



# Quality in Modern Nordic Working Life—Investigating Three Related Research Perspectives and Their Possible Cross-Fertilization

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## ABSTRACT

Nordic working life balance is important in the context of a highly developed welfare state, budget collaboration between the State and municipalities, and a unified labor movement. In working life studies, various research perspectives create meaning around and propose solutions for the many quality issues of modern working life. Welfare research, working environment research, and human resource management (HRM) research attack the multiple challenges of working life in different ways and share the overall objective of solving issues in modern working life. Research from the three perspectives, however, tends to compartmentalize life spheres. They conceptualize the modern working person as an individual, employee, or citizen, neglecting the complexity of lived life where all three spheres blur together, which possibly reflects the difficulty of making modern work life function well. This article is based on a structured literature review of the three main research perspectives (welfare, working environment, and HRM). We review existing international research, observing where the three perspectives show overlaps and identify 24 studies which cross-fertilize in the sense that two or more of the perspectives are applied at the same time in the same study. Our results show that while the perspectives share a common interest in solving the problems of the overlapping working life (OWL), they do so with different methods and criteria for success, and offer different solutions. We propose the concept “OWL” to analyze how working life studies create meaning around quality issues of modern working life. OWL’s main focus is the multiple challenges faced by working people who are simultaneously individuals, citizens, and employees. We arrive at two main cross-disciplinary themes: boundary and quality. The boundary theme reflects an approach to solving the issues of modern working life through improvements of the working life balance. The quality theme reflects an approach to solving issues in modern working life by addressing quality of work, preventing stress, burnout, etc. The review only finds three studies which try to encompass all three life spheres (employee, citizen, and employee), and even when the research perspectives are cross-fertilized, knowledge of possible effects of cross-fertilization is

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sparse. We propose further research in initiatives aiming at improving the complementing and supplementing of the three perspectives especially with regard to facilitation of families with small children, an intensified focus on inclusive workplaces, and a higher degree of correlation between HRM, working environment, and welfare policies.

#### KEY WORDS

Boundaryless work / cross-disciplinarity / discursive analytical strategies / human resource management / modern working life quality / Nordic model / stress / welfare / working environment / work–life balance

## Introduction

A large body of research shows that workers suffer psychologically if they experience a loss of meaning or feel inadequate to the demands of modern working life (e.g., Buch et al. 2009, Lund et al. 2005, 2007, Wainwright & Calnan 2002, The Welfare Commission 2006). To understand the reasons for such stress-related health conditions, much research in the social science fields of human resource management (HRM), working environment, and welfare has focused on different quality issues of the *boundaryless working life* (Aronsson & Blom 2010, The Family and Work Commission 2007, Kristensen 2007, Lund & Hvid 2007). This boundaryless condition comprises the three life sphere perspectives of being: an *individual* with various competencies engaging in a trade relation with an organization, an *employee* engaging in the psychological working environment of a workplace, and a *citizen* engaging in societal working life policies, all at the same time. These three life sphere perspectives roughly correspond to one of three main social research fields: *the individual perspective* with HRM research, *the employee perspective* with working environment research, and *the citizen perspective* with welfare research. Combinations of the research perspectives reflect what we call the “overlapping working life” (OWL), meaning that two or three of the research perspectives are in play at the same time with regard to the same quality issue of modern working life.

In the Nordic countries, a combined view of the OWL is especially relevant, because these countries have a highly developed welfare state, budget collaboration between the State and municipalities, and a unified labor movement. Since in the Nordic countries the government has a particularly important role in maintaining the welfare state and thereby also paying for sick leave, the research perspectives tend to overlap more than they do in other countries, i.e., if work pressure in companies makes employees ill, these employees almost inevitably turn up as patients in the public health system, as opposed to, e.g., Germany and the United States where social security benefits for the most part are handled by private insurance companies (e.g., Dølvik 2012, Esping-Andersen 1990, Kvist et al. 2012, Sørensen et al. 2012). Addressing the interactions of the three research perspectives therefore becomes even more important when dealing with quality in modern working life in the Nordic countries.

This article starts from the premise that if the quality-improving initiatives delivered by research relevant to the three welfare, working environment, and HRM research perspectives were sufficient for the tasks for which they were created, then the result would have been a reduction—not the current increase—in work-related stress conditions (e.g., Albertsen & Garde 2009, Borg et al. 2010, European Agency for Safety and Health at

Work 2011, The Welfare Commission 2006). Because of this, the question arises as to whether the problem lies with the research or its application or both.

The overall aim of this article is to investigate whether cross-fertilization of the three research perspectives occurs, and if so how this cross-fertilization occurs, and what such cross-fertilization results in, in order to contribute to an understanding of how working life research, reflected in a perspective combining the three approaches (OWL), could eventually help improve modern working life health. The research questions guiding this study are therefore the following: What does research from the three research perspectives have in common when approaching quality issues of modern working life? Where and how are the three perspectives different from one another, when and how do they overlap in research, and to what extent are all three perspectives considered together in studies of modern working life issues? What interdisciplinary themes prevail in the relevant literature, and how does each study individually create meaning around a given quality issue of modern working life? And, more generally, why would it be important to increase the amount of research combining all three perspectives of OWL rather than keeping them separate, and what could be examples of ways to accomplish this? The study is a structured literature review (e.g., Petticrew & Roberts 2006) of working life research dealing with quality issues of modern working life from the three related perspectives.

We do this by observing how often and in what ways the three research perspectives emerge in studies dealing with the quality issues of modern working life. This is done by counting the number of publications which seek to cover two or all three research perspectives of OWL. Through examining these particular publications, we also want to determine what overall themes seem to be recurring in this particular type of literature. The main purpose of this is to conceptually determine if studies of quality issues in modern working life generally consider the one life lived.

We use two key notions relevant to our observations of both what all three research perspectives have in common and how they view themselves differently. They are *the concept of productivity*—the main goal and object of study of each perspective, and *initiative*—the way in which each research perspective takes action in order to accomplish goals. Inspired by Andersen's (2003) idea of discursive analytical strategies, we use these two key notions to identify relevant studies.

An analytical strategy is a second-order strategy for the observation of how 'the social' emerges in observations (or enunciations and articulations). The elaboration of an analytical strategy involves shaping a specific gaze that allows the environment to appear as consisting of the observations of other people or systems. (Andersen 2003, p VI)

We thereby develop a "specific gaze" that allows studies of quality in modern working life to appear as consisting of initiatives represented by the three research perspectives of OWL aiming at meeting a certain concept of productivity. With this specific gaze, we analyze the overlap strategy of the studies in order to identify the following: which perspective is the object of study, how it meets the different challenges of its own research field of interest, and what other research perspective(s) are factors of impact on the object of study.

By mapping out the overlap strategies of the literature, gaining an understanding of how research shapes knowledge to affect certain fields of interest, and evaluating the



level of consideration for OWL, we seek not only to be able to provide a status on the current research pattern but also to be able to point to possibilities for creating new cross-fertilized knowledge aimed at increasing the quality level of modern working life.

The article is organized as follows: First, we outline our methodology. We then present our immediate results, pooling our observations of the three research perspectives in a table in accordance with the three life sphere perspectives of OWL. The table is centered on the two key notions—concept of productivity and initiatives—making it an analytical instrument for the following analysis of the particularly relevant publications. Thereafter, we introduce our condensed reading of the three research perspectives and their various approaches to quality in modern working life. Then, we specify the areas in which the perspectives converge creating overlaps. Next, we systematically review and examine the literature we find particularly relevant, searching for overlaps between the three perspectives. Following this, through thorough observations, we identify how each particularly relevant piece of research creates meaning around the studying of quality issues of modern working life, and we determine how the overlaps between the three perspectives occur (overlap strategy), in relation to the different life sphere perspectives of OWL. Finally we discuss the consequences of our results and make recommendations for future research strategies.

## Methodology and Data

Our methodology is a structured literature review (Petticrew & Roberts 2006) carried out as an iterative and interdisciplinary search process. We used electronic databases as the basis of our search strategy (Petticrew & Roberts 2006, p 80). We performed the literature searches in DADS, which is the Digital Article Database Service of the Technical University of Denmark. DADS is a simple search interface, in which it is possible to cross-search through a number of different databases with literature in all areas. DADS contains the following databases: BIOSIS, Compendex, Ebsco Academic Search Elite, Ebsco Business Source Premier, FSTA, and Inspec.

In order to get the right literature and to make sure that we explored all corners of all sorts of literature, we made interdisciplinary searches across all available databases within “all fields.” This means that not only were the obviously relevant databases searched, the rest of the databases, not only the first and obvious choices, were also searched to make sure that no literature was missed.

The main types of literature consisted of the following:

- Internationally published articles, books, and studies
- Nationally (Danish) published articles, books, and studies
- Ongoing national and international research
- Reports from ministries and organizations

As previously mentioned, the three related perspectives of OWL each draw on a separate research field: the individual perspective draws on HRM research, the employee perspective draws on working environment research, and the citizen perspective draws on welfare research. Therefore, we started out looking into the three research fields: HRM, working environment, and welfare in order to see which literature dealing with quality

in terms of OWL appeared. First of all, each research field is very rich in literature. For example, one search of HRM yielded 35,000 items, one of working environment yielded 25,000 items, and one of welfare yielded 100,000 items, a total of 160,000 items of literature. Naturally all 160,000 items of literature did not show overlaps between two or three of the perspectives. They were mainly about their respective area of research.

