

Competency-Based Corporate Social Work Education: An Industry-Education Integration Framework

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Abstract: Economic restructuring and digital transformation are reshaping employment relations and diversifying employee needs, increasing the relevance of corporate social work in China while exposing the limited ability of conventional university education to prepare students for workplace practice. This conceptual teaching-reform study therefore develops a competency-based framework for industry-education integration that combines outcome-based education and constructive alignment with experiential and project-based learning, field education, and authentic assessment so that enterprise and employee needs guide outcomes, curriculum, practice, supervision, and evaluation. The framework develops ethical judgment, evidence-based assessment, professional intervention, project operation, and organizational collaboration through a progression from organizational orientation to project-based practicum and workplace placement, supported by authentic projects, dual mentoring, and multi-source assessment. By distributing educational responsibility among universities, enterprises, social service organizations, and practitioners and embedding consent, data minimization, privacy protection, and accountable human judgment in digital practice, the framework offers applied universities an implementable route into corporate settings without compromising professional integrity.

Keywords: Industry-education integration; Corporate social work; Occupational social work; Social work education; Practice education; Professional competence

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1. Introduction

Corporate social work brings professional values, knowledge, and intervention methods into the workplace by assessing employee needs and responding through individual or group support, crisis and hardship assistance, resource coordination, workplace mediation, volunteer engagement, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Because these services acquire professional value only when they are embedded in organizational structures and relationships rather than offered as isolated welfare activities ^[1], corporate social work must remain both person-centered and organization-aware.

Although corporate social work overlaps with human resource management in employee welfare, career development, and workplace relations, it cannot be reduced to a tool for increasing productivity, and cooperation remains appropriate only when professional purposes and role boundaries are clear ^[2]. By locating employee experience within the interconnected settings of work, organization, family, and community, occupational social work combines individual support with organizational intervention and policy advocacy ^[3]; education must therefore strengthen organizational understanding without weakening its commitment to employee dignity, autonomy, confidentiality, and rights.

This emerging field allows social work programs to expand their service boundaries and improve graduates' occupational adaptability, yet it also demands competencies that lectures followed by a short, loosely supervised internship cannot reliably develop. Students must assess employee needs and negotiate access, convert evidence into feasible programs with managers and unions, and protect private information while documenting decisions and evaluating outcomes. These capabilities require repeated action in authentic settings, supervision, reflection, and improvement through feedback.

China's national policy on industry-education integration calls for education and talent development to respond collaboratively to industrial and innovation needs ^[4]. In this paper, industry-education integration is therefore understood as a principle for curriculum and governance rather than as a synonym for additional enterprise visits or internship places. Under this principle, the needs and standards of workplaces, together with authentic tasks, professional resources, and partner feedback, shape the entire educational process from the formulation of learning outcomes and organization of curriculum content to the design of practice and evaluation of competence.

Current social work programs still devote most field resources to established areas such as community services, child and elder care, social assistance, and correctional practice, whereas corporate social work courses often depend on conceptual lectures or brief, disconnected activities. Students may therefore never carry a service from needs assessment through intervention design and implementation to evaluation and reflective improvement. This gap raises three questions: which competencies corporate social work requires, how authentic enterprise tasks can develop them without compromising professional integrity, and what evidence can demonstrate their development. The paper responds by constructing a coherent competency-based framework for curriculum, practice, governance, supervision, and assessment.

2. Rationale for reform and diagnosis of current problems

2.1. Changing work and the reconstruction of competence

Employee needs now extend beyond wages and statutory benefits because workplace conditions interact continually with career development, occupational identity, psychological well-being, social inclusion, family life, and overall quality of life. Corporate social workers consequently need social work values and methods combined with organizational and labor-relations knowledge, project capability, and responsible digital literacy. Education should therefore prepare social workers who can interpret organizations, communicate across departments, and intervene while regarding employees as rights-bearing service users, rather than producing part-time human resource specialists.

Although enterprise efficiency and employee well-being can be mutually supportive, they are not identical, and a stress-management project becomes ethically problematic when participation data are used

for performance monitoring or counseling individualizes unsafe workloads. Students must therefore learn to recognize such tensions, explain professional limits, and propose multilevel responses ^[2].

