EXPLORING WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT: EXPRESSIONS AND RESPONSES USING QUALITATIVE CASE STUDIES IN A HEALTHCARE CONTEXT

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Agenda

Defining the Research Problem
- The Research Question
- Previous Research

Problem Centric Research
- Methodology & Methods
- The Research Context

Research Findings
- The Case Narrative
- Workplace IR Conflict: Expressions and Responses

Discussion
- The Threat Response Theory of Workplace IR Conflict
- IR Conflict in Context

Conclusions
- Revisiting the Research Problem
- Research Limitations
How do employees express workplace industrial relations conflict?
Workplace IR Conflict is defined as the action, or collective actions, that arise in or relate to the work setting, when one party in the interdependent and power asymmetric employment relationship perceives that another party in the relationship is frustrating, or about to frustrate, an important concern or goal relating to work, working conditions and/or the working environment.”

(Cowman and Keating, 2013:371)
Previous research focuses on the strike (Franzosi, 1989; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Godard, 2011; Hebdon & Noh, 2013).

**But...**

The World of Work has Changed

- Ireland
  - (Roche & Teague, 2010)
  - (King, 2007)
  - (Gunnigle et al., 1997)
  - (Browne, 1994)

- STRIKE ACTIVITY
- VOLUNTARISM
- INDIVIDUALISATION
- JURIDIFICATION

- International
  - (Gall, 2014; Kelly, 2015)
  - (Estreicher, 2009)
  - (Scheuer, 2006)
  - (Dickens & Hall, 2003)

Has IR Conflict Changed Too?
Previous research focuses on the strike (Franzosi, 1989; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Hebdon & Noh, 2013)

**But...**

“[Industrial conflict] means of expression are as unlimited as the ingenuity of man”

(Kerr, 1954:70)

- Decline in strike ≠ an absence of conflict at work
  (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Roche & Teague, 2010; Godard, 2011; 2014)

- Limited our understanding...
  (Hebdon & Noh, 2013)

- Research *how* conflict is expressed...
  (Weingart et al., 2014)
Previous Research

Exit-Voice...broad applicability

But...

- Power-asymmetric? Interdependent? (Edwards et al., 1995)

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- Overlooks resistance (Edwards et al., 1995)
- Fox (1966:12) “...restrictive practices and resistance to change...”
- Resistance to Loss (Dent & Goldberg, 1999)
Methodology & Methods

“...the research questions are at the center of research design choices”

(Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011:15)

Defining the Research Problem

Problem Centric Research

Research Findings

Discussion

Conclusions

Methodology

Non-Strike Expressions of IR Conflict

Methods

- Interpretivist Qualitative Research (Merriam, 2002)
- Phenomenology & Symbolic Interactionism
- Multiple Stakeholder Theory

- Relational (Sessa, 1996)
- Interactive (Rahim, 2001)
- Context specific (Edwards et al., 1995)
- Low Visibility (Gall & Hebdon, 2008)

- Multiple Embedded Case Study → Semi-Structured Interviews
- Tracer Issue (Denis et al., 2001)
- Thematic Analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006)
The Research Context

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Why Healthcare?
- High Union Density
- Labour Intensive
- Multi Union & Multiple Groups

Resource Constrained

Professional Power

Potential for IR Conflict

“[I]ndustrial Relations ...under continuous and sustained pressure”

(LRC, 2001:1)
The Case Narrative

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- Breakdown of Social Partnership
- Unilateral pay cuts
- Public Service Agreement (PSA) 1
- PSA 2 Negotiations

Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy (LMRS)

- Revised On-Call Payments
- Extended Working Day
- Redeployment & Relocation
- Changes to Skill Mix
- Move toward 5/7 roster
- Non-Payment of Labour Court Compensation

Poor Trust Relations

(Doherty, 2011; Wall, 2012)

(Roche, 2012)
Workplace IR Conflict: Expressions

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<td>Withdrawal</td>
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<td>655</td>
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- Qualitative & Interpretive...
- Odena (2013) convergence ↑ trustworthiness of findings
- ELVN?
•“There’s no need to fight. [Y]ou try to avoid strikes..."
•“...did what they were told instead of fighting for it..."
•“ I kind of lost the fight of it
•“the more you hear the more you get fired up and you don’t want to come to work anymore"
•“they don’t bother mixing with people, they sit in the car in the car park, listen to the radio, get a break: ‘I need to get a break I need to get out of here...’"
•“if a person is discontented..they won’t go that extra mile"

•“... to stick my heels in.. didn’t want to...all of a sudden moving jobs"
•“...Put my foot down. I would not concede anymore"
•“ people can dig their heels in if they want to...’okay that's not my job’..."