In order to find literature showing overlaps represented by two or three of the research perspectives, we had to be more precise concerning our definition of overlaps between the three related perspectives in order to find the most suitable keywords for our database searches. In the first phase of screening, we established a systemized strategy that was able to help us realize what exactly we were searching for when searching for overlaps. That is to say, that we—inspired by the idea of discursive analytical strategies and analyzing the way in which each study creates meaning around a certain object (Andersen 2003)—were looking to identify articulations in the literature characterizing one research perspective overlapping another. We therefore systematically observed the study in order to locate articulations by means of which the particular study was expressing an ambition to accomplish something (create meaning) which would benefit human beings as individuals, employees, citizens, or several of these life spheres at the same time—each life sphere representing a research perspective being HRM, working environment, or welfare as objects of the study.

The overall result of these searches showed that overlaps between the research perspectives became especially evident when looking at initiatives as objects of study. In this article, our definition of observed initiatives is as follows: the way in which each research perspective takes action in order to accomplish its goal when aiming at increasing the level of quality in modern working life. Therefore, when a research perspective is aiming at meeting a challenge in modern working life—in order to increase or maintain a specific quality factor of modern working life—an initiative is activated in order to do so.

Through our first screening it became clear that the overlaps were to be identified by at least two or three initiatives from each research perspective being present at a time, each representing a research field being, respectively, welfare, working environment, or HRM. However, in order to be able to say something about the overlaps concerning quality in modern working life in phase two, we had to screen again, for studies containing initiatives both concerning quality in modern working life and which also showed overlapping between two or three of the research perspectives. In this screening process, we encountered several relevant initiatives. However, after a more intense screening process and a finer assessment of the resultant literature, we realized that the following six initiatives not only very often overlap with the other two research perspectives but also contribute particularly relevant knowledge related to quality in modern working life.

We assessed the relevant initiatives using the following three criteria:

1. That the initiatives are areas of action representing one specific research perspective.
2. That the initiatives are vital in order to understand quality in modern working life.
3. That the initiatives are very specific when pointing out where, when, and how the three research perspectives overlap and thereby potentially could create cross-fertilization between the three research fields of interest.

Based on the above-mentioned criteria, we identified the following six initiatives as final keywords used for database cross-searches in this review (two per research perspective).



**Table 1** Overview of Keywords and Their Relations to Research Perspectives and Approaches.

Research Perspectives	Approaches	Keywords*
HRM	Individual	Work–life balance
HRM	Individual	Employee development
Working environment	Employee	Well-being
Working environment	Employee	Stress
Welfare	Citizen	Sickness absence and health
Welfare	Citizen	Family and working life

\* It is naturally possible that there are other more or less relevant keywords. However, it was our assessment that these six were the most relevant when looking for overlaps between the three research perspectives.

We made the cross-searches combining the six keywords in every possible way. However, we only used one keyword at a time per research perspective, for example, that “well-being” and “stress” were never combined since they draw on the same research perspective. During our cross-searches, we only took literature published within the timeframe 1999–2009 into account, because the largest concentration of literature related to the six keywords occurs in this period of time.

## Results of the Literature Searches

We identified 127 publications. Through a thorough screening and evaluation process, we identified that 86 of the 127 publications were particularly relevant publications, since they not only overlapped two or three of the research perspectives at the same time but also dealt with the prevailing challenges of quality in modern working life. During this screening process, when searching for “well-being,” for example, we were very careful to make sure that the term was used as a keyword in an employee perspective and working environmental context and not just as a word describing a person’s general condition—and so on with the rest of the keywords. First of all we did this to make absolutely sure that it was the perspectives and not just the words which were overlapping in the search, and second we did it to identify in what ways the research perspectives overlapped. Our criteria of assessment in this process was our identification of the concept of productivity for each research perspective, the study’s ambition to accomplish something benefiting the individual and family area, the employee and workplace area, or the citizen and society area. If, for instance, a study was about welfare aiming at social and societal sustainability, the welfare research perspective was activated. If the publication at the same time had an ambition to say something about productivity associated with a good psychological working environment, then the working environment research perspective was also activated in the particular study, meaning that the two research perspectives overlapped.

Regarding the three research perspectives, we observed the following main differences among their analytical focus:

- Drawing on the welfare research perspective, the citizen approach primarily operates on the macro level, and its productivity concept is therefore social and societal sustainability.

- Drawing on the working environment research perspective, the employee approach primarily operates on the meso level. The employee approach's productivity concept is therefore a positive psychological working environment.
- Drawing on the HRM research perspective, the individual approach primarily operates on the micro level. Its general focus is on the development of human resources in order to support the financial productivity of the company.

Table 2 condenses our observations of the differences between the welfare, working environment, and HRM research perspectives. The table reflects our observations of how the three perspectives each have different key notions concerning productivity; the hoped for outcome of the studies conducted within the perspective, and initiative; and the way in which each research perspective takes action in order to accomplish its goals. In the literature review, we use these two key notions to analyze the overlaps of the three research perspectives in order to identify which one of the three research perspectives is in play in the study and how it meets the different challenges of its own research field of interest. We examine the areas where working life research already overlaps this in order to point out potential learning using the two key concepts—concept of productivity and initiative—as guidelines.

Next we reviewed the 86 publications, analyzing them for overlaps in the light of OWL guided by Table 2 as an analytical instrument. A more detailed analysis showed that only 24 of the 86 publications were particularly relevant regarding thematic relevance and field-specific overlaps providing knowledge about modern working life. These 24 publications were used as the analytical foundation of the thematic analysis in this article. We refer to them in the following numerical order: 1. Steiber 2009; 2. Lapierre & Allen 2006; 3. Strategic Direction 2009; 4. van Emmerik & Peeters 2009; 5. Steinmetz et al. 2008; 6. Acton & Golden 2003; 7. Svensen et al. 2007; 8. Lund et al. 2003; 9. Bourne et al. 2009; 10. Darcy & McCarthy 2007; 11. Blank et al. 2008; 12. van Rhenen et al. 2006; 13. Cornish et al. 2007; 14. Casey & Grzwacz 2008; 15. Kasearu 2009; 16. Bergman & Gardiner 2007; 17. Wright et al. 2005; 18. Bruening & Dixon 2007; 19. Kirby 2005; 20. Lovell et al. 2009; 21. OECD 2007a; 22. OECD 2007b; 23. Loretto et al. 2005; and 24. Tsui 2008.

The results of the review are summarized in Table 3. Table 3 shows every possible combination of the three categories of keywords combined two and three at a time in the cross-searches and the results. It also shows how the 24 publications are distributed on these searches. The white area shows the results of the searches with two perspectives combined at a time, and the dark gray area shows the results where all three perspectives were combined at a time. Table 3 shows that not very many of the relevant publications involve all three perspectives. The dark gray area in Table 3 shows the results of the searches where all three research perspectives are in play at a time. As can be seen in the results of these searches, on many occasions we found no publications at all when keywords from each of the three perspectives were combined three at a time. This means that for the most part the relevant literature involves two of the perspectives at a time and very few all three at a time, meaning that the three different perspectives of modern working life are not frequently employed together and combining two perspectives at a time is more common.

**Table 2** A Comparison of Welfare, Working Environment, and HRM Research Perspectives.

Research Perspective	Input/Challenges Leading to an Activation of the Field	Output Conditions	Initiatives	Positive Consequences	Production
Citizen					
Welfare research Focus on citizens and society Operates on a macro level	Socioeconomic and social consequences of a high level of sickness absence, bad public health, and a missing appropriate balance between family life and working life	Focusing on social problems related to sickness absence and health and coherence between family life and working life contributes positively to the welfare state	Investigations of social and economic contexts and their consequences regarding sickness absence and coherence between family life and working life	Consideration of particularly vulnerable citizens in the labor market	The good socially engaged society. Concept of productivity: social and societal sustainability
Employee					
Working environment research Focus on the employee/workplace Operates on a meso level	Poor mental health, poor well-being, and stress	Focusing on organizing and managing mental health minimizes the risk of establishing a bad working environment, thereby contributing to creating a good workplace	Job satisfaction surveys, prevention of stress	Well-being at the workplace	The good and safe workplace. Concept of productivity: good psychological working environment
Individual					
HRM research Focus on the individual human being's relation to the organization Operates on a micro level	Mismatch between actual level of competencies and competency requirements. High staff turnover; different kinds of absences, etc.	Focusing on increasing company productivity through employee development and work-life balance contributes positively to the individual, the company, and thereby to company finances	Employee development and work-life balance initiatives	Increased efficiency, the whole human being	The good profitable company. Concept of productivity: financial profit



**Table 3** Overview of Search Combinations and Resultant Publications.

<b>HRM Individual Keywords used in the combined searches</b>	<b>Working Environment Employee Keywords used in the combined searches</b>	<b>Welfare Citizen Keywords used in the combined searches</b>	<b>Results Number of particularly relevant publications</b>	<b>Publication Numbers cf. overview above</b>
	Well-being	Family/working life	2	1, 2
Employee dev.	Well-being		1	3
	Stress	Family/working life	2	4, 5
Employee dev.	Stress		1	6
Employee dev.		Family/working life	–	–
	Well-being	Sickness ab./health	2	7, 8
Work–life balance	Well-being		2	9, 10
	Stress	Sickness ab./health	2	11, 12
Work–life balance	Stress		1	13
Work–life balance		Sickness ab./health	1	14
Work–life balance		Family/working life	(2)	15, 16*
Employee dev.		Sickness ab./health	1	17
Employee dev.	Well-being	Family/working life	–	–
Employee dev.	Stress	Family/working life	–	–
Work–life balance	Well-being	Family/working life	(1)	18*
Employee dev.	Stress	Sickness ab./health	1	19
Employee dev.	Well-being	Sickness ab./health	–	–
Work–life balance	Stress	Family/working life	(3)	20, 21, 22*
Work–life balance	Well-being	Sickness ab./health	1	23
Work–life balance	Stress	Sickness ab./health	1	24

\* The two categories cover a broad range of literature, as the search words “family and working life” and “work–life balance” have a similar meaning, since both topics are centered round the family. The other search words are not so close together, which is why they create a much wider dispersion.

