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Rationalities in Trade Union Practices: A Discourse Analytic Perspective on The Strategies of Three Danish Trade Unions for Professionals

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ABSTRACT

The ambition of this paper is to analyze the discursive practices of three Danish trade unions for professional and managerial staff as found in their strategy and position papers. Using discourse analytic methods, the paper analyzes, discusses, and compares the strategy papers of the three unions in order to investigate how they problematize their roles and objectives. This investigation clarifies the discursive premises of the unions and it shows how these premises restrain and afford their agendas. The overall purpose of the paper is to investigate and describe the dominant logics and rationalities that shape the documents and to point to their limits and bounds. Through an archaeological investigation, the paper critically examines the implicit and tacit naturalizations made in the documents and reveals the ideological presuppositions of the discursive practices of the authors. The paper documents how "strategic management" has become an integral part of Danish trade unions practices and the paper sets out to discuss this trend in relation to the general neo-liberal decentering of the "social" and promotion of "community" as the locus of governance. Through examples from the practices of the Danish trade unions for professionals, the paper substantiates how new technologies of governance and the subjectification of union members as "customers" tend to transform the role of the trade unions from the position of "political actors" to "service providers" in the advanced liberal societies.

KEY WORDS

Discourse analysis / Neo-liberalism / Professional societies / Strategy / Trade unions

Introduction

In this paper, we wish to investigate the discursive practices of three academic trade unions in Denmark—The Danish Society of Engineers (IDA), The Danish Association of Lawyers and Economists (DJØF), and The Danish Association of Masters and PhD's (DM)—as found in their strategy and position papers. The overall objective of the paper is thus to analyze the strategy and position papers of the three trade unions in order to investigate the problematizations (Bacchi, 2009; Foucault, 1984) by which

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the policies, visions, and goals of the unions manifest themselves as what can and ought to be considered about their practices. We thus understand “strategy” as an “activity” that is performed by actors and that can be discerned through the study of the material-discursive practices of the actors (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006). The purpose of this paper is not to evaluate the strategies or to make judgments about the proposed objectives of the strategies. Neither are we looking for objective, causal explanations for the success or failure of the strategies of the unions. The objective of the paper is to investigate and describe the dominant logics and rationalities that have shaped the strategies and point to their limits and bounds. In this archaeological endeavor (Foucault, 1984; Bacchi, 2009), we wish to position a critical voice that can point to the implicit and often tacit presuppositions and granted assumptions of the strategies. The exposure of the dominant rationalities in the strategies will potentially contribute to a disclosure and destabilization of the discursive practices. The analysis thus bears the putative promise of establishing resources that can transform the strategic work of the unions, or at least point to the obstacles for developing alternative avenues.

The argument of the paper will be put in five subsequent sections. Firstly, we will develop the theoretical and methodological perspective of the paper and thus position ourselves as researchers and trade union activists. We will identify and delimit our perspective within the practice theoretical, discourse analytic, and the governmentality traditions in order to stress the perspectival and partial character of our research. Secondly, a brief description of the context of the research production will be established. Thirdly, we present our reading of the strategies of the three unions in order to describe their discursive positions and explicate the rationalities and technologies by which the strategies are informed and oriented. Fourthly, we will reflect on our findings in relation to the wider societal development informed by the governmentality perspective. Fifthly, we conclude our discussion and point toward further research.

The ambition of the discourse analytic perspective is to describe *how* the strategies are produced. It is not an ambition to explain *why* the strategies are produced in specific ways given specific historic and societal conditions. We will, however, discuss the strategies in relation to a societal diagnosis of the development of “advanced liberal societies” (Miller & Rose, 2008) in order to situate them within broader discursive frameworks. In concluding remarks, we will reflect on our research and its potential for (re)introducing silenced agendas about solidarity, identity, inclusion/exclusion, political ambitions, and activism in trade unions strategies.

Research perspectives and theoretical/methodological outlook

One of the authors of this paper has worked as an executive officer in academic trade unions over the last two decades. He has been involved with the development of the unions’ policies and strategies and has advised a process of setting new visions for the development of The Danish Society of Engineers. Thus, he has been an actor in the strategic work of the academic trade unions¹. On the one hand, his position as a trade union officer gives us privileged first-hand access and valuable background information about the unions’ strategy work, but on the other hand, it can prove to be problematic according to traditional scientific standards of impartiality, detachment, neutrality, and objectivity on behalf of the researcher. Whether his position ends up affording or compromising

our research very much depends on the ambitions of our research and on the theoretical and methodological approach that we employ. It is thus necessary to be explicit about our approach and to position our perspectives within a theoretical and methodological framework in order to give transparency to our research.

Our theoretical and methodological approach is inspired by practice theory (Nicolini, 2013), discourse analysis (Bacchi, 2009; Foucault, 1984; Jørgensen & Philips, 2002; Keller, 2013) and governmentality studies (e.g., Dean, 2010; Miller & Rose, 2008). Furthermore, it draws on resources in Critical Management Studies (e.g., Alvesson et al., 2009) and Science and Technology Studies (e.g., Hackett et al., 2008; Langenhove & Harré 1999). These research traditions do not aspire to be homogeneous and well defined in themselves or reciprocally, but they are united in their anti-essentialist ontology that recognizes the historical, social, and contingent character of human action. These traditions stress the situated position of the actors within material and discursive frameworks and formations. This means that the actors have no pre-discursive access to “reality” or “the other”—experience will always be mediated by language, our collective classifications, conceptualizations, material-discursive practices, and so on.

