

# Democratic Early Childhood Education and Care Management? The Norwegian Case

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## Abstract

Available research from the 1980s and 1990s suggests that Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Centres have been characterised by democratic and non-hierarchical management. This corresponds with strong norms in the ECEC sector about democracy, involvement, equality and participation. However, New Public Management reforms represent a pressure for stronger managers and less democratic involvement from the employees. There is thus reason to expect that the democratic aspects of ECEC management are being pushed back. In this chapter we examine whether democratic management practices are an element of ECEC management and we examine conditions that may favour such management practice. Some 40% of all Norwegian ECEC managers responded to a national survey, and this survey material allows an assessment of democratic management practices and the conditions for such management.

## Abstrakt

Tilgjengeleg forskning frå 1980 og 1990 åra tyder på at norske barnehagar har vore kjenneteikn av demokratisk og ikkje-hierarkisk leiing. Dette fell saman med sterke normer om demokrati, involvering, likskap og deltaking i heile sektoren. New Public Management reformer representerer eit pres i retning sterkare leiing og mindre demokratisk involvering av dei tilsette. Det er derfor grunn til å venta at dei demokratiske sidene ved barnehageleiing er under press. I dette paperet undersøker vi om demokratisk leiing kjenneteiknar barnehageleiinga og vi ser på vilkåra for slik demokratisk leiing. 40% av alle norske barnehagestyrarar svarte på ein nasjonal survey og dette materialet gir eit grunnlag for å diskutera om barnehagen er prega av demokratisk leiingspraksis og kva vilkåra for dette er.

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## Tiivistelmä

1980- ja 1990-luvun tutkimusten mukaan norjalaisten päiväkotien johtamista voi kuvata demokraattiseksi ja epähierarkkiseksi. Tämä heijastelee varhaiskasvatussektorin vahvoja demokraattisuuden, osallisuuden, tasa-arvon ja osallistumisen vaateita. Kuitenkin julkisjohtamisen uudistuksien suuntaisessa kehityksessä tarvitaan pikemminkin voimakkaita johtajia ja vähemmän demokraattista työntekijöiden osallistumista. On siis syytä olettaa, että varhaiskasvatuksen johtamisen demokraattiset näkökannat työnnetään taka-alalle. Tässä artikkelissa tarkastelemme olosuhteita, jotka suosivat tällaista johtamistapaa. Noin 40 % norjalaisista varhaiskasvatusjohtajista vastasi valtakunnalliseen kyselyyn. Tämän kyselyaineiston perusteella arvioidaan demokraattisia johtamiskäytäntöjä ja olosuhteita.

## Introduction

Available research suggests that Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) institutions have been characterised by democratic management principles (Børhaug, Helgøy, Homme, Lotsberg, & Ludvigsen, 2011; Gotvassli, 1996). This meant that ECEC directors and the staff jointly made many decisions concerning how to run the institution. As will be argued below, this is a notion of democracy as direct participation in decision making processes.

New Public Management reforms were introduced in Norway in the late 1980s and have challenged this type of management, by its emphasis on strong management authority, reporting and responsibility. Democratically oriented notions of management are therefore assumed to be under pressure. The question arises as to how well the democratic management notions have resisted these pressures. We do not know the answer to that question, because the mentioned research was conducted around 1990.

Management practice is contextual (Strand, 2007). In this chapter, we examine ECEC institution management in a Norwegian context. However, within the Norwegian context, conditions vary and may affect the strength of democratic ideals in management practice.

Thus, two research questions will be the focus of this chapter:

- to what extent has the Norwegian, democratic ECEC management practices been sustained after two decades of NPM?
- what individual, cultural and organisational conditions promote such democratic management practice?

As a background, we will review Norwegian research and specify and document that this management has been understood as democratic by most scholars in key studies conducted around 1990. We will also argue that NPM challenges such management practices. We will examine concepts about democratic management and possible preconditions for such management. A Norwegian survey was conducted in 2008, and 40% of all ECEC institution directors responded to its questions about management practices. These data were thus collected when NPM had been in operation for 20 years. They thus make it possible to give a more recent picture of the strength of democratic management practices, and of the conditions that promote it.

The data was collected in the project, “Governance challenges, organisation and management in the ECEC sector”, funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The project was managed by the Rokkan centre at Bergen University. Bergen University College was a partner in the project.

