Worker participation in the management of occupational safety and health — qualitative evidence from ESENER-2

Country report – Sweden

European Risk Observatory

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List of abbreviations

APT	Arbetsplatsträff
CEO	Chief executive officer
CoP	Community of practice
CSR	Chief (or senior, or head) safety representative
ESENER	European Survey on New and Emerging Risks
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
FTE	Full-time equivalent
HR	Human resources
HRM	Human resources manager
HSE	Health and safety executive
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IT	Information technology
KPI	Key performance indicator
LO	Landsorganisationen i Sverige (Swedish Trade Union Confederation)
LTI	lost time injury
MSD	musculoskeletal disorders
NIWL	National Institute for Working Life
NPM	New public management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSH	Occupational safety and health, in Sweden labelled work environment
OSHM	Occupational safety and health management
R&D	Research and development
RSR	regional safety representative
SACO	Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations
SEK	Swedish krona
SN	Svenskt Näringsliv, Confederation of Swedish Enterprise
SR	Safety representative
SWEA	Swedish Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket)
SWEM	Systematic work environment management
TCO	Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees
TFA	Trygghetsförsäkring vid arbetsskada
WEA	Work Environment Act

Glossary

AFA	The insurance company administrating the collective agreements' labour insurance, jointly run by the social partners
Arbetsplatsträff	Work floor meeting between supervisor and team members
Chief safety representative	Also known as senior or head safety representative, appointed to coordinate safety representatives' activities in workplaces with more than one safety representative
Communities of practice	The social construction of the meaning of work, including its risks and possible ways of handling them
Regional safety representative	Safety representative appointed by a union to support occupational safety and health in smaller workplaces in an area or district, provided that the workplace has at least one union member and no joint work environment committee
Systematic work environment management	The provisions transposing the EU's Framework Directive (89/391/EC) into Swedish law
Trygghetsförsäkring vid arbetsskada	The social partners' agreed insurance for occupational injuries and diseases, topping up public social insurance

1 Introduction: a qualitative follow up of ESENER-2

This report describes qualitative and quantitative aspects of worker participation in Swedish employers' mandatory systematic work environment management (SWEM). It also discusses major problems that this participation faces in the changing economy. The focus is mainly on the role, position and influence of safety representatives (SRs) in SWEM, as the representative form of participation has been dominant in Sweden for a long time (WEA, 2016: ch. 6; see section 3.3 below).

The study is part of an EU-wide project in seven Member States that also covers Belgium, Estonia, Greece, Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. These countries were selected because they cover a variety of economies, labour markets and regulations on worker participation in occupational safety and health (OSH) across the European Union. This project in turn is a qualitative follow-up of ESENER-2, the Second European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks, which took place in 2014, interviewing almost 50,000 establishments employing at least five people and across all activity sectors, in 36 European countries. Carried out by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), ESENER aims to provide information on how safety and health are managed in the workplace, with a particular focus on psychosocial risks, worker participation, and drivers and barriers to action. To complement the ESENER survey and to deepen the understanding of worker participation, EU-OSHA set up this qualitative follow-up project. Like this one on Sweden, the national reports from the six other countries will be published separately. There will also be an overall analytical report on the forms and functions of the various types of worker participation in the employers' management of the work environment in the EU (by the Cardiff Work Environment Research Centre).

This report on Sweden is based mainly on three types of data. Primary data from 20 case-studies of establishments selected from the ESENER-2 sample and from interviews with 6 key informants, plus 3 short ones with union work environment officers, on the SRs' position and role. Finally, the report is also based on secondary data from a review of research, union reports and other similar sources.

The overall structure of the report is as follows:
- Chapter 2 will describe the research methods and our types of data.
- Chapter 3 presents the Swedish context for SRs.
- In Chapter 4, we present basic indicators on risks and health at work in Sweden.
- This context is summarised in Chapter 5 as key emergent themes of SRs' position and their influence on how the work environment is managed.
- Central results of the six key informant interviews are presented in Chapter 6.
- Chapter 7 is a short list of the 20 establishments studied.
- Chapter 8 presents key findings from these establishments.
- Finally Chapter 9 discusses those findings, and their limitations, against the background of the results of the interviews and of the literature review.

2 Case-study, interview and literature review data

2.1 The sample from which we selected 20 establishments

The 20 establishments in our study most probably had a more than average interest in their work environments and managed them more closely than average, and, connected to that, were doubtless more than usually interested in SR participation and influence in the employers' mandatory SWEM (AFS, 2001: 1). The positive bias is an effect of the selection mechanism. ESENER-2 was a statistical sample drawn from the population of 144,000 Swedish establishments with at least five employees, but only 27 % of these took part (EU-OSHA, 2016). Eighty-one per cent of those who answered agreed to be re-contacted (and provided their contact details). Our population from which to select the 20 establishments is thus 22 % of all relevant Swedish establishments. Consistent survey experience indicates that those interested in and positive about the survey's subject are much more prone to take the trouble to answer. With only 22 % choosing to participate in ESENER and also to be re-contacted, this bias is probably strong. Our 20 studied establishments should therefore be expected to be more positive about and active in managing the work environment than the total population of Swedish establishments or workplaces, as described in the presentation of national data on SWEM and on SRs in sections 3.2 and 3.3 below.

Our selected cases also have a further positive bias in their work environment management and the position of SRs. In consultation with EU-OSHA, the research team decided to focus on establishments that are (reasonably) fixed in organisation and place, and hence to avoid transport and construction. Many workers in the latter two industries are employed in supply chains or are posted, both of which make it harder to appoint SRs and for them to have an active and competent work environment cooperation with management (see section 3.3.4 below).

That our sample of establishments is biased towards a positive attitude is further indicated by the fact that only 45 % of the Swedish respondents to ESENER-2 were single-site organisations, while 55 % were units in multi-site organisations. This is by far the highest rate of multi-site respondents among all the ESENER-countries. It also over-represents multi-site versus single-site establishments in Sweden by 11 times, as the latter are some 90 % of all establishments with at least five employees. Multi-sites organisations are nearly by definition (much) larger than single-site establishments. Single sites are also nearly always also firms, i.e. legally responsible employers. The positive bias in the SWEM of our sample is therefore even stronger in the small private establishments than in the medium-sized and large ones. Given that research consistently demonstrates that, on average, work environment management improves with increased firm-employer size (Frick, 1979; Antonsson and Arnberg, 1984; Walters, 2001; Frick, 2013a: ch. 10; Walters and Wadsworth, 2016), this enhances the positive bias of our 20 cases. It also emphasises the difference between on the one hand individual ESENER's establishments or workplaces as parts of larger employers and on the other independent firms as employers legally responsible for their own SWEM. For example, research indicates a clear difference in SWEM between a retail shop that is an individual small firm and one that is an outlet of a large retail corporation (Frick, 2013a: ch. 3).

ESENER-2's size limit of at least five employees is also the smallest size at which SRs are to be appointed in Swedish workplaces (WEA, 2016: 6:2). In 2014, there were SRs in roughly one in seven or eight of the Swedish workplaces or establishments where they should be appointed; coverage was much higher in the public sector and much lower in private services (see further section 3.3 below). In contrast, 76 % of the Swedish establishments that opted to answer the ESENER-2-survey had formal employee representation (EU-OSHA, 2016: 74) and nearly all of the establishments listed by ESENER-2 from which to select our 20 case-studies had local SRs (see Chapter 7). This is another indicator of the positive bias in ESENER and hence in our sampled case studies.

However, the ESENER respondents are probably more representative of the public than the private sector. Small public establishments are much more likely to have SRs than small private ones (Frick, 2013b). The few large public employers (nearly all of which have very many workplaces) have also organised the process requirements of the SWEM provisions — such as task delegation, risk assessments and action plans — better than the private employers, especially the small ones (Frick, 2013a). Although poor quality in the public sector employers' implementation of these routines often hampers the preventive effectiveness of their SWEM, they nevertheless mostly formally exist in such organisations and can thus be expressed as affirmative answers to ESENER-2's questions. This

conclusion is supported by answers to ESENER-2, in which a much higher proportion of Swedish public-sector establishments reported both the presence of SRs and involvement of them in the design of measures to address risk than did private establishments (EU-OSHA, 2016: figs 3 and 6; see also the broader data on SWEM practices by sector in section 3.2 below). We lack data to differentiate between the response rates to ESENER-2 by public in by private establishments, but the more common existence of SRs and of SWEM routines may make public-sector workplaces or establishments more willing to answer ESENER-2 than the private-sector ones with fewer of either.

2.2 Issues in the case-studies

While the absolute figures in the ESENER-2 responses on various aspects of occupational safety and health management (OSHM) are likely to be exaggerated compared with the total population of establishments, further analysis and internal comparisons between the answers to various ESENER-2 questions can still yield important knowledge (like the analysis of ESENER-1 data by Walters et al., 2012). Likewise, the probably positive bias in our 20 case-studies does not invalidate them as information sources. Twenty cases are evidently too few for any statistical inferences but instead what we are looking for in such a sample is variation in major context factors, such as size and major economic sectors, and we have achieved this aim. That the 20 cases are biased (although, thus, likely to be slightly less so in the public sector) can largely be compensated for by comparisons with other available data. Such a mixed method is the basis for our conclusions and overall analysis of the results in Chapter 9.

However, our results are still mainly indicative. They are — apart from the existing data — mainly based on the 20 studies of establishments, which can best be described as mini-case-studies. An advantage of doing qualitative case-studies (while having the disadvantage of no statistical representation) is the possibility to follow up and compare various leads, for example through repeated interviews and checking documents (Flyvbjerg, 2006). A normal case-study thus requires time for repeated visits and document analysis, but this project did not allow such a methodology. Our data gathering was limited to one visit to interview (at least) representatives of management and of workers. However, we could often collect some complementary information, such as an extra interview, subsequent information through emails, short telephone interviews, conversations with workers and information about establishments from their websites. In combination with previous knowledge of work environment management and of SRs' participation and influence in this, the data from the studied establishments provided much of the information sought in this project. The results are fairly extensive on what the establishments did in SWEM and their SRs' participation in this but they are more tentative on why they did so (see key findings in Chapter 8).

For practical reasons, we selected mostly establishments not far from Stockholm. This hardly added any significant bias; our 20 studied establishments should reflect the situation in all of the Swedish ESENER-2-sample. The economic structure in the Stockholm area is different from that in the rest of Sweden. However, the regional differences in relative size of industries are corrected for in our sample, through the nine-box matrix of three sectors each of three sizes. Otherwise, the logics within each industry in combination with nationally consistent industrial relations and work environment systems result in no systematic difference in the issues of this project between. For example, a school run by the city of Stockholm and one run by a small rural municipality are quite similar. That geography has little or no influence has also been demonstrated in various studies on SWEM and SRs (for example Frick, 1979, on small firms; Frick, 2013a, on SWEM; and Frick, 2013c, on municipalities).

To protect the anonymity of the ESENER participants, our potential case-studies were selected from a list of establishments put together by TNS (the company that carried out the fieldwork for ESENER-2). Even though the establishments had expressed an interest in being re-contacted, first in the ESENER-2 survey, and then again in response to a contact made by TNS, several establishments declined to participate in our Swedish study.

The same nine-box code plan for size (small, medium and large) and sector (private manufacturing, private services, public sector) was used in all the seven Member States studied. At least two establishments were included in each category, except categories 1 and 5 (see chapter 7), of which only one establishment each was visited. However, several discrepancies were found between the sizes and sectors of the establishments in the list provided by TNS and what we encountered. We have throughout

used the 'real' size and sector of our establishments, which means that our definitions of the establishments visited deviate slightly from the ESENER-2 results.

All establishments were promised anonymity. Therefore, they are not presented by company name but are given descriptive names by the researchers that are intended to signify the character of the establishment without exposing its identity. All interviewees at the establishments were also promised anonymity. They are presented by general title with little detail, to prevent identification. For the same reason, when using quotes in the more critical parts of the analysis, even less detail is given, for example by leaving out at what establishment the quoted interviewee works.

All interviews were recorded, but not transcribed in their entirety. Given the limited resources for the project, the researchers have listened to the recordings, making notes and making partial transcriptions. The analysis is based on the notes from the case-studies. The quotes presented in this report, however, are not generated from complete transcriptions. For some establishments, few or no transcriptions were made, so they have not been quoted in this report, although they are included in the analysis.

2.3 Key informant interviews and complementary interviews

Key informants add information to the literature review and the case-studies. Chapter 3 will further describe the context of Sweden's industrial relations and work environment (regulatory) systems, but in short the trade unions and the employer organisations still organise a large majority of all employees and employers (measured as proportion of the workforce) and they are quite active, often in cooperation with each other, in all aspects of the work environment. Work environment officers/experts from the central unions and employer organisations therefore have relevant knowledge and experience of how SWEM is implemented at their own establishments, including the position and influence of SRs within SWEM.

To tap this knowledge we interviewed work environment officers/experts of Almega (the largest employer organisation in the private services sector; Jan Johansson, 2016-03-08), of Teknikföretagen (the largest employer organisation in private manufacturing; Björn Hammar, 2015-09-10), of Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting (SALAR, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions – i.e. Municipalities and County councils – the largest public-sector employer organisation; Ned Carter, 2016-05-11), of Landsorganisationen i Sverige (LO, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, the union federation for blue-collar workers; Sten Gellerstedt, 2016-04-04) and of Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation (SACO, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations, the union federation for academic staff; Fristedt, 2016-04-04). From the white-collar federation Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation (TCO, Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees), quantitative information and qualitative assessments of the SRs in the unions were sent by mail (Lise Donovan, private communication 2016-03-09; see the union structure in section 3.1.2 below).

SRs are normally (i.e. nearly always) appointed through the local employees' unions with a collective agreement, which also uphold the SRs' rights (WEA, 2016: ch. 6). The Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA, Arbetsmiljöverket) is obliged by the act to support cooperation between the social partners and to interact with the SRs, but the authority has no SR policy. To get the view on SRs of the third major actor, the state, we interviewed the political secretary of the Minister for Labour (Rasmus Cruce Naeye, 2016-03-05), with a special focus on the government's recent work environment strategy for 2016-2020 (Regeringen, 2016; see section 3.3.4). All interviews included open questions prepared for each interviewee. The major results of the interviews are presented in Chapter 6 below. Together with the emergent themes of the literature review of the context, the interviews are used to analyse the key findings from the establishments (in Chapter 9).

Shorter telephone interviews were also conducted with 3 union work environment officers, to complement findings from the 20 establishments:

- Christer Roos (2016-04-21) at the construction workers' union on why their SRs rarely appealed to the SWEA despite frequent grievances, largely due to problems with subcontracting;

- Erik Hallsenius (2016-04-24) at the larger of the two teachers' unions on why their chief safety representatives (CSRs) rarely if ever use their right to raise organisational and social health risks at the higher political levels that determine much of the schools' work environment;
- Håkan Sundman (2016-05-09) at the Stockholm branch of the industrial workers' union IF Metall, on for which small firms the union has appointed regional safety representatives (RSRs.

2.4 Literature review and quantitative data

In 2015, we surveyed the broader socio-economic and industrial relations background of Swedish worker participation and representation was charted. This was mainly based on a review chapter on the system and situation of SRs in Sweden (Frick, 2013b) and a broad research review of the employers' SWEM (Sweden's implementation of EU Directive 89/391/EC; Frick and Johanson, 2013; Frick, 2013a; summarised in English by Frick, 2014). These (and some of the statistics and research on which they build) provide the major background on worker participation in work environment management in Sweden.

The research reviews have been complemented with more recent secondary data. Figures and facts have, as far as possible, been updated. New research and reports have also been used to describe the context and as a basis to analyse findings from the primary data from the ESENER establishments visited and the interviews. These include the government's work environment strategy 2016-2020 (Regeringen, 2016), the EU's ESENER-2 data on Sweden and work environment surveys by unions to their SRs. Several other recent studies are used for both the context (Chapter 3 below) and the discussion of the findings from establishments and interviews (Chapter 9).

2.5 Conclusions on the methods and possible data

The 20 case studies do not represent a statistically representative sample of Swedish establishments or workplaces in quantitative terms. However, as in other case-studies (Flyvbjerg, 2006), establishments from various sectors and of different sizes can still give qualitative insights into the national system for worker participation — mainly into how SRs operate in establishments with more organised SWEM practices and more positive attitudes to worker participation — after several decades of changes in economic and employment structures, since the SR system was largely set up during the 1970s (Frick, 2002, 2013b). To better understand the relevance of the case-study results, Chapter 9 sets them against the broader descriptions and assessments in the informant interviews and the findings of the literature review.

3 The Swedish context of worker representation

3.1 Labour market and industrial relations

3.1.1 An open and strong economy with more and more services

Sweden's economy and welfare model grew after the Second World War. A nearly continuous boom lasted until the oil crisis during the 1970s, when international competition also caught up with our export manufacturing industry. However, unemployment was kept low (rarely above 4 %) until Sweden's domestic economic crisis of 1991-1994. The economy shrank for three consecutive years while unemployment and public budget deficits soared. From 1995, the economy recovered through restructuring, deregulation and cutbacks in public spending and staffing in the welfare sector. Despite relatively high economic growth since 1995, unemployment has not been less than 6 %.

Sweden now has a deregulated and open economy. Half of its gross national product is made up of exports and imports. From the dominance of manufacturing in the post-war decades, private services are now the largest and fast growing sector. In 2014, 2 % of workers were privately employed in the primary sector and mining, 20 % in manufacturing and utilities, 10 % in construction, 8 % in transport and trade, and 29 % in other private services, while 32 % were public employees (SCB, 2015; AKU, 2016). After a severe dip during the financial crisis of 2009, the economy has kept growing, at 3.4 % in 2016 and with a good outlook for the coming years. In 2006, 77 % of the men and 72 % of the women between 20 and 65 years of age were gainfully employed (including self-employment) (Ds, 2008). Unemployment has recently gone down slightly, but 7.6 % are still seeking work (AKU, 2016). Many unemployed people are young (22.6 % of those aged 15-24 years) or born abroad (17 % of unemployed people, according to Migrationsfakta. In 2016; 11.5 % of those born abroad are unemployed, according to Ekonomifakta, 2016a; 2016b). The problem of an aging population is not acute, but there will be fewer working people for each non-working person. This has resulted in a public inquiry into how to delay retirement and how to reduce work environment risks to promote employees' long-term work ability (SOU, 2013).

In 2015, 4.3 million people were employed in Sweden, and 0.6 million were self-employed (SCB, 2015). Reductions in manufacturing and a greater focus on their core business by corporations have created more supply chains with more and smaller firms and workplaces (AV, 2012a). Every year 45,000 new firms start up, and 80 % of them provide services (Ds, 2008). From 1993 to 2015, the registration of new firms and their number of employees more than tripled (Ekonomifakta, 2016c). Compared with the manufacturing and public sectors, the growing private service sector has smaller and more short-lived firms, younger staff and higher staff turnover (Frick, 2005). Employees are now spread over 395,000 workplaces, 63 % of which have between one and four employees. Only 1.5 % have at least 100 employees, but the latter still employ some two-thirds of the workforce (SCB, 2016). Part of the growth of supply chains has been in franchising firms, which accounted for more than 3 % of all employees in 2015 (Svenskfranchise, 2016). Self-employment nearly tripled between 1981 and 2010 (Ekonomifakta, 2011). In 2009, the government made self-employment possible even when the only customer is the former employer. Self- and temporary employment have grown to 14 % and 20 % respectively, and some 40 % of temporary employees have zero-hour contracts or are on standby (SCB, 2015). Privatisation of formerly completely public welfare services (health, care and schools) has since the 1990s made one-fifth of their staff into private employees, often working in small firms.

Sweden has a strong segregation between 'female' and 'male' jobs, not only across but also within sectors and workplaces. Women predominate in the public sector and in many private service industries (Westberg-Wohlgemut, 1996; Vänje, 2013). The population and labour market have gradually become more ethnically mixed. People born outside the Nordic countries increased by 39 % between 2003 and 2010 to form 12 % of the population. This proportion has since grown, with the influx of some 300,000 refugees since 2013, especially during 2015 (Migrationsfakta, 2016). Including posted workers and other temporary migrants, in 2010 EU citizens made up some 11 % of the workforce and another 9 % were from outside the EU (Migrationsverket, 2010). Since 2008, Sweden has had the most open, demand-driven labour immigration of all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Employers can freely recruit workers from abroad (including outside the EU) if they advertise the job beforehand and state that they will respect the conditions of prevailing collective agreements. However, these promises are not binding. Unions have often found actual wages and working conditions

to be much poorer than promised (LO, 2013). The OECD, therefore, recommends that Sweden reinforce its mechanisms to combat social dumping and ensure employer compliance with national standards (OECD, 2011). Globalisation also affects the labour market in other respects. People privately employed by foreign-owned companies in Sweden jumped from 4 % in 1980 to 22 % in 2014 (IVA/NUTEK, 2006; Tillväxtanalys, 2014). With increasing transnational corporate ownership, many manufacturing jobs have been exported since the 1990s and downsizing has become more common, including in profitable firms.

The economic and job structure changes outlined above have been accompanied by raised standards of education. Among adults (aged 25 to 65), close to half had only primary school education in 1970, but in 2010 15 % had only primary school education, 49 % secondary school, 22 % had academic bachelor degrees (three years training) and 14 % higher academic exams. Education varies geographically. In some wealthy suburbs and university towns, 40 % to 50 % of their populace have university degrees. In total, around 45 % of young women and 35 % of young men now start tertiary education. This is accompanied with fewer blue-collar and more professional jobs. Furthermore, few blue-collar jobs in manufacturing are now unskilled, although many unskilled jobs remain in private services. Those with higher education also receive a great deal more training from their employers than unskilled workers. However, many employees find that they cannot fully use their training and skills in their jobs, and also that there is too much control of their work, not least from IT systems (Gellerstedt, 2011). Surveys (for example Unionen, 2015; AV, 2014a, 2014b) indicate that stress and long and unregulated work hours are common, and are the most serious health risks including in highly qualified jobs.