Neither do the traditions share one common “method”, but they do have a “family resemblance” in their choice of situated, contextual, and historic research methods of material-discursive formations. Likewise, the traditions are skeptical in relation to causal, totalizing, and global models of explanation. Furthermore, the traditions all reject positivist criteria of validation in research. Instead, the research process is viewed as an interpretative production of theoretical/empirical material that is not liable to the transcendental positivist criteria of “facts,” “objectivity,” and “truth.” Instead, the criteria of quality and validity of research should be judged according to the working standards of the research community, that is, relevance, methodological rigidity and transparency, analytical consistency, theoretical and empirical reflection, and so on. In consequence, it is the community of social scientists that acts as the ultimate tribunal of validation in the social sciences.

Thus, our ambition is not to give an impartial, neutral, representative, or objective account of the strategy development. Neither do we see our account as a subjective plea. Our ambition is to give a rigid, structured, and text-oriented account that will illuminate the distinct problematizations (Bacchi, 2009) and hegemonic projects of the strategies. Thus, the ambition is explorative and critical (Foucault, 1988). Our explicit focus on the strategy documents and position papers will delimit and define our research object, and our analysis will draw on a corpus of theories, methods, and concepts rooted in the social sciences with established standards and criteria (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002; Keller, 2013; Nicolini, 2013). This will not establish our analysis as “impartial” or “neutral,” but it will, however, make the analytical preconditions and analytical grips explicit. By employing a discourse analytic perspective on the empirical material, we wish to suspend our normativity and establish a consistent framework for the description, interpretation, and discussion of the strategies (Smith, 1995, p. 27–28). The discourse analytic perspective enables us to distance ourselves from the empirical material and thus distance our analysis from our positions as actors within the field of trade union strategizing (Dean, 2010, p. 56).

Our analysis will view the three strategy documents as textual realizations of horizons of discursive practices. Thus, our analysis will not consider whether the documents actually *represent* the “real” practices of the unions. On the contrary, our analysis will



interpret the strategies as “acts of confession” or “purified declarations of intent” (Kosselleck) with *performative agency*. Strategy should thus not be considered as an abstraction, essence, or as the prerogative of specific managerial groups. Rather it should be considered as situated activity (Jarzabkowski, 2005, p. 4) and the analyzed documents are seen as expressing, arguing, and enacting specific interests and priorities—as elements in a process of strategizing. In this paper, we thus consider the specific elements of strategizing that is enacted through the performativity of the unions strategy documents. According to this perspective, we thus focus on the documents that express the ambitions of the three unions in order to explore the content and forms of these statements. It is obvious that our discourse analytic perspective will be inspired by the work of Foucault. However, this paper does not leave room for a systematic genealogical investigation. Instead, we will limit our exposition to an archaeological reading of the texts that—on an eclectic basis—draws on the above-mentioned academic traditions.² Choosing an archaeological perspective in preference to a genealogical perspective means that our analysis will only deal with the actual manifestations and patterns of the strategies and not take their historical constitution into account. Thus, our ambition is not to investigate the genesis of the strategies or their processes of transformation. The strategies will be read as regimes’ “actions on action” in order to transform practice. The strategies of the academic unions will be seen as instruments of governance in relation to other partners and the unions themselves (Knights & Morgan, 1991).

Throughout our analysis of the texts, we have been guided by Bacchi’s (2009) suggestions for applying discourse analysis to investigate policy. Bacchi demonstrated how a Foucaudian discourse analysis can be structured by posing five general questions to texts (Bacchi, 2009, chapter 1):

1. What is the “problem” represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem”?
3. How has this representation of the “problem” come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

Following Bacchi, we have posed these questions to our texts and critically investigated the nodal points (i.e., privileged signs—as e.g. “quality” in our analysis—that subsumes other signs in order to acquire meaning—e.g., “membership services”) and chains of equivalence that constitute the “fields of discourse” and perform “closure” by producing subjectifications, subject positions, and eventually identities (cf. Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, chapter 2). Throughout these processes, we can identify how the three unions produce their identities and construct their *raison d’être* discursively.

The findings of our discourse analysis motivated us to interview the presidents of DM and IDA in order to validate the analysis and deepen and advance our interpretation of the unions’ roles, objectives, and *raison d’être*.³ The interviews revolved around the role of “solidarity” and “collectiveness” in present-day union practices in Denmark and how the unions reflexively define their positions in their strategies. Thus, the conversation touched upon questions like “is present day unionism founded on solidarity and how is solidarity conceived in the unions for professionals?”, “who should be included/excluded in union solidarity?”, “what should be the overall objective of the unions?”, and “how should unions pursue their objectives?”.

In our analysis, we will relate our discursive reading of the unions' strategies to the theoretical framework of "governmentality studies" (Dean, 2010; Miller & Rose, 2008; Rose, 1999; Rose 1989/99) in order to determine the forms of governance enacted within the documents. We need to understand the unions' reflections about their visions and missions in relation to the general societal development and the development of new rationalities and technologies of governance. Our ambition is not to explain the presence of the unions' strategies or describe their geneses. Our intention is to reflect upon and discuss the conclusions of our analysis in relation to a general diagnosis of society. The development of strategies in the unions is not an isolated phenomenon. It must be considered in relation to general discursive tendencies and developments in society in general.

