New Industrial Relations.

Best Practices Proposals to empower European employee representatives

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How should employee representatives (ERs) be empowered, as to contribute to flexible, fair and innovative employment relations? This was the central question in a study performed by the ‘New European Industrial Relations’ (NEIRE) network, researchers from eight European countries who conducted interviews and organized focus group sessions with ERs, Trade Union (TU) leaders and members, and experts in the field of industrial relations (IR). The eight countries are: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Based on this study, we formulated best practises proposals (BPP) that may strengthen the competencies of ERs. ERs are employees within the company who have (part-time or full-time) roles as representatives. They are democratically elected by their co-workers in the organisation; they play their role on the shop-floor of the company; and they are paid by the company.

Europe is characterized by a variety of traditions and cultures with regard to industrial relations. The BPP therefore have a cross-cultural character. In all countries, competent ERs are necessary to help defend and enhance workers’ rights and social objectives, which is of utmost importance in the current economic crisis.

In all participating countries, a multi-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach was taken. Three field studies in eight European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom) were conducted including quantitative and qualitative data collection. Quantitative data collection was conducted through questionnaires filled in by ERs in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain. Qualitative data were gathered from in-depth interviews in each participating country; with additional countries: Estonia, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Finally, we applied a survey feedback method in each of the 8 countries though national focus groups.

The ten questions asked in the interviews and discussed in the focus groups were:

1. How can you negotiate flexible arrangements within the boundaries of labour law? Is there any flexibility for negotiating individual arrangements (so-called ‘idiosyncratic deals’)?
2. How do you increase the employability of an ER?
3. How can you contribute to corporate social responsibility (CSR)?
4. How can you be a strategic business partner as an ER?
5. How can you improve the relationship and build trust between ER and 1) management; and 2) co-workers?
6. How should you behave as a mediator in escalated conflicts between workers and management?
7. How can you improve the competencies of ERs and build on trade union innovation?
8. How can you attract and commit active ERs?
9. How could you enhance the influence of ERs?
10. How should you manage your personal role conflicts and stress as an ER?

Before summarizing the BPP, various systems of worker representation in Europe are described.
All European countries have formal systems in which the interests of workers are represented. Still, there are many differences between countries with regard to TUs and ERs. First, TUs engage in a variety of ways with legislators. Within Nordic countries TUs and the state are closely related through national systems of representation. In Denmark and Germany, TUs play an active role in learning programs. In Spain and Portugal, there are sector level agreements and there is a dialogue with the state, although this dialogue is not continuous. In Eastern Europe, TUs and the state are weakly related. In the UK, the state-labour relation is not institutionalised.

Secondly, relations with employers vary across Europe. Germany and Denmark have strong relations between leading corporations and TUs, due to a common export agenda and a commitment to training and health and safety. Such relationships are absent in the United Kingdom. In Southern Europe, there is low trust between TUs and employers. In Eastern Europe, markets have a higher priority than social dialogue, which hinders the development of high-trust industrial relations.

The existence of statutory works councils (WCs) or workplace employee representation structures is a distinctive feature of industrial relations in Europe. WCs are: Permanent elected bodies of workforce representatives, set up on the basis of law or collective agreements, with the task of promoting cooperation within the enterprise for the benefit of the enterprise itself and employees, by creating and maintaining good and stable employment conditions, increasing welfare and security of employees and an understanding of enterprise operations, finance and competitiveness.

Employee representation varies across Europe. In the 27 EU states plus Norway, there are four states (Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) where the main representation is through WCs with no statutory provision for unions at the workplace. In eight countries (Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and Sweden), representation is essentially through the unions. In another eleven countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain), it is a mixture of both, although sometimes TUs dominate. In a further five countries (Bulgaria Estonia, Ireland, Latvia and the United Kingdom), TUs are the sole channel, although legislation now offers additional options. In many countries new national legislation implementing the EU Directive 2002/14/EC on information and consultation has complicated the picture so that a heterogeneous scenario across Europe persists.

1. Flexibility: A dragon with multiple heads
Aukje Nauta and Marit Janson

There are four types of flexibility that organisations may use:

1. External numerical flexibility, such as temporary work. Organisations use this type of flexibility to adjust the number of employees to fluctuating demands.
2. Internal numerical flexibility, such as flexible hours, which organisations use to adjust the actual usage of employees who are already employed within the organisation.

3. Functional flexibility, such as job rotation, which organisation use to assign activities and tasks dynamically to their employees.

4. Financial flexibility, such as pay for performance, by which organisations adjust their employment costs to (financial) performance.

