

# **'The Dispositive': Foucault's Concept for Organizational Analysis?**

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## **Abstract**

Foucault's notion 'the dispositive' has been introduced in organization studies as a highly promising concept. However, its analytical and empirical potentials remain to be fully explored. This article develops dispositional analytics which conceives of organizations as pervaded by multiple dispositives that interact, reinforce or contradict one another. In this reconstruction, particular emphasis is given to the visibility produced by dispositives, through which subjects and object emerge in a particular prescriptive light. Furthermore, analytical privilege is given to relations over substance. This means foregrounding the interrelations between dispositives as well as the dispositive's 'internal relationality', that is, the relations established by each dispositive out of which organizational problems arise and transform. The framework's potentials are explored in a study of care workers' responses to a management reform that disciplined and depersonalized care-giving. The difficulties that care workers faced in straddling legal demands, service standardization and care ethics are understood as a situation of heterogeneous dispositions. In this context, care workers and their managers tactically reconstructed their subjectivities, relating to the dispositives in diverse and unexpected ways.

## **Keywords**

Care ethics, Deleuze, discipline, dispositive, elderly care, Foucault, law, security

A new concept has arrived in organizational research inspired by Michel Foucault; the uncanny term 'the dispositive'. The field is already populated by a number of well-known concepts derived from Foucault, including 'discipline', 'governmentality', 'biopower' and 'technologies of the self', which have all become part of the critical vocabulary in organization studies. Indeed, infusing analytical concepts into organizational analysis has been a significant effect of the adoption of Foucault by organization scholars since the late 1980s. The most recent addition to this range of concepts, 'the dispositive', is presented as a solution to longstanding problems in organizational analysis, since the notion promises to overcome received dichotomies such as freedom versus control, agency versus structure, inside versus outside, and subject versus object.

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If the concept delivers on its promises, it could constitute a remedy against such entrenched problems in organizational research as well as significant shortcomings attributed to organization studies inspired by Foucault. Indeed, Foucault's growing influence in organizational research has been accompanied by a steady critique claiming that the Foucauldian focus on discourse or power-knowledge leaves little space for agential freedom (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Newton, 1998; Thompson & Ackroyd, 1995). The critics formulated a problem that keeps returning to organizational scholarship inspired by Foucault: How to analyse the power effects of discourse, or power-knowledge regimes, according to a twofold requirement: (a) allowing room for individuals' irreducible agency that give shape to organizational practices, while (b) dispensing with the constitutive subject consistent with Foucault's philosophical anti-humanism.

Against this backdrop, a recent article notably introduces the *dispositive* in organizational research, proclaiming that 'dispositional analytics allows for a new interpretation and use of Foucault in relation to organization studies' (Raffnsøe, Gudmand-Høyer, & Thaning, 2016, p. 272). One of the attractions of the notion is that it highlights organizations as privileged sites for the construction of subjectivities, while at the same time allowing space for individuals' practices of negotiation, manoeuvring or resistance in relation to organizational power structures. So far, however, these potentials remain largely suggestive, since the *dispositive* is still a nascent concept in organizational research. In their article, Raffnsøe et al. (2016) reconstruct the epistemological premises of the notion, and they point out implications for management and organizational research. Taking inspiration from this pioneering article, Foucault's own texts, as well as recent advances within and outside of organizational research, this article seeks to develop dispositional analytics for empirical organizational research. A case study of employees' reactions to a service reform in elderly care provides our testing ground for the suggested framework.

The article comprises four main sections. The first section reconstructs the *dispositive* as a tool for organizational analysis, highlighting how the interplay of *dispositives* creates a contradictory and indeterminate organizational space. The second section integrates dispositional analysis with Foucault's notions of 'counter-conduct' and 'self-conduct', extending the dispositional framework to individuals' practices of self-constitution. A third section presents a case study which explores dispositional analysis in the context of reorganization and disciplinary standardization of care work. Finally, the fourth section discusses the case study's findings and the issue of normativity and critique in dispositional analysis.

### **The Dispositive in Organization Studies**

So far, only a few attempts have been made to elaborate precisely what is meant by 'dispositive' and how the concept can be used for organizational analysis (Diaz-Bone & Hartz, 2017; Raffnsøe et al., 2016). The exact meaning of the term 'dispositive' and its significance in Foucault's thinking remains debated in the commentary literature. Interpretations range from those who see the concept as peripheral and insignificant (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, pp. 119–121) to those who celebrate it as crucial for understanding Foucault's overall intellectual project (Deleuze, 1992, 1988).

In an early and rare study (Jackson & Carter, 1998), the dispositive was introduced to designate an apparently expansive and controlling regime of power. Jackson and Carter described the dispositive as ‘the “apparatus” which, one might say, operationalizes governmentality’. They wrote: ‘It is the apparatus of control which produces submission and compliance to the demands of governance’ (Jackson & Carter, 1998, p. 60). However, such an interpretation of dispositives as controlling and determining forces in practices of governance and subjectivation has been contested.

Raffnsøe et al. (2016) offer a very different rendering of the dispositive as a more open-ended, modifiable force that disposes actors, while the dispositive itself is, at the same time, continuously shaped by actors. They did not, however, unfold the notion empirically in an organizational analysis, which is our purpose here.

As a first approximation, one can define the dispositive as a configurational mechanism that connects a series of discursive and non-discursive elements. The dispositive designates a particular propensity in practices of discourse and subjectivation, as well as a specific ‘dispositionality’ in how organizational forms may emerge, transform and change. Foucault said in an interview, which is the only place (so far published) where he defined the dispositive, that the term designates:

a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the [dispositive]. The [dispositive] itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. (Foucault, 1980, p. 194)

In this definition, Foucault sought to mark out an intermediary plane, or an ‘ensemble’ which is traversed by a particular strategy connecting up procedures, regulations, instruments, institutions and statements. Discipline is an illustrative example. The disciplinary dispositive connects jurisprudence, correctional practices, psychiatric classification and the architectural design in prisons, armies, hospitals and factories. Across these different institutions and practices, a strategy of normalization began to emerge in a historical process. We note that the concept is defined in such a way (an unspecified ‘system of relations’ traversed by a strategy) that it requires extensive historical description before the concept begins to take shape.

The reluctance towards giving precise definition and content to concepts reflects Foucault’s methodological precept against universals and his insistence on tracing singular historical processes (Foucault, 1991). In an interview, Foucault emphasizes that to describe a dispositive involves an active act of construction. An interlocutor asks: ‘You like to accentuate the artificial character of your procedure. Your results depend upon the choice of reference points (. . .) Is it all a matter of appearances?’ Foucault replies: ‘Not a delusive appearance, but a fabrication’ (1980, p. 212). Implied here is that the dispositive is a system of relations that the researcher constructs retrospectively on the basis of historical material. Importantly, then, the dispositive is a *methodological* tool, not the designation of an immovable historical force (e.g. a kind of ghostly machine operating in history). The researcher must recognize that she partakes in constructing history when she, from complex and entangled processes, marks something out and names it a dispositive.

