

**Gatekeepers of the Labor Market: Employer  
Considerations of Disabled People and Disability  
Employment Policy**

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Autumn 2022

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OsloMet Avhandling 2021 nr 42

ISSN 2535-471X (trykket)

ISSN 2535-5414 (online)

ISBN 978-82-8364-443-2 (trykket)

ISBN 978-82-8364-466-1 (online)

OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet

Universitetsbiblioteket

Skriftserien

St. Olavs plass 4,

0130 Oslo,

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Postboks 4, St. Olavs plass

0130 Oslo

Trykket hos Byråservice

Trykket på Scandia 2000 white, 80 gram på materiesider/200 gram på coveret

# Acknowledgements

Most of this thesis has been written from my living room, where I in March 2020 set up my small IKEA desk with an extra monitor as home office mandates was set in action. I want to thank all the people who made it possible to write a dissertation mostly in solitude without really feeling alone.

Thanks to my supervisor, Kjetil van der Wel, who always seem to be able to provide a comment or reflection that pushes my work a big step forward. Thanks to my co-supervisor Janikke Solstad Vedeler, who always has been there as an enduring supporting force, a wonderful collaborator and co-author, and the best manager I have ever had.

I also want to thank my colleagues at NOVA, who have provided social and professional support. While working on my thesis I have been employed at the department of health and welfare, and I have always felt like I have been taken seriously as a colleague with you. Thank you for reading and commenting on my manuscripts. Especially thanks to those of you who showed up to the quizzes I organized.

My thesis has been written as a part of the HIRE project, financed by the Norwegian Research Council. I am grateful to all who made this project happen and made it enjoyable to participate along the way. Thanks to Vegar Bjørnshagen for always providing the most useful comments on my manuscripts and for being someone with which I can share my frustrations and joys. Thanks to Elisabeth Ugreninov for being an excellent project leader.

The PhD candidates at NOVA and Department of Social Work, Child Welfare and Social Policy that have read and given feedback on my work, who have provided encouragement during these years, in courses, writing seminars and other occasions – thank you.

A lot of people have provided support in writing the kappe. First, Hanna Vangen and Marlene Persson provided invaluable social and professional support in the kappe writing process. I also want to thank Gagan Chhabra who took the time to read my thesis and give useful comments on my work. In addition, May Britt Solem and Monica Kjørstad provided feedback on my methodology chapter, for which I am very grateful.

I also feel a lot of gratitude towards all the employers that took time out of their busy schedules to talk to me. Everyone who says yes to participating in the research of a PhD candidate should know that this makes us incredibly happy.

Finally, thanks to friends and family, who have supported me through the ups and downs. My mother and father, thank you for providing me the safety to trust the notion that things turn out okay in the end. To Stian, for all our engaging discussions. Thank you, Morten, for always being there and providing enthusiastic and unconditional support. Vilja and Alfred. Thank you for providing me with a life outside work that will always outweigh any professional work in importance.

Kaja Larsen Østerud

November, 2022



# Summary

Disability is associated with considerable labor market disadvantages, as reflected in the large employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people. This gap is persistent, and investments in active labor market policies in recent decades have yielded little improvement. One possible driver of labor market inequality is employers' recruitment practices regarding disabled people. This thesis explores that factor by critically investigating employer considerations of disabled people and disability employment policy. By exploring employer accounts, the thesis asks two overarching questions: (1) *How do employers evaluate disabled jobseekers?* and (2) *How do employers engage with disability employment policy in ordinary recruitment?* The thesis offers a multidisciplinary approach by bringing in perspectives from disability studies and sociology together with a demand-side perspective on labor market integration from social policy. The findings show how economic considerations, in-group favoritism, and norms of normality influence employers' hiring practices in a way that represents a considerable disadvantage for disabled jobseekers.

The empirical foundation is 48 qualitative interviews with Norwegian employers, divided into three data sets. Data sets 1 and 2 consist of 38 interviews with employers who were subjected to a field experiment before the interviews. Employers in data set 1 received a fictitious application from a mobility-impaired candidate, while those in data set 2 received a fictitious application from a candidate who disclosed mental health problems. Data set 3 consists of 10 state employers that have recently been subjected to a hiring quota by an inclusion initiative launched in 2018: the Inclusion Dugnad (*inkluderingsdugnaden*).<sup>1</sup> The empirical material provides insight into the perceptions, attitudes, and practices of hiring managers and HR personnel.

The thesis consists of four articles. Articles 1 and 2 both draw on interviews with employers who had been subjected to a field experiment. Before the interviews took place, the employers received two fictitious applications for a real vacancy; one applicant disclosed an impairment. Article 1 uses data set 1 to investigate why employers discriminated against a qualified mobility-impaired candidate by applying the theoretical perspective of the ideal worker. The article shows that the ideal worker against whom disabled people are evaluated is constructed with both a productive and a social component. The main exclusionary

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<sup>1</sup> *Dugnad* is the Norwegian word for unpaid voluntary community work, where the community comes together to work towards common goals.

mechanism identified for wheelchair-using applicants is related to social considerations about fitting in and being able to take part in the employer's established social practices. In article 2, which use data sets 1 and 2, disclosure is in focus; the paper examines whether, when, and how employers prefer either mental health problems or a mobility impairment to be disclosed. By employing the theoretical concepts of stigma management and impression management, the article reveals employer expectations regarding self-representation. The findings show how disclosure is a balancing act between appearing candid and competent and meeting expectations to present a positive narrative around disability.

Articles 3 and 4 use data set 3 to look at how managers and HR personnel meet regulatory demands to increase the hiring of disabled people. Article 3 investigates behavioral and attitudinal engagement with the Inclusion Dugnad by pairing employer accounts with a document analysis of annual reports from 161 state enterprises. The article shows how the typical state employer seems passive, displaying generally positive attitudes but negative behavior (i.e., not actually hiring disabled people). The article points to important barriers like efficiency demands paired with ableist impressions of disabled people and the lack of applicants who disclose having an impairment. Article 4, co-authored with Janikke S. Vedeler, pairs Norwegian interview material with interviews with 10 employer representatives from the United States. The article presents a cross-national investigation of barriers to regulatory approaches to employer engagement. We discuss commonalities in the struggles to translate regulatory demands, quotas, and anti-discrimination legislation into inclusive hiring practices. We highlight struggles related to the identification and quantification of disabled people that are constrained by the heterogeneity of the disability construct.

The findings presented in this thesis have important implications for employers, disabled people, and social policy. For employers, the articles shed light on discriminatory hiring practices and the challenges related to work inclusion that may help them identify and evaluate their own practices. For disabled people, the findings bring to light marginalizing components of recruitment. This knowledge is an important tool in the struggle for employment equality. For social policy, the thesis expands the knowledge of why employers often remain passive about or even dismissive of policies intended to increase hiring rates and diminish discrimination against disabled people. The thesis draws attention to important barriers to making disability employment policy work, such as the logics of the modern labor

market, the multifaceted nature of disability itself, ableist stereotypes, and discriminatory evaluation practices.

# Sammendrag

Funksjonshemming er forbundet med betydelig arbeidsmarkedsulemper som særlig kommer til uttrykk i et stort sysselsettingsgap mellom funksjonshemmede og den øvrige befolkningen. Gapet har vedvart i lang tid og de siste tiårenes investeringer i aktiv arbeidsmarkedspolitikk har medført lite bedring. En potensiell viktig faktor som bidrar til sysselsettingsgapet, er arbeidsgiveres rekrutteringspraksiser overfor funksjonshemmede. Denne avhandlingen er en kritisk utforskning av hvordan arbeidsgivere forholder seg til funksjonshemmede arbeidssøkere og sysselsettingspolitikk for funksjonshemmede. De overordnede forskningsspørsmålene er (1) *hvordan evaluerer arbeidsgivere funksjonshemmede jobbsøkere?* og (2) *hvordan engasjerer arbeidsgivere seg i funksjonshemmingspolitikk i ordinær rekruttering?* Den gir et tverrfaglig perspektiv ved å koble sammen sosialpolitiske perspektiver på tilbudssiden i arbeidsmarkedet, et sosiologisk perspektiv på marginalisering og diskriminering og et søkelys på barrierer for samfunnsdeltakelse fra funksjonshemmingsstudier. Avhandlingen viser hvordan økonomiske betraktninger, inngruppefavorisering og normalitetsnormer påvirker arbeidsgiveres ansettelsespraksis på en måte som innebærer en betydelig ulempe for funksjonshemmede arbeidssøkere.

Det empiriske grunnlaget er 48 kvalitative intervjuer med norske arbeidsgivere, som består av tre datasett. Datasett 1 og 2 er intervjuer med arbeidsgivere som i forkant av intervjuene blitt utsatt for et felteksperiment. I dette felteksperimentet ble de tilsendt to fiktive søknader til en reell stillingsutlysning. I datasett 1 oppga den ene søkeren å sitte i rullestol, mens i datasett 2 oppga den ene søkeren å ha et hull i CV-en på grunn av psykiske helseproblemer. Datasett 3 er 10 intervjuer med statlige arbeidsgivere som er en utpekt som hovedmålgruppe i inkluderingsdugnaden der de var omfattet av en ansettelseskvote i 2018-2022. Datamaterialet gir innsikt i ledere og HR-ansattes oppfatninger, holdninger og praksiser når det gjelder funksjonshemmede jobbsøkere.

Avhandlingen består av fire artikler. Artikkel 1 og 2 bruker begge intervjudata fra arbeidsgivere som har blitt utsatt for et felteksperiment. Før intervjuene fant sted mottok arbeidsgiverne to fiktive søknader til en ekte utlysning. En av søkerne oppga å ha en funksjonsnedsettelse. De fiktive søkerne hadde like kvalifikasjoner, kjønn og alder og den eneste forskjellen av betydning var funksjonsnedsettelsen. I artikkel 1, der jeg bruker datasett 1, undersøker jeg hvorfor arbeidsgiverne diskriminerte en kvalifisert funksjonshemmet søker.



I artikkelen bruker jeg teoretiske rammeverket den ideelle arbeidstakeren og analyserer vurderinger som arbeidsgiverne la til grunn for sine evalueringer av kandidatene. Artikkelen viser at den ideelle arbeidstakeren som funksjonshemmede vurderes opp mot ikke bare har en produktivitetskomponent, men også en sosial komponent. Den sterkeste ekskluderende mekanismen som ble identifisert i datamaterialet var sosiale vurderinger om det å passe inn og kunne delta i etablerte sosiale praksiser. Artikkel 2 bruker både datasett 1 og 2 til å utforske det å avsløre en funksjonsnedsettelse i en rekrutteringsprosess. Den spør om, når og hvordan arbeidsgivere foretrekker at en søker avslører at de har en bevegelseshemming eller mentale helseproblemer i ansettelsessituasjonen. Ved å bruke de teoretiske rammeverkene stigmastyring og inntrykksstyring viser artikkelen at arbeidsgiverne har visse forventninger til hvordan funksjonshemmede skal presentere seg. Funnene demonstrerer hvordan avsløringen er en balansekunst mellom det å fremstå ærlig og kompetent og hvordan det er fylt med forventninger om å presentere et positivt narrativ rundt funksjonsnedsettelsen.

Artikkel 3 og 4 bruker datasett 3, intervjuer med statlige arbeidsgivere, og ser på hvordan ledere og HR-ansatte som er involvert i ansettelsesbeslutninger møter lovpålagte krav som har til hensikt å øke andelen ansettelser av funksjonshemmede. Artikkel 3 undersøker holdninger og atferd i møte med inkluderingsdugnaden ved å koble intervjudata med en dokumentanalyse av 161 statlige årsrapporter. Artikkelen viser at den typiske statlige arbeidsgiveren ser ut til å være passiv, som innebærer at de hadde positive holdninger, men negativ atferd (dvs. ingen ansettelser av personer med funksjonsnedsettelser). Artikkelen peker på barrierer som effektivitetskrav i offentlig sektor, funksjonssjåvinistiske oppfatninger av funksjonshemmede og en mangel på søkere som oppgir å ha en funksjonsnedsettelse. Artikkel 4 er skrevet sammen med Janikke Solstad Vedeler. Her kobles det norske intervjumaterialet i datasett 1 sammen med et intervjumateriale med 11 amerikanske arbeidsgivere. Ved å analysere dette kryssnasjonale materialet finner vi felles faktorer som bidrar til å forhindre at regulative tilnærminger til arbeidsgiverengasjement fungerer etter intensjonen. Vi diskuterer likhetstrekk når det gjelder utfordringer i oversettelsen av politikk til praksis på tvers av de to ulike kontekstene. Vi fremhever hvordan arbeidsgiverne strever med identifisering og kvantifisering av personer med funksjonsnedsettelser i inkluderingsarbeidet, og at dette dels har bakgrunn i kompleksiteten som ligger i funksjonshemmingsbegrepet.

Funnene i avhandlingen har implikasjoner både for arbeidsgivere, funksjonshemmede og sosialpolitikk. For arbeidsgivere kan artiklene gi ny innsikt i diskriminerende

ansettelsespraksiser og utfordringer relatert til arbeidsinkludering. For funksjonshemmede peker funnene på viktige marginaliserende komponenter i rekruttering, og slik kunnskap er et viktig verktøy i kampen for likestilling i arbeidslivet. For sosialpolitikken utvider avhandlingen kunnskapen om arbeidsgiver som sosialpolitisk aktør ved å vise hvordan arbeidsgiveres holdninger og atferd kan være et vesentlig hinder for arbeidsmarkedsintegrering. Avhandlingen peker på flere viktige barrierer for å få arbeidsmarkedspolitikken til å fungere, som de fundamentale logikkene i det moderne arbeidsmarkedet, kompleksiteten som ligger i fenomenet funksjonshemming, funksjonssjåvinistiske holdninger og diskriminerende evalueringspraksiser.

# Contents

- 1 Introduction ..... 4**
  - 1.1 Disability Employment Policies in The Norwegian Context ..... 7
  - 1.2 Key Concepts: Disability and Discrimination ..... 12
    - 1.2.1 Disability ..... 12
    - 1.2.2 Discrimination..... 14
  - 1.3 Positioning the Thesis..... 15
  - 1.4 The Structure of the Thesis..... 18
- 2 Previous Research on Disability, Hiring, and the Employer Role..... 20**
  - 2.1 Problem-Oriented Research..... 20
    - 2.1.1 The employer role from the perspective of the disabled person..... 20
    - 2.1.2 Investigating the employer side: Attitudes and behavior ..... 23
    - 2.1.3 Research on employer responses to regulatory employment policies ..... 27
  - 2.2 Solution-Oriented Research..... 31
  - 2.3 Concluding Remarks on Previous Research..... 35
- 3 Theoretical Framework ..... 38**
  - 3.1 The Concept of Employer Engagement..... 38
  - 3.2 Hiring Decisions of Organizational Actors: Economic, Social Psychological, and Institutional Perspectives..... 41
    - 3.2.1 The economic perspective..... 42
    - 3.2.2 The social psychological perspective ..... 43
    - 3.2.3 The institutional perspective..... 45
  - 3.3 Norms of Normality..... 48
    - 3.3.1 The ideal worker..... 48
    - 3.3.2 Ableism..... 50
    - 3.3.3 Stigma..... 51
  - 3.4 Concluding Remarks on Theoretical Frameworks ..... 53
- 4 Methodology ..... 54**
  - 4.1 A Critical Realist Approach ..... 54
    - 4.1.1 Critical realism and its implications for this thesis..... 56
  - 4.2 Data Sets 1 and 2: The Field Experiment Follow-Up Interviews..... 58
  - 4.3 Data Set 3: The State Employers ..... 62
  - 4.4 Interview Duration and Transcription ..... 65
  - 4.5 Analysis ..... 66

4.5.1	<i>The technicalities of analysis</i> .....	66
4.5.2	<i>Inference: Abduction and retroduction</i> .....	68
4.6	Ethical Considerations .....	70
4.6.1	<i>Approval from NESH and NSD</i> .....	71
4.6.2	<i>Ethical considerations in conducting interviews and analyzing data</i> .....	71
4.7	Reflexivity and the Role of the Researcher .....	73
<b>5</b>	<b>Summaries of the Articles</b> .....	<b>76</b>
5.1	Article 1—Disability Discrimination: Employer Considerations of Disabled Jobseekers in Light of the Ideal Worker .....	76
5.2	Article 2—A Balancing Act: The Employer Perspective on Disability Disclosure in Hiring.....	77
5.3	Article 3—Leading the Way? State Employers’ Engagement with a Disability Employment Policy .....	78
5.4	Article 4—Disability and Regulatory Approaches to Employer Engagement: Cross- National Challenges in Bridging the Gap Between Motivation and Hiring Practice.....	79
<b>6</b>	<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>80</b>
6.1	Employer Evaluation of Disabled People.....	81
6.1.1	<i>Normality ideals and social evaluation</i> .....	82
6.1.2	<i>Seeing disability as an individual shortcoming</i> .....	83
6.2	Employers Relating to Disability Employment Policies .....	85
6.2.1	<i>The invisibility of disabled workers</i> .....	85
6.2.2	<i>Lacking knowledge about disabled people and their protective rights</i> .....	87
6.3	Limitations and Future Research .....	90
6.4	Contributions to Research and Implications for Practice .....	92
<b>7</b>	<b>References</b> .....	<b>99</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>118</b>
	Appendix 1: Interview guides .....	119
	Appendix 2: Email Templates for Recruitment of Participants .....	123
	Appendix 3: Statement from The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH).....	127
	Appendix 4: Approval from the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) .....	133
	Appendix 5: Participation Form—Field Experiment Group .....	141
	Appendix 6: Participation Form—State Employers.....	145

# List of articles

## Article 1

Østerud, K. L. (2022). Disability discrimination: Employer considerations of disabled jobseekers in light of the ideal worker. *Work, Employment and Society*.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F09500170211041303>

## Article 2

Østerud, K. L. (2022). A balancing act: The employer perspective on disability disclosure in hiring. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 56(3), 289–302. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-221192>

## Article 3

Østerud, K. L. (2020). Leading the way? State employers' engagement with a disability employment policy. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 11(1), 3–21.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.122196>

## Article 4

Østerud, K. L., & Vedeler, J. S. (2022). Disability and regulatory approaches to employer engagement: Cross-national challenges in bridging the gap between motivation and hiring practice. *Social Policy and Society*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746422000021>

# 1 Introduction

Disabled people constitute the world's largest minority group, making up approximately 15% of the population (Grue, Johannessen, & Rasmussen, 2015; OECD, 2010). Even so, modern welfare states struggle with the fact that disability is associated with several undesirable outcomes in life. This thesis focuses on the marginalized position disabled people have in the labor market, as reflected in a persistent and considerable difference in employment rates between disabled and non-disabled people. This disability employment gap, while varying in size, is found all over the world (Geiger, Van der Wel, & Tøge, 2017; ILOSTAT, 2020; OECD, 2010; van der Zwan & de Beer, 2021), indicating that disabled people face enduring structural barriers in obtaining and maintaining a foothold in the labor market. This has obvious negative consequences; for example, weak labor market integration is linked to higher rates of poverty (Grammenos, 2019, p. 318). In addition, unemployment denies access to an important sphere of life that can provide purpose, status, activity, and social contact (Jahoda, 1981; Paul & Batinic, 2010).

In social policy practice, much effort has been dedicated to the supply side of active labor market policies (ALMPs), focusing on how jobseekers should adapt to the labor market and be incentivized to work in order to improve labor market integration. However, a perspective heavily favoring the supply side can lead to an impression of exclusion as something that results mainly from individual attributes, which can reinforce impressions of unemployment as a personal responsibility (Salognon, 2007). In addition, hypotheses that disabled people opt out of work because they do not want or have to be employed are inconsistent with comparative employment patterns. For example, studies show that having a welfare system with generous disability benefits is not associated with lower employment rates (Bentley et al., 2022; van der Wel, Dahl, & Thielen, 2011, 2012). Furthermore, sick and disabled people do not show significantly lower work commitment in generous welfare states (van der Wel & Halvorsen, 2015). In addition, research on employer behavior shows that disabled people face systematic discrimination in hiring (Baert, 2014; Baert, De Visschere, Schoors, Vandenberghe, & Omeij, 2016; Bellemare, Goussé, Lacroix, & Marchand, 2018; Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021; Hipes, Lucas, Phelan, & White, 2016; L'Horty, Mahmoudi, Petit, & Wolff, 2022). These findings point to important barriers on the employer side. The demand side perspective, meanwhile, focuses on how employers can adapt to jobseekers and change their hiring practices. The demand-side perspective has gained

momentum in the social policy literature over the past two decades (see e.g. Bredgaard, 2018; Ingold & Stuart, 2015; Van Berkel, Ingold, McGurk, Boselie, & Bredgaard, 2017; Van der Aa & Van Berkel, 2014), recognizing the pivotal role employers play as gatekeepers of the labor market, “making the decision between in or out” (Lewin, 1947, p. 145).

This thesis focuses on employers’ recruitment practices and how employers evaluate disabled jobseekers and relate to employment policy in ordinary recruitment situations. In Norway, as in many other OECD countries, there has been a shift toward more regulatory employment policies targeting the demand side (Tøssebro, 2016). This has been expressed most clearly through the adoption of policies like anti-discrimination legislation. The impact of such policies depends on how they are “interpreted, monitored and enforced—and on what states do to promote awareness of the gravity of problems” (Olsen, 2019, p. 479). However, there has been limited research on how regulatory policies relate to employers’ hiring practices in the Nordic context.

Research on factors that influence the labor market outcomes of disabled people have repeatedly pointed to the importance of employers (e.g. Coleman-Fountain, Sainsbury, Trezzini, & Kánová, 2017). Still, we lack sufficient knowledge about what happens when employers evaluate disabled people in recruitment processes (Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020; Karpur, VanLooy, & Bruyère, 2014). Even in the general literature on employers’ discriminatory hiring decisions and other evaluative acts—such as those around promotion or wages—there has been a preoccupation with outcomes rather than on how employers actually make the decisions (Reskin, 2003; Rivera, 2020). This paucity of knowledge can be described as a “black box” in discrimination research. My dissertation seeks to open that box and investigate the specific processes at play when employers receive job applications from disabled candidates.

I aim to contribute to the research on employers’ recruitment practices and attitudes toward disabled people. The thesis employs a qualitative approach that allows for an in-depth exploration of employer considerations of both people and policies. For this purpose, I conducted 48 interviews with Norwegian employers, 38 of which were with employers who were subjected to a field experiment in advance. This innovative methodological approach combines behavioral data from a real-world recruitment setting with rich qualitative accounts. The final 10 interviews were conducted with state employers and aimed to uncover how managers and HR representatives relate to the employment policies to which state employers

are subjected. Four published articles comprise the foundation of the thesis as a whole, which seeks to answer two overarching RQs:

*RQ1: How do employers evaluate disabled jobseekers?*

*RQ2: How do employers engage with disability employment policy in ordinary recruitment?*

RQ1 addresses the evaluation of disabled jobseekers in ordinary recruitment. This is done by using the concept of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990) and identity management theories (Goffman, 1959, 1963). By exploring employers' evaluative behavior, I aim to shed light on a potentially crucial mechanism that may contribute to the disability employment gap. RQ2 is concerned with employers' relationship to disability employment policy. Using Bredgaard's (2018) conceptualization of employer engagement, I seek to investigate employers' engagement in terms of both hiring behavior and attitudes toward disability employment policies. While all four articles are relevant to answering both RQs, articles 1 and 2 are focused largely on RQ1, and articles 3 and 4 are primarily dedicated to answering RQ2.

Consequently, this thesis investigates how employers relate to both disabled people and disability policy, providing new insights into the attitudes and behavior of employers and what happens in the translation from policy to recruitment practice. This two-layered approach means that the thesis seeks to provide knowledge of both how employers respond to top-down policy and demands and how they approach interpersonal encounters with disabled jobseekers. One important argument this thesis makes is that the two are interrelated. Psychological and sociological factors that influence employers' responses to disabled jobseekers are important elements in both their hiring evaluations and how they incorporate disability employment policy in their recruitment practice. The level of general responsibility employers assume based on regulatory policies will also influence how they end up approaching disabled jobseekers.

Four published articles make up the foundation for this thesis. Article 1—"Disability Discrimination: Employer Considerations of Disabled Jobseekers in Light of the Ideal Worker"—and article 2—"A Balancing Act: The Employer Perspective on Disability Disclosure in Hiring"—make use of field experiment follow-up interviews, where employers were interviewed after receiving a fictitious application from a disabled jobseeker. The articles explore employer reactions to and considerations of jobseekers who disclose an impairment. As such, the two articles help open the black box and shine a light on some of the



mechanisms at work in these pivotal interpersonal encounters. It is by identifying *how* and *why* employers make hiring decisions that we can best inform social policy that can counteract employment inequality (Reskin, 2003; Rivera, 2012).

Article 3—“Leading the Way? State Employers’ Engagement with a Disability Employment Policy”—and article 4—“Disability and Regulatory Approaches to Employer Engagement: Cross-National Challenges in Bridging the Gap Between Motivation and Hiring Practice”—investigate how employers engage with regulatory disability employment policy, drawing on interviews with Norwegian state employers. By using different conceptualizations of employer engagement, the articles demonstrate how generally positive attitudes are often paired with a lack of actual hiring behavior. This is a finding that has been demonstrated in the literature (e.g. Araten-Bergman, 2016; Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020; Kuznetsova, 2016). However, the processes that might explain why this discrepancy exists remain underexplored. These two articles highlight potential issues that arise in the translation of policy to practice.

## **1.1 Disability Employment Policies in The Norwegian Context**

Norway struggles with a large and persistent employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people, despite significant political efforts to close it. Comparisons of this gap with those in other countries is difficult due to the challenges of accurately measuring the disabled share of a given population (Molden & Tøssebro, 2012). Nonetheless, comparative research indicates that Norway fares worse than many other European countries, where the overall trend is a slight improvement in employment rates from 2002 to 2014, even though the gap remains significant globally (Geiger et al., 2017). For Norway, no such improvement is found. Instead, we see a steady decline in employment rates from the 1990s onwards (van der Wel, Dahl, & Birkelund, 2010). Workforce participation by disabled people increased from 55% in 1980 to 59% in 1987 but then fell to 47% in 1991 and 48% in 1995 (Hanssen & Bliksvær, 1999). Since then, we have seen a further decline, to 37.5% today—a number that has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic (Statistics Norway, 2022). It should be noted that some form of disability employment gap is unavoidable. Being disabled can involve impairments that make participation in work extremely difficult and undesirable. However, there are many non-working disabled people who want a job but are denied access. According

to Statistics Norway (2020), there are approximately 100,000 people with an impairment who say that they wish to work but remain outside Norway's labor market.

Three common policy responses to disabled people's struggles to access the labor market can be identified. I base my account of these responses on the conceptualizations offered by Halvorsen and Hvinden (2009), who describe three disability policy systems, and Olsen (2019), who refers to three pillars of the welfare state. The three policy responses are (1) income security, (2) employment services, and (3) protective legislation and regulation. Income security means providing redistribution through fiscal transfers to people who are unable to work. Income security systems, however, can also be structured to incentivize work, such as by enforcing strict eligibility criteria and time-limited support. The second policy response, employment services, means providing support for entering the labor market through the public employment service and its subcontractors. The third response, protective legislation and regulation, includes anti-discrimination legislation and regulatory measures that incentivize or even force employers to hire and retain disabled workers. This thesis focuses on this third response. Levi-Faur (2014, p. 604) emphasizes how regulation can also be a "central redistributive instrument," as with rent control, arguing that regulation and redistribution are not mutually exclusive policy instruments. Applying this view to the disability case, regulatory measures can have important redistributive effects by banning discrimination and thus facilitating labor market participation that affects income levels and poverty risk. These regulatory measures can exist in the midst of a strong redistributive social democratic welfare state like Norway (Benish & Levi-Faur, 2020).

The Nordic countries have largely been associated with a welfare state model that combines generous income programs with the comprehensive provision of services (Bambra, 2005; Halvorsen, Hvinden, Kuivalainen, & Schøyen, 2018; Olsen, 2019). These generous income programs have been paired with the Norwegian work approach to social policy (*arbeidslinja*), which aims to get every capable citizen into work in order to fund social expenditure (Terum & Hatland, 2014). As a response to critiques regarding the sustainability of the welfare state, with a high level of social benefits in interaction with a compressed earnings structure, Nordic countries have since the 1990s adjusted their income programs to provide more powerful incentives for labor market participation (Halvorsen, Hvinden, Kuivalainen, et al., 2018). This means introducing stricter eligibility criteria and reduced benefit levels. While Norway has largely managed to avoid the most intense versions of the neoliberal trend of restructuring social security and enacting benefit cuts (Grover & Soldatic,

2013), there are some examples of retrenchment and changes in terms of stronger incentives to find work. Relevant cuts for disabled people in recent years include stricter criteria regarding how long one can receive the temporary work assessment allowance (*arbeidsavklaringspenger*), which was envisioned as a way to incentivize long-term sick and disabled people to get into work more quickly (Holgersen, 2017). Recipients of the temporary work assessment allowance under the age of 25 have also experienced benefit cuts. Furthermore, a disability benefit reform was implemented in 2015 that was intended to make it easier to combine disability benefits with ordinary work. However, the reform has not yielded increased employment rates (Office of the Auditor General of Norway, 2017). The question is whether supply-side measures seeking to incentivize underrepresented minorities to get into work fail to address the most crucial actor: the employer. Several social policy scholars have become critical of the usefulness of an approach that overly relies on the supply side, warning against “supply-side fundamentalism” (Peck & Theodore, 2000, p. 729). A demand-side perspective, by contrast, involves an increased focus on correcting market failures by calling crucial attention to employers, who can chiefly be influenced through the third policy response of protective legislation and regulation. Throughout countries in the OECD, we can identify a shift in which demand-side measures—such as anti-discrimination legislation, modified employment quotas, stronger employer incentives, and improved wage subsidies—are receiving greater emphasis (OECD, 2010).

The history of Norway’s focus on income security and the provision of services rather than legislation and regulation is best understood in relation to the country’s history of facilitating cooperative industrial relations. In the Nordic industrial relations system, close cooperation between the state, trade unions, and employer confederations arguably weakens the potential to implement initiatives that challenge the autonomy of business (Barth, Wallerstein, & Moene, 2009). Hence, Norwegian governments have been hesitant to use mandates as a means of making organizations increase their hiring of disabled people. Instead, they have a tradition of relying on voluntary efforts and cooperation through agreements with working life parties (Hvinden, 2004). One central agreement in this respect is the inclusive working life agreement (the IA Agreement), a tripartite agreement between the authorities, the major trade unions, and the major employer confederations that came into force in 2001. This agreement originally had three subgoals: (1) reducing sick leave, (2) increasing the share of disabled people in the workforce, and (3) extending careers for seniors. However, 17 years after its implementation, the conclusion was that the second effort had failed (NAV, 2017); it

was therefore removed in 2018. A report (Ose, 2013) indicates that employer efforts toward and knowledge about obligations to hire and provide training for disabled people were very low. Ose (2013) even suggests that the first subgoal could have had a negative impact on the second, because it introduced a more demanding sick leave follow-up scheme.

The remarkable lack of results in those 17 years reveals the difficulty of closing the disability employment gap and shows how disabled people appear to be routinely deprioritized. In 2018, the same year the subgoal was removed, the Inclusion Dugnad was launched as its replacement. It targeted not only disabled people but also those who have been out of work for extended periods. It offered no new structural support systems for employers but did implement a quota for state employers, which meant that 5% of new hires had to be disabled or have a two-year employment gap. It thus introduced a regulatory element to disability employment policies for state employers. For employers in other sectors, the shift represented a move to fewer mechanisms of accountability for inclusion work, for example through the individual organizational agreements concerning inclusion activities that were previously developed in cooperation with regional working life centers (NAV Arbeidslivssenter) to gain access to support and assistance. With a change of government and an evaluation showing that the Inclusion Dugnad had failed to deliver on its promises (Direktoratet for forvaltning og økonomistyring, 2021), it was quietly discontinued. As of 2022, state employers are no longer required to meet the quota introduced with the Inclusion Dugnad. This means that at the time of writing, Norway no longer has any major national demand-side inclusion initiatives that target disabled people.

The history of cooperative industrial relations could be one reason why anti-discrimination legislation came later to Norway than to many other countries. In this regard, Norway is catching up to the trends recognized in OECD countries (OECD, 2010). The United States was a leader globally, with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was implemented in 1990 (McMahon et al., 2008). Norway's neighbor Sweden was an early mover in Scandinavia and enacted a law against disability discrimination in working life in 1999 (Tøssebro, 2016). In Norway, the Working Environment Act was changed in 2004 to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on disability, among other factors, and the first anti-discrimination law for disabled people was implemented in 2009: the Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act. With this law, an activity duty was also introduced that obliged employers to work systematically to promote equality and hinder discrimination against disabled people within their organization. All employers with more than 50 employees and all public

employers were also required to report annually on both the status of disability equality within their organization and how they have worked with the activity duty. In 2018, the Anti-Discrimination and Accessibility Act was replaced by the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, which unifies the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of multiple forms of personal characteristics. This act explicitly seeks to “dismantle disabling barriers created by society” (section 1). This legislative turn in Norway can be viewed in relation to international pressures and developments, with Norway influenced by the international disability movement and legislation in other countries and supranational bodies, especially the United Nations and the European Union (Chhabra, 2021b; Tøssebro, 2016; Waldschmidt, 2009).

Even though Norway has implemented anti-discrimination legislation regarding disabled people, how the law is enforced is another question. A 2011 Norwegian Official Report (NOU) noted several points of critique in how anti-discrimination legislation was enforced and followed up by central official authorities (NOU 2011: 18, 2011). They point to a fragmented responsibility for equality policy inside the state administrative apparatus, exacerbated by a lack of resources allocated to fulfil equality ambitions and the lack of a professional work environment among the specialists in the government administration. The report highlighted how many municipalities do not follow their activity and reporting duty, which shows a lack of knowledge and concrete action in regard to anti-discrimination, even within the public sector. The report calls for a more systematic approach to spreading awareness of responsibility specified by anti-discrimination law. In addition, Norway has been criticized by the United Nations for providing poor access to legal aid to disabled people who claim that they have experienced discrimination and for the Norwegian Anti-Discrimination Tribunal’s limited power to order restitution and compensation (United Nations, 2019). Thus, it is fair to ask whether the implementation of the law changed much in terms of an employer’s prerogative to choose its own employees.

Despite the efforts in income maintenance, services, and regulation noted above, decreasing the employment gap has proven a complex task, and policy has generally not translated into improved participation (Holland et al., 2011). Thus, Norway represents a case where labor market integration efforts appear strong, but the employment gap is large and persistent. Using Norway as a case, this thesis can provide insights into why disabled people struggle to enter the labor market even when the political will to change that situation is strong across the political spectrum. To be sure, the reasons involve a complex mix of factors. In this thesis, the focus is on one aspect: the interaction between disabled people and

employers in ordinary recruitment situations, particularly in the early phases of the recruitment process.

## **1.2 Key Concepts: Disability and Discrimination**

### *1.2.1 Disability*

Disability is a concept of a contested nature. Definitions have been subject to criticisms and revisions in the academic literature, activist efforts, and policy documents. Individually oriented or biomedical understandings long dominated perceptions of disability. According to these understandings, it is the medical condition or impairment that causes the disability (Hvinden, 2020), which is then identified as the root of the problems faced by disabled people. This perspective has been heavily criticized by disability scholars who advocate for the opposite perspective: the “social model” (Barnes, 2012). That term was coined by Mike Oliver, a British disabled activist and scholar, who emphasizes the need to shift from focusing on individuals’ physical limitations to how physical and social environments impose limitations (Oliver, 1980). In this line of thinking, impairment is separated from disability: where impairment is biological and represents a defective limb or bodily mechanism, disability is the oppression and disadvantage people experience because society is not organized for people with impairments. The rise of the social model has arguably led to a paradigm shift in research on disability, opening up an understanding of disability that takes social arrangements into account (Barnes, 2012).

The field of critical disability studies offers another perspective. This field leans on post-structuralist and post-modernist insights and employs tools from feminist studies, critical race theory, and queer theory. Corker (1999) has been cited as one of the first academics to present ideas that laid the foundation for this approach. In critical disability studies, there is an inherent reluctance to offer a clear definition of disability with well-defined boundaries. In the deconstruction of categories such as impairment and disability, the argument is made that disability is a dynamic concept and that any binary divide between disabled and non-disabled is based on an illusion (Shildrick, 2012). A notable contributor to this research stream is Campbell (2001), who focuses on the notion of ableism: the presumption of ableness and the accompanying view of disabled people as inherently deficient human beings. Shakespeare (2014) calls critical disability studies the cultural model, emphasizing how the aim is to uncover aspects of culture that disavow impairments. The goal is then to recognize why

disability appears to induce feelings of fear and threat and to change these perceptions by expanding our views of bodily difference (Shildrick, 2012). While the cultural model has provided valuable perspectives on normative expectations, the most notable critique raised against the model is twofold: (1) that the aim of deconstructing difference is an unrealistic measure of achieving equality for disabled people, and (2) that it ignores the fact that impairment itself can produce negative effects and have undesirable dimensions (Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

In this thesis, I have adopted a relational and critical realist understanding of disability, which enables a broad understanding of factors that marginalize disabled people in the labor market. This understanding attempts to unite different perspectives on disability, although it can also be viewed as a moderate version of the social model. With the relational model, which is prominent in Nordic disability research, disability is regarded as arising from an interaction between a person and their impairment and the barriers they encounter in the environment, such as societal arrangements and cultural norms (Tøssebro, 2013). In this way, the relational model seeks to avoid succumbing to the essentialist tendencies found in the other three models, whether they involve individualistic, contextual, or cultural essentialism (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006). Shakespeare (2014) is a notable proponent of this perspective and argues that one can acknowledge the environmental factors of barriers, discrimination, and oppression and still grant that impairment itself can constitute a barrier. The relational approach has encouraged developments in disability research that have made way for a multidisciplinary engagement with disability that draws on sociology, social policy, psychology, social work, and economics (Roulstone, 2013).

Accordingly, impairment in this thesis is referred to as the loss or alteration of bodily or mental capability, while disability is used to describe the state where impairment and environmental barriers combine to constitute limitations for the individual. Although it uses a critical realist relational model as a point of the departure, this thesis nonetheless is leaning toward a social model approach. This is partly due to its anchoring in disability studies and partly by the nature of what is investigated. The data do not engage with any real disabled jobseekers. Rather, it is the attitudes and perceptions of employers regarding fictitious job candidates that are the object of investigation. This means that the thesis explores primarily the social rather than the individual aspects of disability. In addition, because of the research design in articles 1 and 2 (field experiment follow-up interviews) and the focus on ordinary recruitment, the thesis is mostly concerned with qualified disabled people with a relatively

high or even full work capacity. For these types of jobseekers, the impairment constitutes a smaller barrier than is the case for jobseekers with impairments that impose more severe restrictions on work capacity; thus, purely or at least largely social barriers such as prejudice and stereotypes become more important. In line with a relational perspective, however, it is important to note that work capacity is not a solely individual characteristic but is something that is constituted in relation to the work, tasks, work environment, and adjustments provided. Nonetheless, the adoption of a critical realist relational approach in this thesis is motivated by a view of disability as an emergent property and a recognition of impairment as a complex reality (Shakespeare, 2014). This view is perhaps best reflected in article 4, which makes the complexity of disability a central point, and article 2, which highlights the impact of tacit employer perceptions of disability (or consequences of impairment) as either an individual or a relational phenomenon.

Throughout the thesis, disabled people are referred to by identity-first language: that is, “disabled people” instead of “people with disabilities.” There is an ongoing debate about correct and inclusive designations (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). We can find much variation in the literature on the use of identity-first or people-first language, which depends on national and disciplinary traditions, disability conceptualizations, and idiosyncratic preferences. I have chosen identity-first language because disabled activists themselves have stated their preference for that approach (Vivanti, 2020), and because I believe it acknowledges the disabling impact of the environment and how disability is intertwined with identity.

### *1.2.2 Discrimination*

Simply put, discrimination is the unequal treatment of people based on their belonging to a specific group. This discrimination may either be direct or indirect (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). Direct employment discrimination refers to differential treatment based on an attribute or group membership that is irrelevant to the core job tasks, while indirect discrimination (also called disparate impact) is equal treatment applied according to rules and procedures that inadvertently favor certain groups. Importantly, discrimination is behavior, it does not necessarily imply motivation or intent based on animosity or prejudiced attitudes. Thus, employers can discriminate without knowing that they are doing so. Sociological conceptions of discrimination have traditionally been grounded in conflict theory, proposing that people discriminate in order to protect their own privileges by excluding members of subordinate



groups (Reskin, 2000). The influence of psychological theories of social cognition has added important nuances by underscoring how discrimination can also be the product of mental shortcuts and salient stereotypes in decision making. This type of research argues that discrimination is most often based not on hostility but rather on a tendency to favor those belonging to the in-group (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014).

The law accords with the view of discrimination as a behavioral act. The Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (2018) prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination (§§ 6, 7, and 8). The law also prescribes a duty to provide reasonable adjustments to people with impairments (§ 22) and specifies that not providing such adjustments constitutes discrimination. However, the law also specifies that denial of adjustments does not constitute discrimination if it would place a disproportionate burden on the employer. Thus, deciding not to offer a job to a disabled person may not constitute discrimination if doing so would entail considerable cost or difficulty for the employer. The law specifies that whether the employer's burden is disproportional depends on the effect the adjustments would have on the applicant or in general for the dismantling of disabling barriers.

In this thesis, I treat hiring discrimination as differential treatment on the basis of an impairment that does not impact the ability to perform the core tasks of the job for which the candidate has applied. Furthermore, in line with the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, this discrimination can be based not only on a current and/or discernible impairment but also on an assumed, former, or future impairment.

### **1.3 Positioning the Thesis**

This thesis draws on and contributes to the fields of sociology, disability studies, and social policy. I adopt a critical realist perspective that is useful for an interdisciplinary approach to a complex phenomenon like disability (Bhaskar, 1998, 2008; Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006; Danermark, Ekström, & Karlsson, 2019; Maxwell, 2012b). One possible way of organizing different streams of research on disabled people's labor market integration and job entry is to separate *problem-oriented* from *solution-oriented* research. These types can be seen as two sides of a coin: they offer different perspectives on the same phenomenon yet are dependent on each other to provide the full picture.

Problem-oriented research focuses on barriers: on the prevalence, nature, and consequences of discrimination. It can be tied to what Hvinden (2003) calls “the discourse of equal rights and opportunities” (p. 612), which is described as a scientific and political discourse where the right to participate in society is central and barriers to full participation are explored. This is research that documents the existence of differential treatment, investigates its causes, and identifies its consequences. The fields where we most often find this type of research are sociology and disability studies. Sociology has a long history of focusing on processes of social stratification and marginalization, especially related to characteristics like social class, race and ethnicity, and gender. However, the labor market stratification and discrimination of disabled people has traditionally received less attention in sociology than the challenges faced by other marginalized groups (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Jenkins, 1991; M. Jones & Wass, 2013; Robert & Harlan, 2006). The field of disability studies, on the other hand, centers on disability as a defining characteristic and on how society creates oppressive structures for people with impairments. While it offers an extensive literature on disabled people’s perspectives on processes of marginalization, it remains less focused on other actors, such as employers, a topic that is more prevalent in sociological literature on social stratification and discrimination. In social policy research, problem-oriented studies have documented the existence and persistence of a disability employment gap across different countries (e.g. Geiger et al., 2017; van der Zwan & de Beer, 2021), but research that qualitatively explores the reasons for this gap from the employer side is less common.

Solution-oriented research, on the other hand, acknowledges the disability employment gap and seeks to identify solutions to help close it. This type of investigation is a growing area in social policy research that focuses on the demand side and the combined or support-side perspectives on labor market integration (Frøyland, Andreassen, & Innvær, 2018). It is often concerned with the implementation of ALMPs and the necessary conditions for success. Solution-oriented research on employers in the social policy field often intersects thematically with human resource management (HRM) research concerning corporate social responsibility (CSR), diversity, and inclusive employment (Van Berkel et al., 2017). There are several examples of solution-focused research on employer participation in ALMPs: that is, how employers become involved in promoting labor market participation for marginalized groups (Hemphill & Kulik, 2016; Ingold & Stuart, 2015; Orton, Green, Atfield, & Barnes, 2019; Van Berkel, 2020; Van der Aa & Van Berkel, 2014). The literature investigating employer

participation in ALMPs seeks to shift away from a strict supply-side perspective and direct focus on the attitudes and behavior of employers. Research has indicated that the typical employer is passive; it has positive attitudes toward inclusion but does little actual hiring from marginalized groups (Bredgaard, 2018). Thus, the research from this angle has been preoccupied with finding solutions that can turn passive employers into committed and inclusive employers (Hemphill & Kulik, 2016; Van Berkel, 2020). At the same time, scholarship has been less engaged with uncovering the mechanisms of why employers are passive or hesitant in the first place and fail to hire disabled people in their ordinary course of recruitment.

This thesis is written primarily as a contribution to strengthening problem-oriented knowledge about disability and marginalization in the labor market. It does so by combining a demand-side perspective on labor market integration from social policy, a discrimination and marginalization perspective from sociology, and the centering of disabling barriers in society from disability studies. Livingston (2020) argues that to achieve racial equity in the workplace, we need to start with an understanding of the problem at hand and a belief that it is something about which to be concerned before we can move on to strategy. In other words, solution-oriented knowledge needs to build on adequate problem-oriented knowledge. To be sure, the same logic needs to be applied to achieve equity in the workplace for other minorities. In recent years, a small but growing number of field experiments have shown that disabled candidates receive fewer callbacks after job interviews than equally qualified non-disabled candidates (Ameri et al., 2018; Baert, 2014; Baert et al., 2016; Bellemare et al., 2018; Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021). However, discrimination is under-communicated as a root cause of the disability employment gap, at least outside the field of disability studies. While some research in the disability studies field demonstrates the experience of discrimination from the disabled person's perspective (Benoit, Jansson, Jansenberger, & Phillips, 2013; Chhabra, 2021a; Duckett, 2000; Shier, Graham, & Jones, 2009; Vedeler, 2014), there is a lack of problem-oriented research on employers. To understand how discrimination unfolds, we need to investigate the situation from the perspectives of both employer and jobseeker. If we lean primarily on disabled people's stories, it would be easier for employers to dismiss claims of systemic discrimination, as research shows that minorities who claim that they have suffered discrimination can be seen as "complainers" (Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Wang, Silverman, Gwinn, & Dovidio, 2014).

To be able to move employers in the direction of concern and strategy, an important research aim must be to enhance the knowledge of how disability discrimination unfolds and is legitimized. We need to understand how organizational practices of evaluation and hiring can act as barriers to inclusion. In this thesis, I aim to explain employer reasoning for disability discrimination in hiring and provide insight into why employers struggle to meet disability employment policy goals. This type of knowledge is the foundation on which we can then formulate effective strategies to improve the work inclusion of disabled people.

Articles 1 and 2 investigate marginalizing components of employer evaluation in ordinary recruitment that can lead to discrimination. In them, I draw mainly on two theoretical concepts from sociology: the ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Foster & Wass, 2013) and stigma and impression management (Goffman, 1959, 1963). I use these concepts to elucidate how employers evaluate disabled people in relation to norms of normality during the hiring process. These perspectives help the thesis demonstrate how the evaluative acts of employers become events that create inequality in society by presenting significant barriers to employment.

The last two articles in the thesis provide a problem-oriented perspective on employer engagement by investigating barriers to engagement among employers who are sympathetic toward inclusion but struggle to meet actual hiring goals; they are known as passive employers. Articles 3 and 4 contribute to employer engagement research by investigating the impact of regulatory disability employment policies like quotas and anti-discrimination legislation on ordinary recruitment and barriers to the success of such policies.