Firms need flexibility to realize a dynamic balance between demand and supply of labour. Workers need flexibility as well, for example to adjust the number of work hours to private obligations. A recent perspective on flexibility refers to *idiosyncratic deal making*, (I-deals), which refer to voluntary, personalized agreements of a nonstandard nature that individual employees negotiate with their employers regarding terms that benefit them both. The challenge for organisations is to be optimally flexible: operating dynamically without too much insecurity for workers – this is also called *flexicurity*.

Results from the study show that flexibility practices vary strongly between both countries and sectors. Many respondents experience flexibility negatively; they fear worker exploitation. Especially external numerical flexibility is perceived as threatening the position of lowly educated people. Internal numerical flexibility often causes tensions between the organisation and its employees, because organisations tend to schedule work such that employees have to work long hours or at inconvenient times. Nevertheless, some ERs have succeeded in negotiating flexible hours that fit both company and workers’ needs. ERs have mainly positive views of functional flexibility, which enables employees to develop their skills and adjust to organisational demands. Not many respondents referred to pay as a possible means to increase the flexibility of the firm. Those who did were often negative, especially about pay for individual performance. A trend for some ERs is to be involved in flexibility practices that serve a healthy work-life balance of employees, sometimes called ‘new ways of working’, or working ‘anytime, anyplace’. But some ERs perceive pressure for more weekend or evening work. The trend that employment relations are getting more individualized poses dilemma’s for ERs. On the one hand, they acknowledge that workers have different needs; on the other hand, they fear that I-deals may weaken the position of workers and collective labour agreements.

*Most important practical recommendations on flexibility*

*DO:*

- Define in your own company what is meant by flexibility, and what the specific tensions and challenges are with regard to flexibility in your company.

- Help the organisation in their search for a right balance between flexibility on the one hand and security on the other hand, for example by discussing optimal percentages of temporary workers, ways to invest in both temporary and fixed workers, healthy work schedules, etcetera.

- Invest in making collective agreements on flexibility at work. For example, when implementing personal budgets for increasing employability (i.e. functional
flexibility), communicate intensively and personally with employees, to ‘seduce’ them to actually use these budgets themselves.

- Discuss with management how to downsize and outsource in procedural and interactional just ways (in case this appears to be unavoidable). For example, make and execute good communication plans and give employees as much voice as possible in reorganisation processes.

- Set up, together with management, pilots to experiment with ways in which employees can manage and schedule their own working hours and working locations (working ‘any time, any place’ or ‘new ways of working’), as means to increase productivity as well as work-life balance.

- Discuss with management ways to replace external flexibility with functional flexibility.

- For example, instead of hiring temporary workers, train workers to be able to perform more than only one job, role or task; or set up an internal flex-pool of workers who like to rotate between different projects.

- Discuss with management whether financial flexibility is an effective means to realise specific organisational goals or not; if introduced, test whether the effects of flexible pay turn out as expected.

- Introduce opportunities for workers to make idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) and, at the same time, pay attention to procedural justice to ensure that i-deals do not undermine perceived fairness. E.g., take care that i-deals are made in transparent ways.

- Evaluate on a regular basis how collective rules and regulations with regard to flexibility work out for the well-being and productivity of individual workers (including temporary workers).

- Keep in mind that there is “no flexibility without security, and no security without flexibility” (Wilthagen 2010).

**DO NOT:**

- Look at flexibility as ‘something bad’ and security as ‘something good’. Instead, acknowledge that both the organisation and the employees are in need for both flexibility and security.

- Be reactive-only with regard to flexibility. Instead, engage in strategic discussions with management with regard to the right balance between flexibility and security.

- Fight flexibility per se, but fight against the negative side effects and outgrowths of flexibility.

- Treat temporary workers as ‘outsiders’, but include them in HR-policies. For example, give them access to training and education to increase their employability.

- Perceive the tension between flexibility and consistency as an issue that can be solved by specific rules, regulations, and collective agreements. Instead, teach employees and managers that they have to deal continuously with this tension (which means that they should have, or be trained in, negotiation and conflict management skills).
- Allow the so-called ‘shady deals’ or preferential treatment, which will lead to unjust advantages for certain categories of employees at the expense of others (i.e. the Matthew Effect).

2. Employability: The art of being capable
Valeria Pulignano and Seth Maenen

Employability concerns the ability to gain initial employment, to maintain employment and to obtain new employment if required (Schmid, 2000). To gain employment, people need key skills, career advice, and an understanding about the world of work. To maintain employment, people need to stay competent and learn new skills. Employability also refers to the capacity to make self-managed transitions from job to job, in or between organisations. To stay employable, people need jobs that are sustainable, healthy, safe, and secure.

