows the 'profile' results to be interpreted within a deeper theoretical setting. Fundamentally, it is not the client group in itself which controls the content of worker practice. Rather, it is the way different client groups are perceived, understood and defined by those occupational groups able to describe the work in terms of their own outlook, interests and skills. SSD managers do not passively respond to their 'task environment'. They actively define it and shape it wherever possible so that it accords with their own abilities and resources. Client groups take on their meaning in the light of managerial interpretations and definitions.

Individual clients within particular client groups might display sufficient variation to disturb the original equation that

'the work determines the worker'. But under the present analysis, the similarity of problem and activity profiles by different kinds of worker for the same client group suggests that no matter what the individual case idiosyncracies might be, cases in the same client group, by and large, are perceived and handled uniformly.

Conversely, if fieldworkers using their occupational expertise were controlling the content of work ('the worker determines the work'), it might be expected that different types of fieldworker (qualified and unqualified, Level 1 and Level 3) working with the same client group would generate different 'profiles'. That this is not the case suggests that another mechanism controls the relationship between work and worker. Using the concept of occupational control, the formula 'work determines the worker' can be seen as merely the surface appearance of a deeper order.

Particular client groups are 'standardised' by the processing procedures and structures of the organisation. The idiosyncracies (intrinsic uncertainties) of individual clients are subdued or lost in the standardising process. The client group, as the organisation's 'raw material', is defined through statute, procedure, method of process and resources available. As interpreters of statute and designers of work, managers control the content of work. Their understanding penetrates the organisation and practice so that workers think and act in terms of the organisation's perceptions of the client groups. So although the definitions made of each client group vary, and so produce different profiles for each client group, different kinds of worker working within the same client group display similar 'profiles'.

Managers determine the meaning of each client group for the organisation and so determine the perceptions and responses of fieldworkers vis a vis each client group. One of Harris's (1979, p.71) respondents saw work with the elderly through the eyes of the organisation:

I think that both in this office, and certainly in the one I was in before, it seems welfare work, by that I mean it's the term I use for work with the elderly, tended to be assigned pretty exclusively to welfare assistants and their brief is not to do casework. It is to do more, you know, mechanical jobs, in the sense of transportation, etc., and I think if the department says that welfare work is a fitting use of welfare assistants' time, then it may be saying something.

The organisation is also felt to influence the worker's

behaviour at early stages of involvement too. Addison (1982) sees the organisation determining work at the intake stage in an SSD as it attempts to defend itself against a range of anxieties, including the quantity of work, the insistence of events and the sense of impossibility, unpredictability and hostility in the environment. As well as what she sees as rational in the light of these demands, departments 'have to ration their services and set priorities in a formal way' (pp.615-16). The effect on the organisation and its workers is for them to perceive and understand the environment and clients in a particular way in order to reduce anxiety, minimise uncertainty and manage the work.

If the organisation influences the practices of workers, a certain commonality in approaches taken and activities conducted is to be expected. That there are more similarities than differences between social workers in practice has been realised by a number of authors who, like me, explain this state of affairs in terms of the structural boundaries that curtail and determine the content of practice (Bailey 1980; Black et al. 1983; Hardiker 1981, p.102). However, rather than just see the organisation as some inert, determining given, the present interpretation understands the organisation to be the product of particular occupational groups and their techniques and interests. In the case of SSDs it is managers who have largely devised the 'structural boundaries' that channel and predefine major elements of practice.

4. THE DISTRIBUTION AND DIFFERENTIATION OF FIELDWORKERS AND CLIENT GROUPS

On the face of it, the amount of indeterminacy and uncertainty confronting occupations which practise in the sphere of moral behaviour, social problems and human conduct is high. The opportunity for deciding how things are to be understood and how practitioners ought to proceed is considerable. But though people might try to explain delinquency or violence, the existence of such categories of behaviour depends upon moral and social judgements being made about those types of behaviour. Such matters cannot be derived from scientific theories (Downie and Loudfoot 1978; Hesse 1978). Communities react to the behaviour of their members and thus are responsible for designating the conduct of some individuals as unacceptable, anti-social and not to be tolerated. The premise that underlies all social work practice is that clients are clients, not because of any innate condition, but because society defines them as such (Davies, M. 1981; Howe 1979; Warham 1977). Ultimately, social workers have no mandate to define their clientele. In controlling how we understand and respond to

departures from 'normal' and 'proper' moral and social behaviour, the 'ideological basis of indetermination' simply are not available to social workers for the purpose of occupational control (Johnson 1977, p.108). The state, as third party, mediates between practitioner and client. However, there are two areas in personal social service work over which occupational groups might establish some control:

- (i) the type of work and client group, with some areas being regarded as more critical or sensitive than others;
- (ii) the techniques and procedures available in order to cope with the work, particularly in areas where satisfactory or appropriate outcomes are not easily guaranteed.

