Organisational and Social Safety Climate in Human Service Organisations – Developing Proactive Approaches and Tools for Research, Practice and Intervention

CTA – Centre for Work Life and Evaluation studies
Malmö University

The research programme is funded by FORTE – Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare
Dnr 2016-07220
Organisatoriskt och socialt säkerhetsklimat inom människovårdande organisationer – Utveckling av proaktiva arbetsformer och metoder inom forskning, praktik och intervention

Sammanfattning
Människovårdande organisationer (HSOs) inom skola, vård och omsorg möter stora förändringar och utmaningar som påverkar arbetsmiljön (krav, resurser, kränkningar osv) för både anställda och chefer. Programmet kommer att bidra till forskningsområdet med ett nytt begrepp organisatoriskt och socialt säkerhetsklimat som tillsammans med ”Job Demands-Resource” teorin utgör ett teoretiskt ramverk. Det övergripande målet är att utveckla arbetsformer och metoder som kan användas för forskning, praktik och intervention i syfte att utveckla en hållbar arbetsmiljö inom framtidens HSO.

Under de första tre åren av programmet kommer vi att: 1) vidareutveckla befintliga metoder och instrument som kan användas för att undersöka det organisatoriska och sociala säkerhetsklimatet i olika HSOs 2) genomföra studier av anställdas och första linjens chefers arbetsmiljö 3) genomföra studier om arbetsplatsmobbing och trakasserier med fokus på offren såväl som vittnen. Resultaten av studierna ger oss fördjupad kunskap om krav, resurser och kränkningar samt om metoder som kan användas för att utveckla det organisatoriska och sociala säkerhetsklimatet inom HSOs. På basis av ny kunskap från de olika projekten kommer de följande tre åren av programmet att ägnas åt att genomföra studier på olika organisatoriska nivåer inom HSO. Resultaten kommer att klargöra hur HSOs genom ett sunt organisatoriskt och socialt säkerhetsklimat kan möta framtida utmaningar såsom stress, kränkande särbehandling, hög personalomsättning och rekryteringsproblem.

Programmet kommer att genomföras vid Centrum för tillämpad arbetslivsforskning och utvärdering (CTA), Malmö högskola. Forskargruppen är tvärvetenskaplig och har kompetens inom ett brett spektrum av teorier och forskningsmetoder. Förutom internationella vetenskapliga publikationer, kommer resultaten att presenteras i en bok, på vår hemsida och på konferenser.

Organisational and social safety climate in human service organisations – Developing proactive approaches and tools for research, practice and intervention

Abstract
Human Service Organisations (HSOs) such as schools, social and health care are facing major changes and challenges, which impact the working environment (demands, resources, harassment etc) for both employees and managers. We will contribute to the research area with a new construct, organisational and social safety climate that together with the Job Demands-Resources theory will form the theoretical framework for the programme. The overall aim is to develop approaches and tools that can be used for research, practice and intervention in order to develop a sustainable working environment for HSOs in the future.

During the first three years of the programme we aim to: 1) further develop existing methods and instruments that can be used to assess the organisational and social safety climate in different HSOs, 2) conduct studies of employees’ and first line managers’ work situation 3) conduct studies on work place bullying and harassment with the focus on victims and witnesses. This will provide new knowledge about the demands, resources and victimization behaviours as well as methods that can be applied in order to develop organisational and social safety climate in HSOs. On the basis of the empirical and methodological knowledge gained in the different projects the subsequent three years of the programme will be devoted to intervention studies involving employees, first-line managers and senior management in HSOs. The results will clarify how the HSOs by creating a sound organisational and social safety climate can meet the future challenges such as stress, victimization at work, retention and recruiting problems.

The programme will be based at the Centre for Work Life and Evaluation Studies (CTA), Malmö University. Our research group is multidisciplinary and has competence in a wide range of theories and research methods. Besides international scientific publication, the results will be presented in a book, on our website and at conferences.
Programme description

1. Background, purpose and research questions

The point of departure for the current programme is the transformations and challenges in Human Service Organisations (HSOs). We will contribute to the research area with a new construct, Organisational and social safety climate, inspired by the concept of Psychosocial Safety Climate (Dollard & Bakker, 2010) and the new statute from the Swedish Work Environment Authority – Organisational and social work environment (AFS 2015:4). The construct Organisational and social safety climate together with a Job Demands-Resources theory will form the theoretical framework for the programme. The overall aim is to develop approaches and empirically validated and reliable tools that can be used for research, practice and interventions in order to develop a sustainable working environment in HSOs. The programme is based on ongoing and planned studies in the following research areas:

- Different approaches for research, practice and intervention in HSOs
- Organisational and social work environment for the employees in HSOs
- Organisational and social work environment for the first-line managers in HSOs
- Organisational and social factors related to bullying and harassment in HSOs

1.1. Transformations and Challenges concerning Human Service Organisations (HSOs)

Organisations designed to handle health care, education and social services are gathered under the umbrella term human service organisations (Hasenfeld, 2009). Around 1.21 million people in Sweden, i.e. one fourth of the labour force, are employed in HSOs (SCB, 2015). The planned programme focuses on HSOs as these organisations are facing considerable challenges today and are expected to do so even in the future.

The demographic and technological changes imply increasing as well as changing demands on health care (Commission of the European Communities 2008; Harford, 2009). One demographic aspect is the increasing number of refugees in recent years, which challenges the different HSOs. Also, the number of children is expected to increase, putting further demands on the school sector (SKL 2014; SCB 2015).

Work-related stress is a global problem according to results from an expert opinion survey conducted by the ILO (2016). The survey points out that work-related stress was a source of higher concern in specific sectors such as in healthcare, education, services and in the public sector in general. Earlier research has also shown that work environments in HSOs are stressful (Dollard et al., 2003; Härenstam, 2005). We can thus conclude that the stressful work conditions have been prevailing for several years and most probably will continue to do so in the future.