Here, the focus is on employability of ERs. ERs need to know everything about the dynamic world of work, because of the role they play in protecting workers from unemployment and keeping their skills up to date. ERs furthermore need to develop a vision and a strategy on employability of workers in the company. They also need networking, communication and negotiation skills in order to build coalitions within the firm to influence company decisions. Finally, ERs should act as ambassadors of an employability climate, in which life-long learning is highly valued.

The results show that to be employable as an ER, ERs need access to education and training, in order to learn about the changes occurring at the workplace and on the labour market. For example, getting up-to-date knowledge on workers’ rights and obligations, e.g. labour law and social security law, is critical for ERs. Second, ERs need to work within a ‘hygienic’ environment that is not hostile to TUs’ and ERs’ work. An Estonian respondent illustrates that this is not self-evident: ‘ERs who have been laid off will have a hard time to find another job.’ Third, there is a need to generate awareness, trust and responsibility. However, this is difficult because relations between management and ERs are sometimes antagonistic, for example in Spain. Fourth, ERs need to obtain structural support and resources, for example more time to do the ER-job, as well as financial resources for receiving training. It is uncertain that employers will invest in these resources. Fifth, ERs need to influence the process of company decision making, as is the case in Denmark, where many ERs act in the executive board of companies. Finally, ERs need to build a ‘track record’ based on previous experience. Defining clear career paths for ERs is important to enhance their employability, as are meeting places where young representatives can learn from their experienced peers.

Most important practical recommendations on employability on ERs

DO:

- Involve ERs in the decision-making process of companies—improving employee participation and social democracy at the company level.
- Create meeting places where ERs can learn from their peers.
- Provide adequate structural and financial resources by both TUs and employers.
- Develop “cooperative-oriented” vs. “hostile-oriented” competences by both ER and employers, especially line managers at the shop floor level.
- Mutual understanding and high motivation by the ER to be involved in training and learning activities.
- Share ideas and experiences among ERs in order to acquire knowledge and respect from the workers.
- Develop career paths for ERs.
- Include a focus on “union matters” as far as ER training is concerned.
- Provide financial state support for developing learning activities in conjunction with a good structural support (in particular improving staffing and IT facilities) by employers and TUs.
- “Making-time” for ER work (i.e. attending courses and understanding the information provided by employers so to be able to act) and improving the “leadership” (“dialogue function”) of ERs.

**DO NOT:**

- Act only as “bargainers” of working conditions at the workplace.
- Look only at training furnished by unions and/or employers as the best way to get employable—“day-to-day learning is also important”!
- Lose contact with TUs’ work at the shop floor.
- See line management as the only responsible for your career paths.
- Be entrapped in individualisation of HR practices.
- Look at employability as an exclusive function of productivity at the workplace.

**3. Corporate Social Responsibility: Not only a fashion trend**

Miguel Martinez-Lucio, Valeria Pulignano, Michael Whittall and Heidi Ittner.

There is currently a renewed interest in CSR, also among TUs and ERs, due to factors such as an increasing concern with the environment and the impact of the post 2008 recession on the need to regulate finance and banking capital. The European Commission defines CSR as a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis. CSR is relevant for TUs and ERs. For example, CSR may be an opportunity to deepen dialogue within the firm about issues such as waste management and local community relations.

The results of this study show that ERs feel a need to address CSR, although it is sometimes reactively driven, such as in German cases on bad publicity around certain companies. In Denmark, some ERs are active in formulating CSR-policies as well as ensuring that there is progression in its implementation. ERs are engaged in several CSR practises, such as evaluating sustainability reports, launching a project to establish a TU for IT workers in India, and making an agreement that non-native workers are given extra training. However, as appears from the focus group in Spain, CSR is an employers’ issue only in Spanish companies, who want to create a proper image of their companies. The same seems the case in the UK, although a respondent said that ‘quite a bit is done on dignity at work, anti-
bullying policies, and equality and diversity’. The focus of ERs on CSR is often narrow, and CSR is more often an issue in larger than in small and medium-sized businesses. Respondents noted that CSR is often nothing more than ‘just a public relations vehicle’. British ERs experience that companies haven’t learned much from the financial crisis. ERs from countries with weak CSR traditions are sceptical, for example a Portuguese respondent: ‘The overwhelming number of companies do not have the slightest notion of dialogue or social responsibility.’ ERs experience that CSR may impose more work on the m, which may lead to work stress; or it may undermine their traditional role.

