

Chapter 2

European Policy on Workplace Innovation

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2.1 Introduction¹

Workplace innovation is gaining prominence as an emerging European policy agenda for creating organisational performance and quality jobs. The evidence underpinning this is convincing (see Chap. 6), its theoretical foundations are sound (see Chap. 5) and quite a number of countries have developed supportive programmes (see Chap. 3). For policy makers, the principal objective is to encourage companies to adopt workplace innovation. The European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN), that started in 2013 describes workplace innovation as follows: “Workplace innovations designate new and combined interventions in work organisation, human resource management, labour relations and supportive technologies. It is important to recognise both process and outcomes. The term workplace innovation describes the participatory and inclusive nature of innovations that

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embed workplace practices grounded in continuing reflection, learning and improvements in the way in which organisations manage their employees, organise work and deploy technologies. It champions workplace cultures and processes in which productive reflection is a part of everyday working life. It builds bridges between the strategic knowledge of the leadership, the professional and tacit knowledge of frontline employees and the organisational design knowledge of experts. It seeks to engage all stakeholders in dialogue in which the force of the better argument prevails. It works towards ‘win-win’ outcomes in which a creative convergence (rather than a trade-off) is forged between enhanced organisational performance and enhanced quality of working life” (Dhondt 2012, p. 2).

This chapter describes the development of European policies regarding work organisation and workplace innovation over the last 20 years and its societal context. Three periods are being distinguished: the nineties, the Lisbon Agenda and the EU 2020 Strategy. There is quite some evidence for the positive effects of workplace innovation (Alasoini 2016; Dhondt et al. 2014; Fricke 1997; Naschold 1994; Oeij et al. 2015; Pot 2011; Ramstad 2009; see Chap. 6 as well). How this can be understood theoretically is explained in Chap. 5.

2.2 Recent Updates of Productivity and Industrial Democracy Policies

Workplace innovation, as it developed from the beginning of this century, is a member of the Sociotechnical Systems Design (STSD)-family (Mohr and Van Amelsvoort 2016), going back to the restructuring of Europe after the Second World War, starting more or less the same policies for productivity and industrial democracy in several Western European countries. Although consensus about the use of the concept of workplace innovation is growing and its policy profile is getting stronger, other different policy concepts are being used for more or less the same approach (Kesselring et al. 2014). Examples are ‘innovative workplaces’ (OECD 2010; EESC 2011) and ‘sustainable work systems’ (Docherty et al. 2002). And, as can be expected, in national programmes and initiatives (Totterdill et al. 2009; Pot et al. 2012) concepts in each country’s language are being used. ‘Workplace innovation’ is also being used in the USA, Canada and Australia besides concepts such as ‘high involvement workplaces’ and ‘relational coordination’ (Gittell et al. 2010).

The emergence of interest in workplace innovation can be understood by looking at developments in the economy, technology and the labour market. The broader context is that in the early 1990s a significant shift in Europe’s economy and businesses could be observed, fueled by information technology. This shift reversed the historical pattern where tangible capital was considered to be the main asset in companies. Around 1990 investments in intangible capital (in percentage of adjusted GNP), such as patents, R&D, marketing, organisational competences became higher than investments in tangible capital (Corrado and Hulten 2010). Regarding innovation the conviction grew in Europe that ‘social innovation’

(work organisation, competence development, employee participation, etc.) is probably more important than ‘technological innovation’ to explain the company’s performance (Bolwijn 1986). This context explains the need to develop and utilise the skills and competences of the present and potential workforce to increase added value as part of a competitive and knowledge-based global economy (European Commission 2014). One more reason for ‘workplace innovation’ is that organisations can only fully benefit from technological innovation if it is embedded in a proper work organisation (Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014, p. 138). Finally, there is a need to enhance labour productivity to maintain our level of welfare and social security in a near future with fewer people in the workforce due to the ageing population. This growing awareness of the need for new forms of work organisation led to a number of activities at the European level.

