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# Value Discretion in a People-Changing Environment: Taking the Long View

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*This article explores the normative value judgements (called value discretion) made by Ontario Works income assistance case managers in their people-changing roles. The focus of case management under welfare reform has moved from determining eligibility for income assistance—people processing, to moving recipients from assistance to employment—people changing. The article outlines case managers' pursuit of "the long view" in working with recipients over time, moving from assessment to crisis work to meeting workfare requirements. In taking the long view, case managers expose a basic contradiction in welfare reform that people changing does not result in the shortest route to a job.*

*Key words: bureaucratic discretion, value discretion, workfare, case management*

There has been consistent interest in the policy implementation side of social welfare provision from the early work of Lipsky (1977/2010) and Prottas (1979), who examined the use of bureaucratic discretion by front line workers, to more recent efforts focusing on changes to the nature of discretion under welfare reform and new public management (see for example: Dubois, 2014; Evans & Harris, 2004; Lens, 2008; Sawyer & Green, 2013; Taylor, 2014; Taylor & Kelly, 2006). This article reports on a study of the use of discretion by front line workers who administer a provincial income assistance program in Ontario, Canada called Ontario Works. Their use of value discretion exposes the contradictions between a mandate to transform the long-term unemployed into employment-ready workers and the mandate of finding the shortest route to a job.

Neo-liberal welfare reform in Canada began in the 1990s with cuts in transfer payments by the federal government  
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for cost-shared, provincially-administered income assistance programs. In addition to cuts in transfer payments, legislative mandates were reconfigured into block funding with the removal of standards which restricted provincial activities such as workfare. The provincial response to both cuts in funding and devolution of policy responsibility included restructured social assistance systems (Baker Collins, 1998). In Ontario, under a Progressive Conservative government, social assistance benefits were cut by 21.6% in 1995, followed by a complete restructuring of social assistance, including the introduction of workfare. Under a Liberal government (elected in 2003), there have been marginal policy changes to social assistance, including small cost-of-living increases, and changes to earnings reductions and asset levels. The primary infrastructure of the workfare program, however, including the continual proving of eligibility and work required in exchange for benefits, remains largely intact.

## Literature Review

### *From People Processing to People Changing*

Income assistance program structures for households who are poor under neo-liberal regimes are means-tested, intrusive and punitive. Under welfare reform and the imposition of workfare, the implementation of welfare policy has become centred on the case manager/client relationship. It is the principle setting in which the state materializes in the lives of the long-term unemployed (Dubois 2010, 2014; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; McDonald & Marston, 2005), and in which social citizenship and subjectivity are given meaning (Gooden, 2004; McDonald & Marston, 2005; Prottas, 1979). The case management role has also shifted from an emphasis on establishing eligibility, or people processing (Prottas, 1979), to assigning individual responsibility for economic self-sufficiency, or people changing (Meyers, 1998; van Berkel, van der Aa, & van Gestel, 2010). This new role requires active intervention in the lives of recipients, with transformation sought in individual behavior, attitudes and circumstances towards particular ends (Dubois, 2014; McDonald & Marston, 2005; Meyers, 1998, van Berkel et al., 2010).

The world of people-changing is fraught with contradictory impulses for case managers. There is greater discretion in developing an individualized plan for employment readiness for individual clients (Johnson, Chun-Chung Chow, Ketch, & Austin, 2006; Meyers, 1998; van Berkel et al., 2010), and yet performance targets in some jurisdictions have the effect of closing off discretion in exchange for the heavy use of sanctions in order to meet monthly quotas (Taylor, 2014); or the strict eligibility culture remains and a narrow focus on rules obscures clients' work efforts and actual progress (Lens, 2008).

The world of people-changing is also fraught for households who are poor. There is a unique dependency on the judgements of front line workers for these households given the desperate nature of presenting problems and the involuntary nature of the application. The literature on front line workers speaks of the presenting problems as "tragic circumstances" (Lipsky, 1977/2010), "dire need" (Stivers, 2007), "multiple forms of social suffering" (Dubois, 2010), "matters of life and death" (Campbell, 2011; Murray, Low, & Waite, 2006), and "extreme hardship" (Jewell & Glaser, 2006). Because the stakes are so high, decisions made by front line workers have profound impacts (Jewell & Glaser, 2006) on people's life chances (Anderson, 2001; Lipsky, 1977/2010). In addition, applicants are seeking essential services they cannot obtain elsewhere (Brodin, 1997; Lipsky, 1977/2010) and they face front line workers who have intimate knowledge of the rules (Rowe, 2002). This knowledge (and the power to share or withhold this knowledge from applicants) and the involuntary nature of the application gives power to front line workers that is disproportionate to their status in the organization (Dubois, 2010).

