

BroadVoice

Broadening the spectrum
of employee voice
in workplace
innovation

National report – Italy

Company case study 2M

ADAPT

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Case study 2M

1. Company characteristics and state of innovation

Case 2M is an Italian family-owned company, established in the upper Milan area with production sites in Nerviano, Pogliano Milanese e Cerro Maggiore, over 60 years ago, specialising in the production of components for household appliances, particularly within the washing machine sector. The company adopts a vertically integrated production model, with most components manufactured in-house, from metal stamping and plastic molding to the final assembly. Its core products include safety systems for washing machines and program selectors. Operating exclusively in the B2B market, the firm collaborates with major international brands. Approximately 80% of its production is exported globally, supported by a subsidiary in Shanghai and a dedicated assembly facility in Serbia. The company continues to innovate, expanding its product range to include components for dishwashers and other appliances, with ongoing development in key technological areas.

Case 2M demonstrates a comprehensive approach to innovation spanning technological, cultural, and organisational aspects (which will be investigated in the next section), also motivated by the high standards required by the big brands with which the company has business relations. On the technological front, the company invests significantly in advanced machinery, including robotic systems, and revamping of existing facilities, with 90% of production processes being automated. In line with what asserted above, Case 2M has developed a research centre to explore cutting-edge innovations which collaborates with universities and focuses on new technological solutions, fostering cross-disciplinary innovation. Beyond technology, innovation at the company extends to the creation of their Academy, launched in 2020. This initiative supports the company's commitment to employee training and development, with a focus on sustainability, digitalisation, and well-being. The Academy offers both physical and virtual spaces for learning and aims to enhance not only technical skills but also cultural awareness, particularly concerning ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles. The location of the research centre and the Academy is also of particular interest: they are both situated in the MIND innovation district derived from the area where the EXPO exhibition took place in 2015 in Milan, confirming the embeddedness of the firm with the most innovative players at the local level.

2. Workforce characteristics

Case 2M employs a total of 229 individuals, with an average employee age of 47 years. The workforce predominantly consists of blue-collar workers, totaling 146, while there are 72 white-collar employees, 4 apprentices, 4 managers, and 3 executives. Blue collars are mainly warehouse workers, maintenance technicians, and assembly, pressing and cutting operators. White collars are mostly supervisors, engineers and department heads. Among blue collars, men are almost twice as women (96 compared to 50). A similar situation applies to white collars, among whom there are 22 women and 54 men. Only 1 out of 7 managers and executives is a woman. The vast majority of

workers (around 221) are employed with an open-ended contract, while less than 10 workers are agency-based. The turnover rate amounts to 18%.

3. Industrial relations

The company applies the NCLA signed by the trade union federations FIM-CISL, FIOM-CGIL and UILM-UIL and the employers' associations Federmeccanica and Assital (latest renewal on February 5, 2021), while executives are covered by the NCLA signed by the trade union Federmanager and the employers' confederation Confindustria (latest renewal on July 30, 2019). The representation of workers has been essentially through FIM-CISL for at least the past 20 years, with a unitary workplace labour representation (RSU) established as early as the 2000s, and today composed of seven members. The current unionisation rate is approximately 10-15%, showing a positive trend in growth over time. Despite this low rate, worker participation in union activities is notably high, with engagement rates for assemblies and elections of worker representatives reaching 80-90%. Regarding union rights and leaves, the company complies with the NCLA regulations and has not encountered significant requests for additional prerogatives. The FIM-CISL representative who assists the company notes that the overall atmosphere is constructive. In the same vein, the management team also reports a positive industrial relations climate, characterised by openness and sincerity during discussions.

«I have been with the company for nine years, and I've never experienced or sensed a hostile atmosphere. It's simply not part of our culture. Of course, on some issues, everyone defends their own views, but I have to say I really enjoy union meetings because the discussions are sincere. I never feel like I need to be cautious because there's a hidden agenda. There's a strong sense of trust and responsibility towards the topics discussed, and a commitment to follow through on the actions we agree on» (HR Manager)

Key areas of labour-management discussion include organisational work processes, innovation and participatory strategies, particularly related to performance-related bonuses and bilateral working groups, as well as occupational health and safety and welfare. Training and development are also prioritised, with the company boasting its own Academy to address employee training needs, by actively listening to employees' suggestions. In this field, though, the worker representatives interviewed denote a lack of constancy on the part of management in consulting them.

