Transparency as ideal and practice

Labour market policy and audit culture in the Swedish public employment service

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Abstract

New Public Management (NPM) ideas and practices have significantly reshaped labour market policy. This article takes a closer look at some of the implications of NPM practices and "audit culture" at local Public Employment Service (PES) authorities in Sweden. Based on interviews with staff at a rehabilitation unit in PES, the article analyses processes of evaluating work capacity and disability for marginally employable people, as part of the Employability Rehabilitation Programme. By studying the classification procedures, the article aims to show how administrative categories work as "technologies of government" that make transparent and "legible" desirable traits in the individual. Such classificatory schemes, we argue, are integral parts of the operational procedures of NPM. Moreover, the analysis shows that the categories through which the individual moves are plastic and pliable in relation to political predicates and labour market fluctuations. In this process, employability and disability become floating categories

Introduction: Employability and disability as policy categories

Our starting point is the notion of the "employable individual", which has emerged as a powerful policy category, saturated with assumptions about what it takes to be attractive in the labour market. The discourse on employability reflects a trend towards enhanced emphasis on competition, mobility, flexibility, and continuous learning in contemporary Western labour markets (Garsten & Jacobsson 2004). As welfare provisions are tightened and unemployment numbers rise, people are expected to assume individual responsibility for the development of their professional portfolios, their capacities, and for their career trajectories. Enhanced self-responsibilization of the individual is seen as a recipe for dealing with financial constraints, unemployment numbers, and for achieving a greater degree of dynamism in labour markets (see e.g. Clarke, 2005).

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Despite its wide-ranging usage, employability remains a contested concept in terms of its use in both theory and policy (e.g. McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Peck and Theodore, 2000). To some extent, employability has remained a "floating signifier" (Levi-Strauss, 1950), i.e. a term in itself void of meaning, thus apt to carry diverse definitions and open to be translated in various ways in different local contexts (Garsten and Jacobsson, 2004; Fejes, 2010). Nonetheless, the "employable individual" is an influential normative category in current labour market discourses, infused with assumptions about what it takes to be attractive in changeable labour markets (e.g. Garsten and Jacobsson, 2004; Fejes, 2010; Willams, 2005). Professional skills and work experience are no longer considered to be sufficient; "softer" social skills, flexibility, and adaptability, are also required, as well as the capacity to market and to sell oneself. Job coaches, career counsellors (Sharone, 2007, Fogde, 2009) and other "experts on subjectivity" (Rose, 1989) are engaged in seeking to transform unemployed subjects into "entrepreneurial" and "self-reliant" selves (Rimke, 2000; Thedvall, 2004). The normative implication is that the individual is expected to assume active responsibility for her own employability by being prepared to work on her "self" in order to improve her attractiveness to the labour market. A crucial question arises: How are people who cannot live up to these expectations and who face challenges with respect to making themselves employable, dealt with in labour market policy implementation?

The discursive shift towards employability and activation has meant putting in place new procedures, routines, and practices at PES agencies, and new ways of organizing welfare provisions. It has also meant new expectations and demands placed on employees and jobseekers. As we will show in this article, for some jobseekers with "weak employability", the way to enhance employability and find employment goes through a process of detecting and coding disability at the Public Employment Service (PES). By coding unemployed individuals as "disabled", the PES can devise special assistance for them, such as subsidized or sheltered employment or other types of special resources for a period. Disability coding can thus be a means to access public resources and to enhance one's employability. Being coded as disabled is thus one way of "becoming employable enough" (cf. Cremin, 2010).

Thus this article analyses the processes of evaluating work capacity for marginally employable people as part of the Employability Rehabilitation Programme, with special focus on examination, judgement, and functional impediment codification. By looking more closely into the classification procedures as technologies of government (Rose, 1999), we aim to show how the administrative labels work to mediate and distribute employability. Moreover, we argue that such classificatory schemes are integral parts of the operational procedures of New Public Management. These technologies of government are aligned with the central NPM notion of making performance auditable, a

notion rooted in the specialist judgment and knowledge base of service professionals. They are articulations of the kinds of "auditable performances" (Power 1999) that are put in place as a result of NPM models and linked to the logics of responsibilization and activation. The classificatory schemes of NPM thus work to funnel individuals into a process that facilitates the allocation of resources according to performance and capability criteria, and that assists in the oversight of procedural adherence. We argue that the coding is in part a side-effect of audit culture and legibility concerns.

The classificatory schemes also imply new ways of governing organizational processes and novel mechanisms of "making up people" (Hacking 1986). The labels that are "offered" and opened up for those who undergo rehabilitation are positioned as voluntary. Yet, it is only by accepting and agreeing to be coded as disabled that one may receive the benefits and resources available. While the codes may enhance the employability of the individual, s/he is "formatted" in a process in which the desirable criteria for employability are set according to a specific organizational intervention programme. Employability thus emerges as a result of a template for what is considered acceptable and desirable by the organization, in this case the PES. Our analysis thus highlights some of the "regulatory paradoxes" which surround audit and governance in the realization of labor market policy. Whilst the classifications are intended to work as neutral diagnostic instruments for the allocation of resources, they ultimately have unintended consequences for those who are classified, as well as for those who carry out the classifications. They contribute to strategic utilization and opportunistic use of the classificatory tools available, and may in the long run undermine the very cause they were meant to support, i.e. providing equitable benefits for the unemployed. Our analysis also reveals the contingent and arbitrary nature of the classifications, even though they are intended to be neutral and "verifiable" instruments.

