Resistance-driven Innovation?
Frontline Public Welfare Workers' Coping with Top-down Implementation[1]

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ABSTRACT

Employee-based innovation researchers point to the important role of welfare workers in public service innovations. Bureaucratic and New Public Management inspired managerial agendas, still widely present in Nordic welfare organizations have been tied to an increase in feelings of inauthenticity and use of coping strategies by welfare workers. At the same time, post-NPM principles of collaboration and service tailoring are more in line with professional values of welfare workers. Drawing on a critical realist informed case study comprising qualitative interviews and observations in the Norwegian public welfare and employment services, we describe types of revision and resistance practices used by frontline employees when faced with top-down implementation instructions, linking them to different types of innovations. The article adds to literatures on employee-based innovation by conceptualizing resistance practices as value-motivated resistance-driven innovation that may have a function of calibrating public value creation in welfare organizations submerged in bureaucratic and NPM-inspired managerial regimes.

KEY WORDS

Coping strategies / employee-based innovation / frontline employees / new public management / Norway / professional values / resistance / top-down implementation / welfare state

Introduction

Could coping strategies used by frontline welfare employees to resist centrally initiated implementation instructions be conceptualized as a type of employee-based innovation, potentially benefitting the organization that initiated the implementation instructions in the first place? A significant role of Nordic public welfare organizations is to provide essential welfare services to citizens. For several decades, public sectors in Western nations have been affected by the influence of overlapping governing paradigms (Kamp et al. 2013; Torfing et al. 2016), followed by ever-increasing focus on the innovative capacities of the public sector and the important role of innovation in solving the 'wicked problems' of society (Hartley 2005). As a result, considerable

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amounts of innovation in policy, services, and frontline work processes have been initi-ated by central levels of government with the intention that they be implemented top-down and disseminated at the frontlines of public service organizations. However, the gap between the intention of centrally initiated implementation instructions and their actual application or lack thereof in the practice field is a puzzle at the core of much academic interest (Hill & Hupe 2014). Understanding the conditions and the practices of the employees at ground levels in public welfare organizations are vital for imple-mentation studies. It is at this level of organizations that new policies and services meet the target groups and are meant to be applied. Public workers perform their work-tasks under the constraints of bureaucracy, scarce resources (Lipsky 1980) and with constant instructions to implement centrally initiated new work processes and documentation routines (Thunman 2016). Such instructions, inspired by remnants of a New Public Management (NPM) in a bureaucratic managerial regime in much of the public sector, represent a significant part of the daily work of staff at the frontlines of Nordic welfare services and are found to weaken professional autonomy and the workers' opportunity to make choices according to professional ethics and values (Kamp et al. 2013).

Literatures emphasizing employees' sense of autonomy (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999) and dignity (Karlsson 2012) as crucial factors in employees' work life, hold that employees' reactions to managerial instructions that do not give them the possibility to exercise their autonomy in accordance with their professional dignity, may lead to orga-nizational misbehavior and resistance. Resistance and coping strategies in Lipsky-inspired (1980) policy implementation studies are often problematized as causing deviations from managerial intention. To the best of our knowledge, however, the questions of whether and how coping strategies, in the form of resistance by frontline workers in dealing with top-down implementation instructions may be conceptualized as employee-based inno-vation, are scarce. Several bottom-up innovation literatures focus on invisible or impro-vised innovations that emerge from work practices among employees in general (e.g., Ellström 2010; Smith 2017) and frontline public employees specifically (Fuglsang 2010; Lippke & Wegener 2014). These often emphasize learning as a core prerequisite of such practice-based innovations. Employee-driven innovation literatures highlight the role of intentional innovation activities driven by employees (Høyrup 2010). They often focus on the role of management in facilitating employee-driven innovation. However, innovations in work practices by workers coping with everyday work challenges may also be coun-terproductive to managerial goals. This echoes the findings of Lipsky-inspired scholars on coping strategies of resistance among what he calls 'street-level bureaucrats'. Whereas, in much innovation literature, explicit, planned, and managerial-friendly innovation activities have been in focus, this article attempts to add to literature on employee-based innovations that emerge from practice and work routines and that are seemingly coun-teracting managerial intentions. Our findings support the academic interest in how to achieve intentional implementation at ground levels (Hill & Hupe 2014). By turning the dilemma around, we propose that coping strategies used by frontline workers to resist certain top-down implementation instructions may be conceptualized as a value-based resistance-driven innovation, a complementary type of employee-based innovation that emerges as a by-product of coping and creates value for the core mission of the organiza-tion. This alternative take on employee-based innovation suggests that value-driven work adaptions may be a core function of innovation among employees in certain circum-stances, just as learning is in others.

We study these possibilities through a qualitative, critical realist informed case study (Easton 2010). The study explores the top-down implementation process of a specific work inclusion method called the Facilitation Guarantee (FG) within the Norwegian Employment and Welfare Services (NAV). This article mainly draws on the part of the case study that explored the reception of the FG in a selected frontline office of NAV through observations of case meetings and semi-structured interviews with frontline workers and their local leaders during a 4-month period in 2015. The focus was the frontline workers' reflections upon their work situations, as well as their experience and reactions to top-down implementation instructions the previous years. Drawing on a critical realist informed methodology (e.g., Danermark et al. 2001), the empirical findings at the office were analyzed in the light of the wider contextual understanding that the full case study provided. The aim of this article is twofold. First, it is to present types of coping strategies by frontline employees when dealing with a constant flow of implementation instructions that informants categorized as belonging to a 'documentation-regime'. Second, it is to analyze these types of coping strategies through a lens of employee-based innovation theories and to discuss the potential of conceptualizing resistance practices as a complementary type of employee-based innovation that is value-motivated and that has a function of potentially calibrating public value creation in public service organizations submerged in documentation regimes. We have structured the article as follows. We first elaborate our conceptual framework. We then present the research methodology including the case setting and selection. Next, we present our empirical findings, analyzing the frontline workers' coping strategies and discussing their innovative potential. We conclude with some final remarks, contributions, and theoretical insights of the article.

