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Restructuring of Ontario's developmental services sector: Impacts on human resource management and labour relations

The developmental services sector in Ontario faces critical challenges in the areas of human resource management and labour relations. The ability to recruit, train, and retain developmental service professionals is a critical concern for all stakeholders in the sector. But the challenges facing the developmental services sector go well beyond the traditional concerns of human resource professionals. Public sector restructuring in general and the transformation of developmental services in particular have generated complex and contentious challenges. These challenges have been particularly evident in the area of union-management relations. In 2007, the sector witnessed large scale disputes by unions seeking to improve wages for front line workers. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) formed coalitions with agencies and family advocates as part of a "We Count Too" campaign to lobby government for more funding. The Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) launched work stoppages at four Community Living agencies, involving hundreds of workers, to press for greater wage equity in the sector. While the negotiations over these collective agreements have been resolved, the challenges facing the sector remain.

This research project will provide a multi-faceted study of the human resource and labour relation challenges facing the sector. The project combines qualitative, in-depth case study analyses with quantitative, survey-based studies to better understand the impacts of restructuring in Ontario's developmental services sector on front line professionals, human resource practices, and union-management relations.

Research objectives: The objective of this research project is to improve the quality of developmental services in Ontario and ultimately, to improve the quality of life of individuals accessing those services. The core focus of the research study is on the role of unions and human resource managers in the sector and the impact of labour-management relations on the provision and quality of developmental services.

The study of labour relations often addresses contentious issues and clashing perspectives. This research project strives to provide a comprehensive examination of the critical challenges facing the sector in general and within the field of labour-management relations and human resource practices in particular. By interviewing and engaging key stakeholders in the sector, the research will provide space for these diverse perspectives and voices. The objective of the project is to improve the quality of developmental services through greater understanding of the role of unions and impacts of labour-management relations and human resource practices. As such, these projects do not seek to prescribe a 'one size fits all' model of best practices, but rather to provide a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing

front line developmental service professionals. The goal of the research is not to advocate one particular union or agency against another, or agency-based versus individualized funding mechanisms. The goal of this project is to build greater understanding of the critical human resource and labour relations dimensions of the transformation process.

The principal researcher brings a unique set of background knowledge and personal motivation to this project. Robert Hickey is the proud parent of a five-year old daughter with Angelman Syndrome and intimately familiar with the family advocate perspective. Prior to earning his PhD in industrial relations from Cornell University, Dr. Hickey spent ten years as a labour union representative. He currently teaches labour relations and dispute resolution in the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University. His practical knowledge of the sector as a parent of a child with developmental disabilities, background as a labour relations practitioner, and training in academic research provide the principal investigator with an understanding and skill set well-suited for this broad research project.

Stakeholder participation: The success and ultimate contribution of this project to the state of developmental services ultimately depends on the active participation and support of all stakeholders. The overall research project has two principal components. The first consists of qualitative research studies which explore a range of specific cases. The primary research methods associated with this first component involve semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The second component involves survey-based studies which will be administered across several different target populations including HR managers, union officials, direct care professionals, and family advocates.

Reports of research findings: Each of the case study projects will result in accessible reports made freely available to all key stakeholders and participants. The researcher will also provide customized research reports to stakeholders upon request at no or minimal cost. In addition to the published reports, dissemination of the research findings will be provided at conferences, workshops, and other events held by stakeholders.

It is expected that the research projects will generate several articles for a variety of scholarly, peer-reviewed journals such as the *Industrial and Labor Relation Review*, *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, and *Public Administration*. The principal investigator will protect the identity of all participants and organizations requesting confidentiality in all reports, articles and other disseminations of research findings in accordance with the research project's ethical protocols approved by Queen's University.

Queen's University Research Ethics Board: The research design and methods proposed in this study have been reviewed and approved by the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at Queen's University. All stakeholders will be provided with a Letter of Information and Consent Form, explaining the purpose of the project, their rights, and protections should they choose to participate.

Part 1: Case studies

Transformation in developmental services

The research project begins with a large scale study of the historic and current restructuring trends in the developmental services sector. Initially, the research project seeks to understand the nature and extent of the transformation of developmental services in Ontario. More specifically, the core research question guiding this project focuses on the implications of restructuring for developmental service workers, union-management relations, and human resource practices. The purpose of this first step in the research project is to provide the background and broader context of the restructuring process taking place in the developmental services sector. The subsequent case studies will build on this foundation and examine specific issues in more detail. These case studies will focus on the following topics which are explained in more detail below:

Job restructuring and service transformation
Collective bargaining and the 2007 contract disputes
“We Count Too” coalition campaign
Innovative human resource practices
Impacts of individualized funding on developmental service workers and HRM practices

Research activities:

Using qualitative case study methods, interviews with key stakeholders will form the core research activity in part 1 of the project. Interviews will be scheduled at times and locations convenient to the participants. The researcher will provide participants with copies of the interview guide and questions prior to the interview. The interviews will be semi-structured, allowing participants flexibility to raise issues and discuss a wide range of topics. On average, interviews will last approximately one hour. Most interviews will be conducted on an individual basis. However, in some case studies, a focus group format may provide a more appropriate interview method. The researcher will ask for permission to record the interviews. No one besides the researcher will have access to any of the data collected in the interviews. Participants have the unconditional right to speak off the record or end the interview at any time for any reason. If participants choose to withdraw from the study, the interview data will be destroyed.

