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Challenges to welfare state at top of
ministers' in tray

Oct 01, 2012

Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 6/2012

Newsletter from the Nordic Labour Journal 6/2012

Theme: Strengthening Nordic welfare state cooperation



Financed by
Nordic Council of
Ministers

NORDIC LABOUR JOURNAL

Work Research Institute
OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University,
Postboks 4 St. Olavs plass, NO-0130
Oslo

PUBLISHER

Work Research Institute, OsloMet
commissioned by the Nordic Council of
Ministers.
The Nordic Council of Ministers is not
responsible for the content

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An email edition of the newsletter can
be ordered free of charge from
www.nordiclabourjournal.org

ISSN 1504-9019 tildelt: Nordic labour
journal (online)



**REDAKTØR-
ANSVAR**

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Editorial: Nordic ministers' fruitful Svalbard meeting

Norway's Minister of Labour Hanne Bjurstrøm wanted to celebrate Nordic cooperation and invited her colleagues to Svalbard.

COMMENTS

21.09.2012

BERIT KVAM

Rarely have so many government ministers been present at a Nordic labour ministers' meeting, and rarely have discussions been so open. It's hard to say whether travelling far to an exotic destination with plenty of time to debate particularly relevant issues had any influence on the outcome, but she did achieve something.

"This has been one of the most fruitful meetings of labour ministers organised by the Nordic Council of Ministers I have been part of during the 15 years I have been Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Employment," Denmark's Bo Smith told Nordic Labour Journal.

Globalisation and difficult economic times challenge the Nordic welfare states. The consequences of labour immigration was a central issue during debates, along with gender equality. Sweden's Minister for Employment Hillevi Engström presented a newly established gender equality commission which aims to fuel debate on issues like why there are still wage gaps between the sexes, how to get more women into leadership positions and how to reduce part time work among women. Representatives from the social partners, the Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS) and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) were also present at the meeting. The red hot issue was youth unemployment.

Finland's Minister of Labour Lauri Ihalainen said reducing youth unemployment was an issue close to his heart, his first priority as Minister of Labour. Finland's government launches a comprehensive campaign this week in Finland's fifteen largest cities aimed at helping young people.

Iceland's authorities are going to seek out every single youth who is not in work or education in order to get them active, said political advisor Anna Sigrún Baldursdóttir.

How much will job creation measures for weak groups cost, and which measures work? Hanne Bjurstrøm would very much like to find the answers to these questions. She got

support from Denmark's Bo Smith who underlined this is also something which particularly engages Denmark's Minister for Employment.

"I would like to get invited to Denmark to discuss this bilaterally," said Hanne Bjurstrøm.

And this is the key in the Nordic cooperation: to share experiences and learn from each other. Openly debating core challenges made the Svalbard meeting particularly fruitful.



Lauri Ihalainen (Finland), Hillevi Engström (Sweden), Hanne Bjurstrøm (Norway) and Fredrik Karlström (Åland) in front of the Svalbard Governor's vessel.

Challenges to welfare state at top of ministers' in tray

Youth unemployment has high political priority in the Nordic region. At the latest Nordic Council of Ministers meeting, labour ministers agreed to encourage employers to take on some of the responsibility for young people who don't work and who are not in education.

THEME

20.09.2012

TEXT AND PHOTO: BERIT KVAM

The Nordic countries also agreed to cooperate on ways to handle the consequences of labour immigration - both in terms of scope and the risks of social dumping. These were key issues during the ministers' meeting, where Svalbard's Arctic surroundings and cultural heritage also played an important role.

Sitting around an open fire in the traditional earth hut next to Barentz Hus, eating reindeer casserole and listening to young explorers talk about the life of the polar bear while darkness descended over the wilderness outside, Nordic men and women were being brought closer together. Exotic cultural heritage from earlier coal mining activities and settlements

left an impression as the Governor - the Norwegian government's highest representative in Svalbard - invited the guests to a boat trip in Isfjorden (the Ice Fjord). The powerful Arctic nature provided a dramatic backdrop; the mountains had clearly visible geological layers and their rolling peaks were covered by September's first snow.



