Theoretical and empirical background for the guidance tool
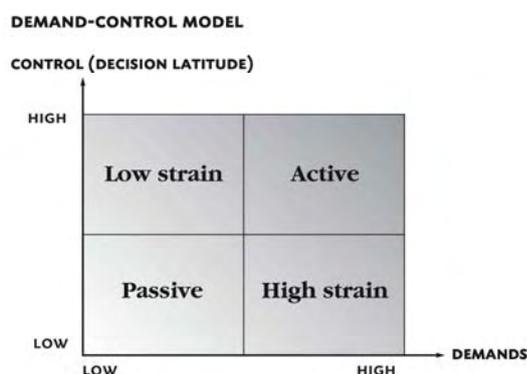
The following is a brief description of how the different main inspirations for the guidance tools are put together to create a balance model. The balance model is underlying the guidance tools, by dividing them into three main parts: "prevalence of risk factor", "prevention" and "organisational consequences".

Research from the National Research Centre for the Working Environment in Denmark (NRCWE) has identified 6 key elements of major importance for the PWE (COPSOQ, NRCWE 2003):

- **Influence/control** on own work and working conditions**.** Low influence/control is a stressor. High influence/control is a growth factor.
- **Meaning** at work. Low meaning is a stressor. High meaning is a growth factor.
- **Reward** (wages, carreer, appreciation/recognition). Low reward relative to the effort is a stressor. High reward relative to the effort is a growth factor.
- **Predictability.** Relevant information about important plans and changes. Low predictability is a stressor.
- **Social support** from managers and collegues. Low social support is a stressor. High social support is a growth factor.
- **Demand** (workload, pace of work). High or low demand is a stressor.

Based on the NRCWE research and the recommendations by the Methods Committee on regulating PWE the guidance tool primarily focus on demands, influence/control, and social support. Obviously other factors are relevant for PWE too but in developing the guidance tool, the WEA focus on the elements relevant to labour inspection in the Danish context, i.e. the psychosocial factors which are linked to the working situation of the employees.

The conceptual framework underlying the guidance tool could be described as an extended Karasek model (Karasek and Theorell, 1990):

DEMAND-CONTROL MODEL

CONTROL (DECISION LATITUDE)

HIGH	Low strain	Active
LOW	Passive	High strain
	LOW	HIGH → DEMANDS

After Karasec and Theorell Demand – Control Model (1990)

The model highlights the importance of looking both at the specific demands in a given job and which *means of control* the employee has of his/her work conditions – in the model below translated into the *resources* made available by the enterprise to assist the employee in fulfilling the job demands.
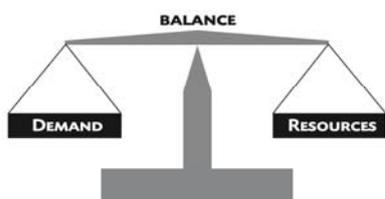
The concept of *resources* in the guidance tool is a broader concept of influence/control. It also consists of e.g. support from collegues and management, pratical help, help with prioritisations, clear tasks and expectations, training, and balance between quantity and quality on one hand and time available on the other hand.

Furthermore, the tool is based on the risk management approach for managing working environment. That is, a focus on the organisational rather than individual level, a participatory approach (which, here, means that the purpose of the tool is to access the "local knowledge" of the employees and managers; i.e. the guidance tool is designed as questions for employees and management), and that the factors being assessed should cover the most important and prevalent PWE risk factors in a given sector. These considerations lead to the following 6 risk factors in focus:

- Quantitative demands (workload, pace of work)
- Emotional demands
- Work related violence
- Traumatic experiences
- Night- and shiftwork
- Bullying and sexual harassment

These risk factors are characterised by being both prevalent in many sectors and by being within the realms of what the WEA are entitled to inspect. Using the risk factor approach the aim of the inspections become to assess if and how a given risk factor is present in an enterprise and which means the enterprise uses to assure that the risk factor is either eliminated, reduced or handled to prevent health risks. This way, in the guidance tool, "demand" is translated into "prevalence of risk factor" and "resources" are translated into "prevention".

The focus of the inspection is to assess whether there is a balance between the prevalence of the risk factor and the prevention measures taken by the enterprise. In making this assessment, the inspector can use knowledge about consequences of problems in the psychosocial working environment that can be measured on an organisational level, eg. low quality, high turnover and high sickness absence. When

introducing the risk factor approach and organisational consequenses the balance model ends up as follows:

WEIGHING OUT THE PROPORTIONS
Prevalence of risk factor proportional to the enterprise´s level of prevention.

