



# The Nordic Model and Management in International Corporations: A Scoping Review<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The overall aim of this scoping review is to present empirical studies regarding how the Nordic model has been investigated in relation to management in international companies. The subsequent objective is to discuss the model's robustness regarding internationalization. The question raised is how the Nordic model, in relation to management, is configured in empirical studies undertaken in international corporations. Using systematic literature searches to examine peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2022, 15 out of 972 studies were eligible for a full review. Primarily, one facet of the model was investigated: workplace democracy. Foreign-owned companies operating in Nordic countries partly adopted the model, whereas the model was implemented to some extent in Nordic-owned companies abroad. Management's support and employee involvement were considered important. This review indicates that there is pressure on the model, although it has extended beyond the Nordic border and appears to be adaptable to global working life.

## KEYWORDS

*institutional theories / international organizations / management / Nordic model / scoping review*

## Introduction

'Going Nordic' has long been an inspiration and has attracted attention in both politics and research, nationally and internationally (de la Porte et al. 2022). The main reason is that the Nordic countries—Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Finland, and Norway—top the rankings, among other things, in terms of competitiveness, trust, and equality (World Economic Forum 2023). The Nordic model, which has been called 'the next supermodel' (The Economist 2013), is regarded as exceptional (Browning 2007), a trademark for the Nordic countries (Byrkjeflot et al. 2021; Livingston 2022; Pedersen & Kuhle 2017), and a role model for economic performance, economic opportunity, and equality (Andersen et al. 2007). The combination of economic management, public

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welfare policy, and an organized working life (Dølvik 2013) has contributed to creating small wage differences, a well-functioning working life, welfare schemes, competence, and fiscal policy (NOU 2021). The model has also fostered strong collaboration, decentralized decision-making, mutual recognition of rights and obligations, and mutual trust between employees and managers at both the national and company levels (Gustavsen 2011). A high degree of unionization is an important prerequisite for the model's support and legitimacy, while crucial for the model is how managers comply with employees' rights (Torp & Reiersen 2020). In this sense, the Nordic model includes management strategies that allow employees to participate actively in discussing objectives and financial performance in the workplace.

Attention to the Nordic model has increased over the years, and the model has proven to work well in the international economy (Dølvik 2013). However, changes in working life due to neoliberalism, the dominance of free-market rationality, internationalization, and the entry of gig platforms and digitalization have different implications for national institutions, regulators of employment relationships, and work processes. Internationalization implies increasing the cross-border movement of people, capital, goods, and services (Grimalda *et al.* 2020), and management ideas and practices (Xiao-chen 2021). Combined with technological innovation, these factors have made interaction between individuals, companies, and countries easier and have contributed to increased international competition. Changes in working life, combined with a decline in unionization in member countries in The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2019), are assumed to undermine the Nordic model's system of labor relations (Hagedorn-Rasmussen & Klethagen 2019; Torp & Reiersen 2020). This may put institutions and regulators' conditions for work, such as job security and partnerships, under pressure. A major question is whether the model is sustainable and robust in its current form in the face of internationalization, or whether its temporary advantages may disappear over time (NOU 2021). Using a scoping review research approach (Arksey & O'Malley 2005), this article presents literature on the Nordic model and management in international corporations, where in the latter, managers hold positions of substantial authority.

The aim of this article is to present empirical studies regarding how the Nordic model has been investigated in relation to management in international companies. By synthesizing the configuration of the Nordic model in relation to management in international corporations, the second goal is to discuss the model's robustness regarding internationalization. The question raised is how the Nordic model, in relation to management, is configured in empirical studies conducted in international companies. This article contributes to the international management literature and the implications of internationalization, particularly the implications of changes in working life for the Nordic model.

## The Nordic model and management

In the literature, the Nordic model is conceptualized in different ways, such as a social democratic welfare state model (Esping-Andersen 2006), a free-market welfare state model (Iqbal & Todi 2015), a social democracy model (Brandal *et al.* 2013), and a labor market model, as well as the Nordic gender equality model (Teigen & Skjeie 2017).

These terms can be criticized for the lack of recognition of the qualities of working life (Gustavsen 2011) as well as for excluding important institutions, such as the role of labor unions and collective bargaining (Barth et al. 2014).

In this article, the main features of the model refer to the social level and the business organizational level (Børve & Kvande 2012). The Nordic model provides universal welfare state policies and welfare schemes at the societal level. Concerning working life, the model includes regulatory arrangements and rules of tripartite collaboration and interaction between employers, employees, and the state. At the business organizational level, the industrial or employment relations systems of the Nordic model, the Nordic working life model (Kasvio et al. 2012), or the micro democracy model (Christensen & Westenholz 1999) are distinguished by the collaborative dynamics between shop stewards/employees' representatives and managers. Employee participation is emphasized with a tradition of collaboration and co-determination between employers and employees (Dølvik 2013). Collective bargaining is based on agreements between employers and trade unions that regulate pay and work conditions. Both trade unions and multi-employer organizations are involved in collective bargains, while state intervention is minimal (Andersen et al. 2015). The collective bargaining system is underpinned by strong local cooperation between employers and employees (Rasmussen & Høgedahl 2021). Managers are required to involve employees in decision-making and have the duty to provide for employees' influence by offering them opportunities for direct and indirect participation. Employees' direct participation relates to employees' right to participate in the design of their workplace and work situation, and opportunities for self-determination, influence, and professional responsibility, while indirect participation refers to representative collaboration (Børve & Kvande 2012). Unions play central roles in decision-making processes in matters beyond pay and work conditions (Berge et al. 2009). Institutional conditions, such as employees' rights anchored in laws, agreements, and unions, justify management practices (Børve & Kvande 2022) and limit managers' autonomy (Gooderham et al. 2006).

