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Those in Charge in the Land of the Baboons: An Investigation with the Participation of Inspectors and Controllers

The case which is being referred to concerns the work relationship between operational executives (inspectors and postal workers) and checking account managerial agents from the financial services branch of the post office. In order to facilitate coordination between the organization and its clientele, the organization of services within the financial center was entirely restructured: institution of modular structures; simplification of the rules of bureaucratic functioning. These measures have had effects on the work of the operational managerial staff which is urged to work directly with the agents, to create a "proximity management" according to the directors, to abandon a written culture in favor of an oral culture (an increase in meetings, direct intervention with agents). We have analyzed the difficulties with which the operational managerial staff was confronted through the various duties it is supposed to fulfill (management of accounts, commercial activity, client service, programming of work and personnel management). Besides the fact that these activities create an atmosphere of contradiction: administrative or managerial logic opposed to a kind of "merchant" logic (Boltanski, Thévenot, 1991), the complex nature of work situations is above all the result of situated activities (Joseph, 1995). When executives work directly with agents, they are required to fulfill their duties in public and must be as competent with technical aspects as they are with communication. As a result, they must justify their decisions even if their actions resolve the problem, and to make their actions understandable for the agents by explaining their decisions as an expert would to a novice. The face to face relations oblige them to confirm, in every situation, a context of mutual understanding.

What is the nature of knowledge used in these complex situations? In order to work with agents *in situ*, the operational executives have at their disposal "scripts" or "frameworks" (Goffman, 1991) which are predetermined and stereotyped sequences of action which assumes that the situation is considered as known. Making these activities coherent assumes that individuals use signs drawn out of the circumstances which should be considered as any other resource for whatever context of experience. But this training project acquires strength of objectification of experience only when the activity becomes problematic. It therefore functions as a tool of location and correction of problems of the intelligibility of the situated activity. In any case, this project of location uses cognitive tools (bureaucratic objects and written supports) which permit each of the participants to realize that he is in a situation which is already known.