

Participation and codetermination among Norwegian employees – state of the art 2009

Union members and non union members compared

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1 Introduction

Norwegian work life is known to be democratic and consensus seeking and to have strong employee rights to participate and codetermine in the planning and running of the work place and the business. Participation, collective bargaining and consensus among the social partners are assumed to contribute to work place productivity as well as national economic growth. In this paper we describe the status quo of democratic work life arrangements of today, their distributions and varieties and how they work. We intend to contribute to the understanding of work place democracy by comparing organised (unionised) employees with the unorganised, and comparing those who are in work places with collective agreements with those who are not. We ask this research questions;

Do unions matter in the establishment and practice of democratic arrangements at the work place?

This question is to be analysed by comparing employees who are union members by those who are not. The analyses are based on a survey in a representative random sample of Norwegian employees and managers undertaken the spring 2009.

“Democratic arrangements” are defined according to laws and agreements as:

- H&S (health and safety) employee rights, H&S-officers
- Work environment committees (WEC)
- Employee representation in boards
- Rights to be informed
- TU reps (shop stewards and representation at different levels)
- Company councils, department councils, negotiation councils (TU reps)
- Rights to participate, codetermine and to information and discussions about changes
- Collective bargaining rights and collective agreements

About halve of the Norwegian work force is organised, and about 3 of 4 are covered by a collective agreement on wages and working conditions (Falkum et al 2009). Democratic work life arrangements are institutionalised over a long period of time, and as such they should be well known by the work force. This makes it reasonable to use Norway as a case for analyses of the research question.

2 Methods and data

We analyze data from a representative national survey on democratic work life arrangements in Norway conducted in February 2009 on assignment for the Ministry of labour and inclusion (Falkum et al 2009). The purpose was to give a report on the status quo of characteristics and levels of democracy in the Norwegian work life.

Fafo has built knowledge and competencies in this research field for decades (Neergaard & Stokke, Dølvik, Stokke, Seip, Trygstad 2004, Falkum 2008, Hagen 2010). This knowledge is a base for, and is reflected in the design of the project, its studies as well as the analyses presented.

Two methods were used in the project. First we made qualitative interviews with shop stewards and managers in 30 work places in public and private sector. Some of them had no collective agreement and their employees were not organised. However, in the recruiting of work places to participate in the study we got strong indications that “the worst cases” denied to participate. Those were small private enterprises where we assumed management either to be against unions and employee representation or to perceive the study as some sort of control that might jeopardise them. The interviews were used to design the quantitative survey, to illustrate analyses of quantitative data and to help understand findings.

Secondly; we made a randomised representative survey among employees and managers. This is the main data in the following analyses. The survey was partly based on previous surveys in 53 different work places in altogether 12 large corporations and public services (Falkum 2008). Questions from these work place studies were adapted to a national survey. The interviews in the 30 work places were also used to design questions. The survey contained 39 main question batteries with altogether 323 variables. A survey sample of 8000 persons was drawn from the national employee – employer register by the Statistics Norway (SSB) who also conducted the technical administration of the survey and finally delivered the statistics to us (SPSS file). The questionnaire were distributed by the national mail system directly to each member of the sample and returned directly by mail to Statistics Norway in ready addressed and stamped envelopes. The net sample of answers was 3362 in the end. This is controlled and found representative for Norwegian employees (included managers) along variables like gender, age, education, sectors and industries and so on. It is compared with samples in several other major surveys like AKU (Arbeidskraftundersøkelsen), Levekårsundersøkelsen (living conditions), both periodical surveys conducted by Statistics Norway, and a major HAS-survey conducted by Fafo in 2007 (Bråten et al 2008). The net sample of our survey is statistically representative and well fit for analyses (Falkum et al 2009). The analyses are all made by the authors in collaboration.

The survey was obtained in the spring of 2009. The financial crisis was at its peak, and the pessimists forecasted 8 – 10 percent unemployment in the end of 2009 (Professor Salvanes, Aftenposten). This is taken into consideration in the analysis, albeit the impacts of the crisis on employee survey answers are hard to define and measure without data obtained at different periods of time.

3 General findings

Market liberalism was renewed by Milton Friedman in the beginning of the 1980s. This was soon adapted and implemented in political regulations in various ways in most countries in the western sphere. In England it gave heavy governmental attacks on the unions, recognized as “Tatcherism”. In Norway finances were deregulated and liberalized in ways that ended in recession in the late 1980s. EU extended the free float of labour, especially from 1994. None of the famous organisation management concepts from the 1980s and 1990s included unions,

stewards, codetermination or collective agreements as concepts, actors or conditions for successful implementation (Andersen 2003).

