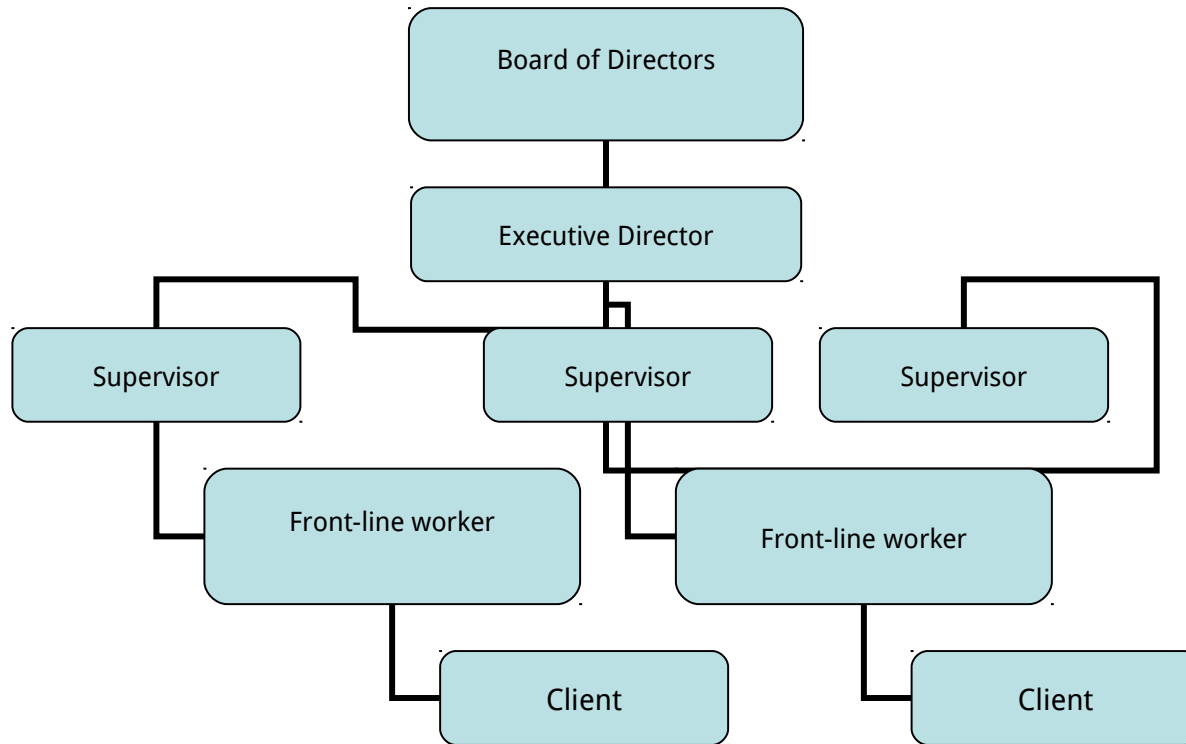# ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

Understanding Decision-making and Organization Life Cycles

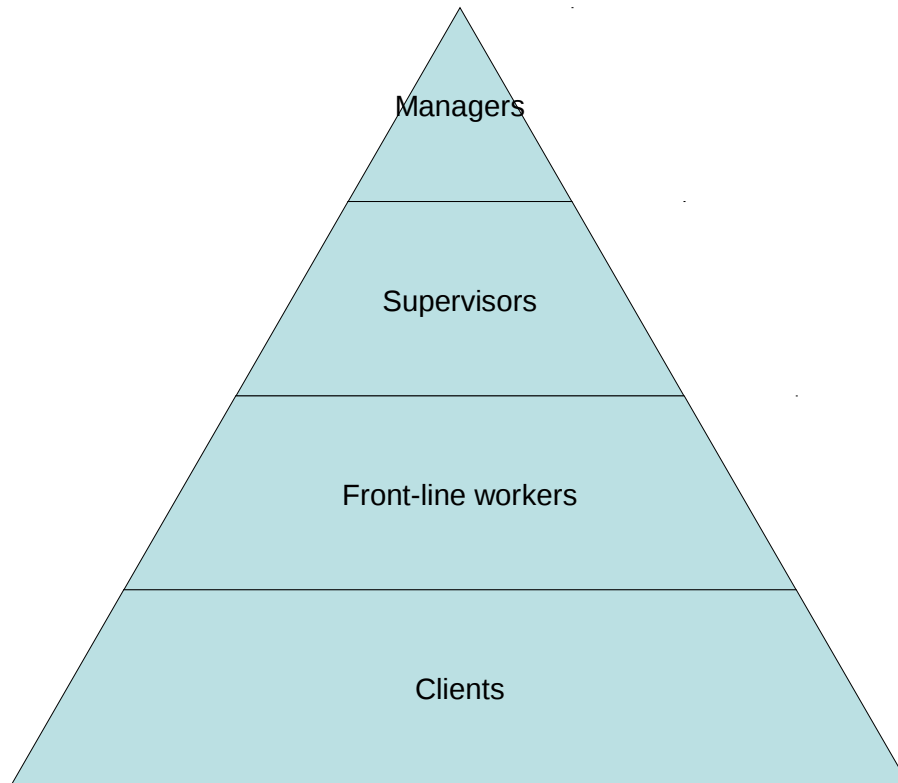# Social Service Organizations Exist to Provide Help: Help can be provided by:

