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Employment with a feminist agenda

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Nordic prime ministers

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Knowledge and efforts needed for a better work environment

We all want a working life we can live with. How do you achieve that? We have asked people in workplaces which have won awards for good work environments, experts and others who are serious about the work environment: what is needed to create change for the better?

EDITORIAL

12.11.2014

BY BERIT KVAM

Not long ago skeletomuscular strain was the greatest threat to a healthy working life. Now psychosocial problems have taken over. Yet we still struggle with injuries and accidents in more traditional workplaces. Different generations of work environment problems exist side-by-side, while new ones emerge.

Nano technology is a new threat. An increasing number of people are exposed to nano particles at work. The scope of the threat remains unknown. That's why experts say the greatest risk is ignorance about the materials we handle and how we handle them. The Nordic Institute for Advanced Training in Occupational Health has been at the forefront of doing something about this, by organising courses in nano safety since 2010.

Regardless of the challenges facing our work environments, change for the better is possible. Just look at the award-winning examples from Denmark and Sweden in this month's theme.

Young people are most at risk in the labour market and suffer more accidents and injuries. "I follow safety instructions," says Mathias Schou Sørensen. He works for the supermarket chain Netto which has focused on community, training and feedback in order to improve the psychological work environment. The chain is now nominated for the 2014 Danish Work Environment Award.

Workers at the Karlstad Hospital in Sweden tell us about how they transformed ward number 6 to embrace patient-focused care, which also resulted in an improved and more innovative work environment. They recently received a major award for their transformative work.

Nothing happens by itself, says Eva Vingård, Professor Emerita at the Uppsala University. She has identified thirteen factors which contribute to a healthier workplace. Key

among them is good leadership, fairness and good communication.

Eva Vingård thinks the interest in preventive work environment efforts is growing, and believes the main reason is the fact that psychosocial issues now represent our largest work environment problem. Psychosocial problems are easier to prevent than to fix at a later stage. That is good to know when the latest Eurofound research shows one in four workers have psychosocial problems.

What is needed? Knowledge and cooperation, but most importantly a systematic effort to make a changing work environment become better.



The final hours before the new airport on the Faroe Islands opens and the builders are rushing to do the final touches. Stress is one of the main threats to the Work Environment in Europe.

Challenge: gathering Europe in a joint vision for the work environment

25 percent of workers in the EU have a job which causes them psychosocial problems like stress, according to the fifth European working conditions survey. The results have been analysed in a report by Eurofound in cooperation with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. But measuring work environments is considerably harder than measuring unemployment.

THEME

12.11.2014

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Whether a person is in employment or not can be a tricky enough question, as working life becomes increasingly flexible – or uncertain – depending on whether you are an employer or employee.

But the grey areas of uncertainty become even greater if you look at work environments. Anything from nano particles, chemicals, noise and working hours to salaries and management issues can influence work environments. Conditions which one person can handle just fine could be the very things making another person sick. As the service industry

grows, the kind of work environment issues which matter the most changes too.

It is not so easy to determine whether or not a business is 'healthy' either. Is the level of sick leave falling because the work environment has improved or is it because those who are on sick leave are taking early retirement?

For as long as the two European work environment organisations have existed, a lot has been done to gather comparable statistics. The first pan-European survey, called the European Working Conditions Survey – or EWCS – was not carried out until 1991, and included 12 member states. The latest one, EWCS 5, came in 2010 and included 34 countries, including Norway (but not Iceland). 44,000 people were interviewed and asked to answer 242 questions. Work is still going on to analyse the material and to draw conclusions.

Changing theories

While the surveys have been carried out, the view of for instance psychosocial risks has changed too. Researchers have launched different theories for what causes the problems. This means new questions must be asked.

The joint report, 'Psychosocial risks in Europe: Prevalence and strategies for prevention', lists three influential theoretical concepts:

- The first is the demand and control theory, developed 35 years ago by Swedish researcher Töres Theorell and his American colleague Robert A Karasek. According to the two professors, jobs with high levels of demand coupled with low levels of control lead to negative health effects and poor production levels. People's creativity and enthusiasm should be encouraged instead.
- The second theory proposes that psychological stress results from a mismatch between efforts made by workers and the rewards they receive from their employer in terms of pay, esteem, job security and career opportunities. The Swiss researcher Johannes Siegrist is behind this model which is known as the effort-reward imbalance model.
- The third theory looks at how work is organised and whether the workload is distributed equally. 'Organisational justice' is an umbrella term for many different kinds of justice issues, looking at whether men and women get equal pay for equal work, whether workers' input is measured in a way they have no confidence in, unfair dismissal etc. The Finnish researcher Marjko Evolaino is one of those who have shown how these issues have major consequences for people's health too.

More training needed

One statistic built on the first theory looks at whether employees possess the necessary skills to solve the tasks they are given. 13 percent of workers in the EU say they need

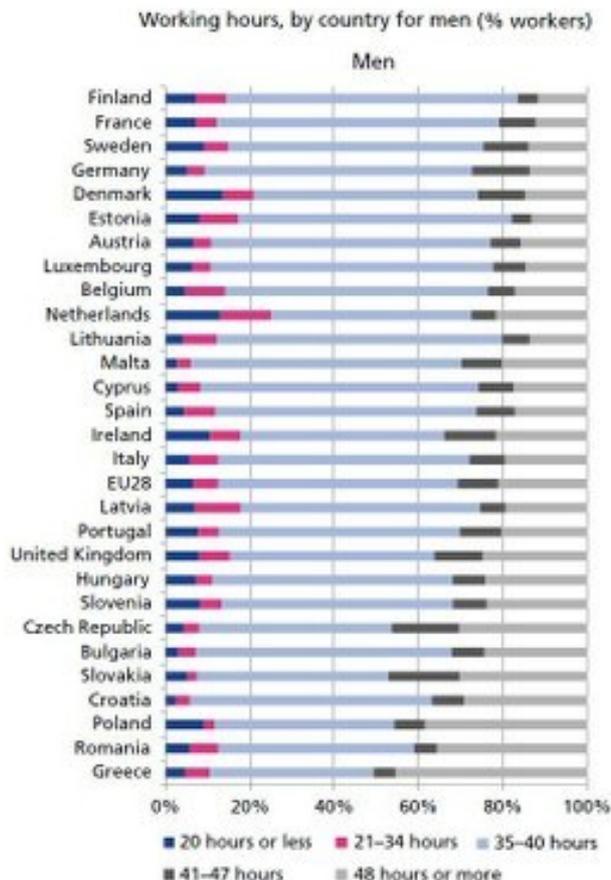
more training in order to manage their jobs. The size of the problem depends on your trade. Only seven percent of farmers feel they need more training, while 20 percent of people working in finance feel they do.