## **1.4 The Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is structured as follows: chapter 2 details the central elements of the Norwegian context, going through developments in demand-side disability employment policies. Chapter 3 maps out relevant contributions in previous research on disability and hiring, presenting an overview of empirical studies from both problem- and solution-oriented perspectives. Chapter 4 is dedicated to presenting the theoretical framework of the thesis. Theories that are applied directly in the four articles are explained, as are theoretical perspectives that have been used more implicitly in the articles and that is utilized in this overarching text. Chapter 5 describes methodological approaches and provides an account of

how the data were obtained and analyzed. Additionally, I describe how I have used critical realism as a philosophy of science. Chapter 6 summarizes the four articles, and chapter 7 discusses the findings and relates them to the two overarching RQs. Finally, I discuss the articles' contributions to research and practice.

## **2 Previous Research on Disability, Hiring, and the Employer Role**

This section reviews relevant empirical contributions to the central topics in this thesis. For the purposes of positioning this thesis and clarifying its contribution to knowledge, I organize the presentation of research by separating it into two main streams: problem-oriented and solution-oriented. I do not claim that all research contributions fit neatly into one or the other, but this separation is a valuable tool for thinking about previous research contributions. First, I consider problem-oriented research: the employer role from the disabled person's perspective, employer attitudes and hiring behavior, and employer responses to regulatory policy. I then provide a short overview of solution-oriented research found in employer engagement and HRM research. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive review of all relevant literature but to map out the most important research streams and identify gaps in that research.

### **2.1 Problem-Oriented Research**

#### *2.1.1 The employer role from the perspective of the disabled person*

Problem-oriented research on employer attitudes is well represented in the field of disability studies, in which perspectives of disabled people are central. Coleman-Fountain et al. (2017) offer insights on this issue from the disabled person's perspective by drawing on 217 qualitative interviews with people with mobility, visual, psychosocial, and intellectual impairments. Participants from nine European countries were interviewed in 2014 and separated into different cohorts: those born around 1950, around 1970, and around 1990. The findings from this comprehensive research project indicate that the oldest cohort found it easiest to enter the labor market. The youngest cohort reported more choices in education than the older cohorts, but they also encountered greater restrictions in a competitive labor market. Coleman-Fountain et al. (2017) point out how public employment services, the state of the labor market, and the role of the employers emerged as key determinants of their participants' trajectories. They claim that changes in the labor market have led to fewer low-skilled jobs and made it more difficult to obtain higher-skilled jobs. Established career paths for people with particular impairments, such as visually impaired people, that were available to the

oldest cohort were no longer available to the younger cohorts. Instead, disabled people have increasingly been expected to compete for the same jobs as others in the open labor market. Coleman-Fountain et al. (2017) argue that this challenge is then exacerbated by a lack of appropriate support from public employment services, which may find it easier to offer disability benefits instead of helping people navigate an increasingly demanding labor market. Thus, an emphasis on participation in the open labor market and the choice of the individual has increased the participants' risk, which has become individualized. Coleman-Fountain et al. (2017) point out that a central unifying characteristic of diverse employment experiences across different national contexts and age cohorts is the experience of prejudice and discrimination. This finding is supported in multiple contexts and impairments regarding the jobseeking experience of the disabled person.

Indeed, it is a recurrent international finding that disabled people experience attitudinal barriers in the form of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination (Benoit et al., 2013; Robert & Harlan, 2006; Shier et al., 2009). Trezzini, Schuller, Schüpbach, and Bickenbach (2020) emphasize that social and organizational barriers were the most important barriers for their interviewees, rather than impairment effects or personal factors, meaning that they could have been addressed at the workplace level. McKinney and Swartz (2019) identify employment barriers for disabled people throughout the recruitment process, from advertisements and application forms through interviews, selection, and psychometric testing. The initial selection of candidates and the interview stage seem to be the most decisive phases. At the beginning of the recruitment process, disabled people face challenges and dilemmas such as deciding how and when an impairment should be disclosed and navigating accommodation needs. Duckett (2000) describes how jobseeking experiences are dominated by feelings of anxiety because disabled applicants feel that the deck is already stacked against them in the highly competitive context of recruitment. Vedeler's (2014) article on job interview stories from Norway and the United States describes three narratives of mobility-impaired workers: recognition, uncertainty, and discrimination. The stories of discrimination and uncertainty illustrate that many people experience being treated as "matter out of place" (Douglas, 2002) and discarded when employers learn that they are wheelchair users. Furthermore, the article shows how a lack of experience and knowledge of what disabled people can do makes employers doubt whether an applicant will be able to perform the job that is open. Similar experiences are described by Chhabra (2021a) among visually impaired youth in Norway and India; those interviewees described struggling to get the chance to demonstrate their qualities, how job

interviews are cut short, and how positions are suddenly “filled” once employers learn about the an applicant’s disability status.

The question of disclosure often takes center stage in recruitment processes for people with impairments. This question of whether to make a disability known in the context of recruitment has been tied to hidden impairments in particular (Prince, 2017). It has been described as a predicament (Prince, 2017), the hidden disability dilemma (Fitzgerald & Paterson, 1995), and the disclosure conundrum (S. G. Goldberg, Killeen, & O’Day, 2005). However, it is also a relevant dilemma for people with visible impairments in the jobseeking context. The studies by Vedeler (2014) and Chhabra (2021a) cited above demonstrate how visibly impaired jobseekers must decide between reducing their chances of getting a job interview and evoking surprise and the possibility of a dismissive reaction when they arrive for an interview. In order to be successful in securing a job, disabled people report that a thoughtful approach is required as to the disclosure of impairments and the ability to handle inappropriate questions and address unspoken concerns (Jans, Kaye, & Jones, 2012). The decision to not disclose, research has found, is often grounded in disabled people’s negative experiences and fears of experiencing stigma and discrimination (Scanlon, Kamp, & Cochrane, 2020), while the decision to disclose is grounded in a motivation to advocate for one’s needs and gain accommodation (Lindsay, Cagliostro, Leck, Shen, & Stinson, 2019). Research on disabled people in the workplace does report the positive effects of disclosure, as it can help create an open and supportive work environment (Gustafsson, Peralta, & Danermark, 2018). Thus, whether or not to disclose remains a genuine dilemma: there is no clear solution.

The studies highlighted above show how jobseeking is an experience that has additional layers of difficulty for disabled people, and it is imperative to consider that the recruitment situation—with its evaluative nature—appears to be a central component in the labor market marginalization process. Randle and Hardy’s (2016) qualitative study on disabled professionals in the film and television industry emphasizes the importance of entry points into work. The film and television sector is characterized by low job security, widespread use of non-standard contracts, and considerable amounts of project-based work. The authors link this frequent job (re-)entry to the creation of qualitatively different barriers to employment than those faced by other minorities because of a recurring need to ensure employers that they are capable and productive. In other words, Randle and Hardy (2016) point out that disabled people may be particularly exposed to negative attitudes in the



evaluative situation of hiring because of the prejudice they experience concerning their capabilities. Thus, research on disabled people's perspectives highlights employer discrimination as a root cause of labor market exclusion.

### *2.1.2 Investigating the employer side: Attitudes and behavior*

When reviewing the research on employers, it is useful to distinguish between research focusing primarily on attitudes from research focusing primarily on behavior. Interestingly, the literature shows that the behavior and attitudes regarding disabled jobseekers do not always line up (Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020). Investigations into employer attitudes toward disabled workers show that they hold both positive and negative attitudes. Two literature reviews in the vocational rehabilitation literature by Burke et al. (2013) and Ju, Roberts, and Zhang (2013) suggest that employers largely report positive attitudes toward disabled people and that they value the diversification that disabled employees can bring; moreover, for some types of impairments, employers value their low absenteeism and turnover and high dependability. Both reviews show that having experience with disabled workers seems to boost positive attitudes and hiring intentions—a finding that is supported by many individual studies (Andersson, Luthra, Hurtig, & Tideman, 2015; Copeland, Chan, Bezyak, & Fraser, 2010). In the review by Ju et al. (2013), the negative employer attitudes concern job skills, productivity, safety, attendance, appearance, social skills, and other employability skills. Burke et al. (2013) also point to the cost of accommodation, worker qualifications, and fear of litigation. These reviews reveal that employers express more negative attitudes when asked to assess people with specific types of impairments compared to non-disabled individuals. Furthermore, they show a discrepancy between positive attitudes toward disabled people and actual instances of hiring.

Hernandez, Keys, and Balcazar (2000) highlight the important distinction between global and specific attitudes toward disabled people. They show that employers may demonstrate more positive global attitudes that do not involve declaring an intention to engage in specific hiring behavior, but that employers are more negative in specific attitudes that have a narrower scope and do involve statements of intended actions. The relationship between such specific attitudes and hiring behavior is investigated by Araten-Bergman (2016), applying the theory of planned behavior, which espouses specificity in surveys concerning attitudes and has shown that more specific questions can better predict behavior

(Ajzen, Joyce, Sheikh, & Cote, 2011). However, Araten-Bergman (2016) finds that while the theory of planned behavior predicted intentions to hire disabled people, it failed to predict actual hiring instances. Instead, Araten-Bergman (2016) points out how organizational factors—like having a written disability hiring policy and providing disability training—was a more significant predictor of hiring behavior. This means that inclusive recruitment processes that are proactive and innovative and enacted by senior management may be more impactful than individual attitudes.

Addressing the repeated finding of a discrepancy between attitudes and behavior, Kaye, Jans, and Jones (2011) question the validity of survey-based research—suggesting that they paint a “rosy picture” of employer attitudes toward disabled individuals—and note possible explanations like self-selection bias or social desirability bias. The authors attempt to sidestep such biases by analyzing interview accounts of American HR professionals and managers who had attended employer-requested training in anti-discrimination legislation regarding disabled people because they showed resistance toward compliance. They find that strong reasons for not hiring disabled people include cost of accommodation, lack of awareness around how to deal with disabled workers, and fear of being “stuck” with a worker who cannot be fired due to fear of litigation. The authors suggest that other reasons may be impressions of reduced job performance, lack of qualifications, and need for extra supervisory time.

Research on Norwegian employer attitudes is scarce in the peer reviewed literature, and it is largely reports in the gray literature that help elucidate the current status of knowledge. That research reveals a prevalence of negative attitudes in which Norwegian employers imagine disabled employees having a lower work capacity and high rates of sick leave and need for assistance; they therefore see disabled people as potentially costing time and resources (Falkum, 2012; Falkum & Solberg, 2015). In addition, employers reported perceived difficulties and erroneous assumptions when it comes to accommodation (Fyhn, Johnsem, Øyeflaten, Jordbru, & Tveito, 2019; Hansen & Haualand, 2012). For example, employers reported believing that a visually impaired person could not read or write on a computer or that wheelchair users could not visit customers out of the office (Fyhn et al., 2019). Through a review of cases brought to Norway’s Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, Hansen and Haualand (2012) show that employers often lack knowledge about their legal obligations to accommodate disabled employees. A survey of 1,600 employers shows that many of the respondents expressed positive attitudes and that 61% agreed with the

statement that they could miss out on competent people if they failed to fairly consider disabled people (Svalund & Hansen, 2013). In addition, 58% agreed with the more general statement that it is important to hire disabled people. Previous experience with disabled employees was associated with more positive attitudes in general. At the same time, the survey corroborates international research showing that positive attitudes do not necessarily translate into hiring behavior. Very few employers had taken concrete measures to recruit disabled people, and most were skeptical of moderate affirmative action, in which a disabled person is preferred if there are two applicants with similar qualifications. Skarpaas and Svare (2014) further demonstrate the complexity of translating positive intentions into actual hiring in ordinary recruitment. Their report shows that the four participating employers failed to hire a single disabled person in a total of 130 hiring instances, despite the concrete intention of hiring at least five during the project period. A case study by Kuznetsova (2016) reveals a notable difference between the positive, inclusive “front of stage” of Norwegian organizations presented on websites and in annual reports and the actual practice that takes place “backstage”. While the employers in the study conveyed an explicit commitment to inclusion, the study reveals that they lacked corporate inclusion strategies and that there were few disabled candidates in their limited work training efforts.

Leaning only on surveys and interview-based research to understand employers’ discriminatory behavior in recruitment can be problematic, because research often reveals a discrepancy between what employers say they do and what they actually do (Pager & Quillian, 2005). In an effort to understand employers’ behavior, researchers have used experimental methods, primarily vignette experiments and field experiments. The former simulate a hiring situation and have employers evaluate different fictitious candidates. One such experiment was recently conducted in Denmark: Shamshiri-Petersen and Krogh (2020) find that the experiment group who received information about a candidate being a wheelchair user showed significantly lower interest than the control group, who were presented with a non-disabled candidate with an otherwise identical description. Furthermore, they find that information about possible financial compensation provided only a minimal boost in employer interest. A recent Norwegian vignette study also shows how disabled candidates (with physical impairments, mental health problems, and visual impairments) are rated lower than a control candidate (Fyhn, Sveinsdottir, Reme, & Sandal, 2021). A Swedish vignette study reveals weak to moderate interest in hiring disabled people and differences in interest based on impairment type (Andersson et al., 2015). This study, like an American vignette

study (Dalgin & Bellini, 2008), shows how employers seem to prefer more “stable” impairments, such as physical mobility impairments, and are least interested in people with intellectual, cognitive, and psychiatric impairments. Being a wheelchair user is also rated more positively than having a diagnosis of depression, ADHD, somatization disorder, or schizophrenia in a Norwegian study by Fyhn et al. (2021). Interestingly, the opposite pattern appears in two recent Norwegian field experiments by Bjørnshagen (2021) and Bjørnshagen and Ugreninov (2021), where a much higher discrimination rate was found in the wheelchair user experiment than in the mental health experiment. However, as this was two different field experiments targeting different types of jobs and positions, they are not directly comparable. In any case, due to the fuzziness of the disability category, the value of specificity of impairment type in attitudinal inquiry may be particularly important (Dwertmann, 2016), as the differences between these studies demonstrate.

The study design that may come closest to a real hiring situation is the field experiment, which is also called a correspondence study. In field experiments, researchers construct fictitious applications that are sent in response to real job listings. A minimum of two types of candidates are created: one who discloses an impairment and one who does not. Thus, it is possible to compare how equally qualified candidates’ applications are handled by employers in the real labor market and to identify the effect of randomly adding information about disability. Field experiments have long been used to study ethnic or racial discrimination in hiring and housing (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). Recently, this method has also been deployed in disability research, with studies demonstrating that disabled people suffer from discrimination and that equally qualified disabled candidates receive fewer interview offers (Ameri et al., 2018; Baert, 2014; Baert et al., 2016; Bellemare et al., 2018; Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021; Hipes et al., 2016; A. Stone & Wright, 2013). While field experiments show the prevalence of discrimination, they do not tell us how and why it occurs. This demonstrates a need for research that can incorporate data about both behavioral and attitudinal aspects of hiring and that looks more deeply into how employers reason when faced with a disabled jobseeker (Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020).

The research described above shows that employers often express globally positive attitudes toward disabled people. Studies of employer attitudes frequently report that they are sympathetic to the idea of work inclusion. However, surveys concerning more specific hiring intentions, vignettes, and field experiments all reveal a more skeptical behavioral tendency. The possible reasons for this can be recognized in the cited literature: impressions that disabled

people lack job skills and are less productive, coupled with a fear that it may cost more time and money to hire a disabled person stand out as the most frequent concerns. What happens in the evaluative situation of hiring still needs more study.

### *2.1.3 Research on employer responses to regulatory employment policies*

Studies concerning employer responses to regulatory employment policies can be seen as a form of problem-oriented research because they are directed at the problem of discrimination. Some might also argue that they are solution-oriented because they can be directed toward whether and how policy can mitigate discrimination. I choose to use the problem-oriented category here because this kind of research has mostly been concerned with revealing the problem of discriminatory behavior rather than describing how inclusive behavior is created, especially when it comes to anti-discrimination legislation.

There are two main regulatory policy instruments used to combat employment discrimination: anti-discrimination legislation and quotas. These instruments are a response to the possibly discriminatory recruitment practices that keep marginalized groups out of the labor market. In this way, regulatory policy aims to change employer behavior as opposed to relying solely on the personal responsibility of jobseekers to become more “employable” (Salognon, 2007).

Unfortunately, the literature on anti-discrimination legislation does not provide clear answers as to whether such legislation is effective in improving labor market integration. While there is some evidence to support that it reduces terminations, that is less clear when it comes to hiring (Button, 2017). Some studies on anti-discrimination legislation indicate that there could be a modest positive effect on hiring (Ameri et al., 2018; Delhommer, 2020; Kruse & Schur, 2003), while others demonstrate little to no positive impact (Acemoglu & Angrist, 2001; Clayton et al., 2012). Examining the effects of legislation on disability discrimination is difficult; one important reason is the variability in measuring the proportion of disabled people in a population (Kruse & Schur, 2003; Molden & Tøssebro, 2012). While anti-discrimination legislation is implemented as a means of reducing discrimination, one argument against it is that it can do the opposite by increasing costs of hiring and firing and heightening the fear of lawsuits (Acemoglu & Angrist, 2001; Kruse & Schur, 2003). In any case, the effects of legislation are difficult to disentangle from other important variables. There are, however, a few contributions in the literature that have tried to evaluate the effect

of anti-discrimination legislation. The research that does exist is primarily from the United States and the United Kingdom.

The United States has been a leader in anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people, with an emphasis on a regulatory approach to social policy rather than on redistribution, as in Norway (Vedeler & Schreuer, 2011). The most important development was the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was signed into law in 1990. Early studies on the ADA suggest that it had an adverse rather than a positive effect (Acemoglu & Angrist, 2001). Kruse and Schur (2003) challenge this finding, highlighting how the choice of measurement of disability can impact how employment trends are registered. They point to their finding of increased employment following the ADA when using what they argue is a more appropriate measure of ADA coverage (impairments that do not prevent work participation). Yet, their main conclusion is that their results do not provide a clear answer to the effect of the ADA and that any positive or negative effect must be interpreted with caution, given the limitations of disability measures. This sentiment is echoed by Donohue, Stein, Griffin, and Becker (2011), who also challenge previous findings of an adverse effect. A more recent contribution was made by Ameri et al. (2018), investigating the effect of legislation through a large field experiment. The authors examine the difference in callback rates between companies covered and not covered by the ADA (private sector companies with 15 employees or fewer are not covered). Their findings point to a possible positive effect of the ADA. At the same time, they are cautious in their conclusion because of data limitations. At the very least, they assert that their findings show that there is no adverse effect of the ADA on hiring discrimination.

Another country to consider is the United Kingdom, which implemented the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in 1995. The research on the DDA indicates that it has had no impact on the employment rate of disabled people (Bambra & Pope, 2007; M. K. Jones, 2009). Some also suggest a negative effect here, though it is not possible to attribute the observed drop in labor market participation to the implementation of the DDA (Bell & Heitmueller, 2009; M. K. Jones, Latreille, & Sloane, 2006). In their review of studies considering the effect of the DDA, Clayton et al. (2012) state that none could demonstrate any improvement in employment after the DDA was proclaimed. They also discuss studies concerning employer awareness of the law and highlight how studies show low awareness of the DDA's main provision concerning making reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

There are no large-scale, systematic peer reviewed studies on the effectiveness of anti-discrimination legislation in Norway. However, the employment rate of disabled people as a group has not improved since its implementation, indicating that any effect is not great. Some studies have investigated how anti-discrimination legislation is enacted. Kolberg (2019) evaluated municipal reports on equality work and indicates that the quality of reporting is generally poor. When it comes to discrimination of disabled people specifically, Hansen and Haualand (2012) provide a review of cases brought to Norway's Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud. The authors find a tendency to process the cases as breaches of the obligation to accommodate rather than as direct discrimination cases, and they argue that this tendency reflects a view of disability discrimination as an individual rather than a structural problem. The findings from these reports accentuate a key issue in anti-discrimination legislation: it is not enough to simply ensure that legislation is in place because how the law is disseminated, interpreted, and enforced plays a key role. The role of employer competence and understanding of the law is emphasized by an Australian study by Darcy, Taylor, and Green (2016). The authors analyzed cases from the Australian Human Rights Commission and found that the discrimination cases demonstrated how employers misunderstood the key legal concepts that underpin the Australian Disability Discrimination Act (1992), including the concept of "reasonable adjustments," which created substantial discriminatory barriers despite the employers' legal obligations.

The research cited above indicates that anti-discrimination legislation has little effect on labor market integration at the national level. Still, the studies have major methodological drawbacks. They investigate the employment rate before and after a law was implemented. Since it is impossible to look at the counterfactual situation—how employment numbers would look if the law had not been implemented—we do not know whether the employment rate would be worse had anti-discrimination legislation not been implemented. Furthermore, anti-discrimination legislation may have different effects for people with different types and severity of impairments (Button, 2017; Kruse & Schur, 2003). In any case, it is relevant to ask why legislation could fail to improve labor market integration. One possible reason could be a lack of employer awareness. The studies that investigate how employers understand the law reveal a lack of knowledge and understanding of what disability discrimination entails and of employer obligations toward accommodation (Clayton et al., 2012; Darcy et al., 2016). This reveals that the intended message to employers inherent in the implementation of anti-discrimination law does not always reach its addressees. Another reason could be managerial

resistance. In fact, research on discrimination lawsuits indicates that managers see such lawsuits as a threat to their managerial autonomy (Berrey, Nelson, & Nielsen, 2017). However, other research points to a positive effect on diversity following a lawsuit for large organizations that are highly visible. Knight, Dobbin, and Kalev (2022) suggest that this finding could be because such an organization will experience greater institutional pressures to comply with legal and societal norms.

Quotas, meaning a legal obligation to employ a certain number of disabled people, are found in most EU countries, with some exceptions, such as Denmark, Sweden, and (before Brexit) the United Kingdom (Fuchs, 2014). Norway does not use a quota system but had a soft, non-sanctioned quota system in the state sector during the Inclusion Dugnad (2018–2022). The literature indicates that the use of quotas as a regulatory policy tool also yields mixed results. The difficulty of the lack of a clear definition of disability also creates problems here; furthermore, it is challenging to isolate the effect of quota policies from other labor market policies (Sargeant, Radevich-Katsaroumpa, & Innessi, 2018). The studies that are available report a possible small but positive association between quotas and labor market participation, but these results should be interpreted with caution (Fuchs, 2014; Matsui, 2013; Nazarov, Kang, & von Schrader, 2015; Sargeant et al., 2018).

Some argue that quotas are the antithesis of antidiscrimination and equal opportunity (Fuchs, 2014). Sargeant et al. (2018) say that quotas may send the undesirable message that disabled people are “unable to compete for jobs on equal terms” (p. 414). Vornholt et al. (2018) suggest that quotas can provoke negative attitudes toward disabled people and contribute to the experience of stigma. On the other hand, as field experiments on disability show (Ameri et al., 2018; Baert, 2014; Baert et al., 2016; Bellemare et al., 2018; Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021; Hipes et al., 2016), the fact that disabled people struggle to compete on equal terms in the open job market can be true without this being due to those jobseekers being unqualified. As such, a quota can be a recognition of the fact that disabled people suffer from discrimination and accumulated disadvantage in the labor market and that employers have a responsibility to help remedy a societal problem that they helped create. A qualitative study in France by Richard and Hennekam (2020) investigates how disabled jobseekers themselves experience the disability quota system. They describe how quotas can be a positive factor and help disabled people be more aware of their rights, and how disclosure in a quota system for some disabled people could be empowering. They do, however, also show that personal attributes such as educational level, impairment visibility,



and the need for accommodation impacted whether disclosure was actually experienced as empowering. In addition, they underscore that to produce the best outcomes, quotas need to be paired with a commitment to diversity at the organizational level through means like diversity training, trade union initiatives, and affinity networks.

In summary, the evidence for any clear effect of regulatory policy on the employment rates of disabled people is hard to find in the existing literature. At the same time, studies investigating the effects of such policies are riddled with methodological challenges. While early research on the effects of anti-discrimination legislation on labor market participation for disabled people suggested a negative effect (Acemoglu & Angrist, 2001; Bell & Heitmueller, 2009), later studies indicated at least a neutral effect (Ameri et al., 2018; Kruse & Schur, 2003). Regardless of whether we are able to detect an effect in employment rates, regulation acknowledging disabled people directly can be seen as a form of recognition (Fraser, 2003) that makes norms of non-discrimination explicit. Nonetheless, investigating further why employers do or do not adjust their hiring practices to the requirements of the law is an important aim for research going forward. The effect of quotas is hard to isolate, which means that we do not really know whether they increase labor market participation (Fuchs, 2014; Sargeant et al., 2018). However, the tensions inherent in a quota system—between hiring principles based on qualifications and the aim of hiring underrepresented groups who experience systemic discrimination—remain an important issue that demands further empirical examination.

## **2.2 Solution-Oriented Research**

Given the large and enduring employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people, there is an increasing interest in social policy research on how the gap can be closed. As several scholars have argued in social policy discussions, most of the attention has long been devoted to the supply side (Bredgaard, 2018; Frøyland et al., 2018; Orton et al., 2019; Van der Aa & Van Berkel, 2014), often concentrated on concepts such as employability (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). However, in recent years, there has been increased interest in the demand-side perspective in social policy research. In this lies the recognition of the employers' gatekeeping role and how employers need to be addressed in policy design and implementation (Bredgaard, 2018). A third approach has also been articulated in the literature, which is known as the combined or support-side approach (Frøyland et al., 2018; Frøyland,

Schafft, & Spjelkavik, 2019). As its name suggests, the combined approach seeks to incorporate both supply- and demand-side perspectives by providing support to both the jobseeker and the employer. It is associated with supported employment, a type of employment program method, based on the notion of place-then-train, with rapid placement into competitive employment followed by targeted support and training (Frøyland et al., 2018). Supported employment has been demonstrated to provide social inclusion for disabled people through careful matching and support (Gustafsson et al., 2018) and generally better employment outcomes than traditional labor market programs (Frederick & VanderWeele, 2019).

In this landscape of social policy research bringing employers into the equation we can find the emerging topic of employer engagement. In this literature stream we find a mix of demand-side and combined perspectives, focusing on how employers can be part of the solution to closing the disability employment gap. Employer engagement has been defined as “the active involvement of employers in addressing the societal challenge of promoting the labor market participation of vulnerable groups” (Van Berkel et al., 2017, p. 503). Employer engagement research seeks to further our understanding of the processes, motivations, and drivers of employers taking responsibility by hiring marginalized groups. Even though there are different conceptualizations of employer engagement (see the next chapter for a theoretical review of the concept), the majority of research on this topic is solution-oriented and focuses on how employers can increase hiring rates of disabled people or other marginalized groups. There are several contributions to the literature dealing with how to get employers involved in ALMPs and what characterizes an engaged employer. These studies often do not target disabled people specifically but are concerned with unemployed people who often need some accommodation or training in order to secure employment. Furthermore, they are mostly concerned with employers that are involved in specific labor market programs rather than ordinary recruitment.

Understanding the motivations for being involved in ALMPs has been the goal of much solution-oriented employer engagement research. Van der Aa and Van Berkel (2014) draw on interviews with Dutch employers and distinguish between four different types of employer motivation for using the public employment service as a recruitment channel. One group was motivated because that service offered an easy way of recruiting primarily low-skilled workers. Another was mainly driven by economic motivation, because wage subsidies could lower their wage costs. The third group was motivated because participation offered a way of

fulfilling CSR obligations. The fourth group was a mixture of the other three types. Van der Aa and Van Berkel (2014) argue that knowledge about employer motivation is central to the development of demand-oriented activation policies and that it can be fruitful for the public employment service to see employers as co-producers rather than clients. This sentiment is echoed by Orton et al. (2019), who contend that it is important to develop policies that allow employers to become proactive strategic partners rather than reactive gatekeepers. They highlight how participation often is motivated by CSR rather than core business needs and claim that an important step forward is to operate on the local level instead of implementing one-size-fits-all approaches mandated by central government control in order to better adapt to these needs.

A few studies link employer engagement or involvement with hiring practices regarding disabled people, but the literature remains sparse overall. One example is Hemphill and Kulik's (2016) interview-based study of Australian employers. The authors create a typology of loyal hirers, light hirers, non-hirers, and antagonists. By classifying employers in this way, they aim to provide direction for public employment service agents by suggesting that they direct their focus toward light hirers and non-hirers, the employers with a potential for increasing their hiring rates. They demonstrate how these employers can have incomplete knowledge about disabled people but argue that positive experience stands out as an important precondition for positive attitudes. They conclude that employment consultants have the potential to create positive experiences with disabled employees, which can facilitate engagement.

Breimo, Anvik, and Olsen (2021) investigate accounts of employers in Norway that are committed to hiring and providing work training for young people with mental health problems. They argue that these employers are doing more of what can be characterized as social work by motivating, encouraging, and closely following up on employees. However, they also maintain that this approach could pose problems. Employers are not usually trained to help people with complex problems and also have a particular position of power that could put jobseekers in an uncomfortable position. They also ask whether work training with employers like these really does prepare young people with mental health problems for employers who are less willing to engage in these "social work" practices.

Another example of employer engagement related to the hiring of disabled people is Van Berkel's (2020) investigation of inclusive employers in a Dutch setting. That study sheds

light on two different ways employers frame inclusive HRM policies by being either vacancy- or candidate-centered. The former means that recruitment is focused on finding candidates that fit the requirements for existing vacancies, while the latter means that the organization instead meets a candidate first and then develops a job to fit that candidate's skills. Furthermore, Van Berkel (2020) shows that motivation to participate is not enough and that support systems are needed for some organizations to "bridge the gap between motivation and participation" (p. 13). As such, Van Berkel (2020) attempts to identify specific HRM approaches that can help find and support committed employers.

In an editorial introduction to a special issue of the *Human Resources Management Journal*, Van Berkel et al. (2017) argue for making ALMPs an HRM issue, calling for HRM research looking into how employers get involved in contributing to the societal goal of including marginalized groups in the labor market. Within the HRM literature and related fields like business management and organizational studies, research investigating diversity is relevant for employer engagement issues, but this research rarely speaks to social policy. The most relevant stream of research in this field is research related to diversity management, which emerged as a field in the 1990s and is concerned with how diversity can be managed in ways that provide benefits for organizations (Janssens & Zanoni, 2005).

Employer motivations for engaging in diversity initiatives have been a central research topic in diversity management research, and in this regard, there is a clear link with employer engagement literature investigating employer motivation and rationales for inclusion. This stream of research has been more concerned with ordinary recruitment than the employer engagement literature. While the early initiatives of equal employment opportunities and affirmative action were intended to address social injustices resulting from systemic disadvantage (and was thus perhaps more problem-oriented), in the 1990s the growing field of diversity management began turning toward the business case for diversity, arguing that having a diverse work force is—in and of itself—good for business (R. R. Thomas, 1990). This tension between different motivations for increasing diversity, social justice and the business case, has been apparent in the literature ever since, but several scholars argue that they are not in opposition, let alone mutually exclusive (Dobusch, 2017; Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010). From a diversity management perspective, scholars have argued that having disabled employees is beneficial for business by providing a more diverse and productive workforce that better represents the population (Nafukho, Roessler, & Kacirek, 2010). In addition, it is argued that disabled people may offer

a skilled and loyal workforce, greater diversity of thought, and a more refined awareness of disability accommodations for customers (Lunsford & Dolison, 2019). The solution offered by this type of research is to understand the different rationales employers could have for hiring disabled people and highlight what employers have to gain financially in terms of specific skills and in terms of organizational culture. While diversity research has been extensively carried out in the marginalized positions of, for example, women and ethnic minorities, several scholars point out that disabled people continue to be neglected in diversity initiatives (Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017; Procknow & Rocco, 2016). This is a clear gap in the diversity literature in which the issue of disabled employees is “extremely scarce”; it is thus “imperative to shed more light on diversity management practices towards this underrepresented group” (Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017, p. 68). While there is research on disability diversity in the HRM field (Beatty, Baldrige, Boehm, Kulkarni, & Colella, 2019), people with impairments are often the forgotten diversity group.

### **2.3 Concluding Remarks on Previous Research**

Both problem- and solution-oriented research on labor market marginalization shows how closing the disability employment gap represent a “wicked” policy problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973). As such, naming one specific issue as the sole root cause or calling for one way to solve the problem seems unrealistic. Instead, the aim should be to “make progress towards improvement” (Alford & Head, 2017, p. 397). To do this, we need an adequate understanding of both the problem and possible solutions.

Problem-oriented research highlights how discrimination remains a persistent problem across the world and represents an enduring barrier for disabled people’s labor market participation. Furthermore, regulatory policies like anti-discrimination and quotas appear to have done very little to mitigate labor market exclusion. The current problem-oriented literature illustrates the fact that disabled jobseekers encounter barriers to integration in the recruitment situation. Nevertheless, more research is needed to elucidate the gap between employers’ explicitly stated values of inclusion and diversity and their often discriminatory recruitment practices (Pager & Quillian, 2005). We need research that can incorporate behavioral and attitudinal dimensions, that helps us understand how and why, rather than whether, employers make hiring decisions that exclude disabled jobseekers (Reskin, 2003; Rivera, 2020). In other words, the current status of knowledge indicates that one important

contributor to labor market exclusion is that employers choose not to hire disabled people, but we know little about the nature and causes of this phenomenon.

Solution-oriented research helps imagine ways of moving toward improvement and with evaluating different types of employer-oriented policies. We need this type of research to move beyond the mere recognition that the disability employment gap problem exists. Given the persistency of the gap despite advances in anti-discrimination legislation, investigating how employers can be proactive partners may offer more potential to create motivation among employers to participate. However, some issues in the solution-oriented literature provide reasons for being careful and call for a building a stronger basis of problem-oriented knowledge. The diversity management literature offers financial and organizational arguments for increasing diversity, but some argue that highlighting this type of discourse can provide employers with an argument for discriminating against certain groups when it is not obvious that supporting them is good for business (Noon, 2007; Woodward & Winter, 2006). Disabled people are a minority group in which impressions of lower productivity are especially prominent (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2011; Jammaers, Zanoni, & Hardonk, 2016; Kaye et al., 2011). Therefore, a discourse centering on the value of productivity-related motivations may be harmful.

Solution-oriented perspectives in the social policy literature are often concerned with conditions for successful employer participation in specific ALMPs. By starting from specific ALMPs, research on employer perspectives in making particular disability employment policies work could run the risk of accepting the premise that disabled people are indeed suboptimal workers whom employers cannot be expected to hire without support. D. R. Fletcher (2004) asserts that demand-led approaches in activation policy may in fact legitimize discriminatory behavior by employers when they accept mandated employer hiring as a given standard. Being critical of the hiring requirements embedded in such policies thus becomes important for research on employer perspectives.

Additionally, we need to be careful about attaching the problem of the disability employment gap to only the solutions proposed by the demand and combined sides and the employer engagement literature, which is often focused on the long-term unemployed and on participation in active labor market programs. Being disabled can lead to being unemployed and to participation in active labor market programs, but that is not always the case. Disabled people are a very heterogenous group (Dwertmann, 2016), with widely different needs and

competencies. This heterogeneity likely contributes to the wickedness of the problem and makes it important that any proposed solutions to the disability employment gap reflect this heterogeneity and not perpetuate simplistic stereotypes. This also means investigating employer engagement in ordinary recruitment, which are processes that are subject to regulation. Still, the employer engagement literature has been less concerned with ordinary recruitment.

Furthermore, scholars have been preoccupied with reasons for employers being engaged and less focused on why they are not. As Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen (2020) demonstrate, many employers expressing positive attitudes toward hiring disabled people but do not actually hire them. Identifying the reasons for this lack of hiring is thus an important research aim. There are some contributions in the literature that touch on this point, such as Ingold and Stuart (2015), who demonstrate poor knowledge about specific ALMPs among the employers investigated and a belief that potential candidates would lack the needed skills and fit with their organizations. Hemphill and Kulik (2016) also identified prejudiced attitudes about disabled people's competence and financial concerns as salient arguments for employers who were not interested in hiring disabled people. The findings in these studies indicate two levels of knowledge and attitudes among employers that influence engagement, one at the policy level and the other at the interpersonal level, regarding disabled people as a group. However, these are issues that need of further exploration. The existing research comes to contradictory conclusions in terms of attitudes and behavior, and we know little of the actual hiring decisions employers make regarding disabled applicants (Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020). Therefore, we need a better understanding of the problem before we can propose targeted and efficient solutions. I do not suggest that hiring discrimination and employers' hiring practices is the only driver of the disability employment gap, but I do argue that it is an aspect of hiring in need of further empirical investigation. This thesis addresses this need by exploring employers' explicit attitudes and behavior toward disabled job seekers in ordinary recruitment, going into the specific problems, justifications, and stereotypes employers provide as explanations for their hiring practice.

## **3 Theoretical Framework**

This chapter lays out the theoretical concepts and perspectives that comprise the framework for this dissertation. The chosen perspectives enable a broad understanding of employer behavior and attitudes toward disabled jobseekers. To analyze the empirical material in light of the RQs, I have chosen a multidisciplinary approach. This choice is informed by my critical realist perspective, which is well suited to a pluralist theoretical approach (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006; Shakespeare, 2014). I elaborate more on critical realism in the methodology chapter, after I present the chosen theoretical perspectives and concepts in this chapter.

I begin by describing the concept of employer engagement and how it is used in this thesis. Next, I detail theoretical perspectives that can shed light on why employers may discriminate against or choose to include disabled people: the economic perspective, the social psychological perspective, and the institutional perspective. These perspectives are not all explicitly deployed in the articles, but they provide a useful frame in this synthesis of those articles. Finally, I describe three important theoretical concepts that were employed more directly in the articles and that emphasize how ideas of normality and what constitutes a “standard” human being consistently put disabled people in a precarious position: these are the concepts of the ideal worker, ableism, and stigma.

### **3.1 The Concept of Employer Engagement**

This thesis uses employer engagement as a central theoretical concept, particularly in articles 3 and 4. Since there are different ways of applying the concept, I want to discuss how it is conceptualized and used in this thesis. As noted above, employer engagement has been defined as “the active involvement of employers in addressing the societal challenge of promoting the labor market participation of vulnerable groups” (Van Berkel et al., 2017, p. 503). The term “employer engagement” has been used interchangeably in the literature with terms such as “employer involvement” and “employer participation”, but in recent years, scholars have attempted to organize the literature around the term “employer engagement” (Van Berkel et al., 2017). An example of early conceptualizations of engagement in peer reviewed research can be found in Martin and Swank (2004), but it has a longer history in the policy literature, especially in the United Kingdom, where it has been associated with ALMP



evaluations (Van Berkel et al., 2017), and in Denmark, where a focus on the development of employer engagement has been strong (Bredgaard & Halkjær, 2016).

What unifies the employer engagement literature is a focus on the involvement of employers and demand-side labor market policy; still, it remains a body of research that is multifaceted and diverse (Van Berkel, 2020). The concept has been used to study employers' general hiring behavior toward marginalized groups (Bredgaard, 2018; Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020) and their participation in programs and initiatives that go beyond ordinary recruitment procedures (e.g. Ingold & Stuart, 2015; Salognon, 2007). Research investigating the latter often examines how the public employment service and service providers motivate and interact with employers in order to get them involved (Aksnes, 2019; Gjersøe & Strand, 2021; Ingold, 2018; Ingold & Stuart, 2015; Ingold & Valizade, 2017; Raspanti & Saruis, 2021). Ingold and Stuart (2015) identify what they call "the two faces of employer engagement" (p. 444): (1) employers' involvement with activation policies, and (2) providers' engagement with employers. Some contributions to the employer engagement literature aim to categorize degrees and variants of employer engagement (Bredgaard, 2018; Hemphill & Kulik, 2016; Nelson, 2012), while others have explored employer motivations for participating in ALMPs (Bredgaard & Halkjær, 2016; Moore, McDonald, & Bartlett, 2017; Orton et al., 2019; Simms, 2017; Van der Aa & Van Berkel, 2014).

In part, employer engagement can be seen as a field that refers to all research concerning employer involvement in employment policies directed toward marginalized groups, but it can also be regarded as a perspective facilitating a view of work organizations as societal actors and seeking to highlight how hiring behavior can reproduce or help even out social inequalities. This perspective challenges the individualistic view that can be associated with an excessive emphasis on the supply side, where struggling to get into work is seen as a result of personal shortcomings (Hobbins, 2016; Peck & Theodore, 2000; Salognon, 2007). Thus, employer demand as a given, objective fact is rejected and instead treated as hiring practices that are malleable and changeable (Salognon, 2007). This way of using the employer engagement concept thus helps turn the supply-side ideology that governs many ALMPs upside down by also assigning responsibility for minority disparities in employment to the employers who hold the key to employment access (Ingold & Stuart, 2015). In practice, this changes the focus from regulating and promoting the responsibilities of the individual seeking work to the responsibilities that enterprises have toward marginalized groups and society at large (Van der Aa & Van Berkel, 2014).

Van Berkel (2020) identifies three ways in which the literature has conceptualized employer engagement. The first is the demand-led approach (D. R. Fletcher, 2004; Gore, 2005) and refers to studies of how candidates are found and trained based on employers' recruitment needs by the public employment service and similar actors. The second is a regulatory approach, which deals with how employers incorporate government regulation like anti-discrimination legislation and quotas into their recruitment practice. This line of research is concerned with how regulation can be used to make enterprises comply with societal norms of inclusion and diversity in their ordinary recruitment practice. The regulatory approach thus entails breaking down barriers that are present in discriminatory selection and recruitment practices and incentivizing employers to develop inclusive recruitment practices. The third is the combined approach, which was mentioned above. It combines the supply- and demand-side perspectives by considering how the public employment service can work closely with both employers and jobseekers, using methods derived from supported employment and individual placement and support (Frøyland et al., 2018; Frøyland et al., 2019).

This thesis is most closely aligned with the regulatory approach, as it investigates how employers incorporate regulation into their ordinary recruitment practice. It leans primarily on the work of Bredgaard (2018) and Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen (2020) by directing the focus on the type of employer that Bredgaard (2018) defines as "passive" (see articles 3 and 4). Bredgaard (2018) provides a typology of employer engagement that separates the two dimensions of attitudes and behavior. This results in four types of employers: the passive, the dismissive, the skeptical, and the committed. When Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen (2020) put this typology to use to investigate the hiring of disabled people in Denmark, they found that a majority of employers were passive (54%); this indicates that a large share of employers acknowledged a social obligation to recruit disabled people but demonstrated few instances of actually hiring them. They thus illustrate an important aspect of the conceptual understanding of employer engagement by separating between attitude from behavior and putting the passive employer in the spotlight.

This thesis primarily addresses ordinary recruitment, which is less common within the employer engagement literature that has largely investigated employer involvement in ALMPs and employment programs that supplement ordinary recruitment processes and involve the public employment service. I maintain that employer engagement is not necessarily dependent on such participation. The active involvement of employers in promoting the labor market participation of disabled people can also be incorporated into

ordinary recruitment procedures that seek to counteract discrimination and are attuned to the challenges of jobseeking for disabled people. Consequently, being a committed and engaged employer in this thesis is treated as combining positive attitudes toward regulatory policies with actually hiring disabled people. Moreover, as the employer engagement concept has been applied to many different target groups—either unspecified “vulnerable” groups or specific cohorts like unemployed youth (Hyggen & Vedeler, 2021; Orton et al., 2019; Simms, 2017)—this thesis sets itself apart by placing the focus explicitly on disabled people. In so doing, it demonstrates that it is fruitful to investigate employer engagement in relation to specific target groups instead of lumping all potential targets together as “disadvantaged groups” or “vulnerable groups,” since there may be challenges unique to each group.

The employer engagement framework is a useful concept for this thesis because it draws attention to employers’ crucial role in creating, sustaining, or narrowing the disability employment gap and because it offers a demand-side perspective that places responsibility for labor market stratification on employers. Thus, employer engagement is a central concept for the whole thesis but is applied directly in articles 3 and 4. Through this thesis, I demonstrate the value of exploring why employers are not engaged and how focusing on disabled people as a specific group poses distinctive and potentially unique challenges.

### **3.2 Hiring Decisions of Organizational Actors: Economic, Social Psychological, and Institutional Perspectives**

In this section, I elaborate on three overarching perspectives that help explain how employers relate to disability policy and disabled people: the economic, the social psychological, and the institutional perspectives. While economic and social psychological perspectives can explain discrimination, institutional perspectives can be applied to describe forces that can pull in the opposite direction and motivate employers to include disabled people in their workforce. The perspectives presented here are central in the literature on discrimination and represent important underlying explanations for hiring behavior in this thesis.

### *3.2.1 The economic perspective*

Many studies of disabled people emphasize employer concerns around productivity (Jammaers et al., 2016), cost of accommodation, and fear of litigation (Burke et al., 2013; Kaye et al., 2011). Therefore, some emphasize that discrimination against disabled people may be the result of risk-averse employers avoiding potential financial losses (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2011). Statistical discrimination is an influential theoretical framework for explaining discrimination based on such economic considerations; it originated in the field of economics (Arrow, 1971; Phelps, 1972). According to the theory of statistical discrimination, employers base hiring decisions on the impression of the group in question as being less productive, statistically speaking. Disability status thus can act as a proxy for lower productivity and higher organizational costs. This is portrayed as a form of “rational discrimination,” in which where employers act based on limited information about an applicant’s productivity. In evaluating jobseekers, the employer may turn to these stereotypical images of the unproductive and unreliable disabled worker as grounds for rejection.

However, using statistical discrimination and economical rationality as an explanatory model of discriminatory behavior has been called into question (Rivera, 2020; Tilcsik, 2021). One criticism is that the model’s use and dissemination could legitimize stereotypes. In fact, Tilcsik (2021) finds that exposure to the theory of statistical discrimination led study participants to have a greater belief in the accuracy of stereotypes and a greater acceptance of stereotyping, in addition to higher rates of gender discrimination, in a hiring simulation. This discriminatory tendency was not associated with choosing candidates with better scores on a standardized exam. Tilcsik (2021) argues that statistical discrimination as an explanatory framework for employers’ hiring practices has the potential to gain influence because it prescribes accurate behavioral implications and resonates with a widespread cultural belief in the value of instrumental and economical rationality, thus making it more palatable. As a field, economics has considerable professional authority and influence on policy formation (Hirschman & Berman, 2014). As such, policy responses to an economic perspective on discrimination are often highlighted as central to efforts to even out employment disparities; they typically involve economic “carrots” and “sticks” to incentivize employers to be inclusive with, for example, wage subsidies and quotas backed by financial sanctions. Some scholars indicate possible financial motivations for hiring people with a wage subsidy (Van der Aa & Van Berkel, 2014). Others find that financial incentives are not an important

motivation for employers engaged in employment programs to hire disabled people (Moore et al., 2017). Additionally, multiple field and vignette experiments looking more directly at hiring behavior indicate that adding the information that a disabled candidate can be hired with a wage subsidy does not increase employer interest in hiring (Baert, 2014; L'Horty et al., 2022; Shamshiri-Petersen & Krogh, 2020). This could mean that the possibility of a wage subsidy in itself confirms an impression of lower productivity that induces skepticism or perhaps that there are additional mechanisms that discourage employers from hiring disabled people.

For disabled people who have repeatedly been associated with perceptions and stereotypes of lower productivity (Burke et al., 2013; Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2011; Jammaers et al., 2016), an uncritical account of employers' economic considerations can be particularly harmful, because it may risk perpetuating those stereotypes. This means that even though I believe the economic perspective has the potential to help explain employer aversion, I apply it with a critical sense to avoid possibly legitimizing discrimination and stereotypes. In several of the articles in this thesis, economic and productivity-related considerations are a part of the employer accounts presented (see especially article 3); however, it is important not to frame these considerations as unquestionably accurate accounts of the risks of hiring disabled people but rather as (1) stereotypical impressions of disabled people based on a narrow set of norms and (2) rationalizations that cut across normative and legislative boundaries of legitimate reasons for differential treatment.

