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Nordic Council of Ministers

Principles and concepts in Nordic occupational safety and health policies

Dimensions of strategic thinking and approaches





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*The analysis was carried out by the researchers Asko Suikkanen
and Marika Kunnari, University of Lapland*

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TemaNord 2008:594

© Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen 2008

ISBN 978-92-893-1776-4

Print: 1st edition Saloprint. 2nd corrected edition Kailow Express ApS

Copies: 1st edition 350. 2nd corrected edition 85

Printed on environmentally friendly paper

This publication can be ordered on www.norden.org/order. Other Nordic publications are available at www.norden.org/publications

Printed in Denmark



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Nordic co-operation

Nordic cooperation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and three autonomous areas: the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic cooperation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic cooperation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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Foreword

This report is a result of a project financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers after its approval in the Nordic Working Environment Committee. The study compares the strategies/programmes on health and safety at work of the Nordic countries and of the EU with each other and with the priorities of the Programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation in the labour market and working environment sectors 2005–2008.

The study shows that the EU's programs and the Nordic programs emphasize quite different viewpoints. The state has different roles in these programmes, which result in different cultures regarding the occupational health and safety policy practices. Whereas the EU strategy has a distinctly reformative role aimed at leading its member states towards a new way of thinking, the Nordic strategy is a mere account of the prevailing thinking in the Nordic countries, and emphasizes more state-centred, traditional features in comparison to the programs of the EU.

However, the study also shows that when comparing the Nordic countries' programmes/strategies, they are quite dissimilar and even divergent. While the consultative nature of authority action stands out as a distinct feature of the Finnish strategy, the Swedish programme is characterized by the prioritization of objectives from the starting point of certain lines of business. And the special feature of Norway's strategy is its authority-oriented actor level, whereas the Danish programme is characterized by rewarding, punitive, and controlling authority action, and the Icelandic by the concrete means through which its objectives are pursued.

The report gives a rare overview of the main characteristics of the different strategies/programmes on health and safety at work of the Nordic countries and of the EU. The aim is to further the discussion and mutual learning among the Nordic countries on how to set up efficient strategies/programmes and ultimately to strengthen the working environment in the Nordic countries even further. In this way it is hoped that the report can also be a contribution to obtaining one of the globalization goals of the Nordic co-operation within the area of working life that is making the Nordic countries an even more attractive region to work and live in for Nordic citizens as well as for qualified labour from abroad.



Halldór Ásgrímsson

Secretary General, Nordic Council of Ministers

Foreword by the project leader

This report is a result of a project financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers after its approval in the Nordic Working Environment Committee. The aim of the project was to analyse the modern working environment policies in the Nordic countries and to identify differences between these policies. The goals and priorities as well as the inspection activities in the Nordic countries have much in common. On the other hand, the strategies and the methods chosen in the countries vary.

The project was carried out as research work by researchers from the University of Lapland in cooperation with representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland. In addition, a seminar with representatives from each Nordic country was arranged, when the preliminary results of the analysis were available. The report was finalised on the basis of the recommendations from the seminar. At the seminar it was agreed that every country would deliver a brief description, to be included in the report, of its policy as clarification and completion of the description in the analysis made by the researchers. The researchers are responsible for the analysis and the results presented.

The project group consisted of the following persons: Lars-Mikael Bjurström and Kaj-Erik Holmberg from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and Asko Suikkanen and Marika Kunnari from the University of Lapland.

In addition, the following persons participated in the Seminar in Helsinki 22–23.11.2007: Peter Fenger, Working Environment Authority and Klaus T. Nielsen, Roskilde University; Denmark; Þórunn Sveinsdóttir and Kristinn Tómasson, Administration of Occupational Safety and Health, Iceland; Godtfred Bøen, Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and Solveig Gaupset, Labour Inspection Authority, Norway; Bo Barrefelt, Ministry of Employment and Kaj Frick, Mälardalen University, Sweden; and Leo Suomaa, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland. The project group wants to thank all the contact persons for their contributions to the project and the final report.

The project group also wants to thank Professor Guy Ahonen from the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration for his valuable comments while preparing the final report.

The analysis of backgrounds and execution of policies was part of the original objectives of the study. However, for reasons dealing with the limited resources, as well as the research material and methodology, the object of the actual analysis was restricted. The complementary descriptions delivered by the countries meet at least to some extent to the original, somewhat broader objectives.

We hope that this report will inspire to discussions about occupational health and safety policies and strategies and thus contribute to developments. The report is published in English because the analysis includes comparisons to EU strategies and because we believe that there might be interest in the results outside the Nordic countries, too. Obviously there is also a need for further research in this field.

August 2008

Lars-Mikael Bjurström, Head of the Project

Abstract

The objective of the study is to compare Nordic programs on the working environment and safety and health at work as well as their strategic approaches. Another aim is to interpret the differences, similarities, and semantic relations between national (Nordic) working environment programs and the European Union's corresponding ones. This is done with regard to the strategic lines of the programs and the contents of the procedural programs. The objective of the study is to further the discussion among the Nordic countries on the situation of their country-specific strategies/programs.

The Nordic policies on health and safety at work are examined in light of the country-specific strategies/programs on health and safety at work. The background programs and comparison criteria encompass the European Union's strategies on health and safety at work for the years 2002–2006 and 2007–2012 and the Programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation in the labour market and working environment sectors 2005–2008.

The research is conducted through a qualitative content analysis. In the first phase of the analysis, the material was studied iteratively to find the common, reduced themes of all the programs/strategies: the objectives, means, action level, actor level, and authority activity. In the next phase, the themes were examined by looking for differences and similarities of expression between the programs/strategies, whereupon different content-related strategy dimensions were derived. The analysis continued by examining each background and country-specific program from the viewpoint of these strategy dimensions.

Based on the above analysis, one may conclude that the European Union's programs and the Nordic program emphasize quite different viewpoints. The state has a different role in these programs, which results in different cultures regarding the OSH (Occupational Safety and Health) policy practices and their amendment. The EU strategy has a distinctly reformative role; it is aimed at leading the member states toward a new way of thinking. The Nordic strategy is a mere account of the prevailing thinking in the Nordic countries, and therefore it emphasizes state-centred, traditional features in comparison to the programs of the European Union.

Especially the objectives and means of the Nordic country-specific programs deviate from their background programs. Except for Denmark, the Nordic countries have relatively general and principled objectives concerning their ideologies on health and safety at work. The actor practices of the Finnish program are the closest match to the EU programs.

When comparing the country-specific programs/strategies, the consulta-

tive nature of authority action stands out as a distinct feature of the Finnish strategy. The Swedish program is characterized by the prioritization of objectives from the starting point of certain lines of business. The special feature of the Norwegian strategy is its authority-oriented actor level. The Danish program is marked by rewarding, punitive, and controlling authority action, and the Icelandic by the concrete means through which its objectives are pursued. To sum it up, the Nordic countries appear dissimilar – even divergent – in regard to the salient content dimensions of their strategies on safety and health at work.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study, objective and research questions

TemaNord 2001 describes the trend in fatal occupational accidents in the Nordic countries from 1970 to 1998. In Sweden there were 272 such accidents in 1970 and in 1998 the figure was 50. In Norway the corresponding figures were 116 and 64, in Denmark 128 and 78, in Finland 212 and 43 and in Iceland 4 and 2. Thus the number of fatal accidents had decreased considerably by the end of the 20th century. (TemaNord 2001:535, 92.) The Scoreboard 2005 study assessed national occupational health and safety practices, giving scores for the various countries. According to this study, the trend in the number of accidents in the previous ten years in the Nordic countries is good: In Denmark, Finland and Norway, the number of accidents has decreased, in Sweden the situation has remained unchanged and in Iceland there has been no significant trend observable. In the light of the above, TemaNord (2007, 252) ranks the Nordic countries highly as countries with “healthy economies”.

The points of departure for working in the Nordic countries are good by global standards, as a high value is attached to work in Nordic culture. In TemaNord 2007 this is expressed as follows:

“It has been claimed that to Nordic employees, ‘job satisfaction’ is the most common of all sources of pleasure.” (TemaNord 2007:530, 255.)

Work and working conditions have, however, changed considerably during the past decades in the industrialised countries. These changes have also had repercussions for occupational diseases. Many chemical and physical occupational problems are nowadays better under control than before, but alongside and in place of the old problems, new ones have arisen. Nowadays allergies, disorders of the musculo-skeletal system and mental health problems can be classified as occupational diseases. Particularly psychosocial problems and their health impacts have been a focus of research. (E.g. Verksamhetsprogram 2004–2006.)

Working conditions also have economic impacts. Among the arguments for a good working environment, factors often mentioned are the costs incurred by individuals, companies and society due to a poor working environment. On the basis of economic calculations made in the Nordic countries, losses caused by poor working environments amount to approximately 2–4% of the country’s GDP. The costs incurred for absenteeism due to sickness and accidents resulting from the working environment are not as a general rule the most significant of the additional costs, but as a

significantly more important factor we can see the impacts of the working environment on employees' mental well-being, and consequently on productivity. This economic perspective has not been mentioned specifically in connection with the occupational safety and health authorities' activities in the Nordic countries, with the exception of Finland. However, the economic perspective can be used to promote improvement of working conditions at workplaces more effectively than by appealing to legal requirements. Understood from this perspective, an investment in improving the working environment is not simply an expense, but a key factor in profitability and an investment in the future. (TemaNord 2004:501, 13.)

The research at hand is part of a project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The occupational safety and health (OSH) administration of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has ordered the study from the Department of Social Studies at the University of Lapland. The study has been carried out by Professor of Sociology Asko Suikkanen and researcher Marika Kunnari. The study examines Nordic policies on health and safety at work in the light of country-specific strategies/programs on health and safety at work and their relation to the principles of their background programs. The background programs and criteria for comparison encompass the European Union's strategies on health and safety at work for the years 2002–2006 and 2007–2012 and the Programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation in the labour market and working environment sectors 2005–2008.

The objective of the study is to compare Nordic programs on the working environment and safety and health at work as well as the strategic approaches behind them. Another aim is to interpret the differences, similarities and relations between national (Nordic) working environment programs and the European Union's corresponding ones. This is done with regard to the strategic mindset of the programs and the contents of the procedural programs. During the last 20 years a significant change has occurred in the Nordic countries. National socio-political programs in the public sector have changed into programs that clearly fit into or even comply with the programs of the European Union. Both the operating environment (context) of working environment program preparation and the operating mechanisms (aims, system of means) have been under a process of change. In the following we attempt to assess how changes in the operating environment and operating mechanisms manifest themselves in the working environment programs of the European Union and the Nordic countries and how these programs relate to one another at the beginning of the 2000s.

The transformation of the assessed strategies is shown by a common trend in terminology: the names of European programs have evolved from occupational protection programs to occupational safety programs and, in the 1990s, to working environment programs. The first shift was from work force protection to occupational protection during the first half of the 20th century, during the second the shift was from occupational protection to working environment development. The public sector's control policy over

the working conditions is in a state of change; in principle, the public sector has started to develop and support the development of innovative working environments. In the background there is a change in social (communal) intervention (a shift toward reacting) in paid work. Public intervention in paid labour and business practices began at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century in the most industrialized European countries. It started out in the margins, but it had a tendency to intervene in problem situations and to perform restrictive actions. The history of intervention in working and business life is long. In general, the strategy of intervention has evolved from taking punitive action due to bad or forbidden situations toward advising, consulting, or rewarding in pursuance of better conditions. When it comes to occupational protection, occupational safety and working environment program strategies, it is important to focus on an interpretation of the actors (employer, employees, state), work division, authority, action content, and relations within these strategies. The relations between the actors have basically evolved from contradictory toward contractual relations of cooperation. The central question concerning the relations between actors is how the programs of the different countries treat the role of the actors and how they define specifically the state actor's initiative and, on the other hand, the employer's responsibility. These are strategic questions among programs on safety and health at work. The purpose of this study is to assess whether and how current working environment programs in different countries deviate from one another as regards these strategic choices.

The objective of the study is to further the discussion among the Nordic countries on the situation of their country-specific strategies/programs. Due to a large number of programs on safety and health at work, it is very challenging to reach the core of each country's policy. The core of the programs means their strategic dimensions, their argumentation, and their relations to one another. In our view, exposing the strategic dimensions of the programs makes it possible to problematize the institutional thinking on health and safety at work in each country. The purpose of this research has been to reach for that core in light of the chosen materials and through the ideas induced by the analysis. These ideas are presented country-by-country in the Analysis chapter of the research.

The research questions are:

1. What is the thinking behind the working environment policies of the working environment strategies/programs in each Nordic country and in the European Union?
2. What are the most important dimensions of the working environment strategies/programs of each Nordic country and what are they in the European Union?
3. What types of differences are there in the working environment strategies/programs of the Nordic countries and the European Union?

Answers to these questions are sought, first, by defining a) the setting of objectives within the programs, b) the attitude of different actors toward the development of working environments, c) the questions of responsibility in reaching the goals, and d) the content-related dimensions of the objectives. Second, answers to the objectives are sought by interpreting a) the means suggested in the working environment programs, b) the noticeable dimensions of the means, and c) the roles of different actors in their implementation.

1.2 Research material and research method

The research setting is formed by an assessment of each country's national working environment program that is in use at present or was in use at the turn of the millennium. From each country and the European Union researchers have chosen the period's salient strategy/program that is considered to reflect the outlook that exists/existed and the corresponding work environment policy. The researchers have made the choices knowing that in addition to the chosen strategies/programs there are more precise programs that control environmental actions in each country. This became evident already from the thousands of pages of material sent from the Nordic countries to the researchers for closer inspection. Due to the limited time the material had to be given precise limitations. This limitation is largely based on the selection of the most appropriate material for the research. Thus, the aim has been to choose those strategies/programs that describe for their part the general mentality behind each country's policy on health and safety at work at the beginning of the 2000s, although the time spans differ from one another to some extent. The selection has also been based on the idea of maximum correlation between the strategies/programs, to enable a comparative analysis. On the other hand, a critical factor in influencing the selection of the material was its availability/traceability and its level of incidence. Therefore, it is not the operative practices of different actors that are being assessed; nor is it their real forms of manifestation or their implementation. The aim is to assess strategic thinking by analysing dimensions of content. The content dimension analysis is utilized to form a general picture of each strategic outlook and the rationale behind it. The analysis hence focuses on the ideology adopted in each country (community) on health and safety at work, that is, the thinking that precedes the program's implementation. The relation between strategic OSH thinking and its implementation is neither direct nor unambiguous. The thinking reflects the aspirations concerning health and safety policy, especially from the state actor's viewpoint, whereas the implementation represents the realization of the policy.

The research material consists of the European Union's two most recent strategies on health and safety at work as well as the Programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation in the labour market and

working environment sectors 2005–2008. These background programs are understood here as global actors' general expressions of will concerning the principles, approaches, and strategic orientations to be adopted in working environment policies. The research material also includes the strategy/program of each Nordic country outlining the policy on health and safety at work. For Finland, this means the 1998 strategy on health and safety at work concerning the administrative field of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. As for Sweden, it means the action plan of the Swedish Work Environment Authority for the years 2004–2006 and the related regulations "Systematiskt arbetsmiljöarbete, SAM" (systematic working environment work). The Norwegian issue under study is the strategic plan of the Norwegian administration of health and safety at work for the years 2004–2007. The Danish issue under study is the national work environment council's action plan "Report on Future Working Environment 2010" and the related "smiley" program. The Icelandic research material is an abstract delivered by their officials: "Occupational health and safety practice in Iceland." In addition, the material includes the report "Nordisk arbetsmiljökonferens 22–24.5.2006." This report demonstrates that the country-specific research materials are relevant and hold the same information content as the actual policies of the countries.

Since the research material has been delimited according to the above-mentioned arguments, many country-specific, defining programs have been excluded from the actual analysis. Therefore, the representatives of each Nordic country have had the possibility to comment and elaborate on the results of the research. These country-specific texts are presented separately from the analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is used as the research method to reach conclusions and to perform a systematical document analysis. The documents include books, articles, reports, and other text material. The content analysis is utilized to look for semantic aspects in the texts and to verbally describe the contents of the documents. The analysis is also aimed to add value to information, i.e., to convert fragmented material into a clear and coherent body of information. In the content analysis the material is processed through logical reasoning and interpretation; it is first disintegrated, then conceptualized, and finally reassembled in a new order to form a logical whole. This type of analysis can be material-based, as in this case, theory-based, or theory-oriented. (Kyngäs & Vanhanen 1999, Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2004.)

In the first phase of the analysis, the material was studied iteratively to find common, reduced themes for all programs/strategies: This phase resulted in five themes:

1. objectives
2. means
3. action level
4. actor level
5. authority action.

In the next phase of the analysis the themes were processed by searching for differences and similarities of expression in all the programs/strategies. Thereafter, the expressions were grouped into different strategy dimensions, which were named after their content:

1. objectives: specific vs. universal nature of the objectives
2. means: the concrete vs. generic nature of the means
3. action level: multilevel vs. single-level action
4. actor level: networked vs. authority-based
5. authority action: consultative and/or rewarding vs. controlling and/or punitive authority action.

The analysis was continued by examining each background and country-specific program from the viewpoint of these strategy dimensions. This method was used to find out the noticeable characteristics of each Nordic country and their background programs and to reveal the differences between the strategies/programs.

The specific vs. universal nature of the objectives. The examination of this strategy dimension aims to find out how detailed the objectives of the strategies/programs are. *The concrete vs. generic nature of the means.* This strategy dimension was analyzed to determine the detail level of the means to reach the objectives within each strategy/program. *Multilevel vs. single-level action.* An examination of this strategy dimension revealed the target groups of the objectives and the means to reach them (e.g. employer level, business level, national level or international level). In this context, the concept *multilevel* denotes an action level that covers several levels of action, whereas the concept *single-level* refers to strategic thinking in which the starting point of action is one particular, single level. *Networked vs. authority-based actor level.* An examination of this dimension gave us an idea of the people or parties that have the responsibility to pursue the objectives and to realize the means. Shared responsibilities and obligations between the employee, employer and authorities were seen as the starting point of a networked actor level. The authority-based actor level was understood as the authorities having a strong role as actors, whereas employees and employers are targets of authority action. *Consultative and/or rewarding vs. controlling and/or punitive authority action.* Examining authority action in this respect shed light on the role of the state and authorities in health and safety at work.

A rather rough interpretation was made that a strategy dimension materializes in the theme of an examined strategy/program when the theme

Strategy/programme (Country)		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific				universal
means	concrete				generic
action level	multilevel nature				single-level nature
actor level	networking-based				authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding				controlling and/or punitive

Figure 1.1 Themes and dimensions of strategies and programmes

does not contain the characteristics of the other alternative of the dimension. It was considered of consequence which alternative the theme of a strategy/program mainly supports or if it supports both alternatives. If the analyzed part of a program contains elements from both alternatives, it has been classified as a *mixed content* item (features from both). Thus, the differentiation of the dimensions of the programs/strategies is based on reading, textual comparison, and qualitative estimation.

1.3 Structure of the study

Chapter 2 presents the contents of the background programs and an analysis of the programs.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the program of each Nordic country with contents included. The chapter contains an analysis of each country's strategy/program on health and safety at work in terms of the following features: the specific vs. universal nature of the objectives, the concrete vs. generic nature of the means, the multilevel vs. single-level nature of the action level, the networked vs. authority-based nature of the actor level, and the consultative and/or rewarding vs. controlling and/or punitive nature of authority action.

Chapter 4, sums up the results and the conclusions derived from them followed by a discussion in Chapter 5.

The actual analysis and policy is followed by each Nordic country's authority view on the starting points of health and safety at work in Chapter 6.

2 Background programmes on occupational safety and health policies

2.1 Adapting to change in work and society: a new Community strategy on health and safety at work 2002–2006

The Community strategy on health and safety at work 2002–2006 has three novel features:

- It adopts a global approach to well-being at work, taking account of changes in the world of work and the emergence of new risks, especially of a psycho-social nature. As such, it is geared to enhancing the quality of work, and regards a safe and healthy working environment as one of the essential components.
- It is based on consolidating a culture of risk prevention, on combining a variety of political instruments – legislation, the social dialogue, progressive measures and best practices, corporate social responsibility and economic incentives – and on building partnerships between all the players on the safety and health scene.
- It points up the fact that an ambitious social policy is a factor in the competitiveness equation and that, on the other side of the coin, having a “non-policy” engenders costs which weigh heavily on economies and societies.” (The Commission of the European Communities 2002, 3; Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet 2007, 49.)

