

The Norwegian Working Life Model – seen from below

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Biography

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1. Background

In this paper we aim to look at cooperation and co-determination at company level and if the practice of such rights meets expectations by the policy makers at central level. We will also discuss what consequences fulfilment of these rights, or lack of fulfilment, may have on the Norwegian working life model. Co-determination and cooperation at company level are usually viewed in a local level context where it can be seen as based on democratic values and as having a positive influence of the efficiency of undertakings (Nergaard 2014, Nergaard & Trygstad 2012, Hagen & Trygstad 2007, Heiret 2003, Engelstad 1999). In this paper we will

broaden the view and look at company level co-determination and cooperation as a part of the national model of labour relations. To what extent are we able to identify main features of the model at company level, and can the model be said to have stand strong at this level?

The Norwegian model of labour relations is one variety within the Nordic model of labour relations that can be found in the Western European countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The Norwegian model was shaped in the beginning of the 20th century and consists of a combination of regulations embedded in industry-level collective agreements (voluntary regulations) and statutory regulations. The model combines “hard” and “soft” dimensions (Marginson & Sisson 2004:87). Central features of the model are high level of unionization, high level of coverage of industry level collective agreements, multi-level cooperation based on (tripartite) central coordination and relatively strong cooperation at company level (Dølvik 2008, 2013, Stokke et al. 2013). In sum, these provide both individual and collective co-determination rights at the workplace. In general the organized parts of the labour market are characterized by well-established channels for voice through union representatives, and a climate of co-operation and trust. It is believed that the model promotes efficiency and productiveness.

A key condition of the effectiveness of multi-employer bargaining arrangements is their articulation (Crouch 1993) or vertically coordination across levels (Traxler et al. 2001, Marginson 2014). Effective coordination on the vertical plane, give sector and cross-sector organizations of employers and trade unions the capacity to act strategically and commit their members. The vertical coordination can be threatened in two different ways. A pressure of decentralization can reduce the capacity of top-down coordination (Marginson 2014). The corrosion of the local level would likewise jeopardize the articulation mechanisms. The main focus of this paper is the model of labour relation at local level, and whether this “one leg” of the model stands steady. While central level part of the model has been in focus in several studies, the knowledge about cooperation at local level is less developed and poorer.

In the following section we give a brief presentation of the methodology. In section 3 we outline central prerequisites for the Norwegian model of labour relations to function locally. Then we present our findings in section 4 before we turn to the discussion in section 5. Based on the findings we discuss whether weak or absent codetermination at company jeopardize the Norwegian model of labour relations.

2. Prerequisites for the Norwegian model of labour relations to function locally

The Norwegian case might be seen as a robust case in many aspects. The trade union density is fairly high, and the collective bargaining coverage is around 70 percent, not including the effect of generally applicable collective agreements. This indicates that there will be local trade union representative in most companies, and that an important prerequisite of cooperation at company level thereby will be in place. At the same time, when studying the model locally, researchers tend to focus on big companies in manufacturing. Both size and sector could be decisive factors when it comes to work place arrangement for participation regulated in laws and agreements. Researchers have paid less attention towards smaller enterprises in manufacturing as well as enterprises in other parts of the labour market. According to the National accounts, Norway has faced a growing private service sector and a shrinking manufacturing sector since the 1970s (www.ssb.no National Statistics, National accounts)

Trade union density in Norway was at 52 per cent in 2013, but with great differences between private and public sector, as well as within the private sector. Employees in the public sector are more likely to be members of a trade union than those in private sector. Furthermore, union density is higher in private manufacturing than in private service industries. The level of unionization is also higher in big companies than in small companies. When it comes to collective bargaining coverage, we see the same differences. While all employees in the public sector are covered by a collective agreement, the same goes for around half of employees in the private sector, with manufacturing having a higher coverage than the service sector (Nergaard 2014).

Collective labour relations and collective agreements fulfil a key function in the regulation of wages and working conditions in the Norwegian labour market (Nergaard, 2014). Collective agreements play a major role in regulating wages, since Norway has no statutory minimum wage. In cases where issues are regulated by law and collective agreements, e.g. overtime pay and holidays, the latter normally provide more favourable conditions for workers. Furthermore, co-determination at the workplace primarily occurs through the elected TU reps at workplace level, and rules for information and consultation of TU reps are laid down in

collective agreements. The Norwegian representation system is based on so-called single-channel representation, meaning that the representation at workplace level is based on representatives of the trade union organizations. In practice, this type of trade union official will also be involved in matters pertaining to the working environment and working conditions, and in some cases the safety delegates will be active shop stewards or “dedicated members” of the local trade union (Falkum et al. 2009).

Company level - “the one leg”

The company level cooperation between management and TU reps within the framework concluded by partners at central level, is seen as a central feature of the Norwegian labour relation model. *Firstly*, this kind of two-tiered bargaining opens up for local negotiations on wages as well as working time and other issues that are laid down in collective agreements. The parties at local level will have substantial freedom to find local solutions within the framework (Barth & Nergaard 2015). However, the duty to enter into cooperation and negotiations at local level is more developed in some agreements than in others. *Secondly*, effective implementation of the employees’ rights will in many cases rely on the presence of a trade union and cooperation between the local union and the management (Dølvik et. al 2014, Hagen & Trygstad 2009). This applies particularly to employees who have a weak bargaining position, or are unaware of their rights. Specific features in industries may affect management style, the distribution of power and democratic rights and structures at the work-place that may influence opportunity for participation and voice. *Thirdly*, the present of TU reps at company level indicates that the management has representatives to include in processes concerning the development of the company and worker related issues.