The internationalisation, and later on the globalisation of economies reduced the influences and powers of unions by some employers like Rupert Murdoch, and by right wing politicians, at least in some countries. The new “truths” and their regimes, regulations and prescriptions were perceived of as threats and powers that in worst case would dismantle the labour movement completely and wipe out interests that was struggled for since long (Standing 2010).

Whether unions, collective bargaining and employee participation have effects on business performance is discussed in numerous articles (Arthur 1994, Perotin & Robinson 2000, Addison & Belfield 2001, Freeman et al 2001). Kvinge & Grimsrud (2006) found the results on these research questions inconclusive in their literature review. Variables in the different models are hard to define, make operational and measure in comparable ways across businesses, regions and nations. The question of connections between work place democracy and productivity has no final answer. However, this debate also relates to different perspectives on work place democracy. HR (Human Relations/Human Resource Management) perspectives support the idea of employee participation (Graham) and direct individual influence on work situation and relations (Gustavsen et al, Levin et al 2002). IR (Industrial Relations) perspectives support institutionalised labour rights and representative and indirect democracy in work life and at work places (Dunlop, Stokke, Dølvik). Goddard & Delany (2000) concluded that the HR perspectives seemed to out concur the IR perspectives. Thus the debate seems to conceive of HR perspectives as opposing IR perspectives or the two kinds of arrangements to be incompatible.

In Norway the democratic arrangements at the work places have been carried and supported as codes of conduct by large industrial companies like Norsk Hydro, Norske Skog, Statoil and also by Norwegian parts of multinationals like Siemens since the 1940s and 1950s. The roles of these large corporations change as the globalisation of economies expands. The public sector has taken over as main carrier of democratic work life institutions and practices. Trygstad (2004) analyse and discuss democratic arrangements and processes in public sector. Hagen (2010) analyse and discuss relations between corporate governance and industrial relations in corporations. Together (Hagen & Trygstad 2007) they find the debate on HR and IR somewhat misleading and conclude that IR arrangements most likely will support HR arrangements, and not concur them. This is further discussed in the final part of the paper. The general findings of our survey, however, support their assumption.

A stable regime of labour regulations

In 2009, almost thirty years after “new market liberalism”, we would expect to find it’s tracks as a liberalisation of labour regulations and workers rights. Our survey shows, however, that 91 percent of managers and 93 percent of employees mean that it is “most important” that labour laws and collective agreements are recognised and obeyed at the work places. These laws, agreements and formal regulations have undergone only minor changes since the 1970s (Falkum 2008). The democratic arrangements and regulations are, in other words, strongly supported by a large majority. The position of the unions and TU reps seem to be stable and only minor harmed by the globalisation so far, even though the share of unionised employees are reduced by five to ten percent since the mid 1980s. The employment rates have increased in the same period, and we have had the same transfer from industrial to service related occupations as in most other countries. That will explain some of the drop in unionisation. 92 percent of employees in public, and 55 percent in private sector were covered by collective agreements in 2007 (Bråten et al 2009), and 93 percent in public and 52 percent in private in

2009 (Falkum et al 2009). Neergård & Stokke (2010), using register data, shows that 63 percent of all employees were covered by collective agreements in 1998, and 59 percent in 2008. The studies altogether show stability in the labour regulation, despite decline and different methods and measures in the three reported studies.

Democracy by law or by agreements?

A rather clear frontier is normally drawn in Norwegian work life between participation and codetermination that are legitimated by legal acts or collectively bargained agreements (Trygstad & Hagen 2007). Analyses of labour history show that the government normally promotes legal acts as best means to regulate labour relations, that employers associations prefer agreements for laws and that the labour union (LO) have been more pragmatic to the two different ways to legitimate rights and obligations (Falkum 2008). The social partners, politicians and labour researchers have all assumed that the way arrangements are legitimated is crucial to the way they diffuse, are organised and work. It seems to be less important at the work places. Both managers and employees are rather pragmatic to the formal bases for the arrangements. How they are practiced and contribute at the work place seems to be more important.

Distribution of democratic arrangements

Despite the overwhelming support to the democratic arrangements, they are not fully implemented to the extent they should;

- 2 of 10 work in work places that should have HAS-stewards but have not
- 2 of 3 should have H&S committees, but have not
- 1 of 3 has company boards (BU)
- 2 of 3 practice the rights to board representation in private sector, everyone in public sector
- 1 of 6 has reps in corporate councils (konsernutvalg)
- 1 of 20 has European Works Council (EWC)
- 8 of 10 participate in management – employee gatherings
- 8 of 10 have individual employee - management consultations (medarbeidersamtale)

These are average measures. There are lots of variations from one work place to the other. However we find only minor and insignificant differences between industries, sectors, size (number of employees), age, gender or education (Falkum et al 2009). However, if one of the arrangements is established it is more likely that you have several. 1 of 6 works in work places with none of the described democratic arrangements, 4 of 10 practice all of them. And some of the work places have organised free willing arrangements that are not defined or described in either laws or agreements.