•“... to come up with a solution that's going to fix it"
•“..if you don't say it to ..somebody, well, they don't know what's going on. It can’t be fixed"

•“I must say I would nearly go on strike for [additional hours]"
•“I took it upon myself ...emailing the Lab Manager every day..."
•“... [we] really don’t want to hurt patients..."

•“I think mostly people just go sick.."
•“took loads of annual leave...just couldn't..face it"
•“how do they cope? They leave....when they can get jobs, yeah!
•“ you’re not listened to so there's no point in giving out"
•“ you’d.. see the link ..lateness...down to the..manager"
•“ a lot of venting, a lot of giving out...empty threats"
•“ you know, you say 'oh take it easy' "

•“I think it lasted about two days...people just wouldn't take to it"
•“ They’re downgrading the profession a bit"
•“Well they can say no to being asked to do.. something extra"
•“they’ll always level the score..."

•“see what..we could do to improve...then talk [line] manager"

•Strike / Industrial Action
•Voicing Discontent
•Sabotage

•Absenteeism
•Annual Leave
•Quitting
•Silence
•Tardiness
•Venting
•Withdrawal of Effort, Cooperation, Commitment, Social Withdrawal

•Resistance to Change, Loss, More, Resistance as Revenge

•Soft Voice

•Fight
•Flight
•Freeze
•Fix
Workplace IR Conflict: Expressions and Responses

Defining the Research Problem

Problem Centric Research

Research Findings

Discussion

Conclusions

**Anti-Strike**

• "... I can’t imagine a strike to be honest... We wouldn’t do that! Nooo!" [laughs] (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, 2)

**Sabotage**

• "... we would have had our suspicions that there was some sabotage... " (HR/IR, 3)

**Direct Voice**

• “...I wouldn’t by pass [management] and go straight to the union ...[it would be] going [too] far” (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, 2)
Workplace IR Conflict: Expressions and Responses

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Defining the Research Problem

• [certified absenteeism] has been a tool ..if they've been annoyed with somebody in management, they may take a week sick...screw you, here's a sick cert" (Trade Union Representative, 3).

Absenteeism & Annual Leave

Silence - Venting

• "I wouldn't go to a line manager... I'd have, like, a little bitch to my friends" (Medical Lab Aide, 4).

Withdrawal

• “even lunch breaks, they don't bother mixing with people, they sit in the car park, listen to the radio and get a break: 'I need to get out of here..." (Support Staff, 1).

Withdrawal - Social
- Commitment
- Cooperation
- Effort

Discussion

Conclusions
Workplace IR Conflict: Expressions and Responses

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FREEZE

Resistance to Change & Loss
- "I think it lasted about two days... other people just wouldn't take to it" (MLA, 1).
- Will there be a job? Will I be offered redundancies?.... do I lose my job?" (Union, 2).

Resistance to More
- "[They] can say no to being asked to do something, you know, something extra " (HR/IR, 1).

Resistance as Revenge
- "They’ll always level the score... okay, you get one [win] - there's always some other little change coming“ (Lab Manager, 4)
Workplace IR Conflict: Expressions and Responses

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Enact Solutions

"Well, I, like well what you try and do is put forward, you know, try to come up with a solution that's going to fix it [lab service delivery]" (Consultant, 1).

Soft Voice

"I might make some suggestions ...so I’d hope to guide them a little bit" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, 2).

Reaction

"I remember the [laughs] Haematology manager said '[Basic Grade] has some cheek!'" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, 2).
The Threat Response Theory of Workplace IR Conflict

- IR Conflict ≠ Strike
- Inductively derived → psychophysiology
- Interdependence & Power Asymmetry
- Recognises threat & stress in IR Conflict

**Defining the Research Problem**

- Strike
- Industrial Action
- Voicing Discontent

**Problem Centric Research**

- Incorporates Resistance
- Change, Loss, More, Revenge

**Research Findings**

- Physical & Non-Physical Retreat
- Repositions Silence
- Unbundles Soft Voice

**Discussion**

- (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005)
- (Schmidt et al., 2008)
- (Edwards et al, 1995)
- (Fried, 1993)
- (Dent & Goldberg, 1999)

**Conclusions**
Revisiting the Research Problem

“there is, at a minimum, a need to consider adopting one or more alternative methodological and ontological lenses to complement or even supplant the one provided by conventional [IR] research”

(Godard, 2011:299)

- Less visible non-strike expressions → Qualitative methods

IR Conflict (still) exists in the lived experience of people at work

- Threat Response Theory
  - Inclusive
  - Specific to ER
  - Recognises threat

1. Context
2. Industry
3. Workplace
Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are the views of the authors and are not necessarily representative of the views held by the Irish Research Council, Trinity College Dublin or the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
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