Article

Continuities and differences in a Norwegian welfare service context: Comparing conversations about financial and employment problems in 1992 and 2015

by

Siv Oltedal
Professor in social work
University of Stavanger, Department of Social Studies
Norway
E-mail: siv.oltedal@uis.no

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Abstract

Welfare and social work aim for social justice and self-determination, and the work is sensitive to both its institutional context and to the worker-client relationship. In this article, we re-analyse and compare two sets of collected data (Oltedal, 2000; Olsen, 2022). The data consists of institutional talks between frontline workers and clients in a Norwegian welfare-to-work-service context; the social services (Sosialkontoret) in 1992, and an integrated labour- and welfare service (NAV) in 2015. The institutional framework of the two services shares many similarities, including the overall policy goal of securing people's financial livelihood, as well as labour market inclusion. We investigate the following question: How is moral and control dealt with in institutional welfare conversations in Norway in both 1992 and 2015, related to clients' financial and unemployment problems? The aim of the study is to explore changes in institutional talk by identifying and discussing contextual and relational-dependent similarities and differences.

The employment control aspect is more visible in 2015 data through social workers' emphasis on a step-by-step approach wherein measures are reframed, while social workers in 1992 are more inclined to leave it up to clients themselves to make work-life connections. While the financial control aspect is more visible in 1992 through social workers' emphasis on the client's moral responsibility, this is less dominant in 2015, in which social workers are acting more neutral and descriptive. The institutional discourse has changed. In 1992, the framing of the talk between frontline workers and client has a stronger moral focus than in 2015. This is due to the animator footing (Goffman, 1981), where workers bring the context and the societal perspectives regarding norms for social welfare recipients into the discussion. In 2015, the principal footing (Goffman, 1981), where the possibility for the frontline worker to voice their own judgement is more visible and the framing of the talk is more relational-dependent. Changes can also be traced back to differences in welfare policy, where the financial issue is more in focus in 1992, while welfare-to-work is more on the frontline workers agenda in 2015.

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Introduction

Based on principles of social justice and self-determination, social work aims to help vulnerable people improve their life situation, including their social and financial welfare (IFSW, 2014). The work is relationally sensitive, based on a strong ethical foundation that promotes dialogue, and highlights the interpersonal and dynamic nature of the work (Fellesorganisasjonen, 2024; Shulman, 2016). Ideally, social work entails interventions 'at the points where people interact with their environment', which recognizes the knowledge and viewpoints of clients, and seeks to change structural barriers to people's welfare and life chances (IFSW, 2014). At the same time, social work is committed to the norms and good of society as a whole, and also exercises control, for example, by making clients take or refrain from specific actions or (re-)considering their choices and behaviours in the perspective of the social worker or the broader community (Janebová & Truhlářová, 2018). Control elements also follow from the contextual nature of social work, in which the professional purpose is constantly negotiated (Healy, 2022; Caswell et al., 2013), for example, by activation policies that combine supportive and disciplinary measures (e.g. mandatory participation in work-related activation) (van Berkel et al., 2017). Frontline workers execute moral agency because their discretion ranges over questions of value, which is not merely about technical issues (Zacka, 2017, p. 66). What counts as valuable activities in a society is a moral question. Innjord (2024) highlights that to name something as work is about valuing, and for users in the welfare state it is of crucial importance not to devaluate their complex and demand activities during work inclusion processes.

In this article, we compare institutional talk (Drew & Heritage, 1992) between clients and their social workers in a Norwegian welfare-to-work-service context in 1992 at Sosialkontoret (Social services), and in 2015 at NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration). The institutional framework of the two services shares many similarities, including the overall policy goal of securing people's financial livelihood and inclusion into the labour market. Research on the street delivery of social welfare and activation policy in Norway has increasingly recognized how public assistance encompasses both empowering and coercive approaches, as well as being relationally sensitive (Hansen & Natland, 2017; Gjersøe et al., 2019; Leseth et al.,

2020; Olsen & Oltedal, 2021). For example, Gjersøe et al. (2019) find that social workers in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) take encouraging approaches that are sensitive to the statutory exemption for compulsory activation, while also putting firm pressure on clients by insisting on activity when deemed appropriate. However, a qualitative study on how young social assistance benefit recipients in NAV experience compulsory activation shows that experiences of help and reasonable requirements may quickly change into experiences of injustice and unreasonable sanctions (Leseth et al., 2020). In this article, we investigate how social workers and clients in 1992 and 2015 deal with moral and control aspects related to financial and unemployment problems in the life of the client. The aim of the study is to explore changes in institutional talk by identifying and discussing contextual, and relational-dependent similarities and differences.

The Norwegian welfare-to-work service context of 1992 and 2015

Norway has been characterized as a social democratic welfare model with high levels of decommodification, a commitment to social equity and a cross-class solidarity paving the way for universal and generous welfare benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990). As early as in 1966, the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) implemented a comprehensive pension and social insurance system (Folketrygden) to buffer a decrease in living standards in circumstances of unemployment, disease or accidents.