An effective cooperation at company level will rely on the presence of a TU rep that can negotiate on behalf of the members at the work place (Stokke 2008, Nergaard et al. 2009, Barth et al. 2014, Barth & Nergaard 2015). Previous studies in private service sector have pointed to another crucial fact. In companies in industries like hotel and restaurants and cleaning, there are huge challenges when it comes to electing a TU rep at the work place although the company have a collective agreement. One reason is the high turnover rate in these companies, another is that a large proportion of the TU reps find it difficult to negotiate and discuss issues with the management, because they fear the consequences when they

disagree. In many companies, there is a lack of trust and confidence among the partners at the local level (Trygstad et al. 2011, 2014).

Well-functioning cooperation between the parties will depend on TU reps having access to formal and informal forums where relevant topics for their members and the development of the company are discussed (Trygstad 2013, Dølvik et. al 2014, Hagen & Trygstad 2009). Barth & Nergaard (2015) find that the Norwegian model of labour relations still has a strong standing. However, they identify two signs of weakness. Firstly, the collective bargaining coverage has decreased slightly. Secondly, they find that collective institutions at local level are undermined. Among other things, there has been a substantial decrease in the existence of formal cooperation committees between management and TU reps at company level between 2003 and 2012, and these committees discuss a decreasing variety of topics.

The requirements to establish formal committees differ as regards the number of employees and structure of a company. Falkum et al. (2009) found that the knowledge among management and employees on these requirements was low, and that the parties at local level seem quite pragmatic when it came to the legal requirements.

The concept of trust or a trusting attitude between the management and the TU rep is also highlighted as important in collective agreements. Trust is based on previous experiences, but is relating towards decisions in the future, and related to calculated decisions between different (risky) possibilities (Trygstad 2004, Nergaard & Trygstad 2012, Coleman 1990 in Gulbrandsen 2001). Trust involves predictability. Nergaard & Trygstad (2012) find clear correlations between TU reps being included in determination processes and perceived respect from the employer towards the position as a TU rep. TU reps who feel that they are not included in the decision making is more likely to say that they lack influence, that the employer does not facilitated for union activities at the work place and that they are not treated with respect by the employer. This will make it difficult for the TU rep to be anything but a counterpart to the employer as trust will be lacking in the relationship between the parties at local level (ibid.).

In a study undertaken in 2012 among engineers, Trygstad (2013) found that TU reps in foreign owned companies had access to fewer formal meetings and evaluated their influence as TU reps lower than those in Norwegian owned companies. TU reps explained this by pointing to reorganisations and new forms of management in the foreign owned companies. In these companies there were also lack of trust between TU reps and management, and the TU

reps regarded the management as bureaucratic and hierarchical. The effect of foreign owned companies are also part of this paper, and we will return to that later.

3. Data and method

While still solidly in place in manufacturing (and public services), the institutional characteristics connected to the Norwegian model of labour relations fit more poorly in industries like retail and hotel and restaurants, which are included in our study. The organization rate among employers and employees are low, the coverage of collective agreements patchy. Unions and legally proscribed institutions for employee voice and participation are often absent or declining (Longva 2001, Nergaard & Stokke 2007, Trygstad et al. 2011, Berge et al. 2013). The companies in our study are covered by collective agreements but 7 percent (or 130 persons) some lack elected TU reps at the company level.

The analyses are based on a survey among TU reps at company level within several industries in the private sector; manufacturing, construction, hotels & restaurants, retail and a category “other”. We conducted a web based survey among TU reps within three trade unions covering construction work, manufacturing, retail and more. The different industries involved in the study vary along dimension like size, union density and collective agreement coverage.

41 per cent of the TU reps answered the survey, which constitute 1800 respondents. We also conducted in-depth interviews among management and TU reps at company level in more than 30 companies of different size, from under ten employees to several hundred, in the same industries included in the survey. Interviews were done following a semi structured method. Central questions were: how do the management and the TU reps consider the cooperation at company level. Do they cooperate, do they have formal committees for cooperation, which topics are discussed, and what function well seems from the parties point of view. Do they have informal talks and discussions about issues related to the company or the employees, and how do they trust each other. The interviews lasted for approximately 1 ½ hour, and the TU rep and the representative for the management were interviewed separately.

Different types of models

When analysing the interviews we identified four main cooperative models at local level. Firstly, we found companies with well-developed formal and informal cooperation.

“If I was to list all committees were we are represented...I would sit here the rest of the day. There are tons. [...] I would say that 70 percent of the cooperation is

conducted in meetings and the rest informally” (TU rep, manufacturing, 5000 employees).

Secondly, we visited companies with no formal committees, but with good informal cooperation. Thus even though the parties did not have any regular meetings, they discussed issues related to the company and the employees on a more ad-hoc basis.

“We don’t have any formal meetings, but we talk regularly (manager, grocery store, 19 employees).

Thirdly, we found companies with no formal or informal cooperation. This did not necessarily indicate a hostile relationship between management and the TU rep, but that these tasks were not made a priority during busy working days. In these companies the employees would often go directly to the management if they had issues they wanted to discuss rather than making use of the TU rep.

“We have no regular meetings with the TU rep or the safety rep. Things have been discussed in meetings for all employees. We have an unprejudiced attitude and the workers contact me directly” (manager, auto repair shop, 15 employees). “I use less than one hour a year on TU work” (TU rep at the same work place).