### *3.2.2 The social psychological perspective*

One explanatory perspective for hiring decisions that draws attention to the fact that they are not only based on economic considerations is the social psychological perspective. While a significant portion of the economic and sociological research on discrimination and labor market stratification portrays employers as “human capital maximisers who base decisions on systematic—albeit often flawed—cognitive calculations of the match between workers' skills and those required by jobs” (Rivera, 2020, p. 221), the social psychological perspective emphasizes how both cognitive and emotional factors play a role. Here, I consider three important components of this perspective: stereotypes, likeability, and in-group favoritism. Making hiring decisions based on these components clearly breaks with the established value of employment decisions being based on merit and in this sense lacks the

more culturally resonant aspect of instrumental rationality found in statistical discrimination. Therefore, it may be difficult for researchers to access these types of considerations because it would mean admitting to less socially desirable hiring practices (Pager & Quillian, 2005). However, social psychological research has demonstrated that human beings systematically stereotype people based on group belongingness and that we often favor people we like and see as similar to ourselves (Almeida, Fernando, Hannif, & Dharmage, 2015; García, Posthuma, & Colella, 2008; C. B. Goldberg, 2005; Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014).

The stereotype content model outlines two fundamental dimensions of stereotypes, competence and warmth, that designate being respectable and being likable, respectively (Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999). Typically, groups associated with being low on one of these dimensions are associated with being high on the other. Disabled people are associated with paternalistic stereotypes that are high in warmth but low in competence (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). This means that they are disrespected but also subject to sympathy, compassion, and even pity. Paternalistic forms of ableism have also been reported as a common form of prejudice by disabled people themselves (Nario-Redmond, Kemerling, & Silverman, 2019). Research on implicit attitudes toward disabled people reveals that although explicit stereotypes are often found to be related primarily to lower competence, implicit measures show that disabled people are associated with both less competence and less warmth (Rohmer & Louvet, 2012, 2016). Disability status can be associated with the negative stereotypes of being dependent, passive, and weak (Nario-Redmond, 2010). Thus, though disabled people are extremely diverse, such perspectives suggest that assumptions regarding personal characteristics are derived from generalizations about the group (D. L. Stone & Colella, 1996; Vornholt et al., 2018).

Likeability is a central emotional component of evaluation. Whether employers like a candidate or not can impact their interest in hiring that candidate (Cotton, O'Neill, & Griffin, 2008). Even though likeability may be irrelevant for the job tasks, employers may still emphasize likeability in their recruitment evaluations because they believe it matters for the social environment at work (Chatman, 1991). As Rivera (2020) argues, we spend a great deal of our waking hours at work, and a sense of emotional connection with coworkers can impact job satisfaction and organizational attachment. However, for marginalized minorities, this can constitute a barrier. For example, Cotton et al. (2008) found that unusual Russian and African-American names were rated lower on likeability and associated with less interest in hiring than more common names.

Likeability is associated with in-group favoritism. Differential treatment can result not only from a clear animosity toward and negative stereotyping of the group in question but also because we prefer people similar to ourselves. This is a more subtle form of discrimination than the overt forms that are based on negative stereotypes and dislike. Greenwald and Pettigrew (2014) suggest that in-group favoritism, rather than out-group hostility, is a stronger explanatory factor in discrimination in contemporary society. In this way, managers who exhibit in-group favoritism can be more preoccupied with considerations concerning person–organization fit or person–group fit rather than person–job fit (Horverak, Bye, Sandal, & Pallesen, 2013; Rogstad & Sterri, 2018). Hiring then becomes a form of “cultural matching,” where concerns about fit outweigh concerns about productivity (Rivera, 2012, 2020). In Hebl, Cheng, and Ng’s (2020) review of hiring discrimination research, they recognize the shift from overt to more subtle discrimination. However, they also argue that we may be at the beginning of a new period of more overt discrimination that may be driven by an increased focus on diversity initiatives that increasingly appear to evoke defensiveness from high-status groups—such as white, non-disabled men—who then feel that they are becoming disadvantaged. Nevertheless, the authors maintain that we must expect the continued prevalence of more subtle forms of discrimination.

The social psychological perspective provides this thesis with a recognition of how work organizations are social arenas and that hiring means choosing someone to join in this arena. The perspective is valuable in seeing how hiring decisions are not simply about finding the most qualified and productive candidates. This is especially important in article 1, which demonstrates how in-group favoritism can contribute to discrimination against disabled people.

### *3.2.3 The institutional perspective*

The theoretical framework of neo-institutional theory, which was developed by scholars such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Meyer and Rowan (1977), seeks to explain the social process by which organizations seek legitimacy by conforming to the norms and values of their external environments. They describe drivers of institutional similarity and the “myths” that serve to institutionalize certain rules, procedures, and structures. As such, “organizations and their strategies are substantially influenced by the broader institutional settings in which they operate, and shaped by the institutional legacies that reflect the culture,

history, and polity of the particular country or region” (Doh & Guay, 2006, p. 49). According to neo-institutional theory, the decisions of organizational actors are not solely impacted by economic considerations but are also enacted in a context where “normative demands, cognitive frameworks, cultural expectations and legal regulations (...) impinge upon organizational activity” (Scheid & Suchman, 2001, p. 107). This perspective can help contextualize the findings in this thesis in relation to the larger question of how organizations can use their developed logics to contribute to solving societal problems.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) employ the Weberian metaphor of the iron cage to describe how organizations are often subject to processes of isomorphism that make organizational practices across different organizations increasingly alike. They suggest that this happens through three mechanisms: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. These are mechanisms that could impact hiring practice, because they can prescribe certain ideals that drive organizational actors’ decisions. Coercive isomorphism refers to external pressures, both informal and formal, by other organizations on which the organization in question depends. A relevant example is legal requirements that force organizations to comply with certain regulatory demands. Hiring practices have increasingly been impacted by anti-discrimination legislation that can bring about isomorphism in hiring because it sets rules for what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate differential treatment of candidates. Mimetic isomorphism refers to the imitation and borrowing of other organizations’ practices. Normative isomorphism is a mechanism in which organizational actors draw on cultural and normative values that are largely brought about from professionalization. Scott (2014) builds on DiMaggio and Powell (1983) in defining three pillars of institutions—the regulative, the normative, and the cultural–cognitive—and linking these pillars to each of the mechanisms. Each pillar represents a different source of legitimacy, and Scott (2014) argues that they can be a strong force when aligned and a source of confusion when they are not.

Some contributions to the disability literature that use neo-institutional theory are relevant for this thesis; they show how this theoretical perspective can be applied to investigate how organizational actors are impacted by disability employment policies. As social policy around the world is increasingly impacted by neoliberal developments that put financial pressure on disabled people finding a job (Grover & Soldatic, 2013). Moore et al. (2017) argue that this provides a new institutional environment in which attention to the employers’ responsibility for the employment gap is increasingly on the agenda. They



highlight how social legitimacy is dependent on contextual factors such as industry and national regulation.

When it comes to coercive isomorphism, it is interesting to look to the United States, the first country to implement extensive disability rights. Scheid and Suchman (2001) find evidence of both coercive and normative isomorphism as sources of compliance with the ADA. They argue that, although legislative measures are most often associated with coercive isomorphism, they also convey symbolic messages that shape normative values and become a source of normative isomorphism. The employers interviewed in their study that expressed a stronger normative source of isomorphism were also more likely to conform to the ADA, while those expressing coercive isomorphism were more likely to have negative attitudes toward disabled people and less likely to comply with the law.

Harcourt, Lam, and Harcourt (2005) contrast the institutional perspective with an economic perspective. They argue that hiring disabled people is perceived as having an adverse economic cost. Thus, the pressure to increase the hiring of disabled people, avoid discrimination, and provide accommodation is an institutional pressure that can be seen as conflicting with economic considerations highlighted in the theory of statistical discrimination (Arrow, 1971; Phelps, 1972). Harcourt et al. (2005) describe institutional pressure as an opposite force: in order for organizations to secure legitimacy, coercive, normative, and mimetic mechanisms all pull in the direction of promoting diversity and inclusion. They argue that their findings support both economic and institutional perspectives in the hiring practices of New Zealand enterprises. They also show that organizations are capable of both pursuing economic rationality in discriminatory behavior and increasing legitimacy through claiming to be inclusive employers without actually changing their hiring practices. This is in line with the gap between the frontstage and backstage in Norwegian organizational practice demonstrated by Kuznetsova (2016).

Kuznetsova and Yalcin (2017) apply an institutional perspective to disability inclusion in the Nordic setting by studying four case companies in Norway and Sweden. They find a lack of direct influence of anti-discrimination legislation on the hiring practices involving disabled people of the case companies, showing how coercive, normative, and mimetic mechanisms of isomorphism are largely absent. They demonstrate how the legitimacy of being an inclusive company is often tied to other groups, making disabled people a group that receives less direct attention. The Norwegian employers often interpreted being inclusive in

terms of efforts to retain existing employees. In the Norwegian setting, anti-discrimination legislation is fairly new, and the findings in Kuznetsova and Yalcin (2017) indicate that regulatory disability employment policies have exerted little influence on employers' organizational practices and values. As such, they do not find evidence of the kind of coercive and normative influence that Scheid and Suchman (2001) report in the American context. The institutional pressure created by regulatory disability employment policies is thus an interesting and important question to investigate further in the Nordic context.

In this thesis, the institutional perspective can provide an image of the counterforces of other factors identified as possible drivers of discrimination and marginalization. In the discussion chapter, I apply the institutional perspective in light of the findings and discuss the signs of possible institutional influence among the interviewed employers.

### **3.3 Norms of Normality**

The social psychological perspective described above addresses how perceived difference influences managers' employment decisions. However, there are several theoretical contributions that have been applied in disability research that also address the cultural aspects of difference that have contributed to this thesis. An important notion in these theoretical perspectives is that disability denotes a kind of difference that departs from the taken-for-granted standard of being "normal." Disabled jobseekers can challenge perceptions of normality, and research demonstrates that employers can struggle with the tension between recognizing disabled people's differences and seeing them as equal to other employees (Mik-Meyer, 2017; Nydal & Breimo, 2021). Three theoretical concepts concerning normality standards have been used in the articles: the ideal worker, ableism, and stigma. The selected theoretical concepts provide perspectives that can illuminate some of the unique challenges associated with disability.

#### *3.3.1 The ideal worker*

The concept of the ideal worker refers to cultural notions that portray people with certain characteristics as more employable. The term originated in feminist sociology and has been described as a concept that creates structural, enduring gender inequalities (Acker, 1990). Acker (1990) argues that organizations are not gender neutral and that gender

inequalities are deeply embedded in organizations and rest on masculine ideals. The ideal worker is an abstract—and at first seemingly genderless—individual who on closer inspection has the social characteristics of a man (Acker, 1992). This individual is a devoted employee with no outside responsibilities (such as family care or housework) impinging on their job, and is “always ready, willing and able to work” (Cooper, 2000, p. 395). It is not that the concept of the ideal worker does not affect men—as shown by research on men in occupations heavily impacted by this ideal (e. g. Reid, 2015)—but as the people who are most often able to live up to this ideal are men, it becomes a structural disadvantage for women. Acker (1998) argues that this gendered structure serves as a foundation for the organization of work and contributes to explaining struggles to achieve gender equality despite gender equality policies.

In disability research, the notion of the ideal worker has been applied to describe how jobs are created around an able-bodied ideal that marginalizes disabled workers (Foster & Wass, 2013; Jammaers & Zanoni, 2020; Jammaers et al., 2016; Randle & Hardy, 2016; Sang, Calvard, & Remnant, 2021; Scholz & Ingold, 2020). While Acker (1990) acknowledges that race, class, and sexuality are other forms of stratification that bring about structural disadvantage through the organization of work, she is hesitant to conclude that other differences like age or disability are as “thoroughly embedded in organising processes as gender, race and class” (Acker, 2006, p. 445). Foster and Wass (2013, p. 710) are critical of the neglect of disability discrimination as a form of stratification and argue that “it is the abstract measurements of efficiency and productivity, of job design and ‘ideal’ worker behaviour that make up part of established organisational logic and management ideology which excludes people with impairments.” They show how such a universal norm acts as a foundation for job design, that managers act upon this norm, and that this in turn disadvantages people with impairments. They use transcripts from the Employment Appeal Tribunals under the United Kingdom DDA and find that, in the cases they investigated, jobs were designed around an employee able to perform multiple set tasks, eliminating within-job flexibility. Thus, employees who were able to do most but not all of the tasks assigned to their role were viewed as costly, disruptive, and unworkable. Requesting adjustments and accommodation thus frequently conflicted with managers’ conceptions of what they could require of their employees—conceptions that were wedded to the concept of an ideal or standard worker and abstract job descriptions devoid of their human incumbents. Foster and Wass (2013) tie this to historical capitalist developments in the labor market, in which the

search for efficiency led to a standardization of jobs. This development reflects the impact of what they call “productivist” theories that espouse “objectivity” and “rationality” and can be recognized in modern working life through the standardization of, for instance, work times, methods, job descriptions, and performance. In this conceptualization, the ideal worker can be understood as combining a normality and productivity norms.

This standardization regime can serve as a clear structural obstacle to gaining employment for people whose minds and bodies fall outside what is considered “standard” and “normal.” In this way, the notion of the ideal worker is tied to ableism, a concept that reinforces the idea that disabled bodies represent inferior states of being, upon which I elaborate below. The ideal worker as a theoretical concept is crucial to article 1 but is also used in article 3. It provides the thesis with a valuable perspective on how employers often have a mental image of a standard employee against which jobseekers are evaluated. In article 1, the contents of the ideal worker are explored. The article investigates different dimensions of the employers’ tacit constructions of the ideal worker and how they can marginalize disabled jobseekers. As such, the thesis seeks not only to use the concept of the ideal worker but also to contribute to the practical and theoretical development of applying the concept in relation to disability and hiring.

### 3.3.2 *Ableism*

The term “ableism” was introduced to the academic disability literature by Campbell (2001) as referring to “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability, then, is cast as a diminished state of being human” (p. 44). Ableism, then, is the presumption of ableness as the “standard” and disability as a “substandard” way of being. This concept has guided the thesis in the way it describes how employers meet disabled people as deviating from typical, standard human beings, eliciting expectations regarding productivity, disclosure, evaluation, and accommodation.

The concept of ableism originated in the cultural model of disability that rejects disability as a natural category. Instead, it is a culturally imposed category of a phenomenon that is inherently impossible to dichotomize. Thus, ableism is often associated with the stance that the negative aspects of disability are externally imposed. This view has been criticized by, for example, Vehmas and Watson (2014), who point out that the idea that a wish to

correct or cure an impairment is ableist and insensitive toward people with debilitating conditions, such as depression and motor neuron disease; moreover, the authors argue that this makes it impossible to discuss prevention measures, such as prescribing folic acid during pregnancy to prevent congenital spinal cord injuries. While I believe these to be valid objections to a strict interpretation of ableism, it is possible to apply the concept of ableism in a non-essentialist manner that still acknowledges that there are individually based negative factors that are not imposed by culture, such as pain (Shakespeare, 2014). Ableism is useful in describing a general cultural belief that disability is inherently negative, even though that may not be true for every individual. To be sure, opposing the conception of disability as something always and inherently negative can be carried out while acknowledging that having an impairment can entail inherently negative aspects.

The value of the concept of ableism for this thesis is to show how the expectation of what constitutes a “normal human being” causes problems for disabled applicants in the evaluative situation of a recruitment process. As such, ableism has been a crucial concept in framing expectations of normality. It has been put to direct use in article 3 but throughout the thesis has served as a corrective to the ingrained expectation that having an impairment is above all a tragic and medical state instead of an aspect of being human that can be central to one’s identity.

### 3.3.3 *Stigma*

Ever since Goffman (1963) introduced the concept of stigma to the social sciences, it has been applied extensively to describe and explain marginalizing and discriminatory social attitudes and practices. Stigma research has contributed greatly to research on disability by illustrating the pervasive effects of negative labeling on identity and life chances. Stigma research has illustrated that, in social encounters, disability “throws a wrench into the works” and causes discomfort, which calls for efforts to relieve the social strain (Susman, 1994).

Different conceptualizations of stigma exist, and there is still no universally agreed-upon definition. Stigma as a concept has been used in several fields and disciplines, especially sociology and social psychology, but it has also been deployed in health sciences, criminology, and social policy. There are, however, certain attributes that are shared across different conceptualizations—most notably, that it entails a labeling of difference that is subject to devaluation (Bos, Pryor, Reeder, & Stutterheim, 2013). These components are

present in Goffman's (1963) conceptualization of stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" and that reduces the person "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p. 3). C. Thomas (2007) describes a conflict between medical sociology's "deviance paradigm," which is represented by the stigma concept, and disability studies' "oppression paradigm," which has its origins in the social model of disability. The oppression paradigm promotes a rejection of disability as a personal tragedy and directs attention toward the oppressors instead of the stigmatized. More recent conceptualizations of stigma have been more successful in incorporating lessons from an oppression paradigm, seeing stigma and deviance as "structured social relations" (Scambler, 2009, p. 453).

One such influential conceptualization of stigma was offered by Link and Phelan (2001), who define stigma as "the co-occurrence of its components—labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination" (Link & Phelan, 2001, p. 363). Furthermore, they highlight the importance of power, claiming that power must be exercised for stigmatization to take place. This model is useful in the context of hiring, since it integrates the behavioral component of discrimination and the contextual component of power. Power is central to employers' gatekeeping role, and thus the employers' ideas about disabled people have the potential to be particularly influential when they are evaluating jobseekers. The strong suits of this conceptualization are that it incorporates different analytical components—mainly psychological and sociological—in addition to referring to both internally held ideas and meanings and to behavioral acts. In the face of stigma, "discredited" or "discreditable" people can employ strategies to preserve their identity. Goffman (1963) mapped out strategies such as passing and covering that conceal the stigmatized identity entirely or minimize its obtrusiveness, respectively. Thus, stigma is not a static concept, as stigmatized individuals are not simply passive victims. Nevertheless, it is through a difference in power that certain actors sustain stigma.

In the realm of work and employment, the stigma associated with disability has been repeatedly demonstrated to restrict both access and opportunities to work (Dalgin, 2018). For instance, stigma management strategies have been described in the literature on disabled people in work settings, especially passing; that is, not revealing that you are disabled (Boucher, 2015; Kaushansky et al., 2017; Moloney, Brown, Ciciurkaite, & Foley, 2019; Vickers, 2017). Because disability is a complex concept and includes people with a wide range of impairments, stigma may impact disabled people very differently, both in the

salience of negative stereotypes and in the availability of different stigma management strategies.

The stigma concept was especially important in writing article 2, mainly by providing a way to understand employer expectations regarding stigma management strategies. The insights from this research stream highlight how maintaining a stigmatized identity in a hiring situation creates difficult dilemmas for the jobseeker and how employers with an especially powerful role can reproduce stigma in how they respond to disclosure.

### **3.4 Concluding Remarks on Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical concepts and perspectives discussed in this chapter provide the thesis with a framework that incorporates insights from social policy research, the hiring discrimination literature, and disability research. Institutional pressures expressed through regulatory policy can be expected to create isomorphism in support of disability inclusion. Economic considerations, social psychological considerations, and cultural norms of normality are mechanisms that are proposed to counter this influence, leading to exclusion and discrimination. The overall theoretical framework provides a multifaceted understanding of labor market marginalization in hiring, while the different concepts and perspectives deployed highlight mechanisms at different explanatory levels. Put together, the different theoretical approaches further underscore the complexity of homing in on the key root causes of discrimination. Indeed, they indicate that behavior and attitudes toward hiring disabled people depends on a mix of economic, psychological, institutional, and cultural factors. How these factors play out in practice in a concrete hiring situation is an important empirical question to explore. The different perspectives are used in the thesis to answer the two overarching RQs. The economic and social psychological perspectives in addition to norms of normality are particularly used in addressing the question of how employers evaluate disabled people. The employer engagement framework and the economic perspectives, norms of normality, and the institutional perspective have been central to answering how employers engage with disability employment policy.

## 4 Methodology

This section is dedicated to explaining my methodological choices. I elaborate on how I use critical realism as a philosophy of science and how I have produced my qualitative interview material. In addition, I explain my analytical strategies and provide details on ethics and reflexivity. The data were collected as part of the HIRE research project—a mixed methods project combining field experiments, interviews, and field observations. My contribution to this project consisted of conducting qualitative interviews, and the present thesis is based on three data sets that contain a total of 48 qualitative interviews.

Disability is a phenomenon well suited for qualitative inquiry due to its complex and heterogeneous nature (Dwertmann, 2016). Disability studies have long used qualitative interviews as a method for gaining insights into marginalization processes and discrimination against disabled people and thus supporting an emancipatory research agenda (Donileen, 2017). Qualitative research has provided indispensable information about the lives of disabled people and how the societal structures impinge on the experience of being disabled (O'Day & Killeen, 2002). This thesis offers a different perspective by investigating other actors' treatment of disabled people. Researching accounts of gatekeepers who may have discriminated against others differs from researching accounts of marginalized groups themselves. At the same time, the research participants gave their time to my research effort while receiving no extrinsic benefit. As such, I have had to balance gratitude for their generosity to me with a critical perspective on their accounts.

### 4.1 A Critical Realist Approach

This thesis has an interdisciplinary nature, which means that it needs a metatheoretical perspective that is able to incorporate different perspectives. Critical realism is particularly well suited to a pluralist approach to disability research (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006). This metatheoretical perspective includes insights from other perspectives without committing to either a positivist or constructivist position, which makes it suitable for multidisciplinary fields (Kjørstad & Solem, 2017). Critical realism is a philosophy of science that has provided me with a useful distinction between ontology (a theory of reality) and epistemology (a theory of knowing), a non-reductionist perspective on the multifaceted concept of disability and a fruitful approach to interdisciplinarity. Critical realism originated in the work of Roy Bhaskar



in the 1970s and 1980s and has since been elaborated by Andrew Sayer (1992), Andrew Collier (1994), Margaret Archer (1995), Tony Lawson (1997), and Joseph Maxwell (2012b), among others. As Maxwell (2012b) points out, a great deal of qualitative research is implicitly realist in its assumption and methods, but few scholars explicitly claim or even acknowledge adopting a realist perspective.

A central aspect of critical realism is how it postulates the relationship between ontology and epistemology. As a philosophy of science, it both recognizes that there are intransitive objects of knowledge that exist in the world irrespective of our knowledge of it and that we do not directly access these objects of knowledge through our empirical observations. In this way, we avoid committing the “epistemic fallacy,” which is to reduce what is to what we can know about it (Bhaskar, 2008). In order to make sense of the ontological world, we construct theories and abstractions, which Bhaskar (2008, p. 11) calls transitive objects, “the artificial objects fashioned into items of knowledge by the science of the day”; these theoretical abstractions can be closer to or further from describing the intransitive objects, “the raw materials of science” (Bhaskar, 2008: p. 11). This means that “all theoretical descriptions are fallible, but not equally fallible” (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 116). Consequently, as a critical realist I maintain an ontological realism while accepting a form of epistemological constructivism (Maxwell, 2012b).

According to critical realism, reality is stratified, or layered, in two ways (Danermark, 2002). First, a distinction is made between three ontological domains: the empirical, the actual, and the real. The empirical is the domain of experiences, the actual are all the things that happen whether or not we experience them, and the real is the deepest level; it consists of mechanisms with generative power. These mechanisms are out of phase with patterns of events that occur, and those events are out of phase with what we actually register. The mechanisms must therefore be analyzed as tendencies (Bhaskar, 1998). By making this ontological distinction between causal laws and patterns of events, we are allowed to “sustain the universality of the former in the face of the non-invariance of the latter” (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 10). The aim of scientific inquiry is thus to discover the underlying mechanisms that generate the empirically observed patterns rather than simply describing those patterns (Danermark, 2002). For this thesis, it means that I am concerned with mechanisms that impact employers’ hiring practice and attitudes toward disabled people. An important aspect of discovering these mechanisms is context: mechanisms can be activated or halted due to the contextual conditions. The activation of a mechanism need not be understood as simply an

on/off switch but can be viewed as operating on a continuum, more like a dimmer switch (Dalkin, Greenhalgh, Jones, Cunningham, & Lhussier, 2015). Furthermore, some mechanisms may reinforce one another, while others may hamper the manifestation of other mechanisms (Danermark et al., 2019).

The second form of is the hierarchically ordered levels of mechanisms, such as the biological, psychological, and social levels. This form of stratification is important in interdisciplinary work and is discussed in relation to disability below.

#### *4.1.1 Critical realism and its implications for this thesis*

Employing critical realism as a metatheoretical framework has had certain implications for my thesis. Here, I explain the three most important implications: the formulation of the RQs, the approach to the disability concept, and the use of theory.

One major implication of employing a critical realist perspective is that it “relegitimizes ontological questions for the phenomena we study” (Maxwell, 2012b, p. 13). I set out to answer ontologically based questions concerning how employers relate to disabled people and disability employment policy. I treat the ideas and meanings held by my interviewees as no less real than physical objects. Formulating RQs from a critical realist perspective also means that I do not avoid questions framed in terms of unobservable data. For example, I ask the RQ of how employers evaluate disabled jobseekers in hiring rather than how employers describe their hiring decisions involving disabled jobseekers. Thus, instead of formulating my RQs only in terms of what I can directly access, I formulate them in terms of the phenomena I believe to be involved, even if they are not directly observable (Maxwell, 2012b). The mechanisms that are the object of my inquiry are mainly psychological and sociological mechanisms that impact employers’ hiring practice, so the RQs are posed in a way that serves the purpose of this investigation. In critical realism, scientific inferences concerning phenomena that are not directly observable mean leaning on retrodution: asking what mechanisms must exist for something to be possible. I describe how I have approached this issue in the section concerning analysis.

Another important aspect of critical realism is that it is non-reductionist and eschews any notion of a single causal explanation for the phenomena under study. Just as we would not explain people only in terms of their cells, critical realist theorists argue for a similar non-

reductionist approach to explaining social phenomena (Sayer, 1992). In conceptualizing disability, this thesis builds on that understanding. As noted in the introduction, I lean on a critical realist relational model of disability because it alleviates essentialist tendencies associated with the other disability models and brings in a non-reductionist schema for explaining disability and informing disability research (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006). Bhaskar and Danermark (2006) argue that the disability studies field has a complexity that gives it the general character of “a necessarily laminated system” (p. 280), which means that it needs to use knowledge from several different layers of mechanisms. They present a seven-layer laminated system for understanding disability, ranging from the lowest physical and biological levels through psychological and psychosocial levels to the socioeconomic, cultural, and normative levels at the top. Their point is that one can identify mechanisms in each level that play a causal role in the life outcomes of disabled people and that critical realism provides an especially inclusive perspective. The inclusivity of different levels of causal mechanisms in this thesis is manifest in chapter 3, where I include theoretical frameworks directed toward levels ranging from the psychological to the normative. An important concept in critical realism is emergence, which means that each level represents something entirely new, qualitatively different, and even unique, which cannot be reduced to underlying strata. Because each stratum represents something new and unique, strata also produce objects that have emergent powers: that is, “powers or liabilities which cannot be reduced to those of their constituents” (Sayer, 1992, p. 119). The consequence is that each level investigated in this thesis is examined with a recognition of the emergent properties of different levels of analysis.

Bhaskar and Danermark (2006) argue that the “claim for critical realism is that it is the ontologically least restrictive perspective, insofar as it is maximally inclusive as to causally relevant levels of reality and additionally maximally inclusive insofar as it can accommodate the insights of other metatheoretical perspectives”; this, they say, is the “double inclusiveness” of critical realism (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006: p. 294). This means that critical realism is particularly inclusive when it comes to both ontology, the real mechanisms that exist in the world, and epistemology, the theories we apply to explain them. In approaching disability as a multifaceted phenomenon, leaning on a critical realist perspective has informed my view of disability as a relational phenomenon (Shakespeare, 2014).

Critical realism also has implications for how I relate to theory. It belongs to a tradition that emphasizes the value of theoretical abstractions as opposed to trying to be as

close as possible to the study participants' own concepts and terminology (as is common in grounded theory and phenomenology, for example). Thus, analysis involves going beyond the language of the people we study. It is not enough to simply collect and repeat the interpretations of interviewees. To have relevance, conceptualizations in social science must surpass everyday language and use theories and conceptualizations at a more general level; "otherwise, no new knowledge has been added" (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 34). Theories elevate the analysis and provide possible causal explanations for the tendencies identified in the data. As explained above, theories are not treated as something that coincide perfectly with how the mechanisms work but as descriptions that can be more or less correct. Deciding which type of understanding is better means applying judgmental rationality through different modes of scientific inference, including abduction and retroduction, which I discuss in the analysis section. Critical realism rejects multiple realities, but it can sustain the notion of different valid perspectives on reality (Maxwell, 2012b). As such, theories are important "frameworks for interpretation" and heuristic devices that help the researcher make sense of the findings (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 159).

My critical realist approach is not explicitly addressed in the articles, with perhaps the exception of article 1, where I cite Hoddy (2019) and A. J. Fletcher (2017). Rather, critical realism has been an implicit perspective throughout all four articles. It thus remains a philosophical underlaborer throughout the thesis, not by directing attention to specific theoretical frameworks but by providing a set of underlying assumptions about reality and the production of knowledge.

## **4.2 Data Sets 1 and 2: The Field Experiment Follow-Up Interviews**

Data sets 1 and 2 are both follow-up interviews with employers subjected to a field experiment. They were carried out as part of the mixed methods design in the HIRE project. This project mapped out a research design that was fixed before starting my doctoral studies, comprising both quantitative field experiments and qualitative follow-up interviews. Field experiments are a well-established method for investigating discrimination, particularly ethnic discrimination (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). Follow-up interviews are much less common. The decision to incorporate qualitative interviews into the design was inspired by other field experiment studies investigating ethnic discrimination and conducted in Norway (Birkelund, Rogstad, Heggebø, Aspøy, & Bjelland, 2014; Midtbøen & Rogstad, 2012). To my knowledge,

there are no prior field experiments on disability that have been combined with follow-up interviews, and articles 1 and 2 thus offer a methodologically innovative approach.

Field experiments are considered by many to be the gold standard of discrimination research because they make it possible to isolate the direct effect of minority status on hiring decisions. Notwithstanding its advantages, it is a research tradition that to a lesser degree has been able to explain the processes by which minority status impacts employers' recruitment decisions (Fibbi, Midtbøen, & Simon, 2021). Sociological research has long been concerned with employers as "agents of inequality," but most of the research has focused on hiring outcomes rather than the evaluative process and how decisions are made (Rivera, 2020, p. 216). Qualitative interviews can provide insights into these processes, but there is always a risk of employers answering in socially desirable ways that do not reflect their actual hiring practice. Combining behavioral data from a field experiment with qualitative interviews enables the researcher to get the best of both worlds. By asking employers to explain their reasoning in a concrete case of differential treatment, it is easier to avoid more general, socially desirable statements. At the same time, qualitative inquiry allows for an exploration into the processes that led to the hiring decision.

Data set 1 consists of 18 interviews with employers who have been subjected to a field experiment investigating discrimination against mobility-impaired jobseekers. In this field experiment, pairs of fictitious applications were sent in response to real job advertisements: one candidate reported having a back injury and used a wheelchair (see Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021). Data set 2 consists of 20 interviews with employers who had been subjected to a similar experiment in which one candidate disclosed a previous history of mental health problems (see Bjørnshagen, 2021).

Other than the disclosure of either a back injury or mental health problems, years of experience and education were the same in all pairs of applications that were sent out. The candidates were 21 to 27 years old and varied in terms of more or less education, with a maximum of a three-year bachelor's degree. Gender was randomly assigned to the candidates, but each pair always had the same gender. Both field experiments revealed a preference for the non-disabled applicant (Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021). These field experiments document the prevalence of disability discrimination. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to go beyond querying the extent to which discrimination occurs delve into the employers' considerations of the fictitious disabled applicants.

The sampling for the field experiment follow-up interviews was done purposively, based on the employers’ behavior patterns. The field experiment group can be divided into four possible groups based on their behavioral responses in the field experiment (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Overview of four different types of responses to field experiment**

	<b>Non-disabled candidate received callback</b>	<b>Non-disabled candidate did not receive callback</b>
<b>Disabled candidate received callback</b>	Group 1: Callback for both	Group 2: Callback only for disabled candidate
<b>Disabled candidate did not receive callback</b>	Group 3: Callback only for non-disabled candidate	Group 4: Callback for neither

Only employers who had extended an interview invitation to one or two candidates were asked to participate, eliminating group 4. I wanted to gain a balance in the sample between employers who invited (groups 1 and 2) and those who did not invite (group 3) the disabled applicant. The time span from when the employer was subjected to the field experiment to when they were interviewed varied. The shortest amount of time from when the application was sent to when the interview was held was about one month, and the longest was about 10 months. Ideally, the employer would be interviewed as soon as possible after the hiring decision was made because that would mean clearer memories. This ideal timing was not always feasible due to practical concerns for the field experiment, as we did not want to reveal the experiment to employers too early out of fear that information about it might spread. Furthermore, waiting did provide the advantage of having preliminary results from the field experiment, making it possible to discuss them with the employers.

In data set 1, I contacted 70 of the total sample of 145 employers in the wheelchair field experiment who extended an interview offer to at least one candidate. My goal was to have approximately 20 participants, and I stopped contacting new employers when I started approaching this number. In total, 18 employers agreed to take part. I conducted the interviews from June 2019 to February 2020. Eight employers invited both candidates, two invited only the disabled candidate (one of whom, due to an error, only received the application from the disabled person but was still included), and eight invited only the non-disabled candidate. The interviews were for the most part conducted with a single participant,

but two were conducted with two participants. The positions applied for in this sample were accountant, developer, customer service, receptionist, salesperson, and service engineer.

Data set 2 comprises employers who were subjected to the mental health experiment. The field experiment yielded 210 employers who invited at least one candidate to an interview. A research interview invitation was sent to a total of 89 employers, with 20 agreeing to participate. As with data set 1, the goal was set at 20 participants. I conducted these interviews between May and October 2020. In this sample, 10 invited both candidates, one only the disabled candidate, and nine only the non-disabled candidate. Only one interview had two participants. The positions applied for in this sample were electrician, kindergarten teacher, truck driver, carpenter, salesperson, developer, and accountant.

In terms of educational qualifications, the positions in both data sets required a bachelor's degree or less. In addition, they were all from the private sector. This is because the use of recruitment portals in the public sector that required registration of user profiles made it unsuitable for the field experiment. Kindergartens and IT companies are overrepresented in the samples because of a high demand for qualified personnel that led to high callback rates for these positions. The average interview duration in data sets 1 and 2 combined was 36 minutes. The shortest was 17 minutes, and the longest was 64 minutes.

I conducted most of the interviews in data set 1 in person, but six were conducted by telephone between June 2019 and February 2020. When I was about to start conducting interviews following the mental health experiment in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic placed restrictions on interviewing. All interviews for data set 2 were therefore conducted by telephone between May and October 2020. In qualitative research, face-to-face interviews are traditionally viewed as preferable because they provide the researcher with non-verbal clues and make it easier to establish rapport. However, it is possible to point to certain strengths of telephone interviews. They not only offer flexibility and access to busy people and those far away, but they also give interviewees the opportunity to choose a comfortable private setting in which to talk and allow the researcher to take notes without distracting the interviewee (Cachia & Millward, 2011). Phone interviews gave me access to a larger group of people and proved to be invaluable when pandemic-related restrictions made face-to-face interviews impossible. Fortunately, I interviewed the employers from the wheelchair experiment first, which allowed me to evaluate accessibility of the physical workspace in the interviews that I was able to conduct face-to-face.

The interviews were semi-structured. I used an interview guide that had been developed beforehand. A good interviewer immerses themselves in the interview situation, being sensitive and attentive to the situated clues and leading the interview toward topics well suited to illuminating the RQ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Although the interview guide provided the basic structure and questions, flexibility was also ensured through active listening and follow-up questions on topics raised by the interviewee. The topics covered included recruitment practices, diversity, disabled employees, disability disclosure, corporate social responsibility, and NAV. In addition, I asked questions concerning the employer's evaluation of our fictitious candidate. I brought the resumés and application letters from the fictitious candidates and showed them to participants during the interviews. This was done to help employers remember how they evaluated the candidates and why they made the choices they made. This added a behavioral dimension to the interviews and allowed the conversation to be led by this concrete evaluation instead of discussing only hypothetical scenarios. I experienced this as a major strength that brought about answers that might not have otherwise been voiced. For example, I was interviewing one of the employers and asked him why he did not call in the disabled candidate but did call in the other. First, he tried to explain by saying it was random and claiming that the company did not call in any candidates from the recruitment portal used in the field experiment (finn.no). When I said that we did receive a callback from the other candidate with an equivalent resumé, he ended up agreeing that he had made a conscious decision to not invite her for an interview and presented a prejudiced view of disabled people as difficult to work with as the reason. Whether he would have acknowledged this reason eventually cannot be known, but the impression I got was that grounding the conversation in a clear behavioral act elicited more honest and concrete conversations about how employers evaluate disabled jobseekers.

### **4.3 Data Set 3: The State Employers**

Data set 3 consists of 10 interviews with state employers from Norway. The reason I chose state employers was that they were the target of a soft quota regulation launched in June 2018 that committed state employers to ensuring that at least 5% of new hires had a disability or a two-year CV gap. To investigate how this initiative had impacted these employers, the aim was to interview employers recently involved in hiring decisions and identify any effect on their attitudes toward and practices of hiring disabled people. Another reason to conduct



these interviews was to include the public sector in my thesis, as data sets 1 and 2 are exclusively from the private sector. The public sector is traditionally expected to be more inclusive than other sectors. Investigating employer representatives' attitudes toward hiring disabled employees in this way provides insight into HR and management practices in an environment that can be described as having a "maximum of inclusionary potential" (Dobusch, 2017, p. 1649).

I also chose to limit my sample to only state employers because I specifically wanted to investigate the impact of the Inclusion Dugnad in the implementation stage. As noted above, the Inclusion Dugnad was introduced as an alternative to the IA agreement, and state employers were presented as those who could lead the way for other Norwegian employers, creating a sort of mimetic isomorphism. Investigating the impact of the Inclusion Dugnad thus presented an important empirical case against which claims of a renewed effort toward disabled people could be tested. In hindsight, another possibility could have been to broaden the sample to include private sector employers, especially those who had previously signed an IA agreement. This might have provided an interesting comparison and would have made the Norwegian and American samples in article 4 more similar. However, limiting the sample to only state employers enabled a more in-depth investigation into the unique position of state employers when the Inclusion Dugnad was launched.

As to recruiting, I wanted to reach employers who had recently been through a recruitment process because they were an important target group for the Inclusion Dugnad. To reach managers who had recently hired, I used public job advertisements. I found advertisements in the major Norwegian online databases finn.no and nav.no. The job advertisements that led to them being contacted were all for jobs demanding at least a bachelor's degree; some required a master's degree. They were in areas such as IT, law, policy development, and communications, all in a public administration context. With a few exceptions (mainly IT, where there is a shortage of qualified staff), the competition among applicants for these types of jobs is highly competitive. Four of the employers were ministries, five were central agencies, and one was a higher education organization. Shortly after the application deadline (a minimum of two weeks), e-mails were sent to the employers requesting their voluntary participation. Some e-mails were followed up with a second e-mail or a phone call if a response had not been received.

In the beginning, I set out to recruit only hiring managers; however, as the recruitment effort moved along, I was redirected to a few HR representatives and found that they provided me with perspectives that complemented the managers' accounts. As the interviewing progressed, it became clear to me that few of the interviewees could refer to any experience of hiring disabled people. Employing a purposive approach to sampling, I also wanted to make sure my sample included someone who had actually been involved in the hiring of a disabled person; as such, I used my network to contact an employer representative recently involved in a trainee program for state employers targeting disabled people. The reason why I settled for only one employer with recent inclusion experience was that I wanted to preserve the aim of including employers who had recently conducted a recruitment process. I wanted to understand the most common responses to the Inclusion Dugnad, rather than homing in solely on inclusive behavior. In this way I could engage in a problem-oriented approach and seek to understand the central barriers to employer engagement. In total, 26 people were contacted, and 10 employers agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted in person from January to March 2019, and the interviewees consisted of seven men and five women; eight were hiring managers and four HR representatives.

The interviews in data set 3 were also semi-structured, based around an interview guide of predetermined topics and open-ended questions. The interview guide had four main themes: (1) recruitment practices (How do you separate and select different jobseekers in the hiring process?); (2) the Inclusion Dugnad and related initiatives (What do you know about the Inclusion Dugnad, and how does it impact recruitment?); (3) disabled people as employees (What is your experience with disabled employees?); and (4) experience and reflections regarding cooperation with the NAV (How do you evaluate NAV as a partner in inclusion?). Initially, I was also interested in asking the employers about anti-discrimination legislation and the activity and reporting duty. In the first interviews, I included specific questions on this matter. However, the responses I received were not constructive for the dialogue in the interviews. The employers I asked about this were confused about what the activity and reporting duty was or referred to it as an HR matter about which they knew very little. The questions became something that created uneasiness because they came across as a test of their (lack of) knowledge. Because of the uneasiness these questions caused, I changed my strategy to ask more generally about measures they knew about that were in place to increase the hiring of disabled people (topic number 2). All interviews were digitally recorded

and then transcribed by an external consultant. The longest lasted 68 minutes; the shortest was 35 minutes, and the average was 49 minutes.

To supplement the interview data, I also conducted a simple document analysis of state employer annual reports. One finding from the interviews was that the employers had very limited experience with hiring disabled people. Reading all the available annual reports (161) in which state employers were required to report on their fulfillment of the disability hiring quota implemented with the Inclusion Dugnad enabled me to see if I had grounds for generalizing this finding. This triangulation provided me with a stronger foundation for my claim that instances of new disabled hires were scarce. Thanks to the information in these annual reports, I was equipped with both quantitative and qualitative measures of how the state employers worked with the Inclusion Dugnad. Thus, via triangulation, I was provided with a more “complete, holistic and contextual portrayal of the unit(s) under study” (Jick, 1979, p. 603).

#### **4.4 Interview Duration and Transcription**

Interviewing managers and HR personnel about their professional roles meant asking them to take time out of their busy schedules for a research interview. I learned that asking for more than 30 minutes of interview time was difficult in the field experiment sample, especially for telephone interviews. This is in line with research demonstrating that telephone interviews tend to be shorter (Irvine, 2011). Some interviewees were less preoccupied with staying within this time frame than others, but I quickly learned that I had to use the allotted time wisely. I found that the private sector employers from the field experiment samples were less generous with their time, possibly because they felt less of an obligation to contribute to publicly funded research than the state employers. This means that some of the interviews were shorter than I would have liked, with an average of 36 minutes. It can take time for the interviewee to grow accustomed to the interview situation and begin voicing interesting reflections. In addition, the dynamic in phone interviews may entail participants providing less elaboration (Irvine, 2011). I did, however, try to help the interviewees ease into the interviews by asking some simple questions about themselves and their jobs as a “warm-up” before delving into the main topics (Burnard, 1994). The short duration of some of the interviews is a potential limitation of this material. Nevertheless, I eventually found a rhythm in conducting the interviews and believe I still managed to produce interesting and rich

qualitative data. Beginning with the state employer interviews, where I felt much less rushed (with an average of 49 minutes), provided me with valuable experience in posing fruitful questions that would encourage respondent elaboration.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. For the majority of the interviews, an external professional transcription service was used. Transcription of oral interviews always means losing some of the meaning that was originally communicated by the interviewee (Tolgensbakk, 2020). Ideally, I could have transcribed all interviews myself, but due to the relatively large number of interviews, I decided to use an external transcription service. For data set 1, I transcribed three interviews myself, but the rest of the interviews (including all those in data sets 2 and 3) were outsourced. Upon receipt of the transcribed interviews, I read through parts of the transcriptions while listening to the recordings to check quality and ensure that the transcriptions coincided with my impression of the meanings conveyed. I regularly revisited the audio files in the analysis stage when I felt the need to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the written text or encountered ambiguous excerpts. Since I conducted all the interviews myself, this periodic relistening and revisiting helped me stay in touch with some of the extralinguistic features that are often lost in transcription.

## **4.5 Analysis**

### *4.5.1 The technicalities of analysis*

In each article, the analysis was carried with an overarching categorizing strategy, in which the researcher divides the data into coded categories and goes through them in multiple rounds to reach higher-order themes. For the majority of the analytic work, I used the NVivo analysis software, which is a useful tool for categorizing and structuring the material (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). I also occasionally used printed physical transcripts to help me not lose touch with the coherence of the individual interviews. My approach to analysis was formed by my partiality toward thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022; Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017). In their impactful paper, Braun and Clarke (2006) formulate thematic analysis as a six-stage process, emphasizing that these stages are not strict rules but guidelines offering a basic recipe that must be tailored to each specific analysis to fit the data and the RQ. They highlight this process as recursive rather than linear, and moving back and forth between phases is expected. The strength of thematic analysis is that it provides the researcher with a way to conduct a deliberate and rigorous qualitative analysis. One important

disadvantage, as Braun and Clarke (2006) acknowledge, is that by coding and breaking up the data into smaller units, a researcher can lose continuity in individual accounts.

Maxwell and Miller (2015) suggest that categorizing strategies should be paired with connecting strategies that can help the researcher stay in touch with the narrative in each interview. While leaning primarily on categorizing strategies, I complemented the analysis with narrative summaries of each interview; indeed, I did so to a greater extent as my research progressed. Writing short summaries of each interview made it easier to stay in touch with the context. The summaries were revisited during the formulation of overarching themes and categories. First and foremost, I chose analytical approaches for each article based on what was suitable for its RQs. In articles 2 and 3, I explicitly made use of thematic analysis, as formulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). In articles 1 and 4, I found that thematic analysis did not provide me with what I needed in the analysis stage and chose different, but similar, approaches.

In article 1, I used a critical realist approach inspired by grounded theory, where the focus is on uncovering generative mechanisms (Hoddy, 2019). I chose this approach because it fit better with the aim of finding reasons for the employers' choice to discriminate against a disabled jobseeker. The approach uses techniques from grounded theory but seeks to replace some of the inductive logic that runs the risk of near-sighted empiricism (Danermark et al., 2019) with an analysis that actively draws on pre-existing knowledge. The theoretical approaches I set out to use were notions of an ideal worker connected to concerns about productivity, in addition to social psychological theories concerning in-group favoritism and theories concerning economic considerations. These were tied to the two fundamental aspects of the employers' evaluations that I uncovered: the productive and social contributions to the organization. At this stage, I made use of modes of inference called abduction and retroduction, which I elaborate on below.

I used thematic analysis in both articles 2 and 3 but not quite in the same way. This was partly a reflection of my growth as a researcher, but it was also due to the flexibility offered by this approach. An important analytic choice in thematic analysis is whether themes are identified at the semantic or latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). The former is more concerned with the explicit or surface meanings of the data, while the latter goes beyond the surface to search for the underlying assumptions and ideologies that influence the semantic content. In article 3, my analytical approach was mostly semantic, and

the four key themes identified showed a pattern of semantic content. This pattern was the point of departure for a theoretical discussion about how the pattern was made possible. In contrast, choosing a latent focus means that the themes are already theorized, and their development in itself requires a higher degree of interpretation. For article 2, the analysis was more latent, where the three overarching themes I formulated were integrated with theoretical insights. For example, the theme of “the imperative of constructing a positive disability story” is clearly linked to problematic “supercrip” narratives and stories of overcoming (Grue, 2015) identified in the literature.