Although there are discrepancies between leadership style and behavior in the Nordic countries, studies indicate some distinctive aspects of Nordic management (Smith et al. 2003). Nordic leaders are generally characterized as democratic-oriented in collaboration, emphasizing equality, informality, and consensus-oriented decision-making processes. Leaders trust subordinates and colleagues to a greater extent than leaders in other countries (Schramm-Nielsen et al. 2004). Nordic management (Smith et al. 2003), Scandinavian management (Byrkjeflot 2001), or the Scandinavian management model (Trygstad & Hagen 2007) is considered to reflect the quality of working life programs, such as the Scandinavian industrial democracy experiments developed in Norway in the 1960s (Thorsrud & Emery 1970; Thorsrud 1984), and the Saltsjöbaden agreement signed in Sweden in 1938 (Gallie 2003). An important result of practicing such an equality-based and democratic model is a high degree of trust between employers, shop stewards, and employees, which makes it possible for the actors to both negotiate wages and collaborate on productivity goals (Hernes 2006). Distinctive features of management practice in the Nordic countries and their democratic and somehow flat hierarchical societies are assumed to support each other (Schramm-Nielsen et al. 2004). However, an ongoing discussion has to do with how and to what extent the institutional context influences the organization's practices (e.g., Røvik 2015; Oppegaard 2020).



## Internationalization of working life

Increased internationalization of the business world implies more foreign business owners established outside their original national borders and an increased number of employees employed in international organizations. The presence of more international business owners is expected to increase diversity in the corporate and management culture because managers bring with them management ideas from other cultures, while employees are used to other types of management (NOU 2021). In the international management literature, the supporters of the so-called homogenization or convergence hypothesis (Edwards & Rees 2006) claim that internationalization entails national economic regimes and associated management systems being paralyzed, irrelevant and national differences disappearing (Hopkins & Wallerstein 1982). The consequence is that organizations develop universal management practices, independent of their contexts. According to this perspective, organizations that do not adapt to the demands of international markets and replace local management practices with universal management practices are doomed to fail. Previous research finds partial support for converging developments, for example, in some human resource management (HRM) practices, although there is no clear consensus (Ariss & Sidani 2016).

By contrast, others view organizations as social constructions influenced by institutional contexts (Scott & Meyer 1994). This tradition claims that organizations established abroad may experience contextual distance or institutional duality, as they are expected to adapt both to a new context and expectations from their headquarters (Zhang *et al.* 2023). Contextual distance refers to the difference between the institutional profiles of two countries, typically the home country and the host country of an international organization (Arslan & Larimo 2010). Within this tradition, organizations are not passive but respond to a new environment, depending on factors such as size, the position of power in the environment, and whether the organization's norms and values reflect the environment (Scott & Meyer 1994). For instance, translation research has contributed to important insights regarding how management concepts travel across time and space and the process of adoption and adaptation (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). Contextual distance can lead to tensions between a company's source context and institutional contexts abroad. This may result in local organizational variations and modified concepts designed to fit a new local context (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996; Røvik 2016) or organizations may discard their original model. Internationalization thus may contribute to divergent outcomes (Hannerz 1996).

## Design and search methods

This literature review was conducted through systematic and transparent searches using Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) iterative and dynamic step process for scoping reviews. Undertaking a scoping review involves a process of rapidly mapping the key areas and concepts underpinning a research field to examine the extent, range, and nature of research activity to identify research gaps and plan follow-up action (Arksey & O'Malley 2005). A scoping review requires analytical reinterpretation of the literature (Levac *et al.* 2010). In contrast to systematic reviews, it does not include an assessment of the quality of the studies included, or a checklist for procedures. Scoping reviews present an overview of the

literature irrespective of methodological quality or risk of bias because the search parameters and the criteria for inclusion/exclusion are finalized subsequent to the searches, which determine the number of articles that can be incorporated in the review (Tricco et al. 2018).

Following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) six-step framework, we defined the research question (Step 1). Relevant studies were then identified and selected, and the data were charted (Steps 2–4). Finally, the results of the studies were sorted, summarized, and reported (Step 5). Step 6 of the framework, a consultation exercise including consumer and stakeholder involvement, is optional and was not included in the present review for practical reasons.

### Identifying relevant studies and selecting studies

Keywords for database searches were developed by reading former research, as advised by university librarians and derived from discussions with experts in the field. Based on previous studies and the research question, different synonyms for the Nordic model, management, and international corporations emerged. The first search bloc focused on the Nordic model and synonymous concepts applicable to the context of working life. The second search bloc emphasized management and encompassed terms for the employee–employer relationship, and industrial relations, which are integral to practices of management within the Nordic model. The third search bloc comprises synonymous words for international corporations. The search terms were combined into a search string using the Boolean operators AND and OR. Table 1 shows the foundation for scoping the field of relevant studies and the final search string.