Whilst the intention of the caseworkers involved is to make disabled people employable through the operation of interventions tailored to the needs of the individual, their primary implication is that they contribute to the functioning of a bureaucratic process of classification and governance, to satisfy what Power terms "the anxious ruler" (1999). We show how the classification practices work as "technologies of government" (Rose, 1999), serving the organizational need to make individuals "read-able" and "process-able". Following Scott (1998), we conceptualize the bureaucratic assessment practices as techniques of "legibility" in that they allow for an organizational "reading" and processing of individuals. Furthermore, they allow for a particular performance to be put into practice, one that is focused on the funnelling of unemployed people into bureaucratic slots that open up for particular interventions.

In this evaluation process, employability, work capacity, and disability become floating signifiers. The categories are plastic, relationally defined, and

interdependent. To be non-employable *becomes a disability* and conversely, to be disabled *can make one employable.* Moreover, the categories demand versatile individuals who can adjust to and "qualify" for their distinctions and demands (Garsten & Jacobsson 2013).

The article is structured as follows: first, we describe the study conducted in more detail. Then we discuss the broader policy context before we outline our theoretical perspective, which will guide us in the empirical sections that follow. The concluding section summarizes the main findings and discusses some implications.

The study

The study builds on 22 interviews conducted in 2007 and 2008, 15 of which were with staff at PES Rehab (Public Employment Service Rehabilitation or *AF Rehabilitering*) in two Swedish counties, and seven of which were with local employment officers and staff at the Public Employment Service central administration.[1] PES Rehab is a consultative function of the Public Employment Service organization, where work life psychologists, occupational therapists, and social welfare supervisors work. These specialists investigate the work capabilities of the individual on assignment by administrators at the Public Employment Service. Our attention is directed, first, to how staff at PES Rehab work to classify disability, to investigate work capacity and thereby to judge the employability of people. Secondly, we look at the process of negotiation and contingency that this entails.

More precisely, our study articulates the organizational technologies of government, involving the use of organizational typologies and procedures to make individual characteristics clearly legible, as reflective of audit culture in public welfare bureaucracies. We show how the categories used in the processing of people, i.e. categories used to convey information about employability, disability and capability, are themselves floating signifiers, defined relationally and plastically, within the context of a bureaucratic apparatus and performance logic. This bureaucratic context furthermore works to de-politicize processes that are in effect politically driven and charged. Their plasticity makes them amenable tools in enhancing the performance logic and in making performance auditable.

Calibrating employability at the interface of state and individual

New Public Management techniques carry implications for social citizenship. Social citizenship, while defined in legal regulations, is implemented by street-level bureaucrats and caseworkers as part of their daily routines for client encounters. It is in the "interface zone" between individuals and the state (cf. Martin, 1997) that social citizenship is ultimately defined. It is also in this dynamic zone that the clients' subject positions are assigned and subjectivities are negotiated and shaped (e.g. Korteweg, 2003). Hence, it is a place where the calibration of normalization, normativity, moralization and, occasionally, the compulsion that constitutes policy implementation takes place. This interface shifts according to ideological changes, organizational transformations and policy adjustments. With the influx of NPM ideals, the interface zone has come to highlight the underlying assumptions of market-orientation. With the present policy focus on employability, the interface between state and individual has shifted in the direction of individual responsibility and activation. The discourse on employability is furthermore individualizing, and in part de-politicizing, in the sense that explanations for unemployment are sought in the supply of labour, more precisely in the qualities and characters of individuals, rather than in the supply of jobs as determined by macro-economic policy (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004; Sharone, 2007). Hence, solutions to unemployment are also sought in the qualities and characters of individuals. These are thus constructed as intervention areas for policy.

The individualist emphasis goes hand in hand with the shift in administrative techniques towards advanced liberal forms of government (e.g. Miller and Rose, 2008), which involves a new diagram of control exercised by authorities and institutions and a constant and never-ending modulation of conduct (Rose, 1999). It is exercised, for example, through the practices of continuous training, lifelong learning, perpetual assessment, continual incitement to improve oneself, constant monitoring of health, and never-ending risk management. A growing cadre of specialists, such as coaches, rehab experts, educational experts, medical experts, personal trainers, therapists, and so on, supply their services to individuals and help out in their fashioning of selves along with current labour market ideals. This may involve coaching, CV-writing, presentation skills, and even dress code management (e.g. Rimke, 2000; Fogde, 2009).

The individual is henceforth simultaneously an object of intervention *and* an active subject, and the intervention often aims at infusing agency in the individual – albeit an institutionally shaped form of agency (e.g. Korteweg, 2003; Mik-Meyer, 2006). Practices such as individual action plans for the unemployed, career advice, self-evaluation sheets or other types of evaluation instruments reflect organizational and institutionalized templates for desired qualities.

It is against this backdrop, we suggest, that we should understand the increasing number of people coded as disabled in Sweden. There is, in several European countries, an emergent division between active citizens (who are capable of managing their own risks and are expected to do so) and targeted populations (disadvantaged groups, or people "at risk") who require various types of interventions in the management of risk (Dean, 2008: 167; Caswell et al., 2010). In Sweden too, recent developments have accentuated the increasing dualisation of labour market policy; a categorization of the unemployed into "normal job-seekers", who can be offered job counselling or self-service activities, and "disadvantaged" groups, which need special measures (Peralta Prieto, 2006). This dualisation is reinforced by a dramatic reduction of investment in active labour market policy spending (Bengtsson and Berglund 2012).