Previously the focus has been on physical risk factors, but today it is the risks in psychosocial work environment that are increasing and also prove to be difficult to handle, according to a new European study (EU-OSHA, 2015). Psychosocial risks, along with the physical risks, cause poor health and absenteeism (Eurofound, 2015).

Adverse social behaviours such as violence, harassment and unwanted sexual attention are an issue of concern in the European workforce. The proportion of workers who report that they experience a feeling of work well done has decreased over the past decade, and gender segregation is still a problem (Eurofound, 2015).

There is an increasing need for recruitment in HSOs, due to demographical changes, globalisation, economic fluctuations, technology development and increasing mobility in the labour market. At the same time there are indications that it is difficult to recruit and retain personnel in HSOs, and this pattern also applies to first-line managers. It should be noted here that immigrants when integrated in the Swedish labour market can make a valuable contribution to HSOs (SKL 2014; SCB, 2015).
1.2. Some special characteristics of HSOs

HSO is a generic term for organisations whose employees work in close relationship with other people. Hasenfeld (2009) has formulated the following definition: …a set of organizations whose principal function is to protect, maintain, or enhance the personal well-being of individuals by defining, shaping, or altering their personal attributes… (Hasenfeld, 2009).

1.2.1. Complex and vague goals and governance

HSOs differ from other kinds of organisations in that they work directly with people whose attributes they attempt to shape and they are mandated by society to protect and to promote the welfare of the people they serve (Hasenfeld, 2009). Another important characteristic of HSOs is that the political goals are generally comprehensive, vague and complex (Carnochan et al, 2014). There are a number of general descriptions of aims that contain vague formulations regarding the client’s rights. These descriptions allow free scope for the organisations to organise their work in order to attain the goals. This implies that the meaning of concepts like “caring”, “nursing”, and “teaching” alters at different points in time and between different organisations. Since the goals in HSOs are vague, and many aspects of the work are qualitative, there is a difficulty in measuring the results of the work (Carnochan et al, 2014).

1.2.2. Female-dominated organisations

The human service occupations in Sweden have the highest proportion of women employed. The category “Personal care and related workers” constitutes the largest women-dominated occupational group in the Swedish labour market. The most women-dominated occupation is the category “Assistant nurses, hospital ward assistants etc.” with 93% women. Also, a large proportion of women are found as preschool teachers, where 92% are women. Other occupations that are dominated by women are social workers (84%) and primary school teachers (78%). Thus, these occupations contribute considerably to gender segregation in the Swedish labour market (SCB, 2015).

1.2.3. Emotional labour – emotional demands

The different occupations in HSOs are expected to engage in emotional labour, which can be defined as a part of proactive and reactive relational work, as an instrument through which the worker-patient interaction takes place (Morris & Feldmann, 1997). Hasenfeld (2009) has described emotional labour as a performance art which “requires the artful sensing of the others emotional state and crafting of one’s own affective expression so as to elicit the desired response on the part of the other” (p. 293).

In general, emotional labour often requires interpersonal and personal skills such as emotional sensing, developing understanding and empathy. It also requires a great deal of flexibility in managing one’s own emotions and an ability to choose an approach that is most effective in a given situation (Bergström, 2014).

All employees in HSOs are exposed to high emotional demands, but they seem to be particularly high in health care (Rugulies, 2010). Being exposed to violence and threats from patients is common among women working in care. This group is also among those in the Swedish labour market that perceive their job as mentally stressful (Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2009).

1.2.4. Moral commitment and work quality

The interaction between the human service worker and the users influences both the work process and the work outcome. The work tasks are often emotionally demanding and sometimes decisions have to be made in open conflict with the clients. Open or hidden hostility complicates the interaction with the clients and can create situations of threat and uneasiness (Enosh, Tzafrir & Stolovy, 2015). Whereas industrial production is based on material objects, the users in HSOs are human beings with their own will. Thereby, the work is based on a moral foundation in these kinds of organisations.

Having compliance between internal moral values and the values in daily work seems important, not only for avoiding stress, but also for a sustainable work life in the long run (Hjalmers, Söderfeldt, & Axtelius, 2006). Thereby, the quality of work output is an important aspect of the psychosocial work environment in HSOs. Quality of work may even provide opportunities for personal fulfilment,
professional pride and thereby positive outcomes such as engagement and job satisfaction. On the other hand, lack of opportunities to attain satisfying quality of work may increase complaints from users and thereby lead to negative outcomes such as stress-related symptoms.

1.3. The organisational and social work environment – new regulations from the Swedish Work Environment Authority

The Swedish Work Authority has presented a statute, new regulations concerning the organisational and social work environment (AFS 2015:4). This statute replaces the earlier National Board of Safety and Health general recommendations (AFS1980:14) on mental and social aspects of the work environment. The new statute came into force on 31 March 2016. What is new in this statute is that the focus is now on organisational rather than mental (psychological/psychiatric) aspects in the work environment and that the social aspects now also includes workplace harassment or victimisation. This implies that instead of focusing on individuals (blaming the victim) the organisational aspects are considered crucial for a good work environment. The aim is to encourage the employers to be proactive and prevent risks related to organisational and social conditions in the work environment (AFS 2015:4).

A central implication of statute is that a comprehensive assessment of the psychosocial working environment is required followed by concrete actions. In order to reach this goal, reliable and valid instruments are needed. The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) is one such instrument mentioned by the WHO and by the ILO as a useful risk assessment and management tool (ILO, 2016; Leka & Jain, 2010; Pejtersen et al., 2010).

As the new statute includes a number of job resources and job demands, a relevant theoretical framework for analysing the organisational and social work environment is Job Demands-Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). This will be discussed below.

