

The future of work within the Nordic working life model –opportunities and challenges

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Debates on the future of work often concentrate narrowly on technological change and automation of jobs, whereas other important forces of change are overlooked. In this paper we discuss what consequences digital technological change, interacting with other global megatrends such as demographic change, green transition and globalization, will have for Nordic labour markets and work life models.

Internationally, the evolution of the Nordic models is regarded a success story, where high levels of growth and employment have been achieved, along with lower levels of inequality than in any comparable social models (Dølvik et al., 2015a; Magnusson et al., 2009). There are however signs that the Nordic societies are moving in direction of widening wealth and income gaps, making them less distinct from other European countries. Several challenges are arising –demographic trends point towards shortages of labour, while globalization and automation for many decades have caused loss of manufacturing jobs. A key question is therefore whether the increasingly digitalized service sector will, as have been the story so far, be able to compensate for the job losses in tangible goods production in the future. Another central question is how changes in the job and skill structure instigated by the megatrends will affect the quality and pattern of work, contractual and regulative forms, employment relations, and job market adjustment. In view of recent trends, accentuated by the Corona-crisis, it seems that the praised resilience and flexible adjustment capacity of the Nordic models in no way can be taken for granted in the future of work. In discussing these issues and the prospects for model renewal, we'll draw on theories of institutional change, service cost disease (Baumol, 1967), and new political economic literature on growth and welfare reform (Baccaro & Pontusson, 2020; Hassel & Palier, 2020).

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