Sweden has a longstanding tradition as an active welfare state, offering the unemployed "active" measures such as placement support, employment training, retraining opportunities, and mobility support rather than merely "passive" measures in the form of financial subsidies (cash assistance). The cornerstone of Swedish labour market policy, the Work Strategy, has over recent decades been translated into a sharpening of the qualifications for receiving unemployment benefits and social insurance. Activation in the form of increased conditionality and re-commodification has replaced investments in upskilling and training (Bengtsson and Berglund, 2012). Labour market policy programmes have been reduced in favour of employment on the regular labour market and job-matching measures have been emphasized in the national labour market's policy directives. The more costly training measures have been replaced by the less expensive job counselling services. The main assignment of the PES is now to match jobseekers against job openings in the labour market. The main support measures of the PES are now targeted to jobseekers who are no longer covered by unemployment insurance or those judged to have a special need, such as those deemed to be disabled (Garsten & Jacobsson 2013).

At the same time, the political assignment of the PES in Sweden, to rehabilitate and activate jobseekers with disabilities, has been more clearly articulated. To counteract social exclusion, resources have been assigned to offering special jobs and traineeships to prevent and rehabilitate illness and disability. The aim is to provide to people with disabilities the same opportunities as to regular jobseekers to participate in the labour market (Prop. 2007/08:1). In other words, while the tool-box of measures available for "ordinary" unemployed has shrunk considerably, a disability coding opens up for a wide spectrum of measures and support for people deemed in special need (see also Holmqvist, 2009).[2] A disability coding may thus be an attractive option both for casework-

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2   Apart from wage subsidy, there are the following supportive measures available: support for
     technical aids, support for a personal assistant, special support for starting up a business, special

ers and for individuals with a long history of unemployment or currently find-ing themselves far from the regular labour market.

In Sweden, subsidized employment is by far the most common assistance given to people classified as disabled. That a market for disabled individuals is created by "manipulating" the pricing of productivity is nothing new. However, the current emphasis on ability, competence and marketability of oneself means that requirements for employability are raised to higher levels and "inflated". As a result, an increasing number of people risk ending up as less employable or even "disabled" (see also Holmqvist, 2009). This is reflected in the number of people who are coded and registered as disabled at the Public Employment Service in Sweden, which has increased dramatically in recent decades. In 1992, 10 per cent of all registered unemployed at PES Sweden were coded as disabled while in 2011 the corresponding number was 25.3 per cent.[3] It is the coding of the "psychological disability" and "learning disability" that has seen the most dramatic rise in numbers, having increased about sevenfold between 1992 and 2011 (statistics from the statistics department at PES, Sweden, 2012).

The increase reflects changes in contemporary work life, such as fewer unqualified jobs and high productivity demands in all sectors. However, it also, we suggest, reflects changes in work life standards of normalcy. Interestingly, the number of people coded as disabled has increased also during periods of lower unemployment. The PES staff in our study confirm this development, stating that today they classify as "disabled" people who would not have quali-fied as such twenty years ago. Nevertheless, our argument here is that the cod-ing – and the organizational "production" of "disabled" – is also a side-effect of audit culture and legibility concerns. In the following we will spell out a criti-cal theoretical perspective for analysing the disability coding as organizational techniques of visibility and legibility.

Techniques of legibility and the audit logic

As pointed out by Mary Douglas (1966: xvii), rational behaviour involves clas-sification, and the activity of classifying is a human universal. As Bowker and Leigh Star (2000) pointed out, large-scale infrastructures are in special need of classification tools. Public organizations, such as welfare state bodies, need to classify individuals in order to be able to direct assistance to them. Organiza-tions cannot treat individuals as unique creatures; instead they need to classify

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introduction and follow-up support by way of a personal coach at the prospect of employment, and different forms of alternative employment such as Development Employment, Security Employ-ment, employment at Samhall, i.e. a government-owned company providing development oppor-tunities for people with disabilities through sheltered employment, and Sheltered Public Employ-ment. Some of the support measures are temporary.

3   In real numbers more than 171,000 people were coded as disabled in an average month in 2011.

them according to their organizational schemes in line with their own organizational logic. In this complexity- reducing process, the individual is transformed into a subject of the organization and a manageable case. This may in a next step require a "re-subjectification" along the lines of the template of the organizational intervention programme in question (cf. Bergström and Knights, 2006), which is why it can be argued that organizational classifications create "institutional identities" (Mik-Meyer, 2006).

We contend that the disability codes are part of the assemblage that makes up technologies of government. In Rose's view, "technologies of government are those technologies imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired effects" (Rose, 1999: 52). It is an assemblage of forms of practical knowledge, with modes of perception, practices of calculation, types of authority, forms of judgement, human capacities, devices, and so forth. In this context, routines for making legible are pivotal for the ability to govern (cf. Scott, 1998).[4] Thus, we conceive the bureaucratic assessment practices as being techniques of legibility, in that they allow for a "reading" of individuals. Through the use of routines and typologies aiming to enhance the legibility of individual strengths and weaknesses, the bureaucratic apparatus enhances its governing functions. The processing of individuals thus relies on techniques for making strengths and weaknesses legible and thus actionable. Legibility is crucial for the performance logic to be operative and hence for governance, in that it allows for the actions to be followed up, as well as for verification and control, and for sanctioning or reward. By making legible, i.e. "readable", in this case the functional impairment of a person, the individual may be funnelled to the corresponding labour market intervention programme. The results of this intervention may then be followed up, evaluated, and compared. Legibility thus makes the individual "process-able" and the public administration accountable.

It should be stressed that to make someone "legible" is by no means a neutral process, but a process predicated on organizational priorities and political aspirations. It is thus a partial and selective process, in which a particular and discerning organizational gaze is operative. The public administration *observes* certain traits and features and re-constructs them in its organizational categories, which has led Michailakis (2003: 209) to conclude that "one is not born a disabled person, one is observed to be one" (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2013).

