

From Efficiency to Care: Shifting Accountabilities in COVID-19 Digital Job Placement

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Large parts of society closed down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which transformed the provision of government services including welfare. In Denmark, employment assistance efforts at job centers were suspended between March 12 – May 15, 2020. Here caseworkers assessed individuals' need for welfare remotely instead of physical interviews at the job center. We conducted weekly interviews with 6 job consultants across 3 Danish job centers over ten weeks to understand how their work practices changed during the pandemic (> 60 interviews). We identify a shift in the logic of casework from efficiency towards care, as the data infrastructure for approving welfare to unemployed individuals, broke down. The shift to remote job placement was both fully digital but at the same time relying on caseworkers patching the data infrastructure (e.g. relying on communication by telephone to reach job seekers). The paper contributes a unique understanding of the underlying assumptions of the model of work in caseworker systems. In the wake of the pandemic, the importance of care for the individual became the predominant logic in job placement. In particular, our findings suggest that the care concept takes on different forms under the condition of “digital” remote job placement.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interactions (HCI)** → Empirical studies in HCI

KEYWORDS

Public services, future of work, job placement, infrastructure

ACM Reference format

1 INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has increased unemployment. Since March 2020, unemployment in Denmark rose with more than 150.000 [8], large numbers for a small European country with a population of approximately 5,5 Mio. people. The rising unemployment is a challenge for societies across the world and increases the need for effective job placement efforts. In Denmark, the lockdown included the suspension of employment assistance efforts and paused the legal obligations of job seekers on public welfare, hindering efficiency measurements. For example, targets for efficiency in Danish job placement is measured as the number of in-person interviews (meeting between a public official and an unemployed individual).

There is speculation that responses to COVID-19 will hasten the emergence of *the future of work* throughout the pandemic. Increased digitization is seen as part of this future by the municipalities, responsible for job placement in Denmark [20, 21]. The future of work has long been of interest to the HCI/CSCW community [25]. In their study, Volda et. al. investigates how the values of social workers and IT systems in social work might be aligned digitally, but the logic of these values easily collide [46]. Recently, Light and Seravalli [24] posed the question: can municipal platforms provide care after adopting the logic of New Public Management? This happens as public services increasingly become digitized, increasing reliance on data. Acknowledging this ‘datafication’ of work, Kaziuanas and others argue for the possibility of caring-through-data [19] otherwise often articulated as measures for efficiency.

This paper presents initial findings from what we coin as *the digital job center*. As the government suspended employment efforts, we observed a change in, and a shift from, efficiency towards care in the digital job center. Job consultants' registration of data on efficiency (e.g. physical meetings with an unemployed individual) became a battleground of the colliding logics of job placement consultants and the accountable governmental agency. Suspension of employment efforts (surprisingly) lead to a breakdown in the data infrastructure as a physical interview could not be registered during the suspension of the employment assistance efforts. As a result, new legislation enabled job consultants to work remotely in the digital job center for two months and increasing their time spent on *care*, without the usual conflict of the legal and managerial demands of efficiency. Working from home, we interviewed caseworkers (job consultants) about the change in work practices. For example, caseworkers now relied on interviews with job seekers over the telephone. As employment efforts are being restarted as the lockdown in Denmark lifts we try to make sense of the unexpected transition to digital remote job placement.

We examine work in digital welfare services during COVID-19, guided by the following research questions: What are the underlying assumptions about care and efficiency in casework that characterize the model of work built into the case management system, and how are these assumptions performed as the job center becomes digital during COVID-19?

We conducted weekly telephone interviews with six job consultants from three job centers in three different municipalities over ten weeks (April 20th to June 26th), who work with newly unemployed individuals. We found that the response to COVID-19 drastically changed the work conditions and practices of job consultants. The three municipalities are different in size, location, and local employment situations. During the time of the study, unemployment increased between 30-200% in the three study sites. For example, one of the municipalities heavily reliant upon the service sector, and tourism was affected more than a municipality nearly without tourism. Differences between municipalities were large even in a small country like Denmark. The three municipalities in our study use the same casework system (CWS) which constitutes the primary digital infrastructure for casework [31, 38]. The CWS is used by job consultants to document meetings with citizens, archive or locate information, as well as retrieve information for managerial purposes or share information with unions or government agencies. It also connects to scheduling systems and emails where citizens receive information from the job center.