2.3 The ‘90s, the ‘Green Paper’, EWON and the European Work and Technology Consortium

During the mid-1990s the Employment Directorate General (DG EMPL) of the European Commission established ACTEUR, a policy advisory group which brought together representatives from national programmes and initiatives as well as officials from EU Member States where no national programmes had been established. At the same time individual lobbyists mobilised an influential coalition of researchers and policymakers, resulting in the publication in 1995 of ‘Europe’s next step: organisational innovation, competition and employment’, a manifesto for the future of work organisation (Andreasen et al. 1995). Also in 1995, a different part of DG EMPL established the European Work and Technology Consortium. The Consortium brought together sixteen public policy and research organisations from ten EU Member States to create a ‘Medium Term Plan for Collaborative Action for the Modernisation of Work Organisation’ (Totterdill 2003). A seminal moment for those advocating the recognition of workplace innovation as a key dimension in the EU strategy came in 1997 with the publication of the Commission’s Green (consultation) Paper ‘Partnership for a new organisation of work’: “The Green Paper invites the social partners and public authorities to seek to build a partnership for the development of a new framework for the modernisation of work. Such a partnership could make a significant contribution to achieving the objective of a productive, learning and participative organisation of work” (pp. 5–6). Interest in work organisation as a driver for European competitiveness and quality of working life had been growing, partly fueled by national initiatives such as those in Norway, Sweden, Ireland, France, Germany and the Netherlands. The Green Paper provided a rallying point for those who had been advocating recognition of workplace innovation, and there was high expectation that specific policy interventions would follow (Ennals 1998). Based on the responses to this consultation, a policy document ‘*Modernising the organisation of work—A positive approach to change*’ was published by the European Commission in 1998.

A substantial volume of evidence for the positive effects of new forms of work organisation was provided by the European Work and Technology Consortium (1998). By 1998, it had become clear that, despite enthusiasm from some trade unions, there was little appetite amongst European social partners for intervention in the workplace whether regulatory or otherwise. Likewise several EU Member States and some senior officials within DG EMPL remained not enthusiastic, considering workplace innovation to be no more than a ‘Nordic obsession’ (Totterdill et al. 2012a). However, those officials at DG EMPL who believed in ‘Modernising the organisation of work’ won the debate.

ACTEUR was re-launched in 1997 by DG EMPL as the European Work Organisation Network (EWON) to support the policy of ‘a new organisation of work’ and instigated a series of policy dialogues, conferences and research projects until 2002, accompanied by a news bulletin. Meanwhile, Eurofound conducted a large scale research project into ‘employee participation in organisational change’ which provided again evidence for the positive relation between employee participation and organisational performance (EPOC: Eurofound 1997). EWON summarised for DG EMPL the positive research results in different countries (Savage 2001) and so did other researchers (Brödner and Latniak 2002). DG Research commissioned research into successful cases. In that report the concept of workplace innovation was used (Totterdill et al. 2002). EWON was discontinued by DG EMPL itself. This action was never explained to the participants. Most of the attention for organisational innovation was later assigned to EU OSHA, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (related to stress prevention and wellbeing at work) and to Eurofound.

In this first period, work organisation became a clear topic with support from the European Commission, in particular DG EMPL albeit this support was not translated into a clear policy vision towards companies and national governments.

2.4 The Lisbon Agenda and Work-In-Net and EDI: Fragmentation of a Message

In 2002, a European Social Fund (ESF)-programme (DG EMPL) focused on the realisation of a more flexible labour market and work organisation. One of the main areas proposed for investment was the ‘design and dissemination of innovative and productive methods of work organisation’. EWON prepared a report on this subject for the Commission (EWON 2002). There are instances in Finland, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Sweden where it has been used as a foundation for national programmes or initiatives (see Chap. 3).