In the following section, we present our condensed reading of the three research perspectives and their overlaps through convergence.

### The Three Related Research Perspectives and Their Overall Quality Approach

From the perspective of the welfare research perspective, if an unbalanced working life results in, for example, stress, absenteeism, exclusion, and malfunctioning families, this is a problem. In short, if citizens cannot be productive in a sustainable way because of a



malfunctioning working life, the welfare state suffers. This issue is especially relevant in the Nordic countries because of its welfare state model with its interest in and responsibility for social inclusion. For instance, Denmark not only has the world's highest employment rate for women (Emerek & Holt 2008) but also has almost one million people on benefits. In many cases, these people have been pushed out of the labor market, and in other cases they have never been able to enter the labor market because of health and socioeconomic consequences (Høgelund et al. 2008).

The main argument of the welfare research perspective is that the welfare state is bound to pay attention to quality in modern working life; it would be too costly if it failed to do so. Socially, some of the largest items of expenditure are caused by labor market-related issues (e.g., absenteeism, attrition, and stress), and for each individual company a large and still increasing amount of its total costs is associated with how people are included in the labor market. If citizens are deployed in an unsuitable manner resulting in stress, burnout, exclusion, sudden death, etc., it is the responsibility of the welfare state to pick up the costs as (former) employees are supported by passive benefits. Furthermore, it is significant when companies fail to retain older workers in the labor market, since these employees in principle are fully able to work and thus should be active and contributing to the total economy (Holt 2006). Finally, there is the area concerning workers' struggle to ensure coherence between family life and working life. This area is also important for the welfare state, something which, for example, the establishment of the Commission of Family and Working Life (2007) reflects. With regard to quality, the welfare research perspective—especially the Nordic-inspired one—generally aims at enhancing working life conditions for citizens.

In brief, the working environment research perspective covers the interplay between the relationships, influences, and conditions under which human beings work. However, working environment research is also concerned with the technical and social development affecting the safety of the employees and ultimately the physical and mental health at the workplace. The employee is therefore the conceptualization of the main focus of interest of working environment research. Working environment research generally deals with the paradoxical fact that working conditions can cause impacts, which for some people can be stressful and for others stimulating. Thus, it is difficult to provide general guidelines especially in the “softer” areas (e.g., Sørensen et al. 2008).

The perspective, however, is traditionally based on the different factors affecting people at work. It is divided into the following groups—physical, chemical, ergonomic, and psychological effects as well as accidents. Technical, social, organizational, and managerial influences are generally added as ways of understanding how people at work are affected. There are a number of different approaches to these various factors affecting the working environment: the physical/technical approach with a focus on physical factors such as ventilation conditions, temperature, and noise; the medical approach with a focus on the health-promoting or straining nature of work; the management-oriented approach with a focus on the importance of management and HRM; the safety-oriented approach with a focus on counteracting the risk of accidents; the chemical approach with a focus on substances and materials in the workplace; and the ergonomic approach with a focus on musculoskeletal injuries (Sørensen et al. 2012).

As the many different approaches reflect, the working environment in a service-oriented society represents a more complex and multifaceted area than was the case previously (Hasle et al. 2010). It is not that the traditional physical factors no longer are

significant, or that they have been supplemented by several new dimensions. It is that the understanding of work, the employees' roles, the way work is perceived, and the relationship between management and employees have changed so extensively that working environment can no longer be comprehended on the basis of traditional categories and approaches (Allvin & Aronsson 2003).

The working environmental focus of this review is primarily the psychological working environment, since it is this branch of the working environment perspective that seems to overlap with the HRM research perspective and the welfare research perspective. Although working environment must be understood as the interplay between the relationships, influences, and conditions under which human beings work, there have been major changes in the ways in which the working environment has been understood over time. The psychological working environment did not play a central role in working environment research until the 1990s, meaning that it is a relatively new area of working environment studies with intensified focus on relations and social capital (Hasle et al. 2010). So, from this perspective, quality is obtained through keeping the worker psychologically safe and healthy.

The HRM research perspective has emerged from and is designed as a means of tackling the transition from an industrial society toward a knowledge society (Larsen 1997, Larsen & Brewster 2000, Legge 2005, Ulrich 1997). Traditional industrial companies, where machines are at the center of production, are now more often being replaced by knowledge, service, and administrative companies. The product in these new types of companies is intangible and consists of human behavior such as knowledge, service, care, counseling, etc. This is a fragile kind of production, since production and consumption happen simultaneously. The product cannot be recalled in the same way in which industrial products can be recalled by the manufacturer. Human behavior is not returnable and can only—in certain cases—be remedied, which is not only difficult but also expensive. The general interest in working life conditions (and human beings) already evolved around the year 1900 in terms of worker protection, improvement of social conditions, and (later on) efforts to improve the physical working environment. In the aftermath of the industrial boom in the 1960s, and service management in the 1970s, the concept of personnel management gained great acceptance. Personnel management covers attracting, maintaining, developing, and phasing out employees (individuals) in an organization. In the 1980s, there was a major breakthrough, mainly caused by two parallel research initiatives, respectively called the Harvard School and the Michigan School (Beer et al. 1984, Fombrun et al. 1984). These schools were followed by a massive research effort, and today the HRM concept is a solid research and practice field.

HRM contributes to the individual and organizational goal achievement (Larsen 2006, p 434). This development is materialized through a number of initiatives. These initiatives are focusing on the one hand on a knowledge dimension and on the other hand on a health dimension. The knowledge dimension is expressed through a wide range of staff developmental initiatives, e.g., competency development, talent development, leadership development, organizational learning processes, etc. The health dimension is expressed through a series of initiatives aiming at supporting the human resources through “the whole human being” and its potential contributions to the company's financial progress, e.g., work–life balance, health promotion, smoking cessation courses, health insurance, stress management, and senior arrangements (Larsen 2006). Seen from



the HRM perspective, quality is achieved through optimizing the competencies of humans through the management of their resources.

### Overlaps through Convergence

In what areas do the three perspectives converge when approaching quality issues of modern working life?

The citizen approach of welfare research operates on the macro level, meaning that working life initiatives mostly result in socioeconomic consequences. At the same time, the macro level provides the framing conditions for the acting spaces of the two other related perspectives: laws, conventions, and public services. The societal challenges are the socioeconomic consequences of, for example, high level of absence due to illness. A great deal of the absence due to illness arises from working conditions at the various workplaces, where either the psychological or the physical working environment is of poor quality. This has negative consequences for the affected person and family, just as the company suffers financially. At the societal level, sickness benefit is a large and increasing item just as sick leave of longer duration can exclude the person from the labor market, which has wide implications not only financially but also in relation to social inclusion. Additionally, sickness absence can result in increased health care costs. Sickness absence is therefore a good example of how the three perspectives overlap. Problems stemming from the workplace or poor or no HRM initiatives will have major impacts at the community level. However, the problem cannot be solved just on the society level.

Another example of overlap is found in the fact that Danish parents are in employment. This is possible because the welfare state has ensured the parents maternity and paternity leave and day care offers. These are public service benefits, which are necessary in order to keep up the employment rate of all men and women of working age, and thereby maintain societal productivity. However, in recent years, there has been a development both in the workplace and in public services, which creates problems. Modern working life requires such temporal flexibility of employees, to work more in less time and sometimes at odd times. Public day care systems, by contrast, are moving in the opposite direction. They maintain opening hours which, for the most part, do not match the demands of modern working life. Public services are a precondition for the employment of parents; however, they have also become a barrier to employment and further development of modern working life. At the same time, many companies view the very fact that the employee has a family as a matter between the family and the welfare state, and therefore not something that the company is responsible for. Family-friendly employee policies are to be found at many companies, but they rarely have a hold of the real problems, namely that modern working life requires so much time and energy of the individual worker that there is very little left for the family. The lack of balance between working life and family life is a social problem, which cannot be solved at the society level as it is taking place at the same time as the society level is contributing to the creation of work–life balance and the lack of work–life balance simultaneously (Emerek & Holt 2008, Esping-Andersen 2002, Fine-Davis et al. 2004).