Miller and Rose (2008, p. 84) stress that the modes of governance have changed in the advanced liberal societies. It is a characteristic of these societies that the aims, mechanisms, limitations, and even the object of governance must be understood as new practices of freedom and choice. It is a characteristic of the advanced liberal societies that governance is sought through other means and mechanisms than political enforcement and regulation—in order to set the citizens and social actors free and increase autonomy. Instead, liberal governance works through actions and mechanisms that seek to model, shape, and utilize the dispositions and actions of free agents. Governance thus works through "free will" and "the choice of the individual" (e.g., Rose 1989/99; Rose 1999). The genealogical investigations of Miller and Rose show how new forms of liberal governance have come to dominate the significant institutions and discursive fields of western societies (e.g., healthcare and education). Miller and Rose do not propose a general theory of society or impose totalizing models of societal transformation processes. Instead, they describe and highlight significant tendencies and historical developments in the advanced liberal societies. In these societies, governance has been dominated by "the social." "The social" has become instrumentalized by political regulations of the market and the behavior of individuals in order to establish "security" and "social justice." The governance of institutions in society has been based on the a priori premise that stability in society depends on a common solidarity—solidarity among citizens confined within the geographical borders of the nation state. However, the social territorialities of the nation states are challenged by economic globalization and the increasing fragmentation of the social units. Cities, sectors, specialized markets, segments, subcultures, and so on are challenging the dominant role of the nation states as identity-guiding markers (Miller & Rose, 2008; Rose, 1999, chapter 5). In consequence, the governance of societal institutions has undergone a transformation. The governance "from a social perspective" (i.e., a totalizing political perspective where the limits of society coincide with the territoriality of the nation state) is increasingly challenged by a perspective that installs new units of alignment and guidance. These units bring together hybrid "a-moral" and economical rationalities and technologies with the "micro-moral" rationalities of local communities. The communities can be dispersed communities of interest, local communities of practice, or other communities that reproduce social relations and moral codes as a basis for the regulation of individual and collective practice. Miller and Rose thus demonstrate how the "crisis" of the welfare states coincides with transformations in the dominant modes of governance. They describe how the traditional totalizing "social perspective" has been marginalized and substituted by new modes of governance inspired by neo-liberal principles and ideals of "individualism" and "freedom of choice" that combine "a-moral" market-based incentives with the "moral" perspectives and interests of (local) communities.

Background

Before we set out to analyze the strategy documents and position papers of the three Danish trade unions, we will briefly contextualize the texts by giving some background information about the unions and the Danish labor market structure in relation to unionizing. There is a long and strong tradition of unionizing in Denmark (e.g., Galenson, 1998)—also among white collar workers and professionals. Thus, the general density of unionization in Denmark is over 70% and the absolute number of unionized professionals is increasing, as a growing number in the labor force has a professional background. The union density of IDA is estimated to reach 60%, whereas in DM and DJØF, the numbers are higher. In Denmark, unionization of professionals is organized in accordance to the professionals' educational background. In order to become a member of IDA, DJØF, or DM, you have to hold an academic degree on a bachelor, master, or doctoral level in engineering/the natural sciences (IDA), the social sciences, law and management (DJØF), or the humanities or natural sciences (DM), respectively. The trade unions of the professionals have a combined focus. Besides supporting their members in processes of collective bargaining and the enforcement of employment contracts, the unions also—to varying degrees—fulfill the role of professional societies. Thus, the Danish unions for professional are balancing between traditional union activities and activities that focus on professional affairs. IDA, DJØF, and DM are by far the largest and most influential professional trade unions in Denmark, but there are approximately 20 other unions for professionals (e.g., for veterinarians, architects, dentists). The employment conditions for the members of the three unions differ in various respects. Approximately 90% of the members of IDA are employed in the private sector. In DJØF, the members are distributed on a fifty-fifty basis between the private and the public sector, while approximately 75% of the members of DM are employed in the public sector (primarily in the educational and research sector)⁴. IDA also differs from the other two unions in respect of the balance between men and women among members. In IDA, only app. 20% of the members are women, whereas in DJØF and DM, the gender ratio is more evenly distributed. In the public sector, wage and working conditions are regulated by collective bargaining, whereas wage and working conditions for professionals employed in the private sector mostly are regulated on an individual basis. Until 2009, all three unions were members of the Danish Confederation of Professional Organizations (Akademikerne), that is, one of the three central confederations of unions in Denmark (the two other are for unskilled/skilled workers and professionals without a university degree, respectively). Akademikerne represents the professionals in collective bargaining in the public sector—and to a lesser extent deals with collective bargaining in the private sector (but very few collective agreements exist for professionals in the private sector). In 2009, IDA chose to leave Akademikerne and take the role of an independent trade union—due to IDA's dissatisfaction with how Akademikerne prioritized services in relation to members within the private sector. However, due to an agreement to strengthen focus on members within the private sector, in 2014, IDA joined Akademikerne again and a former president of IDA, Finn Larsen, was elected president of the confederation. A so-called “market agreement” established by the professional unions has regulated the membership recruitment amongst university graduates until recently, but the proliferation of new university degrees with mixed curricula has made it difficult to draw clear-cut boundaries between the domains of the unions. In consequence, the agreement was dropped and now it is up to each union to define their criteria for admission. As will be

made clear in the following analysis of the unions' strategies, this development has increased the competition, profiling, and marketing efforts of the unions. Another central tenet of the analysis concerns the general development of the professional labor market. In general, the proportion of professionals at the Danish labor market is increasing and still more professionals find jobs in the private sector. Close to half of the members of Akademikerne are now employed within the private sector—and including the number of nonunionized professionals—more professionals are now employed within the private sector than in the public sector. There is, however, no tradition for collective bargaining for professionals in the private sector in Denmark. In sum, these developments have contributed to destabilize the traditional union practices of the three trade unions: the predominance of collective bargaining in the union practices is contested, as still more professionals have individual contracts with their employers, and the demarcation of the trade unions' territories according to the members' educational background is blurred by reforms in the educational sector. In consequence, the trade unions have become reflexive about their practices, missions, and services. Union practices are problematized and the unions engage in a constant process of reflection about their *raison d'être*. This development has given priority to the fabrication of position papers and strategies that in explicit terms discuss and state the visions, missions, and goals of the trade unions. The governing bodies and committees of the trade unions thus use considerable amounts of time and resources—assisted by their professional secretariats of political advisors and administrative officials—in writing up strategy documents.⁵ The following analysis will examine the essential strategy documents of the three professional unions.

