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Track 3: Employment policies – labour demand, demography and social partners

DE-PROFESSIONALIZATION IN DANISH LABOUR MARKET POLICY IMPLEMENTATION?

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INTRODUCTION

During recent years, the Danish labour market system has been subject to strong institutional and organisational change (Bredgaard and Larsen 2005; Jørgensen 2002, 2006/2007, 2010; Larsen 2009). The two most recent changes are the structural reform from 2007 that re-organised the institutional set-up of the labour market system along with a new monitoring and controlling system and – of utmost importance - a transfer of all responsibility for labour market policy to the municipalities from 1.8.2009. The official goal was first to bring more “learning” into the system and, secondly, to handle over decision-making authority to local jobcentres and local politicians. The decision authority by the side of the municipalities now also includes insured unemployed people, not only people on social assistance. But in reality the state has improved its control and steering arrangements in order to benchmark and correct the municipalities. This might look contradictory, but the reality is that responsibility for activities have been decentralized while at the same time control and steering has been centralized.

Governance structures have been strongly altered. New Public Management guided reforms have been implemented and they have repercussions as to the development of the policy area. Control measures have been strengthened from the centre, e.g. the state authorities. The institutional changes within the labour market system have introduced a strong focus on hard, quantitative output measures and performance metrics - while omitting other important aspects as accessibility, adequacy, quality, etc. (Jørgensen and Baadsgaard 2009; Jørgensen, Nørup and Baadsgaard 2009). Concurrently, new methods and tools needed in order to describe and assess the unemployed and the sick have been introduced. These include; the work ability assessment method (“arbejdsevnetoden”), the resource profile (“ressourceprofil”) and the visitation toolbox with the dialog guide (“visitationsværktøjskassen” with “dialog-guiden”). The use of these methods and tools are compulsory and mandatory to the jobcentres. Will the result be a de-

professionalization and creation of a machine-bureaucracy in Danish labour market policy? This will be the central focus in this paper.

NEW STEERING ARRANGEMENTS – AND NEW SOCIAL WORKER PRACTICES?

These institutional changes have been introduced and presented merely as technical or organisational changes without political significance. But in reality they also influence and change the content of labour market policy. In brief, the labour market policy in Denmark has become exclusively supply side oriented, short term focused, more standardised, and more strongly based on economic incentives. A reduced role of qualitative activation offers in favour of immediate job placement has been documented (Larsen 2009, Jørgensen 2010). Activation measures now are offered more as discouraging to the individual unemployed person instead of a positive and motivating offer which was previously the case.

During the last 7-8 years, Denmark has witnessed a change in policy, polity and administrative practice. Labour market policies and social policies have changed to become “employment policies”, and the state employment offices and the municipal employment offices have been merged and transformed to local jobcentres. And the administrative arrangements under which they are implemented have changed to new institutional set-ups increasingly constructed around New Public Management strategies of devolution, contracting, and performance measurement. In this connection central wishes of outsourcing of employment policy operations must be mentioned too. This has taken the form of introducing so-called “other actors”, and these private firms have taken over responsibility for concrete actions in relation to activation and regular contact with the unemployed persons.

A major part of the institutional changes should be seen as an attempt by the national authorities to manage the municipalities in their labour market operations and to ensure stronger consistency between the intended policy and the adopted one, meaning the results of the local implementation of the centrally formulated policy. This could also be called stronger implementation control.

A great part of these changes are aimed at management and control of the municipalities in general. These measures include the introduction of a yearly policy programme, the Employment Plan (“Beskæftigelsesplanen”), the establishment of the nationwide system of measurement (“målesystemet Jobindsats.dk”) and the use of incentive schemes. Contracts are made both within the public sector and with “other actors”.

These changes might only indirectly have influence on the professional practice of social workers but, actually, they change the working conditions and the orientations within the system. How much impact they have on the professional practice depends on the extent and ways of reflecting the various control mechanisms in the organization of work and in the consciousness and actions of the employees. We will discuss this in dept later. Other kinds of changes are, however, directly addressing the operational level and have a more direct impact on social work practice. This undoubtedly has repercussions as to the situation and practice of front-line workers, primarily social workers. These include the requirement to apply the method of work ability assessment (“arbejdsevne metoden”), compose the resource profiling (“ressourceprofilen”), and make use of the visitation toolbox (“visitations-værktøjskassen”). This implies standardization of methodology and hence the reduction of discretion in the choice of methods by the side of the employees. Further initiatives also have a direct impact on the professional practice of social

workers, amongst these procedural requirements for deadlines and punctuality in particular implementation of the conversations with the unemployed people, activation and visitation. The result is standardization of workflow and reduction of discretion in relation to planning and needs assessment.

