

Introduction

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Introduction

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In this issue of Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies, we present seven quite different articles, all authored by researchers from Sweden.

Three of the articles examine some general trends in working life: The first article examines the precariousness of the labor market, and two articles examine how increasing global competition affects the quality of work in the service sector in the Nordic countries.

Four articles focus on mechanisms that create inequality in working life and the labor market: Gender inequality in the working environment is examined in two articles. In one article, it is examined how ethnic inequality is maintained in work organizations. And one article examines how stigmas from certain organizations are transferred to the employees of the organization.

Below, the seven articles will briefly be introduced.

Håkansson and Isidorsson investigate in their article the current precariousness of employment and working conditions. They focus on temporary agency workers in the industry in Sweden. It is questionable whether temporary agency workers in Sweden belong to the precariat because the Swedish temporary agency workers have the same employment contract as other employees. In addition, many temporary agency workers are working in the same company for years. Håkansson and Isidorsson have carried out a survey in a Swedish industrial company, where there is widespread use of temporary agency workers. They find that there is great similarity between temporary workers and company employees. However, there is a big difference between the two groups' assessment of their job security. The explanation of this they find in the possibilities for competence development. Neither the client organization nor the temporary work agency wants to invest in competence development.

Bergman and Gillberg present for us in their article "The Cabin Crew Blues," a profession that has experienced a dramatic deterioration in their working conditions over a few decades, namely the cabin crew at the venerable SAS. The article is based on in-depth interviews of eight elderly cabin attendants, all of whom have a long seniority in the profession. Bergman and Gillberg conclude that it is not the emotional exploitation, as Arli Hochschild suggests, which is most difficult for the cabin crew. They find instead that the competitive pressures the airlines have experienced in recent years have created what they call "flexploitation," with increasing work intensity, increased vulnerability, and age as a problematic factor.

Blomqvist, Peterson, and Dhar-Bhattacharjee have studied offshoring of IT development from Sweden to India. This article examines specifically how offshoring affects working conditions onshore. The article is based on two case studies of Swedish IT development companies. Inspired by Labor Process Theory, it is examined how labor organization is affected by offshoring and how power relations are affected. Blomqvist et al. find that it is largely the more routine, but in some cases also more technically demanding jobs that are moved to India. It provides new, more management-oriented job opportunities in



Sweden, but it brings the technically oriented employees in a weaker position. Further, the offshoring contributes to a neo-Taylorization of the IT-development work. The changes in work organization reduce the Swedish employees' position of power. New power relations are established between the Swedish company and Indian companies. And, consequently, the offshoring is a part of the establishment of new global power relations.

Falkenberg et al. examine the importance of gender in our assessment of the working environment and health. This is an issue that is quite difficult to investigate, because men and women are largely occupied in different jobs. In this article, men and women with exactly the same jobs are studied: physicians who work in the same acute care hospital in Sweden. The work climate is investigated in a survey. The authors find two very significant differences between the sexes in their assessment of their working conditions, both related to the social relations in the workgroup: cohesiveness and co-operation. An explanation could be that the processes of inclusion and exclusion in teams and networks are different among the genders.

Vänje present a literature review on sick leave among female employees in health care in her article. The motivation for this study is that women in the Swedish labor market generally have higher sickness absenteeism than men, and health care is a female-dominated sector with a very high absenteeism. The article presents, on the basis of available literature, an overview of a) the most important changes that have happened in the work of the health care sector, b) what the research says about work, health, and gender in the health care sector, and c) the meaning of gender at work in the health care sector. The article points out numerous factors that affect absenteeism, but emphasize two factors: the emotional demands are large and fairly ignored, and gender discrimination is widespread, which leads to absenteeism.

Boréus and Mörkenstam investigate how inequality between natives and immigrants is created and maintained in working life. Sweden has, compared with other countries, success in creating opportunities for immigrants at the labor market. Boréus and Mörkenstam analyze the relations between native Swedes and immigrants in a company that could be considered as a best case: a Swedish housing company. However, they find that in this company as well inequality is created and maintained between natives and immigrants. In line with Acker's concept of inequality regime, the authors study the institutionalized actions and beliefs that create and maintain inequality in organizations. Boréus and Mörkenstam find a systematic wage gap between natives and immigrants, and career opportunities for the two groups also seem to be unequal. The native employees have much better opportunities for capitalizing their social capital than the immigrants. The immigrants have difficulty in being heard in meetings and informal dialogues in the company.

Jensen and Sandström investigate theoretically and empirically how stigma can be transferred from organization to person. Some organizations carry a clear social stigma—the product of the organization is considered to be socially deviant. Many studies of how such organizations are managed have been conducted. Jensen and Sandström examine however how the organizational stigma is transferred to the employees. Empirically, the authors examine how people with ordinary jobs (as administrative staff, etc.) in the arms industry and the porn industry are caring the stigma of the organization. They find that only individualized approaches to deal with the stigma exist. This contributes to retain employees in this stigma.

Helge Hvid