"I think this meeting shows that when we take our time, when we are concrete and more open, we have quite a lot to learn from each other. I think the combination of this shared experience of Svalbard with all its nature and history, the generous schedule for debates and the fact that the countries have been represented on a high level, has been important," Bo Smith, Permanent Secretary at Denmark's Ministry of Employment, told Nordic Labour Journal. He put into words what many experienced, and this was appreciated by Hanne Bjurstrøm who heads the Nordic cooperation on working life issues.

"Our debates were very good and people were very open about the challenges which face them. It strikes me how much we have in common."

Youth outside

Youth unemployment is a top political priority and fuelled detailed debates during the ministerial meeting.



"Our Nordic welfare systems are very well equipped, but nevertheless we have young people on the outside, either because they've fallen out of the school system or because they have major problems," said Hanne Bjurstrøm.

Norway is a case apart because of its low unemployment, and all measures are now targeting people under 30. Hanne Bjurstrøm has focused particularly on young people with reduced working ability.

"Among young people with disabilities we know there are many who were born with problems and many have serious psychological problems. All of the countries face challenges not least when it comes to having realistic expectations of getting exposed groups into working life. I felt we had a good debate and an important discussion on this topic. I got further confirmation for just how challenging these issues are," Norway's Minister of Labour Hanne Bjurstrøm told Nordic Labour Journal.

As chair she actively pushed for a joint plan for how to encourage employers to take some of the responsibility for getting young people with no work or ongoing education back into the labour market.

"We agreed to talk to public and private employers to help them understand the extent of their responsibility when it comes to getting more people into jobs. I was keen to include into this also people who are not highly skilled."



Bo Smith, Permanent Secretary at Denmark's Ministry of Employment, underlined the importance of the thorough debate on youth unemployment:

"It was extremely useful to go through all of the initiatives the different countries have launched to make sure young people without an education do get an education, and that those who have an education but struggle to find a job do get a job, so that we don't lose a generation of young people in times of low growth. The debate gave us an overview over the existing initiatives and the good experiences the different countries have had. With this I really feel we got something to take home with us."

Increasing labour immigration

Line Eldring, researcher at Norway's Institute for Labour and Social Research (FAFO), opened the debate on 'Challenges and opportunities as a result of European labour mobility', pointing out that the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargement with new member states from Central and Eastern Europe has triggered the largest movement of labour which Europe has seen in modern times.

Nordic countries have also proven attractive for job seekers and workers from the new member states. On top of that there is a considerable number of workers employed by foreign companies, self employed people and non-registered workers. Eight years after the EU enlargement, researchers can conclude that neither the most pessimistic nor the most optimistic predictions have come true. But Nordic working life structures have come under considerable pressure.

The debate on the consequences of labour immigration and the risks of social dumping also drew comments from the Danish delegation:

“Some people might come to exploit our generous welfare systems or there might be salary dumping. On these issues we agreed that, based on our many years of experience, including in the wake of the Laval ruling, it is now time to get an overview of the risks of social dumping. We also agreed that the Posting of Workers Enforcement Directive is one issue we all give high priority to, and it would be good if all the Scandinavian countries could work together on the implementation of this,” said Bo Smith, who also wanted to underline the challenges faced by all the countries of integrating foreigners with language problems into the labour market.

“Here too I believe we can benefit from comparing what we do individually to integrate for instance immigrant women. It’s a group we all have problems including into our labour markets, and who particularly struggle with the language.”



Both ministers and the social partners were concerned about the risk of low-paid labour immigrants with bad working conditions squeezing young people and others with low education or reduced working ability out of the labour market.

Minister of Labour Hanne Bjurstrøm highlighted the Swedish system of registering service providers as an idea for others who want to improve their overview over labour immigration and workers’ wages and working conditions, allowing the social partners a more active role in preventing social dumping.

Deputy director at the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry (NHO) Baard Meidell Johannesen represented

the employers at the meeting. He said social dumping contributes to push weak groups out of the labour market.

So what do you, Minister of Labour Hanne Bjurstrøm, think about that?

“That was also something I wanted to focus on. In my opinion we need to work to integrate people who are on the outside, be it people with reduced working ability or disabilities or immigrants with few formal skills. Of course, when we receive very strong groups of workers who are willing to work long hours for little money, it is hard to integrate the weaker groups into the labour market.”

