

Research - Knowledge - Action  
- for a better working life



# Enterprise development and employee participation

Senior Researcher Anne Inga Hilsen,  
Oslo, August 19th 2009

**AFI** ARBEIDSFORSKNINGSINSTITUTTET  
**WRI** WORK RESEARCH INSTITUTE

[www.afi.no](http://www.afi.no)

# The Work Research Institute (WRI)

- WRI's main objective is to produce research-based knowledge about work environment, organisation and management
- WRI was founded in 1964 by Einar Thorsrud, supporting research experiences made as part of the Industrial Democracy Programme in Norway

*As of July 1, 2002, the Work Research Institute became a wholly-owned governmental limited company. From January 1, 2005, the government ownership has been administered by the Ministry of Education and Research. The responsibility of governance was simultaneously delegated to Oslo University College in co-operation with Vestfold and Agder University Colleges*

# Democratisation of work life

- From Tavistock Institute of Human Relations to enterprise development and broad participation – a Norwegian story
- Industrial Democracy Programme 1950s & 60s – involved key industrial enterprises and researchers
- Generating new theory and new practice in work life
- WRI's research approach is linked to a Norwegian and international action research tradition. It involves emphasis on process oriented methods. The approach represents a conscious anchoring of the research in democratic values.

# Defining action research

“Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world-view”  
*(Reason & Bradbury 2001)*

- Action research seeks **contextualized, “actionable”, co-generated or co-constructed knowledge** / understanding about human phenomena of importance to those in the setting being studied

# Enterprise development and employee participation in Norway – the background

- Broad class compromises established in the 1930s, initiating a long-lasting co-operative partnership between capital, labour and the state
- Social democracy, strong state in the financial market, state or mixed ownership in many of the major corporations (as in the oil sector)
- Institutionalised cooperation between the labour market parties (the social partners) through collective agreements and national programmes for enterprise development on a national level

# Enterprise development and broad participation (involvement of workers)

- Broad participation and social dialogue is the basis for the Norwegian Model
- Broad participation is essential to develop new local practises based on local knowledge and competencies
- Broad participation
  - Because it broadens the pool of knowledge and competencies behind decision-making in an enterprise
  - Because it is a democratic right and duty in a democratic society, supported by legislation and collective agreements
  - Because it ensures broad support of the measures and initiatives taken

# Case1: Enterprise development and broad participation in an international company

- Continued support of enterprise development in an industrial enterprise since ED2000
- Facilitating processes of change
- Organising for participation
  - Dialogue conferences, task forces at all levels of the enterprise, survey-feedback methods etc



# *Enterprise development and employee participation in an international company – challenges and learning*

## Challenges I: “Lost in translation”

- Why Norwegian management is not lack of management – convincing foreign owners
  - Explain the Norwegian Model to owners from a more hierarchical business culture
  - Link the Norwegian experiences to international discussions and trends in business

# Challenges II: Why the slow way is fastest in the long run

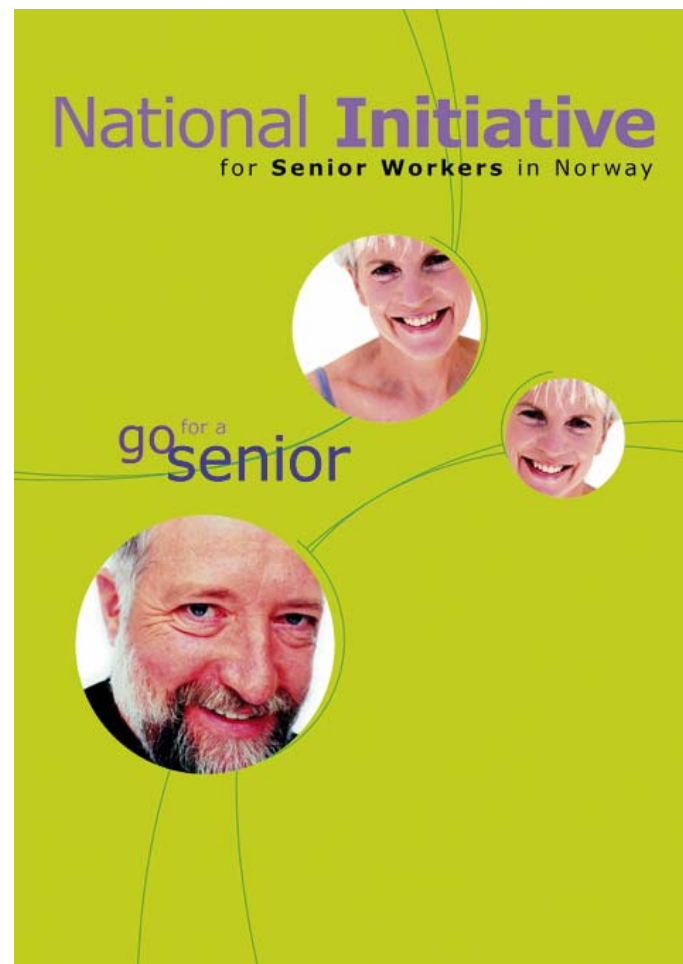
- Advanced and technologically challenging production requires competence and participation in production and innovation – investing in competence is investing in good production
- Broad participation in enterprise development is highly valued
- Few disruptive conflicts
- High employee commitment

# Challenges III: Arguing the value of employee participation

- Supported by research
  - The role of WRI to document and explain
  - Access to international research networks and conferences where the case can gain acknowledgment and support

# Case 2: The participative research approach in the field of active ageing

- Project in a large Governmental agency (NIS)
- Network of 9 work places at three levels in three counties
- Development project based on broad participation and tripartism and a participative research approach



# Promoting active ageing through changing perceptions of ageing



Typical older workers?

- Who are “older workers”?
- Would it be better for them not to work?
- From old and frail to experienced and able - the resource perspective in active ageing

# Conclusion

Participation in change work at the enterprise level

- | Broad participation – not develop solutions for others
- | Tripartism to confirm the interest of developing better and more productive workplaces

Promoting active ageing through enterprise development



Changed perceptions of seniors

- | Exploring the meaning of being a senior
- | Exploring the value of experience-based competence

Changed practice demonstrates that seniors are being recognized as resources to the enterprise

Demonstrated in examples of cross-generational learning, systematic appreciation of experience-based competence, organisation of age diverse teams/groups,

# Enterprise development and employee participation – because it works...

- Local bottom-up process of developing new practice and new knowledge supports national broad cooperation on solving work life problems: the social dialogue
- The social dialogue as a force for innovation and change, - and for strengthening democratic governance
- The EU context: *...EUs fundamental task of consolidating the European model of economic and social development and securing prosperity while ensuring solidarity (COM(2002) 341 final)*

# Contact information:

Anne Inga Hilsen

Senior researcher

Work Research Institute, Oslo

Mob.: +47 926 62 169

[anne.inga.hilsen@afi-wri.no](mailto:anne.inga.hilsen@afi-wri.no)

# More information at:

[www.afi.no](http://www.afi.no)