



# What do Social Processes Mean for Quality of Human Resource Practice?

■ **Kjeld Nielsen**

*Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Denmark<sup>1</sup>*

■ **Louise Møller Pedersen**

*PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Denmark*

## ABSTRACT

Well implemented human resource practice (HRP) is linked to increased performance, innovation, and the well-being of both managers and employees. In the literature, a distinction between the hard and the soft HRM-models is drawn: the hard model focuses on employees as a cost, whereas the soft HRM-model treats them as a potential Nielsen (2008a). However, little is known about the informal aspects of HRP and which social processes actually lead to implementation success or failure. The purpose of this paper is to develop a concept of social processes between managers and employees that can increase the implementation and quality of HR-performance. Two studies of HRP within two manufacturing companies are used to illustrate the pros and cons of this new theoretical concept from a performance perspective. Involvement, commitment, and competence development are identified as key aspects of the quality of HRP. Moreover, a good psychological working environment and systematic priority of HRP are essential contextual factors that can enable or hinder social processes. Otherwise, production pressure and power relations between managers and employees can hinder the implementation of the new concept. The concept of social processes can help HRP to contribute on social processes between managers and employees as important aspects of quality in work with human resources. However, the influence of team organization and the social processes between employees needs to be explored further.

## KEY WORDS

*Case studies / evaluation / HR-performance / quality in human resource practice / social process*

## Introduction

Well implemented human resource practice (HRP) is linked to increased performance (Huselid, 1995; Kuvaas, 2007), innovation (Ceylan, 2013), physical and psychological well-being for managers and employees, and a decrease in turnover rate and absenteeism (Huselid, 1995; Buhai et al., 2008; Søndergård Kristensen, 2010). Hence, HRP is important for company performance, and managers *can* make a difference by using their skills and personal competences (Fisher & Gonzalez, 2013). In Nordic countries like Denmark where the minimum salary is high, it is especially important to optimize company performance during periods of economic growth as well as during economic crisis. However, as the Human Resource Management literature (HRM-literature) mainly focuses on HRP-outcomes (productivity, turnover, financial performance) (Kuvaas, 2007),

---

<sup>1</sup> E-mail: kjeld@socsci.aau.dk



little is known about the implementation of HRP and which processes actually lead to implementation success or failure for firms (Buller & McEvoy, 2012). Implementation is here defined as the process from the management decision about a HR-initiative to how the HR-initiative is actually realized by the employees (Rotstein, 1994). One review concludes “that it is premature to assume that HRM initiatives will inevitably result in performance gains” (Wall & Wood, 2005:454). Moreover, there can be different reasons why organizations adopt or reject HRP (Subramony, 2006). Huselid shows that although employee skills, employee motivation, and organizational structures are positively related to productivity and corporate financial performance, they are negatively related to turnover (Huselid, 1995). Moreover, a recent review identifies firm-specific human capital and social capital as necessary to achieve and sustain organizational performance (Buller & McEvoy, 2012). Finally, the “firm’s social capital” is a relevant approach in Nordic work life research, especially within the Danish research of work environmental on labor market (Kristensen et al., 2008). However, the purpose of this paper is to provide a detailed analysis of social processes in HRP and not an analysis of the overall concept of social capital.

HRP is embedded in a social context on the macro and meso level. This can include the financial situation, national laws, and company politics regarding working conditions (Nielsen, 1992; Pedersen et al., 2012). On the micro level, social relations and interactions between managers, employees, and the firm have a significant impact on HR-performance (Fisher & Gonzalez, 2013). Hence, the quality of HRP can be defined as a social process that is linked to company performance.

Recent debates regarding the evaluation of HRP emphasize context, the personal characteristics of key actors, and the interpersonal relations between key actors are crucial for the output of organizational-level workplace interventions (Egan et al., 2009; Pedersen et al., 2012; Nielsen & Randall, 2013). However, with few exceptions [e.g., Emery & Thorsrud, 1976; Gustavsen & Hunnius, 1981; Gustavsen, 1990, 2011; Hasle & Sørensen, 2013 (see below)], most Nordic HRP literature and evaluation studies focus on effects and ignore the social processes involved (Krogstrup, 2011; Saksvik et al., 2013).

The questions are: how to establish quality in HRP in changing work organization? And what do we mean with social process between employee and manager?

On the basis of studies within the coal industry, the Tavistock School (Trist & Bamforth, 1951) argues that it is possible to organize productive working group illuminated by cooperation and interpersonal help and spontaneous support between the workers. Groups with a high level of communication and cooperation were able to decide within “relative autonomy” in doing the jobs and who should do the jobs (Gustavsen, 1990:70). Bergman (1995) describes how the members of production teams within Swedish high technology process industries are developing both their independent competence and norms in a cooperative way to manage “insecurities in the labor processes.” So, the modern worker on high technology work places should not be seen as an “appendage to the machinery” (Marx), but as an active, integrative subject in a technical system of production (Bergman, 1995:375; Nielsen, 2003).

Hence, quality of HRP within the group continued in modern discourse of the Nordic Model of Work Organisation, defined as “learning and broad participation and a strong link between productivity and innovation” (Gustavsen, 2011). In opposite to the American HRM-literature (e.g., Beer et al. 1985) that focuses on the need and aspiration of the individual actor, the Nordic work life research assumes that employees are

social constructed actors. Employees, both individually and collectively, shape meaning of work and use influence on management (Hasle & Sørensen, 2013).

Inspired by these concepts (democracy, participation, autonomy, competence, and learning) from Nordic work life research, there is still a methodological challenge of integrating Nordic literature with references “outside our region” (Karlsson, 2013), for instance to generalize “mechanisms of social relations” in a work organization in a way that captures the complexity and dynamics of strategy, human resource management, and quality in HRP.

Exploring and interpreting the classic HRM-literature, the purpose of this paper is to construct a concept on social processes that can increase the quality of HRP and potentially improve the outcome of HR-performance. The processes are exemplified by two Danish case studies from manufacturing companies in which HRP has been studied with an emphasis on teamwork competencies and accidents, respectively (Fig. 1) (Nielsen & Mølvadgaard, 1999, 2000a, 2008b; Pedersen et al., 2012).

**Theoretical concept of quality of HRP, social processes, and HRM performance**

HRP is a part of most organizational activities such as recruitment, development, and performance job design and feedback (Walton, 1985; Nielsen, 2008a). Hence, quality of HRP is essential. Concepts of quality of HRP, social processes, and HRM performance (Nielsen, 2008a) form the theoretical background of the paper and are presented in Fig. 1.

**Figure 1:** Quality of HRP, social processes, and HRM performance for managers and employees

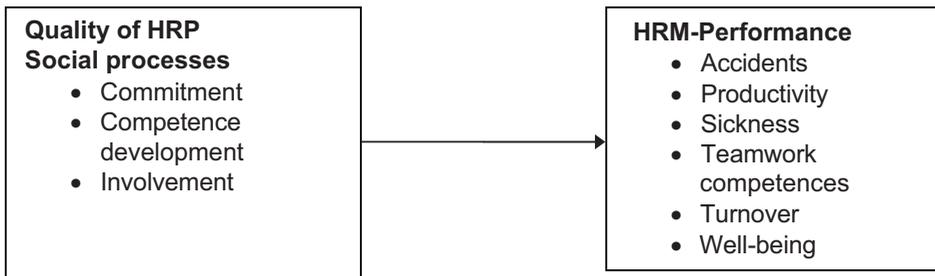


Figure 1 illustrates that quality of HRP includes involvement by both managers and employees who are committed by a real development of competence to carry out job functions more effectively (Nielsen, 1992; Nielsen & Mølvadgaard, 2000a). The quality of HRP is embedded in social processes between the firms’ managers and employees. An analytical distinction is made between two HRM concepts regarding social processes: a commitment strategy and a control strategy (Walton, 1985; Nielsen, 2008a). The commitment strategy treats human resources as an investment, and the labor force is regulated in functional flexibility in relation to the company’s need for labor. According to this concept, employees are expected to involve themselves in the development problems of the organization, and the management is concerned with developing qualities