### *Value Discretion*

These dimensions of case management—the people-changing mandate, the high stakes involved, and the power differential—can leave considerable space for the exercise of discretion. Bureaucratic discretion is a term used broadly and across multiple professions where policy implementation is a central function. One dimension (among many) of discretion described by researchers is the act of making normative

judgements based on individual values, professional codes of ethics and/or perceived societal judgements (Dubois, 2010; Lipsky, 1977/2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Taylor & Kelly, 2006). In their exploration of bureaucratic discretion, Taylor and Kelly (2006) categorize the various dimensions of discretion in a way that is helpful for distinguishing the exercise of normative judgements from other dimensions. The authors distinguish between rule discretion, task discretion and value discretion. Rule discretion refers to the interpretation of legislation in unique settings, task discretion refers to the ability to complete tasks in settings of high caseloads and reduced resources, and value discretion refers to making normative judgments in the application of bureaucratic rules. The bureaucratic discretion focus in this study is on value discretion.

The application of value discretion has been called the regulation of identity (Dubois, 2010), an assessment of moral character (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003), the correction of moral failings (van Berkel et al., 2010) or the mobilization of "moral common sense" (Kjorstad, 2005, p. 391). Rather than the occasional lapse into moralizing judgements, Hasenfeld (2000) argues that the work of administering social assistance is inherently moral work which includes judgments about a person's worth, his or her ability and willingness to change, and his or her responsibility for their situation.

It is in the exercise of value discretion that case managers begin to make normative value judgements that distinguish between applicants who are worthy of assistance and those who are not. In the face of standardized rules and very unstandardized individual circumstances, treating everyone the same seems inherently unfair (Dubois, 2010; Lipsky, 1977/2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Prottas, 1979). Some authors suggest that worthiness is based on need and a kind of economic triage happens with regard to the depth and genuineness of the need (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Radey, 2008; Rowe, 2002). Others suggest a distinction between situational applicants who need only temporary assistance and those who are generational recipients (Hagen & Owens-Manley, 2002; Lens, 2008; Turgeon, Taylor, & Niehaus, 2014). Differential treatment of social assistance recipients based on racial discrimination has also been demonstrated (Keiser,

Meuser, & Choi, 2004; Radey, 2008; Stivers, 2007; Watkins-Hayes, 2011). And finally, recipient behavior, particularly motivation, is also a factor, with applicants who are compliant and motivated preferred to those who are persistent, demonstrate knowledge of the system or seek third party support in their application (Hagen & Owens-Manley, 2002; Isenhour & Goldstein, 2008; Lipsky, 1977/2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Morgen, 2001; Prottas, 1979; Sandfort, 2000).

Under neo-liberal welfare reform, case managers play a central role in the task of people-changing, drawing on a variety of diverse and often conflicting allegiances (Sossin, 2005). Whether case managers draw on professional ethics, legislation, moralizing categories of recipients or individual moral beliefs, the problematic end result is the same: applicants receive differential access to public services.

### Methods: Value Discretion in the Implementation of Ontario Works

In the implementation of Ontario Works, case managers occupy a distinctive front line role. They determine income eligibility, enforce workfare requirements and deliver services to support employability. Conceptions of bureaucratic discretion in the literature are often drawn indirectly from interviews with case managers about program administration. This article draws on case manager interviews in which they are asked directly about their perception of spaces for the exercise of bureaucratic discretion in their implementation of Ontario Works (OW). (For a discussion of the institutional context of discretion and the spaces for discretion, see Baker Collins, 2015).

