SOCIAL WORK ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

Social work administrators and supervisors have an ethical responsibility to protect clients' rights and to foster an atmosphere in which workers will do the same. At the same time, they are accountable to the agency's sponsors for productivity and for operating within the authorized budget. With diminishing budgets and rising demands, this can be a difficult task. In addition to ethical obligations toward the agency, an administrator also has responsibilities toward his or her employees, as well as to the agency's clients. Many administrators think that the line between ethical and unethical behavior is crossed only when their activities result in personal gain. They feel that it is ethical to do whatever is necessary as long as their activities benefit clients or the agency. If a government contract provides money for staff training but not for staff supervision, they do not hesitate to redefine supervision as training. Recreation services are renamed respite services if government funding for recreation is dropped. In such cases, an illusion of compliance is achieved by playing semantic games. But do such practices present ethical problems?

Another ethical dilemma that some administrators face occurs when there is a conflict between their responsibility for organizational maintenance on the one hand and professional or communal responsibility on the other. Take the case of the director of a children's home that for decades has provided institutional care for infants aged three days to one year. From a professional point of view, there is no longer any justification for continuing this type service, but what about the director's responsibilities to the sponsors, to staff, and to others for ensuring that the agency continues to function. How would you respond to the ethical dilemma facing this social work administrator?

An ethical dilemma of a different nature is presented in Exemplar 10.11.

10.11 | THE GOOD OF THE AGENCY, THE COMMUNITY, OR THE STAFF?

EP 2.1.2

John Meenaghan is a social planner in a United Way community fund-raising and social planning agency. Over lunch, Melissa Bridgewater, a longtime friend and a member of the executive staff, told him that the executive director—who is not a social worker—and several favored members of his personal staff have been living lavishly on their expense accounts and padding their expenses. All the information she provided in the past has been completely accurate. The executive director is tyrannical and punitive but has been extremely creative and improved productivity many times over. The fund drive has reached new heights. Later, in his office, John spent almost an hour contemplating why Melissa shared this information with him. Why doesn't she go public herself? What should he do, if anything?

John Meenaghan understands that whistle blowing can do good as well as harm. If he goes public with the information about agency corruption, he could do much harm to the agency and undermine its fund-raising capacity for some time into the future. Alternately, if he goes public with the information (for which he has no direct