Abducting *'success'* and *'failure'* in Danish Labour Market Policy – beyond mere deconstruction

> "The abductive suggestion comes to us like a flash. It is an act of *insight*, although of extremely fallible insight. It is true that the different elements of the hypothesis were in our minds before; but it is the idea of putting together what we had never before dreamed of putting together which flashes the new suggestion before our contemplation."
>
> Charles Sanders Peirce 1934: 113

Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (2008) has offered us – building on the work of Foucault – an analytical approach in which we are encouraged to explore the circumstances under which certain categories come to be politically interesting and singled out as in want of political intervention. They demonstrate how social scientists during the past couple of hundred years have offered different languages by which to talk about 'the person' which have diffused into politics and popular culture in ways that enable governments to depend on the population's cooperation in the implementation of the different political programs. In that sense they offer an analysis by which to explore how things become politically visible and possible. In this paper I will not take Rose' and Miller's advice and compose a deconstruction of the public policy. Instead I will argue the case for an analytical position that rather than being analytically detached is thoroughly engaged. Perhaps the approach is rather like that of Bruno Latour (2010) who describes his analytical approach to studying the French Council of State as that of *"a gourmet keen to understand the recipes of the chefs"* rather than *"a health and safety inspector checking on hygiene standards"* (Latour 2010: 22).

Employed by the Danish Ministry of Employment as a PhD student, my job is quite broadly to qualify their policies and to assist the policy makers in developing new and better ways in which to make them: exactly the kind of social research that scholars like Miller and Rose (2008) warns against, because I do not intent to critique nor to second-guess the intentions of these policy makers. I buy their terms and I will in this paper argue why that is an advantageous position – not only for doing applied research but also for generating basic research insights, which in my opinion must be the goal of all academic research.

My PhD project can be summed up as a portrait of an implementation process. It focuses on a few selected points in the Action Plan on Sickness Absence that was politically adopted in November 2008 by the Danish Parliament. My research looks at how the action plan came to be crafted in the Ministry of Employment and its National Labour Market Authority and at the varieties of lives, practices, and structures it encountered, affected, and created once it left the government officials offices. Among other things, I have looked at a test project designed by the National Labour Market Authority which began in January 2009 and continued some nine months. The implementation of this test project will provide the empirical material for this paper as a basis for a discussion of the anthropological contribution to impact studies.

Anthropology and implementation of state policy

The study of implementation in anthropology has most often been focused on showing that things do not go as planned most often focusing on the reasons for and consequences of this. Veena Das (2004[i]) points out in 'The Signature of the State' that apart from obvious cases of mismanagement and corruption that invariably is a challenge to implementation of legislation and policies, a further obstacle to implementation is the fact that those employed to administer the laws might find them difficult to interpret and apply. This circumstance is well-described within Scandinavian legal studies of non-lawyers' application of the law (see review Kristiansen 2001[ii]). In such cases of *illegibility*, Das argues, what might in fact be 'implemented' is not government policy but the individual bureaucrats' "readings of the wishes of their superior" (ibid: 239). The interesting consequence of this, she cautions, is that negative outcome of state interventions might therefore too readily be attributed to misreadings of the law rather than to flaws in the design or the fundamental inappropriateness of an intervention (ibid: 245).

Akhil Gupta (2010[iii], forthcoming) has in his 'Red Tape' a slightly different take on this. In his book he analyses the implementation-gone-wrong as a systematic production of arbitrary outcome. What he means by this is that tensions between the demands of different agencies, people, positions, places, etc. (ibid: 31f.) plays a role in producing negative outcome regardless of good or bad intentions (also Scott 1998[iv]; Murray Li 2007[v]). By doing so he removes the focus from a theorization of intentional behavioural conflicts between front-staff and manager such as the ones

portrayed by Lipsky (1980[vi]) and the alleged bureaucratic indifference postulated Herzfeld (1992[vii]) to a focus on systemically produced arbitrariness.

In this systemic arbitrariness described by Gupta, James Scott and David Mosse (2007[viii]) however find some universal characteristics that might explain partially why the vast amount of time and energy that goes into crafting projects and policies fail. Scott distinguishes between a project design's function as a plan versus its function as a scheme (Scott 1998: 228); while as a written plan a project design can be well-crafted in meeting current development trends and criteria for allocation of resources, it might simultaneously fail as a scheme for the development it envisions. This distinction is developed further by Mosse who points out that a policy, before it leaves the offices of the policy makers, primarily serves the purpose of legitimizing intervention, negotiating the allocation of resources, and of mobilizing support both centrally and locally for the intervention (Mosse 2007: 460). This purpose, he writes, marks the crafting of the policy much more than its need to orientate practice subsequently. His argument is that interventions are less driven by the policies that legitimize them, than the 'exigencies of organizations' (ibid: 463) that are charged with carrying them out. In other words, the design-phase of the project continues throughout the 'implementation'. In the following section of the paper we shall look at a few of success and failure relating to the implementation of the test project.

A few versions of *success* and *failure*

1. The successful adoption of the Action Plan on Sickness Absence

The Danish Government's plan to reduce sickness absence, the *Conclusion paper on the action plan on sickness absence* (my translation)[ix] was adopted during the negotiations of the Finance Bill for 2009[x] that took place in November 2008. The purpose of the agreement, that contained 39 different initiatives (Beskæftigelsesministeriet 2008), was to reduce the collective sickness absence in Denmark with 20% by 2015 (Finansministeriet 2008: 102). The agreement entailed according to the Finance Bill new initiatives amounting to 170 million DKR a year (app. 22.8 mil €) plus 240 million DKR (app. 32.2 mil €) over a three year period specifically for an experiment with 'clarification and work retention *(arbejdsfastholdelse)*' (ibid.). The effort to reduce sickness absence was aimed at gaining some manpower to an "already scarce workforce" (ibid.) and the Action Plan on Sickness Benefit therefore served as one brick out of several in the Governments and the labour market parties negotiations to secure manpower to the Danish labour market.