Loa Brynjulfsdottir, General Secretary at the Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS) encouraged the ministers to improve cooperation on concrete issues. What is your view on that?

“We have an agreed process within the existing Nordic cooperation to remove border obstacles between the countries. When it comes to social dumping we have agreed to work together in the face of an EU directive which could represent a challenge to our model. I am happy about this. I also recognise there are many differences between our countries, both politically and in the ways we have organised our welfare societies. Yet there are some over-arching structures we must look after, the very reasons why we are doing so well compared with much of the rest of Europe. That’s why I am happy that we have decided to work together on this,” said Hanne Bjurstrøm.

Gender segregated labour market

Sweden’s Minister of Labour Hillevi Engström also got engaged in the discussions with her Nordic colleagues.



“I think these meetings provide a lot of inspiration and ideas. In the EU 27 many countries appear strangers to us because their labour market models are different, while here in the Nordic region we share so much and can learn a lot from each other.”

She introduced the debate on gender equality in working life.

“This has been a worry in Sweden for some time - partly the gender segregation of the labour market and partly the fact that women earn less than men and that women to a greater extent work only part time.”

The Swedish government has just established a committee for gender equality in working life where employers, trade unions, researchers and others will look at the different conditions and opportunities faced by women and men in working life, while trying to find out the reasons behind these differences. The committee’s findings should encourage debate and highlight what needs doing to achieve better gender equality in working life.

Was this an inspiration for Norway?

“It was my idea that we should discuss women and working hours,” says Hanne Bjurstrøm.

“Sweden had a broader approach to gender equality in working life. I am very happy to take part in that approach. Our challenge in Norway is that we have many women in working life but many of them work part time. Some work part time involuntarily, but nine in ten do it voluntarily. So I agree with

Hillevi Engström when she says what constitutes ‘voluntary’ is up for discussion, because many might feel the nature of their job makes it impossible to work full time. I have huge respect for that. What Sweden is doing now seems to be very exciting. They are launching a kind of commission which will look at working life in a gender equality perspective, looking at wages, sick leave, part time work, career opportunities. We will be following this work and see whether we can use some of their findings.

“I have been focusing on the fact that women work a lot of part time, because working life is so gender segregated and because it is mainly women who work within the health sector. When the level of part time working women approaches 50 percent, we get a labour shortage and that is a challenge,” said Hanne Bjurstrøm. She also agreed with the NHO’s assessment during the meeting that many want more spare time to enjoy their good quality of life.

“It is a choice people make. But I must, as the Minister of Labour, underline that when people do this it does have consequences on a collective level which we must relate to.”



Finland's Minister of Labour, Lauri Ihalainen, is focussing fully on youth unemployment

Finland's comprehensive social guarantee for young people

The Finnish government is rolling out a comprehensive programme aimed at young people. The social guarantee aims to offer all under-25s and all newly educated under-30s a job, study place, apprenticeship or rehabilitation within three months of the young person becoming unemployed.

THEME

20.09.2012

TEXT AND PHOTO: BERIT KVAM

“Nothing saddens me more than seeing young people without an education and out of work. Today 40,000 under-25s in Finland are neither in education or in work. They have fallen between two stools.”

Finland's Minister of Labour Lauri Ihalainen is giving his full attention to youth unemployment. If he could choose one thing to get done during his time in government, it is to make

sure young people don't remain on the fringes of society but that they find jobs or enter into education.

“There are many reasons why they have ended up on the outside. They might not have finished higher secondary education or they haven't had the energy to even start after finishing elementary school. Many young people need help to improve their self-belief, and they need to learn how to control

their own lives so that they can get into a system of education," says Lauri Ihalainen.

Challenging transitions

"There are special challenges linked to the transition from elementary school to higher secondary education and when going from higher secondary education to getting your first job."

The youngest age group need to be approached where they are, "whether they are at home or among their friends". They will be given a tailored offer depending on their life situation which should help them get into the education system.

The social guarantee means just that - that all young people should be guaranteed a chance to get a college education or a vocational education. The state has earmarked €60m every year for five years for this. On top that it has promised €50m a year for the next five years to help 20-29 year olds who have no education beyond elementary school.

"We were very surprised when we found out that Finland had 110,000 young adults who had no education beyond elementary school.