A common denominator for the welfare-to-work service context of both 1992 and 2015 is a strong political and cultural norm of self-sufficiency through employment. The Norwegian labour market and social policy from the 1980s onward has been strongly influenced by concerns for increased unemployment, and a growing number of passive benefit recipients (Lødemel, 1997). In line with the 1990s shift in European welfare policy towards workfare and activation, Norway redirected from a ´passive´ income protection system to an ´active´ labour market integration system, with the objective of increasing self-sufficiency and employment in the population (Lødemel & Moreira, 2014). This ´work-line´ [arbeidslinja] orientation included a welfare system rigged for making people rationally choose employment over long-term reception of public benefits (Hatland & Pedersen, 2023, p. 143). For example, as early as with the

1991 Act of Social Services, it was allowed to impose work requirements in return for benefits (Ellingsæter et al., 2020, p. 40; Lødemel, 2001). However, the Norwegian activation paradigm deviates from the stricter ´work-first´ orientation that developed elsewhere in Europe. The Norwegian ´human capital approach´ consists of rehabilitation and work-training measures and other competence-building activities, combined with requirements to actively seek jobs (Minas, 2014). Moreover, the national social assistance scheme is defined as a ´decentralized, discretionary relief regime´, by being anchored at the municipal level and providing services in relation to other services, and where social workers have a relatively high degree of discretion in individual benefit assessment (Eardley et al., 1996; Erlien, 2017). Historically, the social assistance scheme was a social policy measure to combat poverty, but the scheme and benefit level have gradually been discussed as something that undermines work ethics (Terum, 1996). The Norwegian trade union for social workers (today: Fellesorganisasjonen; FO) has been advocating for right-based social assistance, replacing the means-tested economical support (Messel, 2013, p. 118). The authorities have been reluctant to give such rights due to concerns about negative effects on peoples' incentives to find work. Unlike in 2015, in 1992 there was still a board of laypeople deciding on social benefits claims from clients. However, the development was to increase the power of the administration, and decrease political influence in client issues (Terum, 1996, p. 129).

Perhaps the biggest contextual difference between 1992 and 2015 concerns the structural distribution of welfare services. In 2006, the Stortinget established NAV, a merger of three agencies covering social assistance, pensions and labour market issues. NAV aimed to get more people into work through a holistic and effective service organization that offered services accommodating the individual needs of clients (Stjernø & Hatland, 2020, p. 304). The NAV reform extended the activation scope towards a wider range of target groups, including those with health and social problems (Minas, 2014). Consequently, social assistance recipients were granted full access to the portfolio of NAV's services for rehabilitation and competence up-skilling that previously were reserved for social security benefits recipients (Andreassen & Aars, 2015). Furthermore, work-life transition was underscored as an explicit service objective with the 2009 Act of Social Services in NAV.

Institutional talk in relation to the Goffmanian framework

According to Turner, Goffman recognized that interactions occur within a macro social context, and he presents Goffman`s model of interpersonal structuring related to how individuals ritualize and regionalize their interactions (Turner, 1988, p. 145). Predicted ritual forms can be repeated and linked together in chains of interactions, such as turn-takings and openings as stereotyped sequences of gestures. Regionalized interactions are related to space and time as a specific institutional setting. A backstage region, for example, will require different opening, closing and sequencing rituals than a frontstage region.

When people meet, they have an initial ´frame of understanding´ regarding the social situation they are in and the activities they are engaging in. Such primary frameworks draw on abstract contexts of ideology, politics, collective opinions and subjective experiences. People perform frames through the management of ´face´, and seek to control other participants' impression of what the situation is essentially about. As participants in framing processes are essentially producing meaning and context for social interaction, frames are open to transformation, and vulnerable to manipulation and negotiation (Goffman, 1974).

A specific form of speaker-audience frames are footings, which is about the alignment of speaker and audience to each other, and 'much depends on the minutiae of the institutional arrangement within which any particular discourse occurs, and on the intention of the speaker' (Burns, 1992, p. 325). Goffman (1974, p. 518) divides the source of the speaker, which involves two functions, as a *principal* speaks on behalf of oneself, meaning that the source of the word is the person itself, while an *animator* is like a sounding box, talking on behalf of somebody else. In the institutional setting we can illustrate a principal as a voice from person to person, while the animator is more of a 'voice referring to' laws, regulations and societal norms. Participants' use of footing (Goffman, 1974, 1981) refers to different speaking positions from which one can convey a claim about an ongoing activity, as to what meaning or context should be applied in this regard.

Institutional talk (Drew & Heritage, 1992) or institutional discourse is a form of communicative genre, which 'are located as a strategic intersection of "freedom" and "constraint" in communicative interaction' (Luckmann, 1992, p. 223). For example, perspectives being set and taken are different in a private versus a public sphere. Genres are linked to defined types of social situations, such as social worker-client interactions and 'some of the most clear-cut genres are types of "institutional discourse", i.e., cases of task-oriented discourse designed to deal with some specific activity' (Linell, 1998, p. 240). Institutional talk is task oriented, and includes one part which is employed in a formal organization. Fredin (1993) shows in a study of institutional discourses of Swedish welfare that social workers are interactively dominant in most cases, and strategically steered the course of the dialogue and established a social welfare perspective.