**Table 1** Key research terms

The Nordic Model	AND Management	AND International corporations
"Nordic model*" OR "Scandinavian model*" OR "Nordic labour market model*" OR "Nordic labor market model*" OR "Nordic working life model*" OR "Nordic flexicurity model*" OR "Nordic collaborative model" OR "Nordic micro model"	leader* OR manage* OR govern* OR "industrial relation*" OR "work relation*" OR "industrial democracy" OR "employment relation*" OR "employee relation*" OR "labor relation*" OR "labour relation*" OR "organizational relation*" OR "organisational relation*" OR "labor-management partnership*" OR "labour-management partnership*" OR "workplace relation*" OR "labor-management relation*" OR "labour-management relation*" OR "union-employer relation*" OR "union-employee relation*" OR "union-management relation*"	"multinational compan*" OR "multinational organization*" OR "multinational organisation*" OR "international compan*" OR "international organization*" OR "international organisation*" OR "global compan*" OR "global organization*" OR "global organisation*" OR "transnational compan*" OR "transnational organization*" OR "transnational organisation*" OR "multinational enterprise*" OR MNE* OR "multinational corporation*" OR MNC* OR "international corporation*" OR "global corporation*" OR "transnational corporation*"

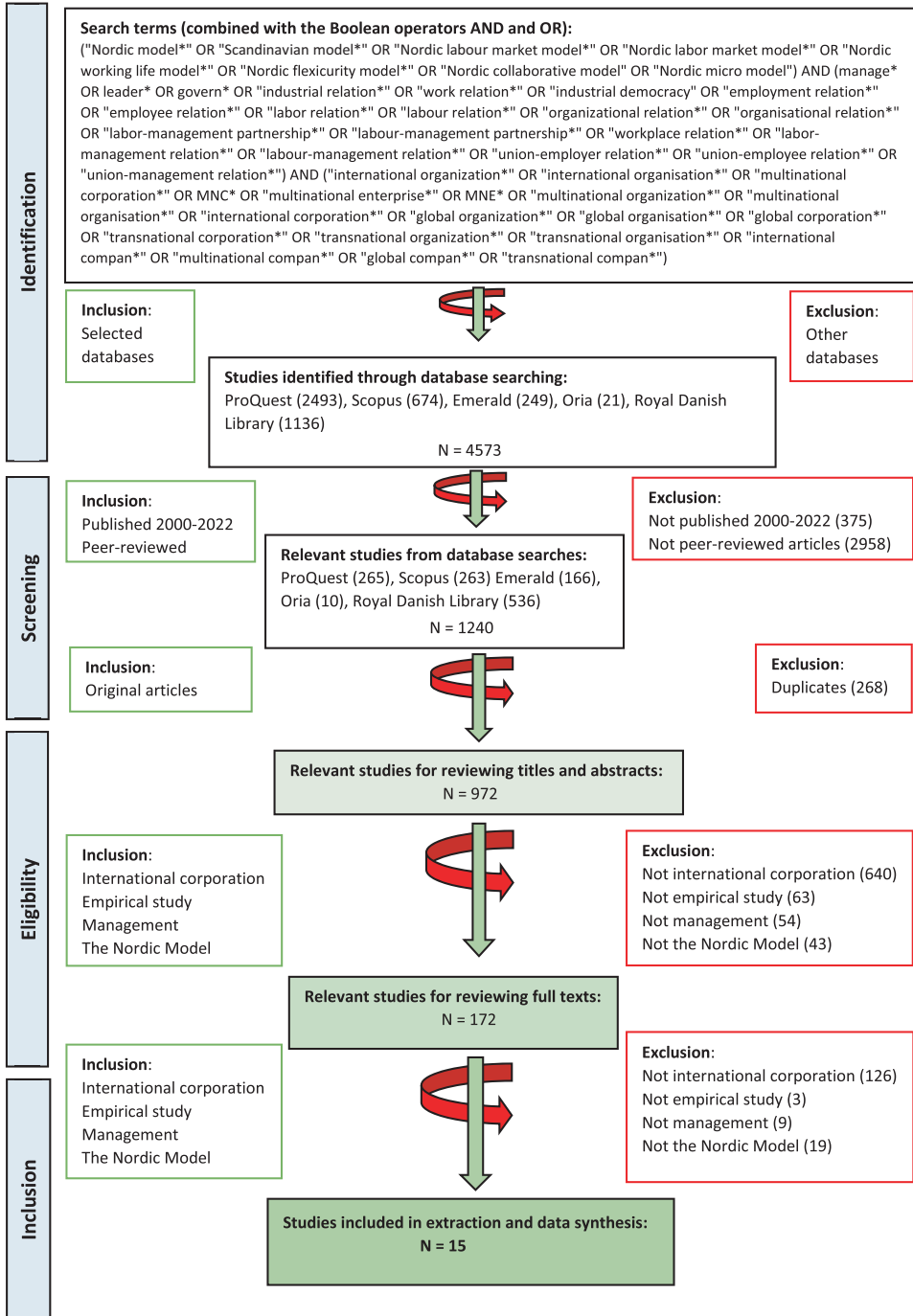


Searches using the databases Scopus, ProQuest, Emerald, Royal Danish Library (Det Kongelige Bibliotek), and Oria were conducted with expert guidance by a university librarian in May and June 2023. These databases were chosen because they are interdisciplinary and contain articles from journals in sociology and business (management/leadership). Oria and Royal Danish Library are databases residing in the Nordic region. Relevant articles were transferred to the bibliographic software EndNote (2020). The inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed during the preceding pilot searches. To facilitate a contemporary depiction of the current state of the research field, articles published before 2000 were omitted. To ensure scientific quality, only peer-reviewed articles were included. To investigate the sustainability of the Nordic model in an international context, empirical studies conducted in international companies were included. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2** Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Databases	Scopus, Emerald, ProQuest, Royal Danish Library, Oria	Other databases
Time frame	2000–2022	Articles published before January 1, 2000, and after January 1, 2023
Type of material	Peer-reviewed articles	Books, book chapters, conference papers, grey literature (non-peer reviewed-literature, unpublished literature such as BA-, MA-, and PhD-theses)
Research arena	International corporations	Other arenas
Type of study	Empirical studies	Other studies
Topic	Management	Other studies
Exposure of interest	The Nordic Model	Studies not related to The Nordic Model

The screening process started with searches in the databases Scopus, Emerald, ProQuest, Royal Danish Library, and Oria. A total of 4573 records were identified. Based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria, articles published before 2000 or after 2022 were excluded (375 articles). Second, non-peer-reviewed articles were removed (2958 articles). Third, duplicates were omitted (268 articles). Subsequently, articles not based on empirical studies in international companies were excluded, for example, literature reviews and studies at the national level. Finally, articles unrelated to management or the Nordic model were excluded. Three main barriers appeared in the screening process: (1) determining how the article was related to the Nordic model, (2) a lack of clarity about how management was addressed, and (3) uncertainty about whether business organizations were international. In the eligibility process, studies that did not explicitly address the Nordic model, management, and international corporations were removed. The final screening process was done as a collaborative effort among the authors, reading titles, abstracts, and full articles. The outcome was the exclusion of 957 articles and the inclusion of 15 articles. The process for achieving the review results followed the PRISMA guidelines (Moher *et al.* 2009) and is presented as a flow chart in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** Flow chart (based on PRISMA, Moher et al. 2009; Dille & Røkenes 2021).