The three strategies

By focusing on the strategy development of the professional trade unions, we wish to analyze how the unions express their ambitions of governance in relation to their internal affairs and in relation to others, and—more specifically—how strategies can be considered to act on actions. IDA, DJØF, and DM have drafted up visions, plans of actions, position papers, and so on that develop the goals, ambitions, and activities of the unions in explicit terms (DJØF, 2008, 2010; DM, 2008, 2009; IDA, 2005a, 2005b)⁶. The documents typically describe the general visions of the unions, but sometimes they also draw up the targets and objectives of the unions on a more concrete basis. The concern of our analysis is with the unions' statements of tasks, challenges, opportunities, and so on, and how this problematization installs specific rationalities and techniques of governance for the practices of the unions (Miller & Rose, 2008). In our interpretation of the text, we will search for central priorities in relation to the exposition of the texts, themes, storylines, structures of arguments, rhetorical genres, and positionings of the unions (Langenhove & Harré, 1999). On this basis, we will discuss the strategies in order to elucidate the rationalities and logics of their construction.

IDA

The vision memorandum of IDA (IDA, 2005a) is a brief five-page note drawn up in bullets. The visions and objectives for IDA are phrased by the use of slogans and watchwords. The memorandum states that: "By 2011 IDA should be the leading professional

body for university graduates.” This implies, among other things, that IDA should be “the most competitive professional body on the market, based on an overall consideration of quality, effectiveness, and level of costs.”

Thus, IDA defines itself as a professional body and a union for university graduates with a background within technology and the natural sciences. However, the language used to describe IDA’s vision indicates a commercial framing of the union’s objectives that stress competition with other unions. The parameters for competition are thus stipulated to be quality, effectiveness, and the level of costs.

What is to be considered as “quality” is not explained in detail in the text, except that: “IDA should develop a broad and adequate supply of membership services that members can utilize if they are in-between jobs, when negotiating salaries, or in unfortunate situations of unemployment.”

“Quality” is thus related to membership services provided by the secretariat of the union. But “quality” is also indirectly specified in the additional stipulation that IDA should strive to become “the preferred forum in Denmark in relation to all technical and technological issues.” In this last conception, the trope of “competitiveness” is used again to add value to the union membership, but this time in relation to the members’ professional standing. Thus, the construction of the concept of “quality” is both related to a discourse where the union member is perceived as a customer and a discourse where “quality” is related to the union’s yielding capacity to supply professional services. The text states that the members’ loyalties to IDA should be measured in terms of “the members’ indicated satisfaction with the utility value of their membership.”

The text is much more explicit in relation to the parameters of effectiveness and level of costs. “Effectiveness” is determined by propositions that address “promptness,” “goal-directedness,” “focus,” “priority,” “synergy,” “optimization of procedures,” “advantages of large-scale operations,” and closely related to “cost-consciousness” in relation to spending the union’s money. Furthermore, the text addresses the maintenance of members’ loyalties by means of “segmentalized and focused offerings” in the form of economic membership advantages “that will offer the member an average minimum of 75% cost reduction on their membership fees,” “Costs” are related to the level of the membership fees and the text states that “all categories of fees should be reduced by 20% by 2011.”

In relation to the ambition that IDA should become the leading professional body in Denmark, the vision also expresses aspirations about membership growth: “The number of members engaged in active employment should be increased from 42,000 members to 60,000 members, and the number of student memberships should be increased from 6,000 to 8,000.” Increasing membership numbers are viewed not only as a means to obtain large-scale operations and effectiveness but also as an independent success criterion of the strategy. Explicit reasons for having increasing membership numbers are not stated as an objective, but the text state that: “the procurement of new graduates from different educational institutions should reach 90 percent of a year group.”

DJØF

DJØF’s position paper is a 12-page long document. It is composed in an argumentative prose style that elaborates and substantiates the goals, challenges, and actions of the union. The position paper states that DJØF has three objectives:

to become the best professional union in Denmark to provide opportunities for development and security for its members; to increase the number of members to 80,000 by the end of 2012 and to 100,000 by the end of 2015; to increase membership satisfaction in the first three years by 10 percent.

The position paper deals with the objectives in two general sections. “Membership service” provides the overarching framework for the discussion of the objectives in the position paper: individual and collective support to the members in relation to negotiating salaries and working conditions; career guidance and counseling in relation to professional development; lobbyism for the profession; employment initiatives; concrete (economic) advantages (e.g., discounts on consumer products and wholesales initiatives); membership communication; and growth and recruitment. The other section of the position paper discusses the objectives under the heading: “Resources and systems.” It deals with human resource issues in the union’s secretariat and the union’s ICT facilities. “Membership services” are thus constructed as a broad and inclusive category covering both the direct and individual membership service and the mediated (political) lobbyism on behalf of the interests of the profession.