1.4. Job Demands-Resources as a theoretical framework

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), is an outgrowth of the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The JD-R theory complements and integrates earlier theories and approaches in work stress research (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014), and work motivation research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Consequently, the JD-R theory captures both negative (health erosion), and positive (motivational) processes that the demands and resources in the work environment can generate. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory is a well-established theoretical approach in current stress and occupational safety and health research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). The JD-R Model has been tested empirically in a number of studies including different occupational groups and outcomes (for an overview of the literature see Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). There is also longitudinal evidence incorporating tests of reversed causation (Boyd et al., 2011; Hakanen, Schaufeli, & Ahola, 2008; Seppälä et al., 2014).

A central assumption is that while demands and resources exist in all kinds of work, specific demands and resources may be of particular relevance for different occupational groups (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). JD-R theory differs from earlier more static approaches such as the demand-control-support model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and effort-reward model (Siegrist, 1996) by taking into consideration that different resources can interact with different demands, and these interactions are specific to a particular type of work situation. This means that each specific work situation has its own patterns when it comes to how resources can act as a buffer for different work demands.

1.5. Social and Organisational climate in HSOs – the role of senior management

Earlier organisational studies have pointed out the important role of social and organisational climate for different factors in the working environment. The leadership influences the cooperation between employees and the organisational climate. Previous studies show that social organisational climate mediates the relationship between the immediate manager’s leadership style and employees’ health and well-being (Muhonen et al., 2014). Furthermore, employees whose immediate manager has an empowering leadership style seem to have greater potential for learning and development in their
work (Jönsson et al., 2015). The social organisational climate appears to play an important role even in different bullying contexts, which further indicates the need for organisations to engage in activities for developing a constructive social climate at the workplace (Muhonen et al., submitted).

A recent Official Report of the Swedish Government (SOU 2016:2), analysing efficiency in the use of resources in care, points out the culture at the workplace as one of the key factors that can contribute to efficiency in the care sector. Here culture is defined as the values and attitudes on which the work procedures and behaviours are based, on both an individual and an organisational level (SOU 2016:2). The culture at the workplace is also considered as a more powerful means of governance than top-down steering. Successful enterprises are characterised by a sound and non-hierarchical team-spirit, which also influences the view that patients are viewed as the central actors in the care situations. Further, the first-line managers are pointed out as crucial bearers or intermediaries of the culture.

There are several instruments that can be used to assess different aspects of the organisational culture. One recently developed measure is the Psychosocial Safety Climate – PSC (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). PSC is considered as a property of the organisation and can be defined as ‘‘policies, practices and procedures for the protection of worker psychological health and safety’’ (Dollard & Bakker, 2010, p. 580). The PSC comprises the senior management’s commitment and priority given to the employees’ psychological well-being and security, making it an organisational property (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). PSC can be regarded as a reflection of the true priorities in an organisation, for example competing interests in productivity versus well-being of employees. In high PSC contexts managers will act to protect and enhance employee psychological health via policies, practices and procedures that influence work conditions.

An important feature of PSC is thus that it is an upstream factor and possible to influence by changing management behaviours. However, with the new provisions (AFS 2015:4) the role of the organisation and demands on management in relation to establishing a sustainable work environment go a step even further than PSC. Therefore, the main idea behind PSC needs to be developed further in order to be applicable in the Swedish context and to cover the new provisions. COPSOQ, on the other hand, covers aspects of the organisational and social work environment including e.g. harassment, social relations and different kind of demands at work (Berthelsen, 2016). Scales from COPSOQ can be used to measure aspects of organisational climate together with new items and items from PSC.

1.6. First-line managers in HSO

First-line managers have a central and complex role in organisations, but despite this, they have rarely been the focus of psychosocial work environment research (Lundqvist, 2013). First-line managers (FLMs) can be defined as “Those people who are closest to the ‘operating core’ and have supervisory responsibilities” (Townsend & Russell, 2013, p. 4). FLMs have a stressful job where the pay and privileges often do not correspond to the requirements and the amount of responsibility (Akademikerförbundet, 2012). The stressful work situation among managers has led to high turnover. There is a lack of managers in Sweden, partly because many managers retire, partly because young people seem uninterested in taking on management positions (Ledarna, 2014).

It is estimated that there are about 300,000 FLMs, of whom 44% are women (Ledarna, 2014). Unlike the higher management levels that are still heavily male-dominated, especially in the private sector (SCB, 2014), the gender distribution among FLM is relatively equal. However, numerical or quantitative gender equality does not guarantee qualitative gender equality, i.e. women and men may have different terms, conditions and opportunities, despite that they are at the same organisational level (Kankkunen, 2009; Muhonen et al., 2010). Previous studies have shown that women managers do not have time for their own development and also perceive lack of support from their superiors (Muhonen, 2012). This can lead to women leaving their managerial career prematurely (Muhonen, 2010).

Besides that the psychosocial work environment has implications for health, wellbeing and work engagement for the FLM, the managers’ high stress level, burnout and low well-being seems to transfer to the subordinates (Skakon et al., 2010; Hakanen et al., 2014). It is not only the negative aspects that are contagious, but even the manager's engagement seems spread to rest of the
organisation (Bakker et al., 2005). Thus, being FLM includes both risks and opportunities for the working environment in organisations.

1.7. Aim of the programme

Using the AFS 2015:4 as a starting point, the overall aim of the research programme is to develop organisational and social safety climate as a theoretical and empirical construct that can be applied in the context of HSOs. This will be achieved by including senior managers’, first-line managers’ and the employees’ perspectives on the organisational and safety climate. The programme is based on ongoing research projects that serve as a knowledge base for developing new projects. In this way the programme will enable continuity and a longitudinal approach in the research area. The research group is multidisciplinary and a mixture of different methods will be used during the programme.

WPA: In order to assess the organisational and social safety climate one aim of the programme is to develop both (1) quantitative and (2) qualitative methods for this purpose. (1) The quantitative method will be based on an existing instrument, Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ), which will be combined with a questionnaire measuring Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC), an instrument that assesses perceptions of the highest managers’ attitudes towards psychosocial safety in the workplace. (2) When it comes to the qualitative method a focus group method assessing discursive occupational risks will be further developed and evaluated.

