

## Organisational commitment through participation in decision-making: Case study municipality Hengelo



### City hall Hengelo

*Dr. Sarai Sapulete, senior consultant Social Policy and Health, Ecorys, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, [sarai.sapulete@ecorys.com](mailto:sarai.sapulete@ecorys.com)*

*Drs. Bob Vermaak<sup>1</sup>, CEO e-Democracy, Utrecht, the Netherlands, [bob@edemocracy.nl](mailto:bob@edemocracy.nl)*

### Introduction

Employees can use voice in organisations in different ways. One of the ways in which they can participate in organisational decision-making is through works council. The Works Council Act applies to organizations in the Netherlands, in the private as well as the public sector. Works councils should be elected every three to four years (Works Council Act). Works councils have the right to be informed and consulted on a wide range of organizational matters, and have the right to give consent on topics regarding social matters within the organization.

Over the past years, interest in joining a works council has diminished, and many works councils deal with open seats on their boards. About 40 per cent of works councils have open seats, and in almost half of government organizations there have been no works council elections (Snel et al., 2016). This problem is rooted in several causes, such as:

- Increase in flexible work: flexible workers do not have the right to vote until they work at a company for six months or more, and do not have the

---

<sup>1</sup> Presenter and corresponding author

right to take a seat in the works council until after a year of working for the company;

- Lack of commitment: taking a seat on the works council for a period of four years, is not attractive to (young) people who commit to companies for a shorter period of time.

Several organisations in the Netherlands are therefore exploring ways in which they can commit employees to participate in decision-making, either via direct or via indirect participation. To help organisations formulate a way in which they can designing their model of participation, Ecorys and e-Democracy have developed the MPO (medewerkerparticipatieonderzoek or: employee participation study). This model studies the organizational commitment of employees, and the extent to which employees (would like to) participate in organizational decision-making.

## Theory

The underlying theory that we use is the framework of organizational commitment (Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993), which connects organizational commitment to concepts such as employee satisfaction, job performance, and organizational citizenship behavior. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (e.g. Van Dick et al., 2006) entails behavior such as willingness to work overtime, helping new colleagues in their job introduction i.e., behavior that reaches further than formal job description. Participation in decision-making is related to this type of behavior as well. Therefore, we expect participation and commitment to be related. However, to test this hypothesis, it is important to distinguish different types of commitment. To do so, we use the distinction of Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993) and formulate the following hypotheses:

**Affective commitment:** Employees feel an affective or emotional attachment to the organization.

H1: employees with a higher degree of affective commitment are more likely to participate in organizational decision-making.

**Continuance commitment:** Employees perceive costs with leaving the organization.

H2: employees with a higher degree of continuance commitment are less likely to participate in organizational decision-making.

**Normative commitment:** Employees feel obliged to stay in the organization, because they feel a sense of loyalty.

H3: employees with a higher degree of normative commitment are more likely to participate in organizational decision-making.

## Methodology

We have developed a questionnaire, measuring the extent of participation as well as the different items compiling our organizational commitment measure. We have conducted a 0-measurement and 1-measurement, to identify the relation between commitment and participation, as well as the developments in participation over time.

The surveys were administered in 2014 and 2016. Table 1 shows the response figures for both years (37% of completed questionnaires in 2014, and 32% of completed questionnaires in 2016). In both years, men were slightly more inclined to fill out the questionnaire than women.

**Tabel 1. Response figures 2014 and 2016**

	2014	2016
Respondents invited	902	833
Respondents partial responses	526 (58%)	411 (49%)
Respondents complete responses	330 (37%)	267 (32%)

### **Wisdom from the East. How Hengelo is leading the way in the Netherlands.**

Hengelo is a medium-sized city in the East of the Netherlands. The municipality brought forward the founding father of Stork (well in fact, his parents), as well as former minister Henk Kamp (VVD). The municipality is located between Enschede and Almelo. It is a growing and green municipality.