Digitalization adds complexity because data-based assessment, AI-assisted work, project platforms, and remote support may improve timeliness while intensifying surveillance or exposing sensitive information. Students must therefore learn to justify data collection, secure consent, limit identifiers, detect bias, and preserve human accountability. Although national policy promotes educational digitalization ^[5], professional programs must translate that ambition into ethical standards suited to field practice.

2.2. Practice education as the mechanism of professional formation

Social work competence develops when students respond to real people within institutions marked by constraints, competing interests, and uncertainty; national policy accordingly requires practice to be incorporated systematically into talent development plans ^[6]. Undergraduate standards likewise require alignment among objectives, curriculum, practice conditions, and quality assurance ^[7]. Such alignment is especially important in enterprises, where authority and culture shape decisions alongside confidentiality and employment relations.

Practice must develop progressively because observation alone is insufficient, whereas immediate responsibility for complex cases is unsafe. Students should move from low-risk orientation to supervised projects and integrated workplace tasks, interpreting experience through feedback and reflection at each stage. Even a simple workshop becomes professional social work only when assessed needs guide its design, participation is voluntary, boundaries are appropriate, its change logic is defensible, and outcomes are evidenced.

2.3. Five persistent weaknesses in existing provision

The first weakness is a mismatch between broad program objectives and workplace tasks because expected knowledge, capability, values, and responsibility are not consistently translated into observable performance. Consequently, essential work such as employee interviewing and managerial communication receives uneven attention, as do risk identification, budgeting, referral, and evaluation.

The second weakness is disciplinary fragmentation, as programs separate social work methods from the organizational, legal, psychological, research, and corporate-responsibility knowledge required in enterprises. Students may remember individual courses yet remain unable to address a problem that simultaneously involves legal obligations, psychosocial needs, family circumstances, and organizational conditions. Since national reform policy calls for alignment between industrial needs and education ^[8], the curriculum should be organized around integrated tasks rather than separate course ownership.

The third weakness is reliance on simulation and isolated activities because enterprise restrictions involving confidentiality, privacy, safety, and time often lead courses to substitute role play or written cases for sustained practice. Although useful for rehearsal, such activities rarely require students to manage uncertainty while negotiating boundaries, using feedback, and documenting consequences across a complete process. This limitation conflicts with field education research emphasizing structured tasks, supervision, and reflection ^[9].

The fourth weakness is shallow collaboration, in which universities control curriculum while enterprises merely provide venues or use students as temporary staff. Poorly matched needs, limited personnel, and

weak institutional support can confine cooperation to short-term activities^[1], leaving access, supervision, and evaluation without joint design.

The fifth weakness is the separation of assessment from performance because examinations cannot reveal whether students can communicate with employees, explain confidentiality, negotiate boundaries, and revise action through feedback, while polished products may conceal weak judgment or unequal teamwork. Assessment must instead document what students do, why they act, how they use evidence, and whether supervision improves performance, thereby connecting outcomes and curriculum with authentic practice, stakeholder responsibility, and ethical safeguards.

3. Theoretical foundations and overall reform logic

3.1. Industry-education integration as curricular and governance alignment

Deep industry-education integration goes beyond internships, guest lectures, and cooperative agreements by aligning curriculum and governance. Universities and partners first identify recurring tasks and required competencies, after which authentic organizational problems shape cases, projects, and course sequences. Enterprises and service organizations provide appropriate settings, mentors, permitted data, and feedback, while evaluating only the performance they are qualified to observe. This alignment allows education to respond to workplace change while universities retain responsibility for professional autonomy, employee interests, ethical standards, and learning progression.

3.2. Outcome-based education and constructive alignment

Outcome-based education starts with the performance learners should demonstrate and works backward to curriculum, instruction, and assessment^[10], whereas constructive alignment ensures that learning and assessment directly elicit that performance^[11]. Together, they provide a foundation for competence-based social work education. Because global standards connect human rights and social justice with research-informed practice and theory-practice integration^[12], educational expectations should be expressed as observable professional behavior assessed in context.

Corporate social work education must replace vague endpoints such as “understand employee assistance” with demonstrable outcomes. Students should design confidential assessments, distinguish individual distress from organizational risk, formulate feasible services, communicate with stakeholders, and use evidence ethically. Learning activities must elicit these outcomes directly: ethical judgment requires documented deliberation under supervision, whereas collaboration requires professional communication with partners. Rubrics should then describe observable levels of the same performance.

