An analysis of the trade union co-ordination to restructuring in Europe – The dimensions of collaboration, form and organization

Valeria Pulignano (Catholic University Leuven – Belgium)
Miguel Martínez Lucio (University of Manchester - United Kingdom)
Steve Walker (Open University – United Kingdom)

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1. Introduction

Trade unions and their representatives are facing a serious challenge from what is commonly called globalization. More specifically, increased global competition and change at work undermines trade unions power by weakening control over labour market competition. Restructuring challenges the sectoral and national organization of trade unions and brings new pressures on existing organizational structures and bargaining systems. Industrial Relations agendas are changing and the pressure of constant restructuring even prior to the current recession is creating a need for reflection as to how unions act and represent members. The essence of the paper is that we need to consider different dimensions across which restructuring and union responses occur at different levels. To this extent, we need to avoid simply falling into a workplace based (i.e. looking at structures of employees representatives alone) and local based view of mobilizing, or a national and state level view of union lobbying or organizing (and mobilizing), but instead look at how different levels of union action develop a portfolio of approaches and complement each other – and sometimes not - within the broad politics of restructuring. What is more, we need to also think in terms of not just the external organizational relations (employers, members, community, etc.) of unions but also the internal organizational requirements and relations that build a more proactive response (see Stuart et al, 2009). There is a need to break away from simples based on an either-or-logic of union choices (see Martínez Lucio and Stuart, 2009) and which begin to open an understanding of the way the politics of restructuring is broader and more complex. The union as an agent has to be brought into the discussion on restructuring not just in terms of moral and strategic imperatives but as a real entity with complex external and internal relations, along with complex internal structures and needs.

In this complex and articulated picture, the activities that trade unions adopt in response to restructuring, as intrinsically linked to the EU integration process, reflect two factors: the restrictions of the power of labour in the given political and socio-economic contexts and the gains expected by labour within the same contexts. The latter are associated not only with alternative EU developments but also with the capacity trade unions have in the EU to build up capacity in order to influence economic change while creating dynamic new relationships between themselves and their membership. In previous work (Martínez Lucio et al., 2009; Pulignano, 2009) we have already noted that the cross-borders dimension of worker activity has been nourished by new areas of debate, engagement, and creativity which have emerged through the development of networking and coordination activities. These networks are in most of the cases driven by the use of the information technology and mediated by other factors, such as the organizational context, communication cultures and organizational contingences. In addition, we must also examine how these networks are managed to the minimum extent necessary for effective coordination and cross-border collaboration. Some degree of management which is understood as coordination and facilitation is probably necessary in most cases for the creation of effective organizational networks. In some cases this may include the central provision of organizational resources (Martínez Lucio et al., 2009). Moreover, we are aware of the fact some networks can follow a top-down traditional bureaucratic management rather than bottom-up approach. Then the question becomes to explore the
nature of this management, which is the content and the nature of the coordination and collaboration activities, and the extent to which it seeks to predetermine acceptable outcomes. This is very important and it needs to be carefully explored if we are interested to examining the extent of innovativeness of sustainable structures of trade unions engagement in creating effective international responses to restructuring. If we want to fully and deeply take on the debate on how trade unions as organizations engage with the issue of networking and transnational collaboration to respond to the economic and social challenges of restructuring we need to recognize the complexity of the vertical and horizontal relations which surround and accompany their activity as social agent of change; we need to understand how and under which conditions they are able to develop and manage coordination and how this coordination can became sustainable; we need to investigate the new forms of working, information and communication trade unions develop in order to create effective and sustainable responses to change. Arguably, this implies then the need to push forward the debate on labour transnational networking and international collaboration in Europe to a new dimension, which attempts to highlight not only the dynamic and organizational aspects which accompany the form of networking and collaboration currently existing and which have been developed by the trade unions as a response to economic and social change, but which looks primarily also at the way how these networking and different forms of cross-border collaboration are managed via the development of coordinative activities and made strategically sustainable and coherent in the long-term. This implicitly means to look also at the tensions between organizational hierarchies, competing community of practices and understandings and traditions of the world of labour itself.

Our concern is twofold. Firstly we want to show how the new organizational forms of networking and cross-border collaboration developed by the trade unions in Europe is not just a matter for unions’ internal or external relations. More specifically, it is about the different activities trade unions in Europe develop – that is “what the trade unions do” - and the effects of these, and the way how they are made sustainable by the trade unions themselves within their institutions. Secondly, drawing from the aim of understanding the purpose and the nature of collaboration the paper will originally propose an analytical classification of the diversified networks and collaborative strategies trade unions have implemented in Europe to respond to restructuring.

The case studies we present, which focuses on the specific case of developing networking strategy for collaboration within the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), shows that four main types of strategies can be identified. They reflect different approaches the trade union movement in Europe adopts to stimulate capacity in order to affect the process of company restructuring. These strategies are: organizing and membership mobilization; establishing proactive dialogues with employers and the state; trust-making process via cross-national and sectoral- communication and the exchange of responses to overcome cultural differences; skills-building and supporting measures at the local level for bargaining purposes.