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4   Scott (1998) argued that the state, in its attempts to simplify the classic functions of state control, strives to arrange the population in ways that simplify interventions. These state simplifications, he argues, function rather like "abridged maps"; they neither successfully represent the activity of the society they depict, nor do they intend to do so. Rather, they represent only the slice that interests the official or the organization division in question. Hence, they make legible those dimensions that are relevant for the functioning of state power, while leaving others illegible, or invisible. More importantly, state simplifications are not just maps, but when allied with state power, they enable much of the reality they depict to be remade (ibid.: 3).

Thus, in this article we understand disability codes as *legibility techniques* that serve an organizational need, in particular in meeting the New Public Management logic of management by objectives and auditing of performance. The range of available diplomas, certifications and other signs of achieved learning goals, are examples of making legible an individual's skills and competences, as are the evaluations and tests performed by the PES in its assessment of work capacity. Note here that the public administration, that is the PES, needs to "read" individuals, but that the environment also needs to "read" the public administration and its performance.

Entailed in the argument in this article is that NPM principles as implemented in welfare bureaucracies have huge implications for the client-related work of street-level bureaucrats. They tend to constrain the caseworkers" discretion, as the emphasis on standardization typically reduces the scope for individualized interventions and professional discretion (e.g. Østergaard Møller and Stone, 2012). Consequently, studies from various countries report signs of de-professionalization in the wake of NPM reforms, where professional service delivery is increasingly replaced by bureaucratic programme administration (see research overview in van der Berkel and van der Aa, 2012). One consequence of NPM practices, then, is that "mechanical objectivity" (Porter, 1995), for instance through standardized assessments, tends to replace trust in professional expertise. The work of caseworkers is increasingly to "read" the clients according to standardized templates, which has led Caswell, Marston and Larsen (2010: 400) to speak of "screen-level bureaucrats" replacing "street-level bureaucrats". How clients are categorized is sometimes determined by the kind of information that the computer-based classification systems can handle, which in turn is often determined by legibility concerns. Thus, the discretion that traditionally characterized street-level bureaucracy, and which enabled some flexibility in matching solutions to clients, has been considerably reduced under the current administrative practices. Nevertheless, one way to widen the range of support measures available and to match a solution to an individual's needs is to classify the client as disabled; the price attached is the disability code – and thus the label as disabled.

Classifications form the base for organizations to act upon individuals but their influence exceeds the particular policy measures they enable. Organizational categories, like all social categories, are not just practical devices by which to classify and sort people out (Bowker and Leigh Star, 2000); they also may affect those classified, for instance by affecting their subjectivity and self-understanding. The power of the diagnosis is essentially the power of shaping subjectivity by providing the "map" and clues by which to understand one's situation. In this sense, classifications and classes, categories and people, emerge hand in hand, a process of "making up people" by which people come to fit their categories (Hacking, 1986). As Hacking argues, once categories are

available an increasing number of people come to fit them. Ultimately, categories and social orders are co-produced. Social and structural changes create new categories of people, which may then be reflected in national statistics (for instance statistics of deviant behaviour, illnesses or disabilities). In the following, we will look into the practice of disability assessment and coding.

The magic spell: Classifying disability, sorting people, and allocating resources

As stressed above, the Public Employment Service has a special mission to support jobseekers who face difficulties in the labour market. In addition, the PES has a sectorial responsibility in national politics for the disabled, aiming to cater to the needs of the functionally impaired (AF, 2008a). At the PES, the individual"s work capacity is evaluated in relation to the labour market. This means that for the PES the impairment appears as labour market relative and it emerges in relation to a specific job and a specific work environment. To be dependent on a wheelchair, for example, would not be considered a functional impairment if you were to work as a switchboard operator. However, and in contrast to medical evaluations of work capacity, it is not enough to test work capacity in relation to a *fictional* labour market. The PES has to try to find an actual existing job for the person in question. This inevitably makes the concept of employability significant, since an individual may be found to have work capacity, yet still not be employable, simply because no employer would consider hiring her. The PES specific programmes for functionally impaired aim to *compensate* for the reduction of work capacity and, in this way, increase their employability, partly by making capacities legible.

Officials at the PES refer clients who face difficulties in the labour market for further counselling or investigation of work capacity. This is done by a specialist unit in PES (PES Rehab), where the main experts are work life psychologists, occupational therapists and social welfare supervisors. The different professional categories undertake, respectively, "work life psychology investigations", "activity-based investigations" and "work-related social investigations". The aim is to investigate the client's work capability prerequisites. The three main categories of functional impairment at the time of our study were: physical, psychological, and socio-medical impairments (for more detail, see the next section). However, in response to public debate the socio-medical impairment code (nr 81) was removed as of July 1st, 2015 (Arbetsförmedlingen 2015-01-09).[5] The investigation of capability along these lines provides the ground for the further treatment of the case at hand.

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5   The PES argued that public opinion no longer supports conceiving those problems as a disability. The background was, inter alia, research-led criticism of medicalization of social problems and unemployment (e.g. Jacobsson & Seing 2013).

As argued above, classification serves practical, procedural purposes. The coding of disability and its registration in the internal PES database forms the basis for record keeping and thereby serves an administrative purpose. The records are intended to gain an overview of the number of people in need of support and of changes over time. The classification is also considered necessary in order to inform the distribution of resources and to channel assistance to the right targets. The record thereby functions as a signal to policy-makers and to meet transparency requirements placed on the public sector. The classificatory schemes or templates employed by the PES professionals serve to make legible what is, in reality, a complex assemblage of capabilities and "weaknesses".