Given these prospects, different client groups might be assessed in terms of the uncertainty which they are defined as displaying, their social importance and their susceptibility to particular types of occupational techniques and skills. Each client group offers a type of work which provides more or less opportunity for different occupational groups to increase their control over the content of practice. The distribution and differentiation of fieldworkers can now be explained with reference to the locus of control as it occurs between managers and fieldworkers, particularly as it affects the meaning given to each client group. The way client groups are defined and the meanings given to them by different occupational groups influences both the practices defined as appropriate and the type of worker allocated to that client group.

Again, the explanations offered in Chapter 3 are not entirely redundant. Rather, they are put in a broader context. Qualified social workers do 'ditch their dirty work'; the old and handicapped are delegated to lower ranked workers. But the reasons for such rejection lie less in the intrinsic unsuitability of the work for the expertise of qualified workers and more in the ability of managers to control exactly the meaning that such client groups have for the organisation and its resources. So it is that the work associated with the old and disabled becomes standardised and routine, with little need or opportunity for the use of discretion by workers. The association between certain types of worker and kinds of work can now be considered in terms of the balance of control over the meaning and content of practice as it occurs between managers and fieldworkers. The two major client groupings, the old and handicapped and children and their families, will be discussed in the light of this conceptual framework.

The old, physically and mentally handicapped

Legislation and policy affecting some client groups permits a relatively straightforward interpretation of the 'meaning' given to people and their problems, at least as it affects the agency, its organisation and services. Intrinsic uncertainties are 'defined out' by the limits of statutory interest and their organisational interpretation. If it is possible to deploy resources in a predictable, prescriptive and routine fashion in defined circumstances, control rests with those who design the service and not with those who carry it out. This is why formally programmed 'service' responses predominate in work with the old and handicapped.

'Professional' social work's technologies are inappropriate as far as the agency is concerned for much of the work with the old and handicapped because it only requires simple organisational responses in order to achieve the desired result. Therefore in terms of social workers gaining control over the content of practice, there is little potential in work with the old and handicapped. Management techniques are more suitable, sufficient and effective. There is no requirement to see or understand the work in more complex terms. Moreover, because the overriding condition of old people and the handicapped remains unalterable and therefore certain, there is no gain to be found in having other occupational groups define the work associated with these client groups. They remain old and handicapped. In which case there is no need to hand over control to other occupational groups working in these areas. Indeed all that is required of workers is that they follow procedures matching defined resources to defined need. So, as Larson (1977, p.222) says, 'In most occupations, routinised specialities tend to be the equivalent to the 'dirty work' which professions delegate to ancillary occupations'.

Children and their families

Whereas the legislation and its interpretation affecting old people and the handicapped permits a set of responses which can be adequately described by the provision of services and procedures, child care and family legislation requires a different interpretation. The 'raw material' of abusing parents and delinquent teenagers is perceived and understood to have greater intrinsic complexity and uncertainty. 'Doing something about' these behaviours is not so easily achieved. The two main and contrasting technologies available are those of control and cure, where control means either separating people (children from violent parents) or removing them (offenders from the community). Each offers the prospect of rendering the material stable and certain, but using a different set of

techniques.

Control-based strategies remove or separate those who mis-behave from those who suffer the consequences of their misbehaviour. In this way, the offending behaviour is said to be no longer possible. The new statutory situation offers 'certainty' in respect of the client suffering the behaviour as originally identified. For example, parents cannot assault their children or teenagers commit offences when they are no longer in the community. Although these situations bring immediate relief, the long term outcome is much less certain. Confidence in this line of action is not absolute. When children are encouraged to be reunited with their parents or delinquents returned to the community there is no guarantee that things will be better.

Cure techniques attempt to change the behaviour and attitudes of those 'malfunctioning' so that the offending behaviours and attitudes are eliminated. This holds the possibility of a more lasting resolution of the problem as defined by the law, the community and their agents. However the technology which backs this type of occupational practice is weak and as yet there is no guarantee that the outcome prescribed will be achieved. So, although cure poses the possibility of treating people so that their unacceptable behaviours are eliminated (which makes it a potentially attractive technology), its weaknesses mean that administrative and statutory control techniques, though not addressing the root causes, nevertheless have a short to medium term effect on reducing uncertainty, albeit in restricted terms.

