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Theme: New Nordic perspectives on the work environment



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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Berit Kvam

EMAIL

nljeditor@gmail.com

WEB

www.arbeidslivinorden.org

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New tendencies in Nordic work environments

Work environments can be many things. In this issue of the Nordic Labour Journal we investigate some of them. Oslo recently hosted the largest Nordic conference so far on Supported Employment. One of the questions asked there was who gets to partake in the labour market in the first place?

EDITORIAL

16.10.2018

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, ACTING EDITOR

Not many years ago the view was that people with a psychiatric diagnosis were too weak to ever get a job. If you ask people who are in that situation, between half and three quarters say they want to work. They want to create a personality beyond their diagnosis; they also want the satisfaction of doing a job and getting paid for it. And not least, they want to be part of a work environment.

Supported Employment is about getting the best result from job training by making it happen in the actual workplace. To succeed you must do more than involve the boss, the jobseeker and their mentor. All the employees must be onboard. The director of Norway's welfare administration Sigrun Vågeng told the conference that it is easy to learn something new, but hard to stop doing what does not work. That also applies to Denmark, which is facing work environment reforms.

Things have been moving in the wrong direction. Despite the fact that most companies say they prioritise work environment issues, there are 17% more employees experienced psychological strain and symptoms of stress and depression in 2016 compared to 2012.

One report has come up with 18 proposals which all conclude that work environment measures should use the conditions in the workplaces as a starting point to an even larger degree. Inspiration comes from Sweden, which has a stronger culture of cooperation in workplaces than in Denmark when it comes to work environments.

There is always a need for new knowledge, since working conditions change all the time. A new Swedish survey will look at how the Swedish Work Environment Authority can improve their inspections and promote satisfactory work environments for the self-employed and for people working on digital platforms.

Nader Ahmadi is the head of the newly established public body for work environment knowledge, Mynac, in Swedish

Gävle. In 2007 the centre-right Alliance government closed down the National Institute for Working Life. Since then, research has been fragmented between many different universities and university colleges. Ahmadi wants the new public body to be like the spider in the network that gathers information and makes sure it spreads. One of his first meetings was with Nordic colleagues in the Faroe Islands.

In Finland there is mounting awareness that one of the biggest work environment issues is the threat particularly women working in the social and health sector are exposed to. One concrete measure to improve their safety has been to install more than one door in rooms where client meetings take place. It makes it easier to flee if the client becomes too aggressive.

Death threats are also part of Vidar Sagmyr's working day. He is part of the construction industry's "disruption patrol" in Trondheim, that gathers information on cowboy construction companies. At times he has carried an assault alarm. NLJ followed him through a normal working day.

Less dramatic are the daily journeys in lift for those who work in multi-storey buildings. Finnish Kone is one of the world's four leading lift producers.

"Today there are probably 30 to 40% more people in a building that is older than ten years, than what it was planned to house," points out CEO Henrik Ehrnrooth.

Lifts quickly turn into bottlenecks. But by gathering information from hundreds of thousands of lifts around the world, the company can predict when a lift needs a repair even before it stops. New technology can make lift traffic more efficient. Not being stuck in a lift is also part of a good work environment!



A new attitude to who might participate in the labour market?

“Nothing is harder than giving up what does not work.” That was the message from Norway’s welfare administration director Sigrun Vågeng as she opened the largest Nordic conference on Supported Employment so far in Oslo. Is this a sign of a paradigm shift?

THEME

16.10.2018

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Sigrun Vågeng heads NAV, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, which deals with both employment services, unemployment benefits and municipal social workers. It employs 19,000 people and gets one third of the Norwegian state budget. 700,000 Norwegians get their main income from NAV. That is why researchers listen extra carefully to what she has to say. It is easy to learn something new, she claimed. What is difficult is to change what is already established.

“I believe it is a good message, but I am not sure that everyone in the audience got it. If they did, it is very relevant,” says Øystein Spjelkavik, researcher at the Norwegian Work Research Institute and one of the Nordic region's top experts on Supported Employment. There were many NAV employees present during the 2018 INKO conference. It is important that their top leader is open to new ideas.

“This is about attitude and what level of knowledge NAV employees have when faced with someone who has greater challenges than others.

“Do you meet that person like they have always been met, thinking this is someone we can only feel sorry for, who will always be a looser in the labour market, or do you meet them with a more salutogenic attitude?”

People working with Supported Employment often mention Aaron Antonovsky (1924-1994) as one of their great inspirations. He was a professor in sociology at the Ben Gurion University in Israel, and was the person who coined the term salutogenesis.

The word means “the origin of health”. The idea is to focus on the factors that create and maintain good health, more than on the factors that cause illness.

Wikipedia explains it like this:

“He observed that stress is ubiquitous, but not all individuals have negative health outcomes in response to stress. Instead, some people achieve health despite their exposure to potentially disabling stress factors.”

“If it was this attitude she referred to, it is very important. Because that means you have to do something about NAV’s knowledge,” says Øystein Spjelkavik.



Øystein Spjelkavik and Annika Malm, a Customized Employment consultant, during one of the seminars at INKO 2018.

Because what would happen if the welfare administration, rather than allowing diagnosis determine who should be given the chance to enter the labour market, really embraced the idea of using the individual’s working ability as a starting point?

The INKO conference coincided with the presentation of the Norwegian budget for 2019. It proposed to set aside 125 mil-

lion Norwegian kroner (€13.2m) for the joint effort to create a more inclusive working life, which the Minister of Labour Anniken Haugland had called for. One aim is for 5% of newly appointed state employees to be people with psychological challenges or “holes in their CVs”.

Is this a big sum of money?

“The sum set aside for Supported Employment has increased year on year, and every little helps. Yet in light of the fact that we have a total pot of 13 billion kroner (€1.37bn) for employment services, this is still a very small sum of money.”

How would you distribute NAV’s budget?

“I would confer with Vågeng and her experts and local NAV leaders to see how many resources would be needed to really achieve a paradigm shift.”