One fourth type is also possible, but did not appear that clearly in the interviews we made. That is companies with formal committees, but with no informal cooperation. One manager within manufacturing said that they had formal meetings, but hardly talked informally. However, when interviewing the TU rep of the same company, the TU rep said that they had quite a lot of informal contact. The different types could be illustrated as follows:

Table 1 Types of cooperation. (Alsos et al. 2015)

| | | | |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|-------------|
| | | Informal cooperation | |
| | + | | - |
| Formal cooperation | + | Located | Not located |
| | - | Located | Located |

In the figure we have included also the fourth type of cooperation which we will search for in our further analyses. We use this model as a starting point when analysing the survey data, and we ask whether these different types can be identified.

Analysis

In the paper we use different variables in bivariate and multivariate analysis. Below we present the variables used in multivariate analysis. As dependent variables we use:

Presence of arrangements. This is an additive variable, where none arrangement is coded 0, one arrangement coded 1, and so forth.

Participation in formal or informal meetings or discussions: Respondents who participate in both formal meetings and informal talks/discussions with the management on their level is coded 1, those who participate in formal meetings, but very seldom or never have informal talks/discussions are coded 2. TU- reps who just have informal talks/discussions and very seldom/never participate in formal meetings with the management on their level is coded 3, and those who seldom/never have formal meetings and informal talks/discussions are coded 4.

As independent variables we use the following:

Gender is coded 0=man, 1=woman

time in office is a numeric variable, years.

Number of employees at the workplace is coded as 1= below 10, 2= 10 to 19, 3=20 to 49, 4=50 to 99, 5=100 to 199, 6=200 and more.

Type of assignment 0= TU rep at company level or at group of company level, 1= TU reps at lower level.

Share of unorganized employees at the workplace 1= below 20 per cent, 2= 20 to 29 per cent, 3= 30 to 49 per cent, 4=50 to 69 per cent, 5= 70 and more.

Has your workplace been reorganised the last two years? 0=yes, 1=no .

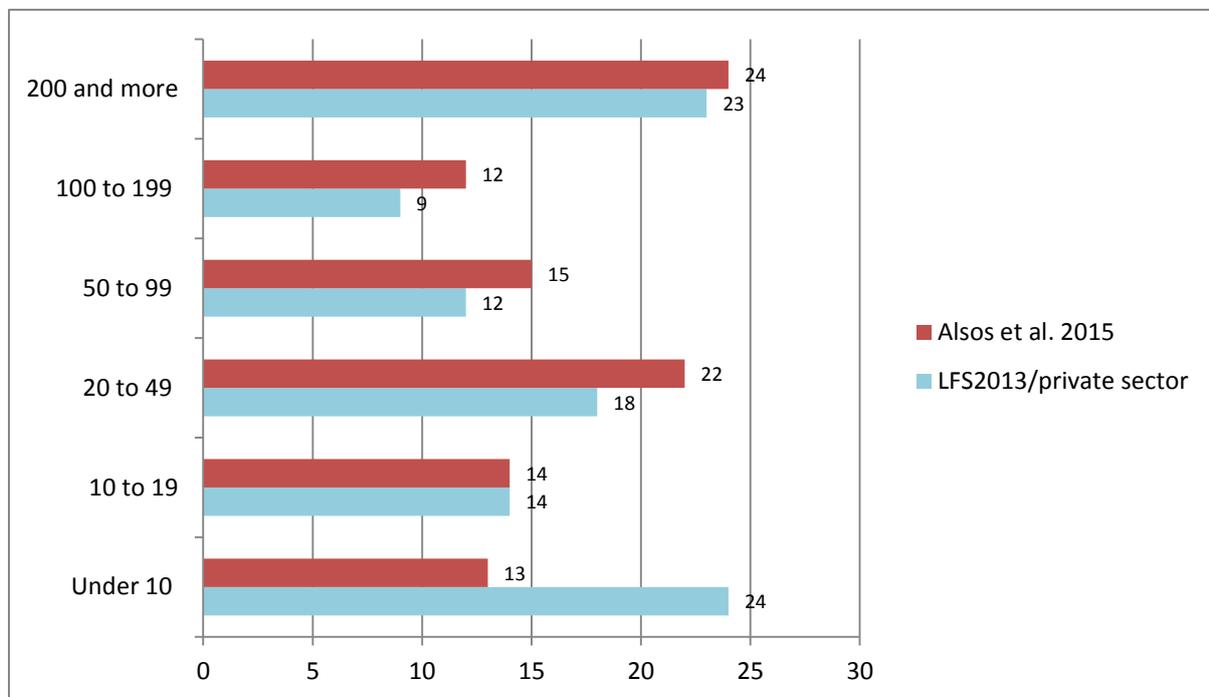
Is the company Norwegian or foreign owned? 0=Norwegian, 1=Foreign, and at last:

Industry: 1=manufacturing, 2= construction, 3= hotels & restaurants, 4= retail, 5= other. In the multivariate analyses the different industries are coded as e.g. 0=the rest, 1=manufacturing)

The size

One central question in the survey as well as in the interviews were do the TU reps meet the manager at his or her level to discuss matters concerning the company, the development of the company, issues concerning productivity, profitability, hiring, working environment and so on in formal or informal forums. Several of the arrangements regulated in the WEA and the Basic agreement have thresholds concerning size. Basically, a line can be drawn at 50 employees and more; the bigger the company is when it comes to number of employees, the more arrangement should be in place. In our material we have companies with fewer and more than 50 employees. In figure 1 we see employees by company size in our sample and in the Labour Force Study (LFS) 2013.