Most important practical recommendations on CSR

DO:

- Train and develop skills in relation to CSR. Special attention must be paid to employers and the state as a central agenda item.
- Link with workers and ERs in developing countries and extend the role of CSR to them, especially in multinational corporations. It is important to link this to local and international suppliers and consider how their conditions can be covered and supported within CSR policies and activities.
- Link equality agendas into the CSR agenda. This is vital as fairness and dignity at the work agenda is a natural bridge between CSR at work and CSR more broadly.
- Map and plan the relevant resources and time–arguing the case for investing in the people working on these topics.
- Link local contexts and communities into the CSR agenda so to allow the union to build its community profile.
- Engage with external bodies on questions of CSR such as social movements and NGOs.
- Commit the TU and its role within the firm on such developments such as CSR–CSR has to be linked to a renewed interest in industrial democracy.
- Focus on the environmental dimension and include the development of specialised representatives.
- Lead together with management the CSR agenda.
- Be innovative in developing CSR and do not just sign one agreement and leave it.

DO NOT:

- Sign off CSR statements without following up–the rhetoric of CSR can become very attractive but then not developed and implemented.
- Let management define the terms of the debate without getting involved at every stage of the discussion.
- Confuse CSR with the union becoming a financial stakeholder or workers being offered shares and individualised ownership.
- Confuse the presence of more accessible information with their being more impact on actual CSR policies and the firm–information is only one part of the process.
- Let CSR become a passing fashion style and leave the agenda when management decides to focus on what is ‘new’ in business magazines and trends. Management has tendency in terms of management ‘fads’ and has low level of interests in passing subjects.
- Build CSR agendas without clear outputs deadlines and projects that are visible to all–CSR must be real and linked to improvements for workers, the social context and the organisation.

4. Participation and Dialogue: Engagement in a context of change
Miguel Martinez-Lucio, Valeria Pulignano, Michael Whittall and Heidi Ittner.

Participation and dialogue are important means for ERs to become a ‘strategic business partner’ of the company. Social dialogue – which is based on the notion that both employer and worker interests may progress more if different actors collaborate – has existed for well over a century within European IR, in various forms. It started with ‘corporatism’ in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} Century as a response to revolutionary labour struggles; followed by a more societal approach in the 1970s and 1980s in which independent employer and labour organisations collaborated for a ‘common good’; and it is now moving into the direction of a ‘mutual gains approach’, which implies dialogue at the corporate and workplace level between all stakeholders, covering issues of mutual interest such as training and the quality of work and production. The move to a ‘mutual gains approach’ brings new pressures and relationships. ERs have to have broader knowledge than IR issues only; there has to be trust between ERs and management; and ERs run the risk of being viewed as part of management if they collaborate (too) closely.

The results from the study show that roles of ERs change in a context of partnership: from caretaker and negotiator to communicator and developer. In Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, some ERs are actively involved in strategic discussions with management on issues such as product development, strategic personnel planning, and cost cuttings. However, ERs sometimes complain about receiving management information too late or incomplete, especially those in Spain. For a real social dialogue, management has to recognize the value of ERs and TUs. The results furthermore show that effective dialogue between management and ERs asks for capable and well-trained people on both sides, and a democratic company culture. Some ERs appear to be engaged not only in dialogues with management, but also with external relations. For example, a Dutch WC chair is regularly lobbying with national politicians. New forms of dialogue are not without risk, especially in countries with a weak regulatory system of IR such as the United Kingdom. Finally, respondents report that they are sometimes viewed as part of management if they collaborate closely with management. However, this can be overcome, as a Belgian union trainer illustrates: ‘We can have trustful relations with employers, as long as it remains clear that we are there to protect the interests of the workers’.

Most important practical recommendations on participation and dialogue

DO:
- Have a good informal dialogue and relations that can sustain themselves through difficult moments.
- Develop on-going dialogue and relations of trust between ERs and their members on decisions reached so as to sustain the credibility of the TU.
- Ensure that the company and management also make their contributions and sacrifices.
- Have a direct communication line from the work floor to top management through the ER.
- Train and build capacity for representatives and management in relation to participation.
- Support the development of a strong collective regulatory and political environment so that the risks to unions and workers are minimal.
- Set up clear time frames and access points for information and how it is disseminated by management.
- Talk with management in the early phase in which they develop their first plans.
- Stop acting as a controller only and start to become a real business partner that exchanges ideas.

**DO NOT:**

- Over-rely on informal relations with management and closed discussions.
- Delay to start dialogue once changes emerge.
- Avoid the role of members and workforce as the final decision-maker on key issues.
- Avoid talking to ERs in other countries in multi-national firms.
- Lose sight of historic and political TU values.

5. **Trust: As essential as breathing**

Patricia Elgoibar, Lourdes Munduate, Francisco Medina and Martin Euwema

Trust is the willingness of people to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another, especially the expectation that the other party will cooperate in the future. Research has shown that interpersonal trust in the workplace is related to job satisfaction, low stress, organisational commitment, productivity and knowledge sharing. Trust is essential for building relations, cooperation, and integrative negotiation. Hence, mutual trust that ERs have with management and co-workers is an essential tool for getting things done.

