

AUTHOR QUERY FORM

Journal title: DPS

Article Number: 395942

Dear Author/Editor,

Greetings, and thank you for publishing with SAGE. Your article has been copyedited, and we have a few queries for you. Please respond to these queries when you submit your changes to the Production Editor.

Thank you for your time and effort.

Please assist us by clarifying the following queries:

No	Query
1	PLEASE PROVIDE REFERENCE FOR THE DISCRIMINATION AND ACCESSIBILITY ACT, 2009 OR DELETE CITATION.
2	PLEASE CHECK QUOTATION AND PAGE NUMBER.
3	PLEASE VERIFY THAT THE DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS STATEMENT IS ACCURATE AND CORRECT.
4	PLEASE VERIFY THAT THE FUNDING STATEMENT IS ACCURATE AND CORRECT.
5	IN THE PROCTOR REFERENCE, PLEASE CHECK THE ISSUE NUMBER. IS 51 CORRECT?
6	SHOULD “: SOSIALDEPARTEMENTET” BE ADDED TO THE ST.MELD.NR.34 REFERENCE?

Policy in Action: Stories on the Workplace Accommodation Process

Journal of Disability Policy Studies
XX(X) 1–11
© Hammill Institute on Disabilities 2011
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1044207310395942
http://jdp.sagepub.com



Janikke Solstad Vedeler¹ and Naomi Schreuer²

Abstract

Workplace accommodation is an important measure to ensure equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Substantial research has investigated workplace accommodations in the United States. This article represents a first step in exploring the complexities of workplace accommodation from a cross-national perspective. Drawing on 29 qualitative interviews with employed Americans and Norwegians with mobility disabilities, we investigated similarities and differences in experiences with accommodation provision. Two main similarities emerged: Many of the American and Norwegian interviewees made use of accommodations, and the employer played an important role in the provision process in both countries. Concerning the particular role of the employer, two main differences emerged: American interviewees' accounts of obstacles to a smooth accommodation process were related to the redistribution agent (i.e., the employer). In Norway, employers can either provide the accommodation themselves or make use of subsidized public services. When the employer chose to make use of public services, Norwegian interviewees reported a slow process and obstacles that were related to the recognition of eligibility, which rests on medical assessment. The article reveals a common vulnerability among people with disabilities when dependent on the recognition of their needs and effective provision of workplace accommodation to be competitive employees.

Keywords

disability, employment, policy, workplace accommodation

In both the United States and Norway, workplace accommodations are an important measure for promoting equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities by making changes in the work environment or in the ways things are usually done. Workplace accommodations may include modifying policies; making facilities, equipment, or devices accessible for persons with disabilities; restructuring jobs and testing; providing training materials; changing work schedules; and/or providing opportunities to telecommute from home (Kaplan, Weiss, Moon, & Baker, 2006; Schartz, Hendrichs, & Blanck, 2006).

The literature on workplace accommodations can be divided into three major bodies of knowledge. The first is legislation, policy, and litigation that address the implementation of accommodations policy, eligibility of people with disabilities, and what happens when accommodation requests are denied (Autry, 2004). The second body of knowledge draws on cognitive psychology and help-seeking models to predict personal adaptations to improve physical or cognitive functioning and willingness to request accommodations (Baldrige & Veiga, 2001; Balser, 2007; Lund & Nygård, 2003). The third body of knowledge evaluates the accommodations used and the outcomes in terms of

cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit measures (Schartz et al., 2006; Schreuer, Myhill, Samant, Aratan-Bergman, & Blanck, 2009).

Although the separate bodies of knowledge exist, studies have not emphasized a cross-national approach to workplace accommodation “policy put into action,” referring to “the delicate point where the needs of the person with a disability must harmonize with the workplace policies and procedures and the needs of supervisors and co-workers to insure that the gaps in functional capacity caused by disabling condition do not interfere with meeting job requirements” (Gates, 2000, p. 86). Drawing on interviews with 29 employed Americans and Norwegians with mobility disabilities,¹ this is the first study to explore similarities and differences in the accommodation process in the United States and Norway—countries with significantly different

¹Norwegian Social Research—NOVA, Oslo, Norway

²University of Haifa, Israel

Corresponding Author:

Janikke Solstad Vedeler, Norwegian Social Research—NOVA, Munthesgate 29, 0260 Oslo, Norway
Email: jsv@nova.no

social policy approaches. By focusing on the interviewees' stories, this explorative research design facilitated an examination of the interviewees' past and present experiences of the accommodations process. We contextualize the stories within their respective national accommodation policies and subsequently discuss cross-national similarities and differences in their experiences. The objective of such a qualitative international comparative research study² is not to provide generalizable findings concerning strengths and weaknesses of the policies in action. Rather, the article represents a first step in exploring from a cross-national perspective the complexities of workplace accommodations policies in action, policies that are implemented by different systems but nevertheless share the objective of equalizing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Two Policy Approaches to Workplace Accommodations

As reflected in the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and Norwegian white papers and action plans (St.meld. nr.34, 1996–1997; St.meld.nr.40, 2002–2003), both governments acknowledge the importance of equalizing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, statistics show low employment rates of people with disabilities: An estimated 21.6% of Americans with disabilities age 16 and older were employed in 2009, compared to 70.0% of Americans without disabilities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). In 2010, the employment rate in Norway among working-age (15–66 years) people with disabilities was 43.6%, compared to 74.6% of the total population (Arbeidskraftundersøkelsen [AKU; Labor Force Survey], 2010).³

The governments of both the United States and Norway perceive the employment gap between people with and without disabilities as an undesired inequality. In general, governments can respond to such undesired inequalities by implementing redistributive and/or regulatory social policies (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009; Majone, 1993). A redistributive policy aims to redistribute resources such as services in cash and kind to different groups of the population to narrow the inequities among these groups. A social regulation policy is imposed by governments to remedy market failure “by setting legal standards for health and security and labor protection or by stimulating the development of industry standards for the accessibility and usability of different products and services” (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2009, p. 178). As explained below, social policy in the United States is primarily regulatory, whereas Norway's is primarily redistributive.