After the methodological section, the first part of the paper provides an overview of the international debate on trade unions international alliances and company restructuring. It
also develops and operationalises the typology of collaborative networking strategies that trade unions have developed in Europe in response to restructuring, and the EU integration process more generally. The second part carries on examining the way how trade unions build up these strategies and how they make them sustainable within their own institutions. This means more closely to investigate the range of processes (and the nature of those) for the strategic comprehension and response to the challenge of restructuring internationally. It also means to assess the tensions between different organizational hierarchies and to put greater emphasis not only on the substantive analysis of company restructuring and trade unions as such, but more importantly on the methodological way how trade unions have been able to coordinate activities across-borders in network to respond to the challenge of industrial change more specifically.

2. Research Design and the Context

The paper combines a cross-national and industry approach in order to examine important key strategies and add to the development of strategic responses of the trade unions and their representatives at the different levels of the unions’ activity in Europe. The discussion put forward in this paper draws on the TRACE (“Trade Unions Anticipating and Managing Change in Europe”) project led by the Education department (former ETUCO) of the ETUI-ETUC in Brussels in a two years period 2005-2007.

As clearly stated on its dedicated web page (http://www.traceproject.org) the project aimed at building improved capacity within European trade unions to respond to situations of company change and to defend the interests of working men and women facing this challenge. It is relevant to mention that TRACE built on the experiences of earlier projects lead by the ETUI-ETUC itself in Brussels, which explored elements of the relationship between information technology and trans-national training and education (Walker and Creanor, 2005). In particular, the project TRACE was developed through a network established in the Dialog-On project, which TRACE served to reinforce (Walker et al., 2007). More specifically, Dialog-On aimed to provide some guidance and suggestions as to how communities of practice can be established, nurtured and supported in the virtual environment. Both the Dialog-On and the TRACE project use electronic networking to support ongoing trans-national trade union work in relation with restructuring. In this respect their objective is to develop the capacity of intervention of trade unionists into the corporate governance of companies. This mainly implies to promote the use of a variety of innovative approaches, ranging from formal training activities to transnational networking activities between different communities of practice.

The paper, draws on 18 cases of joint trade unions ‘key actions’ (KAs) at both national and European level, which represented the core of TRACE: 10 cases at the national level including 11 national trade unions confederations and 8 cases at the European level including 6 European industry federations (EIFs) in 8 different sectors such as graphical, finance, metal, chemical, public, primary and secondary education, High education, transport. Each KA was developed by the responsible national (or European) trade union confederations (federations) within a framework of agreed objectives and foreseen outcomes (see Table 1). As table 1 illustrates most of these objectives propose the
management of change as a tool for governing the processes of multinational restructuring and identify in the information, coordination and cooperation amongst the different trade unions members and their representatives at both national and European-level the way how to develop an effective response to transnational restructuring. However, as mentioned above, other strategies emerge as followed by trade unions in Europe, such as how to better learn from each other by boosting communication, learning and training activities as essential in order to built up effective cross-border coordination and inter-workers solidarity as well as how to influence restructuring by lobbying external organizations of interests and institutional bodies.

[Table 1 about here]

The authors have been actively involved in the coordination and evaluation of TRACE. In particular, they have been responsible for the design of the evaluation framework (the second and third authors) and they have coordinated the activities of the different KAs closely (the first author). With regard to the evaluation, the authors have used a critical realist perspective (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) in order to firstly highlight the central importance of context on the outcomes of any social intervention and secondly to point out the fact that similar intervention may have radically different outcomes in different situations. The “implementation theory” (Weiss, 2000) of each intervention was specifically identified (for a fuller account of this see Walker et al, 2007; Martinez Lucio et al., 2009).

Each of the 18 sub-projects was then followed in detail, providing the basis of this paper. Data collection consisted of participatory observations to trade unions meetings and project workshops organised by the trade unions and their employee representatives during the whole duration of the project and aimed at developing their specific KAs. The lead author – Pulignano – through a pattern of action research, participation observation and data gathering developed a rich array of materials and data which mapped the development and challenges of the project over a two year period. This was followed up by detailed interviews and discussions.

In addition, the evaluation led by Steve Walker (Walker et al, 2007) consisted of a total of 60 qualitative semi-structured interviews with local, national and European trade union officials covering the sectors and the national trade union organisations directly involved in the development of the sub-projects were developed and they integrated the data collection. In particular, we used a mix of methods for the interview which varied from KA to KA (depending on the content of the sub-project). However, despite the diversity we managed to ensure that: one interview with the trade unions leading each sub-project was undertaken at the beginning, during and at the end of the sub-project. This allowed us to have clear objectives the sub-project aimed to address, the difficulties expected to be encountered during the evolution of the project. Interviews were also conducted with the some protagonists at the end of the sub-project and aimed at assessing their perceptions with the whole process and how it evolved. As indicated above, for each KA different project workshops were organised during the evolution of the KA. In these workshops project leaders and participants presented and discussed progress reports.
3. The analytical context: the focus on cross-national collaboration in situation of restructuring in trans-national businesses

Most of the accounts on global restructuring and the power of trade unions merely presume labour’s weaknesses in front of economic and industrial transformation. In particular, two substantive clusters of argument have attempted to theorize relations between changing economic structure and labour’s situation (Cox, 1997; Crouch, 1998). One of the two arguments claims that economic and industrial change undermines labour because weaker nation states can no longer protect “their” workers, with national institutions governing industrial relations and the labour market and the state’s powers of macroeconomic manipulation becoming less effective. Conventional social democratic politics are rendered obsolete. These expositions have been extensively addressed by the “skeptical” critiques of globalization (Ruigrok and Van Tulder, 1995; Doremus et al., 1998). However, the situation that labour cannot be reduced to identity within its nation states nor its condition wholly understood within national contexts alone has been soon and quite clearly discussed amongst the international commentators. Therefore, the attention has shifted to the changes in the organization of capitalism as the principal factor undermining labour in situation of transnational restructuring. More specifically, labour is weakened as more mobile capital increases its power in relation to immobile workers and as delocalization of production implies the shift of capital to low-wage locations (see, for example, Herod, 1997; Wood, 2002; Slaughter, 1999).

