

Workers' responsibilities in work disability prevention, would they?

Abstract accepted for WDPI 2014

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Worker responsibility in work disability

- 'How do workers perceive their roles and responsibilities with regard to disability prevention and would they be willing to assume more responsibilities to prevent work disability?'
- Abstract accepted for WDPI 2014
- Part of round table seminar:
 - Four presentations of different viewpoints on worker responsibility

Work Disability Prevention and Integration (WDPI)

- Implementing Work Disability Prevention Knowledge
- Takes place in Toronto, Canada
- Participants include:
 - Doctors, Nurses, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Human Resources, Unions, Insurers, Labour, Legal Profession, Chiropractors, Rehabilitation Therapists, Disability Management, Disability Case Workers, Return to Work Co-ordinators, Disability Prevention Policy Makers, Social Workers, Mental Health Workers, Health Safety, and other professionals in the field of Work Disability

Round Table Seminar

- Abstract submitted as part of 'round table discussion' about return to work and RTW interventions
- Looking at RTW and worker responsibilities from three different perspectives
- 'Workers' responsibilities in work disability prevention – **would** they, **should** they, **could** they?'

Round Table (II)

- 4 presentations followed by discussion
 - Workers' responsibilities in work disability prevention, **would they?** Bram Rooijackers
 - Workers' responsibilities in work disability prevention, **should they?** (Employer norms) Nicole Hoefsmit
 - Worker responsibilities in work disability prevention, **should they?** (Work re-integration professional norms) Karin Maiwald
 - Employees' Responsibilities in work disability prevention, **could they?** Cindy Noben
 - Group discussion with panellists and audience.
Moderator: Angelique de Rijk

Workers' responsibilities in work disability prevention, would they?

- First presentation in the round table
- Based on data from the 'Op Eigen Kracht aan het Werk' project
 - Project on working with chronic illness:
 - Eight different groups of chronically ill people from the Netherlands
 - Sarcoidosis, Renal disease, cystic fibrosis, visual impairments, neurofibromatosis, HIV, autism and severe headaches

Chronic illness and RTW?

- Why look at the experiences of people with a chronic illness?
 - Will never recover (completely) from ailment
 - Working will thus always be affected by illness to some extent
 - Undertake **repeated** attempts to return-to-work

Methods (I)

- Data collection:
 - Qualitative study with high number of participants (n=49)
 - Focus groups among six groups of chronic illnesses (n=41)
 - Individual interviews among two remaining groups (n=8)
- Sample characteristics:
 - 26 men, 23 women
 - Aged 25 to 68
 - 30 employed, 19 unemployed
 - 29 received higher or university education, 15 lower education, 5 declined to answer

Methods (II)

- Analysis:

- Interviews transcribed verbatim
- Research question: ‘How do workers perceive their roles and responsibilities with regard to disability prevention and would they be willing to assume more responsibilities to prevent work disability?’
- Transcripts analysed with constructivist interpretation of grounded theory

Results

- Responsibility framed as:
 - Doing more yourself
 - Taking initiative/lead
 - Being equal partner in dialogue
 - Being (more) involved, participating more
- Workers experience pressure to do assume more responsibilities in RTW process:
 - From employers (e.g. loss of job)
 - From social security institutions (e.g. loss of disability benefits)
 - From society (e.g. social exclusion)
 - From self (e.g. loss of self worth)

Results (II)

- Taking responsibility is framed as taking charge of RTW process
 - More responsibility = more control, chance to shape and steer RTW process to desirable outcome
 - Avoiding responsibility = lack of control, high risk of undesirable outcome
 - Loss of control is feared; things will “happen” to you or be forced upon you

Results (III)

- Lack of trust in parties/agencies involved with RTW process
 - Agencies lack knowledge to help (specific to people with rare conditions)
 - Assuming more responsibilities is seen as a way to address knowledge gap
- Shouldering responsibility is seen a sign of 'good faith'
- Often already assume a great deal of responsibility; already 'doing what they can'

Discussion

- Workers' responsibilities in work disability prevention, would they?

Short answer:

YES!

Discussion (II)

- **HOWEVER: What's underneath that yes?**
 - Willing to assume responsibility, but not (always or completely) voluntary;
 - Self-interest
 - Necessity
 - External pressure
 - Different conceptualization of workers' roles
 - Participating – become an equal partner in RTW process
 - Adversarial – fight or struggle against RTW process
 - Passive – let RTW process occur without involvement (no willingness to assume more responsibility)

Discussion (III)

- Assuming responsibility primarily a way to shape the RTW process to a desired outcome
 - Participants place high value on working; BUT RTW is not always the most desired outcome!
 - When work disability is the desired outcome, participants try to steer the process away from RTW
- Willingness to assume more responsibility curtailed by feeling that efforts to RTW are already maximized
 - “What else can I do?”
- Assuming responsibility as “currency”
 - Showing self to be willing to take responsibility elicits better responses from employer, social security agencies; show of good faith
 - Assuming responsibility as a way to get more support from surroundings: worker as negotiator

Concluding remarks

- Willingness to assume more responsibility with regard to RTW
 - Expectation that more effort on their part should also mean that their surroundings put in more effort too
- Not always able to assume more responsibility; already assume a great deal of responsibility and feel they can do no more
- Framed as way to take control of RTW process
- Can mean that taking control of RTW means that RTW becomes less likely

Concluding remarks (II)

- To what extent is it useful to further press workers towards taking more individual responsibilities?
 - Are workers not assuming enough responsibilities?
 - How do employers and re-integration professionals perceive worker responsibility?