This change in job structure has also increased individualism at work (Bruhn, 1999; Allvin and Sverke, 2000) as opposed to the traditional collective identity among manufacturing workers (Lysgaard, 1967). At the same time, there are aspects of proletarisation of professional jobs — much of it through new public management (NPM) forms of control in welfare jobs — and increased job strains through underfunding and through the growth of 'working without limits', for example through receiving work emails even at home (Unionen, 2015). Blue-collar workers are also often micromanaged in their jobs, through IT systems (Gellerstedt, 2011).

3.1.2 Deregulated labour relations but still collective agreements

At the peak of their strength, during the 1970s, the labour movement of LO and the ruling Social Democratic Party initiated a series of work reforms that remain the basis of Swedish labour law. Apart from the Work Environment Act (WEA), the most important were acts on:

- union representation on company boards;
- shop stewards' right to take paid time for their role;
- lay-off rules on 'first in, last out';
- co-determination, namely union rights to information and consultation before employers take decisions that affect employees.

Labour's strength and the corporatist and centralised labour market model begun to erode from the late 1970s. This increased with the economic crisis in the early 1990s. Most political tripartite corporatism has been dismantled and collective agreements are now reached at the industry level (although nationally coordinated). In combination with the changing economy and increased education, the labour market changes have affected the trade unions. The blue-collar ones in LO had 63 % of all members in 1975, the white-collar ones in TCO had 31 %, and the academic unions in SACO had 5 %. In 2015, LO had shrunk to 43 %, TCO had grown to 38 % and SACO had exploded to 19 % of all union members.

The level of unionisation shrank from 83 % in 1993 to 69 % in 2015, with 74 % unionisation in white-collar and 63 % in blue-collar occupations. Union decline accelerated when the government greatly increased the cost of membership in 2007. Membership varies by sector, from 81 % or more among public employees to 50 % or less in many private service companies. The unionisation rate is even lower among young workers in the cities, in small firms and some service trades, with, for example, 28 % in

the growing hotel and restaurant industry. The number of employers without collective agreements has at the same time grown to some 160,000 (55 % of all; Kjellberg, 2016).

Sweden joined the EU in 1995 but rejected the euro in 2003 after the government lost a plebiscite. Few adaptations to adopt the EU's work environment *acquis* were required, as most regulations were ahead of the EU's. However, other EU decisions have affected industrial relations and thereby the work environment actors. The Directive on Posted Workers and some EU court verdicts (e.g. the Laval case, C-319/05) weaken the Nordic industrial relations model of primarily settling wages and most other working conditions in collective agreements, rather than in legal regulations (Bruun et al., 1992). Unions can now take only limited industrial action to uphold some minimal conditions for posted workers, which has increased the risk of a dual labour market with social dumping (LO, 2013).

The economic crisis of 1991-1994 shifted the governance model from the earlier preference for social engineering during the reform years after the Second World War, towards new public management and market solutions. Public services are now managed by quantitative targets and they are being gradually privatised. One in five employees in publicly financed welfare services, such as schools and care, now work for private employers (AF, 2011). Public infrastructures are being transformed into private corporations. There are fewer, simpler and more general regulations. The labour market has to a large extent been deregulated, making it easier to use supply chains with casual and/or imported labour.

Despite all of these changes, the Swedish/Nordic industrial relations model remains largely intact (Sandberg, 2013). Some 90 % of the employees still work under collective labour contracts, as larger employers are unionised and the unions sign contracts with many un-unionised ones (Kjellberg, 2016). Unions and employers retain much influence on labour policies through e.g. meetings with authorities. The social partners also maintain many joint bodies and projects at national and sector levels. This cooperation has for a long time included the white-collar unions TCO and SACO and the public employers (Rothstein and Bergström, 1998), and it is especially strong on work environment issues.

3.2   Regulating the work environment and its management

3.2.1   Much voluntarism to implement work environment regulation

Swedish ministries are small. Policies are specified and executed through the often large national authorities. Ministers govern these by general instructions, by the acts the authorities are to implement, by appointing their directors-general and boards, by the size of their budgets and by giving them special tasks, usually in their annual appropriation letters. The authorities interact with their relevant interest organisations, which are major actors in Swedish politics, including the social partners. This also goes for the SWEA.

Work environment policies were reformed through several acts and other measures during the 1970s, the most important of which is the Work Environment Act (WEA, 2016) from 1978. The WEA covers (nearly) all conditions and actors that may influence work-related health. It is a framework act with broad requirements and a general preventive duty for employers, for those who produce, import and market products for use at work, and also for other actors in the construction industry. However, these general duties are rarely invoked. Instead, risks are regulated in provisions issued by the SWEA under mandate in the act. Material work environment requirements mostly also apply to work by the self-employed. Since the 1990s, many specific provisions (or standards) have been replaced by fewer and overarching performance-oriented ones. The total sections in the provisions have been cut to one-third.

After some failed attempts (Andersson et al., 1981 Linde et al., 2005; Bruhn and Frick, 2011), the SWEA has recently issued highly publicised and much commented provisions on the organisational and social work environment (AFS, 2015: 4; in force from 31 March 2016). These cover three areas: mental workload, working times and bullying at work. The provisions are mainly a compilation of existing requirements on how to prevent these risks, including earlier SWEA injunctions upheld by courts. The provisions specify various such risks and preventive measures. The latter are to be implemented within the employers' SWEM (see below). The new provisions have been accompanied with much information from the SWEA, especially to employers.

This is in line with Swedish work environment policies, which from the start have been consensus oriented and primarily aim to advise and persuade employers to assess and address risks. The SWEA still uses information and guidance as a major strategy, and formal enforcement and sanctions for violating provisions (Table 3.1) or after accidents are rare. The great majority of employers comply with the non-binding requirements of the SWEA's inspection notices without the need for cumbersome enforcement (Frick, 2011a,b). However, to increase the imposition of sanctions by simplifying the legal process, since 2014 fines have been specified for violations of all requirements in the provisions that are deemed to be clear enough. In January 2015, this covered 48 requirements (AV, 2016a). In 2014, the first year in which this was operational, the SWEA issued 55 fines; the number grew to 355 in 2015 (AV, 2016a). The new fines and the use of other forms of sanction (Table 3.1) should be seen in the context of a one-third cut in the SWEA's funding between 2006 to 2009 and a consequent reduction in the number of workplace inspections from 20,500 in 2006 to 13,600 in 2015 (yearly reports: AV, 2009; AV, 2010a; AV, 2011d; AV, 2012a; AV, 2016a; Johansson, 2016a). The SWEA can now inspect the increasing number of small employers once in 25-30 years.

3.2.2 Regulation and supervision of systematic work management

The 1970s reforms strengthened three work environment actors: the state's regulation and inspection, the employees and their SRs, and the experts in research and development (R&D) and occupational health services. However, a wave of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) during the 1980s demonstrated that this was not enough. Too frequently, work environment activities were in a 'sidecar' position: engaging in local dialogue but separate from real decision making (Frick, 1994). The fourth and most important actor, the employers, thus had to be mobilised to improve their management of the work environment (SOU, 1990).

Based on a change in the WEA in 1991, the 1993 provisions on internal control introduced employers' mandatory self-regulation as the primary strategy to safeguard health at work. The new reform tried to integrate them into the management of production and its working conditions. Internal control had domestic origins but was part of the international trend towards process regulation of OSHM (Frick et al., 2000). It incorporated the EU's Framework Directive (89/391/EEC) into Swedish law, but it gave workers stronger participatory rights than the directive (see section 3.3.1 below) and required better quality control of OSHM by stipulating a feedback and learning loop of internal audit and improvement. The SWEA now combines process requirements with the old material ones to implement the WEA. Risk assessments are the basis of many provisions, including those on chemical hazards and on MSDs.

The internal control provisions were updated and renamed systematic work environment management (SWEM) in 2001 (AFS, 2001). Since then, labour inspectors cite them far more than any other provisions (AV, 2008a, 2016a; Johansson, 2016a), they accounted for 57 % of all requirements in the inspection notices issued by SWEA in 2015.

Table 3-1   Inspections and notices by type of requirements 2007-2015

Actions	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015
Visited workplaces	20,500	19,000	20,300	19,200	13,600
Inspection notices	14,000	13,000	13,700	11,500	8,500
Requirements in these	54,000	46,000	42,000	40,800	26,300

Actions	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015
SWEM (risk assessment etc.) (%)	40	41	45	50	5
Technical (%)	21	22	19	20	16
Hygiene and chemicals (%)	21	20	18	14	15
Psychosocial and ergonomic (%)	19	16	18	17	13
Injunctions or prohibitions	750	889	941	1,034	519
References to prosecution	240	259	351	303	123

3.2.3 Employers mostly delegate SWEM to line managers

A research review for the SWEA evaluated how employers implement SWEM provisions (in Swedish as Frick and Johanson, 2013; and Frick, 2013a; both are summarised in English in Frick, 2014. Manager surveys were deemed to be neither valid nor reliable tools to indicate the level and type of compliance with these procedural provisions (Frick and Johanson, 2013: 34-36).The review was instead mainly based on some 270 reports, mainly of case-studies but also other reviews, comparative studies, labour inspection campaign reports and work environment statistics. The validity of these mainly qualitative findings was supported by the very consistent results of the reviewed studies.

To understand what SWEM requires employers to do – i.e. the implementation model – the evaluation distinguished three levels in the provisions' sections:

1. What should be done? Procedures to detect and abate risks:
- organised routines (section 5);
- task allocation (section 6);
- risk assessments, including before changes are made (section 8);
- action plans and follow-ups of their measures (section 10).

2. How should it be done? Methods of implementing the procedures:
- integrate SWEM into daily management (section 3);
- invite employees and their SRs to participate in all of SWEM (section 4);
- empower those who have SWEM tasks with budget, time, competence and authority (section 6);
- give employees sufficient information on risks and risk control (section 7);
- engage OSH services if/when managers lack sufficient competence (section 12).

3. Management checking that the SWEM procedures eliminate or reduce all risks:
- employers to manage their operations to avoid causing injuries or ill health (section 2);
- SWEM to cover all relevant physical, psychological and social conditions (section 3);
- a policy with work environment objectives to prevent work-related ill health (section 5);
- audit SWEM practices each year and (if necessary) improve them (section 11).

The review evaluated SWEM by industry and size. With normal variations between employers, SWEM practices turned out to be very similar across industries. The compliance of larger employers (under 50 employees are presented below) is best at the first level: the required procedures. Nearly all organise SWEM with documented task allocation, risk assessments and action plans for unresolved problems. However, the assessments are rarely comprehensive, nor are plans always implemented. This form of SWEM is more effective against technical risks in continuing operations than against organisational risks and when changes are planned. Large employers often have employee surveys with questions on psychosocial risks, but few have SWEM that acts effectively against such risks. These may instead recur as, for example, high stress levels in the next survey.

This narrow implementation — with more focus on documented procedures than on eliminating risks — is mainly caused by deficiencies at the second level. Employers rarely empower their SWEM actors sufficiently. Written task allocations and instructions and at least some training are normal, but instructions may be unclear and training is mostly insufficient. However, the SWEM review found that managers (and others) rarely have enough resources — time, funding, competence and authority (as is specified in the provisions) — for their SWEM. When they often complain of lack of time for SWEM, this means that senior management has not prioritised the work environment enough to focus line managers on their SWEM tasks (Frick and Johanson, 2013). LO's SRs considered that managers very often lack these SWEM resources, and again the situation was worst in service industries (Gellerstedt, 2012). When provisions specify what employers must do to counter a risk, managers can generally obtain funding for this. However, many technical risks are still not assessed and resolved because managers have limited SWEM capability. Employers with limited SWEM capacity rarely hire OSH services to improve their work environment management. Rather, these services are more often and more appropriately used by 'good' employers who are trying to become even better, while most employers with OSH services (internal but mostly externally hired) use them primarily for various forms of health care, including rehabilitation (SOU, 2011).

Worker participation is mandatory in SWEM, to support its effective implementation. There is also much dialogue between managers and particularly SRs, e.g. in workplace meetings and joint work environment committees. However, this participation is in practice less effective to improve OSH-conditions. Employees and representatives often face passive managers with limited SWEM capability (Frick and Johanson, 2013). This passive, and sometimes active, resistance (Gellerstedt, 2012) is more common in relation to expensive or more complex problems, which (again) are mainly organisational risks for physical and mental overload. In practice, SRs have limited opportunities to use their extensive legal rights of participation and influence, encountering, for example, problems in getting time off and in relation to restrictions in how risks are socially constructed in the so called communities of practice at work (Sjöström, 2013). Nevertheless, the mentioned SWEM evaluation also found examples of active SRs having good dialogue with managers, sometimes even on organisational issues.

The third level – of a management control of SWEM, to ensure that it assesses and resolves all major risks — is the least implemented. Policies are common but they rarely have work environment objectives that are clear enough to guide SWEM and against which to evaluate its practices and results. SWEM is often 'evaluated' in the sense of yearly follow-ups, but these focus on procedures (for example numbers of safety rounds and joint meetings). Most employers with significant accident risks have, and monitor, objectives to minimise lost time injuries (LTIs) and try to improve their safety. However, occupational diseases are by far the most common risks, causing at least four-fifths of all ill health from poor work environments (Hämäläinen et al., 2009). These long-term risks are, however, 'measured' only as sickness absence, which is a very poor indicator of health risks at work (Larsson et al., 2005). Few employers, therefore, have objectives for, check, audit or improve their SWEM against most of their work risks.

Nevertheless, although causality is hard to demonstrate, the SWEM evaluation indicated that the active promotion of the provisions seems to have led to a more effective (albeit far from complete) assessment and reduction of risks of accidents, noise, chemicals, vibrations and also micro-ergonomics (for example adequate lifting equipment), especially when other provisions specify what should be done. Some of the reviewed studies also describe how ambitious line managers find ways around too restrictive SWEM — as organised and monitored by higher level managers — to resolve work environment problems by any means.

SWEM practices are thus basically the same across industries, but there are still differences between them. Large manufacturers have safety traditions that often help them to significantly (although not fully) integrate SWEM into their management, for example to also reduce MSD risks. On the other hand, the even larger public employers seem to be less successful. They have a social dialogue tradition and a formally well-organised SWEM that is fairly effective against technical risks. Nonetheless, they have a structurally limited ability to manage their prevalent organisational health risks of mental and physical overload. These employers tend to delegate SWEM down to poorly resourced line managers with limited feed-back to the higher levels that determine working conditions in, for example, schools and hospitals (Frick, 2013a: ch. 5-7; Frick, 2013c).

Small firms have implemented SWEM to a lesser extent. In line with other results on their work environment management (for example Hasle and Limborg, 2006), the review found less organisation, competence and capability in how they manage risks at work (Frick, 2013a: ch. 10). This ineffective SWEM is linked to small firm managers frequently overestimating both their knowledge and the quality of their work environments. They rarely use OSH services or other advisers to support their SWEM. Their SWEM also has limited worker participation. Small firms have only one-third as many SRs per employee as in larger employers and the few lone local SRs have a weak position, as the social construction of work is dominated by the manager-owner Frick, 2013b). Nevertheless, many of the larger small enterprises (with 20-49 employees) have started to implement SWEM to some extent, which may reduce technical risks in particular.

3.3 Safety representatives' cooperation with managers

3.3.1 Strong right for worker representation in the employers' systematic work environment management

The role — albeit often too ineffective — of worker participation and representation in SWEM is a major example of how work environment policies have long been supported by social dialogue. The social partners had a say in the tripartite governance of labour and social policies even before the general franchise in 1921. This includes workers' right to appoint local SRs since 1912. The cooperation increased after the growing LO (blue-collar federation) and the employers in the SAF (Svenska ArbetsgivareFöreningen, now Svenskt Näringsliv, SN) reached a historic compromise and general agreement in 1938 in Saltsjöbaden. The SAF and LO then agreed in 1942 on cooperation to promote workplace safety. From then on, until the crisis of the early 1990s, these social partners 'owned' Swedish work environment policies, through much cooperation but also by dominating initiatives, public inquiries and the national authority's board. That formal corporatism was abolished during the crisis of 1991-1994, but the social partners — including the white-collar federations TCO and SACO and the public employers — still cooperate a great deal with each other and the SWEA on work environment issues (Frick, 2011a). According to its instructions, a major task of the government authority, the SWEA, is to promote cooperation between employers and employees on the work environment.

Within the social dialogue, participation of workers' local representatives in SWEM is a pillar of Sweden's work environment policies. In 1912, workers right to elect SRs predated democracy in 1921. In 1974 SRs got stronger rights to participate in and influence how employers manage the work environment (SOU, 1972). The WEA regulates four types of employee representation in the required cooperation between employers and employees:

1. safety representatives (SRs);
2. chief safety representatives, (CSRs) where there are more than one SR;
3. (joint) safety committees; and
4. regional safety representatives, for small firms (RSRs, see section 3.3.5 below).

These representatives' rights are detailed in chapter 6 of the WEA (and further regulated in the government ordinance, Arbetsmiljöförordningen, 1977) in order to support the SRs' active and competent dialogue with — and hence influence on — how employers and managers handle the work environment.

- At workplaces with at least five employees, SRs are to be appointed by the local trade union that has — at least normally — a collective agreement with the employer. In the absence of such a union, SRs are to be appointed by directly the employees (WEA, 2016: ch. 6, section 2). The SR's mandate is normally for three years and employers must be formally informed of their appointments for the SRs to enjoy their rights. Unlike other union representatives, SRs support and speak not only for union members but for all employees in the area, team or department for which they are appointed. Since 2010, the SRs of firms that hire external workers may act on behalf of these. Self-employed people are supported by SRs only on construction sites, where the SRs are to monitor prevention coordination and everyone's compliance with the material provisions.
- The local union branch may appoint a (regional) SR from outside the workforce for workplaces without safety committees but with a collective agreement and at least one union member (section 2).
- If a workplace has more than one SR, one of them shall be appointed CSR to coordinate the SRs' activities (section 3).
- Within her or his safety area, the SR is to monitor the safeguards against illness and accidents and the employer's compliance with the SWEM requirements (section 4).
- SRs shall participate in the planning of new or altered premises, equipment, work processes, work methods and the organisation of work, as well as the planning of the use of hazardous substances, and in the establishment of action plans as required by the SWEM-provisions (section 4).
- Employers and employees (mainly the appointing trade union) are jointly responsible for ensuring that SRs receive the requisite training (section 4).
- SRs have the rights to be notified of relevant changes in working conditions, to have the paid leave required for the performance of their function, and to access all relevant documents and obtain information – including being informed by management – needed for their function (sections 4 to 6).
- If employers do not quickly answer formal SR requests for an inquiry or action, the SRs may appeal to the SWEA, which must quickly inspect the workplace (section 6a).
- If the SR sees an acute and serious danger, and if this cannot be immediately fixed by asking the employer, the SR may stop work pending the SWEA's decision (section 7).
- At a workplace where at least 50 persons are regularly employed, there shall be a safety committee consisting of representatives of the employer and of the employees. The employee representatives are to be appointed by the local union or by the employees if there is no union (although joint safety committees are then extremely rare). At least one SR shall represent the employees and a senior manager the employer. The safety committee must participate in the planning of work environment measures (that is, in the SWEM) at the workplace and follow up the implementation of these measures, as further specified in the act (sections 8 and 9).
- SRs may not be hindered by their employer from fulfilling their duties, and other employers must give them access to workplaces where an employee represented by the SRs is working. An SR may not be given worse conditions or pay because of her or his appointment. Otherwise, an SR can claim damages from the employer, either personally or through her or his union (sections 10 to 12). Upholding SRs' rights is therefore an industrial relations issue, and not a public law issue for the SWEA to monitor and enforce.

3.3.2 Fewer safety representatives with less time for their tasks

In larger workplaces, the coordinating chief (or head) SRs are often quite influential in their half- to full-time positions (19 % of LO's 4,723 CSRs had half-time or greater positions in 2012; Gellerstedt, 2012). On the other hand, more SRs now seem to have been chosen by management (Jan Johansson, 2016-03-08); in 2012 this was reported of 11 % of LO's SRs, 25 % of the single SRs, that is, those in small

firms, and as many as 36 % of the single SRs in construction (Gellerstedt, 2012). If afterwards the relevant unions properly register the representatives selected by managers, these SRs have full legal rights – but this rarely happens in practice. Otherwise, they are dependent on their managers' benevolence.

The number of SRs per employee in the LO-unions is down by some 30 % since 1989 (Gellerstedt, 2012). The unions now have 95,000 SRs, of which the LO unions had 57,833 (1 SR for every 22 working members; Dagens Arbete, 2015a), TCO unions had some 31,550 (1 for every 32; Donovan, 2016), and SACO's unions had around 5,600 (1 for every 98; Fristedt, 2016). LO's SRs covered some 12,500 of the some 145,000 workplaces with at least 5 employees, that is, those that should appoint an SR. Some 90 % of these workplaces are small, i.e. with less than 50 employees. TCO's and SACO's representatives are mainly appointed in workplaces that also have LO SRs. They and the LO representatives probably together cover at most 15-20,000 workplaces, of which some 10-15,000 are small (with 5 to 49 employees). In all there are thus SRs in 10-15 % of all workplaces that should appoint them, and less 5-10 % of the small ones[1] (although most of the latter are supported by regional safety representatives, see section 3.3.5). This is a reduction from some 20-25 % of the workplaces with SRs in 2003 (Frick et al., 2005). The present SR-coverage is also far less than in ESENER-2, in which 71 % of the workplaces responded that they had an SR. Of the small workplaces (5 to 50 employees) 47 % responded that they had an SR, and in the private service sector 38 % of the respondents had such worker representation (EU-OSHA, 2016). The much higher proportion of workplaces with SRs in the ESENER-2 survey again suggests that those who responded to the survey had better work environment management than the average in Sweden. However, the association between having worker participation and good workplace OSH practices reported in ESENER-2 is very much in line with what was found in the evaluation of the implementation of the SWEM provisions (Frick and Johanson, 2013; Frick, 2013a).

The number of working members per SR within the three federations has only changed slightly since 1980 (Keisu Lennerlöf, 1981). Instead, the labour market has shifted to more white-collar jobs, in which SRs are more scarce. The overall ratio of SRs to employees has therefore declined from 1 in 30 in 1980 to 1 in 45 in 2015 (NB: unlike the ratios above, these figures include non-unionised employees, whom the SRs also represent). The SR ratio varies by industry. In 2004 (the latest available general figures), there were representatives in 3 % to 10 % of private service workplaces with at least five employees, compared with 21 % of construction sites, 35 % of factories and 79 % of public workplaces (Arbetarskydd, 2004), with, for example, SACO's teaching union having more than one-third of the SACO representatives in 2016 (Fristedt, 2016). In 2012, LO's SR-survey also revealed major differences in SR ratio between industries, from 13 LO members per SR in paper mills to 68 in hotels and restaurants (Gellerstedt, 2012).

The total time that SRs spend on their tasks has shrunk much more than the number of representatives. In 1996, LO's SRs activity alone was equal to some 10,950 full-time equivalent positions (FTEs), which was a considerable increase from 1980 (LO, 1997). Four years later, the unions' experience was that very many SRs were pressed not to take enough time for their tasks (ATK, 2000). The activity of LO's SRs had dropped to some 6,500 FTEs in 2012, because there were fewer LO SRs but also because they had become less active. SRs in TCO and SACO are expected to add at most 1,000 FTEs to bring the total to some 7,500 FTEs. The SRs probably remain by far Sweden's largest work environment actor (excluding the considerable work environment efforts made by managers that are hard to assess), but their much reduced total efforts can hardly avoid to hamper their influence on how employers manage the work environment.

3.3.3 Managers' varying cooperation with the SRs

SRs have mainly economic and normative powers to influence how employers manage the work environment (and a limited legal power in emergencies). SRs often had a strong market position during the reform years of the 1970s and 1980, when they were the voice of the workers whom employers had

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[1] Based on numbers of SRs in the three union federations, assuming roughly the same proportions of sole and chief safety representatives as in 2003 (Frick, at al., 2005). Number of workplaces according to SCB, 2016.

to court in a strong labour market. With higher unemployment since the 1990s, SRs now have less economic power in general. Nevertheless, there is still a labour shortage in many areas, and managers often want to motivate employees in modern, streamlined production systems. The long history of cooperation on the work environment may also have taught many managers that improvements can often raise productivity, that is, the much-promoted 'business case'.

That most SRs still have at least reasonable cooperation with their managers was indicated in the SR surveys by all three union federations in 2012. The surveys asked questions on who the SRs are, on their training, on the work environment, on SWEM and on the SRs' relations-cooperation with managers (Gellerstedt, 2012, on the LO unions' SRs'; Fromm, 2012, on TCO's; and Fristedt, 2013, on SACO's). For LO's representatives, physical workload risks (such as MSDs) are as important as organisational ones (stress, working time/hours and leadership), whereas the latter predominate in white-collar jobs. Otherwise, the surveys present similar pictures of the SRs and their situation. Some 35 % of LO's SRs can take all the time needed for their tasks, while another 40 % could take quite a lot of time, with roughly the same figures for TCO's and SACO's SRs.

However, one-third of LO's lone SRs (that is, those in in small workplaces) could not take enough time off for their tasks. Lack of time was also common among TCO's representatives in small firm, and close to half of their SRs in municipalities could not take enough time off for their tasks. The SRs were also asked if they had their managers' support, which 56 % of LO's representatives reported (with only on response alternative), while 64 % and 70 % of TCO's and SACO's SRs respectively reported either full or quite a lot of support from management. On the other hand, 30 % of TCO's SRs reported that being SR had worsened their relationships with management (Fromm, 2012), while 8 % to 17 % of LO's representatives in service industries found that managers resisted them in their SR role (Gellerstedt, 2012). The rise in the number of SR appeals to the SWEA is another sign of increasing conflicts between SRs and managers. SRs' stoppages of acutely dangerous jobs (according to the WEA, 2016: ch. 6, section 7) have increased somewhat from the 1980s to 100 per year in 2015, but the formal requests for a direct labour inspection (WEA, 2016: ch. 6, section 6:6a) have grown significantly from under 100 per year in the early 1990s to 500-600 in 2011-2015 (Johansson, 2016b) and the SWEA expects the number of these formal SR complaints to continue to grow (AV, 2016a).

The SRs had mixed views on their employers' SWEM (see SWEM practices in section 3.2.3). According to 47 % of LO's SRs, both management and employees were active in SWEM (to reduce risks at work) while another 12 % found management to be active but workers to be passive and 22 % saw both groups as (too) passive. All three federations' SRs saw deficiencies in managers' capability to run an effective SWEM. Managers had limited competence (according to 45 % of LO's SRs, 55 % of TCO's and 54 % of SACO's) or lacked it completely (9 % of LO's SRs, 20 % of TCO's and 12 % of SACO's). The SRs were even more critical of managers' time for SWEM activities, which 17 %, 37 % and 25 % of the SRs in LO, TCO and SACO respectively found to be greatly lacking (plus 37 %, 44 % and 44 % respectively that found it somewhat lacking).

3.3.4 Developments that may erode safety representatives' participation and influence

However, while the three union federations' abovementioned recent SR surveys indicated that most representatives still have a reasonable cooperation with their managers, there are also several tendencies to focus more on individualised health at work than on risk prevention, These changes tend to erode the employees' collective influence on work environment prevention through their SRs (Frick, 2013a: ch. 4).

a. Human resources (HR) departments are growing and have an increasing role in managing industrial relations and also safety and health at work. However, these more important actors often focus more on sickness absence and workplace health promotion than on prevention (Schmidt and Sjöström, 2015).

b. The growth in foreign ownership (see section 3.1.1 above) sometimes introduces more authoritarian management cultures. This showed up in a survey in which the managers who

believed that local social dialogue is good for business dropped from 70 % in 1996 to 46 % in 2003 (Levinsson, 2004. Oudhuis and Olsson (2006) also reported how new foreign owners had more top-down OSHM practices and therefore limited the cooperation between line managers and SRs. Likewise, more focus on behavioural safety than on upstream prevention is being increasingly adopted even in high-risk firms (Rasmussen, 2010; Frick, 2013a: ch. 4).

c. Municipalities and county councils (which have one-quarter of all employees) have organised the SWEM procedures. However, as also mentioned above, their SWEM is poorly connected between workplaces and the top political levels, which determine their major risks of physical and mental overload at work. The middle and local levels (for example individual schools) are left to handle the workload as best as they can within narrow resources and authority. This circumscribes what problems and remedies their SRs can raise in practice. Their SRs are also hampered by the social partners' general agreement (on Förnyelse, Arbetsmiljö & Samverkan, known as FAS 05). This merges work environment and general co-determination cooperation in the same forum. Workplace union representatives are mostly also SRs (hence the many SRs in this sector). However, in practice, work environment issues are often at the bottom of the agenda at both local workplace meetings and at higher cooperation levels (Frick, 2013a: chs 5 and 6; Frick, 2013c; Schmidt and Sjöström, 2015). The frequently high workload in this sector may also be why TCO's SRs in municipalities and county councils reported more difficulties in taking enough time for their tasks and in management cooperation than SRs in other sectors (Fromm, 2012).

d. More direct worker participation may also diminish SRs' influence. Although workers' representative participation has been emphasised for a long time, the social partners have always advocated that risks should as much as possible be raised and resolved between individual employees and their supervisors. This direct participation has grown in recent years. Regular workplace/workgroup meetings between all employees and their managers are much advocated, not only in the public sector's collective agreement (FAS 05) but also in the private sector. Such a direct worker-manager dialogue is essential when production and the tasks it involves (as discussed above) generally change towards more individual jobs and responsibilities. Another individualising trend is the spread of yearly conversations between line managers and each employee, which are to cover all important aspects of work including the work environment. IT systems are also widespread in OSHM. Individual employees can often directly report problems they notice in these – and in broader, integrated quality management systems – without the SRs necessarily being informed (Antonsson et al., 2011). The ensuing more individual working conditions and dialogue about these may reduce the collective representative role of the SRs.

e. The abovementioned structural changes (sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2) in the economy and its labour market have in several respects made the employers' SWEM more difficult and resulted in more adversarial industrial relations, both of which erode the position and influence of SRs (AV, 2012b; LO, 2013). The increases in precarious forms of work, in supply chains and in foreign firms and posted workers all make it harder (and sometimes impossible) to sustain the Swedish model of managing the work environment in an active dialogue with the SRs (as remains supported by both social partners; see Chapter 6 below). These changes are especially strong in transport and construction that is, in the two industries excluded from this EU study. For example 17 % of the SRs in transport feel actively opposed by management (Gellerstedt, 2012). However, precarious work, supply chains and foreign labour competition are growing in general, including in the majority of the more stationary sectors included in this project. SRs are, for example, hard to find in the growing number of private staffing agencies (Sjöström et al., 2015). The SWEA also notes this development in its project on how to inspect foreign employers and workers and employers that SWEA considers have neither the ability to comply nor any interest in complying with the work environment regulations (AV, 2012a).

f. However, the spreading of SWEM practices — with their limited effectiveness — does not seem to have undermined the role of active SRs. In so far as more active and comprehensive work environment management by the employer is effective to prevent more and more safety and health risks, there should be less need for active SRs to alert managers to risks and to push

them to take remedial actions. Such a reduced role for SRs was commented on by an employer's OSH expert who was interviewed (see Chapter 7 below), and described in some Danish and Norwegian studies on more formal OSHM systems (Lund, 2004; Hovden et al., 2008; Dyreborg, 2011). Less emphasis on SRs and on a preventive dialogue with the employees was also noticed in, for example, Rasmussen's (2010) study on US-inspired management of behavioural safety. However, the general picture in the large SWEM evaluation (section 3.2.3 above) was not that more organised SWEM resulted in active managers with less need for or interest in a dialogue with the SRs. A major reason for this may be that managers still do not take full responsibility for the work environment management, as indicated by both their own and the SRs' responses that managers have too little time for SWEM activities (and managers' limited time for SWEM was further confirmed in an evaluation of the administrative burden of labour regulations; NUTEK, 2008).

While more organised management of the work environment seems rather to promote SR involvement, there are thus several tendencies in both the labour market and work environment practices that tend to limit the opportunities for SRs to be appointed and to have a competent and active dialogue with their managers on how to improve the work environment. Despite these erosions in SRs' influence and cooperation and despite the more than halving of their activity, SRs are not mentioned in the Swedish government's recent work environment strategy for 2016-2020 (Regeringen, 2016). The strategy prioritises three objectives: zero tolerance of fatal accidents and the prevention of accidents at work; a sustainable working life; and improved psychosocial work environment. To achieve these objectives, the strategy proposes some preventive measures in a few specified jobs, but its main focus is on a number of inquiries to further understand the nature of the risks and how to better prevent them. However, preventive work environment activities — that is, SWEM — are not problematised but only briefly mentioned, without proposals for improvement, despite the demonstrated shortcomings in SWEM (section 3.2.3 above). The SRs and their role in prevention are not mentioned at all. This contrasts with the continued emphasis that the interviewed social partners, including the employers' representatives, place on the importance of competent and active SRs (see Chapter 7 below).

3.3.5 Regional safety representatives support small firms

To partly compensate for the lack of local SRs in small firms (see section 3.3.2 above) trade unions may appoint regional safety representatives (RSRs). An RSR can be appointed for all workplaces within a defined area and industry provided on the one hand that the union has a collective agreements and at least one union member at each workplace and on the other that there is no joint safety committee. This system was first set up to get SRs in the construction and forestry industries with their temporary and movable workplaces. I 1974 it was extended to the whole labour market. RSRs have the same rights but a slightly different assignment than other safety representatives: to monitor the work environment and ask for necessary improvements, to support local worker participation in the OSHM, including the appointment and support of local SRs, and to support OSHM in general (i.e. also of the employers) in small firms (Frick and Walters, 1998; Frick, 2009).

The requirement of not having a joint safety committee excludes small workplaces within larger organisations – notably the public sector but also many private multisite firms– that have such committees at higher levels. In 2015, private-sector unions in LO, TCO and SACO had appointed 1,660 RSRs (315 as FTEs; AV, 2016b) to support most (the data are incomplete) of the 1.3 million (or 31 % of all employed) who work in small firms and thus also the managers-owners of these firms. With more and more private service firms, all relevant SACO unions have now also appointed RSRs and increased their activity, albeit from a low level and LO's RSRs still dominate in numbers (1,123) and activity (AV, 2016b)

In all, the RSRs cover 537,000 workplaces, but more than half of these are temporary construction sites. There is a growing lack of RSR coverage as more small enterprises, and especially micro-enterprises, lack union members among their employees and the RSRs hence have no right of entry. Non-unionised firms are especially common in the growing private services sector (SOU, 2007; Jan Johansson, 2016-03-08). In all there are many thousands of small workplaces where employees have no work environment representation at all, and also some others where their 'safety representatives' in practice have been chosen by management. However, a public inquiry will look into the RSRs' rights of access

also to non-unionised workplaces and the RSR-funding was increased by 10 % in 2016 (thus less than inflation since the last hike in 2001; Regeringen, 2016).

The RSRs visited some 57,000 workplaces in 2015, but they also gave advice by phone and email and led training courses. RSRs thus visit each of their workplaces only once in 5 to 10 years. This is mainly an effect of the limited funding, in which the unions pay some half of the RSR-costs themselves (and the government pays the other half), while all other SRs are paid by their employers (AV, 2016b). Still, RSRs' support to the work environment in small firms is at least 10 times more frequent than the SWEA's. The Authority inspected 8,624 small workplaces in 2015, but very many of these were parts of larger employers (Johansson, 2016a). At the same time, managers of small firms rarely have effective SWEM (Frick, 2013a) and rarely hire OSH services to support their prevention activities (Frick et al., 2005; Antonsson et al., 2011). Even with their shortage of funding and hence their scarce visits, the RSRs are thus by far the largest actor to promote safety and health in small firms. Conflicts between RSRs and owners or managers of small firms are comparatively very rare. On the contrary, very many of the latter are happy for the RSRs' free advice on how to handle risks at work (Frick, 2009; see also key interview findings in Chapter 7 below).

3.4 Enlightenment supports the legitimacy and normative power of safety representatives

3.4.1 The contested social construction of risks

Although SRs have some legal power to stop work in emergencies, their major means of influence is normative power. By the strength of their arguments (including references to regulations), they have to convince managers of the need for and possibility to improve the work environment. This normative power is supported by several rights of SRs, such as the rights to training, to information and to a dialogue with management. It is further supported by the SWEM requirements that all to whom the employer allocates SWEM tasks must have the necessary competence and time for this, and that the employer (in practice: managers and others with allocated SWEM-tasks) have a duty to engage in dialogue with SRs and other employees on SWEM.

Which issues SRs raise in a dialogue with managers, which they do not and how they influence management decisions depend not only on the SR dialogue rights but also on how representatives, managers and all others involved define work and its risks. The social construction of the 'reality' of the work environment is an often contentious power issue (Nelkin, 1985; Sund and Åmark, 1990). To obstruct regulation, employers have often minimised risks and exaggerated the costs of prevention (Olsen, 1992; Ruttenberg, 1983; Ashford and Caldart, 1997). Wenger (1998) described how communities of practice (CoPs) define work and its setting, and Gherardi and Nicolini (2000) and Sjöström (2013) demonstrated how the local CoPs shape how employees and managers construct, and restrict, their definition of work, of its risks and how these are to be handled.

3.4.2 An enlightenment strategy promotes voluntary improvement

During 1970s LO used surveys on, for instance, stress and chemical risks to raise awareness of these issues and to mobilise public support for work environment reforms. These reforms included what can best be described as a government enlightenment strategy to promote voluntary improvements of the work environment, including informed local dialogues on this (Håkansta, 2013). Much tax money has been used in this enlightenment to produce and spread the knowledge that work environment risks are diverse, widespread and serious but that they can be abated, very often at moderate cost or even with increased productivity. This enlightenment has mainly taken the form of:

- much R&D on work environment and other working life issues, and active application of the R&D results to working life, through research funds and through a National Institute for Working Life research (NIWL);

- support for multi-disciplinary OSH services and subsidies for employers to hire their help, to spread and apply the risk solutions identified by the increased R&D;
- training of SRs and managers, starting with a large kick-off campaign in the mid-1970s that reached some 250.000 engaged in work environment issues, of which most were SRs but many were also supervisors (Kamienski, 1979).

Budget cuts after the 1990s crisis also hit work environment enlightenment. Funding for R&D and for training and information has since been gradually reduced, while the subsidy to OSH services were abolished in 1993 (Håkansta, 2013). Those services have since then been consultants on the market, which has more demand for their support for individual health activities than for workplace prevention (Frick et al., 2005; SOU, 2011). These cuts accelerated during 2006-2014, with even less funding for research, training and information, and the National Institute for Working Life (NIWL) closed in 2007.

The social partners have partly compensated for this loss with more grants to applied work environment research from their joint company for labour market insurances, AFA (Arbetsmarknadens FörsäkringsAktiebolag). AFA also supports central training of SRs (after the government subsidy was abolished). While the government generally cut enlightenment funding during 2006-2014, it increased the SWEA's appropriations for this purpose, which has made the authority a major information provider. For example, the new provisions on the organisational and social work environment (AFS, 2015: 4) are accompanied with much information, including a letter to all Swedish employers. The recent government work environment strategy (Regeringen, 2016) also includes an inquiry about a new national centre to coordinate, assemble and disseminate work environment and working life research (although it will, if set, up have a much more limited assignment and staff than the old NIWL).

3.4.3 Unions and employer organisations actively train and inform

Various non-government organisations also provide much information and training on the new provisions (AFS, 2015: 4). Some of these are consultants on the market but most are either trade unions or employer organisations or bodies set up and run jointly by them. Since 1945, they have a joint training and information council for the private sector, called Prevent. Its basic training course ('Better work environment') sells 10,000-15,000 copies a year, together with 15,000-20,000 copies of other training materials, which are often (re-)used to train new groups of SRs, managers and others (Quist, 2011). Prevent also issues a journal, produces and distributes a great deal of information, runs development projects on various problems with the social partners, and has a large work environment web portal. Public-sector employers and unions cooperate with Prevent, but also have their own information and training through the joint organisation Suntarbetsliv ("healthy working life"). And the social partners' AFA not only funds more R&D but also produces and distributes information on risks and remedies.

SRs still often want more training, particularly on organisational and social risks (Gellerstedt, 2012; Fromm, 2012; Fristedt, 2013. However, the enlightenment strategy supports the legitimacy of work environment as an important issue (even for investors; Almqvist and Henningsson, 2009) and of active union SRs (see Chapter 6). For example, the employer organisations initially opposed the new provisions on the organisational and social work environment, but now train and inform their members of what the provisions require and how to comply with them (for example Suntarbetsliv, 2016). At the central level there is thus much consensus on a broad and precautionary definition of the work environment and that local social partners must be trained, be informed and cooperate on these issues. However, locally, the consensus varies more and so does the social construction of risks and the legitimacy of SR activism (Sjöström, 2013). One the one hand, many large employers have organised training and information for their managers and (with the local unions) their SRs. The information and training also starts to cover organisational and social risks (although this competence has been mandatory since the Internal Control provisions of 1993). On the other hand, the SWEM evaluation found that managers often lack adequate work environment competence (section 3.2.3 above) and there are also tendencies for employers to be less accepting of SR interference in how they manage the work environment (see section 3.3.4).

4 Indicators of risks and ill health at work

4.1 Reported and recognised occupational accidents and diseases

4.1.1 Fatal accidents

The previous chapter tried to give a brief but broad overview of the economic and labour market context and of existing data on the forms and functions of worker participation in the employers' management of the work environment. Before we summarise this knowledge of worker participation (in Chapter 5), we shall present the main existing indicators of risks at work, that is, what the employers' SWEM and the workers participation in it have still to prevent or at least reduce.

The number of fatal accidents has dropped dramatically over the last 60 years (while the number of people employed has grown from 3.0 million to 4.3 million; Table 4.1). Most lives have been saved by changes in the economy and its technologies. These have resulted in that much fewer people have to perform highly hazardous work (Larsson, 1990). However, more preventive technology and work methods have also increased safety (Frick, 2004). Relative fatality rates differ markedly between industries. During 2007-2011, farming, fishing and forestry had the highest fatality rate, followed by construction; transport and storage; and manufacturing (AV, 2016c).

Table 4-1: Fatal accidents at work among different groups

Year	Employees	Self-employed	Others	All
1980	123	29	18	170
1985	92	34	17	143
1990	116	23	15	154
1995	60	28	8	96
2000	43	18	6	67
2005	53	15	-	68
2010	49	5	1	55
2015	26	8	6	40

Notes: 'Others' killed include military personnel, prisoners and students. In 2015 'others' were posted workers, whose fatalities have been known to SWEA but which should be recorded in other countries.
The number of women killed has gone down from 5-15 per year during 1955-1970 to 1-8 per year during 2000-2015.
Sources: AV (2011a, 2012c, 2016c).

4.1.2 Reported occupational accidents

The total number of reported accidents has also fallen but not as dramatically as the fatalities. Besides the abovementioned techno-economical changes and prevention, the fall in reporting is largely an effect of changes in workers' compensation insurance. There seems also to be a genuine reduction in the accident rates but it is hard to separate how much this is caused by having fewer people in dangerous jobs from better prevention in such jobs. Temporary employees and self-employed people report relatively much fewer accidents than permanent employees (Table 4.2). This is believed to be mainly caused by their reluctance to report occupational accidents (even those resulting in absence) to avoid jeopardising future jobs (AV, 2011b), although their higher risks show up in the fatality rates. During 2007-2015, employees had 1.0 and self-employed people had 3.2 fatal accidents per 100,000 persons.

Table 4-2: Reported accidents resulting in sick leave for different groups

Year	Employed men	Employed women	Self-employed	Others	All
1980	86,000	21,000	7,000	2,000	116,000
1985	75,000	24,000	6,000	3,000	108,000
1990	63,000	24,000	4,000	3,000	94,000
1995	21,000	12,000	1,000	2,000	36,000
2000	23,000	16,000	1,000	2,000	41,000
2005	19,000	13,000	400	1,000	33,000
2010	16,000	12,000	200	1,000	28,000
2015	18,000	13,000	200	2,000	33,000

Note: The workers' compensation insurance became much more restrictive since 1993, which drastically reduced the reporting of accidents and diseases. Only accidents resulting in at least one day's paid sickness absence are included since then.
Sources: AV (2011b, 2016c).

In the work environment survey (section 4.2 below) some 77,400 employees (1.5 % of the women and 2.1 % of the men) had reported accidents with sickness absence in 2013, but the SWEA's statistics include only 30,659 reports (AV, 2016d). Sundström-Frisk and Weiner (2005) also found a 40 % reporting rate in their analysis of underreporting, as did Kurppa (2015; of accidents with at least three days' absence). Although the official statistics shortly mention that the figures are reported injuries, this caveat is not included in the titles of the yearly reports on 'Occupational injuries', nor do they mention the magnitude of the underreporting. Instead, the SWEA claimed that accident risks are lower in smaller than in larger firms (AV, 2014c), ignoring both underreporting and that much research consistently finds risks to be higher in smaller firms.

Occupational accidents and diseases are processed in two systems. The social partners' labour market insurance (AFA) compensates income losses and some extra costs for occupational accidents with more than 14 days' absence (trygghetsförsäkring vid arbetsskada, TFA). TFA also compensates income losses and extra costs for occupational diseases, but only if they are listed in International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention 121 or recognised by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency as caused by work. The latter agency now rarely compensates occupational injuries, as the public worker compensation insurance mainly provides an annuity for income losses of sickness absences lasting more than a year. Income losses up to a year are instead covered by the general sickness absence insurance.

Public worker compensation insurance has also been criticised for being gradually more restrictive in its acceptance rules and in their implementation, with a declining acceptance rate (Torén. 2010; Arbetsskadekommissionen, 2012; ISF, 2015). The Social Insurance Agency accepted 6,000 injuries for compensation in 2004 but in 2010 these had dropped to around 2,000 (Kommunalarbetaren, 2012). From 2005 to 2014 the number of cases assessed by the Social Insurance Agency dropped from 19,857 to 2,425, while the cost to the government for compensation insurance was halved from some SEK 6 billion to less than SEK 3 billion. Fewer women's than men's claims were recognised, even for similar MSD injuries (Dagens Arbete, 2010, 2015b; Table 4.3). However, statistics on recognised occupational injuries are in arrears. Diseases in particular are often reported years after the first symptoms appeared, and the processing of claims may take a long time. Numbers for recent years are therefore by definition much lower than for earlier ones, for which more cases have been reported and settled.

Table 4-3. Accident claims for life annuity accepted or rejected by the Social Insurance Agency

Year	Women		Men	
	Recognised	Rejected	Recognised	Rejected
2005	847	1,421	1,694	1,866
2008	405	683	822	1,045
2011	203	713	476	1,146

Source: FK (2012).

The social partners' TFA by AFA compensates for more costs than the public worker compensation insurance and accepts more occupational accident claims (Table 4.4). AFA's reporting and processing of accident claims is also faster than for diseases, which makes recent figures more accurate.

Table 4-4; Accidents recognised by AFA by seriousness

Year	1-30 days' absence	> 30 days' absence	Permanent invalidity	All
1995	11,000	6,000	5,000	23,000
2000	14,000	8,000	4,000	27,000
2005	17,000	5,000	4,000	27,000
2009	18,000	4,000	4,000	25,000
2013	33,000	2,000	7,000	45,000

Note: Men have some 60 % of the more serious and of all recognised accidents. The increased numbers in 2013 are also influenced by changes in the worker compensation regulations and in how these are applied.
Sources: AFA (2005, 2011, 2015).

4.1.3 Reported occupational diseases

After workers' compensation insurance became much more generous in 1977, claims for compensation rose during the 1980s, especially for occupational diseases and in particular by women with MSDs (table 4.5). After the restrictions in the workers' compensation insurance from mid-1993 there has been sharp drop in lodged claims for occupational diseases. This is believed to be mainly caused by increased recognition that it is hard to get claims accepted (Torén, 2010; AV, 2011b; Arbetsskadekommissionen, 2012; ISF, 2015).

During the five years 2007 to 2011, most diseases were reported in the sectors of health and social care (11,263 claims), manufacturing (10,730) and education (5,159) (AV, 2011b). In 2010, men's claims were mostly for MSD problems (49 %), deafness and tinnitus (18 %) and psychosocial problems (11 %), with no other disease type amounting to more than 3 %. The ailments reported by women in 2010 were MSD problems (43 %) or psychosocial problems (30 %), with no others amounting to more than 4 %. The suspected causes of these problems were slightly different, mainly poor ergonomics (44 % for women and 48 % for men), organisational or social factors (32 % and 24 %), chemical or biological exposures (14 % and 12 %) and noise (4 % and 10 %).

Table 4-5: Reported occupational diseases for different groups

Year	Employed men	Employed women	Self-employed	Others	All
1980	14,000	8,000	700	200	23,000
1985	19,000	12,000	800	300	32,000
1990	23,000	25,000	2,000	300	50,000
1995	6,000	8,000	300	700	15,000
2000	10,000	13,000	300	600	24,000
2005	8,000	9,000	300	500	18,000
2010	4,000	5,000	100	400	9,000
2015	5,000	7,000	100	200	12,000

Sources: AV (2001, 2008b, 2011c, 2016c).

As mentioned, few of these reported diseases are recognised by the public workers' compensation insurance, administered by the Social Insurance Agency (and the figures are delayed by late reporting and long processing of claims) (Table 4.6).

Table 4-6: Diseases with life annuity claims accepted and rejected by the Social Insurance Agency

Year	Women		Men	
	Recognised	Rejected	Recognised	Rejected
2005	1,281	6,711	2,123	4,506
2008	389	2,223	742	1,925
2011	144	1,032	346	1,012

Source: FK (2012).

The figures are also behind the events for occupational diseases recognised by the social partners' TFA at AFA (Table 4.7).

Table 4-7: Women's and men's occupational diseases recognised by AFA

Year	Women	Men	All
1995	1,219	2,029	3,248
2000	1,258	2,305	3,563
2005	117	606	723
2009	58	272	330
Sum 2009-2013	415	1,934	2,349

Note: The last row gives aggregated figures over five years.
Sources: AFA (2006, 2011, 2015).

There are also some figures on the seriousness of the recognised diseases (Table 4.8).

Table 4-8: Occupational diseases recognised by AFA, by seriousness

Year	No invalidity	1-15 % invalidity	16-30 % invalidity	Deaths	All
1995	1,835	1,341	35	37	3,248
2000	1,648	1,026	17	23	2,714
2004	358	184	12	2	556

Source: AFA (2006).

During the 10 years 2000-2009, AFA recognised 194 fatalities as mainly caused by occupational diseases and paid compensation for them. Of these, 153 were cancers, including 122 mesotheliomas. Men dominate the more serious diseases and especially the fatalities. Recognised diseases are also different for women and men. In 2008, for women, they were mainly skin diseases (25 %), infectious diseases (16 %), respiratory diseases (14 %), carpal tunnel syndrome (11 %), deafness and tinnitus (8 %) and other MSDs (4 %). For men, the most common recognised diseases that year were deafness and tinnitus (35 %), effects of vibrations (16 %), carpal tunnel syndrome (14 %), respiratory diseases (8 %), other MSDs (8 %), skin diseases (5 %) and cancers (5 %; AFA, 2011).

4.2 The work environment surveys are more reliable and valid indicators

Hämäläinen et al. (2009) demonstrated that occupational diseases cause at least 90 % of global work-related ill health, including premature fatalities. Sweden is no different. A research review found that in 2007 at least 740 people — mostly men — died from cancers in particular, but also from coronary and lung diseases caused by work (Järvholm et al., 2010), while there are some 50 fatal occupational accidents per year. More men than women thus die from risks to which their current or former work has exposed them and they dominate the official injury statistics. However, several research reviews have demonstrated that presently women are more exposed than men to both musculoskeletal (Lewis and Mathiassen, 2013) and organisational and social health risks at work (Sverke et al., 2016). Such physical and mental overloads at work are the main causes of early retirement, while accidents only cause a small proportion of this (Anxo et al., 2014). The frequent early retirements caused by unhealthy work environments are officially recognized as a major obstacle to postponing the real retirement age in pace with the aging population (SOU, 2013).

Despite this, accidents still dominate the official occupational injury statistics. The reporting rate for work-related diseases (with sickness absence) is even lower than that for occupational accidents. In the 2014 work-related disorders survey (AV, 2014b), some 219,000 employees (6.5 % of the women and 3.7 % of the men) answered that they had been absent from work in 2013 because of a disease they believed to be caused by their work, while the SWEA's statistics only recorded 12,000 such cases. This 5 % coverage is a drastic drop from the 20 % reporting rate found in 2004 by Sundström-Frisk and Weiner (2005). In all, 13 % of those with work-related disorders (with sickness absence, both accidents and diseases) answered in 2014 that they had reported these as occupational injuries (as is mandated in the Social Insurance Act). The main reasons for not reporting were: 36 % did not consider their disorders serious enough to report; 13 % did not know that injuries should be reported; 11 % said that one does not get any compensation anyway; and 4 % were afraid of offending their employers (AV, 2014b).

While (the much underreported) accidents still dominate the official injury statistics, the large biennial surveys on the work environment and on work-related disorders are more valid and reliable general indicators of risks at work, since their start in 1989. Their subjective answers about conditions at work have been demonstrated to be quite accurate, if the survey questions are carefully crafted to be as specific as possible (Wikman, 1991). Although the reliability of the surveys has decreased somewhat, as the response rate has shrunk to around 50 %, they remain the most valid indicators of risks and health at work. The latest published surveys include indicators of the development of the work environment and of work related disorders between 1989 (or sometimes later) and 2013 or 2014 (AV, 2014a, 2014b):

- 'Have way too much to do' (agree completely or mostly) grew from around 50 % in 1989, 1991 and 1993 to 58 % of men and 64 % of women in 1999. Between then and 2013 it slowly went down, especially for men, to 48 % and 57 % for women (AV, 2014a). Among those in the same job for at least 5 years in 2009, 40 % of the men and 54 % of the women found that the workload had increased (AV, 2010b).
- Heavy lifting (more than 15 kg several times a day) every day. This has slowly dropped from 16 % for women and 23 % for men in 1989 to 10 % for women and 16 % for men in 2014.
- Being exposed to noise (making it 'impossible to talk at a normal voice') at least one-quarter of the time' remains roughly the same, with 30 % of the men and 13 % of the women in 1989 and 29 % of the men and 17 % of the women in 2014.
- 'Diversified working duties' (completely agree or partly — in contrast to repetitious work) are slightly less common. In 1989, 1991 and 1993 this was reported by some 60 % of both men and women but in 2014 it had gone down to 54 % for women and 53 % for men.
- Those who can determine their own work pace up to half of the time (as opposed to 'work much to a set pace') have grown from 36 % of the men and 51 % of the women in 1993 to around 45 % of the men and 61 % of the women in 2014.
- 'Difficulty sleeping every week due to thoughts of work' grew from 12-14 % in 1989, 1991 and 1993 to 19 % for men and 22 % for women in 1999 and has since then varied slightly around these levels.
- In 1989, 32 % of the women reported weekly pain in the back or neck and 30 % in the shoulders or arms. This grew to over 40 % for backs or necks and close to 40 % for shoulders or arms in 1999-2005, went down in 2007 and in 2009, but in 2013 was again up to 44 % of the women and 27 % of the men for the back or neck and 37 % of the women and 25 % of the men for the arms or shoulders (AV, 2014b). Such pains are much more common among unskilled workers than among professional white-collar employees, among whom 15-20 % of men and 25-30 % of women still report such weekly pains (AV, 2010b).
- The number who have been 'exposed to violence or threats during the last 12 months' grew from 8 % among men and 16 % among women in 1995 until 2001-2003, since when it has remained around 10 % for men and 18 % for women.

Other major findings from the 2009 survey (AV, 2010b) were that:

- Some 65 % of men and 59 % of women work office hours (weekdays 8.00-18.00), but 19 % of men and 26 % of women have shift-work, and 28 % of men and 37 % of women sometimes work at weekends. During the survey week 27 % of the men and 21 % of the women worked overtime.
- Some 65 % of the unskilled female and 55 % of the unskilled male workers were 'physically exhausted after work' every week. So were around 35 % and 25-30 % of the professional women and men respectively.
- In contrast, 55-60 % of professional women and men 'keep thinking about work at home', versus 30 % of the women and 25 % of the men in unskilled work.
- Nine per cent reported that they had been 'bullied by the boss or colleagues during the previous year'. As many as 18 % of the women and 7 % of the men had been sexually harassed during the previous year.
- Women's exposure to noise (at least one-quarter of the time) is highest among those working with children (38-59 %), for example nursery and primary school teachers. Men were mostly exposed to noise in construction and manufacturing (49-77 % among various groups).
- Some 28 % of the men and 16 % of the women were exposed to air pollution by dust or chemical substances, mainly in manufacturing or construction jobs.

5 Key emergent themes of safety representatives' influence on the employers' SWEM

The previous chapters indicate major differences between the 'best' and the 'worst' jobs. Some employees work in highly skilled and well-paid jobs with a strong labour market value and with mostly sound and safe work environments. Others have unqualified, easily replaceable, poorly paid and often unhealthy and hazardous jobs. This gap has increased in Sweden, since the economic crisis of the early 1990s. The increased duality is the major factor behind key emergent themes that also have an effect on the appointment of SRs, their position and their participation in their employers' work environment management.

5.1 An increasingly polarised labour market

On the one hand, the labour market has shifted from blue-collar towards more highly skilled jobs, often requiring academic degrees and with good job opportunities. However, these jobs mostly entail much individual responsibility, including regulating one's own type and amount of work. There is also a weaker tradition of collectivity and of appointing SRs in these professional jobs. At the same time, there are more precarious jobs — mostly but not only blue-collar ones — in temporary and self-employment, as posted workers, on zero-hour contracts, as labour hire, and as franchisees or as other jobs that are highly dependent on the supply-chain. Finally there are many more small firms — including in privatised welfare services — with poorer union and work environment traditions. The labour market basis for appointing SRs and for their influence has thus partly shifted and partly been eroded.

5.2 Unions strong in old but weaker in growing industries

The unions remain strong in the public sector and in technical industries such as manufacturing, utilities and construction. However, overall union membership has fallen from 83 % to 69 %, mainly because there are more small firms and more private services, both of which are much less organised. Some workers in precarious jobs — especially in the public sector — are highly organised but most others have a much lower unionisation rate. Unions therefore have less coverage to appoint SRs — especially in the growing number of completely un-unionised small firms — and they have fewer resources to support their SRs.

5.3 A SWEM-dialogue but with limited safety representative access to important decisions

Medium-sized to large employers have organised many of the procedures of risk assessments and other requirements in the provisions on SWEM. However, employers rarely give managers enough time, competence and resources for an effective SWEM. Although the organised SWEM gives SRs opportunities for a dialogue with managers, its ineffectiveness still hampers what issues SRs can raise and how. To go to the top in the prevention hierarchy, especially on risks with mainly organisational causes, mostly requires representatives to break the consensus and enter into conflict with higher managers. This gap between formal SWEM and limited SR access to the more important decisions on the work environment is especially notable in the public sector. The growth of small firms, often in dependent positions in supply chains, has resulted in many more companies with limited SWEM capabilities, in which it is hard to appoint SRs and for these to be active.

5.4 Fewer and less active safety representatives

The proportion of SRs has shrunk from 1 SR in 30 employees in 1980 to 1 in 45 in 2015. This is mainly an effect of the shift from blue- to white-collar jobs, which traditionally appoint fewer representatives.

However, it is also caused by lower unionisation in the growing private services sector. These companies are nearly all small, and small firms have a much lower (also relative) SR-rate than in in larger employers. While the abovementioned large technical and public employers retain roughly the same number of SRs, there are thus more and more firms and workplaces without any SRs. There seems also to be an increase in the number of 'safety representatives' selected by management, who have no SR rights unless they are formally confirmed by the unions.

The remaining SRs have also become less active. Since 1996 their activity — as FTEs — has fallen by around one-third. Still, the SRs remain the largest work environment actor, as OSH services have mainly been reduced to various forms of health care. However, the reduction in time that SRs spend on their work environment tasks is also likely to affect their influence on their employers' work environment management.

5.5 Trends in cooperation with the management

Most SRs report good to reasonable cooperation with their managers but there are also many with little or no support. In LO's blue-collar unions, SRs have less time for their tasks and less management support in the growing small firms and private services, while TCO's representatives often report such problems in the public sector. On top of that there are management developments that may diminish employers' cooperation with and support to the SRs, through the growth of HR management with more focus on individual health than prevention, of foreign ownership with more authoritarian and often also more behaviourally based work environment management, and of more individual dialogues between managers and employees, which may overshadow their more systematic dialogue with their SRs.

5.6 Regional safety representatives to cover more small firms

The growth of small firms with little to no SR activity has increased the importance of Sweden's special system of regional SRs. This system is largely intact, although still grossly underfunded, so that unions pay close to half of the costs of RSR. In recent years, SACO's unions have also appointed RSRs, although with very limited funding (but LO's RSRs still dominate in numbers and activity). However, the RSRs now have to cover and support many more small firms than before. The RSRs visit each of 'their' small firms once in 5-10 years but this is still much more often than the SWEA's labour inspectors do. Another problem is the growth of completely non-unionised firms (including Swedish firms reliant on foreign temporary workers and foreign firms with posted workers) to which the RSRs have no access.

5.7 Enlightenment, the social construction of risk and safety representative legitimacy

At national level, the SRs' and SWEM's focus on upstream prevention is supported by much R&D, information and training, and by both social partners. Hence, the SRs have strong legitimacy for both their activity and in the issues they may raise. However, at the local level, this legitimacy is hampered by frequent management ignorance, which is probably also increasing with the growth of small firms with poor SWEM and the reduced funding to support R&D, training and information on the work environment.

5.8 From technical towards organisational risks that are harder to specify

Accident statistics and the work environment and health survey show how technical risks — of accidents, noise, chemicals etc. — are diminishing. Still, such risks remain serious for large groups of employees, not least in small firms and in supply-chain industries such as construction and transport, which have poorer SWEM and conditions that are less conducive to the activity and influence of SRs. However, the

main health risks are organisational ones that may lead to bodily and mental overload, notably in working with people in the welfare industries such as schools, hospital, social services and care of the elderly, to which mainly women are exposed. To combat such risks, SRs have to raise organisational problems of understaffing, poor leadership, threats and violence and the like and demand solutions. These risks are much harder to specify, including for the SRs, and hence less regulated. However, the SWEA's new provisions on organisational and social work environment, and the enlightenment campaign around it, may raise the local awareness level and thus support the representatives and their managers in also tackling such complex health risks.

6 Key findings of the six key informant interviews

The previous chapter presented what we know of the labour market and work environment background of worker participation – especially through safety representatives – in the employers' SWEM. We will now proceed to the new data in this comparative EU study, that is, in our case of Sweden. As discussed in Chapter 1, these data derive partly from interviews with key informants but mainly from the 20 case-studies. The latter will be listed and their results presented in the next chapters but first we will describe the main results from the informant interviews.

The study interviewed six key informants: five work environment experts or officers of the social partners and one representative of the Ministry of Labour. We also obtained some additional data by mail and through three small interviews (see section 2.3 above). Although the interview spanned several subjects, their results can be mainly structured in terms of the following issues.

6.1 The social partners strongly support active safety representatives

The experienced central employer and union representatives have quite similar views on SWEM and on the important role of SRs in it, although those from the employers also had some critique. One private employer expert has heard of cases where SRs misused their rights, where employers found that SRs misunderstood/misused their role and went too far in their demands, for example through what the employers saw as politicised union campaigns. Unions have, for example, trained SRs to investigate accidents, which is the employers' responsibility to do. He also found that there are biased questions in union surveys.

The public sector employers' OSH expert finds that the cooperation between the social partners is good at the central-national level, with regular meetings that are very constructive and many joint initiatives. However, cooperation might be harder to achieve at the local level, in municipalities and county councils, and the central social partners do not always know how things work out at there. They mostly receive information on this when things have gone so wrong that central partners have to intervene. 'No one calls to tell us that everything works just fine.'

One reason is that first line managers in the public sector are under a lot of pressure, with regulations, responsibilities and demands from many different levels and parties. A big issue is therefore how to create 'sustainable managers'. The delegation of work environment responsibilities ('tasks' in SWEM) rarely mentions what first line managers should do when they lack the capacity or resources to fulfil their responsibilities. However, the relationship between managers and SRs is also a question of culture. Managers need to understand that SRs are supposed to act in favour of good working conditions and that they are not only complaining and whining. Managers should therefore not push SRs to become defensive, because this makes for conflicts that are not very constructive. The SRs need to learn how to present issues, opinions and requests in a way that makes it clear that they want to improve the working conditions; and such an impression of a joint purpose is hard to achieve by directly referring to the law.

Nevertheless, all three employer experts interviewed emphasised that local cooperation is very much mostly good. The public employer expert compared Sweden with other countries and found the consensus approach to be far better than a conflict, win/lose approach. This approach is much more resource efficient and leads to better outcomes. In all, the employer representatives therefore strongly support active and informed SRs as major actors in local SWEM. The same goes for the RSRs, about whom the employer experts had heard occasional complaints but much more often that small entrepreneurs appreciated the RSRs' free and competent advice. The union officers found that SRs rarely misuse their rights but that employers and managers nowadays more often harass and restrict SRs, especially in industries hard pressed by tough foreign competition such as transport and construction. However, the union officers' experience is also that, where there are SRs, local cooperation between them and their managers is mostly reasonable or good.

6.2 Safety representatives not mentioned in the government's OSH strategy 2016-2020

Although the social partners thus continue to support active SRs, a second overall result is that the Swedish government has no opinion on the role and situation of SRs. They are not mentioned in the recent government strategy to improve the work environment in 2016-2020 (Regeringen, 2016; see section 3.3.4 above). This says nothing on the SRs' role in promoting the strategy's three main objectives of zero fatal accidents, a sustainable working life and an improved psychosocial work environment. The political secretary to the Minister for Labour (Rasmus Cruce Naeye, 2016-03-05) had no comment on why the strategy excludes SRs, or on why it is very brief and without proposals on SWEM, despite that this is the major mechanism to achieve the strategy's three objectives.

6.3 SWEM and direct employee participation may affect the safety representative role

The engineering employers expert emphasised that the regulation of SWEM aims to change the role of SRs. They used to be local work environment actors, as they were far better trained than their supervisors, but in SWEM SRs are to monitor how managers implement risk assessments and action plans, and no longer to do much themselves. The central partners have tried to clarify the SWEM roles of SRs and managers, which has resulted in improved local understanding of this. However, some SRs are still somewhat lost or disappointed by their loss of an active role or the change in it. There is also a trend towards more direct participation between individual workers and their managers, partly because it is sometimes hard to find those willing to become SRs but more because production is more advanced, workers are more involved in quality issues and work environment issues can also be recorded and handled in IT systems (Antonsson et al., 2011). However, SRs are to be informed of the work environment issues handled directly between workers and managers.

In the public sector, the collective agreement, FAS 05, on joint cooperation on work environment and co-determination issues states that the first step of cooperation on the work environment (and hence worker participation) shall be regular work group meetings (Arbetsplatsträff, APT), where the work environment shall also be addressed. The public social partners' joint body, Suntarbetsliv, has developed a tool/instructions to promote better meetings, and hence increased and a better-informed direct worker participation on work environment issues. However, the employer expert finds that managers must be trained not only how to talk so that workers listen and understand, but, more importantly, 'how to listen in a way that makes people [workers] talk'. It also important to be very clear what the meetings are about, that is, for the work environment to be an explicit issue. However, in practice it is doubtful whether everyone wants to participate in every decision or they sometimes just trust the managers and/or the SRs to do the right thing. The employer expert sometimes also sees false expectations that the workplace is a democracy where a majority of employees can overrule the manager's decision. That is, of course, not the case, especially in the public sector, where democratically elected politicians make decisions that determine the major tasks and hence working conditions.

The LO expert emphasised that, while FAS 05 promotes direct worker participation in APT, the WEA still mandates employers and managers to cooperate with the SRs. However, with limited workplace budgets and decision-making authority, SRs would often have to approach the responsible politicians at the top of the organisations, which is quite challenging. FAS 05 has merged roles, so that local SRs are also shop-floor union representatives, but without a mandate to negotiate. This combined union role is less popular, so the concerned union often appoint separate SRs. LO and its unions also try — but often fail — to get an SR, or CSR, elected to the local union board, to better integrate employee participation and influence through the Co-determination Act and the WEA.

6.4 Safety representatives in a fracturing and changing economy with less unionisation

The work environment expert for the employers in the growing service industry sector notes a lack of both unionisation and SRs. There may also be a turf-war between competing unions (although such inter-union conflicts are generally rare in Sweden), or a union with only one member at the workplace may refuse to appoint a non-union employee as the SR, even if she or he is nominated directly by the (un-unionised) employees. With more and more such workplaces, sometimes also with more than 50 employees, there is a growing need to give them work environment support. To cover the increasing number of completely un-unionised workplaces, this employer expert envisaged the possibility of government-appointed and paid regional SRs, that would thus no longer be run by the unions.

SACO's work environment officer also thinks there is a need for more RSRs to support employees and managers in small firms. The federation's highly skilled members are mostly much sought after and can get reasonable conditions. Yet they need more support from the external and experienced RSRs, as the pace of change increases; for example, many firms change identity very fast. The privatisation of welfare services is a change that also affects SACO's members. The pharmacists' union has therefore increased its SR activity to support members and their work environment when pharmacies change owners.

LO's expert explains that a strong reason for unions not to appoint non-members as SRs is the fact that the unions pay for most of the SRs' training and other support. A non-member SR would thus drain the union's shrinking resources, without contributing to them. Regional SRs often have to handle such cases and then try to recruit the nominated SR into the union, which is another demand for RSR-support to small workplaces and firms. The growing staffing agency sector is an industry with great difficulty in finding willing SRs, who hence are scarce in such firms. The SRs in firms that hire labour try to also support the temporary workers from staffing agencies but often lack enough time for that, for example to write occupational injury reports. To make this effective, there needs to be an agreement between the staffing agency and the hiring firm on who pays for how much of the SR's time, but such agreements are rare. The shortage of SRs in the service industries also has a political-economic background. Their blue-collar employees are often seen as replaceable, which means that they frequently feel mistreated by their employers, and therefore need a lot of union officers' time to support them. This creates higher union fees and the high unemployment rate means that employees pay fairly high fees also to the union-administered unemployment insurance. Therefore, when the conservative government raised the costs of both union and unemployment insurance membership in 2007, this led to a drastic drop in membership in the service industries. This has made it harder to find SRs, especially ones who are union members.

6.5 Safety representative training, conditions, cooperation and support

The training of SRs remains a priority (see section 3.4.3 above) but it was not raised much in the informant interviews. Still, SACO's work environment officer reported that it has gradually increased its work environment activities, including training of SRs, although this varies between its 23 academic unions. Some 3,500 copies of SACO's brochure on 'Being a safety representative' have been distributed (on some 5,600 SRs), especially in the smaller unions. The trained representatives see knowledge as power; more knowledge — especially on the difficult issues of stress and workload and on SWEM — enables them to improve the work environment more. The issue of organisational and social work environment and the new provisions (AFS, 2015: 4) have resulted in much training, often done through joint training and information bodies. This is the largest training campaign since the introduction of SWEM in 2001, a campaign that aims to give all actors legitimacy to raise such work environment risks and do much more against them (Gellerstedt, 2016).

6.6 Time pressure and other obstacles to safety representatives' influence

SACO's SRs in private services often face time pressure, that is, not having enough time set aside — and hence to get a reduction in their normal work — for their tasks. The lack of time is especially strong for lone SACO SRs, that is, those in small firms. Time is also a problem within the public sector — for example for physicians, psychologists and teachers who are also SRs — but there the problem is at least recognised and raised. In larger employers, the CSRs report less time pressure. As they often work on work environment issues for one-quarter of their time or more, replacements for them in their normal jobs have to be organised.

Among blue-collar SRs, those in transport probably face most resistance, and sometimes harassment, from their employers. This industry is hard pressed through both subcontracting and globalisation, in manners that have been criticised as social dumping (LO, 2013). At the same time, the blue-collar SRs within LO find that they get much less support from the labour inspectors. The inspectors talk only briefly with the local representatives during their inspections, or not at all. Some inspectors have been reported to the SWEA for neglecting their duty to talk with both social partners, including the SR. LO has therefore got the SWEA to let RSRs inform new inspectors about the SR role in the course of their training.

7 The 20 establishments studied

7.1 Establishment table

The 20 establishments visited in this study are listed in Table 7.1. The size and sector codes can be found in Table 7.1. The column 'SR' indicates whether the establishment had safety representatives or not. Two, marked with parenthesis, had SRs that were not appointed by unions (see Chapter 8). The establishment marked 'RSR' has a central SR who acts as the equivalent of an RSR in supporting SWEM in the local school (see section 3.3.5 above on RSRs).

Table 7-1: Establishments studied

No	Size/sector code	Business	SR
1	1	Metal assembly	(y)
2	2	Assembly plant	y
3	3	Process industry	y
4	4	Event restaurant	(y)
5	4	Software 1	y
6	5	Traffic safety products	y
7	6	Publishing company	y
8	6	Staffing agency	y
9	6	Software 2	y
10	9	Academic department	y
11	7	Preschool	y
12	7	Art school	RSR
13	8	School 1	y
14	8	School 2	y
15	9	Municipal administration	y
16	3	Steel manufacturing	y
17	2	Food industry	y
18	4	Fast food restaurant	n
19	2	Industrial tech supplier	y
20	8	Medical clinic	y

7.2 Code plan

The coding plan for size and sector is a simpler form of the 27-box matrix in the ESENER-2 survey.

Table 7-2: Size and sector codes

1	Private goods producing and small: 10 to 49 employees
2	Private goods producing and medium: 50 to 249 employees
3	Private goods producing and large: 250+ employees
4	Private services and small: 10 to 49 employees
5	Private services and medium: 50 to 249 employees
6	Private services and large: 250+ employees
7	Public and small: 10 to 49 employees
8	Public and medium: 50 to 249 employees
9	Public and large: 250+ employees

8 Key findings on participation in the studied establishments

Below we describe some of the major results from our study of worker participation in Sweden that emerge from the case-studies. These are presented as a number of themes that are apparent in the case-studies. The first section summarises themes that are developed in the following paragraphs. Our findings and analyses are exemplified with quotes from the interviews, to offer a better understanding of the reasons and arguments that are discussed.

Again, it is necessary to point out that our findings come from a number of case-studies and, as it is often the case in qualitative research, do not constitute a representative overview of how worker participation is practised in Swedish companies. The case-studies show a positive view of worker participation that, at least in some ways, stands in contrast to results from other studies (Frick, 2013b). This can be explained, as pointed out above, by the positive bias in the selection of cases. Another explanation is that in the majority of our cases the employer representatives interviewed have some form of organisational role in developing work environment management, and hence are those within the establishment who also have to promote worker participation in this management. Therefore, they may be inclined to have a more positive view than other managers in the establishment.

With these limitations in mind, the results from our case-studies still provide valuable insight into arguments, motives, rationales and benefits of well-developed worker participation from a wide array of workplaces, from large multinational to small local companies, from private goods-producing companies to public administration and services. The results from the case-studies reveal key factors for establishing constructive involvement of workers and their SRs in work environment management.

Our findings also point out some obstacles to worker participation as well as some limits to the influence of workers and/or SRs. These findings identify important issues that have to be addressed to achieve successful worker participation, one that covers all relevant areas of work environment and that contributes to the decision-making processes, resulting in the desired improvements.

8.1 A general positive view of worker participation

All our interviewees in the 20 establishments have a very positive view of worker participation in work environment management, without any exception. Both employer representatives and workers' representatives argue strongly for the necessity of involving workers in preventing and managing health risks at the workplace. From our findings, it is clear that worker participation is seen by all parties as an important and integral part of work environment management. This is further supported by our interviews with key informants. A wide range of positive arguments for worker participation are brought up in the establishment interviews as well as in the key informant interviews, for example that it is necessary for observing and managing risks in an efficient way, that workers' knowledge is valuable for finding solutions to problems, that it is central to developing a good work environment as well as good production quality, besides more defensive arguments such as the right of workers to protect themselves or that workers need to be involved to secure compliance with rules and regulations.

With only one exception, all establishments visited have one or more SR. In some cases the SR role was rather recently established, but these and the establishment with no SR have well-developed relationships between workers and managers, including discussion on work environment issues. All establishments had some form of organisational structure for work environment management and worker participation, but the degree of formalisation of these structures varied a lot between them (see below). Some of the larger companies have very elaborate management systems for work environment, where the involvement of workers and SRs is included in routines and procedures that the organisations use. Others are more dependent on more informal discussions and day-to-day interactions between managers and workers. One important general finding from our study is that most of the managers and SRs interviewed emphasised informal interactions and relations as crucial for the results and efficiency of work environment management. This is not to say that formal structures are less important; indeed they are important, both for securing workers' rights and also as tools for achieving efficiency. However,

the emphasis on informal dialogue indicates that mutual trust and respect are important elements in most companies' models of work environment management.

The positive view of worker participation in general, and of SRs in particular, was not always specified or detailed in the interviews. Instead, worker participation was regarded as something essential and integral to SWEM and hence more or less taken for granted. Still, several interviewees expressed specific views on the importance of worker participation, for example the operations manager at the traffic safety product supplier:

> It is a key success factor for a dynamic safety management.

Operations manager, traffic products

8.2 Committees, meetings and dialogue

With only a few exceptions, all establishments in the study had organised structures for workers to participate in their work environment management. The generic model was regular meetings at different levels in the organisation. At floor level this was often called 'work floor meeting' (APT), in which workers within a specific unit or department had a meeting with the first line manager. The frequency varied, from monthly to weekly meetings. The work environment was a mandatory subject on the APT agenda in most — but not all — establishments. However, almost everyone said that such issues actually were discussed, even if it was not mandatory.

In all establishments except for the smallest, issues could be referred from these work floor meetings to the next level in the organisation, usually to a safety committee or equivalent. SRs participated in these committees. In the really large establishments, there was also a top-level safety committee, in which CSRs participated. In the interviews, both employer representatives and SRs said that most work environment issues were resolved at the work floor meetings. Only occasionally were issues referred to the safety committee, such when the cost was higher than the first line manager had authority to decide, or if it concerned other parts of the organisation.

Work floor meetings have several purposes, from informing staff about production targets, changes etc. to discussing work environment issues. In some interviews both employer representatives and SRs claimed that the form of meetings had undergone changes over the years, from being mostly about management informing workers to more of a dialogue. In some interviews, it was clear that information and production targets still remain predominant over work environment. For example, one SR explained how their meetings needed more focus on the work environment:

> Meetings should not only be about numbers. You have to talk about staff, work environment — that it is on the agenda for every meeting.

SR, Software 1

In several establishments, the work floor meetings have been relieved from being overloaded with information by increased use of other channels, mostly by using the intranet or e-mail for information that does not require discussion. When information is taken care of in other ways, the work floor meetings offer more time for discussions and dialogue between manager and employees. Several of the managers interviewed appreciated this opportunity to get employees' input on different issues, including work environment. A preschool manager explains what benefits she sees to having work floor meetings:

> I always try to refer the issue back to employees and have a discussion: 'What do you think about this? Are there any ideas? How do we solve this? What are the possibilities?' [...]
> Because the more people there are thinking about it, the more angles and nuances you get. Otherwise it is easy to just see one side of things.

Manager, Preschool

The dialogue at work floor meetings gives an opportunity to effectively identify and assess work-related problems and risks as well as ways to manage them that are consistent with local work practices. Employees can point out aspects that need to be considered for interventions to be successful in their specific work context. However, it is dependent on a relationship between the manager and the

employees that is characterised by trust and shared interest in accomplishing a good work environment. This was the case in most — but not all — case-study establishments. Generally, SRs attended work floor meetings of only their own work groups and visited other work floor meetings only if other employees asked them, which is very rare. Work floor meetings, hence, are primarily a channel for direct worker participation.

Swedish regulations require workplaces with 50 or more employees to establish a joint safety committee, which has to include workers' SRs and employer representatives. All establishments studied, except for the two smallest, had safety committees (the other establishments with fewer than 50 employees were part of larger firms with such joint committees). In these committees more strategic work environment issues were discussed, such as forms of SWEM, follow-ups of incidents and accidents, and planning of major interventions. The SRs' presence is mandatory at the meetings so the committees are the main forum for representative worker participation. In the case-study establishments with more elaborate SWEM, the safety committee appointed work groups for different projects or particular work environment tasks, in which SRs also were included. SRs' participation in the committees and work groups was much appreciated by most managers. Several managers said that they felt that SRs were knowledgeable on work environment issues so it was a big help for managers to have a well-informed SR. Still, the relationships between SRs and employer representatives were crucial, and several interviews discussed how this relationship had to be established and maintained. Good relationships, hence, were seen as a success factor for good and effective work environment management. Within the Swedish public sector, safety committees are commonly combined with meetings between employers and unions, required by the Swedish Co-determination Act. These meetings are called 'cooperative groups' (*samverkansgrupp*) or 'cooperation meetings' (*samverkansmöte*), which indicates the importance of establishing a dialogue between the parties (see above). A superintendent at a school, with responsibility of work environment management, explains how good cooperation was a key factor in its work environment management:

> *We have really good cooperation, and a really good cooperative group. We have a good time together and rarely disagree on anything. Almost never, actually. So we have a well-functioning cooperation. We don't think that we work against each other. You can hear that from many other schools, that there is much conflict. But we don't have that here.*

> Superintendent, School 1

The absence of overt conflict gave room for constructive dialogue, focused on shared problem-solving and strategic planning, which the superintendent claimed distinguished the school from other schools where more conflicts hampered the dialogue. To say that there is a lack of conflict, however, is not the same as to say that there are no conflicting interests in work environment issues. Instead, the consensus perspective described in the quote above should be interpreted as an agreement to follow the rules and on the process for managing the work environment — 'the big issues'. A good dialogue should be open to discussing different views, without questioning the cooperative model as such. This, however, requires that both parties show mutual respect for each other and for the process. An HR strategist at a fairly large municipal administration, with several thousand employees, described what she thought was the key factor for establishing a well-functioning cooperation:

> *I think it is very much about creating involvement. And, it sounds like a cliché, doesn't it! [laughter ...] And also, as top manager, [you have] to ask the union representatives — how do YOU want it to be? How can WE make this as good as possible? [...] It's not that we have the same opinions as the unions — and we shouldn't have — but that we can have a good dialogue, so it doesn't become some sort of fight.*

> HR strategist, Municipal administration

Constructive worker participation in work environment management hence requires the different roles to be clear and the relationships to be maintained in a way that contributes to dialogue. This argument was raised by several interviewees, in different words, for example by an HRM:

> *We have said from the beginning that the safety representative and I work together on these issues, with our different roles.*

> HRM, Event restaurant

The theme 'working together, with different roles' was present in the majority of establishment interviews, in different forms and described with different words, such as 'good atmosphere', 'companionship', 'respect and trust', by both employer representatives and SRs. It was pointed out in several interviews that top management support is necessary to establish well-functioning relationships at lower levels in the organisation. A few interviewees stated explicitly that it was a matter of company values:

> *About work environment... How you choose to look at these things, I think it is about the values in the company. What do we stand for? What do we represent? And I think we have in our values that we trust each other, we believe each other and we are like one team. We only have different roles.*

<div align="right">Manager, Metal assembly</div>

A mutual understanding of the different roles opens up the possibility for SRs to maintain a critical perspective towards relevant work environment issues, without creating unnecessary conflicts. For example, the safety manager at the Staffing agency said that 'the old way' of considering SRs, as always opponents who threaten to shut down the workplace out of spite, no longer exists within the company. In his view, SRs could be 'very sharp' and point out the seriousness of situations, but always in a very constructive way that facilitated a constructive response from the responsible managers.

Beside committee meetings and work groups, SRs in most of the studied establishments participated in risk assessments and safety inspection rounds. Issues found on those occasions were then managed at the committee meetings. Some companies, especially the larger private goods-producing companies, had elaborate systems for managing reports from inspection rounds, risk assessments, accidents, incidents, observations and deviation. Others were more dependent on personal observations and reporting, and saw SRs as important to draw attention to important aspects of the work environment:

> *They [SRs] come with valuable input, I absolutely think so. We get to hear many things that managers or HR would not be able to catch up on in other ways.*

<div align="right">HRM, Software 1</div>

The HRM went on to say that SRs were especially important when it came to issues such as cooperation between colleagues, relationships with managers etc. The HRM was of the opinion that the SRs had good knowledge about those matters and that they knew what issues to act on. Hence SRs were seen as important to identify problems and to raise matters that otherwise would have been hard to detect or would take a long time to manage.

Input from SRs was also used to improve the process of work environment management, to achieve better efficiency and quality. In some establishments with elaborate management systems, including several different forms of risk assessments as well as quality audits, there was a need to continuously define what issue was to be handled using what process. One employer representative expressed a wish for increased use of SRs in this improvement process:

> *And I would like them to help us lift the safety inspection rounds to the correct level, that they can point out that 'this does do not belong to the safety round protocol — you have to write a non-conformity report instead.*

<div align="right">HSE, Process industry</div>

For the Staffing agency, the SRs can also provide the management and sales organisation with knowledge on work environment factors at the customer companies and hence facilitate the selection of consultant workers with the appropriate training and safety knowledge:

> *SRs can be our knowledgeable 'eyes and ears' on site at the customer company. That is why we are extra happy to have them.*

<div align="right">Safety manager, Staffing agency</div>

Several establishments, for example the Staffing agency, argued that it was important to include SRs at an early stage in planning what measures should be taken to abate assessed risks. This was seen as a way to make use of employees' knowledge about their workplace and the work tasks.

Support and commitment from top management was regarded as a key factor for establishing a good cooperative atmosphere in several establishments studied. The superintendent at one of the schools exemplified this by referring to how the head had achieved a well-functioning cooperation group:

I think the main reason is that we have a headmaster that wants it this way. She has a really good relationships with all the unions. And that we don't think in terms of us and them, but that we all work together [towards the same goals].

<div align="right">Superintendent, School 1</div>

The superintendent goes on to explain what it takes to establish good relationships:

The headmaster needs to let go of any feeling of superiority towards union representatives. Sometimes they come up with what you might consider being a bit 'strange'. Sometimes you just think 'dear god' [laughter], but to let go of that prestige anyhow and try to do something about it. Because it does come from those working here.

<div align="right">Superintendent, School 1</div>

Accepting and respecting differences in ways of behaving, in priorities and in roles were described as key factors for maintaining good relationships and hence assuring that workers found it meaningful to participate. Even if not all worker demands were seen as relevant, a respectful attitude from management contributed to maintaining dialogue and functional meeting routines. Several of the managers interviewed gave examples, but argued that the procedures were important to maintain and that it sometimes meant giving a respectful response to what they perceived as irrelevant demands. As stated above, almost all employer representatives interviewed were of the opinion that most demands from SRs and workers were at least reasonable and at best contributed to the development of the establishment. Hence, they regarded the relationships and the procedures as being of great value and several of them expressed a wish for increased activity from the SRs:

I think most managers would like to have more involvement from the SRs, since they think that they are good, that they are knowledgeable on work environment issues and that it is good to get help from them. Many suggestions for improvements come from SRs and from things they have discussed with their co-workers. So, from my experience, managers like talking to their SRs and they would like even more input from them.

<div align="right">HSE, Steel manufacturing</div>

Many interviewees also saw worker participation as essential for the integration of work environment factors, such as designing the workplace, machinery, etc., with work practices and methods. Both employer representatives and SRs emphasised the importance of workers' input on the development of the physical workplace and on what it took to perform work tasks in an efficient way. Workers' input then could be balanced against other interests:

On those occasions when the engineers have made adjustments without involving us [SRs/workers] it just don't work. [...] They want to save money, making things as compact as possible — which makes it harder to work with, to reach things...

<div align="right">SR, Process industry</div>

A few establishments in the study had elaborate systems for ensuring worker participation in relevant processes:

A large part of our projects are managed by our engineering department. And we have worked a lot with them so they have a KPI [key performance indicator] to follow up on that workers have participated in all projects, that they measure and evaluate this.

<div align="right">HSE, Process industry</div>

These highly systematic and formalised processes were most common in larger, private goods-producing industries. Still, the importance of workers' participation was emphasised in several establishments, regardless of size or sector. One of the smallest establishments in our study exemplified the importance of worker participation in managing the work environment, but also for the development

of effective production methods. The manager interviewed said that no one in the management had any experience of managing manufacturing, but that they had people with good knowledge about the product, good sales persons, economists etc.:

That's why 'the lads' [workers], they are the ones who know. There is no one that knows as much about manufacturing as those who actually manufacture.

Financial manager, Metal assembly plant

The establishment had little formal or organised work environment management, but was very successful in both assessing and managing risks. It achieved this through mutual respect, interested and committed managers and deep involvement of workers in the planning and forming the workplace. For example, the SR and other workers had been very much involved in the reconstruction of the workshop, and the SR said:

We are pretty free to decide, as long as we still produce.

SR, Metal assembly plant

The SR described a situation when there had been a lot of stress about certain products and express orders with short-notice changes in the design because customers had new ideas and requests. The SR and one of his colleagues were given the task of planning the production with regard to machine and employee capacity. The SR said that this had led to a better workflow in production, which also reduced stress. The financial manager interviewed agreed and said:

And this is an interesting solution. Because originally it was the production manager, or whatever his title is, that should plan and manage the production. But we [management] and the employees saw that it didn't work. [...] So we delegated the planning to the safety representative and his colleague.

Financial manager, Metal assembly plant

The SR and the manager had also jointly found solutions to several work environment problems, such as reducing physical strain from lifting metal sheets by new work methods and adjustable wagons to store the material, reducing noise by encasing machines, and reducing stress by re-organising the storage rooms. This small company, operating in a highly competitive market, thus found the participation of workers and SRs useful and valuable to optimise production as well as the work environment.

8.3   Informal relations, mutual confidence

As mentioned above, trust and mutual respect was a significant aspect of the relationships between managers, workers and workers' SRs that facilitated SWEM. Even in the establishments with extensive and elaborate management systems and routines, such as the food industry company, the steel manufacturer, the industrial tech supplier and the process industry company, informal relations characterised by trust and confidence were seen as essential key factors. The formal structures, for example the safety committees, were important for discussing, planning and solving complex issues. However, almost all establishments found that most minor issues were solved more or less informally through day-to-day interaction between workers or SRs and managers at different levels.

One explanation of this is that formal hierarchies in the establishments are not seen as insurmountable obstacles to a dialogue between managers and workers. Several managers and SRs described how workers can approach managers if they want to bring their attention to something. For example, the SR at the traffic safety product company said that he contacts the operations manager or the chief executive officer (CEO) if there is a problem and finds this contact to be without problems. The HRM at the event restaurant gave a similar description, with which the SR agreed:

Because there are so few of us full-time employees, I really think we have an open dialogue. I think that most of our employees feel that they can go and talk even to our CEO and say, well, not anything, but almost. I don't think anyone would hesitate — if they see something, if they

think that, 'if we do it like this it would be much better' — I don't think they would hesitate to say that.

<div align="right">HRM, Event restaurant</div>

The manager of the fast food restaurant had the same experience: most things were brought up in the daily interactions with him and he saw these comments as mostly relevant:

Employees says that 'this is stupid', 'this is an obstruction, 'I always run into this' or similar. If it is something that is possible to take care of, then we write it down.

<div align="right">Manager, Fast food restaurant</div>

In larger organisations, it is for obvious reasons not as common for workers to speak directly to top managers. Still, in several of the establishments studied, workers do approach high-level management, for example health and safety executives (HSEs) or department managers. In companies with such roles, such as the industrial tech supplier and the steel manufacturer, the HSEs (or equivalent) said that workers regularly approach them when they walk through the factory, which is valuable for gaining information, but also sometimes time-consuming. As noted above, several establishments wished for increased contacts between SRs and management. One reason was that it was perceived as more efficient to talk with representatives than with all workers. However, meetings and appointments were not seen as the most effective way to establish a dialogue, so some employer representatives expressed a wish for more informal and easier contacts with the SRs, as well as more initiatives taken by them:

I wish that we [HSE and SRs] both had more regular contacts, besides when we approach them with some issue. That in could be a two-way dialogue, that doesn't have to be regular appointments, but that it is as easy for SRs to contact us... because I don't feel that happens so often. It is extremely rare.

<div align="right">HSE, Process industry</div>

In most of the establishments studied, SRs have access to high-level managers, but several managers argued that the work environment concerns every employee, so managers need to have good relations and dialogue with all workers, not only the SRs. Worker participation in work environment management is thereby not limited to the role of SRs, but a more general principle, which also follows from the WEA. The health and safety executive at the industrial tech supplier explained how he regards worker participation:

From the employer point of view, we make no difference between safety representatives and other workers. When we do risk analysis and such, we just grab a worker to participate. Of course, we try to grab those who are safety representatives, if they are in the right department, on the right shift etc. But there is no reluctance [from workers] to participate or to have an opinion on how things should be done and so forth — everyone does that. So I'm not even sure that there is any point in being safety representative.

<div align="right">HSE, Industrial tech supplier</div>

At the establishment in question, managers spent a lot of time on the shop floor, which made it easy for workers to point out any issue or problem. Hence, there was no immediate need for an SR to act as intermediary between workers and management on minor, specific issues. However, the SR had an important role in the safety committees and the work groups that planned SWEM and followed up results, accidents, incidents and so forth.

8.4 Contributions from safety representatives

Bearing in mind that the selection of establishments for this study and of interviewees is most likely to have a positive bias, the interviews generated substantial information about what qualities in and contributions from the SRs were most appreciated by the employer representatives.

Several employer representatives expressed that they wanted active SRs with high integrity who could contribute to improving work environment management:

I want a strong CSR, who does not yield on anything... you must speak up when things are bad.

HSE, Industrial tech supplier

You need the independent role [of SRs]. You want them to be critical in a constructive manner, so to speak.

CSR, Process industry

Qualities in SRs that several employer representatives appreciated were that they should be active, knowledgeable, strong, communicative, fearless, devoted and constructive. Establishments with work environment specialists or coordinators, such as the HSE and CSR quoted above, saw the SRs as important for ensuring quality in their OSHM. The independent role was seen as a way to balance input from first line managers or other parts of the organisation that were not knowledgeable enough about safety and health at work. Independent SRs were hence seen as important for getting a critical, constructive opinion on working conditions or on interventions at the workplace. Several employer representatives expressed the importance of active SRs that contributed input from their viewpoints:

I have worked with one of them [SRs] before, and she has more or less got over the feeling that they are causing trouble. I say, 'you are supposed to question things!'

HSE, Software 2

To overcome the feeling of SRs causing trouble, both managers and unions need to contribute. In several establishments, this meant explicitly articulating what was expected of the SRs, including that they are supposed to point out things that are wrong. To do that, SRs need knowledge, as well as the dedication to act upon it. When these aspects were lacking, the managers saw it as a problem:

Some know a lot, but many... how to say, it does not really come from the heart. If you go on a safety inspection round and point something out, they are like 'ah, that's nothing'.

HSE, Steel manufacturing

Lack of OSH knowledge was seen as an explanation of why workers as well as SRs did not take enough precautions. At the same establishment as in the quote above, they have identified and addressed these circumstances and are actively try to raise safety awareness:

Me and the chief safety representative work together to 'shake them up'. We have worked hard on this for a few years and they have had a meeting in the safety representative group where they asked 'do you REALLY want to be a safety representative, and if so — this is what we demand from you'.

HSE, Steel manufacturing

Employer representatives therefore expressed how they wanted SRs to have the competence and authority to identify and communicate risks as well as act on them. One HRM expressed the following expectations of what she saw as good SRs:

they are open, inclusive and easy to have a dialogue with. And let us know when there is something [wrong], that they call attention to issues, and not just keep things for themselves. And also they must be perceived as easy to contact by the employees.

HRM, Software 1

Several employer representatives also emphasised the role as representative, and not only as 'safety expert'. Several interviewees specifically stated that it was important that SRs are supposed to gather opinions and demands from co-workers:

A good safety representative is one that is a good listener in his or her work group, that is active and asks, not only waiting for people to come to the safety representative but actually asks. [A good SR] is knowledgeable on work environment and the regulations, and perhaps some technical knowledge. Someone that takes the role seriously. [...] And that has the courage to bring issues to the right person/level. I think that is important. It is possible to be a good safety representative even if you only report to me [HSE], but it is better if they dare to have discussions with the managers.

HSE, Steel manufacturing

The ability to listen to colleagues and to make their opinions into coherent demands that can be communicated to all management levels is a quality that several employer representatives said they appreciated.

A good SR must have a keen ear and be sensitive towards their colleagues. And they need to cooperate between the different unions. And of course, they need to be of the opinion that OHS is super important, and not only become SR for other reasons.

Superintendent, School 1

In the employers' view, an effective representative role also included interaction among the unions, where there were several unions represented at the workplace, so that the employer did not need to have the same discussion several times with different representatives.

Communication skills were of course also important when it came to interaction with management. A well-functioning SR, in the employers' view, needs to have the ability to discuss critical issues with managers:

It must be a person that you can talk to and discuss [things with]. And that you feel confident in, because sometimes there are sensitive issues, which the SR must keep confidential.

Manager, Preschool

Trust is a quality that many employer interviewees referred to, although not always explicitly by that term. In some cases it is referred to as an outcome of the ability to discuss things in a constructive manner with a focus on the point at issue. In addition, SRs described how they try to maintain a constructive dialogue when making complaints:

it might not help to be too oppositional, if you put it that way. It may be better to 'rub them up the right way' to make things happen

SR, Traffic safety products

This quote exemplifies how the process for participation in work environment management is not seen as a major arena for conflict, even where there are differences of opinion. It also shows the importance of representatives being able to express themselves in ways that do not seem oppositional to the management, but still succeed in achieving the representative's goal, sometimes by convincing managers that the demands are important and appropriate.

As a contrast to the desired qualities in well-functioning SRs, some interviewees give examples of dysfunctional SRs. One example, from a municipality, was an SR who rarely attended any committee meetings, but when she did was very aggressive, having strong opinions. Employer representatives, as well as other SRs, did not regard her opinions and demands as relevant or believe that the employees, who were supposed to be represented, supported them. The result was that the meetings became unconstructive and that neither the employer nor the SRs were satisfied with the outcome.

Some interviewees expressed the view that sometimes employees take on the SR role for the wrong reasons. For example, a CSR said that previously some workers had asked to become full-time SRs,

that is, doing nothing other than being a representative, but 'only to escape from their regular work tasks', and hence not driven by any real interest in work environment issues.

If that is the reason, you will not be a very good SR. It is the wrong reason.

CSR, anonymous

For SRs' contributions to have positive outcomes, hence, the representatives require certain qualities, not least devotion to and interest in work environment issues and improvements.

8.5 Examples of safety representative interventions

SRs have strong rights following the WEA. Most of their tasks involve participating in meetings and discussions on different subjects; but ultimately they have the right to shut down a workplace that the representative finds to present immediate and serious danger. Far from every SR has ever been in a situation where it has been necessary to stop work or shut down a workplace or area. Below are two examples from the interviews that are intended to illustrate such a situation.

One of the chief SRs at School 1 described how about a month before the interview he shut down (that is, stopped work in) an entire part of the school that in his opinion was unsafe for both students and staff. He contacted his own manager and the responsible managers in the organisation that owns the building and from which the school rents premises. He then took pictures of what he regarded as risks and sent them to the managers together with his own comments. He then shut down that part of the building, meaning no one was allowed to enter until the risks had been taken care of. This was a major intervention that affected both teachers and students, who no longer had access to the closed part of the building and therefore had to change plans and locations. However, the management still regarded the SR's action favourably:

The managers think this is really good, because they don't always have the time to watch over every part of the premises themselves or from the perspective that we have.

CSR, School 1

The CSR also has direct contact with those who own and are responsible for the buildings. If something comes up at a safety inspection or in any other situation, the CSR reports any issue or deviation directly to them and mostly receives a good response. Every report that he send is based on facts and he supplies material that backs up his statements, such as photos supporting his argument. Doing this maintains the good relationship between him and the management.

It has worked really well, I think. They see what I mean and take it seriously. It is not forgotten.

CSR, School 1

Another example came from the Staffing agency. The social welfare service had a temporary need for agency workers to meet the increased workload due to the refugee reception and housing situation. They needed many agency workers on short notice, which meant very hasty recruitment at the agency. Extremists had previously attacked several facilities in Sweden and there had been several cases of arson. With regard to the potentially dangerous situation, the CSR 'pulled the emergency brakes' and called a meeting to discuss the work environment and safety for the workers.

This [the work tasks and the political situation] means special demands on the agency workers, and the chief safety representative raised this as an issue and contacted me. We arranged a meeting very rapidly and tried to sort out — what does it look like more specifically. Then it does not have to become anything more than that. I think we saved a lot of time because of this, as well as a lot of frustration.

Safety manager, Staffing agency

The CSR demanded that risk assessments should be undertaken, that crisis management needed to be organised better and that contact lists should be documented, among many things. The response

from the management was immediate and a meeting was arranged shortly where all issues were discussed and planned for.

> *It was very quickly done — everyone agreed within an hour and we felt that we had things under control due to our well-functioning organisation and administrative structures.*

<div align="right">CSR, Staffing agency</div>

The actions taken by the CSR was seen as helpful and appropriate and contributed to improved routines in the company.

8.6 Training

A prerequisite for a 'dynamic' partnership that was mentioned in several interviews is that both parties need enough competence to pursue constructive dialogue, as expressed in the following quote:

> *I like it when a competent union meets the competent employer, and that you build something, in 'symbiosis'. If that is the contribution of the union, it is all good. [...] To have a counterpart that balances our aim to make a profit with reason and common sense.*

<div align="right">Operations manager, Traffic safety products</div>

Most establishments in the study had SRs who had undergone training of some sort, and in many cases they had taken several different courses covering many work environment issues.

The interviews did not have time to go into any detail about the contents or exact arrangements of the training, but it was clear that it differed between the establishments studied. In many cases, the SRs had attended training courses that were arranged by their union. Some were basic work environment management training (known as BAM, short for 'Bättre ArbetsMiljö', which stands for 'better work environment) and some were more specific training on certain areas, such as accident prevention. In some cases, the occupational health service arranged the training, or parts of it.

However, several of the establishments studied had joint courses for managers and SRs. This was emphasised as having strong positive effects on the quality and efficiency of work environment management as well as on worker participation. When both SRs and managers got the same information at the same time, it meant that they had a common starting point in their discussions. It also helped to clarify the roles and, by doing that, it reduced the risk of unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings. In some cases, the employer and the union arranged the joint training together, taking turns to give lectures on different subjects. The argument for this arrangement was that it played down any unwanted expectations of an antagonistic relationship, giving room for more cooperation and focus on the subject matter.

8.7 Limits to participation: the organisational and social work environment

However positive the general view of worker participation and active SRs was in our studied establishments, it was still clear that there were limits to the access that workers and SRs had to important decision-making processes and to what areas and issues it was possible for them to influence.

The case-studies, consistent with the literature, indicate that well-established and well-functioning work environment management facilitates worker participation (even though a couple of cases in this study had achieved extensive worker participation with little support from formal SWEM structures). The interviews hence show that work environment issues that are addressed by SWEM are also subject to worker participation. Traditional work environment management usually has its strongest focus on accidents and direct physical risks, and less on long-term health risks, MSDs, strains etc., even though the latter are also often addressed. However, it is generally easier to achieve good SWEM, and hence well-functioning worker participation, when it concerns physical risks, accidents, machine safety etc.

In our case-studies, there are several examples of how both health risks and psychosocial risks are addressed by safety committees, discussed at meetings etc. Still, they are discussed much less than, for example, accident risks or technical/physical aspects of the work environment. Worker influence and the roles of SRs were also less well defined when it came to psychosocial issues.

Within the same period as our interviews were conducted, new provisions on the psychosocial work environment were introduced. The new provisions about the organisational and social work environment came into effect on 31 March 2016, regulating knowledge requirements, goals, workloads, working hours and victimisation. In all but a few of the studied establishments, the new regulation had led to discussion on their psychosocial work environment and on how to comply with the new provisions. The ambitions, aims and results of the discussions differed greatly among the establishments studied. However, in general the discussions are rather limited, focusing mostly on symptoms and sick leave, leaving out any analysis of root causes or systematic approaches to preventing stress by managing the work environment.

Even establishments with elaborate routines and a highly systematic approach to work environment management stated that it was difficult to integrate prevention of psychosocial ill health with their SWEM. For example, the HSE at the steel manufacturing company explained that, in her opinion, their existing routines already covered several of the requirements in the new provisions, but they needed to learn how to do it even better within the current SWEM, and not just ask 'who is stressed?'

Assessing psychosocial risks, as well as investigating work-related root causes of psychosocial ill health, requires thorough scrutiny of both the work environment and the specific work tasks. Even though several case-study establishments discuss the work tasks and how to perform them, these discussions are rarely seen as part of work environment management or included in the SWEM routines. For example, the SR at the traffic safety product supplier said that they do not talk much about work tasks on the safety rounds, but only about equipment, loose cables or the like. The employer representative at the same company said:

> The difficult thing is to assess the psychosocial work environment on safety inspection rounds. You kind of need a special meeting for that.

> Operations manager, Traffic safety product supplier

The operations manager goes on to give examples of work tasks that they should discuss at such meetings, such as the right to say no to assignments, how to point out that certain working conditions are inappropriate, for example cold, dark and working alone. Such discussions, however, require a very open meeting climate, since they can touch upon issues that workers or managers feel uncomfortable talking about, for various reasons. Consequently, discussions about issues such as stress or how to perform certain work tasks, are not part of the regular work environment meetings in several of the establishments studied. In some establishments, the SRs became an important way to raise psychosocial issues:

> The more sensitive [psychosocial] issues are not addressed in meetings. They [employees] talk directly to their SR, in their role.

> HRM, Software 1

Talking to SRs instead of first line managers or at meetings is an important opportunity for workers to address issues that they feel are sensitive in one way or another. For instance, if one suffers from stress resulting from inability to manage an unreasonable workload, it may be easier to talk to an SR than to the manager. Other sensitive areas are conflicts, especially between workers and managers. Such issues are difficult to manage through the same organisational structures as other work environment issues. Safety committees and workplace meetings are hence not seen as suitable forums to discuss these issues:

> Not much psychosocial. Because it is not like they say that they don't like their manager to us.

> SR, Event restaurant

Even if there is an SR present at the meetings, many workers still see it as inappropriate to address conflicts with managers (or colleagues) as work environment issues. The HRM at the same establishment says that those things are better handled in anonymous surveys. However, surveys tend only to focus on the situation at large and not on particular problems, relations or individuals. It is also common for managers to regard surveys as something external to the SWEM processes, or as an issue not within their responsibility:

> The challenge is to find a simple enough way to scrutinise these [psychosocial] issues, so that they become part of the daily business and not something that the managers feel like, 'oh no, here comes another employee survey that requires my attention.'

HRM, Software 2

How the surveys are used and how they are integrated in SWEM are therefore of great importance to the possibility that SRs will act upon them. Among the establishments studied, surveys were widely used. However, in most cases they used them to identify symptoms within the total workforce, and not to identify root causes or to point out situations that were particular problems.

Only a few SRs said in the interviews that colleagues came to them with questions about the psychosocial work environment. One example is the chief SR at the industrial tech supplier, who said that it was very rare for anyone to contact him to talk about stress. He thought that either they talked to the managers directly or they did not say anything at all. He said that it was far from certain that an employee who experienced stress would be comfortable to talk to the specific person who was serving as SR. The HSE at the same company said that, in his experience, people talked to those co-workers they felt comfortable with, not those who were appointed as SRs.

The HSE at the steel manufacturing company said that SRs had had some extra training on the new regulation of the psychosocial work environment, but that it might still be difficult for them to act as representatives, especially in the industrial setting:

> They [SRs] need to know what the provisions say, even if it may be hard for them to act on those issues — an effect I think of the 'macho culture'. But they need to know what it says.

HSE, Steel manufacturing

When psychosocial issues are absent from SWEM, SRs do not get involved in dealing with them. For example, the CSR at School 1 said that he was mostly involved in physical issues, safety-related issues, and facilities and maintenance issues.

The difficulty in regarding work tasks and how they are performed as SWEM issues was a recurrent theme in the interviews. Even when it was clear that certain work tasks often led to stress, they were hard to talk about in work environment terms.

> The biggest [work environment] issue that I think we should talk more about is the stress in the control room. We try to find ways to deal with it, but it is hard.

CSR, Process industry

In most of the establishments studied, both managers and workers were well aware of stressful situations and factors that caused stress. For example, the HR strategist at the municipal administration was of the opinion that many psychosocial issues, stress and conflict had their roots in non-working routines, bad planning or unclear work tasks. Such disorders may finally show up in sick leave numbers, employee surveys, end-user ('customer') surveys and financial results. Still, the issues seem very difficult to bring to the work environment management agenda to discuss the root causes:

> It is very hard. It is very sensitive. I have said that, I have brought up that we have problems. It is rather well known. But... At the end it is money that talks.

SR, Software 1

One factor that contributes to the difficulties in discussing the psychosocial work environment is the perceived lack of knowledge, especially among managers. Even when the outcome in ill health is clearly

visible and concrete, it seems hard to attribute it to psychosocial work environment factors. An HRM exemplifies this, saying that managers generally do not see the connection between physical symptoms and psychosocial work environment, for example if there is any relationship between migraine and recurring stressful periods at work, if neck/shoulder pains are related to the work situation etc.

The interviews show several examples of how issues such as workload or lack of management support in prioritisation of work tasks are perceived as being beyond what SRs can influence. When workload and work tasks are not covered in the work environment dialogue, workers are left without support:

Unfortunately, we have a manager here that, if you say to him that he has to prioritise [among employees work tasks], 'what task shall I do?', then he says 'all of them'. And that is very stressful. And it turns into a work environment problem, that we don't feel confident in him. So we work at our own understanding of the situation. That's how it is. When there is no management, the staff have to decide what to do by themselves.

<div align="right">SR, anonymous</div>

In contrast, one employer representative says that their organisation has specified targets, for example to increase efficiency (do more work per person), but rarely discusses how to get there, what it means for the organisation, if it will imply extra workload etc. Also, the employer representative says that they do not have those discussions with SRs, who just accept the fact:

Management have little understanding of the employees, of their work situation. They are only concerned with the money, how much profit it is possible to make...

<div align="right">SR, anonymous</div>

Excluding workload and work task performance from SWEM means that many decisions that are of major importance for the work environment and for workers' health are not available to worker participation. Some interviewees say that decisions on, for example reduction in staff numbers are not accompanied by a risk assessment of the work situation for the remaining employees, for example by considering what work tasks managers have to eliminate to avoid keeping doing the same amount of work with fewer employees.

There are several indications in the case-studies that the psychosocial work environment is being separated from 'regular' work environment management and hence not handled in the same systematic way, within the same organisational arrangement, by the same actors, with the same priority on prevention or with equivalent elaborated methods. For example, the HR strategist at Software 2 explained how discussions of the psychosocial work environment are mostly reduced to being about policy documents and hence not about actual risks or how to abate them. In the private goods-producing industries, SWEM coordination is often part of a quality department, or equivalent. The reason is that most of the problems — and solutions — concern the production in itself, and how it is designed and re-designed to reduce physical risks. Worker participation, then, is a matter for line managers, workers and SRs.

When it comes to psychosocial issues, however, they are instead largely referred to the HR department to deal with. For example, the HSE at the steel manufacturing company, which had a well-established organisation for SWEM, said that the new provisions on the psychosocial work environment had attracted interest from the HR department, since it sees them as more of an administrative than a technical issue. A common view that many referred to in the interviews is that the psychosocial work environment is 'about people', and hence is a matter for the HR department. However, other interviewees contested this view, saying that the psychosocial work environment is mostly 'about work tasks', and hence a matter for the line management. It is worth noting that HR departments are not given an explicit role in the SWEA's guidelines to the new provisions, which instead point out the importance of involving managers who have the authority to make decisions and the resources to carry them out. HR is, in most establishments, a support function without authority to make decisions on workplace design or on how work tasks shall be performed. Hence, the increasing role of HR in psychosocial work environment management may at the same time limit workers' influence on these issues.

A parallel process that was mentioned in at least one establishment in this study is the increased occurrence of 'health inspirers' (sometimes labelled 'health representatives'). They are mostly appointed

by the management and are given the task of promoting health activities, such as wellness training or arranging lectures on healthy eating. The role does not have the same legal status as SRs and is not regulated in the WEA. 'Health inspirers' are supposed to complement the SRs with a more 'promotive' view. Still, the 'health inspirers' sometimes replace SRs in discussions of the work environment. The municipal administration had almost 100 'health inspirers' and the HR strategist said that the inspirers were given the task to educate and inform workers not only about health promotion, but also about psychosocial work environment issues:

> *When they [the inspirers] have worked more with work environment issues, about 98 % of it is psychosocial and 2 % is adjustable desks, air quality and such things. It is very much 'how do we behave towards each other at work'.*

<div align="right">HR strategist, Municipal administration</div>

Without the legal rights of SRs and without the representative role, there is a certain risk that the presence of 'health inspirers' will limit worker influence, especially on psychosocial issues. It may also result in even fewer resources being given to SRs, such as time off to fulfil the role.

The limited influence of SRs on the psychosocial work environment was observed by some employer representatives in the establishments studied. For example, one HRM (anonymous) went so far as to say that the cooperative model of SWEM, in which SRs are to balance demands from the management, was not sufficient. The HRM argued that, since it was very hard to discuss the actual causes of stress with managers, such as excessive workload and too few employees, there is a need for more labour inspections, and perhaps harder, more critical inspections and even more fines. A labour inspection note would, in that informant's opinion, put the required pressure on managers that would make them prioritise SWEM and workers' health. SRs did not have the power or authority to promote such a change of management opinion, even with their strong right to call for the labour inspectorate's attention. A fine as well as the negative effects on the company's brand would make top managers actually do something about the work environment, in the HRM's view. This shows how SRs have limited influence on areas of vital importance in work environment management, even in organisations with strong unions and a well-established organisation for SWEM.

In contrast, some establishments in the study had readily identified the beneficial correlation between absence of stress and increased productivity:

> *It is interesting, in regard to stress and work environment, that, during the periods where we have not achieved harmony [due to lack of orderliness, non-functional logistics and personal conflicts], then we have not made any money. Only last year [which both the SR and financial manager describe as harmonious] the company became profitable.*

<div align="right">Financial manager, Metal assembly plant</div>

All workers, including their SR, had been deeply involved in identifying and reducing factors causing stress, and in the development of production organisation and working methods. The quoted establishment was not alone in ascribing importance to the psychosocial aspects of work design, and several other establishments accordingly made efforts to address these problems in some way.

8.8 Limits to participation: systematic work environment management in public organisations

The public sector (our study does not include the State) in Sweden is characterised by well-established formal procedures for SWEM (Frick, 2013a: chs 4 and 5), which also cover the cooperation between the parties according to the Co-determination Act. The safety committees are therefore combined with co-determination meetings and are commonly named cooperation groups or cooperation meetings. The meetings are commonly arranged similarly in different parts of the public sector, with specified 'levels', from the work floor, through intermediate levels, such as municipal administrative units, to central cooperation, for example for a local authority. This structure is in many aspects similar to those in the private sector. However, there are differences. An important one is that there is less flow of information between the different levels in the public sector, as they seem to be less constituted as one coherent

organisation than in most private companies. Local units, such as a school, preschool or home care service, hence seem to have less communication with, and support from, the intermediate level, such as a municipal administrative unit, than does a department in a large private company.

Still, many important decisions that directly affect work and working conditions are made at central or intermediate level. From our case-studies, it seems as if SWEM at local level is not much communicated to — or followed up by — higher levels within the public administration. This means that, in spite of having well-established formal structures and routines — with cooperation groups at all levels, for example from school to administration to municipal level, where work environment is part of the agenda of all meetings — important work-related issues are not discussed at the level where the actual decisions are made. Most of our cases from the public sector expressed these experiences, although they were rarely questioned by either SRs or managers. Even when the formal participatory rights and procedures were known and established, they were not utilised to influence important work environment decisions, as exemplified by an SR:

> *So, we do have the possibility to bring issues to a higher level. But I wouldn't know if I feel that there are any economic resources at the administration. They are a 'purchasing' administration and do not have any money themselves. All money is located at all the different units, which have to fund the administration. So, if anything, it has to be brought to a central level, up to the municipal council. And that feels very far away.*

> SR, anonymous

To exemplify work environment issues that needed to be discussed at a higher level, another SR said that they suffered from a heavy workload in the workplace, with too little time to perform all work tasks. Besides carrying out the services, they had many other tasks, such as rather extensive documentation and many meetings with 'end-users'. The amount of mandatory administrative work tasks had increased, but the demands on the core service remained as high as before, without any staff increase. Sick leave caused further stress on the remaining employees, since there was rarely anyone to substitute for those at home. These issues resulted in even more sick leave and were discussed at the local cooperation meetings. However, they were not directly communicated to the higher levels of the local authority, for example by escalating issues to the top management in the same way as in several of the private establishments studied. The local manager could apply for an increased budget the following year, but rarely with direct reference to work environment health risks. Problems that were general within a certain profession could be discussed and addressed at higher levels, sometimes by initiatives from SR. Still, the discussions were mostly kept general and did not concern problems at a specific unit.

First line managers in the public sector similarly had little power and authority to make necessary decisions. They had a formal right to 'return' their work environment tasks and responsibilities to higher levels, but this was seldom utilised, at least partly because it would result in higher management questioning the lower manager's capability. This also limited the possibilities for SRs to influence the work environment and to raise issues to the higher organisational level where decisions were made that strongly affected the work environment at the floor level.

8.9 Limits to participation: reluctant safety representatives

For many first line managers, having an SR among the employees will imply costs, at least for lost working time when the representative is off, for example to attend meetings. This may, in some cases, lead managers to view SRs as something negative and make them reluctant to allow time off or to arrange substitutes when the representatives are away from work. A consequence, pointed out by several interviewees, is that unclear routines, for example regarding the right to take time off, make SRs less active in their role, so they do not argue for change or raise issues, even when it is also called for or even wished for by the employers:

> *It is very rare that they... take their chance, or what to call it. It could be that they don't feel that they have the time, I don't know if that is a factor*

> HSE, Software 2

Some of the establishments visited, for example Software 2, have solved this by having a central budget, so that first line managers can invoice the central administration for the extra costs of SR time.

Another factor that makes SRs refrain from actively engaging in work environment management is that dialogue with managers requires some competence and ability in communication (see for example Sjöström, 2013). Participating in SWEM meetings means engaging in discussions that sometimes involves technical and/or abstract language and, from time to time, require skills in argumentative techniques to express requirements and convince managers as decision makers. Some workers and SRs, especially in blue-collar establishments, may find such meetings and discussions uncomfortable, as stated by, for example, the CSR at the industrial tech supplier. The HSE at the steel manufacturing company said that SWEM meetings often included a mix of managers, workers, SRs, engineers etc. The HSE said that there was a big difference between how much SRs and workers talked in these 'mixed' meetings and in the meetings with the HSE alone. Even meetings where the top managers are not present are perceived as more open to active participation from the SRs. The HSE saw this as negative and hoped that SRs and other workers could see beyond the status levels and prestige, so that it would be possible to talk to the top managers as to any other person.

Calling attention to work environment issues is, as noted above, often seen as positive by the employer representatives interviewed, as this helps the establishment to comply with the WEA and its provisions. However, it requires strong and confident SRs to actually point out when the employer does not follow the regulations. Some employer representatives said that far from all SRs actually explicitly require that the employer follow the WEA:

> They don't. They are too nice/soft. It is I who have to say 'this is in the law, think about that'. So it is very rare that things come from SRs in that way.

> HSE, Steel manufacturing

Hence, even with very clear and strong legal rights for the SRs, as well as a more or less outspoken request from the employer for them to speak up, not all SRs raise work environment issues with reference to the legal requirements.

One manager also identified cultural differences as another reason for SRs' reluctance to talk to the management:

> I can see that there is a difference for employees with immigrant background. It seems to be much harder for them to speak up if there is anything. Perhaps they are more imprinted not to speak up to the employer. They just keep their heads down and work. So, it more like, I have to approach them to talk and ask and make them feel safe.

> Manager, Fast food restaurant

Cultural background, as recognised in the quote above, can imply certain expectations of relationships between workers and managers, and how they should be maintained. Like the argument above that blue-collar SRs may feel insecure about how to discuss things with managers, language barriers may affect their willingness to participate in work environment meetings and articulate opinions there. As the manager quoted above also recognises, managers may need to approach workers, to make them 'feel safe' and invited to participate in the discussions.

8.10 Lack of safety representatives

One major finding from this study is that there seem to be a shortage of workers who are willing to take on the role of SR. Unions (and in practice also employers) seem to have difficulties in recruiting SRs, and that goes for all types of workplaces. The interviews contain several explanations for this, which are discussed below.

All but one of the establishments visited had at least one SR, but for some the appointment was only recent and for others the challenge was to get as many SRs as they thought was required. For example, a company goal of the industrial tech supplier was to have one SR in every department, but it had not

achieved that yet. The safety manager at the Staffing agency was frustrated at the situation, and said that he had worked for a long time to recruit SRs:

We have always had difficulties with this. We have tried to be as positive and open, and... sort of promoted this. But it is really hard.

Safety manager, Staffing agency

The HRM at Software company 1 gave another example of the difficulties in getting employees to volunteer to become SRs:

It is not like four or five employees raise their hands.

HRM, Software 1

Another example is the CSR at the industrial tech supplier, who explained that he was about to quit his job and was having a hard time finding a replacement for himself as CSR, even with help from both the union and the employer. At the event restaurant, the elected SR was the only one with any interest in safety and health issues, thanks to her educational background and current employment at the HR department:

It was a lack of interest from the others. And I have a background in HR, so I think that it [work environment] is rather fun, or really fun! So I like to do things like that.

SR, Event restaurant

One employer representative explained how he had had to work hard to establish functional forms of SWEM and worker participation. Before employing him, the company did not have any SRs and the workers did not ask for one, so he had to take the initiative to recruit at least one:

Since we have no culture here, and since the union is so small, I have asked people [to become SRs]. It went so far that I had to ask, to look at the departments and see if there was any interest. [...] It is really strange to have to ask for a worker representative, but that is how it is.

Operations manager, Traffic safety products

The operations manager was very clear that SRs are — and should be — workers' representatives, so the unions and/or their co-workers should appoint them. However, because of low interest among workers in being SRs, several of the employer representatives described how they had to make considerable efforts to find volunteers. The HSE at the industrial tech supplier said that in 'the old days' the SR was seen as a desirable role, that they had 'little pins that said that they were safety representatives', but it is different now.

One explanation, mentioned by some interviewees, is the decreasing level of unionisation, making representative tasks less attractive to workers. However, union membership had decreased in only some of the establishments visited, while others had had less fluctuation in numbers of union members.

Another reason for the difficulty in recruiting SRs, described by several interviewees, is that the representative tasks are regarded as demanding and that it implies too much extra work:

They think it is too much responsibility, that it is enough work just doing the job and looking after the products. I have tried.

CSR, Industrial tech supplier

To be an SR requires commitment and the readiness/willingness to take time to help colleagues, and to represent them in difficult situations such as rehabilitation or work environment-related conflicts. The CSR at the Staffing agency said that, for someone with little free time, for example someone with small children, it may be hard to fulfil expectations:

It is a bit heavy, even when given the time to act as SR. It can be very easy [to be a SR] but it can also be very demanding, from time to time.

CSR, Staffing agency

Most of the interviewed SRs said that they could get the time off from their ordinary work tasks to fulfil their representative role. However, several of them added that they knew they had the right to take the time they need and that they needed do no more than inform the manager to gain approval, but that they still refrained from doing so. One main reason is that the SRs are rarely replaced with substitutes when they are away from their ordinary work, leaving their work tasks undone and their work team one employee short. An SR at one of the software companies said:

> *We are in a situation that, if I leave work, then someone else will suffer for it. And that makes you refrain from that.*

<div align="right">SR, Software 1</div>

Other SRs said that they had kept a low profile in their role, partly not to upset colleagues or leave them with too much work. This is especially noticeable in establishments with low unionisation and no historically established forms of representative participation, where, as one SR put it, the colleagues see the role as unnecessary.

This situation is explained in the interviews as a consequence of slim organisation with little slack in time, no extra employees and very little room to do anything other than execute one's ordinary work tasks. One employer representative laughed at being asked if SRs are replaced when they perform their role, saying, 'What planet are you from!' This is to be understood not as unwillingness to include SRs, but as a result of the organisation's working conditions. Any activity by the SRs therefore needs to be planned carefully, which is not always the case. Most interviewees says that there are few difficulties for SRs to attend the most important meetings, such as quarterly safety committees, or to act in emergencies, such as if there is an accident. However, it is much harder for the SRs to get acceptance for taking time to talk to colleagues, to attend meetings at short notice, to attend all risk assessments or to act on less acute issues, from both managers and colleagues. Some SRs said that it was rarely explicitly stated that it is OK to take time off when needed, and several said that they wished that the employer would make it easier to be SR, for example by informing, planning and arranging for the representatives to get enough time for their tasks.

8.11 Appointing safety representatives

As described above, several of the case-study establishments reported difficulties in finding employees interested in taking on the role of SR. In some establishments, the difficulties were explained by low levels of unionisation among workers, but establishments with high levels of unionisation also experienced the same difficulties. As the unions did not succeed in finding volunteers, the employers had to take action:

> *Actually, I think that [the safety manager] is really keener on getting more SRs than I am. Because he sees it as a way to ensure that we [the company] follow rules, routines and policies at the offices.*

<div align="right">CSR, Staffing Agency</div>

> *We have had on our agenda that we want to make a drive to inform employees of the importance of SRs and their role, to get more, active, SRs. But the SRs need to take the lead in that, we can only help.*

<div align="right">HSE, Steel Manufacturing</div>

As stated by the WEA, the unions are to appoint SRs to represent all workers. Several employer representatives expressed frustration over the inability of unions to appoint SRs, and felt hindered from taking action or supporting the process. It was, however, rather common for the employer to take the initiative to appoint SRs:

> *It was a joint venture [laughter], and that actually felt really good. Because, even if you have your roots in the union, your mandate as a SR is wider than that.*

<div align="right">CSR, anonymous</div>

The relationships between unions and SRs were in practice not as self-evident as the WEA states. A few of the interviewed SRs were not union members and others knew SRs at their establishment who were not members. In several cases the employers' objective to get SRs appointed prevailed over the representatives' presumed union connection:

The union had a meeting, and no one volunteered or wanted to become [SR]. And unfortunately [the present SR] was not then a member of that union, so they tried to recruit her. But she did not want to. And I don't think that it [union membership] is the most important thing. So we elected her anyway. And everyone thought that it was good to have someone that is committed to work environment.

HRM, anonymous

We have said that, if the employees at the local offices do not choose a SR, then the local manager shall appoint one. Because we need to have SRs.

CSR, anonymous

The lack of union support for non-unionised SRs was rarely seen as a problem, and neither was their actual legal status, without any formal rights, according to WEA. However, without the union connection, there is a risk that relationships between, for example, the SR and employer representatives with work environment tasks, such as an HSE or HR strategist, may become indistinct and unclear for workers, or, equally, that as SR who in practice is 'appointed' by the employer is completely dependent on the employer's benevolence.

9 Summary and conclusions: worker representation in the 20 establishments in the light of other data

9.1 Consistent data on the SRs' position and influence

This is a study of workers', and especially their SRs', participation in and influence on the employer's work environment (or OSH) management. In Sweden, this means the employers' mandatory SWEM (Sweden's version of the Framework Directive, 89/391/EC, regulated in AFS 2001:1. The SRs' participation in SWEM is supported by their detailed and strong rights in the WEA (2016: ch. 6; see section 3.3.1 above) and also in the SWEM provisions.

Our 20 case-studies are spread over all economic sectors and sizes of establishments, but they are, as discussed in Chapter 2, a positively biased selection and we have limited data from each of them. Standing alone, their findings are therefore difficult to interpret (and cannot be used for any quantitative statistical analysis). However, seen against the background of the literature review (Chapters 3 and 4, summarised in emergent themes in Chapter 5) and the key informant interviews (Chapter 6), the results of our case-studies are very consistent with these other data sources and the cases add many in-depth illustrations of and insights into the position and influence of Sweden's representative and direct worker participation in SWEM.

The previous chapter described a mostly good cooperation between managers and SRs in the 20 establishments studied. It also gave many examples of what that meant in practice, for example mutual trust, informal problem solving and 'coalitions' between managers with the main SWEM responsibility and SRs to increase awareness and effectiveness of SWEM in all of their organisations. This chapter will summarise these case-study results. Towards the end (in section 9.7) the experiences of the establishments will be compared with other data, including regular union surveys of their SRs, data that both confirm the 20 case-studies' mainly positive results but also indicate that average SRs face far more problems in the changing Swedish labour market. Finally (in section 9.8), we will describe how the system of union-appointed RSRs is by far the most important 'safety net' to partly compensate for these widespread problems in worker representation and participation, as the RSRs support worker participation and work environment improvements in small firms with limited SWEM.

We will distinguish between three (albeit interacting) steps in our analysis of how workers and their SRs can participate in and influence management's decisions on the work environment (compare the implementation models in on the one hand Antonsson and Arnberg's, 1984, on the 'action steps' to recognise, accept, understand and resolve risks in small firms; and on the other the three levels of SWEM, as described in 3.2.3 above):

I. Safety representatives first have to recognise working conditions as possibly detrimental to employees' health, and also that these risks can — and therefore should — be fixed by the management in its SWEM (see section 9.4).
II. The risks that the representatives recognise must be brought to the attention of management, which presumes some channels for the SRs to engage managers in a dialogue on the nature of and possible measures against these risks (section 9.5).
III. The outcome of safety representatives' influence on the work environment rests on their ability to make managers implement their proposed (or other adequate) measures to eliminate or at least reduce the recognised and raised risks (section 9.6).

9.2 Active dialogue with a positive view of safety representatives

However, before we go into these steps, we should note a clear overall result from the 20 case-studies. With very few and limited exceptions, the interviewed employer representatives have a very positive view of the importance and usefulness of active SRs in recognising and fixing work environment problems. They often want more, better trained, more active and more critical representatives to support their own SWEM, and to prod other managers into (more) action. This is not a confusion of the roles of managers and of SRs but rather a mutual recognition and respect of their separate roles for the common goal of improvement. Except for the smallest establishments, they all have organised SWEM that includes regular meetings and dialogues between management and SRs in, for example joint safety

committees, project groups when changes are planned, and SRs' participation in safety rounds and in other forms of risk assessment.

Public sector safety committees are mostly combined with the meetings between employers and unions required by the Swedish Co-determination Act. These meetings are called 'cooperative groups' (*samverkansgrupp*) or 'cooperation meetings' (*samverkansmöte*), which indicates the importance of establishing a dialogue between the parties. A superintendent at a school, with work environment management responsibility, explained how good cooperation was a key factor in their work environment management:

> *We have really good cooperation, and a really good cooperative group. We have a good time together and rarely disagree on anything. Almost never, actually. So we have well-functioning cooperation. We don't think that we work against each other. You can hear that from many other schools, that there is much conflict. But we don't have that here.*

Superintendent, School 1

SRs' participation in committees and work groups was thus much appreciated by most managers interviewed, including to integrate work environment solutions into the production technology and practices. Several managers found the SRs to be knowledgeable on work environment issues and that it was a major help for them to have a well-informed SR. This relationship between SRs and employer representatives was crucial in the establishments, and several managers and SRs interviewed discussed how it had to be established and maintained. Good relationships, hence, were seen as a success factor for effective work environment management.

The extensive dialogue between representatives and managers is combined with regular work floor meetings between supervisors and employees on general work issues, including the work environment. This direct dialogue resolves many problems in the establishments studied, but complex ones are mostly referred from the work floor meetings to the next level in the organisation, usually to a joint safety committee or equivalent. In the large establishments, there was also a top-level joint safety committee, in which CSRs participated. The two independent small firms in our sample compensated for their lack of formalised SWEM with the managers' and owners' personal commitment to a dialogue with workers for the sake of a good work environment (and a profitable business). There are also many such informal contacts on work issues between managers and workers in the larger establishments, including from the shop floor to higher management.

9.3 The cases are both 'normal' and better than average Swedish workplaces

The 20 studied establishments are not privileged but operate under the same conditions of competition, budget constraints and other limitations as other organisations or firms in their sectors. When their managers are so positive about SR activity and influence, they find that preventive SWEM, with SRs who raise issues and demand improvements, is compatible with and even contributes to their varying business models. These managers saw work environment improvements more as investments than as only costs. The view that 'safety pays' was thus clear among the managers interviewed (however, our studied twenty establishments are most likely extra positive to OSH-issues; see 2.1 above).

The detailed findings of the case-studies indicate that there are still both limitations to and problems in this cooperation between managers and SRs. These shortcomings will be exemplified below, in the discussion of the various steps of SRs' influence on managerial work environment decisions. It should also be noted that we talked with the managers (or sometimes HR or similar staff) in the establishments who are most in charge of implementing SWEM. In several cases, these employer representatives had to work hard to bring all of the line managers on board, to get them to fully assume their preventive SWEM duties for their parts of the operations. The case-studies thus indicated that there are also more adversarial views on the work environment in the studied establishments.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the employer representatives interviewed had a markedly positive general attitude to worker participation and their SRs, and to the extensive formal and informal dialogue.

It is in line with the perspective of the interviewed central key informants (see Chapter 6 above). Both social partners emphasised the importance of competent and active SRs interacting with managers in their SWEM (in contrast, the government does not mention the safety representatives in its work environment strategy).

The social partners' shared objective of active SRs also contrasts with the often less favourable conditions for many (and often lack of) SRs in Swedish workplaces, as described in the literature review (see sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.4 above) and partly in the key informant interviews with union work environment officers. These problems will also be described below (section 9.7). The discrepancy between our 20 case-studies and broader research and statistical data sources is most probably an effect of the biased selection of the establishments studied. They were sampled among establishments with more than average commitment to and management of the work environment, including cooperation with their SRs (section 2.1 and 2.2 above).

9.4 Risk recognition depends on knowledge and social construction

SRs' ability to recognise risks depends to a great extent on their work environment competence, through training and information (see section 3.4 above). The importance of training SRs (and managers) for a good work environment dialogue and management was emphasised in several of the establishments studied. Several of them had joint training on this topic for managers and SRs. The importance of training was also underlined by the central social partners in the key informant interviews. This is why they have an agreement to set aside some funding from their joint work insurance company, AFA, for central SR training, after the government abolished the subsidy for this. However, the trade unions' SR surveys (see section 3.4.3) reveal that lack of training still remains a major obstacle to the activity and influence of many SRs (a problem also mentioned in some of the case-studies). Equally, the literature review indicates that in very many firms, employers do not give their managers, and others with delegated SWEM tasks, enough training (or other resources) to properly understand and execute these work environment duties. Lack of competence is especially an obstacle to managing the widespread organisational and social work environment risks. As a consequence, it becomes hard for SRs — who are often better trained — to engage managers with a limited work environment competence in the intended systematic dialogue on risks and solutions (see section 3.2.3 above).

However, which risks SRs recognise, and which they find that they can raise with management, does not depend only on 'objective' knowledge through specific work environment training. It rests equally on the subjective definition of work and its risks by the workplace's managers and workers (see Sjöström, 2013; and section 3.4.1 above on the social construction of this). The case-studies give several examples of how organisational risks in particular (mainly excessive or unhealthy forms of mental or physical workloads) are either not seen as health risks or defined as an inevitable part of the job and hence not an issue to be managed in SWEM. Trained SRs with a broader perspective on the work environment may sometimes transcend too narrow local risk definitions (as partly happened in some cases). However, if they act too much without their co-workers' consent and support, they may define themselves as no longer members of the community of the workers' collective (Lysgaard, 1967; Sjöström, 2013). Raising risks that managers do not accept as legitimate work environment issues can equally lead to difficult confrontations for the SR.

Managers' work environment training is therefore essential to help SRs to raise risks. Several interviewees also commented on the importance of joint training of managers and representatives so that they share views of the workplace and how it should and can be improved, in a joint social construction of the local work environment. Lack of other managers' competence (and time) to effectively implement SWEM was often mentioned as why the interviewed SWEM managers still had much work to do to improve SWEM in the organisation. This lack of competence and interest among their managerial colleagues often included lack of top management support for the people interviewed who were responsible for SWEM — often HRMs or HSEs — to implement SWEM well in all departments.

This result from the case-studies is in line with the broad evaluation of SWEM (section 3.2.3 above; Frick, 2014). It found managerial lack of competence to be a major obstacle to the full effectiveness of SWEM in assessing and managing risks, and also to effective participation by SRs. The evaluation traced these managerial problems to a lack of implementation and support from the employers or top managers, who rarely have empowered their line managers (and others with SWEM duties) with enough time, competence, funding and authority. Although the 20 establishments studied had higher ambitions than most workplaces — and probably also better results, but we have very limited data on these — they too thus often lacked full support from their top management to make line managers competent to fully implement SWEM in every department, including to support SR participation on all issues.

The establishments studied indicate that apart from some costly measures — such as new premises — the main contested risks are too high mental and/or physical workloads created by inappropriate organisation of work. Work organisation decisions and the health risks they may create are still largely regarded as within the employers' management prerogative and not part of how the work environment is defined; that places such issues out of bounds for the SRs. This too is in line with the abovementioned SWEM evaluation, which also found a marked difference between better recognition of technical risks (for example of accidents or from noise or chemicals) and worse recognition of organisational ones.

The SWEA's recent provisions on the organisational and social work environment (AFS, 2015: 4) are an attempt to broaden the definition of the local work environment (see section 3.4.3). The provisions were launched with an information campaign and they have been much noted in various media and resulted in many training courses. This has probably increased attention to and legitimacy of organisational risks, but it is still unclear if it has also resulted in more participation by and influence of SRs on these hitherto partly taboo issues. The SWEA's guidance material on the new provisions does not much support participation, as it only mentions that SRs should be informed but does not otherwise emphasise their involvement in the managerial decisions about the organisation of work. However, that is a clear SR right according to the WEA.

9.5 The importance of effective SWEM for a good participation and dialogue

In theory, the SRs' influence is not dependent on how they can participate in the employer's SWEM. Representatives have strong rights (see section 3.3.1) to raise and require improvements of any issue they consider a work environment risk, even if the local SWEM is poor and offers them few meetings and other opportunities for a dialogue with management. However, the literature review, the key informants interviewed and our case-studies all indicate a strong link between the level of the employers' SWEM and the SRs' participation and influence. In practice, it is quite difficult to break the consensus and be an active SR in workplaces where management is ignorant of and/or passive on work environment issues.

Nearly all of the establishments studied have procedures for SR-participation. The few small firms, with less formal SWEM, had managers who promoted such a dialogue. This greatly helped their SRs to be active in promoting improvements. There also was much direct worker participation in work environment issues, through formal and informal dialogue between managers and workers. Yet there were limits to the channels for SR participation. At the workplace level, lack of knowledge of the SR role and function among both managers and other workers was sometimes an obstacle to the representatives' participation in the establishment. However, the major limitation was that the important work organisation issues were mostly excluded from the participatory dialogue. This was especially the case in the public sector, often linked to the fact that the SWEM procedures and their dialogue with SRs and other workers are delegated down to the workplace level, with limited communication to the higher levels. Higher management decisions on how to organise and resource production was rarely a part of the risk assessment in SWEM. SR who insisted on participating in these important work environment parameters as well would probably have caused an open conflict, which no SRs did in the studied public-sector establishments.

The literature review confirmed that SWEM and participation are notably better at the work floor level than at higher management levels, especially so in the public sector and especially on work organisation

issues (Frick, 2013a: chs. 5 and 6; Frick, 2013c). This may why there is an overrepresentation of public-sector jobs (for example nursing and teaching) among those exposed to mental or physical work overloads (AV, 2014a, 2014b). However, limited attention to, and the ensuing limited influence of SRs on, widespread organisational risks in the work environment were also common in SWEM in the private sector (Frick and Johanson, 2013). Although most of the private-sector establishments in our case-study were aware of psychosocial work risks, we still found that they too paid little attention to such risks in SWEM, and participation of SRs in dealing with them hence was limited. The establishments had a common mechanism to separate such organisational risks from the rest of the work environment and to delegate them to the HR departments, in which managerial decisions on, for example, workload due to work organisation were mostly turned into individual health issues.

9.6 The cases exemplify most varieties of safety representatives' participation

As the final step, SRs have to persuade managers to take preventive or remedial actions on the risks that they have raised. The case-studies demonstrated how this influence is mainly a result of the two earlier steps: defining the work environment and having the opportunity for dialogue, mainly within the employer's SWEM. The WEA, as mentioned, gives SRs strong rights to require improvements, even in the face of uninterested and ignorant managers. Yet it is in practice quite hard for them to mainly base their activity and attempts to influence on these legal rights, in workplaces where not only managers but often also their co-workers have more restricted views of what is a legitimate work environment issue.

The effects can be described as separate levels of SRs' participation in and influence on managers' work environment decisions:

Full participation of SRs, that is, the ability to raise and influence the solution of all possible work environment risks, including the more sensitive and costly ones. This was hardly the case in any of the 20 establishments. At least some decisions affecting the work environment were always taken by managers with little or no consultation with the SRs. However, in the best establishments, mainly a few larger private manufacturing ones, those were exceptions and nearly all issues were included in their SWEM and open to influence by the SRs. These 'establishments still had risks in their work environments, but the acute and/or serious ones were resolved and there were also attempts to manage the more long-term risks. Often this meant a continuous struggle to avoid making mental and/or physical workloads excessive in a continuously changing production, while (nearly) all technical risks were either eliminated or taken care of as they appeared.

Mixed participation, when SRs notice, can raise and help to resolve many risks, but with clear limitations through a differentiation between risks that are included in the SWEM and those that in practice are not. This was the situation in most of the establishments studied, except one the one hand the best and on the other a few small ones without SRs. The limitations faced by SRs in most of the establishments were mainly the abovementioned sensitive – and mostly costly – issues of premises or the more common ones of organisation and staffing levels for work tasks.

This is illustrated by some SRs who described how they had met management resistance to discuss some issues, while they had had a successful dialogue to resolve others. Such a 'half-and-half' SR influence was notably the case within the public-sector establishments, with their gap between formally organised SWEM (and SR and direct worker participation in it) at the workplaces and much less risk management and SR participation on higher management decisions on the organisation and resources that affected conditions at work. Such a gap existed also in the private establishments but was less pronounced there. The scope and effectiveness of SWEM – and much related participation – in the private establishments was more continuous throughout their separate organisational levels. Although even the private establishments rarely fully included organisational and social risks in their SWEM and its participation, these risks were rarely serious in them.

Limited participation of SRs, where they influence only some — often uncontested — work environment issues. There were some less active and motivated SRs and managers in the cases studied, but this open lack of interest in cooperation (from both sides) was rare in our positive selection of establishments.

SRs more often mentioned indirect obstacles, such as unclear routines, especially about how to take time off for their function. Some establishments solved this by having a central budget, which first line managers could invoice for the extra costs of 'their' SRs' time. However, in several establishments, SRs were formally free to take all the time needed but they still hesitated to do so. They were rarely replaced, so their tasks were left to their workmates to do, or just piled up for the SRs to do when they took up their normal jobs again.

Another limiting factor that makes SRs refrain from actively engaging in SWEM is that an effective dialogue with managers often requires communication skills (Sjöström, 2013). To participate is to engage in discussions that sometimes also involve technical and/or abstract language and, from time to time, also require skills in argumentative techniques to express requirements and convince managers as decision makers. Some workers and SRs, especially in blue-collar establishments, may find such meetings and discussions uncomfortable. Even with such skills, SRs have to be strong and confident to actually point out to employers when they violate regulations. Some employer representatives said that far from all SRs explicitly required them to follow the WEA and its provisions. Cultural differences are an important aspect of to the difficulty to stand up to management. Some of the establishments had foreign born workers, whose expectations of relationships with managers and how these should be maintained were perhaps different from the 'activist' (albeit preferably in a positive dialogue) SR role supported by the WEA. Language barriers were also seen to limit some foreign born SRs' willingness and ability to participate and articulate opinions in work environment meetings.

A lack of SRs is by definition no SR participation at all, but it there can still be an active direct dialogue between managers and workers. This was the case in the only real small firm among the establishments we studied. None of the workers were unionised but the active manager had convinced one of them to be 'safety representative' on a more informal basis. A general finding from this study is that there seems to be a shortage of workers who are willing to take on the role of SR. Unions (and in practice also employers) seem to have difficulties in recruiting SRs. That goes for all types of workplaces.

All but one of the establishments visited had at least one SR, but for some the appointment was only recent and for others the challenge was to get as many SRs as they thought were required. One employer representative explained how he had to work hard to establish an effective SWEM, with active worker participation. Before employing him, the company did not have any SRs and the workers did not ask for one, so this manager had to take the initiative to recruit at least one. He was very clear that SRs are — and should be — workers' representatives, so the unions and/or their co-workers should appoint them. However, because workers had little interest in being SRs, both he and several other employer representatives described how they had to make considerable efforts to find volunteers. One explanation mentioned was the falling unionisation level, making representative tasks less attractive to workers. However, union membership had decreased in only some of the establishments visited, while it remained relatively stable and high in most of them. Another reason given for the difficulty in recruiting SRs was that the task was regarded as demanding too much extra work. For someone with little free time, for example with small children, it may be hard to fulfil these expectations.

Several interviewed managers were frustrated at the unions' inability to find and appoint SRs. As employer representatives, they were reluctant to act and support this process. Nevertheless, some of them had still initiated the appointment of SRs. In practice, the relation between unions and SRs was not as self-evident as the WEA states. A few of the interviewed SRs were not union members and others interviewed knew of SRs in their establishments who were not members. In several cases the employers' wish to have a dialogue with a SRs appointed prevailed over the requirement that the representatives is to be appointed by the union (if there is one with a collective agreement, which was the case also in these establishments). In practice, the lack of union confirmation of (and hence of support to) such SRs was rarely a big problem, and neither was the lack SRs' lack of formal appointment – and hence of rights – according to the WEA. However, without the union connection, there is a risk that relationships between, for example, the SRs and employer representatives with SWEM tasks may become indistinct and unclear for workers, and an SR who in practice is 'appointed' by the employer is dependent on management's benevolence (which was present in the positive case-studies).

9.7 More negative experiences in the unions' SR surveys

The establishments studied have varying experiences of SR participation and influence, from nearly full participation and influence to the absence of SRs. This range is also found in the literature review. Before we compare these broader results with the 20 establishments studied, we shall briefly summarise the recurrent union surveys of their representatives and other data on Swedish SRs (see section 3.3 above and references there).

9.7.1 Decrease in SR coverage and even more in their activity

There are now some 95,000 SRs. Most are appointed by blue-collar unions within the LO federation, but a growing number of representatives are from the general white-collar unions in TCO and the academic unions in SACO. With a growing labour force, this is a 30 % drop in the number of representatives per worker since 1980. The drop is mainly caused by the shift from blue-collar to white-collar jobs, in which SRs are more rare. There are SRs in 15,000-20,000 workplaces, of whom some 10,000-15,000 representatives are in the around 145,000 small workplaces (i.e. with 5-49 workers). In 2004 there were SRs in between 3 % to 10 % of workplaces in the private service sector with at least five employees, compared with 21 % of construction sites, 35 % of factories and 79 % of public-sector workplaces. LO SRs' activity alone was equal to some 10,950 FTEs in 1996 (LO, 1997). This dropped to some 6,500 FTEs in 2012, because there were fewer LO representatives but also because they had become less active. Representatives in TCO and SACO add at most 1,000 FTEs to bring the total to some 7,500 FTEs. Even though the fewer SRs have a decreased coverage and activity, they remain a major actor in the Swedish work environment (and are, as mentioned, strongly supported as such by both social partners, although not mentioned by the government).

9.7.2 Often good relations, influence and support but an ineffective SWEM to participate in

Most SRs find that they have at least a reasonable cooperation with their managers (as indicated in the union surveys of 2012. Most of the representatives also find that they can take at least a reasonable amount of time off for their tasks. However, one-third of LO's lone representatives (that is, in small workplaces) could not take enough time off for their tasks. Lack of time was also common among TCO's representatives in small firms, and close to half of their representatives in municipalities could not take enough time off for their tasks. Thirty per cent of TCO's SRs reported that being a SR had worsened their relations with management, while up to 17 % of LO's representatives in service industries found that managers resisted them outright in their SR role. SRs' formal requests to the SWEA for an inspection (in accordance with WEA, 2016: 6:6a) is a sign of more conflicts between representatives and managers. These have grown from under 100 per year in the early 1990s to 500-600 per year in 2011-15 and the SWEA expects them to continue to increase.

All three federations' SRs saw deficiencies in their employers' SWEM. Some half of the representatives found their managers to have limited competence or to lack it completely (10-20 % of the SRs). There was also criticism of managers' time for SWEM activities, which many LO representatives and even more those of TCO and SACO found to be lacking. The SR surveys' criticism of the employers' SWEM is supported by the evaluation of how SWEM was implemented in 2013 (see section 3.2.3 above), which found that, although most of the larger employers (with some two-thirds of all employees) had organised SWEM procedures, the effectiveness of their SWEM to prevent or abate risks was much reduced because line managers had too little competence, time and resources. At the same time, structural changes (sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 above) in the economy and the labour market have in several respects made the employers' SWEM more difficult and resulted in more adversarial industrial relations, both of which erode the position and influence of SRs. The fracturing of larger firms into many smaller ones, the growth in private services with less unionisation and a weaker work environment tradition, and the increases in precarious forms of work, in supply chains and in the use of foreign firms and posted workers, all make it harder (and sometimes impossible) to sustain the Swedish model of SWEM in an informed and active dialogue with the SRs and other workers.

I we compare this limited coverage, participation and influence of SRs in the general labour market with the experiences of our 20 case-studies, the latter are clearly a positive selection. In terms of formal representation, all but one have SRs — albeit sometimes after much management effort to persuade a worker to assume the task. With the growth of workplaces in Sweden with few or no union members, there seem to be more such informal, non-unionised SRs (that is, not appointed by the union with a collective agreement with the employer). But a much larger problem is that SRs are completely lacking in some 85-90 % of all workplaces where they should be appointed.

The establishments studied had varying levels of SR participation — as in all of working life — but their SRs rarely had the conflicts with managers that many (but not most) other SRs report. This may be because these 20 establishments run a more organised and effective SWEM, in which the SRs can participate, than what is indicated by the abovementioned SR critique of shortcomings in SWEM in general, found in the SWEM evaluation in 2013.

In all, although SRs are still many, active and influential in Swedish workplaces, there is an increasingly split labour market (section 3.1 above), in which unions are weaker, and where there are fewer and less active SRs, with less cooperation with their managers.

9.8 Breaking some barriers: the system of regional safety representatives

Sweden's system of RSRs (see section 3.3.5 above) breaks through many of the barriers that local SRs face. RSRs may be appointed by regional unions for workplaces without a joint work environment committee (in practice nearly always with fewer than 50 workers) where there the unions have collective agreements and at least one member. In 2015, unions within the three federations, LO (by far the most numerous and active in terms of RSRs), TCO and SACO, had appointed 1,660 RSRs (315 FTEs) for 537,000 workplaces (at least half of them temporary construction sites), of which 57,000 were visited that year. This equates to only one RSR-visit in 9-10 years. That year, the labour inspectorate inspected only 8,624 small workplaces, and very many of these are units run by larger employers. As small firms rarely hire help from the occupational health services, the regional representatives are thus by far the largest actor to support workers' participation and managers' SWEM in small firms.

I. The RSRs nearly always have much more work environment competence and experience than the owners/managers (and the workers) in the small firms that they support. Like all others responsible for implementing SWEM, managers and owners of small firms have a duty to acquire enough work environment competence, but they mostly comply less well with this and other requirements in the provisions (Frick, 2013a: ch. 10). However, this does not mean that they do not care for their employees. On the contrary, small firm owners and managers seem to appreciate the RSRs' visits and improvement recommendations much more often than be irritated that someone is raising issues outside their own limited perspective on the work environment.

II. The RSRs are diplomatic enough, and most small firm owners and managers are interested enough, for the RSRs to engage in dialogue although most small firms lack organised worker/SR participation.

III. Through their competence and ability to engage small firm owners and managers in dialogue, the RSRs also break through another major barrier for SR influence, that is, the sheer lack of SRs in 90 % or more of small firms.

The system of RSRs thereby compensates for some of the problems in SR activity and influence in small firms. However, its major shortcoming is the limited funding. Regional representatives visit small firms at least 10 times more often than labour inspectors do, and also give advice by phone and mail, but they can still visit each firm only once in several years, even though the unions use fees from other members to pay up to half of the costs of RSRs themselves (while the government pays the rest). With the continuing fracturing of larger firms (see sections 3.1 and 3.3.4) there is an increasing need of support from RSRs to the continually growing number of small firms. Yet, these new firms — especially in private services — may be completely non-unionised and hence have no access for the RSRs.

However, the regional safety system is of little concern to the establishments we studied. All but one of the small ones are part of larger organisations. The only genuine small firm did not mention any RSR support, although a regional representative was appointed for it. Its owner-manager was unusually proactive in his informal dialogue with the workers on how to improve the firm and its work environment. This is probably why the appointed RSR had used his scarce time to visit other small firms with less ambitious SWEM.

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