Finally, stress is a specific example of a research area that overlaps with the welfare, the HRM, and the working environment perspectives covered in this review. According to a white paper from the National Research Centre for the Working Environment, there

are indications of an increase in the occurrence of milder mental health problems in Denmark, for example, stress. In 2005, 8.7% of the population reported that they often suffer from stress in their daily lives. This is 1.5 times as many as in 1987. Furthermore, the white paper estimates that the cost to society arising from mental health problems is DKK 55 billion per year (2008 level), which is also an increase compared to previous years (Borg et al. 2010).

## **Strategic Analytical Overlap Analysis—Cross-Disciplinary Themes and Good Examples**

This section has two purposes: one is to identify cross-disciplinary themes spanning the 24 resultant publications. We do this by pointing to research methods, purposes, and results related to quality in modern working life. Second, we focus on how the idea of OWL varies depending on which research field and concept of productivity is activated in the articles. First, we identify the cross-disciplinary themes. Then, in a more detailed analysis of publications placed within the two cross-disciplinary perspectives, we set out to exemplify how the nature of the publication—and thereby its contribution to the understanding of OWL in terms of the three perspectives—develops depending on which perspective is the object of study, and how many perspectives are represented in the study at the same time.

### **Two Cross-Disciplinary Themes: Boundary and Quality**

Through our observations of the studies' analytical strategies, we have identified two themes spanning the 24 publications: one which deals with the boundaries in modern working life, and one which deals with quality in modern working life. Approximately one-half of the publications deal with the boundaryless working life and the challenges that this entails (Table 4). As is apparent from our literature analysis, these challenges are generally about the fact that, over time, it has become increasingly difficult for the individual employee to find and set boundaries for his or her working life and family life. At the same time, it has become more difficult for companies to find and set the boundaries for how employee resources should and can be used to the benefit of the company. Finally, it is also becoming more complicated to set the boundaries for when and how the employee's family life and working life can and should flow into one another. This has an impact on the welfare system, since employees are being supported when they become sick from, for example, stress-related illnesses. In what follows, we call this phenomenon "the boundary theme." The other half of the publications are about the quality of working life dealing with both the negative consequences of working life and the various disorders related to this, which might affect the employees (Table 4). The publications also deal with different possible ways of affecting quality in modern working life. The main approach is people being affected by different work-related psychological disorders, which can lead to even more serious psychological or physical diseases: burn-out, sudden death, or suicide. Hence, this perspective deals with areas which influence quality in modern working life and initiatives which affect the different areas of quality. We call this phenomenon "the quality theme."



These two themes cut across the search categories and appear in the total mass of data. The fact that the boundary theme and the quality theme emerge from the total mass of data must be understood in the sense that it is possible to read all of the 24 publications included in this review meaningfully from either one or the other perspective. The themes may be present as a main theme in one article at a time or be a subtheme where the other perspective is the main theme. Thus, these two themes constitute the basic structure of quality in modern working life in the articles. In the following, we analyze the 24 articles and their overlap strategy. We use the two themes as an analytical frame. Through our strategic analytical observations, pointing out the fundamental dynamics characterizing the nature of OWL through the two themes, it becomes possible to see when and how the three research perspectives overlap. When doing this, we work with two concepts: the object of study and the impact factors. The object of study is the area of focus in a given publication—meaning the observed perspective in focus that wants to attain something in regard to its area of interest (concept of productivity): the individual perspective (financial profit), the employee perspective (good psychological working environment), and the citizen perspective (social and societal sustainability). The impact factors are areas which influence the object of study (and thereby the concept of productivity). We isolate the object of study and analyze the way in which the productivity concept constructs the object of study in each article. First we identify either one or two of the perspectives representing the object of study/concept of productivity at the same time. Second, we identify which perspectives represent the impact factors in the study. Through this way of observing the system of the study, we are able to determine how each study creates meaning, and thus how many life sphere perspectives of OWL are present in each particular study. We call this system “overlap strategy.” Table 4 summarizes the results of this analytical process across the 24 publications.

In the following section, we show three good examples of the boundary and quality themes, each respectively having one of the three life sphere approaches of modern working life as an object of study and thereby a concept of productivity. Showing good examples is fruitful because it creates a picture of the achievement that comes with all perspectives of OWL being considered in a study dealing with quality issues of modern working life.

## **The Boundary Theme**

### **The Individual Approach and Financial Profit as a Measure of Success**

Bourne et al. (2009) is a good example of a relevant publication being a result of cross-searches using the search words “work–life balance” (the individual perspective) and “well-being” (the employee perspective). The study’s methodology is based on a quantitative questionnaire survey carried out in different types of American companies. Its purpose is to verify the hypothesis that when employees address too much attention to either family or working life then stress and poor well-being occur, which reduces productivity. To avoid the poor effects, the employees must obtain a balance between the two. The study’s hypothesis is thereby that employees, who master “dual-centricity” (equal prioritization of family and working life), suffer less from stress and poor well-being. It is also its purpose to demonstrate that this phenomenon does not exist to quite

**Table 4** Analytical Overview of Themes, Overlap Strategy, and Conceptual Connections between OWL and Quality Issues of Modern Working Life.

<b>Author, publication number, and cross-disciplinary perspective</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Overlap strategy: The relationship between the object of study (research perspective in focus represented by keyword) and the impact factors (other research perspectives in play represented by keywords)</b>	<b>Conceptual Connection between OWL and Quality Issues of Modern Working Life—Relevance and Deficiencies of the Three Perspectives Related to OWL</b>
1. Steiber (2009) Boundary theme	To determine the extent to which cultural and institutional issues affect employee well-being: family life and working life	Quantitative, international comparative questionnaire study	A conceptual distinction between time and energy conflicts. Women and men have different views. Cultural and institutional issues only affect well-being in terms of family/working life to a small extent	How does the societal and cultural institution connected to family and working life affect work-related well-being? Object of study: the employee perspective (well-being) Impact factor: the citizen perspective (family and working life)	Insight into the relationship between social institutions and cultural differences and well-being at work and the negative spillover between family and working life. No involvement of influential factors associated with the negative spillover and the individual as a human being in an organizational context—i.e., the impact of Work–Life Balance initiatives and other staff building initiatives (the individual perspective of OWL is missing)
2. Lapiere & Allen (2006) Boundary theme	To illustrate the potential advantages and disadvantages of methods used in relation to avoiding conflicts related to family and working life	Quantitative questionnaire study	An examination of potential ways to avoid conflicts related to work and family. Help from family and management using "problem-focused coping" leads to fewer conflicts related to work and family life and increases personal employee well-being	How does family and working life affect work-related employee well-being? Object of study: the employee perspective (well-being) Impact factor: the citizen perspective (family and working life)	Insight into possible ways to improve the level of job satisfaction in a modern working life where family and professional life boundaries overlap. No involvement of the influence of factors related to the individual organizational context and the possible Work–Life Balance initiatives or other staff-building initiatives that may influence an employee's relation to work and family (the individual perspective of OWL is missing)

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<p>3. Strategic Direction (2009)</p> <p>Quality theme</p>	<p>To investigate employee developmental intervention effects in relation to employee well-being and the affect on company productivity and economic performance</p>	<p>Literature review</p>	<p>A measurement of employee well-being has a positive impact on employee turnover and thus company performance</p>	<p>How does a certain type of employee development affect work-related well-being and how does well-being affect company financial goals?</p> <p><u>Object of study:</u> the individual perspective (employee development)</p> <p><u>Impact factor:</u> the employee perspective (well-being) + the individual perspective (employee development)</p>	<p>Insight into the companies' approach to employees who, as a resource available to the company, can be influenced, through special training programs to thrive better in the company and thus remain employed longer than usual.</p> <p>No involvement of societal influences and/or consequences relating, eg, to family as an institution in society and its connection to employee well-being and retention in the company (the citizen perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>4. van Emmerik &amp; Peeters (2009)</p> <p>Boundary theme</p>	<p>To investigate whether there are specific stressors that arise when conflicts are transferred from working life to family life and vice versa</p>	<p>Multilevel quantitative questionnaire analysis</p>	<p>There are specific stressors related to working life and family life when conflicts are transferred from family to work and vice versa. Both the team level and the individual level are each affected but in their own ways</p>	<p>How does work-related stress affect family and working life?</p> <p><u>Object of study:</u> the citizen perspective (family and working life)</p> <p><u>Impact factor:</u> the employee perspective (stress)</p>	<p>Insight into stress factors associated with family and working life and how the two life spheres respectively affect each other and are transferred between each other:</p> <p>No involvement of the organizational framework in which the interaction between family and working life unfolds, i.e., no involvement of HRM interventions important to the formation and/or avoidance of specific stressors and their impact on family and working life (the individual perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>5. Steinmetz et al. (2008)</p> <p>Quality theme</p>	<p>To compare five linear models with different directions of cause and effect associated with working interference between work and family life, depression, and poor motivation to show that everyone, regardless of direction, has the same cyclic motion</p>	<p>Two-wave panel study using a quantitative questionnaire study</p>	<p>A cyclic model that works from the idea that stress factors lead to depression, which leads to conflicts between working life and family life, thus leading to a career characterized by stress factors related to work. Whichever of the five causal models are used, there will be stress in relation to conflicts in working life and family life, if there are stress factors present</p>	<p>How does work-related stress affect family and working life?</p> <p><u>Object of study:</u> the citizen perspective (family and working life)</p> <p><u>Impact factor:</u> the employee perspective (stress)</p>	<p>Insight into how stress factors associated with family life and working life respectively affect each other and are transferred between each other and thus characterize human mental states in both the short- and long term. No involvement of the organizational framework in which the interaction between family and working life unfolds in, i.e., there is no involvement of HRM interventions important to the formation and/or the avoidance of specific stress factors and their impact on family and working life (the individual perspective of OWL is missing)</p>