In our analysis, the classificatory schemes are thus not simply descriptions of the "actual" work capacity, but additionally "make up" these capacities and subjectivities through their ability to provide the categories with official regulatory force. They thereby assist in the distribution of employability. Legibility thus works in tandem with, and facilitates, comparison, categorization and intervention. Nevertheless, the techniques at work in detecting, measuring and governing work capacity or employability are not merely devices serving a practical purpose – they also assist in establishing normalcy standards. Classificatory procedures and tools are thus integral to the bureaucratic logic at work and perform several functions at once. As such, they work in a metaphorical sense as the magic spell of labour market policy and more generally of NPM ideals.

Our interviewees at the PES stress that medical diagnoses are made by medical doctors – the PES staff merely attach the administrative codes to a person. The code is considered a planning instrument, and "does not have too much to do with the individual," as one interviewee put it (Coordinator, PES central organization). As phrased by two other informants:

> To know how much money is spent on these groups you have to have a system. And we manage this by everyone with a functional impairment accepting that we provide him or her with a code in the electronic system. This means that we can count how many people with a functional disorder there are in this country. (Social Service supervisor)
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> The reason for administering functional impairment codes in the system of the PES is mainly that we have to make sure the more exclusive interventions are directed to the right people. This is why we do these assessments and set the functional impairment codes. (Work life psychologist)

The explicit organizational ambition and expectation is to code all clients deemed to have reduced work capacity because, as one informant expressed

it, "if you were only to put a code on every second case, that would be wrong. However, if you feel that this would go straight to hell you don't have to." The formal instruction states that if a person is considered to have a disability, he or she *should* be coded, in order to gain access to the measures. Access to measures and hence resources are thus incentivized. They can only be allocated post-performance. As posited by Leicht et al (2009: 585), this kind of incentivization corresponds to a main thrust of NPM reforms, implying a general movement away from rewarding service providers in terms of diffuse public service or professional norms and moving toward specific performance incentives that are directly measurable. This impact, they argue, has been especially serious among professional groups (see Dunleavey et al., 2005; Kirkpatrick et al., 2004).

Accordingly, PES staff have a strong incentive to use the disability code and the client to accept his/her code. Approval of a code can, however, be a sensitive matter:

> What may be problematic is that the code is about the obstacle while we try to focus on the possibilities. So there may be a little clash there […] It may affect the motivation negatively […] However, in most cases it works out well anyway. Especially those who work with this a lot, they learn how to talk about it. You try to explain the purpose of it, which is to get access to those resources that exist. (Coordinator, PES central organization)

Accordingly, clients may be persuaded to accept the code. As also described by Holmqvist (2009), the disability code grows out of a process of negotiation between the PES staff and the client. Holmqvist found that most clients did not want to be coded as disabled but accepted it in order to increase chances of getting employment. Our PES Rehab interviewees maintain that only a few clients resist the code. However, resistance may be difficult if a number of tests have shown a clear-cut result, and if the code is presented as an offer and a possibility of getting more "exclusive" help. In such instances, coding is directly related to resource allocation, the benefits of which only accrue to those who agree to be submitted to the bureaucratic logic.

Our interviews show that there are divergent opinions within the PES about the practices of coding disability, such as:

> "Let a thousand flowers bloom! Let people be the way they are. Why should we be stigmatizing?" Then there is this other faction, to which I belong, which has as often as possible made the judgement of disability. I realize that this is the only way for this person to actually get access to this money and get this assistance. (Work life psychologist)

The codes are enabling in that they make possible more exclusive forms of assistance to the individual:

> I see it more as a possibility coding. You give this person who might have been a criminal a possibility to return to a job. (Social welfare supervisor)

Thus the coding opens up alternative routes of support and activity for the individual, routes that would otherwise have been closed. But while the codes can be enabling in some respects, they can be disabling in others. In a study of sheltered employment in Sweden, Holmqvist concludes that the longer the employees are engaged in sheltered employment at Samhall (a state company and the biggest provider of sheltered employment in Sweden), the more disabled they become – in the sense that they acquire a "disabling self". Even if sheltered employment is meant to be temporary, in practice very few manage to get a job in the regular labour market (Holmqvist, 2009). Thus, even if the aim of the measure is rehabilitation, it might have the reverse effect. For PES staff, disability codes are administrative tools that work to sort unemployed people into categories, to allocate resources accordingly and to meet transparency requirements. For the individual who is labelled "disabled" the code might significantly alter her self-perception; she might even assume the identity of being disabled. Yet, the process of evaluation may also assist in gaining access to support and resources needed to find a suitable job. What we wish to indicate here is *the dual nature* of codes and classifications: enabling and empowering in some respects, disabling and disempowering in others. While opening practical possibilities, the administrative codes at the same time streamline and enforce standards of normalcy. Moreover, as we will see, a disability is not just a reality to be discovered but an identity to be negotiated.

Objective tests and malleable subjects

The task of PES Rehab is to investigate the work capacity of the individual. This investigation is based on conversations, self-assessments, tests, and on probation at a workplace. The work psychologists" tests focus on assessing the clients" interests and aptitudes, intelligence, logical and spatial capability, word and reading ability, numerical skills, and the like. The occupational therapist tests, among other things, physical mobility, pain, understanding of instructions, and process skills (such as organizational skills and problem-solving abilities). The specialist in question decides exactly how the balancing of tests and conversations plays out. Most of our PES Rehab informants emphasize the conversation as the most important instrument, but tests are still used to a large extent. Sometimes, specially assigned test leaders may undertake tests lasting a full day.