Figure 1 Employees by company size n=8546/1491



According to the LSF data, 56 per cent of the Norwegian employees in private sector works in companies with up to 49 employees, in other words below the threshold. In our sample the according number is 49 per cent. One important explanation is that collective agreement coverage is significant lower in small companies (1 to 10 employees).

4. Searching for features

In this section we ask: in what way do we find the central features of the Norwegian model of labour relations at company level, and in what way does this vary between industries and companies? The Basic Agreement between the two peak confederations state that employees,

through cooperation and codetermination, shall contribute their experience and insight towards creating the financial conditions necessary for the continued development of the enterprise and for secure and satisfying working conditions, for the benefit of both the enterprise and its employees (§ 9-1). And according to § 9-3, “Discussions concerning the ordinary operations of the enterprise”:

“The management of the enterprise shall discuss the following with the shop stewards (the executive committee): - matters relating to the financial position of the enterprise, its production and its development - matters immediately related to the workplace and everyday operations - general wage and working conditions at the enterprise Unless otherwise agreed, discussions shall be held as early as possible and at least once a month, and otherwise whenever requested by shop stewards.”

Similar regulations can also be found in other basic agreements in Norway. This indicates that in all companies covered by collective agreements, regardless of the number of employees, management is obliged to meet the TU rep on a regular basis.

As shown above, our qualitative material indicate that this regulation is not lived up to in all companies, but rather that there exist different types of cooperation models. Below we turn to our survey data, and we proceed by searching for the main feature of the model at company level. We start by looking into the available time TU reps have on their duties, before we identify different arrangements present at company level.

Time and arrangement

None of our informants were at the time of the interview full time TU reps. They combined the assignment as a TU rep with their job, although some of them could use one or two days a week on TU tasks. Some did have access to a TU office at the workplace while most did not. The time TU reps may use for carrying out their duties is regulated in the basic agreements, and typically state that: “The central organisations agree that shop stewards must be allowed the time they need to perform their duties as shop stewards in accordance with the Basic Agreement.” (Basic Agreement NHO/LO § 6-6). It is also stated that the amount of time necessary for a shop steward to perform his/her duties may differ from one enterprise to another: “A possible solution might be to agree on a time frame. Big enterprises often have a time frame agreement. However such agreements may also be suitable for small and medium-sized enterprises.” In the survey, the TU reps were asked about time used on their duties as TU reps, reported in figure 1.

Figure 2 Time used on TU duties during a week. N=1681 (Alsos et al. 2015)

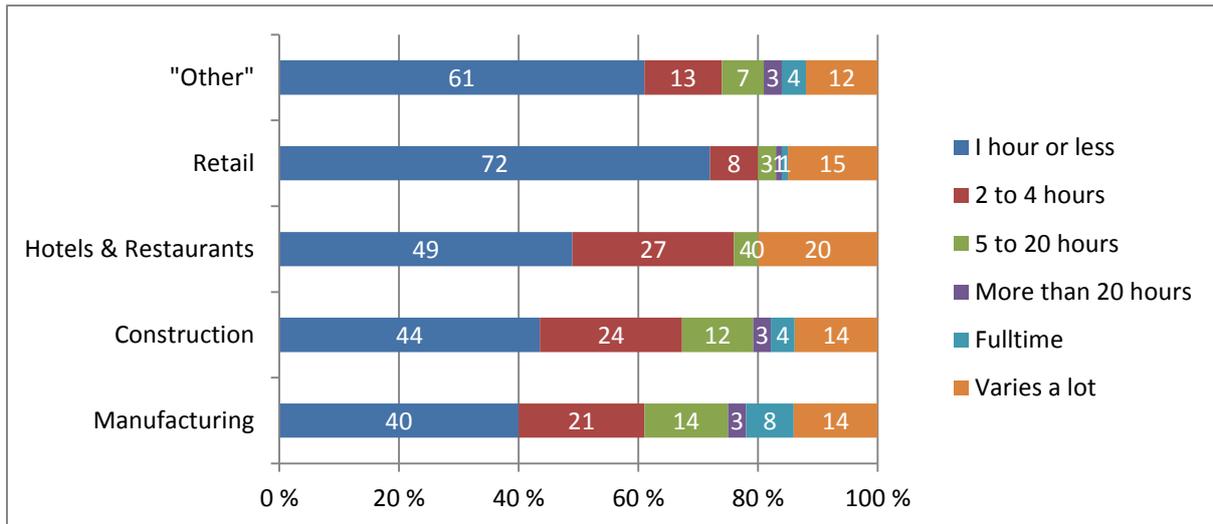


Figure 1 shows differences in time used on TU duties during an ordinary week. There are varieties between different industries. While the majority of the TU reps in retail use one hour or less, we see that the picture changes when it comes to TU reps in manufacturing and construction. The major differences can be related to what tasks the TU reps have, how many members they represent, and how well the employers facilitate for union work. We find a strong correlation between the numbers of members and time spent on TU duties (Pearson correlation .74***). Not surprisingly, TU reps which represent many members use more time than those who represent few.

We have also asked what kind of task TU reps use time on. The top three tasks are: i) wages and labour relations (49 percent “a lot” and “quite a lot”), ii) handling inquiries and questions from members (48 percent “a lot” and “quite a lot”), and iii) local bargaining (34 percent “a lot” and “quite a lot”). In the bottom end we find recruiting new members (18 percent “a lot” and “quite a lot”) and meetings with TU reps from other trade unions (11 percent “a lot” and “quite a lot”). Time spent on TU duties will also be related to number of assignments. Although the majority of TU reps in our material have only one assignment, we find that 18 per cent have two assignments, and a similar share have between three to five assignments.