United States regulatory policy on disability takes an antidiscrimination approach in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the 2008 amendments to the ADA, tracing back to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This

emphasis on antidiscrimination legislation runs parallel with the conceptual development of environmental accessibility and universal design to enhance the standard of living and employment opportunities for people with disabilities through regulations (Story, 1998).

Title I of the ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability against a qualified individual who is able to perform the essential functions of a job with or without reasonable accommodations. It protects every individual who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. Employers with 15 or more employees are obliged to provide reasonable accommodations to applicants and qualified employees. The ADA illustrates the use of social regulation policy to enhance employment opportunities.

In contrast, redistribution has characterized Norwegian disability policy for decades, with less attention to antidiscriminatory measures—Only recently did the government pass the Discrimination and Accessibility Act (2009) [AQ: 1]. The Working Environment Act (Arbeidsmiljøloven, 2005) mandates that employers provide workplace accommodations, and the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme can fund these services through the national budget. These services are operated and provided by assistive technology centers, funded by the government, with no cost limitations (Nordic Cooperation on Disability Issues, 2007).

Eligibility for the National Insurance Scheme-funded services rests on recognition of disability through medical assessment of the employee. As such, two differing understandings of disability operate in Norway. On one hand, government policy expresses an understanding of disability as a disparity between the demands of society/surroundings and the individual's abilities (St.meld.nr.34, 1996–1997). On the other hand, access to welfare service provision rests, in part, on medical examination. Table 1 summarizes the broad differences between the workplace accommodation policies of the United States and Norway.

Although, as previously shown, labor force data demonstrate that both countries face challenges in increasing employment levels of people with disabilities, their employment rate in the United States is significantly lower than in Norway. In the maze of factors that may explain this difference, Hvinden's (2009) analysis points to differences between countries with a regulatory and redistributive approach. His findings suggest that countries with a redistributive policy have a higher employment rate (and less poverty) among people with disabilities than countries with a regulatory approach. Although recognizing the importance of antidiscrimination legislation (e.g., equalizing employment opportunities), Hvinden maintains that “the level and scope of redistributive provisions do make a substantial difference for the well-being of persons with disabilities” (p. 27).

Table 1. Differences in U.S. and Norwegian Workplace Accommodations Policies

Criterion	United States	Norway
Policy ideology	Liberal welfare state with selective welfare services	Social-democratic welfare state with comprehensive welfare services
Implementation system	Social regulation policy requiring employers to provide accommodations through interactive process with employees	Redistribution of resources and services primarily through public assistive technology centers or by employers
Eligibility definitions	Examined case by case: "Qualified individual with disability . . . able to perform the essential functions of the job . . . has a history or record of such impairment . . . or . . . is perceived by others as having such impairment."	A person who due to sickness, injury, or defect has his or her capability to perform income-producing work permanently reduced, or his or her opportunity to choose profession or workplace significantly reduced
Funding	Employers (with 15 or more employees), unless accommodations prove "undue hardship"	The National Insurance Scheme; no limit as to the amount covered

Redistribution and Recognition as Analytical Concepts

In addition to the distinction between regulatory and redistributive social policies, we find it fruitful to employ Nancy Fraser's (2000, 2003) concepts of redistribution and recognition when examining stories on workplace accommodation, addressing facilitators and impediments along the provision process. Investigating dimensions of redistribution and recognition can help in identifying obstacles to what Fraser calls "participatory parity." Participatory parity means that social arrangements must "permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers" (2003, p. 36). In a broad sense, this notion resonates with the ideology of equalization of employment opportunities.

Fraser links redistribution of resources to the economic sphere and recognition to the cultural, claiming that lack of recognition occurs when citizens are being "denied the status of a full partner in social interaction" (Fraser, 2000, p. 114). Fraser's concepts are abstract. We use her concepts in a more narrow sense and argue that they are relevant for understanding how service delivery (redistribution) and eligibility for accommodation (recognition) impact the process of providing and receiving workplace accommodations. In this article, *redistribution* is related to stories on accommodation service provision and *recognition* to eligibility criteria of accommodations.

Method

Participants

Twenty-nine interviewees told about their pathways to employment, including stories on workplace accommodation. In the United States, eight women and six men participated in the study; In Norway, eight women and seven men participated. The U.S. interviewees were 22 to 39 years old (median age = 31), and the Norwegian interviewees

were 24 to 43 (median age = 33). Two thirds of the interviewees had an impairment, with diagnoses such as cerebral palsy, osteogenesis imperfecta, or spina bifida. One third had acquired impairments (e.g., caused by an accident). Many were wheelchair users, some used crutches or a walking stick, and some were walking without assistance but self-identified as having mobility restrictions. Among the U.S. interviewees, seven worked full-time and seven worked part-time. Seven worked in nongovernmental organizations and seven worked in the private companies. Among the Norwegian interviewees, eight worked full-time, whereas seven worked part-time. Seven worked in private companies, two in nongovernmental organizations, and six in the public sector.

Disability organizations in the United States and Norway facilitated contact with potential interviewees by posting ads on their websites as well as putting the first author in direct contact with the interviewed candidates. Additionally, one organization in Norway sent personal letters to its members requesting them to contact the researchers if interested in contributing to the study. This way of recruiting study participants put us in contact with interviewees particularly motivated to share their experiences.