The results show that culture matters for trust. Whereas the Scandinavian model is based on cooperative relations inside organisations, with a balance of power between management and ERs, this is not the case in the Mediterranean model, which is characterized by a high power distance between management and workers, and management taking decisions unilaterally. ERs have to maintain two types of relationships: one with management and one with their co-workers. With regard to trust with management, there appear to be differences in communication, participation, legal frameworks and the economic situation of the organisation that have an impact on trust-based relationships. Open communication appears to
be very important for building trust with management, as is participation. ‘Participation is weakened because companies do not see ERs as active actors in solving problems.’ This quote from a Portuguese ER illustrates how a lack of participation undermines trust. Legal differences play a role as well, as is illustrated by a British ER: ‘Law doesn’t guarantee union rights as it does in Denmark or Germany.’ Furthermore, a bad economic situation can break trust, because it often results in cost cuttings. Crisis can sometimes also increase trust: ‘Information sharing and a closer relationship with management has increased during crises because they need our signature on the redundancy plan’, said a Spanish union leader. Some participants, mainly in countries with more competitive relationships, feel that being too close to management can be dangerous, because ‘otherwise people will hold it against you’, according to a Belgian ER. Trust with co-workers is usually higher than trust with management. This is due to open communication with co-workers on a daily basis, not only face-to-face, but increasingly also via social media such as Twitter and Facebook. The election system can help in building trust with co-workers. For example, ERs in Spain are not just elected by workers who are members of the local union, but also by the totality of workers in the company. ‘It’s a good system because ERs are compelled to justify their actions to all their workers’, says a union leader from Spain. Finally, results show that the more friendly the relationship with management is, the more difficulties ERs face in their relation with co-workers.

Most important practical recommendations on trust

**DO:**

- See the organisation as a common responsibility. Avoid the «them versus us» philosophy.
- Educate management to accept the existence of ERs inside the organisation and involve ERs in decision-making processes.
- Work on open communication (i.e. information sharing, making suggestions, proposing ideas...), and invest in a personal relationship.
- Organisation.
- Be honest and straightforward and give adequate information.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Be willing to compromise.
- Listen to the employees and respect their opinions.
- Establish networks and newsletters, and other (social) media for the employees to inform them about actions.
- Ask for feedback about your actions.

**DO NOT:**

- Keep an “us against them” philosophy.
- Give false or “coloured” information.
- Stay in the office waiting for problems to turn up.
- Trust unconfirmed information.
- Think that information will flow along with the wind.
6. Managing conflicts: blending competition and cooperation
Francisco Medina, Lourdes Munduate and Patricia Elgoibar

Conflict has been considered a reaction of a party (employer, ER, or constituency) to the perception that both sides of the table have different aspirations that cannot be achieved simultaneously. Due to several developments as deregulation and individualization in labour relations, ERs all over Europe are increasingly confronted with conflicts in the organization. As a result of that they have to face negotiations with management. These negotiations cover a wide area of topics, including strategic decisions, downsizing, social innovations, and social plans. In that sense, ERs are faced with demanding situations. On the one hand, the constituency asks ERs to negotiate better conditions for them. On the other hand, management tries to agree conditions that lead to more competitive organizations. These conditions regularly conflict with the interests of the employees, for example in case of downsizing. The ERs’ conflict competencies are, therefore, directly related to their position as representatives and to their ability to negotiate with two sides (management and constituencies). Finally, differences in cultural values, in organizational trust, and in individual characteristics are related to the conflict behaviour from ERs in the context of European IR systems.

The results of the study reveal that a) ERs show a proactive use of different conflict management behaviours to achieve new organizational arrangements; b) ERs use conflict management competencies to identify similarities and differences in interests, and build proposals that take into account both parties’ priorities; c) The inclusion of (informal) mediation activities in the ERs role is increasing in most European IR systems; and d) ERs are able to blend cooperative and competitive behavioural patterns when facing conflict in organizations.

Regarding the cross-national perspective, results show some distinguishing features. There are some differences among countries in terms of the composition of conflict management patterns used by ERs. In cultures with low power distance such as Denmark, ERs display more a cooperative pattern, characterized by higher use of integrating behaviour, while in cultures with high power distance such as Spain, ERs display a more competitive pattern (specially more forcing behaviour). The same schedule works for ERs trust in management. In cultures where ERs have a closer relationship with management (e.g. Denmark), trust is related to more cooperative patterns of conflict behaviour. Finally participants agreed on the need to empower the role of ERs through professionalization and training in conflict management strategies.