BALANCE

RISK FACTOR   PREVENTION

Organizational consequences
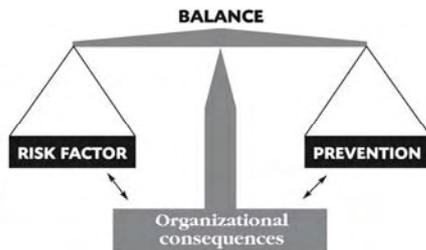
Thus, the PWE risk factors combined with the extended Karasek model and the risk management approach are translated into the guidance tool consisting of three parts:

- At the left side are questions aiming at assessing the prevalence of the risk factor
- On the right side are questions aimed at assessing the measures the enterprises take to prevent that the risk factor becomes a health risk
- At the bottom are questions aimed at assessing organisational consequences.

The following is an example of the risk factor *violence and threats*, from the "office" guidance tool. Please note that in the Danish context the risk factor of violence and threats primarily encompass aggression from external parties (e.g. clients/ customers/ citizens) whereas the risk factor of bullying and sexual harassment encompass aggression inside the workplace (e.g. employee-employee aggression, which in some cases is described as horizontal violence; McKenna et al., 2003).

Risk factor:
Risk of violence and threats

Prevalence of risk factor

These questions are only relevant when the work includes contact with clients, citizens or customers

Are employees subjected to threats and/ or violence?
Ask about the enterprise' own registration and reported incidents with violence and threats.

Amount of incidents with violence and threats (within the last year): _____

Ask about whom, when, where and how often.

Which kinds of violence and threats are occurring?
- Assault or likewise physical violence
- Robberies
- Physical threats (e.g. violation of personal physical boundaries)
- Spitting at employees
- Verbal insults
- Discriminating comments
- Threats on telephone, emails etc.
- Threats on employees' personal safety or employees' children, spouses etc.
- Vandalism of employees personal property
- Other incidents?

Are violence and threats occurring when employees are working alone?
(Describe whom, when, where, how often)

The work is characterized by:
- Control and power position of persons with personal/ social/ financial problems
- Handling of money, e.g. to clients or transportation of money
- Regular management of conflicts with clients/citizens
- Other

Prevention

Which precautions do you take to ensure that violence and threats are limited as much as possible? What are the effects?

Do you have a plan for preventing and dealing with violence, threats and traumatic experiences? What is the content of the plan?

Prevention measures
- Definition of violence, incl. guidelines on how employees should act when faced with insulting or violent behaviour
- Instruction on how employees should act in case of robbery (hand over the money, not to try to catch the robber, calling for help etc.)
- Instruction/ education in conflict management, communication, mental first aid etc.
- Guidelines for working alone/ guidelines for two employees working together when there is a known risk of violence and threats
- Guidelines on who manages the situation during incidents (e.g. who calls for help, who handles the threatening citizen)
- Information about matters that can have an effect on the risk of violence (e.g. the client/ citizens specific problems)
- Work is organised with focus on reducing risk of violence
- Short waiting time for citizen/ clients under high strain
- Appropriate physical work space (e.g. escape routes, space which enables the employee to get away from aggressive clients/ citizens)
- The work space and waiting areas are decorated to give a calm and kind impression and atmosphere
- Appropriate technical prevention measures (e.g. alarms, video surveillance, time lock on money)
- Measures to prevent angry clients/citizens to get in direct physical contact with employees
- Systematic and regular mentoring activities
- Guidelines for registration of incidents

Actions taken shortly after an incident
- Managerial support (who to alarm, who takes over the situation etc.)
- Mental first aid
- Debriefing (among the team of employees)

Follow up
- Professional crisis counselling is available
- Investigation and analysis with focus on prevention
- Incidents are reported to police and other authorities/ insurances
- Managerial support (e.g. call the employees, measures to lighten the return to the work place)

How do you make sure that employees know the plan and it is followed?

Is there anything else that helps to prevent violence and threats?

Organisational Consequences

- High level of "alertness" in the department/ enterprise
- Attitude that violence/ threats/ robberies are an unavoidable part of the job (down playing)
- Bad reputation (of the department/ enterprise)
- Loss of commitment/ lack of motivation to have contact with clients
- Anxiety of working alone
- Other consequences?

The idea behind the tool is that the prevalence of risk factors influences the necessity for prevention, and the level of prevention has implications for the organizational consequences, which in turn has implications for the prevalence of risk factors. Thus, more risks require more prevention while alternatively, more demanding work can be accepted with higher levels of prevention.