We frame our study within prior research on workflow systems, data-intensive practices, and competing logics around data usage in public services, understanding how we can think through experiences from the digital job center as a basis for setting new goals for the design of caseworker systems in the context of public services. What we find is a surprisingly close dependency between the model of work, assuming job placement to be an activity that takes place in physical meetings between the caseworker and individual as part of the assessment is based on an individual's appearance in the job center. These subtle "cues" are underlying the categorization of job consultant's understanding of an individual's needs; however, nowhere in the model of work can such traces be identified. It is only when the data infrastructure of job placement broke down due to the shift into digital, remote job placement that the underlying assumptions of the model of casework became visible. The implications of this finding for theory and technology development, we argue, is a demand for more nuanced concepts of care in the new future of work.

In Denmark, COVID-19 seems to be contained for now but remote work is already tapping into a New Public Management model for how costs of social welfare services can be reduced. From this perspective, the new practices and concerns about care may continue as a 'new normal' for job consultants with effects on models of accountability. Our findings suggest that physical meetings cannot simply be replaced by remote meetings between the caseworker and individual, but it requires careful consideration of the effects on values and logics important for the complicated practice of assessing an individual's needs. As we look to other countries it seems obvious from the scale of unemployment that we are facing a new normal where the sheer fact that numbers of unemployment have risen dramatically creates a need for understanding caring-through-data.

2 PRIOR WORK: DATA INTENSIVE PRACTICES AND ITS UNDERLYING LOGICS

Computational technologies increasingly change and allow us to work in new ways that are remote and yet connected; though remote work may also come at a price when the issues that arise are complicated in new ways. For example, the emergence of communication by e-mail enabled new forms of remote work but also have come to be known for the difficulty of providing the emotional context [13]. Workflow systems have been a long-term interest for the CSCW community [e.g. 13, 44, 45]. One of the goals for organizations to implement workflow systems was to reduce the complexity and "overhead" of communication through categorization, which is now programmed and scalable [14]. Bowers argued that one specific point of failure in this context is when requirements from one procedure conflict with the requirements expected by another. In these cases, sometimes it is necessary to go against policies or standards to get things done [7].

Early CSCW-studies of workflow systems tend to focus on their flexibility as a precondition for their efficient use and "fit" in a particular context. Here workflow systems can have an extensive impact even when they are not 'hard-wired' to practices, due to demands of documentation and data tracking [7]. For domains where care is intended as one of the defining characteristics of a practice (e.g. social welfare and healthcare), only a few have studied how workflow systems support or prevent work. Boulus-Rødje and others show how workflow systems formalize appearance as part of caseworkers' formal categorization of an individual in job placement [3]. Telephone calls may help provide more context when formal categories in workflow systems are not self-explanatory [33] or possible. However, important cues may go lost in the communication through telephone calls, for example, decisions motivated by an understanding of the individual's mood or temper.

Light and Seravalli following Puig de la Bellacasa define care as "1) an active response to others' circumstances, 2) a degree of passion or enthusiasm, 3) an underlying relation of mutual habitation" [24]. Yet, emotion and care are typically not considered as compatible with decision-making in public services, and so they are often not reported even if they have impacted a decision. Determining what information is appropriate, how to format it as data that fits with the caseworker system in our case, and then entering it into this system creates practical challenges during implementation [13]. Thus, we turn our attention to care and data understood in terms of providing the necessary documentation and quality data as part of due process.

2.1 Data Work and Documentation as a Pre-condition for Care

Extensive work documentation and data tracking have increased across work domains and efficiency and is also a driving logic in job placement. With the necessary documentation in place, for example, medical documentation regarding mental or physical issues, or

documentation of international education, a caseworker may approve concrete types of support and benefits for an unemployed individual. Other occupations increasingly have as part of their job to ensure documentation and quality data, for example, electricians [22] and clerks [30]. For example, electricians also needed to overcome limitations in the case management system at hand as a part of their daily work when ordering new materials. Dealing with multiple stakeholders (customers, vendors, the employer/manager, other electricians) their workflow system became an “accounting device” similar to what we observe in job placement. Both caseworkers and electricians have to make themselves accountable. In job placement, both job consultants and job seekers have to account for the data in CWS, for example providing the right information about rights and obligations to the job seeker.