In the municipality, the project was led by Ineke Nijhuis, works council member. The A&O fonds gemeenten (labor market and education fund for municipalities) subsidized the project, and the municipality director, Jan Eshuis, supported it.

At the start, e-Democracy and Ecorys have developed a questionnaire in which variables such as transparency, decision-making and employee preferences were included. In 2014, this questionnaire was administered among all employees of municipality Hengelo. Results of this study led to input for a project plan with sub-projects, such as:

1. Define the purpose of codetermination, together with director and employees;
2. Joint decision-making of managers, line managers and employees (instead of via the works council)
3. Support the works council with a flexible shell of employees who can be consulted topic-wise
4. Testing new instruments, such as an app, to make codetermination quicker and more efficient.

Following, the works council came up with a number of so-called interventions:

- Codetermination days about “opportunities in your career” and “strategic personnel policy”
- Discussions within teams to support decision-making processes
- Creating a flexible shell with 208 participants
- organize lunch sessions with director and employees to discuss topics within the municipality
- Informing employees about codetermination via the app
- Labeled half the employees of the organization “works council member”, to see what possible behavioral effects this would entail

The works council has regularly evaluated and adjusted the project over the course of one-and-a-half year. Next to Ineke Nijhuis there was another project

leader helping the works council out. On 7 December 2017 the most important insights of the project were shared at a conference.

Some of the project outcomes:

1. The number of employees that says to actively participate in codetermination has increased significantly (with 7%)
2. The number of employees who would not label participation as a “duty” within the organization, has decreased (from 47% to 16%)
3. The works council has introduced interventions that have led to an improvement in the expectations between employees and managers in the organization
4. Trust among employees and between employees and managers has significantly increased
5. There were works council elections in 2017
6. Many requests for knowledge sharing in other municipalities and organizations (Prinsenstichting Purmerend, A&O fonds gemeenten, works council meetings, and stichting ORKracht!)

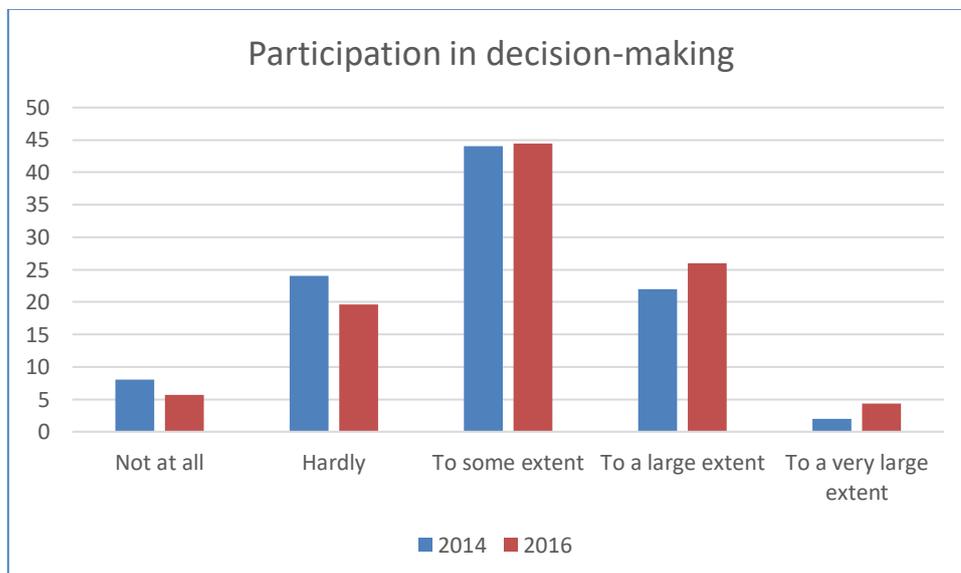
The project has gained interest in the Netherlands. The organization of Public Prosecution intends to connect employees and codetermination in a similar way. Furthermore, there have been requests from the mental health sector, and KLM.