This study began as a pilot project to seek case manager input on the meaning and shape of bureaucratic discretion in support of a larger project proposal. The important insights of case managers about their own discretion prompted an expansion of the project to include additional case manager interviews. In total, 15 OW case managers working in southern Ontario were included in the study. Qualitative interviews with case managers were conducted during 2012 and 2013, with the bulk of interviews taking place in the summer and fall of 2013. The central focus of the interviews was on areas of policy implementation where case managers were able to

exercise discretion and the ways in which they used their discretion in relationships with clients. (In the interview, the term professional judgement was used in place of bureaucratic discretion, which is not a familiar term for case managers.) Case managers were also asked to describe differences among case managers in the exercise of discretion.

Case managers were recruited both formally and informally. Local social service agency personnel were asked to share information about the study with OW case managers who may be interested in participating, and an email recruitment letter was sent to case managers through a regional director of the program. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

The case managers interviewed for this study are representative of a range of years of experience and case management roles. About one third had been working in OW for less than five years, about one third between five and ten years and about one third had worked for over ten years, with two case managers working very long term at 17 and 27 years. There were a variety of case manager roles represented among the participants ranging, for example, from income eligibility and employment counselling, to community outreach, training, and working with particular populations including the homeless, youth and those with addictions and mental health issues. The variation in the roles primarily related to the setting in which case management took place (in community settings or the OW office) and the population of recipients (a general or a specific population). All of the case manager roles focus either on eligibility, employability, or both, and each of the case managers interviewed had experience in both areas. The greater length of experience and the variety of experience among the case managers reflects more extensive knowledge of OW policy implementation.

The case managers who took part in the study work in regional offices in southern Ontario. Since case managers report on both sanctioned and unsanctioned uses of discretion, the specific offices from which case managers originated is not being shared to protect confidentiality. In addition, care has been taken to avoid identifying practices specific to a particular OW office. Campbell's (2011) warning about potential

repercussions for case managers from management responses to unsanctioned use of discretion is well taken.

Case manager interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis program. Interviews were analyzed both inductively and deductively. Inductive analysis discovered themes of values applied in the use of discretion, the tone/setting of client encounters, the scope of the assessment, the participation agreement, non-compliance, and comparisons with other case managers. Once a pattern of taking a long view towards the participation agreement was ascertained, interviews were coded deductively for dimensions of the long view, such as crisis work, barriers, taking responsibility, generational patterns and forward movement.

Case managers are identified below with pseudonyms and their years of experience as OW case managers. Case managers are not identified by their specialized roles, since some roles are unique to regions and thus would compromise confidentiality.

## Findings: Taking the Long View

### *The Long View*

The centerpiece of workfare requirements for Ontario Works is the Participation Agreement (the mandatory individual plan for employment), which outlines the steps the client must take towards employment in order to become and remain eligible for income assistance. Much of the case manager/client relationship is focused on drawing up this agreement and monitoring progress. Participants described the Participation Agreement as that space where they had the most room for the exercise of discretion (see Baker Collins, 2015). This article draws especially on extensive conversations with participants about the development of the Participation Agreement, and thus the exercise of value discretion.

The literature suggests that case managers will exercise value discretion by creating categories of clients that distinguish between those who are worthy and unworthy of assistance with a corresponding generous or restrictive interpretation of the rules. The findings described in this study suggest a different application of value discretion among participants in



this study. The most prominent approach was one which described a general philosophy for working with all clients based on their perceived distance from employment. There was recognition on the part of participants that change towards employment readiness takes time and a willingness to grant that time in exchange for efforts towards employment.

For the case managers in this study, in a people-changing environment, the best way to elicit change is to understand the barriers standing in the way of change and the steps needed to move forward. These steps follow a discernible pattern which moves from the assessment setting to crisis work to drawing up the Participation Agreement to expected change. I have characterized this philosophy as "the long view." It follows a trajectory that has as its aim "forward movement." The long view is not without normative judgements about the character of clients, as will be discussed later in this section, but these judgements happen in an overall framework of granting time to work towards employment readiness with a corresponding expectation that this time will be used appropriately.

#### *The Tone and Scope of the Assessment*

There was consensus among the participants about the importance of the initial contact with an OW applicant and the value of setting a tone in which rapport could be established and apprehension and anxiety dispelled. The aim was to develop a relationship that would enable them to work together over time:

When I work with clients I try to work client-centered, seeing what they perceive as the main issue and start with that to try to create some kind of a relationship so that eventually we are on the same team working on something. (Trina, 14 years)

Several case managers work in community settings where they can "meet people more on their level in their home area" (Gwen, three years). For one case manager, this included attendance at neighborhood events. Several other case managers have instituted a drop-in day where clients can drop in without an appointment.