Figure 1 shows that TU reps in retail spend the least time on TU duties. This is no surprise. One of three local unions at company level has less than five members, and an equal share has between five and nine members. In comparison, 61 percent of the TU reps in manufacturing represent 50 or more members, and only seven percent have fewer than ten members.

Arrangements

As mentioned in section 3, the presence of different cooperation committees or bodies in the enterprise will depend on the size of the company. In our sample 49 percent of the TU reps work in companies with up to 49 employees. Statutory arrangements and committees laid down in the basic agreements (part B) have different thresholds determining when they should be established. In figure 2 we show the existence of different arrangements at company level. Four of these are statutory bodies; safety delegates, working environment committees, and members of the company board, the red bars in the figure.

Figure 3 Arrangement for cooperation on company level. N=1471 (Alsos et al. 2015) Red=statutory arrangements. Blue=collectively agreed arrangements.



We see that almost all TU reps report that there are safety delegates present in the company. According to the Working Environment Act (WEA §6-1) all companies with ten or more employees are required to have a safety delegate. The figure shows that this duty seems to be fulfilled also by companies with less than 10 employees. Only 11 percent say no that they do not have one. Furthermore 54 per cent of the TU reps report that they have working environment committees. The statutory threshold for such committees are set at 50 employees (§ 7-1). In companies with 50 to 99 employees 81 per cent claim they have.

If we turn to arrangements laid down by collective agreements, companies with 100 employees or more shall have a works council consisting of representatives from the management and the employees. Our data shows that only 36 per cent of the TU reps who works in companies with 100 or more employees have work councils. And when it comes to departmental councils, the numbers are even lower. Departmental councils shall be

established in enterprises which employ 200 employees or more, but only 26 percent of those in the target group report that they have such a body. If we separate between TU at lower and higher level, the numbers change slightly. Those who are head of the local union or have other assignments higher up, does to a larger extent report that departmental committees are present than TU reps at the shop floor (32 vs. 24 percent). The same goes for other coordinating shop steward committees. 18 percent of the TU reps say this is present in the company, and 29 percent have a group shop steward. But head of the local union do to a larger extent say that coordinating shop steward committees is present than the TU rep at the shop floor (22 vs. 16 percent). Furthermore, if we look into those who are owned 100 per cent by a group of companies, the amount that has a committee for groups of companies raise to 26 per cent, while those who have a group shop steward increase to 44 per cent. We see that only 6 percent have TU reps at top level in string of companies. If we just look at those who are owned by a chain or string, the share increases to 15 per cent.

Board representation is also a statutory arrangement. If the company has 30 employees or more, two third of the employees may require one representative present at the company board. In our sample, 31 per cent of those between 20 and 49 employees work in enterprises where employees are member of the company board. If the enterprise has 200 employees or more, and it is agreed that the entity does not have a corporate assembly the company is obliged to have members of the board elected among the employees. Seven per cent of the TU reps claim they have European Works Councils established, but this amount increase to 18 per cent when we separate those who work in companies with 200 and more.

Formal committees, arrangements and/or bodies based in collective agreements are far less common than the statutory schemes, except when it comes to board representation (Figure 2). This corresponds with our qualitative data. While almost all informants report to have a safety delegate and a working environment committee in the company, we find that basic agreements based arrangements and bodies are less common. In these companies, the manager and the TU reps have little informal contact and there are few or none regular cooperative meetings. One obvious reason is that many of them only apply in companies of a certain size. But also those who meet the thresholds seem not to be complying with requirements in collective agreements, and our data indicate that at least statutory arrangements regulated in the WEA have a stronger position. This could be related to the fact that the statutory arrangements are controlled by the Labour Inspectorate while regulations in collective agreements are left to the parties to supervise and enforce.

So far our findings indicate that size is an important variable when it comes to cooperation at company level. In table 2 we present findings from a liner regression model.

Table 2: Linear regression (stepwise). Presence of arrangements. 0=none, 15=all

| Model | B value | T value |
|---|---------|-----------|
| Constant | -.96 | -2.571*** |
| Gender (0=man, 1= woman) | -.584 | -3.757** |
| Time in office | .496 | 8.71*** |
| Number of employees at the workplace | .717 | 16.482*** |
| Share of unorganised employees at the workplace | -.176 | -3.683*** |
| Has your workplace been through changes last two years? (0=yes, 1=no) | -.726 | -5.167*** |
| Are the company Norwegian or foreign owned? (0=Norwegian, 1=Foreign) | .886 | 5.092*** |
| Industry (0=other, 1=manufacturing) | 1.074 | 8.827*** |
| N= 1228. Adjusted R2=.410. | | |

The model confirms that size is important, but also indicates that men to a greater extent than women report that different arrangements are present. The same goes for those TU-reps who have been in office for some years. Maybe more surprisingly, TU-reps who have experienced reorganising do to a larger extent report that arrangements are present at their workplace than those who have not. One explanation could be that inactive arrangements can be revived if a situation in the company requires it. This was the case in a retail shop we visited where there were hardly any cooperation activities at all. A couple of years back the shop had been transferred to a retail chain, and this had led to the TU rep being engaged by the management in discussions on how to go forward with the transaction.