WPB: In order to build a solid knowledge base that covers the different aspects of the AFS 2015:4, we will conduct studies on 1) employees’ and first line managers’ work situation 2) work place bullying and harassment with the focus on victims and witnesses.

WPC: Based on the research and methodological development during years 1–3, the aim for the second part of the programme, i.e. years 4–6, is to conduct intervention studies at different organisational levels in HSOs. Here we will also investigate how different digital tools could be used as facilitators in the intervention studies. Bearing in mind that the leaders/managers are key actors in the organisations, the special focus of the interventions is on (1) how top managements’ actions influence the organisational and social climate and (2) the first-line managers role as bearers or intermediaries of the organisational and social safety climate.

2. Significance for the research area

2.1. Development of a new construct - organisational and social safety climate

The current programme will add innovative knowledge on how organisational and social safety climate and the strategic priorities set by senior management impact the opportunities for first-line managers to fulfill their leadership role and thereby impact the work environment in human services in a broader sense.

By including organisational and social safety climate in ongoing and planned research projects it will be possible to validate it simultaneously in different HSO settings. This provides us with opportunities for comparisons of the climate in different kinds of HSOs and also for identifying potential differences and similarities concerning the consequences for HSO staff in schools, social services and dentistry. The results of the programme will thus widen the potential scope for planning of relevant health promoting actions at different organisational levels.

Recently, van der Klink et al (2015) pointed out the need to identify what people in a given context want to achieve in their work and what is of importance for the organisations in order to create long-term sustainability for both parties. This indicates that the work environment should not be viewed separately but as integrated in a holistic perspective. In the HSO context the work environment of the employees is interrelated to opportunities for fulfilling the needs of the users/customers and the organisational priorities for making this possible.

2.2. Further development of the JD-R model

The JD-R model is a theoretical framework for defining the concrete resources and demands of specific relevance for the occupation that is being studied (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). As a
consequence, the way the JD-R model is operationalised in different studies often differs. The main advantage is that the questionnaires typically are targeted and relevant for the respondents, which makes it possible to draw conclusions of relevance for the specific occupation. On the other hand, a drawback is that the targeted operationalisation limits comparisons across studies and thereby aggravates synthesis (Demerouti & Bakker 2011).

The programme will address this trade-off between targeting versus generalisation of questionnaires by focusing on HSOs rather than on specific occupations and by the development and use of generic instruments. This will enable us to identify the relative importance of different aspects of organisational and social safety climate in relation to a number of human service occupations. Besides, it will add novel opportunities for cross-level analyses of how upstream factors impact associations between other kinds of demands or resources and output such as for example health, work ability and job satisfaction for HSO occupations.

The programme also adds to an emerging research field of distinguishing between different kinds of resources in the JDR theoretical framework. Demerouti et al. (2001) make a theoretical distinction between internal personal resources and external resources in the form of organisational or social resources. More recently Bakker and Demerouti (2014) developed this further by stating that the resources can be located at the organisational level, at the interpersonal level, at the task level, and also in relation to the specific job position. Empirically, the research front clarifies that leadership resources may act distinctly from other kinds of resources in the JD-R Model (Schaufeli, 2015). This programme will add knowledge on the interplay of demands and resources arising from different organizational levels.

Emotional demands can be regarded as challenging demands rather than hindrance demands for nurses (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013). However, there is need for research concerning the process of altering potentially hindering demands into challenging demands, which would make them less problematic for occupational health. The programme will add an innovative approach to this upcoming research field.

2.3. COPSOQ III

The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire is a comprehensive, generic instrument, which originally was established to facilitate opportunities for improved communication between workplaces, work environment professionals, and researchers (Kristensen, 2010; Kristensen et al, 2005). A translation of COPSOQ II into Swedish as well as the supplementary questions has been tested and validated (Berthelsen, Westerlund & Kristensen, 2014).

Results from the ongoing Swedish validation study have constituted an important input for changes in what will be the future COPSOQ III. Today, the development of COPSOQ is led by the steering committee of the COPSOQ International Network (Nübling, Burr, Moncada & Kristensen, 2014). One of the CTA researchers, Hanne Berthelsen, is a member of the steering committee. A beta version of COPSOQ III has been released in May 2016, and based on empirical results the final version of COPSOQ III will be published by the end of 2017. The goal is to have the beta version tested in the coming year in as many settings as possible, in other words, in as many countries as possible, both in companies and in national surveys. COPSOQ is integrated in ongoing and planned CTA projects included in the programme. Moreover, we run an AFA-financed research and development project aiming at facilitating communications of research for use in practical work for improving the work environment. An important contribution of the programme will therefore be taking a leading position in establishing COPSOQ III in Sweden and even internationally.

2.4. COPSOQ and intervention studies

Today, COPSOQ has been translated into several languages, offering unique opportunities for international comparisons. Such comparisons are valuable for understanding how upcoming trends in management and organisation impact work environment, health and well-being in different contexts. COPSOQ scales have predictive power for outcomes such as sickness absence (Rugulies, Aust & Pejtersen, 2010; Rugulies, Hasle, Pejtersen, Aust & Bjorner, 2016) and disability pension (Clausen, Burr & Borg, 2014). In particular for human service workers, predictive power has been demonstrated
for burnout and long-term absence (Borritz, 2006; Clausen, Christensen & Borg, 2010; Li et al., 2010). The instrument has also proved to be reliable in order to evaluate the effects of interventions and organisational changes (Albertsen et al., 2014; Smith, Hviid, Frydendall, & Flyvholm, 2013; Pejtersen, et al, 2010).

Even though COPSOQ is widely used in both research and for risk assessment at workplaces, there are only limited scientifically based recommendations on how to follow up results from workplace surveys and on interventions. The programme will contribute in decreasing this knowledge gap.

An innovative methodological intervention approach that will be further developed in the framework of the programme is a focus group method based on discourse analyses.