## Articles included in the review

The searches in the databases resulted in the inclusion of 15 articles in this scoping review, as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3** Articles

No.	Author(s)	Year	Title
1	Tienari, Söderberg, Holgersson & Vaara	2005	Gender and National Identity Constructions in the Cross-Border Merger Context
2	Kvinge & Ulrichsen	2008	Do Norwegian Companies' Direct Investments in Poland Imply Exports of Labour Relations?
3	Sippola	2009	The two faces of Nordic management? Nordic firms and their employee relations in the Baltic states
4	Cordeiro-Nilsson & Hawamdeh	2011	Leveraging socio-culturally situated tacit knowledge
5	Sippola	2011	Nordic subsidiaries in the Baltic States: is model transfer possible?
6	Bjørnstad & Steen-Johnsen	2012	Beyond planning: The implementation of a worksite health promotional scheme
7	Børve & Kvande	2012	The Nordic model in a global company situated in Norway: Challenging institutional orders?
8	Sippola	2012	Local bargaining and codetermination: Finnish experience in comparative perspective
9	Rolfesen	2013	Transfer of labour-management partnership in multinational companies
10	Gooderham, Navrbjerg, Olsen & Steen	2015	The labor market regimes of Denmark and Norway – One Nordic model?
11	Wagner & Refslund	2016	Understanding the diverging trajectories of slaughterhouse work in Denmark and Germany: A power resource approach
12	Jesnes	2019	Employment Models of Platform Companies in Norway: A Distinctive Approach?
13	Sippola	2019	Dancing to the tune of the employer? Union–management relationships at Nordic subsidiaries in Russia
14	Knudsen, Müftüoğlu & Hugøy	2020	Standardizing responsibility through the stakeholder figure: Norwegian hydropower in Turkey
15	Lange	2020	Doing global investments the Nordic way: The “business case” for Equinor’s support to union work among its employees in Tanzania

## Charting and categorizing the data

The data were synthesized by conducting a thematic analysis of the findings. Developing the themes and coding, the studies were done as a collaborative effort among the authors, following Levac *et al.* (2010), who applied three stages of analysis. This involved a



descriptive numerical summary and thematic analyses, presenting the study's outcome, and considering the meaning of the study concerning the overall purpose. An Excel spreadsheet was used to chart the general information and terminology used in each article. The analytic framework used for each study included author name(s), year of publication, country of the study, study context, research objective(s), theoretical approach, research design and method, and main findings in relation to management and the Nordic model. The overall focus of the charting process was to map the diversity in how the Nordic model has been investigated in relation to management in empirical studies conducted in international companies. Subsequently, the aim was to generate insights into the model's resilience in terms of internationalization.

## Results of the scoping review process

### Authors, journals, and disciplines

A total of 15 full-length articles were reviewed. Eight of the studies were collaborative, having been written by 21 authors, whereas seven of the articles were written by single authors. The authors included 16 Norwegians, three Danes, three Finns, and two Swedes, alongside one researcher from the USA who co-authored one of the articles (Hawamdeh in Cordeiro-Nilsson & Hawamdeh 2011).

The empirical studies were published in various journals. The *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* was the main carrier, while the remaining articles were published in a range of journals: *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, *European Journal of Industrial Relations* and *Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, *Employee Relations*, *Gender, Work and Organization*, *Industrial Relations Journal*, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, and *The Journal of Knowledge Management*.