The Norwegian interviews were conducted in person, but three of the U.S. interviews were conducted by phone because of geographical distance. In Norway, the first author, in collaboration with a colleague, conducted two thirds of the interviews. In the United States, the first author conducted all interviews. The interviewees signed an informed consent form, and the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Syracuse University in the United States and the National Committees for Research Ethics in Norway.

When we approach workplace accommodations as an enacted policy, a wide range of qualitative methods are applicable and useful in providing data. For instance, to provide data on how day-to-day accommodations work, one method to use would be field work. To explore

employers' practices for accommodating employees with disabilities, conducting qualitative interviews with employers would be fruitful. To understand the full complexities of national policies in action, a multimethod approach would be needed.

However, the framework of this particular study was to explore similarities and differences in the accommodation process through the employees' own stories. Thus, our research design was based on qualitative, story-focused interviews. The rationale for choosing this design was a need to explore and understand the interviewees' past and present experiences of accommodation provision and the different steps in such a provision process. With the objective of gaining a better understanding of the complexities of the provision process over time from a cross-national perspective, this explorative study focused on the stories of U.S. and Norwegian employees with disabilities.

We used semistructured interviews to offer interviewees the opportunity to give responses in the form of stories. As Mishler suggested, "If we wish to hear respondents' stories then we must invite them into our work as collaborators, sharing control with them, so that together we can try to understand what their stories are about" (1986, p. 249). In interviews, we were guided by some main themes—schooling, education, welfare services aides, entrance into working life, and accommodations—but we also followed up on issues the interviewees themselves raised as important for their employment career.

There are different perspectives regarding the definition of story-based or narrative research. For this study, we approached stories using an "experience-centered" perspective (Squire, 2008, p. 42), as opposed to an "event" or "text-centered" approach that focuses on "an understanding of the personal experience as text" that "takes little account of context" (Patterson, 2008, p. 23). An experience-centered approach assumes, among other things, that stories "'re-present' experience, reconstituting it, as well as expressing it" (Squire, 2008, p. 42). As such, we could examine our interviewees' stories as means of "identity performances" (Mishler, 1999, p. 19), and as windows, "though not perfectly transparent" (Peacock & Holland, 1993, p. 374), into social processes. In this study, we interpreted the interviewees' stories as "windows" into their experiences of workplace accommodation.

Analysis Procedure

Our analysis procedure consisted of a thematic content analysis of the interviews as well as an analysis of relevant policy documents, such as laws, action plans, and white papers. In examining the two countries' policies of workplace accommodation, we were informed by Rivlin's (1971) framework, addressing questions such as the following: What is the main idea of the policy? What is the

target population for the policy (eligibility)? How is the policy implemented? Who funds the policy's implementation? The analysis of such documents provided the policy context for our interviewees' stories.

As noted, the full interviews delved into participants' pathways to employment. This study focused on a portion of those interviews—that is, their experiences with workplace adaptation and accommodation. Thus, we decided to use categorical-content analysis, which allows researchers to focus on "the content of narratives as manifested in separate part of the [complete] story" (Lieblich, Zilber, & Tuval-Mashiach, 1998, p. 16). After thorough reading of the interviews, we developed a list of emerging key themes and subcategories concerning workplace accommodation. The list development was a "circular procedure that involves careful reading, suggesting categories, sorting the subtext into categories, generating ideas for additional categories or for refinement of the existing ones" (Lieblich et al., p. 113).

Three categories of workplace accommodation emerged. The first was the type of accommodations. We approached accommodation types as the different measures undertaken to make existing or new facilities, equipment, or devices accessible for persons with disabilities, or providing job restructuring, changes in work schedules, or telecommunicating from home (Kaplan et al., 2006; Schartz et al., 2006). The second category was the employee's adaptation to the workplace, which included explicit accounts on how the interviewees adapted themselves to working life, such as selecting positions primarily based on accessibility. This category also included expressions related to self-appraisal and self-recognition ("I am . . ."), which could help us understand the perceptions of those who chose not to ask for accommodations. The third category was the interviewee's experiences and interactions along the process, which consisted of stories on interactions with employers, interactions with coworkers, and cost-benefit reflections. These stories centered on issues of needed and provided services (redistribution) and eligibility for services, as well as the interviewee's narrated experiences of respectful and appreciative interaction with employers and public services in providing proper accommodation (recognition).

Results

Interviewees' Needs for Workplace Accommodations

Among the 14 U.S. interviewees, 12 made use of workplace accommodations; in Norway, 14 of 15 interviewees did so. An examination of their accounts disclosed generally the same need for workplace accommodations in both countries (ordered by frequency).

- Work schedule, such as flexible hours and/or reduced work schedule

- Transportation, such as accessible public or substitute transportation
- Physical alteration of the building and/or equipment, such as handicapped parking, accessible path, railings, ramp, handle of the door, open and locking doors system, accessible bathroom, separate office, and adjustable desk
- Assistive technology and devices, such as voice recognition software, dual-monitor system, special mouse, computerized phone, and alarm
- Workplace personal assistance services and job coaching
- Changes in job description or working from home

Additionally, most interviewees mentioned personal accommodations they would also use at work, mainly wheelchair, cane, special shoes, and adapted vans.

Most U.S. and Norwegian interviewees commented about being provided proper accommodations. We relate this finding to the fact that we interviewed people who were holding jobs. We can further relate this finding to the interviewees' workplace: Seven U.S. interviewees worked for nonprofit organizations, of which a majority were organizations working with disability issues. Facing obstacles in the accommodation process was thus fairly unlikely. Additionally, three of the seven U.S. interviewees working in private companies had received employment services in searching for jobs. Among the Norwegians, eight had received services from Public Employment Services. Thus, the employers hiring the candidate were aware of the employee's possible accommodation needs.