2.5. Meeting the requirements of the AFS 2015:4

Our earlier research has shown the importance of the organisational climate in relation to employee wellbeing, job satisfaction and leadership (Jönsson et al., 2015; Muhonen et al., 2014); but also in different bullying contexts (Muhonen et al., submitted), which further indicates the need for organisations to engage in developing a sound organisational and social safety climate at the workplaces (SOU 2016:2). By means of the construct organisational and social safety climate we will contribute to proactive development of the work environment in HSOs.

3. Gender and diversity

One of the challenges in the Swedish society is that the labour market is gender-segregated and continues to be characterised by gender inequality. The situation seems to be approximately the same in other western countries (Eurofound, 2013). The number of women and men in the labour force is approximately equivalent (89 per cent of men and 83 per cent of women), but the number of women in managerial positions has increased slowly over the years. Women constitute 6 per cent of CEOs, 5 per cent of chairpersons and 26 per cent of the board members in limited companies. A minority (29 per cent) of managers in the private sector, but a majority (65 per cent) of managers in the public sector are women (SCB, 2014). Considering that the public sector is female-dominated (nearly 80% of the employees are women), even larger number of the managers should be women. So far women have mainly gained the lowest managerial positions such as first-line managers, positions that have little influence and high demands. Earlier research shows e.g. that female-dominated workplaces have more subordinates per manager than male-dominated workplaces (Kankkunen, 2009). Two of the projects in the programme will analyse FLMs the organisational and social safety risks for women and men who are first-line managers.

The risks in psychosocial work environment are increasing and prove to be difficult to handle (EU-OSHA, 2015). The number of notifications concerning occupationally related diseases among women has increased considerably in recent years, and health care is the sector that reports the highest numbers (AV/ISA/SCB, 2015). Considering the large number of people working in HSOs and the challenges that these organisations are facing, the programme will contribute to improving working conditions not only for women but also for the increasing number of immigrants working in this sector.

According to Eurofound (2015) 16% of workers have been exposed to harassing behaviours. While the physical violence has been recognised as a problem in the work environment, the psychological forms of violence have started to get attention quite recently. This has also been taken account in the AFS 2015:4 where employers are expected to take measures to prevent workplace harassment and victimisation. Two of the projects included in the programme focus on workplace harassment, are thereby addressing different grounds for discrimination and victimisation in the organisations.
4. Description of the projects included in the programme, study designs and methods

4.1. Different approaches for research, practice and intervention in HSOs

The four projects described below illustrate different approaches that can be used for research, practice, intervention and evaluation. These projects are already funded, but we plan for a new project where the organisational and social safety climate instrument will be developed and incorporated with COPSOQ in order to target the new provisions from the labour inspection authority. This project will be conducted during 2017–2019 and Hanne Berthelsen will be the PI for the project that will be funded from the programme budget.

4.1.1. Work and health among first-line health care staff – validation and a new base for the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire in Sweden

The intention of this project is to validate the existing Swedish translation of COPSOQ II and further develop scales specifically directed towards personally enriching aspects of human service work as well as working conditions that are amenable to an ageing workforce. The project contributes to establishing reference values for the COPSOQ II, and for new scales geared to identify-specific rewards and level of exertion in patient work and obtaining knowledge of interaction between individual factors and group factors in relation to psychosocial work environment related outcomes. The project includes cognitive interviews, a multilevel study conducted in public dental organisations in four county councils and organisational data on sickness absence and staff turnover rates.

PI: Hanne Berthelsen, CTA, Malmö University; Co-applicants: Hugo Westerlund, Stress Research Institute, Stockholm University; Tage S. Kristensen, Task-consult, Denmark; Jari Hakanen, Centre for Advanced Studies, Helsinki University

4.1.2. COPSOQ Sweden – a bridge between research and practice concerning work environment issues

This project aims to disseminate and facilitate the use of COPSOQ as a research-based tool for improving the psychosocial work environment at workplaces. Central to the project is the establishment of a website that contains the questionnaire, information about scales, instructions, links and tools to illustrate results for mapping of the work environment, interpretation of results, and planning of concrete interventions (www.copsoq.se). Additionally, data from workplace surveys and from research projects using COPSOQ are collected and presented in interactive diagrams as open-access reference values. The project is expected to facilitate the use of research to improve work environments and to contribute to the public debate about the psychosocial work environment.

PI: Hanne Berthelsen, CTA, Malmö University; Co-applicant: Hugo Westerlund, Stress Research Institute, Stockholm University

4.1.3. Discursive occupational risks

The study resulted in a method for formulating, assessing and intervening in organisational occupational risks. The point of departure is that everyday organising is largely due to the discourses dominating the specific workplace. Through focus groups the discourses can be identified. Thereafter it is possible to raise awareness and understanding of how they interact and create situations that generate ill-being. Interventions are made by problematising the current discourses and introducing new ones. Understanding the discourses can be seen as a prerequisite for success in organisational change and interventions.

PI: Lisbeth Rydén, consultant and doctoral student in Business Administration at KTH Royal Institute of Technology
Financing: AFA. Project period 2010–2015. From 2016 – the method will be further developed and form a basis for Ryden’s PhD thesis

4.1.4. An ongoing evaluation of the project HICube – competent health care
The project HICube – competent healthcare is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and conducted by researchers at Halmstad University. The aim of the project is to contribute with new and innovative ways for developing skills and knowledge in the health care sector. The primary target group for the knowledge development activities are the middle managers, who will function as intermediates towards the staff and the patients. CTA is conducting an ongoing evaluation (Följeforskning) of the project.

PI: Maria Svenér, CTA, Malmö University; Project participators: Anders Edvik and Peter Håkansson, CTA, Malmö University
Financing: Halmstad University. Project period: 2016–.

4.2. Organisational and social work environment for the employees in HSOs
The three projects described below focus on the employees’ working environment in HSOs, more specifically in dental care and in social work. Taken together these projects will provide valuable knowledge illuminating demands and resources of HSO employees. These projects will not require funding from the programme.

