



Introduction

In Jan Ch Karlsson's debate article in this issue he urges all of us to reveal "factoids". Factoids are statements that are repeated so often that they appear as facts even though they are not, and he provides us with some examples of common factoids concerning working life. This issue presents seven articles dealing with different subjects within working life research, all providing us with new knowledge and insights on working life conditions with potential to reveal factoids. The articles also provide us with knowledge that can be used in practical contexts in working life.

In addition to these seven articles the issue contains two comprehensive book reviews, books that contribute to the conceptual development of working life research, namely a review of Nancy Harding's book "On Being at Work. The Social Construction of the Employee", and Steven Peter Vallas' book "Work".

Here I present the seven articles briefly.

Mellner, Arnsson, and Kecklund have studied *boundaries between work and private life* among highly educated employees in a large Swedish telecom company. A total of 1200 employees responded to a questionnaire. Due to technology, organizational development, and globalization established boundaries between work and private life are challenged. Is that a problem, and if it is, for whom? To answer that question the authors divide the respondents in gender and in those who prefer segmentation versus integration between work and family life. And the respondents are divided into those with high boundary control and those with low boundary control. By combining preferences, gender, and work environment parameters, the authors have created new insight into the delicate balance between work and family life. The authors find that the majority of workers prefer segmentation, that boundary control is crucial for the balance between work and family life, and that there still are large gender differences in the perception of boundaries between work and family life.

Ramstad contributes to our knowledge about the *relation between quality of working life and productivity*. She studies how the introduction of "high-involvement innovation practices" (HIIP) at 163 different Finnish workplaces has affected productivity and quality of working life. HIIP is one of a variety of approaches to "sociotechnical work place development" (STS). The implications of introduction of STS for productivity and quality of working life have been examined in quite many previous studies. Ramstad's study is however quite unique: many work places are included, the study has a prospective design, and both managers and employees are included. It is difficult to find the final evidence of a positive correlation between any production concept and productivity—that goes for Lean, Total Quality Management TQM,..., as well as STS. However, Ramstad delivers with her article persuasive arguments for a positive relation between HIIP and both productivity and quality of working life. It makes a good argument for a higher priority of sociotechnical-inspired development of work organizations.

Enehaug and Mamelund present a study of *how restructuring processes influence the working environment*. Prior research has documented that low and unskilled workers and



immigrants are at a higher risk of experiencing negative health consequences of restructuring than nonimmigrants and higher socioeconomic status groups. Enehaug and Mamelund contribute with their study to our understanding of why restructuring processes have negative effects especially for unskilled workers and immigrants. The authors conduct a qualitative study among unskilled and immigrant workers in a large Norwegian hospital where the employees are exposed to permanent restructuring processes. Enehaug and Mamelund analyze the restructuring processes within five critical parameters: 1) perception of the restructuring process, 2) awareness of local norms, 3) social support, 4) manager availability, participation, and control over work, and 5) early role clarification.

Baldschun develops a theoretical model for analyzing *well-being* of a specific occupation: *child welfare employees*. These employees have, for better or worse, a challenging work. When they succeed in changing the life course of a vulnerable child to the better, the work is very rewarding. However, there are also many emotional strains, conflicts with clients and colleagues, and high work intensity. Baldschun makes a systematic literature review, not to get certain (co)relations confirmed, but to develop a comprehensive theoretical frame for analyzing well-being among child welfare employees. Baldschun distinguishes between individual factors and organizational factors, and between work-related mental distress (negative factors) and work-related well-being (positive factors). Based on the review Baldschun makes a model containing six types of well-being: affective, social, personal, psychosomatic, cognitive, and professional well-being. Baldschun suggests that this model is further developed through empirical studies. The theoretical model can also be of inspiration in practical efforts to improve the working environment.

Hermansen does, with his article, contribute to the research of *older employees' retirement*. The gradual aging of society has created a massive interest in postponing old age retirement to maintain a necessary workforce and to reduce welfare costs. Pull and push factors in old age employees' dissections about retirement have been the object of quite a lot of economic and sociological research. Hermansen presents a comprehensive state of the art of this research. Hermansen's own contribution to this research is a study of the impact of reduced working hours for older employees on their retirement age. He investigates whether working in a company offering additional leave affects the relative risk of workers aged 61 and 62 years retiring on the contractual pension in the next two years of their employment. Hermansen finds that additional leaves are affecting retirement timing among older workers in Norway.

Abrahamsson presents a longitudinal study of how *organizational changes affect gender relations* in work organizations. Three industrial companies, implementing comprehensive organizational changes in work organization, were studied in the mid-1990s. Ten years later Abrahamsson revisited the companies to examine whether the organizational changes had a lasting impact at the workplace. Abrahamsson made a special attention to gender relations. She studied how structures and social constructions of gender affect organizational changes and how these changes affect the social constructions of gender. Abrahamsson provides a very rich picture of the complex interaction between organizational change and gender relations and concludes that the organizational changes from the mid-1990s have had a lasting effect. She also concludes that these changes have had a (modest) positive impact on gender equality. It is however not the organizational changes in itself that create equality.

Buch and Andersen have examined the *strategies of three Danish trade unions for professionals*. "Strategic management" has become an integral part of Danish trade

union practice, and Buch and Andersen make a discourse analysis of strategy documents in The Danish Society of Engineers, The Danish Association of Lawyers and Economists, and The Danish Association of Masters and PhD's. They find that the "service rationality" is strong in all three unions. Providing services to the individual members is the core business for the union. Especially the Association for Engineers has adopted business discourses in its strategy. At the same time the unions articulate a "political rationality" governed by principles of rights, obligations, social protection, justice, and solidarity. This is strongly articulated by the associations of masters. All of the three unions emphasize the value of their professional community. By extracting these discourses Bush and Andersen open up for critical analysis of practices of the trade unions.

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