An additional confirmation of the favourable industrial relations climate is the renewal on July 8, 2024, of the company-level collective agreement between the company, supported by the local employers' association Assolombarda, and the RSU, assisted by the local branch of FIM-CISL. The agreement, which includes an *Innovation Plan* drafted on June 20 by the company and approved by the RSU, builds upon and evolves a process first initiated in 2019. That year marked the first time in which at Case 2M an organisational and technological innovation project was tied to the disbursement of a performance-related bonus and accompanied by a range of direct worker participation initiatives, coordinated by a joint labour-management commission. Having achieved the goals set in that initial phase and overcome the economic challenges caused by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the company has developed a new three-year Innovation Plan, aimed at revising key business processes and integrating a new software system to connect different areas

of production. To this end, the Plan, developed in accordance with the guidelines of the Italian Tax Agency on direct employee involvement¹, outlines a series of initiatives aimed at facilitating this significant change from both an organisational and HRM perspective. Specifically, leveraging the educational projects and offer of the company Academy, the 2024 training plan outlines key directions focused on both digital and soft skills development. This includes the organisation of seminars and workshops on digitalisation in the workplace, as well as focus groups to address potential challenges on the production line. Worker engagement is further supported through various initiatives, such as the use of whiteboards installed along production lines to collect improvement proposals from workers, and the enhanced role of team leaders within departments. The 2024 agreement introduces a significant innovation in the structure of the joint labour-management commission, initially established in 2019 and comprising representatives from both company management and the workforce. This commission is responsible for identifying, proposing, and monitoring objectives for improvement and is now organised into five working groups, each focused on one of the following areas: organisational efficiency, quality, safety and environment, welfare, and sustainability. Each group includes selected members from the RSU and management alongside company personnel with specialised expertise in the relevant topics. Two working groups are specifically assigned to enhance three of the five performance indicators associated with the productivity bonus: OEE (Overall Equipment Efficiency), quality-related costs (non-compliance), and waste reduction. The fifth indicator, however, is associated with the advancement of the process of integrating the new software system and optimising business and production dynamics. Economically, the revised bonus scheme provides a maximum gross amount of 2,200 euros for 2024, 2,300 euros for 2025, and 2,400 euros for 2026. Additionally, flexible benefits will be distributed, valued at 80 euros, 100 euros, and 120 euros over the three years of the agreement, respectively.

By and large, as also seen in the 2019 agreement, the recent renewal of the collective agreement reflects Case 2M broader strategy of continuous innovation, employee involvement, and a strong relationship with worker representatives. As the FIM-CISL representative states:

«During both the previous and the current agreement negotiations, a significant part of the discussion focused on work organisation and participatory practices. Whether we talked about performance-related bonuses or implemented innovative initiatives like working groups and mechanisms to increase worker participation, I noticed fertile ground here for discussing organisational logics and approaches. For us, this is strategically important. The company's openness to address work organisation – a traditionally sensitive topic for Italian companies – combined with the work done with worker representatives (RSU) to understand the traditions and approaches within departments and offices, led to a level of organisational depth I had rarely experienced before» (Trade union official)

4. Labour regulation

Labour regulation at the company relies on NCLAs and company-level collective bargaining (as regards i.e., performance-related pay, welfare, direct participation), as well as HR policies (as for

¹ For more information, see par. 3.1.1. of this report.

e.g., worker training, smart working). Even the latter, though, are found to be largely shared with workers and their representatives.

«Both the training plan and the sustainability report were documents that were both presented and discussed at the union assembly. There was in fact a willingness on the part of the company to talk directly with the workforce about these issues, and we chose the union assembly together as the place to discuss them. (...) The smart working regulation is not an agreement but a company policy, but we did it together»
(Trade union official)

As for some issues such as health and safety, both collective bargaining and HRM intervene.

5. *Direct worker participation practices*

The company's approach to direct worker participation encompasses a range of initiatives aimed at fostering employee engagement and enhancing operational efficiency. First, with training and consultative purposes, the company has implemented a series of workshops focusing on key projects on areas like digitalisation, sustainability and psychological wellbeing. These workshops are not merely training sessions; for instance, when addressing digitalisation, they have been designed to assess workers' proficiency with new technologies and gather feedback on their experiences.