The technological development is an important factor. 48 percent of Nordic workers said processes and technology had changed in their workplace in the past three years – a number which is higher than the EU average. In Sweden a full 58 percent answered yes to this question.

Despite the rapid development, monotonous work mixed with high work intensity represents the biggest work environment problem in Europe. Nearly half of all workers in Europe are facing such risks. Finland is top among the Nordic nations when it comes to how many workers face monotonous working tasks, and the level is above the European average.

Finland best for working hours

Working hours represent another well-known problem. European employees work three hours less per week on average compared to 20 years ago, but one third of them work unusual hours and 20 percent work a lot of overtime. Out of all the European countries, Finland has the most 'normal' working hours. Men work around 35-40 hours a week, while some women work slightly less normal hours (either more or less than 35-40 hours a week).



Source: EWCS, 2010.

When trying to draw conclusions for how psychosocial and other work environment problems can be solved, you must also consider national surveys. But it is often difficult to get the message across that you not only need more jobs, but better jobs.

“There is a considerable gap between labour market research (usually carried out by economists) and social research (usually carried out by sociologists). The former is based too much on quantitative data, while the latter is more open to use a broader selection of data, including subjective and qualitative surveys,” the report’s authors note.



Despite recurring robberies and violent episodes, Netto employees take less time off after such events thanks to a new concept

Supermarket chain improves its psychological work environment

The Danish supermarket chain Netto has been nominated for this year's Danish work environment award for improving its psychological work environment by preparing the group's 10,000 mainly young employees in how to prevent and handle robberies and violent customers.

THEME

12.11.2014

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: TOMAS BERTELSEN

The retail sector employs many young people and is also one of the sectors where employees are most at risk of experiencing robberies and violent customers. Robberies are on the increase, and as a result the supermarket chain Netto has introduced a new concept called NettoCare, aimed at helping workers deal with robberies and organised theft.

The results have been so remarkable that Netto has been nominated for the ArbejdsmiljøPrisen (Work Environment Award) for best psychological work environment programme in 2014 — awarded by the Danish Work Environment Council. 12 workplaces have been nominated.

“We see frequent robberies and violent episodes, but there has been a marked fall in workers’ absence after such episodes since we introduced the NettoCare concept,” says Netto’s work environment manager Birgitte Oredson.

Few and simple messages

The concept focuses on prevention, conflict management, upgrading of safety equipment in exposed areas and it secures extra support for employees who despite all this become victims of violence. What makes the concept unique, however, is that it is built on few and easily understandable messages and direct dialogue with the individual workers in the shop during working hours.

“This method has proven to be particularly efficient with young employees, and we have quite a lot of them,” says Birgitte Oredsen.



Mathias Schou Sørensen, centre, is one of many young Netto employees. Shop manager Mukhtar Elmi (left) and Amin Mohammad Poor (right)

A Netto shop typically comprises one experienced shop manager and a deputy manager plus a number of regular workers. 20 percent of Netto’s employees are between 15 and 18, and 30-35 percent are between 18 and 24. Because robberies often happen during the last opening hour when there usually are many young people at work, it has been important to reach young employees with this concept, explains the work environment manager. New strategies have had to be put in place.

“So far we have been using meetings and flyers to inform employees about training and work environment, but we have realised that it is also necessary to talk about this in everyday life and with each other in the work place. That’s why we have appointed 454 NettoCare ambassadors across our outlets who train colleagues. NettoCare also has its own Facebook group.”

Community, training and feedback

She hopes and expects to reach more people by supplementing the traditional measures with these new strategies. To-

gether with colleagues from HR and the group’s department of internal security, she often visits Netto shops in the evenings to talk to young employees about the concept and about their work environment in general.

“Young people are trained to carry out their routines, but they need backup and someone to explain to them why the routines are important. Many young people don’t understand, for instance, why you should never leave a lot of cash in the till. They need to have it explained to them why it matters — that rumours will spread among criminals if a shop does not have much cash. It means it is not worth robbing.”

She has worked with young people and work environments for many years, and agrees with the Danish Working Environment Information Centre (Videncenter for Arbejdsmiljø), which gives the following advice to young people seeking a good psychological work environment:

- Community - seek support and backup
- Training - ask for guidance and instruction
- Feedback - give and receive feedback

In addition to NettoCare, Netto has a range of classic work environment rules for young people, the most important being that nobody under 15 can ever be hired. This rule cannot be broken, underlines the work environment manager. Netto has also developed a list of safety rules which explain what 15-17 year old employees can and cannot do in the shop. They can for instance accept empty bottles and handle items lighter than 12 kilos, but they must not lift items heavier than 12 kilos, handle cases full of beer or soft drinks, and they must not work after 10pm.

Copenhagen and employs 16 people — 14 of them are under 24. Having many colleagues is one of the reasons Mathias Schou Sørensen is very happy in his job:

“I really enjoy my job, and that is mainly because we are so many young workers here. I am on the same wavelength as my colleagues because they too are young, and the atmosphere is great. We work well together.”