4.2.1. The organisational and social working environment and the quality of dental care
The project adds innovative knowledge on the complex interplay between working conditions in dentistry and oral public health. Quality of work can be considered as one of the most valuable goals for human service workers and organisations as it is closely connected to the core of work. The overall aim is to investigate the relationship between work environment and dental care quality at the clinic level and to evaluate self-assessed care quality as an indicator of objective dental care quality at the clinic level. Data from workplace surveys conducted as part of the ongoing Swedish validation project of COPSOQ II and prospective register data on the outcomes, longevity of dental fillings and adverse events will be analysed by Structural Equation Modelling, using propensity scores for confounding adjustment.


4.2.2. Social workers’ organisational and social work in a time of major change
The aim of the project is to investigate how social workers’ organisational and social work environment develops as the result of the various initiatives that the organisation is taking to remedy the identified health and safety problems. This project aims at analysing the interaction between resources and demands and how this in turn affects health, job engagement, employee turnover and the self-assessed quality of work performed. All social workers in the city of Malmö will be part of this study, carried out by means of repeated surveys and interviews over a three-year period. The first data collection has taken place in spring 2016. The material will primarily be analysed at the workplace level in order to identify relevant organisational solutions for addressing work environment problems.


4.2.3. Psychosocial work environment and prediction of job satisfaction among Swedish registered nurses and physicians – a follow-up study
The aims of this study were to analyse similarities and differences in Registered Nurses and physicians’ experience of their psychosocial work environment in 2002 and 2009 and to analyse the stability in the prediction of job satisfaction over time. Questionnaires were distributed in 2002 and 2009, and a total of 860 nurses and 866 physicians answered the questionnaire. The results indicate
that the work environment had improved between 2002 and 2009 and that nurses experienced their psychosocial working environment as more satisfactory than physicians did. Social support, control, role conflicts, role clarity and qualitative demands were the best predictors of job satisfaction, while quantitative demands did not contribute to predicting job satisfaction. Variables predicting job satisfaction were quite stable over time and comparable for both nurses and physicians.


4.3. Organisational and social work environment for the first-line managers in HSOs

We have two projects that study the first-line managers’ (FLMs) working environment; the first one focuses on school leaders while the second one has its focus on the care sector. These projects are described in more detail below.

As there is a lack of studies focusing on FLMs’ role in HSOs we plan for a larger questionnaire study where we will test our questionnaire on organisational and social safety climate. The questionnaire data will be combined with qualitative data, such as shadowing of the FLM in order to reveal how their role as intermediates is constructed. The project will give valuable insight for the forthcoming interventions that we plan to conduct during the second period of the programme. This project will form a basis for a doctoral thesis and will be mainly funded by the programme budget.

4.3.1. School leader resilience in turbulent times: The interplay between individual capacity and organisational resources in the psychosocial work environment

The aim of this project is to study school leaders’ psychosocial environment with a focus on the concept of leadership resilience as an analytical lens to generate a deeper understanding of the dynamic interplay of environmental, organisation and individual demands and resources for developing school leadership resilience. This project has a mixed methods design (questionnaires and interviews). All categories of school leaders from pre-school to upper secondary school are included. This enables us to analyse differences between different categories and sectors (private vs. public). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory will provide a deeper understanding of not only the job demands, but also the resources that motivate and engage school leaders. The project will contribute new knowledge to the research area of school leadership by employing the JD-R theory with a focus on school leadership resilience in the organisational context.


4.3.2. Organisational and social security climate – first-line managers in the care sector

First-Line Managers (FLMs) have a central and complex role in organisations, but despite this, they have rarely been the focus of psychosocial work environment research. The project idea is to investigate the working environment of FLMs with a focus on the importance of organisational and social safety climate in the context of health care organisations.

Besides the fact that the psychosocial work environment can have implications for health, well-being and work engagement for FLMs, the managers’ high stress levels and low well-being seems to transfer to the subordinates. Safety climate is important for all employees in the workplace, but is particularly interesting in relation to the FLM, as they are not only affected themselves but also affect the climate for their employees. We want to develop PSC as the central concept of organisational and social safety environment and analyse the complex relationships that FLMs are involved in their daily work. By adding a gender perspective on FLMs’ work situation the project will fill a knowledge gap regarding the organisational and social safety risks for women and men who are first-line managers.

The overall purpose of this project is to establish innovative knowledge which can be directly transferred to developing more proactive and comprehensive inspections for the Swedish work environment authority in the future.
4.4. Organisational and social factors related to bullying and harassment in HSOs

According to Eurofound (2015) 16% of workers have been exposed to different kinds of harassing behaviours. It appears that employees in the public sector such as nurses and care workers are exposed to increasing attacks. Violence at work can take many forms, from physical violence to more subtle forms of psychological harassing behaviours. Physical violence has been recognised as a problem in the work environment, while the psychological forms of violence have started to get attention quite recently. No matter what form the violence or harassment takes, it is considered to have negative consequences for both the employees and the organisations.

We have an ongoing project about cyberbullying at work and plan to conduct another study about the bullying witnesses role related to the organisational and social safety climate in the HSOs. This project will form a basis for a doctoral thesis and will be funded through the programme budget.

4.4.1. Cyberbullying at work

Cyberbullying in the workplace is a relatively new but growing phenomenon that is likely to have negative consequences for individuals, organisations and society at large. The aim of the current project is (1) to study the prevalence of cyberbullying and its different expressions as they appear in various places of work, and (2) to explain and illustrate the consequences of cyberbullying for the individual worker and work organisation. After a pilot study with interviews and a questionnaire on Facebook, a large questionnaire study was conducted among working adults in Southern Sweden. The questionnaire study followed up with interviews with victims or witnesses of cyberbullying in order to identify underlying causes and highlight the consequences of cyberbullying for the individual worker and work organisation. By increasing the knowledge and understanding of cyberbullying the results of the project can be used as support and help for developing preventive practices in different organisations.

The project is funded by FAS and will be carried out 2013–2018.