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<p>6. Action &amp; Golden (2003) Quality theme</p>	<p>To evaluate how training and development of IT staff affects the level of employee retention and job-related stress</p>	<p>Quantitative questionnaire study</p>	<p>Training and development initiatives, which are well handled, lead to greater organizational strength, higher levels of job-related skills, and job satisfaction. Training and development keeps knowledge in the company, but not employees and does not immediately help the prevention of stress</p>	<p>How does a certain type of employee development affect job-related stress, and how does job-related stress affect company financial goals? <u>Object of study:</u> the individual perspective (employee development) <u>Impact factors:</u> the employee perspective (well-being) + the individual perspective (employee development)</p>	<p>Insight into the companies' approach to employees who, as a resource available to the company, can be influenced through special training programs to become less stressed and so store their knowledge in the company and thus possibly remain employed longer than usual. No representation of societal influences and/or consequences relating, e.g., to family as an institution in society and its relationship to employees' job-related stress, mediation of knowledge, and retention in the company (the citizen perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>7. Svensen et al. (2007) Quality theme</p>	<p>To investigate the prevalence of health problems among satisfied and dissatisfied employees. Evaluate whether personal health problems can be attributed to the working environment in general or subjective perceptions</p>	<p>Cross-sectional, quantitative questionnaire study</p>	<p>Subjective health problems are common among satisfied employees. Work has only limited influence on this substantiated indicator of health</p>	<p>How does job-related well-being affect the welfare society according to sickness absence and health? <u>Object of study:</u> the citizen perspective (sickness absence and health) <u>Impact factor:</u> the employee perspective (well-being)</p>	<p>Insight into correlations between individual work-related well-being and society-related sickness absence and health. No representation of impacts associated with organizational HRM initiatives in terms of Work-Life Balance and/or other staff-building initiatives (the individual perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>8. Lund et al. (2003) Quality theme</p>	<p>To investigate the relationship between sickness absence and health (well-being)</p>	<p>Literature review. Extracts of contributions from the author's own previous reports, along with a description of results from selected international research</p>	<p>Promoting safe and healthy return to work (after sick leave and/or leave) can reduce exhaust emissions and increase the number of people in the workforce</p>	<p>How does job-related well-being affect the welfare society in relation to sickness absence and health? <u>Object of study:</u> the citizen perspective (sickness absence and health) <u>Impact factor:</u> the employee perspective (well-being)</p>	<p>Insight into correlations between individual work-related well-being and society-related sickness absence and health. No representation of impacts associated with organizational HRM initiatives according to Work-Life Balance and/or other staff-building initiatives (the individual perspective of OWL is missing)</p>

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<p>9. Bourne et al. (2009)</p> <p>Boundary theme</p>	<p>To verify a hypothesis that when too much attention is given to either working life or family life, stress and poor well-being arise, which reduces productivity. If employees find a balance between the two, then the bad effects are avoided. In line with the hypothesis, it does not appear to such an extent as previously thought</p>	<p>Quantitative questionnaire survey combined with data from the Human Resource Information System</p>	<p>55% of the respondents can be described as "dual-centric" and they prioritize work and leisure time equally. Contrary to previous hypotheses, the two things do not conflict, which is in line with the study's hypothesis. If companies treat their employees as whole human beings, stress is reduced, well-being increases, and thereby productivity increases</p>	<p>How do work–life balance initiatives affect employee well-being, and how does it affect the organization, that work–life balance initiatives create "whole human beings?" Object of study: the individual perspective (work–life balance) Impact factors: the employee perspective (well-being) + the individual perspective (work–life balance)</p>	<p>Insights into companies' approach to employees who, as resources available to the company, can be influenced through special Work–Life Balance initiatives to find a perfect balance between work and leisure and the effect thereof is that they feel more comfortable as whole human beings, thus becoming more productive in the long run. No representation of societal influences and/or consequences relating for example to family as an institution in society/world of work and its relationship to employees' job-related stress, knowledge transfer, and retention in the company (the citizen perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>10. Darcy and McCarthy (2007)</p> <p>Boundary theme</p>	<p>To investigate how people's life stages affect, in particular, the parent stage relative to conflicts associated with the balance between family and working life and whether there are differences between parents with younger and older children</p>	<p>Explorative study mainly through questionnaire survey.</p>	<p>The factors which influence conflicts related to the balance between family and working life are different depending on which groups of parents are involved. Parents with young children were more likely to be affected by stress and collegial support than parents with older children</p>	<p>How do work–life balance initiatives affect employee well-being, and how do they affect the organization whose work–life balance initiatives create well-being? Object of study: the individual perspective (work–life balance) Impact factors: the employee perspective (well-being) + the individual perspective (work–life balance)</p>	<p>Insights into the relationship between Work–Life Balance and well-being relative to life stages, as well as how the adaptation of Work–Life Balance initiatives relative to life stages can make a difference to productivity. No direct representation of societal influences and/or consequences associated with the relationship between family life, working life, life stages, Work–Life Balance, and productivity (the citizen perspective of OWL is partially missing). The study, however, approximates the involvement of the citizen perspective, but has no specific references to the life stages in the welfare society</p>

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<p>11. Blank et al. (2008)</p>	<p>To illustrate how poor mental health is the reason why only 50% of those who are away from work for more than 6 months come back to work at all</p>	<p>Literature review regarding long-term illness on the basis of poor mental health</p>	<p>The major causes of sick leave are mental diseases, depression, stress, and body weight. The overall success factors that can create positive growth and help predict problems concerning these causes and to remedy them are work/workplace, family history, medical risks, social status, and health situation</p>	<p>How does stress and poor psychological health affect the welfare society in relation to sickness absence and health?  <u>Object of study:</u> the citizen approach (sickness absence and health)  <u>Impact factor:</u> the employee approach (stress)</p>	<p>Insight into potential contexts and solution areas associated with stress and mental health, and these contexts' impact on welfare areas such as sick leave and health. No specific representation of potential impacts associated with organizational HRM initiatives in terms of Work–Life Balance and/or other employee developmental initiatives (the individual perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>12. van Rhenen et al. (2006)</p>	<p>An evaluation of the effects associated with two different types of intervention, two short stress-prevention programs (one psychological and one physical)</p>	<p>The study was designed as a priori randomized trial in which participants were recruited through occupational health studies focusing on work-related stress. The aim was to compare two stress-prevention programs</p>	<p>Sickness absence levels for stressed employees were minimally affected by the stress-prevention programs. In relation to the psychological program, the absenteeism decreased so that it was marginally significant</p>	<p>How do stress-intervention programs affect psychological health in the welfare society in relation to sickness absence and health?  <u>Object of study:</u> the citizen perspective (sickness absence and health)  <u>Impact factor:</u> the employee perspective (stress)</p>	<p>Insight into potential contexts and solution areas associated with stress and mental health and these contexts' impact on welfare areas such as sick leave and health. No specific representation of potential impacts associated with organizational HRM initiatives in terms of Work–Life Balance and/or other employee developmental initiatives (the individual perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>13. Cornish et al. (2007)</p>	<p>An international study of the drivers of employee engagement and job satisfaction</p>	<p>A quantitative survey where data were retrieved from the Inis network in order to measure various aspects of Work–Life Balance interventions' effect in relation to stress</p>	<p>To keep employees motivated, companies must demonstrate corporate social responsibility in terms of binding employees to the company and its objectives. This is done by adapting Work–Life Balance initiatives, so they create balance and joy for employees. The initiative is adapted to the country and its culture</p>	<p>How do work-life balance initiatives affect the employee level of stress and thereby job satisfaction?  <u>Object of study:</u> the individual perspective (work-life balance)  <u>Impact factor:</u> the employee perspective (stress) + the individual perspective (work-life balance)</p>	<p>An insight into how organizational Work–Life Balance initiatives potentially could be adapted to meet the needs of each country in relation to reducing work-related stress. The study does not include societal factors in the institutional sense, i.e., the impact that Work–Life Balance initiatives have on the family as an institution in society and thus societal sustainability (the citizen perspective of OWL is missing)</p>

