

Introduction

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Introduction

In this issue we present six articles, which are quite different in both scope and methodology. Changes in the quality of working life are however a common interest in all articles. Two articles deal with the tension between passion and exploitation in current working life—one is a theoretical article, the other is primarily empirical. Two articles deal with the effects of flexibility on the quality of working life: one examined the effects of the ‘flexicurity model’ on the quality of working life; the other examined how the flexibility of work in elder care affects the quality of working life. Another article examines the importance of personal relationship to the nearest leader for well-being. In the last article the position of women at the labor market is analyzed in the perspective of the last 50 years.

Karlsson writes about an issue that is well known in modern working life, namely the complicated relationship between passion and exploitation. Being passionate about his/her work can be a major contribution to quality of life. The current work gives many the opportunities to be passionate. However, passionate relation to work can also turn into burnout and stress. Passion is not always found in individuals voluntarily. In some cases, passion is expected, or passion can even be a demand from management. Karlsson examines the complicated relationship among work, passion, and exploitation theoretically. He draws on a wide span of theorists, from the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier, theorists in the ‘labor process tradition,’ modern management gurus such as Hammer and Champy, just to mention a few. The article is based on a sample of theories that for most authors would be unmanageable. Karlsson, however, succeeds in making a consistent and precise analytical presentation that can provide inspiration for analyzing current working life.

Passion is also an important concept in Eriksson and Bergqvist’s empirical study of attitudes to work among young people (18–34 years old) in six countries: France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland. Youth unemployment has been high in Europe for several years. This may have affected young people’s attitude to work. If young people have a very positive attitude to work, being out of work may be particularly stressful. Therefore, the authors also examine how attitude to work is distributed among ‘long-term unemployed,’ ‘precarious,’ and ‘regularly employed.’ Attitude to work in the three groups of youth is not the only one studied. ‘Happiness,’ ‘optimism about the future,’ and ‘experience of generally good health’ are also studied. The study is based on a survey of about 7,000 respondents in Europe. The study shows that work is still an important factor in the life of young people despite unemployment. However, there are large variations between countries. Work is still more important for men than for women. The study also shows that there is still quite a big belief in the future among the young, in spite of their difficult labor market situation.

Vulkan, Saloniemi, and Svalund examine how the ‘flexicurity model’ affects employees’ well-being. The basic assumption behind the flexicurity model is that flexible employment is good for the economy and makes job creation possible. However, job insecurity affects well-being negatively. The strain of job insecurity can, however, be countered by establishing a high level of income security (alternative income when you lose your job) and employment security (alternative employment is available if you lose



your job). The authors examine whether income security and employment security can counteract stress associated with job insecurity. Data were collected through a survey conducted in Norway, Sweden, and Finland in 2010/11. The authors found that income security and employment security can compensate for the negative effects of job insecurity. However, income and employment security should be high to compensate for job insecurity—higher than it is for most respondents participating in the study. The flexibility model only works as intended if strong and effective labor market institutions are available and the unemployment rate is low.

In Sweden, great effort has been made to eliminate part-time employment in elderly care. Ede and Rantakeisu examined the changes in work organization that follow when part-time is converted to full-time work. The study was conducted in five municipalities. Elderly care is a sector that traditionally has had many part-time employees. Many of those wanted full-time employment. In recent years, municipalities have followed a strategy in which they offer full-time work for flexibility: working hours and tasks are increasingly flexible, and the employees are expected to work full-time. Ede and Rantakeisu find that increasing flexibility reduces the quality of working life: working hours are unpredictable. The employees are available to work in their spare time. The relationship between employee and clients is weakened because which client the care worker visits is now more flexible. Ede and Rantakeisu conclude that care workers have greater responsibility because the teams are responsible for staffing. At the same time the employees experience heavier workload and less influence.

Furunes, Mykletun, and Einarsen present a study that intends to validate an internationally used instrument, measuring the quality of the relationship between the manager and the individual employee. The instrument is the so-called Leader–Member Exchange Scale, LMX-7. The instrument does not map the quality of leadership as such, but focuses on the specific relationship between the leader and the follower. The authors have not only validated the scale but have also examined how the relationship between manager and the individual employee, as expressed in the LMX scale, affects the psychosocial work environment. The study was conducted among teachers, industrial workers, and bus drivers. The authors find that the LMX scale is valid in a Norwegian context. And in addition they find a relationship between the quality of the leader/follower relationship and the quality of the psychosocial work environment.

Gonäs and Tyrkkö examine the changing structures in the role of women in the labor market from the beginning of the 1960s to the first decade of the new millennium. It is argued that the role of women as labor force can be identified in situations where major restructurings take place. The article is thus based on three studies of major changes in Swedish industry: the first study deals with the restructuring of the shipyards in the 1960s—in the heyday of the Swedish Model. The second study deals with industrial restructuring in the 1980s. The third study deals with the effects of the great crisis that occurred in Sweden in the early 1990s. Gonäs and Tyrkkö conclude that the function of women on the Swedish labor market has changed significantly during this long period. In the 1960s women constituted a reserve army that could be drawn in when there was a labor shortage, and ejected when there was enough of male labor. At the end of the period, women were fully integrated into the labor market, but experienced a high degree of precarification during the 1990s and into the new millennium.

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