The reduction of sickness absence became part of the Government Program after the Danish national elections on November 13th 2007 (VK Regeringen III, 2007: 15)[xi]. At that point in time, the over-all preoccupation for the re-elected Government was to secure the workforce. The demographic development which along with the rest of Europe (xx ref OECD report) tended towards more elderly people and fewer people in the active workforce paired with an expanding public sector made an increase in the workforce seem acute. To reach this goal the re-elected Government, briefly after resuming office, appointed in December 2007 an organ of independent researchers – the Labour Market Commission *(Arbejdsmarkedskommissionen)* – under the heading "more welfare require more work" (Arbejdsmarkedskommissionen, 2008: 1). The assignment of this commission was to propose initiatives that would ensure a permanent increase of unsubsidised labour power of 20,000 persons by 2015 along with "actions to maintain unchanged average working hours, i.e. to counteract the negative impact on working hours from demographic changes" (Labour Market Commission 2010)[xii]. In a press release issued by the newly appointed Labour Market Commission in April 2008 they describe the challenge the public sector in Denmark is facing as follows:

> "In Denmark we have for many years been able to finance an ever increasing public sector because the labour force – and therefore the tax base – graduately has increased. The tax revenues have therefore been able to finance the growth in public expenses without a corresponding increase in the tax burden. This will not continue. The demographic development will reduce the collective labour supply measured in hours. With fewer people at the labour market there are fewer to pay the tax to finance the public sector" (Arbejdsmarkedskommissionen 2008: 2, my translation)[xiii]."

In the press release it is assessed that if the Government Program is to be financed the public budgets are 14 billion DKR short yearly (app. 1,9 billion €). The Labour Market Commission defines three different ways of avoiding public debt, here the third:

> If the tax burden is not to be increased and the requests for the public sector not to be lowered there is only the third and last solution left: Namely that the Danes work more, so that – collectively seen – more earned income is created which will lead to more taxes paid. […] The size of the challenge can also be illustrated by the amount of Danes who – hypothetically – would have to move from passive, public support to normal, unsupported full-time work with a normal salary. […] 50,000 people (Arbejdsmarkedskommissionen 2008: 2, my translation)."

Sickness absence first became visible as a problem when the analysts in the Ministry of Employment noticed that the expenses to sickness benefit had exploded.[1] A drastic increment prompted the analysts to look for causes. It is their job in the governmental administration, a civil servant commented to me, to *"keep an eye at how things evolve"* in order to help their Minister by *"pointing out irregularities"* – here a deviation in numbers. Their further analysis of the numbers in their statistical system exposed another deviation. It seemed that a relatively small group of people who have been sick for more than eight weeks are accountable for *"the larger part of the collective sickness absence"*.

While the civil servants in the Ministry of Employment were analysing their numbers and the possible ways to address them, the Prime Minister prepared himself to call an election. The effort to reduce sickness absence was adopted directly into the Government Program by the soon re-elected Government who makes it its cause to reduce "sickness absence" by 20 %. The Ministry's public analysis report on sickness absence (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2008b)[xiv] is published in April 2008 same months as the Labour Market Commission issues its press release stating that 14 billion DKR a year is missing from the budget equivalent to 50.000 people that must be moved from "public support to normal, unsupported full-time work" (Arbejdsmarkedskommissionen, 2008: 2). In the introductory lines of the analysis report on sickness absence reads:

> "The sickness absence in Denmark corresponds to a yearly loss of manpower of at least 150.000 persons in employment or about 5 % of the labour force. […] The sickness absence is estimated to cost the society at least 37 billion DKR yearly… (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2008b: 3, my translation)."

A bit further into the first paragraph of the analysis of sickness absence the lack of manpower and sickness absence is explicitly linked, and the reduction of sickness absence is cast as the solution to the lack of manpower in Denmark and the ailing public budgets.

> "The demographic development will henceforth pull more people out of the labour market than enters it. In order to ensure continuous welfare and prosperity there is a need to increase employment and the performed working hours *(præsterede arbejdstid)*. This too makes it interesting to look at the large potential residing in the reduction of the sickness absence (ibid, my translation)."

Alongside the government officials' efforts to draft the plan that might put an end to long term sickness absence, a strong wish had been articulated on behalf of the municipal caseworkers who worked with sickness benefit cases. The municipal caseworkers would generally come into contact with sick employees from both private and public sector eight weeks after the first sick day to ensure the sick employee was entitled to public sickness benefit and ideally to facilitate the return to work through dialogues with the employer. Quite a few were concerned about their lack of opportunity to offer concrete help (such as a referral to a psychologist or the like) to some of the citizens they met through the prescribed follow-up in sickness benefit cases. When the 'gross catalogue' of proposals to reduce long term sickness absence therefore was crafted by the employees in the National Labour Market Authority one of the more interesting proposals were from this perspective the test project that subsequently were carried out in 16 municipalities: The idea was that the case worker should identify something (preferably a part time return to work) that would enable the sick citizen to return quicker to work than they otherwise would have been able to, and then offer this something to the citizen. This offer, for reasons of the subsequent evaluation, was obligatory though. The recipients of sickness benefit that was drafted for the test project were to accept a weekly in-person conversation with their caseworker and a minimum of 10 hours of weekly 'activity' or they would lose their right to sickness benefit i.e. their income.

