Diversity clauses in job advertisements: Organisational reproduction of inequality?

Tone Alm Andreassen

Centre for the Study of Professions, OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University, P.O. Box 4, St. Olavs Plass, NO-0130 Oslo, Norway

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the research on inequality in organisations by analysing job advertisements that include a diversity clause stating that minority or disadvantaged jobseekers are welcome. The diversity clause appears as a response to expectations from the organisations' environment, namely anti-discrimination regulations and activation policies that aim to persuade employers to counteract inequality and include minorities and marginalised groups. With disability as a case, the analysis demonstrates how the mundane organisational practice of advertising for new employees fails to avoid reproducing the inequality that it aspires to reduce. A predominant distinction in the advertisement texts between desired employees and disabled applicants (addressed in the diversity clause) shows how organisations, while acting properly and performing the benevolent practice of championing diversity, can still subtly signal the inferiority of disability.

1. Introduction

Rising social inequality, considered one of the grand challenges of today, has motivated organisational researchers to assess the role of organisations in the reproduction of inequality (Amis, Munir, Lawrence, Hirsch, & McGahan, 2018; Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2020). Given the central position of organisations in society and the everyday lives of citizens, organisational scholars are called upon to research organisational practices that reinforce inequality (Amis et al., 2018, 2020). This call is especially relevant since today's organisations face two discourses that aim to persuade them to counteract inequality and include minorities and marginalised groups: (1) the discourse on anti-discrimination, equal opportunity and diversity management (Dobbin, 2009; Edelman, 2016; Sainsbury, Coleman-Fountain, & Trezzini, 2017) and (2) the discourse on activation of disadvantaged workers and jobseekers (Bonoli & Natali, 2012; van Berkel, Caswell, Kupka, & Larsen, 2017). Both of these discourses appeal to organisations' need and desire to demonstrate that they are proper social actors (Meyer & Bromley, 2013), but they also aim to affect highly institutionalised practices that often reinforce inequality (Amis et al., 2020).

This article addresses the organisational practice of advertising for new employees, more specifically the texts of advertisements that include a diversity clause. Surely, recruitment practices involve more than job advertisements. They include mobilising informal networks of organisational members, applicant screening, interviews with high-ranked candidates and more. Nevertheless, hiring practices do not work in isolation but tend to have a cumulative effect (Amis et al., 2020). For example, hiring practices determine who obtains access to which positions, and those who obtain access are later subject to promotion practices. Job advertisements define who is qualified for a job, who may consider themselves qualified for a job and thus perhaps also who will apply for a job.

Although job advertisements obviously cannot be taken to represent all recruitment practices of an organisation, they signal to potential applicants what kinds of employees are wanted. The performative act of job advertisement conveys a message to readers about the ideal employee (Harper, 2012). Thus, a clause stating that diversity is appreciated and that minorities and members of disadvantaged groups are welcome conveys to these jobseekers that they are also welcome to apply for the job.

Yet job advertisements also convey an image of the organisation. By including a diversity clause in their job advertisements, organisations respond to expectations from their institutional environment and signal to the broader public that they are proper social actors who conform to politically acceptable standards gleaned from the anti-discrimination and activation discourses. However, it is not obvious that such diversity clauses contribute to reducing inequality, as is their stated intent. To understand what such a diversity clause might do, the messages and the performative acts of the advertisements must be considered. This is the aim of this article.

Inequality is here, in line with Therborn (2012) understood as 'avoidable, morally unjustified, hierarchical differences', as workplaces of course entail many differences that are defensible.

This article investigates job advertisements through the lens of inequalities associated with disability. Disabled people are encompassed by both anti-discrimination regulations and activation policies. In this context, in contrast to an understanding of disability as an individual's mental and/or bodily impairments, the attention is directed towards barriers created by society, prejudice and discrimination. In many countries, including Norway, discrimination based on disability is encompassed by a general anti-discrimination act, and the act includes obligations to make reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities and to actively promote equal employment opportunities. Requirements aimed at employing organisations are seen as a means of securing social justice and safeguarding the rights of people with disabilities (Sainsbury et al., 2017). Despite cross-country variations, all over Europe and beyond, the circumstances of people with disabilities are characterised by huge inequalities in employment and income (Greve, 2009; Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2013). Barriers resulting from discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes, combined with organisational practices, partly explain these inequalities (Baert, 2018; Bjørnshagen & Ugreninov, 2021; Schur et al., 2013).