Despite the lacking practice of HAS arrangements prohibited by law, the multiple democratic arrangements are established to a rather great extent and they are in use, as we shall see.

Use of the arrangements

In the survey we listed 27 different issues that are assumed to be handled in some kind of employee management relations. We asked the respondents to mark what kind of issues that was handled in the different cooperative arenas at the work place. We found that

- An “average” HAS committee handles 15 of the 27 issues and only insignificant differences across sectors and industries

- The larger the work place (number of employees), the more issues handled by HAS committee (only numbers for private sector)
- Direct participation and employee consultations (medarbejdersamtaler) are the arenas where most issues are handled first
- HAS stewards are more important at the largest work places than in the smaller
- Shop stewards (union reps) are the most wide spread and most used arrangement
- The handling of the different issues in democratic arenas influences the results to a “medium degree”, but more on HAS issues
- The communication between the social partners at work place level is mostly informal
- On average managers and shop stewards spend 5 to 9 hours a month on local industrial relations

The democratic arrangements are in use and matters in the handling of issues of concern for labour processes and employee - management relations. Democracy is at work on individual as well as collective levels at the work places. The disputes on the importance of HR over IR among the social partners, labour researchers and labour politicians are not reflected on work place levels. On the contrary; employees and managers seem to relate to HR and IR in a pragmatic way. The point is not where democratic arrangements came from or how they are legitimated, but how the work in order to realize the interests of employees as well as management. This supports Trygstad & Hagen's (2007) assumption that the controversies between IR and HR perspectives and agents are exaggerated. At work place level this debate is of minor relevance.

Some organisational impacts of work place democracy

The survey shows that the legitimacy of management is highly correlated with the cooperative climate at the work place (0.68**). Legitimacy is defined by the respondents' perceptions of managerial performance. Cooperative climate is defined as respondents' perceptions of human and industrial relations at the work place.

We found a significant correlations between three different forms of employee influence and organisational clarity (0.19** - 0.38**). The respondents influence on “their own work situation”, “the organisation of work” and “the governing and management of business” were significantly correlated with a “clear distribution of responsibility, tasks, decision-making, information and resources”. The more democratic distributions the more influence and vice versa.

In the same ways we found that democratic arrangements and employee influence are positively correlated with their perceptions of effectiveness, ability to change and business performance at the work place.

Summary

The analysis of the survey concludes that the formal regulations are highly accepted and recognised as such, but also that they are interpreted and practised in various ways. The formal rules and content in laws and agreements are less important than the dominating norm of employee and management cooperation. Employees and managers seem to use cooperation as a mode of conduct no matter what issue at stake. At work place level IR perspectives seem to be fully compatible with HR perspectives, and direct employee participation and union representation are to sides of the same coin. Norwegian work life is highly dominated by a culture of cooperation between managers and unions. (Falkum et al 2009). In the following we describe the differences between union members and unorganised employees. Do unions matter?

4 Differences between union members and non members and collective and private agreements

Organised workers and union members are respondents who have joined LO (Confederation of labour unions in Norway), UNIO (confederation of unions for employees with education from universities and colleges), Akademikerne (confederation for organised employees with academic education), YS (confederation of occupational organisations) and other organisations. These are compared with those who are not members of any of the employee/labour organisations.

Some general differences

Lots of industrial plants and businesses are changed and modernised by technology. Businesses are restructured. New enterprises are raised and old ones are closed down. 100 000 employees are transferred from industrial production and the origin of labour unions to other industries/branches since the mid 1980s. The part of organised workers in the work force has not dropped accordingly, but it is of interest to explore what characterise the unionised employees with the non-members. Table 1 show some obvious differences.