Winner [47] reminds us that technologies reflect the values of their political context. Reporting from social services, Volda et. al. finds how “the logic of the system” and “the logic of social service workers” may share the same values, but tension exists in the different interpretations or logic of these values [46]. This is the case for efficiency. When applying for social service benefits, the logics of efficiency are both moving applications through the system quickly and ensuring that all necessary information is entered the application correctly, removing the need for further requests of information. Identification of shared values is a key to successful technology adaptation, but what happens when different logics or values collide? In social welfare services, Volda et al. find, caseworkers’ frustration increases when the logic of the application system does not make explicit what information is required for an application [46].

What we learn is: workflow systems rely on work documentation and data registration, thus care practices increasingly rely on data work [12, 34, 39], collecting, interpreting, and contextualizing data done by the professional. Opportunities for providing public services is dependent upon the available digital infrastructure [32, 38]. Nevertheless, values across workers in social service and their workflow system can be the same, the logic of, for example, efficiency, might collide. Continuing this research, we explore what happens with care and efficiency in the job center, when there is a breakdown of infrastructures.

3 METHOD

COVID-19 and the societal lockdown between March 12 – May 15, 2020 in Denmark obstructed the authors' planned ethnographic field-study [41] in Danish job centers. Doing qualitative fieldwork during the COVID-19 pandemic in Denmark, we, therefore, needed to adapt to our field site, as Seaver suggests, when studying technologies that are intangible for one reason or another [43]. Paradoxically, our research project (initiated pre-COVID-19) aimed at understanding the role of algorithms for decision-support in job placement. As COVID-19 became a reality, the technologies we turned out to study was analog telephone communication. Job consultants patching of data infrastructures, was far from any algorithmic or intelligent technology currently being developed for what is usually considered the future of work in the area of social welfare services. Thus, we conducted this study to investigate what happens when the job center became digital and remote in the turbulent times caused by COVID-19 and the suspension of employment placement efforts.

3.1 Data Collection & Time Frame of the Study

As physical meetings were prohibited, we conducted telephone interviews with six job consultants from three municipalities during the ten weeks of the study (April 20 to June 26). Fig. 1 illustrates the timeframe of the study.

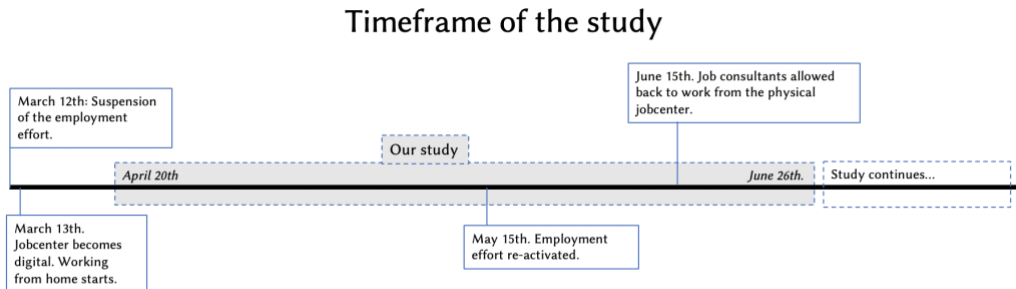


Fig. 1. “Timeframe of the study” March 12 – June 15, 2020.

We conducted more than 60 interviews (ongoing) totaling more than twenty-four hours, including one interview with a head of office responsible for employment from the governmental Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, and two – one with a consultant, and one with a consultant and the vice head of office - with the municipalities’ interest organization Local Government Denmark. The purpose of these three interviews was to gain an understanding of the background and perspective of the changes in job placement. We constructed approximately 100 pages of notes, including interview guides, interview notes, and memos. The interviews lasted between 15-45 minutes and were conducted in Danish. The first interview with each job consultant followed the same semi-structured interview format [23]. As the job consultants worked with different groups of newly unemployed people in different municipalities with different local practices, we tailored subsequent interview guides by context, often just three-five questions. Interviews with job consultants often gave rise to new questions for the next interview. This also made it possible to experience, how different job consultants and job centers reacted to the same events, e.g. re-activation of the employment effort.

The interviews were analyzed through an iterative approach [15], which allowed different themes of interest emerging, including a shift in the logic of job consultants’ work from efficiency and control to support and care. During the study, we continuously evaluated our preliminary findings with the job consultants, for example how and why documentation of interviews changed and its potential consequences.