Conceptual framework

Management principles, professional values, dignity, and coping strategies

Incorporating contextual factors into the analysis of implementation practices at the frontline of public welfare services is crucial for understanding how and why frontline workers respond to top-down implementation instructions in the way they do (Hupe & Buffat 2013). The work situations of employees in frontline positions in public service organizations are infused with complexities of societal and organizational pressures and expectations (Schott et al. 2015). It has been suggested that western public welfare sectors, and the public and academic debates on welfare systems and governance, are increasingly moving away from NPM principles of performance management and market-based efficiency orientation (Lægreid & Christensen 2007). Post-NPM trends have been noted (Fossestøl et al. 2015), which emphasize employee-driven service innovation, collaboration, user-participation, and coproduction as important agendas for meeting the changing demands for welfare services (Torfing et al. 2016). In the midst of this, however, Nordic public welfare organizations often still contain elements of both traditional bureaucratic and market-based NPM managerial principles (Kamp et al. 2013). For example, high demands from top-levels of welfare organizations to implement NPM-like documentation and registration procedures at the operational levels are strongly present in the sector

(Fossestøl et al. 2015; Thunman 2016), as is the standardization of services in line with bureaucratic principles (Kamp et al. 2013).

Frontline workers in welfare services are often inclined to abide by values and ethical standards of their profession (Kjørstad 2005; Thunman 2013; Tummers et al. 2009). Frontline workers, in the field of social work, are for examples inclined to abide by the value of 'service' based upon the ethical principle that 'social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems' (NASW 2017). This can be seen in a desire to provide individualized and tailor-made services for their recipients and are important bases for how welfare workers perform their work. This may possibly collide, however, with bureaucratic rationality (Kjørstad 2005) and management principles that favor standardized solutions, quantifiable outcome measurements, and constant implementation demands and new ways of working (Kjørstad 2005; Schott et al. 2015; Tummers et al. 2009) that are not necessarily adding to the value of 'service'. The contextual conditions brought by management reforms that have characterized public sectors of Western nations for decades are found to weaken professional autonomy and the workers' opportunity to make choices according to professional ethics and standards (Kamp et al. 2013). The reduction of employee autonomy threatens the important sense of dignity at work (Karlsson 2012). A stem of literature that emphasize the workers' sense of autonomy (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999) and dignity (Karlsson 2012) as crucial factors of work satisfaction claims that the workers' reactions to a mismatch between their sense of autonomy and dignity versus managerial principles may lead to organizational misbehavior and resistance. Seen in this light, bureaucratic and NPM-style managerial pressures that characterize the work environment of frontline staff in Nordic welfare services are likely to come into conflict with their professional standards of work ethics and values. This may lead to an experience of not being able to deliver according to their professional values at work, opposing their sense of autonomy and thereby dignity in that work, and consequently may lead to resistance (Karlsson 2012).

In this paper, we see this potential experience of mismatch between professional values and managerial instructions in the light of the policy implementation literature of Lipsky's (1980) dilemma of the 'street-level bureaucrat'. Street-level bureaucrats are the frontline workers who interact directly with the public they serve, and make decisions about providing services to the citizens, putting new policies into action. Lipsky (1980) emphasizes how they use discretion and coping strategies when dealing with demanding clients and scarce organizational resources. This leads to staff 'adjusting' centrally induced policies, which gives them a role as the 'actual' policy makers who heavily influence the implementation outcome. Lipsky and scholars after him have established an array of behaviors that frontline staff uses for coping with these restraining factors in their work environment. The concept of 'coping' is often associated with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984, p. 9) constructive or adaptive strategies to tolerate or minimize stress or conflict. Seen in the context of managerial pressures characterizing the work environment of frontline staff that is likely to conflict with their work ethics and values, coping strategies may be used for upholding these values and thus their dignity at work. Coping strategies, such as resisting standardization, documentation, and registration demands, can thus be described as frontline workers' coping with the discrepancy they face between their own values/ethics and the managerial demands to their work (Thunman 2016). This may be discussed in light of resistance as a consequence of

the workers' fundamental need to claim their professional dignity (Karlsson 2012) and autonomy (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999) in such an organizational setting.

Innovation theory and employee-based innovation

Coping strategies among 'street-level bureaucrats' are often seen as problematic to the intended implementation outcome in Lipsky-inspired literature. Research on employees' role in innovation processes, however, often does not problematize this issue. Rather, it focuses on types of innovation initiated at ground level, such as employee-driven innovation (Høyrup 2010) bricolage and invisible innovation (Fuglsang 2010), practice-based innovation (Ellström 2010), work(er)-driven innovation (Smith 2017), and barriers and facilitators of such innovations (T. Wihlman et al. 2014). Central criteria in definitions of innovation are that innovation relates to a specific change that is new for those involved and that the idea is put into practice (Fuglsang & Pedersen 2011). In addition, the new practice should lead to, or at least be intended to lead to, some kind of value creation or improvement at the system level for it to be defined as innovation (Fuglsang & Pedersen 2011), and specifically to public value creation in the case of innovation in the public sector (Hartley 2005). Employee-driven innovation specifically has been defined 'as the development and implementation of new organizational forms, service concepts, modes of operation, and service processes in which the ideas, knowledge, time, and creativity of employees are actively used' (Klitmøller et al. 2007; referred by T. Wihlman et al. 2014, p. 162).