Most important practical recommendations on conflict management

DO:

- Meet before negotiations with your team to plan and identify interests, priorities, strategies and team members roles
- Keep in mind you have to negotiate on two sides: a) constituency (intra-group negotiation) and b) employers-employee (inter-group negotiation).
- Try exploratory problem solving: promote proposals that integrate both sides’ interests.
- Behave on the negotiation table as if you were going to be “together forever”. Balance ‘long term relationship’ issues with ‘self-interest’ issues.
- Use a neutral third party to facilitate discussion if you are getting absolutely nowhere.
- Evaluate with the WC, as well as with management, after tough negotiations.
- Celebrate successful negotiations as an organization (strengthen the win-win orientation).

**DO NOT:**

- Use an emotional-based approach to conflict management.
- Allow things to get personal
- Replicate a threat from the other party. Instead use integrating behavior to start a cooperative reciprocity
- Get trapped with the message of your constituency, “crush the enemy”.
- Communicate to your constituencies ‘we have won from the company’. Next time, it will be pay-back time.

### 7. Critical competencies for an innovative union

Ana Raquel Soares and Ana Margarida Passos

Organisations are faced with unstable and dynamic environments that require continuous improvements not only in products and services but also in their overall functioning. Rapid shifts in the context create new challenges for workers and therefore, to TUs and ERs, demanding of them a new set of competencies. A competency is an individual characteristic that is causally related to job performance. Competencies are made up of knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA’s). Knowledge refers to what an individual knows that is relevant to a particular job; skill is the capability to perform in a job; and attitude is an internal state that influences individual’s decisions to act in certain ways. A specific competency that seems to be important for ERs today is the ability to innovate, i.e. generate and implement new ideas. Due to trends such as a higher educated workforce, new organisational structures with more flexible work and teamwork, and the internationalization of organisations, the ability to innovate employment relations is very important for ERs.

Results from the study show the typical KSA’s that ERs should have, according to the respondents. The knowledge ERs should have is concerned with labour law, social law, rights and duties of ERs, restructurings of organisations, pensions, social security, salary, working conditions, medical benefits, workloads, finance, economics, business strategy, and collective agreements. The skills they should have are: communicating, speaking to an audience, engaging in dialogue, listening, understanding other's thoughts and emotions, cooperating, coaching, training, solving problems and conflicts, negotiation skills and finally, doing TU work such as mobilizing people to join, organizing a movement, and writing pamphlets. The preferred attitudes of ERs are: defending the interests of workers, showing interest for the situation in the company, valuing justice, being self-conscious, proactive, assertive and...
passionate, and engaging in social and political campaigns. All respondents were highly concerned with competence development. Many respondents perceive that more and more competencies are required from ERs. ‘ERs need to gain competences; globalization and everything in connection to this. Language, as more and more ERs act on an international level where English is the working language. Also a strengthening of their negotiation skills is required. Today, changes occur at a frantic pace, and they have to be able to enter into negotiations with very short notice, which gives them very little time for preparation, gathering of information, including the co-workers in the process,’ says a Danish union trainer. Dilemma’s that respondents mention is that ERs are not selected on the basis of their competencies; that they sometimes lack time to follow training; and that ERs usually fulfil their role temporarily, making investments in training less profitable.

Most important practical recommendations on competencies and TU innovation

**DO:**

- Make needs assessments. Invest in team training as WC, and partly include management.
- Work with innovative training and learning technologies and suppliers.
- Embrace new technologies in union and ER work.
- Modernise forms of employee participation.
- Think outside the standard procedures and solutions.
- Adapt to new generation’s needs.

**DO NOT:**

- Ignore the value of ERs suggestions.
- Engage in a selection method for ERs that does not work effectively.
- Shut the door to young people that bring change and new ideas.

8. Attraction and Commitment: Understanding ERs’ individual perceptions and differences
Maya C.F. Jensen, Hans J. Limborg, Flemming Pedersen, y Soren Viemose

The study of attraction and commitment of ERs is crucial, since understanding these two dimensions gives us valuable information on: what motivates the ERs, and how it is possible to recruit and retain qualified and motivated ERs in the future.

Organisational attractiveness is a general positive affect that an individual has towards an organisation. Attraction can be seen as a process within the attraction-selection-attrition cycle. The same may hold for ERs, who will start with feeling attracted to the ER role, followed (for some but not all) by being selected, and ended by attrition. Organisational commitment is the extent to which employees are dedicated to their employing organisation, and the likelihood that they will maintain organisational membership. Affectively committed individuals are people who are committed because they like to be so and feel loyal
towards the workplace. *Normatively* committed individuals are committed because they feel a moral obligation to be so. *Continuance* committed individuals are committed because they lack alternatives and associate leaving with high sacrifices. ERs’ commitment is assumed to be driven by the same three components. However, for ERs with dual roles, their commitment with being an ER might clash with their commitment with their regular job (dual-commitment).