2. Looking for a purpose – failing to see the point

From the beginning concerns has been expressed about whether it is really good for people with psychologically conditions (stress, depression, anxiety) to be send to activity. Is it good to be encouraged to return to work as soon as possible if you are down with a case of serious stress, for example? A prominent psychiatrist who has backed-up the project from the beginning has been invited to address these concerns at a meeting during the first month of the test project between case workers and team leaders from the participating municipalities and the National Labour Market Authority. During his address the psychiatrist cautions the case workers: *Where the private practitioners get it wrong is when they believe what their patients tell them. You must not make that mistake, because it is a part of their illness to underestimate their capabilities.*

[1] These insights into the drafting process and the quotes stems from interviews with government officials who has

The day after the meeting this statement is the subject of a coffee-kitchen discussion in one of the participating municipalities. One of the case workers involved in the test project comment: *So if there are depressed and they estimate that participating in the project will be harmful for their mental health, we just have to push on because it is part of their condition to claim that.* She shakes her head in recognition of the catch-22 of the situation. In the following weeks and months the recipients of sickness benefit who are absent from work due to psychological illness are not the most willing participants. Especially because many of them are already in treatment by psychologists and fail to see the relevance of the municipal offers of class-room teaching and physiotherapy. One day one of the case workers has a really unpleasant experience:

A: I spoke to this woman today. She was dumbfounded by the fact that she was obliged to participate in the project. She had already discussed the prospect of returning part time with her employer, but both of them felt that it was a really bad idea and she did not herself feel ready yet. Currently she spends all her time concentrating on getting well. She is seeing a psychologist, a physiotherapist, and her doctor weekly. And now I need her to come in here once a week as well. To talk about what exactly, she asked me? Well, I do not know. And she must participate ten hour a week in one of the courses. The only way to get out of it is to return part time to work within a few weeks, so that is what she plans to do even though both she, her employer, and I agree it's too soon.

Me: And you still need to speak with her on a weekly basis?

A: Yes, that is part of the project design. And we are meant to have 50 cases each. Let us say I only get 20 because some decides to go back to work, then that is still twenty meetings a week of saying 'so what has happened since last week, are you ready to return to work?'

One of the other case workers has another way of dealing with what she too experiences as meaningless parts of the test project:

B: If what we are doing here is senseless then either we have to make it appear sensible, or we will have to document that it makes no sense at

---

worked on the drafting of the Action Plan on Sickness Benefit.

> all. By that I mean, we must refer people to senseless activities and then document that it did not help them. Off course if we judge at it directly harms them then we must exempt them from the project.

It is not easy to make this judgment off course. If neither the private practitioner, nor the sick person him- or herself it to be trusted then only the discretion of the case worker is left. And they are sometimes left in doubt as in this case discussed at the weekly project-meeting:

> C: I've got a citizen and she definitely does not want to be referred to activity. She is suffering from stress and perhaps a minor depressive condition. She does not want it at all. So I have spent a few week preparing her for being referred to a course, talking about it, demystifying it. So I hope that when I speak to her this week we will be at the point where I can refer her. When we had the meeting where I told her she was drafted for the test project she broke down crying. Her entire world just collapsed. And by now she has managed to squander so much energy resisting it and through so much about it that I cannot help thinking that it would have been easier for her just to go back to work. She is really using tremendous amount of energy resisting this project and by and large it is probable useless for her, but some things she might benefit from. It has been really nice to be able to spend a few weeks convincing her. Not that she will ever like it.
>
> D: Have you ever tried asking her what she would find helpful if she imagine we could give her anything in the world?
>
> C: Yes. She wants peace and quiet. […]
>
> D: Well, maybe she is right. Maybe that is what she needs.
>
> C: Well, but the thing is, she is quite resourceful. It sometimes takes me an hour to get her out of the receiver when I call her.

A few weeks later 'D' comments to me that inherent contradiction in the test project that undermines the entire effort to help people is that the help is forced upon people. *It undermines*

from the beginning the trust and confidence in us which is a precondition for the citizens' ability to believe that we actually want to and can help them.

3. Getting rid of 'minus-cases' – an administrative success

In the spring of 2009 it was an administrative priority in the municipal Job Center not to have 'minus-cases' *(minussager)*. A 'minus-case' was a case in which the municipal case worker had not followed-up punctually – that is, contacted the citizens and made significant case-related actions within a set period defined by the law. One Tuesday in March 2009 I over-hear a conversation between a case worker and her team manager as I pass them in the hallway of the municipality. The case worker – a young woman – is clearly up-set and – it seems to me – on the verge of tears. *But she risks getting fired if I do not hurry with this decision*, she says, and her team leader answers: *If you ask me why I tell you to give priority to the 'minus-cases' it is because we are obliged to abide by the law. We have to comply with the requirement for punctuality. By the end of this week we can have no more 'minus-cases'. However, you prioritize your work.*