in working life and production as a precondition for optimizing performance in terms of the working environment in a flexible organization. The actions take place through formal and informal social relations between managers and employees, between colleagues, and between subordinates and superiors in the organization. Here, involvement is defined as the active form of an individual's responsibility for doing something, for example, learning new machine technology or participating actively in safety work (DeJoy, 2005; Wood et al., 2011). Commitment is defined as a passive form of the individual motivation to do something, for example, to execute a job and to identify emotionally with the values and goals of the company (Guest, 1987). Competence development is the individual's increased capabilities and skills for solving tasks (Ellström, 1994). According to the control strategy, the organization is hierarchical and labor force is perceived as a cost that must be controlled minutely through the allocation of work, through specialization, and through the clear division of authority. Depending on the company's need for labor, the labor force is regulated numerically (Nielsen, 2008a). The distinction between the soft and the hard HRP tradition is integrated as a part of the theoretical framework of the paper and will be further explained from the original HRM-literature in the following.

### **Human Resource Management from a social perspective**

A broad definition of HRM is that it comprises all activities involving management and the development of human resources within the organization. This embraces activities that are related to organizing the work, recruitment, development and application of human resources, rewards, assessment, and termination of human resources (Nordhaug et al., 1997). In brief, the role of HRM is to support activities that create profit and, in the long term, reshape and develop the organization on the basis of the strategic objective of the firm (Devanna et al., 1984; Beer et al., 1985; Legge, 1995; Boxall & Purcell, 2011). In the classical HRM-literature, a distinction is drawn between the "hard" and "soft" HRM models, represented by the Michigan model and the Harvard Group, respectively (Legge, 1995:66). This distinction has various implications for social aspects of HRPs.

The Michigan model emphasizes the relationship between HRP and organizational structure as determined by the strategic objectives of the organization (Devanna et al., 1984). This model assumes that the development of the organization is structured by goals and organizational strategy. As a result, strategy and organization take on decisive importance for the framework in which the strategies and qualities of HRP are developed. The hard version of HRP means managerial control to the labor force (Nielsen, 2008a). In this model, human resources are not defined, but perceived as a "black box." Furthermore, the employee perspective on HRP is not incorporated. However, this perspective is explicitly included in the Harvard Group "soft" model in the original HRM literature (Beer et al., 1984). From this perspective, the task of management is to raise HRP to a strategic level of decision making for the common good of all stakeholders. Underlying this model is an emphasis on social aspects such as employee influence on the overall HRP. "Employees are proactive rather than passive inputs into productive processes; they are capable of 'development', worthy of 'trust' and 'collaboration', to be achieved through 'participation and informed choice'" (Legge, 1995:67). As an important subsidiary goal, HRP is to be conducted in a way that promotes the

employees' sense of well-being and satisfaction with their jobs. This mode of perception emphasizes the potential of human resources (e.g., skills and knowledge) as a way to increase individual and organizational performance. Additional, managerial focus on the social and psychological aspects of the workforce, for example, social support, motivation, commitment, trust, and cooperation, to support these processes. An example of this perception of HRP can be found in a Scandinavian academic context (Grimsø, 2000; Ehrnroot, 2002).

The soft tradition emphasizes human resources, where focus is on the realization of the employees' social, personal, motivational, and cognitive potential, rather than on the accomplishment of tasks within the organization (see, e.g., Ellström, 1994; Nielsen, 2008a). Performing tasks through applying human resources is therefore to be seen from the perspective of social behavioral processes that take place in every practice of human resources with the aim of meeting organizational targets.

### **Quality in HRP from a social perspective**

This paper focuses on quality of HRP through analysis of social processes on these processes. An argument that is often used regarding quality is that the human aspects of an organization are not given the attention that they deserve (Wilkinson, 1999). Questions of involvement and culture are overlooked or treated by the management as superficial when it comes to practical and theoretical quality management (QM). Moreover, until a closer alignment between the ideas and practices of QM and HRM takes place, it is unlikely that QM will achieve its aims (Wilkinson, in Dale 2007, p. 228).

The hard tradition of HRM ascribes quality of HRP one or more "strategic role(s)" within a total QM (TQM) philosophy (Brown, 1996; Ulrich, 1997). This conception does not see social aspects to apply human resource in transition, that is, through alternative ways to apply human resources. By way of contrast, the soft tradition conceives quality of HRP as the firm's ability to apply a committed HR-strategy. As Guest puts it, "organizational commitment combined with job-related behavioral commitment will result in high employee satisfaction, high performance, longer tenure and a willingness to accept change" (Guest, 1987:514). Equally, the original TQM emphasized and supported the same point of view on the employee's participation in changing work processes to create quality and customer satisfaction (Dale, 1999:3).

According to the TQM literature, the internal customers of a firm (employees), the external customers, and other stakeholders from society in general define what "suitable" quality is in relation to work processes and the final product. On the other hand, it is up to management to decide which standards to apply in relation to quality measurement, including requirements for tolerances in products and work processes.

Within the TQM perspective, the fundamental assumption is that management continuously involves, motivates, and develops the employees in order to improve behavioral processes within the organization. Hence, in order to achieve quality in HR-performance, management must focus on supporting the employees on the basis of social processes. From a process perspective, HR-quality is fundamentally a question of developing and involving employees in daily work processes. Planning the daily work processes requires extensive social relations (mutual trust, social support, openness, and so on), and the management needs to be aware of this.



*Quality* in HRP is here defined as “the extent to which targets are met from the perspective of the management and the employees.” Targets in every organization can be expressed as the wish to achieve the highest possible profit, growth, survival, employee well-being, social responsibility, and so on. If these targets are achieved, the organization is effective. The extent to which targets are met can be established on the basis of several HR-activities at various levels. Therefore, the HR department can decide a number of criteria for quality, such as targets for staff turnover, absence due to illness, and so on. These targets will often correspond to the managers’ and employees’ perception of a good working environment.

The overall target for HRP is to carry out tasks that can optimize the performance of the organization through the input of human resources and a good working environment. However, these processes are often affected by various conscious and unconscious individual and organizational norms and values that regulate the behavior of the managers and employees but are not included in the formal HRP-strategies (Mintzberg, 1996). Hence, the outcome of HRP can be categorized as expected or unexpected and as positive or negative (Pedersen et al., 2012; Nielsen & Randall, 2013).

### **Social processes and quality of HRP**

On the basis of the soft tradition of HRM and the approach to quality presented above, the general argument of this paper is that quality in HRP is embedded in social processes, that is, three significant factors: (1) involvement of the employees, (2) employee competency development, and (3) the employees’ organizational and job commitment. If the management uses soft HRM methods, the main focus is on the functionally flexible use of labor force, communication techniques, personnel training, and process evaluations. If, conversely, the management uses hard HRM methods, the focus is on the numerical flexible use of the labor force, measuring results, and controlling staff costs. In the real world, HR decisions are a mixture of hard and soft methods that can be difficult to differentiate in practice.

### **Method**

Here, social processes in HRP are identified through examples from two case studies involving companies A (case 1) and B (case 2 and 3). Case studies can be used to develop new understandings of social phenomena in a context through analytical generalizations from empirical and theoretical material (Yin, 1989). In Company A, the focus is on social interactions between managers and employees in the process of implementing new process technologies and improving company teamwork. In Company B, focus is on improving company safety through four interventions involving both the managers and the employees.

