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Jun 19, 2013

Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 5/2013

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Theme: Work engagement gives Nordic competitiveness



Financed by
Nordic Council of
Ministers

NORDIC LABOUR JOURNAL

Work Research Institute
OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University,
Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass, NO-0130
Oslo

PUBLISHER

Work Research Institute, OsloMet
commissioned by the Nordic Council of
Ministers.

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An email edition of the newsletter can
be ordered free of charge from
www.nordiclabourjournal.org

ISSN 1504-9019 tildelt: Nordic labour
journal (online)



**REDAKTØR-
ANSVAR**

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Editorial: Job engagement is pure gold

How do you achieve job engagement and work commitment? In this summer edition of the Nordic Labour Journal our writers, experts and researchers explore what happens with job engagement when work pressure increases. Does job engagement really equal increased productivity? Is job engagement pure gold?

COMMENTS

19.06.2013

BY BERIT KVAM

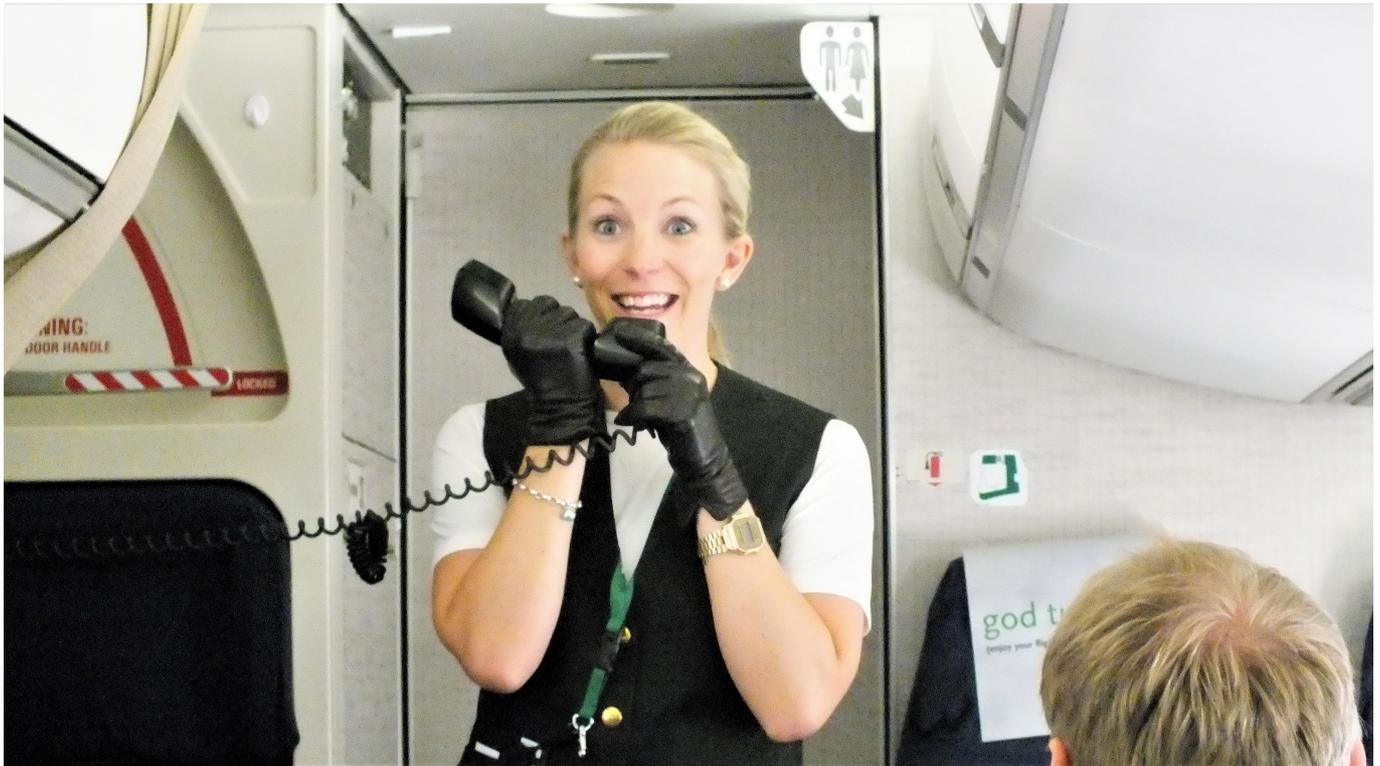
In the second act of his play *Ghosts*, Henrik Ibsen compares the joy of work to the joy of life itself. With that in mind it is thought-provoking to focus on job engagement and commitment to work while some 25 million people in Europe and nearly one million in the Nordic countries are unemployed. To them job engagement might seem like a luxury problem. But cuts can hit those who still work and staff reductions often lead to tougher work environments. It is important to make sure job engagement doesn't disappear out the door together with those who lose their jobs.

In the report 'Nordic Growth Sectors –How can working life policies contribute to improving the framework conditions?' from the Nordic Council of Ministers, the work environment is one of five important dimensions. The authors say Nordic businesses should systematically measure and publish data on the psychosocial work environment, and that good examples of businesses that have improved in this area should be gathered from across the Nordic region. Yet measuring without acting on the results could make matters worse, warn Danish experts in 'Action needed to combat bad psychosocial work environments'.

'Almost always fun at work' looks at how Finnish Fondia has managed to create job engagement and be named best employer of the year by the European Great Place to Work Institute. Working life researcher Jari Hakanen says there is an obvious link between job engagement and increased growth.

Yet working life researcher Benedicte Brøgger is not sure whether that link is right. In 'Could increased job engagement improve productivity?' she wonders whether the opposite could be true; that growth industries improve because it is easier for them to find suitable tasks for employees. Even when job engagement doesn't mean more money, it could result in more innovative businesses and better customer relationships, as employees actually care, says Benedicte Brøgger.

Asbjørn Grimsmo has performed systematic work environment surveys in Norwegian media companies for decades. The 2012 Journalist Survey shows job engagement is challenged when people are expected to be online at all times. Grimsmo thinks employers must allow participation, ensure social support and trust within the organisation, learning opportunities, meaningful work and organisational fairness. Finding the balance between having enough work environment resources to stay on top of things while demands rise can secure both job engagement, commitment and improved health, says Grimsmo. Pure gold?



People with high job engagement treat their customers better too. Here Widerøe air hostess Wenche Haaland surprises passengers with her enthusiasm

Could increased job engagement improve productivity?

There seems to be an obvious link between job engagement and high productivity. Nordic politicians highlight the work environment as a competitive factor and hope it can lead to increased growth. But it's not that simple. There are loose cannons and lost sheep among workers too.