Has there been a paradigm shift like this anywhere in the world?

“No. There are some states in the USA that say Supported Employment should be a first priority, but in practice this is not the case.

“So a paradigm shift has never happened, and it is probably the wrong term. But I imagine we can achieve a shift in perspectives, in how we look at who can participate in the labour market. Perhaps you could use the term rhetorically within NAV when talking about the old and the new model?”



Johanna Gustafsson has written a PhD thesis on Supported Employment, and told the conference how attitudes to people with psychiatric problems vary in society. According to her, you could divide them into three groups: Those who only consider it an illness, those who believe problems only emerge when people are exposed to the environment and those who consider people with psychological problems as heroes – who manage “despite everything”.

Some companies have specialised in hiring people with Asperger’s, since they are considered to be able to perform certain tasks very well – like looking for errors in computer pro-

grams. Are there other groups with similar skills among people with psychological diagnosis?

“Generally speaking it is rare. But something does happen when we meet people who are different. Today’s workplaces are suffering under so many cuts that there is rarely space for this. I once visited the Charles University in Prague, where they had employed a person with learning difficulties as a mentor for new students. He wore a uniform and showed them where they could find everything across the university – like where the toilets were situated. The university had even measured how effective this was, and found that students got to grips with things faster when he was their mentor.

“Finally we must look at productivity. Must we really keep unproductive people out in order to achieve high levels of productivity?”

During the conference there has been a lot of focus on employers and their role. Experience shows that it is easier to place SE candidates in smaller companies employing between eight and ten people, where the boss often has had some experience with people with psychological problems or physical handicaps. But will not that opportunity be filled very quickly if there is a real drive to implement Supported Employment?

“It is wrong to think along those terms. We have to think that workplace inclusion will never end. New groups will always be coming in. We are never done. That is why it is so important to involve research and that the Nordic model also must include the workplace inclusion model.

“No-one will ever find the solution to all of the problems, but we can imagine that if we secure new knowledge, things will get easier. That’s what I’m hoping for, of course.

“The aim in the shorter term must be to create a safer theoretical and practical framework for workplace inclusion. Many believe we have come far with Supported Employment, but for me things have only just begun,” says Øystein Spjelkavik.



The Nordics implement Supported Employment in very different ways

The Nordic countries use Supported Employment for getting vulnerable groups into the labour market in very different ways. A growing number of studies show the method gives better results than traditional measures.

THEME

16.10.2018

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Supported Employment is an umbrella term for various measures that focus on the personal support provided to both employees and employers. The method was introduced in the USA in the 1980s and arrived in the Nordic countries in the early 1990s. It aims to train and develop a person's working skills in the workplace where the intended job exists. The strategy is often called "place then train" as opposed to the traditional "train then place".

Supported Employment, or SE for short, uses the individual's working skills as a starting point and then tries to find a suitable job. The matching between the jobseeker and the job is therefore crucial.



“It is like the priming work you do before painting a wall. If it is performed badly, or if you have chosen the wrong colour, it will stay with you throughout the entire process,” as Johanna Gustafsson from the Örebro university told one of the many seminars held during the 2018 INKO conference. The situation in the different countries can be crudely summed up like this: Sweden has the largest projects, Norway has come the furthest with the education while the term Supported Employment is nearly unknown in Denmark – despite the fact there are a few projects running in some municipalities. In Finland an upcoming welfare and province reform has overshadowed all other debate, and in Iceland the method is being used in the capital only.

“It is now 25 years since I went to Sweden and taught the method to the first job coaches there,” said Grete Wangen from the Oslo Metropolitan university. She is also the leader of SENØ, Supported Employment Norge.

As early as in 1992, the Norwegian employment service began a three year long trial called Arbeid med bistand (Jobs with support), which was inspired by Supported Employment. This was later made a permanent measure within the employment service, mainly in social enterprises.

Sweden has the most SE workers

In Sweden a similar yet considerably more comprehensive project was established, called SIUS, Särskilt introduktions- och uppföljningsstöd (Special introduction and follow-up support).

“The last time I checked, there were 927 SIUS consultants within the employment service, and if you add just over 1,000 working in the municipalities there are 2,000 consultants working with Supported Employment,” said Bertil Johansson, who has been involved from the very beginning and who now heads the Swedish organisation, SFSE.

He and other conference participants underlined that there are many variations of Supported Employment. Not all have it as a goal to create salaried jobs, and some are more focused on the training. Sometimes there is also a need for more – there are programmes for Supported Living and Supported Leisure. Since the form varies and the projects are often not permanent measures but limited in time, there have been few scientific evaluations of the projects.

“There is also the risk that the method is being tailored to the organisation and not the other way around. But we cannot simply blame the system. This is also about our belief in the individual. Are we really working with those who need SE, or are we using resources on those who would manage on their own?” said Bertil Johansson.

After the first wave of enthusiasm in the 1990s, the expansion slowed down in the 2000s.



Øystein Spjelkavik from the Oslo Work Research Institute headed the first Nordic study of Supported Employment in 2011.

“When we carried out the study back then, it was difficult to find a single researcher who focused on SE. Those who were involved practically and who had set up associations were full of enthusiasm, but they had no political contacts,” said Øystein Spjelkavik.

Today both Sweden and Norway offer courses in Supported Employment. There is also an international standard, the so-called Fidelity scale, for how to execute the programme. It grades 14 different areas from one to five according to how close a project sticks to the original model.

In Sweden and Finland, Supported Employment is often combined with wage subsidies in order to motivate employers to hire more people, while this is less common in Norway.

Supported Employment was originally developed to help people with psychological problems or physical handicaps. At the time, the idea that these people might manage in ordinary working life was alien to many.

Automatic early retirement

“Despite the fact that 50 to 75 percent of people who have some sort of diagnosis want to work, in Norway only ten percent of them do. In general, employers have been reluctant to hire people with chronic illnesses. Until recently there was little focus on work for this group of people, neither in the health service nor in the employment service. Many faced near automatic early retirement, says professor in psychiatry Erik Falkum.