The results of the study reveal the factors that influence the attraction and commitment of ERs. These are: societal values and the image of the union; communication and information about the benefits of being an ER; individual interests, such as career aspirations and being protected from layoffs; and morality, loyalty and social values of the individual. In Estonia and Portugal, being an ER (or a union member) is combined with discrimination, few rights, bad working conditions, and in some cases fear. But in many other countries the ER role protects employees from being laid off. Some people think that an ER role will harm their career, while others expect the opposite. The study shows five distinct reasons for being attracted and committed to the ER-role: morality, loyalty and justice perceptions, feeling pressured because nobody else wanted to be an ER, personal career, information and power seeking, and protection against layoff. Barriers for attracting new ERs are: the bad image that unions have, changing societal values towards individualisation and flexibility, lack of communication about the benefits of being an ER, fear and discrimination, bad conditions for career-development, work-life-conflicts and generational change. To illustrate, Belgian participants of the focus group said: ‘*In the old days, if you were a TU secretary, you were a VIP. Today, this respect is gone.*’

*Most important practical recommendations on attraction and commitment*

**DO:**

- Ensure new member-involvement methods and high visibility of activities and gains.
- Ensure good communication and communication strategies (including use of social media).
- Ensure qualified and competent ERs as role models.
- Develop the ideological dimension and attend the battle for values (e.g. solidarity).
- Ensure good ER recruitment tools and forums (e.g. youth committees).
- Facilitate and train promising ERs and their substitutes.
- Define the objectives of the ER more clearly (e.g. their work assignments).
- Ensure that being an ER won’t damage the career (or even promote it).
- Ensure improved working conditions for ERs (e.g. time consumption and salary).

**DO NOT:**

- Implement new initiatives as if all ERs were driven by the same motivating factors.
- Initiate and implement changes without informing members and ERs.
- Criticise and reject potential ERs who are primarily driven by a career development perspective or other individual perspective.
- Highlight (and require) that the ER function is a vocation which requires full attention for several years and is very time-consuming (instead, flexibility and a less time-consuming function should be offered).
- Create (traditional) stereotypical pictures, since a more complex and nuanced approach might attract more ERs/members.
- Dilute the visibility of the TU. Although a more nuanced approach might benefit attraction and commitment, some members require a more visible union.

9. Role conflict and stress: Juggling hats
Mare Teichman, Liina Randmann, y Velli Parts

Role conflict arises when individuals are faced with competing demands that stem from multiple social roles. Role conflict is inherent to being an ER, because most ERs fulfill their role next to a regular job in the company. Moreover, this dual role may cause workload, which may interfere with private life. ERs have to deal with several parties, such as managers, co-workers, and TU colleagues. All three parties may have different expectations from the ER, which may create a ‘triple role conflict’. Role conflict is one of the possible stressors, i.e. factors that cause individuals to experience occupational stress. Based on an analysis of the interview and focus group reports of this study, the main stressors of ERs appear to stem from individual sources, professional work, and/or ER work.

Results show that individual sources of stress of ERs stem from personal lives of ERs, work-life imbalance, being pessimistic about one’s own role as an ER, and fear of conflicts. A Dutch ER said: ‘My life at home suffers sometimes because of my ER’s role’.

Professional work stressors appear to be related to time pressure, workload, communication problems, organisational change and poor management. ‘I need to work weekly between 50 and 60 hours’, says a British ER. ER’s work stressors reported by the respondents are: lack of support, role conflicts, conflict with management, experiencing high levels of personal responsibility, having to meet high expectations, feeling isolated as an ER, and difficult negotiations. An example of conflict as a stressor is: ‘The stress comes from constantly going to court’, as a Spanish ER said.

Stress from the responsibilities of being an ER, which is made up of various stressors, presented in a great number (81% of those interviewed) of ER in all of the countries participating in the study. Almost all of the ER that mentioned their work stress compared their level of stress to the level of stress of their colleagues. Stress occasionally leads to sleeplessness amongst ERs. To prevent this or worse stress-related problems, ERs have to cope with stress in effective ways. There are three types of coping strategies: appraisal-focused strategies occur when people modify the way they think, for example: blaming something or someone. Problem-focused coping means that people actively deal with the cause of their problem and try to solve it. Emotion-focused coping strategies involve releasing pent-up emotions, distracting oneself, managing hostile feelings, and using systematic relaxation procedures. Emotion-focused coping is oriented toward managing the emotions that accompany the feelings of stress. In the interviews, ERs mentioned all three coping styles. Examples are: ‘You have to accept that stress belongs to this role’ (an appraisal-focused strategy described by a Dutch ER); ‘You must learn to manage stress, attempt to handle
things calmly, try to listen more than talk, understand the other party’ (a problem-focused strategy described by a Portuguese ER); ‘I do a lot of sports with colleagues to relieve stress and pressure’ (an emotion-focused strategy described by a German ER).