## The evolvement of democratic ECEC institution management

ECEC institutions were first established in Norway in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and remained until around 1970 a service for a small minority of children (Korsvold, 2005). The ECEC sector expanded rapidly after a new law was passed in 1975. Today, most Norwegian children attend ECEC institutions. Parents pay a moderate fee which may not exceed a governmentally defined ceiling. However, the expansion of the sector was partly driven by private ECEC providers such as parent associations, non-profit associations, churches and, increasingly, commercial enterprises. Today, the private ECEC providers represent some 50% of the sector.

Training of ECEC professionals escalated after 1975, and a whole generation of newly trained managers entered the sector in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The first major study of the management of ECEC institutions was conducted by Kjell Åge Gotvassli in the late 1980s (Gotvassli, 1990; 1996). His research has been a key reference for later Norwegian contributions, many of which date from the same period. Some of Gotvassli’s findings point to a democratic type of management, but the reasons for this are not necessarily democratic ideals. In some contributions,

it has been found that the ECEC manager was remote and almost invisible (Gotvassli 1991, 162). The role was not clearly defined, the manager hesitated to communicate points of views clearly, and the distribution of power was fluid (Gotvassli, 1996). This led to discussions and planning which was not systematic, lacking in commitment and short of overall guidance. Gotvassli (1990) refers to a study made by Ingeborg Kvalheim who has observed the following about an ECEC manager:

“She does not *want* to be an authority, and she finds it difficult to make a stand concerning problems that she registered in various sections of the ECEC institution. She wanted her institution to be nice and pleasant, so that the employees would feel safe and accepted.” (Gotvassli 1990, 18).

Thus, it is not surprising that Gotvassli (1990) found that 48.6% of the ECEC managers in his research did not wish to be managers at all (p. 38). Other researchers have also pointed out that ECEC institution managers are conflict avoiding (Bergersen, 2006). Gotvassli (1991) argues that although various studies point to different directions (see for instance Bastiansen 1991), conflict avoidance and a preference for good social relations are nevertheless prominent (Gotvassli, 1991, 167). According to Bergersen (2006) during interactions between the manager and employees the emphasis is placed on relationships and dialogue and conflicts are avoided (p. 128). Such weak management and conflict avoidance implies, by intent or not, that management is in the hands of all or most employees and that the director is a co-ordinator, facilitator or secretary. Norwegian ECEC managers have indeed been found to be democratic in the sense that all employees are involved in decision making processes (Gotvassli, 1991, 165). In short, research, mainly dating from around 1990, conclude that ECEC institutions were managed by means of democratic, participatory processes and only weakly directed by their director.

The belief that Norwegian ECEC managers have been and still are democratic can also be seen in the numerous contributions that discuss why this is so: One explanation that has been put forward is that notions about ECEC institution management were developed in the period of expansion after the reform of 1975 (Gotvassli, 1990, 57). Many young directors started their careers in this period when the effects of the general radicalisation and anti-authoritarian currents from 1968 were still very strongly felt. The majority of this generation of directors was young and inexperienced when

they started working as directors, which also led them to take an open and democratic approach to management (Gotvassli, 2004). Ingeborg Kvalheim (1990) who has followed Norwegian ECEC teacher training for decades writes that weak management, non-hierarchical structures, a preference for harmony, participative management and emphasis on human relations and care are characteristics of the management thinking of the sector. She explains this with the “warm, open, and democratic mode of cooperation that directors have experienced in their own training as ECEC teachers” (Kvalheim, 1990, cited in Gotvassli, 1991, 162). The democratic mode of management is also related to gender by several observers: In the 1970s, ECEC institutions were established and directed by young women who knew they were about to build up something new. At the same time, a key idea in Norwegian ECEC policies at that time was that these institutions should not have the school, but the home as its model. The implication here is that the home (unlike a school) was an arena for feminine values and maternal care (Bergersen 2006, 130).

## New Public Management and changing management practices

Since the mid 1980's, *New Public Management* (NPM) has been implemented in many countries, even though it takes a different shape or form in different national contexts (Læg Reid, 1993; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2007). In recent years, some reforms have rejected NPM principles and have returned to older ideas of governance and coordination. Christensen and Læg Reid (2007) have labelled this post NPM reforms. These tendencies have, however, not supplanted NPM which still plays a major role in practical public administration and in debates about public sector reform.

