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Changes in framework conditions in the Norwegian petroleum industry: What are their relations to safety?

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Framework conditions are important for safety, as they affect the possibilities for keeping risk under control. In this literature study, which is a follow-up of a similar study from 2011 (Rosness et al., 2011), 119 articles were reviewed to identify emerging framework conditions and their relation to safety in the petroleum industry. Changes in external framework conditions have led to company internal cost reductions and efficiency measures. In turn, this have contributed to more organizational complexity, and also putting the tripartite cooperation between the state, the employer organizations, and the trade unions under pressure. Different mechanisms that could lead to higher major accident and work environment risk are discussed.

Keywords: Framework conditions, Industrial relations, Organizational factors, Contractor management, Offshore

1. Introduction: framework conditions and safety

Framework conditions that are important for major accident and work environment risk have been an area of interest for the Petroleum Safety Authority Norway (PSA) for several years. In 2011, a report from a literature study was published, where the concept, and research on framework conditions were explored. (Rosness et al., 2011). In the report, framework conditions were defined as follows (ibid: 63, our translation):

Framework conditions are conditions that affect the practical possibilities an organization, organizational unit, group or individual has to keep major accident risk and work environment risk under control.

Framework conditions affect work environment risk and major accident risk indirectly, in such a way that room for manoeuvre, opportunities for interaction, resources, intensives, etc. are affected. They could include resources (e.g., time, manning, economic resources), conditions for cooperation, incentives, standards and laws, technology, physical conditions etc., and they could also be analyzed on different system levels.

The current paper is based on a new literature study, which particularly focuses on changes in industrial relations and organizational framework conditions in recent years. More explicitly, the following problem formulations will be explored:

- What is the development and state of knowledge of organizational framework conditions and industrial relations in the Norwegian petroleum industry?
- How can industrial relations and organizational framework conditions affect the possibility of controlling major accident and work environment risk?

2. Method: short literature review

The literature search was performed in the Scopus, Oria and Google Scholar databases. A search was made for research literature that had a publication date from 1 January 2015 to January 31th. The search was limited to the petroleum industry and articles that had Working environment, Safety, Major accidents, OHS, HES, or HSE or in title, summary or keywords AND at the same time the following keywords:

- Time pressure
- Manning
- Competence
- Working conditions
- Contract
- Tripartite cooperation
- Trade union
- Remote control
- Maintenance

The search resulted in a total of 119 articles that were reviewed for relevance on face value by both the authors. In addition, recent reports, studies and books were reviewed that were considered relevant to the topic. We also performed a search with Norwegian keywords corresponding to the English described above and included literature that was already known to the authors.

3. Analysis

The first problem formulation will be addressed and discussed in the subchapters 3.1 and 3.1, where literature on changes in organizational framework conditions and industrial relations will be reviewed. In subchapter 3.3, findings related to possible safety consequences of these changes for the petroleum industry will be reviewed and discussed.

3.1. Organizational framework conditions

Over several decades, an increasing rate of change has been observed in work organization, often linked to globalization and stronger market competition, which in turn increases the need for new and more efficient ways of producing goods and services. The changes have been both structural and processual. In addition, there is a rapid change in technological solutions that can enable other types of change.

In this literature study, we have placed particular emphasis on changes in and consequences of the structural organization of companies in the petroleum industry, even though the types of changes are partly interrelated.

Structural changes in working life could lead to more complexity. In the petroleum industry, operators, contractors and subcontractors are increasingly collaborating on tasks and processes. An increasing rate of change and increased complexity can also have negative safety consequences (Le Coze, 2015), for example related to unclear responsibilities, hampered communication, cultural differences and flawed coordination.

Outsourcing has been common in the petroleum industry (Nygren, Jakobsson, Andersson, & Johansson, 2017). This can be linked to the many specialized work tasks in the industry, but also to the fact that petroleum is strongly affected by considerable fluctuations in oil and gas prices and associated variations in activity levels.