Nevertheless, for less skeptical authors, globalization does not preclude a weakened labour and resistance from the working class “per se’, but implies that if labour is to succeed it needs to be at the same scale, and organization at the same kind, as global capital (Tilly, 1995; Mazur, 2000). Amongst those who emphasize an independent role for labour within a globalised economy, a “transnational collective response”, as Radice (1999:22) describes it, may be seen as the only alternative to accepting the world market as ultimate arbiter. In this respect, some authors have started to debate around the attempts to extend and deepen trade unions internationalism and cross-borders collaboration, for example, through the European Trade Unions Confederation (ETUC), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the International Trade Secretariat (ITS) as well as the European Trade Unions Industry Federations (EIFs) (Martin and Ross, 2000). Existing unions may then be regarded as an important resource for new transnational strategies (Cornfield, 1997). With this regard Waterman (1998) advocates “a new international labour movement for (and against) a globalised, networked capitalism” or social movement unionism (see also Moody, 1997; Munck, 1998). In accordance, Munck (2008) combines to this the notion of a “transformationalist labour perspective to globalization” (1998: 11) which consists in the creation of a multi-layered and flexible approach by labour to the new global capitalist order.

Along these lines of arguments, trade unions are seen potentially able to countering the issue of constant change and restructuring by trying to establish alliances across national boundaries, given the nature of capital and its international organizational processes. There is now a wide established literature on international labour movement and cross-
national forms of workers and trade unions’ solidarity, especially with regard to multinational corporations. Most of the international empirical work has emphasized the emergence of labour trans-nationalism as the result of workers’ and trade unions’ strategic responses embedded in specific and contingent national and local industrial relations arrangements (Greer and Hauptmeier, 2009; Anner et al., 2006; Martinez Lucio, 2005/10; Lillie, 2004; Lillie and Martinez Lucio, 2004; Hancke’, 2000). In this respect, the role of the sector and European integration has been indicated as crucial in understanding and examining specific forms of national and transnational action as well as the emergence of trade unions cross-borders coordination strategies (Marginson, 2000; Pulignano, 2009). Many of these initiatives being developed are often with the active involvement of workers’ representation at the European level, such as the European Works Councils (EWCs). On one hand, structural tensions have been outlined by those who believe that the emergence of transnational unionism is undermined by the prevalence of national and local interests who jeopardize the capacity of EWCs and workers and unions more generally to build up cross-national solidarity. More specifically, Pulignano (2007) writes that EWCs cannot immediately exercises blockage on whipsawing and “concession bargaining” because of the inevitable unevenness of bargaining outcomes internationally. This position is reinforced by the argument put forward by other authors who refer to the low-trust relations between employees representative from different countries as the main constraint to international solidarity (Martinez Lucio and Weston, 1995; Kahancova, 2008). In particular, according to this thesis, the local conflicts of interest and the diversity in national labour markets and industrial relations structures undermine attempts to turn EWCs into sites of worker strategy, and in effect, it serves as a management tool to re-produce and re-enhance strategies of European restructuring. Nevertheless, by combining structural and ideological factors, Whittall, Knudsen and Hujgen (2007) argue that a common transnational identity can emerge when EWCs have an open and rapid flow of information and those employees’ representative structures tends not to be dominated by a single national group. On the other hand, despite the structural constraints other writers have explored the continued development of labour internationalism as accompanied by the greater scope global competition offers to create larger interdependences between trade unionists and workers in different countries. This is what Fetzer (2008) calls ‘a community of risk’ whose existence is conditional to the ‘protectionistic’ behavior of the trade unions in Europe to stimulate investments and save and/or enhance jobs in European plants. Hence, globalization has set up a form of interdependence within Europe that makes transnational collective action in the unions’ interests.

This paper originally makes a step further in the above mentioned analytical and theoretical debate. It argues that labour internationalism and transnational coordination, and therefore the role different forms of employees’ representations at both local and European level can play in situation of company restructuring, needs to be examined not only within the diversity of unions’ responses, which are immediately contingent to specific national and local situations. More specifically, the paper argues that these responses reflect different strategies, which do not exclude each other, and which trade unions and their representatives adopt at different levels (i.e. regional, national, and workplace) and with regards to the different and complex nature of restructuring, while
trying to build up solidarities and alliances across-borders as a response to corporate restructuring. As such, the paper does not fetishes the concept of collaboration as a form and precondition for an effective trade union response but looks at the content of that collaboration and the way it develops across a range of factors which we call ‘informational’ and ‘influencing’. The paper examines what trade unions do to build up alliances in case of restructuring by looking at the different levels of trade unions activity, such as the regional (i.e. European), national, industry, workplace level on one hand, and the diversified nature of restructuring on the other hand. In so doing, the paper attempts to provide a broader view of what trade unions understand as restructuring more by explaining the anticipatory internal processes leading to the creation and the sustainability in the long-term of transnational solidarity and more proactive responses. In so doing the paper adopts a concept of internationalism that goes beyond the “short-term” contingent unions’ responses to specific cases of company restructuring. The need now is to look at how collaboration is created and continuously and strategically sustained in the “long-term”. This brings in an in-depth analysis of how trade unions strategies are created and re-created in response to the different facets of restructuring and the challenges it brings. Strategies for employees representatives and trade unions cross-borders coordination in Europe should not just be examined as ‘isolated’ responses to specific cases of company restructuring and their constraints, but be understood in terms of distinct initiatives whose meaning contribute to disclose a more complex process of continuous learning within the trade union movement on how to build up internationalism. This generates ‘capacity building’ questions within the trade unions movement around issues of unions cross-borders solidarity and coordination, and therefore, it stimulate the creation of internationalism as a ‘community of practice’. As the next sections will illustrate in the paper collaboration is therefore fixed and developed around particular and discreet initiatives.