Although the dispositive principally served to describe historical processes, or, better, particular propensities emerging in social relations over time, we intend to elaborate an analytical framework for organizational analyses, while drawing upon advances inside and outside of organization studies (Weiskopf & Munro, 2012; Raffnsøe et al., 2016; Collier, 2009; Deleuze, 1988; Villadsen, 2008, 2011). In what follows, we reconstruct Foucault's elaborations on dispositives over the first three lectures in his 1978 lectures series (Foucault, 2007) supported by other sources (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 1991, 2003). This reconstruction falls into four subsections that highlight key characteristics of Foucault's rendering of the term. First, the dispositive relies on a conception of power as differentiated and non-uniform, which corresponds to a view of organizations as pervaded by multiple strategies of power. This differential view of power allows for understanding organizational practices as the site where several dispositives interplay, in mutual support or contradiction. Second, the three major dispositives of 'law', 'discipline' and 'security' vividly illustrate the dynamic interplay of dispositives. Third, the epistemological dimension of the dispositive entails that it illuminates objects from a particular normative framework, and the relational nature of the dispositive means that relations precede entities. Fourth, dispositional analysis can proceed by using four analytical entry points for describing the dispositive's modes of operation.

### *Dispositives in interplay*

At the outset, we should note that elaborating a rigorous concept of the dispositive was never the principal concern for Foucault in any of his texts or lectures. He chiefly used the term for describing historical processes, for instance, when tracing the emergence of discipline or modern sexuality. Foucault preferred to shape a concept in relation to specific historical content. Nevertheless, Foucault's descriptions contain a number of analytical and methodological points that are useful for developing dispositional analytics for organization studies. His analysis of discipline is a helpful starting point for explicating the dispositive.

In Foucault's account, the emergence of the disciplinary dispositive was spurred by a distinct 'strategy' or 'imperative' that began to emerge across institutions, including prisons, military barracks, schools and factories. Notably, Foucault described strategies as intentional, yet non-subjective (1979, p. 194). The disciplinary strategy sought to improve and correct individuals, particularly by moulding the body (the prisoner, the soldier, the pupil and the industrial labourer). Disciplinary interventions were guided by concerns for preventing unwanted and unproductive behaviour by correcting the 'human material' in accordance with norms.

Foucault's (1977) genealogy of discipline ended up by marking out a propensity or strategic imperative which was visible across the social body and diverse organizations. The proliferation of discipline during the nineteenth century was evident in the emergence of institutions such as clinical medicine and criminal psychiatry, and it also spurred principles of scientific management at the beginning of the twentieth century (Foucault, 1977, p. 224). Significant for developing an analytical framework for organization studies is that dispositives are neither stable nor deterministic since they are continuously modified by numerous factors (Foucault, 1991, p. 81). Defining dispositives as general propensities in social arrangements eschews any notion of subjectivation as determination. Individuals and collectivities are rather 'dispositioned' or disposed by them.

The dispositive has a relational rather than a substantial nature (Raffnsøe et al., 2016, p. 278). It has too many dispersed origins and comprises too many heterogeneous elements to ever constitute a uniform and self-coherent structure. Foucault gave primacy to relations over entities in characterizing the dispositive as ‘functionally over-determined’. This means that multiple elements coexist, enter into resonance or contradiction with each other, requiring a continuous ‘readjustment or re- working of the heterogeneous elements that surface at various points’ (1980, p. 195). Foucault’s use of the term functional ‘over-determination’ was probably inspired by Freud (1913) who argued that many events in dreams were ‘overdetermined’, since they were caused by multiple factors in the dreamer’s life, and was also invoked by Althusser (1969). When Foucault spoke of over-determination, he similarly referred to a situation where more causes are present than what is necessary to cause the effect. Furthermore, Foucault opposed the assumption of unidirectional causality between cause and effect, instead emphasizing the mutual interplay between various elements in a structure. By this move, he achieved a framework in which the elements of a dispositive do not pre-exist the relations but are constituted and transformed relationally.

Essential for the argument of this article is that Foucault after 1976 performed a significant shift in the way that he approached practices of organizing. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), he presented discipline as an expansive regime that gradually spread across institutions and reached into the microfibrils of society. In marked contrast to this portrayal of ‘disciplinary society’, Foucault began his 1978 lectures by presenting a range of coexisting dispositives, each propelled by distinct strategies:

We should not be looking for a sort of sovereignty from which powers spring, but showing how the various operators of domination support one another, relate to one another, and how they converge and reinforce one another in some case, and negate and strive to annul one another in other cases. (Foucault, 2003, p. 45)

The impression of discipline’s pervasiveness and totalizing reach gives way to a complex heterogeneity in Foucault’s description of the social body as invested with different strategies.

In brief, the tendency towards epochal totalization evident in Foucault’s description of discipline and biopolitics in the first half of the 1970s was left behind in 1978. Instead of a sequential history in which dispositives substitute one another, he emphasized the coexistence of dispositives (Foucault, 2007, p. 8). Hence, Foucault begins to conceive the social field as a set of immanent forces that interrelate, while establishing connections and possibilities of creation. Extending this perspective provides ample space for analysing the dynamic interplay of dispositives in the context of organizations.

### *Three major dispositives*

At the beginning of his 1978 lecture series, Foucault introduced three dispositives that are deeply rooted in Western culture: ‘law’, ‘discipline’ and ‘security’ (Foucault, 2007, pp. 5–24). The material under scrutiny are discussions in eighteenth-century France of problems related to governing cities such as crime, disease and scarcity of grain.

In brief, the legal dispositive is essentially repressive, and it effectuates ‘a binary division between the permitted and the prohibited’. It codifies acts (on the territory, in the city, among

the employees), hence making possible a coupling ‘between a type of prohibited action and a type of punishment’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 5). The legal dispositive takes as its problem the maintenance and reinstatement of order by submitting a group of more or less loyal subjects to the rule of law. From the perspective of the law ‘order is what remains when everything that is forbidden is prevented’ (2007, p. 46). The law seeks to reinstate an order that has been violated by imposing particular sanctions.

The disciplinary dispositive exceeds the law in terms of its field of intervention and observation. Foucault said that discipline is ‘productive’, since it works by fostering and channeling human capacities. It targets individuals, their forces and dispositions by acting on a ‘multiplicity of bodies capable of performances’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 21). Discipline establishes norms of ideal behaviour by means of medical and psychological techniques which ‘fall within the domain of surveillance, diagnosis, and the possible transformation of individuals’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 5). The disciplinary dispositive invests enclosed spaces like barracks, prisons, hospitals and factories, where the corrective observations of individuals and their deviances are distributed around specific norms (Foucault, 1977, p. 144).

By contrast, the dispositive of security is not prohibitive or prescriptive, but facilitative. Instead of sanctioning illegal acts or eliminating deviant behaviour, the problem of security is how to reach acceptable levels of crime or diseases. Hence, security ‘establishes an average considered as optimal on the one hand, and, on the other, a bandwidth of the acceptable that must not be exceeded’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 6). The premise of security is that social reality is not amenable to in-depth regulation that would completely eliminate the undesired. Instead, the question is how much of the undesired is acceptable: ‘it is simply a matter of minimizing what is risky and inconvenient, like theft and disease, while knowing that they can never be completely suppressed’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 99). ‘Securitization’ concerns how to reach the optimal level of intervention, while weighing the costs of intervention against benefits. Since security takes reality as ‘a given’, the key problem is how mechanisms already operative in this reality can be optimized. Foucault’s analysis describes a context in which there is no overarching ideology or foundational structure. Instead, the three dispositives interplay and develop on an immanent plane, where their correlations gradually transform (Foucault, 2007, p. 22).

Summarizing his analysis, Foucault said that law operates on a territory with a set of legal subjects, discipline targets bodies and their capacities, while security manages a series of possible events (2007, pp. 21–22). As is often the case, Foucault’s analysis conveys an uncanny familiarity with current issues. Law, discipline and security appear as lenses through which contemporary problems of governing and organizing may be observed and reflected upon. For example, Weiskopf and Munro (2012) demonstrate how human capital management breaks with the framework of discipline and instead resonates with security, since HCM manages ‘controlled circulations’ (Weiskopf & Munro, 2012, p. 685).