While these tests may contribute to providing a clearer picture of the job-seeker, her strengths and weaknesses, technologies such as self-assessments and tests may imply a subtle form of control. Not only do they discover objectively existing characteristics, but they also create, to some extent, these very characteristics. By making certain characteristics visible and legible, the tests provide a picture that is then objectified. A personality test may, for example, appear as a neutral instrument, but in fact *formats* the person in the vocabulary of the test (Benson, 2008: 275). The technologies contribute to constituting the qualities that are made visible (Benson, 2008: 276). Thus, they contribute to an objectification or reification of the qualities and characteristics presented by the test. For an individual who is presented, or confronted, with such a picture, questioning or objecting to it may be difficult, or even counter-productive.

The assessment of the often invisible "shortcomings" is associated with a degree of uncertainty. One way to reduce uncertainty and to objectify knowledge is through standardization and quality assurance. The PES staff we interviewed were keen to call attention to the fact that the methods are quality assured. The central organization of the PES has also standardized manuals for the assessment of work capability and functional impairment in order to achieve a more uniform usage within the PES (e.g. AF, 2008a, 2008b). These manuals can also be seen as instruments for "mechanical objectivity" (cf. Porter, 1995). It is in the nature of classifications that the "memory" of the contingency in earlier phases of knowledge-production tends to be lost once the label is placed and the "diagnosis" thus appears as a fact.

Hence, a functional impairment or disability grows out of a process in which certainty is created step by step, and whereby a preliminary fact is eventually established. Moreover, in contrast to the clinical psychologists, psychologists at PES (as well as the other specialists) usually have at their disposal less time on which to base their assessment; the conversations have to be problem- and possibility-oriented. The tests and the conversations are part of the "subjectivity work" that the clients undergo, and through which a problem is articulated and a certain self-understanding and self-image are fashioned. Working on one's self (Foucault, 1994) requires the capacity continuously to evaluate and correct oneself, in order to enhance one's attraction in the labour market. Career counselling, for example, is currently largely about learning how to present oneself and how to market oneself (Fogde, 2009). Thus, the "subjectivity work" aims at creating a selling and agentic self. However, at the Rehabilitation Programme, we suggest, subjectivity work is concerned with learning about and accepting one's shortcomings and strengths:

> Our jobseekers cannot be remoulded in that way. They have their functional impairments and they need support in that. (Social welfare supervisor)

Accepting a functional impairment often demands a "destabilization" of one's identity (cf. Benson, 2008: 276), a re-thinking of one's qualities and capabilities. It also involves a process of "qualification" in the role as functionally impaired.

> It is basically about building people mentally so that they feel more secure in their own role and their way of being. (Work life psychologist)

Thus, while the investigation of a person's work capacity aims to frame the problem in an objective manner, the implications of this process are in no way neutral. Coding may be deeply consequential, because codes infringe on the subjectivity of the person. The outcome of an investigation often involves a paradoxical combination of liberation and limitation. Identifying and objectifying the problem may be liberating for the individual client – who may achieve some self-understanding as to his or her problem in getting a job – but at the same time limiting for the future, in the sense of acquiring a disabled self.

In a situation where there are ever-increasing demands on people to be enterprising, active, attractive etc, and in relation to which many people experience that they are "never employable enough" (cf. Cremin, 2010), a subject position as "unemployable" and disabled may paradoxically even be experienced as providing more ontological security – especially as it is supported by objective test results. For a client with a long record of unemployment and of being turned down by employers on the open job market, this identity may even be quite attractive.

Socio-medical disability – a perverse effect of NPM logics?

Above we have argued that employability is a floating signifier. The same can be said about disability. At the PES, functional impairment is defined in relation to the labour market. When market demands are enhanced, more people become disabled, i.e. the number of disabled, to some extent, follows economic cycles. In times of recession the PES, by government decision, gains more possibilities to provide special support through a larger repertoire of intervention programmes, which means that there is both a greater supply of, and demand for, subsidized or sheltered employment in times of economic down-turn. This provides an incentive for PES staff to use the disability codes to assist the client.

For the physical disability codes to be used, a diagnosis by medical experts is required. Often, medical certificates are also used for the psychological disability code and the "specific" or "general learning disability"; however, these codes can also be based on the assessments of the PES Rehab staff. As mentioned above, these are the codes that have proliferated during the past decades. They are arguably more open to interpretation than the physical disabilities. In addi-

tion, at the time of our research, the socio-medical disability code was operable, and provided a clear illustration of infusion of market logics into labour market policy. Interestingly enough, this code lacked international equivalence. It was not listed in the WHO's ICF (*International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Handicap*). In our interpretation, the socio-medical disability code was a residual category for people who were not considered to have a clear psychological or physical disability but for various reasons failed to live up to the expectations of social skills, flexibility or adaptability. "This is something we have created ourselves," as one interviewee, a social welfare supervisor, put it.

Examples of "socially problematic circumstances" that could be coded into a socio-medical disability are criminal background and previous or on-going drug or alcohol abuse (AF, 2008a). However, other circumstances also appeared in our interviews, such as obesity, exaggerated piercing, or insufficient personal care or hygiene. We interpret this to be taken as evidence of a lack of self-reflexive capacity to work on one's self and to present a self that is attractive in the eyes of an employer. Compared to a physical disability, where a statement from a medical doctor is required, the socio-medical code left a greater opening for the staff at PES to make the judgement themselves, i.e. for the social welfare supervisor and her work-related social investigation. The code may be seen in light of what Cohen at al (1972) refer to as the "garbage can" model of organizational choice, providing a categorical space for certain individual characteristics looking for a label, and for perceived challenges and deficits looking for an explanation.

