

Negotiating Ambivalence: The Emotional Regime of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency alt.

Post-Bureaucratic Management Ideals and Affective Governance in the Swedish Social Insurance Agency

Presentation at the international symposium "State, Work, and Affects",
January 28-29, 2016, Vienna University.

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Aim

- To explore the emotional consequences of the recent management reform by investigating 1) the change in affective governance within the SSIA, and 2) and the agency's current emotional regime as experienced and handled by caseworkers.

Research problem: What happens to the emotional regime when post-bureaucratic management ideals are implemented in a highly centralized authority?

Theoretical framework combines insights from

- literature on organizational governance and governmentality in organizations (e.g. Dean, Miller & Rose, Willmott & Knights; cf. Foucault) – stresses subjection & subjectification)
- theoretical perspectives on organizations as emotional arenas and emotional regimes in organizations (e.g. Fineman, Reddy, Sieben & Wettergren, Baumeler, Bolton, Larsson, Wettergren) – stresses ambivalence and scope for ‘navigation of feeling’
- Key concepts:
 - Affective governance
 - Emotional regimes

A shift in affective governance

- move away from a 'command and control'-model of governance to management by values, coaching leadership, 'co-worker-ship', team-work, LEAN production principles (e.g. flow and system thinking), customer orientation (three 'customer promises': 'more human', 'safer', 'simpler'), more autonomy to caseworkers, less strict management by objectives yet clearly articulated political goals;
- Charismatic leadership in the initiation of reform (former GD), normative control through leadership vision
- Leadership through invocation of affects (release co-worker potential, have fun at work, be proud of work)
- Attempts to form a group-mind ('Our joint journey')
- Attempts to play down hierarchy (at discursive level)

Customer promises ('more human, safer, simpler')

- 'You feel always that we meet you with respect and understanding',
- 'You feel always that we make your everyday life safer'
- 'You feel always that we make it easy for you'.

The emotional regime (acc. to caseworkers)

Feeling rules:

- Feel empathy but not sympathy
- Be engaged, to make difficult decisions must never become routine
- Be patient, wait for the right moment
- Keep calm

Display rules:

- Display empathy and understanding for clients' difficult life situation (but without becoming a therapist)
- Display seeing and dealing with a person, not treating/processing a case
- Display confirmation of the client's feelings
- Display calmness

Behavioural norms and scripts:

- Good and polite treatment
- First listen, then explain the rules/regulations
- 'Feel in' where the client is emotionally and adapt the meeting accordingly
- Confirm the clients' feelings
- Inject hope
- Prevent emotional outburst by preparing clients for what may come (incl. negative decisions)
- Choose the wordings carefully (use less bureaucratic language in client contacts, avoid controversial and emotionally loaded expressions)
- Maintain professional distance, do not become a therapist

Balance acts

- Empathy vs. procedural correctness
- becoming cynicism vs. becoming too affected
- 'to be a container and not yet take it over'
- Confirm and withdraw

Conclusion

- A hybrid form of governance (combination of post-bureaucratic *and* bureaucratic management style)
- Resulting contradictions in the emotional regime
- Employees not just subjugated to the organizational-normative regime
- More acting space for caseworkers also means more leeway in relation to the normative and emotional regime + space for emotional 'navigation'
- Strategies for distancing themselves from the organizational norms and the 'official' emotional regime to be explored further in ethnographic research (use of humour, formation of buffer cultures, resistance etc)