Translated into organizational analysis, Foucault’s framework conceives organizational space as dispositioned by several ‘configurational principles’ (Collier, 2009, p. 80), which sometimes reinforce each other and at other times negate each other, creating indeterminacy, contradictions and unintended effects. The immediate similarity between prisons, schools, hospitals and factories cannot be ascribed to an underlying (disciplinary) ‘regime’ (Burrell, 1988) or an ‘ideological structure’ which gives shape to organizations. First, the interplay of

several dispositives means that one cannot rule univocally in organizational practices, and, second, a dispositive is not a self-coherent system, since it produces unintended effects that put it in contradiction with itself (Foucault, 1980, p. 195). In this perspective, organizations hold neither an ultimate source of power, nor a unifying perspective that determines how problems are constructed and solutions identified. In the case study below, we demonstrate that what constitutes organizational problems, for example rule violations in care-giving, becomes hard to determine as a result of incongruent schemes for observing and organizing.

### *Visibility and relationality*

Foucault's 1978 lectures describe how dispositives coexist in a dynamic interplay, that is, how they 'relate to one another, how they converge and reinforce one another in some cases, and negate or strive to annul one another in other cases' (2003, p. 45). In his 1978 lectures, Foucault demonstrated how the interplay of the dispositives of law, discipline and security produce indeterminacy in regard to how to solve problems in cities. Foucault's analysis emphasized how the three dispositives constitute alternative frameworks or 'lenses' for turning mundane problems like theft or disease into objects of regulation (Foucault, 2007, pp. 6–24). These problems at times oscillate between different dispositives and thus emerge for the observer as something entirely different depending on the optical grid that renders them visible and thinkable. For example, in Foucault's analysis, the problem of scarcity becomes something entirely different when inserted in different dispositives, hence becoming part of a specific set of relations.

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, a major concern was how to prevent the scarcity of grain, since it led to inflated prices and popular revolt in the towns (Foucault, 2007, p. 33). Foucault sketches out three phases in the regulation of scarcity which vividly illustrate the operations of dispositives (pp. 35–37). First, there is a phase before 1754 'when the old juridical- disciplinary system was in full operation with its negative consequences', especially of people hoarding grain in times of scarcity. Second, a phase from 1754, when France adopted a regime closely modelled on the English system. This regime used 'slightly artificial means' of regulation like subsidizing exports and taxing imports, and hence it entailed a relative freedom, but one that was 'corrected and supported'. Finally, a third phase (1754–1764) where physiocrats advanced arguments in favour of 'the freedom of grain', seeking to create a dispositive in which scarcity was not prohibited or prevented in advance. Instead the fluctuations of scarcity and abundance should be recognized as natural, and it was a matter of understanding all the events that could influence production, making it 'divert from an ideal line'. In this third model, the very nature of scarcity changed fundamentally, since it is neither good nor evil: 'The very thing that in the juridical- disciplinary system was to be avoided at any cost, even before it occurs, namely scarcity and high prices, was basically not an evil at all.' Instead, it should be considered an essential natural phenomenon which correlates with other natural phenomena.

We notice how the object of scarcity mutates as it shifts between the dispositives. In the 'old' constellation of legal and disciplinary dispositives, grain scarcity was basically a threat to be prevented from ever occurring. It was a phenomenon linked to the disciplining of the farmer, his productive practices and his undesired proclivities, and supply was regulated by rules subsidizing exports and taxing imports. By contrast, when reinserted in the security

dispositive grain becomes one element in 'a series' of events that unfold with a certain regularity and which involve rain, drought, demand, etc. Starting from 'the reality of fluctuations', security surpasses the juridical- disciplinary focus on the market and its scarcity-dearness mechanism. The unit of analysis expands to ever-wider circuits: 'New elements are constantly being integrated: production, psychology, behaviour, the ways of doing things of producers, buyers, consumers, importers, and exporters, and the world market' (Foucault, 2007, p. 45). In this new analysis, scarcity is no longer the principal object of fear; it is rather one element which occurs in relation to a whole series of other elements. Instead of prohibition or prescription, security involves facilitating ever-wider circuits, while checking the risks of excessive fluctuations. We note, again, the analytical primacy of relations insofar as the dispositives constitute a set of relations that give shape to their elements.

In developing dispositional analytics, we also give emphasis to the particular visibilities created by dispositives. Notably, the coexistence of multiple dispositives entails several fundamentally different, even competing, ways of observing the world. In line with his commitment to epistemology, Foucault distinguished between dispositives in terms of their particular 'gaze'. Law, discipline and security are distinct, since they each render the world amenable to observation and calculation in incompatible ways. They direct the gaze of the observers by 'throwing light upon objects', making them shimmer and gleam under a particular normativity (Deleuze, 1988, p. 52). The effects of visualization are not simply that the gaze is directed towards particular pre-existing objects in the world, rather than others. More fundamentally, Deleuze explained, dispositives 'throw light upon objects' from the perspective of a normative frame. This makes objects appear before us in a particular normative light and hence *produces* the objects (rather than merely making them visible). Hence, the disciplinary dispositive 'illuminates' individuals, their actions and their capacities, from the perspective of a particular preventive and corrective normativity, hence producing 'abnormal' objects. The dispositive can thus be observed both in modes of exercising of power and in procedures of knowledge production.

The framework for dispositional analysis that can be reconstructed from Foucault's works has analytical implications for how to study practices of organizing. In brief, within this framework, organizational problems are neither given, nor are they formulated from within an indisputable frame of reference. Organizational problems rather emerge from 'an agonistic play', where different normative perspectives reinforce or challenge one another, creating the organization as a 'multi-layered field of normativity' (Raffnsøe et al., 2016, p. 285). For instance, instead of understanding the employment relation as saturated by 'disciplinarity' (Townley, 1993), it can be conceived as a space over-determined by several, interrelating dispositives. The employment relation can be analysed by paying attention to how particular visibilities are created, bringing to existence specific organizational and management problems from within the optics of law, discipline, security and more.

### **A Framework with Four 'Windows'**

In order to further develop dispositional analytics, it is helpful to consult Deleuze's essay *What is a dispositif?* (1992). Invoking Deleuze's interpretation of the dispositive does not attempt to reconcile Foucault's genealogical critique of institutionalized power-knowledge



with Deleuze's philosophical affirmation of the world's immanent potentialities (Hallward, 2006, p. 161). Here, we merely wish to rearticulate the analytics that Deleuze (1992, pp. 159–161) sketched out, which the author used in a study of the dispositive of social work (Villadsen, 2011). Deleuze suggested four analytical entry points to be used for reconstructing a dispositive, each offering distinct 'windows' for describing the dispositive's modes of operating.