Table 1 Union members and non-members, employees with collective agreement and employees without, by some independent variables (percents)

Characteristic	Collective agreement (n=2206)	Private agreement (n=636)	Union Members (n=2277)	Non-member (n=795)
Females	60	65	57	43
Above 40 years old	58	64	71	59
Work place with less than 50 employees	9	38	9	33
University education (1.& 2. levels)	45	43	48	40
Working part time	23	9	21	15
Have shifted job during the last two years	24	32	25	32
Living in central region (Oslo Akershus)	22	32	22	32
Private sector	36	93	39	83
Trade and sales related work	8	13	3	11
Industry, construction, mainten., oil & gas	9	22	11	18
Managers with responsibility for others	15	31	15	25

These are the most striking differences in work life connections between the four groups of employees. The non members and those with private agreements are more often males and they are younger than the union members. Non members and respondent with private agreements are more often to be found at the small work places. A larger share of the union members has high education compared to the non members. Non members and employees

with private agreements more often have full time jobs than the union members and those with collective agreement and they shift job more often. The share of non members that work in the central region is larger than the share of union members and those with collective agreement that works there. The parts of non members and employees with private agreement that work in private sector, sales and trade, industry, construction, maintenance and oil & gas are larger than those parts of the union members. The most significant of these differences is the fact that employees in small work places more often are unorganised and have private agreements than in larger work places. A larger share of non members has managerial responsibilities than among union members. This is an even larger part for those with private agreements, as expected. The unorganized work force differs from union members along these characteristics.

Employees' perceptions of the work place

Most employee surveys on work place, industry or national levels show a pleased work force that supports their employer, business and management. Figure 1 explores differences and similarities in the answers from union members compared to non members.

Figure 1 Union members and non-members by perceptions of the work place characteristics (percent og respondents who "agree/fully agree" in the statements)