The definition above shows how investigations into the innovation practices of employees view bottom-up innovation as important for improvement work in organizations, and implicitly sees the critical creative potential of ground-level employees (Amundsen et al. 2011). It also illustrates an inherent view that employee-driven innovation is something management is actively aware of and it highlights the role of management in facilitating such innovation. Whereas literature on how to facilitate employee involvement in innovation have focused on explicit and planned innovation activities, some scholars highlight employee-based innovation in day-to-day work that is not deliberately facilitated by management. Lippke and Wegener (2014, p. 379) describe the concept of 'everyday innovation', arguing that 'innovative potentials are extensively bounded in work situations where problems must be solved and new needs emerge'. Such practice-based innovation is tied to learning as part of the work practice of employees (Ellström 2010, p. 28). Frontline staff take part in invisible innovations in their everyday work by 'bricolaging' through the adjustment of organizational protocols and 'intended ways of doing things' necessary for solving the situation at hand (Fuglsang 2010, p. 74). As such, public sector employee-based innovation emerges incrementally as a by-product of the workers' day-to-day learning and solving of their work-tasks, and especially when this leads to new practices, which add to the value of the organization they serve. Yakhlef and Essén (2013) illustrate empirically how care workers cope with the demands of their work and link the care workers' 'in-situ bodily practices of resistance' toward tensions of bureaucratic rules and requirements, to a type of practice innovation (Yakhlef & Essén 2013). By doing so, they propose an innovative potential in resistance practices that may be counterproductive to managerial goals. The study does not link such resistance practices and bodily innovation practices to literature on

employee-based innovation, but the results are supportive of Lipsky's theorization that the coping behaviors of street-level bureaucrats make it possible for public bureaucracies to meet long-term goals (Lipsky 2010, p. 15–25 referred to in Thunman 2016). We see here the theoretical possibility of establishing a link between resistance that is seemingly counterproductive and employee-based innovation, which, in the long run, may create value to the organization. In this article, we specifically ask if a conceptualization of frontline workers' practices to resist top-down implementation may be an alternative type of employee-based innovation, driven by the inherent need to follow professional ethics and values in the frontline workers quest for professional autonomy and dignity in their work in bureaucratic and NPM-inspired public welfare organizations.

Research methodology

To understand the way frontline public service workers respond to top-down implementation instructions in their everyday work situations, we draw on a qualitative, critical realist informed case study. A key purpose of using a critical realist case study is the inherent opportunity to study a phenomenon comprehensively and in depth (Easton 2010) by 'discovering the underlying structures and mechanisms that account for some particular phenomena of interest' (Fligstein & McAdam 2012, p. 192). In the following, we discuss the case selection and background and describe the data collection and analysis process that culminated in the empirical findings, which lay the foundation for this article.

Research context

As in other Nordic countries, Norwegian employment policy has a major focus on work as a means to welfare for everyone and a political goal of providing work inclusion services to help people with needs of facilitation to enter into and maintain employment in the regular labor market. This focus results in the creations and recreations of innovative policies and new work inclusion procedures to be implemented by the Norwegian Employment and Welfare Administration (NAV), which is the public agency in charge of providing welfare and work inclusion services to Norway's citizens. NAV is the result of the largest public reform of recent times in Norway, integrating the public employment service, social insurance, and parts of the municipal social services into one (Christensen et al. 2014). In line with the general trend of overlapping managerial traditions in the Nordic public sector, researchers have found that NAV's managerial agendas hold contradictory logics, including principles of central administration through standardization, performance measuring, and detailed documentation instructions as well as principles of flexibility and local autonomy 'with a comprehensive set of means to develop coordinated services for users' (Fossestøl et al. 2015). These overlapping managerial logics may be seen to influence how the continuous flow of implementation efforts of new innovative policies and work inclusion methods from central levels of government are delivered to the operational level of the organization, including in the increased introduction of using standardized methods and documentation procedures.

Among the many work inclusion measures intended to be implemented in NAV, the FG was selected for further investigation in the case study. The FG is a processual tool

initiated at political levels with the intention to ensure an trustworthy and efficient collaboration between employers, job seekers, and NAV, associated with managerial principles of collaboration and tailoring for the individual. The FG was described as a contract that captured contact information, follow-up plans, and rights and responsibilities of the collaborators, administered by the NAV frontline worker. As a consequence of a critical report by the Governmental Audit Committee in 2012, stating that the FG had not been implemented as expected, focused implementation strategies were set into action nationwide from 2012. The implementation strategies of the FG included the use standardized paper contracts for vast groups of recipients, registration procedures for performance evaluations, documentation and statistical purposes, and seemed to link more closely to managerial principles of bureaucracy and NPM. Despite heightened managerial implementation efforts, frontline staff had only taken the FG into practice to a varying degree in local offices at the start of the case study in 2015 (Høiland & Willumsen 2016).