*New Public Management* is not a theory, it is rather a loosely coupled set of ideas about how the public sector can be run more effectively (Aasbrenn, 2010; Christensen, Læg Reid, Roness, & Røvik, 2009). These ideas focus on allowing a more independent position for public organisations. I.e. that they should be more sensitive to the needs of clients, that they would benefit from competition, that they need stronger management which can be held responsible for results, and that public organisations should have a more clearly defined responsibility, and delegated authority to choose appropriate strategies and procedures (Aasbrenn, 2010, 20; Busch, 2005; Christensen &

Læg Reid, 2007). Klausen (2005) argues that these NPM ideas and principles can be grouped in two pillars. One of them contains economically oriented reform ideas and favours market principles, in particular competition. The other he labels managerialism, which emphasises strong management, clear distinctions between political and administrative considerations and tasks, as well as delegation and manager responsibility for results.

New Public Management is endorsed as the governance doctrine of the Norwegian government. In the ECEC sector, this approach has led to extensive management training programs for ECEC managers from the 1990s. It was also made one of several optional specialisations in the initial training programs for ECEC professionals and a large advisory literature developed aimed at ECEC managers who were looking for guidance as to how to deal with management responsibilities in the new NPM led era. Since 2010 all new ECEC managers are strongly recommended to complete an extensive training (30 credits), called the ECEC manager school. The overall aim of these reforms was to strengthen ECEC managers, and to get rid of the loose management practices in which all participated and nobody was in charge as reported above. This also obviously presented challenge to democratic management. It is therefore assumed that we will not find much democratic management practices left in the sector in recent years.

On the other hand, as suggested by institutional organisational theory, organisations resist change efforts and stick to valued practices and organisational forms (March & Olsen, 1989; Scott, 2001). In 2007, when commenting on a survey about the performance of managers in various types of organisations, *Dagens Næringsliv*, the main newspaper for business interests in Norway, made a major point that ECEC institution managers did better than others and obviously had developed special types of management that other sectors could learn from.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it could be possible that democratic management of ECEC centres has remained important in spite of the NPM pressures. Our aim in this chapter is to examine to what extent the democratically inspired participatory management style found some 25 years ago has persisted up to recently. This assessment depends on what is meant by democratic management.

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1 (<http://www.dn.no/karriere/article1171254.ece>).

## Notions of democratic management

Management can be understood as taking care of key functions for the survival of an organisation. These functions are defined in different ways, and one approach distinguishes among production, administration, integration and entrepreneurship. Management is about making decisions concerning these functions, and by means of communication, to have them executed (Strand, 2007). In this approach it is emphasized that it may vary who takes part in the decision-making and communication of decisions. It may involve others than those who are formally appointed as managers. Democratic management, in this perspective, implies involving more people in the decision making managerial process as real participants.

However, management implies the existence of managers who manage others. Someone is given a special mandate to make sure that key decisions are made and implemented in the organisation (Strand, 2007). Thus, there is an inherent tension between management and democracy. Where participatory democracy is complete, there is hardly any room for left for management. Therefore, democratic management must be seen as a situation where the manager has some directive power which is balanced by the power of those have participatory possibilities.

Carol Pateman (1970) was concerned with democratic practices in the work place, and she argues in her books that managers should allow democratic participation to the employees. She makes a fruitful distinction between three types of participation:

- a) full participation – participation is to be one of the final decision makers,
- b) partial participation – the decision maker has strong incentives to take the wishes and values of participants into consideration when making the decision, and
- c) pseudo-participation – the manager decides and is fairly free to consider or disregard the views of participating employees.

In the case of maximum, full participation, management is no longer needed. It has been supplanted by self-organised groups. In the case of pseudo-democracy, we are no longer dealing with democracy but with manipulation and exploitative forms of participation. That is, when workers are invited to

participate in order to motivate them to work harder and better, but not in order to give them a real say (Hyman & Mason, 1995).

In this Chapter we define democratic management in ECECs as partial participation. That is, the ECEC director has the final say, but there are incentives to involve and take into consideration the points of views of the employees. Such involvement may take many forms and degrees. Our data does not allow us to examine all different types of partial participation found within ECEC institutions. But we are able to examine the extent to which ECEC managers who responded to the survey accepted the general idea of involving the employees in decision-making processes.

Democratic management has been explained in different ways, as indicated above. The gender and training backgrounds are individual characteristics of the ECEC directors. The strength of democratic management may vary, as indicated above. It is assumed that women were more democratically oriented than men, and that training, age and experience can make a difference in their approach to managing and leading ECEC centres. It is also assumed that with age and experience, directors would find it easier to involve employees in decision-making. It could also be the other way around, that with age and experience, directors conclude that it is better not to waste too much time on involvement processes. The effects of these individual factors could be assessed using the survey data.