In our article, the comparative focus between the two periods of times are related to the different blending of the moral and control. The moral issue is about respect or disrespect to the self, and to the person. Moral stories can be told to trigger a desirable code of conduct. The speaker's relation to oneself, as someone he/she is speaking about is important in our understanding of our individual functioning (Goffman, 1974, p. 512). Goffman writes about the 'Moral career of the Mental Patient'(1959), that the moral aspect entails the person`s self and his/her framework of imagery of judging himself and others.

Method, data and analytic approach

Frontline workers in this study are positioned in two different service contexts, albeit with many similarities. In the 1992 data, the workers were formally employed at the Social Service Office, which is a single-purpose, social policy organization at the municipal level. In the 2015 data, the workers worked in a multipurpose service that delivers integrated welfare and labour market policies (NAV), and with two governing lines: one from the state and one from the municipality.

We are using dataset created in two different public funded programmes. In 'The development programme for social services', the 1992 project data was collected from ´ordinary-framed´ encounters, while in the 2015 'Practice- and knowledge

development in NAV offices' project, the data was collected from ´project-framed´ encounters focusing on information gathering and feedback systems.

This is a qualitative study of authentic institutional conversations. The article is based on a reanalysis of the two data sets, one collected in 1992 (Sosialkontor) and one in 2015 (NAV) (Oltedal, 2000; Olsen, 2022). In total, the article's data encompasses transcripts of 52 encounters between workers, with a function as social workers and clients in disadvantageous life situations. In the text, we alter by using worker, social worker and frontline worker though not all of the frontline workers are educated as social workers. However, they have a social work function in that they are formally employed to assess and implement solutions to the needs of individual service users (Oltedal & Skippervik, 2022).

Table 1: Data overview

Data collected – When and where?	**Number of workers**	**Number of clients**	**Number of tape-recorded conversations**	**Comments**
1992 – at four Social Welfare offices (Sosialkontoret)	9 30-60 years All social workers (sosionom)	17	29 In total, 345 pages transcribed	Two conversations for each client-worker relationship *)
2015 at two NAV offices	6 40-55 years Teacher, police, health & social worker, child welfare worker and social worker	23	23 In total, 16 hours and 48 minutes transcribed	One conversation for each client-worker relation

*) In one relationship, there was one conversation, and in other relationships two married couples were present.

Both in 1992 and 2015, the requirement from the authorities was that the social workers should choose which client should be part of the research, with the clients and social workers signing a written consent. In 1992, the first author was present as an observant and researcher in all conversations, whereas in 2015 she was one of three researchers who were observing the conversation. The second author has

studied all conversations from 2015, though without being involved in the actual data collection.

The data from 1992 and 2015 were anonymized, and reported as required. The researcher related to the 1992 data informed the Department of Health and Social Affairs when this was completed (Oltedal, 2000, p. 19). It is not possible to trace identity information about the informants, since this key that matches data with informants has been deleted. Since the data is anonymized, the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is not relevant. The situation with re-analysing these oldest data has been discussed with the XXX university Data Protection Officer (DPO), who has concluded that correct procedures have been followed. This comparative study was not planned in 1992, and the informants were not informed that the data could be re-analysed many years later. Although the entire material has been re-analysed, the result is that all quotations used in this article are already published in the thesis (Oltedal, 2000).

The re-analysing method is to systematically search for units saturated with ambiguity, ambivalence and some kind of disagreement. We use the Goffmanian interpretive framework to identify how the participants frame a ´next step´ in the interaction. We identify conversation sequences, in which a ´next step´ in the process is discussed with the following characteristics: 1) a 'next step' is actualized by one of the parties, related to self-management, finances, treatment, measures, work, education or disability pension; 2) the participants do not necessarily agree on the value, relevance or content of the proposed ´next step´, and 3) ambiguity is attempted to be resolved through a specific framing of the ´next step´ in question. We selected sequences from 1992 and 2015, with data covering the following two themes: social work with financial and employment problems.

This is a comparative study crossing different time periods: ‘(….) one of the distinctive goals of comparative social science is to interpret significant historical outcomes’ (Ragin, 1987, p. 11). As a critical comment on this comparative study, we need to be cautious to generalize these results, as the institutions dealing with these issues have changed from 1992 to 2015. In particular, the focus on work-inclusion has been strengthened regarding organizational collaboration, measures and laws

regarding 2015, compared with 1992. And it is problematic that we are dealing with different age groups. In 1992, the age of the clients was 30-60 years, and in the 2015 data the clients were between 18-29 years. We do not know if the clients are treated differently in relation to their age. However, there is a similarity between these two data-corpuses, because the clients were defined among those the institution did not manage to give sufficient help. The clients were expected to be in need of comprehensive individual counseling. If one should speculate: We anticipate that to be categorized as one in need of comprehensive help from social welfare is more important than what age group one belongs to. To a certain degree, the potential criticism can be moderated by the unique data set of this study, consisting of authentic institutional discourse material from two historical periods, which provides insight into in-situ social work dealing with social problems relating to poverty and labour market marginalization. Since our focus is on relational-dependent and contextual framing, we argue that it is valuable and possible to compare the form of interaction related to the moral and control.

