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**Measures of accountability and delegated discretion in activation work:
Lessons from the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service**

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Author:

Tone Alm Andreassen,

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Science (now OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University)

Centre for the Study of Professions

P.O. Box 4, St. Olavs plass, NO-0103 Oslo, Norway

E-mail: tone.almandreassen@hioa.no (now: toaa@oslomet.no)

Abstract

Activation work – the complex task of motivating, compelling and assisting marginalized citizens into labour market participation – pinpoints critical issues of discretion and accountability in the welfare state. Investigating accountability measures aimed at ensuring qualified discretionary judgements is therefore important.

In this article, I discuss the reformed Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service and the accountability measures aimed at discretionary judgements of frontline workers tasked with motivating, compelling and assisting marginalized citizens into labour market participation.

The conclusion is that, because activation tasks in the Norwegian frontline service imply professional discretion more than administrative discretion, structural measures aimed at restricting the discretionary space of frontline workers seem to have only limited impact. This is because the knowledge necessary to perform means–end judgements is insufficient. Rather, there seems to be a need for epistemic measures aimed at improving the knowledge base for professional discretionary reasoning.

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Main text:

Activation work – the task of motivating, compelling and assisting marginalized citizens into labour market participation – pinpoints critical issues of discretion and accountability in the welfare state. Due to the complex means–ends judgements of the task taking place within regimes that regulate procedures and eligibility criteria for citizens’ rights to employment support and income security, a discussion is warranted about the knowledge and skills needed in such discretionary judgements and about the accountability measures aimed at influencing the judgements (Brodkin, 2008; Kjørstad, 2005; Sainsbury, 2008; van Berkel and van Der Aa, 2012).

Discretion in human services is often conceived as a problem of lack of consistency between policy goals and street-level practice, benefitting some clients and disadvantaging others (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000; Sandfort, 2000). Several studies have demonstrated that activation workers use their discretionary space very differently and that their reasoning seems to be related more to their norms and perception of clients than to the situation of individual clients (Eikenaar, de Rijkb, & Meershoek, 2016; Kjørstad, 2005; Møller, 2016; Nothdurfter, 2016; Solvang, 2016; Van Berkel and Van der Aa, 2013).

Extensive use of discretion can jeopardize the principles of predictability, legality and equal treatment, and it can relinquish democratic control over the implementation of laws and policies (Hupe and Hill, 2007; Molander, Grimen, & Eriksen, 2012). However, welfare states cannot do without discretion insofar as they distribute goods and services according to needs, because this requires taking into account a variety of individual and situational circumstances. Realization of policy goals hinges on the knowledge and skills of those to whom discretion is being delegated.

Answering to individual needs in complex, varied and variable contexts must inevitably be left to the discretion of street-level workers (Brodkin, 2013; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000; Molander, et al., 2012). Neither policy nor national regulation can provide detailed guidance on decision-making in situations where the specific ends, as well as the actual means to achieve them, have to be identified

in each individual situation. Because delegation of discretionary power is unavoidable, and desirable, issues of accountability are essential (Brodkin, 2008).

The aim of accountability is to provide assurance that those to whom discretion is delegated act in justifiable ways, and measures of accountability aim to ensure that discretionary power is used in a reasoned and justifiable manner (Molander, et al., 2012). In this sense, accountability measures do not refer to the actual setting where decision-makers have to justify their discretionary judgements, but rather to measures aimed at making judgements justifiable. Accountability, seen as a mechanism to secure proper behaviour, raises the core question of whether the mechanism works (Christensen and Lægreid, 2016).

The aim of this article is to contribute to our understanding of accountability measures aimed at influencing activation work and to add to the discussion about whether activation work should – or could – be understood and governed as professional service provision or as programme administration (van Berkel and van Der Aa, 2012). The article uses empirical analyses of the accountability measures that have been used in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service and their influence on frontline workers' work with discretionary judgements in assessing clients' opportunities for labour market participation. The case of Norway with an 'enabling' activation policy towards clients with impaired work capacity informatively illustrates the importance of accountability measures that address professional reasoning.