THEME

19.06.2013

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Benedicte Brøgger and Robert Salomon from the Norwegian Work Research Institute, AFI, have dived deep into job engagement literature. They've written the report 'Working with great job engagement – what's in it for business?' on commission from Virke, the Enterprise Federation of Norway, which represents companies within the service industry, retail and education.

The interest in job engagement is part of a greater change within work environment research, which focuses not only on the negative factors in the workplace, but also on what is called positive psychology.

Job engagement can take many forms, like being so engrossed in your work that time flies and it is hard to tear yourself away from what you're doing. Other factors include the amount of energy workers have and how motivated they

are to put in extra work. Do they take pride in their work and are they inspired by it?

“Job engagement can be expressed in two ways; how motivated the workers are and how well they identify with the company’s goals,” says Bendicte Brøgger.

In the chart below you have workers who are neither motivated nor working towards the company’s goal. They are called ‘lost sheep’ by Alan Crozier, in one of the more than 200 studies which Brøgger and Salomon have gone through:

Alignment	High	Enthusiastic amateurs	Engaged
	Low	Lost sheep	Loose cannons
		Low	High

The opposite of the lost sheep are the committed workers, those who are both motivated and who understand the company’s goals. The ‘enthusiastic amateurs’ understand what the company’s goals are but do not do enough in order to achieve them. It is possible to enjoy work without being productive.

The amateurs’ opposites are the ‘loose cannons’. These are workers who are committed but who have their own agenda.

“The loose cannons are first and foremost found within academic occupations, and they can become a problem for the rest of the company because they follow their own special interests.”

Complex term

Alan Crozier’s introduction is only one of many ways to look at job engagement as a more complex term.

“What is almost always missing in these studies is the question of power. An employer can’t just steal the workers’ energy or get them to identify with the company’s goals if they are not allowed to help shape them,” says Bendicte Brøgger.

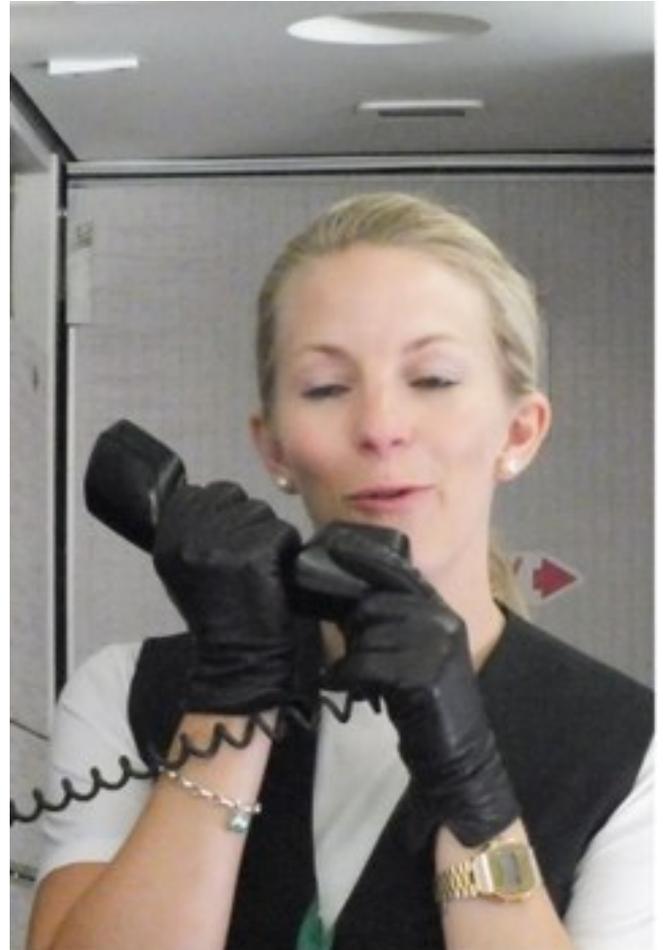
There is also the question of what should happen with the resulting economic gains. Should they be divided or should only the employer or owners be allowed to control them?

Some US studies indicate what kind of gains would result from more commitment from a larger number of workers. According to a 2001 US Gallup survey, 18 percent of all staff over 18 were not committed to their job. If the companies could have reduced that number to 13 percent, it would increase the country’s productivity by 79 billion dollars.

Yet Bendicte Brøgger is wary of turning the question of job engagement into a money issue.

“Increasing job engagement has other consequences, like more innovative companies and improved customer relations because you have workers who care about what they’re working with,” she says.

Enthusiastic air hostess



Luck would have it that we carried the AFI report on a plane journey with Widerøe in the north of Norway, where we were given an impromptu demonstration of job engagement when air hostess Wenche Haaland, completely new in her job – it was her third day – read the safety briefing with an enthusiasm as if it was the most fun she could ever have. A senior air hostess was with her which helped her feel safe performing her tasks.

“The way in which new people are welcomed at work is important to whether they will enjoy work or not,” says Bendicte Brøgger.

She has also been part of a previous Nordic survey looking at whether good work environments can help improve competitiveness. Or is the opposite the case – that the work environment in growth industries is improving because it is easier to find suitable tasks than in a company which is stagnating or facing cuts?

COULD INCREASED JOB ENGAGEMENT IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY?

One of the suggestions in the Nordic report on growth factors was to develop comparable numbers and a barometer to measure the state of the psychological work environment.

Read more about the report here:

Experts: action needed to combat bad psychosocial work environments



The coffee room at solicitor firm Fondia looks more like a bohemian cafe than the common room in a normal solicitors' office. Here Fondia trainee Matti Metsänen serves up a cup of freshly brewed coffee

Nearly always fun at work

Solicitors are rarely considered to be the most relaxed and easy going professional group, but Helsinki solicitor firm Fondia is challenging the stereotypes. The office is teeming with recycled goods, soft values and fun and games – in all seriousness.

THEME

19.06.2013

TEXT: CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN, PHOTO CATA PORTIN

“Our neighbours below complained to our boss that there was too much laughing and noise coming from here. He answered that this was definitely not something he was going to do anything about,” says Pirta Karlsson, Fondia’s head of personnel.

As we arrive in the office, that same managing director – Jorma Vartia – has just arrived. He is carrying a large see-through plastic bag with what looks like plastic bandy sticks and other sporting toys. He says a cheerful hello to everyone in the coffee room, which looks more like a bohemian café than your usual resting space in a law firm.

The best workplace

When Fondia was founded in 2004 the idea was to make it Finland's best workplace for lawyers. A third place in the competition for Finland's best workplace – the diploma hangs in the coffee room – shows that the ambition was more than realistic. Fondia is actually the best employer for lawyers in the whole of Europe, according to Great Place to Work Institute.

Lawyers are known to work hard. They face long working days and demanding tasks. But at Fondia, eight hours rule. All overtime is gathered in a hours bank and must be taken out.

“Our culture means we have avoided a model where people work late into the night. There is always someone who'll say: go home now. That happens at six o'clock, not at 10pm.”