The Community strategy on health and safety at work 2002–2006 includes “a number of complementary objectives to be targeted by all players” (The Commission of the European Communities 2002, 8.) The main target is “*to bring about a continuing improvement of well-being at work, a concept which is taken include the physical, moral and social dimensions.*” Since such a comprehensive idea of well-being at work cannot be measured only on the basis of accidents or occupational diseases, the quality of Community policy must improved. This implies the following:

“It must combine the various instruments and find a basis in the substantial acquis of many decades of Community policies (...). It must also be founded on the experience vested in the various Community programmes in this area. The normative approach, whether it be a matter of the ongoing adaptation of existing standards or the formulation of new standards, remains essential: Article 31 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights states that “*every worker has the right to working conditions which respect his or her health, safety and dignity*”. However, in a constantly changing world of work, it is just as important to promote progressive approaches, whether they be performance rating, based on transparent and reliable data and indicators, action on the part of the social partners (at sectoral or multisectoral level), or voluntary company schemes. It is, furthermore, essential to improve the knowledge and awareness of all players, and to ensure that concerns for health and safety at work are mainstreamed into all other relevant Community policies. To achieve this it must involve all the players (...) within

a frame work of “good governance”, based on universal participation.” (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 4–5.)

According to the Community strategy on health and safety at work 2002-2006, changes in working life must be supported. As the background factors involved in change, the strategy mentions changes in society, in forms of employment and in the nature of risk. Social changes include the increasing participation of women in employment. The strategy points out that this must be taken into consideration in preventive measures, assessment arrangements and rules for awarding compensation. Account should also be taken of the risks to which women are particularly susceptible. Other changes in society relate to the ageing of the active population, with the proportion of workers aged 50 and above in the active work force increasing and that of younger workers decreasing in the coming decades. (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 6–7.)

As regards change in the forms of employment, the strategy notes that there is increasing diversity in the labour market and strong growth particularly in temporary employment relationships. Part-time work and non-standard working times are factors that increase risks to workers. This can be explained by the lack of proper training, psychosomatic problems caused by shift work, a lack of awareness on the part of company managers, or lack of motivation in the case of workers in an insecure employment relationship. The whole of work is going towards more flexible work forms of organisation, since the tangible link between the work and the workplace is weakening with the rapid spread of information technologies. There are specific problems, for example in relation to teleworkers: it is the employer who is responsible for the employees’ health and safety regardless of where they work. (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 7.)

In the context of changing risks, the strategy points to “emerging” illnesses such as stress, depression, anxiety, violence at work, harassment and intimidation, which are responsible for 18% of all problems associated with health at work. They are linked less to exposure to a specific risk than to a whole set of factors, such as work organisation, working time arrangements, hierarchical relations, transport-related fatigue, and the degree of acceptance of ethnic and cultural diversity within the firm. (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 7.)

The strategy emphasises preventive approaches, the aim being to anticipate risks and bring them under control. Education, awareness and anticipation are the means to be used to improve people’s awareness of risks. The most important element here is continuing vocational training. This must be dispensed regularly and be geared to the realities of day-to-day work, with a view to impacting directly on the environment. Anticipation involves, first and foremost, ongoing observation of the risks themselves, based on the systematic collection of information and scientific opinions. It also requires researchers to adopt a consistent approach, and research findings should be to be made known to firms, and especially to SMEs. (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 9.)

Relating to the preventive approach, the strategy stresses the need to apply Community law effectively. This in turn requires an enhanced state of awareness on the part of all concerned, and at all levels. In addition, it must be ensured that the directives are properly transposed and their proper application monitored. Common principles must be applied to labour inspection in the field of health and safety at work, and ways and means of evaluating national inspection systems by reference to these principles. The checks carried out by the inspection services must give rise to uniform sanctions which are dissuasive, proportionate and effectively applied. (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 10–11.)

Furthermore the strategy points to the need for combining instruments and building partnerships. This involves adapting the legal and institutional framework, encouraging practical innovative approaches and working to mainstream health and safety at work in other Community policies. As means for adapting the legal and institutional framework, the strategy mentions

1. ongoing adaptation in existing directives to changes in scientific knowledge, technical progress and the world of work,
2. taking new risks into account,
3. rationalisation and simplification of the legal framework, and
4. rationalisation of the Community instances.

Encouraging practical innovative approaches involves

1. benchmarking and identification of best practices,
2. voluntary agreements concluded by the social partners,
3. corporate social responsibility, and
4. economic incentives.

Work to mainstream health and safety at work in other Community policies is based on the assumption that well-being at work cannot be brought about simply by way of health and safety policy: there are strong links with employment policy, with policy on the disabled and with other policies, such as transport and health policy in general. (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 11–16.)

The strategy also stresses preparation for enlargement. According to the strategy this requires measures that ensure that the new Member States can be absorbed in conformity with the rules concerning health and safety at work. This can be done by:

1. Beeing-up programmes of technical assistance, using partnership and twinning arrangements;
2. Developing arrangements for the exchange of experience;
3. Strengthening the social dialogue at all levels;
4. Integrating the candidate countries into ongoing Community work on statistical harmonisation. (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 17.)

Further, the strategy places a strong emphasis on developing international cooperation, which should focus on the following areas:

1. child labour,
2. improvements to occupational health throughout the world
3. dependence on medicinal drugs and alcohol. (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 17–18.)

The Community strategy on health and safety at work 2002–2006 focuses largely on the need to have specific **objectives**. The objectives are clearly expressed with examples of the factors that are to be influenced by the objectives, so that they are placed in an already existing area. For example in the context of a global approach to well-being at work, the following objectives are listed:

1. “A continuous reduction in occupational accidents and illnesses. Thought should be given to setting quantified objectives, at both Community and Member State level, particularly in sectors of activity with above-average incidence rates (...)
2. Mainstreaming the gender dimension into risk evaluation, preventive measures and compensation arrangements (...)
3. Prevention of social risks. Stress, harassment at the workplace, depression and anxiety, and risks related to dependence on alcohol, drugs and medicines, should all be the subject of specific measures (...)
4. Enhanced prevention of occupational illnesses. Priority should go to illnesses due to asbestos, hearing loss and musculo-skeletal problems.
5. Taking account of demographic change in terms of risks, accidents and illnesses (...)
6. Taking account of changes in forms of employment, work organisation arrangements and working time (...)
7. Taking account of the size of firms. SMEs and very small businesses, as well as self-employed workers and unpaid family helpers, should all be the subject of specific measures (...).
8. Analysis of new or emerging risks, with special reference to risks associated with the interaction between chemical, physical and biological agents (...).” (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 8.)

This makes the objectives more easily understandable and in a way “feasible”, when they are expressed more specifically than as universal concepts. Their specific nature also implies commitment to the objectives, since it will take time to achieve the objectives mentioned.

The **means** recommended in the strategy for attaining the objectives are clearly expressed with a view to making them concrete. Clear measures and procedures are mentioned for implementing the objectives, for example in connection with the preventive approach:

- “The European Agency for Health and Safety at Work:
1. will set up a “risk observatory”, based on examples of good practice collected from firms or specific branches of activity;
 2. will organise exchanges of experience and information by way of the systematic collection of data, with the support of Eurostat;
 3. will integrate the candidate countries into these information networks, and devise working tools which are geared to their specific situation; (...).” (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 10.)

The measures are to be seen both as being situation-bound and as requiring long-term commitment. For example, systematic gathering of information can be seen as a process that is continuous and routine, but for example, developing appropriate tools for the special needs of candidate countries takes place over a long period and requires commitment to the issue. All in all, the means correspond in sufficient detail to the objectives, and the concrete measures recommended in the strategy cover the objectives extensively.

As regards the **action level**, the Community strategy for health and safety at work 2002–2006 covers the company, national and global levels. The objectives and measures are expressed clearly, starting with the conditions for small companies right up to the level of international cooperation:

“Taking account of the size of firms (...) Cooperation *with third countries* – more particularly those of the Mediterranean Basin, ASEAN, NAFTA and the Mercosur group – is essential if we are to ensure that minimum health and safety standards are adhered to (...)” (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 8, 18.)

The **actor level** of the strategy is based on networking and the various actors have the obligation to participate in cooperation and to share responsibility:

“Promoting a quality working environment, taking account of all the aspects, requires a global approach, utilising all the available instruments. It also requires all the actors to assume full responsibility, and it means that each party’s efforts should be open to assessment and appraisal.” (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 11.)

This obligation is based to a large extent on the view that the objectives will be attained by measures that require all actors to participate, in order to ensure that the objectives are achieved. The actors include employees, employers and various authorities.

In the Community strategy for health and safety at work 2002–2006 **authority action** is seen as have two sides. The strategy demands in each Member State effective and equivalent control of the implementation of measures to ensure that comprehensive models of action are in practice used to achieve the objectives:

“(...) For its part, the Commission will, subject to the powers bestowed on it by the Treaty, adopt a rigorous approach to ensuring that directives are properly transposed and the law is properly applied. (...)” (Commission of the European Communities 2002, 10.)

The role of control is not, however, emphasised over and above other measures, but it is one among other means used according the strategy, such as measures relating to prevention and measures based on a consultative approach.

2.2 Improving quality and productivity at work: Community Strategy 2007–2012 on health and safety at work

The primary goal of the European Union's Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2007–2012 is the continuous, uniform reduction of occupational illnesses and accidents. According to the Commission, the general objective during these years should be to reduce occupational accidents by 25 % for every 100,000 workers. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 4.)

In pursuance of this goal the strategy reads as follows:

- “• guarantee the proper implementation of EU legislation
- support SMEs in the implementation of the legislation in force
- adapt the legal framework to changes in the workplace and simplify it, particularly in view of SMEs
- promote the development and implementation of national strategies
- encourage changes in the behaviour of workers and encourage their employers to adopt health-focused approaches
- analyse the methods for identifying and evaluating new potential risks
- improve the tracking of progress
- promote health and safety at the international level.” (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 5.)

On the proper implementation of EU legislation the strategy states that the Community's regulations must be implemented effectively in order to protect the lives and health of workers and to ensure that the companies operating within the large European market are placed on an equal footing. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 5.)

In support of the implementation of SME legislation the following is suggested:

1. dissemination of good practice at the local level
 2. training of workers
 3. development of simple tools to facilitate risk assessment
 4. better dissemination of information and better access to counselling services
 5. access to external prevention services which are of a high quality and affordable
 6. involvement of labour inspectors as intermediaries of change
 7. use of economic incentives at the Community and national levels.
- (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 6.)

In order to adapt the legal framework to changes in the workplace and to simplify it the Commission continues its work to accomplish directives on health and safety at work. Meanwhile, it examines the possibilities to simplify legislation in order to reduce the administrative burden without jeopardizing the achievement of the goals and the level of safety at the workplace. At the national level, all efforts to simplify the operation of

companies are expected to lead to improved national frameworks without compromising the level of safety. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 9.)

The development and implementation of national strategies are supported

1. by improving the preventive effectiveness of health surveillance through systematic methods
2. by taking action to promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of workers, for example through individually adapted training
3. by dealing with social and demographic change, for example by analyzing those challenges of health and safety at the workplace that are brought by elderly workers' entering the labour market
4. by strengthening policy coherence, for example by aiming at consistency in certain fields of politics, such as public health, regional development, social cohesion, public procurement, employment, and restructuring. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 10–11.)

Encouraging changes in the behaviour of workers and encouraging their employers to adopt health-focused approaches are connected with the emphasizing of a culture of risk anticipation in all training programs and at all levels and in all areas of education, also in vocational education and higher education. In addition, the strategy emphasizes the significance of investments on the health of workers in companies: for example, expenses caused by absence go down, personnel turnover is reduced, motivation will increase, and quality will improve. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 11–12.)

The means to recognize risks are connected with e.g. the means to promote mental health. According to an estimate by WHO, depression will become the major cause of unemployment by 2020. To prevent this, the Commission will encourage the member states to incorporate into their national strategies initiatives aimed at preventing mental health problems and improving mental health at the workplace. The Commission also emphasizes the importance of negotiations between labour market organizations in the prevention of harassment and violence at the workplace. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 13–14.)

To improve the tracking of progress tools must be developed for measuring the progress at the national level and at the European level in general. The commission promotes the planning of such quantitative indicators that make it possible to utilize data from statistics and population surveys. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 14.)

Promoting occupational health and safety at the international level starts from cooperation with the competent international bodies and bilateral relations with third countries. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 14–15.)

In addition to the primary target – the continuous and uniform reduction of occupational illnesses and accidents – the strategy emphasizes the importance of noticing, for example, the demographic development and the aging of the working population in the context of health and safety at the

workplace. In Stockholm 2001, the European Council set a goal to raise the average employment rate for men and women in the EU to 50 % by 2010 within the age group of 55 to 64. The European Union should attempt to raise the average retirement age step-by-step by approximately five years by 2010. Also other trends in employment, such as increased self-employment, outsourcing, and equality between the sexes, require more detailed scrutiny. In addition, new and growing flows of migrants into Europe pose specific challenges in terms of health and safety at the workplace. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 2–5; Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet 2007, 53.)

The objectives of the European Union's Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2007–2012 resemble those of the strategy of 2002–2006 in terms of specificity. The new strategy differs from the previous one; instead of several aims, it deals by and large with a single objective:

“The Community strategy 2002–2006 has seen a significant fall in the rate of accidents at work. The new strategy for 2007–2012 proposes to step up our ambition and to aim for a 25 % reduction in the total incidence rate of accidents at work by 2012 in EU-27. (...)” (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 3.)

In terms of commitment to the objectives the aim of the European Union's Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2007–2012 is very similar to that of the previous strategy; long-term commitment is required in order to achieve the objective:

“An ongoing, sustainable and uniform reduction in accidents at work and occupational illnesses (...)” (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 4.)

The **objectives** are expected to yield a profit, though, over a specified time period, within a defined quantitative and temporal framework.

The European Union's Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2007–2012 entails **means** for achieving its objectives. These means are mostly connected with general judicial and supervisory starting points:

“At national level, appropriate steps should be taken to enable labour inspectorates to ensure that those concerned meet their obligations and are able to exercise their rights, including carrying out checks which result in the imposition of dissuasive and proportionate penalties and prosecution for failure to abide by health and safety rules. (...)” (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 7–8.)

In addition, concrete and research-focused starting points were emphasized in this strategy:

Research, both basic and applied, is crucial to improve knowledge about health and safety at work, (...). Scientific research provides arguments and evidence upon which policy decisions must be based. Research priorities should include psychosocial issues, musculoskeletal disorders, dangerous substances, (...)” (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 13.)

The means described in the strategy are in fact mostly concrete operation models, whose implementation makes it possible to pursue the objectives. Compared with the previous strategy, the relation of the means to the objectives is mostly the same: the objectives are provided with detailed means of implementation. Considering the previous strategy, the means are similar from a temporal point of view. The means can still be partly implemented even in the near future by incorporating them into everyday activities. Some of them, on the other hand, require long-term commitment:

”(...) how important it is to develop a risk prevention culture in training programmes at all levels of education and in all fields, including vocational training and university education. Primary education plays an important role, since basic preventive reflexes are developed during childhood. (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 11.)

The practical implementation of training programs is possible even on a short time scale, but much like attitudes, also a culture of certain mode of action and thinking requires long-term activities in order to be internalized by actors.

The **action level** starting point in the European Union’s Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2007–2012 has also remained the same in relation to the previous strategy. The means concentrate on cooperation and the exchange of experiences, and the aim is to achieve the objectives of the enterprise level, local level, and global level from multilevel starting points:

“The Senior Labour Inspectors’ Committee is invited to

- examine the reasons for the different incidence rates of occupational accidents in the Member States and discuss their experience of innovative solutions which have proved effective
- do more, when assessing the impact of (...) to examine the role of labour inspectorates (...)
- do more to develop methods of exchanging information (...)
- strengthen cooperation with the ACSH (Advisory Committee on Health and Safety at work), (...)”

At national level, appropriate steps should be taken to enable labour inspectorates to ensure that those concerned meet their obligations and are able to exercise their rights. (...)” (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 7.)

An examination of the actors that are obliged by the strategy to participate in working environment activities reveals that the **actor level** starting point is based on networking. This obligation concerns workers, employers, as well as authorities:

“Changing people’s attitudes to health and safety issues at work involves, among other things, raising the awareness of those involved in companies and ensuring that the rules relating to the information, training and participation of workers are applied fully and effectively, enabling them to acquire adequate professional knowledge, develop preventive reflexes and perform their tasks safely.” (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 12.)

However, in comparison with the previous strategy one may conclude that agency increasingly stems from the authorities, since one may consider authority action as being above networked activities with special emphasis on control. This does not mean that the strategy would not recognize the meaning of employer- and company-level agency with respect to occupational safety. Rather it means that there are great expectations on the participation of worker- and company-level actors, which also increases the need for authority control.

Related to the above, the European Union's Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2007–2012 emphasizes the controlling nature of **authority action** more than its predecessor. It also emphasizes punitiveness more than the previous strategy if the means are not implemented:

“In its role as guardian of the Treaties, the Commission will ensure that the Community directives are transposed and implemented effectively. It will assist Member States in this regard, but also exercise the utmost vigilance and launch infringement proceedings where necessary, (...)” (Commission of the European Communities 2007, 5.)

In its strategy the Commission “encourages,” “recommends,” and “spurs” different actors to implement the means of the strategy in order to achieve the objectives through consultative action. However, in the background one may discern a requirement to implement the means stated in the strategy to avoid punitive measures.

2.3 The Nordic Council of Ministers' Programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008

The basis for Nordic labour market cooperation has since 1954 been the Agreement on the Common Nordic Labour Market, which was revised in 1982, the revised version coming into effect in 1983. The agreement stresses the basic right of citizens to freely work and live in another Nordic country. The agreement further emphasises that the objective of the governments is to maintain full employment and that they should cooperate with a view to achieving the said objective. Cooperation on the working environment is based on the Nordic Convention on the Working Environment, from the year 1989. This Convention defines the main principles of Nordic cooperation on the working environment. The traditions of close cooperation between the Nordic authorities thus go back many years. In addition to the above-mentioned basic agreements, the Nordic Council of Ministers defines the framework for cooperation between the countries for each programme period. The purpose of cooperation is *to focus jointly to a growing degree on such matters as increasing the supply of labour and the employment rate. At the same time the aim is to respond to the challenges of population development and create a working life that promotes inclu-*

sion, thus preventing marginalisation. Another aim of Nordic cooperation is to *promote gender equality in working life and to remove obstacles and discrimination that prevent people with reduced working capacity from working*. The current cooperation programme focuses on two areas

1. Nordic policy on working life, which is an umbrella term covering the labour market, the working environment and labour law and
2. Interaction of Nordic working life policy with the EU and EEA and with other international forums. (The Nordic Council of Ministers' Programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 26–27.)

The Nordic Convention on the Working Environment is based on the view that a good working environment is of fundamental importance for general well-being. In addition, it is underpinned by a view of the prerequisites for a good working environment, i.e. healthy and safe working conditions, and conditions that otherwise promote the job satisfaction and well-being of workers. In this view, the working environment should be developed along with other technical and social development in society, since a good working environment is seen as promoting both productivity and progress in society (Nordic Convention on the Working Environment 1990, 18.)

In developing a good working environment occupational safety and health work at the workplace is of fundamental importance. The labour market parties are seen to have their own significant role in influencing Nordic work environment policy and the work environment authorities in developing the work environment and implementing policy. Nordic cooperation is considered to be of great importance for efficient use of the available resources and positive development of the work environment. The purpose of this kind of cooperation is seen as being to develop better working environments on the basis of interaction between the different countries and exchange of information. Joint Nordic participation is also seen to be important in international cooperation. (Nordic Convention on the Working Environment 1990, 18.)

The objective of the Nordic Convention on the Working Environment is

1. to strengthen and develop Nordic cooperation with a view promoting development that will bring about better working environments in the Nordic countries,
2. to promote the above development through exchange of experience and information; to promote the rational use of the available resources through coordination, and to support other Nordic countries in the work of developing the working environment,
3. to promote harmonisation of the regulations and requirements relating to the working environment and
4. to promote joint Nordic participation in various international contexts relating to working environment issues.

According to the Convention, the Nordic cooperation described above should nevertheless take into account the right of each country to plan its own working environment policy together with its national labour market parties. (Nordic Convention on the Working Environment 1990, 19.)