Findings

We have investigated how social workers and clients, in both 1992 and 2015, were ´framing´ and negotiating ´next steps´, and how they handled dimensions of the moral and control in their relationship. In a comparative perspective, we found that social workers tended to ´frame´ financial problems as a moral issue, but to a greater extent in 1992 than in 2015. The control elements were explicit, and involved detailed investigations of the clients' priorities, followed by demands for sobriety and behavioural change. Although clients negotiated social workers' framing, they nevertheless stepped up to the moral responsibility imposed on them. On the other side, employment problems were ´framed´ as a complex issue that would take time to resolve. Instead, negotiations here were about a ´re-framing´ of measures, regarding their meaning and utility for the long-term goal of employment as a general finding in both 1992 and 2015.

Negotiating framing of financial problems and 'stepping up' to moral responsibility

When financial assistance was up for discussion, social workers in both periods framed social benefits as a scarce social resource and a non-preferred option to employment. For example, this was evident when Roger's social worker (1992 data) thematized Roger's scarce work participation when discussing his finances: 'We [colleagues] began to wonder if you were starting to feel a little too comfortable with receiving social benefits.'. Likewise, non-preference was also highlighted in 2015 by Fredric's social worker, who explained that by citing the Social Service Act, that social benefit is 'not so much a right', but instead 'a sort of short transitional arrangement, where you get temporary help to get into work.' Moreover, social workers raised financial problems as moral concerns by relating clients' problems to a mis-prioritization of funds (e.g. debt) or a lack of control over funds. This included a detailed exploration of the financial needs and prioritization of the client, followed by suggestions about a change of behaviour. Clients, both in 1992 and 2015, were then ´stepping up´ to the moral responsibility of self-sufficiency, by aligning to dominant social norms regarding the moral duty to support oneself financially, and to institutional norms regarding economic life standards.

Clients were openly opposed to what they perceived as a simplification of their financial challenges, or a moralization or distrust in their financial ability. They resisted social workers' moral framing to varying degrees, usually by pointing to factors outside their control, and arguing for the specifics of their financial malaise. Hence, they were inclined to frame themselves as ´victims of circumstances´. However, their arguments were rarely confrontational in a face-threatening way and conformed to institutional life standard norms, as in the case of the married couple Oscar and Bjørg (1992 data), who needed extra financial assistance to pay their rent:

Social worker:	So, what is your view regarding your [finances]?
Oscar:	In my view, we are in a very difficult situation. I completely understand if you decline [our request], because we are well above the norm, as you put it.
Social worker:	But you keep on acquiring more and more things?
Oscar:	No, we only got [ourselves] that stove, our stove got broken […] we had to get a new one, we could not even make ourselves coffee or anything else.

Social worker:	[…] The only way is to save in other areas. Prioritizing, quite simply, your way of living. Another way to dispose of [finances], that is what you got to do.
Oscar:	I understand your view, but it is not that easy with four youths in the house, [and] when they invite friends at weekends.
Social worker:	Well, I guess you must face the consequences of that yourselves.

The social worker asks about the clients' view of their financial problems, in which Oscar points to parenthood as the reason why they need support beyond the ´standard rate´. The animator footing (Goffman, 1981) enables the social worker to convey an institutional view of the matter, in which she frames parenthood primarily as a private responsibility, and not so much a public concern. Albeit social workers across both periods framed financial problems as a mis-prioritization or lack of control, the moral element was more prominent in the 1992 data than in the 2015 data. For example, Lisa's social worker (1992 data) explicitly concluded that Lisa's financial problems related to a 'no good' budget, and that the solution to her problem was 'a reallocation of funds'. This type of framing contrasted with clients pointing to health problems, responsibility for children, unforeseen events (dentist, vet, broken equipment, etc.) and economic deprivation as factors causing their financial malaise. For them, their financial problems were not linked to bad judgement or morals, but instead caused by conditions beyond their control, leading them into an unwillingly vulnerable life situation.

