

Per Engelstad in memoriam

At the age of 76, Per Hartvig Engelstad passed away in November 2011. Per was educated as a chemical engineer at the Technical University of Trondheim. There he also met Einar Thorsrud, who, soon after Per had finished his education, asked him to become a member of the group of researchers that Thorsrud formed to develop new forms of organisation within Norwegian working life. Both Thorsrud and Per was happy with this recruitment, and for good reasons; Per became an innovator in more areas of working life and action research:

His first remarkable effort, in the sixties, was about the improvement of the quality of work processes within the process industry. The quality system was considerably improved by means of creating new forms of work organisation and learning processes among the operators. Via a number of different channels Per's ideas in this field became part of the international quality movement, as the most outstanding Norwegian contribution to this movement.

Together with the labour market parties in Norway and his colleagues at the Work Research Institute in the seventies, Per created the first practical work life development project, based on the idea that changing working life is a question of collaboration and learning processes among many enterprises, and not a question of dissemination of fixed patterns from single "star cases". This idea has since formed the basis for all Nordic programmes of development of working life.

The experimental work with the broad participation of a number of institutional actors in development processes brought Per into a third area where he became a pioneer: working life development on a regional basis. His efforts in this field became part of a Nordic collaboration, and the Swedish region Värmland became the arena for a project that has formed much of the pattern for this kind of work life development in the Nordic countries.

Even though the word 'gentleman' is not as fashionable as it once was, the word fits Per. He had no need to speak loudly about himself, he was always friendly, constructive and happy about participating in discussions about almost any serious issue; and any issue became subject to more serious treatment when he participated in the discussion. As he came to realise that his life was coming to an end, he also realised that he had had a good life; he engaged in discussing and planning the future together with family, friends and colleagues, even though he himself would not be present in this future. We hope and believe that this contributed to making the loss of Per easier to live with, for his family in particular, but also for us, his colleagues and friends.

On the behalf of colleagues at the Work Research Institute,

Bjørn Gustavsen

Nina Amble

Øyvind Pålshaugen