In the programme period 2005–2008, the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers focuses on two areas, which are *internal Nordic cooperation* and *international Nordic cooperation*. In internal cooperation the focus is on three main sub-areas, which are the labour market, the working environment and labour legislation. The second area of focus, i.e. international Nordic cooperation covers activities outside the Nordic countries and focuses on exchange of Nordic views and experiences relating to the EU and the EEA Agreement. At the same time there is a focus on securing Nordic interests in international forums. (The Nordic Council of Ministers' Programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 31–32.)

The Nordic Council of Ministers has listed means for achieving the objectives of the first focal area, i.e. promoting internal Nordic cooperation. These means are

1. comparisons between the labour market and working environment policy organisations in the Nordic countries,
2. developing labour market policy in sparsely populated peripheral areas,
3. creation of systems for reducing absenteeism due to sickness and unemployment
4. harmonisation of the Nordic labour market systems in order to improve internal mobility.

As regards the labour market, the aim is to increase the size of the workforce and to achieve full employment. To achieve the objective of full employment, emphasis is placed on balancing workforce supply and demand and on encouraging interaction between labour market policy and other closely related policy areas. (The Nordic Council of Ministers' Programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 33.)

The objective of working environment policy is to promote employees' well-being and productivity on the labour market. Both high absenteeism due to sickness and the increasing number of early retirements show that action is necessary, among other things, to reduce the incidence of work-related diseases. Such action should address both current problems and to the prevention of future problems. (The Nordic Council of Ministers' programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 33–34.)

The area of labour law is a mechanism that is connected with the labour market parties and its function is to regulate the labour market. It is closely linked with the entire field of collective agreements. (The Nordic Council of Ministers' programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 34.)

According to the Council of Ministers, the objective of the second focal area, i.e. international Nordic cooperation, relates to Nordic cooperation within the EU and the securing of Nordic interests in the EU and other international forums. Nordic cooperation within the EU includes

1. implementation and monitoring of the Community strategy on the working environment 2002–2006,
2. exchange of experiences on the preparation and implementation of Community legislation,
3. Community employment strategy and
4. preparation of meetings of the Council of the European Union

The objective of securing Nordic interests in the EU includes

1. cooperation on standardisation work within Europe,
2. cooperation through contacts with Community policy-makers and officials and
3. sharing of work and information on central areas in the EU and EEA.

International forums include cooperation, especially with new EU Member States, and with the Council of the Baltic Sea States, promoting Nordic cooperation between neighbouring regions, the EU's Northern Dimension and cooperation among Nordic neighbouring countries, cooperation relating to the International Labour Organisation and the Council of Europe, cooperation with the OECD relating to the sharing of work and information among the Nordic countries in international forums. (The Nordic Council of Ministers' programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 35.)

The **objectives** of the Nordic Cooperation Programme are expressed very broadly and they are discussed on a fairly general level as concerning all areas of working life and sectors. The starting point for the objectives is cooperation. The objectives of the Cooperation Programme cover working life from labour supply and demand through well-being at work to legislative protection:

1. “the labour market area, where the focus is on creating a labour market that will promote full employment and enable a maximum supply of labour,
2. the working environment area, where the focus is on promoting physical, mental and social well-being and thus creating a working life that is inclusive and prevents marginalisation,
3. the labour legislation area, where the focus is on regulating mechanisms that ensure the protection of wage-earners' interests, for example, creating a balance between equality of treatment and flexibility.” (The Nordic Council of Ministers' programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 31–32.)

The objectives of the Nordic Cooperation Programme are to a large extent based on commitment. For example, the content of the objectives of preventing marginalisation and providing full employment is such that achieving them requires both time and continuity:

“(...) Work to promote gender equality will continue, and attention will also be focused on efforts to remove obstacles and discrimination that prevent people with reduced working capacity from working. (...)” (The Nordic Council of Ministers’ Programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 31.)

Expressed as broad target areas, the objectives in the Nordic Cooperation Programme remain on a more general level than those defined in the Community strategies on occupational health and safety, which are relatively detailed in the way they are expressed and which take a stand on certain issues.

The **means** for attaining the objectives proposed in the Nordic Cooperation Programme are very diverse, but it is worth noting that in many cases the means are so general that they are in practice hardly distinguishable from the objectives. The means are certainly defined, but in many instances, the question of how the means are to be implemented remains unanswered. For example, as regards the objectives of enlarging the workforce and ensuring full employment by encouraging ageing employees to stay on at work, the means remain on a very general level. To be sure that the means have the desired effect in practice, it would be useful to know how ageing employees are in reality to be induced to stay on at work. The means would in other words need to be backed by more concrete measures to enable their implementation. Otherwise they remain simply general statements in the same way as the objectives.

The means toward achieving the objectives require commitment and time since many of them are based to a certain extent on changing attitudes. For example, according to the Nordic Council of Ministers, the following factors should be focused on, in order to achieve the objectives set in the area of labour legislation:

1. “discrimination on the labour market and social dumping
2. consideration of regulations on working hours
3. consideration of existing labour market rights, for example, developing flexible forms of work and new forms of employment relationship, including problems relating to hired employees
4. developing a Nordic model and a dialogue with the labour market parties”
(The Nordic Council of Ministers’ programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 34.)

Attitudes do not necessarily change in a moment, but on the other hand, prevention of discrimination at the workplace can be achieved in a very short period of time if intervention is immediate and the problem is discrimination based on workplace harassment. If, however, it is a question of gender-based pay differences, eliminating discrimination will require more time and involve a decision-making process. With its generic means

the strategy is in contradiction with the health and safety strategies of the European Union.

Seen from the perspective of the **action level**, the focus of the Nordic Cooperation Programme is multi-level, and therefore its starting points do not differ from those of the EU strategies. The means for achieving the objectives set can be implemented both on the level of the enterprise and on the national level. For example, the Council of Ministers, sees as means for preventing current problems

1. “reduction of absenteeism due to sickness
2. improving the physical, mental and social working environment
3. developing a working environment that is inclusive and prevents marginalisation.” (The Nordic Council of Ministers’ Programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 34.)

The following actions relating to the prevention of future problems are proposed in the Nordic Cooperation Programme:

1. “ensuring the conditions for life-long learning in working life
2. maintaining and updating work environment standards
3. developing cooperation with policy-makers and authorities to promote a Nordic model
4. prevention of marginalisation from working life
5. prevention of occupational accidents and work-induced ill-health by means of cooperation between research institutions and authorities
6. further development of a sustainable work environment strategy
7. dissemination of information on work environment research (...)” (The Nordic Council of Ministers’ programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 34.)

Thus local-level action is seen as being a possible way of influencing the implementation of broad objectives.

Considering the purpose of the Nordic Cooperation Programme it is natural that on the **actor level** enterprises and employees are less prominent than the joint Nordic approach, for example regarding objectives:

“The objective is to promote the development of cooperation through exchange of experience, concrete tasks and joint initiatives. Due to the many common features of the Nordic labour markets, the Council of Ministers have the opportunity to exchange experiences that can support development in the Nordic countries and provide a basis for developing the Nordic labour market within a European framework. (The Nordic Council of Ministers’ programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 31–32.)

In fact, the program’s action level is relatively authority-oriented and in this respect does not correspond to the EU strategies.

As regards **authority action**, the Nordic Cooperation Programme deviates from the Community strategies on occupational health and safety. For example, it hardly deals at all with the question of supervision, and the objectives and action recommended for the cooperating countries are

expressed as though taking it for granted that the parties concerned will take their responsibility. Thus punitive action is ignored, while attention is focused on equality of interaction between the parties concerned, and on maintaining and developing this interaction. However, the programme's implementation is not possible completely without supervision:

“The subcommittees under the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Labour Market and Working Environment Policy (ÅK-A) are to submit annually reports on their results, including the implementation of the Cooperation Programme. In addition the subcommittees are to present plans of action on how they intend to fulfil their tasks and implement the Cooperation Programme. (...)” (The Nordic Council of Ministers' programme on labour market and working environment cooperation in the period 2005–2008, 36.)

Thus, supervision is primarily aimed at participation, with the related plans and reports, in the cooperation programme of the cooperative states' authorities. Authority action is therefore left in a consultative role.

3 National strategies/programmes on occupational health and safety in the Nordic countries

3.1. Finland's Occupational Safety and Health Strategy

The following points of departure and trends are to be seen behind Finnish working conditions:

- unemployment still high (over 8%)
- limited-term employment, short-term jobs, foreign labour increasingly common
- accidents and work-related illnesses have decreased over the long term
- sick leave quite low; has increased to some degree
- early retirements increased steadily since 1998, but began a downturn in 2005
- better quality of worklife, high working capacity and good health
- control over work problematic in more and more occupations
- strain, stress, burnout, violence new challenges (Social-och hälsovårdsministeriet 2007, 43.)

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Strategy of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (1998, 7)

“The primary objective of the occupational safety and health administration as part of the administrative sector of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is to maintain and promote the workers' working ability and functional capacity and to prevent occupational accidents and diseases. Prevention of work-induced musculoskeletal disorders, mental well-being at work and workers' capabilities to cope with the work - as also management of work as a prerequisite for these - are the special goals for the development of occupational safety and health. (...) The subject matter of occupational safety and health is based on the concept of a good working environment taking into consideration the latest research data, the views of the parties involved in the labour market and European cooperation. It covers safety, health, terms of employment as well as mental well-being and job satisfaction, and expresses itself in the workplace's safety customs. (...)”(Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 7.)

The objective is to promote and maintain the workers' working ability so as to reduce premature retirement. By improving working conditions the aim is to ensure the workers' health, safety and working capacity, and at the same time to reduce the number of occupational accidents and diseases and other work-induced loss of health. The strategy stresses that working conditions are of vital importance to the well-being of people and the whole of society. The safety and health of the worker is an essential prerequisite for working. Healthy and motivated workers produce welfare for themselves, their working community and society. For companies and other organisa-

tions, a capable worker is the most important resource and the fundamental precondition of productive action. The Occupational Safety and Health Strategy also stresses the individual's well-being through the entity formed by work, leisure time and family. Even though the quality of working life is seen as having improved in many respects over the past few decades, time pressure and work-related burnout are still found to present the most significant challenges to workers' well-being. (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 5, 10; Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet 2007, 101.)

The Occupational Safety and Health Strategy is based on the will, ability and capacity of workplaces to manage their OSH issues themselves. The objective is that *workplaces should independently supervise working conditions and at the same time be responsible for improving them*. The Occupational Safety and Health Strategy also mentions the objective of the OSH administration as *responding to the needs of society, the environment and the client and developing the professional skills and resources of district OSH administrations*. Since the workplaces subject to supervision have changed very rapidly during the past few years, a single OSH inspection model is not equally applicable in all cases. The OSH administration must be well aware of the needs of different workplaces, as workplaces today know how to demand good service from authorities, too. The authorities must more than ever keep up-to-date with changing conditions and they must be able to adapt their procedures to meet expectations. Another objective is to integrate *OSH with work as a natural part of working life*. Thus OSH is expected to be part of the workplace management system and to be present in both planning and decision-making. (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 5, 13, 15.)

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Strategy of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (1998, 7), the prerequisites for realising a good working environment are

1. management of working environment issues,
2. a viable and efficient organisation,
3. systematic management of safety and
4. capable and motivated personnel.

A good working environment is seen as a prerequisite for occupational safety, job satisfaction, good productivity, and quality of products and services. The tasks of OSH administration include the following

1. supporting employers in meeting their obligations as regards cooperation on safety and health at work,
2. promoting procedures whereby workplaces themselves, or through the services of an expert they have chosen, can prove their good safety practices and have them verified,
3. investigating the economic impacts of working conditions, and
4. developing financial incentives and means for creating a good working environment (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 8.)

The employer is always the party responsible for occupational safety and health at the workplace, while having the right to appoint competent persons to perform OSH tasks. The employer appoints an OSH manager unless he or she acts in that capacity. Every workplace thus has an OSH manager. The employees elect their own OSH delegate, and both the employer and the employees are represented on the OSH committee. Many workplaces also have other actors who form a network that is appropriate for the purpose and ensures the safety of operations. The most natural cooperation partners are the co-determination or employee participation organisation, and the occupational health service. (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 15-17.)

The workplace safety targets can be met by means of safety management, which may focus either on work- and risk-oriented or on employee-oriented issues. Which aspect is emphasised depends on which area of safety is given priority and what the causes of any negative factors are believed to be. The work- and risk-oriented approach highlights, for example, the identification of hazards and threats, while the employee-oriented approach focus on the identification of safe work practices and on rewarding them. There are many methods of safety management, and the OSH administration can provide guidance on the use of these methods (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 13.)

The best experts on OSH are often the employees themselves, and therefore their expertise should be exploited in OSH issues. The OSH Administration plays a significant role in supporting employees where the employer is unwilling or unable to provide the requirements of a safe and healthy working environment. One central idea of the OSH Strategy is to strengthen the part of OSH Administration, i.e. district administration, that is in close contact with workplaces. For example, the supervision of compliance with the minimum requirements of legislation continues to play an essential role. (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 14.)

Also of crucial importance in the OSH Strategy is the targeting of supervision by the authorities to achieve the desired effect. Supervision by the authorities has often been targeted at eliminating problems, based on inspections of working conditions and demands made to the employer to remove problems or defects. However, new problems are constantly appearing and it seems that in times of rapid change at workplaces, this kind of action is not the most appropriate. One of the objectives expressed in the OSH Strategy is to continue to diversify supervision methods. Since the workplaces subject to supervision have changed in many respects, supervision that takes account of these changes is needed. Research into safety and health at work could, for example, provide answers to the challenges brought by change (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 15.)

Development measures to promote strategic projects include the following:

1. "The primary task of OSH work is to promote safety and health at work and to maintain people's working capacity by means of safe technology, work hygiene, ergonomics etc. Development work is directed particularly at occupations and jobs that involve particular physical and mental stress or serious risks."
2. "Effective improvement of working conditions requires giving consideration to mental well-being and developing working conditions as a whole. The objective is to increase mental well-being at work and to improve people's ability to cope at work. This implies taking people's development needs into consideration."
3. "Working conditions should be developed in a spirit of trust and partnership. The success of OSH work depends on good cooperation at the workplace and better integration of OSH operations with the workplace's other operations. At the same time, every employee's responsibility for developing working conditions is emphasised."
4. "Financial incentives for developing working conditions should be investigated. Further efforts should be made to increase interest at workplaces in studying and giving consideration to the economic significance of working conditions."
5. "In education and training, OSH aspects are to be considered over a broad spectrum both in career guidance and in teaching contents and methods. Basic training should include a working environment course that has to be passed. Special training on the working environment will be expanded. The targeting of research and development will be improved and comprehensive projects implemented. The dissemination and utilisation of research findings will be improved. More international research projects will be initiated and funding sources efficiently utilised." (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 18–19.)

In Finland the **objectives** of the OSH strategy are on a universal level, being aimed at employees in general, and no efforts are made to specify who these employees are or in what sectors they operate. Thus the objectives concern all employees and sectors universally. On a general level the factors that impair working ability and functional capacity are given concrete expression and written into the OSH Strategy, e.g. as follows:

"(...) Prevention of work-induced musculoskeletal disorders, mental well-being at work and workers' capabilities to cope with the work - as also management of work as a prerequisite for these - are the special goals for the development of occupational safety and health." (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 7.)

Thus the universal-level objectives are made concrete by naming certain factors that impair working ability and functional capacity as specific targets of action. For example, the ageing of the population is mentioned as a special consideration in connection with working capacity, since

"(...) the aim is to maintain and promote the working capacity of the population so as to reduce premature retirement from working life." (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 10.)

The objectives of Finland's strategy can be seen both as short-term targets and as long-term objectives requiring commitment, since the action

is intended to be a routine part of normal working life that is carried out voluntarily and with commitment:

“The objective is to make OSH work a natural part of work and to include it in the workplace’s control and management systems and that OSH is taken account of in planning and decision-making.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 15.)

Target setting therefore entails both specific and universal dimensions, and based on this, the Finnish strategy does not exclusively match any of the objectives of the background programmes.

The **means** described in Finland’s OSH strategy for achieving the objectives can be seen as fairly general, as the measures are based on client-orientation and thus depend on the special nature of the enterprise:

“Correct understanding of the client’s situation and better adaptation of the administration’s own measures to changing situations are ways to improve the administration’s responsiveness.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 15.)

The specific nature of measures is expressed in the strategy by mentioning general means for achieving each objective. The general means are, however, founded on certain concrete bases. This is explained by the focus in Finland’s strategy on OSH competence, which is thought of as belonging to the employees themselves: no completely ready-made, concrete means can be specified since the investigation of every situation starts with the particular employee and the enterprise.

In addition, measures that require commitment are further emphasised in the Occupational Safety and Health Strategy:

“(…) In addition, support is given for activities that maintain employees’ working capacity and promote mental well-being.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 14.)

Measures requiring commitment are, for example, means that require a certain change of attitude for their implementation, such as measures taken to maintain employees’ psychological well-being, which OSH administration is required to pursue in addition to its supervisory task. TemaNord 2007 notes that

“Finland is notable for its long term, national and consensus based ‘Work life programme’.” (TemaNord 2007, 253.)

Due to their generic nature, the means of the Finnish strategy to achieve the objectives correspond with the Nordic Cooperation Programme’s ideology, which means that the strategy’s starting points contradict with those of the European Union’s strategies.

As regards the **action level**, the basis targeted by the OSH strategy for OSH activities is to offer incentives at local and enterprise level and to encourage self-motivated OSH activities. Thus in the setting and implementation of objectives the workplace is expected to take an active and responsible role:

“(...) the starting point and main objective of OSH strategy is the ability, skill and willingness of workplaces to manage their own OSH issues. (...) The aim is that in the main, workplaces supervise their own working conditions independently and are responsible for developing them.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 13.)

According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, Finland scores the full eight points out of eight for preventive activities initiated by enterprises.

The strategy also emphasises a national approach, for example, in focusing on the importance of research and training and in promoting various forms of cooperation between authorities. These means are used in the effort to achieve well-being at work and to prevent factors that threaten well-being in the whole of Finland:

“The Institute (the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health) shall take a significant or leading position in certain research and service areas. (...) The Finnish Work Environment Fund distributes research and development grants and scholarships from funds accrued from accident insurance premiums. In addition the sector is funded by the Academy of Finland, the Social Insurance Institution... (...) Educational institutions and universities in various sectors give basic training relating to the working environment (...).” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 17.)

Thus, the strategy with its multilevel action corresponds with the starting points of each background program’s action level.

From the perspective of the **actor level**, the objectives set in Finland’s OSH strategy stress the importance of good working conditions for both the individual employee and society as a whole:

“Healthy and motivated workers produce welfare for themselves, their working community and society.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 10.)

On the basis of this kind of holistic approach at the national level, we can see the objectives as being based on the aim of achieving the best possible result, from which everyone would benefit, rather than of meeting a minimum requirement level. An objective of this kind presupposes that employees are healthy, and as a result of their well-being, have good working capacity and thus produce well-being for the workplace and for society as a whole. Well-being is also linked with economic and productivity factors:

“For companies and other organisations, a capable worker is the most important resource and the fundamental precondition of productive action.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 10.)

A healthy employee is seen in the context of his or her life as a whole, whether at work or during leisure time, and the aim is to achieve a balance of the whole:

“For the individual’s well-being, the entity formed by work, leisure time and family is important.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 10.)

Thus the employee is seen as an individual, but at the same time as an intimate part of his or her own family community, which is also a source of

strength for working life. On the actor level, the responsibility, obligation and right of each person to undertake and promote OSH measures at his or her workplace is emphasised. Thus the aim is to achieve universal-level objectives through the special input of each actor individually:

“A good working environment is created in the workplace first and foremost by initiative. This applies to all workplaces and types of work, and thus also concerns successive periods of short and temporary employment. The OSH administration supports and promotes the integration of safety and health operations with the workplace’s other operations, which also emphasises the importance of each worker’s competence and commitment to developing the working conditions and maintaining his or her own working ability.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 8.)

Even on the universal level, the implementation of these measures is expected: the same responsibility, obligation and right to undertake and promote OSH issues also applies to organisations, OSH Administration and various networks:

“Regional, local and sectoral programmes can support the work carried out at workplaces. The system that steers co-determination or worker participation at the workplace level should also be revised to correspond to the changed work organisation.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 13.)

TemaNord 2007 is on the same lines:

“The Finnish work life programme is clearly aimed at looking after needs of the employees through, for example, the Tykes programme. This programme represents close cooperation between politics, research, authorities and work life parties.” (TemaNord 2007, 253.)