Increasing attention is thus paid to the interplay between political and legal efforts to secure equality for citizens with disabilities, the regular organisational practices that these efforts aim to alter, the ways in which corporate culture creates or reinforces the obstacles faced by employees with disabilities and the manner in which these obstacles can be removed or overcome (Janssens & Zanoni, 2014; Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2005; Schur, Colella, & Adya, 2016; Stone & Colella, 1996).

In comparison with gender, disability 'leads a shadowy existence' due to a widespread assumption that disability is first and foremost caused by individually embodied deficits (Dobusch, 2017) and is unrelated to organisational life (Kornau, Knappert, & Erdur, 2021). Nonetheless, the case of disability—which is associated with deficits, undesirableness, reduced capacity, and diminished worth—can raise awareness about perceptions of deficits and worth that might exist underneath inequality and discrimination also in cases of other dimensions of diversity.

By examining job advertisements, this analysis demonstrates how the mundane organisational practice of using a diversity clause in job advertisements to meet institutional expectations still fails to avoid reproducing the inequality that it aspires to reduce. The article takes up the call for studies of inequality in organisations and contributes to the growing literature that examines the ways in which the inequality reducing efforts of anti-discrimination and activation are working in the everyday practices of organisational life (Dobbin, Schrage, & Kalev, 2015; Janssens & Zanoni, 2014; Romani, Holck, & Risberg, 2019).

2. Analysing organisations and inequality

2.1. Organisational responses to institutional expectations

Hiring is one of the five major organisational practices—in addition to role allocation, promotion, compensation and structuring—that, according to Amis et al. (2020), are central to the reproduction of inequality. These practices are maintained by widely, but not necessarily consciously, held ideals, such as the ideal that organisations are essentially meritocratic in their working. Drawing on Meyer and Rowan (1977), Amis et al. (2020) describe these ideals as institutional myths, which are used as justifications but reflect highly institutionalised environments. Hence, their analysis underlines the institutional embeddedness of organisations, which makes organisations subject to expectations from their institutional environments.

Typically, organisations face multiple, often incompatible expectations and must employ strategies to cope with institutional complexity (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011).

Organisations must achieve legitimacy, not only efficiency, and must answer to expectations to perform as proper social actors (Meyer & Bromley, 2013). Across organisational fields, modern organisations are expected to incorporate conflicting or contradictory demands concerning employee rights, decent wages, physically and mentally acceptable working conditions, environmental issues, ethical trade, transparency, anti-discrimination and the provision of equal opportunities. Organisations face normative pressures about the proper course of action and even about moral duties; they need a 'societal mandate', which they try to achieve by conforming to what society expects of them (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008).

This applies not only to private sector businesses and traditional companies but equally to public sector administrations, service providers and local authorities (Brunsson, 1989; Meyer & Bromley, 2013). However, organisations in 'central' positions in a field may be more exposed than 'peripheral' organisations, and the structure, ownership, governance and identity of an organisation can make it more sensitive to some expectations and less so to others (Greenwood et al., 2011). For example, visible, high-status organisations may be more targeted by external stakeholders. On the other hand, such organisations, because of their size and resources, may insulate themselves from external pressures.

Organisations may respond to pressures from their institutional environment by decoupling actions from their symbolic displays (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008; Bromley & Powell, 2012; Brunsson, 1989; Meyer & Bromley, 2013; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). By decoupling, organisations can abide only superficially by external pressures, without any consequences in actual practice, for example, to resolve conflicts between managerial interests and law (Edelman, 1992). Through separation, 'organisations of hypocrisy'—of double standards—can deal with conflicting values and demands simultaneously, some by ways of talking, others by decisions and yet others by action (Brunsson, 1989). Decoupling means that organisational responses to normative expectations are forms of impression management rather than actual transformations of organisational practices.

Organisations may also respond to expectations from their environment by some form of adaptation to or incorporation of external demands. For some organisations, multiple demands are unavoidable; they are expected to exhibit a hybrid character. For example, social enterprises combine organisational forms derived from businesses and charities (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Mair, Mayer, & Lutz, 2015). In non-profit organisations, for which social justice is central to self-representation, the legitimation of diversity initiatives based on business arguments of effectiveness and serving the organisations' beneficiaries may be reconciled but also conflict with social justice arguments (Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010). When proactively combined, plural logics may allow organisations to adapt to emerging challenges and enact opportunities for innovation (Mair et al., 2015). 'Aspirational' talk that announces ideals and intentions may be a resource for social change, even when organisations do not fully live up to their aspirations (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013).