Being part of a larger case study with the aim to generate knowledge for a deeper understanding of mismatches between centrally directed intentions of policy measures and its implementation at the operational level of public service organizations, the part of the case study that this article is reporting on focuses on the reception of the FG among frontline staff at a specific public employment office. The office was selected because it had notably high numbers for the use of the FG from mid-2013 to the beginning of 2015. The office had received continuous evaluations and feedback from the provincial FG coordinator on statistical results and specific use at the office, and had had a designated person who guided the frontline staff hands-on for a period of several months. However, throughout 2015, the rate of using the FG dropped in line with the withdrawal of these implementation efforts. This, we theorized, seemed to indicate that the FG had not been internalized as a natural practice among the frontline staff responsible for work inclusion of the FG's target groups. During the interviews with frontline staff at the office, other work inclusions strategies and measures also stood as central to the theme of the study. An example was a strong emphasis on the documentation requirements of the usage of a strategy called Job Matching (JM). JM was a way of matching service recipients to available jobs in the computer systems and then registering the procedure in a specific way in that system each time. This was required for all service recipients, but seemed to have reclined in the same way that the FG had reclined. Both the FG and the JM work procedures involved standardized usage and registration procedures that came on top of the core work tasks of the frontline employees. Because of the strong association with JM among the informants while talking about implementation instructions and practices of the FG, we also included empirical material on the JM implementation instruction into our analysis.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection and analysis were inspired by a critical realist informed case study approach (Easton 2010). There were two interconnecting phases. The first was an exploratory phase using method-triangulation including document studies of internal documents and statistical reports and 21 semi-structured interviews of 16 informants distributed at various levels of the organization, from national to provincial to municipal levels holding leadership and coordinator positions. The intention was to gain a contextual understanding by

exploring the implementation system of the FG. The second face was a descriptive and explanatory phase and had the purpose of exploring how frontline staff at the case office perceived and acted on the implementation instructions of the FG and to discuss possible explanations. It drew upon the contextual understanding that was gained during the first phase, and used various qualitative methods for further insight. These included one-to-two hour long semi-structured, in-depth interviews of 11 informants in frontline positions in the selected frontline employment office, supplemented with observational data from office visits, and 24 case- and department meetings and during a 4-month period in 2015. Altogether, the case study included 948 pages of transcribed interviews, 49 pages of observational notes, and 78 relevant documents. This article mainly draws on frontline employee data collected during the second phase of the case study.

The informants consisted of a balanced blend of men and women in the age-span of 30s–60s with educational backgrounds mostly from social work, health, and administration. Most informants were very open about their work situation, providing enthusiastic and often emotionally rich descriptions of their experiences. To protect the anonymity of the informants, interview quotes are not tied to demographic information such as gender or age, and all informants are identified as 'she', although both genders were well represented. Dialects and individual jargons that may identify specific informants are masked by the English translation of the quotes, which also helps protect anonymity. The thematic guides of the interviews evolved slightly during the process of data generation as our insight deepened. The main topics of the interview guides significant for this article include the informants' personal experiences of the implementation of the FG, descriptions of a normal workday and routines, as well as reflections on solving a specific case vignette of a service recipient who was likely to be in the target group for the FG.

In line with a critical realist informed approach, the findings emerged in a constant dialogue and through continuous analysis of the empirical data and theoretical ponderings (Belfrage & Hauf 2017). Each interview and case meeting observation were followed by memo writing and elaborated on during the continuous analysis process (Belfrage & Hauf 2017). Each interview was transcribed verbatim, reviewed together with the observation notes and relevant documents, and coded in the qualitative analysis computer software, Nvivo. The coding process was done in an eclectic inductive and deductive manner, using certain theoretical assumptions but focusing on open coding and systematizing and conceptualizing the data into theory-oriented themes as the analysis progressed (Belfrage & Hauf 2017). During this process, themes of resistance toward certain implementation instructions stood out, as well as themes of overwhelming work situations, professional values, and standards, and the importance of prioritizing work-tasks that answered to these standards. These themes were explored through various theoretical lenses (Belfrage & Hauf 2017). In the following, we present the findings of how the frontline workers in the case study reacted to implementation instructions that did not adhere to their professional and personal values.

Case study analysis and findings: Coping with implementation instructions in a context of contradicting managerial principles

The office division in focus consisted of frontline staff responsible for work inclusion services for people who had complex and specific needs of facilitation and follow-up for

socioeconomic or health-related reasons. The frontline work situation can be described as demanding with an overload of a wide variety of indispensable work-tasks. They consisted of multifaceted tasks within the core services of the frontline division including requirements posed by legislation such as processing incoming welfare applications to secure income according to strict deadlines and set evaluation procedures, as well as direct follow-up of service recipients and potential employers in accommodating work inclusion services. These work tasks were considered by the frontline workers to be matching professional values of social work mainly oriented toward solving the needs of the service beneficiary (NASW 2017). They were also considered to be in line with the core mission of NAV, 'to provide opportunities to people'. In addition to this core work, tasks consisted of handling a constant flow of implementation instructions in the form of new work inclusion methods and priorities, new procedures in information technology, and new or varying focuses on registration and documentation procedures. These were considered distractions to their core work tasks:

> There is always too much to do here. I could work 24–7, no problem (laughs). And if you already have too much that needs to be done, and then you are instructed to do *work tasks that do not feel right*… that is… spend valuable time… It gives frustrations in the workday. Not positive one might say.
>
> — Frontline worker

The informant captures the busy work situation as well as the importance of sticking to work tasks that *feel right and are in line with the 'service' value.* Having to follow instructions that do not feel right, and in consequence having to down-prioritize the work tasks that are in line with the sense of the workers' inclination of serving the end-users, triggered a frustration that may be connected to a lack of professional autonomy and dignity (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999; Karlsson 2012). Frontline workers in the case study emphasized a need to prioritize among their work tasks according to what they considered important and matching their sense of values and ethics of social work. This influenced how they reacted toward the implementation instructions in focus. Instead of the centrally envisioned way of applying the FG and JM as instructed, frontline staff revealed that, despite their feelings of loyalty to their managers, they often prioritized what they considered valuable work tasks over such top-down implementation instructions (Høiland & Klemsdal forthcoming). They disclosed four main coping strategies that will be described in the following and later discussed in relation to their innovative potential.