This paper addresses the question of the importance of these new policies, new steering arrangements, and new ways in which performance is programmed within the employment system. Especially the importance for the front-line workers and their competence development is to be scrutinized. In case the introduction of activation policies could be interpreted as a shift from “people processing” to “people changing” policies, a shift might be expected and invoking a professionalization of social work. This is not the case, we think – on the contrary. The new management practices and the requirements for the use of methods and processes will be perceived as limiting the social workers discretion - and therefore signal de-professionalization.

As to theoretical perspectives, the street-level bureaucracy literature is of course of relevance as it portrays the organizational factors structuring policy implementation locally (Lipsky 1980), but it cannot stand alone. Key factors as discretion and coping strategies of the employees (formal room of manoeuvre and informal practices) within the employment system are of use in our study in case we supplement these with concepts of the institutional settings in which these factors will have meaning and reasonableness (Vinzant and Crothers 1998) and the political programming of the employment policy. The institutional environment is conceptualized with the help of historical and sociological institutionalism (Powell and DiMaggio 1991, Jørgensen 2002, Streeck and Thelen 2005). Organizations are not to be portrayed as closed system, operating relatively independently of broader political and administrative dynamics. And in the Danish case strong recalibrations of the institutional set-up of labour market policy administration have taken place within recent years, giving prominence to New Public Management practices and limitations of street-level bureaucracy. The new practices are to be understood as an extension of political-institutional factors which are important to bring into the analysis (Brodkin 2008, 2006, Jewell 2007, Lin 2000). Policy design and implementation, policy adaptation, and professional norms and strategies are all necessary enlargement of the analytical lenses used in our study.

Professionalization within this policy area refers to a process grounded in and emanating from core values of those involved in developing and implementing labour market policy giving recognition over time to knowledge, skills and abilities of professionals. Formal education is to be seen as part of this. *De-professionalization* refers to processes reducing or eliminating formal educational qualifications in the efforts to solve labour market related problems. Our thesis is that de-professionalization rather than professionalization has been a result of the recalibration and “modernization” of Danish labour market policy during the last 7-8 years, creating new conditions and role definitions for the street-level bureaucrats and the local management within the employment system.

This comes down to a central question in relation to the reform processes of what kind of learning will be developed: will it be adaptation to central wishes and instructions or development oriented practices with local discretion? Is a movement *from responsibility and responsiveness towards accountability*, acceptance of quantitative targets defined at the central level and budget restrictions from the side of the municipalities to be witnessed? And are educational qualifications reduced or eliminated in recruitment practices and daily working situations? Shortly: Will de-professionalization be more visible than further professionalization?

In the Netherlands, a new wave of re-professionalization seems to have started (van Bergel 2009). But perhaps Danish developments are different? What kinds of impact do the above mentioned changes have as to the professional work and the qualifications needed in the employment system in Denmark? We refer to the changes imposed on employee control over their daily work and the dilemmas brought about by the changes of governance structure, role definitions, measurement system, compulsory methods, and concrete instructions. To this comes the question of recruitment practices. This involves both choice of interventions, work operations, and ways of performing personnel management (Jørgensen and Dalsgaard 2010). Did the institutional and organizational changes in fact led to changes in the choice of methods and approaches among the frontline workers (Eskelinen et.al. 2008) and did the management side change preferences as to qualifications and orientations?

Not all kinds of questions can be answered yet. A comprehensive research project covering these issues are pending but not concluded. We are, however, able to comment on what kinds of coping strategies are to be found, the perceived qualification needs, and the level of formal training and further education within the system. The frontline workers always play an important role in the labour market system as implementation agents – even if they never were real political decision-makers - and their reactions as to the policy changes are a key to a new understanding of changes in implementation of labour market policy (Lipsky 1980, Brodtkin 2008).

This paper will highlight preliminary findings from a study of multiple job centers and their ways of handling wicked unemployment problems. The study concerns professional practices and qualification needs in relation to employment interventions for vulnerable and particularly exposed groups. Vulnerable groups are defined as those people yet not ready for direct participation within the open labour market (“ikke-arbejdsmarkedspare ledige”) and people on sickness benefits (“sygedagpengemodtagere”). Data collection was launched in autumn 2009 and is still pending. Final conclusions will be drawn in 2011.