Job advertisements that include a diversity clause signalling proper action provide no direct access to the intentions of the advertising organisations, any possible processes of decoupling, or a likely internal impact of implementing diversity policies. Yet, these possibilities are the context within which the diversity clause must be understood and that might implicitly appear in the advertisement text.

2.2. Anti-discrimination and activation discourses: Sources of normative pressure on employers

One source of normative pressure on organisations is the belief that organisations should counteract inequality and increase the diversity in their workforces. A major human rights movement is an important driver behind the increasing demands placed on organisations (Meyer & Bromley, 2013). More rights have been bestowed on more types of

people—such as women, children, ethnic minorities and disabled people—and the rights of individuals are combined with obligations (placed on organisations) to support these rights. Employers in Europe and the United States have been subject to anti-discrimination legislation that prohibits discrimination and obligates them to act to promote equality. This in turn has motivated employers to incorporate anti-discrimination practices and motivated human resource managers to see anti-discrimination actions as their professional expertise (Dobbin et al., 2015; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998).

Another source of normative pressure is active labour market policies (activation policies) that urge organisations to be inclusive workplaces and (re)integrate marginalised, jobless citizens. Active labour market policies have been the object of political attention in Europe and abroad (Bonoli & Natali, 2012; van Berkel, Caswell et al., 2017). Increasingly, these policies encompass measures aimed at motivating the employers' engagement in 'the societal challenge of promoting the labour market participation of vulnerable groups' (van Berkel, Ingold, McGurk, Boselie, & Bredgaard, 2017). The pressures from anti-discrimination and activation discourses may represent outsider-driven deinstitutionalisation, by which the legitimacy of institutionalised practices is called into question by external stakeholders, science or social movements (Maguire & Hardy, 2009).

Incorporating a diversity clause in job advertisements is one form of response to normative pressures to recruit and retain marginalised jobseekers. Recent research has shown that employers can be mobilised as proactive partners, encouraged to reconsider their recruitment strategy and consider welfare clients as potential employees in exchange for support in other issues of importance to them (Orton, Green, Atfield, & Barnes, 2019; van Gestel, Oomens, & Buwalda, 2019), if underpinned by employment agencies acting as intermediaries or boundary spanners in order to modify discriminatory recruitment processes (Ingold & Valizade, 2017; Ingold, 2018). Their motivations vary and include, for example, enhancing workforce diversity and contributing to 'corporate social responsibility' (Hyggen & Vedeler, 2021; Orton et al., 2019; van der Aa & van Berkel, 2014).

However, organisational practices—such as equal opportunity policies, inclusive workplace declarations and symbols of positivity about disabled people—may be merely symbolic 'window dressing' decoupled from actual organisational practices, which instead exclude workers that do not fit with the image of an ideal worker (Edelman, 2016; Foster & Wass, 2013; Hoque & Noon, 2004; Hoque, Bacon, & Parr, 2014). Employers may declare positive attitudes and commitment to the inclusion of persons with disabilities, but their affective reactions and actual practices can be less positive and can negatively impact hiring decisions, reasonable adjustment arrangements and work performance appraisals (Burke et al., 2013; Kuznetsova, 2016).

The workings of organisations may be preconditioned upon 'ableist' perceptions of the ideal worker. According to Campbell (2001, p. 44), the concept of 'ableism' denotes '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'. Thus, ableism casts disability as a diminished state of being human. In an organisational context, ableism, as a normative assumption of non-disability, denotes processes through which assumptions of non-disability penetrate organisations, infuse organising processes and are maintained as an organising norm (Williams & Mavin, 2012). The dominant organisational image of an ideal, typical or universal worker renders a worker who requires adjustments to perform the job deviant and disabled (Foster & Wass, 2013). Foster and Wass demonstrate how standard jobs, designed around ideal (non-disabled) employees, create a mismatch between a formal job description and an individual with an impairment. When premised (through job design) upon notions of what a typical or ideal employee should be, the behaviour of employers will disadvantage persons with an impairment.