The objectives in relation to “direct membership service” are construed as “accessibility – without considerable delays,” “immediate solutions to members’ queries,” and “professionalism” that can generate a sense of security for the members. The paper explains how DJØF should provide an “excellent service” “that cannot easily be copied and that gives DJØF a competitive advantage.” According to DJØF’s position paper, “the purpose of increasing membership satisfaction is to develop loyalty and thereby retain the members.” The mediated provision of “membership services” will create “long-term value” for the members. It involves “political lobbyism that will create new agendas for relevant issues. By setting new agendas we [i.e. DJØF] can bring attention to our stance and create results that will benefit our members.”

The agendas concern “the development of industrial policies that can be of the utmost importance for members’ opportunities to find employment”; “to influence the priorities for developing healthy working conditions”; “equal opportunities,” and “social responsibility” (in specific relation to “the protection of law,” “freedom of speech,” and “the division of administrative and political governance”). The lobbyism of DJØF should be based on a foundation of “solid knowledge” and “trustworthiness.” The position paper delimits the range of DJØF’s core objectives by specifying that concrete economic advantages are not to be considered as an essential service. They only serve to “attract and retain members—especially students.”

In general, the position paper considers “membership service” as a means to increase membership satisfaction and retain members in the union. The concept of “membership service” is thus seen as a vehicle to increase membership numbers.

DM

The position paper of DM is a 10-page document that states the standpoints and proposed activities of the union in bullets. The field of responsibilities and actions is described on a general level stressing the political ambitions and principles. However, DM has worked out an additional and supplementary memorandum that describes



the union's current activities and planned initiatives in details. The memorandum is a 23-page document drawn up in prose that: "states the prioritized actions of DM in the coming year. It describes the core services, political objectives and the special activities of DM's special interest groups." The overall ambition of the memorandum is thus to: "set up concrete objectives for DM's efforts that can be used as criteria of success for the evaluation of the initiatives."

The memorandum lists two general prioritized initiatives: "equal opportunities" and "opportunities for employees to have a say on their working conditions." In relation to "equal opportunities," DM wants to become "the best salary negotiating union for professionals that enforces equal opportunities"; to guarantee women leverage in society; and enlighten the public about the need for men to use opportunities for paternity leave. In order to increase employees' say on their working conditions, DM will create results: "enforced by law, cooperation accords and collective bargaining and by raising the awareness of rights and opportunities in relation to changing workplace culture and behavior."

In addition to these generally prioritized objectives, the memorandum goes into details in order to set up objectives for the union's local interest groups, for example, in the private sector, managers, and the self-employed. Here, the specified activities range from the education of shop-stewards to the development of welfare policies. In relation to the development of welfare policies, the memorandum explains:

A committee has been appointed to develop welfare policies. Among other things the committee investigates the discursive shifts in relation to welfare models. It is the opinion of DM's board that the [Danish] liberal-conservative government has banished the general philosophy about equal rights for every citizen in the welfare society and left groups to be marginalized by reducing their unemployment compensation rates. This has paved the way to break with the general principles of the welfare society and the flexicurity model.

In closing, the memorandum describes other activities such as career guidance and continuing education that is part of the union's services. The purpose of these activities is: "to update and improve the qualifications and capacities in order for the members to stay employable on the market."

The rationale of supplying economic advantages to the members is that "economic advantages should underpin DM's profile and contribute to the recruitment and retention of members."

Finally, the memorandum discusses DM's communication and news services. Here, it is stated that the objective of DM's member magazine is to "expose DM as an engaged union [...and] a result-oriented partner."

Discursive positioning

By using different nouns and pronouns in the descriptions of their status, the three professional unions position themselves differently. DM is consistently using the word "fagforening" (i.e., trade union) in their self-representation, while DJØF is using the more ambiguous Danish word "faglig forening," that is, a word that both connotes a classic trade union and a strictly professional society). IDA, on the other hand, makes use of

the expression “faglig interesseorganisation,” which can be translated as a professional body, but carries strong connotations to a pressure group while having much weaker connotations to unionism. By using this self-presentation, IDA sends signals about the purpose of the union. It is much more about taking care of the members’ self-interests than engaging in broader union endeavors. It is obvious that both DJØF and IDA enroll themselves in a competitive discourse when they express their ambitions about becoming: “the best professional union (in Danish: faglige forening) in Denmark’ and ‘the leading professional body (In Danish: faglig interesseorganisation) in Denmark,” respectively. By characterizing their ambitions in the terms of the competitive and growth-oriented market discourse, they substantiate their image and identity in a distinct way. DJØF and IDA are thus explicit in their self-positioning, whereas DM positions itself indirectly through stating the unions’ political stances, ambitions, and objectives (Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 24 ff.). DM’s memorandum thus only gives sporadic hints at the market discourse that is so dominant in IDA’s and DJØF’s position papers. It is mentioned that DM has the ambition “to become the best negotiator of equal opportunities for professionals,” but apart from this brief statement, there is no sign of competitive or growth themes in the 35-page long memorandum.