Well, when somebody comes in for an application.... well, you welcome them and introduce yourself and the first thing I say is 'what brought you here?' whereas other people are saying 'OK can I see some ID?' and then they turn right to a computer and it's all the computer and whereas I turn away from the computer, ask them more about the story about what brought them there. (Olivia, five years)

The purpose of a more welcoming approach to clients is to develop a fuller understanding of the complexity of their situations, which paves the way for a fuller assessment. The breadth of this initial assessment, which determines the immediate needs and the long term possibilities, is a key factor in the case management relationship. Case managers can choose a quick and cursory assessment which focuses only on strict eligibility requirements, or they can listen to the deeper story which exposes hidden, long-term barriers that need to be addressed, such as chronic health or mental health issues. Case managers who follow the long view undertake a broad assessment which takes on importance in preparing the Participation Agreement, described below.

### *Crisis Work*

There is a general assumption among participants who take the long view that people must first be stable in terms of basic needs before they can begin to work towards employment. Crisis work is about addressing immediate needs for income support and stable housing. It includes providing time to gain stability. For example, rather than suspending a check due to missing information, participants provide time to get identification documents such as a social insurance number or birth certificate.

Some participants also use what are intended as employment benefits to address immediate needs (e.g., bus pass) as a way of increasing what is recognized to be meager income support.

I've had a number of times people say a single recipient gets \$606 so they say, 'is that all you can give me? Is

that-Is there anything you can squeeze out?' There's no way I can give you any more money, maybe a bus pass. So I can help them kinda figure out other ways, not to cheat the system but other ways to get other benefits. (Olivia, five years)

Several participants described the satisfaction they receive from relieving a crisis for clients.

I build the best relationship with people in that immediate need because most people come in not wanting to be there, so I like when they see me. You can tell that they have that apprehension, but then when we start going through stuff, you can see that automatic relief and you can see that a lot of that crisis that they were coming starting to be relieved as you go through the intake. (Daphne, six years)

*The Participation Agreement:*

*Recognizing Barriers, Building on Interests*

After the crisis is addressed, the Participation Agreement must be drawn up with each recipient. This agreement is the most flexible aspect of the legislation because it allows for individual circumstances to be taken into account. The heart of the Participation Agreement is the required list of activities that will move the recipient towards employment. It is also the vehicle through which discretionary benefits are issued. Participants who have undertaken a broad assessment that takes complex issues in a person's life into account will complete a different kind of Participation Agreement than someone who simply says, "You must do a, b and c to get your check. Sign here." Participants described the latter approach, observed among their colleagues:

You're kind of setting the client up for failure because if I impose on you ten different things that you have to do, and for whatever reason you [are] not able to meet what I've imposed on you, then I will cut you off for three to six months. (Olivia, five years)

In contrast, there are two sides to the long view approach: one is to work at removing barriers to employment, and the other is to build on client interests and activities in moving towards employment.

For case managers who have completed a fuller assessment, distance from employment often includes what they describe as complex, deep-rooted, layered and multiple disadvantages including addiction, mental health issues, low education, and/or poor health sometimes leading to poor appearance (e.g., teeth are in poor condition). Participants used language such as: figure out the barriers, the underlying problem, what is standing in the way, the main issue, the reason(s), because the lives of recipients are much more complex than needing to find a job.

It could be based in trauma, it could be based in childhood abuse, it could be all of these deep layers of things that have nothing to do with what we are doing, yet they're impacting them every single day because job readiness—it's a pretty high level of readiness when you look at it in terms of all the things you have to have in place in your life to be ready to go into employment and keep it. (Hilary, four years)

Some participants reported using the Participation Agreement creatively to remove barriers such as assisting clients with improving dental health, or to complete Grade 12, or helping a client with alopecia purchase a better wig.

In outlining steps towards employability, there is also flexibility for case managers to take into account client interests and current activities. Participants who take this approach use the term "baby steps" to describe a gradual move towards employment. Participation Agreements are seen to work best when there is mutual agreement on the steps outlined and these steps are realistic and achievable.