The Norwegian context

Norwegian activation policy embodies an 'enabling approach' rather than a coercive one (Jessen and Tuft, 2014). Elements of conditionality are present. Benefits to working-age citizens are dependent on fulfilment of activation obligations. Activation, however, primarily focus on human resource development, and can include training programmes and investment in human capital, or medical treatment and rehabilitation. In addition, employers are obliged to make reasonable adjustment to

enable labour market participation despite reduced work capacity. Around 200 000 persons or 6% of the Norwegian population are registered with 'impaired work capacity'; more than 40 000 of them are below the age of 30 (NAV, 2017).

Following the 2006 reform of Norway's public Labour and Welfare Service, a shift in activation policy towards social welfare clients took place, from a workfare policy that required people to work in return for social assistance benefits to a policy closer to a human capital approach (Gubrium, Harsløf, & Lødemel, 2014). A new work-integration programme (the Qualification Programme) that allowed for flexible forms of assistance and training embodied this shift.

During the reform, the frontline workers' tasks were transformed, from primarily benefit eligibility assessments into employment assistance and assessment of work capacity. The street-level workers' discretionary space increased, according to their own reporting (Jessen and Tufte, 2014). The reform also introduced a shift from discretionary judgements around whether a single case was entitled to a certain benefit, to discretionary judgements around the ability of, and probability that, an individual will in the future gain a foothold in the labour market. Thus the frontline workers have to make judgements about goals (the type of occupation or employer), and about activation measures to achieve the identified goal, such as training, vocational rehabilitation, work-integration programmes or education, assistive technology (to compensate for reduced work capacity) or other kinds of reasonable adjustments of work tasks and working hours. Included in these judgements are considerations about the health issues and work capacity of the individuals, of opportunities in the labour market, and the range of possible employers. These kinds of judgements resemble professional discretion because effort is put into support and prognoses, which is typical for a professional model of administrative justice (Adler, 2003; Gjersøe, 2015). They are forms of 'clinical judgement' that involve expert knowledge about means to reach certain aims (Molander and Grimen, 2010). In this respect, the discretionary judgements of the workers are those of professional discretion, rather than of bureaucratic decision-making according to rules and guidelines.

Accountability measures

Discretionary judgements have both a structural and an epistemic dimension (Molander and Grimen, 2010). The structural aspect of discretion is, according to Molander and Grimen, that an agent has been delegated autonomy by an authority, relative to the standards set by the same authority. The epistemic aspect of discretion is that it is a kind of reasoning about particular cases under circumstances of indeterminacy – to find justifiable answers to questions.

Accountability measures are thus of two kinds (Molander, et al., 2012): *Structural* measures aim to restrain or narrow discretionary spaces or to constrain the actions of persons who operate in discretionary spaces. Their primary aim is ‘control rather than good reasons’ (p.215). *Epistemic* measures aim to ‘improve the quality of discretionary judgements by improving the reasoning process or the conditions for reasoning’ (p.221).

Structural measures constrain the space for discretionary judgements by specifying and clarifying entitlements and obligations. Rights and specification of rules, as well as monitoring and review procedures are kinds of structural measures that limit the space for discretionary reasoning.

Epistemic measures aim to improve the quality of discretionary reasoning by improving either the process or the conditions of reasoning. Epistemic measures can be of different kinds. *Formative* measures aim to instil in the decision-makers knowledge, modes of thinking, values and norms, most importantly through formalized educational programmes that certify the competence of the decision-maker. *Supportive* measures take the form of decision-support systems providing decision-makers with up-to-date and reliable knowledge about which interventions work and which do not work, or making available sound knowledge that can inform practice. *Deliberative* measures include arenas where arguments can be examined in critical discussions.

A differentiating feature in the distinction between structural and epistemic measures is thus that structural measures aim to work on the external settings or circumstances in which discretionary judgement take place. In contrast, epistemic measures are aimed at the discretionary reasoning and judgement itself. However, the distinction is somewhat blurred, because structural measures may have epistemic effects. Review procedures, for example, are structural measures, but may urge frontline workers to improve the quality of their reasoning, or the opposite.

While discretion means autonomy delegated by an authority (in this case the authority of public sector workers delegated by the government), the accountability relations of street-level organizations and professionals also concern stakeholders such as professional societies, citizens or client associations (Hupe and Hill, 2007; Kjørstad, 2005; Pollitt, 2003). According to Hupe & Hill (2007), 'public-administrative accountability' (political, legal and managerial) is supplemented by 'professional accountability' (professional associations, peers and colleagues) and 'participatory accountability' (for example interest groups, associations or councils of patients or clients). Structural accountability measures, such as rules and standardised procedures, seem to be associated with vertical public-administrative accountability, whereas professional or participatory accountability tends to involve formative or deliberative epistemic measures.