The relational-dependent principal voice of the social worker in the following extract is different from what we can anticipate in a private talk when we feel sorry when somebody tells us that we do not trust them. Here, we get the contextual animator voice of the social worker when Lisa (1992 data) confronted her social worker saying: 'Sometimes it's like you don't believe me', to which the social worker replied: 'We're not supposed to believe you, heh, we need documentation (….) we have an audit that scrutinizes us'. This exemplifies how social workers also see themselves as subject to external factors for which they cannot be held responsible, and shows how other factors beyond moralization were present when financial matters were up for discussion. One factor was an administrative control mechanism aiming to ensure accountability in public decision-making processes. This shows the institutional character of their interaction (Drew & Heritage, 1992), in which, e.g., formal responsibilities are made relevant to one of the parties. Procedural rules were also

made relevant, for example, by Olivia's social worker (2015 data), who ended the topic by concluding: 'I cannot process it [your application] until I have received all the information, I have told you that […] If I have not received that documentation by the given date, I must drop the case, so we formally get it right'. Frontline workers in 1992 used the animator footing (Goffman, 1981) when they were talking on behalf of norms in the system and societal expectations towards clients. While in 2015, the focus is more towards a principal voice where the frontline worker is sorting out what is the most practical and convenient way of handling this issue. The difference results in a more moral focus in 1992, where the client's self is questioned about how to perform being a client at social welfare.

Although frontline workers sometimes would set aside institutional procedures and demands, the dominant pattern was nevertheless a next step in which clients admitted a degree of moral responsibility for their financial problems. For example, this meant showing a willingness to lower their standard of living, or prioritizing between material needs, like Fredric and Mona (2015 data):

Social worker:	So, you have applied together for establishment [...] and I have made a decision of 8,000 [Norwegian kroner; NOK] […] Is that the list you made?
Mona:	Yes, here is a list of 1,383 [NOK].
Social worker:	[Reading from the list] Pots and plates and various kitchen utensils, a vacuum cleaner, and carpets. A microwave oven, that's something you might want but which is unnecessary [...] You should be able to cook and have a bed to sleep in and something to sit in. There is no inexhaustible source here [...]. Have you checked in a thrift store?
Fredric:	Yes, on Facebook.
Social worker:	Now, let's see [reads further on the list]. These are important things, a shower holder and toilet holder [...] but candles and things like that, they are things you want, things that are nice to have, but it is something you have to buy with your [regular] social assistance.
Frederic:	Okay.
Social worker:	Roller blinds? [...] If we include a couch here, then we must take something away.
Fredric:	We can take [the blinds] away.

In addition to ´hard´ prioritizing, clients also committed themselves to concrete actions to prevent future financial difficulties. This meant, for example, saying yes to debt advice and other saving measures, such as making a repayment agreement, or setting up a monthly budget for themselves. Willy (1992 data) had agreed for a period that the social service put a monthly withdrawal on his bank account to ensure his living expenses, but now he wanted to cancel the agreement. The worker attempted

to make Willy reconsider, by reminding him of his previous negative coping with finances: ‘We have tried that, Willy, and that has not worked out. Willy: I have decided to do it this way. Soc: Yes of course we can do it, but it is too easy [an impetuous solution]’. When Willy no longer agreed to what he experienced as a control measure, there was not much the social worker could do, except reminding Willy of the potential consequences of his choice.

In other relations, clients conformed to such institutional control, which was not necessarily perceived as a negative regulation. For example, Daniella (2015 data) emphasized how setting up a monthly budget had provided a positive control over their household’s spending. Others, however, signaled a discontentment with such suggestions, as they believed that it was not their spending that was the problem, but that they were victims of economic deprivation. Pia (2015 data) explicitly questioned how debt advising would better her situation, when suggested by her frontline worker. Pia nevertheless quickly modified her question by suggesting that she would ‘think about it’. This modification can be seen as a strategy for preventing interactional conflict, as ‘thinking about it’ displays a willingness to cooperate. However, social workers’ suggestions regarding clients’ finances or issues involving financial matters seemed to be integrated in a long-term help perspective. Lars’s (1992 data) social worker initiated a talk about Lars’s current house-renting situation, which the social worker viewed as inadequate: ‘Is Vik [name of the municipality] where you want to live for the rest of your life?’ Lars confirmed this, and the social worker then advised Lars to start planning the purchase of his own apartment instead, as this was financially affordable for him, and could lead to a more predictable living situation. In the case of Pia and Lars, the frontline workers have a principal voice, and are not talking on behalf of the institution. However, as the animator voice is more dominant in social welfare, we cannot confirm that there is no transfusion of that voice, when they are predominantly in a principal voice communication.

To summarize, the financial theme triggered a ´next step´ characterized by clients admitting moral responsibility and committing to a financial self-disclosure and ´hard´ prioritization, as well as concrete actions to change their current financial behaviour. 1n 1992, the worker is focusing more on the moral self of the client related to norms in the society, thereby highlighting the animator footing of the worker. The client

needs to show their effort to become independent of public economic support, while in 2015 the financial issue has a stronger focus on how to create a better budget, and then the worker acts more in a principal footing, using their own common sense.