And I always say ... 'baby steps.' So ok, today they slept in 'til three in the afternoon, then they came and saw you for their PA. So what are you gonna ask them? You know ... what are some things they can do? And

I always say, tell them to go to local College. Grab one of those books. See what kind of courses they like ... Just those little—to start planting those seeds I think is really ideal and **you don't get change overnight. They didn't become like this yesterday.** (Selena, 13 years, emphasis added)

### *Taking Time*

The last part of the quote above alludes to the distance from employment both in terms of barriers and time. Behind the long view is a practical approach that takes into account that the path to employment is developmental. People-changing needs a different approach than eligibility-processing. It will take time to address barriers and to build skills and readiness.

A number of participants explained the time necessary for change as rooted in generational poverty and welfare transmission. Generational receipt of social assistance is presented as one of the multiple disadvantages and barriers to employment, although mental health, addictions, and other barriers are not presented as outcomes of generational poverty. The distance from employment can be vast given multiple long-term issues and the downward trajectory described for those on assistance for some time. "Because, really, the focus was that this is the shortest route to employment. How they figured that one out—people who had been on social assistance for a generation—that they would just come and find employment" (Trina, 14 years).

There is also a dimension of the long view philosophy that recognizes it is foolish to knowingly put someone on a downward trajectory through sanctioning, even though the legislation may technically support such a move. One seasoned case manager described an applicant who was referred to her by a local politician after he had been refused assistance by an OW trainee. She described the applicant as an older recent immigrant who had lost his ID, broken up with his wife, had no income and was facing homelessness. The average replacement time for his ID would put him on the street for six months. "Where is the common sense in that?" she asked (Alma, 27 years). She took over the case and found him eligible.

It should be noted that for some participants, especially

those who work with populations who are chronically homeless with mental health issues and substance use, there are clients for whom employment is an unrealistic goal. The distance to employment is too far.

I mean, Ontario Works is supposed to be temporary financial and employment assistance, and the notion that we have some sort of temporary intervention in people's lives contradicts the reality ... the people that we see, certainly, I mean, we're talking years, literally, and the only way out is not through employment. It is death, or they go on ODSP, right? (Fraser, five years). (ODSP, Ontario Disability Supports Program, is an income support program for those with disabilities.)

### *Information and Power*

There was recognition from a number of participants of their power in controlling information about the intricacies of OW rules, exemptions and available benefits. Most participants tried to be transparent about available benefits and some even coached clients in how to request them. But a number of participants pointed to other managers they knew who withheld information. "I always tell clients, you know, read the rights and responsibilities. Know what you're eligible for, because there's actually quite a few benefits that you're eligible for that you don't ask for, 'cause no one tells you about it" (Daphne, six years).

There was also recognition of the power to collect detailed information on clients' lives: "We basically ask for everything you know. All kinds of personal information that ... I wouldn't tell anybody, so I can certainly understand why it throws them back" (Maryam, two years).

There was another side to the control of information. Participants also recognized the power of clients to withhold information, which was the key complaint about client behavior. Housing arrangements were seen as the aspect of recipients' lives that they were most likely to hide. Participants reported receiving spurious letters from landlords or indications of more people living in a unit than reported. A number of case managers in the study disliked the local policy that discouraged them from pursuing co-residency that was not being

reported. (Sharing rental units among OW recipients is a basic survival strategy, especially for single adults, whose income does not come close to the average cost of a rental unit.)

This concern about client withholding of information belies the power differential between case managers and recipients. In fact, several participants alluded to understanding why people agree to a participation agreement that they know they cannot fulfill:

When you have someone who's intimidating and telling you that you need to be doing this, this, and this, you'll sign anything ... even though you have no intention of going to the YMCA 'cause you don't want to go to the employment program, and then next month when you come in and they ream you out for not going to the employment program well, you know, you just wanted your check, you wanted to say whatever they needed to hear because you've got bigger issues. (Daphne, six years)

The case managers in this study were reluctant to use the ultimate tool of power, which is to "put them in non-compliance," meaning to remove recipients from the caseload for three months. There was recognition of the risk for clients in this use of sanctions: "when you have all those things on the table, people can be quite at risk you know, when you have that kind of penalty."