Flexible working hours is one important part of the package. People are expected to fill their own working day in a way which suits them the best – apart from when the customers demand attention of course.

“I came here from another world. The difference is that people don't complain of being tired or in a hurry. People are always in a good mood. This proves the balance is right,” says Pirta Karlsson.



Pirta Karlsson with what could be the remains of the company's oldest employee

Whisky in the bottles

She and communicator Marja Näsi guide us through the office: from the play room where we stay a while, to the Goa room with pillows on the floor and Indian furniture, via the Gentlemen's room (stuffed pike and head of an elk on the wall, pool table, whisky bottles with tumblers on a table – and yes, the bottles do contain liquid gold) to the old fashioned classroom where internal education takes place and customers can have their events, for instance annual general meetings.

The Silence is a room where you can lock the door and get a massage, while room names like The Living Room, The Front Room, The Tea Saloon and The Library point to other themes.



Marja Näsi enjoys working in "Goa"

No interior architect has sat foot in the central Helsinki office. The staff themselves have been container diving, trawling flea markets, doing online second hand furniture shopping, brought in their own furniture or, in some cases, been shopping at Ikea. And without the right work culture the interior design is nothing but an empty backdrop. It must be filled with meaningful and challenging work.

Humour a must

Pirta Karlsson says the selection process is very important when they hire new lawyers. Bigheads and strivers don't fit in, the community spirit is the important thing. People should care and be considerate – and have a good sense of humour. Job interviews are held in the playroom: those who aren't comfortable sitting there among ice hockey games and toys will not get a job at Fondia.

One important part of Fondia's business model is to offer legal services to small and middle sized businesses. Many of the staff have themselves been responsible for the a company's legal affairs and they know how the customers think. The lawyers are relatively experienced – the average work experience is 13 years. The law firm employs around 100 people and has offices across Finland and also in Stockholm. These are, in other words, people who know what they're doing. The idea is also to offer customers straight-talking legal advice without using the usual legalese.

“Most of our customers want simple services: what shall I do instead of providing a 15 pages long investigation of various legal aspects. Our lawyers say: in my opinion you should do it like this,” says Marja Näsi.

Pirta Karlsson says efficiency cannot be the most important thing.

“We cannot maintain the same productivity if others work 12 hour days while we work 8 hours – it’s a completely different ballgame.”

Meanwhile, managing director Jorma Vartia says he does not want a single case of burnout on his watch. And according to the head of personnel the sick leave statistics is very positive, as well as the number of people leaving for other jobs.

“People need change. It is only healthy that people seek other pastures once in a while.”

Creating their own job

Fondia sounds like a model workplace. According to senior researcher Jari Hakanen at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, being given the chance to adapt your job according to your own needs is one of the most important sources of involvement at work – or what we call job engagement.

“We’re talking about workplaces where people can create their own work. This is also the key to innovation.”

The feeling of community and striving for a common interest is equally important for involvement. You also need leaders who are there to create conditions which will allow staff to succeed; a servant leadership.

“In some workplaces it goes without saying that people must use their own heads and their own experience – the boss trusts people and gives them freedom. Then you have the opposite where the boss is full of disdain or doesn’t care about the staff.”

Anyhow, the authoritarian leadership has reached its conclusion. While the older generation succumbed through duty or force, the new generation will not be humiliated but demands to be heard.

Work must feel challenging and independent enough. You need feedback. People must be allowed to feel that they are succeeding. Then you get jobs which create energy.

“At some stage everybody will experience that what they are doing is not being sufficiently appreciated or they don’t get enough feedback.”

Jari Hakanen heads a research project where the aim is to find models for how to increase involvement at work. The first report, *The Spiral of Inspiration – Innovative and flourishing work communities*, involves 87 workplaces and is now ready. The next stage is turning the research findings into practical reality.

Hakanen thinks job engagement is an obvious path to better growth and that it will have other positive effects, like reducing workplace accidents. He has been interested in this for a long time, and now other researchers are taking up his lead.

“Earlier research focused on stress and sick leave. This has come in the past ten years.”

Experts: action needed to combat bad psychosocial work environments

A Nordic proposition to systematically measure businesses' psychosocial work environments is getting expert backing. But the businesses must also play their part, and hiring a consultant is not always the best solution.

THEME

19.06.2013

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

Nordic businesses should systematically measure and publish data on psychosocial work environments, and there is a need to highlight good examples of companies which have improved their psychosocial work environments.

That is what a new report from the Nordic Council of Ministers recommends, and leading experts in stress and psychosocial work environments agree. They also encourage businesses to get better at solving psychosocial work environment problems. Measures which are not followed by action can often make problems worse, says one of Denmark's leading stress researchers, Naja Hulvej Rod. She teaches at the Department of Public Health at the University of Copenhagen, and heads the Copenhagen Stress Research Centre. This is a joint venture between the University of Copenhagen, the National Research Centre for the Working Environment and Bispebjerg Hospital's labour health clinic.

"Many businesses are already measuring their psychosocial work environment, and in Denmark all businesses with employees must produce a written workplace assessment (APV), and these can include psychosocial work environment issues. But it is important to recommend to the businesses that they produce more systematic measurements of the psychosocial work environment. They should also become better at *solving* psychosocial problems, says Naja Hulvej Rod.

In her view many businesses lack the skills to solve psychosocial work environment problems. Many leaders simply do not know much about what to do with issues like high levels of stress in the workplace, or how to deal with workers who feel they do not have good contact with their leader.

Good measuring tools

The proposal to systematically gather data on the psychosocial work environment is part of the Nordic Council of Ministers' new report 'Nordic Growth Sectors – How can working life policies contribute to improving the framework condi-

tions'. The report identifies the drivers for growth in Nordic growth sectors and points to the work environment as a crucial factor. It recommends a readjustment of Nordic work environment policies in order to improve the psychosocial work environment.

The report recommends businesses to systematically gather and publish data for 'key performance indicators' of psychosocial well-being, which in the long run can be used to create national work environment barometers.

The report's recommendation to measure psychosocial well-being at work in a more systematic manner is also supported by Reiner Rugulies, Professor of psychosocial work environment research at the National Research Centre for the Working Environment in Denmark (NFA). He heads the project group 'Psychological well-being and work' (PIVA), which looks at links between the psychosocial work environment, psychological well-being, health and working ability.

"It would be really good if also small and medium sized businesses to a greater extent measured the psychosocial work environment more systematically, and there are already a range of great tools which can be used for this," says Reiner Rugulies.

One of those tools is a questionnaire called COPSQ (Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire). It has been developed by the NFA, and businesses can download it for free – also in English. Right now the NFA works on a modernised version which includes new work environment factors like borderless work and illegal job tasks which so far have not been included, says Reiner Rugulies.