4. Collaboration and Trade Union Activity – Grounding and understanding the purpose and nature of collaboration

The key question is “What trade unions do to build up alliances in Europe related to dealing with restructuring and its effects”. To this extent the paper focuses on these firm- and state-related dimensions of international co-ordination. The paper argues that trade unions adopt different kinds of strategies in order to establish collaboration and transnational solidarity in Europe that is to set up internationalism as a ‘community of practice’ (Martinez Lucio, et al, 2009) with specific objectives in mind. We can analytically classify these strategies in terms of (1) organizing and membership mobilization (2) the creation of proactive dialogues with employers and the state (3) the set up of a trust-making process which consists in the communication and the exchange of responses across national and sectoral borders to overcome cultural differences (4) skills-building and supporting measures at the local level for bargaining purposes.

All these four strategies can be further clustered on the basis of the extent to which they contribute within the trade union movement in Europe to stimulate capacity to affect the process of company restructuring. This can be done by developing influencing capacity on the decision making process on one hand, and communication capacity in order to
overcome the national barriers and reach common understanding on the other hand. With regard to the former, for example, this can be done by lobbying with the state or establishing social dialogue with the employers; by introducing guidelines regulating the main trade unions’ approach to restructuring or to coordinate activities across different representatives in Europe (i.e. EWCs); by learning how to correctly access and use information; by developing campaigns to improve the workplace organization or by developing skills to train both organizers and local members for bargaining issues. On the other hand, the development of communication capacity can be developed, for example, by exploring differences and learn not to ignore them, by developing shared practical experiences, by fitting different approaches to different cultures while learning from each other across national, sectoral and company borders (see Table 2). This table locates these different strategies in terms of two dimensions – influencing and communication.

[Table 2 about here]

Within each of the strategies outlined above, national patterns of worker representation as well as European employees representation structures (such as the EWCs) retain the greatest importance because trade unions continue to use them more and more as an important structural and industrial leverage to organize and to bargain in situation of restructuring while attempting to build up alliances and establish social cohesion versus the increasing pressures which derive from corporate management practices, such as benchmarking and outsourcing, which have increased inter-firms competition. For example, at the European level, most of the trade unions’ industry federations in Europe have established strategies for supporting and working with the European Works councilors in order to conclude agreements at the company – mostly multinationals – level, and there have been also extensive training programs to help EWCs to develop effective strategies in the area of restructuring.

The results of this intense bargaining activity are illustrated by the most recent data collected by the European Commission. At February 2009 the European Commission recorded 147 transnational texts (including European framework agreements, global agreements, EWC agreements, joint declarations, agreed joint statements, code of conducts, letter of agreements, charters, and declarations) at company level. More specifically, since 2004 it seems to have been a slight increase in the number of agreements concluded at the European level contained in these texts that pertain to restructuring and other relevant social issues. The sectors where the EWCs, in some cases accompanied by the trade union industry federations and the national unions, have been much more involved in the process of negotiation of framework agreements are the finance (particularly insurance), the food, the chemical, the transport and the metal sector. More specifically, in the metal sector the European Metalworkers’ Federation (EMF) has tried to strongly supply to the lack of a regulatory framework for transnational collective bargaining which reflected the European Commission’s former indication (Ales et al. 2006). As a result, diverse European framework agreements (EFAs) at company level have been concluded by EMF in the metal sector in the period 2000-2009. Most of these agreements are in the automobile industry (i.e. General Motors and Ford) but other agreements can be counted in other industries as well, such as the Areva group agreement.
which deals with equal opportunities and the Schneider Electric agreement on the
anticipation of restructuring via the commitment of the company to contribute to the
enhancement of the skills of its employees. Furthermore, more recently in 2009, EMF
signed a European framework agreement with the Thales Group and one with Arcelor-
Mittal. The former seeks to improve the professional development of the group’s
European employees by strengthening the employability of employees within the Thales
Group through the implementation of an annual anticipation process linked to future
employment prospects. The Arcelor-Mittal agreement places social dialogue as a lever
for the anticipation of change and contains commitments to maintain facilities and
safeguard employment levels. In particular, a set of provisions is meant to ensure the
group’s competitiveness and long-term sustainability. According to the agreement, based
on the identification and anticipation of competence and qualification requirements, a
strategy of long-term skills development and training activities will be pursued. (for
detailed information see Da Costa and Rehfeldt, 2009; Telljohann et al., 2009; Pulignano,
2010).