3.2 Ethical considerations

HCI and related field increasingly need to address issues of ethics and politics [10, 17]. Ethical considerations are relevant for our research, as we investigate a possible future of (remote) work, which is already tapping into and legitimizing the New Public Management regime for how costs of social welfare services could be reduced. Our interviews began and continued through and after the societal lockdown of Denmark. Several times we discussed internally how our access to interviews with the job consultants was perhaps easier during the lockdown than under normal circumstances. Firstly, they were all working from home, which several of them pointed out, was comfortable to plan and conduct their telephone calls and not disturb colleagues. It should be noted, when our study began, the job consultants we

followed was not challenged by also taking care of their kids when working from home. We presume this would have been a challenge if our study began earlier, but in that case, the authors would have faced the same problems. Also, no one could see exactly how often, or how much of their time they spent assisting our research, instead of citizens or other tasks. This was confirmed during the interviews after the employment effort was re-activated, as they stated several times that they had less time for us now than during the lockdown. Secondly, we reached them at a disruptive point in time of great change. Some of the job consultants for example expressed a social emptiness, lacking social contact with colleagues, friends, and family. Several of them expressed during the interviews that it was quite nice to have someone to talk to.

All the data, names, and quotes presented in this paper have been anonymized.

4 FINDINGS

In our interview with job consultants working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic and suspension of the employment effort and normal legal framework, we found the same experiences across municipal borders, but not necessarily the same practices. In the next section, we present the story of the job consultant Peter, amalgamated from the interviews in the digital job center.

4.1 Working from Home as a Job Consultant

Under normal circumstances, Peter spends almost half of his time during his twenty-five weekly interviews with unemployed citizens clarifying and informing them about their rights and responsibilities (i.e. the legal demands of the employment process for them to comply with rules governing access to public benefits). Originally, he is educated within sales and marketing, and now a senior job consultant with more than 10 years' experience at the job center. His assigned group of job seekers is people aged 18-30 without union membership, often only with a high school education or less. In the first weeks of the lockdown, the government paused legal demands and canceled all internships and activities. Since the employment effort was suspended, all interaction between the job center and the job seekers became voluntary. Instead of the regular meetings and categorizing citizens being "ready for education" or "activity ready" (not ready for education), his main task was now to postpone planned interviews and call newly unemployed individuals. Calling the newly unemployed had two purposes: first, checking in with them identifying the most vulnerable individuals e.g. to prevent loneliness, and second, categorizing them ("ready for education" or "ready for activity"), which is a necessity for them to receive public benefits and usually comes with legal demands of internships or other training. Peter's experience that people were generally happy and surprised that job center personnel were checking on them:

"The job seekers are happy that we call them. It's different than before when they had to come to the job center. They are happy that there are not forgotten, that someone cares about them" (April 22nd).

"We call it a care-interview because the job seekers can just say "no" to talk with us. It's voluntary. But of course, they don't do that. The difference between the interviews is that at

a regular [legally complying] interview, we would have to activate an offer [internship or the like], that's obligations and rights" (April 27th).

The interviews between job consultants and the unemployed were not about their risk of being sanctioned and losing public benefits for not fulfilling legal demands, but instead, they were expressions of care. As Peter elaborates, these interviews were especially important in identifying the most vulnerable citizens or those with an extra need for someone to talk to. Preventing loneliness as a way of hindering long-term unemployment. Efficiency for Peter became categorizing as many citizens as possible. Categorization was the second purpose of reaching out to the newly unemployed re; categorization is needed to determine the services the person is entitled to. Under ordinary circumstances, non-physical interviews do not meet legal requirements for first interviews, but this demand was suspended between March 12 to May 15 (see Fig 1.). Usually, job centers have up to three months to categorize the newly unemployed. With exploding numbers, Peter made this categorization in one phone call most of the time. Meeting with citizens remotely, he could not rely on the same access to non-verbalized data or "cues" such as the smell of alcohol on the breath, nervous ticks around the eye, or obvious physical disabilities, as he would through in-person interviews. Categorization was coarser than the pre-pandemic. As Peter explained, people in need of public support must receive it. Also, he does not have the time to operate normally. The usual agenda of efficiency, ensuring that the unemployed person is in some form of training or internship shifted. During the suspension of the employment effort, efficiency became reaching out to as many unemployed people as possible and categorizing them.