The problem is that the people who are less likely to fight back are the people that are sort of the most needy, right? They don't feel they have any power, and so when you get somebody who's terminating them, then they, they disappear. They're not, you know, they're not ready to do battle. (Cheryl, 17 years)

### *You Need to CHANGE*

Case managers' discourse in this study confirms convincingly that the task is people changing. The implicit message to recipients is: You need to change. This change discourse has two dimensions to it. One dimension is movement (change) and the other is improvement (change in a positive direction). Movement language includes terms like "towards," "up,"

"move on," "baby steps," "do something," and "produce something." Improvement language includes moving forward, making better choices, improve your life and the lives of your children, and signs of progress. Change needs to happen, and it must be in the general direction of employment.

Get them to move, you know, to the next step. (Roland, 14 years)

You've gotta produce something, you have to bring some material to it. (Hilary, four years)

I don't care if they are even going to find a job or not, that's not the point. The point is I see the development, the improvement. (Rose, 12 years)

It is not necessary to actually find a job. In fact, finding work as a result of workfare activities is infrequent among recipients. The requirement is forward movement and improvement.

Employment is that if you're able to walk alongside with somebody that is making some changes to their life in going into something that is going to bring them more stability and less chaos, and maybe for them to have access services that will help them make sustainable changes in their lives. I think that's pretty gratifying. (Trina, 14 years)

There is an exchange going on here; flexibility in applying the OW rules in exchange for forward movement, for change. The legislation does not require immediate employment, but it does require adherence to the Participation Agreement. There is also an implicit assumption that employment is not achievable without change:

I don't know for me, it didn't pay to look at it like I'm working for the taxpayer and like ... my first line is to get you off of assistance, because ultimately even often people who found jobs, they were temporary, so they're right back on again, **unless you've changed something else.** (Cheryl, 17 years, emphasis added)



Although the route to employment may be a long one, recipients of OW are not allowed to remain where they are in life. Something needs to change and that change needs to meet some definition on the part of the case manager of improvement.

### *YOU Need to Change*

The other side of this message is that the change must be individual, since the clear implication of the Participation Agreement and of workfare itself is that the change needed is change on the part of recipients. One of the ways this need is expressed is in the language of "owning it" and taking responsibility: "We work a lot, you know, identifying it and gently working towards owning it, 'cause once you own it, you can try and fix it" (Piper, two years).

One example of expecting recipients to take responsibility relates to appointments. A significant number of participants lamented a policy which allows recipients to show up late for appointments without penalty. Those who bristle under this restriction reason that showing up on time is a quality of readiness for employment. Similarly, several case managers referred to pushing young clients who are technically exempt from workfare requirements to begin working towards employment anyway:

So many young women that are home with children, they're choosing not to participate because they don't have to. I try to push a little bit harder because I know what it's like to be out of work for a few years and then try to get back into the job market. (Gwen, three years)

There is significant flexibility on the part of case managers in this study to create a realistic path towards employment, but the end goal is clear and required. You need to change.

When someone comes in and they've had six jobs in the past, you know, eight months ... you know, and it's like 'ok, like, are you seeing any patterns here?' ... and, you know, not being afraid to actually bring those to their attention and ask them about them and ask why and what they could do differently. (Cheryl, 17 years)

## The Long View and People-Changing Contradictions

The neo-liberal context of income assistance requires change in a particular direction, from both service providers and service users. Providers must serve more people with fewer resources and better outcomes. There is pressure to reduce the time spent with clients, to engage in stricter eligibility criteria and to reduce caseloads. Applicants must move to employment, no matter how precarious or poorly paid, as soon as possible. The most significant change required on the part of applicants is to no longer be in need of public services (Baker Collins, 2004).

The long view approach of the case managers in this study highlights a basic contradiction in the Ontario Works program and similar approaches to workfare. This contradiction is between the mandate to pursue the shortest route to a job and the mandate to change people. The only way for these two mandates to work in concert is if one assumes that the sole change needed from clients is to alter a negative attitude to paid employment; clients are employment-ready and just unwilling to work. The case managers in this study would point out that this assumption flies in the face of the reality of the lives of the long-term unemployed. The problem is not attitude towards employment, but material conditions, including past trauma, long-term poverty, addictions, mental health issues, and poor physical health.