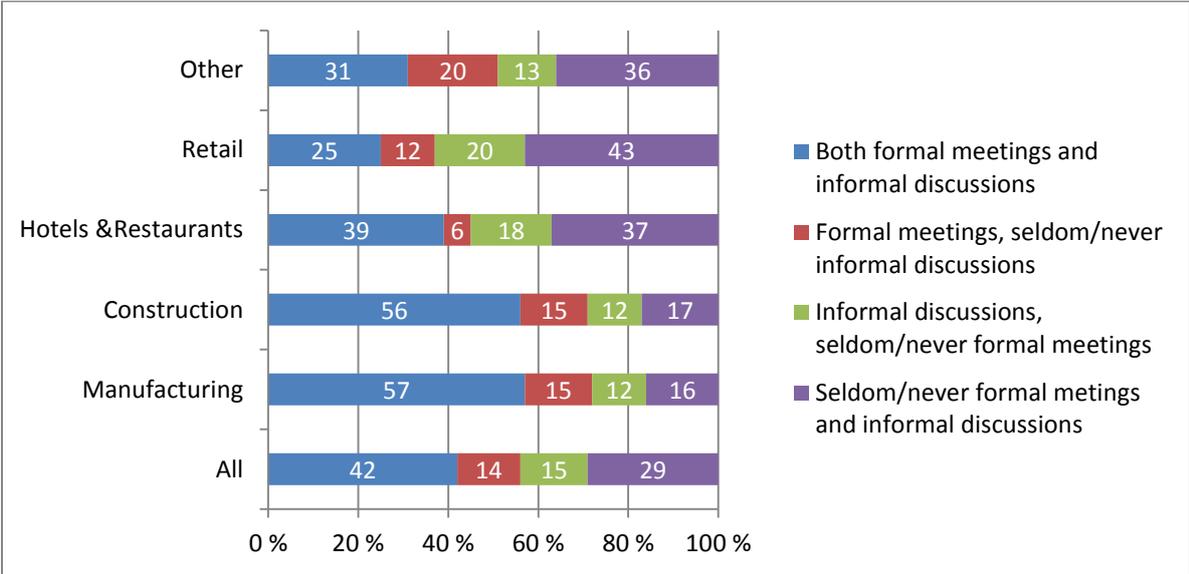
The model also indicates that TU reps in foreign owned companies seem to have more arrangements than Norwegian or mainly Norwegian ones. Hagen (2005:45) points to a similar finding. In her study, the presence of employee representatives on the company board is more likely to be found in foreign owned companies. One explanation offered by Hagen is that foreign owners operating in Norway are eager to follow statutory rules in order to appear as responsible. One last finding is less surprising: TU reps within manufacturing report a higher number of arrangements than others. As already mentioned, companies in manufacturing are often seen as the prototype of the Norwegian model labour relation at the local level.

Formal and informal participation

Our findings indicate that a large share of companies has not established institutional arrangements provided by the Basic Agreement. Regardless of size, the management shall discuss “matters relating to the financial position of the enterprise, its production and its development - matters immediately related to the workplace and everyday operations - general wage and working conditions at the enterprise. Unless otherwise agreed, discussions shall be held as early as possible and at least once a month, and otherwise whenever requested

by shop stewards.” (Basic agreement, §9-3) By not having formal meetings, the local parties do not fulfil the intention the peak organisations have had when drafting the basic agreements. One may argue that the consequences of the lack of formal institutions could be reduced if other forms of formal or even informal corporation are in places. We did ask the TU reps if they participate in information, discussion or negotiation meetings with management at their level. 56 per cent say they do, but still 44 per cent say they do not. We have also asked how often TU reps has informal talks with the management at their level about topics that concern members or business. 29 percent have informal talks weekly or more often, and an equal share has such talks monthly. 28 percent say they only discuss these issues with management on an annual base and 14 percent never do so.

Figure 4: TU-reps which have/have not informal or formal discussions with the management on their level, and which do/do not participate in formal meetings. N=1612 (Alsos et al. 2015)



One hypothesis could be that those who have no formal meetings would cooperate with the management informally. The data material shows us that this is not the cases. If we look at the whole sample, 42 percent of those who participate in formal meetings have informal meetings monthly or more often with immediate supervisor, see figure 4. However, as many as 29 percent have seldom or never neither formal meetings nor informal talks or discussions. There are significant variations between industries. Within retail only one out of four TU reps say that they have both formal meetings and informal talks or discussions with management, while more than four out of ten say that they have seldom or never meetings or talks/discussions with the managements formal or informal. Within manufacturing and

construction the situation looks brighter. In these industries more than half of the TU reps report that they both interact with the management formally and formally, and only 16-17 percent never or seldom has contact with management when it comes to TU issues. One explanation could be that inactive collective institutions at local level could indicate that there is a lack of issues to discuss. Our qualitative data indicate otherwise. In one big retail shop in our sample the issues were actually several, but the manager discussed these within the management and not with the TU-reps. In a company in manufacturing management did look at it differently. He commented on the importance for formal meetings as follows:

“In our formal meetings we discuss matters including production, improvements and other issues. The management meets the TU reps. It is not always so many issues to discuss, and the agenda is quite loose – we can actually talk about a wide range of topics. But we still meet on regularly basis. It is an important arena for developing confidence and trust.” (HR-manager in manufacturing, 100 employees)

In small companies the manager and the TU rep will often work closely together on daily basis. One might think that this would lead to more issues being handled in informal meetings than in larger companies. According to our data it is the other way around. While 34 percent of TU reps in companies with 200 or more employees seldom or never have informal talks with management, the corresponding number for those in companies with 10 to 19 is 54 percent.