Taking 'step-by-step' towards employment and reframing measures along the way

Labour market marginalization was 'framed' to a greater extent by workers as a more complex problem than clients' financial problems. At the core of the problem was the client's health challenges (including drug addiction), often combined with labour market barriers (e.g. high competence demands) and other personal barriers (e.g. housing or relational problems). The two parties seemed to agree that the client's marginalized position was not self-inflicted, and that solving it required a long-term, step-by-step process. This stepwise welfare-to-work approach was evident, for example, when Brit's social worker (2015 data) critically questioned whether Brit should accept a job offer of three hours work per week: 'Do you think you can handle it with your health challenges?' Moreover, Yvonne's social worker (2015 data) explicitly stated that 'one has to … gradually work one's way towards [employment]'.

Frontline workers in both periods showed creativity in relation to the existing policy measure apparatus. In the 1992 data, Martin`s social worker encouraged him to address his alcohol problem, before participating in a welfare-to-work project, to which Martin refused to accept the problem definition:

Martin:	No, I don't have an alcohol problem. No, I actually don't. I can stop [drinking] if I think I have a problem.
Social worker:	Yes […] but they [the project] put a lot of time into assessment …in cooperation with you, and if you're honest and fair about it, ... if you want to achieve something, whether it's getting into education or work or whatever, they do a very good job in terms of that.
Martin:	Then I must at least give my opinion on this system. I think you should bring in someone who has experienced the system ... who knows what it is all about (...) Because it is not possible to put someone who is completely exhausted with me. It won't work.

Fredric (2015 data) argued in a similar manner, when he and his frontline worker discussed the low-threshold work-measure he participated in: 'I want to work [there], but those other guys, they all are drugged'. These examples of clients' reluctance to being confronted with their 'drug addiction' show some of the complexity of welfare-to-work processes. Moreover, both Martin and Fredric framed the work-related

measures as ´not helpful´, as they had to deal with other people who were struggling with a drug addiction. In 2015, however, there were more work-related measures available for people with drug addiction, which provided a wider wiggle room in negotiations on a ´next step´. In the following excerpt, Fredric finally admitted having a serious problem with drug addiction, and the social worker then started exploring ´next step´ options:

Social worker:	The first part can be some kind of help with your drug problem. Treatment?
Fredric:	No pressure … I've been pressured before. I've been to an institution before, it hasn't helped me. When I choose it myself, then I'm ready for it (…)
Social worker:	I think when you say it so clearly now, there are quite a few options for you to get help for addiction.
Fredric:	A psychologist, go and talk to?
Social worker:	Yes.
Fredric:	Got to start somewhere.
Social worker:	Yes, and it's a drug team and...
Fredric:	I don't want that.
Social worker:	And there is something called PUT, which is a Psychiatric Youth Team, and there is the A-Center.
Fredric:	I have thought about that, but I'll be admitted there, won't I?
Social worker:	Yes.

Fredric's defensiveness was linked to his previous experience of being ´pressured´ into treatment. With this backdrop, he seemed to lean towards the least invasive measure, which for him appeared to be the daytime therapy option. In general, social workers suggested a variety of steps towards the long-term goal of employment, such as participating in education, a course, or a job practice (1992 and 2015), ´restitution´ (2015) or rehabilitation (1992 and 2015), or active job-search (2015). Some suggestions seemed to have a function of solely keeping the employment goal warm, while at the same time giving the clients the opportunity to control the pace, at least to some extent. However, one of our main findings is that social workers for the most part suggested measures with work-training elements in it as a primary ´next step´. Furthermore, in the terminology of Goffman (1974), we can say that the social workers, especially in 2015, ´keyed´ such measures to be more of an opportunity for personal growth than something that would actually lead to a job. For example, Berit's social worker (1992 data) attempted to convince her to attend a work-related course, which Berit first framed as ´not helpful´, but then agreed to reframe:

Berit:	… but those courses just lead to nothing. You attend course after course after course, and you end up not getting any job related to that course, and then it's pointless. (…)

Social worker: If the course means you get a financial gain, or it means you later get …
Berit: Get help, sure, then it's worth it.

Also in 2015, clients expressed doubts about the usefulness of work-related measures (Olsen & Ellingsen, 2019), such as Jens, who stated that 'It's probably over 70% who don't get a job [after their internships], but ... it helps to get it on the CV, and having holes in the CV is not a positive thing'. However, despite clients' doubts, they were still hopeful. When Ruth (2015 data) asked her social worker whether her upcoming work practice measure would eventually lead to a job 'if everything goes well, if they are happy with me', the social worker emphasized how the measure would still provide 'activity ... stability ... and experience', even if an actual job would not be the outcome. Hence, social workers invested time and creativity in raising awareness on how a measure could add value and meaning to the client's current life situations, beyond the money or potential job opportunities that a measure could generate. In the following excerpt, the social worker continued to explore how Ruth could personally benefit from participating in the work-training measure:

Social worker: To feel that you use your body and brain a bit?
Ruth: I miss that.
Social worker: It's good, actually; looking forward to the weekends (…)
Ruth: I have been out of work for so long now. Wednesday has become Saturday; I can't tell the difference anymore.
Social worker: No, right, so it will be good to get a routine?
Ruth: Yes.

