



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously claimed that the only thing that is constant is change. Heraclitus made this claim in ancient Greece 2500 years ago, in a society that we—by contemporary measures at least—consider to be a fairly stable society governed by traditions and standards that held sway for centuries. In modern reflexive (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994) and liquid modernity (Bauman 2000), however, it seems that the pace of change has increased tremendously. So much in fact, that the protagonist of Giuseppe Tomasi de Lampedusa's novel 'The Leopard' (2007) stated that nowadays everything must change in order to stay the same. Hartmut Rosa (2015) has theorized the state of modern society as that of social acceleration – social life, and work, has been speeded up and dynamized so that we have to go faster and faster just to accomplish status quo.

One might add that another trait mark of our social existence is its precariousness. Evolutionary theory has helped us understand that human perseverance as biological and social species must be understood in relation to an often hostile environment. We only persevere by constantly coping with our environment and engaging in niche construction – we try to adapt to new environmental changes and—as this can be extremely troublesome—try to create small pockets of stability and regularity in our social existence that enables us to go on in our daily lives.

Working life is indeed a site of precariousness and change. In the Nordic countries, the flux of change that constantly challenge our physical, psychological, and social wellbeing has been stemmed by welfare systems, labor market regulations, collective bargaining, etc. These arrangements function to provide niches that give individuals some stability and room to gradually adapt in a competitive capitalist economy. As the environments of our working lives alter, we must innovate – and innovate our institutional niches – to secure pockets of stability in working life.

In this issue, we present four articles that illuminate change and precariousness in working life – and the measures taken by individuals and organizations to counterbalance challenges in relation to change. The first article 'Us and Them – First-line Management and Change Resistance', written by Chris Rønningstad examines the challenges faced by first-line managers who function as change agents in public welfare organizations in Norway. The qualitative study examines written reports from the managers, and thematic analysis of the material identifies major themes that characterize their experience with change implementation. Rønningstad finds that 'change fatigue' among employees due to constant organizational change requirements, and individual resistance against adaptation to new routines are predominant challenges for first-line managers. Other challenges are related to the role that first-line managers inhabit, as they are often

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<sup>1</sup> You can find this text and its DOI at <https://tidsskrift.dk/njwls/index>.



caught between top management and employees. Furthermore, the managers experience that they are situated in a limited discretionary space that inhibit their managerial repertoire.

The article of Gry Høiland and Elisabeth Willumsen ‘Resistance-driven Innovation? Frontline Public Welfare Workers’ Coping with Top-down Implementation’ also examines change processes in Norwegian public welfare institutions, but in this case by focusing on the strategies and practices of the welfare workers as they implement new initiatives. The qualitative case study describes the resistance practices of the employees as they are confronted with top-down instructions of implementation. The authors conceptualize the resistance of the frontline workers to the top-down instructions as a form of employee-based innovation. They suggest that various coping strategies of the employees – such as ‘down-prioritizing’, ‘tricking’, and ‘rejecting’ – combined with other more professional value-driven revision practices of the employees, can be seen as employee-based resistance-driven innovation that pertain the mission of public institutions to provide service for citizens.

In ‘Northern Lights Instead of Workers’ Rights: Volunteer Working Tourists in Finnish Lapland’, Christopher Brennan examines the precarious workplace conditions that characterize volunteer working tourism. Through a netnographic study of the experiences of volunteer workers, Brennan makes the argument that the work situations of these tourists in many ways resemble the situations of what has been described as precarious employment. The precariousness of the tourists’ work is not only related to the tourists’ working conditions, but the precariousness of tourist work has potential effects for paid work as well: the occurrence of unpaid work in the tourist industry is likely to have consequences for payed workers’ wages, safety, and working rights in general.

Finally, Stefanie König, Magnus Lindwall, Georg Henning, and Boo Johansson in their article ‘Retirement as a Lens for Socioeconomic Differences in Cognition and Well-being’ investigate the role of “retirement” as an analytical focus that can illuminate questions of social inequality across the life course. The authors use register data to study the socioeconomic differences in cognitive performance and wellbeing among retired individuals in Sweden, and the findings are used to discuss various theoretical assumptions in relation to the role of retirement in relation to cognitive capabilities and wellbeing. The study thus helps to better understand how different socioeconomical factors contribute to shape cognitive capacities and wellbeing over a life span – and indirectly lets us see the precariousness and everchanging character of our existence.

By reading the four articles, we are reminded of the unruliness and complexity of working life, but we are also assured that meticulous studies, as these can indeed uncover interesting patterns and structures in work life.

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