

The Effects of Ambiguous Position of Dispatched Workers on Relation and Work Practices between Dispatched and Regular Workers in Office

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1. Aim

This research examines how “ambiguous” position of the dispatched workers (Haken Shain), neither a complete outsider nor a complete insider in a user firm, impacts the following two spheres in the Japanese labor context: relationships between the dispatched and regular staff and day-to-day work practices in collaboration between the two parties. The staffing agency business has been legalized for over decades in Japan. The business involves three parties: staffing agency, dispatched worker and user firm. In this tripartite arrangement, the employer of the dispatched workers is not a user firm, but a staffing agency, which means dispatched worker’s state is ambiguous in workplace. This research focuses on relationships and the way work is operated between dispatched and regular workers from the perspective of the ambiguous position of dispatched workers.

2. Data & Methods

To investigate the questions, this study targeted dispatched clerks, the most common occupation in the staffing agency business. Semi-structured interviews were employed with 27 informants, who were both dispatched clerks and regular employees.

3. Results

The narratives illuminate that a dichotomous relationship is developed between the two parties; regular employees are superior and dispatched ones inferior. This has much to do with the work structure in which dispatched clerks have little discretion over the work and need to be reactive to orders from regular workers. Yet, beyond this structural matter, their position also contributes to the enhancement of an asymmetrical relationship because dispatched clerks are all too often excluded from necessary information as they are regarded as “outsiders”. Also, the ambiguous position of the dispatched clerks influences work practices of the two parties, particularly over task assignments. Tension and confusion arise in the office, triggered by different rules imposed on the two parties about task duties. Regular worker’s hierarchical power is resisted by the dispatched clerks who utilize their position of mobility.

4. Conclusion

From these findings, I conclude that the ambiguous position of dispatched clerks plays a partial role in developing the dichotomous relationship that the clerks are subordinate to regular workers, as the clerks are treated as outsiders at the workplace. Also, the liminal position gives rise to tension and confusion over task assignments, and negotiation is involved in defining the range of assignments. This study implicates that individual workers exercise their new ingenuity and strategy in performing work in response to flexible organizational structures according to the context.