He says his colleagues are considerate and good at looking after each other. He is struggling with a bad knee after a sports injury which means he must be extra careful with lifting boxes and moving pallets. The others are very considerate when it comes to this, he feels.

Wants to study more

A few months after getting his job, he was promoted from sales assistant to first assistant, which means that he is responsible for opening and shutting the shop on some days of the week. Sometimes on an evening shift he will encounter an unpleasant customer, but he has so far not been the victim of a robbery and he has never been scared:

“I don't see it as a major problem, because my boss has been very thorough when explaining how we should react.”

For now Mathias Schou Sørensen is working full time, which means 37 hours a week. But he can't see himself working in a supermarket in the long term. The plan is to save money to travel, and then he will apply to go to university.

“I don't think I'll be here for the rest of my working life, even though I really like my job. My knee isn't up to this kind of physical work, and I would like to study economy. But I can imagine doing shifts here while I'm studying too.”



Annika Carlson, Majbritt Telander Dahlström and Birgitta Finsberg from the surgical ward number 6 at the Karlstad Central Hospital

Patient-focused care improved staff's work environment

When staff at the surgical ward number 6 at the Karlstad Central Hospital were allowed to spend more time on patients and less on administration, their work environment improved too. They recently won a major work environment award worth 50,000 Swedish kronor (€5,400) for their impressive efforts to improve their work environment.

THEME

12.11.2014

TEXT AND PHOTO: GUNHILD WALLIN

Annika Carlson, Majbritt Telander Dahlström and Birgitta Finsberg enter the foyer of the Stockholm City Conference Centre. It is a cool November day and they have left their work at surgical ward number 6 at the Karlstad Central Hospital to come and talk about their work method 'Patient-

cused care'. It has resulted in happier patients and employees who are so content that the ward's sick leave levels have fallen below two percent a year.

It is two weeks since they won a major work environment award at the conference 'Gilla Jobbet' (Enjoy Work). It was presented to them by the organisation Sutarbetsliv (healthy work environment), which brings together trade unions and employers to find ways of improving work environments using preventative measures.

The annual award goes to a workplace which has demonstrated "impressive efforts to improve the work environment". The motivation for this year's prize was: "Building on strong, common values using a clear combination of practical solutions and individual needs, surgical ward number 6 at Karlstad Central Hospital in partnership with the Värmland county council presented impressive results and created the basis for a long-term sustainable workplace."

"We are very pleased with this award. It is a confirmation that we are a good workplace, that we have a good team and good leadership," says Birgitta Finsberg, a nurse who has worked at the surgical ward number 6 since the late 1990s.

Frustrating longing for patients

It all began with a visit to the dentist in 1999. Nurse Marianne Inde, who was section manager for ward number 6 at the time, sat in the waiting room leafing through a research report talking about the patient-centered care at a Detroit hospital. She became curious. She knew many nurses often talked about wanting to work closer with patients. Marianne Inde went to Detroit to look at their way of doing things and then started work to make ward number 6 more patient-oriented. At that time, their work was dominated by administrative tasks. The ward's main office could receive up to 100 calls a day and the environment was stressful and confused.

There were strict divisions between the roles of nurses and assistant nurses, and who did what was very important. As a result, many nurses felt they never reached their patients. Today, 15 years later, work looks completely different.

"People training to become nurses want to work with patients. That is the driving force and if you don't end up doing it you feel bad. We make sure you are near to where the patient is at all times," says section manager Annika Carlson, who also has a master degree in care.

The first thing they did was to shrink the administration, starting with turning the ward's main office into a reception area. Assistant nurse Majbritt Telander Dahlström was tasked with manning it, and she can tell you about people's reluctance to restructuring, and what kind of upset a new division of roles between nurses and assistant nurses can provoke.



"I remember when we started with the reception. I felt under fire from my group, as if I had grabbed a new post. It wasn't as common back then to do something different as an assistant nurse. But I had to do double shifts with the nurses for two weeks and learnt about their job. This new way of working has allowed me to develop a lot," says Majbritt Telander Dahlström who is an assistant nurse at surgical ward number 6, where she has been working since 1997.

New roles for workers

Today the reception is the heart of the administration and staffed 24 hours. All calls go there and are passed on when needed to the responsible nurse. This is also where the triage system is managed — who is most in need of seeing someone, who should be discharged and which treatments should patients have during the day? At the same time nurses and assistant nurses are being organised in joint ward teams and each team has been given a small, open workstation in the vicinity of the patients' rooms. This was not all easy — several nurses were worried about losing prestige if they were made to do more of the assistant nurses' jobs.

"You used to talk about working "in" our "out", which means with admin or with patients. This no longer exists. You are a nurse every day, or an assistant nurse. You work with what you are, no matter the task and it is all about taking what you do seriously," says Birgitta Finsberg.

“Today patients are more ill and need nurses close at hand. We have taken admin away from nurses and they are closer to the patients. Before it was considered proper to work with papers and less proper to be “out”, but since the time of Florence [Nightingale] being a nurse has been about being near to the patients,” says Annika Carlson.

In order to create sustainable change, a lot of energy has been put into developing the softer parts of the business. Many new routines have been created to improve conversation on the ward. There is now a daily morning meeting led by the section manager where everyone meets to look at what will happen that day and when. The meeting also decides what time in the afternoon everyone should meet for feedback – a meeting where they dissect the day, what has been good and what was less good. How was the workload for the three teams, for instance? And what can be improved the next day?

Set structures, not set routines

“Every day is structured depending on needs. In order to be flexible we have no set routines but set structures,” says Birgitta Finsberg.