Many clients addressed how isolation and feelings of loneliness dominated their everyday life when they were not in a regular job or activity. For example, Lars (1992 data) described how he experienced an everyday life without steady work: 'One quite simply becomes lazy', to which the social worker replied: Yes, that's a natural consequence of going idle [gå på tomgang]'. The view of work-oriented measures as a guarantee for a more ´normal´ everyday life was promoted by both social workers and clients. Clients would usually also suggest personal gains of participating in a measure, such as getting to meet other people and be recognized for one's contributions and strengthening one's general working life skills (Olsen & Ellingsen, 2019). A unique gain, which appeared in the 1992 data, was how work-related activity was explicitly promoted as something that increased one's social status, as in the case of Olav:

Social worker:	The fact that you got a job [practice] has also raised your status in the village?
Olav:	I don't care about status (…) They always underestimated me and saw me as an original [person]. But I don't care about what they think about me (...) I only care about what it means to me personally.
Social worker:	It means something to others that you connect with them.
Olav:	Yes, I'm good at that.

The connection between work participation and membership in society, and considerations of how one is viewed by others through one's work contribution, was otherwise more implicitly present. Social workers would, for example, ask clients about previous school or work training situations in which they had been praised or given responsibility by their teachers or managers. Social workers would also support clients' own efforts in increasing their chances to get a job in the long term. For example, Johan's social worker (1992 data) addressed how Johan himself 'must be active' and strategic in his contact with the employment office. Martin (1992) addressed how the employment office only helped him if the social services advocated for his case, as he otherwise experienced that he was 'not being listened to'. In the following excerpt, Christian (2015 data) and his social worker explored how, through planning and everyday routines, Christian could use his three-month ´restitution at home´ to increase his self-control, and strengthen his ability to master a job in the long term:

Christian:	Right now, I'm quite unstable. If I started working now, I would be able to handle one day, but not the next.
Social worker:	Mm.
Christian:	If I master this [exercise plan] ... [if] I go for walks and everything Monday and Wednesday and Friday [for three months]. Gain a sense of mastery, and gain more control over myself [...]
Social worker:	Yes, and why is it so important?
Christian:	It is important to get a job later, considering my mental state. Also to be able to keep a job.
Social worker:	Yes, yes, you are good. Then I write ... coping [in the journal].

Likewise, Aud`s social worker (1992 data) encouraged Aud to see a psychologist while waiting for her upcoming participation in a social service measure that provided work practice for clients. However, while employment was a focus of the social work in 1992, it was not integrated in a ´step-by-step´ process, as was the case in 2015. In 1992, employment seemed clearly outside the scope of the social services, but rather a matter between the client and the employment service. This likely relates to changes in the policy measure apparatus and law regulation, in which the social workers in 2015 were facing more target-oriented welfare-to-work activities, and

where financial support to a larger degree was conditional on measure participation. In general, there was more of a focus on learning and self-development in 2015 than in 1992, related to a ´next step´ towards employment. Although job-related activities in 2015 were actualized as ´opportunities´ more than formal requirements in a process that should end in employment, both parties seemed to be aware that negotiations about participation in measures had a certain limit. This was evident in how the clients navigated when they were presented with a ´next step´, which they were clearly skeptical about, but which they nevertheless displayed an openness to reframe in new ways and participate in. Compared with the financial issue, frontline workers are regarding the employment issue by talking more from a principal position, meaning that the communication is more relational-dependent than contextual. In 1992 the frontline workers effort is more on getting the client to get in contact with other services, while in 2015 they are doing the counselling work themselves.

Discussion

This study set out to identify and discuss how moral and control manifests itself in social worker-client interactions in a Norwegian welfare-to-work service context in 1992 and 2015. We found many similarities, but also some nuanced differences. Norwegian society has historically maintained a strong work ethic (Terum, 1996), while at the same time it has had a political consensus on a social safety net for those who are unable to support themselves through work (Hatland & Pedersen, 2023).There is a continuity in the discussion within this area, in which the historical emphasis on work ethics can explain why social benefits is not a right, but dependent on frontline workers discretion (Terum, 1966). While the financial control aspect was more visible in 1992 through a general underlining of the client's moral responsibility to avoid social benefits, this was less dominant in 2015. Financial assistance had not changed its general moral character; however, in 2015 the social workers explicitly voiced the legal right to social benefits, while social workers in 1992 focused more on the moral responsibility of the client to make the 'right' financial choice and seek alternative financial solutions.

