

Introduction

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Introduction

In this issue, there are three concepts that stand out as particularly important: Equality, Trust, and Agency. Three articles have equality as normative guideline. In the first article, it is analyzed how inequality is reproduced in recruitment practices, even when laws and formal rules are respected. A second article examines class and gender inequality, related to berth, maternity leave, work orientation, and the return to the labor market. A third article examines the evolution of government policy for gender equality. The concept of trust is analyzed theoretically in one article. Agency is highlighted in two articles. The analyses of the first article is at the micro level. Here, it is investigated how agency in daily work is challenged when municipalities are exposed to major reforms. Analyses in the second article are on the macro level. Here, it is investigated how European trade unions can influence EU policy.

Koivunen, Ylöstalo, and Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta have studied recruitment practices in Finland, focusing on informal practices leading to inequality. The study was conducted in a large organization called “the Department Store.” Fifty-two persons were interviewed. The recruitment process is in most cases carried out within the framework of the law. Nevertheless, the authors document a number of values and processes that create inequality in recruitment. These are often based on tacit assumptions. However, explicit focus on the positive business potentials in diversity can also lead to inequality in recruitment practices. Only an explicit focus on equality as a goal in itself leads to equality in the recruitment practice.

Sihto examines the ways in which mothers shape the return-to-work after maternity leave. Sihto has a special interest in the differences in work orientation among working-class and middle-class mothers. She has conducted two focus group interviews in the city of Jyväskylä in the middle of Finland. She finds that the work orientation among working-class and middle-class mothers is not as different in her study as in similar British studies. The reason could be that class differences in Finland are less prominent than in Britain. It could also be that the higher female labor market participation in Finland affects work orientation among mothers. Sihto finds that middle-class mothers work orientation is strongly influenced by the precarisation of the local labor market.

The labor market has through most of the 20th century been considered as the key institution to establish gender equality. Kvist and Overud make an analysis of 40 years of Swedish policy to create gender equality through the labor market. In the 1950s and 1960s, the focus was on getting women into the labor market. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was about getting women into the male jobs. In the 1990s and 2000s, the political concern was about getting women to become self-employed. A shift in policy has happened from the previous strong belief in the state and policy as the agent for implementing gender equality to great confidence in the market and market solutions. There has been a shift from focusing on wage work to women’s entrepreneurship. The present understanding of the problem of gender equality has once again been located in the home: in men’s and women’s unequal sharing of domestic work.

Trust has in the last decade been an important concept in management studies and in working life studies. Trust is however quite a difficult concept. Eikeland has contributed



to our understanding of trust in her theoretical article on the subject. Eikeland examines the concept of trust through her reading a numerous classic sociological and philosophical texts, and she also refers to work-related understandings of trust. For her, the concept of “emergent trust” turns out to be a promising concept: Trust is here not understood as an individual, cognitively oriented phenomenon, but trust is a relational phenomenon, which is strongly related to the character and content of work.

Heiskanen and Jokinen have studied resources and constraints of line manager agency in municipal reforms. Like in many other countries, Finland did went through a major reform of the municipalities. Heiskanen and Jokinen have conducted a comprehensive study of how working conditions in the municipalities are affected by the reform, with a particular emphasis on changes in the line managers working conditions. An extensive survey was conducted in 2009 and 2011. The analysis focuses on resources and constrains of agency among line managers, the importance of intrinsic rewards, and the social climate.

Larsson examines in his article European trade unions channels for influencing European Union policy. National trade unions can influence European policy through the European trade union system. Unions can influence European policy indirectly by influencing national politicians. And, unions can influence European policy through the European Parliament. Larsson finds that unions are using these channels quite differently, depending on the industrial relation regime the union is part of. Larsson identified differences in the trade union strategies to influence European policy among five different trade union regimes in Europe: the Nordic regime, the liberal regime (Britain and Ireland), the continental regime, the South European regime, and the Central/Eastern European regime.

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