However, a few interviewees, and these were all Americans, had not been provided the needed accommodations and had to quit their jobs. Not knowing the employers' side of the story, we cannot know their reasons for not providing proper accommodation. One interviewee had quit his job because of what he claimed was the employer's ignorance of his accommodation needs: "I just think that when you hire someone, who you think will be an asset, you want to learn about how you can be a good boss." In addition to such lack of awareness, or in Fraser's terminology, "lack of recognition" (2000, p. 114) [AQ: 2], cost evaluation was assumed to be an important condition.

In summarizing the accommodation process experiences of the 29 interviewees, four steps emerged: The first one involved the interviewee's identification of his or hers needs for accommodation. The second consisted of disclosing these needs to the employer. The employer could either recognize or not recognize these requests. If the employer recognized the needs, the third step involved an interaction phase with the employer or, in the Norwegian context, also with public services. The outcome of this interaction could be the provision or nonprovision of needed accommodations, the fourth step. If the outcome of the third interaction

phase was not satisfactory, the employee could end up quitting the job.

The interviewees' accounts revealed two main commonalities for the interviewees from both countries. The first common theme was that many interviewees made use of workplace accommodations (e.g., reduced or flexible work schedule and assistive aids). The importance of the accommodations for our interviewees mirrored research that demonstrated the significance of accommodations for facilitating competitive employment among people with disabilities (Proctor, 2003; Schreuer, Rimmerman, & Sachs, 2006) and the international agreement of workplace accommodations as a facilitator for employment participation, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2008). The second commonality was the important role of the employer in the accommodation process.

In the next section, we continue to focus on the role of the employer when contextualizing two interviewees' stories within their respective countries' national policies on accommodations. Although the important role of the employer was a common issue across both sets of interviewees, the particular nature of the employer's role—mandated by the ADA or laid out in the Norwegian redistributive policy—is, as we will show, distinct in the two countries.

Two Stories of the Accommodation Process

To illustrate in more depth the workplace accommodation process in the two countries, we used two of the interviewees' stories, that of "Michael" (United States) and "Christian" (Norway). Michael and Christian share common characteristics in terms of gender, mobility restrictions, scope of services needed, education, and similar occupations. Michael's and Christian's accounts show similarities and differences in redistribution and recognition issues in the workplace accommodation process in the two countries. By relating their stories, we do not aim to give a comprehensive account of all relevant aspects of the policies in action. Rather, we see these stories as providing "windows" (Peacock & Holland, 1993, p. 374) for obtaining a view of how issues of redistribution and recognition in the workplace accommodation process might act as facilitators or impediments in the United States and Norway.

Michael was 39 years old, and Christian was 33 years old. Both lived in a city. Michael was born with a disability, whereas Christian acquired a disability while attending a university. Both needed extensive attendant care because of their disabilities. Michael used a power chair and had restricted arm mobility. Christian used a manual wheel chair and had some mobility in his arms. Michael lived with his parents, whereas Christian lived with his wife and one child. Both held a master's degree in social economics, graduated with top grades, and had several years of work history, with each having worked for different employers.

At the time of the interviews, Michael was working for a nonprofit organization focused on marginalized groups, and Christian was working for a public agency involved with welfare-related issues.

We explored what the two interviewees' stories told us about the workplace accommodation process, focusing on conditions of redistribution and recognition along the process and examining in what way their accounts mirrored the policies in the interviewees' respective countries.

Need for a holistic approach to accommodation. Both Michael and Christian's stories, as did many others', disclosed the importance of taking a holistic approach to workplace accommodation and the delivery of other personal services, all of which are significant for their employment participation. Michael and Christian emphasized that personal assistance/home nursing care and reliable transportation service were prerequisites for their employment participation. Both depended on effective provision of home nursing care, and Michael needed additional assistance at work for personal care activities.

A timely, fast transportation service had been a major challenge for Michael. He said, "If it wasn't a really good job, I would not have taken it," because the commute using a paratransit service was time consuming. He explained, "If I were using a regular bus or transit service, I would be able to get to the office in less than an hour from my house. Instead I have to allow 2¼ hours to get here."

Both Michael and Christian needed physically accessible workplaces but did not attach much importance to this issue in their narratives. We interpreted this as a consequence of their personal adaptation strategies and careful considerations beforehand on the kinds of positions and facilities for which to apply. Christian, for example, stated that he applied only for positions in the public sector, assuming they would have offices that are more accessible. In addition to a physically accessible workplace environment, Michael and Christian required other types of accommodations, mainly flexible or reduced work schedules and assistive technology.

Disclosing the need for accommodations. Interviewees had to consider whether to disclose needs for workplace accommodations during the employment interview or after receiving the job offer. Some discovered subsequent needs after they had held the job for a period of time. Most of Christian's accommodation needs, such as a wireless mouse and a laptop, had been addressed in the employment interview. He emphasized, nevertheless, that he did not disclose the need for a flexible work schedule in the interview, only later when he had been offered the position. Christian was in need of a flexible work schedule because of circumstances beyond his control. Because of dependency on home nursing care and the work shift arrangement, he could not get up prior to 8:00 a.m.; therefore, he could not be in the office before 9:30 a.m. He stressed that once he had addressed this

issue with his employers, all of his employers had understood his need for a flexible work schedule and had accommodated meeting times according to Christian's arrival.