3.3. Experiential learning, field education, and reflective supervision

Kolb’s (1984) model presents learning as a cycle in which experience is interpreted through reflection and conceptualization before guiding further action^[13]. A poorly bounded placement may therefore reproduce routine practice, whereas experience becomes educational when students connect it with theory, receive feedback, and act differently.

Field education is social work’s signature pedagogy because it integrates professional knowledge and skills with values and identity in practice-near settings^[9]. Its value nevertheless depends on clearly defined competence, observed performance, constructive feedback, and reflection. Supervision should therefore

help students explain their observations and interpretations, compare alternative responses, consider affected interests, and decide what evidence would justify revision.

3.4. Project-based learning and authentic assessment

Project-based learning organizes sustained inquiry around a meaningful problem and produces a professional service or product. With adequate support, it strengthens collaboration, self-direction, integration, and transfer ^[14], creating a middle ground between simulation and full placement responsibility. A team might conduct a bounded needs study, design an induction group, or develop a volunteer program while teachers and mentors help students use evidence and practical constraints to revise decisions.

Authentic assessment evaluates professional tasks performed in realistic contexts according to practice-relevant criteria ^[8]. Needs reports and stakeholder briefings, supported by records of intervention, ethical reasoning, and evaluation, therefore provide richer evidence than a single examination. Authenticity preserves the complexity and accountability of practice while matching responsibility and risk to the learner's developmental stage.

4. Core components of the talent development framework

4.1. Competency-oriented learning outcomes

The framework specifies five interrelated competence domains that are analytically distinct for curriculum design and assessment but normally combined in professional performance.

The first domain, professional values and ethical judgment, requires students to build respectful relationships and justify decisions when employee interests conflict with organizational objectives or professional duties. They demonstrate this competence by securing consent, explaining confidentiality, managing dual roles without coercion, addressing safeguarding concerns, and refusing to turn services into surveillance.

The second domain, needs assessment and analysis, requires students to formulate suitable questions and use methods that collect only the information needed to understand individual experience within its organizational context. They must recognize risks and resources, interpret evidence critically, communicate without stigma, and remain sensitive to how power shapes employee responses.

The third domain, professional intervention, requires students to combine casework or group work with crisis response, resource linkage, referral, or advocacy according to assessed need. They must formulate goals with service users, document intervention, monitor risk, and connect individual support with organizational or community action when the problem extends beyond the individual.

The fourth domain, project planning and operation, requires students to translate professional intentions into feasible services by constructing a change logic, defining expected results, and planning implementation through appropriate resources, budgets, responsibilities, risk controls, and schedules. They must also document the process and use evaluation to improve results.

The fifth domain, organizational communication and collaboration, requires students to interpret enterprise structures, labor relations, culture, and stakeholder interests before using evidence to negotiate access, protect boundaries, coordinate resources, and facilitate cross-departmental communication. They must also explain confidentiality limits and offer alternatives that satisfy legitimate information needs without exposing employees.

4.2. Alignment with enterprise service needs and professional work processes

Programs need a repeatable mechanism for translating workplace change into education. By combining annual surveys and task analysis with consultation involving practitioners, graduates, project partners, and employees, they can identify recurring and emerging work related to employee adaptation, psychosocial risk, work-family support, hardship assistance, labor communication, volunteering, and social responsibility.

Task analysis converts a workplace request into learning outcomes by clarifying its cause and stakeholders, the evidence and decisions required, the expected products and standards, and the ethical risks. Thus, a “stress-relief activity” can become a professional task that examines workload and role ambiguity, protects voluntary participation, defines referral boundaries, and evaluates change.

Curriculum tasks should follow a service process in which students discover and assess needs, design and implement an intervention, connect resources, evaluate results, and reflect on improvement. Although new information may require reassessment, making this process visible connects actions that separate courses often teach in isolation. Each brief should explain the context and constraints, available data and required products, and governing ethical and performance criteria.

4.3. A progressive practice sequence

The framework organizes practice into three cumulative stages—organizational orientation, project-based practicum, and workplace placement—rather than treating them as independent experiences.