Some of the explanations we reviewed in the above point to culture. The cultural perspective on organisation and management makes it a key idea that values and world views are stable foundations of organisational life, and that they are very resistant to change (Bolman & Deal, 2003). For instance, that ECECs that were founded in the 1970s were marked by democratic values in the founding stages and can be assumed to have retained this cultural basis later on.

On the other hand, an organisational perspective could also imply an assumption that formal structures can make a major difference. Early contributions in this tradition saw organisations as ruled by formal rules of authority, division of work, coordination and performance standards (Scott, 1992). It must be assumed that formal structures of hierarchy and formal rules will block democratic decision-making. Rules mean to have made the decision about what to do when making the rules. Later on, this formal perspective has also emphasised that organisations depend on their environment and will structure themselves so as to adapt to changing



external requirements (ibid.). For instance, competition could have an impact on the extent of employee involvement in management processes.<sup>2</sup>

The survey data allowed us to examine some possible effects of these conditions on management.

## Methods of research

In 2008, a survey was sent to all ECEC institutions in Norway by e-mail. Some 40% responded, resulting in data from 1462 ECEC directors. They are representative of the population on variables such as proportion of male and female directors and proportion of governmental and non-governmental ECEC institutions at that time. Being collected in 2008 these data cannot say how the situation is in 2013. However, the purpose of this analysis is to examine whether the democratic mode of ECEC management that seems to have developed in the 1970s and early 1980s could still be found after two decades of NPM management reforms and understanding of management as more directive. For this purpose, data from 2008 are valid.

In the survey, directors were asked about various aspects of their management thinking and practice. They were also asked to report on their gender, experience, training, and age. Further, they reported on characteristics of their ECEC institution such as size, founding year, ownership, how much competition they experienced, formalisation and hierarchy, decision making procedures and external relationships. The analysis has been supported by SPSS. When significance is mentioned, it refers to T-tests with a significance level of 0.05.

## Democratic management in Norwegian ECECs

Employees in Norwegian ECEC centres, comprise approximately 1/3 ECEC teachers and 2/3 assistants of various types. The assistant group may have some vocational training in child care. We asked the directors about

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2 In Norway, anyone who satisfies basic technical requirements can start an ECEC centre anywhere. Until 2013, any ECEC center has also been entitled to government subsidies. Because of this, a situation has developed where ECEC centres compete for children as their subsidies depend on the number of children they have.

what issues they involved the other ECEC teachers in. As table 1 shows, there were issues about which the other ECEC teachers were not consulted. The assistants must be assumed to be consulted even less.

**Table 1. Percentage of ECEC directors who reported that they consulted ECEC teachers to a great or very great extent on selected issues<sup>3</sup>**

Issues	(N)	Governmental ECECs	Non-governmental ECECs
Budget	1170	16%	10%
Annual Planning	1169	96%	96%
Pedagogical assessments	1173	98%	98%
Recruitment	1172	42%	65%
Personnel management	1172	28%	39%
External relations	1172	4%	7%

First, let us note that on several important issues most directors did not involve the employees very much, notably budgeting and external relations. Thus, there were at least some areas where ECEC management was not very democratic at all. Second, note that there were more issues where employee involvement was strong than not, and that involvement is high on planning and pedagogical assessments. Personnel issues and recruitment are more divided. Finally, let us also note that concerning personnel management and recruitment, involvement was stronger in non-governmental centres.

However, involvement does not necessarily mean democracy. It could mean noting what the employees think, without taking much notice (i.e. pseudo-participation). Or, it could mean that directors engaged in discussions with their employees. We asked whether there were discussions about goals and strategies. It was found that the majority of directors discussed organisational goals with their employees only sometimes (46%) or once a week (35%) (N=1215). Only 20% did it more often.

We could also approach the democratic nature of involvement by another item. We asked the directors about how important they felt various assertions about management was, one of these assertions was: "Is it important to

3 N are all the respondents on each item. It varies a little bit because some respondents responded to only some of these items. The proportion of private and governmental is approximately half of each.

consult employees in decision making?” Not all directors endorsed this point of view, though 58% of the participating directors tended to agree that this was important. The distribution of responses along a 7 point scale where 1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree, indicated that the great majority endorses this principle, but only 1/3 at the highest two levels, suggesting substantial modifications and reservations (N=1155).