The discretionary judgements of frontline workers are of course influenced by conditions other than accountability measures, such as legislation, recruitment policies and higher education programmes. Furthermore, resource limitations and overwhelming caseloads have an imperative influence on street-level workers' performance (Brodkin, 2011; Lipsky, 1980; van Berkel and Knies, 2016). Heavy workloads due to large portfolios of clients with severe problems are prevalent in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service too (Fossestøl, Breit, & Borg, 2014; Mandal, Ofte, Jensen, & Ose, 2015; Røhnebæk, 2012, 2013). Not all these conditions could be discussed within the space of one article.

Approach

My approach in this article is to utilize secondary sources of empirical studies of frontline offices in the Labour and Welfare Service. I have searched in Norwegian library databases for studies that shed light on frontline workers' discretionary work and the conditions under which this takes place. Of particular interest is frontline workers' judgements about whether a client has impaired work capacity but who will, through appropriate work-integration measures, be able to participate in the labour market in the future, and therefore is entitled to assistance and temporary benefits during this activation period (Work Assessment Allowance, WAA, or Qualification allowance during the Qualification Programme, QP). Such judgements also involve an activation plan stating the activities aimed at enhancing work capacity and opportunities for labour market participation. In these judgements, a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is to be used in relation to both WAA and QP. A WCA is a method that links activation plans/programmes and benefits. Frontline workers also make discretionary judgements in their regular, day-to-day follow-up of the clients, but this analysis primarily focuses on the judgements through which goals are set and means to achieve them are identified.

Aware of the turbulence during the reform implementation period (Alm Andreassen and Aars, 2015), I have concentrated on the post-reform situation, meaning studies with data from 2011 and forward. Due to the huge volume of studies, and because several studies are 'grey literature', it cannot be excluded that some studies may have been missed out.

As a whole, the identified studies represent different methods (case studies, fieldwork, questionnaires and administrative data), and different researchers (nearly 35 including students), as well as insight into around 48 different frontline offices (due to the anonymity of the original studies, it cannot be ruled out that some offices are included in more than one of the studies). Some studies cover all employees of the selected offices, while others concentrate on limited groups of employees, for example those involved in the Qualification Programme or those working with social welfare

services. One weakness is that only a few studies evaluate the impact of accountability measures on frontline workers' decisions or judgements; most studies only describe frontline workers' opinions and experiences.

In addition, I draw on contextual knowledge about the kind of accountability measures that have been used, achieved through participation in the research-based evaluation of the organizational reform of the Labour and Welfare Service, carried out from 2007 to 2014. The evaluation involved nine research institutions, produced around 90 scientific publications, and concluded with a synthesis of the total evaluation research (Alm Andreassen and Aars, 2015).

Accountability measures in the Labour and Welfare service

Standardizing work procedures

Several accountability measures have been in use in the Labour and Welfare Service. A 'Standard for follow-up of users' instructs the frontline workers about how to handle encounters with different kinds of clients. It contains checklists, templates and references to relevant legislation and regulations and provides an official terminology that constructs the workers' ways of talking about their work and their clients.

The standard is transformed into structured, computer-assisted tasks to be performed through information and communication technology (ICT) (Røhnebæk, 2012). For each task, the ICT tool guides the workers through detailed steps to ensure that every necessary aspect is taken care of in the correct order. The tool also provides links to the relevant supplementary information – in particular, the legislation.

The 'Standard' and the ICT tools structure the discretionary work of the frontline worker by providing detailed regulations, with instructions for responsibilities and channels of communication, but they also cause distress rather than give guidance (Herst and Rullestad, 2014; Røhnebæk, 2012). Use of the ICT tool is complicated and many workers find it difficult to stick to the tool's strict structuring of the tasks (Røhnebæk, 2013; Volckmar-Eeg, 2015). The unavoidable, obligatory procedures of the ICT

tool and its requirement of 'extreme loyalty' to the rigid structure make it highly time-consuming and wasteful of resources, according to the workers (Fossestøl, et al., 2014; Røhnebæk, 2012, 2013). Some talk about 'pleasing the system rather than the clients'.