Outsourcing involves a contractual agreement between an operator and one or several contractors. In the Norwegian petroleum industry, so-called “Oneteam” contracts (there are also other terms) have become more common (Bye, Sæther and Vinnem, 2021). Such contracts involve a greater degree of integration of the tasks performed by the operator and contractors. Contractors can carry out work across organizational boundaries and can also contribute to the operator's planning. For the operator, one important motive for entering such contracts is cost reductions and streamlining. Requirements for multidisciplinary work give possibilities for less workers involved. Such contracts can have some negative consequences for the contractors (Bye et al., 2021), including less predictability in scope of work, increased financial risk, and less opportunities for competence building

Outsourcing contracts such as “Oneteam” can have an impact on which forms of employment that are used. There are generally four different ways in which a company can organize its workforce (Zeiler-Sørensen, 2015): According to the Norwegian Working Environment Act, *permanent employment* should be the main rule. *Temporary employment* can be used when some particular conditions are met (for example, temporary positions for permanent employees on leave or when the work is of a temporary nature). *Purchase of labour from other companies* means that work tasks are performed by e.g. supplier companies, regulated through contracts between the companies. *Hiring labor* means that the company (operator or contractor) compensates a third party (for example a temporary employment agency) for engaging the employee for a given period of time. The employee receives a salary and is employed by the third party, but is subject to the rental company's systems, including the HSE management systems.

In general, hiring from staffing companies has increased in Norway over the past 20 years, to

1.5-2 per cent of the employed (NOU 2021: 9). Hiring seems to be increasingly used in the petroleum industry. For example, a survey from 2014 estimated that 46% of companies in the industry had hired labour during the last 12 months (Bråten, 2014). In 2020, the PSA found that 94% of the operators and 72% of the contractors had used hiring. It was 30% among the operators and 28% of the contractors who had a hiring share of more than 10% of the workforce.

The number of employees has also decreased in the industry. The number of employees was 67,616 in 2020, which is approximately 15,000 fewer than in 2014, which was a peak year (SSB, 2021). As described in Bye et al. (2021), there has been a general reduction in the workforce in the industry, most evident in rig operation (33%) and least among the operating companies (5%).

In summary, cost reductions and a quest for higher efficiency are important motives for introducing new ways of organizing working life. This is also the case in the petroleum industry, where fluctuations in oil and gas prices can contribute to strengthening these motivations. Organizational changes often involve a fragmentation of the work, more organizational interfaces and greater complexity. This is evident in the petroleum industry in the form of outsourcing and contracts such as Oneteam or similar concepts, at the same time as hiring is increasing and staffing is generally reduced. How the work is organized can constitute a framework condition, ie "affects the practical possibilities an organization, organizational unit, group or individual has to keep major accident risk and work environment risk under control" (Rosness et al., 2011).

3.2. Industrial relations and union-management cooperation

The most unique and essential structural features of the Norwegian work life is the high rate of unionization among workers, the long tradition of collective bargaining between the social parties, in addition to a very regulated system for labour market conflicts in collaboration between employers/management, employees/union and government. This is called the tripartite cooperation. In addition, the Norwegian approach to industrial relations is often said to be a hybrid approach or a "third way" between the pluralist assumptions (acknowledging that there is a basic conflict of interest between the social parties) and the unitarist approach (that these parties after all share some vision and purpose). The hybrid approach to industrial relations recognizes the importance of both the formal, representative systems for employee involvement and direct forms of employee involvement (Finnestrand, 2011).

A report published by the research institutes, IRIS and FAFO (Melberg et al., 2018), points out that employees in the Norwegian petroleum industry have both the right and the duty to contribute to developing, implementing and following up systematic HSE efforts in the industry in accordance with law and collective agreements. These rights and obligations shall be practiced both directly by each individual employee (direct participation) and indirectly through trade union representatives, safety representatives and members of statutory working environment committees in the companies (Melberg et al., 2018).

Within the petroleum sector, an organization developed from tripartite cooperation called Safety Forum was established about twenty years ago. It is often highlighted as an arena where representatives from employers, trade unions and the governmental authorities discuss more general safety issues and share knowledge and experiences. Despite this initiative, Melberg et al., (2018) report that several unions are concerned that companies are limiting employee participation and cutting back on training. They also show that co-operation between management and trade unions is particularly demanding in complex contractual matters.