The articles were mainly within the sociology and business fields, with eight and five articles in each discipline, respectively. The last two articles (Lange 2020; Knudsen et al. 2020) were in the field of social anthropology. There was some consistency in these different studies about terming the model in singular and labeling the model 'Nordic', for instance, the Nordic model (Knudsen et al. 2020; Sippola 2012; Tienari et al. 2005), the Nordic working life model (Bjørnstad & Steen-Johnsen 2012), and the Nordic labor market model (Jesnes 2019). Other authors used notions such as the Nordic micro model (Børve & Kvande 2012), and the Nordic model of labor relations (Kvinge & Ulrichsen 2008; Rolfsen 2013) and referred to parts of the model. A minority of the studies explicitly limited the model to a specific national context: the Norwegian work-life model (Lange 2020) and the Norwegian model (Bjørnstad & Steen-Johnsen 2012). By contrast, some authors have discussed the notion of a single model. Gooderham et al. (2015) and Cordeiro-Nilsson and Hawamdeh (2011) emphasized that national variations within Nordic countries' regulations make it necessary to specify the model to a particular Nordic country.

Overall, there was a high degree of consistency in these studies regarding which parts of the models were examined. Workplace democracy (Nightingale & Clarkson 1982) referred to industrial relations, employment relationships, employment relations, employee participation, and collective bargaining. Indirect and direct participation were the main topics studied. Two articles focused on the Nordic model concerning Corporate



Social Responsibility (CSR) (Knudsen *et al.* 2020; Lange 2020), while one article related the Nordic model to gender equality (Tienari *et al.* 2005). The main focus across all the studies was how international organizations interacted within Nordic countries' regulations, or within national contexts abroad. Most of the studies were exploratory and qualitative. One article combined qualitative and survey data, while another was based on survey data. Most articles applied institutional theories to frame the studies based on the assumption that the construction of organizations is affected by institutional contexts. The national institutional context was assumed to affect companies' strategic and managerial decisions and institutional distance. However, in some articles, local settings were also considered important. Several studies addressed facilitators of, or barriers to the host's national regulations of working life. Although not explicitly stated in most studies, we view these studies as attempts to describe barriers as a result of institutional distance and differences between the institutional contexts of the home and the host contexts of an organization (Kostova *et al.* 2020). Positioning both the model and international organizations within their cultural, socio-historical, political, and industrial contexts (Czarniawska & Wolf 1986) reveals the importance of sensitivity to contextual issues. The theoretical approach corresponds to a Western-centric view of the role of international companies (Kostova *et al.* 2008), as well as studies of multinational companies (Phillips *et al.* 2009).

The studies covered two main fields: international companies' adjustments to the Nordic model (seven articles) and the transfer of the model to Nordic-owned companies' abroad (eight articles). In the following section, we use these distinctions as a point of departure to present the topics, results, and explanations of the findings.

### **International companies' adjustments to the Nordic model**

The focus of the studies of international corporations in Nordic countries was to examine whether, how, and to what extent Nordic-owned and foreign-owned companies adapted to the Nordic working life context. This encompassed an exploration of the impact of national conditions on management strategies and on the implementation of the Nordic model at the organizational level. Overall, these studies mainly examined adopting parts of the Nordic model, namely workplace democracy. There were some variations in these studies about how workplace democracy was labeled: employee participation, employment relations, cooperation, collective bargaining, work councils, consultation, and co-determination. In general, the studies mostly covered the adoption of indirect participation, while some had an explicit focus on both indirect and direct participation.

There were also variations in the locations where these studies were carried out. Four of the seven articles were based on case studies in international companies within a Nordic region, Norway (Bjørnstad & Steen-Johnsen 2012; Børve & Kvande 2012; Jesnes 2019) and Finland (Sippola 2012), while two articles were comparative studies across the Nordic region: Denmark and Norway (Gooderham *et al.* 2015), and Denmark, Sweden, and Finland (Tienari *et al.* 2005). The remaining article was a comparative study across a Nordic country, Denmark, and a European country, Germany (Wagner & Refslund 2016).

These studies mainly drew on either case studies in one company or used comparative analyses of several companies. Bjørnstad and Steen-Johnsen (2012) explored

the impact of organizational logic of participation and involvement in implementing a health project in a multinational company in Norway. Børve and Kvande (2012) examined the impact of parts of the Nordic model, participation and regulation of working time, on employees' working conditions in an international company located in Norway. By contrast, Sippola (2012) used a case study approach to compare bargaining, co-determination, and cooperation in five Finnish engineering shops operating in the international market. The studies were described in the context of the notion that Nordic countries have undergone a form of organized decentralization as a result of their high rate of unionization, the scope of their collective agreements, the presence of union shop stewards, and local bargaining. In Finland, company bargaining is typically conducted within three domains of work organization: wage incentives, flexible working hours, and job descriptions. A unique feature of Finnish industries is that while a general wage increase is established via industry-level agreements, the manner by which it is allocated to workers is determined at a company level. As a result of increasing global competition, new topics have been included in the bargaining agenda, such as numerical labor flexibility, the use of labor, flexicurity, and equality.