Organizational orientation combines enterprise visits, practitioner seminars, guided observation, case analysis, simulation, and policy interpretation so that students learn how structures and departmental relationships shape labor relations, access, and ethical risk. An observation report, stakeholder map, or ethical case analysis can provide suitable evidence at this stage.

During the project-based practicum, student teams respond to real needs or de-identified tasks through a bounded needs study, support-group pilot, or resource map. Defined briefs and milestones, supported by evidence, supervision records, and reflection, make the work authentic enough to require judgment while limiting its scope sufficiently to protect employees.

Workplace placement locates students in enterprise unions, human resource service providers, corporate responsibility units, or social work organizations delivering enterprise services, allowing participation in a relatively complete process within explicit limits. Students demonstrate readiness for supported practice by documenting what they did and why, explaining how they managed risk and used supervision, and showing how feedback changed their action; placement does not certify unsupervised independence.

4.4. Multi-stakeholder collaborative governance

Four groups share complementary responsibilities. Universities establish academic standards, teach theory and methods, protect ethics, sequence learning, and supervise practice, while enterprises provide authentic settings and needs, explain organizational conditions, and offer access and mentorship. Social work organizations sustain service platforms and contribute project-management and practice-supervision expertise when enterprises lack internal positions. Experienced practitioners from social work, unions, labor relations, and employee services add contextual teaching and assessment within their expertise.

Collaboration requires formal governance, with partners jointly identifying needs and projects, defining mentor roles, supervising implementation, reviewing outcomes, and evaluating performance. Agreements should govern data and consent, confidentiality and safety, intellectual property and publication, resource

commitments, complaints, and withdrawal. Regular reviews can then screen suitability, manage risk, and improve the next curriculum cycle.

4.5. A work-process-oriented curriculum

The curriculum is organized into five content domains linked by authentic projects, whose primary content and competency emphases are summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Work-process-oriented curriculum for corporate social work

Curriculum domain	Main content	Primary competency emphasis
Social work foundations and methods	Social work theory and ethics, research-informed practice, and the core methods of casework, group work, and community work	Ethical judgment grounded in professional values and expressed through appropriate intervention methods
Enterprise organizations and labor relations	Corporate social work viewed through organizational behavior, human resource management, labor relations and law, and occupational health	Organizational understanding that supports labor-relations analysis and effective communication
Employee services and support	Assessment and support across employee assistance, occupational adaptation, stress and crisis, work-family needs, and financial difficulty	Professional assessment that informs analysis of employee needs, direct service, and referral
Project planning and operation	Program design and evaluation supported by theory of change, resource integration, budgeting, project management, and corporate social responsibility	Operational management that connects planning with resource coordination and evaluation
Digital technology and responsible innovation	Responsible use of digital surveys, data analysis, employee-needs profiles, project platforms, and AI-assisted service design under privacy and data-governance safeguards	Data literacy that supports responsible tool use and digital service innovation

The five domains should not become new silos. Social work foundations provide the values and methods for understanding employee needs, enterprise and labor-relations content explains the setting, project operation converts interventions into accountable action, and digital learning supports inquiry and evaluation. An employee-adaptation project can thus connect research methods, corporate social work, group work, and project management when each course contributes a defined task and assesses its own outcomes.

Digital technology should be embedded across the curriculum so that students learn to collect de-identified information, analyze patterns, monitor project milestones, and use generative AI only for non-sensitive drafts. They must also justify whether data are necessary and who may access them, examine potential bias, and reserve consequential decisions for accountable human judgment. These duties reflect Chinese law, which requires a clear and reasonable purpose and restricts personal-information processing to the minimum necessary scope^[15], and should inform project briefs, rubrics, and supervision.

5. Implementation pathways

5.1. Building an authentic and tiered project bank

Authentic projects are the principal means by which industry-education integration becomes teachable. Universities can invite enterprises, unions, human resource service providers, and social work organizations to submit recurring problems in employee services or organizational welfare, after which faculty convert them into educational projects without removing the uncertainty and accountability that make them

authentic. The resulting topics may address the adaptation of new recruits or the needs of young workers, help employees navigate work-family resources or financial hardship, strengthen volunteer participation and psychosocial risk education, or develop corporate social responsibility initiatives.

A project should enter the bank only when it addresses a recognizable need, matches course outcomes and student readiness, supports a sufficiently complete process, and carries manageable risk. Its record should define the partner and learners, competence targets and duration, data classification, expected products, and evaluation requirements. Partners propose problems, faculty create learning briefs, students respond, and mentors review performance, while annual review removes outdated tasks and balances competence coverage.