It has been decided by the central management that none of the case workers in the section of the municipality that handle sickness benefit cases must have any 'minus-cases' on their case-management spread sheet by the end of the week. As a consequence, as soon as a case worker eradicates their own 'minus-cases' he or she must help his or her colleagues with theirs. No other work apart from getting rid of 'minus-cases' must be done that week. This is why the woman in the hallway is up-set. So Mary explains to me when I enquire about the incident. Contrary to Mary, who primarily work the 'easy' cases (cases where the return to work seems like a matter of time and treatment only) the other woman is part of a team that handles application for early retirement and professional rehabilitation. As a consequence, in her cases, people depend on her decisions in order to move on. *This is why*, says Mary, *she should not have taken this up with her team leader. He cannot tell her to prioritize in a way that will undermine the attempt to get rid of the minus-cases.*

I follow Mary down the hallway towards her office. Merete pops in: *So I hear we are getting rid of the minus-cases this week?* Mary gives her a summary of the meeting; the decision to tackle the minus-cases; the objections to the decision raised by the case workers; the logistics of taking each other's cases: *We are not to follow-up in any of the cases that are not 'in minus', we must work no other cases than the minus-cases and when we are done, we help out those who are behind with*

theirs, Mary sums up. Merete leaves shaking her head. Mary turns to me: *Well, I have got some meetings booked here Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.* I give her a quizzical look. *I know*, she says, *but I bloody have to follow-up in these cases from the test project. We have to if the project is to make any sense.*

Two days later at the weekly team meeting Paul, the meat leader, addresses the case workers in a ironic tone of voice. *It was,* he says, *a disheartening experience to pull the minus-cases from the case-management sheet this morning. Particularly since I know how hard you have worked to get rid of them. This morning we have 108 minus-cases and I seem to recall we had 112 when we spoke on Monday.* There is wide-spread laughter in the room. It is the kind of defeatist laughter of a crowd that knows they have done their best with no apparent benefit. Some of the case workers feel its time to look at the long term sustainability of the effort to be punctual:

E: We can work to get rid of the minus-cases now, but it is just a matter of someone being sick for a week or being on vacation, then the number is up again.

F: It is not that I make a conscious effort to find out who generates these minus-cases, but it is kind of hard not to notice that it is always the same people who we have to help out. It has been like this ever since I began working here. Perhaps if this was taken seriously we could plan our way out of this? Because otherwise I am sure that it is just a matter of time before we have to make this maneuver all over again and the work I have planned carefully will have to give way again.

G: As it is now, you just have to be sick for a week. You dare hardly return to work for fear of the huge load that awaits you.

At 13:48 that same day the last minus-case has been handled and the mood among the case workers become a bit silly. Someone suggest to celebrate with some left over beers from a party a while back after work. There is a general atmosphere of having accomplished something, people pop in and out of each other's offices saying, *have you heard it, we made it?,* but the light spirit is mixed with hesitations. Before I leave that day, I pop in to Susan's office to say goodbye. *It's such an empty victory*, she says, *all these e-mails through-out the day counting down the number of minus-*

cases. It's not that I disagree with the accentuation of punctuality. It's just that we have had this problem forever and then all of a sudden we have to put everything else aside to do this. And meanwhile we get behind on other stuff. The stuff we were told to post-pone. Next day, Friday, as closing-time and weekend approaches, the team leader goes around to each case worker to say 'well done' and to say that there is a drink in the meeting room in ten minutes.

The following Thursday, at the weekly team-meeting, the team leader reads aloud an e-mail full of praise from one of the guys in the municipality's central administration. With a collective effort across the house they have managed to reach a general level of punctuality of 97,6 %. *Great*, one of the case workers comments wryly, *so can we pass on his phone number to the citizens who have called in angry all week because we did not touch their cases last week as we had promised?*

4. Struggling to keep 'the system' away – a failure to get well

Anne worked in a company that was involved in the preparations for the COP15: the climate summit that took place in Copenhagen in December 2009. A year and a bit earlier she had been appointed head of a unit that was coordinating a major part of the cultural events that were to take place. Alongside this role that took up more and more of her time, she had continued in her original position as accountant, and before long she was drowning in work. Despite bursting out in tears on several occasions and unfamiliar outbursts of rage Anne persistently ignored her growing physical discomfort in the weeks leading up to the break down, acutely aware that nobody else knew the detail of the work to be done as well as she did. Early January 2009 she could not go on anymore:

> "One day my body just quit. Somebody drove me home, because I did not dare drive myself. I was completely beside myself. I sat on my couch and cried for a week straight. But I was determined to get back. I just had to catch my breath and then I'd be back again."

However, Anne's friends and family convinced her to see her doctor first. Her heartbeat was irregular and she had lost her appetite and stopped eating. This was when her doctor signed the sick note ('serious, physical stress reaction') and told her to stay away from work for six-eight weeks. This was a blow to Anne:

> "My strength of will and my self-perception; there was nothing I could not do or handle. I had counted on two weeks maximum. […] But she simply told me that I was due for a thrombus if I did not go home and relax. I was to cut all contact to my job. E-mail and everything. My employer called me and told me how he had redistributed the tasks and that was a relief, because my major concern was that I had let them down. So from that moment on, all my energy was centered at getting back on my feet again."