An important instrument of the 'Standard' is the Work Capability Assessment (WCA). A WCA is a 'task' according to the ICT tool, a module that guides workers through the judgement process. It is made up of several steps, which must be undertaken in a predefined sequence. Judging work capacity is discretionary work by the frontline workers. Sentences containing the word 'judge' appear 95 times in the six pages of the Standard that describe how to carry out a WCA (Volckmar-Eeg, 2015).

Medical declarations are only one kind of information needed to produce a WCA. Of equal importance is the frontline workers' evaluation of employment opportunities. Still, knowledge about the labour market and ways to approach employers is what workers most often reported as an area where they need more competence (Fossestøl, et al., 2014).

The most challenging requirement of the WCAs has been to assess the individuals in relation to the labour market (Gjersøe, 2016b; Proba, 2012). According to the frontline workers, medical declarations are often focused on medical information and are not sufficiently clear about functional ability and what kind of tasks the clients are able to perform (Gjersøe, 2016b; Håvold, Harsløf, & Alm Andreassen, 2017). Due to lack of such knowledge, and lack of knowledge about opportunities to make adjustments in the clients' work situation, the workers find it difficult to assess if work capacity is (sufficiently) reduced to be eligible for benefits or work-integration programmes (Mandal, et al., 2015; Pedersen, Alseth, Aasback, Nyland, & Marthinsen, 2011). Workers who perform WCAs report that they achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the clients' situation, but they still find it difficult to transform this understanding into judgements about measures to improve the situation (Pedersen, et al., 2011). Workers acknowledge that their reasoning should be empirically grounded and supported with documentation, but still characterise their judgements as 'subjective' statements or 'gut feeling', and to some degree reliant on their personal background (Herst and Rullestad, 2014).

Initially, the purpose of the WCA was as a tool in the professional work of making plans for the clients' entry into or return to labour market participation, but a WCA should also result in a 'resource profile' of the individual client forming the basis of a formal decision on the level of service to which the client is entitled. Moreover, an 'impaired work capacity' conclusion is necessary in order to be entitled to temporary allowances or permanent disability benefits.

Many workers find WCA of minor importance in the real assessments of the clients' work capacity (Mandal, et al., 2015). Mostly, a WCA is undertaken only when the workers have informally concluded that 'specially adapted assistance' is necessary to give a client access to benefits or activation programmes (Fossetøl, et al., 2014; Mandal, et al., 2015; Pedersen, et al., 2011; Volckmar-Eeg, 2015). To the frontline workers the WCA concept refers to the written document that is the result of a WCA, rather than their actual judgement process; they talk about 'completing the document', not about making judgements (Volckmar-Eeg, 2015). WCAs usually represent the formalization or 'rubber-stamping' of decisions already made; the real judgements are made before the WCA is performed (Gjersøe, 2016a).

Quality control

Both internal and external control have been set up to ensure the quality of the work capability assessments. The quality of the written WCA documents has been subjected to several external evaluations (Pedersen, et al., 2011; Proba, 2012). In addition, the Office of the Auditor General (Riksrevisjonen in Norwegian) has criticized the quality of the WCA documents (Riksrevisjonen, 2014).

The central management has established a system of quality control designed to ensure that the predefined judgement process is executed as prescribed. Systematic spot checks of WCA documents have been performed. In addition, when a WCA is documentation in an application for permanent disability benefit, the WCA has to be verified and accepted by an external 'controller'. The final authority in a WCA is thereby withdrawn from the street-level workers, who then sometimes feel

overruled (Fossestøl, et al., 2014; Volckmar-Eeg, 2015). To avoid having WCAs returned by controllers or benefit administration, frontline workers are often determined to avoid writing a WCA if a case is not completely clarified (Gjersøe, 2016a).

The quality control of the written WCA document has motivated several offices to specialise in the task of completing the WCA form (Fossestøl, et al., 2014). Writing WCAs is a job given to experienced workers who are able to cope with the required assessment terminology (Volckmar-Eeg, 2015). The tasks are withdrawn from the workers who perform the actual judgements. Over time, the attitudes of the NAV office workers towards the WCA tool seem increasingly less positive (Fossestøl, et al., 2014; Mandal, et al., 2015).