In article 4, I analyzed my Norwegian interview material, while my co-author Janikke S. Vedeler analyzed her American interview material. Despite this division of labor, we had open conversations with each other throughout the analysis. Instead of following strict coding stages, we repeatedly used a combination of categorizing and connecting strategies to interrogate the material with the question of how policy and inclusion requirements for disabled people were translated into practice. Through a circular process, we revisited our material multiple times and re-read interview excerpts based on the findings from the other national context. In this process, we began to zero in on the themes of the identification and quantification of disabled people; as the analysis progressed through the discussion and a review of the relevant literature, we identified these as core themes on which to concentrate. When these themes were identified, we revisited the data through connecting strategies, searching for narratives that could shed light on how this theme is important for understanding the ways in which employers relate to disability employment policy.

#### 4.5.2 *Inference: Abduction and retroduction*

A realist analysis has two goals: accurately capturing the empirical world and engaging creatively with theory and concepts (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). In the pursuit of the generative mechanisms of the world, “one of the most splendid tools at our disposal is the isolation of certain aspects in thought—abstraction” (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 39). For this purpose, abduction and retroduction, which are central modes of inference in a critical realist analysis, were useful tools for this thesis (Danermark et al., 2019; A. J. Fletcher, 2017).

As modes of inference, abduction and retroduction help the researcher redescribe the core components of the studied phenomenon. This is carried out by using theoretical frameworks involving relations and structures to suggest mechanisms at play (Hoddy, 2019).

Abduction, also called theoretical redescription, means recontextualizing the data within a conceptual framework. While the term was originally used to describe the researcher's pursuit of theoretical explanations for surprising findings, it now usually refers to the analytical approach where one alternates between data-driven interpretations and the theoretical and conceptual thought (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2020). Retroduction means reconstructing the basic conditions for the observed phenomena (Danermark et al., 2019). In other words, abduction means applying theory to shed new light on one's findings, and retroduction means using one's findings to identify the "necessary contextual conditions for a causal mechanism to take effect" (A. J. Fletcher, 2017, p. 189). In practice, the two often overlap. Jagosh (2020) describes abduction and retroduction as two sides of the same coin: abduction creatively reframes a phenomenon and is inherently epistemological, whereas retroduction identifies the real mechanisms of the world and is inherently ontological. Jagosh (2020) puts it as follows: 'On the one hand, abductive theorizing is epistemological in the sense of directing attention to how we should think in terms of scientific innovation. Retroduction is ontological in the sense of unearthing mechanisms that are part of manifested reality' (p. 122). In this thought process, there is the implication of identifying causation. From a critical realist standpoint, however, this does not mean a strict, positivist, Humean understanding of causality but one that understands causality as regularity (Maxwell, 2012a).

Abduction was important throughout all four articles. One aim in the analysis was to identify demi-regularities (tendencies and broken patterns) in the data; another was to engage with theory beyond providing thick descriptions of the data (A. J. Fletcher, 2017), thus "combining observation with theory" (Hoddy, 2019, p. 9). By applying theoretical frameworks, sets of ideas, or concepts to understand the findings, the researcher can shed new light on the observed phenomena. For example, in article 3, I applied both employer engagement and ableism as theoretical concepts. Thus, as I analyzed the interviews, employer engagement provided an important framing of employer attitudes and behavior. Similarly, the concept of ableism allowed me to interpret the interviews in light of an able-bodied cultural norm. In article 1, I applied the notion of the ideal worker to identify the different employer considerations concerning productivity and fit in a new light. It is important to note that abduction very rarely leads to any definitive truths. However, it is possible to use empirical data to test and modify theories as explanatory frameworks (Danermark et al., 2019). This is something I did when writing article 1. While the application of the ideal worker as a theoretical framework helps say something about the findings, I also use the findings to say

something about the theory. I show how norms of normality expressed in the employers' tacit constructions of the ideal worker rest on not only economic but also social considerations. Consequently, I highlight how the social contribution to the workplace is an important component of the ideal worker, which can be tied more explicitly to the concept than has been previously reported in the literature.

I use article 3 as an example of my use of retroduction; it meant asking what conditions weakened ambitious inclusion efforts and made employers passive. One such important condition that emerged from the data was a strong focus on efficiency and productivity, which was exacerbated by recent efficiency reforms requiring all state enterprises to make incremental cuts in annual spending. In other words, they had to do more with less, which made each new hire an even more important contribution to overall productivity. Thus, I conclude that ableist assumptions about disabled people's productivity, paired with new public management reforms urging state employers to be more efficient, resulted in a lack of engagement. This means that ableist norms and productivist work ideologies represent mechanisms that, in combination, become a potent barrier to the success of inclusion initiatives. The phenomenon in question—the lack of engagement and ableist assumptions—was recognized to be dependent on a productivist ideology.

To sum up, abduction and retroduction are indispensable thought operations for the critical realist researcher. Abduction helped me engage creatively with theories and frameworks by redescribing the findings and thus discovering “meanings and connections that are not given in our habitual way of perceiving the world” (Danermark et al., 2019, p. 115). Retroduction has provided the thesis with the aim of seeking to describe the “intrinsic working of things and the conditional modifications” of central mechanisms (Jagosh, 2020, p. 128). Together, they have provided analytical tools that go beyond mere descriptions of the observed phenomena in the empirical domain.

## **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

Throughout all stages of my work for this thesis, I have consistently sought to uphold general norms of research ethics. A key element in modern research ethics is ensuring informed consent. The requirement of consent is in place to avoid violations of personal integrity and secure participants' freedom and autonomy (NESH, 2016). I also argue that this



general principle is important to ensure that the social sciences maintain a good reputation within the general population. One challenge I encountered in my PhD project that the employers I contacted from the field experiment sample were not informed being subjected to the field experiment and thus could not have consented to it. Thus, the behavioral data I rely on to support the interview data were obtained without informed consent. This section contains reflections on this and similar ethical considerations and describes the measures taken in order to obtain the necessary approvals.

#### *4.6.1 Approval from NESH and NSD*

Before the HIRE project began, we sought ethical approval from the NESH for the mixed methods design of field experiments paired with interviews. One factor we considered was whether the societal gains of obtaining knowledge about the prevalence and nature of disability discrimination in the labor market outweighed the disadvantaged position of the employers. NESH's approval document acknowledges that the reasons for not obtaining informed consent in the field experiment were well founded. They also stressed that the follow-up qualitative interviews were an important addition because they provided the employers with an opportunity to explain the reasons for their behavior (NESH, 2018). In addition to NESH approval, the project passed review by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), which also examined the interview guides and consent forms.

#### *4.6.2 Ethical considerations in conducting interviews and analyzing data*

NESH (2016) lists many considerations that are important at the beginning of the research process. Here, I discuss two core ethical issues that I considered in that process: informed consent and respect for the values and motives of the participants.

Violating the norm of informed consent was necessary in the field experiment because the alternatives for gaining the information yielded by those experiments are practically non-existent (Pager, 2007). Still, this fact strengthens the importance of ethical considerations in contacting and recruiting participants for an additional interview. Ethical considerations were therefore an important element in my recruitment efforts. When recruiting employers, I wanted to make sure they experienced true informed consent. In my introductory e-mail, I attached a letter informing them about HIRE and its purpose (see appendices). I explained the

reasons for contacting them and, for those in the field experiment data sets, told them that they had been subjected to a field experiment. The most important information in the letter was then repeated at the beginning of the interview, underscoring that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time.

The above point about respecting participants' values and motives is especially cogent when one is studying discrimination in the labor market—and proved particularly relevant in my field experiment interviews. The NESH (2016) state that “researchers must not ascribe irrational or unworthy motives to participants without providing convincing documentation and justification” (p. 22). Searching for motives of discrimination risks arriving at conclusions that place the participants in a less than favorable light. I aimed to avoid psychological reductionism and meet the employers with an open attitude and a willingness to look for multiple reasons for their behavior beyond their individual dispositions. This does not mean that I underplay discriminatory attitudes as an important factor, but I sought to hold off making conclusions without sufficient justification.

In any case, the starting point for the field experiment interviews was a “test” of discrimination that the employers could have found offensive. This reality demanded sensitivity in presenting their results to the participants. At the same time, an opportunity for a follow-up interview may have provided them with a chance to voice their perspectives and explain their choices. In fact, Midtbøen (2013)—who paired field experiments with follow-up interviews to study ethnic discrimination in the labor market—notes that the majority of the interview participants accepted the premise of the interview and appreciated the opportunity to talk about possible causes of discrimination. He argues that field experiments may not be as controversial as some may believe and that they may even help employers deal with unwanted discrimination in their hiring processes by making them aware of potential subtle biases. This open attitude is something I also experienced in my research. I did contact one person who reacted very negatively to the field experiment and refused further participation based on that fact; however, this person was the only one who expressed such a strong negative response. Although it was likely partially based on selection issues related to who agreed to participate, the amount of positive feedback I received regarding the method—even from employers who had engaged in differential treatment—suggests that most employers do not have a negative reaction toward being subjected to a correspondence study.

The imperative to be especially careful in ascribing unworthy motives to participants became especially prominent in the analysis of the interview material. A potential conflict can be identified between this imperative and a critical stance toward the employers' attitudes and behavior. However, NESH (2016) also highlights how researchers have a special responsibility to respect the interests of vulnerable groups, who in this thesis are the indirect object of investigation. Thus, it is important that discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are accurately described. This thesis adopts a critical stance toward the interviewees, engaging in more of a "suspicious" than an "empathetic" interpretation (Willig, 2013, p. 42) and tries to reveal hidden structures of which even the informants may not be aware. This is due to my critical realist perspective but also reflects the positions of the interviewees and the goals of my inquiry. The empirical foundation for the thesis is comprised of the accounts of employers who hold positions and power in the labor market, and my focus is on their treatment of a marginalized minority group. I believe that this skewed power dynamic—where I investigate how employers have the opportunity to inflict ill-being (discrimination and stigma) or deny access to important arenas of flourishing—comes with normative implications. Critical social science is often implicitly directed toward the reduction of suffering, but as Sayer (2011) claims, it is something the researcher is often reluctant to acknowledge due to the fear of imposing overconfident or ethnocentric views. Nevertheless, I believe evaluation to be an important part of describing the social world. As Sayer (2011, p. 242) states, "sometimes explanation requires evaluation: social science has to be critical in the strong sense of disclosing suffering and restricted flourishing if it is to describe and explain its objects. The goals of social scientific description and explanation and critical evaluation are consistent rather than at odds" (p. 242). Therefore, my understanding of discrimination as a way of restricting flourishing and as something we as a society need to avoid is at the heart of my critical approach.

## **4.7 Reflexivity and the Role of the Researcher**

Knowledge production is not independent of the idiosyncrasies of the researcher (Berger, 2013). Although a critical realist position acknowledges the ontological reality of social phenomena, a central point is that our understanding of the mechanisms of a phenomenon is a fallible construction (Maxwell, 2012a). As such, I seek to interrogate my own possible influences in my interpretation of the data. Addressing researcher reflexivity is

important for improved transparency in qualitative research and means self-disclosing beliefs and assumptions that may shape the inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Therefore, I wish to use this section to explain my background before I undertook this thesis and discuss insider–outsider positions.

Before starting my doctorate, I worked in the NAV for approximately four years, first as a local office frontline worker, counseling people who received sickness and unemployment benefits, and later as an adviser at a regional working life center (NAV Arbeidslivssenter). In that center, I worked with employers to reduce sick leave absence and include people who were outside the labor market. This work was a key inspiration in my pursuing a graduate work focusing on the employer side of discrimination and inclusion. In my work in the local offices, I felt that the employer side of unemployment was neglected, and it was frustrating to see people working hard to find employment but failing because they could not find anyone willing to hire them. Later, in the working life center, I repeatedly struggled with my efforts to encourage employers to increase the share of disabled employees.

The picture of insider–outsider positions in my research is complex. On one hand, I was an outsider to my informants because I came from outside their organization and did not have experience as an employer. At the same time, I entered this field as a non-disabled person who was investigating discrimination against disabled people. This made me an outsider to the indirect subjects of study. In this respect, I was a majority member outsider looking into the treatment of a minority group. As Jammaers (2021) says, “when one is not disabled, one can never fully understand disability and to argue otherwise is to belittle the actual, lived and fleshy experience of impairment (e.g., pain and fatigue) and the social disadvantages that stem from the social construct of disability” (p. 5). This outsider position requires sensitivity and an interest in the perspective of individuals belonging to the minority group (Grove, 2017). In the disability movement, the slogan “nothing about us without us” has been used to communicate the importance of ensuring that disabled people have a say in matters pertaining to them (Charlton, 1998). To address this, I have consulted with representatives from the Norwegian Association of Youths with Disabilities (Unge Funksjonshemmede) in formulating my interview guides. They have also been part of a reference group throughout the duration of the HIRE project.

The fact that I did not appear to have any impairments may have aided me in obtaining honest responses from the employers. Through my previous job in the working life center, I

was used to approaching employers about these matters, which likely also helped me build rapport. I did not mention the fact that I was non-disabled, but it became apparent to me many times during interviewing that it was assumed. Even during the phone interviews, I often had the feeling that it was a conversation between two majority group members discussing a minority group out of earshot. There was one instance in which an employer disclosed a struggle with mental illness, but the overwhelming majority of the interviewees did not disclose any disability. One instance illustrating how this affected the dynamic of the interviews occurred when an employer wanted to explain how surprising it would be for a job candidate to show up to an interview in a wheelchair using me, the researcher, as an example. His point was that if I had just come to the research interview in a wheelchair, this would be very odd—it was apparent that his point was to help me see the strangeness of non-disclosure in hiring settings. The ableist expectation that people in professional settings are generally not disabled became clear in this and similar instances. The assumption that I was non-disabled could nevertheless have provided me with a kind of insider status that I believe made the employers more comfortable in sharing negative impressions and attitudes.

## 5 Summaries of the Articles

### 5.1 Article 1—Disability Discrimination: Employer Considerations of Disabled Jobseekers in Light of the Ideal Worker

Published in *Work, Employment and Society*, 2022, online first 21.02.22.

This article sets out to investigate mechanisms that led employers to reject a qualified mobility-impaired candidate in a real hiring setting. The empirical foundation is data set 1: interviews with employers subjected to the wheelchair user field experiment. The notion of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990) is employed as a theoretical framework and a tool for interpreting the rationales provided by discriminatory employers.

The findings highlight how both productivity considerations and social considerations are found in the employer accounts of their own discriminatory behavior. Productivity concerns were not very common, but when the job involved more tasks outside the office, some employers voiced such concerns. Overall, the social considerations articulated by the employers appeared to be a more salient concern for employing wheelchair users than productivity concerns. The findings illustrate that the employers feared that a wheelchair user would be unable to participate in trips and activities, and some explained that this made them skeptical and, in some cases, was the reason for not offering an interview invitation. Additionally, some employers displayed stereotypes about disabled people being entitled and demanding people who do not contribute to the group. Thus, the employers showed that they imagined a wheelchair user having a harder time fitting into established social practices.

While previous research on disability and the ideal worker has stressed the impact of ableist assumptions and expectations concerning productivity, article 1 argues that employers' tacit constructions of an ideal worker also entail an important social component. The findings demonstrate that the employers fill their abstracted notions of the job with people who are able to fit into existing social practices, thus favoring candidates similar to themselves. As such, the article tries to expand the notion of a committed and dedicated ideal worker to also mean a worker who can dedicate themselves to social arenas in the workplace.

## **5.2 Article 2—A Balancing Act: The Employer Perspective on Disability Disclosure in Hiring**

Published in *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 2022, 56, 289–302.

This article investigates the often-neglected employer perspective on disability disclosure in the hiring process. It asks whether, when, and how employers prefer disabled jobseekers to disclose their impairment during the recruitment process. The article uses data sets 1 and 2: interviews with employers subjected to the wheelchair-user field experiment and the mental health field experiment. Stigma management and impression management (Goffman, 1959, 1963) are used as theoretical frameworks to interpret how employers expect disabled jobseekers to manage their identity in the recruitment process.

The findings show that disclosure is a balancing act between appearing candid and competent and that the timing of disclosure impacts the impression of honesty and competence. Non-disclosure can be seen as dishonest, especially for wheelchair users with a visible impairment, while early disclosure can be seen as a demonstration of lack of social competence when it comes to people with mental health conditions. In addition, the employers preferred identity management strategies that present disability in a positive and unobtrusive manner and downplay the impairment. The third main finding is that many of the employers who showed positive attitudes and behavior demonstrated what resembles a relational view of disability. They saw the outcome of being an employee with an impairment as dependent on the employer–employee relationship, instead of viewing it as a fixed, medical aspect of one’s life.

The discussion points to the problematic aspects of expectations of positive stories, creating a narrow space for authentic presentations of disability. The disclosure of disability was seen as disclosing disruptive information, and the employer expected the disabled person to assume responsibility by smoothing it over. The article demonstrates how disclosure is an interpersonal phenomenon in which employer expectations are an influential force, especially in hiring, because of the heavily skewed power dynamic. With the power employers possess, their expectations and preferences have a strong impact, because the people who are unable to live up to them risk being sorted out of the labor market.

### **5.3 Article 3—Leading the Way? State Employers’ Engagement with a Disability Employment Policy**

Published in *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 2020, 11 (1), 3–21.

The article explores how Norwegian state employers responded to the implementation of inclusion initiative, called the Inclusion Dugnad. The state sector was expected to “lead the way” in the hiring of disabled people, and for this purpose a quota was introduced. The quota obliged state employers to ensure that 5% of all new hires were disabled or had a two-year CV gap. The article sets out to answer the question, “How do state employers in Norway engage with the Inclusion Dugnad at the early policy implementation stage, and what are the potential obstacles to their participation?”

The article is based on data set 3: the 10 qualitative interviews with Norwegian state employers, complemented by a document analysis of 161 annual reports from state enterprises. The article uses employer engagement as a theoretical point of departure and a typology that distinguishes between attitudes and behavior toward labor market policies (Bredgaard, 2018; Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020). In addition, the concept of ableism is used to shed light on how productivist theories of modern working life that presuppose ableness influence employers to focus on productivity and efficiency.

The article reveals that the employers were typically passive and in some instances dismissive of the Inclusion Dugnad. Both the interview data and the document analysis showed that very few of the employers were close to fulfilling the quota. Two main obstacles are evident from the findings: the apparent lack of disabled candidates and a reported conflict between the goals of the Inclusion Dugnad and the cost-cutting and productivity standards governing the state employer sector. These productivity standards force employers to question disabled people’s productivity and reinforce ableist assumptions tied to disability and work capacity.



## **5.4 Article 4—Disability and Regulatory Approaches to Employer Engagement: Cross-National Challenges in Bridging the Gap Between Motivation and Hiring Practice**

Co-authored with Janikke S. Vedeler and published in *Social Policy and Society*, 2022, online first 04.03.22.

This article draws on the state employer interviews from data set 3, in addition to 11 interviews conducted by my co-author with American employers. In this article, we explore why employers struggle to include disability as part of their active diversity approach. Thus, we try to identify cross-national factors that contribute to employer passivity: that they have positive attitudes but demonstrate limited hiring of disabled people. The article uses the employer engagement literature as a starting point for discussing the employer role in the implementation of regulatory disability employment policy, such as anti-discrimination legislation or quotas.

We identify two challenges in regulatory approaches to employer engagement. First, we point to the commonality of disability invisibility: namely, that disabled people seem scarce among employers' applicant pools and among their employees. We show how this lack seems to be at least partly related to the heterogeneity of the disability concept and narrow conceptions of what types of impairment contribute to disability. In the American setting, a fear of litigation also contributes to invisibility because employers are afraid to dig into protected information. In addition, the employers mentioned issues related to disclosure and that disabled people may choose to not adopt such a label.

The second challenge we identify is how employers in both settings often rely on demographic monitoring—that is, the quantification of minority groups in their applicant pools or the employee group in order to evaluate their inclusion practice. Because they have inaccurate numbers due to the disability invisibility problem, they have few measures to evaluate whether their own recruitment practice contributes to systemic differential treatment of disabled applicants. We argue that this issue should be addressed at both the policy and organizational levels in order to bridge the gap between motivation and hiring practice.

## 6 Discussion

This thesis set out to investigate the RQs of how employers evaluate disabled jobseekers in ordinary recruitment and how they engage with disability employment policy. The thesis is positioned at the intersection of disability studies, sociology, and social policy and provides new problem-oriented knowledge concerning mechanisms that exist on the employer side that impact the evaluation of disabled jobseekers and the impact of disability employment policy in the ordinary recruitment situation.

The starting point for the thesis is the large and enduring employment gap between disabled people and non-disabled people (Geiger et al., 2017). In Norway, this gap is larger than in comparable countries and has persisted despite political efforts to close it. Furthermore, research indicates that employers lack engagement, especially in the behavioral dimension, when it comes to hiring disabled people (Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020). We know that employers discriminate against jobseekers who disclose an impairment (e.g. Ameri et al., 2018; Baert, 2014; Bellemare et al., 2018; Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021; Geiger et al., 2017; L'Horty et al., 2022) and that disabled people themselves highlight prejudice and discrimination in hiring as a central barrier to finding work (e.g. Benoit et al., 2013; Chhabra, 2021a; Duckett, 2000; Vedeler, 2014). With this knowledge status as a backdrop, this thesis has sought to understand the nature of the barriers on the employer side. By investigating employer attitudes and behavior, the thesis contributes new knowledge that helps open the black box: namely, how employers actually evaluate disabled people in hiring processes (Reskin, 2003; Rivera, 2020).

Reflecting on the different theoretical approaches and factors presented in chapter 3, the articles identify social psychological factors and norms of normality as having exclusionary power. The economic perspective is also demonstrated, especially in article 3, and seems especially potent when paired with ableist impressions of disability as an identity characterized by negative attributes such as reduced work capacity. The four articles together show a general disability awareness and knowledge among the interviewed Norwegian employers that is rather poor. I do not suggest that this tendency is necessarily a reflection of widespread explicit animosity toward disabled people. It does, however, appear that disability has failed to be put on the diversity agenda in Norwegian working life and that perceptions are constrained by shared cultural ideas of what being disabled means. This lack of awareness and knowledge may suggest that the institutional normative and coercive pressures that might

be expected with the turn toward regulatory policy have not exerted noticeable power in bending employers toward ritual conformity and altering their hiring practices (Scheid & Suchman, 2001).

As I state in the introduction, one argument I make in this thesis is that employer evaluation of disabled jobseekers is connected to how they relate to disability employment policy. The findings show that the demonstrated difficulties of making disability employment policies work are partly explained by how employers like the ones I interviewed evaluate disabled people. Many of the employers voiced significant skepticism about disabled applicants, which induces resistance toward being inclusive. In addition, as article 4 shows, the heterogeneity of the group of disabled people also appears to create confusion as to how employers should approach the task of creating inclusive and non-discriminatory recruitment for disabled people, as demanded by regulatory policy. Furthermore, the articles show how employer awareness and attitudes toward regulatory policy also influence how employers relate to disabled people. The employers generally showed limited knowledge of their responsibilities under Norway's Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act. When employers lack knowledge about anti-discrimination legislation and regulatory policy, it makes it harder to see disabled people as a marginalized group that face barriers in the form of prejudice and discrimination and treat them accordingly. Articles 3 and 4 also show how concrete measures used as tools to fulfil quota goals, like disability box ticking, creates an impression that disabled people are few and far between. Thus, they are seen as an insignificant group of people and not the large minority that they actually are.

Now, I will discuss the main findings by addressing each of the two overarching RQs separately. First, I will discuss how the employers evaluate disabled people and then turn to how the employers engage with disability employment policy.

## **6.1 Employer Evaluation of Disabled People**

As noted, articles 1 and 2 are primarily dedicated to answering the question of how employers evaluate disabled people. They present an innovative method of investigating employer evaluation hiring that provides a way to get into concrete considerations and beyond the "rosy picture" painted by general employer attitudes (Kaye et al., 2011, p. 526). The combination of behavioral and rich interview data provides the thesis with candid employer

accounts on hiring decisions. However, there are also findings in articles 3 and 4 concerning employer evaluation. They demonstrate narrow conceptions of who disabled people are and the powerful influence of notions of the ideal worker. Two general findings in the articles are highlighted here: how ideals of normality impinge on evaluation, and how employer evaluation is often influenced by a conception of disability as a personal shortcoming.

### *6.1.1 Normality ideals and social evaluation*

In the theory chapter, I highlight three theoretical concepts that in different ways point to models of being “normal” and “standard” that cause disabled people to be seen as deficient: ableism, the ideal worker and stigma. While these concepts are interrelated, each draws attention to different nuances. Articles 1 and 3, in particular, show how ableist ideals damage the impression of disabled workers. This ableism is expressed in how ableness is taken for granted, and disability is then cast as something outside what one can usually anticipate—something for which the employers expect compensation and time for preparation.

In article 3, the state employers expressed concerns regarding productivity, a concern that is heightened by a strong neoliberal focus in the state sector on cutting costs and being efficient. In this way, the state employers demonstrated the influence of productivist notions of an ideal worker (Foster & Wass, 2013). The concept of the ideal worker is central to article 1, illustrating how ideals relating to productivity and social factors can contribute to marginalization. While article 3 shows how disabled candidates were imagined as falling short of productivity ideals, article 1 expands the notion of an ideal worker by showing how disabled bodies can also be ruled “out of order” (Acker, 1990, p. 153) from an evaluation of social ideals. This is demonstrated by employers discriminating based on stereotypes about social aptitude and ideas about not fitting into existing social practices that demand a certain mobility, such as work trips. By incorporating insights from a social psychological perspective, article 1 elucidates how labeling disabled people as different and favoring people similar to ourselves can be an important component in evaluation. The employers saw the disabled candidates in light of tacit conceptions of an ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Foster & Wass, 2013), who is both productive and socially integrated. When employer evaluations of candidates led them to conclude that they did not fit with even one of these components, they demonstrated discriminatory attitudes and behavior.

Given the strong focus on productivity in previous research on disability in relation to ideals in the labor market (Burke et al., 2013; Foster, 2007; Foster & Wass, 2013; Jammaers et al., 2016; Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017), article 1 complements the existing literature by shedding light on other aspects of evaluation that marginalize disabled workers. It also contributes to the knowledge of an underexplored aspect of employer evaluation and discrimination in sociology; namely, the emphasis on cultural fit (Rivera, 2012).

Social ideals are also illustrated in article 2. While article 1 presents ideas about how the social contribution of disabled employees led to discrimination, article 2 shows how hiring is an inherently interpersonal and social process where self-presentational decisions impacted employer evaluations. The impact of norms of normality are apparent in how disabled people are expected to manage their position as having a “deviance” that a majority of employers thought they should declare. The imperative of presenting a positive disability story and downplaying the impact of having an impairment can be related to notions of an ideal worker. By downplaying being disabled, one essentially downplays the importance of outside imperatives, making it possible to present dedication to the workplace. Hence, identity management strategies become tools for disabled jobseekers to present an image in line with expected professional identities and conceptions of an ideal worker (Reid, 2015).

### *6.1.2 Seeing disability as an individual shortcoming*

A central finding in this thesis is that many of the interviewed employers tend to individualize the barriers encountered by disabled people. This has important implications for how employers evaluate disabled people. Many of the employers expressed a conception of disability in line with a medical model, where sources of difficulty in life are first and foremost attributed to the impairment. This individualization is reflected, for instance, in article 2’s account of how mobility-impaired jobseekers are expected to take responsibility by disclosing in order to ensure that work buildings are accessible. In this way, employers envision disabled people as needing to take personal responsibility for ensuring that their impairment does not cause embarrassing situations, instead of accepting their responsibility as employers to ensure that their premises are accessible. This turns disclosure into an act of covering and making the impairment less obtrusive (Goffman, 1963). Accessibility then becomes an individualized issue, one that disabled people themselves need to navigate,

investigate, and request. When disabled jobseekers do not align their behavior with these sorts of expectations, employers are likely to evaluate them negatively, as article 2 makes clear.

In article 4, I demonstrate that the cognitive salience of difficult inclusion cases can help create a narrative where the lack of hiring is explained as primarily due to applicants' deficiencies. This is also evident in article 3, particularly in the enterprises' reasons for not fulfilling their quotas, according to their annual reports. Here, a lack of applicants and lack of qualifications among applicants are among the most common reasons given. By individualizing the explanations for the lack of new hires who are disabled by referring to perceived deficiencies of people belonging to this group, the employers could more legitimately reject the feasibility of working toward quota goals. This leaves the responsibility primarily in the hands of disabled jobseekers, echoing the sentiment from a supply-side perspective on labor market inclusion. Many of the employers lack reflection on how their organizational practices could attract qualified disabled applicants and ensure a safe environment for disclosure and how their efforts to create inclusive spaces and an inclusive culture could contribute to disabled people's employment prospects. The contrast is highlighted in article 2, which centers on disclosure; there, I describe how employers who showed inclusive hiring behavior often demonstrated a more relational approach to disabled people in work. In this article, I present examples of employers who acknowledge the organizational impact on both the job performance and disclosure of disabled candidates. In other words, by adopting a demand-side perspective on the barriers to inclusion and viewing employer engagement as an employer responsibility, employers could start seeing how hiring practices are changeable and dependent on how the organization frames disability and accommodation.

In the field experiment follow-up interviews, the tendency to individualize barriers is also evident in how some employers seemed to explain discrimination in the first selection phase of recruitment to benefit the applicant. For instance, some employers said that it is better to disclose in the application, even if this leads to fewer invitations, because being excluded early on could save applicants from trying to enter inaccessible buildings or receiving negative responses to showing up without first disclosing that they are wheelchair users. In this way, some employers portray discrimination as a way of weeding out employers with whom disabled people would not want to work anyway. In article 2, it is striking how the employers answered so clearly in favor of disclosure, when this information is in most cases illegal to ask about, and it was explained in the interviews that disclosure would lead to

significantly fewer callbacks. The majority of the employers seemed to believe that disabled applicants should accept being penalized for being disabled because the employers feel entitled to be informed. Consequently, the burden of employment barriers is put on the disabled person. Furthermore, stigma and impression management strategies make up additional and invisible work that disabled applicants are expected to accept and take on in order to be evaluated positively and be seen as legitimate candidates for a given job.

## **6.2 Employers Relating to Disability Employment Policies**

How can society lean on employers in solving societal problems? This is a fundamental question that can be applied not only to the case of labor market integration of disabled people but also to other issues like gender equality, climate change, and providing healthy work environments. As argued in the theory chapter, an important driver could be institutional pressures that use coercive, mimetic, and normative influence to move employers toward similar practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). As demonstrated in the articles of this thesis, these pressures were notable by their absence in the data. Articles 3 and 4 show how even employers who have made explicit claims about increasing the hiring rate of disabled people struggle with making that a practical reality. Generally, the employers in all the articles show how a conscious hiring strategy involving disabled people is very rare. Two important barriers were identified there and are discussed here. The first is how disabled people appear to be quite invisible to the employers and that the employers displayed little conscious experience with and knowledge about them. This illustrates that when a societal problem seems small and irrelevant, employers fail to see the impact of their own organizational practice on that problem. The second issue is that employer knowledge about existing regulatory policies is poor. This is compounded by the fact that these legislative demands lack a punitive element and are only loosely coupled with normative ideals. Furthermore, mimetic influence appears scattered and small. The institutional pressures to engage therefore appear weak.

### **6.2.1 *The invisibility of disabled workers***

A key finding in articles 3 and 4 is that, according to the interviewees and the annual reports, the number of disabled people who disclose their impairment is very low. Strategies to better evaluate disability diversity, like demographic monitoring, often hinge on that very

disclosure, but the findings show that this does little to help in the effort to hire more disabled workers. Thus, articles 3 and 4 offer some explanations for the lack of employer engagement that is found in previous research (Bredgaard, 2018; Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020). Disability represents a diversity category that is qualitatively different from other minority groups like women and ethnic minorities (Dwertmann, 2016; Randle & Hardy, 2016; Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016). This is especially reflected in the heterogeneity of the concept and its connection to health and accommodation needs. While the issue of disability inclusion would benefit from acknowledging the struggle for labor market integration as an equality struggle that is similar to other minorities, this acknowledgement must be paired with the knowledge that the challenges disabled people face have unique characteristics.

The invisibility problem complicates the employers' relationship with inclusion policies because disabled people are seen as a distant and less relevant group. Moreover, employers have no way of knowing whether the low number of disabled applicants means that few disabled people are applying, or that disabled people are applying but choosing not to disclose their impairments. Article 4 delves deeper into this problem and points to the heterogeneity of disability as a factor that contributes to the invisibility of disabled jobseekers. When there exists no clear-cut definition of what constitutes disability in hiring guidelines, both employers and people with impairments and chronic health problems may be unsure about whether their particular case applies. When employers are unsure of who their target group really is, and members of that group appear to be rare, disability diversity can quickly become a distant and irrelevant concern. Thus, we can recognize an important possible prerequisite for employer engagement: the societal problem must seem relevant to the employer's organizational practice. The problems of demographic monitoring of disabled jobseekers and employees that are identified in article 4 are a clear barrier to placing disabled people on the inclusion agenda and to evaluating whether hiring practices reinforce inequalities. It seems that disabled people are ranked at the bottom of the diversity hierarchy, and we argue that the invisibility problem is an important component of this low priority.

While I tie this finding explicitly to the success of policy implementation in articles 3 and 4, article 2 provides insight into how expectations in interpersonal interactions can further strengthen the invisibility problem. Article 2 shows how employer expectations could lead to the hiring of people who master passing, covering, and downplaying their disability (Goffman, 1963). Behaviorally, this is reflected in the field experiment findings that show that disclosing a disability leads to significantly fewer interview invitations (Bjørnshagen, 2021;



Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021). In terms of attitudes that are conveyed in the interviews concerning the decision to disclose, there is a clear preference toward self-presentation that downplays the effects of having an impairment. In essence, we can reasonably expect that employers will typically end up hiring people who appear to minimize their disabled identity and are willing to go the extra mile to compensate for their impairment. Thus, employers can end up rewarding disabled people who live up to their expectations of making disability as unobtrusive and invisible as possible. As Link and Phelan (2001) point out, power is an important contingency factor in sustaining stigmatizing behavior and attitudes. Employers, who are extremely powerful in the hiring situation, thus play a crucial role in reinforcing disability invisibility and stigma through their preference for positive and uncomplicated narratives.

### *6.2.2 Lacking knowledge about disabled people and their protective rights*

One finding that seems clear throughout the articles is that the interviewed Norwegian employers know little about the protective rights reflected in anti-discrimination legislation. Even among the state employers, the awareness of the hiring quota was quite variable. A reasonable interpretation of this finding is that Norwegian disability employment policies lack normative and coercive institutional influence (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This lack of knowledge could be related to the invisibility problem, because disabled people may be hesitant to claim the status of disability by filing complaints. This hesitation is a finding reported by Halvorsen, Hvinden, Biggeri, et al. (2018), based on life-course interviews with disabled people from different European countries. Several of the interviewed employers in this thesis admitted to differential treatment that would be illegal according to Norwegian legislation, but they were seemingly unaware that the discriminatory behavior they exhibited is against the law. Article 4's comparison of Norwegian and American employers make it clear that the Norwegians were less aware of legislation than the Americans. The interviewed state employers also demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the additional responsibilities imposed upon them. A few admitted to never having heard about the quota that they are required to fill, and the managers displayed little knowledge of the activity duty in § 26 of the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, which obliges them to investigate discriminatory barriers and implement measures to promote greater equality and diversity.

The employer accounts indicate an understanding of inclusion as a voluntary act rather than a legislative or normative imperative. The lack of coercive influence could be a remnant of the voluntary tradition that has dominated the field of work inclusion in Norway (Hvinden, 2004), despite the developments in regulatory policy. The Nordic system of cooperative industrial relations mentioned in the introduction may act as a counterforce to the implementation of regulatory policy. This cooperative system has yielded many undeniable benefits for Norwegian workers and the Norwegian labor market. Even so, we can ask whether using the cooperative approach in response to the disability employment gap has been fruitful. That approach has presented and maintained the impression of inclusion as a positive yet voluntary effort over a long period of time, which can be difficult to change. Even though the Inclusion Dugnad introduced a soft quota for the state sector, even the word *dugnad*, which means unpaid voluntary work, implies that inclusion is somehow a charitable effort. Thus, the coercive influence of regulatory policy is arguably weak.

Furthermore, while the normative ideals of equality, diversity, and inclusion were mentioned by many of the interviewees, disabled people were most often not seen as a central group to include in such efforts. Therefore, it may not be necessary for employers to implement inclusive hiring of disabled people to earn legitimacy as employers that espouse values such as equality and diversity, because they can direct their attention to other groups to earn that reputation. In the original Norwegian IA agreement that included a sub-goal concerning hiring disabled people, employers could earn the status of “inclusive employer” by paying attention to one of the other two goals—reducing sick leave or having people work longer into their senior years—which have more obvious connections to the economic interests of the organization. As Kuznetsova and Yalcin (2017) found, this means that the legitimacy of “being inclusive” can attach itself to the prioritization of existing employees and do little to welcome marginalized groups that are outside the organization. Harcourt et al. (2005) complement this in an interesting way when they report that the degree of labor unionization was not associated with less discriminatory hiring behavior. Thus, protecting and supporting existing employees may be a way to achieve the impression of being an inclusive employer that is supported by both management and union representatives.

Norwegian disability anti-discrimination legislation is fairly new, with the key milestones in 2004 and 2009, and the interview material indicates that it has a very limited coercive and normative influence. The finding that the law has yet to extensively influence hiring decisions means that the most important mechanism of ritual conformity is the

normative influence of a professional ethic. This is conveyed by HR personnel in both the private and public sectors and by managers who see inclusion as a core management task. In the case of the Inclusion Dugnad and the 5% quota, the lack of sanctions means that the employers are not motivated out of fear of direct penalty. Even so, as the interviewees worked in the state sector, they were used to the imperative of loyalty to government mandates—in this way, they did express a general coercive influence. At the same time, inclusive behavior is most apparent in the accounts of HR personnel and some managers who expressed a professional commitment to inclusion.

It seems that the most potent source of disability inclusion in both sectors is the normative ethics of a few people who manifest a special dedication to inclusion. One example is interviewee 24, who is quoted in article 2. She highlighted the relational aspects of disclosure by acknowledging her role in providing a safe environment in which to disclose having mental health problems. Her company was extensively involved in inclusion work, and the kindergarten of which she was the manager was obligated to always have at least one jobseeker in work training. As such, the nature of her company and her accumulated experience made her especially dedicated to being an inclusive employer. While she did not explicitly refer to any legislative obligations in her interview, we can recognize the normative obligations of a manager's responsibility to be inclusive. Another example is interviewee 11 in the state employer data set, who was the only one in that group who could cite recently hiring a disabled person. In her interview, she conveyed a particular dedication to inclusion that seemed to be based on her HR role. She spoke about how HR representatives in the enterprise would deliberately tone down administrative difficulties with accommodation when talking to managers to make them more positive about hiring disabled people. Her account thus points to how dedicated employees within an organization can play a key role in spreading awareness and positive attitudes. While these people could possibly be agents in spreading mimetic influence, we can ask whether that is sufficient to close the employment gap. Stronger coercive and normative influence may be needed, in which the hiring of disabled people is regarded not only as something for those who are particularly interested but also as a core value of "good" organizations. A relevant parallel is gender equality, which in most Norwegian contexts is considered a value at the heart of any organization that wishes to adhere to core societal norms. Interestingly, field experiments in Sweden have revealed no discrimination against women (Bygren & Gähler, 2021; Carlsson, 2011), indicating a strong equality norm that has impacted employer behavior in the Nordic countries. When it comes to

gender, the Norwegian state has also exercised a strong coercive force. In 2008, Norway was the first country to introduce gender quotas for corporate boards, which has produced a positive change (Seierstad, Tatli, Aldossari, & Huse, 2020).

The legislative turn in Norway was a major change in regulatory demand-side measures, and these developments were heavily advocated by disability rights groups (Chhabra, 2021b). This has involved implementing anti-discrimination legislation and ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which recognizes “the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities” (UNCRPD, Article 27). These legislative efforts are important in defining disabled people as a group with protected rights. However, the findings demonstrate the difficulty of implementing regulatory policy in a country like Norway that has traditionally emphasized cooperative industrial relations as a solution to inclusion ambitions. In particular, the coercive and normative isomorphism for regulatory policies like anti-discrimination legislation and quotas appears weak. When employers have poor knowledge of the existence of responsibilities to which legislation subjects them, the power of belonging to a group that can exercise their rights is weakened, perhaps radically weakened.

### **6.3 Limitations and Future Research**

No thesis can avoid limitations. One important limitation of this dissertation is its explicit problem-oriented approach. By focusing on barriers and obstacles, it is difficult to point to empirically based claims concerning measures that are effective in contributing to inclusion. The choice of a problem-oriented perspective reflects an identified need for a better understanding of how employer evaluation can contribute to the employment gap and why employers do not engage more fully with disability employment policy. There is especially a need for research that goes beyond simply demonstrating negative outcomes for disabled people in the labor market and delves further into the mechanisms that lead to poor outcomes (Reskin, 2003; Rivera, 2020). However, the findings in this thesis are for the most part limited to pointing out problems and do not prescribe any clear solutions. Still, uncovering specific problems could provide important directions for solution-oriented research. For example, how do we solve issues related to invisibility and demographic monitoring? What solutions could

minimize the consequences of the negative evaluation of social contributions to the workplace? Can quotas create positive change in terms of enhanced employer awareness and reduced discrimination? More research is needed on how these problems can be overcome by employers and policymakers.

Another important limitation is that, by using individual qualitative interviews as a method, I have ended up with an individualized managerial focus. Therefore, my findings and conclusions are less effective in going beyond individual motivation-based reasoning to address organizational and societal factors that are important factors in understanding and combatting discrimination (Reskin, 2003). Further research should explore the organizational level to provide knowledge about how the organizational context influences practices of inclusion and exclusion. For this purpose, ethnographic studies, such as an examination of the recruitment process, could prove fruitful in uncovering silent practices and taken-for-granted notions. Rivera (2012) uses just this type of ethnographic methodological approach in studying employers' recruitment behavior and preferences, and it could be applied more directly to the topic of disability and hiring. For instance, it could be interesting to further investigate the importance of professional ethics and inclusion "pioneers" within an organization in making inclusion targets a practical reality. As this thesis explores accounts of mainly middle managers and HR personnel, studying the top, most powerful level of organizational hierarchies could also yield important findings.

In addition to directing attention to individual attitudes, using interview material makes it very difficult to investigate implicit attitudes and unconscious bias. We know that people have negative implicit attitudes toward disabled people (Rohmer & Louvet, 2012, 2016). These types of mechanisms undoubtedly play a part in making unfavorable decisions toward minority jobseekers who are perceived as out-group members. Thus, it remains something I have been not able to address in this thesis and constitutes an important limitation.

This thesis has a narrow focus on labor market stratification, as it concentrates on the initial phases of ordinary recruitment processes. More research is needed on what employers do later in the process. How disability impacts the final hiring decision is an important aspect of our knowledge about discrimination and inclusion practice that this thesis tells us less about. As research shows that disabled people typically receive lower pay and hold more precarious positions when they are employed (Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2013), future research could also explore the mechanisms that hold disabled people back from job advancement. The

glass ceiling is a well-used metaphor for women being prevented from rising in organizational hierarchies, and future research could provide better insights into similar trajectories for disabled people (see Kaye, 2009; Purc-Stephenson, Jones, & Ferguson, 2017). It would also be useful to further investigate career trajectories of disabled people in highly paid and prestigious jobs, because access to elite jobs is an important driver of inequality (Rivera, 2012).

Finally, the findings in this thesis represent a small sample of Norwegian employers. Although the findings from the interviews are complemented in part by quantitative findings—like the annual reports from over 100 state employers (article 3) and the field experiments (Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021)—a small sample calls for caution in generalizability and transferability. Other nuances and perspectives could be expected to emerge among other employers. For example, it is worth noting that municipal public employers are absent from the material, and they employ approximately 20% of the Norwegian workforce (Statistics Norway, 2021). Thus, there are bound to be important perspectives that are absent from my limited material. Nonetheless, the primary point of the qualitative inquiry I have undertaken was to generalize to the phenomena under investigation rather than the total population of Norwegian employers (Levitt, 2021). This type of analytic generalization means that the researcher seeks to identify variations and patterns in the data that can help us say something about the possible mechanisms at play, rather than claiming that the patterns identified are representative of the population as a whole. However, there is still much ground to cover to understand the processes of marginalization that disabled people experience in the labor market. Further research should continue to investigate the employer role, using quantitative and qualitative methods to provide us with both broad and in-depth understandings of employers with a range of organizational sizes, from different sectors, and with different backgrounds.

## **6.4 Contributions to Research and Implications for Practice**

This thesis provides a contribution to problem-oriented research on disability and marginalization in the labor market. By bringing together a demand-side perspective on labor market integration from social policy, a discrimination and marginalization perspective from sociology, and a focus on disabling barriers in society from disability studies, it provides

novel nuances to our understanding of how disabled people are subject to discrimination and marginalization in ordinary recruitment.

First, the thesis offers a contribution to the employer engagement literature in social policy, providing problem-oriented knowledge that can aid in our understanding of the wicked policy problem of the disability employment gap and of passive and dismissive employers. It does so by using concepts and insights from the disability studies field, acknowledging the impact of ableist norms and disability as a complex reality (Shakespeare, 2014). Articles 3 and 4 point out barriers created by the productivism that permeates modern working life and employers' struggles with disability heterogeneity and invisibility. These findings are indications of how complex the problem of the disability employment gap is by demonstrating how it is related to the foundational logics of the modern labor market and the multifaceted nature of disability itself. Furthermore, the thesis shows how creating normative and coercive isomorphism toward compliance with anti-discrimination legislation and quotas in response to the disability employment gap can be particularly difficult in a country like Norway, which has long emphasized cooperative industrial relations.

Second, the thesis contributes to the field of disability studies, in which the precarious position of disabled workers and jobseekers is well documented in research exploring the disabled person's perspective (e.g. Chhabra, 2021a; Coleman-Fountain et al., 2017; McKinney & Swartz, 2019; Vedeler, 2014). A strength of the findings in this thesis is that they validate previous findings that adopt the disabled person's perspective and underscore the importance of attitudinal barriers. While there are previous studies that investigate employer attitudes (Burke et al., 2013; Ju et al., 2013; Kaye et al., 2011), this thesis brings in something new by investigating differential treatment of equally qualified applicants, or discrimination more bluntly. The methodological approach in which data on both behavior and attitudes are combined provides an innovative approach to producing knowledge about discrimination. Consequently, the findings provide novel insights into how employer evaluation of disabled people can lead to discrimination. A central contribution in this respect is the importance of the employers' social considerations, which are discussed in article 1. By elucidating the interpersonal nature of disclosure, the thesis also contributes to knowledge of the disclosure process, an important topic in disability studies. The perspective of the disabled person is well represented in previous literature. Article 2 responds to the need to also investigate the employer side and acknowledge employers' important contextual influence on

self-presentation. At the same time, the thesis answers the disability studies field's appeals for research that deals with the societal barriers of being impaired by focusing on employers.

