

## **A few notes on ethics**

*by Florian Schneider*

Presentation (10min) at the meeting with all employees about the report on the working environment at KIT

The report about the working environment is a document which makes evident that the challenge in this Department is a challenge of Ethics.

Often I hear that the most important positive quality of this Department is the fact that it operates like a “big family”. It is easy to agree with this, but it is at the same time a symptom that can help us to trace the source of many problems.

In a professional working environment that is part of a University any remainders of informal cultures of complicity and the exploitation of mutual dependencies need to be replaced with the consistent and coherent implementation of ethics. This is not theory, this requires practice, on a daily basis.

I could use this opportunity now, to complain about the systemic failure: as Head of Department you have a lot of responsibility but no power. Consequently, this fuels hypocrisy, blackmailing and conspiracy theories. I could point to the paradox that the top of this institution demands unpleasant measures but insists that they should be introduced to the employees in a way that they are accepted by everybody at maximum convenience.

I will not do this. Instead, I suggest to use this opportunity today, to reframe some of the urgencies we are facing:

Certainly, I could read the report as a litany of baseless accusations and complaints that could be easily proven wrong. We will all read the report, and everybody will find some passages one agrees with and other passages one strongly disagrees with. But in the end this does not matter too much.

We have another possibility today, and it is up to each individual and all of us whether we make use of it or not.

In the last weeks I encountered very intense situations that also showed that there is a possibility to reconcile, to overcome divisions and build bridges, even if we are tempted to think that we look into an abyss of hypocrisy and perfidy. To prepare for this meeting I had very important and very interesting conversations with the vast majority of employees, with the psychologists and colleagues in HR, the union leaders.

On this basis, I see the possibility to stand together and together to take responsibility for the future of our Department.

This future is within ONE NTNU while contributing to its vision “knowledge for a better world”.

This future is about an institution of higher arts education which faces the urgent challenge to reinvent the “Scandinavian model”.

This future presupposes a working environment that is aware of its strength due to the diversity of its staff and students, but also equally of the obligations that come with it.

Therefore, it is necessary to express in all due form and in all sincerity:

- We are no longer tolerating any attempt of intriguing, manipulating and bullying to pursue partial or selfish interests, often based on conspiracy theories or defending privileges of the past, but always at the costs of the working environment as a whole
- We are no longer accepting any attempt to drive us apart and play us off against each other, according to attributions, such as gender, country of origin, professional background, mother tongue, duration of contract, or whatever preference
- We are no longer supporting attitudes of generic refusal of responsibility followed by the scapegoating of those who then take the lead.

We are ONE NTNU: We are many and very diverse but there is a coherency and consistency, and this is our ethics.

As a part of one NTNU we contribute to this ethics with all the power of art, as it links and balances out research and education, theory and practices, awareness of the past and a future that is subject to change.

We are experiencing times that are critical. They require the capacity to make decisions and take a stance; they demand ethics and their consistent application; they call for visions and their coherent implementation.

This cannot be the task for one person who is then blamed for anything that might appear as potentially unpleasant. The lesson we learn from the report is very simple: The situation requires a collective commitment based on mutual respect and reciprocal, unconditional support.

When I started in 2014 as Instituttleder I promised: “What we all need to learn to achieve and to build is: A fearless mind. Not being afraid of going to work, of leaving the comfort zone, of taking risks and making mistakes.”

At 1300 you will get to know that I have decided not to apply for another term as Head of Department, although I have received a huge amount of trust, support and encouragement from the majority of the employees in KIT. Please do not misunderstand my decision. It does not mean that I leave you alone nor that I would give up. For the next six months, I will tear myself into pieces to make sure that we keep the promise from 2014 and build the basis for the future of this Department.

Let me clarify once more:

NTNU has to protect its employees and leaders against any attacks that are driven by anti-intellectual and xenophobic resentment. There cannot be the slightest doubt that NTNU supports KIT to aim for “quality on a documented high international level”. It should go without saying that NTNU supports its employees no matter their country of birth or background.