«They [*the workshops*] were aimed at a collective work, i.e., we gathered teams of operators or white-collars (that could not know each other because possibly working in different departments), so as that they could work together on a common project even if only for half an hour or 45 minutes, but at least to come up with a couple of ideas. So, they were attempts to get the whole population involved in a cross-functional way». (worker representative)

Secondly, focus groups are conducted primarily on the production line to address quality control and product integrity. These sessions serve dual purposes: they act as a monitoring mechanism for production standards and provide a platform for workers to express their concerns regarding quality issues. However, a worker representative interviewed notes that the focus groups have mostly involved senior staff. Thirdly, as also explained above, the company has recently developed five working groups, each one composed of some of the members of the joint committee (consisting of a balanced representation of RSU members and company managers), as well as workers with specialised expertise on the specific topic addressed. While the working groups themselves are permanent, the company promotes inclusivity by allowing, on a voluntary basis and with the aim of ensuring rotation, three additional workers from each production site to attend and provide input during meetings. In this regard, a worker representative interviewed fears that the fact that working groups' meetings are held outside working hours may discourage workers from joining. However, during the workshop held on January 2025, both company and worker representatives emphasised the important change from a system whereby if a worker had an idea or a problem as regards work organisation, she would have had to report it to the RSU, who could then bring it to the joint committee, to a more 'direct' model that allows the worker to present her idea by asking to attend specific working groups' meetings. Moreover, the working groups are required to report quarterly

to the full joint labour-management committee on the progress of their assigned tasks. At the end of each year, the joint committee is expected to organise a meeting to share the results achieved with the entire workforce, as part of the Innovation Plan's implementation. As a fourth direct worker participation practice, suggestion schemes from employees, typically by means of Kaizen boards, are now integrated into the working groups' agenda. Although the boards will remain in use, suggestions can now be communicated directly by the operators to the department heads or the team leaders (where available), while the working groups are tasked with reviewing and acting on these suggestions, ensuring a formal structure for employee input to be translated into actionable initiatives.

With specific reference to work organisation and lean methods, their implementation dates back to several years ago with Kanban boards to visualise and improve work, job rotation schemes to breakdown hierarchies, workers' participation in visits to foreign suppliers of technological equipment to be deployed in the company, etc. Lean practices progressively became more and more structured also by hiring a lean manager. Today, on production lines, there are structured work teams, operating with a certain degree of autonomy in executing their tasks though reporting to department heads or team leaders for any problems or proposals for improvement. Team leaders were introduced by management in 2020 as an intermediate figure between the department head and the operators, to deal with improvements in issues like organisational efficiency and ergonomics over teams of around 20 workers. Team leaders had to update department heads during regular meetings, seeking assistance as needed or independently resolving problems. However, they initially struggled to establish credibility and authority among workers. According to a worker representative interviewed, this was also due to the lack of sufficient psychological support and time to connect with the various workers and gather their views and opinions, although a training course was provided to all team leaders at the beginning of the process. As a result, the number of team leaders has significantly reduced, as reported by a RSU member, leaving the management with very few people to count on for the reporting of problems and improvements. However, the management has made significant efforts over time to strengthen the legitimacy of team leaders. In 2024, with the renewal of the company-level agreement, team leaders were formally integrated into the working groups, further aligning their activities with organisational goals. As the HR manager reports:

«The experience I gained from team leaders provided me with a new perspective, allowing me to hear from individuals who expressed their thoughts differently. It was no longer just the managers sharing their vision of the company, but also colleagues [*the team leaders*]. They navigated complex situations and faced obstacles; they didn't always have an easy time, but they did an excellent job» (HR Manager)

An additional mechanism employed by the company to promote direct worker participation is the use of surveys. These surveys are conducted on a variety of topics to collect broader employee feedback, acknowledging that not all workers engage directly with RSU members. For instance, a recent survey was carried out as part of the Well-being Project. Similar surveys have also been conducted on themes such as mobility and welfare, allowing the company to capture diverse perspectives and better inform its initiatives.

Moreover, as regards innovation projects, inputs are collected from different channels, such as meetings with team leaders and department heads, who in turn are expected to detect problems and improvement suggestions by talking with the members of their teams or units. The final decision to run a project is up to the management, although information and training activities are usually

carried out to both workers and their representatives before and during the implementation of the project.

