

## Introduction

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## Volume 3, Issue no. 1

### Introduction

In this issue NJWLS opens a new section with reviews. We review three new books, based on professional research, on 'Organizational Misbehaviour', 'Dirty Work' and 'The work of managers'. In the coming issues we will bring more reviews of English-language books based on Nordic working life research.

This issue includes six articles where we start off by Abrahamsson and Johansson, who give us a short but comprehensive presentation of how psychosocial work environment has been understood in research and policy over 100 years, with Sweden as the focal point. Short, because they write in the format of an article. Comprehensive, because the authors take a broad understanding of the psychosocial work environment comprising both 'Health/illness', where factors as stress and burnout are central, 'Management and development', where employee involvement, learning and innovation are central, and 'problematization', which includes critically oriented research on the nature of work. The article not only provides an overview of the research that has been done in this area in the last 100 years. It also relates research to policy and practice. The article thus provides a valuable perspective on today's research and public debate on the works, with a Nordic perspective.

Oudhuis and Tengblad write about Lean production as a challenge for the Nordic working life tradition. Three industrial companies, all of which have been characterized by the Nordic socio-technical tradition, introduce the Japanese concept of Lean. The three case studies confirm what many other studies have already documented: Lean leads to deteriorating working conditions. In addition, the case studies show that Lean not necessarily leads to higher productivity. These findings lead not Oudhuis and Tengblad to a rejection of Lean. Based on their studies, they argue that if Lean should have a positive impact on working conditions and perhaps also on productivity, it should be introduced with a) a great contextual sensitivity, b) there should be a balance between standardization and self-management, and c) employees must be intensively involved in the process of implementation. The Japanese concept Heijunka, which means 'balanced', 'smoothed' or 'levelled', and which in the Western world rarely is connected to Lean production can perhaps create a bridge between Lean and the Nordic socio-technical tradition.

Mustosmäki, Anttila and Oinas write about another challenge for the Nordic working tradition: new-Taylorisation in the service sector, with a focus on call centers in Finland. They investigate the relationship between job quality and work engagement in call centers, compared to other parts of the service sector. The quality of work is investigated with reference to Karasek's well-known Demand / Control / Support model. Work engagement is studied with reference to Schaufeli. It is confirmed that employees in call centers are experiencing less autonomy at work and more time pressure than in the service sector in general. Social support is, however, at the same level. Work engagement is significantly



lower in call centers than in the service sector in general. The main reason appears to be the quality of the jobs. The study confirms that the small degree of autonomy in work affect work engagement negatively. Also high demands affect work engagement negatively, whereas social support did not seem to have any significant positive effect. Some managers suggest that engagement should be created by developing the social relationships: building teams and 'having fun'. Job development seems however to be necessary to increase engagement.

Frick has studied how the Nordic Work Environment Model function in the municipal sector, where unionization is high, trade unions appoint safety representatives, and dialogue between employee representatives and management on the working environment is well organized. Frick focuses on an ambitious project in a Swedish municipality, which should further improve the social dialogue about the work environment, while reducing absenteeism by 50%. The project's results were somewhat disappointing: The dialogue was improved ('How to do' was improved), but the practical efforts to improve the psychosocial work environment remained unclear ('what to do' remained unclear). It turned out that the local leaders had to find practical solutions on psychosocial problems and workload, without having financial resources to make any difference and without being assigned to specific methods. The conclusion is therefore that the Nordic model is doing well - there are many meetings and dialogue. But the working environment is not doing so well. The social dialogue is not associated with 'systematic work environment management'.

The Nordic countries have a large public sector, which experiences a heavy pressure on productivity. William Baumol examined in 1960 what it meant for the economy, that there are sectors such as art, care work, education, where major productivity improvements are impossible. Baumol concludes that these sectors create a downward pressure on the economy. Vuorensyrjä transfer in his article Baumol's theory to the working life. He examines working conditions in those sectors where productivity is fixed, and he finds that employees here are exposed to a strong wage pressures and intense pressure to increase work intensity. One could expect that these conditions would make these sectors less attractive, and the labor market would be leveling out the working conditions and wages as a result. It seems however, that this is not the case. Vuorensyrjä find that one reason for that may be 'intrinsic motives': employees prefer their low-productivity jobs, because they appreciate being able to help others and have the opportunity for personal development. In other sectors, such as hotels and restaurants, where work hardly can be associated with such 'intrinsic motives', precarious work takes over.

Svalund examines how the Employment Protection Legislation is affecting mobility and labor market segmentation. He does this through a comparative study of Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. The Nordic countries have many similarities in terms of employment, welfare, level of unionization, etc. But in terms of the regulation of employment security, there are very large differences. Therefore, a comparison between the Nordic countries is suitable in order to investigate whether different regulatory combinations influence unemployed individuals' probability of getting employment through permanent or temporary job contracts, and further whether those temporarily employed stay employed through a temporary or permanent contract, or become unemployed, hence creating a dual labor market. Svalund finds that Norway, with a rather strictly regulated labor market, provides the highest probabilities for getting permanent employment. The Norwegian strict model exceeds the Danish flexicurity

model. Sweden and Finland have a rather strict regulation of job security for those in permanent employment and a rather lax regulation for those in temporary employment. It seems that the Swedish and Finnish model tend to support the dualization of the labor market: The mobility from temporary employment to permanent employment is low. Svalund questions hereby the thesis of neoclassical economy saying that laxation of the regulation of employment security will create a high flexibility and mobility. Laxation of employment contracts of temporary workers tend to restrict mobility on the labor market.

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