The OSH Strategy mentions as the function of OSH administration to meet the needs of society, the environment and the client. In this sense, OSH administration’s activities should also have as their starting point action on all levels, from the individual/enterprise right up to broader entities. A starting point of this kind also links up with the incentive aspect, as OSH administration and authorities are expected to offer their services on the clients’ terms and not simply on the basis of predetermined principles. This means that enterprises are individuals, with their own needs and characteristic features:

“The workplaces that are subject to supervision have changed in many respects and very rapidly in the past few years. A single model of OSH inspections is no longer anywhere near being suitable for all workplaces, whose development has been promoted by OSH supervision over the years. Workplaces nowadays know how to demand good service from OSH Administration. For this reason administration must know the needs of workplaces and continuously improve its services.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 15.)

Based on this type of actor-level networking, the Finnish strategy resembles the EU strategy 2002–2006 more than the others. The results of the Scoreboard 2005 study support this view: Finland scores seven out of eight points for actor-level networking (Score Board 2005, 28–29.)

In relation to **authority action**, Finland's strategy bases supervision on cooperation. Thus the role of the state can be seen as a consultative role in OSH issues. Supervision is described to a great extent as interaction between the supervised and the supervisory parties. In addition, the implementation of strategy itself is based on a policy of regular supervision and inspection:

“The implementation of OSH strategy should in the last resort be evaluated on the basis of real development in working conditions and the quality of working life. (...) The implementation of the strategy is to be followed up using a versatile range of statistics and research on working conditions. If necessary an overall evaluation is made on the basis of a separate survey. (...) The tripartite Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health, which has the statutory task of handling questions of principle on OSH issues and promoting OSH, follows up the implementation of the OSH Strategy.” (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1998, 19–20.)

According to this principle, as regards monitoring the implementation of objectives, the importance of research is highlighted for supervision of the activities that are aimed at achieving the objectives. Supervision is thus aimed at the entire field of actors and action, but the punitive role of supervision is not emphasised as a special means of attaining objectives. On the other hand, rewards are not emphasised either as an incentive for reaching objectives: successful OSH work is considered a sufficient reward for efforts. In this respect the Scoreboard 2005 study gives Finland 7.5 out of the full eight points for the sufficiency of inspections and the role of inspectors in relation to a good working environment. Finland's strategy therefore corresponds to the starting points of the Nordic cooperation program in regard to this strategy dimension.

3.2 Sweden's Plan of Activity

According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority's Plan of Activity 2004-2006, work environment issues have been an important topic of public discussion in Sweden during the past few years. One reason for this is the dramatic rise in sickness costs. The work environment alone does not explain the high figures for chronic illnesses, but it is one reason among several others. The resources of society for occupational safety and health (OSH) work are limited, and as a result, prioritisation is emphasised in Sweden. Inspection activities are therefore focused on the areas subject to the greatest risks of causing ill-health and accidents. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 1.)

According to the Plan of Activity 2004–2006, work environment activities should aim at a *good, developmental working environment for all*. In addition the Work Environment Authority *has the obligation to promote a working environment which meets the stipulations of the Work Environment Act*. All supervisory work, both in priority fields and elsewhere, employs three tools: inspection, regulatory work and information. Another important task is that of stimulating *all interested parties in the sector to shoulder*

their responsibility and play an active part in work environment activities. In addition the Work Environment Authority must at all times pursue greater security under the law. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2.)

According to the Swedish Work Environment Authority's Plan of Activity, its content does not cover all that should be done for safety and health at work, but the aim of prioritisation is to concentrate efforts on certain important issues and to achieve greater impact. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 1.) The main priority areas for the period 2004–2006 were

1. systematic work environment management,
2. musculo-skeletal ergonomics and
3. organisational and social conditions. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 5; Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet 2007, 41.)

In the first general priority field the objective is for employers to work systematically and preventively in partnership with employees to ensure a good work environment for an increasing number of employees. This work should be made a natural part of day-to-day activities and is to include all physical, psychological and social conditions material to the working environment. Guidance is obtainable from the Provisions of the Work Environment Authority on Systematic Work Environment Management. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 5.)

This kind of systematic work to improve the working environment is described as follows:

1. "To observe and take into consideration psychological and social conditions as well as work environment issues of a physical nature in daily work.
2. To make decisions and carry out measures in such a way that employees are not injured, made ill or harmed in any other way in daily work.
3. This is about observing and taking into consideration all conditions in the working environment that can have an impact on the health and safety of employees.
4. Work environment management also comprehends work which is not performed at a fixed locale, such as construction sites, transport modes and work done in other peoples' homes." (Arbetsmiljöverket 2007a.)

The second general priority field is work-related diseases, almost two-thirds of which are due to physical strain (musculoskeletal disorders). Injuries to muscles, tendons and joints are one of the commonest causes of sickness absence. The neck, shoulders and back are worst affected. Common causes are heavy lifting, one-sided, repetitive working operations and the combination of stress and physical strain. The risk of one-sided physical strain is present in all occupations where there is a high degree of specialisation and a few operations are repeated for a large part of the working session. Light assembly and processing work, supermarket checkout work and work using computers and telephones can be quoted as examples. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 5.)

The background to the third general field of priority can be seen in the rapid increase in ill-health caused by organisational and social conditions in the workplace in recent years. Work environment surveys have shown that more than one worker in six dislikes going to work. More than one third never or hardly ever receive support and encouragement from their bosses. More than a quarter are never or hardly ever involved in the making of decisions about their own work. There are always several factors which, singly or variously combined, can make people unhappy or ill. They include bosses who lack the resources and authority to exercise leadership, absence of clear targets and priorities in connection with heavy workloads, poor control over the way in which one's own work is to be done, lack of recovery and social support, poorly managed reorganisations, and conflicts in the workplace. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 5.)

In the years 2004–2006 six employment sectors were chosen as priority sectors. The sectors are:

1. Health care
2. Caring and social services
3. Schools
4. Construction and civil engineering,
5. Transport and
6. Timber goods. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 3; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 41.)

In health care and the caring and social services the targets concern reducing *work-related stress, workload and musculoskeletal disorders among employees as well as the risk of violence and menaces*. The background factors for prioritising health care and the caring and social services include the intensive work pace, heavy workload and fragmented tasks performed under pressure of time. At the same time health care work demands a high level of concentration and dedication. Shift work and irregular hours are other factors that increase mental and physical strain. One of the means used by the Work Environment Authority to achieve the targets for the sector is work to make policy-makers more knowledgeable concerning the Work Environment Act and their own responsibility for creating a good working environment and counteracting ill-health and accidents. Managers and supervisory staff will be given opportunities of this kind in the form of knowledge, authority and resources, so that different activities can be conducted in accordance with the Work Environment Act. The workplace and tasks there shall be adapted to the employees' aptitudes. There must be scope for recovery and reflection. In order to reduce strenuous work postures and working movements as well as heavy lifting, knowledge is to be improved concerning musculoskeletal ergonomics, and appropriate facilities shall be available. Before deciding on the introduction of changes, the employer shall prepare a written risk assessment and impact assessment for the working environment. That assessment shall also include risks of threats and violence to employees and measures to be taken. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 6,9.)

The reasons for prioritising the caring and social services in the Plan of Activity include the fact that work-related diseases and occupational accidents are very numerous. Heavy lifting and incorrect work postures in cramped working spaces are a common cause of injuries, especially among nursing assistants, assistant nurses and personal assistants. Musculoskeletal factors remain the commonest cause of work-related diseases and occupational accidents, while diseases due to psychosocial and organisational factors are growing fastest. Nearly a third of all reported work-related diseases and occupational accidents due to threats and violence occur in this sector. As in the health care sector, the means for achieving the targets set for this sector include making policy-makers more knowledgeable concerning the Work Environment Act and giving managers and supervisory staff opportunities of this kind in the form of knowledge, authority and resources, so that different activities can be conducted in accordance with the Work Environment Act. Supervision shall also be aimed at inducing employers to investigate and assess more systematically the risks of ill-health and accidents connected with stress and workload, musculoskeletal ergonomics and threats and violence. Before deciding on changes, the employer shall prepare a written risk assessment and impact assessment for the working environment. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 11.)

In the schools sector, the targets include reducing *problems of noise and poor acoustics and the number of accidents and incidents* in chemistry teaching. The *risk of victimisation* is also to be reduced among heads of schools, teaching staff and pupils. The prioritisation of schools is based on the 1990s trend towards increasing number of students in schools and the simultaneous reduction in staff numbers. This trend is seen as partly continuing and causing work-related ill-health. Work-related stress and ill-health have shown a disturbing increase, due to a substantial growth in the workloads of heads of schools, teaching staff and pupils. Heads of schools are becoming progressively more important for the prevention of ill-health and accidents. The risk of subjection to bullying, threats and violence in school has also increased. The means foreseen in the Plan of Activity are the same as those mentioned above for policy-makers and employers. In addition, means are to be concentrated on inducing employers to systematically investigate working conditions and assess the risks of ill-health and accidents resulting from stress and workload, musculoskeletal ergonomics, victimisation, threats and violence, noise, and risks associated with chemistry teaching. The risk assessments are to be documented and shall lead to measures where ill-health and accidents are prevented. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 6,12.)

In construction and civil engineering the target is to ensure that designers and developers shall have routines for observing the working environment during project preparation and in its co-ordination. Moreover, the number of occupational accidents due to falls from height and resulting in more than three days' sickness absence shall diminish by 20 per cent. The reasons for prioritising this sector include the fact that the construction in-

dustry is one of the highest-risk employment sectors in Sweden, with long sicklisting periods. Every third accident/disease or diseases in the construction sector is due to musculoskeletal factors. These accidents and diseases are especially common among concrete workers, sheet metal workers, bricklayers and painters. One fifth of accidents/diseases in the construction industry are due to accidental falls, mostly from height. The means for achieving the targets set out in the Plan of Activity include inducing employers to systematically investigate the risk of ill-health and accidents in connection with stress and workload, musculoskeletal ergonomics and fall risks. The risk assessments are to be documented and shall lead to measures where ill-health and accidents are prevented. In addition, the Authority is to invest in more information to developers, designers, contractors and manufacturers of material and work equipment. Important areas include the choice of building products, design of buildings, introduction of assistive devices, improvements to material transport operations, routines for work in cramped spaces, planning of work and high-quality work environment plans. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 6, 15.)

In the transport sector the target is to reduce *the number of traffic accidents due to stress and fatigue*. The grounds for prioritisation of the sector include the following: Transport and communications are sectors in which great changes are taking place and where problems of the working environment have grown in magnitude. Business structures are often complicated, with many small firms involved. The boundary between employee status and self-employment is not always clear in these sectors. Small transport companies are often dependent on larger ones or on forwarding agents. There is a low level of awareness concerning the employer's responsibility for the working environment. The means mentioned in the Plan of Activity for achieving the targets set include measures aimed at inducing employers to systematically investigate the risk of ill-health and accidents in connection with stress and workload, musculoskeletal ergonomics, threats and violence and traffic safety. The risk assessments are to be documented and shall lead to measures whereby ill-health and accidents are prevented. Supervision is also to be aimed at inducing those responsible for co-ordination to clarify the rules and the allocation of responsibilities applying at transport terminals. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 6, 16.)

In the timber goods industry the target is to reduce *problems of wood dust and noise* as well as the *number of work-related diseases and occupational accidents caused by work with machinery*. The priority given to the sector is based among other things on the following grounds: Accidents caused by machinery, accidental falls, musculoskeletal disorders and disorders due to dust and wood mould are common problems of the working environment. Most sawmill accidents occur in connection with machine failure, repair and maintenance, often under stressful conditions. There is a high risk of negative stress resulting from leaner organisations and an elevated production rate. Musculoskeletal disorders due to one-sided, repetitive and monotonous work are common problems in the furniture industry/joinery

factories. Noise is another major problem. The means proposed in the Plan of Activity for achieving the targets are aimed at inducing employers to investigate more systematically the risk of ill-health and accidents in connection with stress and workload, musculoskeletal ergonomics, wood dust, noise and machine safety. These risk assessments are to be documented and shall lead to measures whereby ill-health and accidents are prevented. Among other things, supervision shall work for manufacturers and suppliers of machinery and other equipment to see to it that the stipulations of the Authority's Machinery Provisions are already taken into account at the design stage. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 6, 19.)

The setting of **objectives** in the Plan of Activity of the Swedish Work Environment Authority can be seen as emphasising specific fields and sectors. The focus is largely based on prioritisation: when certain sectors are subjected to more careful scrutiny, the targets relating to them can be named as specific targets:

“Problems of wood dust and noise shall diminish.”
(Arbetsmiljöverket, 6.)

Set in this way, the target applies specifically to a certain sector, its problems and the solution to the problem. On the other hand, the targets also have more universal starting points. In this case the starting point is to address the problems of a certain prioritised sector, but these problems can be generalised to apply more widely to very different sectors:

“Work-related stress, workload and musculoskeletal disorders among employees are to diminish, as is the risk of violence and menaces.” (Arbetsmiljöverket, 6.)

Thus framed, the possibility to generalise the targets to apply to different sectors arises from the fact that the factors mentioned are not defined in more detail. For example, workload is a very broad concept, and without explanation, both the concept and the related target can be applied to very many sectors.

Sweden's Plan of Activity, like that of Finland, places a lot of emphasis on the fact that work environment activities should be part of the everyday routine at work. The targets have been set in such a way that they can in principle be reached in the course day-to-day activities:

“The number of traffic accidents due to stress and fatigue shall diminish.”
(Arbetsmiljöverket, 6.)

Nevertheless, despite the routine nature of the activities, they also involve work that implies commitment, especially when the background to the problem lies in psychosocial factors. For example, stress and dissatisfaction with work can often only be remedied over a long period, while ergonomic factors can be dealt with in a short space of time. Thus, on the basis of this exact double dimension the Swedish programme's target framing conforms only to a certain extent to the corresponding sub-areas of all the background programs.

Means to achieve the targets are defined fairly generally in the programme, and the means for different fields of priority are defined in very similar ways. However, the means have been given concrete form by including special features of the sector to illustrate the general means proposed:

“Oversight shall be focused on getting employers to systematically investigate the risks for illness and accidents together with stress and workload, musculoskeletal ergonomics, and falling risks. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 15.)

The above means for achieving targets relating to the construction and civil engineering industry is applied to the transport sector as follows:

“Supervision is to be aimed at inducing employers to systematically investigate the risks of ill-health and accidents in connection with stress and workload, musculoskeletal ergonomics, threats and violence, and traffic safety.” (Arbetsmiljöverket, 16.)

In view of the focus on prioritisation that characterises the Plan of Activity, the means for achieving the targets are on a very general level. They basically answer the question of what should be done, but the question of how it should be done remains open and is not dealt with, so that the means remain as it were on the same level as the targets. Concrete measures are presented in the Swedish Government’s 11-point programme for an occupational safety and health strategy introduced at the end of the year 2001. This programme includes three main areas: promoting a better work environment, clear allocation of responsibility to the employer and a quick return to work after sickness. An important part of the 11-point programme is tripartite cooperation between the Government and the labour market parties. Two main obligations are associated with the cooperation:

1. “consultation between the government and labour market actors concerning the recommendations and measures which are intended to execute the various parts of the plan
2. the strategy is developed and the engagement of the actors is defined within the framework for an expanded policy.” (Näringsdepartementet 2001.)

The means included in the 11-point programme are the following:

1. “economic instruments to prevent illness,
2. work environment certification,
3. method development of occupational health care,
4. training of regional safety ombudsmen,
5. health statements (identify poor work environments and follow health development),
6. attempt to reduce illness within the public sector,
7. updating of rehabilitation – focus on the individual,
8. amendment of applicable legislation in order to increase the quality of rehabilitation,
9. forms for the sick-listing process,
10. improved statistics and research in the area of health problems
11. improved access to treatment in health and hospital care” (Näringsdepartementet 2001.)

The means in the Plan of Activity are made clear and concrete by attaching to it the Work Environment Authority's provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management, SAM, which is mentioned as a programme that is supplementary to the Swedish Plan of Activity. The measures provided here are explained in very great detail. Thus more detailed programmes are needed parallel to the Plan of Activity if the means proposed for achieving targets are to be made concrete. The means for achieving the targets set in the Plan of Activity also focus on commitment:

“Supervision is to work to make policy-makers more knowledgeable concerning the Work Environment Act and their own responsibility for creating a good work environment and counteracting ill-health and accidents.” (Arbetsmiljöverket, 9.)

The creation of awareness and of new knowledge always takes time, and long-term work is needed to achieve this end. For example, ensuring the availability of resources also generally requires a long process of decision-making and dedicated research work. With the SAM programme, however, the means are also given a shorter-term dimension:

1. “Identify the risk factors which can lead to illness or accidents.
2. Compare the risks and determine whether they are serious or not.
3. Write down the risks and specify which are serious.”(Arbetsmiljöverket 2007b.)

With detailed and clear instructions of this kind, risk assessment is shown to be an activity that can be carried out immediately. At the same time it is given a clear time dimension that diverges from the background programmes: targets and measures that require commitment may well be backed by actions that can be carried out at very short notice. As in the case of targets, the means proposed in Sweden's programme correspond only partially to the related sub-areas of all the background programs.

In terms of **action level**, the targets set in Sweden's Plan of Activity concern entire sectors:

“The risk of victimisation is to be reduced among heads of schools, teaching staff and pupils.” (Arbetsmiljöverket, 6.)

Thus the targets can be understood as applying to both individual employees and the organisations they represent. The means for achieving the targets can similarly be interpreted largely as derived from the local level but applicable to the whole sector:

“...appropriate facilities shall be available.” (Arbetsmiljöverket, 9.)

According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, Sweden scores seven out of eight points for preventive work on the enterprise level. Furthermore, methods on the national level are evident in the means proposed, for example, in the requirement that policy-makers become more knowledgeable and aware of their responsibilities in this area. The action level is thus based on multi-

ple levels, and Sweden's program corresponds to all the background programmes with respect to this dimension.

The **actor level** in the Plan of Activity is characterised by extensive networking, and the targets emphasise cooperation between employers and employees:

“The main emphasis in all work environment management is on employers working preventively in partnership with employees. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 5.)

In addition, as in the local dimension, the importance of policy-makers' knowledge and the functions of the Work Environment Authority are highlighted. Thus individual actors and groups of actors are made jointly responsible for work environment issues, while pointing out that:

“Ultimate responsibility for the working environment rests with the employer, and improvements are greatly needed.” (Arbetsmiljöverket, 1.)

The same multi-layered actor level is to be seen in the means proposed:

“Managers and supervisory staff will be given opportunities of this kind in the form of knowledge, authority and resources, so that different activities can be conducted in accordance with the Work Environment Act.” ((Arbetsmiljöverket, 9.)

This being the case, administrative actors are expected to act in such a way as to ensure that employers are able to take action that will guarantee a good work environment. Such an environment enables employees to work together with employers to promote and maintain good working conditions. The starting point of the programme is thus strongly based on networking, which means that its starting points correspond with those of the European Union's strategy for 2002–2006. The results of the Scoreboard 2005 study support this view: Sweden scores seven out of eight points for actor-level networking.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority lists in its Plan of Activity certain standing instructions for authorities, which at the same time describe **authority action**:

1. To supervise compliance with work environment and working hours legislation and with legislation on tobacco (in the work environment sector).
2. To supervise compliance with certain aspects of environmental legislation.
3. To issue Provisions and General Recommendations by authority of work environment and working hours legislation and also, by authority of environmental legislation, concerning genetically modified organisms and pesticides.
4. To take charge of official work injury and work environment statistics.
5. To take charge of an information system for occupational accidents and work-related diseases.
6. To observe developments in the work environment sector and take the initiatives occasioned thereby.
7. To compile and distribute information.
8. To take part in training programmes organised by the Institute of Working Life
9. and to inform the Institute of supervisory and regulatory activities planned.
10. To observe and promote the development of occupational health services, in partnership with the authorities and organisations concerned.

11. To promote co-operation between employers and employees in the work environment sector.
12. To collaborate with the National Social Insurance Board, the National Labour Market Board and the National Board of Health and Welfare with a view to achieving more efficient use of resources in the rehabilitation sector. (Arbetsmiljöverket, 20.)

The first two points relate to supervision activities carried out by the Swedish Work Environment Authority:

“The Work Environment Authority has been tasked by the Government and Riksdag (parliament) with ensuring that the work environment meets the stipulations laid down in the Work Environment Act.” (Arbetsmiljöverket, 2.)