In consultation with stakeholders, the researcher has tried to identify individuals and organizations to interview. The researcher also plans to use a “snowball” interview method, meaning key interview participants will be asked to suggest others who might be willing to participate in the study. Applied research in the field of intellectual disabilities raises a number of important ethical concerns, most notably, the voice and perspective of persons with developmental disabilities.¹ This project focuses on the staff who provide services, the unions which represent them and the organizations which employ them. Additional consultations with People First and other advocacy organizations are needed to ensure

¹ For a discussion of these issues see Stalker, Kirsten (1998) “Some Ethical and Methodological Issues in Research with People with Learning Difficulties.” *Disability & Society*. 13(1): 5 – 19 and Dye, Linda, Dougal Hare, and Steve Hendy. (2006). “Capacity of people with intellectual disabilities to take part in a research study.” *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*. 20: 168-174.

space within this project for the voice and perspectives of self-advocates. One of the most important ethical considerations raised by scholars in Disability Studies is to recognize the critical role that family members play in the provision of services to individuals with developmental disabilities. For this reason, the role of family members and non-staff carers are central to the research plan through interviews and surveys.

The following list identifies many of the key organizations and associations, but it is not exhaustive and additional suggestions and contacts would be greatly appreciated:

Government

Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS)
Ministry of Labour (MOL)
Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU)

Family groups and advocacy organizations

Individualized Funding Coalition of Ontario (IFCO)
Family Alliance Ontario
SSAH Coalition
Local parent/family organizations
People First

Associations and affiliated agencies and service providers

OASIS
Community Living Ontario (CLO)
Great Lakes Society
MARC
Faith and Culture Communities
Provincial Network

Unions

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
Ontario Public Employees' Union (OPSEU)
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

The collection and analysis of documentary and archival data will be the other main research activity. Government agencies and other stakeholders provide a substantial amount of information about the transformation process of developmental services in Ontario on their websites. It is assumed that documents in the public realm may be used in this research study provided appropriate citations are credited to the sources of the information.

Job restructuring and service transformation

Detailed case studies of workplace-based job restructuring will seek to understand how the duties, responsibilities, and skills of developmental service professionals have changed as a result of the transformation towards individualized programming. Focusing on specific agencies, this case study research will explore the nature and extent of job restructuring and its implications for union-management relations and human resource practices.

Collective bargaining and the 2007 contract disputes

Another set of detailed case studies examine the 2007 labour disputes. While this stream focuses on cases involving strikes that occurred in 2007, the research questions encompass a much broader scope for examining union-management relations in the sector. For example, these case studies will not only examine the dynamics of the negotiations process and strike activity, but they will also explore the background and contextual factors that led to the strikes, the strategic considerations by the union, the roles and impacts of other stakeholders, the processes that resolved the dispute, and the implications for the aftermath of these disputes on union-management relations. These cases provide an important opportunity for understanding the sources of conflict and strategies for dispute resolution in the sector.

'We Count Too' coalition campaign

Another detailed case study will focus on CUPE's "We Count Too" campaign as an example of social movement union – a coalition between the disability rights movement and the labour movement. This study will examine the background, context, strategic considerations and dynamics of the coalition campaign. The "We Count Too" campaign provides a rich case study of coalition formation, but once again, the research will place the campaign within the larger context of restructuring in the sector and its impact on labour-management relations and union strategies.

Innovative human resource practices

Another set of case studies shifts the focus from labour-management relations to human resource practices. In addition to the conventional concerns of recruitment, selection, retention, and training, these detailed case studies will explore innovative human resource practices designed to create high commitment (also known as high performance) work systems. Studying both union and non-union agencies, the research will examine what innovative HRM practices are taking place and how these strategies can succeed in a sector that faces increasing challenges in recruitment and retention.

Impacts of individualized funding on developmental service workers and HRM practices

The last area of detailed case study research focuses on the dynamics of direct hiring. The provision of services through individualized funding mechanisms has important implications for human resource practices in this sector. The Ministry formed a special panel on staff hired directly by families as part of the larger strategic development of HR practices in the sector. Complementing the work of the panel, the goal of this case study is to understand the challenges facing family members taking on the role of HR managers and to identify the opportunities for improving human resource practices. This research will also examine these developments from the perspective of workers hired directly by families and explore union activities in this area. There are an increasing number of examples of unionization of home care workers and other direct hire employees. Unionization would have significant implications for the HR practices by families directly hiring service providers.

Part 2: Survey-based studies

The second component of the overall research project is comprised of four (4) survey-based, quantitative studies. The surveys will be tested and refined during the first phase of the research project.

Survey I: LR/HR management practices

Target population: Managers with primary LR/HR responsibilities for agencies funded by MCSS (Survey entire population)

Section 1: Agency characteristics

Section 2: Staff characteristics

Section 3: LR\HR practices

Section 4: Change management

Survey II: Union leadership survey

Target population: Elected union officers and staff (Survey entire population of union leaders and staff active in the developmental services sector.)

Section 1: Background and organizational characteristics

Section 2: Collective bargaining strategies

Section 3: Political action strategies

Survey III: Front-line worker survey

Target population: Developmental service workers at agencies funded by MCSS. Critical concern regarding identification of population and access.

Section I: Background details

Section 2: Job details

Section 3: Person-organization relationship

Survey IV: Family advocate survey

Target population: Members of advocacy organizations. (Note –this target population would not be representative of the entire family member \ non-staff carer population.)

Section 1: Background and family characteristics

Section 2: Advocacy activities

Section 3: Individualized funding experiences