5.2. Using project-based learning to integrate courses

Project-based learning should replace selected chapter-centered teaching when authentic inquiry adds value without displacing foundational instruction. Students begin with a problem that no single concept can solve, define it through evidence, compare possible responses, act proportionately, review the results, and transfer learning through reflection. Teachers can scaffold this process with professional tools for interviewing and consent, stakeholder and program analysis, budgeting, risk and documentation management, and evaluation.

In an employee-needs assessment, students first interpret the enterprise context and stakeholder concerns, then formulate questions and select methods that satisfy consent and privacy requirements. After piloting an instrument, they collect permitted data, analyze patterns, validate interpretations, and present recommendations. Research methods guide design and analysis, social work ethics govern consent and confidentiality, organizational behavior supports contextual interpretation, corporate social work develops role negotiation, and project management structures scheduling and communication.

5.3. Dual mentoring and whole-process supervision

Each substantial project should normally have a university supervisor and an enterprise or industry mentor with complementary responsibilities. The university supervisor protects social work values and integrates theory, intervention, ethics, learning progression, and reflection, whereas the industry mentor explains organizational conditions and stakeholder expectations while advising on feasibility and communication. Together, they approve the project, review milestones, manage risk, and evaluate performance.

Supervision extends across the project. Start-up sessions establish purpose and responsibility, confirm access and evidence requirements, and clarify consent and confidentiality, while process supervision supports intervention, teamwork, documentation, and communication. Thematic sessions address crisis response, labor rights, coercion, discrimination, or data use, and completion supervision examines outcomes, unintended effects, and learning transfer. Throughout, students reconsider interpretations, identify affected interests, explain the evidence behind action, and determine what should change.

5.4. Joint practice bases and institutional safeguards

A practice base should extend beyond internship provision by supporting curriculum and project development, faculty practice research, continuing professional education, and graduate employment. Partnership agreements must therefore define project sourcing and mentor qualifications, supervision and access procedures, and rules for student safety, data, intellectual property, publication, financial support,

incident reporting, and continuous improvement.

University policy should recognize faculty time for project development and supervision, while preparing mentors to teach and assess students according to social work ethics and feedback standards. Before placement, students likewise need professional preparation, safety arrangements, confidential reporting, and the right to withdraw from unsafe or unethical tasks.

Programs should establish an interdisciplinary steering group in which academic staff, enterprise representatives, and practitioners review project access, ethical risk, partnership quality, and aggregated assessment findings; employee or union voices should participate where feasible. The group must separate educational from personnel evaluation, prohibit disciplinary use of student-generated data, and ensure that employees understand whether they are joining a service, learning project, or research.

6. A multi-source, process-oriented, and evidence-based assessment system

6.1. Multiple assessors with differentiated responsibilities

Because no source observes every aspect of competence, assessment combines academic and mentor evaluation with service-user feedback, self-assessment, and peer assessment. Academic supervisors judge professional reasoning and theory-method integration, mentors focus on reliability and workplace feasibility, service users report whether participation was respectful and relevant, and students reveal responsibility within teamwork. Each source should judge only what it can validly observe, while behavioral rubrics calibrated with sample work improve consistency without averaging unlike judgments mechanically.

6.2. Assessment of competence across the process

Assessment examines both performance and its development by collecting evidence from preparation and design through implementation, completion, and reflection. A balanced design can combine conceptual tests and observed meetings with project products, supervisor ratings, and reflective analysis, weighting each source by course outcomes. Products may include needs and consent reports, intervention and budget proposals, service records, ethical memoranda, evaluations, and oral defenses. Quality must be judged alongside process because polished presentation cannot offset weak evidence or privacy violations, whereas sound management of difficulty may demonstrate mature judgment.

6.3. Portfolios and value-added evidence

Each student should maintain a portfolio combining professional products with protected feedback, rubric results, and reflection, creating a longitudinal record for course assessment, placement review, career preparation, and program evaluation when employee information is removed or controlled. Value-added assessment can compare performance across orientation, practicum, and placement, while aggregated findings expose recurring difficulties, competence gaps, inconsistent standards, and sequencing weaknesses. Program evaluation should interpret competence and portfolio quality alongside placement performance, partner feedback, project continuity, and mentor or faculty participation, while reporting its evidence and limitations.

