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How the front line 'works' at the WSIB

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Research Action Alliance on the Consequences of Work Injury Symposium
Toronto, Ontario
May 22, 2009

Based on the research project: "The logic of practice: An ethnographic study of frontline service work at Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board"

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Funded by the Research Advisory Council of the WSIB, 2005-2007
RAACWI funding provided by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada
under their Community-University Research Alliance funding envelope (Grant 833-2005-1012)

Focus and Rationale

Study of FL work at the WSIB, specifically the work of ADJ, NCM and CSR working with small businesses

- site of tension
- providers' perspective not known
- part of on-going research program on OHS in small workplaces



Research Objectives

- Scientific not administrative
- Understanding and explaining the *nature* of work at the front-lines of the WSIB
- To account for how FL work is structured by the work environment in which it takes place



Methods

General Strategy:

- get 'in the shoes' of FL staff
- identify how FL ideas and practices are linked to the institutional context

Data:

- individual interviews
- 'go-along' observations
- documents



How FL staff do their work and interact with clients is framed by the disciplinary role and conflicting accountabilities of the WSIB

- disciplinary role
- institutional imperatives
 - solvency
 - impartiality
 - productivity
- silently embedded in operations
- plays out at front-lines; mediating role
- creates conflicting tasks for FL



FL work is a professional assembly line

- 'keeping things moving'
- human service work hard to routinize
- 'soft skills'



Strategic discursive and discretionary practices are 'tools of the trade'

Discursive framings

- portrayal of employers and workers
 - differing legitimacy of economic self-interest
- injured worker role



ADJ Nancy 305

“The doctors didn’t think he [injured workers] could walk, much less run. This man, in 6 months, he was not only walking he was running! Took himself back to work before the doctors were even ready to tell him he could go back to work. And it was astonishing his recovery. He did that because he wanted to. There was no way that he was not going to recover. You gotta admire them, you almost want to make them your poster person. See what the human spirit can do right?.. Then on the other hand you have people who have entitlement issues, they think that they are entitled to everything and more that there’s no way that we can satisfy or compensate for that injury.”



- the 'employer pays' discourse



Front-line work involves strategic discursive and discretionary practices

- Discursive framings
- **Discretionary practices**



ADJ Michael, 276

Like, I originally in good faith, I approved the retraining programme to start some time mid-August.. he [IW] said, "No, I cannot go, I'm not going to that, I have my kid, no-one's going to look after my kid, I can't afford day care". So just to kinda, I probably shouldn't have done this, but just to kind of accommodate him, you know, it was like okay, I can push your start date back two weeks, you know, so you can arrange [child care]... Even though, like, I'm not really supposed to be looking at that kind of stuff, because I'm trying to show him ...in good faith and then he's like, "Okay, you know, I'll go" and then as soon as the programme started he said, "No, I'm not going, I can't afford the bus". So I got a barrier every single...nothing I can do to work with this guy. I've given him pretty much everything I can offer him, nothing more I can do.

(Interviewer): So what do you do with a case like that?

I'm looking at it basically as a non-cooperation type issue. So basically what I'll do is I'll just basically stop the--cancel the training programme and stop the benefits then. He doesn't, clearly, want to participate, so...



Downsides of discretion

Simultaneously abide by and bend rules



FL work with small business is affected by the marginal status of small business within the operating framework of the WSIB

- WSIB designed for large workplaces
- rules may not apply or 'work'
- accentuates discretionary responses



Implications

- FL practices are framed by context and organizational structures, and are socially complex
- differing operating logics
 - justice vs. eligibility
- the problem of (im)partiality
 - leveling the playing field