On the basis of our findings, we can identify what seem to be inactive or excluded TU reps, much in line with what we identified when analysing our interviews. A majority of TU reps in our sample do participate both in formal meetings and informal discussions with management at their level, but a significant share do not. In between we have those who mainly participate in formal meetings or in informal discussions/talks.

We have looked closer into what factors that explain the variation between TU reps when it comes to participation, see table 2.

Table 3. Linear regression (stepwise). Participation in formal meetings and informal discussions/talks. 1= participate in both, 4= participate seldom/never

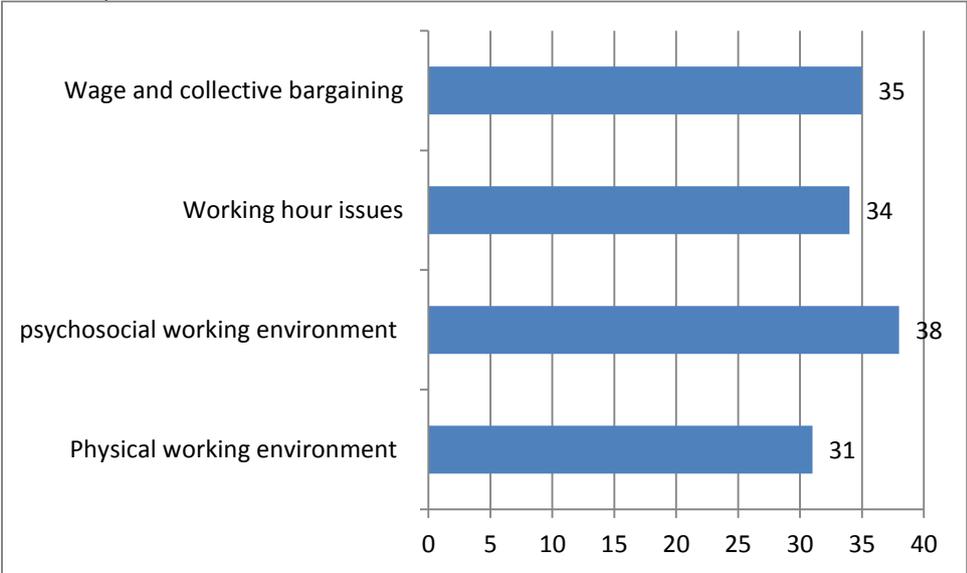
| Model | B value | T value |
|--|---------|-----------|
| Constant | 1.399 | 16.596*** |
| Gender (0=man, 1= woman) | .317 | 3.982** |
| Time in office | -.121 | -4.078*** |
| Number of employees at the workplace | -.141 | -6.795*** |
| TU rep at company level/group of company level, 1= TU reps at lower level. | .319 | 4.591** |
| Has your workplace been through changes last two years? (0=yes, 1=no) | .213 | 3.128*** |
| Industry (0=other, 1=retail) | .136 | 5.227*** |
| N= 1136. Adjusted R2=.178. | | |

Also when it comes to participation in formal meetings and informal discussion the gender of the TU rep makes a difference. TU reps who are women do participate to a less than men. The same goes for those with short time in office and those located in workplaces with few employees. Type of TU assignment does also have influence the participation level. Those who are company TU reps or group of company TU reps participate more than those on the shop floor. We also see that TU reps in companies where there have not been any reorganisation processes the last couple of years and TU reps in retail do significantly participate less than others. Recent reorganisation processes within the company might, as mentioned above, lead to meetings, talks and discussions. These sorts of processes shall, according to both statutory law and collective agreements, involve TU reps (and the employees) to a great extent.

Topics not discussed in formal meetings

56 percent of our TU reps participate regularly in formal meetings and informal talks/discussions or just formal meetings were they meet their meet management on their level. We have asked those who actually participate in formal meetings (also included yearly) if there are topics the TU reps would like to discuss with management, but that is not part of the topics discussed today. In figure 6 we can see that a significant share of TU reps call for what we could describe as traditional cooperation issues.

Figure 5. Topics that are not discussed in meetings were the TU reps participate with the management today. N=1359 (Alsos et al. 2015)



Approximately one third out of the TU reps calls for discussions on topics like wage and collective bargaining, working hour, psychosocial and physical working environment issues.

There are no differences between industries at this question, which indicate that approximately 1/3 of the TU reps in manufacturing as well as in retail calls for discussions related to wage and collective bargaining. It is worth underlining that these are the TU reps that do participate in formal meetings. In addition we have a share of TU-reps that do not participate in formal meetings or informal talks/discussions with management at their level.

Our findings indicate that the Norwegian model at company level is fragile in industries like retail and hotel and restaurants, while it is still more in place in manufacturing and construction, especially in big companies. But even in manufacturing, 16 percent of the TU reps say that they seldom or do not participate in formal meetings or in informal talks/discussions and 12 percent do only have informal talks/discussions with management. Our findings call for discussions concerning the one condition of the “on leg” in the Norwegian model of labour relations.

5. Discussion and conclusion

When analysing our qualitative data, we identified three different types of cooperation. In our quantitative material we added a fourth type. According to our analysis of the quantitative data, we can place TU reps in each cell of the table presented in section 2, table 1, giving us the table 4 below. Firstly, we have TU reps in companies with a number of formal committees each covering different topics, and where codetermination rights are executed both through these committees and more informally through cooperation with the employer. Then we have a second group where all contact between the two parties are informal, without any written evidence of what has taken place. In this group you can also find TU reps in companies where there are no scheduled meetings, but where the parties sit down in ad-hoc formal meetings, and where the outcome is written down in minutes or agreements. The third group have mostly formal contact and less informal contact. This group was harder to identify in our interviews, but appeared in our survey material. And lastly – we have a fourth group of TU reps where both formal and informal meetings are lacking. In table 4 we show the size of the different types of company level cooperation.