Our literature study shows that very little research has been conducted which looks at the connection between tripartite cooperation nationally, or two partite cooperation locally, on the one hand and framework conditions and consequences for the working environment and safety in the petroleum activities on the other. Furthermore, the representative participation in the petroleum industry has often been represented by safety representatives, and to a lesser extent the trade unions and their shop stewards. Melberg et al., (2018)'s study indicates, for example, that it can be difficult to distinguish between cases that are to be handled in the corporate committees, where the unions are represented, and cases that

needs to be handled by the safety delegates. Because many safety delegates are members of a trade union and in many cases also shop stewards, it can be perceived as unclear whether the person in question acts as a safety delegate or as a trade union representative. Although the different actors' function is regulated by different laws and agreements, the boundaries seem to be somewhat woolly and confusing in practice.

The further review is therefore based on a few Norwegian research reports based on tri- and two-partite collaboration in the petroleum industry, and research articles and reports from working life in general where relevant topics such as various forms of affiliation, organizational forms in the industry and the impact of these forms have been considered. Safety delegates as a function is excluded in this context.

The tripartite cooperation has, among other things, enabled centralized wage negotiations which in turn has led to a compressed wage structure. This means that the lowest wages are pushed up, while the highest wages are kept down. This structure has contributed to good jobs for employees with little or no formal competence, and who will otherwise be in a vulnerable position in relation to employees with expert competence (Moene 1999).

At the same time, this wage structure has pushed up technology-driven growth in the companies, as the wage costs in labour-intensive operations have been relatively costly compared with the wage costs in other countries. Whether the choice is between investing in new technology and smarter organization on the one hand, or hiring more people on the other, it has in been relatively profitable to invest in technology - at least in the long term (Moene et al., 2009). We also see the same trend with regard to companies' investments in education and skills development among their employees. Firstly, it will pay to hire an employee with a high level of education, and secondly, it will be important to invest in the competence of their employees. The hourly wage of, for example, a skilled worker is admittedly expensive in Norway compared with the hourly wage in other countries, but with highly competent employees who are able to take responsibility for far more than their specific field of work or task, it will still be financially sustainable.

It has further been argued that this wage model has contributed to an expansion in the highly productive parts of working life, and that workers have been moved from lower paid jobs in low productive industries to higher paid jobs in companies that are competitive. This means that the protection of employees' health and welfare has, as a general rule, been combined with societal considerations and value creation (NOU 2021: 9).

Continued strong tripartite cooperation in the future depends on strong social parties, which in turn depend on a continued high degree of unionization. In companies with less than five employees in the private sector, only 18 per cent of the employees are unionized, while it reaches 59 per cent in companies with 200 employees or more (Nergaard, 2018). Furthermore, it is more common for the representative schemes related to trade union organization and collective agreements to be followed up and practiced in larger companies than in smaller companies. Based on this, it can be assumed that a change in the business structure, where one goes from larger companies to smaller and specialized companies, could affect the degree of unionization and thus also the cooperation between union and employer as an important framework condition in the future.

The degree of unionization has been fairly stable at around 50 per cent in recent years in Norway. In the public sector, the degree of unionization is around 80 per cent, while in the private sector it is around 38 per cent. Although the petroleum sector belongs to the private sector, it is characterized by a high degree of unionization. SAFE, which is a trade union for employees in the energy sector, reports that their membership as a whole has been relatively stable in absolute numbers over the past 10 years. On the other hand, there has been some decline in some areas within the sector such as catering and maintenance. These are functions that have been under pressure in recent years, as they have been either outsourced or organized through temporary contracts. It is also uncertain whether the number of members in these areas has decreased as a result of a reduction in staffing in the industry, or whether it is a result of an increasing number of employees in these areas working on temporary contracts.

Despite the fact that it is perhaps first and foremost employees in temporary and vulnerable working conditions who will have the greatest need for trade union membership, Nergaard (2018) shows that the degree of organization is higher among employees with permanent employment than those who are temporarily employed. Furthermore, studies show that very few hires are organized in unions (Ingelsrud et al., 2020).There are no overall figures or estimates for the degree of organization among employees in staffing companies. Studies nevertheless show that in industries with a high proportion of employees hired from staffing companies, the spread of organized working life has weakened. This is also reflected in the actual practice of two-partite cooperation in the staffing industry. Trygstad et al. (2021) find, for example, that there are large differences between temporary employees and permanent employees in the private sector when it comes to their opportunities for participation and co-determination. There are fewer temporary and hired employees who have, or know that there are, collective schemes such as safety representatives and working environment committees in their workplace than among permanent employees. There are also fewer temporary hired employees than permanent employees who are aware that there are shop stewards in the company they work in. Although these surveys do not look at the petroleum industry in particular, the changes towards temporary employment contracts and the use of hiring are recognizable.