Although still working remotely, the government resumed employment efforts and legal obligations including the possibility of sanction. In this situation, Peter needed to contact all the unemployed people he had talked with through the lockdown, as well as newly unemployed to arranged legally-compliant phone interviews. In these interviews, he followed up on their status (ready for education or not ready for education), advised them on their job search, and informed the citizens of their rights and obligations. Before, the interviews were 'care-conversations' or 'service-calls' as he called it. Now the interviews changed character:

"It's about rights and obligations now. When it's about these things it's about going through their rights and obligations, both to ensure their legal rights, and also making it possible for us to sanction them. It's our only line of action. So...yes, the interviews have changed" (June 10th).

Peter balanced the situation and the consequences of not complying with legal obligations. He did not spend as much time on rights and duties as he used to. Considering the special situation, he is at the time of writing the present paper, still not sanctioning citizens for non-compliance (answering their phone for a scheduled meeting). Summarizing, the suspension of the usual demands for efficiency enabled caseworkers and job consultants to help the unemployed to play a bigger role in their relationship with the job center. As the employment effort is re-activated, this relationship is already re-balancing. How this newly found opportunity for care will be unfolded or limited, is something we investigate as the study continues.

4.2 Documenting Interviews Through Telephone Calls

Peter uses the casework system (CWS) daily which is the central data infrastructure of job placement. It is the system where he enters and documents his work: interviews with citizens, write memos after interviews, sent letters to their e-mail account or the union. Management of the job centers and the governmental agency in the area also use the system to gather

metrics such as creating categorized lists of newly unemployed people or the number of meetings held within a given period. Under normal circumstances, an unemployed person has their first in-person interview within three weeks of unemployment, and at least four legally-complying interviews in the first six months. During the suspension of the employment effort, the telephone interviews with citizens were voluntary for the citizens and they do not count as legally complying interviews. Therefore, Peter at first recorded these interviews in the CWS by writing a summary of the meeting in a document for each case. Some of his colleagues recorded these as “other interviews,” which is usually an interview but does not count as one of the four legally complying interviews. Yet, a month into the digital job center, the practice of registering these telephone interviews changed.

“In the beginning, we documented all communication as a ‘memo’, but it is difficult to withdraw as a list. Now, today there is a message from the governmental agency, that everything should be registered as an ‘interview’. But, there are a lot of demands for the content of an interview compared to other types of interviews. It’s going to be a massive task going through all the cases since March 12th and format them to ‘interviews’. How exactly we are going to it is unclear at the moment. I imagine that you will look at the ‘memo’ and then copy-paste it. But, if the ‘memo’ isn’t good enough, we need to talk to the citizen again. Down the road, it may be important that the citizens get registered ‘interviews’ which doesn’t comply with the legislation and demands [for the ‘interviews’]. (April 24th)

It might seem banal how to register a telephone interview with an unemployed person. Recording data as a ‘memo’ was useful for the job consultant as it contained the content of the interview with the citizen framed as a care-conversation. This was also in compliance with the suspended employment effort. In these conversations, Peter did not touch upon issues he would usually cover like legal obligations and rights. He would still categorize the job seekers, for example, ‘ready for education’ to approve public benefits for them. With the transition to fully-remote job placement in response to COVID-19 job, consultants recorded data about the unemployed based on telephone interviews and mainly registered 1) individual reasons for unemployment (e.g. if COVID-19 was a reason for unemployment or if there were other reasons), and 2) individual needs due to unemployment (e.g. preventing loneliness as a measure to mitigate long-term unemployment). However, the practice of documenting these interviews was not useful for the management or the governmental agency to get an overview of the employment effort. Thus, the practice was changed to satisfy this bureaucratic need – going from a ‘memo’ to ‘interview’. This illustrates how data work in this new situation did not support the logic of the traditional job center and its demands for efficiency. Peter fears potential consequences for the unemployed if they, in the future have to account for these interviews if they did not memorialize their content.

Flashing forward: the task of formatting all the meetings is a tiresome task for Peter and his colleagues, and it also reveals some of the messiness of working during the pandemic.

