



Introduction¹

In this first issue of *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* in 2021, we have compiled six articles and one book review.

The first article, *Leading the Way? State Employers' Engagement with a Disability Employment Policy*, by Kaja Larsen Østerud, investigates governmental labor market attempts to integrate persons with disabilities in Norway. Specifically, the study addresses policy documents and analyzes interviews with state employers to investigate their engagement with the policy. Østerud concludes that even though the employers recognize the importance of the policy, their engagement to enact it is passive and forged with obstacles. Mainly, the New Public Management discourse of productivity standards and cost-cutting, combined with an apparent lack of disabled applicants, makes state employers reluctant to actively promote the implementation of the policy.

In their article, *Are the Early Leavers the Lucky Ones?*, Pekka Virtanen and his coauthors investigate how 'early leavers' fare in situations of major workforce downsizing in Finland. They challenge the received view that 'early leavers' are winners in term of re-employment. Through a seven-year follow-up study based on register data, they suggest that 'early leavers' cannot clearly be identified as winners compared with workers who stay longer during downsizing. They warrant this hypothesis by statistically identifying and comparing trajectory groups. The study shows that the group of 'early leavers' is a heterogenous group that not only includes individuals with a strong labor market position, but also individuals who are not able quickly to find new employment. It is more common that 'early leavers' have a weak trajectory in relation to obtaining new employment than a strong one.

Arja Haapakorpi examine how middle-aged professionals cope with contingent work in the article *Freedom but Insecurity: the Business Consulting Profession in the Post-Industrial Service Society*. Based on 12 qualitative interviews with middle-aged professionals in the business consultancy sector in Finland, she explores how the respondents balance their position between insecurity and the desire for freedom with flexibility in the labor market. The respondents applied individual coping strategies to achieve a sense of freedom while adapting to marked demands, but – in a minor degree – also applied collective strategies in realizing their work ambitions and careers. The experiences of the business consultants with layoffs from previous more traditional employment blurs the division between full-time employment and contingent work in relation to precariousness, and the precariousness becomes integral to their professional, independent work.

Hanna Kosonen and her colleagues continue the discussion of how employees navigate their late careers in *Employment Exits Near Retirement Age: an Agency-analysis*. In this article, Kosonen and coauthors investigate older employees' agency in work exit situations after dismissals or resignations. Analyzing 20 qualitative interviews with

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



now retired employees from a Finnish state-owned postal company, the authors theoretically and empirically explore how structural and individual factors and dimensions of agency come together and result in their work exit. Employing a theoretical framework of agency, developed by Jyrki Jyrkämä, the authors analyze how the interviewees bring together the structural modalities of ‘can’ and ‘must’ with modalities of ‘be(ing) able’, ‘know-how’, ‘want’, and ‘feel’ in their individual interview accounts. The study brings forth the heterogeneity in the group of interviewees, and it stresses the importance of balancing structural and agentic elements in efforts to extend the retirement age for older employees.

Still in Finland, Solia Lemmetty and coauthors discuss Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and their consequences for employees in *Conflicts related to Human Resource Management in Finnish Project-Based Companies*. Based on 95 thematic interviews with employees, supervisors, and HR managers within five Finnish companies engaged with technology design, information technology, industrial, and artistic design, the authors explore what kind of conflicts employees experience in their project-based work, and what areas of HRM practices these conflicts engaged with. The study finds that the conflicts develop when HRM practices are not employee-oriented, and when HRM practices are experienced by employees as unfair. In these situations, HRM practices are experienced by employees with feelings of inequality and envy, and often result in motivational problems.

The last article of this issue, *Regulating Flexibility: Uber’s Platform as a Technological Work Arrangement*, by Sigurd M. Nordli Oppegaard, explores how Uber drivers of limousine taxis in the Oslo region in Norway experience their work arrangements. The study was conducted as a ‘traveling ethnography’ where the author booked trips with Uber, and conducted interviews with 20 drivers in their cars. Oppegaard describes how Uber’s algorithmic trip assignments regulate the drivers’ formal flexibility in compliance with the interests of the company, and how this algorithmic management installs an asymmetrical power relation by making decisions opaque and automatic.

Finally, this issue brings my review of Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner’s new book *Learning to Make a Difference. Value Creation in social Learning Spaces*.

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