Anne immediately began seeing a psychologist and she made rules for herself: She must get up early every day; she must eat everyday even if every bite caused her nausea; she must shower everyday so as not to end up 'looking like the mentally disturbed person' she feared she had become. Finally she made it a rule to get out once every day. This was particularly tough because she suffered from regular anxiety attacks and was extremely uncomfortable around other people – she had lost all overview and 'could not see through social interaction'. Little by little with the help of her psychologist she got better and after seven weeks of sickness absence she began working 12 hours a week graduately increasing the amount of hours week by week with the help of a person from the human resource department where she worked. Things were beginning to look like a successful return to full-time work when Anne's case got drafted for the experiment designed in the National Labour Market Authority. The drafting happened in the municipality when they summoned her to a conversation about her sickness absence:

> "The most ridiculous thing was that I got this letter after I had already begun working part time again. In the letter it said that they wanted to discuss a strategy for my 'return to the labour market'. I just sat there shaking my head. I had never considered myself away from it, you know? Yes, I was *sick*, but I wasn't *away*. I worked part time, I was in treatment, and I had a set plan for how to get back full time. At first I tried calling them to ask if we could just do it over the phone, but they said I was obliged to come in and have the meeting in person. The time it took me to get there and back to work, those two hours I had to extract from my working hours, because I was just up to what I could handle. So here is one of my little suggestions: I am down with stress. Perhaps a phone conversation would be more appropriate. I was working.

> I had a plan. And you hear the municipalities complain about a lack of resources all the time. Now, why the fuck waste it on me?"

At the meeting in the municipality Anne was told that she had been drafted to the experiment.

> My first reaction was just 'shit, now I have to deal with that as well'. You know, I was *so* focused on getting back to work and by God if I didn't have to relate to this thing as well. At first it seemed as if all I had to do was to call her once a week. So I thought *'ok, how hard can that be'*. But actually those weekly phone calls turned out to be the most negative experience in the whole process. Because… she is sitting there with her questionnaire, and once a week I am asked: How are you? … How many hours will you work this week? … How many hours do you plan to work next week? … When do you think you will be fit again? … I cannot imagine anything that would have stressed me more than that. Every time I put down the phone I just felt inadequate; that I ought to work more, that I had to push myself some more and work more hours. And so I did. And bang! I just went down. Luckily I had a supervisor at work who ordered me to take a step back and reduce my hours. So I told the caseworker that these conversations were doing me more harm than good.
>
> Then the week before last, this 'mentor' is thrust upon me. One paid by the municipality coming from this consultancy agency, so that I would not have to talk to the caseworker anymore. And *that* is the most stupid thing – please write that down – *the* most inane thing I have experienced. I mean, had she arrived on the scene just after I got sick I might have been able see the idea in it, but she got involved after I had been working for three months. Plus – she nice and all that – but she does not have a background in psychology, and she wants to discuss why I got stress in the first place, what went wrong and everything. Messing around in the whole thing all over... I just got so sad again. You can see how I tear up now thinking about it. Because I felt like I was being pulled back. I was in this positive process and had come quite a long way and I was beginning to see a full time return to work in the horizon, and then here comes someone and pulls me back and fixates me in a situation I had actually come out of. It was so unpleasant. And that is the other thing; if you want to do these kinds

> of things then offer people a psychologist. It has simply got to be someone who knows what they are dealing with. And not some random person who thinks it is interesting to talk to people. That is not good enough…"

What these versions of success and failure all show with varying emphasis, is the situatedness and local nature of the logics involved in project design and implementation – i.e. what makes sense in the process of drafting a project or evaluating a project, is not necessarily the same as in the moment of taking a decision 'in the field', that is in the moment of the encounter between bureaucrat and the subject of intervention, typically the citizen. This is where anthropology offers its unique contribution to an already extensive field of implementation studies: By contextualizing specifically located logics within the field of other equally situated logics that all work simultaneously or in turns prompted by a law, a policy, a decree, a project, we might learn something about the strengths and weaknesses of the logics that guide policy-makers and bureaucrats' actions and decisions. And our contextualization might offer insights into implementation processes that go beyond the classic 'learn to communicate better' or 'better leadership warrented' – suggestions.

Misreadings; conflicting interests; a systematic production of unintended consequences; friction between different agendas; indifference; the challenge of translating between actual practice and project language – enough seem to stand in the way of both successful implementation and of subsequent informative evaluations. Yet things keep being planned. Time, money, and effort go into implementation. Evaluations are continuously being commissioned and crafted. But, as Mosse asks us, are we left any the wiser? In the previous section I have examined some instances of success and failure with the purpose of multiplying our knowledge of what implementation is and what it looks like from different places in the 'state system' (Abrams). The strength and gain of writing is that while some of these situations and decisions were never 'in contact' in the text we can connect analytically what in the course of life seems detached.

What I aim for is the 'abductive suggestion' that might arise if we 'put together what we never before dreamed of putting together' (Peirce 1934: 113). This technique of juxtaposition is classic within anthropology; Marilyn Strathern argues a case for it in her resuscitation of the comparative project 'Partial Connections' and Michael Taussig has made it his trademark with books such as

'the Nervous System'. Most recently, a book is being edited by Rane Willerslev and Christian Suhr, where the principle is dubbed 'montage'. The basic insight from these analyses (the abductive insight born out of juxtaposition) is that we might learn something crucial about one situation, incident, or judgment by looking at it through the lens of others (also Vohnsen, forthcoming).

The pragmatic contribution and its place in anthropology

> "You must bring out in each word its practical cash-value; set it a work within the stream of your experience. It appears less as a solution, then, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which the existing realities may be *changed*."
>
> William James

Phenomenology and pragmatism as they occur in the writings of Charles Sander Peirce and William James have appealed to me for two related reasons: Peirce's phenomenology wants us to begin our analyses with our informants' beliefs and experiences, while at the same time approaching them analytically. It helps us move individually grounded experience and belief to a general analytical level. William James' pragmatism, on the other hand, moves us a step further, and asks in which ways a certain belief or version of the truth influences the ways in which a given individual acts in the world. Thus, the perspectives take informants' experiences with the world serious by asking us to consider the premises and implications of their beliefs.