7. Innovation, enabling conditions, and limitations

7.1. Principal innovations

The first innovation uses authentic projects to connect outcomes with curriculum, practice, and assessment. Because each project requires method application, ethical deliberation, stakeholder coordination, professional products, and responses to feedback, it reduces separation between classroom learning, practicum experience, and workplace performance.

The second innovation is shared governance, through which enterprises, service organizations, and mentors help design and review learning while clear boundaries protect academic responsibility and employee interests. Collaboration thus becomes a formal arrangement for sharing resources, managing risk, and supporting student development.

The third innovation is ethically bounded digital competence, which treats digital inquiry, data analysis, project platforms, and AI-assisted drafting as ordinary practice but judges their use by legitimate purpose, data minimization, informed consent, human oversight, and professional accountability. This approach avoids both uncritical enthusiasm and blanket rejection.

7.2. Enabling conditions

Sustainable implementation depends on a program-level steering group that converts needs into approved projects, coordinates ethics and resources, and uses feedback for improvement. Faculty development must expose university teachers to enterprise settings and prepare practice mentors for supervision and assessment. Institutions also need rules for project entry, consent and privacy, student safety, risk reporting, disputes, and publication, together with workload recognition and funding for project design, mentorship, travel, data protection, and service delivery. These conditions transform isolated innovations into a maintainable program-level system.

Ethical requirements must be translated into practice before data collection begins by defining a legitimate purpose, limiting the information collected, controlling access and retention, removing identifiers, and preventing re-identification. Although generative AI may support non-sensitive brainstorming or editing, identifiable employee information must not enter uncontrolled systems, all outputs require verification, and no tool should make unsupervised judgments about an employee's risk or entitlement.

7.3. Limitations and empirical research

This paper proposes a theoretically informed reform design rather than claiming measured outcomes, because effectiveness depends on institutional capacity, enterprise access, mentor quality, student readiness, and suitable projects. Enterprises also vary in ownership and scale, industrial context, workforce composition, and labor relations, so a task appropriate for a large manufacturer may be irrelevant or unsafe in a small platform company. The framework therefore requires contextual adaptation rather than mechanical replication.

Future research should test the framework across universities and enterprise types. Quasi-experimental studies could compare competence growth under conventional and project-integrated curricula while accounting for prior experience, and action research could examine how dual mentors negotiate ethical and operational tensions. Longitudinal evidence from portfolios and placements could be linked with graduate employment and stakeholder feedback. Qualitative studies should include employees because they experience the effects of workplace services and data practices directly.

Further investigation should determine how authority is distributed when enterprise efficiency conflicts with professional ethics, how cross-course projects can earn credit without duplicating assessment or overloading students, and how faculty workload systems can sustain partnership coordination. Research must also establish how programs can maintain reliable assessment across mentors and organizations and what standards should govern digital platforms and AI in employee services. Answers to these questions will determine whether reform remains confined to exemplary projects or develops into a stable educational system.

8. Conclusion

The central challenge of corporate social work education is not a shortage of enterprise visits or internship hours but the need to redesign how learning outcomes guide curriculum and practice within partnerships supported by supervision and credible assessment. Industry-education integration becomes educationally meaningful when enterprise and employee needs shape program design, authentic tasks organize students' learning, responsibility increases progressively, partners perform clearly defined roles, and professional evidence demonstrates competence.

The framework connects five competence domains with progressive practice and a work-process-oriented curriculum, supported by authentic project banks, dual mentoring, institutional safeguards, and evidence from multiple sources. It seeks graduates who can support employees and manage projects, interpret organizations and use digital tools responsibly, and defend ethical boundaries under organizational pressure. Most importantly, employee well-being and professional integrity are treated as elements of competence rather than constraints on enterprise collaboration.

For applied universities, the framework offers a practical route for extending social work education into corporate settings while preserving the discipline's distinctive values. Its next stage must nevertheless be empirical, requiring programs to document implementation, measure student development, examine stakeholder experience, and adapt the design across different organizational contexts. Only through such evidence-based iteration can industry-education integration move from a policy aspiration to a credible and transferable approach to corporate social work education.

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