Third, the thesis contributes to the sociological literature concerning employer evaluation in hiring and its role in affecting the distribution of life chances (Link & Phelan, 2001). As both Reskin (2003) and Rivera (2020) highlight, sociological research on employer evaluation and discrimination has primarily been concerned with unequal outcomes of employer decisions and less with the mechanisms that produce these outcomes. The thesis has proposed several such important mechanisms: economic considerations, social psychological perceptions, institutional pressures, and norms of normality. As such, it contributes to the scholarly discussion and theorization of mechanisms that contribute to employer evaluations of disabled people. While hiring evaluations are likely impacted by all mechanisms proposed in the theoretical frameworks section, the articles place particular emphasis on the importance of the social and cultural factors connected to in-group favoritism and norms of normality and how these mechanisms create an impression of disabled people as not fitting in. Article 1 adds to the still overly small number of research articles that attest to the ideal worker concept's effect on hiring and disability (see Foster & Wass, 2013; Jammaers & Zanoni, 2020; Randle & Hardy, 2016; Scholz & Ingold, 2020). The article demonstrates how employers approach hiring with a standard or ideal worker in mind. This means that people who, in the eyes of the employer, break with organizational majority group characteristics have a harder time making a favorable impression. As such, my research supports the argument presented by Rivera (2020) that employers are not merely utility maximizers and that evaluation does not depend solely on how skillful and productive applicants are perceived to be. However, the application of the different theoretical frameworks illustrates how the evaluation of disabled jobseekers is impacted on a complex mix of mechanisms and processes.

The thesis also has the potential to assist policymakers in creating policies that are more fully and fruitfully informed by the employer perspective. As stated in the introduction, solutions need to be built on an adequate understanding of the problem. First, policy needs to address the fact that employer rejection is not based solely on economic concerns. The importance of social considerations, which are highlighted in article 1, shows that policy strategies relying largely or only on financial incentives like wage subsidies would fail to address an important employer concern. For the segment of the disabled population on which I focus in this thesis, disabled people with a relatively high or full work capacity, wage subsidies are also a less relevant tool. Even so, for disabled people who experience prolonged



unemployment and need assistance to find suitable work, measures that deal with socialization into the workplace could be valuable: one example is putting an emphasis on support-side or combined approaches (Frøyland et al., 2018). This requires continued effort in bettering social work practice that can improve cooperation and secure a better flow of communication between NAV and employers. The employer engagement literature investigating this relationship demonstrates issues such as the negotiation of a market logic and intraorganizational recruitment barriers (Ingold & Stuart, 2015; Ingold & Valizade, 2017; Raspanti & Saruis, 2021). This research shows a need for NAV to work out productive interconnections with employers' recruitment practices that can balance the employers' interests with those of jobseekers and society. Nevertheless, as Gjersøe and Strand (2021) argue, this should not rely on relational work alone but should at least be paired with agreements on concrete commitments from employers. To counter some of the dynamics caused by notions of the ideal worker, Van Berkel's (2020) candidate-centered approach to hiring could be a helpful tool for employers and NAV. By using a candidate's skills instead of a standard job description as the starting point, employers and NAV could make use of job carving as a tool to circumvent some of the issues caused by standardization. However, as article 4 emphasizes, disabled people are a heterogeneous group. The problem of reluctant employers is not limited just to disabled people who are unemployed and/or have a reduced work capacity, as is demonstrated in articles 1 and 2. This means that the public employment service cannot aid all disabled people who risk being marginalized and discriminated against in their jobseeking endeavors, because not everyone will be recipients of this type of assistance. The solution-oriented literature in social policy often precludes the use of public employment services to aid disabled people, but it is important to note that this is not relevant for every disabled person.

Furthermore, for mobility-impaired people, the problems identified connected to the social aspect of accessibility demonstrate how general accessibility in society contributes to impressions of being able to fit in. The clear implication is that accessibility and universal design in society as a whole must be a priority if mobility-impaired people are to participate in all domains of society. In addition to accessible workplaces, we need accessible public spaces that allow disabled people to participate more easily in the social arenas that make up important informal places of bonding.

For all disabled people, a change of cultural perceptions of disabled people stands out as important. The findings demonstrate the need for improved knowledge and consciousness of

disability in the Norwegian labor market. However, changing deep-seated cultural perceptions is immensely challenging and takes time. Yet, looking at the transformation in the place of women in Norway's labor market indicates that even great changes are possible. For this purpose, we may need what Fraser (2003) calls affirmative change and transformational change to address both the outcomes and root causes of inequality. Going forward, it is important that the integration of disabled people into the labor market be seen as an equality struggle, but the complexity and diversity within the category sets it apart from other equality struggles; this needs to be factored into how society in general and employers in particular think about inclusion.

In heightening awareness of regulatory policies, it is important to ask whether stricter enforcement of the law and quota regulations is a necessary step. Enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation is largely dependent on the actions of individuals and civil society turning to litigation. Criticisms raised against enforcement of anti-discrimination laws in Norway point a way forward to providing better opportunities for individuals to take legal action. Supporting and highlighting such endeavors could be a strategy for disability rights organizations to draw attention to the legislative rights that are in place (Vanhala, 2006). At the same time, some critics argue that individual discrimination lawsuits can perpetuate rather than change workplace inequality, because employers, agencies, and courts often end up reinscribing "the very hierarchies the law was assigned to attack" by reinforcing stereotypes (Berrey et al., 2017, p. 225). Berrey et al. (2017) do, however, point to greater success for cases involving larger groups of plaintiffs that aim at systemic discrimination than for individual lawsuits. The use of enforcement agencies may be another potential approach (Havinga, 2002) as a policy response that can contribute to a more coercive influence while lessening the need for individual people to take legal action.

As to quotas, it is important to note that relying on stricter quota regulation may be more troublesome than is true for quotas regarding other groups (e.g., women), because of the problems concerning demographic monitoring pointed out in article 4. As noted above, quotas yield mixed results in the literature, and it is difficult to isolate the effect of quota policies from other labor market policies (Fuchs, 2014; Matsui, 2013; Nazarov et al., 2015; Sargeant et al., 2018). Still, a quota communicates employer responsibility for the disability employment gap and responds to the need for demand-side policies that obligate employers to take action. Quotas are a policy response that targets outcomes rather than root causes of inequality, making it more affirmative than transformative. However, by forcing employers to

change their behavior, a quota system could bring about transformative change in the long run by setting in motion a trajectory of change (Fraser, 2003). Indeed, Seierstad et al. (2020) argue that gender quotas on corporate boards have led to structural changes that has challenged “gendered ideas of suitability” (p. 755). As such, I argue that properly sanctioned quotas could help create positive change for disabled people, but this needs further empirical investigation. Research on quotas and their effectiveness should not look solely at general employment rates but also at how quota systems impact employers’ consciousness and practice around disability issues.

Another possibility could be to follow the cooperative route, but with a stronger emphasis on the problems of disability discrimination. This could be done by cooperating with employer confederations, HR organizations, and institutions providing education and training for managers and HR personnel in disseminating employer obligations regarding discrimination against and inclusion of disabled people. This strategy could boost the potential that is recognized in the interview material among HR representatives and managers who already have a special commitment to inclusion. This approach is more in line with the less rigid tradition that has been practiced in Norway, for example through the IA agreement. However, as the inclusion of disabled people proved to be the neglected case of the several goals of the IA agreement (NAV, 2017), it is important that disabled people be placed at the center of such initiatives. This was also a possible problem in the Inclusion Dugnad, as it focused on people with CV gaps, along with disabled people. What is missing are initiatives that place disabled people at center stage, that do not shy away from highlighting disability as a marginalized identity, and that educate employers on disability discrimination as a structural problem.

The thesis also has practical implications for employers. Perhaps better than court-ordered mandates are solutions proposed within the organization that can act as preventive measures (Berrey et al., 2017; Sturm, 2004). The four articles draw attention to problems that arise within organizations, so measures within organizations may be best suited to address the problems identified in those articles. For all disabled people, hiring practices that are better designed to consider the challenges of underrepresented minorities are important measures. One important problem recognized in this thesis is that disability usually ends up at the bottom of the diversity hierarchy; even employers who claim to be invested in diversity and inclusion appear to consider disabled people last. Thus, a proportional solution must be to heighten awareness about hiring practices involving disabled people as a diversity issue. In

order to start putting disabled people on the agenda, their unique problems concerning invisibility and disclosure need to be incorporated into diversity plans. This can mean striving to create a safe environment in which to disclose an impairment or health issue without expecting that everyone should disclose at the first opportunity. Instead of using the employment interview as an arena for negotiating accommodation needs, a safer setting would be after the hiring decision has been made—this way, the jobseeker does not have to juggle demanding identity management strategies with advocating for their needs in the employment interview. Having explicit hiring policies regarding disabled people and providing disability awareness training are two initiatives highlighted by Araten-Bergman (2016) as important predictors of positive hiring behavior. Consequently, organizations can seek to heighten awareness and develop explicit action plans relating to disability in their recruitment strategies and efforts. A key message is thus that disabled people as a group face considerable structural barriers, as opposed to the individualized view in which being disabled is framed in terms of solely impairment effects. In this way, employers can engage in more strategic recruitment practices (Osman & Thunborg, 2019) toward disabled people as a group in order to better align inclusionary aspirations with actual hiring.

## 7 References

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## **8 Appendices**

Appendix 1: Interview guides

Appendix 2: Email Templates for Recruitment of Participants

Appendix 3: Statement from The National Committee for Research

Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH)

Appendix 4: Approval from the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD)

Appendix 5: Participation Form—Field Experiment Group

Appendix 6: Participation Form—State Employers



**Appendix 1 – interview guides**

## State employers

### Bakgrunn

1. Hvor mange ansatte er det i virksomheten/enheten?
2. Kan du kort beskrive kjerneoppgavene i din enhet?
3. Hvor stor grad av mangfold opplever du at dere har i deres virksomhet? Mtp. kjønn, alder, etnisitet, funksjonsevne.

### Rekrutteringsprosesser

4. Hvordan er en typisk rekrutteringsprosess hos dere? Ta gjerne utgangspunkt i nylig utlysning.
5. Hva slags faktorer vektlegges når dere velger ut kandidater, også når det gjelder faktorer utover formell kompetanse og arbeidserfaring?
6. Hvordan tror dere en som oppgir en funksjonsnedsettelse ville bli vurdert i en vanlig rekrutteringsprosess?

### Inkluderingsdugnaden og arbeidsmarkedspolitik

7. Har du kjennskap til inkluderingsdugnaden som er iverksatt av regjeringen der målet er å få flere av de som står utenfor arbeidslivet i arbeid? Hvordan forholder dere dere til denne?
8. Hvordan forholder du og din virksomhet seg til rundskrivet som pålegger statlige virksomheter at minst 5 % av alle ansettelser skal være personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne eller hull i CVen?
9. Hva er det som eventuelt er til hinder eller hjelp for å nå 5 %-målet?
10. Kjenner du til aktivitets- og redegjøringsplikten, når det kommer til personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne? Hvordan forholder dere dere til denne?

### Funksjonshemmede arbeidstakere

11. Hva slags personer ser du for deg når jeg nevner ordet funksjonshemming eller funksjonsnedsettelse?
12. Hva er din erfaring med rekruttering av personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne?
13. Hva kan være fordelene med å rekruttere personer med funksjonsnedsettelse?
14. Hva mener du kan være utfordrende med å ansette en person med funksjonsnedsettelse?
15. Har du eller din virksomhet noen konkrete intensjoner eller iverksatte tiltak om å ansette personer med funksjonsnedsettelse? Evt. hva slags strategier har dere iverksatt?
16. Tenker dere på hvordan dere utformer utlysninger mtp å tiltrekke dere søkere med funksjonsnedsettelse? Ordvalg, stillingsprosent?

### Samarbeid med NAV

17. Hva slags erfaring har dere når det gjelder samarbeid med NAV?
  - a. Hva fungerer best i samarbeidet med NAV?
  - b. Hva fungerer dårligst i samarbeidet med NAV?

18. Har dere benyttet dere av støtteordninger eller tiltak fra NAV i forbindelse med ansettelse av personer med nedsatt arbeidsevne? Hvordan har du opplevd dette?
19. (dersom de ikke har erfaring med å samarbeide med NAV) Er dere positive eller negative til å få i gang samarbeid med NAV slik at dere kan potensielt ansette personer med funksjonsnedsettelse?
20. Hva kunne vært annerledes i samarbeidet med NAV for at det skulle bli enklere å rekruttere personer med funksjonsnedsettelse?

### **Avsluttende refleksjoner**

21. Hvordan tror du andre arbeidsgivere vurderer søkere med funksjonsnedsettelse?
22. Hva tror du kan være grunnen til at personer med funksjonsnedsettelse kan oppleve diskriminering i jobbsøkersammenheng?

### *Field experiment group*

### **Bakgrunn**

1. Hvor mange ansatte er det i virksomheten/enheten?
2. Kan du kort beskrive kjerneoppgavene i din enhet?
3. Hvor stor grad av mangfold opplever du at dere har i deres virksomhet? Mtp. kjønn, alder, etnisitet, funksjonsevne.
4. Har dere ønske om større mangfold som et element i rekrutteringsplanene deres? Hva slags grupper ønsker dere eventuelt å rekruttere?

### **Rekrutteringsprosessen**

5. Fortell litt om bakgrunnen for utlysningen av stillingen vi har sendt fiktive søknader til.
6. Hvor mange søkere var det til stillingen? Er dette mer eller mindre enn dere vanligvis får til denne typen stillinger?
7. Hvor mange ble kalt inn til intervju?
8. Hva slags kriterier la du til grunn for utvelgelsen av de som skulle bli kalt inn til intervju?
9. Har dere interne retningslinjer, metoder eller verktøy i din virksomhet for hvordan man skal gjennomføre en rekrutteringsprosess? Hva slags? Hvor stor grad av skjønn utøver dere i sorteringen?
10. Når du ser på resultatet av felteksperimentet, hva tenker du om det?
11. Hvordan ser du på det å ansette en person som har hatt perioder med psykiske helseproblemer?
12. Det var en rullestolbruker i eksperimentet – tenker dere på tilgjengelighet og utforming på arbeidsplassen når dere får slike søkere?

## **Funksjonshemmede arbeidstakere**

13. Hva slags personer ser du for deg når jeg nevner ordet funksjonshemming eller funksjonsnedsettelse?
14. Hva slags erfaringer har du med å ha kollegaer med en funksjonsnedsettelse?
15. Hva er din erfaring med rekruttering av personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne?
16. Hva kan være fordelene med å rekruttere personer med funksjonsnedsettelse?
17. Hva mener du kan være utfordrende med å ansette en person med funksjonsnedsettelse?
  - a. Sykefravær, arbeidskapasitet, tilrettelegging?
18. Har du eller din virksomhet noen konkrete intensjoner eller iverksatte tiltak om å ansette personer med funksjonsnedsettelse? Evt. hva slags strategier har dere iverksatt?

## **Politikk og samfunnsansvar**

19. Hvordan opplever du at de politiske signalene er når det gjelder inkludering av personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne?
20. Hva tenker du om at myndighetene ønsker at virksomheter skal ansette flere personer med funksjonsnedsettelse?
21. Samfunnsansvar er noe som stadig flere virksomheter setter fokus på. Hva legger du i dette begrepet og er det noe din virksomhet har fokusert på?
22. Har din virksomhet tatt konkrete skritt for å påta seg samfunnsansvar gjennom å rekruttere utsatte grupper?

## **Avsluttende betraktninger + det å oppgi en funksjonsnedsettelse**

23. Det foreligger nå mange undersøkelser som viser at arbeidsgivere systematisk foretrekker personer uten funksjonsnedsettelse fremfor kandidater med. Hva tror du er grunnen til dette?
24. Synes du at personer med funksjonshemming burde oppgi dette i en jobbsøknad? Hvordan kan de best evt. Kommunisere denne informasjonen?
25. Er det forskjell på ulike typer funksjonsnedsettelse når det kommer til det å oppgi den i søknaden? Hvilke bør man oppgi og ikke? Hvorfor?
26. Hvordan bør man fremstå på intervjuet for at du skal få et godt inntrykk?
27. Hva tror du må til for at arbeidsgivere åpner opp for å ansette flere funksjonshemmede?

**Appendix 2: Email templates for participant recruitment**

*State employers*

**Mal - Statlige arbeidsgivere**

Hei \_\_\_\_\_

Jeg jobber som stipendiat ved Velferdsforskningsinstituttet NOVA, og jeg tar kontakt med deg fordi dere nylig har hatt en stilling utlyst. Jeg ønsker å komme i kontakt med personer som nylig har hatt ansvar for ansettelse, for å gjennomføre intervjuer på ca. 30 minutter.

Bakgrunnen er at jeg skal undersøke hvordan statlige arbeidsgivere forholder seg til inkluderingsdugnaden og hva de opplever av muligheter og utfordringer rundt ansettelse av personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne.

Vedlagt ligger et informasjonsskriv der du kan lese mer om hva deltakelse innebærer for deg.

Jeg håper du vil takke ja til å delta, da dette vil bidra til viktig kunnskapsutvikling på området.

Ved gjennomføring av intervjuet kan jeg enten komme til din arbeidsplass, eller så kan vi ta det på telefon. Dersom du takker ja, besvar denne e-posten, så kan vi sette opp et tidspunkt som passer for deg. Hvis du ønsker å delta vil du i forkant bli sendt en liste over temaer vi skal snakke om i intervjuet.

Med vennlig hilsen

Kaja Larsen Østerud

## *Field experiment group*

Hei \_\_\_\_\_

Jeg tar kontakt med deg fordi jeg ønsker å spørre om du vil delta i et intervju som omhandler ansettelse av personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne. Jeg er stipendiat ved forskningsinstituttet NOVA ved OsloMet og jeg jobber på et forskningsprosjekt der vi ser på denne tematikken. Jeg håper du vil være med og bidra til at vi får mer kunnskap om arbeidsgiveres perspektiv.

### **Din virksomhet har vært gjenstand for et felteksperiment**

Bakgrunnen for at jeg sender e-post til akkurat deg er fordi din virksomhet i løpet av det siste året har vært gjenstand for et felteksperiment. Metoden går ut på at vi har sendt to nesten identiske søknader til en stilling dere har lyst ut der den eneste vesentlige forskjellen er at den ene søkeren oppgir en funksjonsnedsettelse. Målet er å se hvordan arbeidsgivere velger i reelle ansettelsesprosesser, og vi måtte derfor benytte reelle stillingsutlysninger.

Vi er klar over at det kan være ubehagelig å bli gjort til gjenstand for slike undersøkelser uten å ha godkjent dette på forhånd, samtidig finnes det ikke mange alternative metoder som er like gode til å undersøke hva som blir gjort i reelle rekrutteringssettinger. Vi vil understreke at vi ikke har sendt noen personer til intervju. Vi beklager likevel omkostningene det kan ha medført for dere.

I forkant av undersøkelsen har vi gjort grundige forskningsetiske vurderinger og den er godkjent av Den nasjonale forskningsetiske komité for samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora (NESH) og er tilrådd av Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelige datatjeneste (NSD).

### **Du inviteres til å delta i et intervju**

For å få en bedre forståelse av hvordan du som arbeidsgiver vurderer personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne i rekrutteringsprosesser, ønsker vi i tillegg å invitere deg som er involvert i konkrete ansettelse til et forskningsintervju. Vi er opptatt av arbeidsgivernes perspektiv og ønsker å få bedre innsikt i deres erfaring og synspunkter.

Vedlagt finner du et informasjonsskriv der du kan lese mer om hva deltakelse innebærer for deg.

## **Gjennomføring**

Hvis det er mulig tar jeg gjerne intervjuet ved at jeg kommer til deg, men jeg kan også ta det via telefon. Dersom du takker ja til å være med, svar meg på denne e-posten. Vi setter opp et tidspunkt for intervju som passer for deg. Intervjuet vil ta omtrent en halv time.

Mvh

Kaja Larsen Østerud

Stipendiat, seksjon for helse- og velferdsforskning

Velferdsforskningsinstituttet NOVA - OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet



**Appendix 3 – Statement from The National Committee for  
Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the  
Humanities (NESH)**

Bjørn Hvinden  
OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet  
[bhvind@oslomet.no](mailto:bhvind@oslomet.no)

Vår ref.: 2018/257

Deres ref.:

Dato: 24.09.2018

## **Uttalelse om randomisert felteksperiment**

Den nasjonale forskningsetiske komité for samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora (NESH) er et rådgivende organ, som arbeider for å fremme god og etisk forsvarlig forskning. NESH er faglig uavhengig og avgjør selv hvilke saker komiteen tar opp til behandling. Uttalelser fra NESH er kun veiledende, og ikke bindende eller sanksjonerende i juridisk forstand. Forskere og forskningsinstitusjoner har et selvstendig ansvar for å sikre at forskningen de utfører er god og etisk forsvarlig.

NESH mottok 22. august 2018 en henvendelse fra Bjørn Hvinden og Iver Neumann, begge tilknyttet NOVA ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet, angående prosjektet *HIRE? A mixed method examination of disability and employers' inclusive working life practices*. Prosjektet er finansiert av Norges forskningsråd, og formålet er «å bidra til bedre kunnskap om arbeidsgiveres vurderinger og praksiser overfor jobbsøkere med nedsatt funksjonsevne». Prosjektet inkluderer et felteksperiment, og det er bakgrunnen for at prosjektleder Hvinden og instituttleder Neumann har henvendt seg til NESH for en vurdering. Med henvendelsen fulgte søknaden til Forskningsrådet og en drøfting om bruk av randomiserte felteksperiment i Norge og andre land.

I tillegg fulgte et brev fra rektor ved OsloMet, Curt Rice, som understreker prosjektets relevans og presiserer at det er «sterkt ønskelig at NESH etter en samlet vurdering kan konkludere at forskningsetiske hensyn ikke er til hinder for gjennomføring av det planlagte metodeopplegget i HIRE». Og videre, siden de «er kjent med at NESH tidligere har vært kritisk til bruk av denne

metoden, vil OSLOMET understreke at dette prosjektet er av stor betydning for universitetet.» I behandlingen av saken valgte NESH å se bort fra dette brevet fra rektor Rice. NESH understreker overfor OsloMet at komiteen er faglig uavhengig og ikke kan la seg styre av institusjonspolitiske hensyn.

Saken ble behandlet på NESH-møte 14. september 2018. Lene Bomann-Larsen som er tilknyttet OsloMet redegjorde for sin tilknytning, og en samlet NESH-komit  ans  henne som habil i behandlingen av denne saken.

### **Bakgrunn**

Feltekspperimentet g r ut p    sende ut 1 200 fiktive s knader til 600 arbeidsplasser i de fire sektorene informasjons- og kommunikasjonsteknologi, regnskap, salg og administrasjon. M let er   skape kunnskap om arbeidsgiveres seleksjon. Halvparten av s knadene vil v re fra «personer» med ulike typer funksjonsnedsettelse, den andre halvparten «personer» uten funksjonsnedsettelse. Det er arbeidsgivernes respons p  disse s knadene som skal utforskes, og for   f  kunnskap om faktisk adferd, vil disse ikke bli informert p  forh nd. De vil i stedet f  informasjon raskt etter at de har respondert p  s knadene, ideelt innen 48 timer, slik at ikke ansettelsesprosessene vil bli forsinket, noe som tidligere har v rt en utfordring i gjennomf rte feltekspementer. Hvis arbeidsgiver ikke sender svar, vil de informeres etter en m ned.

Noen av arbeidsgiverne vil bli kontaktet i etterkant med foresp rsel om deltakelse i en kvalitativ oppf lgingsstudie. Her vil forskerne intervjuer ti av dem som responderte p  de innsendte s knadene og fem som ikke gjorde det i hver av de fire sektorene, alts  60 arbeidsgivere til sammen. Henvender ber p  denne bakgrunn NESH ta stilling til tre konkrete sp rsm l:

- 1) Deres grunner til   fravike informert samtykke;
- 2) Deres oppfatning om av nytteverdien av prosjektets resultater for samfunnet og et stort antatt personer med funksjonsnedsettelse overstiger ulempene for de ber rte arbeidsgiverne;
- 3) Hvordan de ser for seg at de kan gj re ulempene for de ber rte arbeidsgiverne minst mulige.

## NESHs vurdering

I vurderingen av prosjektet legger NESH til grunn [Forskningsetiske retningslinjer for samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora](#) (2016). NESH har også trukket veksler på en tidligere henvendelse fra OsloMet om et annet randomisert felteksperiment hvor vurderingen var at prosjektet ikke burde gjennomføres slik det var skissert ([2016/319](#)). Denne saken ble påklaget, og ved ny vurdering fastholdt NESH sin konklusjon ([NESH 2017/43](#)). I vurderingen av den nye saken mener NESH at henvendelsen er gjennomarbeidet og ryddig. NESH etterlyser imidlertid noen metodiske detaljer som må tas hensyn til i den forskningsetiske vurderingen av prosjektet, og har ellers noen mindre merknader.

- 1) Til det første spørsmålet om grunner for å fravike samtykke viser henvender til forskning på tilsvarende felt som har skapt viktig kunnskap med et tilsvarende design (vedlegg 3). Videre redegjør de grundig for utfordringer knyttet til å få kunnskap om praksis (utover det vi kan lese ut fra statistikken som viser store forskjeller i sysselsettingsgrad). De gjør også en aktiv vurdering av om samme eller tilsvarende nyttige kunnskap kan frembringes ved hjelp av andre fremgangsmåter.

NESHs vurdering er at begrunnelsene for å fravike samtykke er gode, i den forstand at andre metoder vil ha andre svakheter, som gjør det vanskelig å frembringe relevant kunnskap. Det eksperimentelle designet brukes også for å identifisere aktuelle arbeidsgivere, som i den kvalitative delen kan få mulighet til å redegjøre nærmere for sine vurderinger i forbindelse med utvelgelsen. Prosjektet inneholder også komparasjon med både USA og Sverige, noe som kan gi ny kunnskap om variasjon på tvers av ulike systemer og kulturer.

- 2) Til det andre spørsmålet om avveining mellom nytte, relevans og kvalitet på den ene siden og belastningen for de berørte på den andre, gir prosjektbeskrivelsen en grundig beskrivelse av eksisterende kunnskap og utfordringer knyttet til at det, til tross for en rekke tiltak, vedvarer forskjeller i sysselsettingsgrad mellom personer med og uten funksjonsnedsettelse. De viser til verdien av ny kunnskap om mekanismer som hindrer inkludering i arbeidslivet for personer med funksjonsnedsettelse, og hvordan denne kunnskapen kan bedre innsatsen for å forhindre dette, noe som vil komme personer med funksjonsnedsettelse til gode. Det framkommer videre at «personene» vil ha mange ulike funksjonsnedsettelse, som i ulik grad

kan medføre behov for praktisk tilrettelegging og fare for sykemeldinger, samt kan være omgitt med ulik grad av fordommer.

NESHs vurdering er at prosjektet har potensiale for å frembringe viktig kunnskap, selv om henvendelsen nok går langt i å foregripe den faktiske samfunnsnyten. Det sentrale her er avveiningen mellom relevans og kvalitet, herunder metodiske betraktninger. Det avgjørende er at det er mulig å isolere og identifisere effekten av funksjonsnedsettelse, noe som vil avhenge av hvordan denne informasjonen legges inn i de fiktive søknadene. I tidligere saker hvor NESH tidligere har uttalt seg kritisk til bruk av denne metoden, har et sentralt punkt vært om man klarer å isolere effekten av funksjonsnedsettelse fra andre forhold som kan følge med funksjonsnedsettelse, slik som huller i søkers ansettelsehistorie.

Samtidig skisseres det en rekke forskjellige funksjonsnedsettelse med behov for ulik grad av tilrettelegging. Dette kan bety at resultatene blir vanskelige å analysere og sammenligne. Dette er selvfølgelig noe som kan følges opp i den kvalitative delen av studien, ikke minst fordi disse intervjuene blant annet vil handle om arbeidsgivernes vurdering av NAVs tilretteleggingstiltak. Den kvalitative delen av studien er relativt stor og har tilsynelatende potensiale til å fange opp hva arbeidsgivernes respons handler om.

- 3) Til det tredje spørsmålet skisseres en rekke tiltak for å minimere belastningen for de berørte. Henvender drøfter også at et annet design vil medføre mindre ulempe for arbeidsgiverne, nemlig at kun én søknad sendes til hver utlysning. Dette vil imidlertid, som de påpeker, svekke den kontrollfunksjonen det er å sende en tilsvarende søknad fra en person uten funksjonsnedsettelse, noe som igjen kan svekke prosjektets samfunnsnytte.

NESHs vurdering er at henvender har reflektert grundig og godt omkring relevante avveininger mellom design og behovet for beskyttelse. NESH deler også vurderingen av at andre tilnærminger vil redusere den forventede samfunnsnyten.

## **Konklusjon**

NESHs konklusjon er at prosjektet er gjennomarbeidet og at den forskningsetiske refleksjonen er grundig og god. NESH mener imidlertid at en presisering av den metodiske tilnærmingen som skissert over må til for at bruken av randomisert eksperiment her er forsvarlig uten at det innhentes samtykke på forhånd.

NESH gjør i denne forbindelse oppmerksom på at det i den nye [personopplysningsloven § 9](#) finnes et nytt unntak for «Behandling av særlige kategorier av personopplysninger uten samtykke for arkivformål i allmennhetens interesse, formål knyttet til vitenskapelig eller historisk forskning eller statistiske formål».

NESH presiserer at vurderingen gjelder dette prosjektet spesifikt, og at det ikke er snakk om en vurdering av denne metodiske tilnærmingen mer generelt.

Med vennlig hilsen

Elisabeth Staksrud  
Leder, NESH

Vidar Enebakk  
Sekretariatsleder, NESH

*Dokumentet er elektronisk signert og har derfor ikke håndskrevne signaturer.*

Kopi:

- OsloMet – storybyuniversitetet

## **Appendix 4 – Approval from Norwegian center for research data (NSD)**

## NSD sin vurdering

### Prosjekttittel

HIRE? A mixed-method examination of disability and employers' inclusive working life practices

### Referansenummer

951022

### Registrert

07.09.2018 av Janikke Solstad Vedeler - jsved@oslomet.no

### Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet / Senter for velferds- og arbeidslivsforskning / Norsk institutt for forskning om oppvekst, velferd og aldring (NOVA)

### Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Bjørn Hvinden, bjorn.hvinden@oslomet.no, tlf: 95992870

### Type prosjekt

Forskerprosjekt

### Prosjektperiode

01.08.2018 - 31.12.2021

### Status

04.11.2020 - Vurdert

### Vurdering (5)

---

#### 04.11.2020 - Vurdert

Korrekt versjon, gjeldene vurdering:

#### VURDERING

NSD har vurdert endringen registrert 06.10.20

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg den 04.11.20. Behandlingen kan fortsette.

#### INNHold I ENDRING

Utvalg til survey-undersøkelse (delstudie 3) er endret til spørreundersøkelse over telefon.

Respons analyse, skal trekke et utvalg av virksomheter med fler enn 10 ansatte fra bedriftsdatabasen Bizweb.



Respons analyse har under gjennomføring av spørreundersøkelsen tilgang til bedriftenes navn og telefonnummer (gjennom bedriftsdatabase Bizweb), navn og telefonnummer til bedriftene lagres ikke i dataene som overleveres forskerne i prosjektet.

Respons analyse er derfor lagt til som databehandler i prosjektet. NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

#### OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til videre med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Silje F. Opsvik  
Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

#### **04.11.2020 - Vurdert**

##### VURDERING

NSD har vurdert endringen registrert 06.10.20

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg den 04.11.20. Behandlingen kan fortsette.

##### INN

Utvalg til survey-undersøkelse (delstudie 3) er endret til spørreundersøkelse over telefon. Respons analyse, skal trekke et utvalg av virksomheter med fler enn 10 ansatte fra bedriftsdatabase Bizweb.

Respons analyse har under gjennomføring av spørreundersøkelsen tilgang til bedriftenes navn og telefonnummer (gjennom bedriftsdatabase Bizweb), navn og telefonnummer til bedriftene lagres ikke i dataene som overleveres forskerne i prosjektet.

Respons analyse er derfor lagt til som databehandler i prosjektet. NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

#### **23.07.2019 - Vurdert**

NSD har vurdert endringen registrert 14.06.19.

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg den 23.07.19. Behandlingen kan fortsette.

Vi beklager at du måtte vente på oppdatert vurdering.

#### OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til videre med prosjektet!

Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

## 10.02.2019 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet den dagens dato med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

### MELD ENDRINGER

Dersom behandlingen av personopplysninger endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. På våre nettsider informerer vi om hvilke endringer som må meldes. Vent på svar før endringen gjennomføres.

### TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 31.12.2021.

Datamaterialet vil innhentes ved hjelp av ulike metoder: intervjuer, survey og observasjoner.

Opplysningene i datamaterialet vil anses som sensitive (særlige kategorier) for forskningsdeltakere som har en funksjonshemming.

### DEL 1 SAMTYKKE

Prosjektet skal innhente data fra til sammen 7 ulike utvalg. Det skal innhentes samtykke fra 6 av 7 utvalg.

Utvalg 1 er arbeidsgivere som forespørres om å delta i en survey.

Utvalg 2 og 3 er arbeidssøkere og arbeidsgivere som observeres under jobbintervju, og som senere deltar i forskerintervju.

Utvalg 4 er arbeidsgivere i felteksperiment (se under).

Utvalg 5 er intervjuer med arbeidsgivere fra felteksperimentet.

Utvalg 6 er selvelekterte deltakere til en surveyundersøkelse i forkant av felteksperimentet.

Utvalg 7 er intervjuer med statlige arbeidsgivere.

### LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a), jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

### PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD finner at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen:

- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

### DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

## DEL 2 ALLMENN INTERESSE (EKSPERIMENT)

Vurderingen gjelder for utvalg 4, som er arbeidsgivere.

Felteksperimentet innebærer at 1200 fiktive søknader sendes til 600 arbeidsplasser. Målet med dette er å få kunnskap om hvordan arbeidsgivere selekterer arbeidssøkere. Halvparten av søknadene vil være fra personer med funksjonsnedsettelse, mens den andre halvparten ikke har det. Arbeidsgivers respons på søknadene skal være gjenstand for forskningen, og disse vil ikke informeres i forkant. Arbeidsgivere skal derimot informeres om eksperimentet så snart som mulig etter at de har respondert på søknaden.

Det skal ikke innhentes samtykke i forkant av eksperimentet siden dette vil kunne påvirke arbeidsgivers respons.

NESH har vurdert denne delen av prosjektet og anbefaler at det gjennomføres (ref. 2018/257). NSD er enig i de vurderingene NESH har gjort, spesielt med tanke på å fravike krav om samtykke. NSD vil også presisere at eksperimentet får opplysninger om arbeidsgivere og arbeidsgiveres respons. Dette vil kunne knyttes til enkeltpersoner, men vil i liten grad si noe om dem som enkeltpersoner. Dette vil redusere ulempen ved at eksperimentet gjennomføres uten samtykke.

Arbeidsgivere som er med i eksperimentet vil få invitasjon til å delta i intervjuer i etterkant av eksperimentet.

## LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil behandle personopplysninger med grunnlag i en oppgave av allmenn interesse.

Vår vurdering er at behandlingen oppfyller vilkåret om vitenskapelig forskning, jf. personopplysningsloven § 8, og dermed utfører en oppgave i allmenhetens interesse.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være utførelse av en oppgave i allmenhetens interesse, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav e, jf. art. 6 nr. 3, jf. personopplysningsloven § 8.

## PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD finner at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen:

- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a)
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

## DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13/14), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), protest (art. 21).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13 (eventuelt art. 14).

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

## FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

Troll i ord er databehandler i prosjektet, og skal transkribere intervjuer. Questback benyttes til å gjennomføre

survey. NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

#### OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp underveis (hvert annet år) og ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet/pågår i tråd med den behandlingen som er dokumentert.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD:

Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

#### **06.01.2019 - Vurdert**

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen, så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet den dagens dato med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

#### MELD ENDRINGER

Dersom behandlingen av personopplysninger endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. På våre nettsider informerer vi om hvilke endringer som må meldes. Vent på svar før endringen gjennomføres.

#### TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 31.12.2021.

Datamaterialet vil innhentes ved hjelp av ulike metoder: intervjuer, survey og observasjoner.

Opplysningene i datamaterialet vil anses som sensitive (særlige kategorier) for forskningsdeltakere som har en funksjonshemming.

#### DEL 1 SAMTYKKE

Prosjektet skal innhente data fra til sammen 7 ulike utvalg. Det skal innhentes samtykke fra 6 av 7 utvalg.

Utvalg 1 er arbeidsgivere som forespørres om å delta i en survey.

Utvalg 2 og 3 er arbeidssøkere og arbeidsgivere som observeres under jobbintervju, og som senere deltar i forskerintervju.

Utvalg 4 er arbeidsgivere i felteksperiment (se under).

Utvalg 5 er intervjuer med arbeidsgivere fra felteksperimentet.

Utvalg 6 er selvselekterte deltakere til en surveyundersøkelse i forkant av felteksperimentet.

Utvalg 7 er intervjuer med statlige arbeidsgivere.

#### LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 a), jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

#### PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD finner at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen:

- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

## DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

## DEL 2 ALLMENN INTERESSE (EKSPERIMENT)

Vurderingen gjelder for utvalg 4, som er arbeidsgivere.

Feltekspperimentet innebærer at 1200 fiktive søknader sendes til 600 arbeidsplasser. Målet med dette er å få kunnskap om hvordan arbeidsgivere selekterer arbeidssøkere. Halvparten av søknadene vil være fra personer med funksjonsnedsettelse, mens den andre halvparten ikke har det. Arbeidsgivers respons på søknadene skal være gjenstand for forskningen, og disse vil ikke informeres i forkant. Arbeidsgivere skal derimot informeres om eksperimentet så snart som mulig etter at de har respondert på søknaden.

Det skal ikke innhentes samtykke i forkant av eksperimentet siden dette vil kunne påvirke arbeidsgivers respons.

NESH har vurdert denne delen av prosjektet og anbefaler at det gjennomføres (ref. 2018/257). NSD er enig i de vurderingene NESH har gjort, spesielt med tanke på å fravike krav om samtykke. NSD vil også presisere at eksperimentet får opplysninger om arbeidsgivere og arbeidsgivers respons. Dette vil kunne knyttes til enkeltpersoner, men vil i liten grad si noe om dem som enkeltpersoner. Dette vil redusere ulempen ved at eksperimentet gjennomføres uten samtykke.

Arbeidsgivere som er med i eksperimentet vil få invitasjon til å delta i intervjuer i etterkant av eksperimentet.

## LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil behandle personopplysninger med grunnlag i en oppgave av allmenn interesse.

Vår vurdering er at behandlingen oppfyller vilkåret om vitenskapelig forskning, jf. personopplysningsloven § 8, og dermed utfører en oppgave i allmenhetens interesse.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være utførelse av en oppgave i allmenhetens interesse, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav e, jf. art. 6 nr. 3, jf. personopplysningsloven § 8.

## PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD finner at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen:

- om lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a)
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

## DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13/14), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), protest (art. 21).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13 (eventuelt art. 14).

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

#### FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

Troll i ord er databehandler i prosjektet, og skal transkribere intervjuer. Questback benyttes til å gjennomføre survey. NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

#### OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp underveis (hvert annet år) og ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet/pågår i tråd med den behandlingen som er dokumentert.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD:

Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

**Appendix 5 - Participation forms – field experiment group**

## Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet «HIRE»?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å få bedre innsikt i hvordan ansettelsesprosesser foregår i det norske arbeidsmarkedet, og vi er særlig interessert i personer med fysiske og med psykososiale funksjonsnedsettelse. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

### Formål

Hensikten med prosjektet er å bidra med økt innsikt i arbeidsgiveres inkluderingspraksiser overfor personer med funksjonsnedsettelse. Dataene vi samler inn vil være grunnlaget for ph.d.-avhandlingen til stipendiat Kaja L. Østerud. Prosjektet vil også gi grunnlag for politikk og virkemidler som kan bidra til å inkludere personer med funksjonsnedsettelse i arbeidsmarkedet. Dette gjør vi i aktivt samarbeid med NAV, primært via arbeidslivssentrene.

### Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Det er Velferdsforskningsinstituttet NOVA ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet som er ansvarlig for prosjektet. Elisabeth Ugreninov er prosjektleder og stipendiat Kaja L. Østerud og hennes veileder, forsker Janikke Solstad Vedeler er ansvarlige for gjennomføring av intervjuer med arbeidsgivere.

### Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

I forkant av at dette skrivet har blitt sendt ut har deres virksomhet vært gjenstand for en forskningsundersøkelse av ansettelsespraksiser i det norske arbeidsmarkedet. Vi er i denne undersøkelsen særlig interessert i hvordan arbeidsgivere forholder seg til arbeidssøkere med fysiske og med psykososiale funksjonsnedsettelse. Metoden vi har brukt går ut på at vi har sendt to nesten identiske søknader til en stilling dere har lyst ut der den eneste vesentlige forskjellen er at den ene oppgir en funksjonsnedsettelse. Målet er å se hvordan arbeidsgivere velger i reelle ansettelsesprosesser, og vi måtte derfor benytte reelle stillingsutlysninger. Vi er selvsagt klar over at det kan være ubehagelig å bli gjort til gjenstand for slike undersøkelser uten å ha godkjent dette på forhånd, samtidig finnes det ikke mange alternative metoder som er like gode til å undersøke hva som blir gjort i reelle rekrutteringssettinger. Vi vil understreke at vi ikke har sendt noen personer til intervju. Vi beklager likevel omkostningene det kan ha medført for dere. I forkant av undersøkelsen har vi gjort grundige forskningsetiske vurderinger og den er godkjent av Den nasjonale forskningsetiske komité for samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora (NESH) og Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelige datatjeneste (NSD).

For å få en bedre forståelse av hvordan du som arbeidsgiver vurderer personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne i rekrutteringsprosesser, ønsker vi i tillegg å invitere deg som er involvert i konkrete ansettelser til et forskningsintervju. Vi er opptatt av arbeidsgivernes perspektiv og vil derfor gi dere en mulighet til å komme til orde for å dele deres erfaring og synspunkter.

### Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du som arbeidsgiver sier ja til at virksomheten kan delta i prosjektet vil det innebære at du som leder eller representant for din virksomhet gjennomfører et intervju enten personlig eller via telefon. Temaene som tas opp vil være hvordan dere rekrutterer i deres virksomhet, erfaring med og tanker rundt rekruttering av personer med funksjonsnedsettelse samt hvordan dere forholder dere til NAV,



signaler fra politikerne og relevante lov- og avtaleverk. Varigheten på intervjuet kan variere, men vanligvis vil det ta omtrent en time. Vi håper på et positivt svar da det er avgjørende for hvor vellykket prosjektet blir at vi får tilstrekkelig med arbeidsgivere som vil snakke med oss om deres erfaringer og synspunkter.

### **Det er frivillig å delta**

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

### **Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrevet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Det vil være forskergruppa tilknyttet prosjektet HIRE som vil ha tilgang til opplysningene.

Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil vi erstatte med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data. Datamaterialet vil lagres på en forskningsserver.

Både virksomheten, arbeidsgiver og søker vil være sikret full konfidensialitet. Det vil si at ingen opplysninger skal tas med i formidlingen fra prosjektet som kan spores tilbake til enkeltpersoner. Vi vil ikke framstille virksomheten med navn.

### **Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?**

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes innen 31. desember 2021. Da vil lydopptak av intervju slettes. Transkripsjonene, som blir lagret uten gjengivelse av eller tilkobling til navn, vil bli oppbevart for å muliggjøre vitenskapelig reanalyser etter at prosjektet er avsluttet.

### **Dine rettigheter**

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

### **Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?**

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Velferdsforskningsinstituttet NOVA ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

### **Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?**

Hvis du ønsker å delta, ta kontakt med Kaja L. Østerud via kontaktinformasjonen nevnt nedenfor. Du kan også ta kontakt med følgende om du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter:

- Forsker Janikke Solstad Vedeler – [janikke.s.vedeler@oslomet.no](mailto:janikke.s.vedeler@oslomet.no) (tlf: X)
- Stipendiat Kaja Larsen Østerud – [kajalar@oslomet.no](mailto:kajalar@oslomet.no) (tlf: X)
- Vårt personvernombud Ingrid Jacobsen – [personvernombud@oslomet.no](mailto:personvernombud@oslomet.no)
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost ([personvernombudet@nsd.no](mailto:personvernombudet@nsd.no)) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Elisabeth Ugreninov  
Prosjektansvarlig

Kaja Larsen Østerud  
Stipendiat

**Appendix 6 - Participation forms – state employers**

# Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet «HIRE»?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å få bedre innsikt i hvordan ansettelsesprosesser foregår i det norske arbeidsmarkedet, og vi er særlig interessert i personer med funksjonsnedsettelse. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

## Formål

Hensikten med prosjektet er å bidra med økt innsikt i arbeidsgiveres inkluderingspraksiser overfor personer med funksjonsnedsettelse. Dataene vi samler inn vil være grunnlaget for ph.d.-avhandlingen til stipendiat Kaja L. Østerud. Prosjektet vil også gi grunnlag for politikk og virkemidler som kan bidra til å inkludere personer med funksjonsnedsettelse i arbeidsmarkedet. Dette gjør vi i aktivt samarbeid med NAV.

## Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Det er Velferdsforskningsinstituttet NOVA ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet som er ansvarlig for prosjektet. Bjørn Hvinden er prosjektleder for HIRE. Stipendiat Kaja L. Østerud og hennes veileder, forsker Janikke Solstad Vedeler er ansvarlige for gjennomføring av intervjuer med arbeidsgivere.

## Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du som arbeidsgiver sier ja til at virksomheten kan delta i prosjektet vil det innebære at du som leder eller representant for din virksomhet gjennomfører et intervju enten personlig eller via telefon. Temaene som tas opp vil være hvordan dere rekrutterer i deres virksomhet, erfaring med og tanker rundt rekruttering av personer med funksjonsnedsettelse samt hvordan dere forholder dere til og samarbeider med NAV, signaler fra politikerne og relevante lov- og avtaleverk. Varigheten på intervjuet kan variere, men vanligvis vil det ta omtrent en halv time. Vi håper på et positivt svar da det er avgjørende for hvor vellykket prosjektet blir at vi får tilstrekkelig med arbeidsgivere som vil snakke med oss om deres erfaringer og synspunkter.

## Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

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Både virksomheten, arbeidsgiver og søker vil være sikret full konfidensialitet. Det vil si at ingen opplysninger skal tas med i formidlingen fra prosjektet som kan spores tilbake til enkeltpersoner. Vi vil ikke framstille virksomheten med navn.

## Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes innen 31. desember 2021. Da vil lydopptak av intervju slettes. Transkripsjonene, som blir lagret uten gjengivelse av eller tilkobling til navn, vil bli oppbevart for å muliggjøre vitenskapelig reanalyser etter at prosjektet er avsluttet.

### **Dine rettigheter**

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
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### **Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?**

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- Forsker Janikke Solstad Vedeler – janikke.s.vedeler@oslomet.no (tlf. x)
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- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost (personvernombudet@nsd.no eller telefon: 55 58 21 17).

Med vennlig hilsen

Bjørn Hvinden  
Prosjektansvarlig

Kaja Larsen Østerud  
Stipendiat

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**Samtykkeerklæring**

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet HIRE), og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål.  
Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju***
- at det gjøres lydopptak av samtalen***
- at transkripsjonen av samtalen (lagret uten gjengivelse av eller tilkobling til navn) deles med andre forskere i HIRE, samt at den kan lagres etter prosjektslutt***

Signatur \_\_\_\_\_

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# Article 1

Kaja Larsen Østerud (2022). Disability Discrimination: Employer Considerations of Disabled Jobseekers in Light of the Ideal Worker. *Published in Work, Employment and Society*.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F09500170211041303>





# Disability Discrimination: Employer Considerations of Disabled Jobseekers in Light of the Ideal Worker

Work, Employment and Society  
1–17

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DOI: 10.1177/09500170211041303

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**Kaja Larsen Østerud**   
Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

## Abstract

Labour market stratification and discrimination of disabled people remains a less researched topic compared to other minorities despite being a notably disadvantaged group. This article explores the employer side of discrimination against disabled jobseekers by using a field experiment conducted in Norway as its point of departure. Through qualitative follow-up interviews, this article investigates employers' assessments of equally qualified mobility-impaired candidates in a field experiment. The article employs the theoretical perspective of the ideal worker to shed light on how employers evaluate disabled jobseekers against an able-bodied ideal. Although previous literature on disability and the ideal worker has shown the imperative of asserting productivity, the findings in the current article reveal a stronger emphasis on social considerations as grounds for exclusion. The findings show how tacit constructions of the ideal worker not only relate to productivity but also to the creation of the socially integrated workplace.

