



Introduction¹

The first 2025 issue of Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies includes four original research articles written by researchers from Norway, Finland, and Sweden.

The first article, *Wadel's Concept of 'Incorporation': A Means of Improving Sustainable Work Inclusion?* by Kjetil Frøyland and Tanja Haraldsdottir Nordberg explores whether Cato Wadel's sociological concept of incorporation can offer new insights into sustainable work inclusion for marginalized individuals. The study investigates what is required to facilitate sustainable work inclusion and whether Wadel's framework introduces new perspectives on this process. Using a concept-driven analysis, the authors examine 20 workplace-oriented studies from a scoping review of Norwegian research on work inclusion, return-to-work programs, and job retention. Wadel's theory differentiates between 'symmetric incorporation', where integration happens naturally among colleagues, and 'asymmetric incorporation', which involves external support structures. His model emphasizes personal skills, such as motivation and competence, and relational skills, such as the ability to build and maintain workplace relationships. The findings highlight the importance of continuous reassurances in workplace relationships, the gradual development of employee status, and the role of colleagues in sustaining inclusion—factors often overlooked in mainstream research. Existing studies tend to focus on employer engagement, whereas Wadel's perspective views the workplace as a collaborative environment, requiring active contributions from multiple actors, including employers, colleagues, and support agencies. The authors conclude that Wadel's framework can enhance work inclusion policies by incorporating a more holistic and long-term perspective. However, they acknowledge limitations, such as potential selection bias in their chosen studies and the challenge of generalizing findings beyond the Nordic context. They also highlight the need for further longitudinal research to explore how Wadel's concept of incorporation can be applied across different labor market settings.

The next article, *Institutional Hybridity in Networked Cultural Organizations through Boundary Work* by Arja Haapakorpi, Jari Kolehmainen, Henna Jousmäki, Minna Leinonen, and Emmi Siirtola examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Finnish cultural festival organizations, focusing on their institutional hybridity and adaptation through boundary work. The study explores how cultural festivals, structured as network organizations, navigated the crisis and whether their institutionalized structures ensured continuity during the pandemic. The authors apply institutional theory, particularly the concept of 'hybridity', to analyze the flexibility and stability of festival organizations that operate across multiple institutional fields, including public funding bodies, private sponsors, and artistic networks. The research is qualitative, based on interviews conducted in 2021 with representatives from four Finnish cultural festivals, including festival management, municipal authorities, and mediating organizations. The study employs practice theory to examine how everyday practices sustain and transform institutional logics within these organizations. Findings reveal that institutionalization provided economic stability, allowing festivals to survive despite major disruptions in their programming. However, variations emerged in how festivals adapted; performing arts festivals, which relied more on public funding, retained

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



stronger institutional continuity, while popular music festivals, dependent on ticket sales and commercial sponsors, faced greater financial instability and pressure to adapt their programming. Boundary work, particularly negotiations with funding authorities and local governments, was crucial in securing resources and maintaining the festivals' profiles. The study concludes that cultural festivals' networked structures and institutional hybridity helped them endure the pandemic but also exposed tensions between artistic integrity and economic viability. The authors highlight the growing influence of market-based funding in cultural policy, suggesting that future cultural governance will require greater balancing between economic constraints and artistic goals. They call for further research on long-term institutional transformations in the cultural sector post-pandemic.

Third, *Lost in Translation: The Human Resource Business Partner in a Scandinavian Context* by Agneta Häll examines the challenges of implementing the Human Resource Business Partner (HRBP) model, originally developed in the United States, within a Scandinavian corporate setting. The study focuses on how HR practitioners in a Swedish industrial corporation experience the HRBP role, particularly the tensions and contradictions that arise when adapting this management concept to the Scandinavian work culture. The research employs a qualitative case study approach, drawing on semi-structured interviews with HR professionals and line managers, as well as observations and analysis of HR policy documents. Paradox theory serves as the theoretical framework, highlighting the conflicting expectations and structural tensions embedded in the HRBP role. The findings indicate a misalignment between the strategic aspirations of the HRBP model and the practical demands of HR work in Sweden. While the model emphasizes strategic HR involvement in business decisions, the daily work of HRBPs remains heavily focused on administrative and operational HR tasks, creating role ambiguity and frustration. Furthermore, the study finds that the decentralized and collaborative nature of Scandinavian organizations conflicts with the hierarchical and standardized structure of the HRBP model, leading to difficulties in its implementation. The results suggest that Scandinavian HR practitioners often lack the business and leadership experience that the HRBP role requires, further complicating their ability to act as strategic partners. The Häll concludes that the HRBP model requires significant contextualization to be effectively integrated into Scandinavian organizations, recommending a more team-based approach within HR functions rather than individual strategic HRBP roles. The study contributes to the ongoing debate about the local adaptation of global management models and underscores the need for further research on HR transformation in different institutional contexts.

Finally, *'To be a Player, not a Piece': LMX-Relationships in Late-career Employment* by Hege Sofie Hesselberg explores how organizational retirement age norms influence the leader–member exchange (LMX) relationship during late-career employment. The study is based on qualitative interviews with employees aged 50 years and older, as well as managers from two private sector companies in Norway, to understand how retirement pressures impact workplace dynamics. Drawing on LMX theory, which focuses on the quality of exchanges between leaders and employees, the research examines how high-quality LMX relationships can mitigate retirement pressures and foster career extension. Findings indicate that corporate incentives for early retirement, such as severance packages and financial benefits, contribute to the normalization of retirement at 62, despite broader policy efforts to extend working lives. Employees viewed immediate managers as crucial in shielding them from these pressures, but managers

faced conflicting priorities, balancing support for older employees with workforce planning and cost-reduction strategies. The study highlights that high-quality LMX relationships—characterized by trust, recognition, and flexibility—can help employees feel valued and retain their roles longer. However, frequent leadership turnover, lack of age-management policies, and implicit biases often undermine these relationships. Some managers actively resisted corporate retirement norms to protect experienced employees, while others avoided discussions about age, fearing that such conversations could be misinterpreted. The study concludes that while individual managers play a vital role in shaping late-career employment experiences, broader organizational and policy-level interventions are necessary to counteract premature retirement pressures. The author calls for stricter regulations to limit practices that push older employees toward early retirement and recommends clearer managerial guidelines to ensure fair and inclusive workplace policies for aging employees.

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