



English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2020:22

Employees' experiences of participation and co-determination at NTNU

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The main topic of this report is employees' opportunities for participation at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), and how employees' opportunities for and experiences with participation and co-determination unfold within NTNU. The report addresses three issues. First, we examine:

1. the employees' experiences of influence over their professional work, and of control and management of their own work situation. Further, how this vary between different employee groups.

The universities have had their own traditions related to participation and co-determination. At NTNU, as at other Norwegian universities, the collegial participation model is important, Academic staff, technical/administrative staff, younger employees and not least the students — everyone should have opportunities to participate at the university. A board model has been introduced at all three levels (department, faculty and centrally) and the composition of the boards reflects the different groups at the university. The collegial participation model also has another aspect: individual participation is based on ideals of participatory democracy, where general meetings are a key activity. In recent decades, new management ideals have gained ground; management at NTNU is now appointed rather than elected at all levels.

In general, employees' opportunities for participation and influence are a key component of the Norwegian working life model. When describing the model, the social partners are an important element; we find cooperation at central level between the employer federations, the central union organisations and the state (tripartite cooperation), and cooperation between management (employer) and trade union representatives in the individual enterprises and workplaces. Organised cooperation between the employer and the trade unions, as well as interaction between employer/management and shop stewards from various unions are part of what is referred to in NTNU's management system as their system for co-determination. This brings us to the second issue encompassed in our study:

2. Does the co-determination system help employees find that they can also influence decisions of a more general nature, through their representatives?

Individual employees gain influence through the opportunities that exist for participation and co-determination. NTNU is a large organisation with several organisational levels and a large number of units. Our third issue is therefore:

3. to investigate whether and how employees' experience of participation and co-determination varies according to level, whether it differs 1) at faculty and rector level, and 2) at departmental level and below?

The report uses several different data sources to answer these questions. We rely on management documents, laws and agreements that regulate how co-determination and participation should take place at NTNU, and that help set the framework for this. A large part of the project is based on qualitative interviews with employees in four case departments, in which we examine how employees at NTNU can participate in their departments, and which arenas can be used for both direct participation and indirect representation at department level. Furthermore, we have interviewed participants in the central and in many of the local cooperation committees, in order to shed light on how the co-determination system works in practice. The qualitative data are combined with quantitative data from the employee survey at NTNU, the so-called ARK survey. These data form a central part of the analyses of the first issue addressed in our study, the individual's participation in their own work, and in various decisions adopted at NTNU.

In Chapter 3, we review the formal aspects of the governance structure and the various systems of participation and co-determination at NTNU. The formal management structure at NTNU has three levels (rector, dean and department heads), although NTNU's organisational structure can have as many as 5 levels. In NTNU's organisation, the rector and dean are responsible to their boards. At the department level, department boards can make decisions within the area of authority that is delegated to the department, while department councils and extended management groups are only advisory bodies for the department head. Employees are represented in governing bodies at all three levels (central/faculty/department). The rector and dean are counterparts to the trade unions through the central and the local collaboration committees, respectively, while the head of department is responsible for the various participation schemes at department level(s).

In Chapter 4, we examine employer/trade union cooperation in practice, and how this contributes to co-determination and participation for the individual employee, and at different levels at NTNU. In general, there seems to be a good climate of cooperation between employers and shop stewards in both the central cooperation committee and the local committees, although occasionally there are issues about which shop stewards feel that there is little time for case pre-

paration. Some shop stewards experience that there is (too) little real participation, and little they can influence. There are several reasons for this: many of the issues they deal with originate outside NTNU in the form of government projects and initiatives, and the unions at NTNU can have little influence on the premises for these issues. Many of the issues dealt with in the local cooperation committees are only for information, as the discussions are handled at a lower departmental level. While the 'big' overarching issues are handled in the co-determination system, our interviews indicate that there is little contact between shop stewards and ordinary employees at department level, which limits the possibility for employees at that level to grasp such major issues via the trade union based system.

One way of linking participation at department level with the co-determination system is through the local co-operation committees, which should supervise whether and how participation processes at department level have been implemented. We find that the local cooperation bodies carry out inspections of participation at department level by checking whether there has been participation on the issues that come from the departments up to the committee, but few investigate how and whether participation at department level works in general. Furthermore, these systems can be linked, as issues from the departments can be raised to the local cooperation committees. We find that issues from the departments are rarely raised with the local cooperation committees; they are resolved at department level or raised with the management line, to the faculty. The local cooperation committees also do not function as an appeal body for issues that are not resolved at departmental level.