Michael applied for workplace accommodations after taking up the position, as he had once experienced being an employer's second choice:

I remember one interview I had, which was with a small nonprofit, where it was very clear that they liked me and that they considered me a strong candidate, and they told me that I was their second choice in the end. You know, you just, there is one position and I was their second choice. You know it could very well be the case or it could be that it was more even than that and they decided that "well, this person I have to worry about accommodations for."

Michael said that he disclosed the need for voice recognition software, a mouse linked to his joystick on the wheelchair, and personal assistance at work when he had been offered the position. Only later on did he request a reduced work schedule because of the physical exertion of his time-consuming commute. This illustrates how people with disabilities may act as strategic actors in job interviews, drawing from previous experiences when making assessments on how much to disclose of workplace accommodation needs.

Interaction with providers: employers and welfare service agencies. Christian shared his experiences in obtaining workplace accommodations from two different employers. His present employer provided him with a laptop and a wireless mouse the moment he was assigned the position, without the use of government support and services. His previous employer insisted on using public support to pay for Christian's accommodations. Although responsibility for providing workplace accommodation rests on employers, as mandated by the Norwegian Working Environment Act (*Arbeidsmiljøloven*, 2005, sections 4-1, 4-6), the National Insurance Scheme provides grants to create accessible facilities and provide accommodation services. These services include assistive aids, secretarial assistance to employees with visual impairments, and interpreters for employees with hearing impairments. Functional assistance at work is not a rights-based measure ensured by the National Insurance Scheme, but instead is dependent on annual grants from the Norwegian Parliament.

Going through assistive technology centers to receive the public support and funding can add its own complications to the process, as Christian explained:

When they [the former employer] tried to get the support [from the assistive technology center], they needed to get past the red tape . . . to rebuild. . . . There was a doorstep and some stuff, and some door openers. And it was so much fuss.

Christian also experienced this kind of delay and bureaucracy when requesting a wireless mouse, contrasting his experience with that of his colleague without disability:

Then, I needed a wireless mouse, costing two hundred kroner [approximately forty U.S. dollars], that's nothing. . . . It's just a number on the IT budget. But the process needed to be taken through the public support system because they [the former employer] wanted everything to go through [the assistive technology center]. So it took a couple of months [for me to receive that mouse]. . . . If you're a healthy worker who gets a sore shoulder or something like that, you will receive a lot of stuff right away. It's no problem at all. But since they knew [about the public support], they knew there were services for me, then, it became so much more difficult. For instance, I experienced that a colleague next door got a wireless phone overnight because it was something about her not being able to hold the phone or something. But once they knew they could save money, things became difficult.

This points to a welfare service delivery process characterized by a lack of the right support at the right time, i.e., timeliness of services (Scheer, Kroll, Neri, & Beatty, 2003, p. 227), imposing impediments to participation in important social arenas such as employment. This delay in services impeded Christian's work performance.

Moreover, the employer's decision to receive support from the assistive technology center also singled Christian out as an employee with a disability. Categorized as an employee with a disability, Christian was eligible for support from the National Insurance Scheme. To be eligible for the accommodation services, an individual must show that his or her capability to perform income-producing work is permanently reduced "due to sickness, injury or defect" (Lov om folketrygd [National Insurance Act], 1997, section 10–5). The eligibility process was time-consuming, involving the need for an assessment of Christian's dexterity and fine-motor skills. Contrasting his own accommodation process with that of his nondisabled colleague—who got an assistive device "overnight"—Christian emphasized how categorizing him as an employee with a disability to get accommodation expenses reimbursed played a significant role in his accommodation process.

Christian claimed that although he had not quit his previous job because of the accommodations hassle, he was much happier with the accommodation process at the current workplace. The present employer had supplied assistive devices immediately, without funding from the assistive technology center. At his present workplace, his employer treated him as someone who needed adaptations in line with other groups of employees, such as parents with small children in need of a flexible work schedule.

Michael, who needed several accommodations, also had a history of interacting with different types of employers. One of his previous employers had provided him with all needed accommodations, whereas his present employer had been accommodating only in some respects.

Generally they [present employer] gave me the equipment I needed. A computer with top-of-the-line voice recognition software and dual-monitor system. Generally speaking, they did not skimp on any of the computer equipment that I needed. I have a phone . . . a voice override phone that is very "high end" that I use through my computer.

The present employer had not been accommodating regarding all needed services, which posed limitations to Michael's independence in carrying out work tasks.

I put in a formal request, back in March for a device that would allow me to use my wheelchair joystick as a mouse. And they still have not made a decision. [First author asked if Michael knew reasons for the delay.] Bureaucracy is part of it because, basically, the director of this agency is very much like a hands-on director. Everything has to go through him. So, the head of Tech tells him [director] about it at their meetings when they meet, which could be a few weeks later, that sort of thing. He will mention that . . . he can't do anything about it until they get the "ok."

Responding to a question about the advantages of such a mouse, Michael explained that it would reduce his dependency on others. Because of not being able to use his wheelchair joystick as a mouse, he said, "I'm constantly needing help adjusting my hand to use the mouse. If I'm alone, I get stuck. I can't leave my desk without someone reattaching me. It is really a problem." Michael also needed personal assistance at work to help him with such things as note taking and personal tasks like toileting and eating. At the time of the interview, Michael was not receiving adequate personal assistance services from his employer. Consequently, he had to use his own assistance budget to pay for a service that could have been provided by his employer—a service his former employer had rendered. He claimed two reasons for the present employer's hesitance.