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<p>14. Casey &amp; Grzywacz (2008)</p> <p>Boundary theme</p>	<p>Previous studies dealing with the workplace flexibility having a positive impact on employee health and productivity have provided very inconsistent results. The study expands the understanding of this potential association</p>	<p>All response categories are taken from a quantitative survey conducted in 2004/2005 when the employees joined or renewed health insurance policies through their job</p>	<p>Greater working flexibility has a positive impact on employees' health and thereby derives balance between working life and family life. Companies looking for Work–Life Balance principles contribute positively to both business and society</p>	<p>How do work–life balance initiatives affect the level of sickness absence and health and thereby work performance? Object of study: the individual perspective (work–life balance) Impact factors: the citizen perspective (sickness absence and health) + the individual perspective (work–life balance)</p>	<p>An insight into how companies' Work–Life Balance initiatives can have a positive impact on social conditions associated with sickness absence and health. The study does not deal with stress and well-being concepts which are important factors associated with the workplace (the employee perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>15. Kasearu (2009)</p> <p>Boundary theme</p>	<p>A study of the effects associated with various Work–Life Balance factors influencing factors among working women and men in different countries which are characterized by different types of sociopolitical systems and ways to be connected as a couple</p>	<p>Quantitative data from the second round of the "European Social Survey," conducted in 25 countries in 2004</p>	<p>No significant differences in the experience of conflicts related to working life and family life in different countries relative to whether the couple was married or cohabiting. The conflict about balance relative to the allocation of resources between family and work is the focal point, not the country</p>	<p>How do work–life balance initiatives affect factors related to family and working life? Object of study: the citizen perspective (family and working life) Impact factors: the individual perspective (work–life balance)</p>	<p>Insight into how the social conditions potentially make a difference to people's ways of relating to the Work–Life Balance conflicts and initiatives in this area. No insight into the prevalence of stress-prevention and/or well-being conditions on the labor market (the employee perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>16. Bergman &amp; Gardiner (2007)</p> <p>Boundary theme</p>	<p>To examine the concept of accessibility in the theoretical and empirical sense and identifying the structural influence factors for use in future analytical frameworks in relation to balancing working life and family life</p>	<p>Quantitative case studies using employee records and questionnaires</p>	<p>The term "accessibility" is believed to provide good analytical features available for creating an analytical framework which can accommodate both the organization and society</p>	<p>How do work–life balance initiatives benefit both the organization and society? Object of study: the citizen perspective (family and working life) + the individual perspective (work–life balance) Impact factors: the individual perspective (work–life balance)</p>	<p>Insight into how a particular definition of Work–Life Balance (based on the concept of availability) creates a basis for constructing new analytical frameworks with regard to better conditions for Work–Life Balance and meeting the requirements of both organizations and society. No representation of factors related to working environment (stress and/or well-being factors), which have great impact on how Work–Life Balance is created and thereby affects organizations and society (the individual perspective of OWL is missing)</p>

<p>17. Wright et al. (2005) Quality theme</p>	<p>To provide preliminary data on short- and medium-term effects and acceptance of the concept of Appreciative Inquiry as a proper functioning human resource tool in health care</p>	<p>Interviews, Appreciative Inquiry—a constructionist/narrative and qualitative non-problem-management model that uses language and reflection to bring good experience into the future</p>	<p>Insight into how certain employee development intervention types affect sickness absence and health in organizations and how these initiatives have a cost minimizing effect on society level, and how these initiatives have a cost minimizing effect</p>	<p>How does employee development in the form of “appreciative inquiry” affect factors related to sickness absence and health and thereby the organizational drive? <u>Object of study:</u> the citizen perspective (sickness absence and health) + the individual perspective (employee development). <u>Impact factor:</u> the individual perspective (employee development)</p>	<p>Insight into how certain personnel evolving types of intervention can have a significant impact on sickness absence and health in organizations and society and how these initiatives also have overhead reducing effects. No involvement of factors related to the working environment (stress and/or well-being factors), which are very important for sickness absence and health and thus organizations and society (the employee perspective of OWL is missing)</p>
<p>18. Bruening &amp; Dixon (2007) Quality theme</p>	<p>To focus on the factors leading to women more often experiencing discrimination when they have the American sports world as a workplace</p>	<p>Semi-structured 1–2 hour qualitative interviews—a holistic life cycle perspective</p>	<p>Management cannot just look isolated on employees using old-fashioned male-dominated methods. Women experience poor well-being at work in the world of sports, affecting family and working life. The introduction of the Work-Life Balance initiatives which take into account women's context creates better well-being and better conditions of working and family life</p>	<p>How do work-life balance initiatives affect well-being at work, so that it has a spillover effect on family life and sports as a workplace and thereby society. <u>Object of study:</u> the citizen perspective (family and working life) <u>Impact factors:</u> the individual perspective (work-life balance) + the employee perspective (well-being)</p>	<p>An adequate insight into the involvement of all three levels at once embracing modern working life problems. Organizational Work-Life Balance initiatives aimed at individuals (the individual perspective) affects well-being and work environment (the employee perspective), which has a spillover effect on family and working life as institutions in society (the citizen perspective)</p>

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19. Kirby (2005)	<p>Quality theme</p> <p>To talk about how Life Coaching as an employee developmental initiative has managed to reduce work-related stress, which has affected sickness absence and thus reduced both company and societal costs, where the released money can be used for other political purposes instead of for issues in this particular organization</p> <p>A minimum of two people were employed in Bradford Council to carry out qualitative Life Coaching, regularly consulting employees, through a holistic approach, looking at what kind of factors in a person's life lead to stress and thus sickness absence as opposed to traditional ideas about not mixing work and family life in assessments</p> <p>The results of the study show that the employees, according to themselves, experienced that they were less skeptical and experienced improved self-confidence due to the Life Coaching process. No actual examination of concrete results in relation to the link between stress and illness</p> <p>How do employee developmental initiatives affect work-related stress in a way which has a spillover effect on sickness absence and health having a cost-reducing effect on society? Object of study: the citizen perspective (sickness absence and health) Impact factors: the individual perspective (employee development) + the employee perspective (stress)</p> <p>A thorough insight into the involvement of all three perspectives at once. Organizational employee developmental initiatives targeted at individuals (the individual perspective) work-related stress and working environment (the employee perspective), which has a spillover effect on sickness absence and health as a potential cost-reducing effect on society (the citizen perspective)</p>
20. Lovell et al. (2009)	<p>Quality theme</p> <p>To develop a best practice in terms of creating better well-being using less work-related stress among physicians. To identify and discuss the reported factors which prevent well-being from becoming established and the factors which increase well-being among physicians</p> <p>A questionnaire with a qualitative sociological approach which relates to micro, exo, meso, and macro levels</p> <p>Various stress factors were localized associated with micro, exo, meso, and macro levels. The qualitative sociological approach made this possible, since a qualitative analysis can analyze the implicit factors, which connects the different levels. The authors therefore recommend that in the future there be more qualitative research when it comes to examining things that affect personal factors related to both organizations and community institutions such as family and working life</p> <p>Insight into how a study embraces the three approaches: Stress (the employee perspective), Work-Life Balance (the individual perspective), Family and Labor (the citizen perspective) when it concerns human emotions associated with a job. This highlights the qualitative method as crucial to studies in modern working life as the standard response categories maintain the division of levels instead of analyzing across the three perspectives</p> <p>How do work-life balance factors affect work-related stress having spillover effects on the societal institution family and working life? Object of study: the employee perspective (stress) + the citizen approach (family and working life) Impact factors: the individual perspective (work-life balance)</p>

<p>21. OECD (2007a) Boundary theme</p>	<p>To investigate the partial concepts in relation to working people, their life stages: the social and societal appropriateness connected to aligning the two things</p>	<p>Report of the OECD seminar in Paris, May 2007. A composition of studies</p>	<p>Different reflections, financing models, studies, and proposals related to social policies in different countries and their potential sociopolitical intervention affecting the organizational and societal level in order to adapt family and working life, so that they fit with the stages of human life</p>	<p>How do work-life balance factors affect work-related stress, in ways which result in spillover effects on the societal institution family and working life? <u>Object of study:</u> the employee perspective (stress) + the citizen perspective (family and working life) <u>Impact factors:</u> the individual perspective (work-life balance)</p>	<p>A highly relevant international and thorough insight into how societal changes (the citizen perspective) could alter both the organizational conditions (the individual perspective) and working environment (the employee perspective) in the direction of an adjustment which proposes the idea that family and working life must be approached as a flexible size, which can be adapted to different human requirements at different life stages</p>
<p>22. OECD (2007b) Boundary theme</p>	<p>To focus on the synthesis between analysis and recommendations in relation to social policies contained in the four editions and an extension of several countries</p>	<p>An investigation of the shape of social policies in different countries conducted over a number of years via four publications</p>	<p>Family-friendly workplaces are important. There are productivity advantages associated with them for both businesses and society. Access to family-friendly companies is currently uneven. The majority of companies had only made very few steps. General reluctance of governments in relation to interfering in labor negotiations. Some countries, however, had formalized legal requirements requiring family-friendly practices in enterprises, such as Germany, Netherlands, and Sweden</p>	<p>How do sociopolitical work-life balance factors affect work-related stress having a spillover effect on the societal institution family and working life? <u>Object of study:</u> the employee perspective (stress) + the citizen perspective (family &amp; working life) <u>Impact factors:</u> the individual perspective (work-life balance) + the citizen perspective (family and working life)</p>	<p>A very relevant insight into sociopolitical influences (the citizen perspective) in relation to creating changes, which can alter both the organizational conditions (the individual perspective) and the working environment (the employee perspective) in the direction of an adjustment requiring the idea that appropriate combination of work and family life is an important issue which potentially can be met through legal requirements spreading them out in individual companies and in this way affecting employees positively, which is transmitted back to society</p>