Moreover, measures designed to correct and compensate for stereotyping and prejudices can end up reinforcing and maintaining a split between those who manage without extra measures and those who are 'diverse', prescribing essentialist categories of differences and stereotyping and subordinating the 'other' (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Studies have shown that even the best of intentions can lead to new forms of inequality or to the prevailing of existing forms (Omanović, 2013; Radoynovska, 2018). With the term 'benevolent discrimination', Romani et al. have labelled such well-intended efforts to address discrimination that still construct the 'other' as inferior and in need of help (Romani et al., 2019). Such subtle forms of discrimination are difficult to see because they are framed as solidarity with those who are meant to benefit from them.

Thus, job advertisements with a diversity clause may (or may not) be motivated by employers' willingness to engage in making workplaces inclusive. They may still conflict with persistent ideas of ideal employees, and despite benevolent intentions they may still signal the inferiority of disability and other grounds of diversity.

2.3. Discourse analysis in organisation studies

Job advertisements can be approached via discourse analysis as organisational texts that bring organisationally related objects into being through their production, dissemination and consumption (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Grant & Hardy, 2004; Phillips & Oswick, 2012). Discourse analysis can be combined with various organisational theories (Hardy, 2001), but it is well suited to institutional theories because linguistic methods help empirically capture the processes through which institutions come into being, change and disappear (Phillips & Oswick, 2012). Discourse analyses have enriched the understanding of identity, institutions, strategy and organisational change (Phillips & Oswick, 2012) as well as of employers' diversity management practices (Dobusch, 2017; Kornau et al., 2021; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). Discourse analysis is recommended for critical studies of diversity management (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000).

Discourse analyses focus on the role of language in the construction of social reality and view language as a form of social practice. According to (Fairclough, 1993), a social practice is (a) a mode of action and (b) an historically and socially situated mode. Language use is constitutive in both conventional, socially reproductive ways and in creative, socially transformative ways. It is socially shaped and socially shaping. Language use and texts are thus products of their social context, and they produce or do something in and to that context.

Discourses and texts constitute subject positions, meaning organisational positions as well as social identities (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). Subject positions provide the actors that occupy them with rights to speak and act. They are made available to actors; they are not positions actors may decide to adopt (Dobusch, 2017). Subject positions, and the social identities (or representations) ascribed to them, are constructed by the discourses. For example, social identities may be discursively constituted by organisations in accordance with their goals and interests, but identities are also affected by broader discourses operating at a macro-societal level (Phillips & Hardy, 1997). Representations of self (speaking subjects) or others can be identified in texts by the ways in which the actors are referred to, that is the traits, characteristics or qualities that are attributed to them, their justifications or legitimations, from which perspective these attributions are expressed and the intensity with which they are expressed (Wodak, 2001).

Studying job advertisements from a discourse perspective means investigating them as texts and as modes of action to see how the social reality, actors and identities are constructed and what the advertisements and their diversity clause do.

3. Material and methods

3.1. The case organisations

The case organisations in this study are frontline offices of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). With respect to the issue of inequality, these frontline organisations are particularly interesting. They are 'extreme' or 'deviant' cases of employers, meaning that they are special or unusual (Patton, 2002). They are not only employers but also organisations set up to enable the employment of marginalised groups, such as disabled citizens. Therefore, persons with disabilities appear not only as potential employees but also as potential clients and work tasks. Due to their mandate, one could assume that to achieve legitimacy, the frontline organisations themselves must aim to set a good example as employers. Due to the organisations' central position in the welfare state, one could assume that to be considered legitimate social actors, they must be sensitive to expectations from their environment.

These organisations may also be crucial cases meaning cases that are the most likely to fulfil a prediction and yet do not and are therefore disconfirmatory (Gerring, 2007). In other words, given that the frontline organisations of the NAV should be *the* organisations most inclined to promote inclusion in the labour market, if their own actions do not prevent exclusion, it is more unlikely that other organisations are effectively fighting organisational practices that reproduce inequality. The organisations are thus analysed here because they provide extreme, crucial cases for the study of diversity clauses as measures for reducing inequality.

3.2. Empirical material

The empirical material in this analysis is drawn from a larger project studying competence requirements in various sectors, including healthcare and welfare, by analysing the descriptions of desired employees in job advertisements. While investigating the competencies and capabilities desired in the advertisements, my attention was drawn to a diversity clause present in many, but not all, advertisements, often located in the concluding section of the advertisement, seemingly only loosely coupled to the main text. This analysis is the result of the curiosity this diversity clause raised. From the project's broader empirical material, I here analyse 44 job advertisements for posts in frontline organisations of the NAV (all job advertisements from a random day in November 2015). The frontline organisations are organised as partnerships between the state administration and each Norwegian selfgoverning municipality. In 2017, 53 % of frontline workers were employed in municipalities (Terum & Sadeghi, 2019). Therefore, the job advertisements were for both state and municipal posts. Of the 44 selected advertisements, 26 were for municipal posts.