Historically, the treatment of these vulnerable groups has been a municipal responsibility and has largely been handled by social workers (“socialrådgivere”) and social service providers (“socialformidlere”). Both groups of employees have a formal educational background. The social workers in Denmark have a three and a half year long education as entry qualifications. The social service providers have passed exams supplementing their work practices and work experiences in the municipal administration. But besides those two groups more people with different educational backgrounds are employed within the system – some even without any formal training and others with academic background. The social workers now constitute about one half of all the people working within the jobcentres. We estimate that more than 80% of those working with vulnerable groups at the Jobcentres are social workers and social service providers. No information is at hand as to the qualification background of people working within contracting firms.

The fundamental work tasks have initially contained two layers, on the one hand, the task of ensuring a maintenance basis through the approval and allocation of social assistance grants, which was primarily an administrative task, and on the other hand the task of improving the quality of life of vulnerable groups through provision of social work, which was primarily a professional social worker task.

The implemented changes during recent years resulted in alternating work conditions and changes as to the content of the job. First, this was done by a physical separation of the two tasks, so that the job of securing a maintenance base has been carried out by a granting office (“ydelseskontoret”) while the professional social work was to be performed by the Jobcentre employees. Furthermore, the content of professional social work has changed with the policy changes that have occurred with the shift to activation orientation and introduction of more work-first approach elements in Danish labour market policy. Socialization of risks has been turned into a movement of individualization of risks and, correspondingly, the prime objective of the front-line workers is now to control, motivate, and to help the unemployed persons defining themselves in a role of motivated and active citizens ready to take up work offered. Immediately, preferably. As explained by the former Danish Ministry of Employment, Claus Hjort Frederiksen;

“It is a matter of a coherent employment policy with the focus on individualised measures in order to qualify and motivate the individual person to seek and obtain employment on the ordinary labour market. The emphasis is on making work pay. And on ensuring that all unemployed persons are actually available for work.”

ORGANIZATION, MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGY

Despite the creation of common frameworks and stronger central control through a countrywide measurement system, the use of economic incentives, and requirements for methods and standards, the jobcentres have organized themselves in different ways and organized efforts to promote employment rather differently. Similarly, the content of the policy differ between municipalities of which there is now 98. The number of jobcentres is 91. In this section we will present different ways of organizing the jobcentres and various strategies for the employment efforts. In the next section we examine the significance of this changing context for the professional practice.

We will first look at the organization and management of jobcentres and then turn to the strategies used in relation to the handling of vulnerable citizens. Although municipalities are subject to a number of key provisions for the organization and management of the jobcentres, the key provisions relating to organization and management are, however, so broad that it is possible to identify local variations between municipalities.

On the basis of desk research and preliminary examinations of our own empirical data we have divided the organization of the employment efforts into two main strategies. This is strategies reflecting: a) the organization of the municipalities in relation to the central wishes of contracting out of employment arrangements, and b) the local use or non-use of centrally developed steering instruments. As to the question of outsourcing and contracting out, the municipalities can be divided into two main categories: First, a category emphasising an "inside job centre-oriented approach", where contact, monitoring and regulatory functions in relation to individuals are located primarily inside jobcentres - and correspondingly own staffing - and activation largely takes place in municipal auspices. In contrast, we find an "external market-oriented approach" where contacts with unemployed people and follow-up as well as activation normally are outsourced and delegated to other actors. Data from past studies seems to validate and substantiate these assumptions.

Next we turn to the question of management and the use of new steering instruments. The first results of our study suggest that one can distinguish between, on the one hand, two main types of governance - steering through *the management and control of action* – and, on the other hand, steering through *personalized and situation-adapted practices*. The first form of governance is characterized by a focus on and ways of complying with government targets, a pronounced use of targets and performance management, and a strong orientation towards incentives, including the use of contracts and written agreements between management and employees. Sanctions are heavily used against unemployed persons. The second form of governance is characterized by a large focus on local political agendas, overall use of targets and performance management, and limited use of incentives, including a high degree of autonomy of individual departments and among employees. Sanction practices are, presumably, less strong too.

Combining these results and two dimensions, there can be formed two axes, respectively the organizational and the governance axis. Each axis consists off two broad categories. This can create a “four quarter table” which can represent a typology of the Jobcentres. The intention to establish a typology has been to identify ways of addressing the employment efforts in relation to professionalization/de-professionalization. We want to examine the impact on employment work addressing “the most vulnerable citizens”, including the choice of methods and tools to be used.

The considerations and operations are highlighted in the following figure 1.

Figure 1: Typology of jobcentre strategies

		Organizing	
		<i>Internaljobcentre oriented strategy</i>	<i>Eksternal market orientered strategy</i>
Steering	<i>Management steering</i>	I	II
	<i>Individualized and situation adapted steering</i>	III	IV

In consistency with the above-mentioned typologies of jobcentres, we have been able to identify different strategies, understandings of the best way to handle the most vulnerable citizens and to act accordingly. This identification is done on the basis of a large number of interviews in the jobcentres with street-level bureaucrats and with decentral and central leaders. Our first analysis of the data suggests that there may be identified clear variations in how the target groups are perceived, what kinds of interventions are in use, what the aim of the intervention is, what kinds of methods preferred etcetera.