“It is for instance common for authorities to demand that participants must be motivated. That means you lose a large group from the start. The risk is that the group Supported Employment was developed for, people with more complex needs for support like psychological, cognitive and social problems, will be side-lined when the authorities do their cherry picking,” said Øystein Spjelkavik.

He headed one of the first scientifically assessed SE projects in Norway.

“When we launched *Jobbmestrende oppfølging for personer med psykoselidelser*, JMO, (The Job Management Program, JUMP) in 2007, people working with individuals who had a psychiatric diagnosis believed they were too vulnerable to work.

“Imagine how dramatic it is for a 22 year-old who has had his or her first diagnosis to be told that ‘you are seriously ill and will never be able to work’.”

The result of JMO was, however, remarkable: 77% of the participants in the six months long project got some kind of employment. 9% got an ordinary job, while 37% got work placements and 31% got sheltered work.

But Supported Employment has also been applied to other groups, like refugees and youths.

A fresh Swedish evaluation assessed one Supported Employment project looking at youths who have been offered a work compensation scheme because of their reduced working capacity. More than 80% of those who had recently been offered work compensation schemes had a psychiatric diagnosis. In Sweden, this amounts to 30,000 people, at an annual cost of 3.75 billion kronor (€359m). In 2016, just 5% of these ended up in work and 3% in education.

A group of 1,063 people were randomly divided into three different action programmes. Supported Employment was the one that yielded the best results. After 15 months, 26% had found work. The figures for the other programmes were 20% and 18% respectively. SE was the most economical solution, even when the need for more staff was taken into account.

Cherry picking?

With results like this, Supported Employment should have a bright future? Yes, but there is still the worry that authorities will use the method only for groups which will yield the best results.

18 recommendations to improve Danish work environments

Workplaces should be more centre stage in the work to improve work environments. That is the recommendation from an expert committee appointed by the Danish government, tasked with turning around negative workplace developments.

THEME

16.10.2018

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

The quality of Danish work environments is deteriorating despite the fact that most workplaces do more than ever to create a better work environment. In only four years there has been a 17% increase in the number of workers who say they experience psychological strains and symptoms of stress or depression. At the same time 15% more workers say they are exposed to physical strain and experience pain and fatigue after work.

The work environment has seen a marked negative development, which can be costly both for those who are directly hit and for the social economy. Denmark is moving further and further away from the agreed political aim for how the work environment should develop towards 2020. This was the conclusion the government made in 2017, before appointing an expert committee tasked with identifying how the work environment could be brought back on an even keel without increasing the costs of work environment measures.

That task has now been solved. After one year's work and thorough analysis of work environment measures both in Denmark and in other countries, the committee has presented 18 recommendations which all point to the fact that work environment measures to an even greater degree should take into account the actual conditions in the workplaces.

Teach leaders how to prevent stress

One of the recommendations from the committee is that the national inspection authority, the Danish Working Environment Authority, improve their targeting of businesses and trades that are known to have work environment issues. Higher fines should be given in cases of severe breaches of the work environment act.

The work environment authority should also play a greater role in advising businesses. One survey carried out on behalf of the expert committee showed there is a willingness to turn the development around in many workplaces. The survey

shows leaders and workers already prioritise work environment measures, and that nearly half have increased their focus on work environments in recent years. Yet this reprioritisation has so far not managed to turn the negative development around.

The committee also believes there is a need for clearer rules on psychological work environments, and proposes to make it easier to train leaders in how to prevent psychological strain.

Minister for Employment Troels Lund Poulsen (V), who appointed the committee, now wants to present its recommendations to the Danish parliament's employment committee, before opening up political negotiations about them.

"The Danish people's work environments are at stake here, so it has been necessary to make sure no stone has been left unturned in the work to figure out how to improve the measures," said the government minister as the recommendations were presented.

Rapid action required

The expert committee comprised four skilled experts and four representatives from the social partners, including Bente Sorgenfrey, President of the Confederation of Professionals in Denmark FTF, which represents 450,000 public and private employees. The FTF President is happy the committee has recommended to strengthen the measures for a good physiological work environment.

"Clear rules with clear demands for how to work preventatively represent a crucial tool for securing a better psychological work environment than the one many workers sadly experience today."

Bente Sorgenfrey encourages the government and mayors who agree about the need to sharpen the measures needed

to improve the work environments to roll up their sleeves. They must act quickly to develop clear rules for how workplaces should prevent and handle challenges created by big workloads and time pressure, unclear demands, high emotional demands and work-related violence – all issues leading to stress and absence.

The central organisations in the labour market, DA and LO, have both signed up to cooperate closely to realise the proposals that can be agreed on, and have promised not to bring in new proposals during the upcoming political process of executing the expert committee's recommendations.

A demand for more money

It is still not clear whether more resources will be allocated to put the recommendation into action. Several political parties and trade unions have expressed serious doubts about whether the recommendations can be realised if the labour inspection authority is not allocated more resources – after several years of cuts.

FTF does not believe the recommendations will make much of a difference if more money is not allocated to the improvement of work environments, according to Ulla Sørensen from the United Federation of Danish Workers 3F. She has also said that 3F will support more targeted measures from the labour inspection authority with more obligations and sanctions, while 3F is not at all happy about the expert committee's proposal of giving the labour inspection authority an advisory role through a daily dialogue with businesses. 3F fears this would take time, which would be taken from the time the authority spends controlling the businesses.

Denmark can learn from Sweden's work environment measures

Sweden has a stronger culture for cooperation than Denmark when it comes to work environments, according to a survey carried out on behalf of an expert committee looking at measures for improving work environments.