Performance management

An encompassing system of performance management, instigated by the ministry, has dominated the Labour and Welfare Service. The activities of the frontline offices are evaluated according to a variety of performance measures. Examples are the number of clients in activation programmes, the number of completed WCAs per person-year, the proportion of jobseekers where 'job matching' is performed, the proportion of clients on Work Assessment Allowance who have a formally decided follow-up plan, etc. The performance measures are incorporated into the ICT system. Results are generated automatically while the workers use the ICT tools. To enable collection of this information, the system contains a huge amount of unavoidable or obligatory procedures. Scores from the performance measurements are fed back to the office managers who can compare their own results against other offices. The results are used systematically in the follow-up of local managers by central management. Comparison of office results has made frontline managers highly aware of their own rating. While the majority of frontline managers report that performance management is useful, they also report that it directs resources away from tasks of importance to achieve the goals of the reform (Fossestøl, et al., 2014). Ambivalence towards performance management is more pronounced among the workers. While some appreciate its demonstration of the impact of their effort, others argue that

increased attention to quantifiable tasks comes at the cost of quality in the follow-up and care for the clients (Fossestøl, et al., 2014; Fossestøl, Breit, & Borg, 2016; Røysum, 2013).

There are no reports saying that performance management is used at the level of the individual employees. Nonetheless, knowing that the office is evaluated seems to urge both managers and workers to pay attention to the performance measures. An indication of this attention is the widely known expression of 'getting counts', meaning to ensure that activities are counted in the registration system (Fossestøl, et al., 2014). Knowing that the number of clients in activation programmes is recorded not only inspires frontline workers to ensure quick transferral into programmes but also encourages them to perform a less thorough WCA (Volckmar-Eeg, 2015).

Training and learning initiatives

In the Labour and Welfare Service, measures directed more towards the knowledge and skills of the frontline workers have also been in use. Newly recruited employees receive training in the use of the ICT tool and about the reasoning behind the WCA, the format of the WCA document and the procedures involved in the WCA tool. The number of workers who have participated in training courses or workshops has steadily increased and in 2014 around 80% of the workers reported that the workers have received training organised by the regional authorities and that their own office has organized training (Fossestøl, et al., 2014; Proba, 2012). Still, many workers (almost 40% in 2014) reported that training is insufficient to master new work tasks (Fossestøl, et al., 2014). The training in work capacity assessment does not seem to help frontline workers decide how much, or what kind of information is enough to make sound and well-founded judgements (Volckmar-Eeg, 2015).

Training provided by the central management and the regional administrations was considered to be an important source of learning by less than 20% of the workers. The most important source of learning, reported by the workers, has been training on their own. In a survey, more than 80% of the workers mentioned this as an important source of learning, and learning from co-workers was mentioned by around 75% (Fossestøl, et al., 2014).

When frontline workers face uncertainties in their discretionary judgements, they turn to their co-workers. Many social welfare workers reported that their judgements and choices are influenced by fellow colleagues (Jessen, 2015). Both informally seeking advice when in doubt, and regular team meetings for professional discussion of difficult cases, are sources of knowledge to the frontline workers (Volckmar-Eeg, 2015). Moreover, trying to imagine being in the client's position is reported as a source of increased understanding (op.cit).

At some frontline offices, internal training in guidance and counselling has been established, sometimes with the use of experienced workers (Fossetøl, et al., 2014; Volckmar-Eeg, 2015). In one region, workshops have been set up to give frontline workers an opportunity to discuss difficult cases with medical and psychology experts, as well as with fellow workers, with regard to enforcement of activation requirements and to determine eligibility for temporary disability benefit (Kann and Lima, 2015). These have had an impact in the form of reduced sickness absence and benefit use, a finding that is ascribed to the establishment of a shared professional platform, improved competence and reduced subjective discretion (Kann and Lima, 2015).