Consultations and discussions are not the same, and the analysis of the survey data collected showed that these two variables were not correlated. This would suggest that discussing goals is not the same as consulting employees. That could mean that consulting is a democratically very weak form of management, or that it is a stronger form than discussions. The Norwegian term that was translated as “consulted” was “ta med på råd” which reflects the idea of involvement in decision-making. Consultations are therefore interpreted as a stronger democratic obligation than discussing goals.

In summary, the survey data analysed suggests that the democratic involvement of employees is rather constrained. First, it is constrained in the sense that it does not include all issues, only some. Second, it is constrained in the sense that it does not occur on a daily basis but once a week or less often. And finally, it is constrained in the sense that most directors endorse the idea only partially, i.e. only 1/3 completely or almost completely agrees that it is important to consult. Such a cautious and selective involvement is closer to NPM ideas of concentrating management powers with the director.

We asked the directors to what extent various role descriptions described them as leaders. For each description, a scale from 1 to 7 was applied, 7 indicating maximum fit. In table 2 we have given the percentage of the total who reported 5–7 for each role description, and as we can see, some roles were seen as much more appropriate than others. N varies from 1132 til 1158 because some respondents did not respond on all role descriptions.

**Table 2. Percentage of directors who agree that the role descriptions were accurate** (i.e. percentage who answered 5–7 on a scale from 1–7, 7 being maximum agreement)

Role	
Business manager	77%
Controller	21%
Administrator	89%
Personnel manager	90%
Politician	15%
Psychologist	50%
Fellow human being	95%

The most directive role, the controller, has a low score. A role description close to dialogue, close community and non-hierarchical relations (fellow human being) scores very high. But so do administrator and personnel manager, which are more directive roles. Democratic notions seem to co-exist with more directive manager notions.

In short, there is a mixture and a variety of democratic role understandings and directive role understandings, there are results suggesting involvement and discussions as well as indications that this involvement is constrained. This makes it all the more important to examine the effects of factors that may strengthen or weaken democratic tendencies in ECEC management.

## Conditions for democratic management

What are the conditions for democratic management? The best indicator of democratic management seems to be adherence to the proposition “It is important to consult the employees in decision making”. Both in the earlier research we examined and in our own theoretical definition of democracy, direct involvement in decision making is the core of democratic management. We will therefore examine conditions for democratic management by asking what explains the variation on this variable. Support for consultation did not correlate with gender. A likely explanation for this is that the male directors in the survey were socialised into management cultures in the sector to such an extent that it neutralized gender differences. They only make up

10% of directors. On the other hand, it is often argued that men should be more present in ECECs because they bring something different as men. In this case they did not. Support for consultation did not correlate with age either, nor did it correlate with the level of extra management training. Thus individual level factors did not seem to explain very much in this case. This makes it all the more relevant to turn to cultural characteristics of the ECEC centres. We compared the ECEC centres that were established in the 1970s with others, assuming that the ideals of that period would influence these directors in a democratic direction. There was however, no correlation here; the directors in ECEC centres established in the 1970s had the same beliefs in consulting the employees as the others.

Finally, we considered aspects of the ECEC centre as a formal organisation depending on its environment. The survey allowed more variables to be included here. We have considered the size of the centre. We used two different measures of routinisation, that is, the directors were asked to what extent was their ECEC was informally organised and we asked whether the ECECs had written routines on 16 different tasks. The answers to these 16 were combined in a total routinisation combined variable. We also used two measures of *hierarchical authority*: we asked whether the centre had a clearly defined hierarchy, and we asked whether the director felt that he/she was able to cut through discussions and force a decision. Finally, we asked questions about the extent to which the centre had to compete for core resources, i.e. children and personnel. There were reliability problems related to this data because they were only based on the directors' reporting, which must be assumed to be biased. When interpreting data, this has to keep that in mind. As these items are related, there was a need to control for how they affected each other, and therefore a linear, multiple regression was conducted. Table 3 shows the regression results.

**Table 3. Variation in support for consultation as conditioned by organisational factors**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4,213	,461		9,145	,000
Size	-,039	,006	-,203	-6,653	,000
We have an informal organisation	,095	,029	,102	3,296	,001
Competing when recruiting	-,140	,040	-,104	-3,492	,000
Total routinisation	,243	,092	,080	2,628	,009
We have a clearly defined hierarchy	-,086	,029	-,094	-3,029	,003
Director being able to force a decision	,104	,051	,063	2,034	,042

a. Dependent Variable: It is important to consult the employees in decision making.  
N=1045–1051.

In total, the model explains 9% of the variation (Adjusted R square = .093), which is a modest but notable explanatory power.