One issue is what they are legally required to do and what they are not legally required to do. So part of the problem is if they were to say, "Okay, we will provide assistants for you strictly on work related things," I would still need to hire someone for an hour a day to come in on a personal assistance, personal care. Hiring someone for just one hour is more expensive than hiring someone at an hourly rate for a

longer period of time. There would still need to be some way of payment for that one hour. Okay. But really one hour would be more like two hours of pay because you can't just hire someone for one hour. So that's one issue. The second issue is I think that there has been a bit of an organizational resistance to really understanding why I need this. It's a way of saving money.

Michael acknowledged that the ADA is unclear about the provision of personal care assistance in the workplace in terms of what such service should cover. His employer had decided to provide personal assistance only with strictly work-related tasks. A disadvantage for Michael was that he then had to "siphon off" his own personal attendant budget to pay for assistance with eating and toileting at work, with the consequence that he had to live at the home of his parents and rely on their help with personal care.

Another issue was the employer's hesitance to allow Michael to work part-time from home. As stated previously, Michael's primary concern before accepting the present job concerned transportation. After one year of managing the lengthy commute, he had made informal requests about working from home once a week, which had been denied. Michael had therefore decided to reduce his work schedule, taking every Wednesday off. The lack of his employer's understanding regarding his need to telecommute was at odds with the organization's "progressive" work. He explained:

So I don't think that there is a real understanding that there is . . . your duty is to make the accommodation and you need a good reason not to make it rather than a good reason to make it. At least it should be that way. You know, there's no reason why I need to be here physically every day. There is absolutely no reason. I mean, there would be practical problems if I were to work at home. I would still need to figure out a way to get help there.

The delay in implementing the request for the adapted mouse, the lack of personal assistance at work, and the rejection of his need to work from home was interpreted by Michael in terms of "It's still an able-bodied world." Working for an organization that strives to improve the situation of marginalized people, including people with disabilities, Michael had hoped otherwise. He had expected more when interacting with an employer who should have had a better understanding of the ADA's requirement of reasonable accommodation.

Cost-Benefit Evaluation

Along with the accommodations process, both employees with disabilities and employers evaluated the costs and

benefits of the accommodations in terms of gains and outcomes, and not merely in terms of expenses. A U.S. interviewee who chose not to ask for any accommodations talked about the price of feeling in need and stressed that the time and hassle to ask for accommodations was too much. She said, "I would rather take the time to kind of adapt on my own and make those choices myself, as opposed to taking that time to apply for accommodations."

When addressing workplace accommodations, U.S. interviewees related it to direct and indirect expense issues. Most mentioned indirect costs, linking their need for a reduced work schedule to eligibility claims for public health insurance, which they might lose if working full-time. Addressing the direct cost of accommodations, Michael emphasized that the special mouse he needed was expensive. He nevertheless argued that his constant need for help from well-paid coworkers without the mouse would make purchase of the mouse pay off within less than a year.

Christian's wireless mouse story revealed an employer who insisted on benefiting from the public accommodation budget, even for an inexpensive wireless mouse. However, most Norwegian interviewees did not evaluate the costs and benefits of the accommodations in terms of expenses, probably because the employers did not either. One interviewee explained that "the assistive technology center pays for all this [the accommodations]. There are no expenses for the employer." The significance of government-funded accommodations is reflected in the Norwegian accounts, which disclosed few worries about expenses, in contrast to the U.S. interviews, but the Norwegians emphasized the slow delivery of services as a hindrance to their employment participation. The stories also implied that employers did not worry about expenses. The Norwegian interviewees framed the benefit of accommodations in terms of being able to carry out their work tasks, supporting their wish and need to sustain employment.

Discussion

Similarities in the Workplace Accommodation Process

In discussing similarities, we would first like to draw attention to our interviewees' call for a holistic approach to disability and employment that recognizes the continuum between services and accommodations that are needed for work and personal care assistance and addresses the effective provision of services that are prerequisites for their employment participation (e.g., home care/attendant services and transportation). Two further commonalities emerged from the analysis of the 29 interviews, as previously noted: The interviewees' needs for and benefits of accommodations and the important role of the employer. In line with findings in other research, the employers' engagement in the process determined whether the interviewees

framed the process as smooth and interactive or cumbersome (e.g., Reegård, Hansen, & Mandal, 2009). As such, the employer became a gatekeeper who effectively or ineffectively translated the workplace accommodation policies into action. When employers did not provide sufficient accommodations or chose to apply for national funding, as in Christian's case, they were depicted as causing impediments to employment that would be on a par with coworkers.

Differences in the Workplace Accommodation Process

Both legislation and the interviewees' stories point to national variations in the role of the employer. In the following, we discuss the role of the employer by returning to Fraser's (2000, 2003) analytical tools, claiming that impediments to participatory parity must be examined through differences in (a) the redistribution agent, namely, the employer or public services, and (b) the recognition of eligibility for accommodation.

Christian's story depicted employers who, within a primarily redistributive welfare system, had different choices with respect to how they provided accommodations for employees with disabilities, each with different consequences. Employers could choose to act in accordance with the Working Environment Act (Arbeidsmiljøloven, 2005) and provide assistive technology and accessible workplaces, bearing the cost themselves. Alternatively, they could choose to run the accommodations process through the public assistive technology centers. Whereas Norwegian interviewees found the former process to be rather smooth, the latter appeared to make the process cumbersome and lengthy because of reliance on bureaucratic processes outside the workplace itself. The stories revealed the vulnerability of employees when interacting with an employer who was either reluctant or unwilling to provide what our interviewees claimed were necessary accommodations.

When the government redistributes resources to workplace accommodation provision, recognition of needs plays an important role. Under the assumption that the government cannot provide such support to everyone, the government applies mechanisms to determine which individuals have the greatest need. These mechanisms primarily rest on a medical assessment of the employee's functional capacity, or, put differently, the sorting of beneficiaries is based on medical recognition of disability. This practice demonstrates a medical-oriented approach, despite Norway's emphasis in public policy documents on a relative understanding of disability as disparity between the demands of society/surroundings and the individual's abilities.