The points can be interpreted as meaning that the authority is responsible for such action, but there is no mention of the consequences of action in the list of points or in the Plan of Activity. In this respect, SAM (provisions on the Work Environment) give more detail. According to the provisions the Work Environment Authority implements a four-step SAM-status programme:

“SAM (Work environment) status can be applied during inspections, where the employer’s systematic work environment management is examined to such an extent that the inspector is able to make a ruling concerning the workplace’s SAM.

SAM scale:

1. SAM is lacking
2. SAM has been initiated: Managers and supervisors have varying abilities where the work environment is concerned. The employer has clearly defined plans to carry out the first safety round, survey or other investigation of the work environment.
3. SAM is fully functional: Examinations, risk assessments, measures and action plans are carried out regularly and documented. Work environment policies, routines and delegation of responsibilities have been implemented. Employees are given the opportunity to contribute. Work environment aspects are taken into consideration when making decisions that affect the work environment.
4. SAM is fully functional and achieves results: The employer administers an actively systematic programme of work environment management at Level 3 of the SAM scale, which results in continuous work environment improvements.” (Arbetsmiljöverket 2007c.)
- 5.

Thus the activities of the Swedish Work Environment Authority can be seen as having both a punitive and a rewarding dimension. Receiving SAM-status is a reward showing that an enterprise takes responsibility for work environment issues. On the other hand, failure to achieve SAM status shows that work environment issues are in some way poorly managed in an enterprise, and this indication by an authority probably in itself has a punitive effect. The Swedish program thus corresponds with both EU strategies in terms of the rewarding, controlling, and punitive nature of action. According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, Sweden receives 7.5 out of eight points for the sufficiency of inspections and the role of inspectors in relation to a good working environment.

3.3 Norway's Occupational Safety and Health Strategy

According to the strategic plan of the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority for the years 2004–2007, the main objective relating to the work environment is based the aim of providing *a fully satisfactory work environment*. This kind of work environment is seen as including meaningfulness of work for every employee as well as safe working conditions. The objective is aimed at ensuring an inclusive and healthy work environment. The Labour Inspection Authority has further divided the objectives into general and main objectives, and objectives relating to impact and results. In addition, the objectives involve prioritisation as regards work environment factors and the main means for influencing these factors. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

The main objectives of the strategic plan relate to *reducing ill-health and death caused by working conditions to a minimum*. The Labour Inspection Authority is expected to focus particularly on the most important work environment factors that lead to marginalisation from working life:

1. impacts leading to mental health problems,
2. ergonomic conditions that endanger health,
3. biological and chemical impacts that endanger health and
4. serious risks of accident. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004; Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet 2007, 31, 75.)

Prioritisation also takes place within each of the four areas of the work environment that have been given priority. The Labour Inspection Authority has set the following objectives for impacts:

1. fewer employees fall ill and/or are marginalised from working life as a result of mental health problems,
2. fewer employees fall ill and/or are marginalised from working life as a result of ergonomic conditions,
3. fewer employees suffer health problems and/or marginalisation from working life as a result of biological and chemical impacts,
4. fewer employees die, are invalidised, disabled and/or marginalised from working life due to accidents. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

As regards objectives for results the Labour Inspection Authority focuses particularly on the four prioritised work environment factors, which combined with the prioritisation of the main means defined by the authority for influencing these factors, are seen as leading to the following results:

1. the number of employees who experience their work environment as unsatisfactory will diminish,
2. the number of enterprises complying with legislation will increase,
3. the number of enterprises with functioning health, environmental and safety personnel will increase,
4. the number enterprises that have formed links with safety and health personnel will increase and
5. the competence of enterprises on occupational safety and health issues will increase. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

As far as mental health impacts are concerned the Labour Inspection Authority is expected to

1. focus on the background causes of physical and mental stress and marginalisation in working life
2. focus on the ways in which enterprises can solve problems by means of organisational arrangements and actions relating to the problems in question
3. set priorities for its own input to systematic preventive work by enterprises, rather than discussing details, including the Authority's input on workplace harassment. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

The Labour Inspection Authority must through the prioritised actions be able to influence vulnerable enterprises to increase their awareness of their poor psychosocial conditions and unsatisfactory organisational arrangements and the health risks involved. The Labour Inspection Authority is also expected to use effective, versatile supervision methods that address the complex nature of the psychosocial work environment. The Labour Inspection Authority must furthermore have the regulatory tools necessary to oblige employers to take responsibility for both psychosocial and organisational factors relating to the work environment. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

Relating to the above, the Labour Inspection Authority's priorities as regards mental health impacts are to:

1. develop competence networks between inspectors who work at different units within the authority, in order to share information and knowledge
2. carry out systematic reviews of the available information on the causes of work-related mental stress factors and on the basis of this knowledge monitor a few prioritised areas over a period of several years,
3. compile information and teaching material on the impacts of psychosocial and organisational factors on the work environment,
4. disseminate, for example, through the media and presentations, information on the impacts of organisational factors on the psychosocial work environment,
5. develop effective supervision methods capable of addressing the complex nature of the psychosocial work environment and
6. influence the relevance and effectiveness of legislation on organisational and psychosocial work environment factors. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

As regards ergonomic conditions that pose a health risk, the Labour Inspection Authority is to focus on organisational arrangements that will help to avoid and prevent work conditions that may lead to health problems. In addition the Authority is to ensure that enterprises arrange their work so as to avoid heavy lifts and awkward work positions. In order to ensure that the means proposed can be implemented, the Labour Inspection Authority should have good knowledge on the organisational work environment, on musculo-skeletal disorders and on how the legislation can most effectively be applied to the areas in question. In addition the Authority should be able to give both information and guidance on the various health risks involved in the relationship between time pressure, self-determination and the physical organisation of work. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

Relating to the above, the Labour Inspection Authority's priorities are to:

1. develop competence networks between inspectors who work in different parts of the authority in order to share information and knowledge,
2. conduct systematic reviews of the available information on the main causes musculo-skeletal disorders and on the basis of this knowledge monitor of a few prioritised areas over a period of several years,
3. develop indicators for assessing the various health risks that relate to the relationship between time pressure, self-determination and the physical organisation of work, as well as supervision methods and evaluation criteria,
4. provide information for enterprises and sectors that are subject to the problems in question,
5. compile suitable information material on the combined effects of stress due to ergonomic and organisational factors and on means for reducing or preventing these effects and
6. develop effective supervision methods that can address the complexity of the ergonomic work environment. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

As regards unhealthy chemical and biological impacts, the Labour Inspection Authority is expected to have information about harmful chemical and biological factors. In addition, the Labour Inspection Authority is to take measures to reduce exposure to harmful chemical and biological factors to an acceptable level. To make this possible, the Labour Inspection Authority must be able to identify the chemical and biological factors that represent a risk to employees' health. At the same time, it must be known how the said factors affect health and how the risk in question can be prevented. The Labour Inspection Authority must also be able to define the minimum conditions that can be deemed satisfactory as regards chemical and/or biological factors in the work environment. The Labour Inspection Authority should further be able to identify the trends in working life that lead to illness resulting from chemical and/or biological factors, while at the same time they should know the means of prevention of these impacts. The Labour Inspection Authority should also develop legislation applicable for this risk profile. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

Relating to the above, the Labour Inspection Authority's priorities are to:

1. develop competence networks in order to make it possible for inspectors from different geographical and functional parts of the authority to share information and knowledge,
2. conduct systematic reviews of the available information on the main chemical and biological impacts causing health problems and on the basis of this knowledge focus on a few chosen areas,
3. compile information and teaching material that shows what is acceptable and non-acceptable exposure and how unacceptable exposure can be avoided,
4. develop up-to-date legislation and information on the working life risk profile in the chemicals sector
5. develop versatile supervision methods that can address the complexity of the chemical and/or biological work environment. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

As regards serious accident risks, the Labour Inspection Authority is expected to focus its efforts on prevention and in supervision aimed at prevention, to link accident risks with causes possibly relating to organisational conditions. In addition, the Labour Inspection Authority should in-
 uence enterprises to recognise the connections between, for example, inadequate training and poor work routines with possible accidents. In order to do this, the Labour Inspection Authority must have an overall perspective on the most important causes of accidents and information on how organisational conditions in-
 uence accident risks. The Labour Inspection Authority should also focus its efforts on the risk factors assessed as the most serious. In addition the Labour Inspection Authority should, in cooperation with a suitable network, compile information on the impacts of organisational improvements and effective prevention on accident risks. The Labour Inspection Authority should play an active role in in-
 uencing the police/prosecution authorities and the Ministry in disclosing criminal occupational health and safety practices relating to inadequate accident prevention and in developing punitive measures. Moreover the Labour Inspection Authority shall itself investigate serious accidents and near-miss incidents and thus disclose deficiencies in work equipment, legislation, training and inspection arrangements, and at the same time propose measures for improving these. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

Relating to the above, the Labour Inspection Authority's priorities are to:

1. develop competence networks in order to make it possible for inspectors from different parts of the authority to share information and knowledge
2. review the information relating to accidents and near-miss incidents and on the basis of this knowledge monitor a few prioritised areas over a period of several years,
3. focus work on the prevention of accidents and the investigation of accidents on those where a serious breach of the law is suspected,
4. in investigating accidents, assess the causes behind them, for example, time pressure and unsatisfactory working hours arrangements,
5. use serious accidents relating to technical equipment or chemical/biological conditions as a basis for market supervision,
6. gather information on accidents and their prevention and disseminate the information both internally and externally, and
7. systematise information on accidents to provide a basis for amending legislation and changing framework conditions. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

In prioritising the principal means of in-
 uencing the work environment, the resources the Labour Inspection Authority shall allocate resources to supporting supervision, which has been the Authority's most important strategy up till now. This does not necessarily mean increasing the number of inspection visits, but increasing resources so that supervisory measures can be applied more freely to individual targets or areas. It is also considered important to developing new and also existing supervisory measures. As regards supervision of enterprises, supervision should also apply to the

handling and checking of issues dealt with in written material obtained through the authorities. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

In order to meet the above expectations, the Labour Inspection Authority should have information about problems affecting the work environment and the causes of these problems. The Labour Inspection Authority must also prioritise the use of resources in order to ensure a balanced application of supervisory and other measures. The Authority should focus its supervision on organisational conditions and be able to set up clear, logical requirements. In addition, the Labour Inspection Authority should be able to identify and supervise areas where the state of the work environment is deteriorating. The Authority must also have personnel who are competent in analysing the status of enterprises and who have the ability to see the connections between various factors and apply their professional knowledge. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

Relating to the above, the Labour Inspection Authority's priorities are to:

1. prioritise the following work environment factors in supervisory work:
2. impacts leading to mental health problems
3. ergonomic factors leading to musculo-skeletal problems
4. factors causing chemical and biological exposure
5. serious accident risks
6. recognise organisational conditions as possible factors behind the above,
7. implement supervision campaigns on different levels,
8. in connection with supervision, disseminate targeted information on risk conditions and how the enterprise can itself contribute to the avoidance and prevention of accidents/ illness,
9. monitor enterprises suspected of evading contractual obligations,
10. conduct surveys to find new risks in working life,
11. assess supervision and the experiences of inspectors,
12. transfer competence to personnel through cooperation,
13. draw up quality assurance routines and
14. develop appropriate supervision methods. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

The Labour Inspection Authority is expected to act in the role both of an authority and of an educator, while at the same time it is expected to provide support for enterprises wishing to improve their own work environment that cannot be influenced by the Authority through supervisory means. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004; Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet 2007, 31.)

In the implementation of its leading role, the Labour Inspection Authority is expected to be an authority that takes a stand on the state of the working environment. It is expected to develop and disseminate information on hazardous conditions, the relationship between cause and effect, different laws and good practices. In addition the Authority is to promote the ability of different parties in an enterprise to resolve problems relating to the work environment independently. The Labour Inspection Authority is further expected to increase society's understanding of the importance of action to improve the work environment and to act as a promoter of cooperation for

a good, inclusive work environment. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004; Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet 2007, 31, 76.)

Relating to the above, the Labour Inspection Authority's priorities are to

1. communicate its view on the state of the work environment and communicate examples of good practice to enterprises, employees, the media and the public,
2. on the basis of knowledge to create the conditions for enterprises to independently learn and develop their own work environment. This implies that the information is readily available, it should be collaboratively produced and it should indicate risk conditions and the requirements set,
3. develop the Authority's web-based services,
4. participate in the public discussion, for example in the media and in professional journals,
5. conduct various campaigns,
6. implement an information strategy and personnel training in methods,
7. implement information projects based on cooperation,
8. work towards prioritisation of health, environmental and safety issues on all levels of education. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

To ensure that the Labour Inspection Authority fulfils its role as a leader in work environment issues it should participate in drawing up norms for the field of work environment. In addition, it should make initiatives on the work environment to higher authorities and give advice on prioritisation and strategy. Further, the Labour Inspection Authority should show initiative in developing information on the work environment. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

In order to realise these measures, the Labour Inspection Authority should be the competent professional instance for issues relating to the work environment. It should also promote the development of logical regulations and be an objective and independent party working for a good working environment. In addition it should have an overall view of essential information regarding the work environment and translate it into strategies that aim at an inclusive, healthy work environment. Further the Authority should be able to demonstrate the relation between input and output within different time frames. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

Relating to the above, the Labour Inspection Authority's priorities are to

1. develop information as background material for analyses, strategic choices and practical action,
2. provide clients with information based on systematic data collection on trends in working life,
3. work together with legislators with a view to updating legislation,
4. develop a simpler legislative structure by minimising the number of regulations, and
5. develop its competence in commissioning research from outside parties. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

The Labour Inspection Authority is also set the objective of developing its profile as an initiator of action in the field of work environment issues. This is seen as essential for developing the quality of the Authority's work, but also for giving the work higher visibility. The Labour Inspection Authority is expected to organise and continuously adapt its administration to emerging methods and tasks. This expectation applies not only to organisation but also to management, competence and processes. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 76.)

In order to fulfil its role as an initiator of action, the Labour Inspection Authority is expected to have an up-to-date organisation as regards objectives and strategies, promoting the efficient performance of the Authority's tasks. It is further expected to be a challenging and attractive workplace for competent personnel. It is also expected to prioritise management and measures to improve management, development of knowledge and transfer of competence. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

To enable the implementation of these measures, the Labour Inspection Authority should have an organisational structure that guarantees a good balance between competence, coordination and geographical needs. The organisational structures should also be able to promote optimal use of resources and focus on the prioritised tasks. Furthermore, the Labour Inspection Authority must be organised in such a way that contacts between a good strategic level and the operative units are possible. In addition it should have competent leaders with a clear division of responsibilities and authority, be a learning organisation with competent staff and have good methods of deciding, for example, on sharing of competence and efficient work processes. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

Relating to the above, the Labour Inspection Authority's priorities are to

1. implement regionalisation in order to strengthen the Authority's outreach,
2. build strong professional environments that are in proportion to the work environment factors involved,
3. transfer resources from the central authority to the regional level, so as to strengthen the competence environment and outreach of the regions,
4. focus the work of the central authority on actions that play an important role in its accountability,
5. promote more efficient administrative processes in order to free resources for the Authority's core tasks,
6. develop its management principles including framework conditions and monitoring procedures,
7. through participation define objectives and monitor the performance requirements and development needs of personnel,
8. at the personnel level implement plans for a competence and career development model,
9. develop technological solutions, and
10. develop more systematic administrative procedures for measuring results and gather good background information for steering the process. (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

Norway's occupational safety and health strategy stresses prioritisation, commitment to and focus on the prioritised areas, and careful monitoring of these areas. The **objectives** of the occupational safety and health strategy contain both specific and universal aspects, for example, the following specific orientation:

“The objective of the Labour Inspection Authority is to influence enterprises in their efforts to meet the provisions of the Work Environment Act by means such as legislation, supervision, information and guidance. By these activities the Authority's aim is to minimise ill-health and death due to working conditions.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

In setting objectives of this kind, the target of meeting the provisions of the Work Environment Act represents the universal dimension, but relating this universal aspect is the specific target of reducing work-related ill-health and death to a minimum. The specific nature of the strategic objectives becomes evident in the emphasis laid on prioritisation:

“The Labour Inspection Authority shall prioritise its input to focus on those work environment factors that are the most significant causes of marginalisation from working life. The Authority shall continue to focus interest on health environmental and safety work by enterprises, taking account of the prioritised work environment factors.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

The Norwegian strategy emphasises the specific dimension in terms of setting of objectives, but as there are also universal elements, the strategy dimension does not conform fully to the related dimensions of the background programs.

The prioritisation described above generally makes the objectives specific and therefore also the means for achieving them can be applied in a concrete way:

“The Labour Inspection Authority shall:

1. have the ability to meet the information needs of the prioritised target groups
2. compile and publish information that is in line with our efforts
3. be a visible presence in the public debate on occupational safety and health
4. have up-to-date and relevant information to enable us to understand new trends that can lead to problems in the work environment
5. be in the forefront in trials and implementation of measures that can have a preventive impact in the work environment
6. systematically use its own experience of supervision and work environment information from outside as a basis for the Authority's development activities
7. make initiatives for cooperation with other parties that may be significant for occupational safety and health.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

The **means** thus proposed for achieving the objectives can be seen as viable and feasible, compared to the more generally expressed starting points. The means provided in Norway's occupational safety and health strategy are further to a great extent based on action that requires commitment:

“In addition the Labour Inspection Authority emphasises clearly the need for a stronger input in its planning period within each of the prioritised work environment areas. Based on the Authority's own information and external sources of informa-

tion on where the greatest risks lie and where the opportunities for improvement are greatest, the Authority shall prioritise only a few main target groups within each area and follow them closely for several years. The grounds are that we are dealing with complex challenges in the work environment that require time-consuming monitoring in order to bring about lasting improvements.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

The starting point for defining the means in this way is a risk-based approach, and action is problem-centred. The action is directed at the most problematic areas on the basis of prioritisation, and thus action is expected to produce visible results only in the long term. As in the case of specific means, this approach is connected to concreteness as well: dedicated time is required to actually reach the set objectives. In terms of the concrete nature of the means, the strategy corresponds to both strategies of the European Union.

The **action level** of Norway’s occupational safety and health strategy is very much based on the enterprise and national levels. The objectives of the strategy deal with Norway’s internal occupational safety and health, as the strategy’s main starting points being prioritisation of the country’s own OSH issues:

“In all the four main areas the Authority shall focus on possible underlying organisational conditions in enterprises that may reinforce unfavourable/negative work environment conditions and monitor how the enterprise is acting to improve these conditions in its health, environmental and safety work. Organisational conditions include the steering and control stage, how work is organised and arrangements made for individual employees, division of labour, information and communication systems, pace and amount of work, contractual status, resource status and other framework conditions.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

The cooperation involved in achieving objectives is expressed in terms of cooperation within the country. From the point of view of the action level, the strategic means derive to a large extent from the enterprise and the local level:

“The Labour Inspection Authority shall:
be able to identify and understand the psychosocial and organisational conditions at a workplace that imply a risk for the employees’ physical and mental health.”
(Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

The starting point for action of this kind is thus the conditions of employees and workplaces, and the means for ensuring good conditions are based on the reality of the conditions. According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, Norway scores only 5.5 points out of eight for preventive action on the enterprise level. This result is in contradiction to the thinking emphasised in Norway’s strategy, according to which action is to be based on employees’ and workplace conditions.

One feature that emerges clearly from Norway’s occupational safety and health strategy relates to the **actor level**. In terms of strategic objectives, the actor level gives particular emphasis to the Labour Inspection Authority:

“The Labour Inspection Authority shall make efforts to ensure that as many employees as possible can use and develop their working capacity and competence by participating in a fully inclusive working life.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

An actor level of this kind can be understood as meaning that the Labour Protection Authority is the principal actor in occupational safety and health work, targeting its actions at other actors in accordance with the objectives set:

“The Labour Inspection Authority shall during the planning period, develop and improve its role as a leader in work environment issues. This is based on the grounds that the Authority today is faced with complex, multi-dimensional challenges relating, for example, to organisational conditions. These areas are difficult to control by legislative means. For this reason we should both develop our own knowledge concerning the area and actively communicate it to parties in working life and to higher authorities.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

With this kind of objective setting, the Labour Inspection Authority can be seen as the subject who acts, while working life, enterprises and employees are the objects of the action. However, according to the model applied by the Labour Inspection Authority, the aim is to make these objects into subjects. The means for achieving the set objectives are also based to a large extent on the role of the Labour Inspection Authority as an actor, even though responsibility for state of the work environment is placed firmly on the employers’ shoulders:

“The employer is responsible for the state of the enterprise’s work environment. The Labour Inspection Authority is a preventive administration whose role is to work towards ensuring that the objectives, principles and provisions of the Work Environment Act are met in enterprises. We aim to achieve this especially by prioritising four work environment factors and by working actively and using four principle means of influencing the situation:

1. supervision of enterprises
2. guidance for enterprises
3. making initiatives and developing competence and legislation relating to the field of work environment issues
4. adapting our organisation to our tasks and clients.