"It isn't marginalised youth who are standing outside of society, but young people who for some reason never finished a higher secondary education. Our aim with this programme is that 36,000 of the 110,000 will finish their higher secondary education.

"I said this when I met my Nordic colleagues because in today's society it isn't easy to get a foothold in working life if you only have an elementary education. The personal work history can be cut very short if the young person has not finished a higher secondary education," says Lauri Ihalainen.

The programme is targeted at another critical phase too - the transition from higher secondary education to working life. Many young unemployed have finished their higher secondary education but still fail to get a job.

Employers are included

"This is a challenge especially for the private sector, because the public sector cannot solve this problem on its own," says Lauri Ihalainen.

As a result, Finland has established a system they call chance money, the *Sanssi-card*, which is an offer available to all private businesses. The scheme allows employers who hire an unemployed youth to claim state support to the tune of €650 a month for one year.

"The idea is to lower the threshold for employers to hire these young people. The youths are paid a normal salary while the employer gets support. This is a huge undertaking from society and a very ambitious programme," underlines Lauri Ihalainen.

"Our experience shows the importance of taking action early on, as early as in elementary school."

All the schemes will last until 2015, or until the next general election, but the Minister of Labour doesn't think that will be the end of it.

The youth guarantee has been prepared by a task group staffed by people from several government ministries, the social partners, representatives for organisations and young people themselves. It has been a work in progress since 2011.

"We are five government ministers who have been cooperating on this. Over the next months we will visit Finland's fifteen largest cities to introduce the programme."

Each city will be visited by one government minister. The reason for this is a desire to bring on board the municipalities and all the regional and municipal players, because it is they who will put this plan into action.

"This is society coming together and involving everyone. The programme goes live from 2013," Finland's Minister of Labour Lauri Ihalainen tells Nordic Labour Journal.

Catapulted into work?

A youth project in Åland called Catapult is aiming to integrate unemployed youths into the labour market. The name might sound a bit more dramatic than what actually faces its target group of 16 to 24 year olds. But it does say something about Nordic politicians' expectations.

THEME

20.09.2012

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: BERIT KVAM

At the Copenhagen session of the Nordic Council in autumn of 2011 the Nordic employment ministers were encouraged to work out a common Nordic strategy to fight youth unemployment.

The key is to shorten the time between leaving school and finding a job. Research shows even short periods of unemployment can result in lower standards and higher risks of ending up unemployed again later on. This is especially true for young people.

Unemployment among 15 to 24 year olds in Åland has risen from 4.1 to 6 percent in one year. It is still considerably lower than for the whole of Finland, where the July figures stood at 11.7 percent.

But youth unemployment in Åland has been considerably higher than the general unemployment figures. The same situation is repeated across the Nordic countries, with the exception of Denmark.

Largest gap in Sweden

The gap is largest in Sweden, where general unemployment stands at 7 percent while youth unemployment is 27.4 percent.

The Nordic ministers have set aside money for a research project which will study different kinds of youth unemployment and how the labour market works. There are many different reasons why young people can't find a job.

The results will be presented in 2013 but experiences are already being exchanged between the Nordic countries in an attempt to get inspiration from the best project in neighbouring countries.



“I think we can learn a lot from each other in the Nordic countries, but we cannot copy each other. We must preserve the good bits. We have different labour market models,” said Sweden's Minister for Employment Hillevi Engström (the Moderate Party) during a parliamentary debate last spring.

“One thing I find interesting and which I will study closer is Norway's apprenticeship system which has been a great success.”

What went wrong?

When Sweden's Social Democrat government in its 2005 autumn budget wanted to put a lot of resources into offering unemployed youths apprenticeships, it did not end at all well. “What went wrong?” was the telling title of the evaluation done by the Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy, IFAU.

The government predicted that an average of 3,000 youths a month would enter into apprenticeships in 2006. In reality the monthly figure averaged at 600.

One of the main reasons, as identified by Sara Martinsson at IFAU, was that this was not about apprentices in the ordinary meaning of the word - i.e. young people learning a vocational skill through practical work.

“There was for instance no employment contract between the youth and the employer and the youth did not get any extra benefits or a salary. The apprenticeships for young people would not lead to a work diploma,” writes Sara Martinsson in her report, which was published just as the Nordic politicians increased their ambitions to do something with youth unemployment.

