

**Report on first workshop on “Employment in Nordic Countries and Work-related Consequences“, May 26-27, 2014 at Stockholm University**

Main organizer: Claudia Bernhard-Oettel, Stockholm University

The overall goal of this meeting was to discuss recent research results regarding job mobility and employability in relation to age and health with a focus on Nordic countries to derive consequences for future research and practice. The workshop consisted of three keynote addresses, nine paper presentations and one practitioner panel discussion. In total, 21 researchers and practitioners participated in the workshop.

In the **first keynote address**, Connie Wanberg (University of Minnesota) presented factors for reemployment success derived from a meta-analysis of published studies. One of the relevant factors is age: It is more difficult for older employees to find a job (particularly in European countries). Older employees show weaker intentions to engage in job search, lower job-search self-efficacy and less effort in their job search. They receive fewer job offers and are less satisfied with their job. More often, older people are confronted with negative stereotypes, have declining social networks and obsolete skills, which are hindering to easily find a new job. Unemployment is a very stressful life experience due to financial concerns, social undermining, the importance of work and lower optimism, perceived control and self-efficacy.

Perceptions of mental health and employability, that is, the easiness to find a new job, fluctuate during a period of job search (Claudia Bernhard-Oettel, Stockholm University). Unemployed blue-collar workers who received a job offer had fewer mental health complaints, were more employable, but made more concessions to commute. Employees' health complaints were related to more financial worries and lower employability. However, under harsh economic and labour conditions, employability is of limited value for finding a job (Jasmine Low Tee Hwa, University of Valencia). The study comparing data of Spanish young adults in the years 2008 and 2011 showed that personal initiative, career enhancing strategies and employability lost their importance while passivity in career planning became more important when difficult conditions persisted. In a panel discussion, four practitioners, who helped people to find a new job in the context of outplacement for both white and blue collar workers or people with disabilities, supported these results and put them into an applied context (Irene Starck & Titti Jardetun, Starck & partners; Matthias Elm, TSL; Johanna Agri, MISA). They emphasized that it is important to have good contact to potential employers and

to create awareness that participants can use their own social network to find a job. It is also important to find individual solutions with each participant in the program.

In the **second keynote address**, Tomas Berglund (Gothenburg University) analysed the development of several labour market characteristics in Sweden over time (for example active labour market policy, support for unemployed, unemployment rate, tenure, job insecurity, employment protection) and compared them to other countries, mainly Nordic ones. The combination of lower support for unemployed, reduced active labour market policy and strong employment protection legislation was related to the increased (youth) unemployment rate and temporary employment since the 1990s. The advantages of the Danish flexicurity system (active labour market policy, good support for unemployed) were shown as a positive example: Despite little employment protection legislation, because it allows youth and unemployed to find a job in the labour market and prevents long periods of unemployment. The Swedish system also motivates employees to keep their job, although they would prefer to leave.

Employees who are locked in, that is, they remain in a position only to have secure employment, suffer from lower subjective health (Johanna Stengård, Stockholm University). Changes in locked-in status were also related to changes in health, that is, the shift into a position considered as locked-in resulted in reduced health and the shift to not-locked-in in improved health. Upward career steps inside an organization can also produce increased strain due to time pressure and problems with work-life balance, although employees feel satisfied with their career (Thomas Rigotti, University of Mainz). In an analysis of types of knowledge workers that remained stable over time, emotional exhaustion was highest for the pressured and obedient type characterized by high creativity requirements and low to medium autonomy (Aleksandra Bujacz, Stockholm University). Job satisfaction was highest for the autonomous type with high creativity requirements and autonomy and low work pressure.

In the **third keynote address**, Anne Hammarström (University of Umeå) presented a longitudinal analysis of two cohorts of Swedish born in 1965 and 1973. Unemployment negatively affected health, but consequences were more severe for younger unemployed than for older ones. The longer unemployment lasted, the higher was the probability for sickness absence later. Employed women also reported reduced health due to increasing demands and pressure at work. Being unemployed as young adults resulted in a downward spiral from unemployment to temporary employment to poor salary and finally to reduced health. The relationship between temporary work, job insecurity and sickness absences was also shown for a representative sample of Finnish employees (Jouko Nätti, University of Tampere).

The accumulated effect of temporary work and job insecurity make sickness absence days more likely in the later career. This effect is not found among permanent employees. Apart from self-perceived job insecurity, the job insecurity climate, that is, a shared perception of job insecurity referring to the employees' work context also plays a role (Lena Låstad, Stockholm University). Individual job insecurity climate is related to a higher level of burnout and to a lower level of self-rated health. In Danish companies, employees reported low job insecurity despite the financial crisis (Sabine Raeder, University of Oslo). Job insecurity was affected by competition due to globalization, cooperation with other national or international companies and numerical flexibility. Higher levels of job insecurity were found for unskilled workers, in the production industry and at the age between 48 and 54. Older employees appreciated options of flexible working time, which related to enhanced performance, while younger workers increased their work engagement due to measures of flexible working time (Matthijs Bal, University of Bath).

### **Conclusion:**

The workshop successfully shed light on the situation in Nordic countries and Germany, despite the lack of comparative research including two or more Nordic countries. Some studies showed that the employment and labour market context poses relevant limitations to peoples' activities. Younger and older employees or unemployed are two groups at increased risk to suffer from negative consequences. Unemployment, job insecurity and lack of job mobility and career choices were found to negatively affect health. To counteract detrimental consequences, an active job search, individual employability and institutional support in searching for a new job are beneficial. An employment legislation that allows for generous support for unemployed, an active labour market policy and an adequate level of employment protection is also of help. The current state of research, however, does not allow us to conclude that particular national employment system cause less job insecurity and less health problems. Comparative research would be needed to relate employees' job insecurity perceptions and health to the labour market and employment system. There seems to be particular need to study how negative working conditions affect health and well-being in the long run in younger workers who have their whole career and occupational life ahead of them.