Company A (case 1) is an industrial company with 225 employees in total. Company A was about to implement new process technologies (Tab. 1). An evaluation was conducted on the effects of 40 employees and 14 team leaders attending advanced training courses. The courses concerned the use of new technologies and the creation of an efficient production team, respectively. Moreover, the 14 team leaders participated in an extra course preparing them for their new role as team leaders. The evaluation involved

10 production groups from two different departments, each with four employees. Each group had a team leader (named as presenter) appointed from the employees. This “presenter” was a central player in the training project with the task of acquiring technical data and knowledge concerning the new technology and presenting it to the production groups. The project was part of a larger plan for organizational changes in Company A involving all its 225 employees. The objective of the plan was that competency development should take place through cross-disciplinary cooperation. To fulfil this objective, training was to be organized holistically and responsibility for the training process was to be delegated to the individual production groups, where the team leader was responsible. The team-organization was to increase the efficiency of the production groups. The duration of this project was 1½ years, including pilot studies, 14 months of data collection, and the evaluation of the results. These data have since fundamentally inspired the analyses of social processes on quality of HRP (Nielsen, 2008a).

Company B (cases 2 and 3). Cases 2 and 3 focus on improving safety within the wood manufacturing industry from an organizational perspective (2008–2012) (Pedersen et al., 2012). It is an intervention project involving the safety committee, the safety manager, the middle managers, and the production employees. The study uses a longitudinal pre-post intervention-control design involving Company B as an intervention and Company C as a comparison (Pedersen et al., 2012). However, for methodological reasons, only Company B is included in this paper. The case study took a total of 24 months from spring 2008 to the spring of 2010 and included pilot studies, 13 months of interventions in Company B, and baseline and follow-up measures in Company B and Company C. Company B employed approximately 20 managers and administrative staff and 150 production employees (Tab. 1). The top manager, the safety manager, two middle managers, four team leaders, two safety representatives, and 120 production employees organized in two departments participated in the interventions. As Company B belonged to a large overall concern, its safety management systems (OSHAS 18001 and ISO 14001) and fundamental values were predefined.

The further training project was initiated by the North Denmark Region and one regional Technical School, which had received a grant from the region and the EU.

**Table 1** Characteristics of company A and B at the baseline.

	Company A	Company B
Number of top manager(s)	1	1
Number of safety co-ordinators	1	1
Number of middle managers	1	2
Number of team leaders	14	4
Number of safety representatives	3	2
Total number of employees	225	170
Number of employees involved in the study (divided between 2 technologies (T1 + T2) and two departments (D1 + D2))	40	120
Percentage of male/female employees involved in the study	100%/0%	84%/16%



Company A was recruited by telephone contact, and the research group was recruited to evaluate the project by personal contact (Nielsen & Mølvadgaard, 1999). Company B was recruited by telephone contact and initial meetings with managers from the head office of the concern. As they had agreed to participate in 14 months of time-demanding data collection and interventions, both Company A and Company B were expected to be more motivated for change in the working environment than the average middle-sized company (Hale et al., 2010; Pedersen et al., 2010).

### **Data collection methods**

The two studies focus on working environment issues and aim at testing research-based theories about the involvement of managers and employees in practice. Adequate implementation is seen as a precondition for a successful intervention (Pedersen et al., 2012). Hence, both studies are designed as a combination of a process evaluation and an effect evaluation (Krogstrup, 2006). The process evaluation reveals information about the implementation of the project, including the employees' participation in the intervention. In both studies, the criteria for the evaluations are set by the research group and analyzed using the same data types and methods. These methods are questionnaires to all employees (response rates: 90%/95%), 2/10 semi-structured single person interviews with managers and safety representatives, group interviews with four selected employees (Company A and B), and five team leaders (Company A) from each department, and systematic observation (Kvale, 2001; Bryman, 2008). Moreover, in Company B (cases 1 and 3), the percentage of solved tasks decided during the coaching and seminars is used as implementation measures. Although quantitative data can document implementation processes and effects, qualitative data can reveal informal factors that are important for the HRP-process, and it can provide information about *why* these factors lead to success or failure (Pedersen Under review). The comprehensive data collection and mixed methods proposed here are believed to provide a clarifying and valid impression of the HRP, social processes, and HR-performance of the participating companies.

### **Analysis**

The rest of this paper will apply the presented concept of social process on the quality of HRP to cases 1, 2, and 3 involving Company A and Company B. The method of analysis to illustrate the concept within a social context is primarily inductive. Secondary, some theoretical material has been drawn on to explain the context furthermore. That means that the social phenomenon "social process on quality of HRP" has been illustrated within two different units (A, B), where each unit represents a particular social context in a case study design (Yin, 1994).

### **Case 1 within company A: Social process on the quality of human resource practice**

The human relations movement is known for having discovered the importance of social processes, such as group norms on productivity. The group is a social system in which

the members develop social norms and roles for work. The collaboration inside the group is informal and is a condition for the formal organization to function in a flexible way (Rothlisberger & Dickson, 1947). In modern human resource theory, teams with clear common goals, common acceptance of responsibility, supportive leadership, and intensive communication are considered to have potentials that can be taken advantage of during technological change (Bucholz & Roth, 1997). The following case deals with team-based HRP in a further training project aimed at preparing the employees and team leaders for the introduction of new process technologies. The training was organized in five phases: planning, recruitment and courses, supplier visit, production technology, and evaluation (Nielsen & Mølvadgaard, 1999).

The groups of team leaders and the members of the production teams (employees) were recruited internally and carefully selected by the head of the department on the basis of the managers' extensive personal knowledge of all the employees [Interview with middle manager (1), 1998]. Hence, theoretically, the groups of team leaders and the production teams were organized on the basis of personal and social competencies. The groups took an internal course in organization, technical English, business training methods, and production technology training. Additionally, the team leaders visited companies in Germany and Italy with types of production similar to the ones that were to be implemented in Denmark. These visits included meetings with the German and Italian machinery suppliers. The intention was that the team leaders would acquire as much technical knowledge as possible from the suppliers. After these initiatives, the team leaders were to present their acquired knowledge in a pedagogical manner to the employees, especially during the job training in production technology. The team leaders were to activate learning processes in and around the installations. In addition, the team leaders were to be integrated into the individual production groups.

On the basis of a complementary analysis of the questionnaires, interviews, and observation data, the results of the effect evaluation in case 1 are summarized in Tab. 2.

### ***Interpretation case 1***

As presented in Tab. 2, the intervention results were mixed. According to the evaluation concept used, adequate implementation is a precondition for linking the intervention to the results (Pedersen et al., 2012). Moreover, social processes are seen as essential for the outcome of HRP. Hence, an analysis of the processes in case 1 can reveal possible explanations for the mixed intervention results.

### **Training courses for the team leaders**

The underlying aim of the project was to implement a commitment strategy that would increase the quality of the human resource process. The management expressed trust in the team leaders and employees involved, a human resource strategy that can be interpreted as a precondition for implementing the training project successfully. The participants were therefore given much latitude by management to develop their skills so that they could handle the new technology. Theoretically, this type of strategy will motivate the team leaders and employees to participate actively in their competence



**Table II** Total intervention results in case I (company A).

Target of the courses	Criteria to test the fulfillment of target	Instrument to test criteria	Fulfilled	Partly fulfilled	Not fulfilled
Cross-disciplinary cooperation	Cross-cooperation, reduced skills demarcation, well-being, and communication in the group	Questionnaires to the employees and team leaders, group interviews with employees and team leaders	Employees	Team leaders within the group	Team leaders from groups on T1 and T2
Holistically training	Technical knowledge, technical overview, instruction			Employees	Team leaders within the group
Group responsibility for training	The team leaders' and employees' evaluation and responsibility to technical training		Employees		Team leaders within the group
Efficient teams	Technical return	Group and single interviews	Employees		Team leaders within the group

development. In particular, the groups of team leaders had a major responsibility and were seen as central social actors for the technical training to new technology. However, the analysis of the case illustrates that the learning process did not turn out as planned (Nielsen & Mølvadgaard, 1999).