“What I think we should get better at is to listen to what the young people want and wish for,” said Hillevi Engström .

That’s why the Swedish government has commissioned a survey to take a closer look at young people who do not work and who are in education. This is something which has not been talked about much in a Nordic context. The survey will be carried out by Anne-Marie Begler, the Director General of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate.

She will map how large this group of people is and how the balance of responsibility between state and municipalities works. Around 100 municipalities have no plans of action although municipalities have a duty to follow up this group.

Not only negative

Developments have not been purely negative, however. In Norway many young people disappeared from the labour market in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. At the most, during that year’s fourth quarter, 63 percent of 15 to 24 year olds were in work.

The number fell to 57 percent during the second quarter of 2011, but in the latest quarter it has risen to 59 percent.

With the Nordic region’s lowest general unemployment at 3 percent, young people in Norway need worry less compared to the other countries. Yet here too youth unemployment is three times higher - at 9.4 percent - than the general unemployment.

At the same time the country represents an important labour market for young people from other Nordic countries. There is a lot of labour immigration to Norway. 47,000 people of all ages immigrated in 2011, while the expected numbers for 2012 stand between 31,000 and 57,000 people.

In Iceland youth unemployment more than doubled during the financial crisis. In 2007 it was 7.2 percent. It peaked at 18.6 percent in the second quarter of 2011. Since then Iceland’s youth unemployment has fallen somewhat. In July there were 1,100 young unemployed compared to 1,900 in the same month last year and 3,800 in July 2010.

Youth unemployment is down in Finland too. In July 2012 it stood at 11.7 percent, two percentage points lower than in July last year.

According to the youth guarantee which comes into force in January 2013, all people under 25 must either be offered a job or an apprenticeship, a place to study, space in a youth training scheme or in a rehabilitation programme within three months of becoming unemployed.

New drive to get young unemployed Danes into education and jobs

The Danish government launches another youth package to offer education to nearly 100,000 young people on benefits - many of whom have no further education at all. Meanwhile the effects of previous youth packages are beginning to materialise.

NEWS

20.09.2012

TEXT: MARIE PREISLER

100,000 young Danes sit on the labour market's substitute bench - with no job or plan for the future. The economic crisis has hit the young especially hard also in Denmark and as a result the number of young Danes on benefits has risen by more than 35,000. The Danish government says this is a completely unacceptable situation, and it has just launched a new so-called youth package with eight initiatives to help young people access the labour market or to get them into education.

The 645m Danish kroner (€86.5m) youth package aims to help young people who cannot immediately enter education find a way forward. It also aims to create more jobs for school-leavers. The youth package will also help young benefit claimants who risk losing their unemployment benefit from January 2013 to get into education or to find a job.

An education is not enough



Presenting the youth package, the Minister of Employment, Mette Frederiksen (Social Democrats), underlined that an education is any young person's best starting point for a good working life. But in the current crisis an education no longer guarantees an entry to the labour market. That's why the youth package also aims to get young newly educated people into jobs:

“The crisis has shut many doors, and many young school-leavers are knocking to no avail. So we are opening up two fronts. We carefully target young people with no education - for instance by building bridges between youth and educational institutions, so that young people who don't have the qualifications to start an education can get the necessary legs-up.

“And we also do everything we can to help young people with an education get access to the labour market,” said Mette Frederiksen.

One way the government wants to find jobs for more newly qualified people is to prioritise the job rotation scheme. This would allow for instance a home helper or a teacher to get the further training he or she needs. In their absence an unemployed person will be hired as a temporary worker, which gives them work experience.

There are also grants for businesses which hire young people fresh out of vocational training. The adult apprenticeship scheme is being improved and it will become possible to get a job as a “knowledge pilot” - a highly educated person who heads a development programme for staff in a company - in a small company if you are an academic, or as a “trade pilot” if you have vocational training.

The Prime Minister's key issue

Fighting youth unemployment was a central election promise from Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt (Social Democrats), and a special youth package was one of the government's demands both during budget negotiations and during three-partite talks. But none of the attempts led to an agreement, and that is why the government's own youth package is now being presented. It has been received with cautious optimism from both the opposition and the social partners. All parties do say, however, that the youth package alone is not enough.