Likewise, trade unions in national settings in Europe have produced guidelines for union
representatives on restructuring, which refocus on basic trade union organizational issues,
such as “why to be a union member”, “what do trade unions do” and “what is the role of
the shop steward” or more generally the role and functions of the collective structures for
employees representation mainly at the national (local) level. This may be seen as a long
way from the strategic intervention at the cross-sectoral and European-level, but
restructuring often means the movement of employment to areas where unionization is
low, sometimes as a deliberate strategy, so building collaboration and focusing on
workplace organization has to be seen as an equally important part of trade unions
response to restructuring in Europe. In this respect, mapping the membership at different
organizational levels, develop strategic campaigns to improve organization, the
identification of active supporters as agent of trade unionism, the continuous training of
the organizers and the allocation of sufficient human and material resources are crucial
practices which have been identified as implemented by trade unions in Europe in order
to build and re-build workplace organization as an essential feature for the enhancement
of cross-border solidarity and alliances. Trade unions have also coordinated responses
across-borders while improving the understanding of each others’ national employment
relations systems and laws and learned to overcome cultural barriers, and therefore to
reorganize their traditional work along the new line provided by restructuring (for
example learning to work across sectors). In particular, with reference to the former a
point which is made very clear by the trade unions in Europe is that in order to build up
alliances across-borders it is crucial to understand differences while understanding each
others. This is vitally important for a successful coordinated response to restructuring.
More specifically, what is important is that trade unions understand the strengths and
limitations of other countries’ employment legislation and regulatory frameworks, such
as collective bargaining arrangements and collective systems of employee participation
and representation at the shop-floor. Where this is not the case, expectations may be
raised that cannot be met or actions undermined through misunderstanding that could be
avoided. Another aspect, which is closely related to this is the need to broader the spatial
or geographical boundaries of transnational solidarity and support. In other words in
order to be able to effectively respond to transnational restructuring, it is important to understand the change occurred in the economy. For example, it is crucial to capture the intrinsic social consequences, the meaning that the emergence of the service economy accompanied by the development of new services, new techniques and the technological change entails. This implies that while some economic sectors have remained stable for many years, and stable trade unions organizations and industrial relations have emerged to match them, restructuring in other sectors has deeply challenged the stable boundaries of these sectors self, and therefore, their long established employment relationships. This is a particularly challenging aspect of restructuring because in most of the cases trade unions do not have organizations which allow them to operate across-sectoral boundaries or simply they are not used to work together. Hence, learning about this change helps trade unions to develop capacity which enable to see differences and similarities in restructuring strategies adopted by employers across sectors. Information technology has been extensively used to overcome the traditional geographical barriers while fostering communication and coordination among different workers, trade unions and employee representatives in different spatial geographical locations. In this respect information technology is used by the trade unions in Europe to set up and facilitate the development of network and networking. These networks bring collections of actors together in communication patterns of various intensity and structure. The networks comprise various configurations of workplace representatives, regional and sectoral and national trade unions officers at both national and European-regional level.

What emerges as a key point in our attempt to classify trade unions different strategies to respond to restructuring in Europe is that the use of one strategy by the unions does not automatically excludes the use of the others. Empirical findings demonstrate that strategies can be used simultaneously depending on the extent to which trade unions and their representatives are trying to establish short-term strategy in situation of change or are attempting long-term strategic interventions. The latter helps in building up sustainable alliances and creating a spirit of shared values in terms of justice and fairness: as well as shared methods of collective organizing. On the other hand, it can be also argued that long-term strategic intervention helps in building up cooperation while focusing on workplace organization as an equally important part of trade unions responses to restructuring. In the following section we will present four relevant cases of trade unions responses to restructuring in Europe which were part of the TRACE project and which empirically support and further illustrate the argument made above. As above indicated these cases demonstrate that engagement with the question of restructuring for the trade unions in Europe is not just one of militancy or collaboration. It is more nuanced and works through different levels of activity in relation to membership and management, and develops through different projects in relation to communication and influencing. As we will see these projects lead to different types of networks and outcomes and presupposes diverse objects. Nevertheless, all of them are characterized by a strong informative dimension.
5. Cases from TRACE: Levels and Spaces for Co-ordination

The TRACE project demonstrates several emerging strategies elaborated by the trade unions in Europe to respond to the challenge of transnational restructuring. These strategies combine diverse unions’ approaches and levels of activity. This is because decisions affecting restructuring are taken at many levels by management and trade unions themselves, both politically and commercially. For example, restructuring in sectors of high levels of public ownership requires political decisions in relation to deregulation. With this regard, trade unions are regularly seeking to influence the decisions of the European Union to implement supportive policies and in so doing they follow what in concrete the employers do. This has revealed itself to be not an easy task given that it is not always easy to identify the decision maker, or there may be a number of individuals or organizations that affect restructuring. In other cases, trade unions may not have direct access to the appropriate decision-maker, so that it becomes important not only to identify the decision maker and the negotiation process, but it is crucial to use a third party where the trade unions cannot open a door themselves.