Child care and family work has to be understood in such a way that neither 'professional' nor managerial technologies entirely get to grips with the main features of the work. Both have only a partial, temporary or some might say pyrrhic success in reducing uncertainty. The prospect of increasing occupational control over the content of practice in child care work is still open to social workers, managers having been able to devise responses which only offer to hold, monitor or police the client's behaviour with no permanent solution. Even so, this limited response reflects the statutory mandates that underlie much SSD work. So, when it comes to identifying areas which have some prospect of improving occupational power if the technology can be got right, work with children and their families holds out the most hope, or so it would appear, particularly for qualified workers attempting to develop and practise their professional skills.

It might therefore be expected that 'professional' techniques on the one hand and formal procedures and prescriptions as determined by managers on the other would be the two main

response patterns. This appears to be the case according to the results described in Chapter 5. The balance, nevertheless, is tipped towards the managerially designed responses reflecting the current advantage that administrative technologies have in personal social services work. But the manager's viewpoint is not so strong as to preclude alternative worker perceptions of child care practice. Occasionally this may lead to conflict or resistance on the part of the worker. So it is then that cracks in 'managerial hegemony' are most likely to appear in child care work leading to the assertion of cruder but weaker forms of power: the use of hierarchical authority and coercion.

The trend, though, even in child care work, appears to be towards managers increasing their control over practice. Although large pockets of child care work have offered the prospect of occupational freedom, the lack of clear or demonstrable success has led to further restrictions placed around the worker's self-control. For example, recommendations which follow in the wake of enquiries into the death of children through non-accidental injury often suggest the need for tighter staff supervision and more coordination between different types and levels of worker. Monitoring and disciplining the worker's behaviour in order that she obey set procedures falls to managers to organise.

Thorpe's (Thorpe 1977, Thorpe 1979, Thorpe et al. 1979, Thorpe et al. 1980) recommendations arising out of his Intermediate Treatment studies also see an increase in management control. His work is particularly interesting because it records the effect of social workers increasing their licence to practise preventative and therapeutic skills in relation to adolescents who have offended and, more significantly, adolescents (and younger children) thought to be 'at risk' of offending. His investigations into the practice of IT and its effects demonstrate quite clearly that the results of social worker interventions of this kind have led to an increase in the number of young people placed on care orders, an increase in the number of children entering the orbit of SSDs and a consequential increase in costs to SSDs. It appears that professional efforts at preventing children coming into care has actually led to more children experiencing courts and care orders. Thorpe's prescription is that managers should impose tight criteria on the practices of IT workers, that they should curb professional autonomy and restrict the number and type of children receiving the specialist attention of 'professionals' in order to reduce the damage and harm being done.

The ability of an occupational group to control the content of its own practice determines a range of phenomena. For social workers, these include the type of actions which take place in case practice and the organisation of fieldworkers and their work. The concept of control over the content of practice runs through and links each empirical level and its interpretation. The mechanism which helps explain the prevalence of standardised prescriptive 'service' responses in work with the elderly or the dissolution of professional discretion into administratively and statutorily determined procedure in work with children also explains the differential distribution of fieldworkers and client groups. Practice and organisation are understood as intimately linked phenomena.

Explanations of the behaviour of social workers in case practice tend to be approached solely in terms of 'professional' social work theories. If the social worker's practice is felt to be bureaucratically determined this is viewed as a matter of regret. Similarly, the prevailing organisation of social workers is judged in terms of the occupation's ability to establish its professional standing. The improved professional status of social workers is often taken as self-evidently desirable. Any limits placed on professional progress, that is increased worker control, is seen as bad. But the occupational limits and weaknesses are rarely taken as indicators of social work's actual nature and that its character can only be understood in a wider context which lies outside the control of social workers. In seeking to recognise common threads between the 'micro' and 'macro' levels of observation, not only is a close relationship argued between the details of practice and the organisation of fieldworkers but the nature of the activity itself is taken as embedded in its social context. As Salaman (1978, p.523) reminds his readers, 'organisations reflect and reveal societal resources and interests' and that 'the outside world is also inside', permeating the practices of the organisation and its workers.

10 The rise of the welfare manager

The scope for power and occupational control by social services managers and social workers has increased in the general expansion of the personal social services. Within this context social work is defined relative to the prevailing political fortunes and interests of the various occupations involved in the work. The discussion is developed through the following four stages:

1. The growth of the 'service classes'
2. The expansion of the personal social services
3. The weakness of social work's 'professional project'
4. The rise of the social services manager.

1. THE GROWTH OF THE 'SERVICE CLASSES'

The rise of professional, administrative and managerial employees, particularly in private and public bureaucracies, has represented something of a problem for social and class analysts. These occupational groups have been described as the 'service classes' by Renner (1953) and the Salaried Middle Class (SMC) by Gould (1980). Although such groups do not share the ownership of the means of production nor are they part of the elite of state power, their labour is nevertheless taken to be non-productive; 'they are not themselves a source of surplus value but, rather, a charge on the surplus value which is