Finally, workers' individual autonomy in the organisation of their tasks turns out to depend on the specific work performed and the department where they are employed. Workers involved in the Administration unit are therefore considered as quite autonomous in the management of their tasks and are allowed to work outside the company premises up to two days per week.

6. The interplay between direct participation and industrial relations

On account of the agreements signed in 2019 and 2024, industrial relations play a crucial role in shaping and implementing direct worker participation schemes within the company studied. A crucial factor for this positive interplay is, according to the trade unionist, the presence of an HR Manager open to organisational innovation and receptive to contributions from worker representatives. The impetus to formalise existing practices of worker engagement within a collective agreement arose from a seminar organised in 2018 by the local employers' association Assolombarda, of which the company is a member, focusing on worker participation and the associated contributory incentives. The seminar, attended by both trade unionists and company managers, convinced the company to formally document its existing participatory practices.

«And when we attended the meeting in Assolombarda, I thought: 'But we already do this stuff in part. So, you are telling me that I can have an extra incentive? I just have to put down on paper what we do? Yes of course, I have to write an innovation plan, which is a bit of a slog, but can I then get an economic advantage for the employees? Then we do it, so people can see that extra economic quid from these practices'» (HR Manager)

According to the interviewed trade union representative, such participation is seen as a strategic asset, enabling companies to more effectively engage their workforce, retain talent, and remain competitive in the labour market. The trade unionist emphasises that direct participation aligns with a central objective of labour representation: promoting the personal empowerment of workers. This empowerment extends beyond economic gains, aiming to enhance workers' sense of belonging and fulfilment within the organisation. This interest alignment surrounding direct participation led the trade union to take the opportunity (and the challenge) to become an organisational partner of the company. In this partnership, the union would serve as a bridge between the company's strategic goals and the workforce's practical concerns and aspirations, enabling labour representatives to favour, accompany and oversee the organisational change.

«The challenge for the union was to wonder how it could become an organisational partner in this initiative by contributing with its unique perspective: one the company would otherwise lack, since unions serve as a 'translator' of the workforce's views in ways no survey could replicate with the same depth and efficiency.

(...) In my view, the union still holds a unique advantage: it has privileged insight into the company. Workplace labour representatives, along with union representatives, maintain continuous monitoring and speak a language that workers trust and identify with. This kind of interaction is unlikely to be granted by workers to the company directly, as it requires extensive and ongoing work. This dynamic offers added value for the company, which can better understand how its vision resonates with the workforce» (Trade union official)

The two RSU members interviewed are in favour of promoting direct participation, particularly as they believe it can be a way of fostering responsibility and awareness, which in turn promotes a better working environment for all. According to the trade unionist interviewed, the major contribution provided by worker representatives occurs during the implementation phase of participation practices, primarily by helping workers understand the significance of these initiatives, underlining the company's commitment to mutual benefits. RSU members are regarded as fundamental to sensitise and activate workers once overcome their resistance. Moreover, given the risk of disappointment among workers if the desired results are not achieved, another important contribution of worker representatives, according to the trade unionist, occurs in the management and monitoring phase of the participatory process. In this sense, it is indeed important to remind people of what has been done, the benefits they have obtained, despite the fact that tangible economic results may not have arrived immediately. By contrast, the role of worker representatives in the design of participatory innovation paths turns out to be weaker mainly due to the lack of specific competences. The 2024 reorganisation of the bilateral commission into five different working groups, each focusing on precise themes, would respond also to this problem, thus enabling a more knowledgeable membership on the labour side, also thanks to the possibility granted to workers with an expertise on the topic of participating in the meetings.

«One of the reasons why we wanted to change the structure of the joint commission somewhat in this agreement was also the imbalance in its composition. In fact, it is a commission that calls itself joint, but where one half of the members already deal during the working day with issues such as innovation, suggestions, and all that pertains to the commission's task, while the other half is made up of worker representatives who lend their free time to something that does not belong to them and that they do not know. (...) This generates a bit of an imbalance at the start. The delegates [*workplace labour representatives*] told me clearly: 'The commission is a strategic place that we like, but we have the feeling that we play a bit on two different levels, where perhaps the talents that the company has chosen have a level of proposal, of language and arrive already prepared for the commission meetings, while we start a bit behind'. The logic that led us, for example, to the conception of the working groups was precisely to try to disarticulate the plenary committee, which was a bit rigid, and to try to make the delegates and workers more protagonists, hence the idea of calling in workers who have nothing to do with union representation but who know the issues to be discussed. The bet of this agreement on participation is precisely to try to improve the quality especially on the workers' side» (Trade union official)

Beyond the lack of competences, a worker representative interviewed complains about the scarcity of time available to really make an impact on certain business processes and dynamics, which are then the subject of working groups' meetings and also related to the amount of the performance bonus.