1. 'Lines of light': Visibilities are not produced by light that falls upon pre-existing objects. Instead, each dispositive structures light in a particular way, thus creating objects which depend on it for their very existence. (Consider workplace absenteeism: in the optics of discipline, of interest is not so much the act of absenteeism itself but the absentee as an individual with particular dispositions, habits and, very possibly, abnormalities. The dispositive makes absenteeism visible in a particular normative light.)
2. 'Lines of enunciation': The dispositive effectuates rules of enunciation; that is, procedures for stating the truth which creates both objects and subject positions. Hence, 'objects and subjects are immanent variables of the statement' (Deleuze, 1988, p. 95). (Again, discipline would establish rules of enunciation, derived from psychological and medical discourse, that both define the absentee as an object and the position of the examining subject(s).)
3. 'Lines of force': Ways of seeing and ways of saying are interlinked by way of force. Force is integral to a dispositive; it passes through all its elements, imbuing it with a specific prescriptive strategy. The 'lines of force' are particularly observable in organizational programs and technologies. (The absentee's abnormalities would be established by psychological or medical examination and normalized through counselling techniques and medical intervention.)
4. 'Lines of subjectification': The subject is not determined by the dispositives, but is rather 'dispositioned' in a process of self-constitution. Moreover, the lines of subjectification entail virtualities and transgressive potentials that subjects rearticulate or 'bend' in irreducible ways. (The absentees might take up the position as 'medicalized', but they can also rearticulate disciplinary categories in struggles around the definition of absenteeism and what constitutes the absent subject.)<sup>1</sup>

The researcher can give more or less emphasis to each of these analytical entry points in a specific analysis (Villadsen, 2011, p. 1064). In the below case study of a reform process of home care services, we will see that the employment relation can be visualized and discursified very differently, articulating the different dispositives' 'lines of light' and 'lines of enunciation'. In the process, subject positions are established which care workers submit to as individuals and groups, thereby bending or 'enfolding' the dispositive.

Deleuze wrote: 'We belong to social apparatuses [dispositifs] and act within them' (1992, p. 164). At the same time, he emphasized that a dispositive is not an immobile structure of determination, since subjects 'enfold' external forces in strategic and variable ways, creating 'variation of the fold or of subjectivation' (Deleuze, 1988, p. 95). In concrete terms, the analysis can include the ways that organizational subjects rearticulate and

creatively contest elements of the dispositive, without reducing the analysis of the first to the latter.

### **Counter-Conduct and Self-Formation**

Foucault did not elaborate the concept of the dispositive analytically in relation to the theme of subjectivity. Here, we further develop dispositional analytics by integrating analytical resources from Foucault's work on self-formation and counter-conduct. Some organizational scholars have dislodged Foucault's analyses of self-formation from their historical contexts for studying self-conduct in contemporary organizations (Bardon & Jossierand, 2011; Randall & Munro, 2010). This 'fourth wave' of Foucauldian scholarship in organization studies engages critically with earlier adoptions of Foucault while developing 'a more positive conception of subjectivity' (Raffnsøe, Mennicken, & Miller, 2019, p. 1). These scholars often echo the commentary literature on Foucault which typically divides Foucault's authorship into three overall phases (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982), defining the last phase by Foucault's departure from subjugation to recover an active human agent who practises self-cultivation. However, this move has largely kept the analytics from Foucault's late work separate from his earlier authorship, thereby leaving some analytical potentials unexplored. The three axes, knowledge, power and ethics, were actually inextricably linked in Foucault's work and can be integrated in a single framework (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011). We suggest that connecting the analysis of dispositives with the analysis of counter-conduct and self-formation holds potentials for a nuanced approach to organizational analysis.

When Foucault analysed dispositives, he did not explicate the relationship between the dispositive and individuals' self-conduct. However, it is possible to reconstruct this relationship by consulting other parts of his authorship. In his seminal redefinitions of power, Foucault conceptualized resistance as immanent to power-relations, since power passes through 'innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations' (1977, p. 27). Similarly, in his lectures on pastoral power, Foucault described counter-conduct as coextensive with power structures, when analysing how movements contested pastoral authorities by reinterpreting Christian doctrines (2007, pp. 191–255). Some of these 'tactical' reinterpretations were gradually integrated into the Protestant church. Generally, we assume that practices of counter-conduct give shape to, and can modify, the dispositive. Davidson explains this dynamic: 'Force relations structure the possible field of actions of individuals', and yet, 'resistance and counter-conduct modify these force relations, countering the locally stabilized organizations of power' (Davidson, 2011, pp. 28–29). Extending the dispositional framework with the notion of the 'tactical immanence' of resistance opens for consideration of how subjects can negotiate, subvert and modify the dispositives but never entirely break free of them.

Foucault used the term 'self-technology' to describe the practical and reflexive means by which subjects act on themselves. This move did not entail any recovery of the constitutive human subject which would oppose power. Indeed, the concept of self-technology was meant to avoid reducing the subject to an effect of power without, however, assuming a subject in humanist terms. Foucault conceptualized power as a 'way of shaping and coordinating the behaviour of individuals that made no assumption about a violated or estranged human

“essence” (Behrent, 2013, p. 92). The subject was a product of techniques or ‘craft’ (implicit in the Greek word *tekhne*), not the locus of any deep interiority.

In the late seminar lecture, *Technologies of the Self* (1988), Foucault elaborated on the theme of self-formation as a technical accomplishment. In an oft-cited passage, he defined ‘technologies of the self’ as permitting ‘individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being’ (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). In Foucault’s analysis, practices of counter-conduct were intrinsically linked to the pastorate, reconstructing religious subjectivity within ‘the general horizon of Christianity’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 125). Generally, the analysis of self-formation must be situated within the larger historical and social context where subjects relate to forms of governing and knowledge (i.e. dispositives). This emphasis on exploring individuals’ practices of self-constitution in their interrelation with power-knowledge is, of course, very relevant to organizational analysis. Relevant also is the premise that self-formation cannot be reduced to aesthetics, since it inevitably carries moral and political value: ‘Even apparently personal or individual forms of counter-conduct such as the return to Scripture or the adherence to a certain set of eschatological beliefs have a political dimension’ (Davidson, 2011, p. 29). Pursuing this premise, the case study below will describe subjects who invest their reflexive, professional self-conduct with moral and political significance.

The framework developed by extending dispositional analysis with the concept of self-technology escapes the classic agency/structure dichotomy. The agency of subjects cannot be assigned to some original source existing a priori or outside this space; instead it is exerted when the subject establishes a relation to the external world. Hence, ‘agency’ is immanent to the set of (organizational) practices in which dispositives are ‘folded back’ (Deleuze, 1988). In our framework, self-technology is the medium through which subjects are able to produce a conception of their selves and what they hold as truth in relation to the dispositives. The concept hence ‘mirrors’ the idea of multiple dispositives, since self-technology allows the subject to submit to various truths rather than one particular truth. Accordingly, the analytical framework situates subjects in organizational practices that are pervaded by multiple ‘lines’ of light, enunciation, force and subjectivation.

In the next sections, we explore the potentials of dispositional analysis in a study of the employment relation. We illustrate empirically how the intersection of dispositives (law, discipline, pastoral power) constitutes the space in which managers and employees constitute their professional subjectivities.

## **Data and Methods**

The case study below rests on observations from fieldwork conducted in a specific organizational setting of social services provision. The setting is a unit in a Danish municipality, which provides assistance to elderly and handicapped citizens in their homes. Provision of home care is defined by Danish law, which obliges municipalities to support citizens in maintaining a high degree of self-sufficiency and well-being. The municipality determines eligibility for home care on the basis of an individual needs assessment. Services involve assistance with basic housekeeping such as cleaning, shopping, laundering as well as personal care, including bathing, shaving, dressing, and it may also involve preparing a meal.

Home care workers have typically enjoyed considerable autonomy at work, since they were not closely supervised in their daily working practices. However, recent cases of negligent care reported in the Danish press along with growing expenditures have spurred political demands for higher service efficiency which is sought to be achieved by more closely monitoring and standardizing home care.