In 2004, facilitated by the 6th Framework Programme ERA-NET the establishment of the ‘Work-In-Net’ (WIN 2004–2010) consortium was one of the initiatives redeveloping the work organisation networks. (Alasoini 2005; WIN 2010), coordinating research in the field of ‘Innovation of Work Organisation’. In the same

period the Employee-Driven Innovation (EDI) Network was established, in particular by the Norwegian and Danish trade union confederations and researchers in the field of work organisation (Høyrrup et al. 2012). This network was connected to the European programme ‘Lifelong Learning in Europe (LLinE)’. EDI became part of the Norwegian government policy in 2008. A handbook for EDI was made, commissioned by the trade union confederation (LO) and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) together (IRIS and NTNU 2011, see Chap. 19 in this book as well).

Since the Lisbon Growth and Jobs Strategy had been launched in 2000, the European Employment Strategy’s overarching objectives have encompassed not only full employment, but also the promotion of quality and productivity at work. In the Commission the ‘design and dissemination of innovative and sustainable forms of work organisation’ (European Commission 2003) continued to be cited as a means of enhancing productivity, responsiveness and quality, as well as improving working life and the retention on the labour market of older employees. But by the middle of the decade, EU policy outputs relevant to the workplace read like a checklist of fashionable ideas of good practice, for example Corporate Social Responsibility, Financial Participation, Anticipating and Managing Change and Work-Related Stress. Each of these policy interventions made a potentially significant contribution in its own right to European economic and social policy objectives, but collectively offered an insufficiently integrated vision of the sustainable workplace (Totterdill et al. 2012a).

The renewed Lisbon strategy, agreed upon in March 2005, put growth and better jobs in the top of Europe’s political priorities again and implied fresh commitment to a comprehensive approach. In the ‘Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States’ we find the following text in proposed guideline 7: “Work-life balance policies with the provision of affordable care and innovation in work organisation should be geared to raising employment rates, particularly among youth, older workers and women, in particular to retain highly-skilled women in scientific and technical fields” (European Commission 2010b, p. 8). The title of the EU strategy for occupational safety and health (OSH) in this period was: ‘Healthy and productive jobs’.

However, according to Totterdill et al. (2012a) ‘better organisation of work’ remained largely undefined in this policy narrative and its status as a factor ‘which should be analysed’ is a characteristic Commission obfuscation. There is very little evidence to show that the so-called ‘Integrated Guidelines’ stimulated action at national level to support new forms of work organisation. Member States such as those in the Nordic countries, Netherlands, France and Germany with a tradition of policies and programmes focused on workplace innovation continued to deliver such programmes; but countries with no such tradition continued, by and large, to ignore workplace innovation (e.g., Greece: Ioannou 2006).

This lack of traditions was also the case in the ‘new’ EU Member States. For some of them, the former socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, implementing workplace innovation is even more difficult because they have another tradition in which concepts such as productivity, industrial democracy and

social dialogue had different meanings than comparable concepts in Western Europe. In the eighties the Central and Eastern European countries became familiar with the Japanese style of management and work organisation as most of these countries established productivity centres with Japanese aid funds and Japanese consultants (namely Japanese ex-managers in their ‘second career’). These centres were connected to Western European centres through their membership of the European Association of National Productivity Centres (EANPC). The EANPC (2005) promotes not only productivity, but an integrated approach with quality of working life and sustainability. After these countries had entered the European Union the Japanese aid was discontinued, after which the Japanese concepts only survived in a number of companies. A separate set of exchanges of views on work organisation were organised in the eighties by the European Coordination Centre for Research and Documentation in the Social Sciences (‘the Vienna Centre’), a strong network of researchers from East and West Europe (Grootings et al. 1991). The Vienna Centre had been established in the sixties by UNESCO and the International Social Science Council (ISSC). Most of the members of these two networks were researchers. Some were consultants or government officials. They inspired each other to contribute to work organisation policies in their own countries and on the European level.

Even in the Nordic countries implementing workplace innovation was not a matter of course; in Sweden the programmes and research were partly discontinued by the new centre-right government in 2006 (Sandberg 2013).

The outcome of this second period is a European policy pattern that has remained largely fragmented: a series of separate EU policy fields that add up to less than the sum of the parts.