The variations were found to crystallize into 4 broad strategies for action, belonging to each typology of jobcentres. The strategies may in themselves be seen as analytical categories, since

they are simplifications and generalizations that do not contain all the nuances and details that have been reflected in the individual jobcentres and with individual employees at the jobcentre.

Despite this kind of diversity, the jobcentres also exhibit common traits, according to more analysis and to common understanding. Firstly, they are expressing a common understanding that the aim of programmes and actions is employment, people must be motivated for and willing to take up any employment opportunity. Secondly, they formulate the overarching goal of all efforts consisting in self-reliance. Individualization of risks and individual capabilities to cope with problems are seen as interrelated. And, thirdly, jobcentres express a very strong job orientation. Our preliminary analysis suggests, however, that there are marked differences between jobcentres in how the orientation towards jobs and the goal of autonomy and self reliance is to be understood and how attempts to comply with this are being orchestrated. Pushed to extremes; On one side you can talk about the jobs being perceived as *a social integration mechanism*, while on the other hand, the position prevails that the individual job orientation is a control tool and a base for using penalties (also in relation to this weak target audience). This represents *a social disciplining mechanism*.

In our analysis of the strategies for action, we uncover understandings of problems of the Jobcentres, i.e. we map out their description of the target population (target groups), its problems, the extent and types of adequate methods and interventions. This also includes the extent to which they perceive the weaker members of society as a differentiated audience and if moral-therapeutic problems can be ascribed to certain members of society. This comes down to the question; Do the jobcentres perceive the weak citizens as a homogeneous or diverse group? Should they be regarded as a weak target population? Do they describe the situation of the weak unemployed persons primarily as individual caused or do they consider it a matter of common concern? Are problems perceived as "simple" or wicked, complex ones, and do they consider the target group to have few or many problems, etc.?

Next, the fundamental programme understanding of each jobcentre is reconstructed: What is the goal of the efforts and what kind of goal-mean chains are to be constructed? What types of activities should be part of the efforts? What is the position as to the use of sanctions and control mechanisms? Is emphasis on the individual needs or are the efforts seen as problems just being in need of a "one size fits all" solution?

Our analysis of initial survey data suggests that there can be identified 4 different strategies in accordance with figure 1. They can be characterized as;

- I. *Placement in jobs*. Jobs function as this central social inclusion mechanism. The weaker persons must be placed in a job, perhaps also a protected job during the first part of the reintegration process. Jobs are both the target and the solution to the problems of the weak citizens. The task is to find a job that people can handle and keep. By placing the weaker unemployed persons in jobs you also solve the problems and constraints which people have. No clear indication is given how to get the individual to perform. It is up to the employees and the micro processes to figure out.
- II. *Clarification for work*. The weaker unemployed persons must be upgraded to perform a job as qualification requirements generally are uploaded all the time. But job placement is the

ultimate goal. The task is to find a suitable job that can support people now. Skilling is the mean that will lead to jobs.

- III. *Clarification of the citizen.* The relatively weak citizen must be processed in a clarification sequence. Proper placement of the citizen is the main target (mainly employment). The task is to ensure the right reliance and maintenance. Through the chain of events of clarification it is ensured that citizens get the right maintenance basis. Time budgets are to be accepted as a necessary condition for improvements.
- IV. *Sustained activation, control and sanction.* The objective is to get the weak citizens to participate in activation and contact sequences. Successful prosecution of the citizen and reimbursement maximization are the goals. The intensive contacts and activation measures are expected to have effects and impacts on the consciousness and behaviour of the citizen. The efforts should primarily ensure that citizens become self-supporting and no longer receives public support.

Behind the 4 strategies are different understandings of what kinds of problems the weak citizen are confronted with. This in turn leads to different understandings of what kinds of relevant interventions and methods should be used and in what context. Or in other words: what works for whom and when.

There is a diversity of interpretations as to problem structures and policy structures. This implies a proliferation and diversity as to both the organization and management as to the strategies and understandings of suitable interventions. Although centrally created conditions, equal for all jobcentres, have been created, the municipalities have reacted in different ways and developed a diversity of local answers to local labour market problems. This has been recorded organizationally as well as strategically.