Over a seven-month period from March to October 2016, we conducted field observations and qualitative interviews in the home care unit in the municipality of Tønder. The aim was to explore the different coping strategies that care workers and their managers employed in response to reorganization of their work. The fieldwork involved interviews with six frontline managers, interviews with two union representatives and two working environment representatives as well as observations at eight staff meetings and workshops. Each interview took around 45 minutes, and each meeting lasted approximately two hours. The interviews followed semi-structured guides centring on interviewees' reactions to a service reform which had implemented stricter resource allocation and standardization of their working practices.

In addition to the fieldwork, texts on the delivery of home care were consulted, including the municipality's brochure describing their home care services, *Quality Standards for Personal Care and Practical Assistance* (Tønder Kommunes Social- og Sundhedsforvaltning, 2011) and instructions on how to determine eligibility and define needs. All our observations were carried out after obtaining informed consent from informants, and while anonymity is secured, the formal title of the interviewees will be indicated: 'care worker', 'local manager', or 'union representative'. Our strategy for selecting interviewees' statements for analysis can be described as 'purposeful sampling', following Patton's (1990) argument that researchers can purposely select information-rich material 'from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research' (Patton, 1990, p. 169). More specifically, we used the following criteria to select a series of statements and discussion themes for closer analysis. First, they should display the different managerial and professional strategies at play in the organization of home care. Second, the selected material should show employees' varied responses to the service package technology, ranging from embracing its stipulations to contesting them.

The study foregrounds the different strategies of self-conduct by which care workers negotiate an organizational context that they perceive as ridden with conflicting demands or 'dispositions'. Field observations and interviews offered a window for observing how competing strategies for organizing care work were perceived, discussed and handled by care workers and their managers. Given that the study is primarily based on interviews and observations of public utterances, care workers' self-constitution as subjects in discourse becomes central. We adopt the premise that when speakers state their viewpoints and values regarding their care work, this is simultaneously an act of self-constitution or subjectivation. Seen from this perspective, the exchanges during inter-views and at meetings animated the speakers to verbalize and affirm their 'workplace subjectivities'. Foucault paid particular attention to those verbal acts by which the subject affirms who he or she is (Foucault, 2000). The analysis will display how individuals in their speech acts constitute themselves as particular subjects, hereby solidifying, transforming or contesting the strategies that pervade their organizational context.

The case study provides a testing ground for exploring the potentials of dispositional analysis, but this commitment must be balanced against the need to understand the case itself. In employing a single case study, one always faces a strategic choice regarding how much case complexity should be presented, such as the case's own issues and contexts, and the involved actors' interpretations (Stake, 2003, p. 141). This choice of what material to present poses itself in a particular way in dispositional analysis, insofar as this analysis does not aim for exhaustive description of practices. It is neither a matter of recovering in detail what actually happened, nor evaluating the observations against a normative ideal; instead the aim is to articulate the prescriptive dimension of organizational practices. This prescriptive dimension of practices is crucial, since it is formative for what are considered real problems and how they are observed and rendered in discourse (Raffnsøe et al., 2016, p. 291). Deleuze designates this dimension the 'lines of force' (1992, p. 160), that is, prescriptive and formative strategies that are operative in organizational practices and their ongoing transformation. The next sections focus on this prescriptive level and how professionals tactically relate to it in their self-constitution.

### *Standardizing care*

In the decades preceding the study, reforms inspired by new public management (NPM) had targeted elderly care services in Denmark and across Scandinavia, with country-specific variations of course (Anttonen & Haikiö, 2011; Dahl, 2009; Fejes & Nicoll, 2011). The reforms aimed to increase efficiency and transparency with respect to costs and outcomes by implementing systematic measurement, service contracts and specified quality standards (Hood, 2000). These reforms were widely criticized on the grounds that NPM, given its inspiration from business management, imposed evaluation criteria foreign to the professional codex that guides social services.

In Denmark, home care delivery is regulated by the national law on social services which defines the specific entitlements of elderly and handicapped citizens (Serviceloven, 2017). In the last three decades, home care has undergone a series of interventions such as standardization of services, time allocation in minutes, performance evaluations and increasingly detailed registration, all of which can well be termed 'disciplinary'. In a study of Danish elderly care, Dahl (2009, p. 641) labelled these interventions 'the logic of details', which is rooted in neoliberal economics and foregrounds the control of time and the codification and detailed monitoring of work tasks. Much like discipline, service standardization operates by continuous surveillance, observation of performance and sanctioning with reference to the norm (Foucault, 1977). At a first approximation, then, home care delivery could be said to be pervaded by two dispositives: one that visualizes the employment relation and care-giving as a set of law-defined entitlements, and another that visualizes the same space as one of disciplinary normalization.

In this context, discipline supplements and exceeds the law. Whereas the law defines entitlements and the overall content of services, discipline turns a series of actions into objects of measurement, comparison and corrective intervention. In this way, the discretionary power legally assigned to local managers and employees is hemmed in by tools to secure transparency, surveillance and budgetary control. Indeed, the strategy of discipline strives for enhanced calculability, evident in the quest for 'accountability' in service delivery

(Hood, 2000). An overall objective in the reforms of elderly care was to make services more transparent and predictable so each client received exactly what he or she was eligible for.

However, care workers have long adhered to values rooted in the 'ethics of care' which has influenced healthcare professionals broadly. This philosophy defines care by context, relationships and vulnerability, emphasizing the need to understand what is expressed by those in the vulnerable position. Care ethics can be defined as situated moral reasoning premised on listening and 'responding to others on their own terms' (Sevenhuijsen, 1998, p. 85). Caring, then, demands a relational responsiveness that escapes the 'blinded' perspectives of law, class, gender and economics: 'The logic underlying an ethic of care is a psychological logic of relationships which contrasts the formal logic of fairness that informs the justice approach' (Gilligan, 1982, p. 73). Opposed to legalistic or economic constructions of needs as objective and measurable, care ethics contextualizes the well-being of individuals in social relations. Notably, this emphasis on social relations extends the ethical considerations to the self-care of the care-giver.

The value codex invoked by care professions has deeper historical roots in the Christian virtue of 'caritas' (love). This was one of the theological virtues which required extending the love of God to one's neighbour. In modern care work, the ethics of care similarly requires that the care-giver acts with selflessness, caring for the individual's specific needs irrespective of other circumstances (Waerness, 1984). The unpredictable and interactive character of care-giving is emphasized which contradicts disciplinary standardization, predictability and surveillance. Indeed, the 'inter-active relationships of care' (Brown & Korczynski, 2010, p. 422) designates that the content of care is defined in the interaction between care-giver and care receiver, and hence the practice of care-giving must embrace all the contingencies of human life. Foregrounding the expressed needs of the care recipient as the premise for care, the ethics of care broadly resonates with Foucault's (1982) notion of pastoral power, which entailed a continual and individualized care. In modern welfare states, this 'individualizing' power constitutes the counterpart of the 'totalizing' categories of population statistics, administration and jurisprudence (Foucault, 1982).

Against this background, it is possible to begin reconceptualizing the difficulties that care workers face in straddling stricter service standardization and their professional ethics. Their professional codex does not solely imply a compassionate and entirely individualized approach to human needs. More precisely, it is a matter of preserving a space for professional discretion in response to each client, which sometimes requires an empathetic approach and, at other times, the use of standard procedures and techniques. For care workers, the crux of the matter is to be able to make autonomous decisions with regard to balancing empathic approaches with impersonal procedures. Preserving such professional discretion, while adhering to stricter service standardization can be understood as an organizational context of 'over-determination'.