Every third week there is also time set aside for common reflection. Because of all these opportunities for conversation, the gruff never gets a chance to collect, they explain. The team has also worked to create a forgiving environment. In health care there is a great fear of making mistakes, not least among new employees. They get to have supporting conversations every third week for the first three months. This is an emergency ward, the tempo is high and if you are not given support the stress an uncertainty can easily become a work environment problem.

“We have been talking a lot about the fear of making mistakes, and we have worked to get rid of that feeling. If something does go wrong you should know that someone will come to your aid,” says Birgitta Finsberg.

“We have been working with the term ‘good enough’, and how to handle stress. People in the group support each other. We have seen that new arrivals are happy, also with the support they get in reception,” says Annika Carlson.

There is little sick leave, below two percent, and the ward was recently granted a health certificate by the local county council. This means staff have the right to spend one hour a week doing physical exercise during working hours, and they get a gym membership. It can be hard to fit this in when you work on an emergency ward, but those who exercise outside of working hours can document this in order to take time out from their rota later. Work rotation is another health-promoting measure. Both nurses and assistant nurses are allowed to swap and broaden their tasks.

Leadership through surveys

Communication is central to the entire operation. Clear goals are being set and there is frequent feedback on what works,

what doesn't and why. Each year begins with a planning meeting where goals are presented and last year's goals are assessed. The goals are then broken down into manageable, relevant plans which everyone understands and knows about. Everyone is included and is kept informed about what is going to happen, how it is to be done and everyone gets feedback about how the goals are being achieved. The organisation is in constant development. Using patient and worker surveys, everyone knows where the organisation is heading at all times.

“Feedback is key. If you don't have that, many plans just fade away. What you want to introduce or improve must have an ending and a beginning which everyone is aware of. We measure much of what we do and I use surveys as part of my leadership – being able to prove that changes lead to results makes it easier to motivate and carry through different improvements,” says Annika Carlson.

Leadership plays an important role and one of the cornerstones of creating patient-focused care is leaders being present in the workspace. From the very beginning the goals and value basis have been communicated to employees, and everyone has been sticking to what has been decided and feedback has been given. Both Annika Carlson and Majbritt Telander Dahlström describe how they sometimes have felt like nagging witches who squabble in order to stick to what has been decided. You have to have stamina to be able to constantly follow up things, explains Annika Carlson.

“You need leadership on several levels too. Each person must lead him or herself. In reception, for instance, you need to have a mandate to make decisions about your own work, just like on the ward teams. If you want to influence and drive development, you must lead yourself,” she says.

Annika Carlson has also chosen to put together each day's teams herself. She knows her colleagues, knows who might be going through a tough time or who is particularly tired, and she plans the groups and tasks with that in mind. At some periods in life you don't have the energy or chance to make work priority number one, and there needs to be space to accept that.

“We meet people who are in the middle of a life crisis and that is quite demanding for our employees. That's why we need to be able to find safety in our work and to show understanding of the fact that we are all strong or weak at different times. That's how you get sustainable employees,” say Annika Carlson.

Work, but also fun

Back to the Stockholm City Conference Centre. Time has flown by and a conference organiser is hurrying them along. They are due on stage to tell their story about how good care and a good work environment go hand in hand.

“It is fun to get this award also because it proves we are not wrong when we think we’re good. It might also increase interest in our way of working in the hospital. It’s not always easy to get the message out at home,” says Birgitta Finsberg.

The 50,000 kronor award money will be spent on something good for the entire team. They know how to have fun both in everyday life and at parties.

Healthy organisations don't emerge by accident

New Swedish research shows more than one in four young people believe their jobs will have a negative impact on their health. At the same time we are becoming increasingly interested in what makes us healthy at work.

THEME

12.11.2014

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

“It is easy to create a negative image when you read the papers, but you should also remember that negative studies are more interesting to the media than positive ones. Positive Health stories are not very visible, but I wish they were,” says Eva Vingård, Professor Emeritus of occupational and environmental medicine at the Uppsala University.

Several studies published this summer and autumn point to an increase in sick leave and negative developments particularly within the psychosocial work environment.

The work health barometre 2014, an annual survey by Sveriges Företagshälsor (a members association representing corporate healthcare providers), shows 29 percent of women under 30 and 27 percent of men of the same age believe their jobs will have a negative influence on their health in the next two years.

The work health barometre, which has just over 9,000 respondents between 20 and 65, also shows that younger people are more often off sick than older colleagues, and that a considerable number of younger people do not feel motivated by work. 46 percent of women under 30 even said going to work sometimes made them feel psychologically ill. Sveriges Företagshälsor's expert panel confirms that psychosocial factors, especially stress, today make up the most serious work environment problem.

The work environment has no gender

Another survey recently carried out by the Swedish Work Environment Authority shows that employers are ill prepared for this development. The authority visited 1,705 workplaces across the country to see how they work with stress, and found that six in ten workplaces have no plans in place for working with stress and psychological ill health. The negative reports have resulted in a growing focus particularly on young women's health. But Eva Vingård, who has made a career out of studying work environments, reckons things might not be as bad as they seem. Stress and pressure are not new issues, they have always been around. She is sceptical

of turning work environment problems into a gender issue, however.

“It's not wrong to look at this, but I disagree with the focus on women's ill health. Bad workplaces have nothing to do with gender, and I think the focus should rather be on creating good health in the public sector as a whole. If not we risk turning women into a group of victims. I have been working with male-dominated work environments like abattoirs and the construction industry, but nobody ever suggested we should look after men's work environment,” she says.

Thirteen health factors

Eva Vingård began her work environment research in what she calls “the misery trade”. At that time the work environment was about avoiding risks and dangers. Since 2008 she has studied what sets a healthy company or workplace apart from unhealthy ones – both within the public and private sectors. She found thirteen factors which create a healthy workplace – positive, approachable leaders, well-developed communication, cooperation and team work, positive and social climate, influence and participation, autonomy and empowerment, clear roles and expectations and goals, recognition, the opportunity to develop and grow in your work, a suitable tempo and work load, administrative and/or personal support at work, a good physical environment and a good relationship with the interested parties, i.e. patients or customers.