Adjusting

The first and most conciliatory practice we found among the frontline employees was a practice of adjusting the instructions according to their professional discretion. This happened when the frontline workers revised the instruction of how and when to use it, not standardizing it as ordered. Adjusting the instructions, we found, was used to cope with conflicts between the implementation instructions and frontline workers' autonomy of assessing appropriate work inclusion processes for the individual service recipient. Frontline workers, for example, saw a purpose in complying with the implementation

instruction of JM registrations to some extent, but only when deemed necessary in their direct work with the service recipients:

> They require you to do it [Job Match]. In all cases… But I've done it when I feel it's natural to do it. (…) Many of the conversations you have, the person is so far from work, and… you. It's not natural to match and talk about job positions when it's simply not useful for a long time. So far, I'm far from using Job Matching in all my follow-up conversations. Where it is natural, I do it.
>
> — Frontline worker

The instruction was to use JM registrations for all service recipients regardless of their situation and relevance of getting a job. Instead, this staff member only applied the procedure as instructed when she determined that it would be purposeful and useful for the service recipient in line with a professional inclination to tailor services, taking away the elements of the instructions that were perceived as disturbing and unnecessary. The standardized protocol of using it for everyone was thus adjusted to instead only using it for those considered being likely to benefit from the procedure, in line with values of social work. Another frontline worker similarly described that her reason for not using the FG for everyone as instructed was that such standardized procedures did not feel right but artificial:

> Because we [already] have a good dialogue on email, phone, and meetings and when needed… So then, I feel it would be a bit artificial if I suddenly said: 'Yes but we could also use a Facilitation Guarantee.' Unnecessary and artificial.
>
> — Frontline worker

Adjusting the FG instructions so that its application was in line with tailoring services for the individual emerged as a coping strategy. Adjusting the instructions as seem fit, afforded time to focus on the core work-tasks in the follow-up processes, as well as avoiding what they considered unnecessary and artificial procedures that they worried could jeopardize the important one-on-one relationships with their service recipients and employers. Adjusting and revising the instructions thus led the frontline workers to deliver work inclusion services according to their professional discretion of what the service recipient needed in line with the social work value of 'service'. Coping by adjusting the implementation instructions to match their professional standards of delivering services provided a way to keep their dignity and autonomy of their profession at large.

This revision practices in our study may be viewed as counterproductive to the managerial strategy of implementing standardized registration and documentation procedures. However, the workers' motivations to adjust the instructions were not to resist the instructions specifically, but rather to incorporate them into their practices when deemed useful and not destructive to their service recipients, thereby improving the work inclusion service itself. Adjusting the instructions to fit the needs of service recipients can be linked to tailoring the services in question while interacting with and thereby directly benefitting the end-user. It can thereby be linked to the concepts of bricolaging (Fuglsang 2010) and 'everyday innovation' seeing that 'innovative potentials are extensively bounded in work situations where problems must be solved and new needs emerge' (Lippke & Wegener 2014).

In the following, three other coping strategies are presented that did not have the purpose to improve the work inclusion services of FG and JM directly, but that instead were directed against the implementation instructions themselves.

Down-prioritizing

The first practice of directly resisting the implementation instructions was that of resistance through downprioritizing them among all the other work-tasks and agendas.

> I see it in a way as a structural problem in NAV. Because we have so much to keep up with. A lot. We try to do it all, but we barely land one thing, and they put the pressure in one place for two weeks… But then you don't have (…) the desire, capacity, maybe perseverance to keep the pressure up all the way all the time. So, it wears off naturally. No one talks about [a similar measure] that was very much emphasized two years ago. VERY MUCH. There were no words for how important it was. And it IS important. But when the pressure of ONE thing wears off, using it ALSO wears off.
>
> — Frontline worker

The quote illustrates what the informant experienced as a demanding work situation with an overload of work-tasks, including continuously being instructed to focus on new areas to implement for limited periods of time. She elaborates how this made it difficult to stay dedicated and to recognize what was actually to be prioritized in the long run. Using 'the new' wore off when managerial focus wore off, indicating implementation halt. Downprioritizing or even forgetting seemed to be a natural way to deal with this myriad of new focus areas and instructions coming down to them from central levels of NAV. Downprioritizing was widely done to instructions perceived as only a means to 'satisfy the system'. How and why is illustrated in the following quote:

> There are too many focus areas. And when a new focus-area is presented, you let go of the old. And then there is the time pressure and all that. That you have the things that you always do and have to do and always will do, and then you have ten things that you have to do to satisfy others, or a system, a registration procedure or whatever. And those do not necessarily feel important, so they get down-prioritized when another of those focus areas comes along.
>
> — Frontline worker

This informant also draws a picture of a work situation consisting of an overload of implementation instructions on top of an already busy workload of core tasks 'that you always do and have to do and always will do'. These core work-tasks of following up service recipients and application processing were deemed more important than the implementation instructions that were seen as 'ten things that you have to do to satisfy others, or a system, a registration procedure or whatever'. The downprioritization was done in line with what the employees considered important in their work, showing that they drew on their professional discretion and autonomy to prioritize what work-tasks to focus on. Viewing both the FG instruction and the JM registrations as doing 'extra "stuff" to the system for it to be registered and measured' for statistical purposes only, a

frontline worker clearly spelled out what she considered to be the purpose of her work: 'I prioritize client follow-up and necessary proceedings of applications and so on - those things that ARE my job'.

Downprioritizing top-down instructions that they considered not to be their 'actual job', nor as adding to NAVs mission of public value, can then be seen as a way of coping by resistance, helping the frontline workers to be true to their professional values, as well as what they consider to be the true purpose of the organization they work for.