### *'Service packages'*

At interviews and meetings in the home-care unit, one issue consistently received key attention: 'The service packages'. This was the name for a new instrument used to determine the types of home care assigned to each client and to schedule visits by minutes assigned to tasks. This managerial tool carries a disciplinary strategy of 'normalizing' care workers and

making their visits predictable. A package defined the frequency and time assigned to tasks like assistance with personal hygiene (25 minutes), help with cleaning tasks (30 minutes), preparing ready-made food (12 minutes) and registration of the tasks (5 minutes) (time indications are approximations). Arguably, the service packages are premised on a positivism that views humans and their needs as objectively knowable and measurable. This positivism contradicts the ethics of care which insists that human beings are the irreducible locus of interpretation and vulnerability which cannot be objectified.

Apart from detailed time allocation at home-care visits, the packages entailed greater surveillance and control over care workers as well as their managers. Insofar as the package technology required detailed reporting on tasks performed at each visit, subsequently accessible to managers, it also served as an information technology that could inform *and* monitor each employee in the unit. It increased surveillance over lower-level employees, just as the local managers were monitored better because of the new data provided. The service packages can be understood, then, in terms of how information capacity can facilitate more integral and pervasive means of control in organizations (Knights & Murray, 1994). The fact that both care workers and managers became objects of increased surveillance and monitoring mirrors a panopticon-like control, 'making individuals within an organization both calculable and calculating with respect to their own actions' (Willcocks, 2004, p. 280). Discipline complements regulation by law, since it deepens 'the intensity of the managerial gaze' (Willcocks, 2004, p. 279), inciting individuals' self-control to turn them into predictable and self-disciplined subjects.

The packages' requirements for detailed ordering of time and actions resonate with disciplinarity. They brought a microscopic attention to working practices, requesting of the employees that they scrutinized, calculated and optimized their bodily actions, since discipline 'tells you what you must do at every moment' (Foucault, 1977, p. 45). Indeed, discipline can be characterized as an investment that creates functional bodies, since it is applied to the body's actions, its movements and its discourses (Foucault, 2006, p. 55). Within the disciplinary dispositive, 'care' emerged as an object that was intricately connected to the care workers' as well as their clients' disciplinary practice. The packages required a disciplining of the clients, since they needed to comply with a tighter regimentation of their daily routines and self-conduct during visits. Indeed, the goal of discipline was not to restore the subjects' fundamental rights and duties, but to create 'the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders' (Foucault, 1977, p. 128). Care became connected to a series of objectified needs, specified in time and sequentially. Finally, care was pervaded by the strategy of normalization which involved the continuous detection and correction of divergences from the standard.

The packages were supposed to enhance effectivity and predictability of home care, and yet the majority of the care workers felt that flexibility and time for 'proper care-giving' was being constrained. This response mirrors a general finding in care research, namely that care workers view the capacity for discretionary decision-making as crucial for their professional identity (Brown & Korczynski, 2010). Notably, a working environment representative stated that care workers sometimes felt forced to take minutes from one client in order to care for another whom they perceived to be in greater need:

The care worker is stuck between a rock and a hard place. Should you stay within the limits of the package or should you be loyal toward your professional values?

Similarly, a care worker complained:

I feel limited by all the rules. For example, I am not even allowed to help the citizen go to the bakery [to buy bread] instead of cleaning.

The key objection against the packages was that the situated reality of care-giving got reduced to 'hard', numerical values, fundamentally contradicting the ethics of care. A care worker made this discomforting statement:

There isn't any time for the weakest clients. There is no time for care. We dare not ask how the citizen is doing, because we do not have time to deal with it if the citizen starts to cry.

Clearly, preserving a space for autonomous judgement and individualized care in the face of paper constraints was a key concern at the home-care unit. However, care workers reacted very differently to this challenge, spanning from explicit resistance to rigid adherence to the package regulations. We analyse these reactions as different ways of reconstituting the object of care and the practitioner subject who can provide it.

### *Working 'by the book'*

During the study, numerous care workers stated that they worked strictly 'by the book', which entailed following rigidly the stipulations of the packages. This 'line of subjectivation' was expressed in statements like 'I simply work by the book', or 'I abide strictly by the rules and regs'. These employees withdrew from the situated and relational complexity, reconstituting their practitioner subjectivity to simply mirror the packages' requirements. This restricted practitioner resonates with Dahl's ideal type, 'the manual worker', who performs all care tasks as instructed while staying silent on emotional or problematic aspects of work (Dahl, 2009, p. 642). Employees' unbending adherence to rules could readily be viewed as a response that could shield them against contradictory demands on their practices of care ethics and disciplinary standardization. First, working strictly by impersonal regulations, like a bureaucrat, relieves care workers from having to make difficult ethical choices (Du Gay, 2000). Second, for all its emphasis on external, measurable objects, the disciplinarity of the packages is not indifferent to the conscience of the care workers. Instead, it required of care workers that they looked for optimization potentials in their daily practices, hence submitting their own actions to a continuous corrective self-observation. Other studies show that contemporary care workers are not merely required to adhere to specific norms; they are also expected to take responsibility for solving problems, scrutinizing and innovating their own practices (Fejes & Nicoll, 2011). Indeed, for Foucault, discipline targets not only the body, since it also involves the internalization of the normalizing gaze, a regulation of individual conscience.

The employees who worked 'by the book' embraced the disciplinary packages, but they resisted one element: the imperative to become self-examining in terms of optimization. They would do exactly what the service package stipulated, but they refused to invest their whole subjectivity in their working practices. Constituting themselves as 'manual workers', they



could fend off disciplinary demands for work optimization and the ideal of care ethics for personalized communication with the individual client. This group of employees rearticulated discipline (we abide by the protocol) and quasi-legal principles (we are not allowed to). They took over the objectification of care-giving, but they resisted the disciplinary subjectivity imposed on them. Doing so, they practised counter-conduct, in Foucault's sense, encapsulated in the dictum: 'We don't want to be governed exactly like that.'

Care workers' self-constitution as 'manual workers' illustrates how power can be simultaneously constraining and productive. This legal-disciplinary articulation of their practitioner subjectivity severely constrained how these care workers could practise professional discretion when providing home care. At a meeting, a care worker stated that she was not permitted to boil an egg for a person in her care. A frontline manager asked the care worker why she thought such an action was prohibited. She responded that she assumed so because care workers no longer cooked for their clients who now received meals from a catering company. The care worker reasoned that since cooking was not included in the packages, she was not allowed to use cookware. The manager exclaimed: 'You are certainly allowed to boil an egg!' The discussion displays how a mundane act had become indeterminate because of the coexistence of different dispositives that each establish specific visibilities. In the binary distinction of law, the act emerges as either legal or illegal, and entails potential sanctions. From the perspective of discipline, cooking is an act that can be rendered in time and functionality, linked to the normalizing regimentation of the care worker's actions. In the optics of care ethics, this act responds to the client's expressed, situational needs, hence positioning the care worker as compassionate. The discussion oscillated between these divergent constructions of relations between the action, the subject and the regimes of veridiction, without reaching any conclusion.

A significant effect of excessive compliance with rules was that these care workers diminished their own professional discretion and performed a kind of 'over-caring' for clients, which placed clients in an unnecessarily passive role. Such compliance could mean that care workers assisted the elderly with tasks they could have managed by themselves, thereby accelerating a process of 'hospitalization'. A union representative observed that this effect of working by the book was detrimental to the fundamental objectives of care work:

I was assisting a citizen who had just had a bath. Automatically, I helped him put on his shirt. He dryly commented that he could do that himself.

