Abstract proposal

EWCs: lessons learnt from training employees representatives across Europe

EWC are new employees’ representative bodies for multinational companies in Europe. The proposed paper is a non academic one with the purpose to capitalise upon our experience of training European works councils members. Training sessions are unique opportunities to analyse how EWC really work, what are the dynamics running between EWC members, what are the real issues they are facing. Our paper will be based on an almost 10 years experience of training for EWCs involving 430 people and including
- 8 in-house EWC training (from multinational companies based in France (6), Luxembourg (1) and Switzerland (1)
- 2 cross countries and cross sectoral EWC training, one including employees representatives from more than 14 EU countries and coming mostly from the steel, energy, pharmaceutical, bank and insurances, construction, mechanical sectors.

WE will try to draw up lessons from our experiences by focusing on seven key issues such as :

1. Perception of EWC by their members
   Part of EWC members have already an idea about EWC coming from their own national model of WC. But others, mainly in Eastern Europe, Sweden, UK and Ireland do not have such background. Therefore, the concept of EWC may vary to a huge extent and leads to several and sometimes contradictory visions about EWC as place for information, consultation and even negotiation.

2. Expression for training needs
   Many EWC include in their agreements provisions related to training. But what are their needs? How do they combine training and action or agenda to be taken? Are training expressed needs up to the national model of industrial relations?

3. Characteristics of trained EWC members
   To what extent does the way EWC members are selected (election, appointment) influence their attitude? How do they perceive a mandate as EWC member? To what extent does the size of an EWC- which varies between 12 and 110 ! – play a role in their approaches?

4. Lessons learnt from thematic training (EWC agreements, restructuring and economic strategies, external and internal communication strategies, occupational health...)
   Do EWC members know their own agreements and provisions to play with? What kind of information appears to be relevant for EWC members? Do they have different interests and are these interests influenced by their national models? Do they have an internal and external communication strategy and how do they work?

5. Employers and employees representatives roles in EWCs
   How are EWCs structured? How is the employer represented in the EWCs? Is the employer member of the EWC or is he outside the EWC? What are the roles of select committees? Secretary or employee chairman: what function do they play? What is the role of a basic EWC member?

6. Limits facing EWCs as representative bodies in terms of business and employees coverage
Companies are more and more of diverse structures: matrix, decentralised structure, network of subcontractors, etc…: how does it influence EWCs work and to what extent EWC cover companies perimeters ? A parallel question is to be raised about employees’ status when more and more free-lancers, temporary and contingent workers are employed: do they have a voice within EWCs ?

7. EWCs and their links
What are the links between EWC members and their national and local representative bodies ?
What relationship with EU and national trade unions ? What role of external actors like public authorities, NGOs ?

Our paper will also include some general conclusions willing to answer three questions : what are and aren’t EWCs ? What kind of professionalization ? What perspectives for the future ?

The authors: Claude Emmanuel TRIOMPHE and Christophe TEISSIER

Claude Emmanuel TRIOMPHE is the Director of a French-European association ASTREES (Association Travail, Emploi, Europe, Société) and responsible since 1999 for European projects dealing with social dialogue, restructuring, working conditions and labour markets. Formerly employed by the French Labour inspectorate (1984-1999) he as also an expert for the ILO and for the EU to help accession countries (social dialogue, labour conflicts, occupational safety and heath) in modernising their approaches. In addition he is the publisher of a European newsletter called Metis-correspondances européennes du travail: www.metiseurope.eu.

Christophe TEISSIER is a labour lawyer. He formerly worked for the French Ministry of Research (2001 -2005) and is now European projects’ manager at ASTREES (since 2005). As such, he’s been working on different European studies related to employees representation and collective bargaining. European Works Councils as well as transnational social dialogue have been representing a significant part of his activities, and especially training ones. At last, he’s responsible for documentation issues of the European newsletter called METIS –correspondances européennes du travail.

Both play a key role in training EWCs organised by ASTREES (and by former association UET).