The use-value of complication

When a few months into my research I was given the opportunity to present my work to the employee's in one of the offices in the National Labour Market Authority, I decided to describe to them what the implementation of the test project had looked from various perspectives up until then. I wanted to give them an impression of the difference between the idealised vision the project design rested on (and which of course they had known would not be followed punctually, but had

hoped none the less) and the ways in which it had been so far. I tried to show them how the test project had evolved and adapted to different setting and circumstances simultaneously in different places, thus defying any linear implementation model or even iterative. Rather it seemed like a set of discrete and only partially overlapping implementation processes. When I was done, it was time for questions and comments. The two first being:

> *"I think it is really interesting what you are doing, but how will you quantify it?"*
>
> *"When you say it like that, it is obvious that we must do things differently, but what should we do?*"

While it has not been a problem to convince people that anthropological fieldwork is relevant in a Danish ministry that is primarily run by lawyers, economists, and political scientists, the challenge of translating the findings and analytical points into terms that will allow the policy-workers to act differently remains. My aim has through-out been to present them with a set of insights that they will find useful or helpful rather than presenting them with yet another critique of their practise. The 'what should we do' is the thing that initially separate the anthropological practise from the political, because the goals are at first glance different. A central difference, which creates a certain tension between these two domains of intellectual work, arises from a difference in the parameters by which knowledge is judged and validated (se also Riles 2006[xv]). The central question – what is good and useful knowledge? – is answered differently in the two domains.

In anthropology, we usually try to document and describe the complexity and interrelatedness of phenomena. We attempt to validate our knowledge by presenting our data in order for our readers to be convinced that there is a correspondence between what we argue has happened and what did happen. Our orientation or commitment is to the past as it is presented in our memory, our field notes, or our recorded interviews, videotaped rituals, discussions, etc. In policy making, the commitment is to the future. Good and useful knowledge is the knowledge that enables you to achieve a certain impact. You evaluate your work by at least two parameters; a) its ability to get politically adopted, and b) its ability to effect a specific impact. So can the two realms benefit from each other? Is there any good in my insistence on complicating their world-view by multiplying the versions of success and failure? I will off course argue there is.

How will I quantify? How should I do things differently? These are critical concerns for the policy-makers and consequently standard questions to be asked if you are a qualitative researcher in an applied setting. What I am currently occupied with in my research is the extent to which knowing and shape-giving is concurrent. My suggestions is that we know our research area in fundamentally different ways whether we look at it statistically; through the administrative lens of running a business smoothly; from the perspective of a single individual; or through the lens of case-progress. Following from this I suggest that these discrete ways of knowing our object of intervention (be that academic or political) opens up to entirely different ways of acting. In the previous section of this paper I explored some of the ways in which success and failure is constituted differently and below I want to look at how they are related to action, and how anthropology might aim a multiplication of knowledge rather than a fixation of a 'proper' way of knowing the world i.e. ours.

Agentive modes

When I being to write about how knowledge and action is related I take a conscious step into a philosophical tradition, which I will make explicit here; the phenomenology and pragmatism as it is coined and developed by Charles Sanders Peirce in his various essays,[2] and William James' theory of truths as it is presented in his lecturers on pragmatism. Pragmatism, as diverse as the branch of theories can seem, is a simple and open analytical framework. In Charles Sander Peirce's version, pragmatism is a theorization of a set of fundamental principles that govern our intellectual life and offer a generalized framework for understanding the human actor situated firmly in a specific cultural and social context, with a stock of accumulated knowledge and experiences that is unique to him or her. This is perhaps why his theories must appeal to an anthropologist, as has the thoughts of his fellow pragmatists, primarily William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead. Peirce has primarily had influence on anthropology via his sign-theory (e.g. Csordas 1994[xvi]; Daniel 1996[xvii]; Vohnsen 2007[xviii]) while his colleague William James' slightly more instrumental take on the pragmatic ideas has inspired the discipline through its insistence on experiential truth (e.g. Jackson 2008[xix]). Also John Dewey, whose theorization of uncertainty, e.g. *The Quest for Certainty* (Dewey 1929), has made him an integrated part of the medical anthropological canon (cf. Whyte

[2] Primarily as they are edited by Justus Butler.

1997[xx]; Steffen, Jenkins & Jessen 2005[xxi]) has had an impact on anthropological theorization. As these references might show, it has primarily been in studies that seek to theorize human experience (se also Brereton 2009[xxii]) that pragmatism has made its influence in anthropology. A notable exception is Latour 1999[xxiii] who leaves the realm of phenomenology and takes the pragmatic ideas into the scientific labs, where perhaps they were first conceived of, Peirce being a physicist. The main point which I have pursued here is that the way you know something and the way you act on something are interrelated. Not just in the sense that your actions are informed by s 'stock of knowledge' you possess (e.g. Barth and his knowledge traditions), but in a more fundamental sense of the way you 'know' something in the very moment allows for certain actions, stressing that you possess the capacity to 'know' things in many different modes interchangeably that each block the other perspectives out.

