

Obituary
Professor Karina Nielsen
1973-2024



Karina Nielsen was a globally recognised and influential work psychologist specialising in the area of participatory organisational interventions. Her work was an expression of the high value she personally placed on improving well-being and mental health for workers. She generously shared her knowledge, tools and time with others, placing a high priority on mentoring junior scholars and fostering links within her networks. She travelled widely and enjoyed fine food, finding the best restaurants wherever she went and introducing all those who visited her in Sheffield to her favourite. She lived life to the fullest, without regrets, and with a passion for learning. She leaves an impressive legacy in her work, in her enthusiastic and resilient approach to life, and with the many friendships she leaves behind.

She is well known for her work developing and testing models for how organisations can design, implement and evaluate organisational interventions (focused on changing the way work is organised, designed and managed) that aim to promote employee wellbeing. She believed that in addition to testing whether organizational interventions were effective, it is important to understand how to improve the work organization in support of worker health and well-being. Her work included the development of evaluation methods to help researchers and organisations identify what interventions work for whom under what circumstances, an innovative application of realist evaluation. Her work also sought to understand how organisational restructuring influences employee well-being, how workers can sustain and thrive in work following sickness absence, and how ‘good’ leadership can promote a positive environment where workers can thrive.

After studying for her degree in Aarhus, Denmark, Karina completed her PhD in Applied Psychology at the University of Nottingham, UK, in 2003 and then returned to her native Denmark working her way up from researcher to professor at the National Research Centre for the Working Environment in Copenhagen. In 2013, she returned to the UK to be Professor of Work and Organisational Psychology at the University of East Anglia, UK, and joined the Institute of Work Psychology at Sheffield University Management School in 2016.

In a career spanning more than 20 years, Karina was principal or co-investigator on more than twenty externally funded research projects. The value of the grants she was awarded during her time at Sheffield total more than €9,000,000. She was also a prolific writer, publishing more than 140 refereed journal articles, 40 book chapters and two edited books. Her forthcoming books, *Designing, Implementing and Evaluating Sustainable Interventions in Organization: The “How-do” of Improving Worker Health and Well-being*, and *Work and Health* capture the legacy of her research and practice.

Karina won several awards for her work, including top paper awards (*Work & Stress*, 2008); Best Practices Intervention Competition (American Psychological Association, 2009); and Early Career Achievement Award (American Psychological Association, 2009). In 2016, she received the first ever Innovation and Practice Award in Occupational Health Psychology from the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology (EAOHP) and European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) in recognition of substantial contribution her research made to the field of occupational health psychology. She also held visiting professorships at several universities (including Deakin University in 2018, University of Bologna in 2019 and Griffith University in 2019) as well as serving as an adjunct professor at the Department of Psychology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology. She taught the professional education course *Designing, Implementing and Evaluating Organizational Interventions* five times as part of NIVA Education sponsored by the Nordic Council of Ministers, and was a regular keynote speaker at major conferences in the field.

Karina was Associate Editor at *Work and Stress*, and was an editorial board member of several high-quality journals including *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, *Human Relations*, *the Journal of Business & Psychology*, and *Occupational Health Science*. Karina was also the member of several boards, including for the scientific advisory board for the Harvard T.H. Chan Center for Work, Health and Well-being. She was an active member of EAOHP since she was a PhD student, organising several of their conferences, chairing the EAOHP research forum, and being a member of their Executive Committee. She was also a member of the coordinating committee of the European Network for Work and Organizational Psychology Professors in Europe. In addition, she was a research affiliate at Karolinska Institute, Sweden; Associate member of the Society of Organizational and Industrial Psychology, and member of the programme on Mental Health in the Workplace at AFA Insurance. In taking these diverse roles, Karina was valued for her fast critical thinking, reliability and keen eye for a deadline.

Karina was a highly valued collaborator and mentor, with collaborations spanning across Europe, North and South America and Australia. Many of Karina’s PhD students have gone on into academic careers and have published their work in high-impact journals. Karina will be remembered as an outstanding leader in her field who created a collegial environment where researchers could share ideas and learn from each other, and it is through all these people that her work and values will carry on.

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