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Social work and the managerial debate: victim or offender?

Social workers state that the core of their work is being threatened. Social policy makers emphasize a logic of effectivity, efficiency and accountability, while social workers are expected to manage complicated social problems and to account for their time investment and for the clear-cut results they get (Clarke, Gewirtz & McLaughlin, 2002). Social workers are involved with a lot of bureaucratic tasks. This managerial approach leaves them little room to perform the core task of social work, namely working with clients, in an adequate way.

Social work and social workers often position themselves as victims of these developments: government and social policy prescribe – often bureaucratic - rules and social work has to follow these rules. As a result they can't guarantee the quality of social work for (and with) their clients.

In this presentation, we want to nuance this victimization of social work. We state that social work is not solely a victim of the growing pressure on their work, but also an actor in this development: the way social workers think and speak about their profession has important implications for and impact on its discretion. To paraphrase Ulrich Beck (1997): social work is not caught up in the traffic jam, but also *is* the traffic jam.

References

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