## Results

The largest part of employees in the organization participates in organizational decision-making to some extent. In 2014, 24 per cent of employees participated to a large or very large extent. This amount has significantly increased in 2016 (30 per cent).

**Table 2. Percentage participation in decision-making**

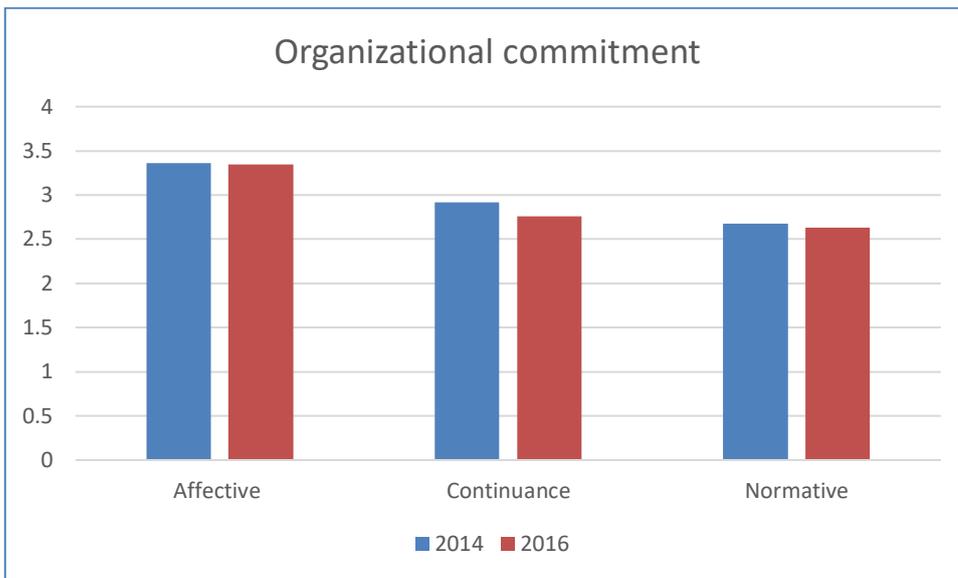
	2014	2016
Not at all	8	6
Hardly	24	20
To some extent	44	45
To a large extent	22	26
To a very large extent	2	4



We see that affective commitment is highest in the municipality of Hengelo. This did not change over time. Continuance commitment slightly decreased, indicating that the number of employees who feels committed to the organization because of a shortage of alternatives, has decreased.

**Table 3. Organizational commitment, 2014 vs. 2016**

	2014	2016
Affective	3.36	3.35
Continuance	2.92	2.76
Normative	2.68	2.63



Regarding our hypotheses, we see that only continuance commitment is related to the extent of participation, negatively as expected. This result holds for both years, 2014 as well as 2016.

### Conclusion

The municipality of Hengelo has been successful in enlarging the participation in decision-making over two years in which several interventions have been carried out by the works council. The relationship between continuance commitment and participation is negative and significant, and this effect remains visible over time. Continuance commitment has decreased slightly, while participation has increased. Because of the relation between the two, this may indicate a causal effect, namely: due to the increase in participation, organizational commitment in terms of continuance commitment has decreased. Further research could focus more in-depth on the causality of this relationship.

### References

- Meyer, J. P., Allen, N. J., & Smith, C. A. (1993). Commitment to organizations and occupations: Extension and test of a three-component conceptualization. *Journal of applied psychology*, 78(4): 538.
- Snel, J., Van Houten-Pilkes, S., & Groenland, S. (2016). SBI Formaat MonitOR 2015-2016: Alle uitkomsten van het grootste onderzoek naar de stand van de medezeggenschap in Nederland. SBI Formaat.
- Van Dick, R. et al. (2006). Identity and the Extra Mile: Relationships between Organizational Identification and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. *British Journal of Management*, 17: 283-301.