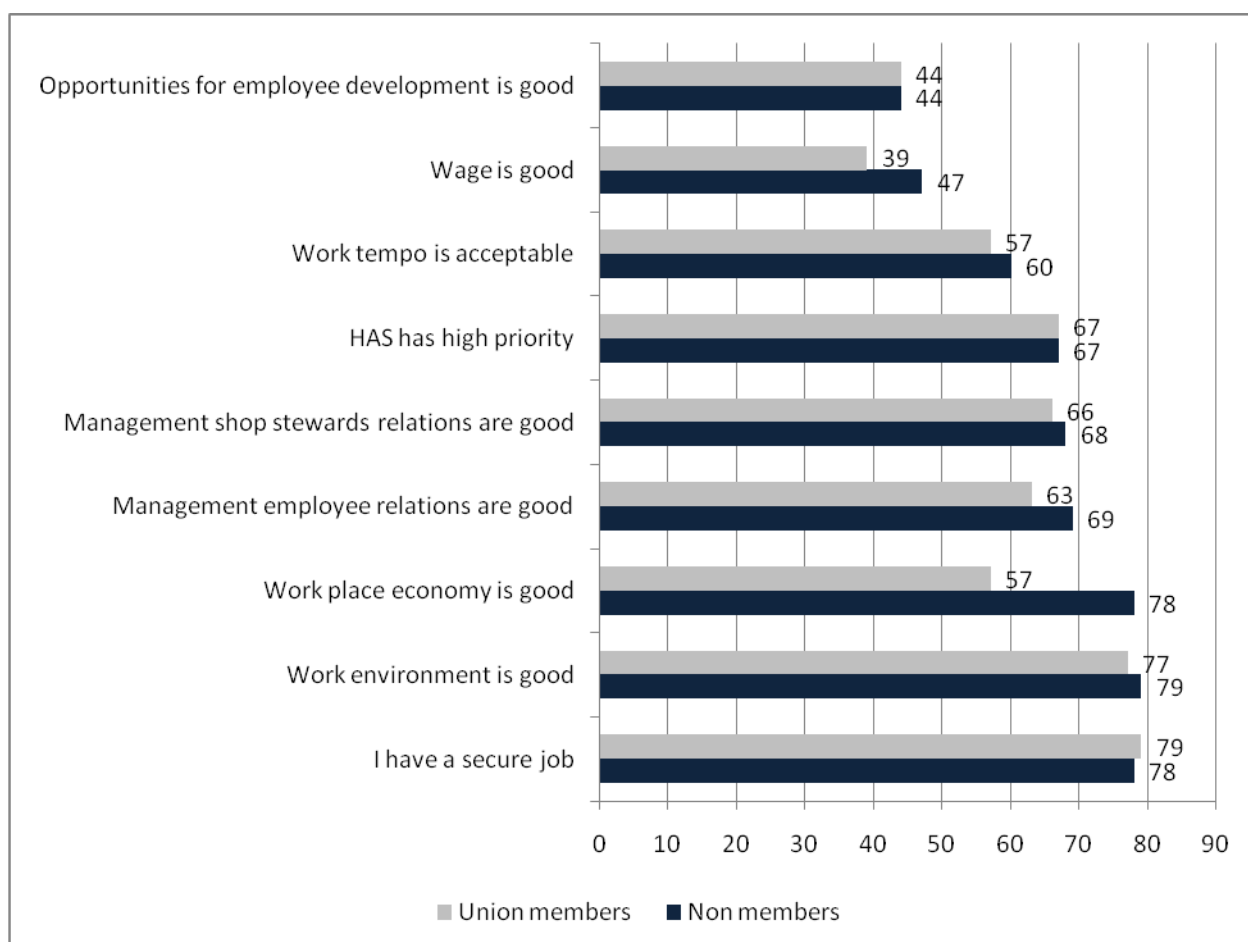
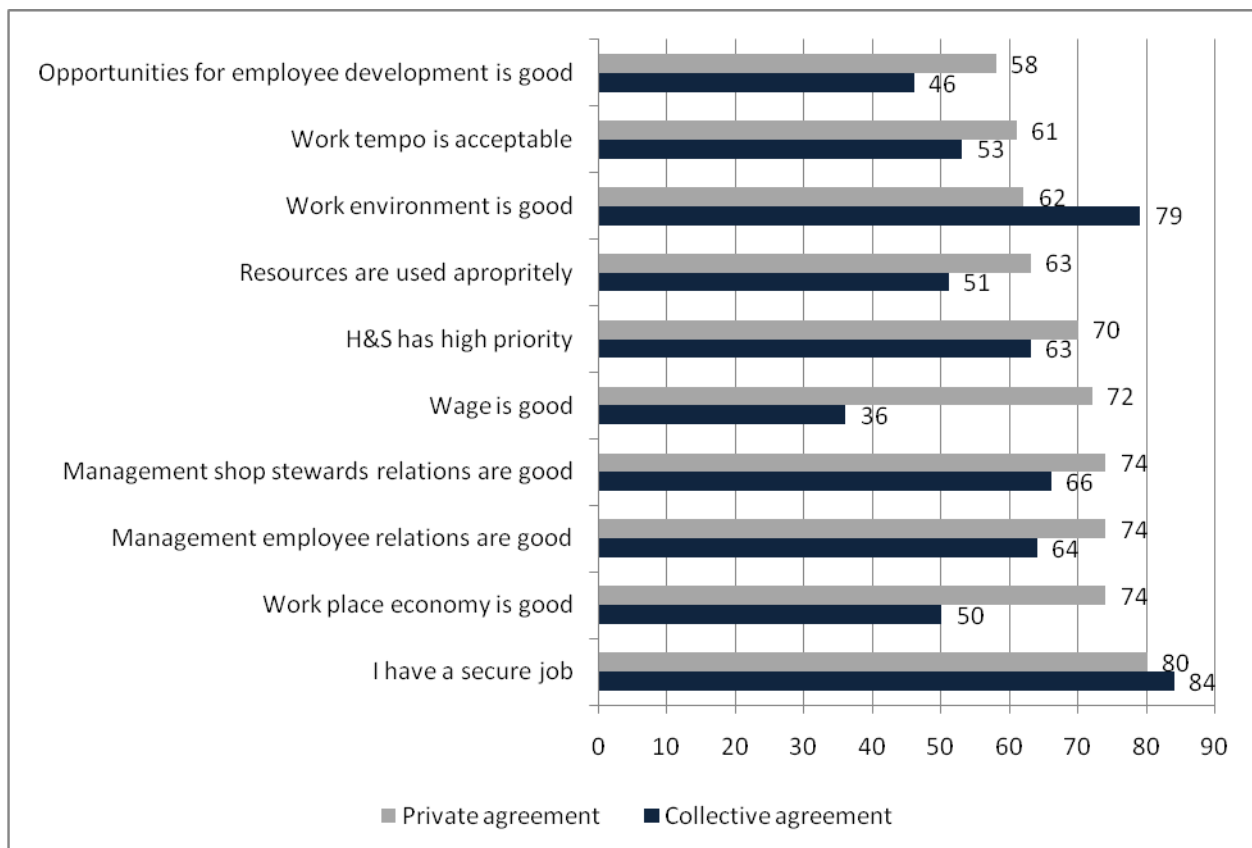


Figure 1 shows that the union members and non members have almost similar perceptions of the work place characteristics at hand. They differ significantly only on two of the variables; union members are much more negative to the work place economy, and they think the wages are too low to a greater extent than the non members. Unions are legitimated by fight for better wages, thus they are assumed to have more information about wage levels in comparable businesses as input for evaluations and opinions. Thus they are more concerned about the economic situation at the work place. In addition their representatives at company councils normally get continuous information about business performance. However, the similarities between the two groups are more striking than the differences. Figure 2 shows the same perceptions for those with collective agreements compared to those with private agreements.