Like Naja Hulvej Rod, he warns businesses against measuring psychosocial work environments without acting on any problems which might emerge:

“If you measure this year after year, without taking action, it could lead to frustrations which trigger even larger psychosocial work environment problems than the business had to begin with. Workers will see that the leadership is aware of the problems but does not react, making it seem indifferent.

Choose a consultant with care

A business which tries to solve psychosocial work environment problems with inefficient methods can also make things worse. This is a worrying tendency identified by the researchers:

“When management takes action it creates expectations among the staff that they are going to get a better psychosocial work environment, but sometimes the solutions are wrong because the company doesn’t know what it should be doing. Then things can easily get worse. One company which we have been looking at hired consultants, but they did not have the right solution for that company at all, and the problems grew,” says Reiner Rugulies.

A business will often employ external consultants when there are problems with the psychosocial work environment. Naja Hulvej Rod encourages businesses to show caution. The consultancy industry has quite a few cowboy operators.

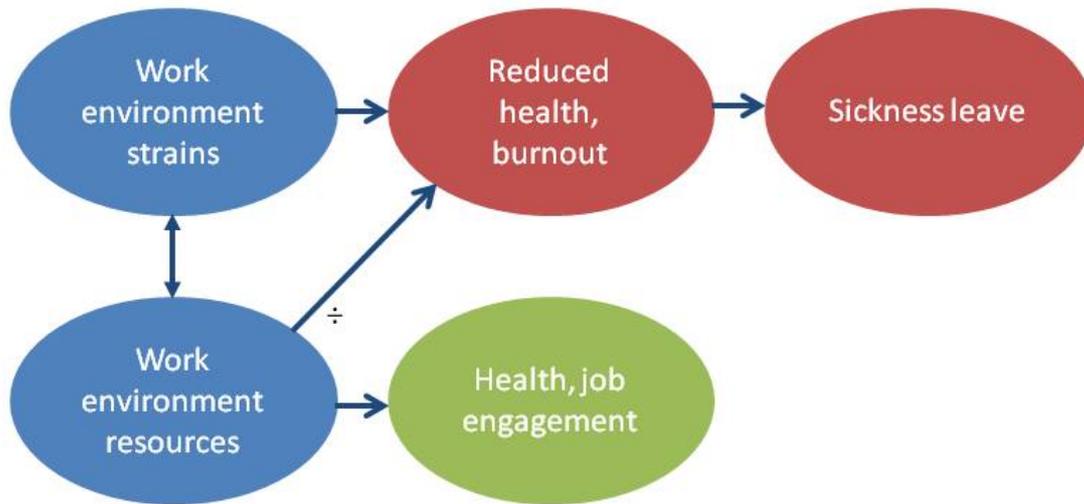
“Businesses will generally want to solve psychosocial work environment problems because they often lead to absence and a fall in productivity. But many consultants call themselves experts in psychosocial work environments without having the relevant professional training, and many businesses end up spending a lot of money on half-baked solutions which could make the situation worse for the staff this involves,” she says.

Start with management

She often sees smaller businesses in particular allowing external consultants to solve psychosocial work environment problems by exclusively focusing on what the individual worker can do himself or herself, without solving the basic structural problems in the workplace. This puts even more pressure on individual workers, because they will then feel that it is all their fault and their responsibility.

She thinks many psychosocial problems are due to bad management or a bad leader. And that is a problem which can be very hard to solve – especially in small and medium sized businesses where the leader who is the source of the problems will also be the person who must figure out how they are to be solved.

Yet it is not necessarily expensive or difficult to improve the psychosocial work environment. Small interventions can often have great effect, thinks Naja Hulvej Rod. A large business which she has looked at has made considerable improvements to its psychosocial work environment simply by introducing a rule saying all workers throughout the organisation must have regular meetings with their line manager.



After Demerouti & Bakker, 2012

The theoretical work environment model shows how work environment pressure and work environment resources influence journalists' health

Pressure on online journalists challenges job engagement

New technology puts more pressure on journalists to be 'online' and makes their job situation more diffuse and the journalists more vulnerable. Meanwhile support systems have not changed. If you want to create commitment and job engagement you need to strengthen work environment resources, say researchers.

THEME
19.06.2013
TEXT: BERIT KVAM

Online journalists are often called 24/7 journalists.

“Because they have the possibility to work all hours of the day and night, the expectation for them to work 24/7 has probably increased too,” says Asbjørn Grimsmo, researcher and author of the 2012 Journalist Survey (Journalistundersøkelsen). He and co-author Hanne Heen, in cooperation with the Norwegian Union of Journalists, have compared the 24/7 journalists’ work environment pressure with that of other journalists.

“It’s a dog’s life, but the only one worth living.” That’s how journalists described their occupation back in 1978, 35 years ago, when the Work Research Institute (AFI) conducted the first work environment survey of journalists. Since then AFI has systematically conducted work environment surveys among journalists every 10 years. Ten years after “a dog’s life” the description was “a dream job, working your heart out”, and in 2002 the journalists were “markers for the future work environment”. Then the digital age kicks in. The work environment survey published in February 2013 focuses on the online journalist. Online journalism, news on mobile phones and the rise of social media have all led to comprehensive changes to the business: printed newspapers have closed, editorial staff has been cut and “digital heads” have been hired.

The hunt for digital heads

The largest cuts to staff took place after the survey was conducted in 2012, but the changes had started and the hunt for ‘the digital heads’, journalists who understand the new technology and manage to deliver, had started.

The 2012 Journalist Survey shows 61 percent of the journalists who took part delivered or produced online content – around three in five. In 1992 the number was zero, in 2002 it was five percent. In 2012 most journalists who produced online content worked in a multi media setting:

- 43 percent produced for two platforms
- 14 percent produced for three platforms

The 2012 survey also shows that journalists who produce for two or more platforms produced around half for print and online, one in ten produced for radio, TV and online and six percent produced for TV and online.

“Developments within communication technology have led to greater flexibility when it comes to where and when you work. But journalists are also available all of the time and must relate to a continuous deadline. While stories used to have a naturally end as the paper hit the printers or as they were filed, they can now continue online,” says Asbjørn Grimsmo.

Difficult to separate work and spare time

When asked “How often, outside of working hours...” around 85 percent of the journalists said they checked their email at least once a day outside of working hours. The use of information technology outside of working hours means the jour-

nalists find it difficult to separate work and spare time, the 2012 Journalist Survey shows.

When asked what is expected of them when it comes to availability “at all hours”, keeping in touch with sources “at all hours”, and deliver or update stories “at all hours”, one in six journalists said they to a high or very high degree face what they call 24/7 expectations in their work.