In contrast to studies regarding international companies' adaptation to the Nordic regulatory context, two articles conducted cross-border comparisons. Gooderham et al. (2015) used survey data to compare employers' communication practices with employees' staff changes in multinational indigenous-owned firms and foreign-owned firms located in Denmark and Norway. Important questions in this article were how national labor market regimes have been adopted to increase internationalization and how this has affected management strategies in different companies in different nations. Wagner and Refslund (2016) used a cross-national case study of the slaughterhouse sector embedded in the global food industry across two nations: Germany and Denmark. These countries' industrial relations and labor market systems used to be similar but have diverged significantly. The article examined whether different institutional and organizational contexts can explain variations in employees' working conditions, especially how institutional and organizational labor movement power account for the observed differences.

One article concerned flexibility and emphasized the gig and platform economy through the lens of how a platform company has adopted employment strategies in the Norwegian labor market model (Jesnes 2019). The 'gig economy' refers to dividing jobs into separate tasks and assignments (Woodcock & Graham 2020), while the 'platform economy' refers to how work processes and markets are organized using digital platforms (Srnicek 2017). The remaining article discusses the Nordic model in relation to equality. Tienari et al. (2005) drew attention to a multinational Nordic-owned company built on a series of cross-border mergers and acquisitions in the Nordic context. Using interviews with male executives employed in the same company located across the Nordic region, the authors analyzed how male executives discussed the absence of women in the company's top echelons.

### **Findings on international companies' adjustments to the Nordic model**

Overall, the findings in these studies were that international foreign-owned companies, to a certain degree, have made adaptations that comply with the legislation and regulations



related to the Nordic model. The results of Børve and Kvande's (2012) study were that while regulatory arrangements related to direct participation were implemented, other parts, such as working time regulations and indirect participation, were considered by the managers to be counterproductive. This corresponds with the findings of the study of employment relationships in platform companies in Norway. Even though the companies had adopted some parts of the Norwegian standard employment relationships, the workers were commission-paid without guaranteed earnings (Jesnes 2019). The companies' use of atypical employment models and algorithmic management implied that the employees could not bargain with the company.

By contrast, Bjørnstad and Steen-Johnsen (2012) found that the adoption and implementation of a health program in an international company in Norway failed. This was explained as a result of a contradiction between the organizational logic: a highly specialized work organization and management based on Tayloristic logic, and the health promotional program's underlying logic of employee participation. Sippola's (2012) study in Finland showed that unions accommodated their roles as mechanisms for co-determination and company bargaining. The local union organizations had somewhat succeeded in reconciling these two roles. The conclusion was that decentralization in the collective negotiations did not appear to pose a threat to the Finnish industrial relations system as long as it was organized and was accompanied by high union membership.

The impact of institutional and organizational settings on employees' working conditions corresponds with the discussion in the comparative studies of how labor markets adopt to increasing internationalization. Gooderham *et al.*'s (2015) comparative study of international Nordic-owned companies and international foreign-owned companies in Denmark and Norway showed that compared to multinational companies in Norway, there was less indirect communication in multinational companies in Denmark. Compared to foreign-owned multinational companies in Denmark, Danish-owned multinational companies were less inclined to engage in direct communication. Although the labor markets were increasingly internationalized, cross-country variations in institutional settings affected the company's strategies differently. These results were explained as a consequence of the impact of national regulations; institutions matter to employees' working conditions. In Denmark, the introduction of flexicurity was considered to have a negative impact on communication patterns between managers and employees.

Wagner and Refslund's (2016) study of the slaughterhouse sector in Denmark and Germany also illustrated cross-national variations. In Danish companies, high wages and good working conditions were maintained. In Germany, there was an increase in precarious employment with subcontracted and posted migrant workers. These variations were explained because of unions' power resources. In contrast to Germany, Denmark has a highly regulated labor market where union power is partly embedded in the national system. Furthermore, membership density in Danish slaughterhouses is high. Tienari *et al.*'s study (2005) likewise draws attention to the impact of national contextual conditions on employees' practices. This article focused on how vertical gender inequality is expressed in discourse within the context of a multinational Nordic company's formation. The study demonstrated that gender intersects with the nationality of male managers, contributing to national differences in their argumentation.

## Transfer of the Nordic model to Nordic-owned companies' abroad

The main question in these studies concerned whether Nordic-owned organizations transferred Nordic practices to foreign subsidiaries, combined Nordic and host countries' practices in foreign subsidiaries (hybridization) or used the host country's environment to deviate from the Nordic model. The overall topic in these studies pertained to management practices related to parts of the model: workplace democracy. Workplace democracy refers to labor relationships, labor–management partnerships, collective bargaining, corporation unionization, and participation. By contrast, two articles studied the Nordic model concerning CSR, either by emphasizing the transfer of unionization (Lange 2020) or by highlighting the impact of the model on the transfer of CSR abroad (Knudsen et al. 2020). There were variations in locations where the studies in these eight articles were carried out: Poland (Kvinge & Ulrichsen 2008), Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) (Sippola 2009; 2011), Singapore (Cordeiro-Nilsson & Hawamdeh 2011), Canada (Rolfsen 2013), Russia (Sippola 2019), Turkey (Knudsen et al. 2020), and Tanzania (Lange 2020).