“No single issue is really more important than any other, but you need structure in order to work like this. It is not enough to have one person burning for this, it needs to permeate the company or organisation. You also need to have the opportunity to work to promote health. Top leadership is of course also important. A good structure doesn't happen by itself and a healthy organisation doesn't emerge by accident,” she says.

Now there is a growing interest in health promoting work, i.e. preventive work environment measures.

“Several factors separate a workplace with a good work environment from another. More than anything it is about having a healthy structure which has room for good leadership, justice and good communication,” says Eva Vingård.

Leadership important for the work environment

Research shows it is easier to create a good structure in private companies than in the public sector. Private companies often have clear missions and a clearer leadership. The public sector is more complex, not least when it comes to leadership. Public companies are bound by political leadership, official leadership and by their mission. So how do public companies which work well do it, like in the example from Karlstad?

“Well, we are asking the same question, but we see that health-promoting work is rooted in strong, humanist and people-loving leadership,” says Eva Vingård.

She believes the increased interest in preventative work environment measures is due to today's work environment, which is different from when it was mainly about reducing noise, solvent use or other physical dangers in the work environment. Today psychosocial dangers represent the largest work environment problem.

“A bad boss cannot be eliminated, even if you feel like it sometimes. Psychosocial issues are harder to solve after the event, but easier to prevent,” says Eva Vingård.

She does think it can be harder to work for a good work environment with today's many temporary jobs, but there could be solutions we have yet to discover.

“You can't stop structural changes like globalisation, flexible jobs and the 24 hour society, but we can identify the deviations and the knowledge about what is wrong. My worry when it comes to work environment measures is that we are stuck in yesterday's world, dominated by big corporations and manufacturing towns, and we fail to see the dynamics which today's changes bring. We need to be at the forefront, see where work environment issues are headed and think “what do we need to know today in order not to be damaged tomorrow?”,” says Eva Vingård.



Nina Izgi controls a so-called sputtering mask. A thin metallic film is sprayed through the holes in the plate, onto the material which is treated

Ignorance of nano particles a growing risk in the workplace

More and more people are exposed to nano particles at work, but few know which types of particles are present or how to handle them. The Nordic Labour Journal visited a Finnish company where safety is everything.

THEME

12.11.2014

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN, PHOTO CATA PORTIN

Around 800 Finnish companies are handling nano materials on a daily basis. That means some 22,000 people are in some way in contact with the particles and a few thousand are directly exposed to nano materials. These are tiny particles, for instance metal, which might have completely different properties to the material in its larger form.

Far from everyone knows about the risks, but Beneq with its 130 employees in Espoo is on the forefront when it comes to nano safety in the workplace. The company manufactures displays for extreme conditions, and sells equipment and services for surface treatments, so-called thin film coatings. The company uses a surface treatment method originally de-

veloped and patented in Finland, Atomic Layer Deposition, ALD. It involves applying a thin layer of atoms to a surface to create certain properties like protection against corrosion.



“We no longer have production where nano particles represent a real problem. We have abandoned processes in which particles were released,” says marketing director Joe Pimenoff. Protective clothing is now used instead to prevent those who work in the clean rooms from contaminating the products.

The work processes have been planned so that only a few specially trained people need to use protective clothing and masks, and the group rotates between different work stations in the clean rooms.

“One tiny particle in the wrong place means a product must be discarded.”

The right attitude

Pimenoff, who regularly gives lectures on nano safety, says it is all about having the right attitude, knowing the risks and having the right information. Those who work in the clean rooms have had special training. New employees learn by peer-to-peer training. Customers have machines installed by Beneq’s own experts, who get them up and running.

Beneq was founded in 2005 when Finland was experiencing a bit of a nano technology boom. The Tekes innovation fund had started a national development programme and capital investors smelled big returns.

“We were riding the nano boom for perhaps five years, but now the nano applications have proper names and they have matured into real products.”

The displays are mainly used for military applications which need to withstand big shifts in temperature, like in fighter jets, and in the oil and gas industry. An LCD display without a heater grows sluggish at zero degrees, stops working at minus 20 and breaks at minus 40. But Beneq’s displays can still be used at minus 60 degrees.



Asta Ollila is equipped to work with surface treatment in the clean room

Beneq must make sure that products are treated correctly all the way to the end customer, for instance self-cleaning glass which is cut to measure to fit in buildings. Self-cleaning glass, which can be manufactured with machines delivered by Beneq, have a titan-dioxide surface which breaks down organic material; anything from soot to bird droppings.

Better knowledge

Professor Kai Savolainen at the Finnish Institute for Occupational Health in Helsinki agrees that companies should know more about what materials they are handling.

“The other day I took my car to the carwash and they offered nano treatment for the windscreen. I asked what that was, and the owner or the shift leader said it was a wax with titan-dioxide which prevents dirt from sticking. The workers had no idea about what nano materials were,” he says.

There are around 300,000 different types of nano particles. Between 50 and 100 are in commercial use. Their properties can be very different from those of larger particles of the same material. People are particularly exposed to some 15 kinds of nano particles, and authorities are therefore keeping an eye on them. One is carbon black, a coal powder mixed into car tyres to make them last longer and which makes them less vulnerable to ultraviolet light. Carbon black gets into the air when tyres wear down. Quartz is mixed into concrete to strengthen constructions.

Titan-oxide is used to make coatings which reject dirt, and is used for instance in paint. But it is also found in some sunscreens and cosmetics. Carbon nanotubes can be found in many variations and are used in clothing to kill bacteria, or added to petrol to protect engines.

Kai Savolainen says the most important thing is that employers understand what kind of material they are working with, which can be a challenge for smaller companies with limited resources. The definition of nano materials is also not entirely clear, and there are combinations of materials which make it even harder to determine.