Tricking

The coping strategy of tricking directed at the documentation and registration procedures in question consisted of frontline workers doing as instructed while the implementation effort was high on the case office's managerial agenda. However, because the instructions were perceived as a 'necessary evil' to 'satisfy the system' stealing valuable time from their core work tasks, the orders were only carried out by following through the instructions on the surface. This was, for example, done by using shortcuts to save time by 'clicking buttons' to produce 'good numbers' in the computer system giving the appearance that the implementation demands were met. A frontline worker describes the process:

> I just tick it, right, that's the button. Then I'm done. So I've done it in a way, but in reality I didn't actually do it (…) because… Really, I should have gone in and looked at the matches of available positions at the job market that came up for that service recipient. [I'm] not interested in what matches I get. Only that I'm able to tick it, so I'm … now I'm deadly honest!
>
> — Frontline worker

Instead of talking to the service recipient about the matches from the JM procedure as centrally intended, the frontline worker honestly described how she often saved time by just 'clicking the buttons' in the computer system to produce the numbers required for statistical purposes. She distinguished between 'just clicking buttons' and 'actually doing it' (following the instructions to job match and to share the resulting matches with the service recipient when seen fit). Importantly also, frontline workers often revealed that this tricking practice was only carried on for as long as the particular instruction was in focus at the case office. As soon as the instruction was not prioritized at managerial levels, they stopped doing it at all:

> We consider all those target-score-things as just nonsense, we even joke about them … We had piles of target-scores that we were supposed … so we got really good at Job Match one month. Then the month afterwards, we stopped. Then someone joked about it later: 'Well, aren't you registering Job Matches?' I answered the colleague: 'No! Job Matching? Didn't we finish that?' (Laughing) And it's a bit like that. We have finished the Facilitation Guarantee as well. It was never we who did it … we just clicked the buttons.
>
> — Frontline worker

The quote shows a serious undertone through a witty illustration of how this type of resistance had become shared practice among staff. We can infer through the

description that these specific implementation instructions were just two of many, and that this led frontline workers to create this strategy of tricking - reluctantly following through as long as necessary, but stopping the registration and documentation procedures as soon as the focus changed. It had become a joke among staff: 'that was what we did last month… now we are doing this', showing resistance toward the specific new registration procedures but, even more so, resistance toward what staff considered constant, useless, top-down implementation instructions being added to their already crammed workload, stealing time from what they considered the core mission of their work. Tricking the system by cutting corners, mechanically 'clicking buttons' and waiting for the current instruction to give way to the next round of 'button-clicking', they tried as best they could to create shortcuts to have enough time for what they considered the core work-tasks of their job in NAV in line with, for example, the values of 'service' in social work. Driven by a motivation for 'true' value creation, this practice of resistance may be counted among the resistance types directed against managerial instructions.

Rejecting

The coping strategy that most obviously may be labeled as a form of resistance in the case study was that of purposefully rejecting the standardized and documentation oriented implementation instructions of the FG and JM: Frontline employees explained that they were already working in the collaborative manner intended, but that they rejected using the FG the way instructed through paper contracts and documentation procedures. A frontline worker described how she was already routinely using this 'new' collaborative work process in her service provision:

> The Facilitation Guarantee I feel that I'm already doing, just I do not do it inside the system… but according to its intention that I understand is that they should know who I am, and what I can offer both employer and user.
>
> — Frontline worker

She rejected doing the FG 'inside the system' by omitting the paper contract to be filled out with the new employer and service recipient and thereby not having it registered into the IT-system for statistical purposes. Similarly, frontline workers in the study used their business cards to show their availability to the new employers, not seeing the point of registering 'even more paperwork'. The frontline workers thus alleged to be using the collaborative method of being available to the employer as part of their routines, abiding by the intention behind the FG. They saw the additional FG procedures as unnecessary and not useful to the target group. The only purpose for following such artificial instructions would be for it to look good in NAVs statistics. This was not something considered important enough and therefore rejected by staff through eliminating the corresponding registration and documentation procedures.

Another example of resistance by mere rejection was the tendency among frontline workers to simply 'wait it off'. This was exemplified by accounts of an often-narrated office policy to have weekly meetings for reporting on how many times staff had registered or documented certain instructions in focus, such as the JM registrations:

> [It] was mostly the same people who showed up in the meetings and reported the numbers. But half (…) eeh … sabotaged it, you can say. They saw it as nonsense. And I agree. (…) many were not as active … and would drag their feet just sitting there waiting for it also to pass.
>
> — Frontline worker

The description of nonparticipation in office meetings as 'sabotaging' by frontline workers demonstrates a strong need in frontline workers to cope with constant new implementation instructions. Frontline workers saw it as necessary to 'wait off' instructions in order for them to pass, sometimes not registering the procedures at all and not even showing up for the meetings. The same practice of 'waiting off' can be partially tied to the trickery practice discussed previously. By just 'clicking off' the JM registrations to get good statistics, some frontline workers were delivering 'tricked' numbers for these weekly meetings that they knew would fade away anyway. Outright rejection of the registration and documentation instructions of the implementation efforts was thus also used as a coping strategy to remedy what frontline workers experienced as a problem at the system level of the organization contradicting their core purpose of working in NAV. Interviewees' comments strongly implied that they questioned the public value creation of such implementation practices coming from central levels of NAV.