- 45 percent said to a high or very high degree they themselves had these expectations
- 30 percent felt the expectations to a high or very high degree came from superiors, employer/ commissioner or customers
- One in four said the 24/7 expectations to a high or very high degree came from audiences and sources

Social media

One in four journalists told the survey that they use social media a lot to gather information, highlight their own stories or to communicate with sources or audiences. Social media allows journalists to get in direct contact with readers, viewers and sources. The 2012 Journalist Survey shows the use of social media in work increases the risk of confrontations with sources and audiences.

“Information technology has made it easier to perform tasks like information gathering and publishing, but the technological development cannot compensate for the increased demands on efficiency at work. Meanwhile the amount of resources which should help make the job manageable have not increased,” says researcher Asbjørn Grimsmo.

Demands and resources

The 2012 Journalist Survey shows that the 24/7 journalists faces greater work environment challenges than other journalists: the 24/7 journalists face:

- greater quantitative, cognitive and emotional demands at work compared to colleagues
- more frequent role conflicts through work
- more conflicts and difficult cooperation at work compared to other journalists
- more confrontations with sources/audience

Important resources which help master the demands of the work environment include:

- participation
- social support
- trust within the organisation
- learning opportunities
- meaningful work
- organisational justice

The 2012 Journalist Survey shows that the 24/7 journalists have access to the same work environment resources as other journalists, but that demands have increased.

“What’s new in the journalists’ situation – online production, social media, new technological developments and the expectation for them to “be online” 24/7 – has all led to increasing demands at work. It has made their job situation more diffuse and increased their vulnerability in the face of sources and audiences. At the same time it looks like work environment resources, the support functions which journalists can draw on in the work environment in order to tackle the challenges they meet at work, have not developed. The balance between work environment pressure and work environment resources is now skewed,” says Asbjørn Grimsmo.

Burnt-out or committed journalists

The burnt-out journalist is according to the survey ‘a journalist who is emotionally exhausted, downbeat and who has a cynical attitude to work, to people around him or her and to him or herself. The burnt-out journalist also downplays his or her own ability to perform.’ The committed journalist is ‘vital, enthusiastic and consumed with his or her job.’ The survey also says burn-out and work commitment are considered to be opposites. Both are results of work and both are considered to be lasting conditions. The journalists’ replies to 16 different statements have helped the researchers develop a scale for burn-out and work commitment running from 0 to 100. Based on this, the average journalist seems to be ‘a little bit burnt-out and quite committed to work.’

The 2012 Journalist Survey authors say the statistics show that journalists who face quantitative demands, many conflicting roles and a lot of conflicts and difficult collaborations, and those who experience insults at work, run a greater risk for burn-out than other journalists.

The most committed journalists reported a high degree of meaningful work and fairness in the workplace, good learning opportunities and a lot of trust in the workplace. Other factors which create work commitment, although to a lesser extent, include the chance to take part and to get support from colleagues.

“Work environment pressure and work environment resources seem to influence work commitment and burn-out among journalists in different ways. Small amounts of work environment pressure seem to reduce the risk of burn-outs, but doesn’t necessarily create job commitment. Work environment resources have an effect on both.

“The most burnt-out journalists have a higher degree of sick leave than those who are the most committed to their jobs, and the length of sick leave increases in step with the degree of burn-out.

“A good work environment with access to good resources results both in work commitment and good health.”

If you want to create commitment and job engagement you need to strengthen work environment resources, says work environment researcher Asbjørn Grimsmo.

The 2012 Journalist Survey has been conducted in cooperation with research colleague Hanne Heen and the Norwegian Union of Journalists. The reference material used in the survey is gathered from COPSOC and QPSNordic.

Moving public services to fight social marginalisation

The Swedish Equality Ombudsman, DO, has been asked by the government to prepare a move from Stockholm city centre to the suburbs of Tensta/Rinkeby – the areas which only weeks ago were shaken by riots. The Stockholm city council has also just decided to move its education department with 400 staff there.

NEWS

19.06.2013

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN

Behind the DO move is a political desire to strengthen vulnerable parts of the city. “It is important to show that society’s institutions can be found close to where people feel the most removed from society,” wrote the Minister for Integration, Erik Ullenhag, in a comment published in Dagens Nyheter on 10 June - the same day the move was made public.

“Moving public bodies is not unique, but this is the first time we have moved a public service to a vulnerable district and in that sense it is unique,” Erik Ullenhag told the press.

He began by painting a general picture of the government’s integration policy for areas with a low employment rate, high benefit dependency and low levels of education, compared to other parts of the city. Many businesses have left vulnerable districts and it is this development the government now wants to turn by moving DO to Tensta or Rinkeby.

Wide-ranging measures for vulnerable areas

Moving DO is one of several measures aimed at strengthening vulnerable districts. Efforts will also be put into creating jobs, strengthen education and lower benefit dependency. The government is planning so-called new start zones with lower payroll tax for employers who hire new people and a chance for workers to keep parts of their benefits even when they start work. It also wants to reassess parental allowances to avoid women becoming trapped at home. Special support will also be given to ten schools. The government has set aside 200 million kronor (€23m) over two years to reward the fifteen vulnerable districts that do best in terms of jobs, education and reduced benefit dependency.

Apart from the signal sent by moving DO – showing a state presence also in vulnerable areas – Erik Ullenhag says the move will also help the growth of local infrastructure like lunch bars, which again will create new jobs.

“DO’s move does not solve the challenges of an entire district, but it is part of our desire to create positive development in the area, and if you talk to people who live there they often say that many businesses have moved out. That’s why moving a public service gives hope for the future and a feeling of belonging,” said Erik Ullenhag.

A surprising decision

The reason why DO in particular were asked to plan and present the consequences of a move by 31 October has to do with their rental agreement in central Stockholm ending at the end of 2014, says Erik Ullenhag. There is also a general desire to move public services from the city centre in order to cut costs.

The decision came as a surprise for people working at DO, and many of the 100 staff might have choked on their morning coffee when opening the newspaper which carried the news of a move to Tensta. A preliminary decision had been communicated to the ombudsman Agneta Broberg and the heads of the trade unions, but it was shrouded in secrecy. News of the decision did not reach the Union of Civil Servants, says Anders Levin, head of the union chapter at DO.

“It’s a political decision and not something you can do much about, but it is unfortunate that it comes now, just as we are about to get a functioning organisation both externally and internally. The way in which it was presented, in a comment piece in Dagens Nyheter, is not ideal either. Many were literally caught unawares,” says Anders Levin.

Increased pressure on administrators

DO was founded in 2009 after the merger of four ombudsman posts, and now works to fight discrimination and to promote equal rights and opportunities - mainly by making sure the law on discrimination is being followed. DO, which now has offices in central Stockholm, had been criticised for being

inefficient since the beginning. The previous ombudsman, Katri Linna, had to step down in 2011 and was followed by today's head, Agneta Broberg.