Furthermore, there are some significant differences in the way in which the unions state and manifest their agency in the position papers. In the position paper (IDA, 2005a), IDA very clearly constructs its identity by discursive and rhetorical means borrowed from a commercial and service-oriented discourse that stress “effectiveness,” “cost-consciousness,” “value-for-money,” “payoff,” and “benefit” as values. IDA’s agency is thus constructed in terms of a service-providing enterprise with the purpose of supplying membership services in a competitive market. Likewise, DJØF’s position paper (DJØF, 2010) draws on the commercial and service-oriented discourse when it argues that DJØF should develop a “top-tuned organization and service” for the members. However, the paper also broadens the scope of “service” by addressing the members’ long-term needs. It is the conviction of the paper that these needs can be addressed by political initiatives. The metaphor of “the costumer” is also prevalent in DJØF’s position paper when it is stated that DJØF should care for “membership satisfaction” and “loyalty” by providing “unique offers” and “branding” of DJØF. The difference between IDA’s and DJØF’s self-positioning is most clearly expressed by DJØF’s ambition to care for the members’ “long-term” needs. Thus, the two unions construct their “members” and “members’ needs” in different ways. IDA constructs the “member” as an economically calculating customer with an agency focused on “value-for-money” and “return-on-investment.” DJØF’s construction of the “member” differs slightly by stressing the customer’s long-term perspective. This entails that DJØF’s concept of “membership service” includes political activities and “branding” as components. These subjectifications of the “member” and the “member’s needs” contribute to the positioning of the unions. In contrast to IDA and DJØF, the self-positioning of DM uses other discursive resources. DM’s position paper and memorandum describe the political objectives and ambitions of the union, whereas the determination of “member’s needs” and the subjectification of the “member” are less well described. Instead, the position paper and the memorandum make use of a relatively totalizing political discourse that makes mention of, for example, “the collective alternation of contract law,” “quality of work and democratic management,” “equal opportunities,” and “collective and solidarity-based retirement reforms”—conceptual categories that derive their meaning



from general social and societal conditions. The choice of vocabulary is of course motivated by the union's ambition to present itself as an engaged organization that takes a stance in relation to social and societal issues. The construction of DM's agency is thus directly linked to a general political framework.

The rationalities and technologies of the strategies

We have shown how the three professional unions draw upon different resources and discursive means in their efforts to position themselves. They make use of different storylines, genres, concepts, descriptions, and rhetoric, but the position papers also install different authorities, moral codes, values, differentiations, divisions of labor, and so on that are stipulated and reproduced in the unions' discursive-material practices. In the governmentality tradition (Dean, 2010; Miller & Rose, 2008; Rose, 1999), these orderings of the discursive formations are described as "rationalities" or "programs" that conduce practice. Rationalities are not inherent mentalities, homogeneous formations, or metaphysical *zeitgeists*. Rather they should be considered as composite and contingent formations that form a relatively stable practice in specific historical and societal contexts. Another dimension of these practices is related to the technologies and instrumental grips that are used in order to act and act on behalf of others. Authorities use these technologies to construct, conduct, and intervene on individual and collective actions. Thus, the technologies prescribe ways to handle member "dialogue" (e.g., surveys of member loyalty and satisfaction, membership representation systems, and so on).

The service rationality

As previously mentioned, the commercial and service-oriented discourse is predominant in the position papers of IDA and DJØF. This "service rationality" construes the member as a calculating customer that can be recruited and retained by attractive offers that give "value-for-money." Likewise, this rationality construes the union's organizations as units of service production that can be optimized and made more effective in order to reduce the members' costs. This rationality is associated with technologies that are installed in order to manage the union's production machinery in the most efficient way. This can be done by using membership satisfaction surveys, recruitment units, segmentation of membership groups, branding, implementation of ICT-based membership systems, optimization of the union's services through HRD, quality management, and so on. As mentioned, this "service rationality" is prevailing in the position papers of IDA and DJØF, but the rationality can also be traced in DM's memorandum. Through the use of technologies, like membership loyalty surveys, partnership analyses, focus groups, quality management tools, and so on, the unions can optimize their "performance" in accordance with the stipulated success criteria. The service rationality strips the union's strategies of explicit values. Instead, the values are installed as implicit technologies of efficiency and performance measures.

The political rationality

Another mode of governance is found in what we will label the “political rationality.” It is characterized by its orientation toward interests and stances in relation to the regulation and governance of society and “the social” (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 84; Rose, 1999). As noted by Miller and Rose (2008, p. 86), “the social” has become an *a priori* for the political rationality by stipulating a social totality governed by authoritative principles of rights, obligations, social protection, justice, and solidarity. This rationality focuses on specifying the social order that commences individual and collective action. This rationality dominates the position paper and the derivative memorandum of DM. The documents state the union’s points of orientation through explicit political objectives and values, such as “freedom of speech,” “equal opportunities,” “academic freedom,” and so on. The memorandum operationalizes these values in the proposed “political activities” of the union that seeks to influence decision makers within the political system, negotiating system and other counterparts.

The picture, however, is not quite clear. Thus, IDA’s position paper states that: “IDA’s motto, STRENGTH THROUGH KNOWLEDGE, applies to the members and society in general. IDA will support the members and society – through professional measures, by labor market initiatives and on a political level.” This disposition draws on a political vocabulary, but it is not substantiated in any sense throughout the position paper and it does not play a role in the overall storylines presented in the paper. Likewise, the commercial and service-oriented strategy is traceable in DM’s papers, for example, when there is a mention of economic advantages of the membership and discounts that should function as recruitment incentives. However, these passages in the papers have an isolated and rudimentary status. DJØF’s position paper also includes elements from both rationalities. It is evident, however, that the general argument presented in the position paper is disinclined to making explicit mention of political values—instead, the values are instrumentalized in the competitive discourse about efficiency.