At the European level, the case of UNI-Europa in the finance sector illustrates that there are diverse key people though which trade unions try to influence decisions. For example, European trade unions as well as national trade unions can establish links with the employers’ organizations in their respective context. Likewise, forms of employees’ participation as well as information and consultation at the plant level represent a channel for employees and their representative to have access to senior business managers in the different organizations. However, it is important that trade unions try also to use external tools and channels for influencing decisions with regard to restructuring issues. This means more specifically to develop networks of influence beyond the formal structures which are offered by the different national and local contexts. The delivery of strategic campaigns, which is a practice mostly used in the United States as a trade unions’ offensive response to the anti-union environment, can be used as an effective union’s tool to exercise pressure on an organization. This is the key tool UNI-Europa in the finance sector engaged itself in TRACE. In particular, UNI-Europa used the campaign on the EU service Directive as an opportunity to develop a network among affiliates and to produce a trade unions guide to the co-decision procedure with regard to restructuring. The European industry federation considers this procedure as particularly important for trade unionists because it is used for decisions on all internal market and employment legislation in the EU. In accordance to UNI-Europa campaigns need to be combined with legislation as an important tool to exercise pressure. More specifically, it identifies some critical key stages in the process of providing scope to influence and anticipate change via legislation. These stages are accompanied by the development of a co-decision procedure to gain influence in case of restructuring. In particular, European trade unions are consulted on draft versions of social legislation, giving to the national unions the opportunity to pressure their own national governments, as well as giving the European Trade Unions Confederation (ETUC) and the Industry Federations (EIFs) the opportunity to prepare their own positions in advance with regard to restructuring. In particular, the European Directives before being transposed into national legislation open a final scope
to national trade unions to shape the transposition. Moreover, the European Commission Communications usually set the parameters for future legislation but they are also designed to encourage debate amongst the different social partners. With this regard Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees (SSDC) can specifically also provide in the sector opportunities for trade unions to work with employers to comment on Commission Communications or policies and also to be more proactive in developing strategies for their own sectors. This type of project viewed co-ordination as requiring a meta-macro political framework and strategy – aimed at lobbying and influencing.

Accordingly, the Swedish SEKO union federation and the European Industry Federation in the transport sector (ETF) developed a Key action aimed at creating guidelines in the logistic sector – where change is rapid and new types of jobs emerge as well as new-jobs related skills – which could disseminate examples of good practices in dealing with restructuring.

Influencing decisions through legislation means not only to work closely with national governments and employers and using campaign to develop a network of action amongst the different unions affiliates. As different Key actions covering both national confederations and European sector-level federations in TRACE illustrate, European Works Councils (EWCs) are a most significant way of seeking to influence strategic decisions at the company-level in Europe, alongside the similar opportunities now available in companies covered by the European Company Statute. Although surveys developed by the European Works Councilors and academic analysis clearly suggest, as above mentioned, that most of the EWCs still have to realize their full potential as influential body, something which the Recast EWCs 2009 Directive will be assessed upon, it is clear that the EWCs have a unique opportunity, supported by European legislation, to draw together fellow trade unionists across national boundaries and to meet with the central management of a multinational enterprise. This provides scope to organize and influence companies at the strategic level, before decisions are taken. The Key Actions led by some of the European Industry Federations in the private sector (such as EMF, EMCEF, UNI-Europa Graphical) and some national trade unions confederations (such as the Portuguese (CGTP-IN) and Spanish (CC.OO) trade unions) produced to a different extent guidelines for EWCs. In the specific case of the Portuguese and Spanish trade unions, these guidelines covered the transposition of the EU directive, and the use of EWCs as a tool for trade unions in dealing with restructuring. The Key Action, more specifically, produced guidelines for EWC members aimed at enhancing the influence of the trade unions on the company-level management-driven decision making process as well as at supporting effective communication between the company and its employees. This implies specifically to enhance the role of the EWCs by dealing with the challenges the project identified in areas such as: harmonizing the different typology of EWCs agreements (Art. 13 and Art. 6 of the European Directive on EWCs); developing common visions to avoid plant competition; increasing the number of meetings and resisting the replacement of “face-to-face” meetings with distance-learning meetings; avoid the use of confidentiality rules as a means of not providing information to the European Works Councilors. Here co-ordination was about establishing corporate level responses as such, framing the subject of the firm as a space for intervention.
In terms of communication led projects these can vary in terms of whether they are macro oriented in creating broader joint working relations or more micro oriented in terms of creating templates of action between local activists and sharing information. Questions of building skills and sharing national experiences and understandings of industrial relations processes, and processes, were vital to the Finnish-Estonian project. This project aimed at allowing new emerging democratic systems and their social partners such as unions the ability to engage more fully with more developed trade union organizations in established systems which are highly regulated and structured. Such projects created working relations around the purpose of union organization and the way membership is structured and developed. This type of project was not common to the dialogue between ‘East’ and ‘West’ (older independent unions and newer ones). The project involving the British TUC and the Austrian OGB, with the aim of exchanging experiences about organizing workers and dealing with intransigent employers, was similar. The question of anticipating change in such projects is much wider than just creating templates for localized trade union action: it is about how unions do not just represent the interests of those being restructured but of how they enter into the new spheres of employment and fragmented spaces that emerge as a consequence of a phase of restructuring. Dealing with the small and medium sized employers and new forms of employer behaviour, which is less partnership oriented, is an increasing concern of many unions and the project in question aimed to introduce and develop organizing techniques and campaign processes. These ‘macro’ led projects were very much about transferring skills, knowledge and experiences across frontiers with relation to union-building as a fundamental pre-requisite to the effectiveness of anticipating change: in so far as anticipation necessitates an anticipator. Co-ordination was premised upon the idea of the need to share organizational approaches to employers and members – and innovations in relation to these.