In an interview survey conducted by Ingelsrud et al. (2020), fear of not getting a renewed contract is one reason employees in staffing companies refuse to organize in unions. Finally, there are several studies that have looked at the quality of the representative schemes in Norwegian working life, and in which areas tripartite- and two-parite cooperation is both strongest and where it is most vulnerable (NOU 2021: 9). These studies show that local two-party cooperation often include issues related to the working environment and pay and working conditions, while shop stewards' input regarding the use of hiring and other labour strategies is less emphasized. This is challenging within the petroleum industry as it is new forms of contracts and the use of temporary forms of employment that seems to be the most important challenges in the industry in the future.

A continuation of collective bargaining agreements requires that employees continue to organize in trade unions, and that companies continue to organize in employers' associations. Great economic pressure in industries, on the other hand, seems to be leading the way towards several alternative forms of affiliation and forms of organization. Examples of this in the petroleum industry is the use of more hiring, so-called nomadic activities, and the use of construction contracts. These are forms of organization where employees are less organized. If the tripartite cooperation is not able to handle this development through the collective bargaining agreements, the tripartite cooperation will not be able to ensure the necessary framework conditions in the industry that curb major accident and work environment risk.

In the following, we will summarize key findings from the research literature on some of consequences new ways of organizing the business may have for major accident and work environment risk.

3.3. Possible consequences

As described above, increased organizational complexity is a development feature in the petroleum industry. In the following, we describe some studies in more detail that illustrate some key safety challenges with this development. Review studies are useful in this context, and in such a study, Milch and Laumann (2016) point to four main categories of safety challenges that can be linked to outsourcing and organizational complexity. We will organize some of the findings from the literature study according to these four categories: (1) Economic/financial pressure, (2) Disorganization, (3) Weakening of competence and (4) Organizational differences

High economic pressure could involve goal conflicts between economy and safety. Contractors are in a competitive situation and are expected by operators to be cost-effective. This can have negative consequences for resources allocated to safety, and also contribute to a fragmented responsibility for safety management. Economic pressure and strong competition can contribute to a high work pressure to achieve economic goals (Mcdermott et al., 2018a). High work and time pressure are related to work

practices that are unsafe, which in turn increase the probability for injuries (Nævestad et al., 2018). There are several studies indicating that contractors are more exposed to injuries and work environment risk compared to operators (for example, Mayhew & Quinland, 1999; Nygren et al., 2017). This also applies to the petroleum industry.

Disorganization means that outsourcing can lead to unclear responsibilities between the various organization, for example when it comes to safety training and who should have an overall view and responsibility. The many organizational interfaces between the organizations also mean that the communication and information flow can be weakened (Kongsvik and Fenstad, 2007). Bureaucratic and oversized safety management systems can also emerge. In general, there might be an underestimation of the complexity of the communication processes and the importance of a good organizational climate for communication in the industry (Nordin et al., 2021). Results from a PSA survey (PSA, 2015: 158) showed that a larger proportion of those who stated that they had undergone an organizational change process, reported occupational accidents with personal injury, compared with those who had not undergone an organizational change process. Similar results were also found in a study conducted by Melberg et al., (2018).

Weakening of competence is partly related to the workforce becoming less stable in this type of organization and that you get more turnover of personnel. Increased hiring could reinforce this. Compared with a more traditional way of organizing, fewer employees will have local knowledge of the workplace (installation-specific competence in our context) and experience/knowledge of the specific work processes. The safety training can also be negatively influenced. In a qualitative study that involved hired drilling workers (Furu, 2020), the results indicated that the competence was variable and that the regular employees did not invest much in training hired workers, as they were only to be there for a short period.

Organizational differences can include different ways of working, and potential mistrust and conflict between the various actors. Lack of trust can contribute to less commitment to safety work (Behari, 2019). In addition, decision-making processes can be fragmented (e.g. Gausdal and Makarova, 2017). Cultural differences between the actors can also be a source of conflict. An interesting study by McDermott et al. (2018b), shows how risk is transferred from operators to contractors that may become scapegoats for errors that occur. It has been documented that reporting of adverse events among hired employees is lower than among permanent employees, which may be due to fears that one will not be re-engaged if one reports (Collinson, 1999; Furu, 2020).