Although the recognition of eligibility represents an impediment to effective workplace accommodation within the Norwegian redistributive system, the U.S. ADA explicitly recognizes the rights of people with disabilities to take

part in the workforce by benefiting from reasonable accommodations. In U.S. regulatory policy, recognition of disability is (in theory) more inclusive because it does not rest on a medical understanding of disability. Redistribution is left to the employer because the ADA instructs employers to take the responsibility and burden of accommodation expenses.

As demonstrated, employees with disabilities are dependent on the employer's recognition of their accommodation needs and are dependent on the employer's willingness/readiness to provide services. An unfortunate consequence of this dependency is a potential conflict between employer and employee, especially when accommodation needs are not satisfactorily addressed or when the provision process is slow. There are agencies mandated to oversee the enforcement of antidiscrimination laws and to assist employees with disabilities who want to go through a mediation process with or file a civil action against the employer (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2002). However, none of our interviewees spoke of this opportunity as a possibility. Instead, they applied personal strategies to cope with a lack of support, such as choosing to reduce their work schedule or quitting their job.

The interviewees' stories suggest that when employers do not render necessary accommodations, employers can hide behind an economic argument and bureaucratic excuses for their lack of provision. Such employers fail to fulfill the U.S. commitment to provide people with disabilities with equal opportunities for employment. Contrary to previous positive accommodations experiences, Michael claimed that his present employer lacked a fundamental understanding of disability issues, despite the country's legislative decision to allow for reasonable accommodations.

Conclusion

The objective of this article was to explore the complexities of workplace accommodation policies in action from a cross-national perspective. United States and Norwegian accommodation policies are implemented with the objective of equalizing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Drawing on interviews with 29 employed persons with mobility disabilities, our study represents a first step in trying to understand similarities and differences in their experiences with accommodations in two countries with primarily regulatory (the United States) or redistributive (Norway) social policy approaches.

Limitations

As previously emphasized, the research design was based on story-focused interviews with employees with disabilities. To understand the full complexities of national policies in action, a multimethod approach consisting of fieldwork

and employer interviews would have been necessary. However, this particular study explored similarities and differences in the accommodations process through the employees' own stories about past and present experiences of accommodations provision, thus providing insight into parts of the complexities of workplace accommodation. This methodological choice, in combination with our sole focus on the experiences of people with mobility disabilities in analyzing and discussing the workplace accommodation provision, represent limitations to our study. We recognize that the needs of people with other types of disabilities may be different from those of our group.

Future Research

The analysis demonstrated two important similarities between the U.S. and Norwegian interviewees. First, most interviewees made use of workplace accommodations. Second, the interviewees' stories demonstrated the important role of the employer in the accommodation process. In the United States, employees are dependent on employers' willingness to render proper workplace accommodations. In Norway, employers are offered two roles: either as sole providers of accommodation services to their employees or as facilitators by making use of funding and support from public services. If the employer decides to benefit from public services, the employee must go through a medical assessment to be eligible for accommodation services. The interviewees' stories revealed that both U.S. and Norwegian policy systems, regardless of the type of policy approach, challenged qualified employees with disabilities who need workplace accommodations to stand forth as competitive labor. Interviewees' stories also showed the interconnectedness of personal aids and services, transportation, and workplace accommodations as important in the equalization of employment opportunities. Our results thus indicate a need for future research, applying a multimethod approach, to further explore this interconnectedness. Such studies should take into account contextual factors like recognition of the accommodations needed for competitive equality of people with disabilities and redistributive policies to facilitate the accommodation process.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article. **[AQ: 3]**

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article. **[AQ: 4]**

Notes

1. The present article reports the findings of semistructured interviews conducted as part of a wider study on facilitators and

obstacles along the pathway to employment of people with mobility disabilities.

2. This is a term denoting "comparisons across national, social and cultural boundaries conducted within international settings" (Hantrais, 2008, pp. 4–5).
3. The definition of *disability* in the U.S. survey was based on a set of six questions to identify any household members (16 years or older), who reported physical, mental, or emotional conditions that caused serious difficulty with their daily activities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). In the Norwegian survey, *disability* was defined as "long-term health problems that may limit everyday life" (Olsen, 2007, p. 4).

References

- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 *et seq.* (1990). Retrieved from <http://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastate08.htm#12101b>
- Arbeidskraftundersøkelsen (AKU). (2010). Tilleggsundersøkelse om funksjonshemmede, 2. kvartal 2010, SSB [Labor force survey. Additional survey on disability, 2nd quarter 2010]. Retrieved from <http://www.ssb.no/akutu/tab-2010-09-06-01.html>
- Arbeidsmiljøloven [The Working Environment Act]. (2005). Retrieved from <http://www.lovdata.no/all/hl-20050617-062.html>
- Autry, J. R. (2004). Reasonable accommodations under the ADA: Are employers required to participate in the interactive process? The courts say "yes" but the law says "no." *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, 79, 665–697.
- Baldrige, D. C., & Veiga, J. F. (2001). Toward a greater understanding of the willingness to request an accommodation: Can requesters' beliefs disable the Americans with Disabilities Act? *The Academy of Management Review*, 26(1), 85–99.
- Balser, D. B. (2007). Predictors of workplace accommodations for employees with mobility-related disabilities. *Administration & Society*, 39, 656–683.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2009). *Labor force statistics from the current population survey: Data on the employment status of people with a disability*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsdisability.htm>
- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (2002). *Reasonable accommodation and undue hardship under the Americans with Disabilities Act*. Retrieved from <http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/accommodation.html>
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3, 107–120.
- Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation. In N. Fraser & A. Honneth (Eds.), *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange* (pp. 7–109). London, England: Verso.
- Gates, L. B. (2000). Workplace accommodation as a social process. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 10, 85–98.
- Halvorsen, R., & Hvinden, B. (2009). Nordic disability protection meeting supranational equal treatment policy: A boost for