In terms of the development of micro level communication oriented projects they were aimed at developing particular sets of information that would inform union activists of the diversity of responses to restructuring and the complex pattern and stages that need to be addressed. The Italian CISL and Danish LO project was aimed at sharing cases and insights into the nature, risks and possibilities of dialogue as a vehicle for engaging with employers and managers. The aim of developing cases, distance learning modules, and broad sets of information was a key feature of this project. The project had a series of educational dimensions – as did many of them (Martinez Lucio et al, 2009). Co-ordination was framed in such a project as the need to share an educational and cultural template. This was key to this and other projects such as the Portuguese CGTP and Spanish CCOO who developed a series of programmes that allowed trade unionists to evaluate the stages and signs related to restructuring and track through responses in terms of accessing financial information and actual union action. These were templates of action that broke down and explained the stages of employer action and the way restructuring has different phases. Anticipation requires understanding the future and its development, and the signals of intent amongst employers.
6. Conclusion

There is much being written in relation to the question of co-ordination in terms of international trade union activity. Much of this has now matured into a significant debate and has the attention of a wide range of scholars. The debate relates to questions of the tensions between formal/bureaucratic approaches and informal and localized/activist based approaches. Within these discussions there are various references to the Internet and its use (see Greco et al). Then new communicative spaces are therefore contributing to the manner in which co-ordination evolves (see Martínez Lucio and Walker 2005 and Pulignano 2008). In addition the tensions within networks between collaborative stances and more independent mobilization based approaches are also the subject of extensive debate. These discussions are forming a template around which many are trying to comprehend the future of the international labour movement in terms of its relations to a new transnational capitalist class.

However, whilst contributing to this debate in one form or another, the authors here feel that there are missing aspects in this debate. The focus is on the form of collaboration and the structure: the boundaries between established industrial relations practices and broader social and political perspectives. Yet the content and focus of collaboration is rarely the focus of discussion. Whilst focusing on what called be a bureaucratically oriented approach in terms of the ETUC TRACE project the paper nevertheless has teased out different dimensions of collaboration in terms of different dimensions of action: in this case the questions of communication and influencing strategies have been used as a ways of looking at trade union activity and within these we have focused on external and internal factors in terms of the former and macro and micro levels in terms of the latter. The idea is to try and understand the different ways in which co-ordination structures itself around different activities, different organizational imperatives and different levels of action. Of course, like all binarisms and sub-binarisms we open ourselves to the potential criticism of simplifying and reducing reality to a series of practices and alternatives. Yet we see these devices as illustrative and serving the purpose of indicating to us how co-ordination works in more complex ways. The structure and content of co-ordination is a complex issue and cannot be reduced to the simple historical binaries of bureaucracy-activist or employer facing-membership facing. Co-ordination works across various sets of relations and requires complex sets of organization and agendas. It is only when we see them in these terms that the task and the challenges can be genuinely understood. Co-ordination works at different levels of communication and political influencing and this is what makes it so unstable and difficult to develop. Tying together the projects we spoke of above is in itself a major issue.

The cases we drew on also raise another issue as well. That co-ordination has to be set aside the question of restructuring and capital in a broader sense than just the closure of workplaces – the focus of so much contemporary discussion which isolates one moment in the process – is important. It is not simply a case of responding to an integrated omniscient capitalist class but of acting in relation to the way in which change and
restructuring is developed. Hence, co-ordination exists in relation to the role of the state and its legitimating of the process of change and legal and ideological terms, the manner in which decisions are reached within employers and how they consult or not across a range of issues, in terms of detailed information and financial processes in terms of restructuring and the manner in which decisions are taken or not, and the question of how the gaps between regulatory systems create anomalies and spaces where trade unions cannot organize or find it hard to organize. There are other features of restructuring but this is one particular set of dimensions. These inform us that co-ordination has to work across the political, structural, strategic, process based and informational dimensions of restructuring (see Hammerstrom, et al 2006). The structure of decision making with capitalism takes on rational and irrational features – systematic and opportunistic features – and this explains the different ways in which co-ordination is structured in relation to such themes. In the case of TRACE this was a bureaucratic attempt to create dialogue and learning across these different dimensions of restructuring and forms of co-ordination. The paper suggests that we need to start opening the box and purpose of co-ordination if we are to see why it fails or succeeds. It suggests we have to locate discussions on co-ordination within the reality of capitalist restructuring and its different dimensions in terms of how it develops and through what stages. In this respect the paper argues that a temporal theme must underpin the debate in terms of how restructuring progresses, is formed and influences outcomes – and then we need to set this up in terms of the different informational and communicational responses from labour (be they mobilization or negotiation based) if we are to truly appreciate the reality of international labour dialogue and action in contemporary capitalism. Otherwise we will be a lost in a static, ahistorical view of organized labour which cannot be understood in terms of globalization.