Next, we are going to establish and identify the implications and importance for professional practice. The organizational and strategic choices seem to imply different pressures as to the professionalization/de-professionalization question. At the same time we will deal with the paradox of how the centrally announced requirements as to methods and processes in relation to activation policy can imply local differences in professional practice and qualification needs.

Professional practice

On a daily basis, the employees of the employment system are faced with quite different challenges in order to find solutions to the central tasks, they are hired to do. The overarching objective is to ensure that the weaker unemployed persons and the off-work and sick people become able to return to the ordinary labour market - immediately or later - to be able to start a formal education, or are approved to stay in a public arrangement for a longer period of time while being treated or trained. At the same time the employees and the programme managers are also faced with several not necessarily compatible demands on how they should execute their jobs and in which ways they should organise the daily work.

The front-line workers who are engaged with these groups are as mentioned above subject to a long inventory of institutional, organisational, steering and political elements, often perceived as barriers, which to some extent define and decide which problems need to be solved first, how the

work is to be carried out, and which methods and tools to be used. There are also a number of requirements and capacity tests for the employees, coming from various quarters, for example in relation to how work efforts must be registered and how priorities in their daily work have to be made. The employees do not have full discretion to organize their work; the room of manoeuvre is limited. This means that their ability to conduct professional discretion is reduced and predetermined to take place with only a few pre-given possibilities. This does not mean that employees have no influence on their work activities and ways of performing, that there is no discretion in working with disadvantaged unemployed and sick people, or that employees do not also influence how a given policy is implemented and carried out in practice. It simply reflects that a common framework for their work has been institutionalized and this is producing limitation to the options at hand while at the same time defining role definitions of the front-line workers and local programme managers. Registration practices and internal meetings occupy most of the time of the employees. Direct contact with the unemployed persons is often occupying less than 20 per cent of the time.

It goes without saying that the narrower the context requirements of the employee's work are and the more management and control of performance is being developed, the less becomes the employee's room of manoeuvre. In recent years, the Danish employment policy has been subject to exactly such narrowing of the framework for carrying out the work with disadvantaged unemployed and sick people. This has been realized through a number of changes in the way work is planned, how it is organised and – last, but not least - through an enhanced management and control efforts. These have been manifested through an increased state control and supervision of the municipalities and by the help of a deliberate reduction of the action options of the individual employee.

The institutional set-up for this change of policy was created during the last 7 years. Under the employment policy changes derived from the structural reform which came into force in January 2007 and with the merger of the municipal and national employment in a municipal entity in August 2009, this framework for the execution of the employment policy was finalized. Alongside the institutional and organisational changes, a substantial change in the employment arrangements has taken place and this has moved the focus more towards active responsibility for the unemployed in relation to motivation and self-management. Unemployment and social security is no longer a question of passive relief, but more of the unemployed and the clients' personal development and responsibility. The political focus has shifted and you can say that the political problem definition for unemployment and for people on sick leave has been altered. These wicked problems are now perceived and treated as tame, simple or straightforward problems, only in need of standardized measures – according to the central political wishes.

The structural changes and alteration of the political approach towards the labour market problems call for a corresponding change in behaviour among the employees within the employment system. Implementation processes and administrative practices have been revised. New action rules have been developed and communicated to the front-line workers. This is simply because these changes alter the context of work performance and thereby also the demands as to how work must be performed in practice. Due to the structural changes and instructions from above, the employees must use new and specific tools and workflows, for example, the so called resource profile, and the action and job plans. Formerly, individual action plans were set up in intense dialogues between the unemployed person and a representative from the public employment office (Jørgensen 2006/2007). This called for complex social work

activities. Similarly, the unemployed are now classified in standardized categories, the so called “match-categories”, which is determined by how well the unemployed persons’ or sick persons’ situation, qualifications and competences match the labour market demands and the extent to which the unemployed are able to return to the labour market quickly or to participate in an employment-directed effort. Specified visitation tools must therefore be used; *standardisation of the work* seems to be a reality, as a requirement for detailed recording of the work activities and case information in several parallel systems increases the amount of administrative work for the employment system employees. Moreover, the social workers and the other front-line workers meet the new qualification demands for internal communications, systematic knowledge sharing and coordination, which was not included in existing social worker education. In addition, the municipalities, which in practice are responsible for the operation of the employment system, have been subject to a significantly higher level of state management and control. The attempt of the state is to control the behaviour of the municipalities through various reimbursement schemes, requirements to use other (private) actors in the efforts, and through quantitative measure of how each municipality is to perform and how the jobcentres can compete with the help of the new measurement system. Competition between jobcentres has been a central steering mechanism.