In the case of the implementation of the test project, when you know sickness absence as a number (150,000 people) and an economic sum (37 billion DKR) – the actions that presents themselves are *reducing*, *moving*, *saving*, *increasing*, etc, and these are indeed the actions that lies in the heart of the selection of the proposals that finally made it into the Action Plan on Sickness Absence: they were required to "actually reduce the sickness absence" and the proposals must be cost-effective and save more money than they cost to execute. On the other hand once it was decided that the action would be to reduce the costs, the knowledge the policy-makers sought were numeric. The main strength and function of numbers in this case is that they enable heterogeneous phenomena to be communicated, compared, added, or subtracted (a point that has been made by e.g. James Scott 1998), but instead of viewing this as a 'violence of abstraction' (Fergusson; Comaroff, ref) I want to draw attention to what this numerical mode of knowing sickness absence allow and which kinds of knowledge it automatically cast as irrelevant; it allows for the mental action of presenting "sickness absence" as the solution to "the lack of manpower" and the deficit in the public budgets as we saw above. Policy-makers need knowledge and perspectives that not only enables them to see large trends, but also act on a large and general scale and here statistics are powerful imaginative tools. Consider how the above statistics where used in an address by the vice-director of the Nation Labour Market Authority to the representative from the municipalities who participated in the experiment I was following:

> *"Every day 150.000 citizens do not go to work, because they are sick. That is the equivalent of shutting down three municipalities every day. […] It is expensive for the society to have so many sick people walking about, and we would rather spend the money on something else."*[3]

When you know the phenomena 'sick citizens' through statistics you can imagine large masses of sick people just sitting there; resourceful when the nation most needs them. You can argue in hard numbers that the economic advantage of doing *something*, and you can begin to allocate resources into research in order to find out why the numbers of sick citizens has increased and how it can be brought down.

To the individual case worker sitting in front of a particular sick man or woman it is not of immediate[4] concern that 150.000 citizen are sick on a daily basis in the situation where he or she has to find out how to act in a specific case. What you need to solve your task in that moment is specific and personal information; the information that will allow you to single out your potential contribution towards facilitating the return to the labour market. In the caseworkers' daily life, however, the statistical mode and the specific mode of knowing the sick citizens clash constantly, leading to an ongoing change of perspective which simultaneously enables and disables them to know and do certain things. Consider the narrative in which the woman Anne got a sick note due to long term physical stress. As a part of the test project her caseworker was obliged to make a weekly phone call to her. It was a shared sentiment by Anne and her case worker that this was of no use at all – the case worker confessed so to Anne (and me when I spoke to her). In an attempt to accommodate Anne's needs the caseworker initially suggested that instead of calling her on a weekly basis, Anne could call her once a week whenever it fitted into her plans and condition. A week later however, the consequence of 30 citizens calling at random times throughout office hours became intolerable for the caseworker, who decided to buy a mentor for Anne. This way both of them is released of the hassle of the weekly, senseless conversation, and a mentor might potentially be a relevant input in terms of ensuring that the 'return' to work does not send Anne back to scratch. Further, it had been pointed out by the caseworkers' team leader, they have not yet taken advantage of the opportunity to use mentors in the test project so far. In effect, the 'knowing' the case worker needs to make her working day tolerable and to take action disable the 'knowing' that made her accommodate to the specific need of Anne at first.

[3] Fieldnote from kick-off seminar for the experiment I was following, January 2009.
[4] Although it is indirectly, as they are the ones that feel the monthly rise and fall in citizens coming through their door.

The largest gap between modes of knowing phenomena in the public sector is the gap between knowing the citizen through meetings or conversations, that is specifically - and knowing the citizen through numbers – that is statistically. In the above examples I have tried to show how by switching representational mode broadly understood as forms of expression we alters our know*ing* of the thing / incident / topic we speak about. In other words, if I talk about sick people and treatment in terms of number, statistics, general features, in those moments we allow ourselves to know certain things about the topic we speak about, while we are prohibited from knowing other things – the specific, existential things. In our everyday life we switch between these modes of speaking all the time. The reason for this is that different ways of speaking about something not only affect our knowing *it* in that moment, but allows us to *do* certain things like we have seen above. That is, our knowing has a close relationship to the future – I am able to make certain decisions and think certain things about sick people when I know the area through numbers that I am not able to do or think when I know it existentially. And vice versa. So now the task for anthropology – specialist into the specific and existential – can be restated. Instead of translating our knowledge into terms familiar and immediately applicable to policy-makers, we can raise the question of which crucially, important pieces of knowledge we are able to convey when we insist that policy-makers leave the statistical mode and approach casework and sickness benefit area existentially?

From specific to general

Here I want to turn to the question about use-value of anthropological research by referring to a speech on the use-value of humanistic research given by the Associate-Dean of the Danish Pedagogical University. In his presentation he suggested we sharpen our arguments by distinguishing between three kinds of use-value; the normative, the conceptual, and the instrumental. Normative use-value, he said, is the classical humanistic aspiration; to form good citizen through education in high-schools, to inquire into the good and healthy life. Conceptual use-value is the insistence on picking apart what appears natural and offer alternatives. Finally instrumental use-value is the knowledge that allows you to do something different or better than you used to. In the beginning of the paper I said that anthropological knowledge uses correspondence as its primary validation criteria while policy is judged by its ability to effect future impact. Put differently you could argue that anthropological research deals in conceptual use-value

while politics require instrumental knowledge. Here in the end I will show how the conceptual use-value and the instrumental might be closely related by an example of *how* the specific knowledge found in the interview with the narrator and in the iconic model above could potentially have fed back into the general policy-making process.