## Keywords

ableism, disability, discrimination, employment, hiring, ideal worker, recruitment

## Introduction

Discrimination against minorities is a topic of long-standing interest in labour market research within sociology and adjacent fields. However, disability disadvantage in the labour market remains an area that has received less attention compared with other minority groups (Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Jones and Wass, 2013). This is despite the fact of disabled people's marginalised employment conditions (Foster and Scott, 2015). Disabled people have been routinely shown to face considerable disadvantages, such as

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significantly lower employment rates than the general population (OECD, 2010), higher rates of ill-treatment at work (Fevre et al., 2013) and lower pay and job security (Schur et al., 2013). The employment gap between disabled and nondisabled people is much debated in disability research, and the reasons for this gap are not yet fully understood. This gap is a persistent global problem, despite extensive investment in active labour market policies, rehabilitation and occupational health (Geiger et al., 2017), thus remaining somewhat of a puzzle.

An important piece of this puzzle may be found on the employer side. Employers play a crucial role in labour market integration because they are gatekeepers – individuals or groups in power – ‘making the decision between in or out’ (Lewin, 1947: 145). Therefore, employers’ understanding of disability and their evaluations of disabled jobseekers are likely to influence hiring practices. The literature reveals both favourable and unfavourable employer attitudes towards disabled people and a gap between generally positive attitudes and more negative hiring intentions (Burke et al., 2013; Ju et al., 2013). This highlights the importance of investigating the process of evaluating disabled jobseekers, an area in which the present literature is scarce (Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen, 2020).

The present article draws on unique qualitative interview material of Norwegian employers to investigate reasons for excluding a disabled person with a mobility impairment in the first selection stage of a real hiring process. Its point of departure is a field experiment conducted in Norway in which pairs of fictitious applications – where one applicant disclosed a disability – were sent in response to authentic job advertisements. Such field experiments have mostly been used to study ethnic discrimination (e.g. Ahmad, 2020; McGinnity and Lunn, 2011). In recent years, however, this method has been used to test for disability discrimination, resulting in a small but increasing number of correspondence studies that show the disadvantaging effect of disclosing a disability (Ameri et al., 2018; Baert, 2014; Baert et al., 2016; Bellemare et al., 2018; Bjørnshagen, 2021; Hipes et al., 2016). The findings from the experiment confirm the previous findings, showing a clear preference for candidates who do not disclose a disability (Bjørnshagen and Ugreninov, 2021). Although correspondence studies show the prevalence of discrimination, they say nothing about why it occurs. The current article sets out to investigate the reasons employers give for their preferences and behaviour through follow-up interviews. Such field experiment follow-up interviews have previously been conducted in relation to ethnicity (Birkelund et al., 2020; Midtbøen, 2014) but never in relation to disability. A notable advantage of this design is that the interviewer has valuable behavioural information about the employer’s response in the field experiment when carrying out the research interview, hence sidestepping some of the pitfalls of potential social desirability bias.

Through an understanding of disability as a relational phenomenon arising from the interactions between the impairment and the environment (Shakespeare, 2014), the present article shows disabling tendencies in the evaluation of jobseekers with mobility impairments. The article investigates why employers have chosen to discriminate against a qualified candidate, shedding light on the mechanisms contributing to disability discrimination. The objective is to offer insights into how employers evaluate disabled jobseekers in the selection of candidates for an interview offer, utilising the theoretical

perspective of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990). Conceptualisations of the ideal worker often constitute this individual in terms of productivity (Foster and Wass, 2013; Jammaers et al., 2016). The current article demonstrates, however, that employers' tacit constructions of the ideal worker are not limited to evaluations concerning productivity, but also to evaluations of the candidate's potential to socially commit to the workplace.

## **The notion of the ideal worker and the evaluation of disabled jobseekers**

The research on disabled people's experience with jobseeking shows how prejudice, stigma and discrimination are repeatedly identified as a reason for struggling to get access to work. This is a widespread problem in multiple national contexts (Chhabra, 2020; Coleman-Fountain et al., 2017) and has led to treatment of disabled people as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 2002; Vedeler, 2014). However, there is a paucity of studies investigating disability, hiring and discrimination, especially from the employer's perspective (Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen, 2020). The current article seeks to address this gap by investigating the employer side; here, by utilising the notion of the ideal worker.

Feminist sociologists have put forth the notion of an ideal or standard worker as a mechanism that produces structural and enduring gender inequalities (Acker, 1990). This ideal worker is an abstract and, at first, seemingly genderless individual, but who on closer inspection bears the social characteristics of a man (Acker, 1992). This individual is a devoted employee without outside responsibilities impinging on the job, such as care work, and is 'always ready, willing and able to work' (Cooper, 2000: 395). Although Acker (2006: 445) is hesitant to conclude that disability is as 'thoroughly embedded in organising processes as gender, race or class', Foster and Wass (2013: 710) are critical towards the neglect of disability as a form of stratification, arguing that it is the 'abstract measurements of efficiency and productivity, of job design and "ideal" worker behaviour that make up part of established organisational logic and management ideology which excludes people with impairments'. Several scholars have since utilised this perspective to understand the marginalised position of disabled workers. Concepts of the ideal worker create a narrow space for acceptable identity construction (Jammaers and Zanoni, 2020; Jammaers et al., 2016), bringing about recruitment procedures (Scholz, 2020), workspaces (Van Laer et al., 2020) and labour market programmes (Scholz and Ingold, 2021) that lean on ableist notions, taking ableness, flexibility and adaptability for granted. As such, Randle and Hardy (2016) argue that this creates qualitatively different challenges for disabled people than for other marginalised groups. The literature on the ideal worker draws attention to an imperative to be productive, efficient and available. Foster (2007) argues that capitalist societies that place central value on wage labour have historically oppressed disabled people by undervaluing them as being less productive. Jammaers et al. (2016) point to the hegemony of the ableist discourse of disability as lower productivity and as something disabled employees need to position themselves against.

Although ideal worker conceptions highlighting productivity are certainly a marginalising component of jobseeker evaluations for disabled people, the present article will demonstrate that employers not only evaluate potential employees based on their

capacity for productivity, but also based on their potential social contribution (Rivera, 2012). Leaning on the influence of social psychological research, this article understands the concept of the ideal worker as also relating to social ideals. Human beings have been shown to favour people we see as similar to ourselves, which is a central contribution from social psychological research on stereotypes and prejudice that can be traced back to the seminal work by Allport (1958). Disabled people risk being stereotyped based on their disability status, hence impacting the impression of their personal characteristics (Stone and Colella, 1996). Psychological research confirms consistent and pervasive stereotypes that serve to define disabled people as a group of individuals who are dependent, passive and weak (Nario-Redmond, 2010). Social cohesion concerns can lead to disabled people being rejected based on these prejudiced impressions and their lack of 'fit' with the organisational culture (Coverdill and Finlay, 1998). An emphasis on cohesion in a recruitment setting may favour candidates who are perceived as more socially competent, hence focusing less on productivity-related characteristics (Björklund et al., 2012). Greenwald and Pettigrew (2014) suggest that discrimination in contemporary society is not so much based on overt hostility but rather on in-group favouritism, preferring people similar to oneself. This tendency to seek social cohesion implies that employers not only evaluate candidates' potential work task performance, but also as potential members of the social group.

In modern capitalist societies, the stressed importance of wage labour also generates nonfinancial reasons for employment (van der Wel and Halvorsen, 2014). Workplaces are crucial social arenas, and this can create incentives to evaluate the social potential of whom you invite to work with you (Rivera, 2012, 2020). The current article makes the argument that these social evaluation tendencies also contribute to employers' constructions of the ideal worker. Acker (1990: 149) argues that the abstracted ideal worker is a committed individual who 'exists only for the work'. The commitment, dedication and flexibility that is emphasised in the ideal worker concept can also be interpreted as having a social component. This component also favours individuals who have the capacity to fully dedicate themselves to the workplace by also assuming a social role, in addition to a productive role. Given our tendency for in-group favouritism, the employers' abstracted image of this socially integrated worker will likely be constructed with people belonging to an in-group in mind, marginalising minorities who the employers imagine will have a more difficult time naturally fitting into the group and existing social practices. These social practices can be constructed and sustained in a way that presupposes ableness.

Pointing out how these ideal worker notions impact the evaluation of jobseekers highlights how stereotypes, organisational practices and managerial attitudes represent important contextual barriers that limit disabled people's work opportunities (Robert and Harlan, 2006). Applying this theoretical framework to recruitment evaluation can provide insight into a central mechanism of marginalisation for disabled people.

## **Methods**

As mentioned, the current article uses a field experiment that was conducted in Norway as its point of departure. In the experiment, 600 pairs of fictitious job applications were



sent in response to real job ads. Each pair had common Norwegian names and roughly similar resumés and cover letters. Applicant gender was randomised, but the pair always had the same gender. The only significant difference was that one of them disclosed a disability in the cover letter, in which the applicant explained that they had a congenital back injury and were a wheelchair user. Being a wheelchair user was not relevant to the core tasks in the selected positions. The call-back ratio from the field experiment was 1.93, meaning that the wheelchair user applicant received approximately half as many interview invitations as the nondisabled applicant (Bjørnshagen and Ugreninov, 2021).

From the total sample of 145 employers in the field experiment who gave an interview offer to at least one candidate, 70 employers were contacted to request participation in a qualitative follow-up study. The sampling was done strategically to achieve a balance between employers who invited both or only one candidate. In total, 18 employers agreed to take part in the study. In the interview sample, eight employers invited both candidates to an interview, two only invited the disabled candidate and eight only invited the nondisabled candidate. The sample consists primarily of general managers, but four interviews were conducted with an HR manager. Table 1 lists the industries and positions from the field experiment. All the enterprises came from the private or nonprofit sectors because application portals in the public sector requiring the registration of applicant profiles made it unsuitable for the field experiment. IT is overrepresented in the sample because this sector had a high call-back rate in the field experiment because of the high demand for personnel.

The interviews were semistructured, and the main topics were the recruitment process, the field experiment outcome, their impressions of disabled workers, work inclusion policies and corporate social responsibility (CSR) and their experience with the public employment service. The job ad and resumé from the fictitious candidates were brought to each interview, and the field experiment outcome was revealed, giving the employers the opportunity to reflect on their interview offer decisions. Although the field experiment only used a wheelchair user applicant to measure discrimination, the interviews focused on disability in a wider sense, deliberately opening up reflections on multiple types of impairments.

The research project was reviewed in advance by the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) and the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. Field experiments pose ethical issues, most notably the lack of informed consent. However, they provide a design for detecting direct discrimination in real recruitment settings in a way that would otherwise be unattainable (Pager, 2007). The review statement from the NESH sets out that the potential knowledge gain and lack of alternative methods are well-founded reasons for waiving of the informed consent requirement; they also point out that the qualitative follow-up design provides employers with an important opportunity to voice their explanations (NESH, 2018). All invited participants were given the same written debriefing on how and why the experiment had been conducted before agreeing to an interview. This information could have made more inclusive employers more inclined to agree to participate. Therefore, the sample would be expected to be more positive towards disabled employees than average, despite strategic sampling. However, the aim of the qualitative inquiry was not to generalise to the population but instead to illuminate mechanisms of discrimination.

**Table 1.** Overview of participants.

	Field experiment result	Industry	Position	Company size <sup>a</sup>
<b>1</b>	Both candidates	Nonprofit	Accountant	Large
<b>2</b>	Both candidates	IT	Developer	Small
<b>3</b>	Only disabled candidate (only application received)	IT	Accountant	Large
<b>4</b>	Both candidates	IT	Developer/ consultant	Small
<b>5</b>	Both candidates	IT	Customer service	Medium
<b>6</b>	Both candidates	IT	Developer	Small
<b>7</b>	Both candidates	Retail	Customer service	Large
<b>8</b>	Only disabled candidate	Mining industry	Receptionist	Large
<b>9</b>	Both candidates	IT	Developer/ consultant	Small
<b>10</b>	Only nondisabled candidate	IT	Customer support and development	Small
<b>11</b>	Both candidates	Nonprofit	Accountant	Medium
<b>12</b>	Only nondisabled candidate	Security and quality control services	Salesperson	Large
<b>13</b>	Only nondisabled candidate	IT and consultancy	Developer	Medium
<b>14</b>	Only nondisabled candidate	IT	Service engineer	Medium
<b>15</b>	Only nondisabled candidate	Insurance	Salesperson	Small
<b>16</b>	Only nondisabled candidate	IT	Salesperson	Small
<b>17</b>	Only nondisabled candidate	IT	Accountant	Large
<b>18</b>	Only nondisabled candidate	Trade union	Accountant	Small

Note: <sup>a</sup>Small: 1–20; medium: 21–100; large: more than 100.

Twelve interviews were conducted in person, and six were conducted by telephone. The interviews were conducted by the author between June 2019 and February 2020 and were all digitally recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and the selected quotes were translated into English by the author and assessed by a professional language editing service. The interviewees were given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity.

The analysis of the interviews consisted of rounds of initial and axial coding (Saldaña, 2016) to uncover the key generative mechanisms that might explain the occurrence of the phenomenon in question (Hoddy, 2019). First, a round of open coding was completed in which all the material was coded line by line. The focus was then narrowed, and the second round of axial coding was conducted to determine the key driving motivations for differential treatment, here reassembling codes from the first stage into the overarching categories. Finally, two main approaches towards hiring were identified, emphasising either a productive ideal or social ideal. These approaches were interpreted in light of the ideal worker, drawing attention to how employer conceptions of an ideal or standard worker led to their evaluation of the candidate. The behavioural aspect of the field

experiment result was utilised in the analysis; however, because the aim was to uncover ‘rough trends or broken patterns’ in the data (Fletcher, 2017: 185), it became clear that the discourse patterns did not necessarily match behaviour patterns. This means that both discriminating and nondiscriminating employers conveyed inclusionary and exclusionary considerations in their accounts. Hence, the findings are organised and presented around identified patterns in the employers’ reasoning rather than their actions – while still providing information about the field experiment outcome to explicate the particular cases.

## Findings

The analysis revealed two main evaluative approaches. In the first approach – productivity considerations – the applicants were evaluated against the formal qualifications and their productive potential to perform the work tasks. In the second approach – social considerations – the candidate was evaluated against the social aspects of the job, focusing on the social setting the candidate would potentially be a part of. All the employers engaged in both approaches, but one approach was typically more dominant.

### *Productivity considerations: Emphasising the ideals related to the performance of work tasks*

In the productivity considerations approach, an individualistic meritocratic norm guided the selection. Employers who emphasised this approach said that they strived to ensure the applicants would be treated fairly based on job-relevant criteria, here focusing on qualifications and the capacity to perform work tasks. Quite a large proportion of employers with this perspective had called in both applicants. They said that being a wheelchair user was not relevant for the work in question; instead, they valued the competence the applicants demonstrated in their resumé. Christina, a manager in the IT industry, stated the following:

[. . .] in my industry you’re so utterly reliant on your professional competence. We’re looking for the best candidates, and then being disabled is not important in itself. (Christina, called in both candidates)

Some of the managers said that applicant attributes that do not affect competence and productivity are irrelevant for their selection decisions. Being a wheelchair user was deemed irrelevant for the work tasks, given that the positions applied for were seated desk jobs. One manager emphasised this in the following way:

If you are in a wheelchair or not, that does not . . . In our workplace, we work with our hands and our head, so it really has no practical significance for working with us. (Rasmus, called in both candidates)

This quote demonstrates how the seated nature of the job means that the discrepancy between the wheelchair user and their colleagues would be negligible when performing

job tasks and, thus, did not activate a strong mismatch between their image of the ideal productive worker and disabled worker. However, as soon as the employer's image of their ideal worker started to differ more from that of the wheelchair user, productivity concerns become more prominent. Although a preponderance of interview statements expressed that being a wheelchair user was not relevant to their evaluation of productivity, there were a few instances of concerns about wheelchair users being able to fulfil the productivity ideal. One employer who had only called in the nondisabled applicant voiced these concerns. In this case, the position was a business-to-business salesperson who would have to follow up with customers in the retail industry by driving out to meet these customers. The manager was surprised when confronted with the result of the field experiment because he did not regard himself as a prejudiced person but imagined that productivity concerns could have come into play. He said the following:

I think that a person with an impairment in the form of a wheelchair, in relation to certain work tasks, would not work unfortunately. Because we, and we know that many people with a disability drive a customised car and that it works fine, but because of the competitive situation out in the market, we're extremely dependent on being efficient. We measure all employees on quality, where having a disability will not necessarily be a disadvantage, but in relation to efficiency, how long will it take from we park the car outside until we're inside the store, have done certain measurements and are back out. [. . .] And obviously now I'm speaking from a place of ignorance, that a person in a wheelchair will not get out of a car as quickly, into a shopping centre, through a store and back into the car to write a report. (Frank, only called in the nondisabled candidate)

This position was different from a pure desk job, activating a stronger mismatch between the ideal worker and the wheelchair user and requiring more imagination to perform the tasks differently. The interview excerpt illustrates how the productive ideal worker was disembodied and seen in relation to an imagined 'standard' employee.

Another employer who also had reservations about the disabled candidate because of the need to go out of house, was Johanna. She advertised for an IT developer position and called in only the nondisabled candidate, partly because they needed a developer who could visit customers. She imagined that inaccessibility would make this problematic, despite the customer companies she mentioned being large corporations where it would not be unreasonable to expect accessibility. The key problem cited, however, was a small flight of stairs, which made it difficult for a wheelchair user to access the office. When asked about the possibility of making it accessible, she said that they had made inquiries to the building owner on one occasion, but this had not led to anything: 'You know how it is with these things, it takes a while before anything is done about it'. Thus, the potential hire of this person was imagined to be more trouble than it is worth, in terms of what this individual might contribute to the workplace. It also exemplifies how inaccessibility is treated as a legitimate reason for rejection, without looking into whether it could be rectified to give the candidate a chance.

How the discrepancy between the ideal worker and disabled worker creates doubts is evident when employers are asked about other types of impairments. An impairment hierarchy emerges, where stable mobility impairments rank above other types of impairments, such as sensory impairments or mental health problems. This was apparent both



in the way the managers compared other impairments with being a wheelchair user and in response to direct questions about other types of impairments. This could be because of a reduced discrepancy in the performance of the work tasks and fewer imagined threats to productivity. When the impairment required the employer to envisage ways of performing the tasks other than the standard way, they became sceptical. One manager in the IT industry who had called in both candidates stated the following:

There's obviously a big difference between being a wheelchair user and being blind. Or deaf. That would be much more difficult. Because we go around talking to each other all the time. Then suddenly everyone would have to communicate with each other in new ways. That wouldn't be easy.

*Interviewer:* What about mental impairments? How would you consider that?

They're harder to detect. It's sort of mean to treat people differently, but it's an impairment that would be hard for us as a small business to have to spend time on, to put it bluntly. (Otto, called in both candidates)

Impairments needing what the employers imagined would be substantial accommodations or resources, such as time and manager attention, were viewed less favourably. Although some managers utilising this approach did mention the attributes associated with the productive advantages of being disabled, this was not very prominent. The most frequently mentioned productive advantage was tied to autistic people in relation to certain tasks, such as testing, in the IT industry. The dominant impression left by this approach was nonetheless that if the impairment did not evoke a strong mismatch in the way the work tasks were usually performed, it was deemed irrelevant. When it did, the employers expressed productivity concerns and legitimised discrimination based on this criterion. Being a wheelchair user was mostly assessed as a neutral attribute, meaning that the explanations for differential treatment in the experiment did not primarily rely on productivity-related assessments, but rather – as the next section shows – on social considerations.

### *Social considerations: Emphasising ideals related to fitting in and social contributions*

Several employers emphasised social ideals in their recruitment decisions; this means that they evaluated the candidate based on their view of how the candidate would fit into the group. In this approach, fit with the social environment in the organisation is a key factor. Among the discriminating employers, these social considerations were the most explicit disability-related reason for discrimination. Social considerations also caused most of the hesitancy expressed by the employers who called in both candidates but nonetheless voiced certain potential issues.

Nils was an employer who voiced clear, socially founded reasons for not calling in the wheelchair user. He worked in a company in the IT industry with fewer than five employees and emphasised that the person they hired had to fit into their small working

environment. He mentioned that they frequently took trips involving fuzzy boundaries between work and leisure, where he thought it would be difficult to include a wheelchair user:

Since we're so small, we have these gatherings every two or three months, where we visit our cabins and country houses and such. One of them is on an island and we have to jump ashore onto rocks to get there. And I have a cabin in the mountains, where we go skiing and use the sauna, etc. And we have one down in Tuscany and that. So, we thought it would be tricky to have someone in a wheelchair. So that was really the only reason for not calling him in, because my first thought was that it looked good. (Nils, only called in the nondisabled candidate)

This reasoning had less to do with accessibility and more to do with striving for social cohesion. Nils emphasised that getting to know each other and being alike was an important quality in coworkers. He did not disregard the applicant's competence, but the deciding factor was related to fitting in and sharing colleagues' interests and activities. His account reveals that it is not enough to do the work tasks – you must also fit in, which seems especially important in small organisations. This perceived limitation to participating in established social practices overpowered the impression of qualifications to do the job.

Nils was not the only employer who referred to accessibility outside the immediate workplace as a barrier for social participation. A few of the other interviewees also mentioned this as a potential disadvantage, as exemplified by the following interview excerpt:

I think that it's an extra burden. When you're going on a trip, you have to adapt things for them. There's quite a lot that needs to be taken care of when you take in someone in a wheelchair. (Johanna, only called in the nondisabled candidate)

Otto, a manager for an IT firm that called in both candidates, expressed the same concern. In the end, they decided to call in the disabled candidate, acknowledging that attending work trips was not crucial for doing the job. His account does, however, demonstrate that he saw accommodating accessibility on trips as something that conflicted with the interests of the group and established social practices:

Okay, how will we do it when it comes to our annual trips in Europe? Hmm. That will actually be a problem. Definitely. [. . .] So okay, this will mean a lot more work, I thought. But we would just have to make do in a way. To put it very bluntly, if we can't bring her along on this trip, then we would just go somewhere else, or she would just have to figure it out . . . I want her to get the job she wants, and then she would just have to skip the trip. If it makes the trip much worse for the other 13 people, then the other 13 should go before her. (Otto, called in both candidates)

An employer who emphasised social considerations in a different manner than related to accessibility was Marius, a manager looking for someone to fill a sales position, which would require selling insurance over the phone. In the field experiment, he only called in the nondisabled candidate. He said that he imagined that a wheelchair user could be tougher and more resilient than other people but that he became hesitant when he

reflected on how this person would fit into their working environment. He said the following:

I'm afraid that they could be a cripple who doesn't contribute and that they draw energy from the group instead in a way. But I couldn't really know that before I'd interviewed her though. (Marius, only called in the nondisabled candidate)

He acknowledged that his judgement was based on scarce information, but it was nonetheless the factor that tipped the scales enough to not call the disabled candidate in. The fact that he used the Norwegian equivalent of the word 'cripple', which is considered offensive when referring to physically impaired people (Sherry and Walker, 2020), further demonstrates an insensitive attitude. Marius was the interviewee who showed the most distinct display of stereotypes and the only employer who really demonstrated overt prejudice as a basis for discrimination. However, in two other interviews where the managers had called in both candidates, the interviewees referred to stories about disabled people who had worked for them through the public employment service; both echoed a sentiment of lack of fit. The employers described these candidates as demanding and difficult to work with, displaying an attitude of entitlement (Kaye et al., 2011). Rasmus, a manager in a medium-sized IT company, said the following about a temporary employee they took on through a wage subsidy scheme and who was mobility and visually impaired:

He was in the public employment system and because of this he became aware of his challenges in a way that I think was negative. There was a lot of fuss about nothing. [. . .] So, he just didn't fit into the group, culturally, with people who are used to getting by on their own and not complaining as much, and they kind of got someone the opposite of that. And that was, that is a challenge. (Rasmus, called in both candidates)

Rasmus mentioned this story quite early in the interview, indicating his hesitancy about hiring disabled people. However, he called in both candidates such that this experience was not generalised to the degree that it impacted the initial selection decision.

Overall, these findings emphasise that some employers do not consider disabled people to be equally equipped to participate socially because of an inaccessible world, a lack of cultural fit and/or a perceived lack of social aptitude. The findings indicate how employers' constructions of an ideal worker incorporate a social component related to ideas about fitting into the organisation, hence demonstrating exclusionary potential.

## Discussion and conclusion

The current article has shown how employers evaluate disabled job applicants along two separate dimensions: productivity and social considerations. The findings demonstrate employers' tacit constructions of the ideal worker in their recruitment evaluations, painting an image of an individual who is both productive and socially integrated. The employers' accounts highlighted here demonstrate poor knowledge of what disabled people can do, a lack of awareness of antidiscrimination legislation and prejudiced attitudes. Accordingly, these findings support previous research in which disabled people's

accounts reveal employer prejudice and discrimination (e.g. Chhabra, 2020; Vedeler, 2014). Moreover, drawing on the understanding of disability as a relational phenomenon (Shakespeare, 2014), the accounts show how people with mobility impairments are disabled by contextual factors, such as a lack of accessibility in society and employer attitudes. Interestingly, the findings also demonstrate how accessibility and ableist attitudes are related when employers legitimise discrimination based on inaccessible public spaces.

The findings make clear that the concept of the ideal worker includes two main components: productivity and social integration. The candidates must demonstrate both fit and skill (Coverdill and Finlay, 1998). The productivity component encompasses a worker who fits with the 'standard' way of doing the work tasks in a way that demonstrates productivity, reliability and efficiency. The ideal productive worker can enter the position and perform the work tasks in line with established practices for the position in question. The findings show the exclusionary potential of the mismatch between the image of the ideal productive worker and disabled jobseeker and how the degree of perceived mismatch creates an impairment hierarchy (Deal, 2003). This is illustrated by how the applicants for seated desk jobs evoked less scepticism than for jobs that required more movement, and the negative attitudes towards sensory impairments that would alter the way the tasks would be carried out. Most of the employers showed that they saw little discrepancy between the ideal productive worker and the wheelchair user because the positions in question were desk jobs where they worked with their hands and heads. Furthermore, they imagined that wheelchair users would be stable and reliable compared with people with mental health problems, which many of the employers saw as a greater threat to the productivity ideal because of potential inconsistent attendance. This is in line with previous research showing an employer preference for people with physical mobility impairments over those with mental impairments (Andersson et al., 2015; Hipes et al., 2016). The ideal worker could serve as a framework for understanding this preference pattern in the devaluation of impairments that serve to challenge the way work tasks are performed. An employability-impairment hierarchy could influence employment possibilities, and research shows that the impairment type is strongly associated with employment outcomes (Boman et al., 2015). Even though wheelchair users are seen as closer to the ideal productive worker for these types of jobs than people with other impairments, some employers still voiced concerns regarding out-of-house work tasks and accessibility accommodation. This shows that even though productivity concerns were not very common in the present interview material, they remain a threat, depending on contextual factors such as accessibility, assigned work tasks and employer flexibility and willingness to accommodate.

A key contribution of the current article is the insight that the inclusion of disabled people is not merely an economic question, but also a social and relational question. In the data material, negative considerations were most often related to social ideals rather than productivity ideals. The present article shows the need to affirm capabilities beyond productivity. Applicants must convince employers that they can fit into the work group and organisation and take part in established social practices. The ideal worker is always ready to work but is also able and willing to help create a socially integrated workplace. The employers demonstrated how they constructed an ideal worker as someone who can

dedicate themselves to the productive but also to the social aspects of work. This could be a partial explanation for the gap between positive attitudes and hiring behaviour and intentions (Burke et al., 2013; Ju et al., 2013). It is not sufficient to be evaluated as qualified for the job when the employer seeks someone who must also fit in.

The significance of social considerations also illustrates the social impact of the physical environment, showing how an inaccessible world can contribute to in-group favouritism at the workplace level. Universal design is needed not only in the workplace – but in society in general – to promote labour market participation for people with mobility impairments. Employers do not only worry about accessibility to the workplace building, but they also question whether it would be possible to include the person in team-building events, company trips and other events outside the workplace. Added responsibility is a factor they considered to be a potential extra burden, reinforcing the impression of the disabled person as someone in need of extra care (Mik-Meyer, 2016) because the physical space would not enable independence. In this way, the physical environment has tangible social consequences and contributes to a type of structural discrimination (Link and Phelan, 2001).

Although the current article has some novel theoretical and practical contributions, a notable limitation is worth mentioning. The interview-based design makes it unsuitable for investigating implicit attitudes because it relies on accounts of conscious thoughts and actions, making this an area in need of more research. This limitation could have played a role in cases where the employers could not remember consciously deciding against calling in the wheelchair user, of which there were a few. However, the study design, combining behavioural and interview data, has made it possible to uncover specific considerations related to actual discriminatory decisions that would have been hard to obtain in an interview setting discussing only hypothetical cases.

Theoretically, the current article can expand our understanding of the notion of the ideal worker. The significance of social considerations reveals how the ideal worker is also someone capable of committing to the workplace, its culture and social gatherings. This commitment is something that employers doubt a wheelchair user will be equally capable of, partly because they do not expect the world to be accessible and because of stereotypes of social aptitude. Norway is a country where the commitment to work is very high (van der Wel and Halvorsen, 2014); this means that participation in paid employment is considered a key part of people's lives. In evaluating potential candidates, employers look for someone who can demonstrate dedication and social integration (Rivera, 2012). Thus, the ideal worker subsumes multiple qualities that centre around two fundamental abilities – productivity and social integration – both of which involve commitment and devotion to the workplace. The employers prefer not being forced to envision new ways of carrying out work tasks, but the current article demonstrates that this is also often the case when it comes to new ways of socialising. The marginalisation of disabled people in work organisations as 'outsiders' has been shown in previous studies (Robert and Harlan, 2006), demonstrating prejudiced attitudes resulting in social friction. Acker (1990: 153) claims that in work organisations, women's bodies are 'ruled out of order' and that the symbolic expression of masculinity allows and encourages informal bonding that excludes women. In the same way, informal bonding practices that take ableness for granted may rule the disabled person's body out of order.



The practical contribution of the present article is the demonstration of discrimination against disabled people in hiring situations, revealing how differential treatment is justified. The employers failed to recognise differential treatment as discrimination but instead saw their actions as a legitimate rejection based on ideal worker notions related to productivity and social integration. These results provide insights into the rationales of employers who are considering disabled jobseekers, showing how productivity considerations bring about a ranking of impairments in terms of negativity and how social considerations evoke personality-based stereotypes and a desire for social cohesion. The current article not only contributes to the body of literature revealing how employers perpetuate structural inequalities that affect disabled people's employment opportunities, but more importantly, it also provides insights that may help employers identify and evaluate their own practices and, thus, become more attentive to making fairer recruitment evaluations. In this lies the recognition of the relational nature of disability and the contextual influence of employer conceptions of what an employee should be.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Janikke Solstad Vedeler, Kjetil van der Wel, the anonymous reviewers and the associate editor in charge of my submission for constructive and valuable feedback on my manuscript.

## Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The research was conducted as a part of the HIRE project at NOVA – Norwegian Social Research, Oslo Metropolitan University, funded by The Research Council of Norway (grant number: 273745).

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**Date submitted** June 2020

**Date accepted** July 2021



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## Article 2

Kaja Larsen Østerud (2022). A Balancing Act: The Employer Perspective on Disability Disclosure in Hiring. *Published in Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 56, 289-302. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-221192>



# A balancing act: The employer perspective on disability disclosure in hiring

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Received 21 June 2021

Revised 3 December 2021

Accepted 9 December 2021

Pre-press 13 May 2022

Published 24 May 2022

## Abstract.

**BACKGROUND:** How to disclose an impairment during the hiring process is an important question for disabled people, yet the associated employer perspective remains overlooked in the literature.

**OBJECTIVE:** The article investigates whether, when and how employers prefer jobseekers to disclose their impairment during the recruitment process. Stigma and impression management is used as a theoretical lens to interpret employer responses.

**METHODS:** The article uses interview data from 38 Norwegian employers paired with behavioral data from a recruitment situation. Prior to the interviews, the employers were subjected to a field experiment wherein pairs of fictitious applications were submitted for real job listings. In these, one of the applicants disclosed either a mobility impairment or a mental health condition.

**RESULTS:** The findings show that disability disclosure is a balancing act between appearing candid and demonstrating competence and that employers favor identity management strategies that present disability in a positive and unobtrusive manner and downplay the impairment. The employers favored disclosure but expected wheelchair users to disclose their impairment earlier than people with mental health conditions. Furthermore, employers with a relational view on disability were found to be more open to hiring disabled people.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The article illustrates how disclosure expectations can represent a significant disability penalty, thus hampering employment advancement for disabled people.

Keywords: Disability, disclosure, recruitment, stigma, identity management

## 1. Introduction

Managing a disabled identity in the recruitment process often revolves around the matter of disclosure; but this can be problematic because the disabled person risks being defined by what they cannot do in a situation where the employer's assessment is based on the applicant's perceived

capabilities (Jammaers et al., 2016). Therefore, the identity management strategies identified by Goffman (1959, 1963), including passing and covering, can be adopted by disabled jobseekers to present themselves in line with the employers' expected professional identities and conceptions of an ideal productive worker (Reid, 2015). Several studies investigate disabled people's perspectives on disclosure (e.g. Allen & Carlson, 2003; Jans et al., 2012; Kaushansky et al., 2017; Lindsay et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2018; Moloney et al., 2019; Reed et al., 2017; Santuzzi et al., 2019; Vickers, 2017), showing

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how it is related to certain advantages, such as suitable accommodation, and clear disadvantages, such as stigmatization and discrimination. Thus, negotiating a stigmatized identity is dependent on the response of the other powerful actor in the picture: the employer. While some research has been conducted on employer attitudes and behaviors toward disabled people (e.g. Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2020; Burke et al., 2013; Ju et al., 2013), little is known about the employer perspective on whether, when, and how disabled people should disclose their impairment (Lindsay et al., 2019b). Disclosure issues are complicated by the heterogeneity of disability (Dwertmann, 2016), and different people with varying types of impairments have been shown to favor different disclosure strategies (Jans et al., 2012). Research shows that employers rate candidates with physical impairments higher than those with mental health conditions (Dalgin & Bellini, 2008). However, how the differences in stigma and concealability are reflected in employers' expectations regarding disclosure remains underexplored. Furthermore, there is a need for theoretically informed work that examines when and how to disclose a disability (Lindsay et al., 2018).

This article addresses these gaps by drawing on a unique qualitative data set that pairs behavioral data with interview accounts. The point of departure is two field experiments in which employers received two fictitious applications for a real job listing. The applications were designed to be similar on all accounts save one – one of the applicants disclosed an impairment. The applicants were presented as either being a wheelchair user or having a gap in their résumé due to mental health problems. Thus, as the interviews were conducted and analyzed, the researcher already had information about the employers' behavioral reaction toward open disclosure during the first stage of the hiring process.

The aim of this article is to investigate employer accounts regarding what kinds of identity management strategies disabled people should employ to present the professional identities expected during the hiring process. The article focuses on the employer's role in constructing acceptable presentations of disability in the recruitment process and explores the differences in the disclosure expectations related to mobility impairments and mental health conditions. The aim is to gain insight into whether, when, and how employers expect disabled people to disclose their disability by drawing on perspectives from stigma management and impression management (Goffman,

1959, 1963). As such, the article contributes to the literature by providing a better understanding of how disclosure decisions and their outcomes are impacted by interpersonal and contextual aspects.

## 2. Previous research on disability disclosure in hiring

Disability disclosure has been particularly discussed in relation to hidden impairments and concealable stigmatized identities (Evans, 2019; Follmer et al., 2020; Jones & King, 2013; Prince, 2017). It has been described as a predicament (Prince, 2017), the hidden disability dilemma (Allen & Carlson, 2003; Fitzgerald & Paterson, 1995), and the disclosure conundrum (Goldberg et al., 2005). In a hiring setting, many may choose not to disclose their impairment if they can avoid it out of fear of being stigmatized, discriminated against, and denied work opportunities (Brohan et al., 2012; Irvine, 2011; Jans et al., 2012; Lindsay et al., 2019a). The reasons for choosing to disclose a disability include the intention to gain accommodation, to be open and honest, and to explain the behaviors that can arise because of an impairment (Brohan et al., 2012; Lindsay et al., 2019a).

Jans et al. (2012) lay out three main points in time during the recruitment process when disclosure is possible: (1) before the interview, (2) during the interview, and (3) after getting the job offer. The authors also highlight the factors that the participants of their study – disabled people who were successful in acquiring and maintaining a job – said had influenced their decision to disclose. They describe significant differences in the views of participants with different impairments regarding disclosure. Notably, professionals with visible impairments, such as being a wheelchair user, preferred to disclose early, while those with hidden and more stigmatized impairments, such as mental illnesses, were more reluctant to disclose the same. A review by Lindsay et al. (2018) also shows considerable variation within the literature regarding the preferred timing of disclosure.

The literature on disability disclosure has almost exclusively focused on the disabled person's perspective, and the current knowledge about employers' attitudes regarding disclosure strategies is, therefore, scarce. Certain studies do indicate, however, that disability disclosure in the recruitment process is associated with negative behavioral responses. A small number of field experiments, which involved

submitting fictional applications for real job listings, establish the fact that disability disclosure during the first stage of hiring leads to significantly lower rates of interview invitations (Ameri et al., 2018; Baert, 2018; Bellemare et al., 2018; Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021; Hipes et al., 2016). A literature review by Brohan et al. (2012) regarding the disclosure of mental health conditions points to vignette and survey studies that indicate that disclosing a mental health condition leads to more of a disadvantage than disclosing a physical impairment. Lindsay et al. (2019b) provide a recent qualitative contribution and find that the interviewed employers wanted disabled applicants to disclose their disability and that they considered open disclosure a way of building an open and trusting relationship and a prerequisite for providing necessary accommodation. Gignac et al. (2020), who interviewed employer representatives with experience in supporting disabled employees with episodic impairments, describe a complex array of issues regarding workplace disclosure. While this study did not investigate the hiring process specifically, a relevant finding is the impact of organizational culture supporting either the belief that disability is dependent on social and environment factors or culture that supports a notion of disability as an individual phenomenon, in line with an individualist medical model. The findings indicate a positive effect of the employer conceptualizing disability in line with a relational model that acknowledges the interaction between impairment and context (Shakespeare, 2014).

### *2.1. Identity management strategies: Stigma and impression management*

Stigma management and impression management provide a useful theoretical lens for identifying patterns of the social expectations related to identity management. Originating from the works of Erving Goffman (1959, 1963), they set out strategies for micro-interactions that can help the actor be viewed favorably in the highly evaluative context of recruitment.

Stigma management has been applied extensively to describe the perspective of the stigmatized person; but as Goffman (1963, p. 163) says, 'Stigma involves not so much a set of concrete individuals who can be separated into two piles, the stigmatized and the normal, as a pervasive two-role social process.' Goffman (1963) introduced 'passing' and 'covering' as strategies for managing a stigmatized identity.

Passing means attempting to conceal an impairment so that others do not detect it, while covering refers to the disabled person striving to make the situation more comfortable for others by restricting displays of 'failings' and minimizing obtrusiveness. These are strategies that disabled people can employ; however, they can also reflect the expectations from the receiving end – from those seeking to avoid uncomfortable social interactions.

The stigma management literature distinguishes between two important impairment dimensions: concealability and controllability (Jacoby et al., 2005). Passing depends on being able to conceal and control one's impairment, and people with hidden impairments can, therefore, pass by not disclosing. Hence, interaction experiences are quite different for people with stigmatized and concealable social identities as compared to those whose impairments are visible (Clair et al., 2005). In the recruitment process, however, people with visible impairments also have the option of not disclosing their disability during the application stage, thus not making the information available to the employer when they make their first selection of candidates. When the disability becomes known, either because of its visibility or because of disclosure, covering can be employed as a strategy to negate a potential negative impression. While DeJordy (2008) claims that covering cannot help an individual escape discrimination and is merely a way of avoiding discomfort, Fernando et al. (2019, p. 770) emphasize that, for someone with an unfairly discreditable identity, covering 'can stop them from being fully and finally discredited.' The authors emphasize that this can be useful in combination with what they call accenting: highlighting a more socially acceptable identity. In this way, stigma can be combated by drawing on other non-stigmatized identities (Toyoki & Brown, 2014). These studies illuminate how stigmatized individuals employ stigma management strategies; but there is obvious potential for further investigation into how stigma-reducing strategies are reflected by the expectations that others hold regarding what constitutes appropriate self-presentation. These expectations are especially significant when held by powerful actors, such as employers. In the recruitment process, the power balance is heavily skewed in favor of the employer, and, therefore, stigma and stereotypes may impact their hiring decisions, leading to status loss and rejection (Link and Phelan, 2001).

In addition to stigma management, this article also draws on the theoretical contributions on self-



presentation found in the literature on impression management. Goffman's (1959) writings on impression management provide the analogy of social interaction as a stage performance. Impression management is a phenomenon that has inspired a myriad of research, which describes various impression management strategies and tactics that can be employed to present oneself in a favorable manner (see for instance Bolino et al., 2008). As a job applicant, the goal is to present oneself as a professional who the employer would want to hire. The applicant assumes the role of an inferior who tactfully attempts 'to put the superior at ease by simulating the kind of world the superior is thought to take for granted' (Goffman, 1959, p. 30). As the recruitment process is a setting where the jobseeker is put under great scrutiny and with significant consequences, the employer will expect the applicant to be meticulous regarding how they present themselves and exercise what Goffman (1959) calls 'dramaturgical circumspection' – being prudent and adapting their performance to the circumstances.

Using impression management tactics is a way of combating the discrepancy disability status can stereotypically represent in the presentation of a potentially productive worker (Sung et al., 2017). To address such discrepancies, the person can develop a plan that 'represents a carefully constructed sequence of behavior, developed prior to interacting with a given target (i.e., it is proactive), that is designed to enhance, protect, or adjust the actor's identity goals' (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997, p. 20). Although the research on impression management tactics is scattered, the tactics mentioned in the literature are often related to either being assertive or defensive (Bolino et al., 2008). Especially relevant for recruitment settings in general are assertive tactics, which encompass self-enhancement, self-promotion, and exemplification tactics and can be employed to convey oneself as someone who brings about positive outcomes and is competent and dedicated. Defensive tactics, such as providing justifications and excuses, may also prove to be relevant when managing negative impressions (Bolino et al., 2008).

Stigma management and impression management prescribe strategies that can be employed in social interactions to convey a favorable image and create a smoother interaction. They highlight how making social interactions flow is a cooperative effort and that the disclosure of a disability may represent a disruption that 'throws a wrench into the works' and causes discomfort, calling for efforts to relieve the social strain (Susman, 1994, p. 17).

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Cases and data

The study was conducted in Norway, and all the included employers were located in the capital region of Oslo. Norway has a large employment gap for disabled people despite a high general employment rate. Only 41% of the disabled population is employed, as compared to 73% of the general population (Statistics Norway, 2020). Hiring discrimination based on disability is illegal (according to the Work Environment Act and the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act) unless it imposes a 'disproportionate burden' on the employer (Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, Section 20). Asking about impairments directly in job interviews is also illegal unless the questions are relevant for evaluating the ability of the applicant to perform the required job tasks.

All the interviewees were recruited from a pool of participants who had been subjected to either of two field experiments in which fictitious applications were submitted for real job vacancies (see Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021). In the two experiments, 600 and 699 pairs of job applications were submitted as a response to real job ads. Every pair had similar résumés and cover letters, the same educational background, and the same number of years of relevant work experience. The only significant difference was that one of them disclosed a disability. This was disclosed in the cover letter, wherein the applicant explained that either they were a wheelchair user, or they had been out of work for a year due to mental health problems but had since resumed working fulltime. In the mental health experiment, the control applicant had also had a year off from work, but this was attributed to traveling abroad. The wheelchair user applicant was more specific when explaining the nature of their impairment by saying that they had a congenital back injury, while the mental health applicant was less specific. In this way, the design leaves 'mental health problems' as a floating signifier (Laclau, 1994), allowing the employers to fill in the gap with their own ideas regarding what this could mean.

Only employers who had invited one or both candidates for an interview were contacted for this study. The sampling was purposefully carried out to achieve a balance between employers who invited both or only one candidate. In total, 38 employers agreed to take part in this study: 18 from the wheelchair experiment and 20 from the mental health experiment. Out



of the entire data set, 18 employers had invited both candidates for an interview, three only invited the disabled candidate, and 17 invited only invited the non-disabled candidate.

The employers who were interviewed were from different industries, including non-profit, IT, retail, insurance, sales, kindergartens, and contracting. In the wheelchair sample, the positions that were applied for were accountant, IT developer, salesperson, receptionist, and customer service personnel. In the mental health sample, there was a wider range of positions, including electrician, kindergarten teacher, truck driver, carpenter, salesperson, accountant, and developer. All the enterprises included were in the private or non-profit sector, since the application portals for the public sector required the registration of applicant profiles and were thus unsuitable for the field experiment. IT businesses (12 enterprises) and kindergartens (nine enterprises) are overrepresented in the sample, as these types of positions had a high interview invitation rate in the field experiment due to high demand for qualified professionals. Small, medium, and large companies were all included in the study.

As the field experiments had to be conducted without obtaining informed consent, a thorough review of the ethical considerations was conducted in advance. The research project was reviewed by the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities and the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. The most important justification for the design is that it allows for direct discrimination in real recruitment settings to be identified in a way that would otherwise be impossible (Pager, 2007). If an interview invitation was received, the employer was swiftly informed that the candidate was no longer a jobseeker to minimize their costs. The employers were contacted by email, through which they were informed about the nature of and the rationale behind the field experiment and were invited to take part in voluntary follow-up interviews.

The interviews were conducted either in person or by phone between June 2019 and October 2020. They were semi-structured, following an interview guide that focused on the recruitment process, the field experiment outcome, impressions of disabled workers, work inclusion policies, and disclosure. The interviewees were presented with the résumés and cover letters from the field experiment and asked to reflect on their recruitment decision and thoughts regarding the disabled applicant. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and selected quotes were translated by the author of this article. In addition, the translation quality of the quotes was assessed by a professional language editing service.

### 3.2. *Analysis*

The analysis strategy was a theory-driven thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Theoretically, stigma management and impression management guided the analysis. This enabled the researcher to be especially attuned to the aspects that were related to covering and passing in addition to impression management expectations. The analysis was more latent than semantic, seeking to identify underlying assumptions and ideologies that influence the semantic content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the interviews were completed, they were thoroughly read and reread throughout the analysis process. Smaller segments and meanings captured in the material were coded and eventually put together into broader themes, uniting smaller data units into a 'pattern of shared meaning' (Braun et al., 2019p. 48). This coding process resulted in three overarching themes, which are presented in the findings section: (1) timing as a balancing act, (2) the imperative of constructing a positive disability story, and (3) the impact of disability perspective.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. *Timing as a balancing act*

The disclosure process takes the form of a balancing act in the interview material. Employers voiced their expectations regarding requiring a balance to be struck between different interests and intended impressions mainly in terms of appearing candid and demonstrating competence. However, the expectations regarding this balancing act differed in the interviewees' responses when the conversation concerned a wheelchair user compared to a candidate with a history of a mental health condition. When comparing the reflections regarding these two types of applicants, it becomes apparent that the employers expect mobility-impaired applicants to disclose their disability at an earlier stage. They did not consider being a wheelchair user to be a private matter in the same way that they perceived a mental health condition. The visibility of the impairment seemed to

make the employers feel more entitled to be informed. As one interviewee put it: 'It will, in any case, be very visible when you show up for an interview in a wheelchair. So, it's something you sort of have to disclose because you can see it' (Interviewee 31 – called in only the non-disabled candidate). A large majority of the employers in the sample who received an application from the mobility-impaired jobseeker favored early disclosure, i.e. before the interview. Only two employers explicitly stated that they would have preferred not to know before the interview because they would not want this information to impact their decision.

