

BOX 1.2**A Clash in Orientation and Attitudes**

Rosemarie was new to her position as chief financial officer for a mental health clinic. She was highly experienced in financial operations, but her work in the past had been in for-profit organizations. When she assumed her new position, Rosemarie was told that one of the important components of her job was to ensure that billing for clinical services was handled appropriately. The clinic had been losing a lot of revenue because the prior finance person was not vigilant about collecting outstanding payables.

Rosemarie took this charge seriously. In her past jobs, she learned the importance of adhering to the specifics of her job description and to performing the tasks expected of her. She was efficient and ran a "tight ship." If collecting outstanding payments from clients was her charge, this is what she would do.

Rosemarie first set out to learn why clients were not paying their bills. She identified the receptionist, who collected fees, as part of the problem. June, the receptionist, had a big heart, and when clients indicated that they couldn't pay or forgot to bring a checkbook, June let it go. The other problem Rosemarie identified was that the social workers didn't deal with clients about financial issues. In informal discussions with a few of the staff social workers, Rosemarie learned that they were reluctant to bring up financial issues, particularly when a client had no insurance. The social workers knew that most of the clients served by the agency had marginal incomes and that pressing the issue of payment might either scare them away or create some tension in the client-worker relationship. They left it, by default, to the untrained receptionist.

Rosemarie asked June to notify her when a client with a "balance due" showed up for an appointment. Although reluctant, June saw no other option. It did not take long before a situation that June decided should be brought to Rosemarie's attention arose.

Eric had been seen by his social worker for over six months and had a balance due with the agency of over \$500.00. With the payment schedule in hand, Rosemarie went to the reception area and asked Eric if she could speak with him for a minute. Rosemarie did not introduce herself until they were in her office, and she shut the door. She knew nothing about Eric other than his name, the length of time he had been a client, and his outstanding balance. Rosemarie waved the payment schedule at him as she said, "We have a serious problem, Eric. Your social worker will not be able to continue to see you until you take care of this outstanding bill. We don't give away services here."

Eric became visibly flustered and began to explain that he and his social worker had an understanding about paying this balance. Rosemarie interrupted and said that the social worker had been remiss about following the clinic's rules; payment for services was to be made each time Eric was seen. Eric turned bright red, and instead of returning to the reception area to wait for his social worker, he left the clinic.

Rosemarie understood that part of her job was to make sure that payments for billable hours were received and that the backlog of outstanding accounts was cleared up as soon as possible. When Rosemarie was given this directive by the clinic director, she took her assignment seriously. She quickly got the im-

pression that the clinic staff, particularly the social workers, were not acting responsibly when they failed to discuss payments with their clients.

From Rosemarie's point of view, there was nothing wrong with her actions. However, she took action based on incomplete information. She acted as if the collection of fees was immutable law and of singular importance (Ezell, 2000). She knew nothing about Eric, his problems, or his financial situation. She did not first speak to the social worker to discuss how Eric might best be approached and by whom. She violated Eric's confidentiality, embarrassed him, and threatened his status as a client of the agency. The trust built up between Eric and his social worker was also jeopardized in this encounter. Due to her inability to understand the culture of the organization and adopt business practices to this culture, she may also have lost a client. And since reputation and the community's belief in the organization's friendliness are often human service programs' strongest marketing strategies, Rosemarie might have hurt the program from a business perspective.

In this instance, administrative goals took precedence over service goals. To the social worker, skill, knowledge, and service commitments are the primary principles in working with clients; for the organization, represented in this case by a fiscal administrator, organizational maintenance is the operating principle. The collection of fees was construed by Rosemarie as the most important goal; she viewed the aggressive pursuit of late payers as ensuring the organization's solvency. However, in this process she not only stepped on the toes of the social worker but may have caused emotional harm to the client.

Accommodations in Conflicting Orientations

The *Code of Ethics* (National Association of Social Workers, 1999) clearly states the professional's central point of reference: "Social workers' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of clients" (p. 4). Certain limitations to this core responsibility are noted in the *Code*, such as social workers' responsibility to the larger society or to specific legal obligations. Performance criteria, decision-making prerogatives, and the exercise of discretionary judgment are, for the social worker, based on the special knowledge and skills of the profession. From the organization's point of view, such prerogatives may conflict with rules, regulations, and operating procedures in which individuality is deliberately overshadowed by standardized role prescriptions. There may be sanctions exercised against the social worker who fails to conform to the agency's ways of doing business. The result may be a high level of frustration, culminating in burnout.

Although the literature has emphasized the conflicts between organizations and professional practice, the relationship is not always dysfunctional. Blau and Scott (1962) and Vinter (1974), for example, noted several points of congruence, including ideology and standards related to affective neutrality or impersonality, derivation of agency goals and professional service aims from the