> What's the point… well of course there is a point, but you think in a way… how important is it? Am I really going to spend my time on this? All 'this' I just call 'nonsense'. But yes, it is good for statistics and to measure how well we perform.
>
> — Frontline worker

Informants in the frontline decisively avoided spending their limited resources on something that they did not consider to improve the quality of services to the service recipients. When providing numbers for statistical purposes was seen as the only purpose of the implementation instruction, rejecting of the instructions was motivated by instead spending the time right and creating value for the service recipients and thereby protecting what they considered the main purpose of the organization. A frontline worker further reflects on the managerial agenda of the implementation instructions:

> [M]aybe they [management at central levels of NAV]do not know that we are actually quite good. That we work quite well with people. That we are well educated. Not with the intention of getting rich, but with the intention of meeting people in a good way. Because that is what I do, the best I can.'
>
> — Frontline worker

This echoes a sentiment that we found to be emerging throughout the data: that frontline workers had an impression that the 'system' or leadership at 'distant levels' in NAV did not comprehend the professional competence and the basic values that the frontline workers possessed, and that they therefore kept measuring performance through documentation and registration procedures that seemed pointless and contrary to what was their 'actual job'. This may illustrate the alienating effect of NPM-like principles on frontline employees, threatening professional autonomy at a microlevel (Kamp et al.

2013; Tummers et al. 2009), and depriving them of their sense of dignity in their work (Karlsson 2012).

The result of this alienating effect can especially be seen in these three last resistance strategies of downprioritizing, tricking, and rejecting, all directly opposing the implementation instructions and revealing what may be conceptualized as a type of innovation. This kind of innovation emerged, then, as a result of employees' resistance practices when prioritizing core work tasks over work tasks that they considered to distract them from delivering services according to their professional discretion, thus protecting their autonomy and dignity at work. The resistance strategies may be seen to eventually add value to both service recipients, who become less defrauded of valuable time for tailoring, and to the organization that are kept more aligned with its core mission of providing work inclusion services to citizens. Below, we further the discussion of how these seemingly counterproductive strategies may be conceptualized as carrying innovative potential.

Discussion: Resistance as value-driven, employee-based innovation?

In Nordic welfare organizations that are known to be complex with competing and even contradictory managerial principles and work instructions (Kamp et al. 2013) and with the street-level bureaucrats' dilemma of never-ending demands from service recipients and constant restrictions in time and resources (Lipsky 1980), work-tasks need to be prioritized. Thunman (2013) examines the implementation of NPM-ideas with regard to the effects on welfare workers' feelings of work-related stress. She finds that being prevented from realizing ones self-value at work, in welfare services submerged in NPM-ideas, may lead to feelings of inauthenticity. Theoretical developments on organizational misbehavior (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999; Karlsson 2012) hold that the lack of autonomy and dignity at work is an important reason for misbehavior in organizations, such as resisting managerial instructions. Our frontline informants may be seen as showing a need to cope with the lack of autonomy that the implementation instructions imposed through inflicting time away from performing their job according to, for instance, their 'service' value so important for them to imply by in order to feel a sense of authenticity and dignity in their work. They coped by revising and resisting the implementation instructions that they did not consider to live up to their core mission at work. The motivation behind these coping strategies were to save time for what they considered 'their actual and core work tasks' to deliver individualized and appropriate services to the service recipients and employers. These motivations came from a clear commitment of frontline staff to provide services in line with their professional values and what they considered the authenticity of their work, thus allowing them to focus on the work-tasks that matched what they regarded as the purpose of their job. Because staying true to value creation on a personal, professional, and even organizational level motivated the revision and resistance practices, we propose viewing them as value-driven work practices to cope with managerial principles that contradicted their inherent feeling of authentication, autonomy, and dignity in their work.

We found that these four coping strategies of adjusting, downprioritization, tricking, and rejecting had become collective practices among frontline workers in the case study.

Coping with implementation demands, which appeared to counter their professional values, and then communicating their prioritizations with their colleagues, such as joking about what is or is not on the agenda for the time being, we propose may be understood as 'innovations that start[ed] as small intrinsic and interactive adjustments [and] le[a]d to the exercise of new practices and routines' (Fuglsang 2010, p. 74). These kinds of employee-based innovations that emerged from our data are not the same as the employee-driven innovation from management literature that are usually initiated and purposely facilitated by management (Høyrup 2010). Rather, they arose from work practices when dealing with day-to-day problem solving. Smith (2017, p. 114) uses the concept of work(er)-driven innovation as 'socially derived practice of developing new and better ways of doing things in and through engagement in work'. He emphasizes the incremental innovations that emerge from practices and routines of work through the negotiation between the workers, their work-tasks, and the demands of their workplaces as well as the occupational practice of the particular sets of work activities in question (Smith 2017).

We expand on the idea of connecting welfare workers' resistance practices against tensions of bureaucratic rules and requirements to a type of practice innovation (Yakhlef & Essén 2013), which is important for the value creation also at the system level (Lipsky 1980). As summarized in Table 1, we choose to classify the four coping strategies into two subcategories in order to more clearly depict two different types of innovations. The coping strategy of 'adjusting' we place in the subcategory of value-driven revision practices that are simply aimed at improving the new measures to fit each service recipients' cases. The three other types: 'down-prioritizing', 'trickery', and 'rejection' we place in the subcategory of value-driven resistance practices that counteract the managerial instructions directly. We suggest that these two subcategories may be conceptualized as two types of employee-based innovations that emerge from practical attempts to solve problems when encountering continuous new implementation demands in conflict with values and professional standards of the employees at the operational level of the organization. Both of them can be described as a 'tendency to think of new and better ways of doing things and to try them out in practice' (Fagerberg 2005, p. 1, cited in Smith 2017) – a notion widely used to define innovation. Conceptualizing revision and resistance practices as employee-based, value-driven innovations, also tie them to the important role of value creation as drivers of public service innovation (Wegener 2016).