Thus the employees in the employment system must meet a row of new work requirements. These requirements are, firstly, made locally of the programme managers of municipalities and the leaders of the individual departments in the municipalities. The requirements are on compliance with political and local objectives and to ensure municipal success in national polls. Secondly, this raises the question of the best way to organise work and arrangements, but also certain demands and requirements as to how the employees can and must execute their work. This includes working methods. Furthermore, this has implications as to what kinds of qualifications employees will need in order to carry out their job and to act in a loyal way within the system. Thirdly, the required tools and methods to be used by the employees also narrow the number of options for action in different situations. And fourth and finally, a set local and national policy objectives and problem perceptions also install considerations and requirements as to the content and focus of the employment effort. The task fulfilment under such conditions is not open for strong discretion on the side of the social workers.

But besides these requirements and challenges, the employees must also meet demands and challenges that come from the very subject of their work, namely the unemployed or off-work sick people. These so-called weaker unemployed and sick people are not a homogeneous group of citizens. Rather, it is a very diverse group with many different and often complex problems in addition to sick call or unemployment. Typically, these are people who also suffer from physical, mental and/or social problems of many different kinds, and to varying degrees these problems restricts or hinders the possibility of labour market integration – or even ability to return to work within a shorter period of time. Different demands on implementation work are also prompted by the fact that the group of citizens is very diverse. People may be in different life situations and have different social perspectives. This goes both in terms of the way in which the employees may approach the individual unemployed person, in the content of the work in each case as to which considerations must be taken and not least, the perspective and workload of each case.

Summing up, this is to say that the employees face a variety of challenges in relation to working with the individual unemployed persons but under clear restrictive conditions and with notebooks and instructions coming from above. “Notebook” inflation is a reality.

Dilemmas of the frontline workers

So far our study has shown that the employees are faced with a series of often conflicting demands addressed from different angles, but mostly from above. This also means that the employees are faced with problems meeting these demands which necessarily are not easy to comply with. According to our analysis, this situation causes different types of dilemmas among the employees, including ethical ones. The dilemmas can roughly speaking be divided into three different categories; a) *dilemmas relating to the distribution of resources, primarily time*, 2) *dilemmas relating to the employees work identity and ethical standards*, and 3) *dilemmas relating to the execution and content of the employment efforts*.

One of the characteristics of the phenomenon dilemma is its recurrence within the system. One well-known dilemma is situations in which the employees have too many tasks and too little time. This dilemma is often linked to the fact that the administrative work in each case takes up more and more time, due to the changed legislation related to the structural reform from 2007 and rising unemployment since mid-2008. This means that a case-worker faces situations where he or she has to choose between either spending a great deal of time on doing all the administrative work in this case - for example to register the case information in several different databases – or, alternatively, to spend time on actual casework that from his or her professional view is more relevant and adequate. But in the last case he or she will not be full-filling the administrative tasks and this could cause troubles with the management.

This time-related dilemma is often closely linked to dilemmas relating the employees' work identity and ethical standards, often of a collective kind, rooted in common formal education as semi-professionals. This goes for social workers. Several of the employees we have spoken to consider themselves as case-workers, job consultants, social workers etc. and not as administrative staff. However, in all four municipalities examined, the administrative tasks to be performed by the employees are taking up more time that it did a few years ago. This means that the employees' work identity and perception of what they are educated and hired to do sometimes conflict with the actual content of their job. Most of the front-line workers mention that they do not see themselves as administrative staff or secretaries, and yet they are obligated to spend an increasing amount of time on these kinds of tasks. This dilemma seems to be occurring more often in municipalities with specific strategies employed, especially IV in our overview above. This implies that solutions to the dilemmas heavily depend on how the municipalities choose and organise their employment strategy.

Another dilemma occurs when the employee's professional opinion on a case differs from the local political objectives or the procedures that must be followed. The employees here have to choose between his or her professional judgment and the organisational norms and rules. For example some of the employees in our study explain how they sometimes face a dilemma when a citizen does not show up to the planned meetings or activities. The rules and procedures say that the employee must report it immediately in order that the financial support to the citizen in case can be cancelled. But the professional judgement made by some of the employees on the other hand says that a cancellation of the financial support will not help the overall purpose – only make this person more poor and helpless - and most likely cause more damage to the progress already achieved. If a decision is taken not to follow the rules and instructions this can be accounted for as counter-implementation from below.

The employees' dilemmas vary to some degree between the four case municipalities analysed. As already noted the four cases differ to some extent when it comes to the way they have organised and managed the local employment efforts and when it comes to choosing strategy. This seems to have strong influence on the working condition for the employee and for which tasks the employees must carry out, including demands made on the execution and definition of their job. The organisational, managerial and strategic differences between the cases also seem to influence which competences the employees are expected to possess or are considered in need of acquiring in order to do their daily work properly.