THEME

16.10.2018

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Denmark can learn from Sweden on a number of points according to the survey from the Oxford Research, carried out on commission from the expert committee looking at how to improve Danish work environments. The survey highlights the differences between how the social partners in Denmark and Sweden cooperate on work environment issues, and that the Swedish method has some clear advantages:

“The Swedish cooperation between the partners on work environment issues is different from what happens in Denmark both in terms of content and culture. Oxford Research says there is a stronger culture for cooperation in Sweden compared to Denmark when it comes to work environments,” and says this “means a stronger, joint problem solving attitude between the partners, compared to what is the case in Denmark”.

The report also underlines that Sweden has a very different wage insurance system, which is closer linked to work environment measures, and that there is a greater focus on prevention. Sweden also has a vocational education system which perhaps leads to greater awareness and focus on work environments among students and businesses.

Oxford Research says a number of Swedish work environment measures could be transferred immediately to a Danish context:

- The practice of announcing inspections in advance
- Greater involvement of inspectors and inspection centres when targeting inspections
- Greater focus on the organisational and social work environment
- Less red tape in relation to providing information after inspections
- Cross-sector cooperation between authorities on fighting work-related crime

The survey was carried out on behalf of the expert committee looking at measures to improve work environments, which has gathered knowledge about work environment measures in other countries, like Finland, Sweden and Norway. The committee has studied Sweden in particular, since both countries' measures and their frameworks are similar, and because Sweden has much fewer reported workplace accidents and serious workplace accidents than Denmark.

The committee therefore asked Oxford Research to carry out a survey of Swedish work environment measures with the view of identifying any Swedish measures that Denmark could learn from or replicate.

The survey concludes that a straight comparison is not possible, because no real effect studies of Swedish work environment measures exists. It has therefore not been possible to find out whether elements of the Swedish measures could be effective contributions to Danish work environment measures.

The survey shows that despite the differences between the two countries' measures, the overarching frameworks for the Swedish and Danish work environment measures are very similar. The following is highlighted:

- Both countries have, to a varying degree, actors who have a specific function within the work environment system when it comes to rules and legislation, public authority, information and guidance as well as research.
- Both countries have a consensus-based cooperation between the social partners, and there is an inspection authority which chooses workplaces for inspection based on risk assessments.

- Both countries have strong traditions for work environment research which informs the political system.
- Both countries have preventative institutions which communicate, guide and provide advice on work environment issues.



Finland: More awareness around workplace threats to social workers

Female Finnish social and care workers run a higher risk of being the victims of violence and threats of violence. Social workers very often suffer verbal threats that sometimes turn into pure stalking. The authorities are now aware of the problem, but the road to safer workplaces is long.

THEME

16.10.2018

TEXT: MARCUS FLOMAN, PHOTO: CATA PORTIN

“This room is a good example of a safe room from a social worker’s perspective,” says Hanna Holmberg, a senior social worker with the child protection agency in Vantaa in Southern Finland. She shows us around the social services office.

“What is good about this room is the three doors situated in different corners of the room.”

The doors allow social workers several exit opportunities if a client gets aggressive for instance. Another safety rule in

this workplace is that the front door always remains locked. A locked door might have stopped the smoke grenade which was lobbed into another social services office in a medium large Finnish city in the early 2010s. We will get back to the smoke grenade later. First some figures.

According to a 2017 report from the Institute of Criminology and Legal Policy, more than one in ten women between 25 and 54 have been the victims of violence or the threat of violence between 2012 and 2016. Finnish research shows

women face threats and violence in the workplace more often than men. The reason is that more women work in social and health care, where the risks of verbal and physical threats are high. The latest labour market barometer from 2018 shows that 44% of workers in female-dominated municipal workplaces have witnessed threats or violence at work.

Preventative thinking is alpha and omega

Hanna Holmberg continues the tour of the social agency office; it turns out that every room where social workers meet clients has at least one extra door.

“My office also has an extra door right behind where I am sitting.

“It is not at all the case that there always is a particular need to think about these safety aspects, but if we know in advance that there are reasons to believe the meetings could turn into dangerous situations, we social workers think extra carefully about where we choose to sit.”



Holmberg also explains how each room in the office has an alarm button which can be used if things turn dangerous. All social workers also carry an “alarm bracelet” when meeting clients. If the alarm is sounded, colleagues and two security guards from the ground floor will come to their aid.

Holmberg adds that not all social services offices in the city have the same level of security.

“Things are very different for home visits, when we need to consider more aspects and where we cannot rely on extra exits. That is why the first meetings with new clients always happen in the office – while we get to know new persons.”

Stalked for years

Not many speak openly about the aggressive behaviour shown by some clients towards social workers. And it is perhaps not surprising – social workers know very well that clients often are among the most vulnerable in society, and it is easy to consider their strong reactions as something that is “just” a part of the job. As Hanna Holmberg says: “Strong and

challenging emotions are so common that it is easy to normalise them, you learn that you cannot take it personally.”



At the same time, Holmberg points out, there is zero tolerance of violence and attacks. But it is up to the individual social worker to judge when a situation feels threatening.

Which leads us to Marjo Oinonen. In the early 2010s she worked as a social worker in a medium-sized Finnish city. Soon after she had made a child protection decision, messages started flooding in from the father in the family, who was upset over the decision.

“To begin with I simply thought I was dealing with a challenging client. It took some months before I realised the seriousness of the situation: He was stalking me.”

In the beginning, Marjo Oinonen tried to handle the situation by applying her professional knowledge to explain the background to and reasons for the child protection decision.

“Little by little it became clear that I could not chance the man’s actions with my professional approach. When he started threatening me and contacting me through all imaginable channels, I realised that this was not normal.”

So she asked her closest supervisor for help and support to report the stalking to the police. Luckily the employer realised how serious the situation was, and after a while Oinonen also got help from occupational health.

The stalking ended after three long years – but Oinonen has used the case to write a thesis on social workers who are victims of stalking.

“The stories I have heard show the stalked workers must take the first difficult steps themselves and ask for help. That is hard, because you are completely paralysed. There is very little research around stalking in the workplace – the entire notion has been far too hidden in society.”