Many of those who favored early disclosure wanted the applicant to do so in their application, while some felt it would be sufficient to receive this information after they had sent an interview invitation but before the interview. However, some felt that disclosing such information after an interview invitation would seem overly tactical and stated that such a strategy would make them feel deceived, as exemplified in the words of this manager:

Because then it's obvious that you have tried to trick the recipient. I really appreciated that she did [disclose]. Well, that you did. But she did it in a nice way... Because... Well, it would have been a bit awkward if, like when [my colleague] went downstairs to get you, and there you are in a wheelchair! That would have been quite a surprise. If it would be positive or negative, I don't know. Probably negative, because the consequences are so great. And then I would have a negative impression from the start. So, I think it's a good thing to disclose the information. (Interviewee 9 – called in both candidates)

The comment about feeling tricked indicates that not disclosing would be conceived as trying to pass as being non-disabled and that such a passing attempt would be dishonest. It underscores the ableist norm that the given premise is that jobseekers are not mobility impaired, and deviations from this norm must be declared.

A recurring word throughout the interviews in the wheelchair sample was 'surprise.' Wheelchair users are expected to consider that their unannounced presence is unexpected and surprising. To counteract such surprise, they are expected to cover by disclosing, which enables the employer to prepare for the encounter. One manager said the following:

I would immediately think, 'Oh, can we even get in here?' Because I don't know what the turning radius would be, and I would think more about that and be a bit like, 'Oh, hi! ...'. A little surprised. I would be. Because I would not have expected it when nothing was stated. (...) It's about making it a good experience for both parties, really. Prepared. (Interviewee 5 – called in both candidates)

Disclosure is thus a way of counteracting surprise and embarrassment, giving the employer time to prepare. In a similar vein, accessibility is frequently mentioned as a reason for early disclosure, where the disabled person is expected to take responsibility for ensuring that they do not show up to inaccessible work premises. One employer who did not invite the mobility-impaired applicant for an interview (Interviewee 13) stated that a short flight of stairs in their company building, which was inaccessible for wheelchair users, was the main reason for doing so. The interviewee, an HR manager in the company, felt it was important to disclose being a wheelchair user for this reason: 'A wheelchair I feel that you must disclose. If not, you won't get through the door anywhere.' Her account demonstrated the view that accessibility is a privilege one is sometimes granted if you ask but not something that you can reasonably expect. Informing the employer can thus be seen as a covering strategy, where the disabled person is expected to spare the employer the embarrassment caused by them showing up for an interview in an inaccessible building, making the impairment obtrusive. The disabled person bears the responsibility for this, instead of the employer, by ensuring that the building is accessible.

A recurring paradox in the interviews is that many of the employers who claimed that being a wheelchair user is irrelevant for the job still wanted the applicant to disclose this information. When the researcher asked why, many had difficulties with providing an answer, especially those who had an accessible workplace. This paradox is even more striking when compared to the accounts related to applicants with a mental health condition. In these interviews, the employers were much quicker to suggest issues that could affect the applicant's work capacity. However, the employers in the mental health experiment sample were much more hesitant to answer clearly in favor of early disclosure. Attempting to pass during the first hiring stage was viewed as a more dishonest action for wheelchair users than for people with

mental health conditions. This indicates that the feeling of deservingness of disclosure is determined by not only the potential impact on the individual's work capacity but also the ideas and norms accompanying their specific impairment.

In the mental health experiment sample, the interviewees stated that they did not expect the early disclosure that is preferred in the wheelchair sample, but they all preferred to know before making their hiring decision. A few of the interviewees said that they reacted very positively to early disclosure in the experiment and maintained that this gave an impression of openness, honesty, and courage. One of the managers described this as follows:

Yes, I think it was a very good thing that he shared it because it's very courageous to be honest about it. ( . . . ) I felt it showed some kind of humility in being so candid. (Interviewee 21 – called in both candidates)

Others reacted negatively, fearing that this early disclosure was a sign that the person overshadows private details and does not understand boundaries, as in the case of this manager:

I remember that I thought that this was a bit too much. I kind of thought, 'Oh, is this one of those people who doesn't understand boundaries?' Like, whoa, who is always unloading . . . I don't know if I'm able to explain myself . . . But I remember thinking that, 'Oh, I'm a bit skeptical,' I thought, because they said it at such an early stage. (Interviewee 31 – called in only the non-disabled candidate)

This highlights another balancing act for applicants with mental health conditions – between sharing too much and sharing too little. It is apparent that the same disclosure text can be interpreted very differently when it comes to mental health conditions. An understanding expressed throughout the interviews was that sharing mental health conditions touches on something that is much more private than physical impairments. While disclosure was preferred, many expressed an understanding that it could be hard to do so. The impression of mental health as a private matter seems to explain why the associated disclosure is not expected as clearly as for wheelchair users and why passing is not judged as harshly. Passing, or, at least, covering, can then be used as tools to protect the employer against the uneasiness that an open presentation of mental health issues could produce. This means that jobseekers with mental health conditions

need to be careful regarding what they reveal. One of the employers highlighted 'the difference between being personal and private' (Interviewee 36 – called in only the disabled candidate), indicating an imperative to be meticulous in the presentation of mental health conditions. The employers, therefore, face a dilemma: They want honesty, but, at the same time, they do not want the interviewee to overshare uncomfortable and private information, as they feel that this demonstrates a lack of social competence.

There was overwhelming consensus among the interviewed employers that the best time to bring up a mental health condition was during the job interview. Some employers admitted to spending little time on each application and said that a presentation of a mental health condition is too complex to be addressed properly in this context. Thus, the interview situation is a crucial arena for presenting a favorable narrative. The employer accounts regarding how this can be done is elaborated in the following theme.

#### 4.2. *The imperative of constructing a positive disability story*

A recurring theme in the employer accounts is the imperative to present a positive disability story – i.e., a story that highlights positive personal characteristics and downplays any negative impact of being disabled. The employers highlighted the interview stage as an important avenue to present this story. Personal encounters were said to provide a particularly suitable setting for applicants to present themselves as a whole person, which is illustrated by the following employer response regarding presenting mental health conditions:

I think it's about being... Well, then you're very honest. Then you're not afraid to share things and potentially talk about them later. And then, you can explain them a bit, I think. Since, in an application, that is something you read, some only briefly, others more thoroughly, and then you start to wonder. But if you're in an interview, perhaps you can explain it in such a simple way that it sometimes doesn't sound so intimidating after all. (Interviewee 29 – called in both candidates)

This quote highlights how the employer wants the person to show more of themselves in the interview and how it is important to provide an organized, simple, and non-intimidating presentation. Overall, the accounts provided in the interviews point to an imperative of a positive narrative and of presenting a

thought-out image – an imperative that becomes more significant the more the employer sees the disability as an inherently negative factor. The interviewees make it clear that they expect the disabled applicant to make somewhat of an effort to present a positive image, as illustrated by the response of one manager:

That's something I definitely consider important – that you kind of dress yourself up a little. It's like when you're going to a party, you dress up a little at least. (Interviewee 12 – called in only the non-disabled candidate)

This sales manager highlighted the need to 'sell yourself' during the interview. His account points to covering as a preferred strategy, minimizing the importance of the impairment. He called in only the non-disabled person and not the wheelchair user but said that he might have called in both if the disabled candidate had stated that 'he is as mobile as anyone else' and that the impairment had no impact on his ability to drive from customer to customer. He also suggested turning it into a strength, saying how it would be an advantage by making him more memorable in meetings. Presenting yourself in a favorable light is not something that is unique to disabled jobseekers – being a general expectation for all jobseekers – but the interview material suggests that the imperative is stronger for disabled applicants. One manager, who did not call in the disabled applicant, said the following:

Interviewee: But clearly, it is then even more important to present your positive attributes.

Interviewer: Yes, so it is more important than otherwise?

Interviewee: Yes, I think so. It's too bad that it has to be that way, but that's . . . that's the way it is. (Interviewee 15 – called in only the non-disabled candidate)

The favored attributes frequently mentioned indicates that the employers prefer that the disabled candidates make use of assertive impression management tactics. They want the candidate to demonstrate ambition and dedication to work, interest in the job in question, and to be forward-leaning and positive. They also highlighted the opportunity to draw on other types of identities, especially a professional identity, that could overpower their concerns about the individual's disability. In this way, they emphasized accenting as an effective strategy for making

a good impression (Fernando et al., 2019; Toyoki & Brown, 2014).

When it comes to presenting the disability itself, some of the interviewees indicate a partiality toward mental health stories that could be related to external rather than internal causes. Referring to external causes can be a form of defensive impression management tactic, providing a socially acceptable justification for having mental health problems. Interviewee 23 referred to two such stories based on her experience that, to her, exemplified acceptable narratives. The first was of an employee who had experienced financial difficulties that caused mental health problems, and the other was about a jobseeker who informed the manager about a difficult spell that she had been through due to a friend committing suicide. Referring to such external causes would make her reassured, and she said the following:

If you can, in an interview, give a good explanation for why things have been the way they are, I would – considering that it was a kindergarten teacher and that we are short on people with those qualifications – I would probably be okay with that, with a good explanation. ( . . . ) (Interviewee 23 – called in both candidates)

A related concept is that of overcoming, which is a positive disability story that is often highlighted by the employers in that they would like the person to explain how they overcame their difficulties and are now stable and conscious about how they would solve potential problems that could arise in the future. A manager who did not call in the candidate with a history of mental health problems, due to concerns about their inability to do the job and be mentally present, said the following:

It's sort of the full picture, how he presents himself in the interview, and a bit about the process around the illness maybe. And maybe treatments and . . . How he expresses himself about it. ( . . . ) I think if you're honest about this being something you went through and can feel it is a thing of the past. And that he knows what triggers the problems and can be conscious about that going forward. (Interviewee 32 – called in only the non-disabled candidate)

A notion related to overcoming is 'supercrip' representations (Grue, 2015), and they were present in the employers' considerations regarding wheelchair users. Four of the 18 interviewees in the wheelchair sample mentioned Birgit Skarstein – a famous



Norwegian Paralympian who is a wheelchair user – as a role model. They highlighted how ‘not focusing on barriers but on opportunities’ is something that they would welcome in disabled candidates – not being someone to feel sorry for but, rather, someone who accomplishes seemingly impossible tasks. An interesting case from the data set is an interview with the manager of a small company who decided not to call in the disabled candidate due to him being skeptical of the candidate’s ability to partake in work trips and leisure activities. When asked how he would prefer the candidate to disclose their disability, he initially demonstrated ambivalence but eventually presented a supercrip story of how a wheelchair user could make a favorable impression (after mentioning Skarstein as a ‘role model for what you can achieve’):

If they had just come to the interview without us knowing in advance, and the wheelchair just rolled in, you know, then, what we saw as being a bit of a problem concerning getting up here wouldn’t be much of a problem. So, in that case, it would be smart not to write anything about it. (. . .) Then it’s just like, ‘Oh, how did you get up the stairs?’ And then, they could just talk about, like, how easy it is to get around in a wheelchair in Oslo. And ‘Oh, I can get up and down escalators and go around pretty much everywhere.’ (Interviewee 10 – called in only the non-disabled candidate)

#### 4.3. *The impact of disability perspective*

A methodological advantage of this study is that the interview data was paired with behavioral data, thus making it possible to investigate the differences in the accounts of employers who called in the disabled candidate and those who did not. The analysis uncovered one especially important difference related to the employers’ tacit conceptions of disability. The inclusive employers generally demonstrated a disability perspective that was more relational in nature than that of the exclusionary employers. A relational perspective was associated with inclusive hiring behavior, especially when it was matched with an acknowledgement of the employer’s responsibility for ensuring a fit between the employee and the work environment. Those who held a relational view said that disclosure was the necessary first step to getting to know one another and establishing a dialogue regarding how the employer could contribute to the individual succeeding in the workplace.

The contrasted perspective, in line with the medical model, was expressed by the employers who conveyed impressions of disability as an individual phenomenon. They were more interested in whether the applicant could say that they had recovered or how they could present solutions to their perceived shortcomings. By viewing disability as less fixed, the employers with a relational perspective saw disclosure as an invitation for them to take part in the creation of a suitable work environment. The manager in the following quotation recognized how being able to be open and talk about disability and health was important because of this relational aspect:

You are so, like, dependent on each other on a daily basis that you have to know one another a little in order to know how the other person thinks, how they do things, or how they want things to be and how they expect me to do my job and so on. So, I think it’s important to spend some time on that. (Interviewee 30 – called in both candidates)

The importance of dialogue was especially emphasized by the employers that considered applicants with mental health conditions, who said that disclosure was a demonstration of an open attitude that made it possible to talk about mental health. They expressed that they found closed-off employees problematic because it could hinder this cooperative effort. The fact that a relational view was more salient among employers who considered candidates with mental health conditions could be related to the notion of mental health conditions being something more volatile and more connected to social relations than physical mobility impairments. However, there were instances of employers who acknowledged their role in making the workplace accessible, demonstrating instances of a relational perspective on mobility impairments. One example is of Interviewee 1, who called in both candidates and immediately made inquiries into the possibility of installing a new ramp and door opener for a heavy door. The relational understanding that wheelchair users are dependent on accessibility was general knowledge among the employers. Nevertheless, Interviewee 1 demonstrated a relational understanding whereby she recognized her own contextual impact and responsibility. For managers with a relational view, disclosure then becomes a prerequisite in order to effectively play their part in accommodating the candidate’s needs.

Some of the employers with a more relational view seemed to consider even the act of disclosure in a

relational light. They saw the applicant's disclosure decision as not only being dependent on the candidate but also on the manager's ability to create an environment where subjects such as impairment, health, and accommodation could be discussed in an open manner. One manager said that finding out that a candidate was disabled after the hiring point would be negative:

Then I would think, darn, we had a bad interview, since this didn't come to light. Not because there is anything wrong with having some issues, but because I would think I'd done a bad job if I hadn't been able to get to know this person to that degree before she was hired. (Interview 24 – called in both candidates)

In this quote, the interviewee demonstrates an understanding of how the disclosure process and the relationship between disability and the work outcome are a product of not only the person but also the applicant–employer relationship. Thus, the responsibility is shared rather than placed solely on the disabled jobseeker.

Hence, the employers' disability perspective serves as a mediating aspect of the consequences of disclosure. For a disabled applicant, disclosing a disability to an employer with a relational perspective could entail positive consequences in the form of accommodation, while disclosing to an employer with a medical perspective could result in rejection and discrimination or a strong expectation to present a positive front that involves downplaying the impact of the disability.

## 5. Discussion

The findings in this article illuminate the employer perspective on identity management strategies that can be used by disabled jobseekers and how employers see disclosure as a balancing act between appearing candid and displaying competence. The employers demonstrate a stronger sense of requiring disclosure when it comes to visible impairments, expecting earlier disclosure in such cases than in those involving mental health conditions. While visible impairments are regarded as something that is more public, mental health is considered more private and inappropriate to share with someone you do not know. Therefore, the conundrum is also reflected on the other side of the employer–employee relationship in how the employer wants the information to be disclosed, but that revealing too much demonstrates

a lack of social skills, which negatively impacts the candidate's display of competence. The differences uncovered illustrate the value of basing research in concrete impairments rather than hypothetical scenarios related to the general concept of disability, which is complicated by its prominent heterogeneity (Dwertmann, 2016).

By using impression management and stigma management as abductive analytical tools, this article sheds light on how employers want disabled people to disclose impairments by presenting candid, positive, and dedicated worker identities, where disability plays a minimal role in their lives. By investigating employer accounts, we gain insight into what kind of world they take for granted, which disabled applicants must simulate to put them at ease (Goffman, 1959). As Goffman (1983: p. 3) argues, social interaction is a 'sustained, intimate coordination of action,' meaning that we strive to help each other achieve a smooth interaction and avoid embarrassment. The findings show that the matter of disclosure does not simply concern whether to disclose or when to disclose but also how this should be done. Disability represents a disruption that can generate surprise and uneasiness, and employers expect disabled jobseekers to assume the responsibility of smoothing this over by using covering and impression management strategies. Employers emphasize the use of assertive strategies accompanied by accenting other identities, and covering appears to be necessary to minimize the impact of their impairment. For mental health conditions, defensive strategies that involve providing external causes are also mentioned.

These findings echo research that indicates the advantages of presenting disability in a favorable light. The adoption of such a strategic approach has been identified in previous literature from the disabled person's perspective (Boucher, 2015; Jans et al., 2012; Kaushansky et al., 2017; Lindsay et al., 2019a; Vickers, 2017), highlighting strategies that are about 'marketing your brand,' being straightforward and positive, and downplaying the impact of the disability by underscoring that it does not affect your ability to do the job. This article shows how strategies are formed in a context where employers' expectations favor these types of strategies. Hence, the disclosure process is in this way ingrained with expectations of presenting a positive narrative, where narrow employer preferences may make it difficult to enter the scene with a more authentic presentation of disability. Boucher (2015) underscores the problematic nature of the imperative to present a positive front

where even those who reach higher echelons in the organization are unable to act authentically in their disabled identity. The consequence of the imperative to downplay the disability is that it contributes to making disabled people virtually invisible and reinforces an impression of inferiority. The findings reported in this article support this point by describing how employers call for presentations of a positive image and the use of strategies that minimize obtrusiveness, creating a narrow selection of acceptable disability presentations. Furthermore, this imperative can lead to a lack of accommodation in addition to taking an emotional toll that impacts employees' work ability (Vickers, 2017).

Interestingly, many of the employers who hold a positive outlook toward inclusion demonstrate what resembles a relational view on disability (Shakespeare, 2014), especially when it comes to mental health conditions. With a relational starting point, they are more open to negotiating the terms of employment with the applicants who they encounter and acknowledge the employers' environmental contribution to creating limitations and opportunities. This finding could mean that employers who demonstrate this view are more comfortable with addressing disruptive information during social interactions with their (potential) employees. How employers understand and frame disability can be influenced by organizational culture (Gignac et al., 2020) and their approach to the leadership role. Research shows that a strong relationship between a leader and an employee, which is built on mutual respect and trust, contributes to the employee's willingness to disclose health information (Westerman et al., 2017). Further, the findings presented in this article support this sentiment in that inclusive leaders see the outcomes of hiring as a result of the mutual relationship that they help create.

A challenge that remains for disabled applicants is that the negotiation of terms of employment and accommodations is expected to take place during the job interview – an arena where their competition may not have any perceived limitations to negotiate. Thus, the negotiation, the impression management strategies, and the covering actions that are expected can possibly reduce the typical focus on more directly job-related topics. Disclosure issues can thus represent a significant disability penalty, hampering employment advancement for disabled people.

These findings have implications for both research and practice. This article sheds light on the

contextual impact of employers on the identity work of minorities in organizations and contributes to the literature on employer perspectives regarding disability disclosure. Employers meet potential employees with certain expectations of what suitable self-presentation entails, and these are particularly powerful in a recruitment setting, as failing to live up to them could impact employment outcomes significantly. These expectations can contribute to making disabled identities disappear, thus demonstrating how identity work is constrained by cultural representations, stigma, and prejudice and how self-representation is a product of not only personal characteristics but also contextual factors. This article's key contribution to the disclosure literature is to highlight these contextual and interpersonal factors that could serve to limit disabled people's self-presentation and job opportunities.

For employers who seek to facilitate inclusive recruitment procedures, a sensitive approach to disclosure is needed. First, drawing on the findings on employers with a relational view, a suitable measure could be to facilitate an organizational approach to disability as a relational phenomenon. This can entail fostering a culture of acceptance toward employees with different impairments (Gelb & Corrigan, 2008) and emphasizing the manager's responsibility of ensuring that the required accommodations work. Although there is potential to build strong relationships following disclosure, it should not be expected nor demanded given the findings that demonstrate how people who disclose their disability are subject to discrimination. Non-disclosure may simply be an act of resistance against undeniable discrimination and oppression (Kanuha, 1999). Instead, employers should give disabled people agency to present their disabled identity and be afforded a wider range of acceptable self-presentation. Employers play a key role in disabled people's success in the labor market. As such, they need to be held accountable to a larger degree for how their expectations and recruitment strategies influence disabled people's access to work and accommodation.

## **Acknowledgments**

The author would like to thank her PhD supervisors Kjetil van der Wel and Janikke Solstad Vedeler for their support and feedback. She also wants to thank researchers, participants and partner institutions involved in the HIRE project.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares having no conflicts of interest.

## Ethical approval

The study has been reviewed and approved in advance by the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (2018/257). In addition, the project passed the evaluation by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, who reviewed the interview guides and consent forms.

## Funding

The research was conducted as a part of the HIRE project at NOVA – Norwegian Social Research, Oslo Metropolitan University, funded by The Research Council of Norway (grant number 273745).

## Informed consent

Either written or verbal informed consent to record, transcribe, analyze, and publish anonymized statements was obtained from all interviewees prior to conducting the interviews.

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## Article 3

Kaja Larsen Østerud (2020). Leading the Way? State Employers' Engagement with a Disability Employment Policy. *Published in Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies 11*, 3–21.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.122196>





# Leading the Way? State Employers' Engagement with a Disability Employment Policy<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*In the literature on labor market integration, there is growing recognition of the importance of employers. This article aims to contribute to this stream of research by investigating state employers' engagement with a soft employment quota launched alongside a wider initiative in Norway, named the Inclusion Dugnad. An initial document analysis showed that only 3.1% of state employers fulfill the quota at the early stage. Analysis of 10 state employer interviews revealed that they appeared to be mostly passive and, to some degree, dismissive of the Inclusion Dugnad. They relied on passive measures where disabled job seekers are expected to actively seek out the employer and not the other way around. The main obstacles to achieving employer engagement seemed to be the apparent lack of disabled applicants and the reported conflict between the goals of the Inclusion Dugnad and the cost-cutting and productivity standards governing the state employer sector.*

## KEYWORDS

*Active labor market policies / disability / employer engagement / employment / labor market integration / public sector*

## Introduction

In labor market policies throughout Europe, the integration of disabled people is a topic that has received significant attention. Driving these policies is the persistent and evident employment gap between people with and without disabilities. In OECD countries, the average employment rate of people with disabilities is 44% (OECD 2010). This is a considerably smaller portion than among the general working-age population which is 75%. In the Nordic countries, a relatively large employment gap persists despite a high general employment rate. Although the exact numbers vary according to how disability is defined, Sweden generally has a smaller gap and Norway has a larger gap (Geiger et al. 2017). In Norway, the numbers are similar to the OECD average, with 43.8% of the disabled population being employed, versus 74% of the general population (Statistics Norway 2019). According to Statistics Norway (2018), a quarter of these unemployed disabled people—that is, 85,000 people—say that they wish to work, but finding work relies not only on willingness but also on opportunity.

Whom employers hire and do not hire has a profound impact on the labor market integration of marginalized groups, including disabled people. In the literature on

<sup>1</sup> You can find this text and its DOI at <https://tidsskrift.dk/njwls/index>.

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active labor market policies (ALMPs), there is a small but growing group of researchers turning their attention to employers and the concept of employer engagement, that is, employer involvement in ALMPs (Bredgaard 2018; Bredgaard and Halkjær 2016; Ingold and Stuart 2015; Martin 2005; van Berkel et al. 2017; van der Aa and van Berkel 2014). This line of research recognizes the fact that any government strategy that aims to include marginalized groups in the labor market ultimately hinges on its ability to engage employers. In the Nordic context, the dominating view of disability is relational and seen to arise from an interaction between the person and their impairment and the barriers they encounter in their environment (Tøssebro 2013). The relational definition recognizes that the disabling effects of the labor market is not only dependent on characteristics of the disabled person but also on how they are evaluated by employers. This is a sentiment echoed in an employer engagement perspective.

This article sets out to contribute to the growing field of employer engagement by investigating how employers relate to disability employment policies, that is, policies aimed at increasing the employment of disabled people. The objective is to look more closely at state employers in Norway and how they engage with the Inclusion Dugnad,<sup>3</sup> a labor market policy launched in Norway in 2018. As earlier research has focused primarily on the private sector or failed to address the differences between sectors, this article sheds light on some of the specific challenges in the public sector. Employer engagement and the typology formulated by Bredgaard (2018) is the guiding framework for the analysis. The research question thus becomes the following: How do state employers in Norway engage with the Inclusion Dugnad at the early policy implementation stage, and what are the potential obstacles to their participation?

## Disability employment policies in Norway

In the last two decades, the integration of disabled people into the labor market has become an issue of increasing importance for governments across Europe. Despite some differences, an OECD report from 2010 points to a considerable convergence of policies (OECD 2010). The report emphasizes a shift from a passive to an active employment-oriented approach, focusing on measures such as antidiscrimination legislation, modified employment quotas, stronger employer incentives, and improved wage subsidies. The Nordic countries are characterized by being generous welfare states providing an important safety net for people with impairments and health issues (Halvorsen et al. 2015). However, there is a solid consensus that maintaining the Nordic model is dependent on active participation from its citizens including work participation for everyone who is capable (Frøyland et al. 2019). Hvinden (2004) points out that there is generally a strong ideal to promote work participation in the Nordic countries, but that there has been a reluctance to enforce formal obligations for employers. Instead, they rely more on voluntary effort and agreements. The Inclusion Dugnad is one of the rarer instances of trying to implement formal obligations, but it

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<sup>3</sup> *Inkluderingsdugnaden* in Norwegian. According to the *Dictionary of the Norwegian Academy*, *dugnad*, a Norwegian word that originated from Old Norse, refers to unpaid voluntary community work and can be translated as ‘help’ or ‘support’. Having a *dugnad* means relying on the voluntary participation of the general community to reach common goals.

still builds on the strong Nordic norm of active citizenship through work participation (Frøyland et al. 2019).

The Inclusion Dugnad is an initiative that is related to other disability employment policy trends in Norway targeting employers. In 2008, the first antidiscrimination law for disabled people was implemented, banning discrimination in recruitment. In addition, the government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2013. In 2001, the government set in motion the Inclusive Working Life Agreement (the IA Agreement), which is a tripartite agreement between the authorities, the major trade union confederations, and employer confederations. Until 2018, one of the subgoals of the IA agreement was to prevent labor market withdrawal and increase employment for people with disabilities (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2014). However, when it comes to increasing the employment rate, the results of this agreement have been disappointing; there have been no results to show for the 17 years since its creation (NAV 2017). In the renegotiation of the agreement in the fall of 2018, the parties agreed to remove the subgoal completely. This left the Inclusion Dugnad as the only national public initiative that encourages employers to commit to including disabled people.

The Inclusion Dugnad initiative was launched in 2018 by the Norwegian government with a key goal of promoting employment for disabled people. In this inclusion initiative, the government wants to instill the *dugnad* spirit in employers and motivate them to contribute to labor market integration by hiring people with disabilities or with CV gaps of at least two years. The Inclusion Dugnad is both a persuasion strategy and a regulation strategy. The persuasion strategy is a motivational campaign urging Norwegian employers to consider the importance of labor market integration for people from marginalized groups while addressing the need for employers to contribute. This soft persuasion approach, which is aimed at every employer in Norway, is paired with a regulatory approach for state employer, that is, a quota. ‘The State shall lead the way in the effort to include more people’ were the words of the Minister of Local Government and Modernization when launching the quota, urging state employers to be role models for all Norwegian employers (Ministry of Local Government and Modernization 2018). The quota commits state employers to ensure that at least 5% of new hires are disabled or have a CV gap of at least two years. In the circular sent out to state employers about the quota, an instance of hiring a disabled person is counted if the applicant ticks the disability box in the job application portal, or if a new hire communicates that they have a disability that will require accommodations. The Inclusion Dugnad is a legislative obligation for state employers, but it is not backed by sanctions. Even though it is a rare instance of a formal obligation or quota in the Nordic setting, the lack of any sanctions is in line with previous trends in Nordic disability employment policies, where there has been a reluctance to enforce regulations with supervision, control, and sanctions, even when applied to the state itself (Hvinden 2004).

## Theoretical background

The angle from which we approach labor market integration issues has consequences for how we construct the problem and therefore the solutions. The concept of employer engagement has arisen as a reaction to an arguably one-sided approach to ALMPs. The





literature describes three main approaches to ALMPs: a supply-side, demand-side, and a matching or support-side approach (Bredgaard and Thomsen 2018; Frøyland et al. 2018). A focus on the supply side means improving the qualifications and employability of the job seeker for the labor market. In addition, it can mean focusing on incentivizing work participation by enforcing stricter eligibility criteria for disability benefits and implementing activation measures backed by sanctions. In contrast, a demand-side approach means focusing on influencing the employer's willingness to train, hire, or guide the unemployed person (van der Aa and van Berkel 2014). The third approach can be described as a combination of the supply and demand sides, as the aim is to match labor supply (job seekers) and labor demand (employers) (Bredgaard 2018). The support-side approach systematically utilizes ordinary workplaces based on the notion of 'place then train', and the most notable programs within this approach are Supported Employment and Individual Placement and Support (Frøyland et al. 2019).

Within ALMPs, there has been a clear emphasis on supply-side policies (Bredgaard and Halkjær 2016; van Berkel et al. 2017) to the degree that some call it supply-side fundamentalism (Peck and Theodore 2000). This can be linked to a trend in Western societies where long-term unemployment is seen as a result of personal shortcomings (Hobbins 2016). One major problem with a one-sided focus on supply is that it is based on a conception of unemployment as a personal responsibility and contributes to the stigma against people who are already in a vulnerable position (Salognon 2007). Furthermore, it has been difficult to produce convincing results of supply-side policies (Kluve 2010). Therefore, the supply-side domination in social policy has been challenged.

A concept that is suited to the task of challenging this is employer engagement. This can be defined as 'the active involvement of employers in addressing the societal challenge of promoting the labor market participation of vulnerable groups' (van Berkel et al. 2017, 503). Van Berkel et al. (2017) point to the paradox that ALMPs have mainly been treated as a social and public policy issue, and they argue that they should also be treated as an Human Resource Management policy issue. Despite employers being the target of many ALMPs, little systematic attention has been paid to their role (Strindlund et al. 2018). Thus, the involvement of employers in ALMPs remains an under-researched and under-theorized issue (Bredgaard and Halkjær 2016). The concept of employer engagement does, however, make an important contribution to the increasing efforts to remedy this deficiency. Ingold and Stuart (2015) state that the concept turns on its head the supply-side ideology underpinning many ALMPs, whereby unemployment is seen as a problem with the individual. Instead of thinking that jobs are available only if people can be persuaded to take them, it can be said that jobs are available only if employers can be persuaded to offer them. There is, however, no unified understanding of employer engagement as of yet, and in the policy literature, terms such as 'employer involvement' and 'employer participation' have been used interchangeably (van Berkel et al. 2017).

Some attempts have been made to separate and categorize employers' engagement on the basis of their participating behavior and attitudes (Bredgaard 2018; Martin 2004, 2005; Nelson 2012) and on their motivation for participating in ALMPs (Bredgaard and Halkjær 2016; Orton et al. 2019; van der Aa and van Berkel 2014). Others use employer engagement to describe the activities of providers (public employment services or external job agents) to get employers involved in ALMPs (Aksnes 2019; Ingold and Stuart 2015). This article is concerned with employers' behavior and attitudes because the aim is to investigate the employer side of both participation and nonparticipation.



Many of the attempts to categorize employers tend to conflate attitudes and behavior, and to counter this, Bredgaard (2018) presents a typology that clearly separates the two dimensions. Based on either nonparticipation or participation and positive or negative attitudes toward ALMPs, Bredgaard creates a typology of four different employers: the committed, the dismissive, the skeptical, and the passive (see Table 1). The committed employer participates and has a positive attitude, and at the other end of the spectrum, the dismissive employer has a negative attitude and does not participate. The passive employer has a positive attitude but does not participate, and the skeptical employer participates but has a negative attitude.

**Table 1** The employer engagement typology by Bredgaard (2018)

	<b>Nonparticipation</b>	<b>Participation</b>
<b>Positive attitudes</b>	The passive employer	The committed employer
<b>Negative attitudes</b>	The dismissive employer	The skeptical employer

This typology is the framework utilized in analyzing this study, and it is done by looking at the dimensions of attitudes and behavior vis-à-vis hiring disabled people.

The potential obstacles for employers' engagement with a disability policy must be understood in relation to conceptions of disability. In disability studies, there is an emphasis on how ableist norms, that is, norms that perpetuate a normative nonimpaired standard body as the fully human state (Campbell 2008), disadvantages the disabled person in the labor market. Foster and Wass (2013) point to the ideals of efficiency and standardization as an obstacle to labor market integration and maintain that modern jobs are organized around ableist assumptions regarding what constitutes an ideal worker. When jobs are designed for people without any impairments, accommodating disabled workers is an unexpected hassle. A study by Mik-Meyer (2017) complements this argument in an interesting way. Mik-Meyer, who studied employers in a Danish context, highlights to how the highly praised values of sameness and equality in Scandinavia reinforce the idea that all employees are the same and, thus, must be treated as such, making it difficult for people who are in need of special accommodation. Jammaers et al. (2016) shed light on the pervasiveness of negative representations of disabled workers, especially around the assumption of lower productivity. They point out the contradictory position of disabled people in the workplace; as disabled, they are defined by what they are not able to do, and at the same time, as employees, they are hired for what they are able to do.

Assumptions about productivity and what disabled people can do is an important aspect to consider in the context of state employer hiring processes. The administrative apparatus in Nordic countries is characterized by merit-based bureaucratic professionalism and by openness and transparency (Greve et al. 2016). This is evident in the strict hiring regulations the public sector is made to follow. A central regulation is the qualification principle. This principle in the Norwegian Civil Service Law states that the highest-qualified applicant must get the job (Civil Service Law § 3). Hiring decisions are made in this context, emphasizing a merit-based norm possibly based around assumptions about competence and productivity. Civil Service Law § 6 does, however, permit moderate affirmative action, whereby a disabled applicant can be favored over another if the former's



qualifications are approximately equal to those of the other best-qualified candidate. In addition, they are obliged to invite applicants who tick the box to an interview in case they find him or her qualified for the job (Civil Service Law § 6).

Traditionally, disabled people have seen the public sector as more attractive than the private sector because the former implicitly challenges the productivity models associated with work controlled by market mechanisms (Roulstone 2012). However, with strong influence from New Public Management (NPM), the public productivity models seem to converge with those in the private sector, emphasizing cost cutting, efficiency, and discipline in resource use (Boston 2011). NPM norms of cost-cutting are present in the Norwegian sample through a recent efficiency reform. In 2015, The Norwegian government implemented a de-bureaucratization and efficiency reform throughout the state enterprises for which the goal was to increase productivity while using fewer financial resources, matching the productivity growth that is seen in the private sector (Ministry of Finance 2019). The goal was set to cut budgets for state enterprises by around 0.5% a year, forcing them to make incremental cuts every year. Cost-cutting reforms influence hiring practices and, therefore, also possibly employer engagement. Another aspect is also an increasing lack of unskilled work tasks in the public sector. Research indicates that there are large disparities in employment between disabled and nondisabled workers and that disabled people tend to be overrepresented in entry-level positions that do not emphasize job skills (Kaye 2009). This could mean that mechanisms that make it harder for disabled people to access skill-demanding positions will be extra potent with state employers primarily seeking high-skilled workers. Earlier research on employer engagement has focused mainly on employers in the private sector or has not highlighted any differences between sectors. For example, contributions such as Aksnes (2019); Ingold and Stuart (2015); Martin (2005) focus on private sector employers, while others, such as Bredgaard (2018) and Simms (2017), include both private and public employers, without differences being specifically addressed. Therefore, this article complements the current body of research by addressing and examining some of the specific challenges state employers in the Nordic public sector face, a sector expected to be particularly inclusive.

## Methods

The main choice of method to explore the state employers' relationship with the Inclusion Dugnad was qualitative and was based on state employer interviews. The interviewees were recruited by searching job advertisements in the major online job databases, nav.no and finn.no. The criteria for participation were that they had recently advertised a vacancy in order to reach employers recently involved in hiring. They were contacted by the e-mail or phone listed in the job ad to request their voluntary participation. In total, 27 state enterprises were contacted. Eventually, 12 people from 10 different state employers agreed to be interviewed; this means that some interviews were done with two people at the same time. Semi-structured interviews were carried out between January and March 2019. The employers were located in the Oslo area. One interviewee was recruited strategically based on their involvement in a specific trainee program targeting disabled job seekers. This was done in order to make sure that employers involved in the actual hiring of disabled people were also represented. The interviewees were either middle-level hiring managers or human resource (HR) personnel working in recruitment

(four HR employees and eight hiring managers). Both HR personnel and hiring managers play important roles in recruitment strategies, but they serve different functions and access different resources. Ensuring that both roles were represented in the interviews provided insights from both points of view. The advertisements were for jobs that demanded a bachelor's degree at a minimum; some demanded a master's degree. The positions were within subjects such as IT, law, policy development, and communications within public administration. All the interviewees came from the central government. Four interviewees were from government ministries, and the remainder were from central agencies or the higher education system. All the enterprises can be described as knowledge-intensive organizations, where the work is of a primarily intellectual nature and the employees are highly educated (Alvesson 2001). Apart from some IT jobs, the positions in question are part of a very competitive labor market, and the interviewees stated that they typically had many qualified candidates from whom to choose.

In the interviews, the participants were asked to describe their recruitment practices and how they related these to the 5% goal, with an emphasis on disabled job seekers. They were also asked about their experience with an impression of disabled people as employees and whether they had any experience using the public employment service. The longest interview lasted 1 hour and 8 minutes and the shortest 35 minutes, with an average of 49 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Table 2 lists all participants; the names provided are pseudonyms to ensure the interviewees' anonymity.

**Table 2** Overview over participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Participant number</b>	<b>Enterprise</b>	<b>Level in public administration</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Male/female</b>
<b>Christian</b>	Participant 1	Enterprise 1	Public higher education organization	Manager	M
<b>Monica</b>	Participant 2	Enterprise 2	Central agency	Manager	F
<b>Rune</b>	Participant 3	Enterprise 2	Central agency	HR	M
<b>Marianne</b>	Participant 4	Enterprise 3	Central agency	Manager	F
<b>Eva</b>	Participant 5	Enterprise 4	Central agency	Manager	F
<b>Eric</b>	Participant 6	Enterprise 5	Ministry	HR	M
<b>Roger</b>	Participant 7	Enterprise 6	Ministry	HR	M
<b>Robert</b>	Participant 8	Enterprise 7	Central agency	Manager	M
<b>Astrid</b>	Participant 9	Enterprise 8	Central agency	Manager	F
<b>Thomas</b>	Participant 10	Enterprise 8	Central agency	Manager	M
<b>Anna</b>	Participant 11	Enterprise 9	Ministry	HR	F
<b>Tor</b>	Participant 12	Enterprise 10	Ministry	Manager	M

The method used to guide the analysis was thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). A deductive approach to the material was chosen, using the typology provided by Bredgaard (2018) as a starting point, and the codes and themes that were developed were semantic rather than latent. The framework provided a flexible analysis along the two axes of attitudes and participation. The two dimensions served as a basic set

of codes based on an a priori theoretical understanding of engagement. The interviews were coded in NVivo line by line in each of these dimensions when relevant, and subcategories were identified and eventually themed.

To complement the qualitative interview material with a broader perspective, the quota fulfillment reported by all the state employers was investigated. In order to do this, the state enterprises' annual reports in which they are required to provide information about the quota were analyzed. All state employers are required to publish an annual report concerning the enterprise, where they report on key issues, such as finance, accomplishments, and prospects. These annual reports were published in May 2019 and related to the year 2018, and the full analysis was done after conducting and analyzing the interviews. The Inclusion Dugnad is one issue on which they are obliged to report, and they must describe both what they have done to reach the target of 5% and the number of hires who fit the criteria. A total of 161 annual reports were found and read. Only five reports were unavailable on the enterprises' own webpages. The reports were analyzed by counting frequencies. First, the frequency of mentioning the quota and reporting the quota fulfilled was counted. Second, the reasons given for not fulfilling the quota was listed and eventually categorized in order to calculate frequencies. Table 3 summarizes the data sources. In the following section, findings from the document analysis will be presented first. The annual reports provide a background of the general picture of all state employers before delving deeper into the specific findings based on the interview material.

**Table 3** Summary of data sources

	<b>Total number</b>	<b>Time period</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
<b>Annual reports</b>	161	A report on the year 2018, published May 2019	Frequency counts
<b>Interviews</b>	10	Conducted January-March 2019	Thematic analysis

## Findings

### Annual reports

The reading of the reports revealed that very few of the state enterprises fulfilled the quota goal (see Table 4). Only 3.1% of the enterprises reported that 5% of new hires either had a disability or had a two-year CV gap.

**Table 4** Enterprises mentioning and fulfilling the 5% quota. N = 161

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Enterprises reporting quota fulfilled</b>	5	3.1
<b>Enterprises mentioning the quota</b>	119	73.9

We must keep in mind that this is based only on the period from July to December 2018 and the early implementation stage. Therefore, it is interesting to look at the reasons given for not reaching the target. Among the 119 enterprises that mentioned the

quota but had not reached it, many gave reasons for not being able to fulfill it. Table 5 lists the most common reasons: (1) They had few or no vacancies, making hiring opportunities scarce; (2) they lacked applicants with a disability or CV gap; and (3) the applicants who disclosed a disability or a CV gap lacked the qualifications to compete with other applicants. Other less common reasons were that they required highly specialized personnel, that personnel needed health approval, or that they had been through organizational restructuring and downsizing.

**Table 5** The three most common reasons given in the annual reports. The percentages reflect the proportion of enterprises that address the quota in the report but were not able to fulfill it. N = 114

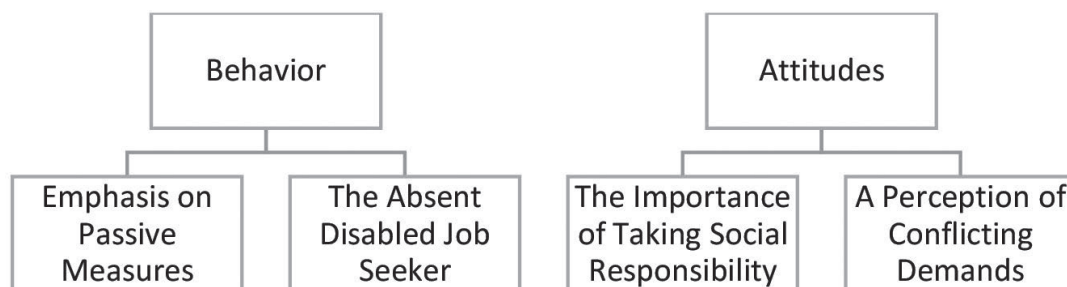
Reasons for not fulfilling the quota	Number	%
<b>Few/no vacancies</b>	31	27.19
<b>Lack of applicants</b>	29	25.4
<b>Lack of qualifications among applicants</b>	26	22.8

### Interviews

Using the Bredgaard (2018) typology to categorize the interviewed employers, it was found that the typical state employer in the sample was the passive type—that is, an employer with a positive general attitude but with little or no actual inclusive hiring behavior. Six of the ten employer representatives fit this type. The dismissive type also fit some of the interviewees, but to a lesser degree; three of the employer representatives matched this particular type. Only one of the 10 employers fit the committed type, having recently hired a disabled person. None fit the skeptical type.

The central analysis for the interviews was, however, the thematic analysis of the interview material, aiming to uncover what was below the surface of the categorization, drawing on the two dimensions in Bredgaard’s (2018) typology—behavior and attitudes. The coding of the data and the careful development and review of possible themes ended in two pairs of themes within each dimension or four themes in total (see Figure 1). Within the behavior dimension the themes, (1) emphasis on passive measures and (2) the absent disabled worker were identified, and within the attitude dimension, the themes (3) the importance of taking social responsibility and (4) a perception of conflicting demands. The themes reflect broad topics represented across the different interviews.

**Figure 1** The four themes linked to the two dimensions of the employer engagement typology.





## Behavior

The coded statements on the behavior dimension are concerned with topics related to concrete actions taken to meet the demands of the Inclusion Dugnad or the lack thereof. The analysis resulted in one theme about the clear focus on measures that are passive, emphasizing the job seeker, and not the employer taking the active role, and one about a recurring problem that arises regarding their main efforts, the absent disabled job seeker.

### Emphasis on passive measures

All the interviewees mentioned passive measures that were implemented in order to hire people with disabilities, and they stood out as the main approach to increase hiring. One of these was putting an inclusion statement in their job ads that encouraged people from multiple underrepresented groups, among them people with disabilities, to apply for the positions. It became clear that they saw these as phrases that they were obliged to put in their ads and that many of the recruiting leaders felt little ownership toward them. As one manager stated:

The fact that we have those mandatory two to three sentences at the bottom of every ad, where we encourage people with a foreign background or a disability to apply, may not be enough. Because it becomes one of those standard phrases that is in every ad because it has to be there. So, I guess we could be more proactive toward that group of job seekers. (Thomas, manager)

The inclusion statements appear to have become a standard component of all job advertisements across different state enterprises, and the HR line was mentioned as a driving force behind the enforcement of this rule. In addition to these statements, a key element of the passive strategy is the opportunity for the disabled job seeker to tick a box asking whether they have any impairment. This is a feature in the job application portal that all state managers use in their recruitment processes. A manager, explained:

We are part of the public system, and the fact that we have provided the opportunity to tick the box ... that you have parameters like this as an opportunity ... I think is a part of what we do to make this group visible and raise awareness in the recruitment process. That is the most specific thing we do, I think. (Eva, manager)

The interviewees pointed to this as an opportunity to consider the disabled applicants more fairly, and many stated that they followed the regulation in the Norwegian Civil Service Law obliging them to always invite qualified applicants who tick the disability box. Some of the interviewees acknowledged the possibility for moderate affirmative action, but none claimed to have actually taken part in an ordinary recruitment process whereby they hired someone who ticked the box. The interviewees also pointed to this box-ticking exercise as a control mechanism, explaining that they were expected to provide a written justification for not calling in a disabled applicant for an interview. Together, the inclusion statements and the disability box represent a strategy whereby the employers expect the disabled job seekers to actively seek out the employer and not



the other way around. Disabled applicants are expected to compete for vacant jobs in the same way as everybody else.

There is one exception to this pattern; one interviewee, an HR representative, was recently actively engaged in the state trainee program for disabled people with higher education. This is a program in which state employers can take part that is exclusively for disabled applicants and lasts for a two-year period. The employer had used this as an active recruitment strategy, and the latest candidate to complete the program had recently applied for and obtained a permanent position in the organization.

### **The absent disabled job seeker**

An issue related to employers expecting disabled applicants to come forward in order to hire more of them is the fact that all the interviewees stated that the number of applicants ticking the disability box was miniscule. One interviewee stated:

Well, how often? I don't know. We do make a note of the numbers—at least a minor review. Shall we see ... The applicants themselves tick the box. Yes, you know, in 2017, out of 1,829 applicants, 13 applicants disclosed a disability. To then find qualified people in such a small group, it is not very easy. (Roger, HR representative)

This seems like a typical experience across the interviews. The interviewees stated that their experiences with disabled job seekers were very limited because they very rarely applied, at least with an openness about their disability. None of the managers had hired someone who was disabled at the hiring point. In addition, there was a general lack of experience with disabled coworkers. When asked about the diversity in their organization, the interviewees responded quickly with concerns about gender and ethnicity, while disability was not mentioned unless asked about specifically. It seems disabled people were not usually at the forefront of their minds. They simply were not present to them, which may contribute to the feeling that efforts to include disabled people do not seem relevant. This issue may be connected to what they perceive a disabled person to be, but the fact remains that they struggle to find them in their stack of applications.