The first three measures concern the Labour Inspection Authority’s tasks and activities. The fourth refers to the Authority’s own organisation and how it is arranged and adapted to make us efficient and effective in our own production.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

As regards the first three means, the Labour Inspection Authority’s role of actor is based on its role as the principal actor in relation to enterprises. In the fourth point the role of principal actor is transferred to the enterprises, and the Labour Inspection Authority is to perform its tasks on the basis of the needs of enterprises. In the case of some prioritised areas, the role of the Labour Inspection Authority as principal actor gives way to acting as part of a network:

“The Labour Inspection Authority shall:
make initiatives on cooperation with other parties that have influence on ergonomic work environment factors and on the prevention of work-related musculo-skeletal disorders.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

However, this action is based on the initiative of the Labour Inspection Authority and thus on its strong role as an actor. At the action level, the Norwegian strategy is thus strongly authority-centred and corresponds to the related section of the Nordic Cooperation Programme. Despite this, the Scoreboard 2005 study gives Norway seven points out of eight for networking on the actor level; this is in contradiction to the emphasis placed in the strategy on the Labour Inspection Authority’s role as an actor.

In terms of **authority action** Norway’s occupational safety and health strategy highlights control and the principle of punitive action:

“The Labour Inspection Authority shall:

1. supervise enterprises to ensure that the obligations of laws and regulations are observed
2. as regards deviations from the requirements of laws and regulations found in connection with supervision, react by means of appropriate follow-up (order, stoppage, fine and/or notification)
3. in connection with supervision, give grounds for and explain the orders given and specify in detail the obligations relating to supervision of the enterprise’s conditions.” (Arbeidstilsynet 2004.)

Thus the punitive element is not based solely on the Labour Inspection Authority’s exclusive principle of punitive action; giving information on the meaning of orders issued is also mentioned in the strategy as the objective in problem situations and as the means of achieving objectives. This can be interpreted as meaning that the problem situations are not seen exclusively as arising from conscious breaches of regulations – they may also be based on ignorance, to which the Labour Inspection Authority is supposed to react. In terms of authority action, the strategy therefore emphasises consultative, controlling, and punitive action, so in this sense Norway’s strategy corresponds to both of the European Union’s strategies. According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, as regards the sufficiency of inspections and the role of inspectors in relation to a good working environment Norway scores the full eight points, ranking top among the Nordic countries.

3.4 Denmark’s Action Programme

Since 1996, an action programme entitled “Clean Working Environment 2005” has been the overall framework for working environment efforts. On the basis of this action programme, in 2002 the social partners in the Working Environment Council prioritised four problems and at the same time set up goals for improvements to be realised. The action programme and associated priorities expired at the end of 2005. (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 1.)

In 2005, the Danish Working Environment Council set up a committee to prepare recommendations for new priorities. On the basis of the work of the committee, in October 2005 the Working Environment Council produced a new national action plan and priorities for overall working environment initiatives up to the end of 2010. The new priorities are based on the working environment seen in a broad context, where the importance of the working environment is seen as significant for both the individual and society. For example, in this connection, the importance of a good working environment for the individual employee is recognised, but at the same time it leads to lower absenteeism due to sickness, which in turn affects productivity. At society level, lower absenteeism due to sickness means considerable financial savings. In addition, the priorities have been defined with a view to working environment problems, emphasising the significance of the working environment for both the individual and society, including work-induced health problems and problems to society, with the health consequences involved for employees. Future working environment problems are anticipated from the following aspects:

1. development and trends,
2. spread and
3. severity.

Development and trends refers to whether a working-environment problem is expected to increase, decrease or remain the same over the next five years. The programme deals with globalisation and competition, growth of the service sector, rapid technological development, ageing of the population and immigration factors as labour market trends. Development trends affecting the working environment are continuation of the known working environment problems, a decrease in the number of traditional production-related jobs, an increase in the number of sedentary jobs leading to an increased risk of musculo-skeletal disorders, increasing psychological strain resulting from work, the changed composition of the workforce and possible new risk factors arising from technological development. Spread refers to the number of employees affected by a working-environment problem today. Severity means the consequences of a working environment problem for health, absenteeism, and loss of ability to work. These three factors – development and trends, spread and severity – have been combined to give an overall picture of which working environment problems could be included in priority setting on the basis of a technical perspective (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 2–4.)

In addition to prioritisation, the programme includes strategies for achieving the objectives relating to development of the working environment. The Working Environment Council places special importance on considering working-environment efforts in the context of increasing employment and minimising absenteeism due to sickness. In addition, the Working Environment Council has also pointed out that working environ-

ment efforts contribute to general health policy. Their prioritisation also emphasises that Denmark takes part in EU cooperation.

Further, the Council points to education as an area of special interest for a good safety culture. The Working Environment Council has agreed on recommending new priority for four working-environment problems with proposals for reduction targets. These are

1. industrial accidents,
2. the psychological working environment,
3. noise and
4. musculo-skeletal disorders (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 6–7; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 16.)

The number of industrial accidents fell throughout the 1990s. The justifications for prioritising industrial accidents include the wish to ensure that this trend continues, and the serious consequences of such accidents for employees, enterprises and society. These may include death, loss of ability to work, permanent injury, long-term absenteeism due to sickness, as well as risk of exclusion from the labour market. Industrial accidents have also been rendered a priority in the EU. The impacts of industrial accidents are measured by injury, loss of ability to work and absenteeism due to sickness, the target being a 20 per cent reduction. (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 7–8 ; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 16.)

The Working Environment Council prioritises the psychological working environment because of the health consequences of the area and its consequences for employment policy in the form of absenteeism due to sickness as well as because the area is widespread and development trends are rising. The area has also been rendered a priority in the EU. Psychological working environment problems are measured in terms of absenteeism due to sickness and the target is a 10 per cent reduction. New research projects have been launched in this area (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 7–8 ; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 16.)

The Working Environment Council places priority on noise in a wide context. This priority focuses not only on the well documented working environment problem of noise causing hearing damage, which can lead to serious consequences for the health of the individual, quality of life and ability to work; by including nuisance noise, the focus is also on impacts, the consequences of which have not yet been fully identified, but which could lead to great nuisance. Many employees are exposed to nuisance noise and the problem is increasing. It is measured by noise causing hearing damage and self-reported noise. The aim is to reduce noise causing hearing damage by 15 per cent and noise nuisance by 10 per cent. (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 7 ; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 16.)

Musculo-skeletal disorders are prioritised because they can have extensive consequences both for the individual (such as pain, absenteeism due to sickness, loss of ability to work), and from an employment-policy perspective because musculo-skeletal disorders cause a lot of absenteeism

due to sickness and early exit from the labour market. These problems seen as very serious and they are on the increase. No reduction targets for these disorders were specified in the programme at the beginning of 2007, but precise figures and targets are expected in this area. The parameter for measuring the problem is absenteeism. (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 7–8; Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet 2007, 16.)

With these priorities the aim is to achieve the government's overall objective of "More People in Employment". A good working environment is important to prevent industrial injuries, absenteeism due to sickness, loss of ability to work and termination of employment and to retain the elderly in the labour market. At the same time, the working environment policy priorities should support the government's health policy and accord with priorities at EU level. (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 8.)

As in the Working Environment Act, the Action Programme also expects enterprises themselves to deal with health and safety issues under guidance by labour market organisations and guidance and control by the Danish Working Environment Authority. By giving priority to a number of specific working environment areas, the government aims at achieving clear results with regard to those working environment problems that seriously affect the working environment of today and of the future. This is a national priority, and all working environment players are expected to participate in carrying out this task, both together and individually. However, the working environment problems that have been given priority are not the only important working environment problems in the labour market. Several other important working environment problems also affect health and safety. The government believes that each enterprise should continue to address any significant working environment problems it might have, regardless of whether these problems are included on the national list of priorities. The requirements of the Working Environment Act should always be the focus of attention, no matter what the priorities are. The government also expects that the individual sector working environment councils take an active role in the implementation of the new priorities. Some working environment problems that are not very common at national level can however be very common in specific sectors. Sectors should of course continue to work with these problems even though they are no longer included on the national list of priorities. (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 10–11.)

In terms of follow-up of the Action programme, it is seen as important that the list of priorities does not become too static. The priorities are based on existing knowledge, however new knowledge may require new initiatives on working-environment problems that were not initially included in the set of priorities. The government therefore places great importance on constant follow-up of trends in the labour market as well as the development of new technologies, and that the consequences of these for the working environment are assessed. If it should be necessary, the government may decide to adjust the list of priorities. Therefore the list should be seen

as a dynamic list of priorities that can be adapted to a changing reality. (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 12.)

From the beginning of 2005 the Danish Working Environment Authority has been responsible for screening the occupational safety and health conditions of every Danish enterprise. Every enterprise is screened at three-year intervals. The purpose of these activities is

“(...) to obtain an overview of the health and safety levels of the enterprises. In other words, screening means that the Danish Working Environment Authority will be able - to a much greater extent than previously - to prioritise its efforts and target enterprises with poor health and safety records.”

The screening visit is made unannounced, and during the inspection, the authority finds out what efforts the enterprise is making to ensure healthy and safe working environment conditions and whether, for example, the enterprise has made a written workplace-specific evaluation of working environment issues. If the enterprise's health and safety issues are found to be in good order, there is no reason for a new inspection in the near future. However, if problems are found, an adapted inspection is carried out by the Danish Working Environment Authority, at a time agreed on with the enterprise. In this inspection, the authority conducts a more thorough inspection of the enterprise's health and safety issues than at the screening. The Danish Working Environment Authority also makes new inspection visits to enterprises. These are visits to enterprises that have already been screened but where there has not been a need for an adapted inspection. As a result of inspections, a list of the inspected enterprises is published on the website of the Danish Working Environment Authority (www.at.dk).

The above mentioned website also shows whether any problems have been encountered in health and safety conditions. This is shown by a Smiley symbol. The Smiley is removed when the enterprise has solved the problems – it is though shown for six months. The enterprise can also be given an improvement notice, which is a notice ordering an enterprise to seek advice from an authorised health and safety consultant with a view to solving one or more of its health and safety problems:

“It is the health and safety consultant's task to assist the enterprise in solving the health and safety problem(s) subject to the improvement notice. Furthermore, the consultant is to assist the enterprise with a view to strengthening the preventive health and safety activities. The consultant's job therefore includes assisting the enterprise in incorporating the solving of the specific health and safety problems in its workplace assessment.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2007a.)

There are three kinds of improvement notice:

- “(...) improvement notices issued in case of complex and serious violations,
- improvement notices issued in case of many violations and
- improvement notices issued in case of repeated violations.

In addition, an improvement notice may be issued to investigate the psychological working environment where there is no violation of the health and safety legislation.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2007a.)

Enterprises with a health and safety certificate are listed on the Danish Working Environment Authority's website with a green Smiley with a crown. Enterprises that obtain a health and safety certificate meet the statutory health and safety requirements. The Danish Working Environment Authority will therefore only in special cases supervise enterprises having a health and safety certificate. The enterprise can select the certificate it is awarded on the basis of one of two models:

1. "Accredited inspection of the enterprise or of one or more of its production units
2. Accredited certification of the working environment management system of the enterprise or of one or more of its production units."

The first of these was developed especially for small enterprises, and it focuses particularly on the material conditions of the working environment and individual initiatives in the enterprise as regards health and safety issues (www.at.dk.)

The Danish Working Environment Authority's Action Programme for 2010 is based on the prioritisation of specific **objectives**. The objects of prioritisation are not, as in Sweden, different sectors, but rather work-related problems. Thus the targets of the action programme are more detailed compared with the general level:

"Recommendations from the Working Environment Council for priority working-environment problems:

1. Industrial accidents
2. Psychological working environment
3. Noise
4. Musculo-skeletal disorders" (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 7.)

The targets relating to these factors are expressed as reduction targets in percentages:

"Reduction target, industrial accidents, 20 per cent." (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 7.)

This clearly indicates the specific nature of the targets. The concrete nature of the targets is further shown by the fact that they are dealt with as quantitative and measurable. The parameters used for the measurements include various statistics relating to the type of work-related problem concerned.

The Danish action programme is furthermore limited to a certain time span:

"(...) the government has set new priorities which will make up the framework for overall working-environment efforts up to the end of 2010." (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 1.)

The targets are also quantitative and they should be met by the end of the action programme:

“Working environment problem: Psychological working environment, reduction target: 10 per cent.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 7.)

Several years have been reserved for realising the targets, which means they can be seen as targets requiring commitment in that their realisation is assessed in the long term by statistical methods. The specificity in target-setting thus corresponds to the ideals of the Community strategies.

The **means** for achieving the targets are dealt with in the Action Programme on a very general level, largely with reference to research findings:

“According to the Council’s recommendations, once these results are available, (...) a new national prioritisation of risk factors which can lead to musculo-skeletal disorders should be carried out and specific reduction targets should be established.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 9.)

Setting new targets is also considered a means for attaining earlier targets. Thus concrete measures are not dealt with in the programme. This is at least partly explained by the following:

“The government believes that each enterprise should continue to address any significant working-environment problems it might have, regardless of whether these problems are included on the national list of priorities.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 10.)

Since the basis of action to improve the working environment is the enterprise’s own initiative, the enterprise at the same time has the burden of responsibility. This responsibility involves the enterprise’s own active efforts to find means of solving problems, whereby ready-made solutions are given less importance. As far as measures are concerned, a time limit is set for action. The Smiley programme provides a framework within which a time frame is set for the solving of problems:

“(...) the enterprise has received a notice with a time limit or an immediate improvement notice.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2007b.)

Means of this kind force the enterprise to take action to improve the working environment within a certain time limit; this means that the measures, which are not in a concrete form in the strategy, should be realisable in a relatively short time period, and it should be possible to integrate them with routine working methods. All in all, Denmark’s programme with its generic means corresponds to the Nordic Cooperation Programme.

On the **action level** Denmark’s programme can be seen as a national programme in terms of its objectives, in which prioritisation is based on the EU’s priorities. In this way, the objectives are grounded in a broad, generally accepted view. The areas prioritised in Denmark can, however, be viewed from an enterprise-based perspective, and the objectives with quantitative targets reflect the national nature of the programme. These targets can only be achieved by action on the national level:

“Nationwide prioritisation has been successful. Setting priorities in this way has ensured that efforts are directed towards the most important working-environment problems for the benefit of all employees.”(Arbejdstilsynet 2005,1.)

However, the means for achieving targets are rather on the level of the enterprise than on a national level:

“This has also ensured that all the working-environment players work towards a common goal.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 1.)

According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, Denmark scored 6 points out of 8 for preventive action on the enterprise level. This was an average score by Nordic standards. At the enterprise and national levels, the action level of Denmark’s programme corresponds to all the related sectors of the background programmes.

In terms of the **actor level** Denmark’s occupational safety and health work is based on a broad scope, starting from the individual employee:

“This is a national priority, and all working-environment players are expected to participate in carrying out this task, both together and individually.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2005, 10.)

In terms of the actor level, the role of inspectors as actors is seen as important in working environment action. There are numerous inspections, highlighting the role of inspectors as actors. The Smiley programme also points to the authority of inspectors in defining the quality of the working environment of enterprise-level actors. The actor level of the Danish programme is networked and authority-based, with an emphasis on the latter. It therefore corresponds to the European Union’s strategy 2007–2012. According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, the networking ability of actors in Denmark is awarded seven points out of eight.

A distinct characteristic feature of Denmark’s Action Programme relates to **authority action** and the controlling role of state. TemaNord 2007 describes the situation as follows:

“Denmark regulates the work life through framework legislation and emphasises agreements/settlements more than Sweden, Norway and Finland do.” (TemaNord 2007, 253.)

The Smiley symbols awarded as a result of inspections are a public indication of the state of the enterprise’s occupational safety and health, which means that punitive/rewarding action is relied on to a great extent to promote occupational safety and health activities:

“The purpose of screenings is to find enterprises with significant health and safety problems and to subject them to a thorough ‘adapted inspection’.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2007c.)

The Smileys published on the Working Environment Council’s web pages are linked with enterprises and they clearly indicate the real state of occupational safety and health in the enterprise:

1. “A green Smiley indicates that the enterprise has no issues with the Working Environment Authority.
 2. yellow Smiley indicates that the enterprise has received a notice with a time limit or an immediate improvement notice.
 3. A red Smiley indicates that the enterprise has received an improvement notice or a prohibition notice.
- “A Smiley with a crown indicates that the enterprise holds a recognised health and safety certificate. This means that the enterprise has made an extraordinary effort to ensure a high level of health and safety.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2007b.)

A classification of this kind can just as easily be read as a punishment or as a reward, especially when it is linked with the factors to be seen as benefits that go with the health and safety certificate awarded for a green Smiley:

1. “the enterprise sends a positive signal to the surrounding world and improves its reputation
2. it becomes easier for the enterprise to attract new and retain existing employees
3. health and safety at the enterprise is improved thereby increasing the welfare and motivation of its employees
4. the enterprise improves its cooperation with suppliers and customers.” (Arbejdstilsynet 2007d.)

A green Smiley is thus a reward for a good working environment and enterprises are encouraged to make an effort to achieve this mark of approval by means of public announcement. Thus publicity is seen as contributing to making a good working environment something worth achieving. With this kind of punitive/rewarding authority action, Denmark’s programme complies with both EU strategies. According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, Denmark scores seven out of eight points for the sufficiency of inspections and the role of inspectors in relation to a good working environment coming after Finland, Sweden and Norway. In itself this is a good result, but its poorer score than that of most of the other countries is surprising considering the focus on control in Denmark’s Action Programme.

3.5 Iceland’s occupational safety and health strategy

Iceland’s occupational safety and health strategy 2005–2007 was approved by the Board of Occupational Safety and Health at the end of 2004. The strategy includes the basic starting points of occupational safety and health and nine objectives and at the same time it explains the structure of OSH and how it works. The starting points for OSH are:

1. “a safe and sound work environment, which is always in line with social and technological development in society
2. goal-oriented contribution to the workplace’s work environment management”

OSH activities are guided by nine objectives, four of which apply to issues outside the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health (AOSH) and five of which apply internally. The starting point is that the objectives provide the basis for strategies, from which methods are in turn derived, and from them measures and cooperation. The objectives that focus on matters outside the AOSH concern the working environment of workplaces and the health of employees. These objectives are to:

1. “Prevent on-the-job accidents
2. Prevent work-related illness
3. Promote systematic work environment management, which leads to continuous improvement of the work environment and increased well-being
4. Adapt workplaces to work skills” (Tómasson & Sveinsdóttir 2007; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 23.)

The objectives affecting AOSH are the following:

1. “to serve as a centre of knowledge and experience within the work environment
2. to base its work on skills, quality and co-ordinated work procedures
3. to seek co-operation with workplace partners, occupational health care, institutions, schools and other actors within the work environment
4. to be a developing workplace with satisfied and qualified employees
5. to be run within specified economic boundaries” (Tómasson & Sveinsdóttir 2007; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 23.)

For example, the objective “AOSH bases its work on knowledge, quality and co-ordinated work procedures” can be realised by the following strategies:

1. “Constant development of methods for various forms of inspection and accident investigation”
2. “Co-ordination of working methods between districts” (Tómasson & Sveinsdóttir 2007; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 25.)

The methods used here are to develop further the quality instructions issued by AOSH and cooperation among developers in the working environment area. The means derived from the methods are

1. “To initiate quality procedures for various forms of inspections
2. Adapted inspection, conventional inspection, market tracking and inspection campaigns
3. Use work environment guidelines in inspection
4. 23 occupational branches
5. Internal audit of inspection visits
6. Courses and meetings for inspectors
7. “Chat-channel” for inspectors” (Tómasson & Sveinsdóttir 2007; Social- och hälsovårdministeriet 2007, 25.)

Linked with the same objective is the strategy of ensuring that inspectors have the required knowledge and ability to perform their tasks. The method derived from this strategy is to improve and maintain the inspectors’ good

level of knowledge and for the special departments of AOSH to provide support and input to the inspectors' activities.