Anders Levin says the reactions reaching him were what could be expected from such a quick decision. Those who know the Tensta/Rinkeby districts are struggling to see where exactly the new offices could be situated. Others say they want to be allowed to work efficiently without having to deal with a move after all the criticism which has been levied on the authority. It is still unclear how many staff will agree to the move.

“All change is difficult if you are subjected to it all of the time. You lose your footing and inner stability. Possibly adding another hour to your daily commute can be tough. But it is a political decision and we have to make the best of it,” says Anders Levin.

Lack of experience

So what is known about moving public services out to vulnerable districts? Does it create hope for the future and increase people's sense of belonging? Nils Hertting at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research at the Uppsala University has his doubts. He has spent many years researching on attempts to mobilise people living in vulnerable suburbs through various cooperation and dialogue projects, but does not know of any research looking at what happens when a public office moves out in this way.

“I can understand the political logic, the idea of bringing together different parts of society, but we have no experience of what effects such a measure might have. We have not seen anything like this before,” says Nils Hertting.

There is no doubt something needs to be done for the most vulnerable suburbs. That became clear during the riots a few weeks ago, which spread from suburb to suburb. At the same time it is genuinely difficult to find measures which either work politically or are based on knowledge.

“Politicians sometimes are forced into implementing measures without knowing whether they will work, and integration politics are often experimental. It becomes a bit of a risk, but it is important that the policy does not backfire in just this district and in this integration policy context. Failure would be highly symbolic - that public services in suburbs don't work,” says Nils Hertting.



Iceland's Minister of Social Affairs: The importance of writing off debts

Eygló Harðardóttir is the Minister of Social Affairs in Iceland's new government. The low number of female ministers and women in parliamentary committees has created heated debate. Most committees have an uneven gender distribution, which goes against the law. But the new minister is not particularly worried. She reckons the number of women will rise soon.

PORTRAIT

19.06.2013

TEXT: GUÐRÚN HELGA SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, PHOTO: ROBERT REYNISSON, DV

Eygló Harðardóttir has been in her job for just a few days and is still learning how everything works. The new government ministers are facing difficult tasks. They are all young, most of them in their 40's and have not been members of Iceland's parliament for very long. Eygló Harðardóttir became an MP only in 2008, but she is already Minister of Social Affairs. Gender equality is part of her brief.

Unequal gender distribution

Just three of the new government's nine ministers are women. Many question the unequal gender distribution

among the new ministers. The gender division in parliamentary committees is also very unequal.

But Eygló Harðardóttir is not particularly worried. Work to improve gender equality is always ongoing, both within the political parties and within parliament and the government. But that is not enough. She says politicians must always be on top of developments and safeguard an equal gender distribution.

Eygló Harðardóttir points out that the committees' composition will change during the election period and that this could

lead to more women members. She also points out that the government plans to appoint a tenth minister and that this could be a woman.

Demand for change

The minister also reckons voters' demand for change is reflected in the choice of ministers. She points out that none of the ministers have held government positions before. They are also highly educated.

"The level of education within the government is higher than ever before. Many ministers have also studied abroad for longer or shorter periods of time," she says, and believes the new government is open to new ideas.

"We are young and dare to try new things, but what this will lead to is naturally something only the future can tell," she continues.

Uneasy labour market

Many Icelanders are expecting wage increases when new collective agreements are negotiated this autumn. Icelandic workers have seen their salaries fall in recent years, as only the lowest paid have had wage increases. The labour market could grow less secure, households want more of their debts written off than before and workers feel it is time wages increased in real terms.

The Minister of Social Affairs feels the Icelandic economy is still stagnant, that investments are at an historic low and that economic forecasts have not been met. She says the economy must be stimulated to make sure businesses begin to invest. But for families the largest change will come when some of their debts have been written off.

"The writing off of debt means the largest improvement in living standards," says the minister.

"It is also important to reduce interest rates. That is probably more important than percentage increases in the collective agreement," she continues.

The new government wants a good working relationship with the social partners. Eygló Harðardóttir is proud that the cooperation in Iceland's labour market works so well, and says she has now asked for a meeting with the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ) and the employers' organisations.

Open, cooperative policy

Iceland's new government will not continue negotiations on EU membership. Minister Eygló Harðardóttir says the country nevertheless will lead an open foreign policy aimed at cooperation. The government welcomes cooperation with all of the world's countries, both with their Nordic neighbours and the major powers. The minister is convinced this will be reflected in the new strategy which is being planned at the foreign ministry and at the Prime Minister's office.

A lot will happen in the Nordic areas in the coming years. Iceland sees Norway as a role model. The minister points out that Norway has decided to remain outside of the EU, and that the Norwegians have led a successful foreign policy, including successful peace negotiations.

"Iceland can lead an active foreign policy on the international arena on the same terms as Norway," she reckons.

"Norway remains outside of the EU, but enjoys good cooperation with EFTA and other countries. This is something Iceland should strive to achieve," she says.

EU standardisation of services worries trade unions

Common EU standards are aiming to speed up cross-border trade in services. Just as long as this doesn't mean introducing EU rules through the backdoor which would be in breach with member states' labour law and collective agreements, say trade unions – whose concern is shared by the Swedish government.

NEWS

19.06.2013

TEXT: KERSTIN AHLBERG

Since the 1980s the EU has used standards as a tool to boost cross-border trade in goods. The European Commission asks a standardisation body to develop a standard for a certain product, and if a manufacturer later says that for instance a machine is made to this standard, employers in all member countries can assume that it also meets EU work environment legislation. Standards even play a role in public procurement processes. The procuring authority will refer to an EU standard to describe what it wants to buy. In this way the internal market trade is made easier for both sellers and buyers.

So far, though, this has mainly applied to goods. Now the Commission hopes to stimulate cross-border trade in services in the same way. This has created concern among trade unions, and they get support from the Swedish government.

They're concerned because the standardisation bodies are private organisations which make up their own rules and whose business is ruled by the needs and desires of the marketplace. While all parties concerned, including trade unions, are meant to be allowed to take part in the standardisation work, private business maintains a dominating role – not least because of resources. Furthermore, the standards can include rules on pretty much whatever the 'market' requires. And this is where trade unions say they have found some worrying examples.

Page after page in the European standard for airport and aviation security services which came into force in 2011 (EN 16082:2011) details for instance the security services' human resources. Most of it is regulated through laws and collective agreements in the member states – and should not be regulated anywhere else either, say the trade unions. The standard lists a range of ways in which an employee would be in serious breach of his or her employment contract, in other

words the things that would give the employer good reason to fire the employee.

The Swedish government doesn't like this either. In a written exchange with the Commission it points out that standards should be limited to deal with the requirements of the actual service, not those providing the service. Just like employment law should not be influenced by the service directive, the Commission should highlight for the standardisation bodies that standards for services must not be dealing with terms of employment, work environment or the right to negotiate and agree to collective agreements and so on, the government said.