2.5 EU2020 Strategy and EUWIN

Since the demise of the 1997 Green Paper, workplace innovation has fallen through the gaps between several policy platforms including competitiveness, innovation, employment and social inclusion—even though it has profound implications for each. The formulation of the EU’s Europe 2020 vision and strategy during 2009–2010 (European Commission 2010a) therefore provided an important opportunity for European policymakers to learn from evidence of how innovation in working practices can address economic and social priorities and translate this into policies. However, that opportunity was missed by the policy makers of the initial EU2020 Strategy (Dortmund-Brussels Position Paper 2012).

While the broad vision behind Europe 2020 may represent widely acceptable goals, it fell into the same traps as the previous Lisbon strategy. In particular, there was no concrete model of how convergence between quite different policy objectives such as competitiveness, innovation, employment, health and safety and social inclusion will be achieved in practice. However, the good news was that this time,

after DG EMPL had been in the lead since the mid-1990s, the initiative was taken by DG Enterprise and Industry, related to industrial and innovation policy.

2.5.1 A New Start

In March 2011, the European Commission's DG Enterprise and Industry (DG ENTR) organised a workshop on workplace innovation within the launch of its Social Innovation Europe initiative (Dhondt et al. 2011; Pot et al. 2012a). This launch reflected a growing recognition that innovation, central to the EU's 2020 economic strategy, has a clear social dimension. The studies of Corrado and Hulten (2010) had given policy makers a platform to support a broader set of factors to develop innovation. Key influences on the European Commission included a 2011 Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (employers' associations, trade unions, NGOs) on 'Innovative workplaces as a source of productivity and quality jobs' (EESC 2011) and the 'Dortmund-Brussels Position Paper' (Dortmund-Brussels Position Paper 2012) signed by more than 30 experts and practitioners across the EU, both calling for more proactive interventions by the European Commission. DG ENTR reacted to this Position Paper by organising a set of meetings to understand what they could do.

In order to define concrete ways to move the policy agenda forward at EU level, DG ENTR subsequently put the issue of workplace innovation on the agenda of the European Policy Group in Brussels in June 2012 which brought together the directors for Industrial Policy of all member states and leading industrial companies. Following a discussion with this group, DG ENTR decided to support and fund a European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN) embracing all 27 EU Member States, candidate countries, Switzerland and Norway.

2.5.2 DG GROW in the Lead

According to DG GROW (the former DG ENTR) workplace innovation improves motivation and working conditions for employees, which leads to increased labour productivity, innovation capability, market resilience, and overall business competitiveness. All enterprises, no matter their size, can benefit from workplace innovation, states DG GROW. It improves performance and working lives, and encourages creativity of employees through positive organisational changes, combines leadership with hands-on, practical knowledge of frontline employees and engages all stakeholders in the process of change.

The main objectives of the DG GROW initiative are to foster the uptake of workplace innovation across European businesses and raise policy maker awareness, at all levels, of the benefits of these innovations (http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/policy/workplace/index_en.htm).

Through DG GROW, the European Commission prioritised workplace innovation with, for example, the reinforced 2020 EU Industrial Policy Communication and the innovation policy. Crucially it established the EUWIN in 2013 to support this priority, to exchange good practices and establish ‘workplace innovation alliances’ of employers’ associations, trade unions, governments and knowledge institutes.

This policy is also part of the ‘Advanced Manufacturing Programme’ (ADMA): “Workplace innovation has to provide advanced solutions for manufacturing industry, based on the newest technologies. Virtual reality and side laboratories, where employees can perform extra research and experimentation, not connected with their daily tasks, are examples of combining advanced manufacturing technologies and advanced workplaces. Furthermore, workplace innovation can help companies to enhance competitiveness by using the innovativeness and creativity of all employees. (...) The Commission has included workplace innovation aspects in the R&D&I programmes for advanced manufacturing. Explicitly including R&D on human-centred manufacturing could enhance the active and innovative role of people in factories and could contribute to design the workplaces of the future” (European Commission 2014, pp. 27–28).