Figure 2 Employees with collective agreements and private agreements by perceptions of the work place characteristics (percent og respondents who "agree/fully agree" in the statements)



Collective vs private agreement and wage formation seem to split employee perceptions of work place characteristics significantly. Those with collective agreements have better work environments, they are somewhat more secure on their job situation and they are less pleased with their wages and the business performance by far compared to those with private agreements. Collective agreements demand communication, shared information and collective debates about these issues while private agreements are handled in individual relations. Thus the conditions for developing perceptions, reflections and opinions in the two "spheres" are very different and will affect the respondents conceptions of their work places. This is assumedly reflected in the figure.

Comparing figure 1 and figure 2 it is reasonable to conclude that collective agreements create processes and structures that influence more on employee's perceptions, conceptions and attitudes than union membership alone. On the other hand; collective bargaining and agreements are the main means and tools of the unions. As we shall see; 87 percent of union members have collective agreements vs 34 percent of the non members. Comparison of figure 1 and 2 thus allows for a conclusion; collective agreements affect the understandings and opinions of non union members to resemble the understandings and opinions of the unions.

Democratic arrangements compared

Table 2 Access to democratic arrangements at the work place for union members and non members, and collective and private agreements place (Percents)

Democratic arrangements	Members (n=2277)	Collective agreement (n=2142)	Non-members (n=795)	Private agreement (n= 624)
Collective bargained wages	87	-	34	-
H&S steward	87	87	74	77
H&S committee	67	66	44	51
Information and consultation	42	41	28	35
Employee comp. board reps	49	47	48	56
TU reps/shop stewards	88	87	64	70
Interest org./ union/ house com	87	86	45	51
Works council /BU	16	15	12	15
Negotiation council	33	32	13	18
Recruitment council	45	45	15	16
Corporate steward	24	22	15	21
Corporate council	12	11	7	11
EWC	4	4	3	3
Employee consultation	86	85	80	87
Employee/managem. conferences	84	84	82	79
Cooperative body without union reps	16	16	14	17

*Respondents with education at university and college excluded

** Union members: 48 percent answer that they don't know, non members 43 percent don't know

Some of the respondents are not union members, but have private agreements. Some are members but have no agreements. The column for “Private agreements” thus have both members and non members, while “Members” includes employees with private agreements.

The most striking observation is that non union members have less access to democratic arrangements than all the other groups, and that work places with private agreements seem to have established democratic arrangements in line with those with collective arrangements but on lower levels; significant for H&S committees, shop stewards, company and negotiation councils. And they score higher on board reps. They practice private agreements but have collective structures and democratic arrangements to get along.

The table compares union members with non members for access to democratic arrangements defined by laws or agreements. A majority of union members and 1/3 of the non members have wages that are collectively bargained. This is one of the main reasons for the existence of unions; to make employees have their just shares of value added in production. In this perspective it is surprising that as much as 34 percent of the non union members have collectively bargained wages. Some of them are certainly free riders; non members at work places with unions and collective agreements.

Controlled for education (48 percent of members and 40 percent of non members have education at university level) and for managerial tasks/responsibilities we find no significant change in access to democratic arrangements. We have also excluded union members in public sector to see if the scores would change. We found some significant differences between union members in private sector compared to members in public sector;

68 percent of members in private sector have employee reps at company boards, compared to 49 percent of all members. Board representation was first introduced in enterprises owned by the state, and then in shareholders companies by law in 1972. Public services and public administration are governed by political institutions and have different arrangements.

27 percent in private sector compared to 16 percent of all have works councils. The most surprising is the low percentage who has established works councils. Public sector has “administrative council” as an equivalent to works councils, and this may explain the difference.

24 percent of union members in private sector compared to 45 percent of all members have recruitment councils at the work place. This arrangement is significantly more present in public sector.

38 percent of union members in private sector and 24 percent of all members have corporate stewards, and 22 compared to 12 have corporate councils. 7 percent in private sector have European Works Councils (EWC) compared to 4 percent of all members, and 3 percent of non members. The rest of the comparison show no significant differences between members in private and public on the other variables in table 2. Except for “recruitment councils” all these significant differences are also significantly increasing the gaps between union members in private sector and non member’s altogether. We would expect it the other way round since only 83 percent of non members are in private sector and that the exclusion of union members in public sector would close the gaps.