The Commission agrees that a standard 'ideally' should concentrate on the service per se. It nevertheless dismisses the government's objection as irrelevant by pointing out that standards are voluntary. And that is true – at least formally. No one *has* to subscribe to any one standard. But in reality the voluntary nature of standards is often an illusion for providers who want to stay in business. To quote but one example: if an aviation authority which is procuring safety services says these must follow the 2011 standard, all providers who want to be part of the tender must fulfil that standard's demands. If not there is no point of making an offer. According to the Swedish Transport Workers' Union this has already happened in Spain.

And the Commission has asked the European standardisation bodies to choose a number of areas which could benefit from being standardised. One example is precisely the standardisation of service providers' personnel policy.

Those who are interested in labour law seem to have got a new area to watch.



Per Yngve Christensen runs the Vadsø asylum centre, which has just received a shipment of long-awaited new white goods

OECD: Economic worries fuel immigration debate

The number of asylum seekers in the whole of the OECD topped 400,000 for the first time in eight years in 2011. Preliminary figures shows this trend carrying on in 2012. There are large differences within the Nordic region. In Sweden last year nearly twice as many people sought asylum as in Denmark, Finland and Norway combined.

NEWS

19.06.2013

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Last year 30,000 people sought asylum in Sweden, 9,800 in Norway and only 3,000 in Finland and 2,600 in Denmark. Despite this Norway has seen the hottest immigration debate after Statistics Norway published a controversial report which calculated the costs of a 'non-Western' immigrant to be 4.1 million Norwegian kroner (€530,000) over a lifetime.

This led the business daily *Finansavisen* to calculate that immigration will have cost Norway 4,000 billion kroner (€520bn) by 2100 – more than the entire oil fund and the

state's shares in oil company Statoil. When the daily *Aftenposten* opened a debate on Statistics Norway's prognosis, 1,994 comments poured in over five hours. Comments were then suspended as they became racist and abusive.

When we visit the Vadsø asylum centre in the northern county of Finnmark – one of Norway's oldest centres after operating for 21 years – the mood is more coloured by the fact that it is one of the finest summer days so far, with temperatures reaching more than 20 degrees despite the fact we are 500 kilometres north-east of Kiruna in Swedish Lapland.

“No other municipality in Norway has more refugees per capita than us. The asylum centre hosts 240 people, but many of those who are granted asylum settle inside the municipality too,” says Per Yngve Christensen, who runs Oscarsgata Reception Centre, a private company running the asylum centre in a former hospital in the middle of the town.

One in five people have refugee background

Vadsø municipality hosts 6,000 immigrants – 5,000 in Vadsø town proper. One in five people here have refugee background if you count those living at the asylum centre.

“If you count the people who work with housing for refugees in the municipality, asylum seekers provide more jobs than any other business in the municipality. We’re talking about 60 to 70 jobs,” says Per Yngve Christensen.

“When new people start working here I tell them that if you haven’t had the chance to see the rest of the world, you can do it here.”

The composition of asylum seekers at the centre reflects the national makeup of refugees in Norway. Just now they are mainly from Somalia, Eritrea and Afghanistan.

“But a few years ago we had 100 Columbians here. We had salsa every day.”



In one of the communal rooms we meet Aynur Naman from the Muslim Uyghur minority in western China’s Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region. She has been in Vadsø for six months and spends her time learning to play the guitar.

“I enjoy Vadsø, but I hope I am granted asylum soon,” she says.

OECD: Immigrants good for the economy

According to the OECD’s annual International Migration Outlook 2013, many European countries are now debating whether immigrants represent a positive or negative contribution to the economy. The latest opinion polls show 50 percent of people in European countries and Canada believe immigrants contribute less in tax than what they receive in health and welfare services.

“There are fears that immigration might put further pressure on the public purse at a time when fiscal consolidation is at the forefront of policy agendas,” reads the introduction to the OECD report.

“These fears go well beyond anti-immigration parties and risk jeopardising efforts to adapt migration policies to the new economic and demographic challenges that many OECD countries will have to face over the coming decades.”

According to the OECD there is, however, no reason to fear immigration as a risk to welfare. Immigration’s effect on BNP in any country is rarely more than 0.5 percent, in a positive or negative direction.

“One can be confident that, with the growing focus on skilled labour migration during the past two decades, recent immigrants are more likely to be net fiscal contributors,” writes the OECD.

Statistics Norway sceptical to the OECD figures

Countries with high numbers of labour immigration, like Norway, see a more positive effect of immigration than countries where refugees and family reunions dominate immigration. According to OECD economist Thomas Liebeg, who spoke to the Norwegian daily Aftenposten, the average contribution from immigrant households to the Norwegian taxman is €4,505. The contribution from Norwegian households with no immigrant background is somewhat higher at €5,055 a year.

Statistics Norway gets very different figures when looking 85 years into the future.

“I am not surprised by OECD’s positive figures. Their calculations resemble earlier calculations for Norway, where only the effect of recent years has been taken into consideration. It would be very strange and very worrying if the years we have just put behind us did not show positive numbers for immigrants as a whole,” says Erling Holmøy, one of the authors of the Statistics Norway report.

“We have had many people in their most productive age coming to Norway, finding jobs in a tight labour market. A lot of them have found work at once, without taking further education, they have few children, they don’t use the health service much and don’t collect much in terms of social benefits.”

Less oil wealth per person

But immigrants grow old and in a country like Norway where income from oil means all citizens pay less tax than they otherwise would have, more immigrants means less oil wealth per person.

Statistics Norway has protested against the interpretation that their figures show the personal cost per immigrant. This is about both the person and children who are subsequently born.

The two researchers also underline that it is challenging to estimate population data when immigration is an increasingly important factor – not only how many people are born or die. Another report from Statistics Norway shows the number of immigrants from eastern European EU countries will increase the most in Norway, from 80,000 in 2010 to 730,000 people in 2100.

If you could go back to 1928 and try to predict the composition of Norway's population in 2013, it becomes clear how uncertain these prognosis can be. That period of time saw a world war and the birth of the EU. Perhaps the largest future immigrant group will come from China, like Aynur Naman?



'Workers on Their Way Home' (1913). One of Edvard Munch's monumental paintings of workers from the Anniversary Exhibition 'Munch 150'

Munch in the canteen – for Freia's workers only the best was good enough

Edvard Munch's iconic *The Scream* created art history when it was sold at Sotheby's in New York in 2012 for €91,033,826. *The Scream* is also part of the Anniversary Exhibition Munch 150, because Munch didn't paint just one, but often several pictures of the same motif. The anniversary also features the Freia Frieze, which Munch painted for the workers' canteen at the Freia chocolate factory in Oslo.