In Chapter 5, the ARK survey is used to shed light on employees' experience of participation and influence at NTNU. The survey shows that the employees at NTNU consider their job autonomy to be good. This applies to both individuals' self-determination over their own work and the opportunities to control or change their work situation. We find that various organisational and individual characteristics to some extent affect employees' participation in decision-making processes and their own job autonomy. At the same time, there is a relation between these issues and the leader's relationship orientation, as well as the employees' relation to their colleagues as a group.

ARK provides further insight into whether employees receive information and have the opportunity to participate in various decisions, and whether they actually participate in decision-making processes that are important to them. The overall picture shows that a majority are satisfied with how they are involved when decisions are to be made. They also know which channels to use to influence decisions. However, there is a significant minority who believe that their involvement in decisions that affect them is not good enough. Furthermore, a large proportion of the employees believe that they have a good opportunity to

obtain information about matters that are important to their work, but here too there is variation in the employees' assessments.

We also focus on how participation varies between employee groups. We find, firstly, that working in a department that has a department board increases the probability that employees have poor knowledge of and participation in decision-making processes compared to those who have a department council or an extended management team, everything else being equal. Being a PhD fellow, or another type of temporary employee, has a negative impact on participation in and information about decision-making processes.

In Chapter 6, we use our qualitative case studies to examine how participation takes place at department level, and whether and how the participation system at department level is linked to the participation systems at faculty level and centrally at NTNU. Most of the people we have interviewed are satisfied with the opportunities for participation, but in our departments there generally seems to be little room for manoeuvre as there are limited finances and few opportunities to prioritise. When there are issues to be discussed and priorities to be made, it is perceived as important that the processes are transparent, and that it is clear how different decisions were made.

In our case departments, we find examples of both extended management teams and department boards. The frequency of meetings in these bodies varies and can depend on the size of the department, tradition and previous practice by the college or NTNU. The Department of Electronic Systems is an example of a medium-sized department that has chosen frequent meetings (on a fixed day every other week). This also contributes to close contact with the academic group located in Gjøvik. At the departments where meetings of the formal participation body are held less frequently, for example a couple of times per semester, it is more difficult to use this as an arena for discussing issues that 'come up' and must be resolved quickly. Staff meetings at large institutes easily become a form of information meetings; they become so large that there is little room for discussion. However, we find that department seminars also provide an opportunity to gather all employees in the department, and these are perceived as very useful by those we interviewed. There is more room to discuss important internal issues, such as organisation, new initiatives etc. In our case departments, many discussions that are important for the individual employee's work are held at the levels below the department, for instance at the section level.

The performance appraisal interview is one way in which employees can influence their own work situation and experience of daily work through dialogue with the immediate manager, or the manager with personnel responsibilities. The performance appraisal interview is supposed to be held once a year, but a large proportion state in the ARK survey that they have not had an appraisal in the last 12 months. ARK shows that most people find the performance appraisal

interview useful. Another way in which the individual can participate is through direct contact with the head of department. In our case departments, accessibility – an open door policy – is perceived as a useful way for the individual to be able to raise issues swiftly and without formality.

In Chapter 7, we discuss the safety delegate and their role and significance for participation and co-determination at NTNU. At NTNU, schemes have been established for safety work in line with the provisions of the Working Environment Act. The working environment committee (AMU) exists at central NTNU level, and safety representatives exist at central, faculty and department level. Separate guidelines have been prepared for the types of issues to be dealt with by the safety delegates, and how. The safety delegate scheme is important to ensure that all employees have a channel which bypasses the management, into the central and local cooperation committees.

At departmental level, the safety delegates find that they are contacted to varying degrees by employees with questions about assistance in matters concerning the working environment. The goal of trying to resolve issues concerning the working environment at the lowest possible level is practised, but difficult issues are raised one level above. NTNU's guidelines state that safety delegates should not enter into personnel conflicts. In practice, this seems to mean that the safety delegates in many cases pay little attention to psychosocial work environment challenges at departmental level.