These unexpected and unintended results at the front line of care work shows that dispositives always carry an excess of potentialities, including self-contradicting effects. Even when individuals pursue a particular strategy in their practices, e.g. service standardization, the ensuing results are never univocal. They entail risks and instabilities which might radiate back into, or ultimately undermine, the strategy. Notably, the strategy of disciplinary optimization in effect created inefficient practices.

### *'Civil disobedience'*

Strict rule adherence stands in contrast to an alternative reaction which some care workers described as 'civil disobedience'. The aim of this working practice, care workers explained,

was to preserve ‘professionalism’ understood as discretionary decisions and time-prioritizing in response to clients’ specific needs. Instead of following the stipulations of the packages, the ‘civil disobedient’ employees insisted on the expertise they had acquired through their training, using personal judgement and empathy. It became clear that being disobedient involved creativity, including working in ways that bordered on rule-breaking or violated rules. Such defences of ‘occupational autonomy’ are not unique to our case (Hjalmarsson, 2009). The employees who practised ‘civil disobedience’ said it was a necessary means to defend their professionalism against standardizing infringements, and hence it was an absolutely legitimate resistance. At a workshop, a care worker said: ‘The rigid requirements make professional creativity necessary in order to make the daily working practices manageable.’ Employees’ disobedience spanned from minor innovations in work practices, which sprang from negotiating the statutory regulations, to explicit refusal to surrender their professional autonomy in care-giving. At first glance, this civil disobedience can be understood as the antidote to the packages, since it contested the intertwinement of law and disciplinary procedures.

The law must be considered further, however. When asked how they felt about disregarding the rules, some care workers explained that they did not see their conduct as illegal. They reasoned that since the packages undermined citizens’ entitlements to receive proper care, it was justifiable to violate them. In fact, some reasoned that their disobedient working conduct defended fundamental clauses in the Danish social services law. Notably, in the Danish context, the term ‘civil disobedience’ connotes courageous acts of sabotage that civilians carried out during the Second World War against the occupying German forces. Clearly, the employees that invoked the law referred to another image of the law than those colleagues who worked ‘by the book’. Helpful in this context is the distinction between rules (law) and norms (discipline). The key difference is that the law is external to the object of government, whereas norms are supposedly internal to the object:

A rule is external to that which is governed: it is imposed upon its subjects in relation to an extrinsic standard of authority, morality, virtue, order, duty or obedience. A norm, on the other hand, appears – or claims – to emerge out of the very nature of that which is governed. (Rose & Valverde, 1998, p. 544)

Hence, the normativity of norms is justified by their normality, that is, observations of normal occurrences supporting distinctions of normal and deviant. When care-giving is defined by standardized ‘packages’, the establishment of disciplinary norms is similarly tied to normality: the normal client, normal needs, normal standards of hygiene, normal duration of a shower, and so on.

At first glance, law and norm stand in a mutually supportive relationship, since the law often serves to support and authorize the power of norms. Indeed, discipline is not isolated from law but deeply dependent on it. Foucault notes that discipline constitutes an ‘infra-law’, a ‘counter-law’, and that it extends ‘the general forms defined by law to the infinitesimal level of individual lives’ (1977, pp. 222–223). In our case, although law and disciplinarity stands in a supportive relationship, we note that care workers contested the norms of packages with reference to the law. They articulated an image of ‘a higher law’, the law as universal principles, while rejecting the legal-disciplinary compact that normalizes care-

giving. These care workers wanted to reverse the infusion of disciplinary norms into their practices, as if they wanted to reinstitute the division between universal law and disciplinary normalization: ‘whereas the juridical system defines juridical sub-jects according to universal norms, the disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 223). In dispositional analytics, the legal dispositive carries an excess of potentiality. The law’s abstract universality can be articulated as defining the equal entitlements of all citizens to standardized services, yet, conversely, the law can be invoked as guaranteeing each citizen’s individualized care. In the latter articulation, advanced by the ‘civil disobedient’ employees, the law’s *universality* entails caring for the *particular* individual.

These observations can be compared with Randall and Munro’s (2010) study of mental health care, where voluntary health practitioners contested the normalizing effects of conventional medicine. Studying a community of voluntary practitioners who treat victims of sexual abuse, Randall and Munro found that practitioners developed pragmatic and exploratory approaches to caring. Clients could establish an active relationship to themselves, a ‘care of the self’, which substituted ‘the normalized self’ of conventional medicine (Randall & Munro, 2010, p. 1487). By comparison, our study also found professionals who resisted ‘normalization’ of care-giving, but not by constituting a care ‘for themselves’ in opposition to conventional healthcare expertise. Instead, they pursued counter-conduct premised on deep-rooted professional ethics. Care workers also divergently invoked the law as a premise for their disobedient self-constitution. We thus find a counter-conduct that is performed immanently in relation to power structures. It escapes the dichotomy of ‘compliance with’ versus ‘resistance to’, insofar as these professionals practised an ‘immanent critique’ of the welfare state and its legal-disciplinary underpinnings.

### *Shopfloor innovation*

Local managers in the home-care unit expressed their awareness of the civil disobedience doctrine practised by some care workers. Several managers said that they tolerated these practices of minor disobedience, and some even condoned them. They found these reactions to standardization in some sense beneficial, since they ‘tested’ the meaningfulness of the new regulations. A manager said: ‘We need to challenge the rules. How else are we to figure out whether we need to change them?’ The managers reasoned that care workers on the front line had privileged knowledge about the clients’ needs and how to care for these, even if they challenged the regulations. Hence, a manager expressed her sympathy toward civil disobedience as a defence of professionalism in care work. She took a certain pride in employees who solved problems independently, even if they breached some regulations:

I feel good about my employees being a little disobedient. For example, if they use their work vehicle to go buy a litre of milk [for the client]. They should be allowed to think for themselves and to use their professional competences. However, I like to know, so that I can back them up if someone calls me up saying that they have seen an employee out buying groceries while wearing uniform. If I can give reasons for why we do what we do, then nobody can attack us.

Apparently, the employees could practise ‘disobedient’ creativity, as long as they did not explicitly violate regulations or damage the public image of care workers. These managers evidently sought to strike a balance between ensuring that working practices complied with the regulations and granting employees discretionary power. The question that the managers faced was whether they should apply the rules, minimizing deviations and disobedience, or tolerate deviations arising from the unpredictable and interactive nature of care-giving.

More broadly, this contradiction is paralleled in NPM-inspired management, insofar as NPM combines two competing managerial logics – ‘the logic of details’ and ‘the logic of self-governance’ (Dahl, 2009, pp. 641–642). As mentioned, Dahl (2009) defines the logic of details as rooted in neoliberal economics, involving detailed time control and monitoring of codified work tasks. By contrast, the logic of self-governance is informed by human resource management, emphasizing flexible leadership and delegation of responsibility. In our context, managers sought to negotiate this contradiction by tolerating employee’s ‘misbehaviour’, as long as it remained within certain limits. Departing from the demands of law and discipline, they sought to define the boundaries of acceptable work conduct by practising a variant of ‘trust-based’ leadership. Some managers initiated discussions of whether it was possible to institute some collective norms for ‘legitimate violations’ of the protocols. They reasoned that if imposing the legal-disciplinary compact was hardly feasible or beneficial, they could try to institute, together with the employees, a notion of ‘acceptable limits of disobedience’.