In implementation of the Qualification Programme, the central management promoted professional development and guidance, training programmes and organized quality development (Schafft and Spjelkavik, 2011), in line with a tradition of improving the quality of social services through development of professional competence (Alm Andreassen, 2015). Later, a skills-training programme for social workers was established (Malmberg-Heimonen, 2015; Malmberg-Heimonen, Natland, Tøge, & Hansen, 2015). The aim was to improve social workers' professional competencies by enhancing and systematizing follow-up work. In contrast to training in the procedural and technical aspects of the work, this programme addressed relationships with clients; collaborative work with the clients' network, other services and the labour market and employers; and the administrative work of planning and evaluation of services, including evaluation of work capacity (Malmberg-Heimonen, 2015).

The Qualification Programme resulted in increased entry into the labour market and higher income among the participants compared to a control group (Markussen and Røed, 2014). Obviously, the flexible and individualized content and the relatively few clients to follow up by each frontline worker have contributed to the results (Schafft and Spjelkavik, 2011). Most likely, the emphasis placed on upgrading the skills of the workers has backed the results by strengthening the workers' ability to approach the labour market and the clients. The subsequent skills-training course was evaluated through a cluster-randomized study and the conclusion was that this programme positively affected the social workers' evaluations of their professional competencies, and increased reemployment among social welfare recipients (Malmberg-Heimonen, 2015; Malmberg-Heimonen, et al., 2015).

User involvement

The Labour and Welfare Service is obliged by law to involve spokespersons of the clients (the service user groups) in the planning and evaluation of services. The involvement has been organized through 'user-councils' to which organizations representing, for example, disabled people, drug addicts and economically disadvantaged groups have been invited. The council meetings were dominated by exchanges of information, primarily from the frontline offices to the users, rather than by discussions about matters of importance to the offices or the user groups (Alm Andreassen, Breit, & Legard, 2012; Hualand and Hilsen, 2014). The office managers expected the user groups to be more proactive in bringing user experiences to the table, but the matters that the managers placed on the agenda were primarily information about decisions by the central management (op.cit).

Discussion

In the Labour and Welfare Service, there are elements of what Hupe & Hill (2007) term 'professional accountability' and 'participatory accountability' respectively. Both formally and informally the frontline workers' peers and colleagues seem to be important reference groups in their discretionary work. Many professionals indicate that discussions with peers seem to influence their reasoning

(Jessen, 2015). Professional accountability seems institutionalized through team-meetings and workshops aimed at discussion of difficult cases. Such arenas for collegial discussions could be seen as epistemic measures for examination of discretionary reasoning.

The user-councils could have functioned as a form of participatory accountability and a deliberative epistemic measure where actions and arguments could be examined. In practice, though, the councils have seldom discussed matters of importance. Thus, they seem to have limited impact on the actual performance of the frontline offices.

The form of accountability most dominant in the Labour and Welfare Service seems to be 'public-administrative accountability'. The performance management system works as an information system for the political leadership and as a control system for the central management (Jantz, Christensen, & Læg Reid, 2015). At the local level, the system works as a structural measure aimed at monitoring and reviewing the activities and, to some degree, even the output of the work. The system seems to spur attention to quantifiable tasks, deflated discretionary judgements, and reduced attention to qualitative aspects of the assistance given to the clients. The possibility that performance management may lead to goal displacement, and create incentives for street-level workers to take short-cuts or use exclusionary practices, is familiar from other countries too (see the review in Brodtkin, 2008). As emphasized by Brodtkin (2008), performance measures are too rudimentary to capture qualitative aspects of practice, and may obscure aspects of maladministration, with negative consequences for accountability. While performance management could stimulate discussions that foster organizational learning and thereby work as an epistemic measure, this would imply a shift in focus away from being an instrument of control (Jantz, et al., 2015).

The system of quality control of the work capacity assessments seems to have transformed what was initially meant to be a tool to guide discretionary reasoning during the assessment process into a procedure of documentation. Attention is directed towards the document and the written texts. The

WCA is not guiding the real assessment processes. Therefore, the assessment tool loses character of an epistemic measure.

The computer-assisted 'Standard for follow-up of users' aims to guide the whole work process of the frontline workers through directing the steps of the judgement process. The system provides a kind of decision-support designed to ensure that all relevant aspects of a case are taken into consideration, also providing easy access to relevant legislation and regulations. In that respect, the Standard resembles an epistemic measure. However, the system's time-consuming, unavoidable, obligatory procedures, due to the performance measurement system, seem to produce stress and frustration rather than guidance.