The table shows that the differences between union members and non members are smaller for legally legitimate arrangements than those that are based on collective agreements. The legal arrangements are universal for all work places with more than 10 employees (HAS Stewards), more than 50 employees (HAS committees and employee board reps). The differences between

members and non members on these variables are to some extent explained by the fact that non members more often work at small work places than union members (see table 1). On the collectively bargained arrangements (shop stewards and below till EWC) the differences increase relatively compared to the arrangements above.

On the four bottom arrangements (EWC to cooperative body...) there are no significant differences between union members and non members. These are participation arrangements that are anchored in managerial concepts as well as main agreements. Conflicts over these issues are scarce.

The union members have access to more democratic arrangements than non members, as expected. However, the table shows that non union members work in work places with democratic arrangements. A majority of them have access to HAS stewards, shop stewards and to employee management consultation and conferences, while almost halve of them have interest organisations/house committees/unions and board reps at their work places. This should be reflected in democratic participation.

Participation

Participation is a firstly a question whether the different democratic arrangements are used and for what purpose. We have asked the respondents if they have brought up issues of work environment

Table 3 The use of democratic arrangements in work environment matters by union members, non members, collective and private agreement. ("Did you raise work environments issues in some of the democratic channels?" Percent who answered yes))

Channel	Members (n=2277)	Collective agreement (n=2142)	Non-members (n=795)	Private agreement (n= 624)
Managm./employee consulting	47	46	33	38
Directly with my leader	45	44	34	37
H&S officer	25	25	14	16
TU reps/Shop steward	26	25	9	15
Union/interest org/house com.	15	14	3	6
Work Environment Committee	9	9	5	6
Company council	1	1	1	1
In wage negotiations	6	5	3	4
Other party based channels	11	10	8	9
Board reps	4	3	3	5
Corporate steward	1	1	1	1

Union members and employees with collective agreements seem to use all the channels more than non members and those with private agreements. Some of the differences may be explained by the size of the work place. Small work places will have more direct communication that reach everyone more than in larger work places. Small work places will have lesser need for the formal democratic arrangements. We have already seen that non members and private agreements are to be found at the smaller work places. But the differences are significant also in the use of consulting and direct communication with leaders in favour of members and collective agreement. According to the size hypothesis the non members and private agreements should have scored higher than members and collective agreements.

Unions and collective agreements seem to encourage and strengthen employee participation in all channels compared to non members and private agreements. This is an important finding to be discussed in the final part.

We have asked the respondents about the major change at the work place during the last two years and how they participated and reacted to the situation.

Table 4 How respondents participated in the implementation of the last decision of major change at the work place during the last two years, by union members, non members, collective and private agreements (Percent)

Participation in decisions about change	Members (n=2277)	Collective agreement (n=2142)	Non-members (n=795)	Private agreement (n= 624)
I agreed in decision	57	58	76	78
I disagreed and brought it up with the shop steward	33	34	17	15
I disagreed and brought it up with the management	48	41	33	31
I disagreed and brought it up with my colleagues	56	57	42	38
I disagreed but kept it by myself	8	8	9	5
Participation in implementation of change				
I contributed to implementation	63	63	69	73
Pretended as nothing happened hoping for no change	21	22	13	9
Resisted to change	13	12	8	8

This table shows direct employee participation in decision making and implementation of an actual change process. Non members and those with private agreements are significantly more positive to decisions of change, and they contribute to implementation more than members and

those with collective agreements, but these differences are less significant than for decision making. When the employees voice their disagreements colleagues are the most used channel, with direct communication with management comes second. Resistance to change is scores low. Resignation and contribution seem to be preferred over loyalty or subordination, and the differences on the implementation variables in the table are smaller than for the decision making variables.

Influence

There are differences in perception of work place characteristics, access to democratic arrangements, practice of these arrangements and the employee participation in general and in change processes. Thus we assume that union membership and collective agreements will result in differences in employee influence.

Table 5 Employee influence on their own work, work organisation and business organisation (Mean scores on a scale from 1= no influence to 5 = great influence)

Influence on own work	Members (n=2277)	Collective agreement (n=2142)	Non-members (n=795)	Private agreement (n= 624)
Choice of work tasks	4,19	4,17	4,29	4,43
Conduct of my work	4,45	4,43	4,51	4,63
Quality of my work	4,52	4,51	4,57	4,63
Work organisation				
Who I work with	3,10	3,07	3,40	3,58
My own work hours	3,31	3,23	3,82	4,08
Tempo at work	3,86	3,86	4,16	4,21
Use of resources at work	3,34	3,29	3,65	3,87
Business organisation				
Strategic decisions	2,44	2,40	2,53	2,77
Quality demands	3,05	3,01	3,15	3,41
Effectivity demands	2,95	2,93	3,15	3,37
Profit demands	2,33	2,29	2,64	2,89
Work methods	3,33	3,31	3,31	3,51
Distribution of information	2,60	2,56	2,65	2,88