The risks associated with nano particles have emerged only over the past decade. The EU's Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals, REACH, was ready in 2006. It does not mention nano particles at all even though they are classified as chemicals.

Many now warn against the risks of unrestrained technological progress while research on the effects on our health is lagging ten years behind. The insurance company IF has for instance put nano particles on its top-three list over the most dangerous risk areas of the future.

Not comparable to asbestos

Nano particles are often compared to asbestos fibres. Asbestos, a silicate mineral, came into use in the late 1800s as a good insulation material, and was commonly used as late as in the 1970s. The material is still legal to use in the USA, despite the fact that the link between asbestos fibres and lung cancer has been undisputed for nearly a hundred years and millions of people have died from asbestos-related illness. In the UK asbestos still kills more people than road traffic.

Kai Savolainen still says the comparison with asbestos is not quite right. Asbestos is made up of long, narrow fibres, while there is no singular group of particles when it comes to nano materials. The length varies and most are shaped like small spheres.

“Around 100 types of carbon nanotubes have been manufactured in labs, out of which around 10 have been looked at and one of them could possibly cause cancer. That material has been taken off the market.”

Most nano materials have not been tested and new products enter the market all the time. Nano materials are also used in such small quantities that they don't break the one tonne barrier which triggers registration with ECHA. The problem is that research on nano material and health is very complicated and expensive. One study of one single substance costs several millions of euro.

“Different types of nano material can trigger different kinds of health issues. Some can be damaging, while others can be beneficial to health.”

Savolainen's advice to companies which suspect they do not know what kind of nano materials they are handling is to ask the authorities. Meanwhile they should reduce their staff's exposure to nano materials as much as possible.

Workplace measurements done by the Finnish Institute for Occupational Health show the exposure to nano particles is relatively low and concerns only a few people. There could still be unrecorded data among smaller companies which have little or no resources to make measurements, as the instrument needed costs 200,000 euro — although smaller and cheaper instruments are beginning to reach the market.

NIVA gives training

The Nordic Institute for Advanced Training in Occupational Health (NIVA) started early with nano safety training and organised the first course as early as 2008. In the autumn of 2010 NIVA, which is financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, organised a 'Nordic Tour' of one day seminars exploring health issues and risks associated with nano particles, covering all of the Nordic countries. The latest event was held in Copenhagen on 10 - 12 November this year, with around 20 experts and doctoral students attending.



Newly appointed Minister for Employment in the Löfven government, on her way to the royal palace

Ylva Johansson: Minister for Employment with a feminist agenda

Her ambitions are clear: youth unemployment is priority number one. Second on the list is to match jobseekers and jobs. She wants to improve working conditions in female-dominated workplaces and she will fight for more social rights within the EU.

PORTRAIT

11.11.2014

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO/ AFTONBLADET / IBL BILDBYRÅ

More jobs. It has become a mantra on all levels. The new EU President says it, the Swedish Prime Minister says it as of course does Sweden's new Minister for Employment Ylva Johansson. What is needed to turn words into action?

"My task is to make sure the labour market works and to improve measures to get more unemployed into work," says Ylva Johansson.

She will do this through good cooperation. A cooperative spirit and optimism seem to be her tools for realising policies, whether it comes to getting a minority government's budget voted through parliament, or securing good cooperation with the social partners in working life, municipalities and county councils — and not least with the rest of the government.

"The government's work must be aimed at investment and growth in order to create more jobs."

Necessary investments

Have austerity measures in Europe gone too far?

“Yes. Perhaps not too far, but there has been so much focus on cuts in many European countries that it has become counterproductive.

“Without investments and growth you cannot turn the tide. But you won’t be able to maintain jobs long term if your economy isn’t in order, and you can’t turn the tide if you don’t invest either, so you must strike a balance.”

Do cuts in Europe influence Sweden?

“Yes, market fluctuations influence Swedish economy, but I would say despite low demand in Europe we enjoy a fairly good demand in our economy. So, yes, we are affected by demand in Europe, but we can’t blame all of Sweden’s problems on this.”

It looks like the German economy is slowing down. What does that mean for Sweden?

“Of course, if the German economy slows down it will have considerable effect on us because Germany is a very important export market and an important trading partner. So there are worrying signs in our near surroundings.”

Ylva Johansson is a fast talker. She is a seasoned politician with a lot of drive, and she is quick to react when something happens. When the Swedish public broadcaster used their flagship documentary programme to highlight working conditions for young people and calling for minimum wage legislation, she doesn’t think that is the way to go. When focus falls on a fatal workplace accident, she writes an opinion piece in the national broadsheet Svenska Dagbladet: We need a new strategy for the working environment policy. It must have a vision for zero fatal accidents in working life.

When the Nordic Labour Journal meets the Minister for Employment she has been in the job for about a month. But she has not spent much time in her ministerial office: she has been meeting European colleagues at ministerial meetings in Milano and Brussels, attended conferences in Stockholm, celebrated the working environment day and she has set out a travel plan to meet the leadership of Sweden’s 291 municipalities. She wants a dialogue to find out how to work together in order to establish more trainee jobs for young people.

“This is completely necessary. If you want to get a lot done, you need to work a lot yourself. For me it is important to find parties to cooperate with. If we are to get rid of unemployment I can’t stay in my office. I must get out and work with the municipalities, the employers, the social partners. I must build relations which make it possible to create proper cooperation.”

A feminist government

You are the Minister for Employment in a feminist government.

She responds with a jubilant “YES” and a big smile.

But is it enough to have 50 percent women for a government to call itself feminist?

“No, it is not enough. You also need a feminist agenda. It runs through all the government ministers’ projects.”

She reckons the feminist agenda can be found in the priorities in the government’s proposed budget.

