



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This issue of Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies collects four new articles.

In *Cultural Obstacles in Transnational Trade Union Cooperation in Europe*, Bengt Larsson aims to understand cultural differences that are seen as obstacles to cooperation by trade union representatives. Based on 38 interviews with 46 trade union officials from nine European countries, Larsson identifies the major cultural obstacles for cooperation. Even though noncultural factors – such as financial and network resources, different priorities, and differences in national labor market policies and regulations – are major obstacles for successful cooperation among trade unions, cultural factors play an important role in hampering cooperation. With inspiration from neo-institutional theory and organization theory, Larsson conceptualizes union culture in relation to norms, values, and meanings drawn from broader society. The findings of the study point to language and translation issues, differences experienced in cultural values and everyday practices, and differences in issues relating to ideology and identity regarding member orientation, negotiation, mobilization of members, etc.

Miira Niska and her Finnish colleagues are preoccupied with the conflicting tendencies in the Nordic labor markets: Due to the demographic development of the aging labor force, policymakers urge employees to postpone their retirement age and remain in the active work force. But on the other hand, many traditional industries are engaged in massive employee downsizings due to automation and digitalization initiatives. In their article *Evaluation of Lifelong Work Satisfaction among Former Postal Service Workers*, the authors study the work life satisfaction trajectories of former postal service workers in Finland. This case illustrates the conflicting tendencies that harass the Nordic labor markets. Using qualitative survey data and qualitative interview data, they analyze how the informants evaluate work life satisfaction. The findings show that almost one-third of the respondents reported a decreasing work life satisfaction associated with poor health and work ability and due to poor job control, poor job support, and feelings of organizational injustice. This resonates well with previous studies, but surprisingly, Niska and her co-authors' study finds no significant differences in work life satisfaction pathways among white-collar and blue-collar workers or among men and women. Lack of work life satisfaction is a significant factor why people do not want delay retirement age, and thus an important obstacle for policy initiatives that seek to cope with retention of elderly workers.

Robin Jonsson and his Swedish colleagues are also concerned with the conflict between the aging work force and the problems of retaining elderly workers in the active work force. In *Organizational Hindrances to the Retention of Older Healthcare Workers*, the authors explore the obstacles to and opportunities for retaining older employees in the Swedish healthcare sector. Through 19 qualitative face-to-face interviews with line managers and human resource partners at two sites in Sweden, three themes appear in relation to the obstacles for retention of older healthcare workers: line managers' high

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



workloads, the absence of age-management strategies, and universal HR policies not conducive to older workers' individual needs. Even though the line managers and HR partners in general had positive attitudes toward older healthcare workers, these obstacles often made it difficult for the line managers and HR partners to engage in initiatives that potentially could retain the older healthcare workers. Based on these findings, the authors suggest that the healthcare sector needs to be more proactive and strategic in addressing retention issues for older workers.

The last article in this issue discusses the persistence of gender bias in the evaluation of leaders. In *'Competent' or 'Considerate'? The Persistence of Gender Bias in Evaluation of Leaders*, Denise Salin confronts the popular assumption that gender equality has already been achieved in a Nordic country like Finland that ranks very high in international gender gap reports. But contrary to this popular assumption, Salin shows that gender bias still persists among business school students' evaluation of male and female leaders in Finland. Through two studies, business school students with previous work experience were asked to evaluate leaders. The first study asked the informants to evaluate leaders on their qualities in a case study – only, the genders of the leaders in the case study were swapped for approximately half of the students. The second study collected subordinate descriptions of good and poor leaders written by business school students. These stories were subsequently analyzed using qualitative content analysis to detect gender biases. The studies show that female and male leaders were rated differently for identical behavior and that the evaluations thus were gender biased.

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