In April 2009 I attended a seminar along with 60 policy developers, Head of Office's, and Governmental Directors met in order to formulate a set of principles for cross-ministerial collaboration. The director of development from the Ministry of Taxation addressed the assembly stating that the common incentive that ought to over-rule all territorial fights should be the condition that in the future there will be a growing pressure from the public to deliver better services, while the will be fewer people to deliver these services. He quoted an OECD report stating that if the size of the Danish public sector could be held constant over the next ten years, it would still require that 70 % of a youth generation would be recruited into the public sector. He suggested that the only responsible thing to do would be to stop expanding the public sector, attempt to make existing services more efficient, and to move which ever resources could be gained through such a process into other areas of the public sector.[5]

During an interview I presented a Head of Office from one of the offices involved in the test project on the sickness benefit area and asked him whether these kinds of reflections were ever present during the development of new policies. He answered:

> *"No, they are not. Not in the big societal scale you talk about. I can easily see why they ought to be though. But our policy field does not contain those kinds of reflections. You need to go to another level, to the Ministry of Finance, or somewhere where they have the big overview, and can move above it all and make those kinds of reflections. […] One concrete thing I have been wondering about is whether there are enough professionals to solve the tasks we have. And that does not matter whether we are talking about teachers in the schools or handling the tasks in the Jobcenters. And I think there is a difficulty in even recruiting sufficiently qualified personnel and making sure that those employed to solve the tasks actually matches the jobs."*

[5] Fieldnotes from meeting.

In relation to the implementation of the test project these are central points. This particular Head of Office did not participate in the design of the experiment, so I here only use his statement as a suggestion of mechanisms that might be in play and hinder that it becomes 'a success' in the sense of being implemented in the ways and to the standards envisioned in the drafting process. Firstly it was designed as if in isolation from both the surrounding society and also the additional work done in the municipalities (e.g. that the effort to reduce the number of minus-cases in general might over-ruled the demand for weekly follow-up in the test project) – something that the interview with Anne with stress clearly indicate it is not. In the case of the test project this meant that the design effort went towards perfecting the program while the possible reflections about whether or not there might be larger societal circumstances that might be relevant for its implementation is not reflected in the project design. And indeed it is the case. The daily news paper Politiken[6] ran 15th to 17th of July 2009 a series of articles that explored the conditions for physical rehabilitation. Here the number of people in need of physical rehabilitation outnumbers the amount of rehabilitation clinics by far.

[i] Das, V. 2004. 'The Signature of the State. The Paradox of Illegibility' in Eds. Veena Das & Deborah Pole *Anthropology in the Margins of the State.* School of American Research Press. Pp: 225-252

[ii] Kristiansen, Bettina Lehmann. 2001. 'Kapitel 9: Generelt om retsanvendelse' In *Pantefogderne og deres retsanvendelse*. Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag.

[iii]

[iv] Scott, J. C. 1998. 'Introduction' and 'Compulsory Villagization in Tanzania: Aesthetics and Miniaturization' in *Seeing Like a State. How Certain Schemes to Improve Human Condition have Failed*. Yale University. Pp: 1-8, 223-262

[v] Li, Tania Murray. 2007. *The Will to Improve.* Duke University Press.

[vi] Lipsky, M. 1980. '*Street Level Bureaucracy*. Russell Sage Foundation.

[vii] Herzfeld, M. 1992. *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. University of Chicago Press.

[viii] Mosse, D. 2007. 'Is Good Policy Unimplementable? Reflections on the Ethnography of aid Policy and Practice' in Ed. A. C. Jiménez *The Anthropology of Organizations.* Ashgate Publishing Ltd. Pp: 451-483

[ix] Beskæftigelsesministeriet 2008a, *Konklusionspapir om Handlingsplan om Sygefravær*, www.bm.dk

[x] Finansministeriet 2008, *Aftale om Finansloven for 2009*, Schultz Distribution. Pg. 101-102.

[xi] VK Regeringen III 2007. *Mulighedernes Samfund. Regeringsgrundlag.* Statsministeriet Publikationer.

[xii] Labour Market Commission 2010. http://www.amkom.dk/in-english.aspx

[xiii] Arbejdsmarkedskommissionen 2008a. Oplæg til Pressemøde 23. april 2008: *Mere Velfærd kræver mere arbejde.* http://www.amkom.dk/skriftlige-oplaeg.aspx

[xiv] Beskæftigelsesministeriet 2008b. *Analyse af Sygefraværet*. Beskæftigelsesministeriet.

[xv] Riles, Annelise (ed.). 2006. '[Deadlines]: Removing the Brackets on Politics and bureaucratic and Anthropological Analysis.' In *Documents. Artifacts of Modern Knowledge.* University of Michigan Press. Pg: 71-94.

[xvi] Csordas, Thomas. 1994. *The Sacred Self.* University of California Press.

[xvii] Daniel, E. Valentine. 1996. *Charred Lullabies.* Princeton University Press.

[xviii] Vohnsen, Nina Holm. 2007. *(Self)diagnosing Multiple Chemical Sensitivity. An exploration of the interplay between experience and action.* Thesis, Aarhus university.

[6] (http://politiken.dk/indland/article751473.ece)

[xix] Jackson, Michael. 2008 [2005]. *Existential Anthropology.* Berghahn Books.
[xx] Whyte, Susan. 1997. *Questioning Misfortune. The pragmatics of uncertainty in eastern Uganda.* Cambridge University Press.
[xxi] Steffen, Vibeke, Richard Jenkins & Hanne Jessen. 2005. *Managing Uncertainty.* Museum Tusculanum Press.
[xxii] Brereton, Derek P. 2009. Why sociocultural anthropology needs John Dewey's evolotionary model of experience. In *Anthropological Theory.* (9): 5-32.
[xxiii] Latour, Bruno. 1999. *Pandora's Hope.* Harvard University Press.