**Most important practical recommendations on role conflict and stress**

**DO:**

- Inform new WC members about possible sources of stress that accompany WC work and how to cope with stress.
- Invest in education and training programs on coping with (role) stress and conflict.
- Study to understand and deal with your personal stressors at your ER work. The most common are lack of support, conflict management, personal responsibility, peers’ high expectations, isolation, and negotiations.
- Keep in mind that stress results from the cumulative combination of many stressors.
- Develop all three coping strategies (cognitive, problem-focused and emotion focused), to adapt to stress- and conflict full situations.
- Offer ERs opportunities to help them cope with stress-including resilience training, annual reviews and appraisals, and personal development plans, as well as healthy lifestyle and wellbeing programmes.
- Provide (by unions and organisations) ER assistance programmes.

**10. Empowerment: ‘We can make the Difference here’**

**Martin Euwema and Patricia Elgoibar**

Empowering ERs involves moving decision-making authority down the organisation hierarchy and granting them the ability to significantly affect organisational outcomes (Menon, 2001). This relates to ERs and WCs, where management is in the position to actively involve the representatives in decision making on a wide variety of issues, and in different stages of the organisational decision making process. The benefits of power-sharing in organisations and the conditions under which it tends to be most effective, have been well-documented (i.e. Tjosvold, 1981, 1985; Yukl, 1994; Steward & Barrick, 2000). Generally all interviewed persons and groups agree on the importance of having empowered ERs. This also holds for the workforce in general. Industrial relations actors, mainly ERs themselves, their unions, management and administrations recognize ‘on paper’ that an empowered and committed workforce is essential for the effective functioning of modern organisations.

Results of the study show that ERs differ in the influence they report in organisational decision making. There appear to be five factors that determine the level of empowerment of ERs. The first factor is societal culture, especially power distance, which refers to the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country accept that power is distributed unequally. In countries with low power distance, individual ERs feel more empowered compared to ERs in countries with high power distance. Indeed, we find clear differences between countries with low power distance, such as Denmark and the Netherlands, and countries with high power distance, such as Spain and Estonia. ‘We have
good conditions and a fine relationship with the management’ says a Danish ER, whereas an Estonian ER says: ‘The ER essentially doesn’t influence anything.’ The second factor is legislation, as is illustrated by a quote form a Dutch ER: ‘It helps that we have the possibility to go to court; this gives us the power to reject certain policy proposals.’ Not all employers respect and apply the law, as for example Portuguese ERs state. A third factor is the size of the company. ‘ERs in big companies might be in a better position than ERs in minor companies, where they have no one to consult’, says a Danish ER. However, we also find examples where bigger companies are detrimental to ERs´ influence: ‘A problem is that the decision-making process in this multinational company increasingly happens abroad.’ says a Belgian respondent. A fourth factor concerns the relationship with management. ‘Influence is about building a trustful relation with management’, says a Danish ER. In contrast, a Portuguese union leader says: ‘Management is scared of dialogue. They think that in dialogue they lose power’.

Most important practical recommendations on empowerment

**DO:**

- Invest continuously in professionalism of the individual ERs and the WC as a team.
- Develop both ‘hard’ (e.g. legal) and ‘soft’ (e.g. communication) competencies.
- Develop joint training with line managers, so as to increase understanding of each other’s role, and promote mutual empowerment.
- Build your network, and contact with both top-management and the workfloor.
- Know your rights as ER and WC, and invest in a common strategy to gain influence in the organisation.
- Establish a participation culture–not only by thoroughly sharing information via regular meetings but also by actively involving and integrating employees into specific projects and decision processes.
- Try to solve problems quickly and competently.
- Be inventive and think ‘out of the box’ to have more impact.
- Ask the legal services of the union for help when needed.
- Join formal and informal decision-making bodies and circles.

**DO NOT:**

- Rely only on the traditional model of employee participation, in which fighting was the normal way of acting.
- Stay away from the support of the union and co-workers. This support is important for your influence.
- Think you do not need further training and development.
- Be afraid to contact high managers to speak about your ideas.
- Stop trying to get more membership.

To conclude, we show that all groups involved in the new European IR stress that ERs can make a difference through getting empowered. In that, empowerment should be promoted by ERs themselves, unions and management.
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