2.5.3 *DG EMPL*

As reported earlier, DG EMPL was supporting workplace innovation through the ESF-funding. European agencies supporting the policies of DG EMPL continued to supply new ideas and policy recommendations. Eurofound already organised the first seminar on workplace innovation in 2005 and developed the concept over the years in their European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS; Eurofound 2012) and the European Company Survey (ECS; Eurofound 2015). In 2010, a workshop was organised by DG EMPL and some researchers to explore the concept of workplace innovation again (Totterdill 2010). Since the launch of Social Innovation Europe in 2011 ‘social innovation’ was applied to work as well, called ‘workplace innovation’ which became a topic in policies of DG ENTR (Enterprise and Industry, now DG GROW) as well as DG EMPL. “With the Europe 2020 Strategy it also became a priority to support workplace innovation aimed at improving staff motivation and working conditions with a view to enhancing the EU’s innovation capability, labour productivity and organisational performance” (European Commission 2015, pp. 169–70).

EU-OSHA commissioned a literature review on the relation between workplace innovation and occupational safety and health (OSH) (Eeckelaert et al. 2012) because the claim of workplace innovation is to improve quality of working life and organisational performance simultaneously. Consequently workplace innovation was connected to ‘wellbeing at work’ in the research priorities of OSH (EU-OSHA 2013a) as well as in the policy to extend OSH to ‘wellbeing at work’ (EU-OSHA 2013b).

In 2015 DG EMPL published the document ‘Employment and social developments in Europe 2014’. Chapter 3 is about ‘the future of work in Europe: job quality and work organisation for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’. One of the paragraph titles is ‘Complementing technological innovation with workplace innovation’ (p. 164). Presenting much empirical research—among which are Eurofound’s European Working Conditions Surveys—its conclusion is that “Better jobs and work organisation yield a more productive workforce” (p. 137). Having better jobs and work organisation reduces the risk of stress, enhances wellbeing and leads to a lower tendency to quit the job. Better work organisation implies in particular a balance between job demands (job intensity) and job control (job autonomy), wholeness of tasks and more open access to decision-making processes. These are a few of the indicators which, the report suggests, should inform EU policy making to support investments in work organisation.

Other topics in that chapter are wages, OSH, and work-life and gender balance. It explores the ways in which technological change and innovation will transform the job landscape of the future (for example, polarisation of required skills and wages is seen as a risk) and can lead to a possible industrial renaissance in the EU. In this context managing the transition into a new labour market where many jobs succumb to automation must become a key priority for policymakers, according to DG EMPL.

The chapter then explores how work organisation can be shaped to increase productivity and labour market participation under the continuous pressure of ongoing structural changes (technological progress, globalisation, demographic change and the greening of the economy). It looks at how stimulating creativity and fostering exchanges between workers can prevent stress and help maintain physical and mental health, while at the same time improving productivity and innovation capacity. It sees how special arrangements can be implemented to accommodate older workers, workers with disabilities or certain diseases, and workers with family responsibilities. The chapter then discusses future challenges with respect to workplace learning. It ends by examining how expanding global value chains will affect work organisation, focusing on risks related to the global restructuring of value chains, virtual collaboration across time zones and the absence of multi-layered social dialogue.

One of the conclusions of that DG EMPL document is that for the knowledge-based potential to materialise, the knowledge triangle (knowledge, education, innovation) has to be complemented by forms of work organisation that use workers’ human capital to their fullest. It will be important actively to engage employees in identifying and developing solutions while allowing them to participate in the implementation of work innovations so that they become more receptive to change. “In this context, an important policy would be to facilitate the creation of EU-wide platforms that allow employees and employers to exchange experiences in developing and implementing solutions related to production and work organisation. The specific characteristics of such platforms will vary between production entities and may take place at European or national level. They can promote the exchange of experiences, help identify best practices, monitor their implementation,

assess their impact on productivity and identify social implications” (European Commission 2015, p. 163). The proposal to facilitate the creation of EU-wide platforms looks very similar to the EUWIN network (2013–2016) which was commissioned by DG ENTR.