While the Social Service Act of 2009 explicitly highlighted mandatory participation in return for benefits, the 1991 Act was more moderate on this issue. Regarding the moral-control aspects of employment assistance, the control aspect was more visible in 2015 than in 1992. While social workers in 2015 placed great attention on how clients managed their everyday life to ensure the quality of a step-by-step process towards employment, frontline workers in 1992 were facilitating work- life connections, but they approached clients as more autonomous in matters concerning employment. The rather confrontational approach of the frontline workers in financial matters, and the incongruity in situational definitions between workers and clients, created a tension in the face-to-face interaction that both parties had to deal with. We found several strategies on behalf of both, including clients portraying themselves as 'victims' and social workers projecting themselves as 'subject to system demands'. However, making clients reflect on- and prioritize between perceived financial needs, can also be understood as a way of helping the client to ensure a more predictable financial situation in the long term. At the same time, such an approach risks having a moral undertone, which can lead to clients feeling distrusted and their problems being oversimplified, if external factors are not considered and discussed with them.

In 1992 the worker is using different forms of animator footings (Goffman 1981). They refer to societal norms for social services to enable clients to be self-supporting. It is related to the law, to good budgeting and to being able to demonstrate that one is aiming at being independent of the social service support. In 2015, the worker is also referring to the temporary nature of social assistance. However, the moral tone of the attitude towards the receiver is less focused and more a practical help regarding, for example, budgeting. The worker in 2015 voices a more principal footing, trying to provide what he/she could consider smart ways of saving money.

The employment problem of the clients in our study were addressed by the frontline workers in both periods as a complex issue with no quick-fix or short-term solution. They also displayed a deep commitment to encouraging clients' integration into both working life and society, as also found by Gjersøe et al. (2019). Despite the varying level of inference by workers regarding the client's autonomy in employment matters, overall, the frontline workers were concerned that the clients should experience work-related measures as meaningful, rather than as formal requirements towards

employment. Much time and effort were put into reflecting and discussing with the client on how a measure such as work training must be understood in a broader sense than only a step towards employment; it could also be viewed as an opportunity for, and a process of learning and self-development (2015), establishing social contact and routines in everyday life (both 1992 and 2015), increasing one's social status (1992), increasing one's general work-life skills (e.g. cooperation skills), and getting new coping experiences (2015). In particular, the linking of learning, self-development and coping experiences to the work training measure in 2015 shows how the 'human capital investment' strategy of the Norwegian activation paradigm (Minas, 2014) manifests itself in authentic practice.

Communicative genres as institutional talk (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Luckmann, 1992; Linell, 1998) are identified at welfare-to-work services. The institutional talk can be identified as altering between speaking positions related to principal footing and relation-dependent ritualizing versus as animator footing and contextual regionalizing (Goffman, 1974; Turner, 1988). In this article. we focus in particular on the frontline workers' speaking position. The institutional talk in 1992 and 2015 contains specific freedom to the frontline worker, to speak on behalf of themselves in a principal voice and in an animator voice, that reflects political and organizational demands and constraints. The moral issue about how social workers in the interaction define the self of the client, and approach them as persons (Goffman, 1959), seems to be more "risk-oriented" in 1992 compared with 2015. By this, we mean that the handling of the financial issue in 1992 is very complex and comprehensive; thus, the focus is more on the animator footing representing the voice of the system, while their own principal voice talking as humans-to-humans is not focused on within the institutional talk. We need to underline that it is reasonable to believe that both parts in many cases seem to be aware of these demanding frames of the talk – and that sympathy is developed in many of the interactions between social workers and clients. The moral issue is not that prevalent in 2015 because it seems like the frontline worker is more of a 'formal' bureaucrat on behalf of the system. In 2015, there are more measures, demands from the system and the law to work on employment issues. To succeed in work inclusion, the frontline workers' principal voice is emphasized to be creative and sensitive toward the client.

Conclusion

Our main findings relate to how, on the one hand, frontline workers in 1992 and 2015 frame employment problems as a complex issue that is not necessarily self-inflicted. On the other hand, they frame financial problems usually resulting from a weak labour market attachment as an individual and moral issue. Frontline workers suggest ´steps´ that can lead the client to work, while at the same time being restrictive concerning which ´steps´ are required to manage limited financial resources in a sustainable way. There are control aspects related to both financial and employment issues in both periods of time. We have identified that regarding finances, the control aspects are more prevalent in 1992 compared to data from 2015. While it is the other way around related to the employment issue, in which we can identify more control mechanisms in the 2015 data than in 1992. The control itself may not be problematic; however, it is a challenge when it is related to the moral issue and questioning of the client's self-presentation.

The institutional discourse has changed. In 1992, the framing of the talk between frontline workers and the client has a stronger moral focus than in 2015. This is due to the animator footing (Goffman, 1981), where workers bring the context and societal perspectives regarding norms for social welfare recipients into the talk. In 2015, the principal footing (Goffman, 1981), where the possibility for the frontline worker to voice their own judgement is more visible, and the framing of the talk is more relational-dependent. Changes can also be traced back to differences in welfare policy, where the financial issue is more in focus in 1992, while welfare-to-work is more on the frontline workers' agenda in 2015.

The moral dimension related to whether the client is in line with societal expectations of being a worthy social welfare client is a pivotal issue. When dealing with finances, the moral issue is more at stake, compared with dealing with employment issues. Thus, the moral dimension is more important in 1992 than in 2015.

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