Technologies of governance

The strategies of the three unions are oriented by a political rationality and/or service rationality. Furthermore, it demonstrates that these rationalities are associated with various technologies that are used to govern actions (e.g., the use of membership loyalty surveys, quality management, branding, and so on). But where does this discursive analysis leave us? The strategy statements of the three unions reflect a general transformation of the modes of governance as described by Rose and Miller. The position papers of IDA, DJØF, and DM are influenced by the rationalities of the service/market discourse and the political discourse. It is obvious, however, that DM’s strategy statements most significantly argue from the perspective of the political rationality, whereas IDA’s and DJØF’s lines of arguments are inscribed in the rationality of the market and services. These discursive framings both enable and limit the strategy horizons of the unions and thus delimit the unions’ scope of possible and meaningful actions. This can be made clear by relating our analysis to the societal diagnosis outlined by Miller and Rose. Miller and Rose document how the “the social perspective” impairs political imagination and



fantasy, as the advanced liberal societies are gradually differentiated and fragmented into territorial communities that are regulated by the principles of the market, structures of incentives and micro-social values and relations. But what are the implications of this development in relation to the unions' strategies?

Seen from a general historical perspective, this development has made it more difficult for the unions to base their strategies on a general political cause. It has become still more difficult to legitimize the old dream of the unions about achieving solidarity through the development of the welfare state. The unions thus refrain from making alliances to or even endorsing the general political agendas of the political parties. Although the professional unions in Denmark never have had intimate relations to political parties, they have had—and to a certain extent still have—ambitions about setting general political agendas. This ambition is still most outspoken in the position paper of DM. Although IDA has ambitions to influence the political agenda, the issues most often raised by the union relate to relatively narrow agendas about technology and industrial policy. The policies and activism of IDA are thus primarily related to issues of immediate concern for the community of engineers. In general, the unions are inclined to consider political activism and lobbying as “membership service” and not in general as a contribution to a “social” cause. In general, the professional unions consider the “social” as troublesome. Although it might happen that the professional unions take a stance in relation to redistribution policies and taxation, the unions have difficulties in establishing a consensus on these issues. Members of the professional unions often consider these issues strictly a matter for the political parties. This “de-totalizing” of the unions' activities manifests itself as a tendency to focus more on “empowerment” technologies (career guidance, continuing education, professional courses, etc.) than general societal issues. The position papers of the three unions elaborate on these technologies in great detail.

Another notable characteristic of the unions' position papers is their subjectification of the members. In the traditional “social perspective,” the members are subjectified in terms of ethical codes of rights and obligations (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 90). Although this discourse gives agency to the individual, this agency is always defined in relation to wider societal determinants (the social and economic conditions, position and background of the individual, and so on). This ethical code informs DM's strategy, whereas the strategies of IDA and DJØF subjectify the members in quite another way. The construction of the member/subject in DJØF's strategy only pays slight attention to the general societal framework (although DJØF explicitly states that the union wants to influence this framework!). Instead the construction lingers around the idea of the active and independent subject that is in control and the union as an assistive community that can provide services on demand. By positioning the member as an independent customer, the member is able to “empower” his/her career by “drawing on the union's services.” The union is described as a “meeting place,” a “community,” and a “resource pool”—by investing your assets in the “pool” you are able to profit and optimize your “livelihood.” DJØF's position paper has no mention of “rights” and “obligations” in relation to either working conditions or society in general. The engagement and aptitude of the subjects are conferred to the community of the union.

The unions' reception of the analysis

The general reconfigurations of the unions' discourses—from a totalizing social perspective to a de-totalizing community perspective—are manifest in the position papers of

the unions. The conception of “collectivism” and “unity” are thus construed along the lines of the “community.” On the other hand, the unions establish a mode of governance where members may *choose* to engage in the community and make use of the “services” of the union in order to “empower” their individual careers. However, our interpretation of DM’s position paper and memorandum makes it clear that the discursive drift in no way is universal. But it is evident that the “community perspective” plays a pivotal role in the professional unions’ reflections on their *raison d’être*, whereas the traditional “social perspective” is marginalized.

As previously mentioned, we had the opportunity to present our discourse analytic reading of the strategies to the presidents of respectively IDA and DM and interview them about their thoughts about the future role of the unions in relation to issues of “collectivism,” “solidarity,” and the general prospects of unionizing professionals. The interviews made it clear that the presidents of the two unions were aware of the different rationalities described in our analysis and they also recognized that these rationalities suggest different—and contesting—perspectives of unionism and union work. Both presidents were thus quite aware of the fact that the unions cannot be considered as homogenous entities and that there are many and different reasons for members to join and engage in union activities. They thus stressed the composite and dynamic role of unionism and pointed to formative historical events that had molded various interests and perspectives into present-day professional unions. These historical accounts and reconstructions given in the interviews were used as a basis for the presidents’ further elaborations on the future of union practices in general and the strategic perspectives of IDA and DM in particular.

The position taken by the president of IDA regarding the future of unionism tended to emphasize the importance of the “what’s-in-it-for-me” perspective:

I don’t think we’ll be able to convince people to join our community (in Danish: *fællesskab*) – or any other solidarity – unless they have a clear idea about what they can gain from joining. [...] What I want to say is that the members will not become members unless there is something in it for them.

The president further elaborated on this perspective by stressing the hybrid character of the union’s community:

I think there will be an increasing recognition of the need to be part of many communities. [...] I think we will witness the birth of a community for professionals in Denmark. And I think there will still be a need to have a community for engineers – that is, people with a degree in engineering or people with a special interest in engineering issues, or people with close work relations to engineers. But this community might very well exceed the borders of Denmark.

Further on in the interview, she continues this line of argument about joining communities:

I think the traditional and historical trade union perspective will be a driver for many years to come. But if you are to think about the development of our society [IDA] and the development of communities, you need to envision yourself in the future. What is happening around us? How are workplaces changing? How is society changing? And



how should we position ourselves as those we have become? What use can we make of the community? And this is where I believe ... if I should express my personal opinion ... we need to combine several communities. If you draw circles, there are small communities and big communities, and this [IDA] is the framework for the communities. But the communities can cross national borders – it can be virtual networks. It can be communities where people meet face to face. And then we can have communities that cover traditional trade union activities, and communities that have activities in other areas. But they are all ... they all belong to our community.