In Norway, like in other European countries, accountability through procedures has been increasing, such as rules for case management, categorization of the clients, and standardization of client contact (Jantz and Jann, 2013). Similarly to what is known from other countries, the impact on street-level workers' discretionary practice of measures such as performance monitoring, standardization or ICT-based work procedures seems minor or negative (Blackmore, 2001; Brodtkin, 2008, 2011; Sandfort, 2000).

Although accountability through procedures diminishes flexibility, proliferation of rules and regulations cannot automatically be equated with greater control over professional discretion (Evans and Harris, 2004; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000). Standardization does not necessarily imply decreased discretion; instead, manuals can increase discretion, since frontline workers have to make constant assessments and choices as to what information is necessary (Ponnert and Svensson, 2016). Requirements for achieving results based on predefined targets are primarily frameworks that leave space for frontline workers' professional autonomy (Jessen, 2015).

The Standard presupposes that workers can mobilize professional means–end knowledge and use the information they are guided to collect in order to clarify problems and identify solutions. Using the Standard and the assessment procedures, the frontline workers achieve a more comprehensive

understanding of their clients' situations, which sometimes enable them empathically to place themselves in the client's position. However, many of them struggle with interpretation and weighing up of the information into a 'diagnosis', and with inferences from diagnoses to means and ends in the client's case. These steps – classifying a problem, reasoning about it, and taking action in it (to diagnose, to infer and to treat) – are the actions of professionals (Abbott, 1988).

Delegated discretion is based on the assumption that the agent to whom discretionary power is delegated is capable of passing judgements and making reasonable decisions (Molander and Grimen, 2010). The shift from administrative bureaucratic discretion to professional discretion entails a shift in what it means to be capable of passing judgements. Professional discretion implies the existence of professionals whose actions can be based on a professional knowledge system. According to the classic sense of the term, a profession is an occupational group that possesses recognized, unique knowledge and expertise, certified by educational credentials (Brante, 2011; Evetts, 2011; Freidson, 2001).

Activation workers, however, are professionals only to a limited degree, and the relevant knowledge about labour market inclusion of marginalized groups with reduced work capacity does not constitute a professional knowledge system. 'Activation work' is not an established occupational jurisdiction, either in Norway or in other European countries (Sainsbury, 2008; van Berkel, van der Aa, & van Gestel, 2010). Rather they have been 'professionals without a profession' (van Berkel, et al., 2010). When it comes to educational background, the frontline workers of the Norwegian labour and welfare service represent a mix. While some workers have decades of on-the-job training, in 2014 more than two-thirds of the frontline staff had tertiary education at a university level, most often as social workers or health professionals (Vågeng-utvalget, 2014). These professional study programmes provide knowledge and skills that might be of relevance in activation work, but until recently, the work-integration task was hardly addressed (Terum, 2014). Thus, a sufficient knowledge

base has been lacking that frontline workers could rely on in the means-end judgements that they have been entrusted with.

The impact of the workshop for discussion of difficult cases, the upgrading of skills in the implementation of the Qualification Programme and the subsequent skills-training courses for the frontline worker is explainable in this light. These measures have not only increased the competence and confidence of the frontline workers but also influenced the outcome of frontline workers' work. These are formative, epistemic measures addressing the frontline workers' knowledge, modes of thinking, values and norms. They point to the importance of learning in relation to policy implementation and to giving frontline workers access to intellectual resources in the form of knowledge, skills and reasons (Hill, 2003).

Conclusion

'Enabling' activation policies require not only administrative, bureaucratic discretion but also professional discretion about when and how the goal of labour market participation of clients with health problems and impaired work capacity could be achieved. The case of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service points to the importance of accountability measures that address professional reasoning and to the limitations of accountability measures that approach activation work as administrative decision-making according to rules and guidelines.

Without the existence of professions with a coherent knowledge base on which activation work could be grounded, neither structural measures, aimed at restricting the discretionary space of frontline workers, nor supportive epistemic measures in the form of decision-support procedures, seem to satisfactorily support the professional means-end judgements of activation work. In contrast, formative epistemic and deliberate measures influence the frontline workers' work with discretionary reasoning because they address needs for new knowledge and skills. Because such measures include discussions among the frontline workers, they seem to involve not only public-

administrative accountability, but also professional accountability. Accordingly, they may also address the different norms and values involved in activation work.

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