The expectations placed on individuals in the labour market in terms of socially acceptable appearance, behaviour and social competence reflects a shift in the perception of normalcy in work life, with tougher demands and less space for odd personalities and behaviour out of the ordinary: "You cannot afford someone who is not productive, who is slow and tardy and somewhat quaint", as a work life psychologist put it. Another work life psychologist said: "I have experienced that we are narrowing down what is perceived as normal." This may pertain to looks, weight, or behaviour: "That you are just too much." In her view, the demands for substitutability lead to people "being fitted into a mould, of some sort":

> Since demands on the labour market have tightened so much, more and more people are unable to pass the bar – the bar of demands. And then more and more people are being coded as functionally impaired.

In today's labour market context, the plasticity of available categories for "sorting people out", i.e. defining who is employable and who is not, manifests itself in the shape of an overlap between lacking employability and having a regular functional impairment.

The socio-medical disability code that is now abandoned was, in our view, an unintended side-effect of the workings of the performance logic of the NPM model. It was created as a residual category for people who were not considered to have a clear psychological or physical disability but who for various reasons failed to live up to the expectations of social skills, flexibility or adaptability. The prevalent logic of classification led to the invention of a new slot that first of all met the needs of the bureaucracy to manage the flow of unemployed, as well as dealing with their situation, but also to organize and measure performance. In our contention it was thus primarily the bureaucratic control system and audit culture that spurred the insertion of this category, and not necessarily the needs of the target group.

Employability, work capacity and disability as relational concepts

Evaluations of work capacity and employability, as well as disability, are defined in relation to the actual labour market and more specifically with respect to a specific job. Work capacity is both context- and task relative; it is defined in relation to a specific workplace and a specific job. The supply of jobs and the demand of employers become decisive not just for employability but also for work capacity. All three are thus relational concepts, and as such fluctuate in their precise meaning. In the process of coding disability, defining work capacity, and thus judging employability, distinctions tend to become fuzzy. As pointed out by Bowker and Leigh Star (2000), the sheer density of classification systems also means that they are likely to "meet up" in various ways. As we will show, employability, work capacity and disability are liable to conjoin in the local practice of the PES, at times creating less transparency and legibility, instead of more.

Even if work capacity and employability tend to coalesce, our informants in the PES Rehab staff maintain that work capacity resides mainly in the individual, whilst employability is ultimately defined by the employer:

> This concept is owned by the employers to a large degree. To be employable during a boom may not be the same thing as being employable in times of recession. This is partly dependent on the particular needs for workforce that employers are facing. It's obvious that they lower the bar at certain times, and raise it at others. The individual may also change in her employability but it is just as much the employers and the labour market that change. (Social welfare supervisor)

Some of the PES Rehab staff interviewed criticize the normalcy expectation inherent in the concept, whilst others contend that the concept of employability serves to highlight employers demands, which at the end of the day are what

determines who will get a job and who will not. The interviewees maintain that employers' requests are more articulate and more influential today, primarily as a result of labour market changes and enhanced market competition. For the individual, this means that expectations are raised:

> The individual has to adjust to a large extent. She may have to accommodate to higher demands, maybe to shorter contracts. You are not supposed to place too high demands because then you may not be employable. The employers want flexible people who may adjust easily. (Social welfare supervisor)

This social welfare supervisor is sceptical towards the employability talk:

> See, I think it's dangerous. Because this term will become ever more difficult to define – what's the content? And it will glide. It will depend on supply and demand.

Thus, both work capacity and employability are relative concepts, with employability being the more plastic one. The message here is that a person's employability is largely determined by the demand for workforce and hence by market forces, and only secondarily by the person's attitudes and behaviour. But as the task of PES staff is to find a job for the client, they *cannot disregard employability.* An interviewee says:

> I may have the physical resources as well as the psychological ones. But am I employable? How do I act? What do I look like? What background do I have? How do I live? What is my motivation? In the end it's all about employability. (Work life psychologist)

In practice, a person who, after assessment, is judged to have work capacity might still be unemployable. Staff at PES Rehab thus have to engage with both the concept of work capability and that of employability, a process that contributes to the blurring of conceptual distinctions.

The higher demands in work life and the more strictly defined boundaries of normalcy have also created grey zones, populated by people whose personal characteristics influence their degree of employability without being clearly seen as functional impairments (see also Holmqvist, Maravelias & Skålén, 2012). Some informants perceive it as easier to deal with those who have clear, visible impairments:

> If we can see with our eyes that this person has a functional impairment, then we can adjust and accommodate. But we who work on this, the specialists, we see that it is employability that's really the problem today. (Manager, PES Rehabilitation)

That is to say, there are increasingly many who are not considered to have a visible functional impairment, but who are still not employable:

> Then we are dealing with something other [than a functional impairment]. You may not be sufficiently active, you may not be sufficiently attractive, and you may not be sufficiently communicative.

Oftentimes, it is to do with the conduct and behavior of the individual:

> That you are somehow difficult, that you are at the margins of what is considered normal. (...) Or else, most things can be fixed. (Occupational therapist)

The socio-medical disability coding that was in operation at the time of our research, as well as the codes of general or specific learning disability and psychological disability, were thus ways for the organization to deal with the grey zone cases. But it also implied that there was a floating boundary between the lack of employability and the presence of a functional impairment. For some individuals with reduced employability the way to employment goes through a disability code. The classificatory system here functions as a mediator and distributor of employability. By the same token, it also serves to normalize characteristics by sorting them into established categories.