Oinonen’s advice is to react as quickly as possible

“If the stalking has been going on for two weeks, the case should be assessed and both occupations health, the employer and police should be involved at once.”

If you think back to your old place of work – did your employer maintain safety and consider the employees’ security?

“I have to say that the preventative bit in particular was not part of the picture – that you and your colleagues decide in advance which clients might pose a risk. This in spite of the fact that it was quite recent – the early 2010s – that I worked there. We also had no alarm system at work and the office front doors were not locked. And one day the man who was stalking me came to the office and lobbed a smoke grenade into my workplace!”

Authorities are aware of the problems

It has not escaped the authorities’ attention that social workers are particularly exposed to threats. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health’s latest policy document on workplace protection focuses on “psychosocial stress” at work. It identifies the Social and health care sector as one of the trades that needs extra monitoring. The occupational safety administration in Southwestern Finland is responsible for an ongoing occupational safety programme. They have chosen to investigate private players in the Finnish social and health sector in particular.

“In later years we have seen increased awareness about the threat of violence as a real risk factor. Among the workplaces we have inspected so far, 60% have identified violence as a risk factor, and they have a plan for how they should act should problems arise. I think that is a high number.”

Among private social and health care employers investigated by the occupational safety administration, four in 10 still were still subject to criticism. The occupational safety administration’s task is to investigate and point out breaches, but it is the employer’s responsibility to do something about the breaches.

“They have been tasked with rectifying the larger or smaller breaches that we have found. They now must be able to show that they can identify any elevated risk factors and create a plan for how to reduce the risk in threatening situations.”

Marjo Oinonen wants to see broad and active efforts to inform employees about safety rules in workplaces.

“It is still too common for staff not to be aware of what the work safety guides say. There is so much more that needs doing when it comes to increasing awareness.”



Nader Ahmadi heads the new work environment authority with “ears to the ground”

In Swedish Gävle a new public body in work environment knowledge is emerging, which will be responsible for creating and disseminating knowledge. “The work environment is extremely important for socially sustainable societies,” says the Director General Nader Ahmadi.

PORTRAIT

16.10.2018

TEXT AND PHOTO: GUNHILD WALLIN

“Creating a new public body is an enormous challenge. How many times to you get the chance to do that?,” says Nader Ahmadi and laughs enthusiastically

Since 1st June he has been the Director General for the new body, and now, just over four months later, more and more pieces of the jigsaw are falling into place. Since this is a new public body, all routines must be created from scratch, for instance all policies which regulate everything from conflicts of interest to travel. Staff has been and will be hired, but it takes time. Most of them had to work their terms of notice before

joining, which means activities at Mynak, which the body is known as, did not really get going until the middle of August, with 11 new staff.

“What characterises us is a pioneer spirit. It has been hard work and fun,” says Nader Ahmadi about the first few months in the new public body’s life.

Not another institute for working life

Creating the new public body was the idea of the former centre-left government. Just over a year ago, it decided to appoint a special commissioner to establish the public body for

work environment knowledge. In a press release announcing the decision, the government said part of the motivation was the fact that the social partners – both trade unions and employers’ organisations – have been asking for a public body like this.

After the centre-right Alliance government closed down the National Institute for Working Life (Ali) in 2007, research around various aspects of working life became spread across various universities and university colleges. This made it harder to gain an overview of exiting knowledge within the fields of working life and work environments. There has also not been any particular body that could evaluate work environment measures.



Mynak is meant to be a centre of knowledge for work environments, and it can monitor the effects of labour market policies when it comes to work environment issues, and follow and promote the development of occupational health services.

“I am often asked whether we are getting a new National Institute for Working Life, and explain that Ali was a gigantic organisation with an annual budget of 450 million kronor. We have a budget of 35 million, so we cannot take that role. We are also not conducting any research,” says Nader Ahmadi.

Linking research to needs

He compares the new public body’s role to that of the spider. The homepage will be a portal for the newest work environment research, and Mynak will work together with a network of relevant researchers. They will take stock of relevant work environment knowledge, and also be on the lookout for gaps in the knowledge. If Mynak identifies the need for a certain type of research, its ideas will be passed on to the research funding bodies afa, Forte and various universities and university colleges.

One of Nader Ahmadi’s tasks is to keep open a dialogue with the Ministry of Employment, and guide them too where new research on work environments is needed. He will also stay

in touch with the social partners and is already busy creating networks, which means a lot of travelling to Stockholm.

“Our role will be that of the spider, who spreads knowledge but also alerts others of what is needed and where there are knowledge gaps. Good research on work environments exists already, but it is not that easy to access it,” he says.

The idea is for Mynak to have three main functions – analysis, communication and support. And it is very important that these work together, believes Nader Ahmadi. The public body will not be delivering information “passively” – the aim is to constantly think “what should we pass on and to whom?”

“I have worked in organisations which have operated in silos – with no cooperation between different parts of the company. We will not do that here, we will make sure everyone works together. The communication department will work with the analytical staff, for instance, and be part of the process also through meeting with the researchers.”

A non-stop working life

Nader Ahmadi is a professor in sociology and was the vice rector for the Gävle University College before he got the chance to become Director General. He has also been the head of the Faculty of Health and Occupational Studies at the same university college, and that is where he really developed his interest in working life.

One of the things the faculty specialises in is stress injuries, an important area which of course will be part of the knowledge that the public body will disseminate. But right now, Nader Ahmadi is particularly interested in the work environment issues emerging in the wake of the rapid technological development.

“We will cover both work environment issues found in traditional workplaces and the new ones which emerge as a result of the rapid and fundamental technological development. This is an enormous challenge which we have to face. How will this impact on working life and life in general? Will new robots make humans superfluous? What are the alternatives? And is all innovation a good thing?

Nader Ahmadi describes his own working life as something that never stops. He often spends evenings with his laptop in front of the TV, answering emails. Sitting in the sofa at home still gives him a sense of freedom.