The included variables intend to measure employee's perceptions of their own individual influence at work; results of democratic work place arrangements. The perceptions and interpretations of one's own influence are developed in different work place contexts. Union dominated work places will be different from work places with small or no unions at all in many respects as we have seen; if there are collective or private agreements, shop stewards, company councils and other formal and representative democratic arrangements. Employees at work places with formal representative democratic bodies will expect unions and shop stewards to take care of their interests in matters of work and business organisation, and thus have lower expectations to their own individual influence on these issues than work places dominated by individual relations and private agreements. This should be kept in mind when the results are interpreted.

The table shows that non members and those under private agreements have some more influence on their choices of work tasks, but all together the differences in influence on own work are not statistically significant (Falkum et al 2009). From managerial theories about empowerment, liberal hypothesis about individual freedom and from the fact that small work places have shorter and more direct communication lines it could be argued that the non members and private agreements should have more influence than union members and those with collective agreements. However, the differences are not statistically significant.

The union members and those with collective agreements have less individual influence on work organisation than non members and employees under private agreements. The difference in influence on work organisation is quite small, but statistically significant (Falkum et al 2009). Unionised work places with collective agreements are larger than non unionised work places with private agreements (see table 1). At large work places work organisation is a management task and the employee influence is supposed to be handled by union reps in appropriate democratic channels. Individual employees at unionised and non unionised work places will thus have different expectations to their own influence on work organisation. In this perspective we could argue that the observed differences could have been bigger.

The differences in union members and non member's influences on business organisation are not statistically significant (Falkum et al 2009). However, the differences between collective and private agreements are statistical significant. Employees with private agreements have more influence on business organisation. Influence on business organisation is definitely not a matter of individual influence at large unionised work places. On the contrary; that kind of influence is one of the union's power bases and a matter for union representative's codetermination, not for individual employee participation.

Summary

Our data shows that the differences in work place democracy between union members and non members are smaller than assumed in the work life. Democratic arrangements are established and practised at non unionised work places, if not to the extent as at unionised work places. Furthermore, the battles over legitimacy and anchoring of the arrangements seem to have no impact on praxis at work place level. Collective agreements are the main tools for union influence at work places and have great impact on the employee's perceptions of work place relations and performance compared to the existence of unions. It is what they do that matters.

5 Discussion

The bottom line finding is that the unorganised work places resemble the organised and unionised work places. Most Norwegian employees have access to democratic arrangements in some or another shape. These arrangements are in use and Norwegian employees have influence on work and work organisation. Unions and the representative democratic channels seem to give employee's collective influence on business organisation to some extent. Again; we underline that our sample probably catch the well functioning work places and that a complete picture should include the worst case work places according to Norwegian standards. However, they could correct the pictures in some directions, but they are hard to recruit to surveys like this. Norwegian work life is not divided in the unorganised vs the organised. The democratic arrangements are strongly supported by managers as well as employees and the complete work life seems to be democratic.

The second crucial finding is that the anchoring of democratic arrangements does not matter in democratic praxis at the work places. Employees and managers at the work place level pay attention and recognise the cooperation that gives consensus in decision making and participation in implementation processes and ignore whether they follow legal rules or negotiated agreements. Intentions to share efforts and results seem to rule praxis. The individual employee participation and direct influence on own work situation is supported by the representative democratic arrangements and union influence on business and work organisation. The HR and IR perspectives seem to be compatible and mutually supportive at the work places.

Do unions matter? By looking at the data and results of our survey one could easily jump to the conclusion that the differences between union members and non members are small and indicates that the unions are no longer reasonable or appropriate in today's work life. However, we insist to turn the question the other way round; why do non members with private agreements resemble union members with collective agreements so much as they do?

The survey data is convincing; the collective agreements determine social relations as well as codes of conduct at the work places. Collective bargaining and collective agreements stems from union demands. They are developed as solutions to serious conflicts between labour and capital, employees and employers over decades. Together with labour laws they institutionalise agreed solutions as formal rights on both sides. When institutions work they constitute and legitimise social norms that determine relations, roles and ways to act. Over time these norms are followed by the social partners, their members and after some time by managers, TU reps and employees. The democratic arrangements become rules for "the universal way things are done" in Norwegian work life. We have shown these norms to influence the understandings as well as the actions and the behaviour of union members as well as non members. Unions seem to matter in the case of Norway.

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