- An individual's family, relatives, friends, and neighbors.
- An informal network of friends, relatives, and neighbors.
- An informal organization of people who band together to help one another or provide services to others. Informal organizations have small budgets and mostly volunteer staff. There may be a designated leader, but no formal decision-making structure. Boundaries between service providers and recipients may not be distinct.
- Formal, nonprofit organizations have boards of directors, a designated administrator (executive director), and nonprofit registration with the state and/or IRS. Organization participants have designate roles and responsibilities. There are distinct boundaries between service providers and recipients.
- Formal, for-profit organizations are operated to make money. The primary decision-maker is the owner(s) or the corporate board of director. Profits may be distributed to shareholders.

Organization Chart for a Non-Profit Organization

Board of Directors

Executive Director

Supervisor

Supervisor

Supervisor

Front-line worker

Front-line worker

Client

Client

Hierarchy implies that power is concentrated at the top among a few people.

Managers

Supervisors

Front-line workers

Clients

Board Members (theoretically)

- Make policy for the organization.
- Are legally and fiscally responsible for what the organization does.
- Hire and fire the executive director
- Assist with organizational fundraising.
- May be elected or selected.
- Are responsible for overseeing election or selection process for new board members.
- Review agency budgets and expenditures
- May be in program planning, strategic planning for the organization, and program evaluation.
- Do not deliver services themselves in most circumstances.

Other decision-making structures for non-staff members include

- Advisory boards

- Task groups

- Informal community networks

- Participation in community forums

- Respondents or researchers in community needs assessments and evaluation of services.

- Client input into service decisions made by social workers and other human services staff.

Empowerment practice requires:

- Clients and staff members should be involved in decision-making for the organization. Designated seats on boards may be held by clients.

- Clients and staff members should be involved in conducting needs assessments, program planning, and evaluation.

Benefits to the organization include:

- More effective services.
- Services that are more responsive to client needs.
- Clients are less likely to feel powerless.
- Staff members are more motivated to provide better services and may be able to "see" the results of their work.

Limitations:

- Staff may not want to give up power.
- Clients may not feel that they have the power resources with which to participate.
- Participation may be used to manipulate or co-opt opposition to a new plan or policy.
- Participation may be granted only as a "token," real decision-making power is not allocated to clients and/or staff.

Organization structures can vary from traditional to other types of organizations

Characteristics	Traditional Organizations	Alternative Organizations
Clients	Deliver socially acceptable programs to socially acceptable clients	Formed to advocate for or deliver services to groups who needs are not met
Funding	Funding comes from long-established and multiple sources	Do not have well-established funding sources
Leadership	Have designated administrators within a defined structure	May be inspired by a charismatic leader or social movement with ability to mobilize volunteers & staff
Service Delivery	Has established service structure and protocols	Must establish service delivery approaches with input from clients
Size	Medium to large	Small
Staff	Staff salaries are roughly equal to that of other agencies	Heavily dependent on volunteers and low paid staff
Values	Those of dominant culture	Values different from dominant culture

Types of Alternative Organizations Include

Clients	Disadvantaged Group	Women	Church members; low-income communities	Ethnic Group Members
Funding	Foundations, Individuals	Foundations, Individuals	Individuals Government Foundations	Individuals, Foundations, Government
Leadership	Charismatic or Structured; Mobilizes Members	Flattened hierarchy; attempt to include all participants in decision-making; Mobilizes Members	Hierarchy; Charismatic	Charismatic in some circumstances; may be variations in traditional hierarchy depending on cultural values
Service Delivery	Unstructured; few direct services	Develops new models	Often traditional; but some newer models may be used	Culturally specific approaches
Size	Large, medium, small	Medium, small	Large, medium, small	Large, medium, small
Staff	Volunteers; nonprofessionals	Volunteers, paid staff	Volunteers; paid (often non-professional) staff	Volunteers; staff
Values	Most often Nontraditional	Feminist	Consistent with church principles	Ethnic group norms

Organizations have life cycles

- Start out as an informal group of volunteers and friends

- Start to acquire funds

- Designate formal leaders and board members

- Acquire nonprofit status

- Hire staff and establish policies & procedures.

Consequently

- Relationships are less likely to be friendships.

- The organization becomes more bureaucratic.

- A handful of people are involved in decision-making.

Vignette

Keisha is an MSW student who is completing an internship with the Mission Street Anti-Poverty organization (MSAPO). One of her responsibilities involves providing staff support to the organization's young mothers' self-help group. Members of the group have informally started a baby-sitting exchange for group members. One of the members has reported that group could qualify for a grant to provide information and referral services for families needing child care. Although MSAPO has agreed to serve as a temporary fiscal agent for the group, the organization would need to start the process to become a tax-exempt organization. Current members of the group support the plan in principle. However, there is concern about the impact of creating a formal organization and the responsibilities it would place on members. Keisha has been asked to conduct research on the impact of incorporation.

- What should she tell members about the benefits and risks associated with changing the organization from an informal to formal organization?

- How would this conversion change relationships among members?

- What new responsibilities would new members need to assume?