In addition to individual issues, there was acknowledgement by case managers of important contextual issues, such as low minimum wage, low OW rates, a changing job market that requires higher skills, lack of affordable transportation, poor quality housing (including bed bugs), cuts in services such as childcare, long wait lists for mental health and addiction services; as well as individual issues that would be seen as outside someone's control, such as trauma, brain injury and abuse.

However, this acknowledgement of contextual issues reveals another contradiction in workfare approaches to income assistance. While changes in any one of the service shortfalls listed above would improve the lives of recipients, this is not the kind of change required by workfare. Recipients cannot put advocating for more affordable housing or campaigning

for poverty reduction on their Participation Agreement. Nor can case managers exclude recipients from workfare requirements because of poor prospects for employment.

Even for participants who take the long view of moving towards employment, Ontario Works is still a workfare program and the case manager/client relationship is where individual responsibility is assigned. Workfare is based on an assumption that the long-term unemployed look different from the rest of society. Behind the need to change is an implicit normative judgement that clients are not currently living a life that warrants support from the state in the form of income assistance unless they make efforts to change. In spite of the acknowledgement of contextual issues, the onus for change is on the individual and descriptions of individual barriers include deeply entrenched patterns such as generational poverty.

A final contradiction is that this stereotypical perspective of entrenched poverty actually helps motivate the long view and results in administrative flexibility in ways that matter in the lives of recipients. Participants who take the long view seek to understand the complexity of clients' lives, address crises so as to provide stability, and provide time to work towards employment in ways that reduce long term barriers and build on client interests. The result for recipients is a much less punitive approach to workfare in an environment where a punitive approach is tolerated. For example, when asked to compare themselves against their colleagues, all of the participants described colleagues who take a very stringent approach to the Participation Agreement and derive an unrealistic list of requirements which the recipient is unlikely to meet. This sets the client up for failure, and these colleagues use the requirements of workfare to apply sanctions that reduce their caseloads.

The question inevitably arises as to why the participants in this study take a long view. It may be that the voluntary recruitment process used in this research was more likely to attract those case managers who were prepared to discuss their use of discretion and whose use of discretion was more generous than their colleagues. It is beyond the purposes and scope of this study to answer why the case managers in this study took a different approach than many of their colleagues.

But research on front line workers and the use of discretion offers some clues about what motivates the use of discretion among front line workers.

Some researchers have found that professional codes of ethics which emphasize human dignity and/or individual autonomy are a factor (Sawyer & Green, 2013; Taylor & Kelly, 2006). Other researchers suggest that case managers move back and forth between individual moral values and the values and ideology of the organization (Kjørstad, 2005; Morgen, 2001; Oberfield, 2010). Hasenfeld (2000) and Sossin (2005) suggest case managers draw on multiple and competing obligations in the exercise of discretion including obligations to the public, to professional duty, to organizational and legislative contexts, to applicants and to their own personal moral beliefs.

In addition, while much has been written about the restrictive nature of neo-liberal welfare administration, a number of researchers have found front line workers take what might be called a long view approach, even in restrictive environments. Isenhour and Goldstein (2008) found workers who relied on professional and personal experience to resist punitive approaches and to develop alternative definitions of self-sufficiency which recognize barriers. Workers resisted aspects of the program which they disagreed with for clients who were working towards a goal. Kjørstad (2005) also found front line workers who resisted restrictive workfare policies that did not fit with client needs, particularly in situations with poor job prospects for clients. Additionally, a study by van Berkel et al. (2010) found a group of front line workers who emphasized a sustainability approach and another group who emphasized care or protection of clients.

The participants in this study join others who have resisted restrictive workfare policies. It is important to acknowledge, however, that in taking the long view, the participants in this study could only challenge the first contradiction in workfare programs, that people-changing can be achieved through pursuing the shortest route to a job. The workfare program does not leave room for them to challenge the second contradiction, that the most important barriers faced by clients are not individual but systemic.

In addition, there are many jurisdictions in which outcome

measures and quotas would prohibit even taking the long view. In these situations, the basic contradiction between people-changing and the shortest route to employment is borne by recipients in differential ways based on levels of need, race, motivation, and/or hard-to-serve status. This will continue to be the case as long as the required change is assigned to individual poor households rather than to public institutions to address issues such as affordable housing, child care and a precarious labor market.

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