“You see a lot of extra investments which will benefit women, while there are cuts to investments aimed specifically at men. We have for instance set aside a lot to support single parents, most of whom are women. There is major tax relief for the lowest income pensioners. That will mainly benefit women. We are improving the terms of employment for workers in the elderly care sector. That affects mainly women. We are extending the paternal leave quota with one month, which in the long run will impact on women’s wages. There is a range of such proposals in the budget, some dealing with money directly like the child benefit for single parents and the increase in the state pension.

Fed up with wage differences

“I am fed up with the wage differences in working life,” Ylva Johansson wrote in her blog six months before she became Sweden’s Minister For Employment. Now she can do something about it. What happens then?

“We will map wages in all workplaces. But we will do much more: if you read my blog you would have seen that I have identified four areas which are important if we want to sort out the issue of equal pay for equal work. It is important to map wages because it influences wage discrimination in a workplace. It is also the case that women are more likely to be working part time or on short term contracts, which means they are paid less. So this is also a structural problem. We hope a new majority in Sweden’s municipalities and county councils after the March elections can come to an agreement with the organisations to make full time jobs the norm.

“I’m optimistic,” she says, but admits she cannot be sure until after the election and when a new majority has been secured, allowing the decision to be made.

Are you an optimist?

“Yes, and right now the situation looks very positive. We will also pass legislation which will limit the opportunity to hire people on a temporary basis. Sweden has been criticised by the EU Commission for failing to follow the directive on temporary work. So clearly this is something we need to address, and it will also influence women’s wages. We have also made changes to parental leave giving both parents three months

off each. We will scrap the cash support [for parents to stay at home with pre-school children], which will also have a structural impact on women's pay.

"It is also the case that women often work in sectors which are less valued than others. We have earmarked three million kroner (€326,000) for measures aimed at making the female-dominated teaching occupation more attractive. We are also increasing funding for health care, care for the elderly and pre-schools. An increase in total resources helps female-dominated trade unions during wage negotiations, even though the government doesn't interfere directly in negotiations."

All in all, Ylva Johansson thinks the government is doing quite a lot which will have an impact on wage differences in the time to come.

How long things will take? She is not sure. The budget is for 2015, and then she can only hope everyone will act the way they are supposed to act.

Strong new education drive

"Making the labour market work is the main challenge," says Minister for Employment Ylva Johansson, and points to the fact that many unemployed people and many unfilled jobs show that the matching of the two is not working very well.

Do you blame the Reinfeldt government?

"Yes I do, actually. They made serious cuts to education. We are turning things around and are investing broadly in education. There will be more study spaces in vocational education, colleges, further adult education and folk high schools [further education without academic degrees]. Long term unemployed can study or take further education with state support. This is something new.

"We also have the 90 day guarantee for youths which will help them gain the skills needed for the labour market. The aim is for youths to have an offer of education, work or traineeship within 90 days.

"I am responsible for a big challenge. The youth guarantee is top of my agenda right now. I am planning to meet the leadership for all of Sweden's 291 municipalities. I want to enter into a dialogue with them about how the state and municipalities can best work together to make sure that all youths, and not least early school leavers, get a new chance. We need new combinations of education and work to give young people the chance to graduate while also making some money."

How will you involve employers?

"I have started meeting the social partners in order to establish a dialogue about the youths. I am very optimistic about this too, and I believe we can make this cooperation work. What used to be missing was a comprehensive solution for work and education. Now we will find out how to move for-

ward together with the social partners so that we can solve this problem properly," says the Minister for Employment.

She believes the generation shift within the municipalities, which will have a particular impact on the care sector, could provide an extra push to help secure an agreement with the municipalities:

"We have initiated measures for youths who have not finished their education. They can spend 75 percent of their time in a traineeship and 25 percent of their time studying to become for instance an assistant nurse, a job for which there is great demand. The state pays for it all – both the education and wages."

This is a proposal aimed at lowering youth unemployment which is part of the budget, and she believes it will be passed in parliament.

"Finding pretend jobs for young people while we know we will soon need labour in these sectors, that is bad policy."

Fear of poverty and social dumping

In the government programme you say you want to strengthen the Swedish model. Is Europe a threat to the Swedish model?

"I think we have managed to work up a respect for the Swedish model of wage negotiations. The greatest threat is that inequalities are rising, unemployment is high in many countries and poverty is spreading in EU member states. This leads to social dumping, or in any case it might. When people are suffering poor conditions they are willing to work for little pay and under poor conditions. So reality is a greater threat than regulations, even though we do face some problems with those was well.

"I want to start a debate with my colleagues in the EU about whether we should introduce a social pact which would see the EU treaty secure workers' rights and social rights on the same level as the right to freedom of movement. The four freedoms are the pillars in the EU treaty, which is the EU's constitution. The fact that they are part of the treaty means they have a very strong position. The social rights do not enjoy the same legal status. They could if we had a social protocol. This is something I would like to carry forward together with my colleagues in the EU."

The government also wants everyone who works in Sweden to be covered by the same wage and working condition regulation. How will you achieve this?

"There are two main issues here: in public contracts, which make up one third of all economy, you should demand that employers respect collective agreements. To do this you need a change in legislation in Sweden which the government is preparing right now. The second thing we must do is to make a change to Lex Laval, which regulates the execution of the

directive for the posting of workers in Sweden. In my opinion, if we don't get all the way there, we can strengthen the state of the collective agreement and get considerably further than where we are today.



Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Denmark's Prime Minister, takes over the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers from 2015. Here with Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven

Jobs top of the agenda at meeting of Nordic prime ministers

Removing border obstacles and increasing investments to create jobs are some of the visions shared by the Nordic prime ministers. During the Stockholm session of the Nordic Council, they also expressed a wish to expand the Nordic region as a brand.