An important reason was the content of the course that the team leaders had participated in. Sixteen team leaders answered a questionnaire regarding their gains from the course. Ninety-four percent of the team leaders found that the courses had given them new technical knowledge to present to their coworkers “to a high degree” (19%) or “to some degree” (75%). However, only 19% found that they were able to solve the exact tasks in the new production process “to a high degree.” Nineteen percent responded “to a limited degree” and 6% “not at all.”

The interview data reveal more detailed explanations of the results. Local contextual factors interrupted the learning environment and processes. These factors included inadequate planning of opportunities for the team leaders to acquire the required technical knowledge about the installation and time pressure in acquiring new knowledge from the German and Italian machinery suppliers because of holidays. The team leaders were not provided with an agenda for the meetings with the suppliers, and, according to the team leaders, the machinery suppliers’ ability and willingness to talk and understand English were limited. Hence, the team leaders did not gain the required technical knowledge from these meetings (Group interview 1, team leaders, 1998).

There were problems in the Danish groups too. The team leaders felt a lack of backing and support from the management, and, at times, the team leaders felt isolated in implementing the project – both as groups and as individuals. A team leader says:

“The communication between the groups of team leaders stopped (...). From the beginning, it was planned that the team leaders should talk together with the employees and the middle manager...That has now been completely abandoned ... I think it is a shame.”  
(Group interview 1, team leaders, 1998)

The lack of communication between the middle managers, team leaders, and employees about common problems and solutions resulted in a decreased commitment among the team leaders. The commitment strategy cracked. This also influenced the course outcome for the employees.

### **Training courses for the employees**

The holistic training was highly important for fulfilment of the project targets. However, the questionnaire results reveal that only 7% of the employees found that they had acquired new technical knowledge during the holistic training “to a high degree.” Fifty percent responded “to some degree.” Ten percent found that the team leaders had given them an overview of technical knowledge to operate with the new technologies “to a high degree.” Only 17% found that the team leaders had instructed them to use the technical functions “to a high degree,” but 37% responded “to some degree.” Thirty percent found that they had been instructed by the team leaders “to a limited degree.” The questionnaire data suggest that the technical skills of the team leaders and their transition from course participation to present were not adequately incorporated in the communication with the employees. Hence, the most important part of competency development was not embedded in the learning process as planned.

The employees’ perceptions of the course content can be summarized as follows:

“Chance factors like the team leader’s knowledge about the machine, the expectations of the employees, and technical problems in the machines have formed the character and content of the course. The course outcome has neither been based on systematic knowledge and presentation by the team leaders nor on systematic communication between the team leaders and the employees.” (Group interview, employees 1, 1998)

Furthermore, to meet the customers’ deadlines and at the same time optimize production, some team leaders and production employees were replaced by the management from the project to production tasks using the old technology. Hence, the commitment strategy was overruled by the control strategy. The commitment of the rest of the employees to completing the training project decreased.

### **Employees’ competences increase the success of the course**

Because of the employees, the project was not a total failure. On the basis of their own initiative, 37% of employees themselves sought technical knowledge about the functions



of the new technology “to a high degree” and 53% “to some degree.” Forty-three percent of the employees used and the gained knowledge in an independent way on the required functions “to a high degree” and 53% “to some degree.”

Ninety percent of the employees participated in the whole project period (Interview middle manager 1, 1998). These employees were both committed and involved in developing and creating their own independent learning styles. The employees acquired skills through their own experiments and theories within the individual production groups. Furthermore, everyone on the team was ready to intervene and help each other when something unexpected happened (Group interview 1+2, employees, 1998). Group responsibility for training was established in the social processes. Furthermore, during the 6 months phase of on-the-job training, a social learning process took place from numerous experimentations. According to the conducted evaluation, this high degree of competence development among the employees was a key factor that made the project a success in spite of the implementation problems presented above (Nielsen, 2003).

The employees created social processes that improved the HRP's and the expected company performance. Hence, the competency development, commitment, and involvement of employees are perceived as significant for the social processes and quality in HRP. Soft human resource strategy involves a high level of social interactions between the employees to decide their self-learning style. The employees build up efficient teams. On the basis of the employees' experiences and established knowledge, the technology could be used in an effective manner for organizational performance in the next step of the project.

### **Analysis of cases 2 and 3 within company B**

In cases 2 and 3, the interventions involved 13 months of monthly individual and/or group-based coaching of the manager, the safety representative, and the one or three team leader(s) in each department (named safety groups). There were also two 3-h seminars for the employees. All the interventions were conducted by members of the research team who were trained for this task. The seminars were organized in the existing production groups of 9–14 employees, which was expected to increase the relevance of the problems discussed and the employees' commitment to the process (Pedersen et al., 2012). The coaching interventions and the seminars were both based on four overall steps: (1) discuss data from the baseline measure (2) identify the causes, consequences, and solutions of safety problems and prioritizing them; (3) decide concrete activities and reaching tangible outcomes; and (4) implementation, feedback, and evaluation (DeJoy, 2005). The processes were bottom-up oriented and based on the principle of liberation of the employee's social, personal, and cognitive potential through involvement and commitment. Hence, during the coaching and the seminars, the coach acted as a facilitator rather than as an expert (Clutterbuck, 2010). At the seminars, the employees were the key actors in discussing and identifying problems and solutions, whereas the manager's role was mainly to listen, clarify questions, and make decisions about activities (Pedersen Under review). After the seminars, the employees, middle managers, team leaders, and/or safety committee were responsible for solving the problems identified. In this process, the middle managers and team leaders were to encourage the employees to solve the tasks and to emphasize their involvement in the tasks. Once a month, the coach followed up on the results of the coaching intervention and the seminars.

After the interventions, data from the coaching interventions and the seminars for the workers were coded by two blinded members of the research team using six pre-defined categories: (1) workers' safety behavior and use of personal protection; (2) the safety behavior of managers and the safety manager; (3) safety communication (managers and workers); (4) safety purchases; (5) administrative tasks and planning; and (6) physical/technical improvements. On the basis of notes from the intervention, the tasks were coded as "solved" (1 point), "started" (1/2 point), or "not solved" (0 points). The categorization "started" indicated that the safety group had conducted a minimum of half of the task, for example, two out of the four safety observations agreed upon. "Solved" indicated that the identified problem was solved or was no longer relevant due to a change of technical equipment (five tasks). On the basis of experience from previous, similar coaching, and seminar interventions, the rates for implementation success were set to 65% solved tasks. The results of the evaluation of the coaching and seminar interventions in cases 2 and 3 are summarized in Tab. 3 and 4. A detailed analysis of the results has been published elsewhere (Pedersen Under review).

### ***Interpretation of cases 2 and 3***

As previously stated, adequate implementation is seen as a precondition for linking the intervention to the results (Pedersen et al., 2012). Hence, the analysis of the results in cases 2 and 3 starts with an interpretation of the implementation processes in the two cases.

### **The individual and group-based coaching interventions for the safety groups**

The individual and group-based coaching of the members of the departments' safety groups was a key element in the process of culture change. Each safety group consisted of a middle manager, a safety representative, and one or three team leaders. A focus on role behavior, safety communication, and prioritization of safety was expected to support the intervention for the workers and maintain the results after the intervention period. However, the coaching interventions led to different results in the two departments (Tab. 5). In case 3, the safety group solved 79% of the identified problems during individual coaching and 58% of tasks from the group coaching. In case 2, the equivalent results were 35% and 50%, and 25% of safety tasks were started (15% in case 3). Differences in the number of identified safety tasks were explained by differences in the number of participants and in the number of coaching sessions conducted in each department.