Table 4. Four types of cooperation and the share of TU reps belonging to each category. Percent (n=1612) (Alsos et al. 2015)

| | | Informal cooperation | |
|--------------------|---|----------------------|----|
| | | + | - |
| Formal cooperation | + | 42 | 14 |
| | - | 15 | 29 |

While the TU reps in group 1 fit with the image of a Norwegian model of labour relations, the fourth group is more difficult to place. It seems reasonable to assume that some kind of formal or informal contact between the parties must be in place in order to say that cooperation exists. Through multivariate analysis we have seen that size of the company and industry matters. We have also seen that TU reps in higher positions participate more than those on the shop floor. The same goes for those who work in companies that have been through reorganisation processes. However, 29 percent of the TU reps do neither participate in formal nor in informal cooperation. Could we still talk about the presence of the Norwegian model of labour relations when these features are lacking?

The qualitative material showed that lack of activity could, but did not necessarily relate to a bad-functioning relationship between the two parties. Inactivity was more often explained by lack of interest or attention at both sides, and/or that the management and the TU rep did not manage to find the time for discussing these issues. Members at the work place did not necessarily see the use of involving the TU rep(s). They preferred to approach the manager directly with their questions or ideas. The manager discussed matters of interest with other managers, and did not see TU reps as a partner in solving problems or as contributors to efficiency and productivity. The TU reps were aware of the situation, but did not manage or had not tried to change it. None of the companies were harmed by any form of crisis. What would happen in these companies if a situation evolved where collective institutions were needed? Would the parties manage to evoke the institutions, or would the lack of practice make this a difficult task? TU reps in companies that had been through a reorganisation process the last two year, reported a more active cooperation at local level, than those who

had not. This indicates that there is a possibility for revitalisation of the cooperation at local level.

When talking about the Norwegian model of labour relations, trust is embedded in the models institutions (Hernes 2006, Trygstad & Hagen 2007). Trust make the parties enable to act, to reach a consensus, to give and take. One question is whether there exists trust between the parties who do not actually cooperate. Trust require predictability which may evolve through repetitive actions like meetings on regular basis. The parties may have a good relationship as colleagues, but still be lacking the trust and experience on how to act as representatives for parties with different interests. When trusts exist, role respect will evolve. It is hard to believe that trust will appear if there are no or very seldom formal meetings and informal talks and discussing among the management and the TU rep. We would therefor argue that lack practice and as a consequence trust, could lead to the collective institutions at local level malfunctioning when it really matters.

How strong is the leg of local cooperation?

We started off arguing that corrosion of the local level would jeopardize the articulation mechanisms, and the top-down coordination that is seen as a central feature of the Norwegian model of labour relation. As shown earlier, only half of employees within the private sector are covered by collective agreements. For those covered a considerable share of TU reps report that there is no TU activity at local level.

One variable that explained the existence of passive or excluded TU reps was the number of employees at the work place. This indicates that splitting companies into smaller companies or smaller branches would affect the functioning of collective institutions at local level. Within company structures we can see two opposite trends. One the one hand public administration and private companies tend to outsource certain services like cleaning, refectories and more. If looking at the labour force, employment within manufacturing has dropped considerably the last 15 years, while the employment in retail trade, hotels and restaurants and support service activities has increased (www.ssb.no National Statistics, National accounts). On the other hand, especially within retail and hotels and restaurants smaller companies have, in order to be competitive, joined larger strings of retail shops or hotels. This does however not necessarily mean that the local unit gets bigger, but rather is a

part of a bigger structure. Knowing that appearance of cooperation at company level seem to appear more seldom in smaller companies, a development leading to people working in smaller units could indicate a challenge to the Norwegian model of labour relation. Furthermore, when controlled for size, our analyses indicate that companies in retail to a larger degree than other lack formal meetings and informal talks and discussions among the management and the TU rep(s). Thus, employees working in the private service sector are less likely covered by strong local collective institutions than those employed in industries like manufacturing and construction. An ongoing outsourcing of services as mentioned above, in combination with a shrinking manufacturing industry, could therefore challenge the Norwegian model at local level or what we also have labelled as the one leg. Whether this represents a new development in the Norwegian labour market, or has been the situation for many years we do not know. If the latter is the case this could mean that the Norwegian model of labour relation stands steady despite of the fact that one of the legs is fragile. However, as shown by Barth & Nergaard (2015) collective institutions at local level have dropped both in number and in the breadth of issues discussed. In this situation, the significant share of inactive or missing collective institutions at local level could represent a new situation, where the effect at central level is yet to be seen.

Conclusion

The Norwegian model of labour relations is usually described by features like high level of unionization, high level of coverage of industry level collective agreements, multi-level cooperation based on (tripartite) central coordination and relatively strong cooperation at company level (Dølvik 2008, 2013, Stokke et al. 2013). In sum, these provide both individual and collective co-determination rights at the workplace. In general the organized parts of the labour market are characterized by well-established channels for voice through union representatives, and a climate of co-operation and trust. The prototype of the model is located in big companies in manufacturing but is also present in public sector. In this paper we have tried to identify the model at company level, and we succeeded. However, the model could only be identified in part of the labour market in private sector. A surprisingly big share of the TU reps in our material does not fit into the model.

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