First, the centre size matters. Measured by number of staff in the ECEC centre, the negative correlation of size on support for consulting employees was clear and significant. This could reflect that frequent consultation is much more time consuming and complex once the number of people employed at the centre increases. In Norway, there is a tendency to build larger ECEC institutions than before (150–200 children and sometimes even more) and to merge older, smaller ones under one director. This can be seen as a policy shift which can undermine consulting management practices. On the other hand, democracy is obviously possible also when there are many participants. Scandinavian work place democracy in general functions on a much larger scale (Levin, Tove, Ravn, & Øyrum, 2012). Instead of warning against big ECEC centres, the argument could be that there is a need to develop new notions of what democratic management can be when the ECEC staff is no longer a small, closely knit community in which participative management takes the form of face to face, daily, informal communication.

Second, competing for personnel was negatively correlated with consulting employees. This is not easy to understand, but it could reflect that

when there were recruitment difficulties, staff turnover increased, making it more problematic to consult because of the stress turnover brings and because newcomers may have difficulties engaging in organisational matters beyond their own tasks.

Third, routinisation matters. Contrary to expectations, however, high scores on routinisation correlated modestly, but significantly, with consultation.

The measures on hierarchy also show confusing results. When directors reported that there was a clear hierarchy, consulting decreased, which makes sense. But directors who reported that they were good at forcing decisions also reported stronger commitment to consultation. How can we make sense of this? How can democratic management be related to directive directors, i.e. director ability to force decisions when necessary? Consultation is not only a bottom-up, grassroots empowering phenomenon. It can also be a management tool for the new, more directive manager. In the general management literature, there has been a growing understanding of the need to engage and motivate the employees by means of participation. But the participation that is being envisaged is closely controlled and directed by the management and is mainly directed towards making employees work smarter and better, and it is not a matter of letting employees take part in the management of the entire enterprise. (Hyman & Mason, 1995.) Thus, support to the idea that one must consult the employees, may mean different things and have different sources, i.e. in the democratic ideas of the 1970s and in modern management theory, the latter offering participation which tends towards the pseudo-participation end. These two currents probably co-exist in the ECEC sector, or at least the data from 2008 suggest they did then. How the relative strength of them have developed later is difficult to say.

In total, we cannot explain a lot of the variation in support of the existence of democratic values. We can however, argue that the individual characteristics that we have measured have no effect. Having been established in the 1970s had no effect either. What matters in this material is organisational framework, notably size, routinisation, hierarchy and, very modestly, competition.

## Concluding discussion

The analysis has shown that in the 2008 data there were marked elements of democratic consultation of employees in Norwegian ECEC centres, but this was not a general characteristic of ECEC management. Democratic principles were applied in some issues and not in others, and directors varied regarding how important they thought such consultation was. 10% of them rejected the idea almost completely. The majority supported it – to some extent. Very few supported it without any reservations. Democracy is constrained, and this has to be seen as connected to findings that Norwegian ECEC directors of today are very conscious of their role and responsibility as managers and take charge of things to a larger extent than previously reported (Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2010). Democratic participation has to be adjusted to this overall strengthening of director authority. However, support for consultation was stronger where the directors were more directive, which suggests that consultation also has a role to play in strong, NPM inspired management, but this is most likely a more controlled and constrained consultation than what was reported in the 1990 findings.

We have found that support for consultation does not vary with individual backgrounds of centre directors comprising factors such as age, gender, training or amount of experience. It does however vary with the organisational structure in which directors work. First, directors in non-governmental ECECs involved staff in more issues than did governmental directors. This is most likely related to the fact that in the public sector, democracy is institutionalized at the very apex of the organisation, i.e. in parliament and local government council and lower level, employee democracy cannot easily negotiate with that. The government has to take care of values that are superior to other concerns and thus the practice of employee democracy can become more difficult in governmental organisations (Downs & Larkey, 1986; Strand, 2007).

Second, consulting the staff was negatively correlated to size. The problem of size is most likely that with increasing size, consultation becomes more complex and time consuming. The influence of size is probably related to the fact that the informal, face to face type of daily consultation that is reported in previous research could survive in small ECEC centres, but not in bigger ones. There is a need for more research on the nature of consultation processes in ECEC institutions. In as far as it is desirable to



promote participatory management in the future, new ways of consultation on a larger scale must be developed. It can develop along the lines of controlled, director controlled participation of management theory. Or it could evolve as broader consultation between more equal partners, as was the tendency in the research reported from around 1990. Such participatory management would, however be at odds with NPM.

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