“For me the work environment is my entire day, and even at night I often dream about something work-related. The border between work and private life is increasingly getting blurred these days, and that’s why the work environment is becoming even more important,” he says.

300 travel days a year

Nader Ahmadi is used to working hard, and is happy with that. For many years he has worked on commission from Sida, the World Bank, Unicef and Save the Children to mention but a few. He has been collected by armoured vehicle in Bosnia when, on behalf of Unicef, he went to investigate children's psychosocial needs after the Balkan wars, and later concluded that the entire country was traumatised.

He has worked with development projects in Caucasus and Central Asia, in Vietnam, China, Laos, Cambodia and Russia. For several years in the early 2000s, he travelled 300 days a year, which made him decide to stop his international work. He has broad, global experience, also from his growing up in Iran and fleeing the country aged 24.

What does all of your international experience allow you to bring to this job?

“The tasks I have carried out have given me perspective. It has helped me a lot – it is easier to deal with personal setbacks for instance. Things are rarely black or white, which means I find it hard to judge. Most things can be done, and this helps me as a leader. I dare make decision,” says Nader Ahmadi.

The public body has also been tasked with following and disseminating knowledge about work environment research mainly taking place in the Nordic region, but also in the rest of the EU. Nader Ahmadi recently visited the Faroe Islands and met Nordic colleagues working with work environment issues – both researchers and inspectors. This brought up questions of the sharing of and learning from experiences, both what can be learned from each other when it comes to knowledge, but also how knowledge about work environments can be passed on.

Mynak creates interest

The offices in central Gävle are still temporary, and the public body is housed in a corner of a gigantic and fairly dull old bank building. It is clear from office chairs and computer screens that are lined up waiting for new locations and new staff that this is a temporary solution. Today the public body employs 11 people, and it will grow to having a staff of between 30 and 40 by 2020, when it will be fully operational. There is a lot of interest in the new public body, and so far Nader Ahmadi has been giving more than 30 interviews.

“This is new to me, after having been a boss in the world of university colleges for nearly 20 years,” he says, and looks both happy and satisfied.

Creating a decent work environment for employees in the new economy

How can the Swedish Work Environment Authority carry out inspections and promote satisfactory work environments for the self-employed, digital platform workers or those who are employed in other new forms of organising work? That is what the authority is trying to figure out in a two year-long project commissioned by the government.

NEWS

15.10.2018

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

Work environment legislation is based on the idea that there is an employer who has hired employees who work in a particular place of work, and that the employer is responsible for providing these employees with a satisfactory work environment. There are some exceptions. An employer also carries some responsibility for temporary agency workers for instance, because it is the employer – and not the agency – who controls the conditions in the place where the agency workers work.

But who is responsible for securing a decent work environment for the so-called self-employed, those who accept commissions via digital platforms or who carry out IT based mobile work? The law provides no certain answers. The question is whether they should be considered to be employees, and who in that case is their employer.

This is the background to the mission the government recently gave the Work Environment Authority. Over two years, it is going to carry out special inspection measures, aimed at new ways of organising work – like in the platform economy. In this way the Work Environment Agency will gather knowledge about work environments where work is organised in new ways, while it can also find out how to use its powers to bring about satisfactory work environments for people working in such places.

An official government report from last year (SOU 2017:24 A changing labour market – what is the impact on the responsibility for the work environment?) opens up for the possibility to reconsider whether work environment regulations should be so targeted at the relationship employer – employee – workplace. Instead, the starting point should be that those with the power to influence conditions in a certain place should carry some kind of responsibility for the people who work there. This way, the regulations will cover all those

who work there and who are in need of protection in their work environment, the report says.

We will know whether the Work Environment Authority's new inspection project arrives at similar conclusions by the end of 2020, when the project is due for completion.

Text: Kerstin Ahlberg, editor EU & Arbetsrätt

New Swedish council to defend collective bargaining

In light of the European Commission's many recent legislative initiatives in the social policy field, the Swedish private sector social partners have joined forces to fight for their common interests on an EU level.

NEWS

12.10.2018

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG, EDITOR EU & ARBETSRÄTT

On 1 October the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation LO and PTK – the council for negotiation and cooperation for private sector salaried employees – established Arbetsmarknadens EU-råd – “the Labour market council for EU affairs”.

Through the Labour market council for EU affairs, the organisations will work towards presenting joint standpoints in order to protect the position of collective bargaining and the Swedish model when the Commission is taking legislative initiatives on an EU level. Such initiatives have been increasing in volume since EU heads of state and government adapted the so-called Pillar of Social Rights in 2017. The Pillar as such does not come with any binding rules, but the Commission has proven to be determined to translate its principles into proposed legislation.

There is also pressure coming from strong forces within the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) – sometimes in direct opposition to what the Swedes really want.

These initiatives put increasing pressure on the Swedish collective bargaining model, the partners argue. At the start of the year, as the Commission presented its proposed directive on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union, it emerged that the trade union confederations and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise shared a very strong opposition to the proposal. Now they are formalising a collaboration aimed at protecting the social partners' autonomy and contractual freedom.

The Labour market council for EU affairs will meet to work together at least four times a year, or when any of the partners ask for a meeting. Work within the council should be built on consensus.



Disruption patrol alerts authorities of work-related crime

Private operators outside of the public labour inspection system in both Norway and Sweden are gathering information on cowboy operators within the construction industry. The Nordic Labour Journal joined Vidar Sagmyr from the construction industry's disruption patrol in Trondheim on an ordinary assignment. This time, he received no death threats.

NEWS

09.10.2018

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN

Vidar Sagmyr is the project leader for the construction industry's disruption patrol –or *uropatrulje* – in Trondheim. Its aim is to create a serious construction industry that can compete on a level playing field. The disruption patrol share offices with several trade unions, and is situated not far from police and tax authorities. Although different Norwegian authorities now work closer together to fight work-related crime, there has been a lack of resources to monitor illegal activities on construction sites.