“It’s a meaningless task. It’s only about reimbursement. Moving something around in a caseworker system. Each time things like these are distributed, new problems occur which wasn’t thought about before. Right now, there are a lot of quick fixes, work-processes, and law-making that don’t fit. It’s basically about proving that we have been busy during the lockdown. The governmental agency would like to see how many interviews the job center has had with unemployed citizens. It’s not something that makes a difference for the citizens, or us [job consultants], it’s for the system” (April 28th).

Data work and documentation is a vital part of casework, yet this change illustrates how bureaucratic needs cannot thrive in this new data practice, which initiated the re-registration of all telephone interviews to satisfy the (managerial and political) system. The state reimburses the job center based on the number of interviews they had with citizens, therefore the more interviews in the system, the bigger the reimbursement to the job center. This makes sense from an economic perspective, yet it is not something that supports the job consultants in their work.

When the employment effort became re-activated, registration of the interviews with the unemployed yet again became an interesting aspect of work in the digital job center. As physical presence is still prohibited in most job centers in Denmark, Peter had his first legally complying interviews remotely via his telephone. He is now obliged to inform the unemployed of their rights and obligations, but he does not spend as much time on these issues as pre-pandemic. Yet, when he is about to register his first telephone interview in the CWS, he faces an unexpected challenge, a red pop-up box appears: "ATTENTION: This is not a legally complying interview." The CWS does not allow a first legally complying interview to also be a telephone interview. He knows that a new legislative framework enacted during the pandemic makes this possible, and acknowledged that the developers probably did not have the time to adjust the system for this new law. In the end, he registered the interview as a telephone interview, although the system clearly states it does not count. He hopes that somewhere between the job center and the governmental agency, someone will fix the error, and calls the next person on his list. Confronted with this issue, he later asked a colleague, Maria who is also a manager, what she does. She registers her telephone interviews like in-person interviews and then she writes a memo on the case stating that the interview was conducted remotely. She does that because the system allows that, and because the content of the two interviews should be the same.

Peter and his colleagues faced a new task of patching the broken data infrastructure. A dilemma of registering interviews as they happened or registering them as the system allows. What the consequences will be for the job consultants working in this broken infrastructure, the job seekers who participated in the interviews, and how the defining practice turns out, is unclear at this point.

4.3 Care Work in Remote and Co-located Work Settings

The "surface" understanding of care that comes through in our analysis of job consultant's interaction with the individual during COVID-19 may be understood as a consequence of the relaxing of rules. It may come as no surprise that job consultants are less accountable in terms of efficiency, for example, the kinds of legal requirements that an individual usually faces as part of job placement. Taking a closer look, the binary understanding of care and efficiency in opposition to each other, which laid out so far, maybe too simplified. Care takes on different forms as the job placement becomes fully remote and digitized. To perform the job placement as a digital institution through working from home, the telephone comes to play an important role as job consultants' patches together the data infrastructure. However, as we shall see in the following, care is not simply equal to approving financial support for a particular unemployed individual or leaving them alone. Instead, what becomes clear in our data is how care in co-located settings take on fundamentally different characteristics from care in remote, digitized job placement where the caseworker and individual mainly interact through telephone.

The understanding of job placement as fully remote and digital during the pandemic fits poorly with the fact that caseworkers are relying on the telephone as the main technology that enables data registration. As we have already seen, data work and registration have become the backbone of job placement. Before the pandemic, care in job placement relied on job consultant's interaction with the unemployed individual in a physical, co-located meeting. Peter explained to us, how they, before the pandemic, would assess what is the need of an individual in subtle ways: was the individual smelling of alcohol, were their hands shaking, or did they show signs of social distress or missing teeth? For Peter and his colleagues, the first, physical meeting with an individual is critical for establishing a trustful relationship and to understand the individuals, and the root cause of their unemployment.

During the pandemic, interviews between job consultants and job seekers were conducted remotely through the telephone. On one hand, job consultants explained how it felt safer for job seekers to meet the job center more on equal terms. Peter explained how "Something happens when people walk through the doors of the job center", which does not happen over the phone. However, it was more difficult getting a deeper understanding of the job seeker, and the root of their problems as job consultants only had their questions and ears to access information – not the other senses detecting other "cues". Job seekers could easily disguise information. Simultaneously, asking questions about sensitive topics as disability, loneliness or traumas, is already a delicate matter which only requires more empathy doing it when job consultants and job seekers are not seated across each other. Consequently, although job consultants might have more time to provide care in the interviews with the citizen, as they are not spending time on rights and obligations, the type of care is changed.

