

TROUBLING IRELAND

**The politics of bullshit:
language and neoliberalism**

Notes for a talk

by Marnie Holborow

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Customers, clients, consumers

Public services have customers on the Luas, university students are customers and patients in hospitals are referred to as clients

As our benighted minister Brendan Howlin puts it “Reform in the public sector is about Placing customer service at the heart of everything we do”

Including the most unlikely agencies: Office of the Refugees Applications

In their Customer Charter list their customers as:

- Individual Asylum seekers,
- dependents of asylum seekers,
- legal representatives of asylum seekers,
- the staff of the Office of the Refugee applications,
- non-governmental organisations,
- the Department of Justice Equality and Law reform, the Government,
- (and even) the UN National Higher commissioner for Refugees

Not all customers are equal, evidently

When you pick up a phone to any company or corporation – you are immediately told you are a valued customer:

Your custom is very important to us, please hold the line. (promptly discover your custom not that important to them as they are understaffed and you have to wait for half an hour)

In workplaces, we are told need to be

customer orientated, customer driven, customer sensitive, customer savvy, tuned into our customers and think like our customers

Customer sits alongside that other strange entity - stakeholder

For decisions that are made, we are referred to mysterious stakeholders, people whose every need must be met eg:

The outcome is subject to the approval of the relevant stakeholders (= management needn't consult with anyone)

Like customer, stakeholder is everyone and no one. As one company mission statement puts it -

Our progress is dependent on all our stakeholders including our members, staff, broker partners, clients and..... the community at large.