Development in division of labour and changes of work content

It seems as if the enhanced management and control system mentioned imply that the qualifications needed within the employment system have been reduced accordingly. Being able to receive orders to obey instructions and perform the tasks set-up without individual influence now appears to be a primary qualification. A second requirement is the ability to communicate with the unemployed persons involved. People able to talk to other people and those who are keen on forming and maintaining networks are now preferred in recruitment situations on behalf of people with formal education. This is a trend we have seen in a number of municipalities, though not in all. Some municipalities still prefer educated social workers especially when working with disadvantaged unemployed. However, the tendency towards de-professionalization within the system is clear. At the same time though other specialized tasks are being developed and here some professionalization might also be recorded.

In some, but not all, of the cases the employees' job consist to a large extent of administrative tasks and contact with and control of the so-called "other actors" to which the actual employment effort has been outsourced. Most of the time these employees do not need the professional skills of a social worker, since they have no "people processing" or "people changing" job tasks. In these cases the first results indicate that a de-professionalization of the social worker skills is taking place. Standardization of procedures and simple job routines has similar implications, proclivity making the jobcentres into traditional machine bureaucracies and skill requirements lower over time. There is, however, also some indication that some examples of re-professionalization can be found. This goes with situations in which new skills are needed to communicate with different labour market actors such as private actors, unemployment insurance funds ("a-kasser"), medical professional consultants, and private companies. This also relates to the ability to read, understand and administrate the legislation and to register and systemize information collected from private actors, unemployment insurance funds etc. It is, however, too early to conclude that there is only a general re-professionalization going on.

In many cases it seems that the content of jobs still consists of a lot of meetings and general contact with the citizens and what you could call typical social worker tasks in general. In these cases, the skills needed and used are skills such as ability to communicate and handle different types of citizens and different types of social problems among the citizens. Despite the fact that the municipalities must follow the same rules when it comes to registration and other administrative tasks and when it comes to outsourcing certain parts of the employment effort, it seems that the municipalities implement and interpret the legislation rather differently. This implies that the content of the jobs of the employees in fact also differs to some degree. Diversity seems to be a fact in Danish employment policy under municipalisation. The diversity we have found is quiet paradoxical when taking into account that many of the standardisations, formal

procedures, prescribes tools and methods, which the employees must use, actually were intended to cause more homogeneity and consistency within in the system and among the municipalities. The diversity implies that the strong limitation of the employees manoeuvre has not led to only a homogenous and consistent employment effort. Perhaps it has led to different coping strategies and practices due to the diversity of the implementation of the central policy within the municipalities. This again raises the question whether it is possible to secure consistency and homogeneity in the employment effort through limitation and maybe even de-professionalization of the employees and within the municipalities or if consistency and homogeneity are more likely reached through a strong professionalized staff with common educational skills, concepts and understandings.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Expert knowledge is challenged – but also needed in labour market implementation. Professionalization or de-professionalization raises theoretical, practical as well as political questions. No final conclusion can be drawn yet from our study as the project is still pending, but it seems that the professional social worker skills which previously were the basis for the employment efforts do no longer hold position. There is a pressure on the qualification needs, dropping from high educational requirements to more unspecific and diverse ones. But also new skills and abilities are called for. For the social worker profession a serious problem arises if de-professionalization will be the future trend and the professional job basis will be eroded. But this has not happened yet. Neither does it imply that the social worker skills are no longer needed, but it is more likely that other professional skills and qualifications seems to be equally used and called for depending on how the local municipality has chosen to organise and manage the employment efforts. Developments will dependent on which strategy the municipality will be aiming at and how the professional education can include a broad base of competences and transferable skills. More kinds of strategies have been identified amongst the Danish municipalities despite central wishes of homogenisation, central control and standardisation of efforts.

Pressures on the employees are strong, for sure. Demands as to changing values, behavior and ways of dealing with unemployed persons are visible and perceptible by the employees. The tendency is clear: Traditional professional *responsibility* of the social workers is being substituted with *accountability* within the employment system. Practices are changing, new qualifications are called for – and more “old” qualifications have been made superfluous. However, very slender data are available at the moment concerning the ways in which local welfare agencies are reforming the organization of work and management processes in order to adjust to policy and governance reforms during recent years. The municipal taking over of all labour market policy functions from 1.8.2009 is too new to let us have firm answers yet. And further research is also urgently needed as to how the functions of frontline workers are being redesigned in connection with changing qualification needs and recruitment strategies amongst the municipalities. Even if de-professionalization now must be called a real threat to the famous Danish employment policy system, the picture is not very clear as to de-professionalization or professionalization. More tendencies are to be recorded at the moment.