Continue

23. Loretto et al. (2005)	To create a holistic model which can accommodate work-related, personal, and societal conditions in order to make a positive difference to mental health and work-related well-being	Qualitative self-reported questionnaire, supplemented by a quantitative survey	A model was developed on the basis of mental health and well-being being influenced by a complex combination of personal, occupational, and social factors. There was a clear correlation between work-related changes and well-being of work life (un)balance and well-being. These factors all seemed to be dependent on each other, which is why they require separate attention from employees and managers	How do work–life balance factors affect sickness absence and health and work-related well-being? <b>Object of study:</b> the employee perspective (well-being) + the citizen perspective (sickness absence and health) <b>Impact factors:</b> the individual perspective (work–life balance)	An insight into a study that has the ambition to involve all relevant and meaningful perspectives in an attempt to say something about how organizational initiatives (the individual perspective), working environment and well-being (the employee perspective), and sickness absence and health (the citizen perspective) are all factors which affect each other in all directions in a holistic view
24. Tsui (2008) Quality theme	To give a general insight into the state of well-being and health among Asia's population in the context of Asia's growing economy	Literature review	The intensified global competition and the growing gap between the rich and the poor have led to stress and tension. Much of Asia's workforce consists of burned out people with symptoms of fatigue, anxiety, depression, musculoskeletal pain, sleep problems, and a large increase in chronic diseases, "karoshi" (sudden death due to overload among relatively young people), suicide, etc.. In order to ensure the social sustainability, companies introduce Work–Life Balance initiatives to facilitate the overworked workforce, thus ensuring long-term productivity	How do work–life balance factors affect sickness absence and health along with work-related stress? <b>Object of study:</b> the employee perspective (stress) + the citizen perspective (sickness absence and health) <b>Impact factors:</b> the individual perspective (work–life balance)	The study is a very relevant approach to the problems associated with work-related stress (the employee perspective) and social conditions (the citizen perspective) according to disease and health (the citizen perspective). The study touches upon all three relevant perspectives, as it identifies both impact factors in society and in the organization/individual (the individual perspective), it contains all relevant aspects that require to be considered



as wide an extent than previously presumed. The results of the study show that 55% of the respondents are “dual-centric,” prioritizing family and work life the same. Contrary to previous hypotheses and according to the article’s hypothesis, family and working life do not clash very often. In this context, Bourne et al. claim that the positive development is due to the fact that companies more often than previously, using HRM work–life balance tools, treat the employees as whole human beings, causing a decline in the stress level and an increase in the well-being level. This development has a positive spillover effect on the total company productivity level and thereby financial success.

With this article, Bourne et al. (2009) paint a good picture of the way in which an individual perspective on quality issues of OWL gives an insight into companies’ approaches to human beings, looking upon them as accessible company resources. As we see it, it is the idea that specific work–life balance initiatives are able to influence employees in ways which make them create a better balance between family and working life, making them become more whole human beings who manage to become more productive in favor of themselves and thereby the companies they work for. In doing so, the article discusses well-being at the workplace and thereby productivity as something altogether dependent on organizational work–life programs and work–life balance initiatives. Well-being thereby becomes the impact factor which influences profits (the object of study and concept of productivity).

Through the individual perspective as the article’s object of study, the interplay between the individual and the organization (the individual perspective) and the workplace (the employee perspective) is primarily in focus. The workplace (the employee perspective) is thereby the impact factor in the article. The article contributes to the understanding of OWL from a financial perspective on productivity. However, it does not refer to the societal and welfare dimension (citizen perspective) when approaching quality issues. This means that the article does not include the societal sustainability factors when investigating the consequences of the interplay between well-being and work–life balance initiatives.

### **Working Environment and Good Psychological Working Environment as a Measure of Success**

Another good example of a relevant publication working on the boundary theme is the OECD report from 2007 (OECD 2007b). The article has the employee perspective as an object of study and is a result of cross-searches using the keywords “work–life balance” (the individual perspective), “stress” (the employee perspective), and “family and working life” (the citizen perspective).

The report’s methodology is a review of the forms of social policies within the different OECD countries carried out over several years and spread over four different publications and 13 participating countries. The purpose of the report is to form a synthesis between different analyses and recommendations regarding stress-related illnesses and social policies. It is its overall hypothesis that social policies, which create suitable settings for a good family and working life, cause a better effect in terms of making people realize that they are a part of both at the same time. This is to say that the social policies, which make it a categorical imperative for companies and employees to always work on creating a balance between family life and working life, are more successful in



affecting several aspects of modern working life at the same time: companies profit from employees suffering less from stress, etc., and the society obtains better sustainability through a strengthened family institution producing better capacity for work and societal productivity. Results show that family-friendly workplaces are important in connection to reducing working environmental stress, this leading to productivity advantages for both companies and society. According to the report, the access to family-friendly companies is very uneven for the present. The majority of the companies had just implemented very few initiatives. However, results show unwillingness among the different governments to get involved with labor market negotiations. Some countries (i.e., Germany, Holland, and Sweden) have formalized regulations, which call for family-friendly and stress-reducing practices within all companies.

In regard to quality issues related to OWL, we believe that the OECD report gives a very relevant insight into the influence of social policies. The report concentrates on the creation of changes aiming at adjusting the issues connected to having a family life and a working life—changes which potentially could affect not only society positively but also individual, organizational, and working environmental conditions at the same time. According to the report, it is crucial that legal founded changes be made affecting companies. According to the report, these changes will affect the employees positively preventing stress, which eventually will rub off on society.

As we see it, the report's object of study and thereby concept of productivity is improved psychological working environment through the prevention of stress (the employee perspective). Having stress as its main issue, the report suggests that the use of HRM tools (the individual perspective) and societal initiatives (the citizen perspective) as impact factors produces better well-being at the workplace (the employee perspective). The reduction in the level of stress and the increase in well-being at the workplace produce an improvement of the psychological working environment, according to the report. Additionally, the report concentrates on the positive influence which the improved working environment has on both organizations and society, meaning that the report works with all three perspectives of OWL. The report is, therefore, as we see it, an example of a very thorough and extensive piece of research dealing with quality issues in modern working life, as it concentrates on correlations between different types of relations connected to the labor market, i.e., work–life balance initiatives (the individual perspective) and the way in which they affect workplace-related stress (the employee perspective), together with the way in which demographical and societal family and working life relations (the citizen perspective) have great influence on employee well-being at the workplace, this being a societal institution. In this way, we observe an interaction of all three perspectives.

In spite of the fact that the report is composed of several partial studies, which do not individually consider all three perspectives at the same time, it still manages to say something satisfactory about OWL and quality issues of modern working life, as it is ambitious about touching upon aspects dealing with quality, working life, human beings, organizations, and society in the context of modern working life.

### **Welfare and Social and Societal Sustainability as a Measure of Success**

A third good example of a relevant publication operating with the boundary theme while using the citizen perspective as an object of study and productivity concept is another OECD report from 2007 (OECD 2007a). The report is a result of cross-searches

using the keywords “work–life balance” (the individual perspective), “stress” (the employee perspective), and “family and working life” (the citizen perspective). The report’s methodology is an examination of an OECD seminar held in Paris in May 2007. The report is a compilation of different studies represented at the seminar. The purpose of the report is to examine studies of different conceptual components related to working human beings, their phases of life, and the societal interest. It concentrates on how potential adjustments of these conceptual components could lead to better social and societal sustainability. It is the report’s hypothesis that it is a problem and stressful for human beings that they have very few chances of adapting their workload to their different phases of life, in terms of personal life, family life, etc. An example of this adapted workload could be that families with small children would have a proportional pressure of work fitting their capacity to do it. The idea is that if work intensity is interpreted with reference to a person’s phase of life, then greater societal balance is obtained. The report’s results consist of different reflections, financial models, examinations, and propositions referring to different national social policies. It points to potential political interventions, which could have an encouraging effect on balancing family and working life, making it fit peoples’ changing phases of life.

In our opinion, the report delivers an exceedingly relevant insight into the ways in which societal changes could potentially change not only organizational but also environmental work conditions toward an internationally synchronized adaption of the idea of family life and working life being flexible quantities adaptable to people’s different needs at different times.

As the report problematizes phases of life in society, we believe that social and societal sustainability is the object of study and concept of productivity. We thereby see individual, organizational, and work environment conditions as impact factors indirectly affecting social and societal sustainability. Seeing that the report manages to include all three perspectives analytically and considers all three concepts of productivity, this publication delivers some very useful knowledge about OWL and quality issues of modern working life.