In Iceland's OSH strategy, the starting point for **objectives** tends to be universal. This means that the objectives have been defined fairly generally so that, taken individually, they remain on a conceptual level and accordingly are very open-ended:

"Prevent work-related illness"

These objectives are intended to apply to all sectors, all working environments and all employees without prioritisation. The objectives are further divided so that they apply not only to the working environment but also to the AOSH itself:

"... a centre of knowledge and experience within the work environment"

This kind of division does have the effect of reducing the universality of the objectives, since separate objectives are applied to the target of the activities and to administrative activities. The objectives for Iceland's OSH strategy have also been set in such terms that commitment to them is required. This can be seen as being based on the universal nature of the objectives, which means that long-term, consistent work is needed to achieve the objectives, which have not been defined in great detail:

"...is a developing workplace with satisfied and qualified employees."

The objectives thus set cannot be achieved by individual measures; in order to achieve them a continuous process of development and maintenance is needed. With its universal setting of objectives, Iceland's strategy conforms to the the Nordic Cooperation Programme.

From universal objectives Iceland's strategy proceeds to **means** derived from the objectives. For example from the objective "... a centre of knowledge and experience within the work environment", the following strategy is derived:

"Systematically apply knowledge gained from inspections and accident investigation in preventative work"

A strategy derived from an objective in this way makes activities relating to the universal objective more concrete, but still remains on a fairly general level. The answer in Iceland's programme is to derive methods from strategies:

1. "Processing of statistics
2. Convey information within AOSH and to target groups in the working life
3. Circular communications with external target groups
4. Info on the website and in the media

5. Inspectors share knowledge and experiences at safety ombudsman courses”

A practice of this kind clarifies action and makes it a concrete practical measure. At the same time the relationship between means objectives becomes understandable, feasible and in that sense sufficient. Due to the nature of Iceland’s OSH strategy, which progresses from the general towards the more specific, the means for attaining objectives can be seen as being based on short-term action:

“Courses and meetings for inspectors.”

Measures of this kind can be carried out at short intervals, but in order to be effective in achieving the objectives, they require a continuous, long-term process of internalisation and implementation. With its concrete means, Iceland’s strategy complies with both EU strategies.

At the **action level** Iceland’s OSH strategy is based on action at the national level, with the aim of creating good working conditions for everybody:

“Prevent on-the-job accidents.”

This kind of relatively unilateral action level based on national action is, however, being revised in Iceland:

“This year the AOSH is starting a new inspection-method “Tillpasset tillsyn”, partly based on a Danish method. It takes into account the changes made in the act 2003 and a new regulation from 2006 which includes paragraphs on risk-assessment in workplaces, and. Great emphasis is put on the organisation’s own initiative and activity in the field, the employers’ responsibility regarding the work-environment and the employees’ health and safety.”

According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, Iceland receives the lowest points of the all the Nordic countries for preventive action at the enterprise level, i.e. five points out of eight. Iceland’s strategy stresses one level as the means are based on general national action. However, the country has moved/is moving towards multilevel action. From these starting points, there is no full match for the Icelandic strategy among the background programs.

On the **actor level**, the main actor in Iceland’s strategy is the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health, whose action is aimed at affecting the working environment of enterprises:

“... a centre of knowledge and experience within the work environment”

The measures for achieving the objectives are also based very much on the action of AOSH and the inspectors:

“Initiate quality procedures for various forms of inspections.”

This kind of administrative-level actor is, however, being brought closer to the enterprise and employee level by basic training on OSH. The training is aimed at bringing OSH issues closer to concrete, designated working environments.

In 2006 the following aspects were added to OSH training for AOSH inspectors:

1. Training based on needs and adapted to individuals
2. New within the work environment: short courses (2–4 hours) at annual inspector meetings
3. Sometimes longer courses, e.g. investigation of on-the-job accidents
4. General or specialised capabilities; can, for example, be identified at development discussions
5. Online courses
6. Conferences and seminars held by AT and others
7. Participation in courses in country and abroad, for example at
 - Professional associations
 - Universities and organisations
 - NIVA (Nordic Institute for Advanced Training in Occupational Health)
8. Opportunity to work within other Nordic Working Environment Authorities
9. Studies in conjunction with work
10. Permission for studies/work possible if it is seen as increasing qualifications³⁷

This is connected with the new focus of Iceland's OSH strategy, which highlights the initiative of organisations themselves. Since the actor level of Iceland's strategy is marked by both networked and authority-based features, the approach of the actor level is closest to that of the European Union's strategy 2007–2012. According to the Scoreboard 2005 study Iceland scores only six points out of eight for networking on the actor level, the lowest score in the Nordic countries.

As far as **authority action** is concerned, Iceland's OSH strategy frequently refers to inspections as the basis for action. This model is similar to that of Denmark, where the controlling role of the state is emphasised:

“Inspectors visit the work-places to check if laws and regulations are being complied with and if not, they may give the enterprise an order to correct the situation within a given time limit or the enterprise is asked to make a time limited plan of improvements, which the inspectors have to approve. If the order is not complied with, coercive fines may be imposed or an enterprise may be closed down under certain circumstances.”

In this approach the punitive aspect is emphasised: inspectors act as authorities, who ensure that OSH issues are taken into account in enterprises and impose punitive measures if they are not. There are no actual rewards as in the Danish programme. There is no clear match among the background programs for the punitive nature of authority action. According to the Scoreboard 2005 study, as regard the sufficiency of Iceland's inspection practice and the role of inspectors in relation to a good working environment, Iceland ranks lower than the other Nordic countries with six points out of eight.

4 Results and conclusions

What kind of thinking guides the working environment strategies/programs and what are their noticeable dimensions in each Nordic country and in the European Union? The European Union's Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2002–2006 is as follows:

European Union 2002-2006		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific	XXX			universal
means	concrete	XXX			generic
action level	multilevel nature	XXX			single-level nature
actor level	networking-based	XXX			authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding		XXX		controlling and/or punitive

Figure 4.1 Characteristics of the EU-Strategy 2002–2006.

The noticeable features of the strategy are characterized by a focus on specific objectives, the concreteness of means to implement them, multilevel action, a networked actor level, and consulting but also controlling authority action. The OSH strategy adopted by the European Union can be considered a modern compromise between varied competing alternatives. According to the strategy, the member states must have specific objectives and concrete means to implement them. The implementation of the OSH policy is to be achieved through networking and interaction between different actors. Implementation through interaction, or rather, through dialogue, is the essential element through which the objectives can be reached. According to this thinking, the authorities are not the central initiator. Instead, they function as a co-actor, which is a major difference compared to the previous strategies, which emphasized the role of the state actor. Furthermore, the occupational safety authorities do not give orders to other actors, but negotiate and agree on different possibilities. The authorities will concentrate on the role of a supervisor and, in the implementation phase, on the role of a settler and negotiator.

The above strategy is succeeded by the European Union's Strategy on Health and Safety at Work 2007–2012, which appears as follows:

European Union 2007-2012		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific	XXX			universal
means	concrete	XXX			generic
action level	multilevel nature	XXX			single-level nature
actor level	networking-based		XXX		authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding		XXX		controlling and/or punitive

Figure 4.2 Characteristics of the EU-Strategy 2007-2012.

The noticeable features of the strategy are marked by a focus on specific objectives, concrete means, multilevel action, a networked and authority-based actor level, as well as consultative, controlling, and punitive authority action. An interesting point in the content dimensions of the strategies of the European Union is that the actor level of the latest working environment program is more authority-based than that of its predecessor from the early 2000s. This change appears to be strongly connected with an emphasis on control in the new strategy. Along with control, the actor level is naturally realized largely from the viewpoint of the authorities.

Among the background programs, the Nordic Cooperation Program appears as follows:

Nordic program of cooperation		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific			XXX	universal
means	concrete			XXX	generic
action level	multilevel nature	XXX			single-level nature
actor level	networking-based			XXX	authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding	XXX			controlling and/or punitive

Figure 4.3 Characteristics of the Nordic Programme.

The noticeable strategic features of the Nordic programme comprise the following: universal objectives, generic means to reach them, action on multiple levels, an authority-based actor level, and consultative authority action. Compared with the European Union's strategies, the objectives are more universal, the means are more generic, and at the actor level the policy is implemented with an emphasis on the expertise of the public sector.

The Nordic program typically emphasizes state-centred social policy. The generic nature of the means and measures and the universality of the objectives leave the program's concrete implementation open for local, business-specific solutions. This type of thinking entails many problems. One of them is the problem of differentiating conditions. Without concrete objectives and means it is difficult to strive for uniform conditions. Universality can also be understood as a principle that gives implementation a strategic meaning. Universal objectives and means guide practices but do not necessitate specific action, which increases the freedom of local actors and businesses in the application of the policy. The European Union's strategy with regard to the working environment program can be understood as a double strategy based on differences between the states. It observes the dissimilarities and simultaneously attempts to commit the states to more concrete objectives and means to achieve them. Differing conditions and cultures of action are a substantial problem to be solved, and the only way to deal with it is to emphasize concrete procedures.

One may even say that the programs of the European Union and the Nordic countries are from different eras or based on different viewpoints. The state clearly has a different role in these programs, which results in different cultures of action regarding the practices of the OSH policy and the amendment of those practices. The EU strategy has a distinctly reformative role; it is aimed at leading the member states toward a new way of thinking. The Nordic strategy lacks this type of an ambitious goal. It is merely an account of the prevailing thinking in the Nordic countries, and therefore the program's state-centered, traditional features are emphasized in comparison to the programs of the European Union.

An examination of each country's strategy on health and safety at work portrays the Finnish strategy as follows:

FINLAND		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific		XXX		universal
means	concrete			XXX	generic
action level	multilevel nature	XXX			single-level nature
actor level	networking-based	XXX			authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding	XXX			controlling and/or punitive

Figure 4.4 Characteristics of the Finnish strategy.

At the program level, the Finnish policy on health and safety at work is characterized by the following: specific and universal objectives setting, generic means, action on multiple levels, a networked actor level, and consultative authority action. Due to its divided objectives setting, the Finnish strategy does not fully comply with the background programs. With its generic means the strategy corresponds with the Nordic Cooperation Programme's mode of action, and thus its starting points are contrary to those of the European Union's strategies. From the viewpoint of multilevel action, the Finnish coincides with all the background programs. As for actor-level networking, Finland's strategy complies mostly with the European Union's strategy 2002–2006. With regard to authority action, the Finnish strategy complies with the starting points of the Nordic Cooperation Programme.

Finnish OSH ideology is in the process of becoming networked and based on dialogue, and from this perspective it is partly analogous to the thinking behind the EU programs. The objectives and means are of more generic nature. This type of thinking can be regarded as being action mode centered, which means that the general objectives and means are secondary with regard to the mode of action. According to this thinking, special and business-specific situations and solutions to them are more significant than the objectives and means defined by the OSH policy. The situation indicates how difficult it is to influence production-related conditions. Compared to the employer, the authorities are outsiders when decisions are to be made on work conditions. This makes the setting of objectives or means quite problematic, which is also manifest in the Finnish ideology when compared to the strategies of the European Union.

In Sweden the situation is as follows:

SWEDEN		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific		XXX		universal
means	concrete		XXX		generic
action level	multilevel nature	XXX			single-level nature
actor level	networking-based	XXX			authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding		XXX		controlling and/or punitive

Figure 4.5 Characteristics of the Swedish policy.

The text analysis presents the Swedish OSH policy as a mixed model, in which the objectives, means, and authority action can be considered to contain starting points from both strategy dimensions. Thus, in the Swedish program the objectives are both specific and universal, the means are concrete and generic, and authority action is both rewarding and controlling. Action takes place on multiple levels and the actor level is networked. In the Swedish program, the starting points of actor-level networking comply with the European Union's strategy 2002–2006, whereas the multilevel nature of the action level complies with all the background programs. Also in the case of authority action, the background programs correspond to both strategies of the European Union in terms of the rewarding, controlling, and punitive nature of action. Further, in terms of objectives setting and means, the Swedish program corresponds to the related themes of all the background programs only to a certain extent because it contains elements from both strategy dimensions.

Based on the text analysis, the Swedish program can be considered to be inconsistent and without a clear strategic stance. The ideology can also be thought of as a transitional strategy that quite obviously is in a state of change. Since the objectives and means of the Swedish thinking include features from the above-mentioned basic dimensions, we may be dealing with a compromise. But most likely this is a phase of transition toward the European Union's strategy on health and safety at work.

The Norwegian strategy is as follows:

NORWAY		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific		XXX		universal
means	concrete	XXX			generic
action level	multilevel nature	XXX			single-level nature
actor level	networking-based			XXX	authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding		XXX		controlling and/or punitive

Figure 4.6 Characteristics of the Norwegian strategy.

The objectives of Norway's strategy are both specific and universal. The means are concrete and action takes place on multiple levels. The actor level is authority-based, and authority action comprises consultative, controlling, as well as punitive elements. In the Norwegian strategy, the concreteness of means complies with the means arrangement of both European Union's strategies, whereas the action level complies with all the background programs. The actor level is authority-based and corresponds to the Nordic Cooperation Programme's equivalent sector. Therefore, from the starting point of networking, it is contrary to the European Union's strategy 2002–2006. Moreover, the Norwegian strategy's authority action corresponds to the European Union's strategies in terms of the consulting and rewarding as well as controlling and punitive aspects. However, there is no match for the objectives setting among the background programs.

As mentioned previously, the Swedish program is considered to be a transitional one, which explains its different strategic approach. The Norwegian program is quite differentiated, and it is therefore problematic to regard it as a uniform or compact way of thinking. Norway's OSH program is heterogenous; it does not lean on a clear actor perspective and the traditional thinking that builds on it. It differs significantly from the European Union's, Finland's, and even Sweden's OSH-related strategic thinking.

The strategy dimensions of the Danish program are as follows:

DENMARK		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific	XXX			universal
means	concrete			XXX	generic
action level	multilevel nature	XXX			single-level nature
actor level	networking-based		XXX		authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding		XXX		controlling and/or punitive

Figure 4.7 Characteristics of the Danish programme.

In the Danish program, the objectives are specific and the means generic, and action takes place at multiple levels. The actor level and authority action contain features from both strategy dimensions. Therefore, the actor level is both networked and authority-based, and the authority action includes rewarding, controlling, and punitive aspects. The objectives setting of the Danish program corresponds with both strategies of the European Union, whereas the generic means correspond mainly to the Nordic Cooperation Programme. Its multiple action level complies with that of all the background programs. The dual nature of the actor level is analogous to the European Union's strategy 2007–2012. As for authority action, the Danish program corresponds to both strategies of the European Union.

Denmark's program differs from the previously mentioned ones especially because its actor level is ambiguous. Further, the content dimensions of its objectives and means are not uniform; in other words, they do not share common ground. The Danish program's ideology is less consistent even compared to the Norwegian program.

Iceland's strategy is as follows:

ICELAND		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific			XXX	universal
means	concrete	XXX			generic
action level	multilevel nature		XXX		single-level nature
actor level	networking-based		XXX		authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding			XXX	controlling and/or punitive

Figure 4.8 Characteristics of the Icelandic policy.

The objectives of the Icelandic strategy are universal and the means concrete. The action level contains both multilevel and single-level aspects, and the actor level has both networked and authority-based features. Authority action in the Icelandic strategy emphasizes controlling and punitive aspects. The universal objectives setting of the Icelandic strategy complies with the Nordic Cooperation Programme. The concrete means correspond to both strategies of the European Union. The actor level starting points of Iceland's strategy comply best with those of the European Union's strategy 2007–2012. The action level of Iceland's strategy is based on single- and multilevel action. It is also based on the principles of controlling and punitive authority action. There is no clear match to these types of action in the background programs.

The table below depicts the system as a whole with regard to all previously mentioned strategies/programs:

All strategies/programs		Position			
Themes	Dimensions	Noticeable characteristics	Features from both	Noticeable characteristics	Dimensions
objectives	specific	EU2002–2006 EU2007–2012 Denmark	Finland Sweden Norway	Nordic Iceland	universal
means	concrete	EU2002–2006 EU2007–2012 Norway Iceland	Sweden	Nordic Finland Denmark	generic
action level	multilevel nature	EU2002–2006 EU2007–2012 Nordic Finland Sweden Norway Denmark	Iceland		single-level nature
actor level	networking-based	EU2002–2006 Finland Sweden	EU2007–2012 Denmark Iceland	Nordic Norway	authority-based
authority action	consultative and/or rewarding	Nordic Finland	EU2002–2006 EU2007–2012 Sweden Norway Denmark	Iceland	controlling and/or punitive

Figure 4.9 Studied strategies/programmes with regard to themes, dimensions and characteristics.

Of the five strategy dimensions studied the Finnish strategy contains the largest number (3) of common dimensions with the Swedish program: objectives setting, action level, and actor level. In addition, the Swedish program has three common dimensions with the Norwegian strategy: objectives setting, action level, and authority action. Iceland has the largest number (2) of common dimensions with the Norwegian strategy: means and action level. Iceland’s strategy has the smallest number of common dimensions with the other Nordic countries; only one dimension of the Norwegian strategy (concrete means) and the Danish strategy (actor-level networking and authority-based approach) corresponds with it.

When comparing the country-specific programs/strategies, the consultative nature of authority action stands out as a distinct characteristic of the Finnish strategy. The Swedish program is characterized by the prioritization of objectives from the starting points of certain lines of business. The special characteristic of the Norwegian strategy is its authority-based actor level. The Danish program is marked by rewarding, punitive, and controlling authority action, and the Icelandic by the concreteness of means through which objectives are pursued.

Especially the objectives and means of the Nordic country-specific programs deviate from the background programs. Except for Denmark, the Nordic countries have relatively general and principled objectives concerning their OSH ideologies. The transformation of Finnish health and safety thinking since the 1980s may be considered extensive, as the foundations of their OSH policy activities are changing from a state-centered toward a more diversified and networked action model. The foundations of the Swedish OSH policy are somewhat analogous to the Finnish ones. Based on an examination of strategy dimensions, the actor practices of the Finnish program are the closest analogue to the European Union's program while the Norwegian and Icelandic practices are furthest from it. The internal structure of the program of the European Union appears homogenous, while the structures of the Norwegian, Danish and Icelandic programs appear heterogeneous compared to the European one.

As to the relative difference between the strategies/programs, TemaNord 2001 states that the last decade of the previous millennium did not bring an improvement to the starting points of knowledge-based exchange of experiences in the Nordic countries; each country has chosen its own route, although there has been parallel progress in the general objectives setting regarding the improvement of the working environment. (TemaNord 200:535, 13.) Development trends observed already in TemaNord 2001 appear to have continued since 2000. As regards the content dimensions of their salient occupational health and safety strategies, different countries appear dissimilar – even divergent when it comes to their objectives. There are similarities in terms of observing the multilevel focus of the action level, which means that the variety and complexity of occupational health and safety activities are problematized in the corresponding programs.

5. Discussion

The introduction of the report outlines as the objectives of the study 1) to compare Nordic programmes on the working environment/occupational safety and health and the strategic thinking behind the programmes, 2) to interpret the differences, similarities and relations between national (Nordic) working environment programmes and corresponding European Union programmes with regard to their strategic mindsets and the contents of the programmes, and 3) to give rise to a discussion on the Nordic strategy / programme texts. Did the study fulfil these objectives?

The starting point of the first objective (comparison of programmes) proved to be a challenging job due to the huge amount of study material. In order to be able to apply a comparative approach to the subject in such a short period of time, the amount of study material had to be limited substantially. The material was restricted to include only strategies/programmes that describe the authorities' approach to OSH policy in Nordic countries at a certain point of time, i.e. the beginning of the 2000s. Thus, the researchers consciously excluded from the study the practices adopted by authorities and their different manifestations in the Nordic countries. Therefore the study may appear to be relatively restricted. On the other hand, we can say that the comparison objective has been fulfilled with regard to the starting point in each country, as the study was concentrated on the foundations of their occupational safety and health policies. During the study process, the researchers have been aware of the OSH policy programmes and practices that complement these general strategies/programmes in each country but the strategies/programmes discussed here proved to be most appropriate considering the objectives of the study.

The challenge related to the second objective mainly concerned the research method. As the review of the different strategies/programmes is based on interpretation of material, there is always a possibility of various interpretation perspectives. Interpreting the contents of the strategies/programmes from the perspective of certain characteristics is not unambiguous and the contents also often have characteristics that are opposite to each other. In this study interpretation was based on such a comparison, as was the case with the first objective. Thus, the researchers sought to find out the characteristics of each strategy/programme that best describe it in relation to other strategies/programmes.