Of institutional and structural factors accounting for the de-professionalization trend these four should be mentioned;

- a) *the transformation of the welfare state*. The withdrawal of the public sector from responsibility for some kinds of social problems and the introduction of work first-approaches has strong impacts on the working pressures in labour market administration. The citizen's needs and best interest is no longer the natural frame of reference and the basic success criteria to social work. The state has also been recalibrating organizational practices and introducing more control and sanction based working procedures,
- b) *the introduction of managerialization of all kinds of service production*. New Public Management has become the new "religion" as to modernization processes - and performance scores relative to other service producers has become a goal in itself. Contractualization is mushrooming and this causes economic parameters to dominate. This has potentials to narrow professional discretion in implementing public policies, to change the meaning of "good work", and to foster new and changing demands for qualifications. The professional case-logic of applying knowledge, skills and abilities is being substituted by rule-based routines. This in turn questions the professional autonomy of the front-line workers,
- c) *evidence based information, evaluation and knowledge systems* have been introduced. Empirical proof should safeguard efficiency and effectiveness. This could call for professionalization of greater parts of the public sector, but in reality it seems as if it will divide the working force into a few number of people being up-graded while more people will experience transformations of their working practices into less knowledge based activities. Best practice is often unique practice. Evidence-based practice is enforced by the central government,
- d) *within social and labour market policy administration the work is being standardized*. A shift of paradigm as to social workers practice seems to take place, enhancing the tendency to standardization as centrally placed decision-makers simplify the tasks of making choices in changing environments and unpredictable situations. Manuals and notebooks, direction and supervision are used to control the employees' behavior. Knowledge bases are being eroded, job requirements are being relaxed, and de-professionalization might be a result. In some systems revisions of formal education has already materialized, also paving the way for substitution of manpower categories within the administration.

The institutional factors are supplemented by behavioral ones, including norm production and ways of front-line workers interacting with managers, controllers, and citizens. Professional social work positions have even been declassified. But ambivalences prevail. Examples of re-professionalization are also to be recorded. The social workers have lost control over the contexts of their work but this is not to say that they also have lost control over the content of their work. Perhaps you should talk of post-professionalization (Randall and Kindiak 2008) instead of just one-dimensional developments.

Professional practice has, however, been changing during recent years. In Denmark, no formal education is officially needed in order to carry out a job within the jobcentres or in the private firms now executing most of the activation measures. This means that no formal and single job monopoly ever existed for social workers. They have collectively been fighting for professional acknowledgement but have not succeeded in establishing a firm job monopoly. The local jobcentres still have autonomy in hiring practices. And as we saw, some jobcentres still prefer well educated social workers while others simply do not want to hire them at all and are using both more and less skilled manpower. There are a few examples of new tasks within the employment system calling for up-grading and more qualified people; but the general tendency seems to be a de-professionalization process. Not only reduced or eliminated formal educational

background is to be witnessed, also a free choice by the side of the employers to redesign jobs is to be seen and thus resulting in fewer qualifications needed. The lack of recognition of formal qualifications in relation to the jobs within the employment system seems to be the big problem at the moment. No efforts have been made during the last 30 years officially to define competences needed in the system. This is a big political and administrative mistake, we think. If the central authorities really want standards to be reached this should be done by the help of professionalization, giving inner-oriented standards which all within the profession will be safeguarding. The professional project of the social workers has not been eroded even if self-regulation has been in decline for some years now. You could perhaps also see this as a remarkable resilience of these professionals and an ability to resist professional decline. New roles for social workers could be developed within labour market policy administration. However, the loss of control of a specialized body of knowledge and professional skills might be threatening.

Consequences of further de-professionalization could also be highlighted. Firstly, new evaluation measures and practices weaken the personal responsibility of the front-line workers and reorient their attention from the real situation towards the possible outcome and performance score. Secondly, the way work is carried out can influence their involvement in a negative way, producing lower motivation and a less emotional-based daily work – work might even be seen primarily as “technical” exercises by some. Thirdly, a reduction in the semi-professional workers recognition of practical problems and possibilities might also be foreseen, eventually resulting in lower moral and ethical sensibility. We hear from more social workers that they will not be able to continue working like this. They might leave the job and the system soon.

Dilemmas are growing. And so are recruitment problems within the employment system at the moment; social workers simply do not find it attractive any longer to take up these jobs. With discretion and responsibility slipping away and control and accountability growing the future do not look bright for the front-line workers within the Danish labour market policy administration – unless reforms and new ways of qualifying people for new tasks would be started. More than professionalism is at stake.

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