Conclusion: Transparency, classifications, and auditable performances

The classificatory procedures of labour market policy are articulations of the kinds of "auditable performances" (Power, 1999) that are put in place as a result of NPM models. Furthermore, they reflect the tight interlinkage between policy on the one hand, and labour market fluctuations and changing workplace demands on the other. Based on empirical research in the Swedish PES, we have shown that a functional impairment is not a given and stable category, but something that is defined in a negotiation process, where a wide range of individual shortcomings in relation to the job market are subjected to observation and interpretation, made legible, and classified into a documented functional impairment. The disability coding practices are to be understood primarily as technologies of government (Rose, 1999), i.e. as assemblages of practical knowledge and procedures imbued with aspirations to shape the conduct of people in certain ways. Access to special assistance and resources is conditioned by such a disability codification. Getting a disability codification, in turn, is dependent on "strengths" and "weaknesses" being made legible and hence actionable.

In this process, transparency and legibility become crucial tools. The allocation of resources depends on individual characteristics being made trans-

parent, i.e. visible, and legible, i.e. readable. The evaluative process is deemed necessary to make strengths and weaknesses transparent and thus "codeable". Once a code is given, the status of the individual is legible for the caseworker and interventions and resources may become applicable. Legibility thus funnels resources and interventions in certain directions. The enhancement of legibility is also a means of rendering the organization transparent to its environment (cf. Scott, 1998) in the broader sense and making performance auditable, which is an organizational requirement reinforced by new public management practices.

Administrative procedures not only make certain dimensions transparent and legible, but they also reinforce standards of normalcy. Categories assist in providing slots for what is inside and what outside the box, so to speak, i.e. considered "normal". Characteristics of the individual that fall outside the box may be combined to make up a "disability" coding. To lack employability thus becomes a disability. The disability coding, in turn, opens up for targeted interventions and programmes that may eventually lead to employment. The bureaucratic categories are thus tightly interlinked and inter-dependent. Categories that may appear stable and definitive, may in themselves be void of meaning, and thus apt to carry a diversity of definitions. Work capacity, functional impairment, and employability may produce the fiction of categorical stability, but are open to be shaped by administrative, organizational and political priorities.

Disability thus develops through the mediation of a classificatory logic, where a disability code is the path to special assistance and employment. The PES Rehab staff have to handle and assist clients judged to have work capacity, even though employers find them unemployable. To understand these dynamics, we need to locate the problem in a wider social and organizational context, in relation to the particular characteristics of labour market policy that are articulated in present labour market discourses. More precisely, we need to pay attention to a set of combining factors: not only changes in work life and in standards of normalcy, but also changes in labour market policy, including cuts in expenditure on active labour market policy, thereby limiting the range of measures available to the unemployed in combination with NPM practices. As Mary Douglas (1966) reminds us, classificatory systems are never absolute, but always relative, and cannot be understood out of context. Employability and disability coding becomes a way in which the PES organization can respond to fluctuations in the labour market and at the same time maintain a degree of control of its workings. In concordance with Hacking's (2007) emphasis on the institutional context of "making up people", we maintain that the administrative procedures of coding, the organizational techniques of legibility and transparency, work to link the organization, i.e. the PES, flexibly with labour market policy goals and to a broader assemblage of related aspects of an admin-

istrative regime. Broadening our view also reveals the flexibility of codification practices, the plasticity of the categories available, and the interrelations between policy measures and market fluctuations. The "magic spell" of codification practices and classificatory schemes resides in the fact that they may be put to use to solve a number of problems associated with the system of governance. The categories of employability, work capacity and disability are shaped by these contextual and contingent factors. What appears as "objective" tests and solid criteria for classifying are in effect often subjectively and loosely defined. Notions of employability and disability thus appear as floating signifiers. Hence, the NPM system of management, in its pursuit of "measureable" and "robust" indicators, produces a bundle of unclear categories. The longterm implications of these effects may contribute to undermine the equity of the system it was meant to support.

The social and policy implications of these coding procedures are hence potentially significant. The classificatory procedures may, apart from undermining the equity of the system, also have implications for the interface between the individual and the bureaucratic organization, i.e. the PES, and the ways in which policy implementation operates. The procedures of classification exert a certain control over individuals by sorting them into an administrative grid of social relations, with differential access to social welfare resources. And it does so by inviting individuals to agree to collaborate in placing a code on themselves and in improving their work capacity and employability. The organizational and administrative powers at work articulate the individualizing effects of such new regimes of power, as they push individuals back onto themselves as the primary source of productive work capacity and of employability. As a result, the organizational interface, with associated expectations and demands on the interacting parties, is significantly changed. As qualities and properties are made visible and legible, responsibility for employability is increasingly placed on the individual. Individuals are separated off from one another and made governable. For the individual client the consequences of these taken-for-granted organizational practices may be wide-ranging. The self-perception of one's impairment is developed in dialogue with "experts of subjectivity" (Rose, 1989) and appears, after the assessment process, as an increasingly indisputable "fact".

To conclude, an analysis of contemporary labour market policies, and their specific technologies and procedures, must pay attention to the practices and procedures at the interface between individual and state. It must be attentive to the potential longterm implications of slippery classificatory systems and their impact on organizational practice. Such an analysis must also be alert to what the effects of the usage of bureaucratic classificatory schemes may be for individual subjectivity, empowerment, or disempowerment. It is in this interface zone between the state agency and the individual client that the work-

ings of NPM and other management models and their broader implications are revealed. In our view, theoretical inquiry should be directed towards exploring and exposing the contradictions inherent in labour market policy interventions and their sets of technologies, not least pertaining to their unintended, and sometimes perverse, effects.

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