This management strategy aimed at generating reflexivity around norms that had emerged among the employees, instead of top-down control, resembles Foucault’s rendering of power as ‘action upon the actions of others’ (1982, p. 790). In the perspective of dispositional analysis, the managers’ lenient handling of ‘disobedience’ pushes law and discipline in the background, while governance, understood as conduct of conduct, is pushed to the foreground. This conclusion resonates with Foucault’s assumption that different modes of power can saturate the social space more or less intensely (Nealon, 2008), but how do new dispositions emerge from the difficult readjustments? Foucault’s work at times offers a ‘genealogical account of emergent, “new” modes of power’, including how new modalities of power emerge out of prior modes of power (Nealon, 2008, p. 25). If Foucault’s overall approach can be reinterpreted as the historical analysis of the emergence and mutation of dispositives, then new configurations may emerge from the interplay and mutual adjustment of dispositives.

On a rare occasion, Foucault (2000) demonstrated such interplay with regard to the emergence of legal psychiatry in the nineteenth century. Foucault suggested that legal psychiatry arose from the increasing discordance between biopolitics concerned with eliminating risks to the population and the criminal law which linked crimes to specific sanctions. The predicament was how to identify individuals who endangered the population not simply due to their actions, but due to their unfortunate dispositions and pathologies. While such dispositions were already measurable by medical techniques, the problem was how to insert ‘dangerous individuals’ into the juridical framework. This urgency gave birth to legal psychiatry, ‘a knowledge system able to measure the index of danger present in an individual’ (Foucault, 2000, p. 194). Perhaps, one could say that a new dispositive emerged at the intersection between law and biopolitics, constituting new visibilities, rules of enunciation and so on in the passing of legal sentences.

Contemporary care-giving is similarly marked by a dual visualization of the individual: the client is viewed as carrying legally defined entitlements and needs and, at the same time, the client is envisioned as an irreducible subjectivity to be interpreted. This duality echoes the tension between the totalizing and individualizing powers that turn the welfare state into a ‘tricky combination’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 782). The civil disobedience doctrine allowed care workers to maintain the client as particular and irreducible to standardization, while defending the universality of the law. Perhaps a new managerial strategy was emerging from the difficult readjustments of dispositives in care-giving. It was spurred by the defence of care ethics in the face of standardization and managers’ attempt to ‘governmentalize’ practices of disobedience and shop-floor innovation.

## Discussion

Here, we have developed dispositional analysis in order to study, first, how organizational space can be disposed by heterogeneous strategies, and, second, how acts of self-formation work within and through the power-knowledge dispositions already in place. The above study explored how care workers’ practices were disposed in all their contradictions (lines of light, enunciations and subjectivation), and how they tactically related to these ‘lines’ in constituting their practitioner subjectivities. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of dispositional analysis is its attention to visualization, that is, how organizational objects, subjects and relationships are visualized in incongruent and transient ways.

In terms of visibility, the law illuminates care-giver and care recipient ‘on the surface’ as bearers of a set of legal obligations and entitlements. Discipline similarly creates a series of ‘external’ objects (minute allocations, defined tasks, satisfaction levels), but it also probes ‘deeper’, casting light on individual dispositions (Townley, 1993). By contrast, the ethics of care visualizes the client as a boundless source of needs that only become visible in personal interaction.

The service packages made a longstanding problem in care work more urgent: how to render the subject in objective categories, or how to produce ‘a subject in objective knowledge’ (Philp, 1979, p. 91). However, our care workers were also confronted with the reverse problem: how to render the objective knowledge about care work subjective, or how to foster a self-disciplining practitioner subjectivity. Notably, some care workers tactically negotiated the disciplinary investments by constituting themselves as juridico-disciplinary subjects, who worked ‘strictly by the book’. This over-identification demonstrated that dispositives hold multiple potentials, including self-undermining properties as evident in the production of unintended effects like ‘over-caring’.

Dispositional analytics offers a critical analysis of how organizational subjects are dispositioned under particular normativities. However, the definition of power as *dispositions immanent to subjects’ relationship to dispositives* excludes notions of a human subject with a free will or an essential nature. Organizational subjects cannot be constituted outside of the field of multi-layered normativity, but they take shape in relation to it in ways that define their freedom. These premises set certain limitations on the kind of critique that dispositional analysis can deliver. The analysis can describe the prescriptive level of organizational practices, and the ways that subjects ‘enfold’ these prescriptions in their self-conduct. However, dispositional analysis does not offer an explicit normative critique.

In our case, we found care workers struggling to extricate their capacities from increasingly rigid disciplinary administration of their work practices by forging new kinds of shared subjectivities. Could we, from a Foucauldian position, affirm the critical potential of this struggle? The viewpoint that the irreducible ethical relationship between care worker and client is blinded by standardization finds a certain resonance in Foucault's own statements. On several occasions, Foucault expressed critique of those kinds of institutionalized power (cf. 'the packages') that narrow the possible social relations we might have. Overall, Foucault wanted to contest any excessive normalization of relations: 'We have to fight the impoverishment of the social fabric', so that we can 'create a new relational right that permits all possible types of relations to exist and not be prevented, blocked, or annulled by impoverished relational institutions' (1998, p. 158). However, such statements hardly amount to a solid position for social critique. Dispositional analytics involves an analytical critique which is performed by reconstructing, from the specific context, the paradoxes and contradictions in dispositional arrangements, as well as the concerns voiced by the subjects involved.

## **Conclusion**

By reappraising Foucault's notion of dispositive we have sought to develop a distinct analytical strategy for organizational analysis. This pursuit undertook the challenge of deriving the general methodological tools from what were, in Foucault's rendering, historical descriptions belonging to entirely different domains. In our reconstruction of dispositional analytics, we gave particular emphasis to the visibility of dispositives, through which subjects and object are produced in a particular prescriptive light. Furthermore, we privileged relations over substance, foregrounding the interrelations between dispositives as well as the dispositive's 'internal relationality', that is, the relations established by each dispositive out of which organizational problems arise and transform.

Our development of 'dispositional analytics' integrated 'the power phase' and 'the ethical phase' in Foucault's authorship, two phases that organization studies have mostly kept separate. This integration seeks to overcome certain long-standing problems attributed to Foucault-inspired organization studies. It effectively eschews the oft-voiced problem of Foucauldian determinism and neglect of agency, without evacuating the constitutive powers inherent in organizing. Hence, the dispositional view of power offers a different pathway than 'the fourth wave' of organizational Foucauldians who shifted attention to the level of individuals' self-conduct, pushing into the background the overall organizational structures. Dispositional analytics focuses attention on how organizational space is always prescriptively structured and, yet, enacted and transformed in multiple ways.

Our study of 'packaged' care-giving explored the potentials of dispositional analytics. We examined the dispositional arrangements that conditioned the actions of care workers, while their reflective indocility contributed to modifying the localized organization of power-knowledge. Perhaps a new managerial dispositive will emerge from care workers' disobedient tactics for defending a space of individualized care combined with their managers' efforts to governmentalize these tactics. The new dispositive would arise as much from the dispositives' virtual potentials as from the ways that professionals constitute themselves when rearticulating law, norms and the ethics of care.

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## Note

1. I owe the example of workplace absenteeism to Richard Weiskopf.

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Kaspar Villadsen is Professor at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. His research revolves around Michel Foucault's authorship, technology, organizations and the relationship between state and civil society. He has published the book *State Phobia and Civil Society: The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault* (with Mitchell Dean, Stanford University Press, 2016). Villadsen's work has appeared in journals like *Economy and Society*, *Human Relations*, *Theory, Culture & Society*, *American Sociologist* and *Organization*.