In case 3, the members of the safety group emphasized the mutual communication about the priority of safety, safety problems, and solutions as important for the results of the coaching process (Interview middle manager 2; team leader 2 and 3; safety representative 2, 2009, 2010). In case 2, the middle manager was highly committed to the project from the beginning. However, half-way through the intervention, the middle manager began focusing on a career change and was also affected by a high production pressure. The interviews and observations indicate that the middle manager from this point and



**Table III** Total results of the coaching of the middle managers, team leaders, and safety representatives in cases 2 and 3 (company B).

<b>Intervention target</b>	<b>Criteria to test the fulfillment of target</b>	<b>Instrument to test criteria</b>	<b>Fulfilled</b>	<b>Partly fulfilled</b>	<b>Not fulfilled</b>
Improve the safety structures in the department	Each safety group must hold a weekly safety meeting structured by a set agenda and follow up on the decisions made	Observations and interviews with the members of the safety groups	Safety groups in case 3	Safety groups in case 2	
Maintain or improve the safety management of the middle managers and team leaders	Maintain or quantitatively improve the middle managers' and team leaders' high level of safety management	Questionnaire to the employees	Cases 2 and 3		
	The middle managers' and team leaders' safety communication has to be more frequent and must include follow up on the employees' suggestions	Group interviews with employees	Middle manager in case 2; middle manager and team leaders in case 3		Team leader in case 2
Maintain or improve the safety representatives' commitment to safety work	Maintain or improve the safety representatives' high commitment to safety	Questionnaire to the employees, group interviews with employees, and interviews with the members of the safety groups	Safety representative in cases 2 and 3		
Improve the safety climate in the safety groups	The relative priority of safety compared with other competing company goals has to be improved significantly	Questionnaire to the employees, group interviews with employees, interviews with the members of the safety groups and observations	Safety group in case 3	Safety group in case 2	
Mutual understanding of problems and solutions	The middle managers, team leaders, and safety representatives must have the same approach to safety work	Group interviews with employees, interviews with the members of the safety groups, and observations	Safety group in case 3		Safety group in case 2
	Monthly departmental meetings with the employees			Cases 2 and 3	

**Table IV** Total results of the seminars for the employees in cases 2 and 3 (company B).

<b>Intervention target</b>	<b>Criteria to test the fulfillment of target</b>	<b>Instrument to test criteria</b>	<b>Fulfilled</b>	<b>Partly fulfilled</b>	<b>Not fulfilled</b>
Improve the safety structures in the production groups	Each production group must weekly hold at least three safety meetings structured by a set agenda	Observations and group interviews with the employees		Cases 2 and 3	
Improve the employees' individual attitude to safety	Quantitative and qualitative improvements in the employees' attitude to safety	Questionnaires to the employees and group interviews with employees	Cases 2 and 3		
Improve the employees' safety behavior	Improve the employees' self-reported compliance with the safety rules from baseline to follow-up	Questionnaires to the employees and group interviews with employees		Cases 2 and 3	
	The employees use of ear protection has to be improved by at least 30%	Observations	Cases 2 and 3		
	The number of registered minor incidents and near-misses has to be twice as high as in 2008	Company data 2008 to 2010	Cases 2 and 3		
	The employees' <i>participation</i> in safety work has to be improved	Questionnaires to the employees and group interviews		Cases 2 and 3	
	The employees' <i>involvement</i> in safety work has to be improved significantly	Questionnaires to the employees, group interviews with employees, data from the seminars		Cases 2 and 3	
	Improve the safety climate in the production groups/departments	The relative priority of safety compared with other competing company goals has to be improved significantly. Safety as a shared responsibility instead of an individual one	Group interviews with employees and questionnaires to the employees	Cases 2 and 3	
The employees and the safety groups must have a mutual understanding of problems and solutions	Daily safety communication with coworkers and members of the safety group	Group interviews with employees	Cases 2 and 3		



**Table V** Safety tasks from individual (ind.) and group (gr-) based coaching (%).

Department and number of tasks	Individual coaching			Group based coaching			Total		
	Not solved	Started	Solved	Not solved	Started	Solved	Not solved	Started	Solved
Case 2 (ind. 23, gr. 44)	30	35	35	30	20	50	30	25	45
Case 3 (ind. 73, gr. 40)	10	11	79	20	23	58	13	15	72

forward neither prioritized the coaching intervention nor let the safety representative take over responsibility for conducting the tasks the safety group had agreed on (Interview middle manager 1; team leader 1; safety representative 1, 2009 and 2010). The middle manager was responsible for safety in the department and his lack of commitment and involvement hindered the implementation of the coaching intervention in case 3.

Moreover, the role clarification between the middle manager and the team leader regarding safety was unclear (Interview middle manager 1; team leader 1, 2009, 2010). Hence, the team leader mainly focused on production and did not take over the safety work from the middle manager: “When we have production under control, we will focus on the rest (safety, red.)” (Interview team leader 1, 2009). This statement underlines a well known challenge: in many Danish companies, the working environment is seen as a subordinate to production instead of an integrated part of it (Hasle et al., 2009). The middle managers’ and team leaders’ lack of commitment to the intervention can explain the mixed intervention results. However, weekly safety meetings and the high affective commitment of the safety representative in case 2 ensured that 50% of the safety tasks identified during the team coaching were actually solved. On the basis of the intervention results, the safety representative was given the responsible for more safety task, including 2 months where he should only focus on safety.

**The work group seminars for the employees**

In total, each of the two seminar rounds resulted in the employees identifying 136 out of 166 different safety related tasks (Tab. 6). For each task, the manager, the safety representative, one to two employees, and/or the safety leader volunteered or were appointed to take action. For instance, they were to check the option of ordering safety gloves in smaller sizes, or making preparations, or calling for further assistance. After 10 months, 83% of the tasks were completed, and an additional 11% had been started but not completed. For example, the teams used the required safety equipment more often, but still not always. The second time the seminars were held, more safety tasks were identified than the first time, and the same percentage of tasks was solved or started. This indicated that the employees and the middle managers still maintained a high level of safety commitments after 1 year of intervention (Pedersen et al., 2012). Moreover, it indicated that the employees’ competences to identify and solve safety problems had improved as a result of their participation in the first seminar.

A more detailed examination of the results showed that in the first round, there was a strong emphasis on physical and technical improvements (40% of the task

**Table VI** Safety tasks at seminars for employees, categorized after who was responsible for taking action.

Responsible actor(s) and number of tasks in first and second rounds	Round 1 (136 identified tasks)			Round 2 (166 identified tasks)			Total (302 identified tasks)		
	Not solved	Started	Solved	Not solved	Started	Solved	Not solved	Started	Solved
Manager (1.: 31, 2.: 23)	6%	6%	87%	17%	13%	70%	11%	9%	80%
Manager and employee (1.: 10, 2.: 19)	0%	0%	100%	16%	21%	63%	10%	14%	76%
Manager and safety committee (1.: 6, 2.: 9)	17%	17%	67%	0%	11%	89%	7%	13%	80%
Safety committee (1.: 33, 2.: 26)	6%	15%	79%	6%	13%	81%	6%	14%	80%
Employee (1.: 47, 2.: 75)	4%	9%	87%	4%	7%	89%	4%	7%	89%
Employee and safety committee (1.: 6, 2.: 11)	0%	40%	60%	0%	0%	100%	0%	20%	80%
Other (1.: 3, 2.: 3)	0%	33%	67%	0%	0%	100%	0%	17%	83%
Total	5%	11%	84%	7%	10%	83%	6%	11%	83%

compared with 21% in the second round). The most dominant theme in the second round was communication (29% of the tasks compared with 14% in the first round). This reflects not only the focus of the interventions but also an improved safety level in the company as a whole. Moreover, employee participation in solving the tasks increased in the second round (45% compared with 35% in the first round), while the number of tasks with leader responsibility for solving the problem decreased (14% compared with 23% in the first round). Employees had the highest rate of solved safety tasks (89%). Hence, on the basis of the soft HRP approach adopted, the employees were able to fulfil their role in safety and to identify and take (co-) responsibility for solving safety tasks. Additionally, the interview data suggest that the employees' commitment to safety increased from baseline to follow up (Group interview employees 1–4, 2008, 2009, and 2010). The employees in cases 2 and 3 performed similarly at both seminars, and the implementation of the intervention was characterized as successful.