The trade union movement praises the Social Democrat-led coalition government's youth package because it allocates money for more job rotation and for more internships. But more is needed, says Dennis Kristensen, chairman of the Danish Trade Union of Public Employees, FOA.

Left, Denmark's Liberal Party and the largest opposition party, says there should also be a complete overhaul of the cash aid system to make it worthwhile to actually be working.

This autumn's youth package is the latest in a row of youth packages. The others were launched by the previous centre-right government and also aimed to prevent young people having to start their adult lives as benefit claimants.

Light at the end of the tunnel

Despite all this things have headed in the wrong direction: nearly one in ten 25 to 29 year old has no work, and unemployment among newly educated people has more than dou-

bled since the crisis began. But there are now some indicators that previous youth packages have started to have an effect. Figures from the Ministry of Children and Education show the number of 15 to 17 year olds with no education or job has fallen dramatically. From the first quarter of 2011 until the first quarter of 2012 this group has shrunk by 26 percent, and there is also an increase in the number of young people who have either started secondary education, who are re-sitting exams or who are starting class 10 (a voluntary 10th year of their nine year obligatory schooling).

Efforts to get more young unskilled unemployed people into education also seem to be paying off. In 2008 and 2009 less than one in four unskilled unemployed 18 to 29 year old started an education. In 2011 that number had climbed to one in three according to a new survey from the National Labour Market Authority.

The Danish government expects overall unemployment to fall next year, but in the short term it will rise. This is shown in the government's latest economical forecast, and the latest unemployment figures backs it up: in July 2012 unemployment rose with 1,500 people on the previous month, and the total unemployment figure reached 165,700 - 6.3 percent of the labour force.



Kristin Skogen Lund's recipe for good leadership: 5 percent strategy, 15 percent position and 80 percent daily execution

Kristin Skogen Lund: NHO's new Director General getting down to business

The wind in Kristin Skogen Lund's sails has increased lately. As President of the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) and a Telenor Group Director she has topped the list of Norway's most powerful women two years in a row. Each time another top job has become available she has been touted as a possible candidate. But now that has ended: from 1 November Kristin Skogen Lund is the NHO's Director General.

PORTRAIT

17.09.2012

TEXT: BERIT KVAM, PHOTO: ILJA HENDEL, SCANPIX

"I was tuning my car stereo the other day, and suddenly I heard an entire debate about me. Gosh, I thought, they're talking about me. It was strange, very strange. The debate focused on my candidacy for the Director General job at the NHO."

Nordic Labour Journal met Kristin Skogen Lund a few days before her appointment was made official. It was not easy to

interpret her smile as I asked whether she would be the new NHO Director General, and she repeated:

"I have always said I cannot comment on that process. I have to keep to that."

The NHO has 21,500 member companies employing some 525,000 people within the construction, industry, service and IT sectors, and it is a member of Business Europe.

Sudden handover

When she was elected as the NHO's president in April 2010, she says, she was 'thrown in' as the former president suddenly stepped down.

"I hadn't aspired to that position to begin with, but when my first term as president was over I stood for re-election because I knew I was capable of fulfilling that role."

When Kristin Skogen Lund was presented as the NHO's new Director General at a press conference on Monday 10 September 2012, she demonstrated that knowledge about the organisation being its president has given her.

"I know the strength this organisation possesses and I have also developed a desire to work with the role business in general and the NHO in particular can play in Norwegian society. I'm looking forward to working with this full time and to dedicate all my efforts to doing a good job defending the role of businesses."

She lists education and skills among the most important issues she wants to focus on, both things "she and the NHO are really passionate about". Doing a good job with our youth today will be crucial for Norway's role in the future, she says. Other issues she highlights as being important include Norway as an energy provider and infrastructure.

Long way to fall

Back to that debate on the car stereo, about her role as Director General. Did she learn anything from it?

"Yes, and perhaps that's the flip-side of the coin - when very high expectations are being built and as a result you have a long way to fall. This of course makes you vulnerable to making mistakes. I handle it no problem, but of course it isn't easy to have a bad day."