References


(forthcoming as ‘Dimensions of Internationalism and the Politics of the Labour Movement: Understanding the political and organisational aspects of labour networking and co-ordination’ in Employee Relations 2009)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Trade Unions Confed. (Key Action)</th>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| CC.OO and CGTP-IN Spain and Portugal       | - Managing change  
- Communication and coordination between EWCs representatives and other workers’ organizations  
- Sectors: chemical, banking and metalworking sectors. | Guidebook on communication and coordination for EWC members |
| CFDT and TUC France and United Kingdom     | Managing change  
Sectors: telecommunications and transport sectors | - Course module, conceived as a support tool for trade union reps, including a tutor’s guide and guidelines on evaluation  
- Handbook for trade unionists and workers’ reps on strategies in facing restructuring crises  
- Action plans for further transnational cooperation within companies |
| CISL and LO-Skolen Italy & Denmark         | - Managing change  
- Sharing information and knowledge  
- Identifying effective negotiation policies with both companies and public authorities. | Guidelines for union intervention in restructuring situations, |
| ISF-CGIL and CGTP-IN Italy and Portugal    | - Managing change  
- Development of a transnational platform  
Sector: textile sector | Transnational platform of demands; outline of negotiating procedures; databank on-line |
| CGTP-IN and CC.OO. Portugal and Spain      | - Anticipate change  
- Developing the Restructuring Analysis Matrix, with indicators to help gather and analyse information on company trends, local socio-economic conditions, productivity and global markets and the consequences of restructuring | - Restructuring Analysis Matrix A  
- Handbook on using the Matrix, |
| LO-Skolen and CISL Denmark and Italy       | - Managing change  
- Creation of a mixed-mode course (two week-long face-to-face sessions, one in each region, together with a distance learning phase) to improve communication between workers’ reps within regions and between workers’ reps and other key local actors, and between regions in the two countries. | Guidebook on regional influence on restructuring and workplace development, including case studies, trade union strategies and dissemination activities. |
| OGB and TUC Austria and United Kingdom     | Managing change in SMEs | Handbook, which addresses change management and the recruitment of trade union members in SMEs, together with the course plan for shop stewards and trade union officers. |
| SAK Finland and Estonia                   | Managing chance  
Improving cooperation, exchange of information and learning from each other context | - Handbook on multinational restructuring  
- Workplace action plans |
| TUC and TCO United Kingdom and Sweden      | - Managing change  
- Development and deliver of web-based learning materials and an online training course on outsourcing. | - Online training module on outsourcing,  
- Study guide and handbook, as support for the web-based learning material |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>European Trade Unions Federations (Key Actions)</th>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| EMF                                           | - Managing change  
- Developing a position on socially responsible restructuring in the metal sector | Handbook on cross-border restructuring for use by shop stewards |
| EMCEF                                         | - Managing restructuring  
- Developing guidelines for coordinating trade union strategy  
- Agree procedures for negotiation and renegotiation of EWC agreements. | - Guidelines for EWCs on restructuring  
- Resolution on trade union coordination strategy for EWCs |
| EPSU                                         | - Managing restructuring  
- Publicizing the reforms on liberalization and privatization in the public sector  
- Highlighting the ways in which public services can provide sources of growth in employment | Handbook, containing information on how EU policies impact on public services and administrations |
| ETF                                          | - Managing change  
- Establishing cross-sectoral communication | Report and a set of guidelines for the logistic sector with an overview of major trends in restructuring |
| ETUCE Primary and Secondary education          | - Managing change  
- Examining the effects of the decisions by various European governments to devolve the bargaining of teachers’ pay and conditions of service from national to local levels, including moves to individual schools and colleges | - Survey on the impact of private working methods in education  
- Reinforcement of the online ETUCE Working Conditions network |
| ETUCE High education                          | - Managing change  
- Evaluating the new trends in the structure of higher education stemming from the Bologna process  
- Developing a broad understanding of EU legislation and ministerial decisions and their interpretation in particular national contexts. | - Online survey and report on the impact of privatisation and casualisation on the functioning of institutions and career developments in Higher Education and Research  
- Reinforcement of the online network on Higher Education and Research |
| UNI Europa Finance                            | - Managing change  
- Exploring the implications for national labour markets and social systems and for UNI-Europa sectors of the EU Directive on services in the internal market. | - Campaigning guide on influencing EU decision-making  
- FAQs on the Services Directive  
- A strengthened cross-sector European online network |
| UNI Europa Graphical                          | - Managing change  
- Building solidarity between different unions and different countries and to exchange information on the different national situations. | - Online network for trade union officers in the gravure sector  
- Database with basic information on companies’ sites, working conditions and national/company collective agreements |

Source: ETUI-Education (Brussels)
Table 2: An analytical systematization of trade unions’ strategies to deal with restructuring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>(Macro)</th>
<th>(Internal)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td>Lobbying and campaign</td>
<td>Skills-building and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(External)</td>
<td>Lobbying with the state and using campaign in order to influence legislation (UNI-Europa Key action)</td>
<td>Resources and supporting training at the local level (ETUCE key action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees (SEKO and ETF key action)</td>
<td>Train organisers and allocate sufficient human and material resources (finish and Estonia Key action).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Underpin the overall learning strategy to restructuring with co-ordinated views and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organising and coordinating action</strong></td>
<td>Establishing guidelines in case of M&amp;A or to coordinate the activity of EWCs (EMF Key action and CC.OO and CGTP-IN key action)</td>
<td>Establishing guidelines to coordinate the activity of EWCs representatives across-borders (EMF Key action and CC.OO and CGTP-IN key action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accessing information and correctly using it (CGTP and CC.OO key action)</td>
<td>Enabling workers to see differences and similarities in restructuring strategies adopted by employers across sectors (CISL and LO-Skolen Key action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organising workers (TUC/OGB key action and Finish and Estonia Key action)</td>
<td>Producing on-line and CD-Rom materials on how different bargaining systems work in different countries (ISF-CGIL and FESETE/CGTP-IN Key action)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Online learning for outsourcing (TUC and TCO Key action)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Training materials for anticipating change (CFDT and TUC Key action)</td>
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*Source: Own elaboration on the base of the results of the TRACE project*