### Summary of the processes in case 2 and 3

In summary, the implementation of the coaching-interventions for the safety group in case 3 and the seminars for the employees in both cases 2 and 3 were successful. High commitment from the top management, the high level of involvement of the employees, and the well implemented safety systems that were already in place are seen as essential for these results. Hence, it has been possible to focus the intervention on pro-active instead of re-active safety. The lower number of solved safety tasks in case 2's safety group during the individual and group-based coaching (summarized to 45% compared to 72% for case 3) and interviews with the team leader and safety representative suggests implementation failure in this safety group. This may explain the different results in cases 2 and 3. Hence, management commitment throughout the whole process is identified as essential to enabling the social processes between managers and employees.

### Summary of the results in cases 1, 2, and 3

The analysis of cases 1, 2, and 3 identifies commitment, competence development, and involvement as essential social processes for HRP-performance. Moreover, local contextual factors can enable the implementation of HR-practises: a good psychological working environment, recruitment by personnel on the basis of their personal competences, and the systematic prioritization of HRP as well as structures for it (Tab. 7). In cases 1 and 2, the intervention results were mixed. Employees' commitment, involvement, and learning by doing led to fulfilment of some intervention targets. However, bad planning, unclear roles among participants, too little communication, and priority of production before competence development hindered the processes and/or led to failure of other intervention targets (Tab. 7). With all six identified enabling factors and few hindering factors present, case 3 can be characterized as an exemplary case. The analysis also revealed different processes and results, depending on contextual factors and the personal characteristics of the key actors. In cases 1 and 2, the managers' commitment to the interventions was highly challenged under high production pressure. However, the project outcomes were (partly) obtained as a result of the high level of involvement of employees and their high commitment to the interventions, to their coworkers, and to their job. In case 1, the employees did not gain the expected knowledge from the courses or from the team leaders. However, through commitment and involvement, they were able to acquire competences to handle their new work challenges. Good social relations between the employees have been essential in these processes. On the other hand, pressure from management to focus on production instead of HRP can hinder HRP-performance (cases 1 and 2). In cases 2 and 3, the employees solved the safety tasks 10 months after the seminars, and similar results were obtained in the second seminar round. Hence, it has been possible to create learning and maintain the employees' commitment to the intervention for 20 months.

Moreover, it shows that the employees agree with their managers' ideas of production quality and quantity. Hence, in spite of the analytical distinction between the hard and the soft HRM-models, production focus and HRP can be complementary – if commitment, competence development, and involvement are all present. The existing HRP-literature also concludes that management commitment (Borg, 2007), planning

(Mayon-White, 1986), and the involvement of employees (Olsén, 2008; Knudsen et al., 2009) are important for HR-performance. However, the results presented in this paper indicate a further exploration of the social processes between managers and employees and between employees, for example, the fact that all the involved teams were organized according to the employees’ personal competences. Moreover, communication between middle managers, between middle managers and employees, and between employees is identified as the key factor that can explain the different results in cases 1, 2, and 3. In case 1, where the training courses were undertaken by Germans and Italians, language barriers posed a special external challenge. However, this can be relevant to other companies on the global labor market. On the basis of the analysis conducted, the key factors for implementing HRP are summarized in Tab. 7.

## Discussion

### Potentials and barriers of the concept of social processes

It is critical that HRP concepts are straightforward, short, clear, related to tangible tasks, and easily adaptable to existing organizational structures. The concept of social processes fills a gap in current work environment research and practice by addressing the importance of the informal relations between managers and employees, which constitute a black box in much international HRP literature. Nordic work life research has a long tradition for exploring quality of social process. The democratic and the participative aspects of working life have originally been a huge inspiration (e.g., Emery & Thorsrud,

**Table VII** Key factors for implementation of hr-practices based on nielsen’s concept of social processes

	<b>Company A, case 1</b>	<b>Company B, case 2</b>	<b>Company B, case 3</b>
Enabling factors	Commitment from some employees	Commitment from some managers and employees	Commitment from managers and employees
	Involvement of some managers and employees	Involvement of some managers and employees	Involvement of managers and employees
	Competence development among the employees		Competence development among the managers and employees
	Recruitment based on the middle managers’ knowledge of the employees’ personal competences		
Hindering factors	Bad planning	Bad planning	
	Unclear roles for key actors	Unclear roles for key actors	
	Production orientation instead of competence orientation in management decisions	Production orientation instead of competence orientation in management decisions	Under high work pressure, production orientation instead of competence orientation in management decisions



1976; Gustavsen & Hunnius, 1981; Banke & Clematide, 1988; Bergman, 1995), to present day enterprise development and improvement of work environment (through broad participation) as explored in, for example, Gustavsen 2011, Knudsen et al. 2011, Claussen 2009; Qvale 2002. The purpose of these concepts is to shape a democratic and improved quality of working life in the society. By way of contrast, this article’s concept of commitment, competence development, and the systematic involvement of managers and employees address the micro-level interaction between managers and employee. Hence, focus is on social processes essential for the quality of HRP within organizations. It is emphasized that HRM-practices is a contextually based phenomenon and should be analyzed in this respect. The theoretical concept can be integrated in the strategic HRP of the companies, for example, weekly meeting with employees regarding the work task. The required human resources are (potentially) already present in the company and can compensate for the informal and ad hoc character of HRP (see case 1), especially in small and medium-sized companies. Some key potentials and barriers of the concept of social processes have been identified using multiple data collection methods in the three cases (Tab. 8).

The key potential of incorporating social processes in HRP is that it creates involvement and commitment among the participants on all company levels. “Soft” HRM-models indicate that involvement and commitment require a long-term investment that will improve company performance as well as the well-being of the employees. In cases 1 and 2, the employees take co-responsibility for the project outcome on their own initiative and change the outcome from failure to (partly) success. Cases 1 and 2 also exemplify how control and commitment can be complementary under the right conditions. Hence, the distinction between the hard and soft HRM-models is analytical rather than definite. Moreover, well-functioning HR-organizations can support change from a focus on production to a focus on competence development and learning. However, the analysis also revealed some limitations of the concept. Power relations between managers and between managers and employees can hinder implementation of the concept. In case 1, the managers fired some employees during the process and replaced employees and team leaders in order to increase production. This both hindered implementation of the concept and strove against the key assumptions of the soft HRM-model. Power relations will be present in any social relation and can enable or hinder open communi-

**Table VIII** Potentials and limitations in human resource practice based on the concept of social processes

Potentials	Limitations
All company levels are actively involved	Other competing agendas including production pressure
The concept of social processes is based on the (middle) managers’ and employees’ competences. Hence, the required resources are (potentially) already present in the company.	Power relations between managers and between managers and employees
The processes create involvement and commitment among the participants.	Different interests among managers and between managers and employees
Well-functioning HR-organization including safety representative that can enable changes	

cation, which is a key element in the concept. All the identified potentials do not need to be present in order to apply the concept of social process. The direct participation of all company levels is seen as especially important to create long-lasting changes. Likewise, the three barriers can be of varying importance depending on the intervention.