Skogen Lund is also the leader of Telenor Digital Services, and we met her at Telenor's headquarters at Fornebu. The beautifully designed building lies in one of Oslo's most beautiful natural surroundings, near the capital's former main airport Fornebu with a view of the Oslo fjord where the sky is high and there is plenty of space. Inside, on the higher floors, the noise from the open atrium becomes more prevalent.

"I've come straight from seeing the boss," she said then with a disarming smile, looking for a quiet room where we could talk. As she had been a little bit late, I had been welcomed by the head of information who talked about Telenor digital Services and Telenor Broadcast. At one stage she did three jobs, he says, leading both Telenor Nordic, Telenor Digital Services & Broadcast while also being the NHO president. Analysts were wondering whether she was moving up, down or sideways within the corporation when she quit her position as leader of Telenor's Nordic region.

"I was very much part of setting up that division, and my background of course played a part in shaping my interest for

that particular field," she says herself. Her previous job had been CEO at Oslo's Aftenposten newspaper.

Asked to leave Nordic job

"After working in the media for many years and watching digitisation changing the reality in that trade, I felt it was important to be part of a similar development within the telecoms industry generally and within Telenor specifically. The media business is often ahead. This development has come later to telecoms because it has taken time for smartphones to become 'smart' enough.

"So this was a strategy I helped develop when I began working here as head of the Nordic region. For nine months I was responsible for both Telenor Nordic and Digital Services. That was clearly far too much on top of me being the NHO president. I was trying to split myself in two. I had originally asked Jon Fredrik Baksaas, Telenor's CEO, to be allowed to end the Nordic job a good while before I finally did. So...", she says and smiles again.

To presume she was moving sideways turned out to be a bad guess. Telenor Digital Services represents much of what the future holds and is a very exciting place to work, says Kristin Skogen Lund convincingly. She would not have left that job for anything but the NHO Director General job she told the press conference a few days later at NHO head quarters.

Telecoms is no longer only traditional telephony or mobile. The sector is developing in a way which allows for digital services and communication, text, sound and video on different platforms to come together as one, and it is happening globally. To keep up with the future and offer the solutions which people want, you need to be part of the development. Telenor Digital Services, which Kristin Skogen Lund helped create, now employs 5-600 people, while Telenor Broadcast - also under her leadership, comprising Canal Digital - has some 1,000 employees spread across many parts of the world. She has also been responsible for "our media activities; the A-pressen ownership and things like that."

Juggling

"I'm juggling many things at the same time and enjoy many points of contact."

One of these contacts is the head of Norway's Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), Roar Flåthen. She has represented Telenor on the A-pressen board, where Flåthen is the chairman.

"I have a very good relationship with Roar Flåthen, I have had that for many years."

This is presumably also an advantage when the two of them might meet in future negotiations as LO leader and NHO Director General.

How do you juggle all these things?

"I work hard all the time."

What else is needed?

“You must be good at delegating. You mustn't try to be in control of absolutely everything, because you simply can't. You must trust the people around you and find a good way of communicating which means you're involved in what you should be involved in, but not in all the other stuff. You need to become good at separating big from small, important from non-important.

“I am also good at time management. I am constantly doing something: if I'm on a plane I have planned what I need to read; normally I have no time to read. I use the windows I get. If I'm in the car I call someone I should call. It becomes a lifestyle. But I also completely relax, when I'm on holiday for instance. I can be a bit chilled then.”

So how do you chill?

“It's not exactly chilling, but I like working in the garden, trudge around and fix things. Clean. I like to do things which show immediate results. But I can also lie on a deckchair for four hours, reading three papers. I can do that too.”

Criteria for successful, good leadership

Use time wisely, delegate and build a 5-15-80 organisation - it's become a bit of a leadership mantra for Skogen Lund. 5-15-80 was also the title of a comment she wrote for Aftenposten on 24 August, in which she gives the recipe for good leadership: 5 percent focus on strategy or planning, 15 percent focus on position and 80 percent focus on daily execution.

“It's important to have good planning and a good position, but the key to success lies in execution” she writes in her article, which is a comment to the 22 July commission's report on the terror attacks in Oslo and at Utøya.

“The report highlighted how several links in the process lacked the ability to recognise that something is not working the way it should or that plans are not being executed, and there's a lack in taking responsibility after the event and adjust the course and help correct the mistakes.”

