

## Discussion Forum

# Varied News Workplace Innovation

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## Policies

**European Commission.** The concept of workplace innovation is mentioned twice in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (2020) in the chapter 'More and better jobs'.

"Social dialogue, information, consultation and participation of workers and their representatives at different levels (including company and sectoral level) play an important role in shaping economic transitions and fostering workplace innovation, in particular with a view to the ongoing twin transitions and the changes in the world of work" (p. 16). Twin refers to green and digital.

"The Commission encourages national authorities and social partners to ensure the information and consultation of workers during restructuring processes as required by EU rules and to promote the participation of workers at company level with a view to fostering workplace innovation" (p. 18).

The EC still needs to see how to give workplace innovation a major role in this Action Plan. Encouraging others to foster workplace innovation is only a first action. However, we can consider ourselves fortunate that the concept of workplace innovation has survived and can be referred to at the EU level and in European countries. Furthermore, it is on the research agenda of DG RTD (see projects Beyond4.0 and Bridges5.0 below) and in support programmes such as 'Workplace innovation uptake by SMEs' of the EU Executive Agency for SMEs.

**European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).** The EESC adopted an opinion on Democracy at Work (2023), in which the committee refers to workplace innovation and EUWIN. "The EESC stresses the value of involving workers in workplace innovation. Initiatives by the social partners to enhance the productivity and well-being of workers at the workplace level should be promoted in a wider European context. The EESC welcomes the initiatives and research of Eurofound and the European Workplace Innovation Network and proposes that the EU take action to develop dialogue between the social partners and other stakeholders at all levels in the context of participatory approaches" (p.6).

**Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER).** The SER is an advisory body in which employers, employees and independent experts (Crown-appointed members) work together to reach an agreement on key social and economic issues. The SER advises the Dutch government and Parliament on social and economic policy. In 2020, the government at the time sent a request to the SER for advice on how to foster workplace innovation. On March 16, 2023, the Council adopted the final text: *Towards further successful application of workplace innovation*.

The advice describes the benefits of workplace innovation for productivity, Innovation capacity and quality of working life and shows good practices. It also refers to EUWIN, TNO and Workitects and to experiences with programmes in Finland, Germany, Scotland and Flanders/Belgium.

One part of the advice is to learn from the experiences in other countries. This will be organised by the SER shortly. A second part of the advice is a subsidy for SMEs that want to apply workplace innovation. The advice's third and most important part is to set up a Platform for Workplace Innovation. This should be initiated by the social partners in consultation with the government.

The platform has a twofold objective:

- Boosting, inspiring and supporting organisations applying or wanting to apply workplace innovation. The platform must, therefore, also play the role of driving concrete innovations. For example, a pilot in healthcare could be started.
- Collecting, analysing, opening and disseminating expertise and knowledge related to workplace innovation. The platform's function as a knowledge centre gives workplace innovation an independent place in the scientific research system.

The government must respond to the advice within half a year.

**Workplace innovation in Republic of Korea.** At the 'International Conference on Workplace Innovation' hosted by the Korea Labor Institute at the Jung-gu Bank Center in Seoul on the 16th of May 2023, cases of workplace innovation from around the world and challenges facing Korea were discussed. Heo Jae-joon, president of the Korea Labor Institute, emphasised, "In recent years, the importance of workplace innovation has become more prominent amid environmental changes such as low birth rates and ageing, rapid development of digital technology, climate crisis, and decarbonisation." EUWIN was represented by Peter Oeij, TNO, and Peter Totterdill, Workplace Innovation Europe CLG, who has been in contact with the KLI since 2009. Korea already has some good examples of workplace innovation, such as Yuhan Kimberly's 'autonomous work team' model in the late 1990s, which inspired other companies. Workplace innovation began with the goal of "increasing productivity" and was led by management. However, the problem is that workers are not at the centre of innovation. "What is important is a change in the mindset of managers, and we need to change the perception that fundamental change can only happen if discretion is given to the workers who know the

field best," Roh, one of the participants, said. The conference participants visited a good example of this, the Lighthouse Factory of LG. Automation and digitalisation changed the mode of production, productivity increased, and physical workload was reduced considerably, but the remaining work has tasks of 13 seconds. Thus, still some challenges for LG to achieve integral workplace innovation.

## Research

**Cedefop and Eurofound.** A new analysis of data from the European Company Survey yielded this report: *Fostering skills use for sustained business performance* (2023). The results support message of the workplace innovation community that skills are not only related to education, but also to work organisation and quality of work. This is often underexposed, even in this European year of skills, despite previous research by Cedefop. The authors refer to workplace innovation and EUWIN (p.7).

**Eurofound.** After years of remote working due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Eurofound published the report *Future of telework and hybrid work* (2023). To support policymakers in ensuring that the right conditions for telework and hybrid work are in place, Eurofound has developed various scenarios on the future of telework and hybrid work, highlighting different implications for the quality of work and organisational practices. Although telework and hybrid work are still evolving, new research suggests that developing telework and hybrid work in an equitable way brings better outcomes in terms of job quality and organisational practices. It will therefore be critical for the social partners and policymakers to consider issues such as ensuring fairness in the workplace, reviewing organisational practices and enabling autonomy, developing managers' skills, streamlining regulatory arrangements, guaranteeing job quality in situations of telework or hybrid work, and ensuring the voice of workers when designing a positive future for telework and hybrid work. EUWIN is mentioned as one of the networks that could facilitate learning about what works (p. 37).

**Research Agenda Workplace Innovation.** Edgar Elgar has published the cutting-edge Research Agenda (Oeij et al., 2023). This book takes an in-depth look at workplace innovation practices that are vital for dealing with the global disruptive changes we currently face. It unpacks the ways in which organisations can become more sustainable, not only for value creation and profitability but also for sustainable employability and employee skill development.

**Beyond 4.0.** Beyond 4.0 was commissioned by the European Commission to a consortium with many EUWIN-partners, coordinated by TNO and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, aims to help deliver an inclusive European future by examining the impact of the new technologies on the future of jobs, business models and welfare. **The final conference was held on March 28, 2023. Among the many relevant publications there is this interesting book for practitioners:** *The practical side of digital transformation: a tool book for practitioners* (2023, open access).

**Bridges 5.0.** Bridges 5.0 is a new project funded under the European Commission's Horizon Programme, and over the next four years the consortium (with many EUWIN partners and coordinated by TNO and Workplace Innovation Europe CLG) will be examining how Industry 5.0 can lead to better outcomes for employees, the environment, business competitiveness, and society. European industry has embarked on a path of digital transformation. Whilst the concept of Industry 4.0 has been driven primarily by productivity and technological considerations, the last ten years have clearly demonstrated the need for wider perspectives to make digital transformation work. Three changes are required.

Firstly, industrial companies do not exist in a vacuum – employees must also share in the resulting productivity gains. Yet employees also have responsibilities, not least to control their skills development.

Secondly, the industry itself must become greener and more circular. These changes also require new management and workforce skills.

Thirdly, investing in skills and finding new synergies between the interests of companies and their employees is a priority if the industry is to become more resilient in the face of an increasingly volatile world.

Our society needs companies and employees to make these changes together. Industry 5.0 adds employees, the environment and resilience to the equation, an alternative future in which businesses recognise their role in building a prosperous and sustainable society based on new modes of production. The challenge is to make the transformation to Industry 5.0 faster and better. The lessons from these experiments will be combined within a new Industry 5.0 Platform.

## References

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