## Limitations

The concept of social processes has some limitations that must be addressed. First, the concept is new and, so far, has only been tested on three cases from two independent Danish studies. Even though the studies have involved different company sizes and reached the same conclusions, more knowledge is needed about the implementation of the concept within different contexts and under stable as well as disruptive organizational conditions. Denmark is known for its democratic management styles and long tradition of employee involvement (Busck et al., 2010; Nielsen et al., 2012). In all three cases, the interventions involved employees and managers engaging in open and constructive dialogue. Therefore, this type of intervention might not be successful in more authoritative countries or in enterprises with bad relations between employees and management. Hence, implementation of the concept in a different context might lead to a different result. The involved studies use a multitude of methods that supplement and validate each other. Although validated methods have been used, there is an element of discretion in the interpretation of the qualitative data in particular. The authors have handled this through mutual interpretation of the data.

## Conclusion

HRPs are formulated as HR strategies, HR policies, and HR procedures (the formal side of HRP), but they are also enrolled within organizational social processes (the informal side). The focus of this paper has been the latter.

HRP is embedded in social processes – between managers and between managers and employees and these processes have an influence on the quality of HRP. Nordic work life research has a long tradition, including concepts such as democracy, autonomy, competence, and participation at work. However, the concept of social processes has not been developed theoretically and applied on HRP. A concept of social processes and HRM-performance has been developed and applied to three cases within the manufacturing industry, cases 1, 2, and 3, each with 40/60 employees. Social processes are here defined as involvement, competence development, and commitment that are essential potentials of human resources, especially when management uses a soft human resource strategy. HR performance can lead to the fulfillment of organizational targets, such as improved competence development and better cooperation between employees and managers. However, all relevant managers and employees on all company levels need to be committed to the change and involved in it, for example, by supporting processes of communication and learning. The studies show both success and failure in HR-performance. In cases 1 and 2, the companies failed to educate the team leaders to their new role in the production. However, due to the employees' high commitment to their job and own initiatives, the performance outcome was reached. The employees



were especially involved in developing their real competence to handle the job changes. Hence, committed employees can and will try to decrease the negative effects of their managers' bad planning.

Moreover, recruitment practice by personal competence and a good psychological working environment are enabling factors for the implementation of HRP. Hindering factors are bad planning, unclear roles among the participants, too little communication, and, in particular, production orientation instead of competence orientation.

In general, quality in HRP demands that management involve the employees and their commitment and competency development in working life. A precondition of quality in HRP is that the necessary competencies are developed by the staff and are available for carrying out the tasks of the organization – and thus for goal achievement. The three cases (1, 2, and 3) underline these social processes. The cases show that the concept of HRP includes employee commitment, employee competencies, and involvement and support from the management. They are key points of orientation for the management that wants to improve the quality of HRP.

If management does not clarify competency development and involvement strategies in the process of change and does not follow up on and support the strategies, there is a great risk that the project will suffer a sad fate in terms of quality measurement. The implications of the concept are that the specific HR practices and their configurations are unique, complex, and dynamic in each firm – because each firm's environment and requisite strategy are also unique, complex, and dynamic. Hence, the theory of social processes should not be interpreted as a universal best HRM practise.

## References

- Banke, P. and Clematide, B. (1988) *Ny teknik - nye job*, (New technology and new jobs), Naut-rapport 1988: 6, Gotab, Stockholm.
- Beer, M., Lawrence, P. R., Mills, Q. N. and Walton, R. E. (1985) *Human Resource Management*, Free Press, New York.
- Bergman, P. (1995) *Moderna Lagarbeten*, (Modern production teamwork), Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Boxall, P. and Purcell, J. (2011) *Strategy and Human Resource Management*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Borg, V. (2007) *Sund i arbejde - positive faktorer i arbejde* (Healthy at work. Positive factors in work life). The Danish National Centre of Working Environment.
- Brown, A. (1995) Quality management: issues for human resource management, *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* 33(3): 117–129.
- Bryman, A. (2008) *Social Research Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bucholz, S. and Roth, T. (1997) in: Lind, J. I. and Skärvad, P. H. (1997) *Nya teams i organisationernas värld*, (New Teams in the World of Organizations) Lund.
- Buhai, S., Cottini, E. and Westergaard-Nielsen, N. (2008) 'The Impact of Workplace Conditions on Firm Performance', *Timbergen Institute Discussion Paper*: 1–31.
- Buller, P. F. and McEvoy, G. M. (2012) 'Strategy, human resource management and performance: Sharpening line of sight', *Human Resource Management Review* 22(1): 43–56.
- Busck, O., Knudsen, H. and Lind, J. (2010) 'The transformation of employee participation: Consequences for the work environment', *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 31(3): 285–305.

- Ceylan, C. (2013) 'Commitment-based HR practices, different types of innovation activities and firm innovation performance', *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 24(1): 208–226.
- Claussen, T. (2009) What's special about the Nordic countries? On flexibility, Globalization and Working life in: Skorstad E. J. & H. Ramsdal: *Flexible Organizations and the New Working Life*. Ashgate Publishing: Surrey, p. 233–256.
- Clutterbuck, D. (2010) "Team Coaching" in *The Complete Handbook of Coaching*, Cox, E.; Bachkirova, T.; Clutterbuck, D. (eds), London: SAGE, pp. 271–283.
- Dale, B. G., et al. (ed) (1999, 2007) *Managing Quality*, Blackwell Publishing.
- DeJoy, D. M. (2005) 'Behavior change versus culture change: Divergent approaches to managing workplace safety', *Safety Science* 43(2): 105–129.
- Devanna, M., Fombrun C. and Tichy, N. (eds) (1984): *Strategic Human Resource Management*, John Wiley, New York.
- Ellström, P. E. (1994) *Kompetens, utbildning och lärande i arbetslivet*, (Competence, Education and Learning in Working Life), Publica, Gotab, Stockholm.
- Emery, F. and Thorsrud, E. (1976) *Democracy at Work*, Nijhoff Leiden 1976.
- Ehrnroot, M. (2002) *Strategic Soft Human Resource Management – The very idea*, Helsingfors, (Publications of the Swedish School of Economic and Business Administration Nr 105).
- Fisher, E. and Gonzalez, Y. S. (2013) 'The ABC Manager - How to Manage People More Effectively in Today's Challenging and Demanding Work Environment', *Engineering Management Research* 2(1): 67–78.
- Grimsø, R. E. (2000) *Personaladministrasjon, Teori og praksis*, (Human Resource Management) 3. udgave, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo.
- Guest, D. (1987) Human resource management and industrial relations, *Journal of Management Studies* 24(5): 503–521.
- Gustavsen, B. (1990) *Strategier for utvikling i arbeidslivet*, (Strategies for developing working life) Lillehammer: TANO.
- Gustavsen, B. (2011) The Nordic Model of Work Organisation, *Journal of Knowledge Economy* 2: 463–480.
- Gustavsen, B. and Hunnius (1981) *New patterns of Work reform*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1981.
- Hale, A. R., Guldenmund, F. W., van Loenhout, P. L. C. H. and Oh, J. I. H. (2010) 'Evaluating safety management and culture interventions to improve safety: Effective intervention strategies', *Safety Science* 48(8): 1026–1035.
- Hasle, P., Kines, P. and Andersen, L. P. (2009) 'Small enterprise owners' accident causation attribution and prevention', *Safety Science* 47(1): 9–19.
- Hasle, P. and Sørensen, O. H. (2013) Employees as Individually and Collectively Acting Subjects – Key Contributions from Nordic Working Life Research, *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3 August 2013.
- Huselid, M. A (1995) The impact of Human Resource Management Practices on Turnover Productivity, and Corporate Financial Performance, Vol. 38, No. 3, *Academy of Management Journal*, 635–672.
- Karlsson, J. C. (2013) Perspectives on Nordic Working Life Research, *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* 3(3).
- Kines, P., Andersen, D. R., Søndergaard, A., L. P. S., Nielsen, K. J. and Pedersen, L. M. (2013) 'Improving safety in small enterprises through an integrated safety management intervention', *Journal of Safety Research* 44(Special issue): 87–95.
- Knudsen, H., Busk, O. and Lind, J. (2009) 'Employee Participation: the high road to a better working environment?', *IREC*, Istanbul.
- Knudsen, H., Busk, O. and Lind, J. (2011) Work environment quality: the role of workplace participation and democracy in: *Work, Employment & Society* 25(3): 379–396.