Too many meetings

“Leaders have too little focus on creating the ability to finish something. They spend too long in meetings and making plans, and they spend too little time actually getting things done,” Kristin Skogen Lund tells Nordic Labour Journal.

How do you create this ability to finish things?

“Again you need to focus on the right things. In many cases you might need to simplify as much as possible, not to make too much bureaucracy. You cannot always be absolutely sure about everything you do, because then you will be guaranteed to be late when you finally get around to doing it. As a leader, for instance of Digital Services where we must establish a lot of new things, I must stand tall and give my colleagues the

confidence to say that yes, we believe in this, let's roll, and then to protect them a bit from other stuff. Let them finish things by launching new services and products and get them out to the markets.

“But this is also a lot about nurturing a culture in as much as you need to give people quite far down in the organisation the chance to take responsibility and to feel that responsibility. If you are responsible for a sales department and constantly experience that there is something wrong with the product or the level of customer service, it is easy to think that I am head of sales, so this is not my area of responsibility.

“That's when I think that you cannot expect the person who heads all of these three areas to see and understand the problem. It is your responsibility to improve things even if you are stepping outside of your area of responsibility. Happy, but never satisfied as I usually say. Always try to maintain such dynamics. That's what I mean when I talk about an 80 percent organisation: if everyone thinks and works under those dynamics you get a nice lateral process after a while.”

Leaders don't know it all

“Another important thing is not to believe you know it all just because you're the leader. It is often the case that those who have the overview lack the insight, and that those who have the insight don't have the overview. It's important for a leader to be able to combine overview and insight.

“Norwegian society is a bit kind and nice. This is a good thing, but we do put up with a lot of things. It is not OK not to finish what we have said we will do. It is not OK anywhere, be it in the public or private sector or in private life for that matter. We do perhaps accept a little bit too much,” she says, but hastens to add that she is not that good in this area herself.

“I'm not necessarily any different, but I do have quite a few roles where it is my duty to make sure things are being done. If I, as a leader, have colleagues who don't do what they're supposed to be doing, I have to take action. And I do, because I must. The worst thing is when you get an erosion of responsibility. Then nobody feels responsible for the total process and for the execution.”

As a leader, how do you avoid a situation like that?

“You must build a culture within which it is accepted that you have responsibility on all levels. Where avoidance is rooted out. There are places where such avoidance is allowed to flourish with nobody doing anything about it.”

Attention

How do you deal with all this attention?

“Some things are very much out there. My public image and my own self-image are two completely different things. I punish myself, I am never satisfied and I think I spot my own

mistakes before anybody else. Having said that, I appreciate being valued. But it's not like I soak that up and make it part of my own self-image. That's not how it works. It is like observing something from the outside, something which is not in here," she says and points to her heart.

She has been heavily engaged in education and skills development both as president at the NHO and as a Telenor executive. She cannot understand why the government does not put more into science and technology.

"There is no doubt that we need more science and technology graduates," she says firmly.

NHO is so many things

"As president of the NHO it has been important to me to be the NHO's voice, I have talked a lot about skills, I have been busy with infrastructure issues and during my time we have had several conferences looking at welfare challenges, public sector efficiency and labour market policies. I have also been interested in trying to understand the complex make-up of our members - everything from one-person companies to Statoil. That is why it has been important to make the NHO relevant to most members and never to forget that we are working for our members - the companies out there which differ greatly in size, geography and types of trade. We must manage to be as relevant as possible to them.

Business Europe

Large parts of Europe are in recession. These are uncertain times. What are her thoughts around these challenges?

"Twice a year I meet my colleagues in Business Europe. Each time it is a real wake-up call because I really understand how far away we are from the reality in many European countries. I feel Norway has done well as a nation and that we should be happy about that, but we must never believe things will carry on automatically.

"This goes for nations as well as for organisations, happy but never satisfied. This is what is so difficult, to get the message across that when things are good, that's when you need to make a few adjustments to make sure things continue to go well. If you don't make those adjustments you end up a little bit off course. In the end you end up being completely off course."

She uses Norway's pension reform as an example.

"The pension reform is a positive example of a measure which is right to introduce, but which has not been introduced to the public sector, which is the sin of avoidance," Kristin Skogen Lund told Nordic Labour Journal a few days before she was made the new Director General at the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise.