

The Future of Workplace Innovation

Richard Ennals and Frank Pot, Honorary Advisors to EUWIN

*In preparing for our forthcoming [Conference](#) on **The Future of Workplace Innovation**, EUWIN's honorary advisors **Richard Ennals** and **Frank Pot** prepared a short article on why this is an important topic for Europe. We think their arguments are worth sharing more widely.*

Workplace innovation is an increasingly influential global movement. With strong European origins, it is increasingly recognised by policymakers and other stakeholders in countries across the world as a powerful tool in helping to achieve diverse economic and social policy goals, from inclusive growth and productivity to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

EUWIN describes workplace innovation as "new and combined interventions in work organisation, human resource management, labour relations and supportive technologies". It is a systemic approach, influenced in part by the European socio-technical design tradition, recognising the interdependence of work organisation, technologies, control structure and labour relations. The term workplace innovation describes a participatory process of innovation in which managers and employees are involved. It presupposes a 'participation & trust' management regime rather than a 'command & control' regime. Drawing on Scandinavian approaches to democratic dialogue, workplace innovation seeks to engage all stakeholders in ways that enable the force of the better argument to prevail. It works towards 'win-win' outcomes based on creatively forged convergence between enhanced organisational performance and quality of working life, leading to self-sustaining processes of participative organisational development fuelled by continuing learning and experimentation.

Workplace innovation was adopted by the European Commission in October 2012 as one of the objectives in the EU2020 Strategy. In the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan of 2021, the Commission encourages national authorities and social partners to foster workplace innovation. Several research projects, funded by the Commission, such as Beyond 4.0 and Bridges 5.0, include workplace innovation. The systemic approach makes it possible to integrate multiple policy facets, such as innovation, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, productivity, skills and decent work. The development model that the European Commission is promoting, Industry 5.0, appears to include these elements. Workplace innovation creates a learning conducive work environment, which provides, together with VET, lifelong learning and sustainable employability, together with an increased innovation capacity of the organisation.

Workplace innovation does not offer a blueprint. Rather, it provides global concepts and practices, generative resources that organisational actors can contextualise as "local theories" to fit their specific circumstances. A growing body of research has contributed to workplace innovation as a distinctive, robust, yet practically focused approach to organisational transformation.

However, the European Company Survey of Eurofound and Cedefop, based on management interviews, shows that only 20% of the establishments have bundles of practices, the so-called high investment/high involvement strategy, that are similar to, or more or less consistent with, workplace

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innovation. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that contexts change (economic conditions, geopolitical relations, industrial relations, political priorities). At this conference we want to discuss how workplace innovation can contribute to the digital and green transition and how more organisations, public and private, can become interested in this. This may require adjustments to the current theoretical underpinnings and the current practical approach to workplace innovation. Perhaps lessons can also be learned from related theories and approaches.

The ultimate goal is to create a sustainable, democratic and resilient society.

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