Seen next to each other, the two themes paint an interesting picture. If less than 1% of the applicants tick the disability box, and the main strategy for state employers is the use of the abovementioned passive measures, it is difficult to see how they can ever reach their 5% goal.

### **Attitudes**

The statements coded in the attitude dimension revolve around how the employers feel about and evaluate the Inclusion Dugnad. Are they hopeful about its fruition, or do they find it difficult? Do they believe that the goals are important? The first theme is about how the employers feel about the importance of taking social responsibility by hiring disabled people. The second concerns how they feel that several different demands tug at them, and that this makes it difficult to achieve all the objectives and rules they are required to achieve and follow.



## The importance of taking social responsibility

In all the interviews, the managers and HR representatives pointed to various reasons why it was important to include disabled people in the workforce. They mentioned gains at different levels—for the individual, the organization, and the society. When asked what they thought of the Inclusion Dugnad, they quickly responded by referring to their responsibilities as employers, and they mentioned concerns about the importance of labor market integration for both the economy and for people struggling to gain access. Many expressed sympathies with the plight of the unemployed disabled person:

It's a great thing that they are focusing on this. It's a big challenge that many disabled people want to work, but are still jobless. (Eva, manager)

A consistent finding was that many interviewees regarded their positions as state employers as special. They recognized that they were in a different position from smaller and privately owned companies and that this meant that they had additional responsibilities.

I'm just thinking, it is positive that the state does have the right conditions. We actually do have the opportunity to help people. We do. We can take one, we can spend resources on helping people into the labor market ... we absolutely can. (Robert, manager)

This shows some willingness to see the opportunities as state employers within their organizations as not being too concerned with the bottom line. Many of them also pointed to this initiative being highly marketed by top politicians, including the prime minister, which brings loyalty to the political leadership governing public administration into the mix. There seems to be a clear recognition of the gains at the individual and societal levels, but what is lacking is the recognition of gains at the meso level—that is, for the organization. The meso level does, however, become more apparent in the following theme.

## A perception of conflicting demands

Despite the positive perspectives on the virtues of taking social responsibility, many of the interviewees showed ambivalence when referring to what they perceived as conflicting demands. They stated that although the Inclusion Dugnad looks nice on paper, their realities and practical demands made it difficult to put it into practice. The interviewees raised three major concerns in this regard: the demand for highly qualified people, the demand for an efficient and reliable public administration, and the scarcity of resources. When these concerns were brought up, they were presented as issues that clearly conflicted with the Inclusion Dugnad. An HR representative said:

We do see that the middle managers want the best-qualified people. All other guidelines may be seen as just disturbing elements. The ministry has strict demands on delivering high-quality work, we want the best people, and then we have this additional demand to take particular groups of people into consideration. From a managerial point of view, this may be seen as a conflict. (Roger, HR representative)



When it comes to concerns about qualifications, many of the employers pointed to the qualification principle. They argued that this was in direct conflict with the work inclusion goals:

I think most enterprises will think the way we do. We have a government broadcasting a goal, giving some guidelines, you know. Then they need to adjust this qualification demand I mentioned. It is clearly stated by law that we must hire the best-qualified candidate. If you have said A, you must also say B. I think most enterprises will struggle with this. (Rune, HR representative)

As mentioned earlier, there is some leeway with regard to favoring a disabled candidate if he or she has qualifications that are approximately equal to those of the best-qualified candidate, but the employers say that the qualifications that they see on applications from disabled candidates are far from being approximately equal. The rigid recruitment system seems to have been rigged to find only certain types of candidates. The hiring regulations for state enterprises were described by the interviewees as highly standardized and bureaucratized. This is evident starting from appeals to advertise a vacancy all the way to the actual hiring. All decisions must be thoroughly documented and are subject to review by hiring committees. There is little room for creativity and individualization in defining job roles, and all candidates must be evaluated on what they believe to be objective criteria. At the same time, these state jobs are highly sought after, and almost all the interviewees described a situation in which they could pick and choose from a large group of qualified applicants, making the competition tough.

The second concern—efficiency—was a strong finding across the interviews, and it was raised frequently by the interviewees. They pointed to high demands coming from the top to be productive and efficient, meet deadlines, and deliver on a variety of responsibilities. Trying to integrate candidates who are not efficient was seen as a significant burden, and having a disability was equated with the risk of being unproductive. This point was highlighted by this manager:

We are dependent on highly competent, functional people here to get the job done. In my experience, it's quite a big burden getting people who are not functional at all. Because they use up resources. And even when we are aware of it and do try, it can be quite exhausting. We do have scarce resources here. We have a lot of public projects we must complete, and then I would think, as a leader, that I need someone with a full mental capacity. (Monica, manager)

In this quote, we see an embedded fear that disabled people do not have the same work capabilities or mental capacity as everyone else, and for this manager, this seems irreconcilable with the high productivity demands. In addition, she perceived a scarcity of personnel resources, adding to the experienced conflict.

Many of the more critical employers mentioned a feeling of conflict induced by being asked to cut costs at one end but expand to ensure inclusive hiring at the other. The interviewees pointed to the pressure to make cuts and use fewer resources. They point to the bureaucratization and efficiency reform, and how they feel that the cuts they had to make reduced the opportunity to hire new people, creating a feeling of scarcity. One manager stated:



I do believe that it is the right thing to do, but they may need to manage the funding schemes behind it and not make incremental cuts in all state enterprises with one hand and make you take on this responsibility while cutting even more with the other. But working as a part of the public administration, it is a part of my job to not express my political opinions. I just have to follow the guidelines given to me. (Christian, manager)

For some of the interviewees, this pressure to cut costs was experienced as conflicting with inclusion goals. They stated that they found that the two messages—to cut costs and be inclusive—pulled in opposite directions. An interesting finding is that many did not see wage subsidies as really addressing their concerns about resources. Being state employers, their emphasis was less on concrete salary costs and more on the fact that a great deal of their success hinges on making successful hires. A wrong hire that does not deliver what he or she is supposed to do costs money. However, the most visible cost is that it takes a greater toll on his or her colleagues, who have to do more on top of their already busy workloads, as well as on the managers, who have to spend time supervising and attempting to find solutions to enable them to achieve their goals with less manpower than expected. Being managers in a country with high job security, the interviewees stated that they wanted to avoid the risk of being stuck for years with someone who could not reliably do his or her job, and a temporary wage subsidy did not do much to lessen this concern.

## Discussion

The point of departure for this study was the research question: How do state employers in Norway engage with the Inclusion Dugnad in an early policy implementation stage, and what are the potential obstacles to their participation? Looking at the numbers from the annual reports, paired with the interviews, we can see that the employers typically took a passive stance. The big picture is that in this early stage of policy implementation, very few active measures are being implemented, and the attitudes toward the Inclusion Dugnad are mixed. Looking below the surface of categorization, the findings indicate that classifying employers as having positive or negative attitudes can be challenging because they often display both. Within the passive category, there seem to be at least two different types of employers. The first is characterized primarily by a lack of knowledge of both the policy itself and of the possible measures that are available to them. This can be called the ‘passive/unknowing’ type. The other type is characterized primarily by ambivalence. This employer would like to contribute but feels that this is impossible, given the conflicting demands. This type of employer can be called the ‘passive/ambivalent’ type. Converting the passive employer into a committed one is a central goal of demand-side ALMPs. For these two types of passive employers, the methods of achieving this may differ. For the unknowing, concrete information is key, while for the ambivalent, measures that take other demands into consideration must be implemented in order for them to feel that they are relevant.

The four identified themes highlight some of the important challenges in the effort to improve labor market integration for people with disabilities. One clear obstacle is problems connected to finding suitable candidates in the labor market and the issues

regarding the strategy of disability box ticking. Even when there are applicants reporting a disability in keeping with the intention of this inclusion measure, will employers judge them fairly? A number of field experiments in which fictitious applications are sent out to real jobs for which a disabled applicant is compared to an equally qualified nondisabled applicant demonstrate that this may not be the case. The overview by Baert (2018) points to eight studies showing that signaling a disability on the application reduces the likelihood of receiving a callback. Studies such as these even make the strategy seem counterproductive. However, there is research to indicate that the formalized recruitment procedures in the public sector seem to work against direct discrimination of minorities (Midtbøen 2015). Setting aside the pitfalls of identification in terms of discrimination, there is also the important issue that people with a disability may not identify as such and may be reluctant to signal it. In 2003, a UK government-funded research project revealed that only half of the respondents who qualified as disabled according to the Disability Discrimination Act considered themselves disabled (Grewal et al. 2003). Ticking a box means being comfortable with assigning a label to themselves and making this a part of their often already vulnerable position of a job seeker. The refusal to tick the box can be a refusal to allow their health condition to dominate their lives and define them, and they choose to view themselves as inherently normal instead (Shakespeare 2014). Thus, with a lack of disclosing candidates, the advantages the formalized recruitment procedures could give become less significant.

Another major obstacle seems to be the strong norm of efficiency and productivity that seems to threaten inclusion efforts. The interviewees saw this as a concern that overpowered others, and they were preoccupied with getting the job done, working fast, and delivering high-quality work, all while being asked to cut down on the total number of employees. The findings demonstrate the influence of NPM, managerialism, and neoliberal reforms, echoing the argument of Foster and Wass (2013) about how of ableism combined with productivist theories in the labor market threaten disabled people's opportunities. Norway is in second place among the OECD countries when it comes to GDP per hour worked (OECD 2019), making Norwegian working life one that highlights efficiency in general. Interestingly, the findings of the present study suggest that the difference between the public and the private sector in terms of productivity focus is becoming difficult to discern. NPM ideas have intensified an emphasis on eliminating slack in the Norwegian public sector, demonstrated by the mentioned de-bureaucratization and efficiency reform. With reforms such as these, the difference between private and public sectors is downplayed and the productivist theories often associated more strongly with the private sector becomes influential. State employers may not focus on the bottom line in the same way as private employers, but there are clear expectations in terms of maximizing productivity.

Inclusion efforts may thus be translated into prioritizing their own employees because it makes more sense to them to spend resources on people in whom they have already invested. Giving a high priority to existing employees who acquire impairments or health issues and not focusing on recruitment is echoed by the interviewees in the present study and has been found in other studies (Ingebrigtsen and Moe 2015; Kuznetsova and Yalcin 2017). It is possible that the highly efficient and competence-demanding working life in the Nordic public sector comes with a price, making less room for people who do not immediately coincide with the managers' concepts of the



ideal worker. In a working life with a high focus on productivity and standardization, making room for the nonstandard worker may represent an unexpected and undesirable effort. Thus, ableist assumptions about productivity become especially potent in an environment that strongly highlights efficiency. Paradoxically, the productivity norm that demands that disabled people seek employment and do not rely on welfare transfers becomes a double-edged sword. This is because it also acts as a barrier when the disabled person meets the rational logic in the organization that makes employers avoid assumed threats to productivity.

This article is concerned with employer engagement in the implementation stage of the disability employment policy. However, a limitation to the study is that there was a short amount of time from when the policy was set in action to conducting the interviews and the analysis of the annual reports. This study is therefore not suited to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy. Instead, it points to potential problems that should be addressed in order to reach the 5% goal. First, the matching issues, or the lack of relevant applicants, must be dealt with. Disabled people should be more easily linked to potential employers, making it easier for them to seek inclusive organizations and for organizations to find disabled candidates. Targeted programs, such as the aforementioned trainee program for state employers, is one example of a relevant measure. An approach like this may alleviate some of the matching problems by making it safe to disclose a disability. This would constitute what Osman and Thunborg (2019) calls a strategic recruitment practice, whereby the employer steps aside from the standard recruitment practices in order to enhance diversity. Furthermore, to provide employers with financial and practical support and reduce the perception of risk, a support-side approach may be promising (Frøyland et al. 2019). This approach has demonstrated that it is possible to challenge the demand-driven labor market as a given premise and intervene in the organization, altering and reshaping employer attitudes toward marginalized groups (Frøyland et al. 2018). Inclusion initiatives must accomplish the balancing act of making it feel safe to disclose a disability in addition to making it seem safe for the employer to hire a disabled person.

## Conclusion

In the present study, the Norwegian state employers demonstrated a clear passiveness toward the Inclusion Dugnad and did not display high levels of employer engagement toward this policy. Although many of the interviewed employers talked about the importance of an inclusive working life into which marginalized groups are given an opportunity to enter, they found it difficult to make this discourse a practical reality for disabled people. The two main obstacles were the apparent lack of disabled applicants and the reported conflict between the goals of the Inclusion Dugnad and the cost-cutting and productivity standards governing the state employer sector. These NPM-inspired productivist norms act as a barrier to employment entry for disabled people because employers are forced to question disabled peoples' productivity. Thus, the Inclusion Dugnad and the prevalent productivist norms represent competing discourses the managers find hard to resolve, making it difficult for state employers to lead the way in this disability employment policy.

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## Article 4

Kaja Larsen Østerud and Janikke S. Vedeler (2022). Disability and Regulatory Approaches to Employer Engagement: Cross-National Challenges in Bridging the Gap Between Motivation and Hiring Practice. *Published in Social Policy and Society*.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746422000021>



# Disability and Regulatory Approaches to Employer Engagement: Cross-National Challenges in Bridging the Gap between Motivation and Hiring Practice

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*This article examines why employers struggle to include disability as part of their active diversity approach. Drawing on cross-national interview data from Norway and the USA, we point to the common finding of employers – who are the target of regulatory disability employment policies – typically falling into the passive employer category of employer engagement, with positive attitudes but negative hiring behaviour. As a partial explanation, we demonstrate the difficulty of identifying and demographically monitoring disabled people among job seekers and employees. We argue that these problems are linked to unique aspects of disability as a diversity category, and tie these to the significance of disability heterogeneity, lack of disclosure and the difficulty of acquiring information related to health. We conclude that organisations need to go beyond mere legislative compliance and be more proactive towards disability as a distinct diversity category.*

**Keywords:** Employer engagement, disability, hiring.

## Introduction

Worldwide, there is a considerable employment gap between disabled people and the general population. To counter barriers to employment, nations have implemented employment policies intended to increase the hiring of disabled people (OECD, 2010). However, policy initiatives often fail to have a clear impact on closing the employment gap (Geiger *et al.*, 2017). A growing stream of research in social policy points to the need to understand how employment policies are translated into practice by organisational actors, using the concept of employer engagement (van Berkel *et al.*, 2017). The term ‘employer engagement’ has been defined as ‘the active involvement of employers in addressing the societal challenge of promoting the labour market participation of vulnerable groups’ (van Berkel *et al.*, 2017: 503). As Bredgaard (2018: 375) argues, an important prerequisite of effective active labour market programmes (ALMPs) and demand-side interventions is developing ‘a more systematic understanding about the preferences and behaviour of different types of employers’. In other words, to be able to inform policy to close the disability employment gap, we must address the motivation and hiring practices of employers. The literature is scarce on the use and implementation of strategies intended to improve the hiring of disabled workers (Gewurtz *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, research indicates that while employers may express positive attitudes towards disability employment policies, they often show negative hiring practices, which means that positive attitudes are not translated into actual hiring (Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen, 2020; Østerud, 2020).

This article explores potential explanations for employers' passive stance and the struggle to integrate disabled people into the labour market by investigating employer accounts from two policy contexts, Norway and the USA. We investigate how employers relate to regulatory disability employment policies, such as anti-discrimination legislation and quotas, in their recruitment practices by drawing on interviews with twenty-three employer representatives from companies that include diversity statements in their job advertisements. More specifically, we examine the issues that arise when disability is treated as a diversity category. We argue that the complexity and heterogeneity of disability contributes to employer passiveness towards disability employment policies. By utilising data from different policy contexts, we aim to identify fundamental issues concerning regulatory disability employment policies, and ask: Why do employers struggle to include disability as part of their active diversity approach? Despite dissimilar policy contexts, can we detect some cross-national commonalities in terms of challenges?

### **Regulatory approaches to employer engagement**

The growing stream of literature on employer engagement draws attention to how the success of policy implementation hinges on engaging employers in inclusive behaviour (van der Aa and van Berkel, 2014; van Berkel *et al.*, 2017). In this article, we focus on what van Berkel (2021) identifies as regulatory approaches to employer engagement, where recruitment is subject to government regulation – for example, through anti-discrimination legislation or quotas. Recruitment and selection practices can constitute a significant barrier to labour market participation for marginalised groups, and this approach seeks to influence hiring practices. Consequently, we understand regulatory approaches to employer engagement as legislative policy measures that force and/or incentivise employers to hire and retain marginalised groups of people. We have chosen to investigate the impact of regulatory approaches on employer engagement in this article because regulatory policies such as anti-discrimination legislation have become widespread in the last two decades, following pressure from disability organisations and supranational bodies (Waldschmidt, 2009; Chhabra, 2021).

How do employers incorporate such rights into their hiring practices? A paradox in research on employer attitudes and hiring practices in relation to disabled people is that employers often express positive attitudes (Burke *et al.*, 2013; Ju *et al.*, 2013) but show negative hiring intentions and behaviour (Baert, 2014; Araten-Bergman, 2016; Ameri *et al.*, 2018; Bellemare *et al.*, 2018; Shamshiri-Petersen and Krogh, 2020; Bjørnshagen and Ugreninov, 2021). Bredgaard (2018) underlines the importance of not conflating behaviour and attitudes, and proposes a model uniting a behavioural and an attitudinal dimension. Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen (2020) have shown that 54 per cent of Danish employer respondents could be classified as 'passive employers', i.e. employers who show positive attitudes towards disabled people but who do not engage in concomitant hiring behaviour. An important goal for research on employer involvement in ALMPs targeting disabled people is to understand what it will take to bridge 'the gap between motivation and participation' (van Berkel, 2021: 545).

## Regulatory policies in Norway and the USA

In this article, we draw on data from two policy contexts, Norway and the USA. Despite decades of social policies intended to increase employment participation, there is still a considerable disability employment gap in both countries. In Norway, 40.6 per cent of the disabled population (aged fifteen to sixty-six years) is employed, versus 73.4 per cent of the general population (Statistics Norway, 2020). In the USA, 33.6 per cent of the disabled population (aged sixteen to sixty-four) is employed, compared to 76 per cent of non-disabled people (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021).

The disability policy approach adopted in the USA can be described as a civil rights approach that focuses on ensuring equal citizenship through the implementation of extensive legislative rights (Drake, 1999). The USA has been a global frontrunner in anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people. The employers interviewed in the USA interact with and must relate to equal employment opportunity policies and regulations that have been in place for decades. This includes the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA), signed into law in 1990. Its Title I on employment makes it 'illegal to discriminate against a qualified person with a disability in the private sector and in state and local governments' (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.: para 5). In addition, federal agencies and contractors are encouraged to take affirmative action and reach specific targets for disabled employees (7 per cent for contractors and 12 per cent for agencies) (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2017).

The policies targeting employers in Norway have primarily relied on voluntary efforts and cooperation between social partners rather than the use of force (Hvinden, 2004). However, there has been a greater willingness in recent years to implement regulatory measures such as anti-discrimination legislation. This legislative shift is the result of international pressure and developments (Tøssebro, 2016; Chhabra, 2021). The *Working Environment Act* was amended in 2004 to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on disability, and the first anti-discrimination law for disabled people was adopted in 2009. For state employers, who are the focus of this article, there is a long-standing commitment to diversity and inclusion. This was reinforced with the launch of the inclusion initiative called the Inclusion Dugnad<sup>1</sup> (inkluderingsdugnaden) with a soft quota for state employers in 2018 that requires at least 5 per cent of all new hires to be disabled or have a CV gap<sup>2</sup>. In order for a new hire to be counted as being disabled, they must have ticked the disability box in the application portal or disclosed after being hired that they have an impairment that requires accommodation. The quota is an obligation, but non-compliance is not sanctioned. The Civil Service Law Section 6 allows for moderate affirmative action, whereby a disabled applicant can be favoured over another if the former's qualifications are approximately equal to those of the next best-qualified candidate. Thus, the Norwegian state sector is subject to multiple regulatory measures relating to disability.

## Disability as a diversity category

The use of regulatory policies is often modelled on regulatory efforts targeting other groups. For example, the ADA was influenced by the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964. However, as a diversity category, disability poses unique challenges (Santuzzi and Waltz, 2016). Dwertmann (2016) points to the heterogeneity of the disability construct as a key challenge for research on the work inclusion of disabled people. While the heterogeneity

of categories such as ethnicity (Agyemang *et al.*, 2005) or age (Kunze *et al.*, 2015) are discussed, the heterogeneity of disability is more pronounced. Disability research has highlighted the conceptual tension between the medical model emphasising impairment as a barrier and the social model emphasising physical and social factors as barriers (Shakespeare, 2014). As the social model has impacted disability research, the contextual element of disability has been widely acknowledged. A contextual understanding is nevertheless based on impairment, and the types of impairment that could lead to disability are diverse. Impairments can be physical, mental, sensory, cognitive, neurological or related to addiction (Stone and Colella, 1996), and there could be large discrepancies within each group in how the impairment manifests and how it is met in terms of stigma and discrimination. Santuzzi *et al.* (2014) argue that invisible impairments are particularly complicated, touching on issues such as disclosure decisions and personal identity. Dwertmann (2016) highlights the challenge of heterogeneity as complicating disability research, and we will show how it may also complicate inclusion practices.

To be effective, a target group of regulatory policies must be identifiable. To decide whether discrimination contributes to underrepresentation of a minority in an organisation, it is common to calculate the demographic make-up of the organisation and monitor its development (Crosby *et al.*, 2005). Reporting employment data of this kind is a way of signalling commitment to diversity (Moore *et al.*, 2017). Demographic monitoring strategies are tied to disability disclosure. However, there are at least two problems linked to identification and disclosure. First, there is the issue of whether people who qualify for legislative protection actually identify as disabled, which is often not the case (Bogart *et al.*, 2017; Chalk *et al.*, 2019). Second, disabled people often have good reason for not wanting to disclose their impairment. Disclosure has been shown to lead to significantly fewer interview invitations in field experiments, illustrating the potential discrimination disabled people risk (Baert, 2014; Baert *et al.*, 2016; Hipes *et al.*, 2016; Ameri *et al.*, 2018; Bjørnshagen, 2021; Bjørnshagen and Ugreninov, 2021). When disabled job seekers find that there is little to gain from disclosure, choosing not to disclose can be seen as an act of resistance against discrimination and oppression (Kanuha, 1999). Furthermore, as disability is linked to impairment, disclosure may also involve disclosure of a health condition (Dwertmann, 2016). This sets disability apart as a diversity category and creates issues relating to what an employer is legally allowed to ask about and incentives to keep impairments private.

Consequently, the heterogeneity of and unique challenges pertaining to disability are important aspects of inclusion. Challenges linked to this heterogeneity may not have been sufficiently addressed in academic literature on regulatory measures or in policy implementation. While disability status unites people in shared experiences of labour market barriers and discrimination (Coleman-Fountain *et al.*, 2017), different impairments may pose different challenges. From the employer perspective, we argue, this heterogeneity could lead to poorer knowledge about the target group and, therefore, prejudiced attitudes and inefficient employment measures. In this article, we understand disability as a relational and situational phenomenon, arising in the interaction between individual and structural factors (Shakespeare, 2014). This understanding allows for a nuanced view on the challenges that arise as people – with different impairments – are targeted by disability employment policies.



Table 1 Overview of Norwegian sample

Interviewee	Enterprise	Position	Gender	Level in public administration	Number of employees
1	1	Manager	Man	Public higher education organisation	501+
2	2	Manager	Woman	Central agency	201-500
3	2	HR	Man	Central agency	201-500
4	3	Manager	Woman	Central agency	201-500
5	4	Manager	Woman	Central agency	501+
6	5	HR	Man	Ministry	101-200
7	6	HR	Man	Ministry	201-500
8	7	Manager	Man	Central agency	101-200
9	8	Manager	Woman	Central agency	501+
10	8	Manager	Man	Central agency	501+
11	9	HR	Woman	Ministry	101-200
12	10	Manager	Man	Ministry	201-500

## Method

To gain insight into employer understandings of disability as a diversity category, we combine and draw on data from two unique interview-based studies conducted in Norway and the USA. The employer representatives were chosen based on their organisation demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion. We compare state employers in Norway and 'equal opportunity employers' (EEO) in the USA because they are both groups of employers who are expected to be more attuned to regulatory policy. Such a comparison enabled us to gain insight into a 'maximum of inclusionary potential' (Dobusch, 2017), where the context is expected to facilitate employer inclusion efforts. The American employers were recruited based on their use of an EEO statement in job advertisements displaying a commitment to equal opportunity and diversity<sup>3</sup>. State employers were selected for the Norwegian sample since this sector has long been expected to strive for diversity and inclusion and to avoid discrimination, as exemplified by the most recent inclusion initiative, the Inclusion Dugnad, introducing a soft quota for state employers. As such, we interviewed employers in both contexts who we could expect to be more attuned to regulatory policies.

The data include interviews with a total of twenty-three employer representatives (twelve in Norway, eleven in the USA). The interviews were carried out in 2019 and 2020. To ensure compliance with research ethics guidelines, the consent forms and interview guides were reviewed by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and the California State University, East Bay Institutional Review Board, respectively. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of all interviewees.

The Norwegian sample consists of twelve people from ten state enterprises; two interviews were conducted with two interviewees. The employers were located in the Oslo area. The interviewees were either mid-level hiring managers or human resource (HR) personnel working in recruitment. In the USA, interviews were conducted with public, private and not-for-profit employers. Eight of the employer representatives were

Table 2 Overview of U.S. sample

Interviewee	Position	Gender	Sector	Industry	Number of employees
1	HR director	Woman	Private	Health	201-500
2	Chairperson	Man	Public	Education	501+
3	Staffing	Man	NGO	Sports	15-100
4	Search committee	Woman	Public	Education	501+
5	Vice-president	Man	Private	IT	501+
6	Director	Woman	Private	Health	501+
7	HR director	Woman	Public	Science	501+
8	HR adviser	Man	Private	Social Media	501+
9	Director	Woman	Public	Community services	15-100
10	Assistant director	Woman	Private	Science	501+
11	Director	Woman	NGO		15-100

located in the northern part of the same state, in metropolitan areas, and three in major cities in three other states. The interviewees were managers, HR personnel or others actively involved in hiring processes.

Both interview guides were thematically organised. The interview guides had similar themes but were adjusted to the contextual and regulatory setting. Both guides contained questions concerning recruitment practices and experiences with disabled job seekers and employees. In Norway, the interview guide included questions concerning the Inclusion Dugnad and the 5 per cent quota. In the USA, the employer representatives were asked about their understanding of what it means to be an equal opportunity employer, as well as about their perceptions of the statutory requirements for hiring people with disabilities. All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

When analysing the interviews, we examined how employers described how they related to regulatory policies. The interviewees' stories are, of course, influenced by what employers are able to tell and what they choose to tell (Riessman, 1993). In our view, their stories offer 'a window – although not a perfectly transparent one' (Peacock and Holland, 1993: 374) on social practices. Thorough reading of the interviews revealed at an early stage that the employers could rarely refer to any recent experience of disabled job seekers, despite often presenting a positive attitude. Based on this, we formulated the following research question: Why do employers struggle to include disability as part of their active diversity approach? By using a list of key emerging themes, we approached the analysis as a circular endeavour, re-reading our data in light of our research question and employer engagement perspectives. As a result, we found three commonalities across the two national contexts, relating to passiveness, disability invisibility and quantitative evaluation of organisational practices.

The two sets of interview materials differ on several aspects. For instance, the Norwegian sample comprises state employers only, while the American sample consists of a diverse group of private, public and non-profit employers. For the purposes of this



article, the variety is a feature of the data material rather than a shortcoming because we aim to identify core aspects of the phenomenon that are present under varying conditions (see Levitt, 2021).

### **Employer strategies for meeting regulatory demands: the typical passive response**

Across both national contexts, the employers typically demonstrated positive attitudes towards the intention of regulatory policy. However, most could not refer to recently hiring a disabled person (within approximately the last two years), making them typically passive employers (Bredgaard, 2018). Only one of the Norwegian interviewees (interviewee 11) could describe recently hiring a disabled person through a trainee programme targeting disabled people. In the American sample, a diverse staff was referred to as a good mix of gender, ethnic minorities and age groups, but only a few (interviewees 7 and 11) addressed disability specifically. Although some (interviewees 1, 5, 7, 11) recounted having disabled employees, no one referred to being involved in recently hiring a disabled person – apart from interviewee 11, who is the head of a disabled people's organisation.

Some differences can however be noted between the two countries. The American employers seemed much more aware of disability-specific anti-discrimination legislation than the Norwegian employers. All but one of the American employers expressed confidence in their knowledge of relevant legislation, including the ADA. As American interviewee 1 said, 'It has been this way for so long, you know, the ADA has been in place for a long time' (HR director). She also commented on what being an equal opportunity employer means: 'So equal opportunity by the law means that you don't rule people out, just, you know, that you allow for anyone to be considered as an employee'. Despite this difference in legislation awareness, the employers in both countries showed commitment to complying with formalised recruitment procedures. Not all the Norwegian employers knew about the quota that applied to them, but they were generally knowledgeable about the general and bureaucratic recruitment regulations in place in the state sector to ensure fair procedures. The majority of the employers in both contexts were also sympathetic towards the goal of getting more disabled people into work, as exemplified by these interview excerpts:

Then there is the human rights aspect of this. You are not a whole human being if you don't have a job. And even if you need help with something, you can contribute in other ways, and that's very important for everyone. And it's very unfair if you have difficulties contributing because you are visually impaired or in a wheelchair or something, because it's not necessarily a problem. (Norwegian interviewee 5, manager)

Earlier you asked how we think about diversity at our company. While we only report publicly on specific data plot points like gender and race, internally in our analyses within HR, with business leaders, we look at things that we don't always publish. (...) [W]e also look at things like sexual orientation, veteran status, disabilities, broader ethnicity categories, and faith-based groups, and age-based groups. So those things are our way of demonstrating to the employees and to our readers that these are aspects of identity that we take seriously, that we value as part of our diversity strategy. (American interviewee 8, HR adviser)

To meet the regulatory demands and live up to diversity aspirations, the interviewed employers refer to different strategies for highlighting marginalised identities. While we maintain that employers in both contexts were mainly passive, this does not mean that they could not refer to any effort, but rather that the strategies chosen rarely led to hiring. The American employers primarily added the EEO statement to their job advertisements, which was their main strategy to show applicants that they included disability as part of their diversity approach. The American employers typically described disability as being subsumed in a general diversity approach that seeks to create an accepting organisational culture. This general approach to diversity means, however, that there was rarely a special focus on disabled people, as expressed by interviewee 5 (vice-president): '[T]he discrimination against anybody based on religion, race, gender, disabilities is strictly, strictly prohibited, so we certainly do not look into if this person is disabled, is this person from this religion. We just look at the qualifications when we hire'. Interviewee 11, the head of a disabled people's organisation, reflected on the use of EEO statements when she said that she had googled companies with such a statement and had discovered that 'the only time the word disability comes up is in their EEO statement. So, you see that, you are like, you know they are not that interested'.

The Norwegian employers relied on standardised recruitment procedures and the self-disclosure of disabled people in the hiring process in order to comply with regulatory requirements. They said that they invite job seekers to tick a box in their application portal to indicate a disability. If anyone ticks this box, the employer is obliged by law (*Civil Service Act*, 2017, Section 6) to invite at least one qualified candidate to an interview. Thus, they highlight disabled job seekers in their pool of applicants, ensuring that they are given thorough consideration. One manager emphasised the strictness of these regulations, underlining how it creates accountability. He talked about how hiring committees and HR staff would review the managers' hiring decisions:

You have to give reasons for why the applicants with a disability were not selected for an interview. You just have to. They keep a record and produce lists, and you must provide a justification for your decisions. [...] There's a lot of focus on this and it will be reviewed. (Norwegian interviewee 12, manager)

In contrast, the American employers said that they intentionally avoid giving weight to demographic information about job seekers during selection, highlighting merit as the main criterion for selection, as interviewee 5 emphasised when discussing discrimination. This was founded on a belief that such information could lead to biased decisions and/or discriminatory behaviour. Nonetheless, in order to monitor their diversity make-up, the organisations ask applicants to voluntarily fill in a demographic information form, which includes disability status. The applicant is made aware of the reasons for the need to submit such demographic data – to ensure that equal employment opportunity efforts reach all segments of the population. The form would not be used by those selecting candidates for job interviews, as was emphasised by American interviewee 1, an HR director, when describing the most recent recruitment for which she was responsible:

Interviewee 1: So, we send out with our applications a voluntary form that they can fill out or not. And people don't have to, and I honestly don't look at it. [...] There is no reason for me to. It goes into an automatic file that comes through and goes into a file.

Interviewer: What is the main purpose?

Interviewee 1: And it is more what it is for. If we ever have to prove to government that we are interviewing all different types of people, we can pull that and say 'look here are all the applicants for this job, look at how they vary'; so, we are not creating an advertisement or screening process that knocks out gender, ethnicity or anything like that. (American interviewee 1, HR director)

Summing up, the strategies differ in their use of identification measures, but they share the commonalities of general positive attitudes but little or no recent hiring (within the last two years).

### **Challenges related to the identification of disabled people: invisibility**

A commonality related to the identification of disabled job seekers is that the strategies (described above) lead to disabled people becoming an invisible and therefore also a forgotten group. Their invisibility makes disabled people as a group seem distant and irrelevant to employers' daily practices. The interviewees in both countries highlighted the general pattern of candidates not disclosing their disability as a problem. In the Norwegian interviews, they largely mentioned this as the main reason they struggled to meet their quota:

I don't know if we have had a single instance of someone ticking that box. And therefore, we don't have that possibility, when looking through qualifications and deciding whether to invite for an interview. It would be easier for us if someone had actually ticked the box, because then we would know more about what applicants we are dealing with. So, there's no resistance, it's just a case of no one disclosing this. (Norwegian interviewee 11, HR representative)

Some interviewees cited the proportion of applicants ticking the box to be below 1 per cent. The effect of the lack of candidates is that the employers have very little conscious experience of disabled job seekers. They then base their impressions of disabled people on limited encounters. In the Norwegian sample, this experience is often related to cases where the impairment is physical, visible and affects work capacity, often referring to candidates who have participated in temporary work training through the public employment service. One of the Norwegian employers expressed this very clearly, as she related her inability to fulfil the quota based on the qualification principle – meaning that you must hire the most qualified applicant – and the need to hire productive workers. She used negative work training experiences with what she called 'heavy cases', meaning disabled people with complex challenges that required considerable accommodation, as grounds for her scepticism:

Interviewee 2: I have had several heavy [cases], that have been part of programmes or what do you call it.

Interviewer: Work training?

Interviewee 2: Work training, in my department. With both physical handicaps, deaf, and stuff like that. Requiring massive accommodation. We failed at it. But he also had a migrant

background and it wasn't possible to communicate particularly well in writing either. We had to use an interpreter, you know, resources, in every meeting. I don't know how much that cost, but it just didn't work out, because there was so much to deal with. It was not just the deafness; multiple things made communication difficult. (Norwegian interviewee 2, manager)

While disabled people with reduced work capacity or complex challenges are also an important part of the target group, the salience of such candidates serves to narrow the impression of who disabled workers are. This narrative is used by the employer in order to legitimise rejecting the feasibility of hiring disabled people on the grounds of what the candidates lack and how it demands resources they do not have, instead of acknowledging the role discriminatory and contextual barriers play.

The invisibility problem is also evident in the American context. One clear finding is that disability is a lower priority when compared with other minorities. Interviewee 8 (HR adviser) claimed that 'the topic of disability is often the forgotten one and the last one people think about' when addressing diversity at the workplace level. This shows in the employer accounts concerning what the American employer representatives (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8) referred to as 'targeted', 'intentional' or 'purposeful' recruitment. As many neither want nor are allowed to positively discriminate when hiring, they instead rely on targeted recruitment to boost their initial pool of candidates. Targeted recruitment can involve sending job advertisements to ethnic minority organisations and attending professional conferences, in addition to posting advertisements on the 'usual' platforms such as the unemployment office. In the employer accounts, targeted recruitment emerges as a tool for making minority groups aware of vacant positions, the aim being 'to make our pool of candidates more diverse', as interviewee 3 (staff developer) emphasised. When employers addressed targeted recruitment, however, they did not relate it to disability. Despite being a common strategy for boosting the pool of minority candidates, it remained underutilised in the case of disability, and thus disability, as a diversity factor, becomes invisible in the companies' active recruitment strategies – if we disregard the use of EEO statements.

Some of the American employers cited the legislative protection of disability and health information as a reason for being careful in inquiring about disability. In the literature on disability and employment, employer concern about health insurance premiums is a well-known issue (Burke *et al.*, 2013). One American interviewee (8, HR adviser) claimed that 'we live in a very litigious society' and addressed how the disclosure of disability is linked to the disclosure of health information. This sets disability apart as a diversity group and complicates disclosure:

I think for several like practical, legal reasons, medical information is confidential and for a company to be digging into an employee's information around health and medical histories and disabilities it is... It requires a lot of thoughtful work and planning to even want to do that. (American interviewee 8, HR adviser)

This quote shows how targeting disabled people is intrinsically linked to complex legal issues, and American employers seemed concerned with legal issues in general, as emphasised by interviewee 1 (HR director): 'Part of our job is to protect our company, right, by following the law'. Asking people to disclose is complicated and both employers and candidates/employees may find addressing the issue uncomfortable. Interviewee 8 said that this factor made producing hiring targets harder, which his company was

attentive to in terms of gender and race, partly because it did not entail asking for potentially confidential information.

### **Challenges related to demographic monitoring of disabled people: evaluating practice based on inaccurate data**

In both national contexts, an important tool for evaluating the diversity make-up of the organisation is demographic monitoring of job seekers or employees belonging to a minority group. In the Norwegian sample, the share of applicants ticking the disability box is used by several enterprises to evaluate their work regarding the 5 per cent quota – for instance, in their annual reports. State employers in Norway have long been required to report on gender balance in the organisation, making it an evaluative component of the enterprises they are accustomed to doing. As mentioned above, a few of the interviewees in the Norwegian sample describe the share of people ticking the disability box as being below 1 per cent. As this interviewee observes, this means that the pool of disabled applicants is miniscule:

We do note the numbers – at least do a brief review. Shall we see . . . The applicants themselves tick the box. Yes, you know, in 2017, out of 1,829 applicants, thirteen applicants disclosed a disability. Finding qualified people in such a small group isn't very easy. (Norwegian interviewee 7, HR representative)

The problem is that basing their review on this number probably does not reflect the share of job seekers who would qualify as disabled. This is linked to two main issues: disabled people not identifying as such and a reluctance to disclose (Jans *et al.*, 2012; Dwertmann, 2016). Some of the interviewees – most often the HR representatives, who had spent more time reflecting on the challenges – were aware of people's reluctance to disclose:

I think it's a double-edged sword that you have to tick this box. People with impairments may start thinking, okay so that makes me a less relevant candidate. You know, there are so many different types of impairments, and some will naturally not be visible at all. (Norwegian interviewee 6, HR representative)

In the American interviews, interviewees 7 and 8 in particular dwelt on disclosure issues in relation to the evaluation of recruitment practices. As a federal contractor, the organisation that interviewee 7 worked for is required by Section 503 of the *Rehabilitation Act* to ensure that 7 per cent of its workforce is made up of individuals with disabilities: 'And we are still showing 2 per cent. We can say we are way below that 7 per cent'. She claimed that the numbers may actually be slightly higher as 'people, you know, are fearful of identifying'. At the time of the interview, the company was in the process of making a plan to include disability more explicitly as a diversity factor, and they had tried to encourage their current staff to self-identify. They were also implementing other measures, including partnering with a not-for-profit organisation, to make the workplace more aware of the need to include disability to a greater extent in their diversity business practices (thus, also facilitating disclosure of disability identity in the workplace). Interviewee 8



explained how a lack of data regarding disabled job seekers and employees was a barrier to formulating and acting on goals to hire disabled people:

And we continue to evaluate, hopefully there is, there might not be as much data that we can rely on to help us formulate those goals. And part of that is challenges I mentioned earlier, not everyone discloses they have a disability. And then, granted the hiring rate for people with disabilities is abysmally low, they are likely to be, you know, unemployed and it is just very sad. (American interviewee 8, HR adviser)

The accounts from both Norwegian and American employers point to the challenge of evaluating staff diversity based on demographic monitoring, as their data may be inaccurate and mask the representation of disabled job seekers and employees. Although the employer accounts testify to a scarcity of disabled people in their applicant pools, we do not know whether this is an accurate reflection of reality due to the identified challenges. The consequence is that regulatory measures may end up failing to protect the part of the population that they are meant to.

### **Concluding discussion**

The findings address the strategies employed by Norwegian and American employers, who have shown an interest in diversity and equality, and in hiring disabled people. The accounts from the two contexts yield some notable differences in strategy patterns. One concerns how the employers choose to relate to information about disability in the early stages of hiring. While the American employers say they generally do not want to know in order to avoid bias and possible discriminatory behaviour, the Norwegian state employers use a system wherein disabled applicants can tick a box. Another difference is the employers' relationship to legislation. The American interviewees show a strong awareness of anti-discrimination legalisation (the ADA); the Norwegian employers do not. The Norwegian employers, however, display a strong motivation to recruit 'by the book' and show awareness of the bureaucratic rules that generally govern recruitment to ensure a fair evaluation based on applicants' merits.

A finding shared in both contexts is that the interviewed employers often express positive attitudes towards the regulatory demands. In the effort to bridge 'the gap between motivation and participation' (van Berkel, 2021: 545), this article has examined the reasons why such positive attitudes are not translated into hiring practice. We argue that the findings address some key issues regarding regulatory approaches to employer engagement concerning disabled people. By exploring different policy contexts, we have demonstrated cross-national commonalities in terms of challenges.

First, the interviewed employers typically showed a passive response to regulatory measures (Bredgaard, 2018; Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen, 2020). They expressed support for the notion that employers must ensure that disabled people have a fair chance of participating in the labour market, but this attitude is not reflected in actual hiring. Addressing passive employers is highlighted as important in policy measures (Hemphill and Kulik, 2016), but in order to make passive employers active and engaged, it is important to understand the unique challenges disability poses as a diversity category.

Second, disability remains an invisible diversity category. In general, the employers report few experiences of disabled candidates, and their accounts show that disability is at

the bottom of the diversity hierarchy. The interviewees often respond to questions about diversity with statements about gender and ethnicity; some of the American employers also include LGBTQ+. The employer accounts echo those of other contributions highlighting the low status of disability as a diversity category (Procknow and Rocco, 2016; Kalargyrou and Costen, 2017; Dalgin, 2018). This invisibility leads some employers to generalise impressions of disability from difficult and salient cases, as illustrated in particular by the Norwegian interviewees. The invisibility problem is also intrinsically tied to questions regarding disclosure. The employers indicate that disabled people may choose not to disclose because of a fear of stigma and discrimination. Disclosure is a dilemma for disabled job seekers, and the difficulty of deciding whether or not to disclose has been highlighted in previous research (Irvine, 2011; Jans *et al.*, 2012; Lindsay *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, employers may be afraid to ask because of the legality of requesting health-related information. The latter issue was especially highlighted in the American context where fear of litigation is a much greater concern. Fear of litigation, which has been highlighted as a barrier in previous studies conducted in the USA (Burke *et al.*, 2013), can incentivise employers to disregard disability status. The result of these factors is invisibility and narrow representation.

Third, the strategy of demographic monitoring, which has proven useful in diversity management concerning other minorities, has yielded flawed numbers for disabled people. The number of openly disabled people among applicants and employees is typically miniscule, but the employers admitted that their data may not necessarily reflect the actual share of disabled people. Previous research shows that companies' public reporting on disabled employees is often of low quality (Khan *et al.*, 2019), which could be a reflection of these difficulties. In fact, Khan *et al.* (2019) show that among a sample of 274 UK firms, only eleven voluntarily disclosed either extensive or limited quantitative data on disabled employees in their sustainability reports. The inaccurate numbers imply that employers cannot rely on the tool they use for other groups that are more easily identifiable, such as women and ethnic minorities. As such, they cannot assess whether there are systematic disparities in their employment practices as regards disabled people. This makes it easier to dismiss the invisibility problem as being due to a lack of interest from disabled people, rather than organisational practices.

There are at least three main implications of our findings. The first is conceptual, meaning how research concerning disability, diversity and inclusion requires an understanding of disability as a relational and situational phenomenon (see Shakespeare, 2014). While Dwertmann (2016) highlights the methodological challenges of work-related research on disability, we highlight the conceptual challenges that arise both in research and practice. A person with an impairment may not necessarily experience disability in all settings, but disability as a phenomenon may emerge in specific contexts when the environment is not accessible and attitudes non-inclusive. The heterogeneity within the group of disabled people and the issues highlighted here does not mean that it is not meaningful to engage with disability in diversity management research. What is important is that such endeavours need to acknowledge how identifying as a disabled person is dependent on personal and situational factors.

At the policy level, the challenges identified make a case for leaning on more than regulatory measures, such as on demand-led and combined approaches to employer engagement (van Berkel, 2021) involving support from the public employment service. Even though the Inclusion Dugnad does involve measures such as seminars in diversity

management and a trainee programme, the findings indicate that these alternative measures need more attention and ought to be better integrated with the public employment service. Furthermore, employment policy for disabled people needs to account for the heterogeneity of disability. This means being aware of the challenges of having invisible impairments. For invisibly disabled people, the negative consequences of disclosure may outweigh any possible positive consequences of legal protection from discrimination. The barriers people with invisible impairments encounter, which lead to systematic underrepresentation in the labour market, may thus not be corrected by regulatory measures. The disability employment gap is a complex problem, and a solution needs to rest on several policy instruments at the same time. Regulatory measures must exist alongside economic incentives (carrots and sticks), information (sermons) (Bemelmans-Videc *et al.*, 1998) and employers' proactive partnerships with the employment service (Moore *et al.*, 2017; Orton *et al.*, 2019). Utilising different policy measures also has the potential to resonate with different motivations and business perspectives, reflecting the variety of employers in the labour market (Borghouts-van de Pas and Freese, 2021).

At the workplace level, an awareness of the unique challenges of disability needs to be incorporated into hiring practices. As van Berkel *et al.* (2017) argue, social policy also needs to be treated as an HRM issue, with the recognition of disabled people as a relevant diversity group making up a significant proportion of the population. The invisibility problem calls for greater attention paid to people with invisible impairments. Santuzzi *et al.* (2014) suggest policies and practices that focus on educating managers and employees about the episodic and ambiguous nature of many invisible impairments, in order to legitimise impairments that are less obvious or well-known. Moreover, organisations that aim to improve their disability diversity strategy need to go beyond legislative compliance and focus on a more proactive approach by creating an inclusive climate where it is safe to disclose impairments and request accommodation (Nelissen *et al.*, 2014).

## Notes

1 Dugnad is a Norwegian word referring to voluntary work where the general community comes together to reach common goals.

2 Having a CV gap means that the candidate has had a period of at least two years out of work. For this article, we focus on disability only. This is partly because we want to draw attention to specific challenges concerning disability, but also because at the time the interviews were conducted there was no possibility of ticking a box for having a CV gap or for moderate affirmative action for this group (which came into place later).

3 An EEO statement may read as follows: We are committed to equal employment opportunity regardless of race, colour, ancestry, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, age, citizenship, marital status, disability, gender identity or veteran status.

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