Fairness in accommodation for injury and disability: What is perceived as fair and why these perceptions matter

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Today

• Types of Justice/Fairness
• Why Justice/Fairness are important
• Apply to accommodation for injury & disability
  – Fairness perceptions of workers receiving accommodations
  – Coworker perceptions of accommodation fairness
Outcome fairness (Distributive Justice) is important. Perceptions of fairness are not only about outcomes.
Process fairness (Procedural Justice) is also important.
Quality of the personal interactions (Interactional Justice) also matter
Why does fairness matter?

• Workers feel valued (relational theories)
• Provides control (instrumental theories)
• Organization can be trusted (uncertainty management)
  – Use fairness to manage uncertainty when concerned about organizational status
  – Provides excellent rationale for why fairness matters to workers receiving accommodation

(Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005)
Successful return to work: The role of fairness and workplace-based strategies

Hepburn, Franche, & Francis (2010)
Successful Workplace-based RTW Intervention Strategies

- Designated RTW coordinator
- Early workplace contact
- Work accommodation offer
- Contact between employer and health care provider

(Franche et al., 2004; Krause & Lind, 2004)
Missing: Attention to HOW

• Goodwill & respect emphasized in RTW qualitative literature (*MacEachen et al., 2006*)

• Interactional justice addresses dignity, respect, and truthfulness
  – Signals to workers that they are valued by their employers and are able to their employer
Are RTW outcomes influenced by interactional justice after accounting for the impact of successful workplace-based RTW strategies?

Does HOW workers are treated matter beyond WHAT strategies they receive?
Participants

• Interviewed within 5 weeks of injury

• 166 Ontario Workers:
  – successful time-loss claim
  – back, neck, upper extremity MSK disorder
  – returning to workplace where they were injured
Measures: Workplace-based Strategies

- Designated RTW coordinator
- Early workplace contact
- Work accommodation offer
- Contact between employer and healthcare provider
Measures: Interactional Justice

• Interpersonal Justice
  – This person treated you in a polite manner

• Informational Justice
  – This person provided you with the information you needed

(Colquitt, 2001; Moorman, 1991)
Measures: Outcomes

• Traditional RTW Outcomes
  – Days on Compensation within 60 days of injury (WSIB Administrative Data)
  – Self-reported Days Absent

• New RTW Outcomes
  – Depressive Symptoms (CESD, Radloff, 1977)
  – Affective Commitment (Meyer et al., 1993)
Multiple Regression Analyses

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Summary & Implications

• Employers should attend to both WHAT they do and HOW they do it
• Interactional justice influences self-reported absence, depressive symptoms, and affective commitment
• These outcomes are related to worker performance and withdrawal behaviours
Early employer response to workplace injury: What injured workers perceive as fair and why these perceptions matter

Hepburn, Kelloway, & Franche (2010)
Affective Commitment

Depressive Symptoms

Distributive Justice

Procedural Justice

Fairness

e.g., “Accommodations appropriate given your experience”; “...given your current abilities”

e.g., “You have been able to express your views and feelings”
How are injured workers making fairness judgements?

Evaluate allocation of material & immaterial resources

Propose Fairness as a Mediator (explains why reactions and strategies linked to commitment & depressive symptoms)
The model provided an excellent fit to the data.
Today

• Types of Justice/Fairness
• Why Justice/Fairness are important
• Apply to accommodation for injury & disability
  – Fairness perceptions of workers receiving accommodations
  – Coworker perceptions of accommodation fairness
Coworkers likely to evaluate the distributive fairness of accommodations (Colella, 2001)

- **Equity rule**
  - Compare own inputs and outcomes to the inputs and outcomes of their colleague receiving accommodation
  - e.g., inequity occurs if see own work inputs increasing with no compensation (reward/recognition)

- **Need rule**
  - Deemed unfair if accommodation viewed as unneeded or unwarranted

(See recent qualitative studies by Dunstan & MacEachen, 2013; Kosny et al., 2012)
Why should we care?

Coworker fairness judgments will affect the success of workplace accommodation for injury, illness, and disability.
Coworker fairness judgments will affect:

• Coworkers themselves
  – Behave negatively toward worker with injury
  – Suffer strain

• Supervisors
  – Make accommodation decisions based on how they believe coworkers will react

• Workers with injury, illness, or disability
  – Choices about accommodation type or duration
  – INTERACTIONS with coworkers about accommodation
Interactions between undergraduates being accommodated for disabilities and their peers without disabilities

Undergraduate experiences with accommodation are likely to affect how they interact with future employers
Parallels with Workplace

• Same ‘Duty to Accommodate’
  – Process just as tricky to navigate
• Peers make fairness judgments
  – e.g., equity rule violated because extra time for testing viewed as making exam easier
  – e.g., need rule violated because viewed as ‘working the system’
• Interactions about accommodation frequent
  – 69% discussed disability or accommodation with peers during academic year
  – 80% discussed with 3 or more peers
Self-disclosure:
Verbally sharing personal information
(about a potentially stigmatized identity)
with another person

Focus of Research to Date:
Decision to Disclose (Y/N)
Impact of this Decision (positive?)
NEW: Disclosure Process Model

(Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010)

Consider that one’s goals/motivations affect not only the decision to self-disclose but also how workers communicate about their identity, how they react to their coworkers, and ultimately if disclosure event is positive or negative.
Approach goals (desire to educate, build relationships)

Present positive emotions, focus on positive content

RESULT: positive confidant reaction
Avoidance goals (desire to avoid social rejection or conflict)

Present negative emotions, focus on negative content

RESULT: negative confidant reaction
Disclosure Process Model suggests possible downward negative spiral

Avoidance Goals

Negative Disclosure Event

No Social support

Poor Individual Outcomes

Cultural Stigma
Why not an Upward Positive Spiral?

- Approach Goals
- Positive Disclosure Event
- Social support
- Good Individual Outcomes
- Reduce Cultural Stigma
Work toward creating an upward spiral

- Employers can make efforts to improve culture
- Provide workers with strategies that may increase positive reactions during disclosure events
  - Make the need rule of justice salient
  - Ensure emphasize legitimacy of needs and how accommodation meets needs

(Experimental vignette study with undergraduates provides support for emphasizing need rule)
Risks for Workers

• Sharing more personal information
• Greater strain?
  – Increased effort during interactions may be required
  – Similar concern expressed in prejudice & discrimination literature with respect to compensation strategies for those possessing stigmatized identities
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Thank You!

Questions?
Gail.Hepburn@uleth.ca
Selected References


• Hepburn, C. G., Blaskovits, B., Francis, L., & Enns, J. R., (2013, June). Disclosure strategies for postsecondary students being accommodated for disabilities: An experimental vignette study investigating ways to reduce negative peer reactions and improve peer perceptions of exam accommodation fairness. Poster to be presented at the 75th Canadian Psychological Association Annual Convention, Quebec City, Quebec.

• Hepburn, C. G., Francis, L., & Enns, J. R., (2012). The success of post-secondary students being accommodated for disabilities: Motivations to disclose to classmates are linked to critical student outcomes. [Abstract]. *Canadian Psychology: Annual Convention Issue, 53*(2a), 146-147.
