



Introduction¹

Welcome to the fourth and final issue of Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies for 2024. This edition features four research articles authored by scholars from Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

The first article *Being Active in Working Life at Age 60, 66, and 72*, authored by Marie Bjuhr, Maria Engström, Anna-Karin Welmer, Sölve Elmståhl, and Britt-Marie Sjölund, investigates the factors influencing participation in working life among older adults, specifically those aged 60, 66, and 72 years, using cross-sectional data from the Swedish National Study on Ageing and Care collected at two points in time (2001–2003 and 2013–2015). The research aims to explore associations between working life participation and variables like sociodemographics, health, and work environment, as well as temporal changes in these associations. The study employs logistic regression analysis stratified by age groups, incorporating interaction terms to capture changes over time. The findings highlight that male gender (ages 66 and 72 years), higher education, better health, and higher professional levels significantly increase the likelihood of participation in working life. Additionally, positive work satisfaction and fewer negative work experiences are critical for older adults remaining active in the labor force, particularly at younger age strata (60 and 66 years). Notably, the proportion of individuals in working life increased substantially over the study period, especially among those aged 66 years, indicating shifts in societal norms and the impact of pension reforms. The study concludes that health, work environment, and structural factors, such as pension policies, collectively shape older adults' ability and willingness to remain active in working life. It recommends that policymakers consider these heterogeneous influences to design inclusive strategies supporting extended working lives.

The article *Daily Habits and Work-life Boundary Control: Telework in the Era of COVID-19* by Calle Rosengren, Gisela Bäcklander, and Kristina Palm investigates the role of daily habits in upholding boundaries between work and private life during pandemic-induced telework among Swedish municipal office workers. They explore how habitual behaviors contribute to boundary management while working from home. Employing a qualitative design, the study utilizes photo-elicitation interviews with 46 employees and managers across two Swedish municipalities at two intervals during the pandemic. Participants submitted photographs depicting their work-from-home experience, which were discussed during interviews to provide insights into their daily habits and boundary strategies. The findings reveal that workplace habits were often disrupted when work shifted to the home environment, leading to a loss of routines such as scheduled breaks or the physical separation of work and private spaces. However, individuals adapted by developing transitional habits, such as symbolic commutes or clearing work-related artifacts at the end of the day, to re-establish work-life boundaries. The study identifies that cues in the environment, whether physical, social, or temporal, significantly influenced the formation and maintenance of habits. For instance, some workers mimicked office habits, like packing a lunch or setting up workstations in specific areas, to maintain a sense of normalcy. Others adopted new rituals, such as morning walks or evening routines, to create clear transitions between work and personal time.

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

The results underscore the critical role of environmental cues and the automaticity of habits in managing work-life boundaries, emphasizing that successful boundary work depends on embedding new routines into the home setting. The study enriches boundary theory by illustrating how habitual behavior mediates the gap between intention and action, offering practical implications for enhancing employee well-being and productivity in telework settings. By leveraging the automaticity of habits, organizations and individuals can better navigate the challenges of blurred boundaries in remote work environments.

The third article *Complexity, Resilience, and Human Resource Management: Illustration from Nordic Higher Education* by Jouni Kekäle and Rómulo Pinheiro examines how Nordic higher education institutions respond to increasing complexity and change, with a specific focus on human resource management (HRM) and resilience in light of the European Union's CoARA initiative, which aims to reform research assessments. The authors focus on how leading academics interpret and adapt to growing expectations for societal relevance in higher education and how these interpretations shape HRM policies. Using a qualitative method, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with nine senior academics in administrative roles at a Nordic university. The findings reveal that respondents were largely hesitant to embrace expanded roles for academics that prioritize societal impact over traditional research and teaching functions. Instead, they emphasized the need to preserve academic freedom and prioritize core research activities while cautiously navigating pressures for increased societal engagement. The study introduces the concept of 'emergent resilience', which identifies absorptive, adaptive, and transformative responses to systemic challenges. While the immediate reactions of respondents were categorized as absorptive, reflecting resistance to change, the study proposes that adaptive or transformative resilience might emerge over time as external pressures increase. The authors conclude that HRM in higher education must navigate these tensions by balancing institutional priorities with societal expectations, providing strategic leadership training, and fostering a supportive environment that accommodates complexity without undermining academic integrity. The study contributes to the literature by offering a theoretical framework for understanding resilience in higher education and proposing practical implications for HRM in complex organizational contexts.

The final article of the issue *Path Reinforcer or Policy Accelerator? COVID-19 and Scandinavian Social Protection Reform Trajectories* by Mattias Bengtsson, Laust Høgedahl, and Jørgen Svalund investigates how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced social protection systems in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, specifically in the areas of unemployment and sickness benefits. The research addresses whether reforms during the pandemic were provisional or became permanent and examines the underlying reasons for these trajectories through the lens of institutional theory. The authors utilized a comparative case study approach, analyzing official documents, government bills, public inquiries, and secondary literature published from March 2020 to December 2023. Additionally, they conducted 27 interviews with key stakeholders, including representatives from governments, trade unions, and employer organizations, to uncover the drivers behind policy changes. Findings reveal that Denmark and Norway predominantly enacted temporary measures, adhering to pre-pandemic policy paths, whereas Sweden implemented several permanent reforms, transforming provisional measures into lasting policies. This divergence is attributed to the varying depth of the pandemic's impact,

pre-pandemic conditions, and differences in policy-making processes. In Denmark and Norway, the reforms were mostly path-reinforcing, with an emphasis on preserving existing structures, supported by tripartite agreements. Conversely, Sweden's reforms reflected a path-clearing policy acceleration, influenced by the severe health crisis and pre-existing pressures for more inclusive welfare systems. The study concludes that while the pandemic did not universally disrupt policy paths in Scandinavian social protection systems, it acted as a policy accelerator in Sweden, legitimizing long-debated changes. This research contributes to institutional theory by highlighting how external shocks like pandemics interact with domestic policy dynamics and institutional contexts to shape reform trajectories.

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