Job advertisements have been used to explore organisations' perceptions of the professionalism expected of their employees and to track changes over time in the skills required of ideal employees and in the values held by organisations (Harper, 2012; Jørgensen & Rutgers, 2014; Kuokkanen, Varje, & Väänänen, 2013). Although job advertisements certainly do not illuminate the whole recruitment processes (i.e., what employers actually emphasise in interviews and how they compare candidates), they do give us information about what employers expect from employees and what they expect potential employees to be attracted by. Advertisements reflect *ideal values* (Harper, 2012; Kuokkanen et al., 2013) because they enact two essential goals: (1) to make the job appear attractive and (2) to signal what kind of candidate the employer desires.

Job advertisements are a specific genre, a form of language usage associated with a particular socially ratified type of activity (Fairclough, 1993), in this case recruiting desired workers. The NAV advertisements are situated in a public sector context, in which jobs must be publicly advertised rather than solely being filled via recruitment of persons already known to the organisation. Those who are qualified (and thus

those who have reason to call for anti-discrimination law) are those who meet the requirements and requests stated in the advertisement.

3.3. Analytical approach

Several previous analyses have explored frontline organisations' requests for and appeals to the professionalism of desired employees (references omitted). These analyses form the background for the analysis here, in which the job advertisements are approached through a lens of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1993).

I first read the advertisements to identify which subject positions are present in them and how they represent the positions' actors and identities, including which subject positions allow actors to speak, which positions are spoken to and which characteristics or qualities are attributed to these positions.

This analysis revealed that the one position allowing its occupants to speak is the employer position, and the positions being spoken to are not only potential jobseekers but also the broader public, from whom the organisation can gain legitimacy for responding properly to anti-discrimination and activation expectations. Yet another position is present in the texts, one that is only spoken about—that of the client.

Thereafter, I examined how the advertisements' language and lists of qualifications create demarcations between desirable and undesirable applicants. Advertisements include and exclude not only by establishing requirements but also through the choice of words and the ways they address the potential applicant. Through this step, the contrasting representations of the alternative positions open to persons with disabilities were exposed: the desired employee present in the main body of the text, the disabled applicant who appears in the diversity clause and the implicitly present client who appears through the task descriptions and qualification requirements.

The fact that these subject positions and their characteristics can be inferred from the advertisements does not imply that they are expressions of the employers' conscious intentions. As Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) remind us, language is not a simple medium for the transport of meaning. Research texts are observations perceived by researchers; therefore, researchers should be explicit about the speculative elements involved. This allows researchers space for freer and bolder ways of interacting with their empirical material (Grant & Hardy, 2004).

Lastly, I approached the advertisements as a mode of action to understand what the advertisements and their diversity clause do when they address the positions spoken to. Because texts bring organisational objects into being, as they are produced and consumed, this approach involved consumption of the job advertisements; that is, a possible reading from the perspectives of potential applicants, the broader public and myself as a researcher.

4. Findings: The subject positions in the job advertisements

The job advertisements were to some degree standardised, though less so for municipal posts. The state advertisements addressed the potential jobseekers as 'you'; most municipal advertisements more impersonally sought a 'person' or advertised a 'position'. Yet the advertisements employed a generic structure that included (1) a promotional characterisation of the organisation, a presentation of the organisational location of the advertised position(s) and the post's responsibilities and tasks, (2) a characterisation of suitable applicants for the posts advertised and (3) a presentation of what the employer offered, with these three sections often appearing in lists. The advertisement ended with formalities about the application procedure (whom to contact and where to submit the application).

The employer occupied the speaking subject position in the advertisements, introducing the organisation with an attractive selfrepresentation. In many advertisements, an introduction presented the Labour and Welfare Administration, its vision—to 'give people opportunities'—and its goal to enable more people to participate in the labour

market. In some advertisements, the introduction appealed to potential jobseekers by casting the municipality as an attractive place to move to.