4.4.2. Witnesses to work-related bullying

The aim of the project is to investigate how bystanders of workplace bullying act and the consequences of this in relation to face-to-face as well as cyber-bullying. The project will provide new insight into how bystanders act in relation to different kinds of bullying, investigating which individual and organisational factors are related to bystanders’ behaviour in the bullying situations and how the actual behaviour is related to health, work engagement, job satisfaction and intention to remain in the organisation among bystanders. The project is based on the theoretical reasoning behind organisational and social safety climate. The target group is the health care sector: doctors and nurses will be included in the study. The study design comprises surveys, interviews and virtual focus groups. The project will contribute new knowledge about workplace-related bullying that managers and human service organisations such as the health care sector can use in their preventive work regarding the work environment.

PI: Sandra Jönsson, CTA, Malmö University. Project participators: Tuija Muhonen and a doctoral student. Project period: 2017–. Project financing: Jönsson’s and Muhonen’s salaries will be co-financed by Malmö University, The doctoral student will be funded from programme grant.
5. Work plan: organisation and time plan for the programme

5.1. The research environment

The programme will be conducted at the Centre for Work Life and Evaluation Studies (CTA) at Malmö University. The research group at CTA is multidisciplinary and includes subjects such as economic history, human geography, psychology, sociology, public health and political science, thereby representing a broad competence with a wide range of theoretical approaches and research methods. Multidisciplinarity is also a distinguishing characteristic of CTA’s research projects. CTA hosts open research seminars where scholars as well as practitioners and experts from other organisations take part. In Table 1 the researchers and the projects involved in the programme are presented.

Table 1. Researchers and projects affiliated to the research programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Projects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanne Berthelsen, Dr Odontology, MPH Researcher</td>
<td>Work and health among first-line health care staff – validation and a new base for Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire in Sweden COPSOQ Sweden – a bridge between research and practice concerning work environment issues The organisational and social working environment and the quality of dental care Social workers’ organisational and social work in a time of major change Organisational and social security climate – first-line managers in care sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anders Edvik, PhD Work science, Senior lecturer Leadership and organisation</td>
<td>School leader resilience in turbulent times: The interplay between individual capacity and organisational resources in the psychosocial work environment An ongoing evaluation of the project HICube – competent health care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecka Forssell, MA Social work, Doctoral student</td>
<td>Cyberbullying at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Håkansson, PhD Economic history, Researcher</td>
<td>Organisational and social safety climate – first-line managers in care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra Jönsson, PhD Psychology, Associate Professor of Leadership and Organisation, Head of Dept. of Urban Studies</td>
<td>Cyberbullying at work Psychosocial work environment and prediction of job satisfaction among Swedish registered nurses and physicians Witnesses to work-related bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuija Muhonen, PhD Psychology, Associate Professor of Psychology, Professor Work Science, Director of CTA</td>
<td>Cyberbullying at work Witnesses to work-related bullying School leader resilience in turbulent times: The interplay between individual capacity and organisational resources in the psychosocial work environment Social workers’ organisational and social work in a time of major change Organisational and social security climate – first-line managers in care sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisbeth Rydén, MA Business administration, Doctoral student in Business Administration, KTH</td>
<td>Discursive occupational risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Svenér, Fil. Lic, Business Administration</td>
<td>Evaluation of the HICube project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakob Tornberg, MA Social Work, doctoral student</td>
<td>Organisational and social security climate – first-line managers in care sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Witmer, PhD Applied Management, Researcher</td>
<td>School leader resilience in turbulent times: The interplay between individual capacity and organisational resources in the psychosocial work environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CTA was established in autumn 2007 and follows up to some extent the work of the regional office for National Institute for Working Life (NIWL) – Arbetslivsinstitutet Syd (ALI Syd). The research profile for ALI Syd was focused on human service organisations with the theme of *Prerequisites and conditions for occupations working with human beings/people.*

Initial funding for CTA was provided partly by NIWL’s public capital, partly by resources from Malmö University. Several researchers at CTA have also been successful in getting research grants from external agencies such as the Swedish Research Council, FAS, VINNOVA, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Scania Association of Local Authorities and the National Board of Health and Welfare.

The aim of establishing CTA was to create a research environment within the framework of applied working life research at Malmö University. Research at CTA is developed in conjunction with the university’s departments/faculties, and supports and coordinates already existing working life studies at Malmö University. A further objective is to develop a creative research environment in close cooperation with the local community. Another goal is to generate theoretical and empirical knowledge in order to create a knowledge centre at CTA.

By engaging in local, regional, national and international networks, Malmö University’s intention is that CTA will contribute to the development of working life studies. Working life studies is here regarded as a unifying concept for research and development (R&D) with the aim of studying and analysing working environments and working conditions in businesses, government agencies and other organisations, and contributing to the creation of healthy workplaces as well as successful and efficient companies and organisations.

From having initially had a diversified profile, research at CTA is now more focused in the area of organisational and social work environment issues in HSO, including both employees and different managerial levels. Being a research centre for applied work life studies, it is natural for us to engage in intervention studies, as we want that the knowledge gained in our projects should have practical relevance. Transferring knowledge from research to practice has been pointed out as one of the major issues in this research area (Forte, 2016).

### 5.2. Overall time plan for the programme

The ongoing projects will form the research milieu for the programme and Tuija Muhonen will coordinate the programme.

**WP A1:** Hanne Berthelsen will be the PI (50%) for the development of the instrument measuring Organisational and Social Safety Climate.

**WP A2:** The qualitative focus group method for assessing organisational and social climate will be further developed as part of Lisbeth Rydens PhD thesis.

**WP B1 & B2:** Two doctoral students (100%) will be employed in the programme. Their research will focus on First-line managers and organisational and social safety climate (WP B1), and Witnesses to work-related bullying (WP B2). Also a post-doc researcher (80%) will be employed in the programme.