As a result, several employer's organisations and trade unions have set up the disruption patrol. It has a steering

committee with seven people – three representing employers and four representing employees. But when Vidar Sagmyr is out on a mission, he usually operates alone.

He has received several tips via social media and through other channels about a foreign construction firm – again. It is quite possible that the firm is guilty of social dumping, and of withholding taxes and fees. Equally probable is dangerous working conditions in breach of health and safety.

Hunting for documentation

"I carry a camera and often use my mobile phone to take pictures. I will document that the company concerned has been

present at the construction site I am trying to find. I already have more than enough information to be fairly sure that the company is running illegal operations,” says Vidar Sagmyr as he packs his equipment.

He is 49, and enjoys ordinary wildlife hunting in his spare time. He is married with grown-up children, and lives in a detached house. He drives his own, private car. Sagmyr is a trained decorator and has seen questionable behaviour from the inside of the trade. He tells us he has been carrying an assault alarm after receiving a death threat.



“That’s when I was out on a control together with the safety representative from the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority. The cowboy didn’t like getting caught. He blamed me, even though the tip that led to the control didn’t come from me,” says Sagmyr somewhat agitated.

He gathers whatever can become evidence. It was the police that gave Sagmyr the assault alarm, and investigated the threats as a criminal case.

Could this become dangerous again?

“No, we will be sitting in the car at some distance. Even though I have received one death threat, there will probably not be any direct contact this time.”

We follow Sagmyr to the parking garage and drive a good distance out from the city centre. We park up and wait a few minutes near where the suspected construction firm is supposed to be working.

“We will wait here and see whether the company’s cars arrive,” explains Sagmyr.

The disruption patrol has existed for three years. He works full time and has reported nearly 1000 law and regulation breaches. Many have been caught for all kinds of cheating.

Excited

Sagmyr suddenly falls silent. His gaze is locked in the car’s rearview mirror. Two black cars with identical logos drive past.

“There! The cars from the company I have been tipped off about. Now we need to make sure we don’t lose them. I also must make sure I don’t get too close,” he says decisively and accelerates out onto the road after a few seconds.

The NLJ’s reporter, who previously has only seen this kind of things in the movies, feels his pulse increasing. We wonder how Sagmyr is feeling in his driver’s seat.

“I feel the excitement. My heart beats faster. I do not by any means know this area very well,” he says.

We watch as the cars turn down a side road. The distance is suddenly very short. Sagmyr’s face tells us he does not like getting this close.

“Heh-heh, I’ll keep going straight instead of taking the side road here. This got too close. They must not get suspicious,” he says.

A quiet action hero

Vidar Sagmyr stops and turns around. We stay very quietly behind a hedge. Then he slowly drives towards the side road where the suspected crooks disappeared.

Does the police or others know you are following cowboy construction firms which perhaps have been punished before?

“It depends a bit on how I tell them,” he answers somewhat opaquely.

“Sometimes the disruption patrol steering group knows. Other times I have let the police know,” he says, a little bit like a quiet action hero.

A bit further down the side roads it turns out it is a dead end. We are suddenly in a rush, as we now only have one way out. Sagmyr rolls down his window and gets out his phone, rapidly taking pictures of materials and the company cars with the logos on the construction site. The distance is perhaps 30 metres, but the workers are inside a building.

Sagmyr turns the car around again. It feels perfectly OK to leave after less than a minute of “close contact”.

What is left to do now is to turn over the observations and pictures to the authorities. The Labour Inspection Authority, NAV, the Police and the Tax Authorities will receive and process the qualified tips.

According to government statistics, work-related crime is on the rise. Seven centres against work-related crime have been set up, where the Labour Inspection Authority, NAV, the Police and the Tax Authorities share offices.

This close cooperation has brought results, according to the government. 3400 companies and construction sites were controlled in 2017. 518 companies were stopped, compared to 352 in 2016. 232 people were expelled from the workplaces, compared to 89 the previous year. 172 fines were issued in 2017, compared to 92 in 2016.

Earlier this year, the Minister of Labour Anniken Hauglie wrote an opinion piece where she did not hold back:

“I have no faith in handling the criminal elements with kid gloves. These are cynical and calculating people who do not stop at anything. So the government is clear that the criminals should be harassed, hunted and shown the door.”

Vidar Sagmyr believes the disruption patrol in Trondheim has strengthened its position.

“We have been taken more and more seriously because we have learned what information triggers action from the authorities.”

In his experience, most construction workers who get caught in the region come from Eastern Europe.

“The foreign workers often have construction engineers or other backers who are Norwegian. The backers are responsible for making all paperwork look legal,” says Sagmyr.

The government wants a change in legislation surrounding confidentiality which would allow NAV workers to share important information with inspection authorities to help them uncover work-related crime.

Across national borders

Disruption patrols are also being set up in Oslo, and efforts are being made to set up more in other places in Norway. Vidar Sagmyr recently visited a similar group in Stockholm, “Fair Play Bygg” to share knowledge. Just like the disruption patrol, the Swedes are temporarily financed by the social partners.

“Both realised the work we do separately is very important. We can learn a lot from each other. At Fair Play Bygg, we noticed how efficient the disruption patrol’s collaboration with Norwegian workplace crime units is. Fair Play Bygg has long

been pushing for a similar cooperation in Sweden. Fair Play Bygg wants to keep up our contact with the disruption patrol,” says Peter Leander who heads the company.

“I think the biggest advantage with maintaining good contact between us, is that it allows us to learn about the similarities and differences between work-related crime in our two countries. In one to three years I hope we still have a good contact.”

The Norwegian government has said it is also necessary to increase cooperation on a European level. The Labour Inspection Authority has therefore entered into collaborations with inspection authorities in Lithuania, Bulgaria and Poland. There is also cooperation on a Nordic level.



Kone: Lifting the office environment to a new level

Few Nordic companies play such a big part in the work environment as Kone. But they do it discretely. As long as everything works, hardly anyone thinks about the lifts and escalators we use to and from our jobs and inside the building where we work.