We therefore suggest that the first subcategory of coping strategies as a type of value-driven revision, developed to cope with the standardized instructions not matching the case-to-case discretionary judgment of frontline workers, can be conceptualized as the type of employee-based innovations already widely documented in the field, such as 'bricolaging' (Fuglsang 2010), practice-based innovation (Ellström 2010), and everyday innovation (Lippke & Wegener 2014). These are all drawing on how employees innovate implicitly to fit the day-to-day situation of various needs of their job, including that of tailoring services for the recipients. In our study, we found that the staff's decisions to adjust the FG and JM registrations, such as not using JM registration procedures if the service recipient had more pressing issues to deal with before he was ready for work, had become collective practices surfacing in many interviews.

We further suggest that the second subcategory of coping strategies, that of value-driven resistance practices of downprioritizing, tricking, and rejection, all directed against the implementation instructions themselves, may be conceptualized as a different type of innovation. This type of innovation is also employee- and value-based, but

it arose from directly countering management-driven implementation instructions in order to instead prioritize tasks in accordance with their professional values. Describing a workplace context of continuous streams of new implementation instructions of work-tasks belonging to managerial agendas not matching their professional values, the frontline workers in the study responded by resisting the instructions to save time. Thus, the resistance strategies can be considered value-driven and bricolage based, but where the implementation instructions are honed, not to improve the new measure per say, as in the other innovation type above, but instead with the purpose of prioritizing the core work tasks for the best of their service beneficiaries as a whole.

We found these filtering and honing mechanisms to be very important for the frontline workers in ensuring a dignified performance of tasks in the context of work-overload, and an overload of new measure-productions. The innovation practices were motivated by the staff's need to stay true to their personal, professional, and what they considered organizational values. These thereby emerged as coping strategies to deal with their already overwhelming work situation of limited resources (Lipsky 1980), the feelings of inauthenticity (Thunman 2013), and lack of autonomy and dignity (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999; Karlsson 2012) inflicted upon them by contradicting managerial agendas. Where the first type of innovation had a function at the organizational level of improving services through adjusting instructions to tailor the services for the individual beneficiary, the resistance-driven type of innovation may be seen to have a function at the organizational level to potentially calibrating value-creation in the organization.

Table I Overview of coping strategies and corresponding innovation types

Coping strategy	Adjusting	Downprioritizing	Tricking	Rejecting
Subcategory	**Value-driven revision practices**	**Value-driven resistance practices**		
Employee-based innovation type	E.g. **bricolaging** (Fuglsang 2010)	**Resistance-driven innovation** Result of value-driven resistance practices counteracting managerial instructions		
Innovation function at organizational level	Improving services through tailoring for individual beneficiaries	Making time for core-tasks potentially calibrating value-creation in organizations		
Innovation function at individual level	Coping strategy to maintain autonomy and professional dignity (Ackroyd et al. 1999; Karlsson 2012) based upon professional values.			

Final remarks

The study suggests that resistance practices that are rooted in prioritizing professional values in the meeting with certain managerial demands may be conceptualized as resistance-based innovation. Our findings show that 'innovation potential may be present while managers or politicians mistakenly conclude that an innovation policy has failed' (Wegener 2016, p. 116). As such, the function of innovation as 'value creation' becomes significant. If the definition of innovation includes 'value creation' at the system level of the organization (Ellström 2010), and here particularly public welfare organizations

whose mission is to provide services to citizens, is it the case that employee-based practices can only be viewed as innovations if they add to managerial goals of the organization? There are many reasons for politicians and managers to introduce new measures to improve public service provisions other than instrumental considerations about efficiency. But what if the implementation instructions endorse documentation and standardization above what frontline workers consider the true purpose of their services? When welfare workers face implementation instructions that are out of line with their professional priorities and feeling of authenticity and dignity to their work, and they react through honing and filtering mechanisms that directly counter managerial goals of policy implementation, can one say that they are still adding to public value?

Frontline workers described the organization as 'flourishing' with demands from the registration and documentation regime. If ever-new implementation instructions from central levels of the organization interfere with the frontline workers' abilities to deliver services that adhere to their values and professional standards and what they consider the values of the organization, we suggest that their use of resistance as coping strategies can be conceptualized as a value-driven employee-based innovation to help calibrate the system. We thus contend that the frontline workers used value-driven innovation practices of resistance and that these may eventually function as calibrators for the public value delivery of the organization by diminishing the use of time and effort to follow standardized documentation instructions not necessarily valuable for the target group any way. As such, the dilemma of implementing policy-induced instructions from central levels of government to the 'ground floor' of public welfare organization (Hill & Hupe 2014) may be turned around. The dilemma could rather be to question the usefulness of developing ever new top-down instructions and measures to solve the 'wicked problems' of the welfare state, instead of giving the professionals at the frontlines, who deal with these problems in their everyday work, the flexibility, time, and resources they need to find creative solutions one case at the time.

The article contributes to the practice- and employee-based innovation field in that we are proposing a complementary innovation type that is specifically attributed to outright resistances practices, not specified in the well-documented employee and practice-based innovation, such as the adjustment of protocol and bricolaging (Fuglsang 2010). We contend that this resistance-driven innovation type emerges as a by-product of value-motivated coping strategies against managerial instructions that do not match the ethics and professional standards of frontline workers. Using the lens of public service innovation as value-creation, we suggest that this type of employee-based, value-motivated and resistance-driven innovation may eventually have an important function of calibrating toward public value delivery, despite strong influences of the standardization, registration, and documentation trends of bureaucratic and NPM managerial principles that are still found in public welfare organizations in Nordic nations.

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