All these activities have helped the concept of workplace innovation to gain a higher policy profile with other EU institutions. The policy concept of workplace innovation was also used by the European Parliament (2013) and IndustriAll European Trade Union (IndustriAll European Trade Union 2014) in their programmes for an industrial renaissance, as well as in national initiatives in Ireland and the UK, and in the translations of this concept into national programmes in Finland, Netherlands, Germany, Flanders/Belgium and Basque Country/Spain.

2.5.4 An Emerging European Policy

As shown in the previous section, the policies of DG EMPL and DG GROW concerning workplace innovation in the third period have many topics in common. Hence, as we see it, an integrated European policy across DGs is lurking. This should include DG Regions as well because workplace innovation alliances can play a major role in regional development as well as DG Research to support and improve these policies by research. So far in the EU2020 programmes little attention is paid to research on workplace innovation. Although Eurofound has strengthened workplace innovation in its surveys and EU-OSHA has put the subject in their list of research priorities (EU OSHA 2013, pp. 52–53), only a few new research opportunities have been created so far in the context of ‘advanced manufacturing’ and ‘social innovation’.

2.6 Conclusions, Discussion and Perspectives

The European Commission has been developing bits and pieces of policy relating to work organisation since about 1995 instead of a coherent policy. Although its aim was always to achieve higher productivity, more innovation capability, more employment and better jobs simultaneously, the emphasis in the nineties was on productivity, in the beginning of this century on employment and the last ten years on innovation. The message that organisational performance and quality of working life are two sides of the same coin came primarily from representatives of the network of ‘occupational safety, health and well-being’ in Acteur, EWON, WIN, EDI and EUWIN.

Policies on work organisation and workplace innovation, however, have remained fragmented. The ‘workplace innovation protagonists’ refer to productivity, innovation, competitiveness and employment, but the ‘productivity people’, the ‘innovation people’, the ‘competitiveness people’ and the ‘employment people’

never refer to workplace innovation, with only a few exceptions. This is not different from the silo-policies in national governments. Nonetheless, there is some progress. The policies of DG GROW and DG EMPL clearly overlap although they have not been integrated up to the current date. More contacts between the two DGs are being planned. It is helpful that there is agreement on the use of the concept of workplace innovation as using different concepts makes it very difficult to develop policies and common understanding.

Policies of work organisation and workplace innovation have never resulted in legislation or regulations at EU level. Mentioning the issue in the Employment Guidelines did not seem to help much, nor did the existence of national legislation in a small minority of countries. Probably workplace innovation is not suitable for a legislative approach, because its implementation depends very much on the social dialogue at European, national, sectoral and organisation level. Furthermore there is a strong feeling among policy makers that they should not interfere in company policies. But EU- and national-authorities can stimulate that dialogue and develop campaigns for knowledge dissemination and capacity building. Alasoini (2016, pp. 20–23) calls that ‘soft regulation’ compared to ‘hard regulation’ (legislation). Some of these authorities stimulated workplace innovation, but unfortunately only for a short period of time as in Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal. France, Germany and Finland (Alasoini 2016) are the exceptions with programmes that have been renewed several times over the past decades.

In the lobbying for and development of these policies an important role has always been played by researchers and their networks. Policies were developed bottom-up by coalitions of European Commission officials and researchers who organised seminars, meetings, workshops, etc., to convince the Commission’s directors, directors-general and finally EU Commissioners. Sometimes also a few representatives of trade unions and/or employers’ associations were active in these networks. These coalitions have appeared to be successful in helping to put workplace innovation higher on the political agenda.

Part of the policy to enhance workplace innovation should include more research into the obstacles and mechanisms that contribute to the failure to implement workplace innovation as a matter of course and into the mechanisms that support implementation. A couple of countries have experiences with national campaigns (see Chap. 3) but so far there is little evaluation research available.