The line of arguments presented here does not see the future of IDA as a traditional trade union but rather as a conglomeration of diverse—and maybe overlapping—communities with varying fields of interests and objectives. In this construction, there might not be a unique common point of reference or set of objectives for the unions' activities—rather the union is conceived as a facilitative framework for diverse communities of professionals.

The president of DM recognizes the fact that members may choose to join a union for many—and diverse—reasons. But in regard to DM, she points to the specific profile of the union:

There are probably many reasons [for joining DM], but one has to do with belonging to a professional community. Sometimes I ask the newly graduated members what made them decide to join DM. Typically they give the same answers. We meet somebody who is like us—with the same kind of educational background and knowledge, and with the same general background. Now, DM covers a lot of educations, but we have a united understanding of the purpose of our educations. And there are also very specific reasons. Something that has characterized our profile has been the struggle for equal opportunities. The young people find this very important. [...] And then of course there are still many who say: 'you have to join a union for reasons of solidarity.'

Conclusion and perspectives

Our reading of the unions' position papers demonstrates the predominance of the "service" discourse as an overarching ideology or rationality in the unions' reflections of their *raison d'être*. But our reading also makes it clear that this rationality is far from unison. The dissonance is especially viable in DM's reflections, but it is also possible to trace elements informed by alternative rationalities in IDA's and DJØF's documents. The "political" discourse with its societal perspectives is the most conspicuous in DM's position paper, but it is also evident that the community perspective plays a significant role in the position papers of all three unions. On reading the position papers we can thus conclude that the unions are struggling to stabilize their identities by positioning themselves in a field of tensions where the discourses of "service" and "the political" form marked points of orientation. Correspondingly, the "community perspective" and the "social perspective" can be seen to demarcate stances that implicitly inform the unions' strategies. Thus, our discourse analysis has illuminated a range of available positions that the unions can inhabit. This range of possible positions is afforded and restrained by discourses that install a "service" rationality and/or a political rationality as a reservoir for arguments,

storylines, legitimations, and so on. By pointing to the preconditions and limitations of the strategy statements of the three professional unions, our discourse analysis has thus been critical and problematizing—in a Foucauldian sense (Bacchi, 2009; Foucault, 1988). The analysis forms a platform for further inquiries and critically informed actions in relation to (re)defining the unions' agendas and activities.

The excerpts from the interviews with the presidents support the findings of our analysis, namely that the professional unions in Denmark outline their strategies by drawing on diverse rationalities with various emphases on the roles of “service” and “the political.” But although there are differences in the emphasis on the “political” as a constituent element in union practices, there is a widespread agreement—as the excerpts show—that union practices are all about providing a “community” for the members. The uniting characteristic is defined by their “professionalism” and/or the fact that they are “professionals.” Obviously, “professional” and “professionalism” are floating signifiers that leave room for interpretation. In the unions' strategies, “professional” and “professionalism” oscillate between signifying a special habitus of the members, a common educational background, common working conditions, common (professional) interests, shared political observations in relation to societal issues (of specific relevance to the profession), a common domain of practice and common conditions of life for the members. Thus, the territoriality of the unions and their missions are closely interwoven with special understandings of the “professional” and “professionalism.” Focusing on the ascription of “professionalism” as a denominator for the unions' reflexive practices would thus outline an obvious continuation for our research agenda.

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End notes

- ¹ Besides his academic career, Anders Buch has been employed in IDA as a senior advisor and responsible officer for strategy development. However, he left his position due to dissatisfaction and disagreements with the political regime of the union in 2012. Vibeke Andersen has throughout her academic career interacted with many Danish professional unions giving advice about policy issues in relation to continuing education and safety and healthcare policies.
- ² Kendall and Wickhams (1999) make clear how discourse analytic perspectives are central in Science and Technology Studies, Nicolini (2013, chapter 8) explains the relevance of discourse analysis to practice-based studies and Grant et al. (2009) explains the role of

discourse analysis in Critical Management Studies. The Governmentality perspective (e.g. Dean 2010) draws heavily on Foucault's works.

- ³ We invited the presidents from respectively IDA, DJØF, and DM for individual interviews. We had stated our research interests in an e-mail invitation and announced that we would like to have their opinions on the dispositions of the professional unions in relation to "solidarity" and "collectiveness." We got immediate and positive feedback on our request from Ingrid Stage (president of DM) and Frida Frost (president of IDA). The president of DJØF was also positive but practical circumstances stood in the way for his participation. The two interviews were performed in the unions' domiciles and lasted 1-1½ hours. The interview method was semi-structured and our intent was to inquire further about the unions' perspectives on their *raison d'être*. Both interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.
- ⁴ <http://ac.dk/media/417536/medlem14.pdf> (accessed November 2014).
- ⁵ The interaction between the union members and their administrative officials and advisors is an interesting issue. We will, however, refrain from elaborating on this dimension any further.
- ⁶ It is not all trade unions that use the word "strategy" as a label for their considerations about visions, goals, etc. Predominantly, the term "strategy" is used by companies and private enterprises. Some trade unions are more reluctant to label their considerations about visions, missions and goals as "position papers" (Danish: "principprogrammer"). Thus, the trade unions are making a discursive statement in their preference to use either "strategy" or "position paper" as a label.