The report consists of several partial studies based on the assumption that people to a large extent are in need of balance between family life and working life in order to be productive, benefiting themselves, their workplace, and society at the same time. The report focuses on the distribution of the workload spread over people’s different phases of life looking at specific work–life balance initiatives initiated by companies working with established societal leave-of-absence schemes and how all this could potentially affect stress and well-being and thereby the psychological working environment. In this way, the idea of restructuring the workload according to important phases of life holds the ambition of creating quality at work and in life for people who work and live today. Thus, this report is a very important contribution to the understanding of OWL and quality issues of modern working life.

## **The Quality Theme**

### **The individual Approach and Financial Profit as a Measure of Success**

A good example of a publication operating within “the quality theme,” having the individual perspective as an object of study and concept of productivity, is a study published in Strategic Direction in 2009. It is a result of cross-searches using “employee



development” (the individual perspective) and “well-being” (the employee perspective). The study’s methodology is a literature review with the purpose of investigating the effect of employee development initiatives: how they influence employee well-being and to what extent this affects company productivity and financial capacity. The study’s hypothesis is that companies which make an effort to measure employee well-being when evaluating employee development initiatives will retain employees for a longer period of time and thereby increase productivity. The results of the study show that measuring employee well-being has a positive impact on the employee turnover and thereby the financial capacity of the company.

As we see it, the study delivers an insight into the way in which companies often look upon employees, viewing them as resources at the disposal of the company, susceptible to the influence of specific training programs, which will help them feel better and thereby remain employed longer than usual leading to an increase in the organizational performance. In this way, the study places employee development as an object of study in the form of training programs and their influence on company productivity (the individual perspective). The employee approach and well-being become impact factors with the ability to influence company productivity and profit in either a positive or a negative direction. The study does not touch upon how organizational initiatives aiming at an increase in employee well-being could potentially influence the societal level. In this way, the study only discusses parts of OWL.

### **The Employee Approach and a Good Psychological Working Environment as a Measure of Success**

An example of a relevant publication that we have placed within the quality theme having the employee perspective as an object of study and productivity concept is Loretto et al. (2005). The publication is a result of cross-searches using the keywords “work–life balance” (the individual perspective), “well-being” (the employee perspective), and “sickness absence and health” (the citizen perspective). The methodology is a self-reporting questionnaire survey supplemented with a quantitative questionnaire survey totaling 10,000 respondents from six participating hospitals from the National Health Service in Great Britain. The purpose of the study was to create a holistic model containing personal, workplace-oriented, and society-oriented aspects of working life aiming at making a positive difference to work-related well-being and psychological health. The study’s hypothesis is that it is imperative that work-related, personal, and societal factors be included when wanting to say something significant about well-being and psychological health related to modern working life. The result of the study is a model built on factors related to well-being and psychological health. The model is complex and made up of different sets of personal, work-related, and societal factors, which are all coherent. The study shows a clear connection between work-related changes and well-being, and between work–life balance and well-being. The study recommends that both employees and management concentrate on each of these factors individually.

In our view, the study delivers an insight into an ambition to include all three life sphere perspectives in question when trying to approach the way in which organizational initiatives, working environment, well-being, and sickness absence are all factors, which influence each other in all directions, creating a holistic picture of working life.

The well-being dimension and therefore the employment perspective is the object of study and concept of productivity in the study, as the study measures how individual, organizational, and societal factors (the individual perspective and the citizen perspective) as impact factors make a difference to the way in which work-related well-being is perceived among the employees in the National Health Service.

As we see it, this study is an extremely good example of how all three perspectives overlapping in OWL are in play at the same time. The holistic model seeks to comply with the issues related to well-being and psychological health (the employee perspective), however, on the basis of the idea that it is important that not only personal and organizational factors (the individual perspective) but also demographic and societal factors (the citizen perspective) be included in the analysis.

### **The Citizen Approach and Social and Societal Sustainability as a Measure of Success**

Kirby (2005) is a third good example of a relevant study operating within the quality theme. The publication has the citizen perspective as an object of study and concept of productivity. It is a result of cross-searches using the keywords “employee development” (the individual perspective), “stress” (the employee perspective), and “sickness absence and health” (the citizen perspective). The methodology used is qualitative and involves two people hired by Bradford Council to consult the employees with “Life Coaching.” Life Coaching is a holistic approach to modern working life, in which the life coaches advise employees how to look at the important factors in their life, which lead to stress and thereby sickness absence. Seen from our perspective, the study claims to be opposed to more traditional ideas of not mixing family life and working life in evaluations of either one of the two. The purpose of the study is to demonstrate how life coaching as an employee developmental initiative carried out with employees of the Bradford Council has managed to reduce work-related stress and affected the level of sickness absence positively and thereby reducing expenses, making it possible to spend the released capital in other important political areas. The hypothesis of the study is that the effect of life coaching is crucial to the employee’s life, which has a positive influence on their job leading to employees becoming more productive and less sick, releasing resources to be used in other fields. The results of the study show that the employees, according to themselves, experienced that they became less skeptical and improved their self-confidence in relation to their job, which, according to the study, presumably affects the level of sickness absence in a positive manner. This study does not show definite and tangible results illustrating a relationship between stress and sickness absence. However, it is a very good illustration of how involving all three perspectives, when examining work-related quality issues, improves the understanding of quality in modern working life: organizational employee developmental initiatives aimed at the individual employee (the individual perspective), work-related stress and the working environment (the employee perspective), which affects sickness absence and health as a potential cost-reductive effect on society (the citizen perspective). In that way, we believe that the study places sickness absence and health as an object of study and productivity concept, as it looks specifically at the way in which employee developmental initiatives and work-related stress could potentially make an important difference to social and societal conditions such



as sickness absence and health. Thus, the study uses social and societal sustainability as a measure of productivity. In spite of the fact that the study does not deliver a specific result, it is a very good example of a study which considers the entire OWL spectrum, as it concentrates on how employee developmental initiatives such as life coaching (the individual approach) are able to affect work-related stress (the employee approach) having an effect on sickness absence also affecting the organization (Bradford Council). The study concludes that it has a positive effect on society, that HRM initiatives improve the working environment, thereby contributing to releasing of societal means to be made use of in other needy areas of society.

## Recommendations and Future Research Perspectives

The relationship between the boundary theme and the quality theme points back to our premise for this review; that the three research perspectives on modern working life each have their focus on one life sphere of modern humans, but to each man or woman modern working life is one life. Since working life increasingly takes up more space, in each person's life and in society, the employee's relation to the company changes from being an employee doing a job under certain conditions to being something where the employment and carrying out the job contribute to the development of the employee's life.

The results of this review support the idea of challenges and development as drivers in choice of work and also that the risk of physical or mental strain or segregation from the labor market seems to be becoming more pressing. This assumption—in the thematic studies—is reflected in studies of the boundary theme, which is primarily focused on the relationship between family life and working life. The assumption is also reflected in studies on the quality theme, which primarily focuses on organizational initiatives, which extend beyond each company to individual well-being, company profits, and community sustainability.

In the Nordic countries, the three research perspectives dealing with quality issues of modern working life intertwine to a very large extent due to the highly developed welfare state, budget collaboration between the State and municipalities, and a unified labor movement. Therefore, the idea of the boundaryless working life is not just a question of balancing the two life spheres, family life and working life. In the Nordic countries, the boundaryless working life entails a third and very important dimension, the sphere of life as a citizen. This life sphere is particularly important for understanding the Nordic approach to OWL and quality issues of modern working life because the government in Nordic countries plays a very significant role, in paying for sick leave, for example, the taking of which is a very common consequence of the different spheres being intertwined. That is to say that when a person becomes ill from the consequences of an OWL, he or she partially leaves the working situation and the system of the company (the workplace life sphere), to be at home in the family surroundings, perhaps partially or full time (the individual life sphere), he or she then partially enters into the welfare society's public health care system (the citizen life sphere). Because of these different mechanisms of modern working life, in which a person's different life spheres continuously overlap, it becomes very important that research considers the fact that the modern Nordic working life is not lived in a compartmentalized manner but as one full working life of being a citizen, employee, and individual at the same time. According to

the results of this review, the threefold division and compartmentalization of the three life spheres' approaches to modern working life—the individual approach, the employee approach, and the citizen approach—very much prevails as a common research strategy. Our results show that approaching modern working life as one full and overlapping working life is rarely done, as the three relevant and related research perspectives each primarily focus their attention on one or two life spheres of modern working life at a time. This means that not only does most research not reflect the full modern working life as lived, it also does not consider the consequences of the three research perspectives being intertwined.

Three obvious areas of fusing the research perspectives and their application would be the following:

1. Focusing on facilitation of families with small children having pressure of work proportional to their capacity to do it.
2. Intensified focus on inclusive workplaces, corporate social responsibility, sustainable workplaces, and health promotion.
3. A higher degree of correlation between HRM and working environment policies and their implementation in terms of work–life balance, maintenance of sick people, and integration of people, who are already excluded from the labor market.

As our outcome of this review on quality in modern working life is a conceptualization of OWL reflected in the current relevant research and its application, it raises a scientific problem not only from a conceptual perspective but also from a practical perspective. Future fusing of the three perspectives, as we see it, could therefore be both normative and tool oriented, more theoretical and philosophical, or both.

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