On the one hand, the financial and economic crises after 2008 did not seem to have much influence on the attention paid to workplace innovation. Important steps in EU policy were taken during the crisis as well as in some countries. To give some examples: in the Netherlands the general employers’ association (AWVN) argued in 2009 that because of the crisis workplace innovation had become even more urgent. In Ireland, the tripartite programme on workplace innovation ended according to plan just before the crisis, but the unions, in particular the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), continued to organise seminars and develop projects. Finland and Germany renewed their programmes during the crises as they had done for decades and Belgium started the ‘Flanders Synergy’ programme on workplace innovation in 2009. On the other hand,

increased competition as a consequence of crisis and globalisation attracts opposite reactions such as cost cutting and a stronger command-and-control style of leadership, sometimes called ‘the low road’ as compared to ‘the high road’ of investing in people (Totterdill et al. 2002). This is more likely to happen in organisations and countries characterised by a liberal market economy (LME) rather than a coordinated market economy (CME) because there is already some trust between stakeholders and institutions such as social dialogue to solve industrial relations issues in collective agreements (Totterdill et al. 2016). However, as neoliberal ideology became more fashionable, social dialogue was also weakened in CMEs and hostility entered industrial relations again. Examples are the discontinuation of the Swedish workplace programmes after the government change in 2006 and the many strikes in 2015–2016 in the Netherlands in the ‘metalektro’ sector, not only for working conditions but for workplace innovation as well. The ‘low road’ is also more prevalent in countries in East and South Europe which are not yet familiar with ideas and examples of workplace innovation and where social dialogue is not well developed.

The idea of workplace innovation is nowadays actively disseminated in those countries, sometimes supported by EUWIN, sometimes by national programmes such as in Finland’s support for Hungary and Romania (Makó et al. 2015). As in Western European countries researchers in those Member States play an important role in disseminating innovative ideas.

There is room for improvement. In the European Working Conditions Survey 2010, one question was: “Are you involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of the department or organisation?” Of the responding employees in the EU-27 countries 46.7% answered ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’ (Eurofound 2012).

For a number of reasons many enterprises, hospitals and government departments, for example, do not implement workplace innovation as a matter of course, in spite of the obvious benefits for employees and employers. That is why a better coordinated policy and more action is needed by governments, social partners and research institutes.

A good opportunity for more action of public authorities, including the European, is the debate on digitalisation and robotisation. We should remember the many failures in the past. Digitalisation and automation were implemented before optimising processes and work organisation. End users were not involved sufficiently. In their book ‘The second machine age’ Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) of MIT observe that in big companies with big ICT projects it takes five to seven years before the organisation has been redesigned and consequently before full benefits can be taken from the new technology. They say “Creativity and organizational redesign is crucial to investments in digital technologies” (p. 138). The concept developed by Brynjolfsson and McAfee is ‘co-invention of organisation and technology’. This co-invention requires the creativity and collaboration on the part of the entrepreneurs, managers and workers at all levels. In our words: There can be no effective and sustainable returns on automation and digitalisation without workplace innovation. It seems that the Finnish and the German governments in

particular are aware of this. They commissioned substantial programmes to support and investigate processes of digitalisation and robotisation including the design of ‘good work’ (Germany) or ‘meaningful work’ (Finland).

For the European Commission this is an opportunity to continue the policy of supporting workplace innovation. Workplace innovation could be easily integrated in EU policy agendas such as Innovation, New Skills, ‘More and Better Jobs’ and ‘Social Dialogue’. On its innovation web page DG GROW refers to “key enabling technologies, such as workplace innovation” (DG GROW 2016). DG EMPL was in the lead of the ‘New Start for Social Dialogue’ in June 2016. The research programme Horizon 2020 prepares under the heading of ‘societal challenges’ calls for research on ‘The human and social dynamics of the Fourth Industrial Revolution’. Let’s hope there is more to come to support workplace innovation.

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