INSIGHT

19.06.2013

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: MUNCH MUSEUM / MUNCH-ELLINGSEN GROUP / BONO, OSLO 2013 OG NASJONALMUSEET / BØRRE HØSTLAND

Munch liked to create stories through his pictures, writes Mai Britt Guleng in the catalogue *Edvard Munch 1863-1944*. She

quotes Munch when he described the content of his Frieze of Life series:

“The frieze has been conceived as a series of decorative pictures that together are to give an image of life. Running through them winds the curving seashore, beyond which is the sea that is constantly in motion, and under the tree-tops life in all its diverse forms is lived, with all its joys and sorrows.”



The Dance of Life was one of the pictures in the series ‘Exhibition of a series of life pictures’ exhibited in Berlin in 1902. There was not only one frieze of life or motif, according to Mai Britt Guleng.

The number of artworks varied from six to 22. Not one single picture was part of all of the ten to twelve series he exhibited between 1893 and 1918, and only a handful of motifs were always represented: The Kiss, Madonna, Vampire, Melancholy, The Scream. But they were painted at different times with large variations in artistic idiom and to a certain extent composition.

There are several series which separately made up their own picture story, writes Guleng, who also says that during several phases Munch was working with concrete plans of a permanent life frieze. During the Anniversary Exhibition at the National Museum one variant of Munch’s frieze of life is exhibited in the same way as in Leipzig in 1903.



From the opening of the Anniversary Exhibition Munch 150. Left to right: Oslo Commissioner for Culture and Industry Hallstein Bjercke, Minister of Culture Hadia Tajik and directors Audun Eckhoff and Stein Olav Henrichsen

“The aim with the Anniversary Exhibition Munch 150 and the catalogue Edvard Munch 1863-1944 is to provide a presentation of Edvard Munch’s art and artistry which is as comprehensive and overarching as possible,” says Audun Eckhoff and Stein Olav Henrichsen, the directors of the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design and of the Munch Museum.

The exhibition features 170 artworks in chronological order and it covers his entire artistic life through 60 years. The National Museum shows highlights from his debut in 1883 until 1904, while the Munch Museum presents artworks from 1904 until his death in 1944.

The Freia Frieze hangs in the Freia hall at the chocolate factory which is now called Mondelez Norge, and it is open to the public at weekends.

Some of the highlights, in addition to the Frieze of Life, include the Linde Frieze with pictures like Dance on the Shore from 1904, the Reinhardt Frieze which was painted in 1906 and 1907 on commission from stage director Max Reinhardt who ran Deutsches Theater in Berlin from 1905 to 1933, and the Freia Frieze. The Workers Frieze which Munch wanted to paint never made it off the drawing board, but several expressive workers pictures contribute to the exhibition’s breadth.

Munch inspired work engagement

It is almost 100 years since the owner of the Freia chocolate factory in Oslo, Johan Throne Holst, commissioned Edvard Munch to paint 12 wall paintings for the women’s canteen. This became the picture story the Freia Frieze.

In the Munch 150 anniversary exhibition catalogue Patricia G. Bermann writes that “the Freia pictures appear – just like the Reinhardt Frieze, like a dream in an urban setting. As is fitting for a women’s canteen the main characters in the compositions are also women, watering plants, harvesting fruit, waving to the boats or contemplating by the water’s edge.”

In the biography of the chocolate king, Erik Rudeng quotes art critic Jappe Nilsen who wrote about the unveiling of the Freia pictures in the autumn of 1922: “Freia has made a great undertaking. It has spearheaded development. It decided that for the workers only the best was good enough and has therefore got Norway’s greatest painter to decorate their canteen.”

“How do the workers show their gratitude?” Throne Holst was asked..

He felt that was the wrong way of putting the question. In an article printed in Sociale Meddelelser Throne Holst wrote:

”That is not the way in which the industry can see the fruits of such labour, no, that can be seen in the pure contentment and work engagement – despite pronounced dissatisfaction with things in general – which makes the workers perform better work, which on the other hand also brings the best workers to the business in question.”

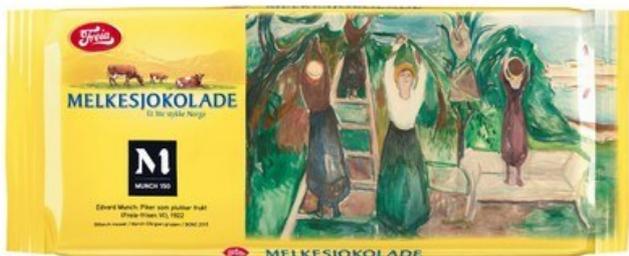
The transformative power of art

In the catalogue *Edvard Munch 1863-1944*, Patricia G. Bermann also refers to a publication from 1955 where Alf Rolfsen writes how Throne Holst had recognised the transformative power of art:

”Art is not really understood; it is experienced (...) it helps us become alive. (...)” Throne wanted the best of Norwegian art for his two welfare areas, the canteen and the garden: Munch and Vigeland.

”The two company welfare areas express the will to give something back to the people which the machine has taken from them. For it is more than a play on words, that the more rational the industry the further it removes the people from the irrational. But art is a conveyor of the irrational, without which the human cannot continue being human.”

Johan Throne Holst made the Freia chocolate factory a pioneering company in terms of the work environment, and he was also an outstanding advertising man who used new tools. Polar explorer Roald Amundsen, one of the heroes of the time, was given Freia chocolate to snack on for his Antarctic expedition. In 1909 Norway’s first electric light advertising board shone down on the main Karl Johan Street in Oslo, and the chocolate boys at the National Theatre sold Freia chocolate.



Mondelez Norge has also tried their hand at PR stunts. Four of the motifs from Munch's Freia Frieze are being used as illustrations for Freia Melkesjokolade (milk chocolate). The motif is women harvesting fruit.

The 12 wall paintings commissioned by Johan Throne Holst for the Freia chocolate factory's 25th anniversary in 1923 cost 80,000 kroner, or just over 10,000 euro,

In the biography *The Chocolate King*, Erik Rudeng describes how Johan Throne Holst, in addition to commissioning

works from the most famous painter of his time, also established a park for his staff with sculptures by famous artists like Gustav Vigeland. In 1914 he established the country's first allotments for workers. 20 years before anyone else he hired the country's first occupational doctor and created the foundation for Norway's occupational health service. He introduced a 48 hour week before this was written into law in 1919.

Munch's unfinished frieze

The idea for a series of pictures about workers was long part of Edvard Munch's world of ideas, including as a proposal for the decoration of Oslo city hall.

Munch didn't win that commission, but still painted some monumental pictures like 'Workers on Their Way Home'.



'Workers on Their Way Home' (1913). One of Edvard Munch's monumental paintings of workers from the Anniversary Exhibition 'Munch 150'

The rest of the pictures planned as a series, or a frieze, never became more than sketches, says Gerd Woll, the leading expert on Munch's workers pictures and a former Munch Museum curator. She would have loved to have seen more of the monumental workers pictures at Munch 150.