There were variations in the questions that were explored in the articles. The question posed in two of the articles was why Norwegian-owned multinational companies wanted to transfer partnership practices to their subsidiaries in Canada (Rolfsen 2013) and Tanzania (Lange 2020). The research question in four of the articles was whether the labor–management partnership or the Nordic management model was transferred and implemented abroad. Kvinge and Ulrichsen (2008) used a case study and a survey to explore whether a Norwegian manufacturing company transferred labor relations when investing in Poland. Sippola (2011) focused on the extent to which direct and indirect participation was transferred by Nordic subsidiaries in the Baltics. In his earlier article, attention was devoted to the extent to which the transfer of the Nordic management model occurred in unionized and non-union industrial enterprises in the Baltics (Sippola 2009). Sippola's latest article focused on whether and to what extent Nordic management relationships emerged in Nordic-owned industrial enterprises in Russia (Sippola 2019). The focus of the remaining articles was how the Swedish model of management was transferred to Swedish-managed organizations in Singapore (Corderio-Nilsson & Hawamdeh 2011) and the impact of the Nordic model on the transfer of CSR to Norwegian-owned companies in Turkey (Knudsen et al. 2020).

## Findings on the transfer of the Nordic model abroad

There were variations in the outcome of studies on the transformation of the Nordic model of labor-management partnership abroad. Labor relations and the Nordic management model were either transferred, selectively transferred, or not at all. Overall, there was a high degree of consistency in these empirical studies regarding the explanation of the conclusion. In cases where the model was transferred, this was addressed as a result of local settings, management's perception of partnership, and implementation strategies. Specifically, the involvement of local employees/unions and managers from the host organization in the implementation process was considered important. Hybrid outcome or non-transfer was explained with reference to national and local barriers, such as lack of necessary institutions and national regulation, lack of experience



and competence, in addition to managers' strategies and aim to leverage inter-country disparities.

Overall, in studies asking why the labor–management partnership was transferred abroad, analyses showed that it was implemented because of the top managers' strategic desire to reduce the risk of establishing a subsidiary abroad, or as a result of the company's CSR policy of protecting employees. Rolfsen's (2013) study showed that through management strategies, the subsidiary of a Norwegian-owned company could put the Nordic model into practice. Among these strategies were choosing an organization's location with a high degree of unionization, building strong relationships with the shop stewards, coaching managers using the Norwegian model of cooperation at a factory in Norway, and training young people with higher education. Lange's (2020) study demonstrated how a Norwegian-owned company, in close collaboration with a Norwegian union, managed to establish a union branch abroad. The company's support for unionization was explained as a result of several factors: employees' rights as part of the company's CSR policies and an assessment that unionization of the staff would be beneficial for the company. A common feature of these studies was the involvement of actors with experience pertaining to parts of the model within the organization's source context, namely a Nordic country. These results are in accordance with Cordeiro-Nilsson and Hawamdeh's (2011) findings. The transfer of the Swedish model of management to Singapore was explained as a consequence of a learning process of information sharing between local employees and local employers and managers with experiences with the model, specifically Swedish managers.

Other authors also attributed the importance of management to whether or not the model was transferred. Sippola (2011) concluded that subsidiaries in the Baltics had developed a hybrid home–host model of partnership mainly because of managers' resistance to implementing participation. Sippola's (2019) study of Nordic management relationships showed little indication of partnership practices at Nordic-owned industrial enterprises in Russia. The combination of management's strategies of limited employees' action and scope for partnership and the discrepancies in the cultural and identity dimensions of 'dancing' at the factories was considered important to the outcome. The finding in Sippola's (2009) study of the transfer of the Nordic management model in the Baltic states was that Nordic employers exhibited a variety of management styles. The Nordic model's bargained constitutionalism occurred in unionized subsidiary firms, while non-unionized firms only partially practiced collaborative strategies in accordance with Nordic management practice. The different management styles were explained by the local setting, whether the unions had fought for collective bargaining or not.

Kvinge and Ulrichsen's (2008) study showed that even though most of the representatives of Norwegian subsidiaries were concerned about extant Polish law, most of them had not implemented any form of employee participation or collective bargaining. Several explanations were presented. First, owners and managers claimed that employees lacked the competence to contribute. Second, the job activities were not considered to call for employees' involvement in work. Third, it was considered difficult because of the lack of necessary institutions. In the remaining studies, the outcome was that companies had not implemented any form of employee partnership. An illustration of this is Knudsen *et al.*'s (2020) study of the transfer of CSR to Norwegian-owned companies in Turkey. Statkraft had enacted responsibility in line with international standards of

CSR in a project in Turkey and distanced the corporation from its Norwegian origin, the Nordic model.

## Concluding discussion

The purpose of this article was to provide insights into how the Nordic model has been investigated in relation to management in empirical studies conducted in international companies. By synthesizing the configuration of the Nordic model in relation to management in international corporations, the subsequent goal was to discuss the model's robustness regarding internationalization. This scoping review has uncovered how the Nordic model, in relation to management, is configured in empirical studies undertaken in international companies and contributes to the international management literature and the implications of internationalization, particularly the implications of changes in working life for the Nordic model.

The mapping of the field revealed geographic differences regarding the contributors to this research area. Although the concept encompassed Nordic countries, the research originated particularly in Norway and Finland. This scoping review demonstrates that the Nordic model has traveled to both different countries in Europe and beyond Nordic borders. In addition, it shows that the model has expanded to spheres such as gender equality and CSR. Despite the variations in the model, it was most commonly referred to as the Nordic model. The reviewed studies generally treated the Nordic model as a configuration of institutions and were mentioned in the singular. Some of the authors argued for the inclusion of nationality in the model because of national variations in the Nordic countries' regulatory schemes and management models. However, although the model was labeled in different terms, most authors appeared to share an understanding of the Nordic region as unique and to have something in common.