- Kristensen, T. S., et al (2008) Virksomhedens sociale kapital – en ny indfaldsvinkel til det psykiske arbejdsmiljø? (The social capital of the firm – a new approach to psychological job environment), *Tidsskrift for Arbejdsliv*, 10. årg. Nr. 2.
- Krogstrup, H. K. (2006) *Evalueringmodeller* (Evaluation models). Århus: Systeme.
- Krogstrup, H. K. (2011) *Kampen om evidens. Resultatmåling, effektevaluering og evidens* (The struggle for evidence. Performance measures, effect evaluation and evidence). København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Kuvaas, B. (2007) 'Different relationships between perceptions of developmental performance appraisal and work performance', *Personnel Review* 36(3): 378–397.
- Kvale, S. (2001) *InterView. En introduktion til det kvalitative forskningsinterview* (Interview. An introduction to the qualitative research interview). København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Legge, K.(1995) *Human Resource Management, Rhetorics And Realities*, MacMillan Business.
- Mayon-White, B. (Ed) (1986) *Planning and Managing Change*, Harper and Row, London.
- Mintzberg H. (1996) Five P's for Strategy in: H. Mintzberg & Quinn, J. B. *The Strategy Process*, 3th ed. 10–18, Prentice-Hall.
- Nielsen, K. (1992) CNC technology, job design and training: The scope for personnel strategies, *New Technology, Work and Employment*, Vol. 7, no. 2, Autumn.
- Nielsen, K. (2003) Det handlende og integrerende menneske i arbejdslivet, (The Acting and reflecting Human Being in Working Life) s.44-52, *Økonomi og politik* nr. 1, 76. årg.
- Nielsen, K. (2008a) Virksomhedens personalearbejde og sociale processer i: Nielsen, K. et al (2008): *Virksomhedens personalearbejde – Ledelse og Administration*, (The Human Resource Practices of Firm), LEO-serien nr. 33, Aalborg Universitetsforlag 2008, p. 45–69.
- Nielsen, K. and Mølvadgaard (1999) *Kvalifikationsudvikling og læringsmiljø i procesindustrien*, (Development of Skills and the Learning Environment in the Process Industry), LEO-serien nr. 22, Aalborg Universitet.
- Nielsen, K. and Mølvadgaard (2000a) Kvalitet i læringsmiljø – metode og resultater fra en procesindustri i: Nielsen & Mølvadgaard (red): *Virksomheders personalearbejde*, (The Human Resource Practice of Firms) Leo-serien nr. 24, Aalborg Universitet.
- Nielsen, K. and Mølvadgaard (2008b) *Learning Environment in th Process Industry – Methods and Results*, in: Christensen, A. (ed): *The Learning Perspective*, Aalborg University Press, 2008.
- Nielsen, K. J., Kines, P., Pedersen, L. M., Andersen, L. P. S. and Andersen, D. R. (Accepted) 'A multi-case study of the implementation of an integrated approach to safety in medium-sized enterprises', *Safety Science*. (E-publication ahead of print).
- Nielsen, K., Pedersen, L. M., Andersen, L. P., Kines, P., Andersen, D. R., Rasmussen, K. and Mikkelsen, K. L. (2012) Integreret ulykkesforebyggelse på tværs af brancher og virksomhedsstørrelser (Integrated accident prevention cross industries and company sizes). *Final report from research project nr. 28-2007-9*. Department of occupational Medicine i Herning. <http://arbejdstilsynet.dk/~media/at/at/01-arbejdstilsynet/arbejdsmiljoeforskningsfonden/afrapporterede-stoetteprojekter/ulykkesforebyggelse/integreretulykkesforebyggelsepdf.ashx>
- Nielsen, K. and Randall, R. (2013) 'Opening the black box: Presenting a model for evaluating organizational-level interventions', *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 22(5): 601–617. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1359432X.2012.690556>.
- Nordhaug, O., Larsen, H. H. and Øhrstrøm (1997) *Personaleledelse – en målrettet strategiproces*, (Personnel Management in a Strategic Process Perspective), Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne, København.

- Qvale, T. U. (2002) A case of slow learning? Recent trends in social partnership in Norway with particular emphasis on workplace democracy, *Concepts and Transformation* 7(1): 31–55.
- Pedersen, B. H., Dyreborg, J., Kines, P., Mikkelsen, K. L., Hannerz, H., Andersen, D. R. and Spangenberg, S. (2010) 'Protocol for a mixed-methods study on leader-based interventions in construction contractors' safety commitments', *Injury Prevention* 16(3): 1–7.
- Pedersen, L. M. (Under review) 'Applying a realistic evaluation model to occupational safety interventions', *Safety Science*.
- Pedersen, L. M., Nielsen, K. J. and Kines, P. (2012) 'Realistic Evaluation as a New Way to Design and Evaluate Occupational Safety Interventions', *Safety Science* 50(1): 48–54.
- Rothlisberger, F. J. and Dickson W. J. (1947) *Management and the Worker*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Rothstein, Bo (1994), *Vad bör staten göra? Om välfärdsstatens moraliska och politiska logik*. Stockholm: SNS Förlag.
- Saksvik, P. Ø., Hammer, T. H. and Nytrø, K. (2013) 'Social Relations at the Collective Level: The Meaning and Measurement of Collective Control in Research on the Psychosocial Work Environment', *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies* 3(3): 31–46.
- Subramony, M. (2006) Why organization adopt some human resource management practices and reject others, an exploration of rationales, *Human Resource Management* 45(2): 195–210.
- Søndergård Kristensen, T. (2010) Trivsel og produktivitet: to sider af samme sag; en gennemgang af den internationale litteratur om social kapital, arbejdsmiljø, produktivitet og kvalitet i ydelserne (Health and production as complementary. A review of the international literature regarding social capital, working environment, productivity and quality). København: Handels- og Kontorfunktionærernes Forbund.
- Trist, E. L. and Bramforth, K. (1951) Social and psychological consequences of the Longwall Method of Coal getting. *Human Relations*, No. 4.
- Ulrich, D. (1997) *Human Resource Champions – The next agenda for adding value and delivering Results*, Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press,
- Walton, R. E. (1985) From control to commitment in the workplace, *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 1985.
- Wilkinson, A. and Brown, A. (2007) Managing people: B. Dale, T. Van De Wiele and J. Van Iwaarden. *Managing Quality*, Blackwell, pp. 200–229.
- Wall, T. D. and Wood, S. J. (2005) The Romance of Human Resource Management and Business Performance and the Case for Big Science, *Human Relations* 2005(58): 429.
- Wilkinson, A. (1999) Managing People in a TQM Context: Dale, B. G. (ed) (1999): *Managing Quality*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Wood, S. and de Menezes, L. M. (2011) High involvement management, high-performance work systems and well-being, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 22(7): 1586–1610.
- Yin, R. K. (1989) *Case Study Research - Design and Methods*, Sage Publications.