**WP C1 & C2:** During the later period of the programme, we plan to employ two researchers as post-docs, 80% employment. Their primary focus will be intervention studies in collaboration between CTA and the HSOs.

Tuija Muhonen and Hanne Berthelsen will also be involved in the intervention studies. An overall time plan for the programme is presented in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctoral student</th>
<th>Witnesses to work-related bullying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral student</td>
<td>First-line managers and organisational and social safety climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-docs</td>
<td>Theoretical and empirical development of the construct Organisational and social safety climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time period</td>
<td>Research activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Year 2017        | Planning and start of the project WP A1  
|                  | Planning and continuation of project WP A2  
|                  | Recruitment of the two doctoral students and a post-doc researcher  
|                  | Planning and start of the projects WP B1 & WP B2  
|                  | Ongoing research in the other projects included in the programme                                                                                                                                                 |
| Year 2018-2019   | Ongoing research (WP A1, WP A2, WP B1, WP B2)  
|                  | Ongoing research in the other projects included in the programme  
|                  | Applications for funding of new projects  
|                  | Publications, conferences  
|                  | Planning for the coming programme period  
|                  | Recruitment of post doc for WP C1                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Year 2020-2021   | Intervention studies WP C1  
|                  | Recruitment of post doc for WP C2  
|                  | Intervention studies WP C1  
|                  | Publications  
|                  | PhD theses                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Year 2022        | Analysis and synthesis of the lessons learned from the interventions studies  
|                  | Publications  
|                  | Hosting a conference based on the results of the programme                                                                                                                                                         |

5.3. National networks and collaboration

Forum for work life research (FALF) is a network and platform for work life researchers in Sweden. An annual conference is arranged. All the researchers at CTA are members of FALF.

We collaborate with other universities in Sweden, e.g. Department of Psychology, Department of Business Administration, Lund University; Gothenburg Research Institute, Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of Gothenburg; Stress Research Institute and CHESS, Centre for Health Equity Studies, Stockholm University.

5.4 International networks and collaboration

We have ongoing collaboration with the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Finland through Professor Jari Hakanen and his colleagues. Professor Hakanen contributes to the programme with his expertise in positive organisational psychology and the JD-R model.

In relation to further development of PSC we have initiated collaboration with Professor Maureen Dollard, who has developed the instrument and is the leading researcher in integrating it with the JD-R model. Additionally, we collaborate with Dr Maren Formazin and Dr Michael Ertel, who are in charge of a project for further development and validation of PSC at The WHO Collaborating Centre for Occupational Health, Federal Institute for Occupational Safety & Health, Berlin, Germany.

Regarding COPSOQ, we have a number of collaborating partners worldwide, all active in the COPSOQ International Network. The network was founded in 2007. Today, researchers and practitioners from more than 25 countries are active in this network, which is led by a steering committee of five people, including Hanne Berthelsen, CTA. In particular we may mention close collaboration with the other members of the Steering Committee, coming from Germany, Spain and France. There is also close collaboration with Professor Tage Søndergård Kristensen, who developed the COPSOQ questionnaire together with colleagues from the Danish National Research Centre for the Working Environment.

In the Öresund region we have ongoing collaboration with researchers from the Danish National Research Centre for the Working Environment, Department of Psychology, Copenhagen University and the Department of People and Technology/Worklife, Roskilde University.
5.5. Advisory Board

CTA has an Advisory Board constituted of both scientists and practitioners in work life issues. In the advisory board meetings current research projects are discussed and participants contribute to the dissemination of the research results in their networks. Besides the CTA Advisory board following researchers will contribute with their expertise in the area:

- Senior researcher Thomas Clausen, the National Research Centre for the Working Environment, Copenhagen
- Professor Maureen Dollard, University of South Australia, Australia
- Professor Jari Hakanen, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Finland
- Professor Hugo Westerlund, Stress Research Institute, Stockholm University

6. Societal relevance

The programme is highly relevant considering the magnitude of the challenges that HSOs encounter today and will be facing in the future. The main challenges comprise a continued need for priority setting and being able to meet future demands of the population. Such changes require a proactive strategy of organisations in order to secure a healthy and motivated staff, who want to and are able to stay in this sector.

Knowledge of factors contributing to well-being and health at work is essential for planning of the health care, social and educational sectors of tomorrow, where shortage of manpower can be foreseen.

The employees in HSOs are predominantly women, illustrating the gender-segregated labour market in Sweden. Women take sick leave to a greater extent than men. In Sweden 45% of the ongoing illness cases for women are due to mental illness, and 34% for men (Försäkringskassan, 2015). This trend has been going on since the 1980s and it is specially the number of psychiatric diagnoses that has increased voluminously. The risk of developing psychiatric disorder is highest among those who are occupied in health care or school (AFA, 2015).

The new provisions of organisational and social work environment (AFS 2015:4) place emphasis on the organisational and relational aspects of the work environment, and human service work is mentioned as an example of particularly demanding working conditions, as is also the role of first-line managers. According to WHO and ILO the workplace is one of the key environments that affect our mental well-being and health (Harnois & Gabriel 2000). Therefore, this programme will be of high relevance for practitioners within occupational safety and health, HR departments as well as organisational policy makers in the public sector.

A poor work environment has implications not only for HSO employees as individuals, but it is also likely to affect the quality of their work. This in turn can have devastating consequences for the clients, patients etc., i.e. vulnerable individuals in need of help.

The societal relevance of the programme is strengthened further by the fact that we – as an applied research centre – are often consulted by HSOs, both trade unions and HR departments. Typically, they want advice and collaboration on monitoring whether their workplaces function according to the legislation and also regarding the handling of requirements arising from the Swedish Work Environment Authority’s inspections.

Relevant publications from the research group

Berthelsen, H (2010). Work-related support, community and trust-Dentistry in Sweden and Denmark: Malmö University, Faculty of Odontology, Department of Oral Public Health.


References for the programme description


Forte (2016). *Arbetsmiljön i kvinnodominerade sektorer*.