- the human rights of persons with disabilities? In H. Sinding Aasen, R. Halvorsen, & A. Barbosa da Silva (Eds.), *Human rights, dignity and autonomy in health care and social services: Nordic perspectives* (pp. 177–202). Antwerp, Belgium: Intersentia.
- Hantrais, L. (2008). *International comparative research: Theory, methods and practice*. New York, New York: Palgrave/Macmillan.
- Hvinden, B. (2009). Redistributive and regulatory disability provisions: Incompatibility or synergy? In G. Quinn & L. Waddington (Eds.), *European yearbook of disability law* (Vol. 1, pp. 5–27). Antwerp, Belgium: Intersentia.
- Kaplan, S., Weiss, S., Moon, N. W., & Baker, P. (2006). A framework for providing telecommuting as a reasonable accommodation: Some considerations on a comparative case study. *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation*, 27, 431–440.
- Lieblich, A., Zilber, T., & Tuval-Mashiach, R. (1998). *Narrative research: Reading, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lov om folketrygd [National Insurance Act]. (1997). Retrieved from <http://www.lovdatab.no/all/nl-19970228-019.html>
- Lund, M. L., & Nygård, L. (2003). Incorporating or resisting assistive devices: Different approaches to achieving a desired occupational self-image. *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, 23(2), 67–75.
- Majone, G. (1993). The European community between social policy and social regulation. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31, 153–170.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). The analysis of interview narratives. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 233–255). New York, New York: Praeger.
- Mishler, E. G. (1999). *Storylines: Craftartists' narratives of identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nordic Cooperation on Disability Issues. (2007). *Provision of assistive technology in the Nordic countries* (2nd ed.). Helsinki, Sweden: Nordic Development Centre for Rehabilitation Technology.
- Olsen, B. (2007). *Funksjonshemmede på arbeidsmarkedet: Rapport fra tilleggsundersøkelse til Arbeidskraftundersøkelsen (AKU; 2. kvartal 2007)* [Disability and employment: Report from additional survey of the labor force survey, 2nd quarter 2007]. Vol. 2007/40. Oslo, Norway: Statistisk sentralbyrå.
- Patterson, W. (2008). Narratives of events: Labovian narrative analysis and its limitations. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (pp. 22–40). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Peacock, J. L., & Holland, D. C. (1993). The narrated self: Life stories in process. *Ethos*, 21, 367–383.
- Proctor, P. B. (2003). Determining “reasonable accommodation” under the ADA: Understanding employer and employee rights and obligations during the interactive process. *Southwestern University Law Review*, 33(51), 55–72. **[AQ: 5]**
- Reegård, K., Hansen, I. L. S., & Mandal, R. (2009). *Sentralforvaltningens trainee-program for personer med redusert funksjonsevne: et virkemiddel for økt bevissthet om funksjonshemmede somar beidskraftressurs* [The central administration’s trainee program for people with disabilities: A measure to increase awareness about the employability of people with disabilities]. Oslo, Norway: Fafo.
- Rivlin, A. M. (1971). *Systematic thinking for social action*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Schartz, H. A., Hendrichs, D. J., & Blanck, P. (2006). Workplace accommodations: Evidence based outcomes. *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation*, 27, 345–354.
- Scheer, J., Kroll, T., Neri, M. T., & Beatty, P. (2003). Access barriers for persons with disabilities: The consumer’s perspective. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 13, 221–230.
- Schreuer, N., Myhill, W. N., Samant, D., Aratan-Bergman, T., & Blanck, P. (2009). Workplace accommodations: Ergonomist as mediator in the interactive process. *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation*, 33, 1–12.
- Schreuer, N., Rimmerman, A., & Sachs, D. (2006). Adjustment to severe disability: Constructing and examining a cognitive and occupational performance model. *International Journal of Rehabilitation Research*, 29, 201–207.
- Squire, C. (2008). Experience-centred and culturally-oriented approaches. In M. Andrews, C. Squire, & M. Tamboukou (Eds.), *Doing narrative research* (pp. 41–63). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- St.meld.nr.34. (1996–1997). *Resultater og erfaringer fra Regjeringens handlingsplaner for funksjonshemmede og veien videre* [Results and experiences from the government’s action plans for people with disabilities and the road ahead]. Oslo, Norway **[AQ: 6]**.
- St.meld.nr.40. (2002–2003). *Nedbygging av funksjonshemmende barrierer. Strategier, mål og tiltak i politikken for personer med nedsatt funksjonsevne* [Removal of disabling barriers. Strategies, objectives, and measures in the disability policy]. Oslo, Norway: Sosialdepartementet.
- Story, M. F. (1998). Maximizing usability: The principles of universal design. *Assistive Technology*, 10, 4–12.
- United Nations. (2008). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=259>

About the Authors

Janikke Solstad Vedeler is a PhD student who works at Norwegian Social Research–NOVA in Oslo. Her interests include pathways into the labor market for persons with disabilities.

Naomi Schreuer, PhD, is a faculty member in the department of occupational therapy, Faculty of Health and Welfare Studies, University of Haifa. Her current interests include accommodation of tasks, as well as accessibility of environments and technology as facilitators for participation of people with disability.