

Participatory organisational intervention as a stage for discursive struggle

Employee participation in decision-making has been widely considered a means to promote well-being at work and improve the quality of working life. However, the results from studies on workplace participation are mixed. One possible explanation for this may be the varying quality of communication in these interventions. In this article, we explore participatory organisational intervention from the perspective of communication. By relying on data from authentic discussions, we show how workplace participation can generate communicative tensions. Additionally, we show how these tensions are presented in dialogue. The data for this study was collected from a structured participative organisational intervention implemented in a Finnish comprehensive school. The data was analysed using the concepts and methodology of discourse analysis. Our results suggest that participative practice in workplaces is in many ways a complex phenomenon, and that the ideal of work-related democratic dialogue can be hard to achieve. We show that participative discussions can be understood as setting the stage for different kinds of work-related meanings. At this point, communicative struggles can also occur. Using examples, we demonstrate what kinds of communication can be beneficial for the continuation of dialogue and conversely what kind of communication can make dialogue more difficult. Finally, we discuss the potential implications of our findings for the practice and research of participatory organisational interventions.