The speaking employer was a collective 'we', not an impersonal administration or agency. To some degree all advertisements had a personalised, promotional tone (as illustrated below). They represented a hybridity of genres, of consumer advertisement and 'synthetic personalisation' (Fairclough, 1993). The employer offered not only salary and meaningful, exiting and important tasks but also attractive working environments and competent, committed colleagues (Aven & Alm Andreassen, 2021).

The desired employee was often spoken to immediately in the introduction: 'We are looking for you who are determined and committed and wish to take on meaningful and varied responsibilities'. In some advertisements 'wanting to make a difference' replaced the last phrase; in other advertisements, both phrases were used but in different sentences. With this and other appeals, the desired employee appeared as responsible and committed to the organisations' social mission (Alm Andreassen & Natland, 2020).

The desired employee also appeared in the advertisement's list of required qualifications (education, skills and capabilities) and in a second list of desired qualifications (experience, transferable skills and attitudes). In addition to a relevant bachelor's degree and previous work experience, nearly all advertisements specified skills, abilities, attributes and/or qualities that the potential employee should possess. These included, for example, communication skills (oral and written), skills with technological working tools and teamwork and collaborative skills. In addition, personal qualities were mentioned, such as being responsible, goal-oriented, creative, innovative and opportunity-oriented; being service-minded, sociable, friendly and able to inspire confidence, motivation and personal change and being independent, self-governing, autonomous, effective, efficient, structured and flexible, with a strong capacity to cope with stressful work situations.

Thus, a desirable employee in the eyes of the frontline organisations was a skilful, qualified worker capable of working with clients, participating in interdisciplinary teamwork and making case judgements and decisions, in addition to being a well-functioning employee capable of managing his or her own time and using limited resources responsibly, efficiently and with commitment to the organisations' mission (Alm Andreassen & Natland, 2020).

The disabled applicant appeared in the diversity declarations. These were present in 28 of the 44 advertisements, in all 18 advertisements for state posts, and for municipal posts mostly in advertisements from the large municipalities, including city districts of the capital of Norway.

The declaration appeared most often after the lists of required and requested qualifications and after the description of what the employer offered. It appeared as an appendage, inserted just before the formalities of the application procedure were introduced. It was usually a standardised text, modelled in line with a recommended text on the website of the Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombudsman (LDO), the independent public authority in this matter.

The declaration often stated, in an impersonal manner, that the organisation is…

…committed to diversity, and we encourage all qualified candidates to apply for jobs with us, regardless of age, gender, disability, national or ethnic background. NAV is an Inclusive Workplace, and we will pave the way for applicants with disabilities. (Translation mine)

An exception was this statement, in an even more impersonal form:

Personal qualities are accorded great importance in the selection [of candidates]. It is a goal of the personnel policy to achieve a balanced age and gender composition and to recruit more persons with reduced functional ability and persons with an immigrant background. (Translation mine)

In line with the autonomy granted to local authorities in Norway, the texts vary among the municipalities. Some city districts stated, in the introductory section linked to the presentation of the municipality, that:

…the municipality's workplaces shall be characterised by diversity, and our employees must reflect the population of the city. We encourage everyone who is qualified to apply for a job with us, regardless of age, functional ability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or ethnic background. The municipality emphasises an accommodating work situation if you need it. (Translation mine)

In the diversity declarations, the employer was the acting subject, offering accommodation in line with the anti-discrimination legislation's placing of obligations on employers. The position of the potential disabled employee was passive, without any attributes other than, possibly, reduced functional ability that must be accommodated.

In contrast to the part of the advertisements addressing the desired employee, in which the employer spoke directly to the potential workers (the 'you' that 'we' are looking for), the diversity declaration termed the subjects differently. While still using 'we' for the employer, the advertisement no longer addressed the potential employee as a person but, with less intensity, merely mentioned an impersonal 'candidate' or 'applicant'.

There were no signals in the advertisements of disability being considered an asset. In this respect, NAV had not heeded the advice on the website of the Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombudsman (LDO) to resist thinking traditionally about qualifications and to ask themselves 'Will experiential knowledge and user knowledge be an additional qualification in posts, for example, in NAV or other user-oriented services of the public sector?' (Translation mine)

Except for the large municipality's declaration that the staff should reflect the population, no statements indicated that the experience of disability was wanted, for example, because it could enhance understanding of clients' situations, increase respect for clients or strengthen client confidence towards the organisation. In addition, no advertisements expressed a desire for 'peer providers' or 'user-employers' (i.e., posts in which personal experience as a service user is an important qualification).

The deviant client was yet another subject position in the job advertisements. In contrast to the desired employee and the disabled applicant, who were visible in the job advertisements, the client was an invisible person. The client was implicitly present in the mandate of supporting the labour market participation of individuals who require assistance to become attractive applicants and employable jobseekers. The characteristics of the clients can be inferred from the work tasks and from the competencies required of the desired employees. The clients are the reason why these skills and motivation are required.

Perhaps exaggerated but not without foundation in the advertisement text, the following implicit representation of the clients appears: When it was specified in some advertisements that the employees should be qualified 'to inspire confidence, motivation and personal change', the client subtly appears as someone in need of motivation, guidance and transformation. When some advertisements specified that the employees needed 'to have faith in humanity', the clients subtly appears as persons who do not instantly evoke belief in their capabilities or motivations, or worse, who do not appreciate what the organisations offer to their clients; rather, faith is necessary to positively engage with them. Similarly, when the desired employees in some advertisements should be able 'to treat the clients with respect, but still explicate boundaries', the clients subtly appear as (unreasonably) demanding. When some advertisements stated that the workers should 'show a humble approach and demonstrate tolerance towards individuals from a different culture or with a different point of view', indirectly the client appears as different.

These expressions might be intended to address prejudiced representations of clients and speak to potential employees that envision hope for clients that others might underestimate or devalue. Yet by the traits, characteristics or qualities that are attributed to the clients, the clients

occupy a subject position opposite the capable, desired employee—different, deviant and in need of assistance to become employable.

5. Discussion

This analysis has investigated an organisational practice through which inequality can be maintained (Amis et al., 2018, 2020): the practice of hiring, more specifically the text of job advertisements. According to Amis et al., this practice is justified by the myths that organisations strive for efficiency and that their interest in recruiting employees is based solely on an individual's capabilities and performance.

Indeed, this myth justifies scepticism towards employees with disabilities on the assumption that these citizens, like other groups marginalised in the labour market, lack the required capabilities and thus will reduce an organisation's efficiency. Against this assumption, anti-discrimination legislation and demand-side oriented activation policies aim to stimulate organisations to alter institutionalised practices and become more inclusive workplaces. Organisations respond by including in job advertisements a clause stating that diversity is appreciated and that jobseekers representing minorities or disadvantaged groups are welcome. This response signals an effort to avoid 'disablism' (Thomas, 2012), i.e. the social imposition of avoidable restrictions on the labour market participation of disabled people. The reasonable adjustment statement promises that such restrictions will be removed.

From examining the advertisements alone, it is impossible to conclude whether the frontline organisations handle the normative pressures of proper actions by decoupling actions from their symbolic displays (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008; Bromley & Powell, 2012; Brunsson, 1989; Meyer & Bromley, 2013; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), meaning that although they offer a surface demonstration of inclusiveness by adding a diversity clause, this act of inclusiveness is decoupled from their recruitment practices.

The advertisements signal compliance with policy requirements by including diversity declarations encouraging disabled applicants and promising accommodation. However, these politically correct declarations are overshadowed by the advertisements' dominant image of an exceptionally competent desired employee. The job advertisements introduce extensive lists of qualifications that the desired employee must fulfil, not only to perform the job appropriately but also to carry out the role of an employee, colleague and co-worker.

This text of the job advertisements seems imbued by a norm of ableism: the ideal, highly able and desired employee (Campbell, 2001; Foster & Wass, 2013; Williams & Mavin, 2012). With a normative assumption of non-disability, disability is constructed as an inability that can be erased through accommodation, so that a qualified disabled applicant will be enabled to fulfil the demands of the job on equal terms. The norms of the ideal (non-disabled, non-different) employee are maintained.

The inability is further underscored by the advertisements' lack of openness to disability as a possible asset to the employer, for example, as an experience that could be helpful in contact with clients. A shared identity between clients and counsellors is shown to positively impact clients' levels of satisfaction with vocational rehabilitation services (Gade & Wilkins, 2012), and peer support is reported to enhance the lives of people with mental health problems (Repper & Carter, 2011). In some healthcare and social services jobs, experiential knowledge of illness, impairment or service use seems to be an asset (Alm Andreassen, 2012).

Despite the advertisements' appeal to jobseekers' commitment to the organisations' mission (employment of marginalised individuals), no link is drawn between the desire for this commitment and the motivations of jobseekers who have experienced marginalisation and thus might have an extraordinary personal determination to realise that mission. Instead, disability is associated only with reduced ability and is characterised by impairments that must be accommodated.

Seen this way, the advertisements represent a demonstration of how formal policies targeting workers with disabilities can be 'empty shells' (Hoque & Noon, 2004). If so, diversity declarations are mere talk and have not motivated altered organisational practice, as previous studies have indicated (Kuznetsova & Yalcin, 2017). They are advertising hypocrisy, so to speak.

Given that the performative act of job advertisement conveys a message about the ideal employee (Harper, 2012), the advertisements speak to jobseekers but also to a broader public. The dominant position of the employer in the diversity declaration, in contrast to the passive disabled applicant, may indicate that it is the broader public that is spoken to. The self-representations of the organisations as holding valuable attitudes and policies, such as being committed to and encouraging inclusive personnel policy, further suggest that the public is the declarations' main audience. By incorporating a diversity declaration, organisations conform to politically acceptable standards and signal that they are proper social actors (Meyer & Bromley, 2013).

Nevertheless, as a performative act, the diversity declaration publicly claims—to potential jobseekers and the broader public—that the organisation is welcoming and accommodating, a promise to which the organisation can be held accountable. In order for organisations to only symbolically comply with institutional expectations, the external carriers of institutional expectations must ignore, or accept, a strategy of ceremonial conformity (Greenwood et al., 2011). In this case the organisations are providers of some of the welfare state's most important services to citizens and are tasked with promoting employment for marginalised citizens. One could therefore argue it is implausible that they would escape fierce criticism for merely symbolic compliance. Because of its central position, the Labour and Welfare Administration may be particularly exposed to equality demands from referent organisations within the government and from stakeholders in civil society, who are likely to demand that frontline organisations practice what they preach. Outsider-driven deinstitutionalisation may drive institutional change when established practices are delegitimised and alternative practices are constructed as acceptable (Maguire & Hardy, 2009).

However, it is to potential employees that the advertisements primarily speak. To non-disabled jobseekers the enacting of ableism might be so subtle that the message goes unnoticed. Experiments indicate that groups addressed in equal opportunity statements (e.g., women) are more sensitive to such clauses than are jobseekers not encompassed by a specific diversity encouragement (men) (McNab & Johnston, 2002).

To disabled jobseekers the advertisements may speak differently. The advertisements fail to speak directly to disabled jobseekers by the way the diversity clause casts them as impersonal applicants rather than persons—the 'you' whom the organisations desire, and by their nonexistent acknowledgement of the possibility that disability experience can be an asset.

In addition, the desired employee and the disabled applicant are accompanied by the implicitly present image of the (disabled) clients as the opposite of able—deviant and in need of support and care. From the perspective of a disabled jobseeker, two out of the three conceivable subject positions in the advertisement are demarcated by a perception of disability as deviance.

Based on this reading of the advertisements, jobseekers with disabilities, despite the encouragement in the diversity declaration, may feel unwelcome. Seen this way, the advertisements could (unintentionally) reproduce inequality.

6. Conclusion

The performative act of job advertisements is to convey messages about desired employees. Zooming in on these messages, this analysis demonstrates that despite the diversity declaration's proper response to political and legal efforts to counteracting inequality and enable workplace participation, a mundane organisational practice, that of advertising vacant posts, may instead reproduce inequality. The

advertisements' predominant distinction between the desired employee and the disabled applicant (and the deviant client) shows that organisations, while acting properly and performing the benevolent practice of championing diversity, can still subtly signal the inferiority of disability. In this respect, the advertisements express 'benevolent discrimination' (Romani et al., 2019) that, despite good intentions constructs disabled applicants as inferior and in need of help.

This analysis contributes to research on organisational practices that reinforce inequality by attending not primarily to the intentions behind organisations' responses to institutional expectations but rather to the responses in their own right. By analysing the messages that the responses convey and their nature as a mode of action within the social context of institutionalised practices, it becomes clear that responses supposedly designed to reduce inequality may nevertheless reproduce inequality. The fact that the organisations in this case, due to their mandate of promoting workforce inclusion, expectedly would lead by example but do not, indicates the difficulties associated with altering the many institutionalised practices and perceptions by which inequality persists in organisations. By attending to the performative act of the diversity clause—publicly declaring a promise for which organisations can be held accountable—the analysis also points to the role of the broader environment in altering institutionalised inequality reproducing practices in organisations.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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