Several researchers have addressed the variations in Nordic countries (Byrkjeflot et al. 2021; Livingston 2022) and the state's role in labor market governance (Dølvik 2013, 2022). For instance, although trade unions in the Nordic labor market models have common features, there are also differences, such as that Norway has significantly lower white-collar union membership in the private sector (Høgedahl et al. 2022). However, among academics, policymakers, experts, and social movements, the 'Nordic model' is an influential concept that represents a successful combination of economic growth, democracy, social and gender equality, social welfare, a highly skilled labor force, and a high-quality of life (Byrkjeflot et al. 2021). Dølvik (2013) suggested viewing the model as a common approach or method for joint problem-solving, adjustment, and the continuous renewal of policy tools and strategies. Others have argued for conceptualizing the model as a 'collective singular' (Koselleck 2011), which is a concept that is mentioned in the singular but in praxis is applied in different ways in space and over time (Byrkjeflot et al. 2021). However, the variation between the Nordic countries' legal and administrative systems for regulating foreign-owned business activities (Knudsen 1980) demonstrates the complexity of the model. National differences indicate that a broader emphasis on national contextual considerations may be useful. Furthermore, they also illustrate the importance of discussing the usefulness of one common Nordic model since the differences between Nordic countries' regulations are so considerable that it would be ideal to use different variants of the Nordic model.



There was a high degree of consistency in the studies regarding the topic, purpose, theoretical approach, and method. The most common topic across the included studies was workplace democracy, which was analyzed in terms of collective bargaining, cooperation, employee participation, and labor conditions. The studies emphasized the consequences of increasing trends of flexibilization, digitalization, declining union density, and strong international competition. These topics were explored from two different angles. One explored adjustments to the Nordic model in international companies located in Nordic countries, while the other emphasized the transfer of the Nordic model in Nordic-owned companies abroad. Most of the studies applied institutional theories as a framework to locate empirical studies within institutional contexts at home and in the host countries and, to some degree, within local settings. Institutional considerations were assumed to affect companies' strategies and managerial decisions and were highlighted as facilitators or barriers. The importance of sensitivity to contextual issues is demonstrated through this scoping review. Furthermore, the research field appears to share an understanding that internationalization may produce divergent outcomes. This demonstrates a recognition of globalization that does not support the convergence hypothesis (Edwards & Rees 2006) but instead highlights local organizational variations (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996; Røvik 2016).

There were some variations in the studies and outcomes. The Nordic model seemed to be modified in international corporations established in Nordic countries, while the model was partly transformed and practiced in Nordic corporations abroad. In cases in which the model was adopted abroad, important factors appear to be the involvement of managers with organizational experiences of the model within the Nordic context and the involvement of local employees in decision-making. National policies and regulations are critical factors, but local settings such as leadership decisions and unionization play an essential role in shaping management practices in line with the Nordic model. These findings correspond with studies that apply translation theory (Børve & Kvande 2022).

It may be conceptualized as a paradox that international organizations establishing themselves in the Nordic region must relate to the Nordic model. In contrast, international organizations with Nordic origins bring the same model with them when establishing themselves abroad (Kostova *et al.* 2008). Overall, the findings in international corporations abroad may indicate that the model is robust and transferable even if the environment does not include institutional arrangements that support cooperation.

The argument for using peer-reviewed articles as a criterion was to ensure scientific quality and the inclusion of theoretical considerations in empirical studies within this scoping review. However, the review indicates that few articles have explored the Nordic model and management in international organizations. This may suggest that relevant research published in, for example, books and conference papers, has been omitted. We assume that researchers may have also used other terms. For instance, in comparative welfare state research (Esping-Andersen 1990), the Nordic model includes gender equality as an important dimension (Teigen 2021; Teigen & Skjeie 2017). These studies frequently used the Nordic model as a framework to explore the impact of welfare states' arrangements, such as parental leave, in relation to gender equality (Kvande & Brandth 2017). De la Porte *et al.*'s (2022) study demonstrated that there has been increased research activity concerning the Nordic model during the last decade, specifically within the field of social sciences. The researchers who conducted these studies have different



backgrounds, including Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Sweden. Many themes associated with the model were applicable to Nordic policies, especially those related to the labor markets and welfare states and the outcomes regarding social classes and gender. Koivunen, Ojala, and Holmén (2021) indicate that there has been a shift in articles dealing with the Nordic model in recent years. The Nordic model is most frequently cited in articles related to administration, education, and sociology and is increasingly associated with social policies and less associated with industrial relations. This indicates that the scoping review reflects the research field of the Nordic model and management in international organizations.

These findings underscore the need to consider the broader institutional contexts in which cross-border management practices operate. This may contribute to providing new knowledge about the importance of management for the existence and functioning of the Nordic model. Several studies using different theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches and comparing the Nordic model and management across Nordic contexts can provide new insights into how the model appears to tackle diverse challenges, such as internationalization. The potential of 'Going Nordic' in the future may be established through further research by emphasizing national and local settings in the intricate interplay between management and the Nordic model.

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