NEWS

10.11.2014

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

“We have been talking a lot about how we can invest in order to create more jobs,” said Sweden's Prime Minister Stefan Löfven.

“This is a challenge we share with the rest of the EU, but we have been looking at what we can do within a Nordic framework. We don't regard investments as not having budgetary

control, we see them as a tool to move on. If we don't invest and plan for the future, there won't be any budgets to control, and there will be no jobs either. So on this we all share the same beliefs and the same strategy. We need to strike a balance between investments and balancing the books.”

When the five Nordic prime ministers Stefan Löfven from Sweden, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Denmark, Alexander Stubb, Finland, Sigmundur David Gunnlaugsson, Iceland and Erna Solberg from Norway, met the press, their agreed vision for the future was noticeable.

“The Nordic region is increasingly speaking with one voice,” said Finland's Alexander Stubb.

“This is true both for the European cooperation and in the UN. Many look to the Nordic region, so it is important to use this momentum to further build the Nordics as a brand.”

Removing border obstacles in the Nordic labour market is one of the main pillars for Nordic cooperation. It has been part of the agenda for 60 years of cooperation in order to develop a better labour market. This was also addressed by the prime ministers during this gathering.

“We have been debating border obstacles in great detail, and this is important for Denmark. Working to remove border obstacles is one of the main issues for the upcoming Danish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers,” Helle Thorning-Schmidt told the Nordic Labour Journal.

She also underlined the importance of finalising current negotiations on a free trade agreement between the EU and the USA: The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

“To get the economy going it is important to secure a free trade agreement with the USA. This would mean increased growth in Europe.”

The 66th session of the Nordic Council took place in Stockholm during the last week of October. Work, education and integration featured on the agenda. 39 government ministers from the five countries and from the autonomous Åland and Faroe Islands took part, in addition to delegations from national parliaments.



Make room for creativity in the workplace

Forget sending employees to courses in creativity and focus on creative breaks during the working day instead. That is one of many pieces of advice from Denmark's new professor of creative leadership, businessman and billionaire Christian Stadil.

NEWS

10.11.2014

TEXT:MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: ULLA MUNCH

All kinds of businesses can and should become even better at making room for creativity, says Christian Stadil, newly appointed honorary professor of creative leadership at the Centre for Business Development and Management at Copenhagen Business School.

“Creativity used to be a luxury for the few, but it must and shall be a task for the many. Creative leadership fuels the sustainable, strong creative idea,” he said in his lecture as he took up his position at the Copenhagen Business School on 3 November 2014.



43 year old Christian Stadil is one of Denmark's most visible and charismatic young business leaders. He is also one of the richest. He is number 23 on the Danish rich list thanks to the Thornico conglomerate which he created together with his father. Christian is the sole owner. In 15 years father and son have created a fortune worth billions through buying and establishing more than 100 businesses within foods retail, technology, shipping, property and with the fashion and sports brand Hummel. Thornico has been valued at nearly six billion Danish kroner (€806m).

Christian Stadil is also an entrepreneur, business angel and internationally renowned for his leadership philosophy, as well as a marketing and brand philosophy which has secured him a range of prizes and awards. He builds his businesses on a basic philosophy he calls Company Karma, which aims to create value from a quadruple perspective: value for the business, workers, customers and the issues the business believes in. He has also co-written several books on leadership philosophy, creativity and personal development. His latest, 'Bathing with Picasso' looks at how creative brains work and how this can be translated into businesses and economy.

Many myths about creativity

Christian Stadil says there are many hard to kill myths about creativity which need to be tackled when businesses want to stimulate creativity:

“Contrary to popular belief, creativity is not a divine gift and creativity is not the sole domain of geniuses. Sitting alone in deep thought in a cold loft doesn't generate many creative ideas either, but neither are they a result of coincidence and they are not limited to certain trades or professional groups.”



According to the newly appointed professor, creativity demands methodical and hard work, and creativity can and should be supported by leadership in all parts of a company. He does this himself in Thornico — despite the fact that the group in his own words is fairly “old school” as a conglomerate based primarily on traditional business areas like production and transport.

“In Thornico we have an annual award for the year's best idea, and the latest one went to an employee in accounts who

has developed a clever new way of managing our debtors. That kind of creativity is at least as important to the business as creativity in the design department and in the R&D department, which are traditionally seen as the most creative.”

“Fake it”

He has formulated a range of strategies for working with creativity in the companies. Perhaps the most important thing is to decide to be creative and to “fake it until you make it”:

“We must decide to become more creative. Fake it, and creativity will surely start to grow,” he says.

Yet he is not a fan of the method and expression “to think outside of the box”, which is often associated with creativity.

“It doesn't help to think too much out of the box when you work with a product or an organisation. Instead, think creatively to the limits of the existing format. You need a framework to be creative too,” he advises.

Creativity is also stimulated by putting different groups of workers together. Christian Stadil is a proponent of differentiating worker teams, where different professional expertise, genders, religions, sexual orientations and ages are represented.

“Drop the age tyranni. I have just recommended hiring a 70 year old who has the energy of a 28 year old. And I find it deeply uninteresting to talk about women vs men in the labour market. Talk about women and men instead.”

Remember the break

The leader himself also plays a very important role as the proponent of a creative culture. As the boss you should acknowledge that you define the organisation's emotional tone,” he points out. Making sure employees feel safe is an important leadership task, says Christian Stadil and refers to basic brain research:

“Flight or fight in the face of fear is basic neurology, so management by fear is as dead as disco,” he says.

He concludes that creativity cannot be forced and that it requires breaks — creative breaks — in the working day.

“Businesses must build in creative breaks in the working day. Forget all the talk about sending employees on creativity training courses, but make sure that creativity emerges in everyday work, which therefore should have space for good breaks. Creativity emerges when our brains think slowly after having worked hard. That's why smoking breaks are good — and it should be OK to take breaks without smoking too.”