Safety culture is a topic that is brought to the fore through the development that has taken place in the petroleum industry, and is also addressed by several researchers in the literature. Safety culture can generally be defined as "... the common values, norms and perceptions of reality related to safety that develop in an organization when the members interact with each other and the environment" (Kongsvik et al., 2018: 222, our translation). There is some research that indicates that a good safety culture in a work community can have a positive influence on safety results (for example Nævestad et al., 2019).

Implicitly, framework conditions (cf. the "environment" in the definition of safety culture) will have an impact on how safety is prioritized and valued in an organization. Over the years, there have been various programs and campaigns in petroleum, where the goal has been developing a common, positive safety culture (Bye et al., 2016; Kongsvik et al., 2016).

Developments in the industry - including more hiring, nomadic activities and the use of integrated contracts - implies that an installation has become a fluid organization with more organizational interfaces (Milch and Laumann, 2019). At the same time, cooperation and interaction over time is a necessary condition for the development of culture. Common values and norms and culture develops through consistent interaction over time. Thus, the increasing fragmentation in the industry, which reduces the opportunities for interaction. has made it difficult to develop common, good safety cultures. Discussion

Like working life in general, the petroleum industry is evolving, both in terms of the organization of work, the work processes and technological solutions applied. Various structural changes in the industry can be regarded as responses to changes in external framework

conditions, such as fluctuations in oil and gas prices. A common denominator for many of the changes is a desire for efficiency and cost reductions. The changes can result in more organizational interfaces and greater organizational complexity. External framework conditions thus provide an incentive for some organizational changes in the petroleum companies, which in turn provide other framework conditions for the performance of work.

The literature review has been organized around four categories of safety challenges. These are developed on the basis of a review of research (Milch & Laumann, 2016), and can be linked to the structural, organizational changes in the petroleum industry: 1) Economic pressure, where contractors are expected to be cost-effective and which can create high time and work pressure, fragmented responsibility for safety, 2) Disorganization, where responsibilities may become unclear and which complicates inter-organizational communication, 3) Weakening of competence, through greater turnover of personnel and reduced installation-specific competence and 4) Organizational differences, where differences between the actors (operator and contractors) can be a source of mistrust and conflict, and which also provides opportunities to shift responsibility for errors from operators to contractors. Developing a good safety culture requires interaction between the actors. A fragmentation in the industry could reduce the opportunities for interaction and thus the development of good safety cultures.

The most unique and essential structural features of the Norwegian working life, including the petroleum sector, is the tripartite cooperation between the state, the employer organizations, and the trade union. This structure has contributed to good jobs for particularly employees with little or no formal education, which again has pushed technology-driven growth in addition to investments in education and skill development among the employees. One effect of the tripartite cooperation has been that it is profitable to invest in the competence of the employees and at the same time it has stimulated occupational safety.

A high degree of union participation is an important premise for tripartite cooperation, which has also been the case in the petroleum industry. From other parts of working life, however, we know that there is more union participation among permanent employees, compared to temporary employees and that few of the hired are organized. The development we have seen in the industry that involves increased fragmentation can thus weaken the tripartite cooperation over time.

4. Conclusion

We have illustrated that framework conditions in the petroleum industry are in flux and have changed significantly over the last decade. More organizational complexity may have influenced the possibilities for keeping risk under control, and also the conditions for tripartite cooperation that has been important for the safety work on the industry level.

This may be viewed in an ecological and system perspective. Major changes in external framework conditions (for example changes in oil and gas prices) have led to internal changes and adjustments in the petroleum companies. The internal decisions that are made, for example about cost reductions and streamlining, create changes in the framework conditions for units, groups or individuals who face risk. These new framework conditions can have an impact on the actual assessments and priorities that are made, as well as affect work performance, which in turn has an impact on major accident and work environment risk.

A system perspective might also provide a lens to consider the interrelations between social and technological issues in the petroleum industry, and inform organizational design to ensure safe operations. This design needs to ensure the necessary framework conditions such as the tripartite cooperating model in the industry in order to curb major accident and work environment risk. Further, a system perspective is useful to raise awareness of the significance of framework conditions, and how such conditions might align and have consequences for operational and sharp end working conditions and decision-making.

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