It seemed that the third objective was already fulfilled at the Nordic seminar on this study in November 2007 in Helsinki. The participants had the opportunity to comment on the still unfinished study. There was a broad discussion on the contents of the Nordic occupational safety and health

policies and the accomplishment of the study. The lively discussion has continued through the whole study process.

What is the significance of this study? There has not been this kind of Nordic comparison before. For this reason alone, the study gives new information and opens up new prospects for further examination. Its greatest importance is to inspire discussion. In this way it provides an opportunity to understand the different mindsets behind the Nordic occupational safety and health policies. It will then be possible to make use of these differences when developing national OSH policy strategies in future.

6 Complementary country-specific descriptions

In this chapter, representatives from all five Nordic countries give complementary descriptions of the OSH policies in their countries. All writers participated in the seminar, which was arranged as a part of the project.

6.1 Report on future working environment 2010, Denmark

Peter Fenger, Working Environment Authority

In Denmark, a nationwide prioritisation of the working environment effort is seen as an important strategy. Setting priorities in this way directs the efforts towards the most important working environment problems for the benefit of all employees. This also makes all the working environment actors work towards a common goal.

Thus, Denmark has directed its efforts on the working environment toward specific goals since 1996. In 2005 the prioritisation expired, and a new list of priorities for working environment efforts for the period up to 2010 was to be set up.

The Danish Minister of Employment asked the social partners in the Working Environment Council to identify and recommend new priorities.

On the basis of the recommendations from the Working Environment Council and a hearing, where a large number of working environment professionals and stakeholders presented their opinions on efforts up to 2010 in the Report on Future Working Environment 2010, which in December 2005 through a Government memorandum (Redegørelse om fremtidens arbejdsmiljø 2010 – ny prioritering af arbejdsmiljøindsatsen) was endorsed as official policy.

The report describes the foundation for the priorities, the new priorities, and the implementation of these. As such the report can be seen as a key strategic document on working environment policy.

Prioritisation within the framework of the new legislation

However, at the same time as putting forward new priorities, a new structure of the working environment regulatory system in Denmark was introduced. The prioritisation has to be understood in the context of this new structure.

The new structure means changes in methods of inspection, regulation as well as guidelines and information based on the working environment problems that have been given priority. When carrying out inspections, focus should be on the most important problems at the enterprise in question, and not just on the priority problem areas.

The list of priorities is also indicative for the National Institute of Occupational Health's development and research activities. At the same time, a broad approach to the working environment must be secured, enabling research and development activities within the working environment priority areas that have already been identified, as being important.

The new structure was the result of a 2005 working environment reform (adopted by the Danish parliament in May 2004). The working environment reform introduced a number of measures that focus attention on the working environment at enterprise level.

This working environment reform stipulates, among other things, a screening of the working environment of all Danish enterprises within a period of seven years; the obligations for enterprises to seek consultancy advice changed; and an introduction of a smiley scheme to illustrate the state of the working environment of the enterprises.

The screening of all enterprises

As from 1 January 2005 and for the following seven years, the Working Environment Authority will screen the health and safety conditions of all Danish enterprises with employees. Subsequently, all enterprises will be screened approximately once every three years. Enterprises prioritised for adapted inspection will be inspected every two years until the working environment standard is acceptable.

The primary aim of screening is to obtain, within an hour and a half on average, a quick overview of the health and safety standard of the enterprises. In other words, screening means that the Working Environment Authority will be able – to a much greater extent than previously – to prioritise its efforts and target enterprises with poor health and safety records.

The Working Environment Authority aims to divide all enterprises into two categories by means of screening. When screening an enterprise, the inspector makes a judgement as to whether the health and safety conditions in the enterprise are adequate, and hence the enterprise should be left alone, or whether the enterprise needs a closer inspection. If the inspector decides that the enterprise should receive a more thorough investigation, an “adapted” inspection will be carried out.

Occupational Health Service

From 2005, the system of compulsory membership in an Occupational Health Service for certain sectors, was replaced by a system of Authorised Health and Safety Consultants. Following inspections, the Working Environment Authority may issue an improvement notice and enterprises are then obliged to call in an Authorised Health and Safety Consultant to help solve their working environment problems. Membership of an Occupational Health Service will in the future be fully voluntary.

Smileys

The Working Environment Authority has established a “smiley” scheme with the purpose of making the work environment standard at an enterprise known to the public. When an immediate notice or a notice with a time limit is issued to an enterprise, a negative yellow smiley will be assigned to that enterprise on the Working Environment Authority’s website. When a prohibition notice or an improvement notice is issued to an enterprise, a negative red smiley will be assigned. The negative yellow and red smileys will be deleted once the enterprise has solved its problems – it is though shown for at least six months. Enterprises that have been screened without reactions will be rewarded with a green smiley. Enterprises holding a health and safety certificate will be assigned a special positive green smiley (crown smiley).

6.2 Aspects of the occupational safety and health strategy of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland

Leo Suomaa, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

The occupational safety and health strategy (OSH strategy) of the administrative sector of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health was drawn up in a situation where the operational environment of OSH had changed very much. A few years earlier, the Finnish OSH administration had been reorganised. The central administration had been changed to comprise one level only, and the OSH bureaus of the OSH Inspectorates had become independent authorities. Additionally, Finland had joined the EU. A new strategic challenge was recognised: the working ability and functional capability of people should be improved, in other words early retirement should be discouraged. At that time the actual retirement age was 59 years.

The strategy was prepared in co-operation with the social partners and other interested groups.

The content of the strategy can be described through its two main goals. One of the main goals concerns the content of the occupational safety and health. Firstly, the aim was to move the focus from a reactive OSH approach towards a proactive approach by promoting well being at work.

Secondly, the psychosocial factors affecting the work environment should be taken into account in a more comprehensive way, in addition to physical and chemical factors. The other main goal of the strategy deals with the emphasis put on the various duties of the various OSH operators. There the first aim was to strengthen the workplaces' own OSH activities and their initiatives compared to activities initiated by the OSH authorities. The second aim concerned the authorities' activities and OSH administration, where it was considered necessary to improve the operational conditions of the regional OSH administration.

The strategy was accepted and published in the spring of 1998, and it is still valid.

It was evaluated that the implementation of the strategy would depend on two key factors. Workplaces' ability, skill and will to carry out occupational safety on their own initiative were considered to form one of the key factors. The other key factor would be that element in authority activities that involves immediate communication with workplaces.

With regard to the ongoing Nordic project, the OSH strategy of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is the best document to correspond to the goals of the Nordic research in question. However, there are also other documents.

The implementation of the strategy has been monitored periodically, and follow-up reports have been published. The reports contain a large amount of useful information that could also be utilised in the research project, if the time and resources were not limited.

The goals based on the OSH strategy of the administrative sector of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health are dealt with in the annual state budget draft. The budget draft submits to the Parliament a report on the performance targets of the OSH administration. According to the performance targets reported to the Parliament, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health will draw up the annual performance target agreements separately with each regional OSH Inspectorate. A framework agreement contains instructions for drawing up the annual performance target agreements. The latest framework agreement was confirmed for the years 2008–2011. Every year an evaluation will be made of how well the performance target agreements have been implemented in each Inspectorate.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has published a document under the title "National Occupational Safety and Health Profile of Finland" (Publications 2006:8), that also contains useful information.

6.3 OSH policy and visions of Iceland

Kristinn Tómasson, Administration of Occupational Health and Safety

Pórunn Sveinsdóttir, Administration of Occupational Health and Safety

The documents forming the basis for the report are:

1. The official policy document of the Administration for Occupational Health and Safety for 2005–2007*.
2. Strategy plan for the Administration for Occupational Health and Safety 2005–2007.
3. Legislation for Occupational health and safety act no: 46/1980 and regulation based on the acts.

The AOSH has holistic approach towards occupational health and safety issues with integration into one institute of planning and administration, inspection, informatics and research. This is reflected in every day work and in particular all major tasks of the AOSH. With this the AOSH aims at being a centre for excellence within the field of occupational health and safety in Iceland. This reflects on its overall as well as day to day interaction with the occupational environment in the country. This includes key actors, including the unions of employers and employees, companies, occupational health services, the occupational research environments, media and depending on issues individual employers and employees.

The report does not reflect that the legislative basis for occupational health activities in Iceland is based on the Danish legislation.

The policy of the AOSH for 2005–2007

The mission of the AOSH is to act for a safe and sound work environment, which is always in line with social and technological development in society and gives a goal-oriented contribution to the workplaces' working environment management.

The visions of the AOSH for 2005–2007

Four visions are applied to the working environment of the workplaces and the health of the workers

1. Prevent on-the-job accidents
2. Prevent work-related illness
3. Promote systematic work environment management, which leads to continuous improvement of the work environment and to increased well-being
4. Adapt workplaces to work skills

Five visions are applied internally to the activities of the AOSH

1. The AOSH is a centre of knowledge and experience within the work environment

2. The AOSH intends to base its work on skills, quality and co-ordinated work procedures
3. The AOSH seeks co-operation with social partners, occupational health care, institutions, schools and other actors within the work environment
4. The AOSH is a developing workplace with satisfied and qualified employees
5. The AOSH will be run within specified economic boundaries

6.4 Goals, strategies and principles of the Norwegian work environment policy

Godtfred Bøen, Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion

As mentioned in the introduction to this report the researchers have based their analysis of the Norwegian work environment principles and concepts on the strategy document for 2004–2007 of the Labour Inspection Authority (Arbeidstilsynet). This choice has some important consequences regarding possibilities and limitations of making comparisons of the work environment principles and concepts in Norway with the other Nordic countries. Partially this relates to the question of how representative the document selected is for the overall Norwegian policy, and partially it relates to the matter of what status the different other analyzed documents have, and what level within the national work environment administrations they were formulated for.

The overall Norwegian strategy and policy in the work environment field, in addition to the one studied in this report, encompasses documents of strategic character at ministry level, and also strategic documents for the Petroleum Safety Authority.

In the following text an effort is made to try and supplement the picture of the Norwegian principles, goals, and strategies of the Norwegian work environment authorities, and to mention some new development trends.

Goals of the policy

In its work environment policy and safety policy, the Government's goal is to achieve a working life where everyone has a place, where the employees' needs for protection and safety are met, and where the development of the economy is taken into account in an appropriate way. The main goal is that working life is safe and inclusive, and that the individuals have safe employment relations and meaningful tasks.

Main strategy

The authorities' main instruments in this work are the regulatory framework, enforcement, guidance, development of information, and co-operation. Since the beginning of the 1990's it has been emphasised that it is the employer's duty to ensure that the work environment and the safety are appropriate and satisfactory. The main strategy of the authorities is

to contribute to the enterprises' ability to prevent accidents and ill health through their own internal control and their systematic work for health, environment and safety. The enterprises shall evaluate the risk factors in their work environment and carry out measures that can reduce the risks and prevent ill health and injuries. The employees have the right and duty to contribute to this work. The systematic health, environment and safety work of enterprises shall prevent any circumstances at work and in the workplace from causing illness and from harming people, the environment or material values. The systematic work shall also improve the employees' ability and will to participate in the working life even at an older age. Thus the work for health, environment and safety is a very central element in the Government's work for an inclusive working life.

The development towards the emphasised role of internal control has led to less detailed regulations that are more characterised by functional requirements. When the regulatory framework is functional, the authorities focus on the goals to be achieved and it remains largely up to the enterprises themselves which methods they choose to achieve the goals. Complexity, technological development and quick changes make it difficult to regulate enterprises' activities directly, and to simultaneously keep the regulatory framework up-to-date with the development. A functional regulatory framework is better for handling such changes because the legislation describes the goals, not the methods. The changeover to functional requirements in several areas increases the responsibility of the enterprises subject to enforcement, but it also gives them possibilities to find solutions that are optimal both for the enterprise itself and from the point of view of the enforcement. Also the enforcement activities have been affected by this change, for the authorities have started to put more emphasis on controlling how enterprises build up their systematic environment and safety work. However, the authorities also continue to monitor how enterprises follow their own routines with regard to individual work processes.

Responsibilities and tasks

The responsibilities for this policy sector covers labour law, working environment and safety in Norwegian working life, both on land and on the Norwegian continental shelf. This includes, for example, the responsibility for the administration of the Working Environment Act, of some provisions in the Petroleum Act, and of the Labour Dispute legislation. The working environment and safety sector also includes responsibility for, among others, the regulations concerning co-determination in companies, annual holidays, wage security, special acts on compulsory arbitrations, and the act of general application of wage agreements, which is an important means to avoid social dumping.

In order to achieve the best possible effects in the preventive work, the work environment authorities focus their enforcement activity on risks. The resources are restricted and therefore it is important to give priority

to those occupations, fields of activity and enterprises where the risks for work-related ill health and accidents are worst.

Authorities in the work environment and safety area

The Labour Inspection authority (Arbeidstilsynet) enforces the provisions of the Work Environment Act and provisions issued by virtue of the Act. The Aliens Act and the Act of general application of wage agreements give Arbeidstilsynet the responsibility and authority to monitor the terms of pay and employment of foreign employees.

The Petroleum Safety Authority (Petroleumtilsynet) is responsible for the enforcement concerning working environment, health and safety in the oil industry on the continental shelf and in individual factories on land. As for Arbeidstilsynet, the Aliens Act and the Act of general application of wage agreements give Petroleumtilsynet the responsibility and authority to monitor the terms of pay and employment of foreign employees.

The National Institute of Work Environment and Health (Statens Arbeidsmiljøinstitutt) is the national institute for the research of work environment and health at work. The institute develops and spreads information on the cause and effect patterns between work and health through research, investigation, training and information. The institute operates in close co-operation with Arbeidstilsynet and Petroleumtilsynet.

Co-operation between the social partners, and co-operation between authorities operating in related policy areas

The Norwegian labour law and working environment policies are based on co-operation between the social partners (authorities, and employers' and employees' organizations). Close co-operation is carried out between the partners in all legislative work in the field. When larger legislative revisions of the Work Environment Act or Labour Dispute Act need to be carried out, they shall always be dealt with by large committees where the social partners are represented. The latest revision of the Work Environment Act was adopted in the summer of 2005.

Arbeidstilsynet, Petroleumtilsynet and Statens Arbeidsmiljøinstitutt have advisory councils consisting of representatives from the social partners. The basic intention is that the parties involved and the authorities together should agree on a common understanding of the state of working life, on the challenges, on appropriate methods to influence it, as well as on what roles and tasks the partners should take on, in order to tackle the challenges. The co-operation between the social partners is developing continuously, and both Petroleumtilsynet and Arbeidstilsynet are involved in activities based on such an approach. For instance there is a tripartite cooperation between the authorities, employers' and employees' organizations regarding regulation of health, safety and the environment in the petroleum sector (The Regulatory Forum). The Petroleum Safety Authority,

the Norwegian Pollution Control Authority (SFT) and the health authorities represent the authorities in the Forum. There is also a tripartite cooperation between the authorities, the employees' and employers' organizations related to establishing administrative norms for chemical exposure levels at the workplace. The norms are prepared by the Labour Inspection Authority in cooperation with the national Institute of Work environment and Health, the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises and the Norwegian confederation of Trade Unions.

The authorities in the field of working environment have not only had extensive co-operation with the social partners, but during the last few years they have also been involved in co-operation with authorities from related policy areas. In Norwegian politics, considerable attention has for a number of years been paid to the fact that the sickness absence rate in Norway is high, and that a relatively large number of the working-age population remains outside working life. The number of people on disability pension and people receiving national insurance benefits is high, and the real retirement age has been decreasing. In 2001, the Government and the social partners made an agreement where they committed themselves to work towards a more inclusive working life, where the goal is to reduce the sickness absence rate, to include more people with functional disabilities in working life and to raise the real retirement age. According to the agreement, the state authorities, the employees' and the employers' organizations shall give a high priority to reaching these goals. The follow-up of the agreement involves a widespread tripartite cooperation between the social partners at the national level. The work environment authorities participate in this cooperation.

Gradually, it has become apparent that it is necessary to create better co-operation between the various authorities responsible for both labour market, national insurance benefits and work environment, in order to reach the goal of a more inclusive working life. It is the duty of these authorities to contribute to the reduction of employee marginalisation and the sickness absence rate, and to make arrangements that make it possible for employees to enter working life or to return to work.

For the work environment authorities this has meant that their contribution to preventive work during the last few years has been given a clearer and more important part in the agreement on a more inclusive working life. For example Arbeidstilsynet has put more focus on monitoring enterprises with high sickness absence rate, and especially on the quality of the enterprises' efforts towards reducing the sickness absence rate, as well as on employers' responsibility to organise work for those of their employees who have reduced ability to work.

6.5 Goals, strategies and principles of the current Swedish work environment policy

Bo Barrefelt, Ministry of Employment

The analysis of the Swedish policy is based mainly on the Swedish Work Environment Authority's action plan for the period 2004–2006. Additionally, a short report is given on the measures carried out in conformity with the then Government's programme, the so-called "11-point Programme" from 2001. The responsible authority's priorities have been used as a basis for the analysis, and the conclusions and perspective are rather limited. Therefore there is reason to supplement the picture of the Swedish work environment policy. With regard to the notions concerning the authority's guiding vs. controlling role, some matters should also be clarified.

Decisions that formulate the Swedish work environment policy

Firstly, the Swedish work environment policy is formulated by the decisions and opinions of the Swedish Parliament and Government. Within the framework of these decisions and opinions, the Swedish Work Environment Authority decides the more precise guidelines for its enforcement and regulation work, and describes these guidelines in its operating plans, among others. The actual policy can be considered to be a combination of various decisions and opinions of principle over a period of several years. The major part of the present emphasis of the policy has been decided in the 1980's or later, whereas most of the basic principles that form the legislative foundation are older. With this background, the text below clarifies the most important opinions of principle that contribute to the formulation of the present Swedish work environment policy.

Basis and goals of the policy

The Government's annual budget draft sets the goals for the policy sector called Working Life Policy, and the goals for the activity sectors called Work Environment, Labour Law and Wage Formation. The goal set for the activity sector Work Environment says: A work environment that prevents ill-health and accidents, is adjusted in accordance with persons' physical and mental capabilities, and promotes the development of the individual.

The goal refers to central parts of legislation and emphasises preventive work, adjustment of the work, and the development perspective.

The latest budget draft gives certain central starting points as follows: A good work environment that takes account of technology, work organisation and content of the work, and where room is given for influence, responsibility, learning at work and creativity, can develop the activity and thus create the right conditions for growth and improved employment. A significant part of this is that the occupational safety and health work will be integrated in a systematic way with the planning, control and execution of the overall operation.

Work environment reform in 1991, systematic work environment enhancement etc.

At the end of the 1980's, extensive revisions were made to the Work Environment Act on the basis of clarifications that had been carried out, for example, by the so called Work Environment Commission. (Government Bill 1990/91:140.) The revised parts contained, for example, the following:

- The requirements to be set on the composition of the work environment were developed through a portal regulation. There are requirements both for technology and work organisation and work content.
- The regulations on employers' responsibility to work adjustment and rehabilitation were taken into use and strengthened.

A new provision (Chapter 3, section 2a of the Work Environment Act) was enacted where it was required that the employer shall systematically plan, lead and control the activity in such a way that the work environment fulfils the requirements set for a good work environment. This has been called systematic work environment enhancement, abbreviated in Swedish as SAM. The important principle with SAM is that the work for a good work environment shall be integrated with the planning and execution of the activity as well as the development of the activity, and it shall form a part of the strategic decision-making. The requirements for systematic work environment enhancement have been described more closely in the regulations of the Swedish Work Environment Authority.

The requirements to integrate the work environment issues into the activity, and to follow these principles in all activities, can be described as one of the most central strategies in the Swedish work environment policy of today. See below also the paragraph concerning system monitoring.

System monitoring, and the controlling role

In 1987, the monitoring of smaller workplaces was transferred from municipalities to the Labour Inspectorate. In the same connection, a decision was made to change the focus of the enforcement work of the Inspectorate (Government Bill 1986/87:100, Annex 12, page 110 and forward). The Inspectorate would to a larger extent than earlier focus its work on ensuring that the employers have such an organisation, resources and monitoring systems etc. which are required in order to observe the requirements laid down by the work environment legislation. This activity was named as system monitoring. The benefits from this model were that those employers who take good care of their work environment could be monitored more seldom and using fewer resources. This enabled allocating more time and resources to workplaces with a bad work environment, and whose work environment activities were not going well. It also gave more resources for monitoring smaller workplaces.