THEME

27.09.2018

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PICTURE ABOVE: KONE

Now Kone want to play an even bigger role – by using their knowledge about the flow of people to improve the work-places.

“Take a ten year-old office building. Today you probably have 30 to 40% more people working there than what the building was originally constructed for,” says Henrik Ehrnrooth, President and CEO at the Finnish company, which is one of the four largest lift manufacturers in the world.

“So what’s the problem? Well, certain parts of the infrastructure will begin to creak. One of the areas you will get queues, is around the lifts. One thing we know for sure is that people

don’t like waiting. Especially not when they are expected to be very productive.”



Henrik Ehrnrooth is the President and CEO for Kone, which employs 55,000 people globally

We are on the 16th floor at Kone's headquarters in Espoo. One of the four lifts running up one of the building's sides has silently brought us here. All the walls in the lift are glass. At the top you can see as far as Helsinki, around 20km east. But there are few other tall buildings around – at least no skyscrapers.

"We had an Asian customer a while back who pointed out that Finland must be a strange country. There are no tall buildings here, yet we are world leaders in lifts!"

Henrik Ehrnrooth quickly adds that out of 5.5 million lifts in Europe, most are installed in blocks of flat five to six stories high.

"Asia is about to overtake Europe when it comes to the number of lifts, while in North America there are only one million lifts. Spain has more lifts than the USA, where it is common to live in detached houses. If a lift stops working in a block of flats it is merely irritating, unless you are so old or handicapped that you cannot use the stairs," says Ehrnrooth.

"In an office building it is like closing one lane on the motorway. You quickly get long queues. That's why we do everything we can to maintain the lifts regularly so that they don't stop," he says.

Around one year ago, Kone announced a new cooperation with IBM allowing them to collect information from lifts 24/7. By analysing the information from hundreds of thousands of lifts, the company can identify warning signs of problems that need to be addressed. This means an engineer can be sent out before the problem actually arises, and he or she can also carry the correct spare needed for that exact lift. This means the number of faults and stops can be dramatically reduced in the future.

This is enormous amounts of data – or Big Data, as it is known – which also provides information about the flow of people inside a building.



"Spain has more lifts than all of the USA," says Henrik Ehrnrooth.

"Improving the flow is not only about increasing speed or lift capacity. It can also be about organising the company in a different way. One good example is a cruise line company for whom we analysed how people moved around one of their ships. We discovered that 60% of the passengers used the lifts in the aft of the vessel, while only 40% used lifts near the bow.

"As a result, the cruise line moved some restaurants and managed to even out the traffic."

Another way of influencing the flow in an office building is for staff to link their mobile phones to the lifts. When an employee approaches the building, the computer system controlling the lifts already knows which floor the person normally wants to go to. Different employees are grouped together and get a message on their mobiles which lift to get.

"This works well in many buildings, like at our own headquarters where we used to have 250 people working but now have 400. Yet influencing the flow of people is about more than simply using the lifts better. You can also improve work environments and improve cooperation, for instance by making sure people meet a bit more spontaneously," says Henrik Ehrnrooth.

"We knew a certain task was being performed on the 5th, 6th and 7th floors, but information from the lifts showed people stuck to their own floor. So we introduced a rule saying it was no longer possible to get coffee on the 5th or 6th floor. People were forced to go to the 6th floor – where the coffee also was of a better quality, and free."

Office spaces are changing

Office layouts have varied, from cell offices where most people had their own rooms, to open space offices. An increasingly popular model is the so-called activity-based office. The idea is to divide the office into separate zones, shaped to fit different types of work. The most common types are concentrated work, creative work and teamwork. There are no per-

sonal workstations. Everyone chooses the environment and workstation which suits the situation the best.

There are no rules for how many square metres each employee should have. According to property companies like Swedish Vasakronan, there used to be a rule of thumb that said each person needs 20 square meters, including all areas like toilets, kitchens, storerooms and entrées. Activity-based offices can reduce the space to 12-15 square metres per person, thanks to open solutions and improved ventilation.

Technology is the driving force behind the new office model. Landline telephones and desktop computers have been replaced by smartphones, laptops and cloud computing. Employees are given more responsibility for making sure they always carry the equipment they need with them.

Kone too has made use of the new business opportunities that arise up when transport solutions can be integrated with the mobile telephone. It can for instance replace the key to your flat.

“We performed a survey which showed that 51% of Swedes believe their lives would be simpler if they could use a smartphone as a key to their home. It is mainly younger people between 18 and 35 who see the advantage of being able to let visitors in to their house, even when they themselves are not at home. This would for instance make it possible to accept deliveries while you are at work,” says Malin-Brandt Lundin, Kone’s Scandinavian head of marketing and communication.



Kone’s test site in Tytyri is next to a mine which has a shaft running 350 metres below ground. This is where new lifts are tested before installation, both with free falling and braking, and testing of wear and tear.

There are many ways of easing everyday life’s often opposing demands from home and work.

“The mobile telephone can become a kind of ‘digital gatekeeper’. It is the final stretch – up to the front door – which is the main challenge for companies that carry out home deliveries. The problem is all the goods that cannot be delivered

because the customer is not at home – or that you end up waiting for a delivery that never arrives,” says head of technology Santeri Suoranta when we meet him at Kone’s Tytyri test site, which is next to a mine one hour north from Espoo.

This is where new lifts are tested in a 350 meters deep shaft. It is the world’s only free fall lift test site. The lift is filled with sandbags weighing one tonne, and are allowed to fall for a while before the brakes are applied.

“Safety is the most important thing of all. All systems are made to withstand 12 times more than what it needed,” says Santeri Suoranta.



Santeri Suoranta demonstrates the difference in weight between a steel wire and the new lift lines used by Kone. They are called Ultrarope and are made from carbon fibre. The weight of lines is what limits how many stories a lift can operate between.

“Of course we also take the issue of personal integrity and cyber safety connected to our new technology extremely seriously,” he underlines.