

## Introduction

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## Introduction

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**A**lso in this issue, we present articles that represent working life research widely. Working life and the Nordic labor market model is examined in three articles: Two articles present studies about current challenges for the Nordic model illustrated by case studies of low-paid service work, largely done by migrant workers. A third article contributes to the understanding of the Nordic model through a study of employers' involvement in active labor market policy. Two studies are dealing with employee involvement in the renewal and transformation of the public sector, respectively, on family-related social service and in hospitals. We present a study of how conflicts at the workplace affect the working environment with a large nongovernmental organization (NGO) as case. Finally, a study of how working conditions affects intention to retire is presented, with a university as case.

*Bergene* and *Hansen* analyze the current development of the Norwegian model of industrial relations in a historical perspective. Bergener and Hasen note that the consensus-oriented Norwegian model, which mostly is date back to 1935 when the first basic agreement between the trade union and employer's confederation was concluded, was based on large open conflicts between employers and employees in the years before. The Norwegian consensual model has since been strongly institutionalized, both at the macro and micro level. Today, these institutions are confronted with new working conditions and competitive conditions. These new conditions are illustrated through two case studies: postal service and cleaning work in the hotel industry. Bergene and Hansen argue against this background that the consensual institutional dynamics established in the Norwegian model under the new conditions contribute to the undermining of the model. There is a hollowing-out of the Norwegian model going on.

*Ollus* has conducted a study of migrant workers in the cleaning industry in Finland. She wants to explore how migrant workers experience their working conditions, and what kind of labor market practices that make migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation. There are interviews with migrant workers in the cleaning industry, with employers and trade union representatives. Ollus find that the exploitation of migrant workers widely is related to flexibility: they are subjected to enforced flexibility, which is connected to their employment contracts. Many have a zero-hour contract, where working hours and location may vary without limits. Finally, Ollus finds that migrant workers have difficulty getting out of the exploitation they suffer because they are dependent on their current work. Ollus therefore notes that it is necessary to focus on the structural conditions at the labor market and develop the collective agreement, if exploitation of migrant workers should be reduced.

Active labor market policy is a key component of the Nordic labor markets. Studies of active labor market policy have until now mostly studied the supply side: the rights and obligations for the employees who are in the target groups of the active labor market policy. What is new in *Bredgaard* and *Halkjær* analyze is that they have studied the

active labor market policy from a demand perspective: what characterizes the companies that engage them self in active labor market policy, here confined to wage subsidy jobs for the unemployed. The study is based on a survey among Danish companies. Bredgaard and Halkjær find that companies far from alone are guided by narrow economic interests in their commitment to active labor market policy. They find that companies that are covered by collective agreements are more engaged in the active labor market policy than others. The same applies to companies with Danish ownership. Likewise, they find that firms with many unskilled workers are more engaged, and that companies that have experienced an economic decline are more involved.

It is increasingly expected that professions and institutions within the public service are working together. That creates a large number of challenges—both positive and negative. *Kanste, Halme, and Perälä* studied how work in services for children and families in Finish municipalities is affected by collaboration management, with focuses on cooperation between professions and institutions. The article is based on a survey among employees within children and family services. The authors find that there is a positive correlation between a well-functioning collaboration management across institutions and professions and employees assessment of work and skills. However, the study also identifies a number of barriers for collaboration management, which it is important to be aware of.

Lean production (LP) is widely used in hospitals as a concept for organizational development. LP is introduced, however, with different reasons, implemented differently and with different results from hospital to hospital. Eriksson et al. have studied the implementation of LP in three Swedish hospitals to identify factors that can help to create sustainable solutions with a high involvement of the employees. The study is based on a large empirical material consisting of interviews and survey data. The study suggests that it is important to involve many different agents from different levels of the organization. Management must be committed at all levels. It is pointed out that involvement of the employees is difficult if the objective of the introduction of LP is only improvements in the budget. The focus on implementation should be maintained even after the first successes are achieved.

*Enehaug, Helmersen, and Mamelund* have studied conflicts in organizations and how they affect the working environment. The study was conducted in a Norwegian NGO with 294 employees. The researchers were invited to explore conflicts in the organization as part of an effort to reduce the level of conflict. The study was conducted as a mixed-method projects with a large number of individual interviews and focus group interviews and a survey involving all employees in the organization. The qualitative part of the study exposes the dynamics of a high level of conflict, where managers and employees are involved in the conflict, most often against their will. About one-fifth of respondents were directly involved in the conflict and about one-third was indirectly involved. Especially for those directly involved, the conflicts had serious health consequences. For those indirectly involved and for the organization as a whole, the conflict had a clear negative impact on the psychosocial work environment.

*Kadefors et al* contribute with their article to the research of attitudes to the timing of retirement. They study how these attitudes are influenced by work conditions, gender, family relationships, and health. Kadefors et al. have studied the attitude to continue working after the normal retirement age among university professors and other categories of staff at universities. They find that various work conditions are important: those

who have an active job (see Karasek Demand Control model) have a desire to continue long. Those who have a high degree of workability (see Ilmarinen) have a desire to continue long. And finally, if the workplace has an age management model (Mykletun) that supports the retention of older employees, employees also have a greater desire to continue longer. Finally, it was noted that more men want to continue their work after normal retirement age than women.

Helge Hvid