5 DISCUSSION

Public services as job placement are increasingly digitized and automated [4-6, 11, 18, 29, 31, 37], – a tendency only strengthened by COVID-19 [17]. Recent debates in CSCW on public services have focused on new opportunities and challenges presented by new technologies as algorithmic decision-support in casework [2, 36, 40, 42]. One can easily imagine how critical rising unemployment numbers become a call for strengthening use of algorithms and other "intelligent" technologies, aiming at increased efficiency. Our study shows a shift from physical to remote job placement, which is both fully digital and remote, provide us with a critical understanding of the underlying model of work in caseworker systems (CWS). Digital in this context meaning relying on telephone communication as a short-term strategy for patching together the data infrastructure and producing the required data about individual citizens as part of job placement. The current model of work requires at least two things: specific documentation of interviews and a physical presence in the job center. This becomes evident when job consultants cannot register a first interview conducted through telephone as a legally complying interview. Peter explained: "The [CWS] says the interview doesn't count, but it does. I hope that somewhere between the job center and the governmental agency, someone will fix it". Our study also reveals that the conditions for the essence of job placement: understanding complex, and sometimes invisible challenges for individuals and helping them, is changed, when the job center becomes digital. A crucial part of this is seeing and understanding the person in front of you. Continuing this, providing care is not only approving public benefits for unemployed individuals, or leaving them alone. Sometimes, job consultants are providing care by persuading unemployed citizens to go to the rehab center "pushing" guiding them to acknowledging e.g. a drug abuse. We argue for a nuanced understanding of care, as in our case, change when transferred from co-location to remote without changing. Concretely, it is more difficult for job consultants to fully see the

unemployed individual and understand them accessing subtle “cues”, when providing care over the telephone. In this context, Gerson’s [13] concern of the digital removing the “emotional context” seems more relevant than ever, especially as working digitally seems to become a new normal even in areas of public services such as job placement.

Public digitization, often described under the term of e-government, in many cases removes face-to-face time between caseworkers and citizens [16, 28]. Logics of different systems may collide due to different interpretations of values [46]. Data registration practices in the digital job center become a place where logics of care and efficiency change and collide. Efficiency for the job consultants is closer to helping and caring for as many unemployed people as possible, more than how many interviews they register in a certain way. Again, Peter is concerned with how job seekers will have to account for care-conversations being registered as legally complying interviews. As datafication increasingly is a part of casework, his concern touches another important CSCW discussion of the de- and re-contextualization of data [1]. In an era of data analytics [4], it becomes increasingly important to discuss how data produced under COVID-19 will be re-and de-contextualized for the post-pandemic future?

Work during the pandemic became digital by default, and how post-pandemic work in the job center will look like is at this point still unclear. What is though emerging is the new task for job consultants who need to bridge the digital divide, deciding which job seekers to meet physically or remotely, and the consequences of doing so. Although it might be tempting to argue for a continued relaxation of legislation in the area employment, the rights and obligations also contain principles such as due time, ensuring that unemployed citizens are not forgotten or left alone.

Our research into job placement during COVID-19 and the breakdown of infrastructures points to digital disconnection as a new focus, when considering the important mechanisms of workflow systems, as we strive to design caseworker systems with concern for human values. Following scholars in this domain [27, 48]. We call for more research into forms of digital disconnection, including abstention, resistance, avoidance, and detox as a conceptual lens into understanding a possible future of post-pandemic work.

6 CONCLUSION

Unemployment has risen drastically through the COVID-19 pandemic, which calls for effective employment and job placement efforts. We empirically explored job placement over ten weeks during the pandemic through weekly telephone interviews with six job consultants from three Danish municipalities. We presented these findings through our amalgamated job consultant Peter. We found that the logics of job placement shifted from efficiency towards care during the pandemic. As part of this shift, the data infrastructure presuming in-person interviews broke down but it also gave way to care practices where the caseworker could, for example, focus on tackling an individual’s issues caused by loneliness, etc. The contribution is a novel and unique understanding of the underlying assumptions of the model of work in caseworker systems. When demands of efficiency, including documentation, were relaxed during the pandemic, the importance of care for the individual became the predominant logic in job placement. We argue for a nuanced understanding of the concept of care, as our findings suggest that care takes on change under the condition of “digital” remote job placement.

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