Finally, from the company's perspective, this partnership is valuable for obtaining real-time feedback on employee perceptions of company initiatives, enabling HR and management to fine-tune strategies to better address workers' needs and enhance engagement. In this way, the union's active participation in organisational processes helps bridge the gap between management's strategic goals and the practical realities of daily operations on the shop floor, ultimately leading to greater acceptance and engagement in company initiatives regarding direct participation.

7. Overall impact of the practices and future prospects

The interviews reveal that the primary challenge to fostering direct worker participation within the company lies in employees' lack of motivation to engage in these practices. This hesitation does not stem from a resistance to adaptation but rather from the caution to disrupt established routines and norms, which makes workers suspicious about embracing change. However, recognising this area for improvement, both the company and worker representatives have started developing a shared language to help employees better understand the value of direct involvement. This effort has required greater openness to employee needs and a stronger commitment to listening, with the ultimate goal of instilling a sense of pride in these participatory practices. Thanks to substantial efforts, interviewees now acknowledge that progress has been made, with employees showing increasing interest in these new company initiatives. As emphasised by the FIM-CISL representative:

«When I worked with RSU members to prepare for meetings with management, I observed a deep passion for work organisation. Their dedication and love for machinery and production processes are evident. I have to say that, after two collective agreements and seven or eight years of persistence, I am beginning to see some results - both in the quality of the assemblies and in the level of engagement shown by people during these meetings. Despite numerous challenges that increased the difficulty – especially during Covid-19, when at a certain point, all of this was put on hold, and the focus shifted to the survival of businesses – this agreement [2024] has genuinely sparked a new level of enthusiasm among some employees. It has also encouraged them to voice their opinions in ways that, in my view, were previously absent» (Trade union official)

Another important point to emphasise is the lack of monitoring mechanisms to assess the economic impacts associated with practices of direct worker participation, although company management is sure about their relevance.

«Participation is a complex issue, there is no guarantee that these efforts will be successful. Additionally, there are various constraints to consider. However, my question today is: can I do without it? No, because otherwise, I risk being unable to identify my real needs» (HR Manager)

In this regard, one worker representative interviewed emphasises the importance of assessing the economic impact of each individual practice or project. However, he/she acknowledges an increase in productivity over the past year, which may also be influenced, though, by production standstill

during the pandemic. Another worker representative notes that since the signing of the first agreement in 2019, people now seem happier, although there is no shortage of voices against it.

The trade union representative views direct participation with a mix of satisfaction and self-reflection. While acknowledging the progress made and the union's active role in fostering workplace participation, the representative emphasises that further improvement is essential, especially in extending the impact to the local community. In this regard, the company could act as a springboard for other businesses in its region and beyond, especially as many large corporations increasingly pursue participatory practices without including trade unions. This vision is strategic rather than philanthropic, and the representative stresses the need for trade union's sustained and systematic efforts in both internal and external engagement to maximise the benefits of direct participation. A significant barrier remains the absence of a unified trade union perspective on regional needs and capacities, as Italy's numerous union federations often lack an overarching vision that addresses the specific requirements of each territory. This is despite the CISL's commitment to enhancing worker participation in workplaces as demonstrated by the popular bill, launched by the trade union confederation itself in 2023 and now discussed in Parliament, containing a specific chapter on 'organisational participation'. However, the FIM-CISL representative interviewed emphasises that the recent upward trend in inflation has somewhat diverted the organisation's attention from discussions surrounding worker participation.

The company shares with the union the need to talk more about participation in Case 2M both externally, to other realities and to the territory, and internally to make all workers understand the value of these experiments and convey pride in what has been done. Furthermore, according to the HR Manager, the ability to listen to people must always be improved, despite the progress already made.

8. *Summary of the case study*

Case 2M is an Italian medium-sized family-owned company specialising in the production of household appliance components, such as safety systems and program selectors for washing machines. Operating in the B2B market, it collaborates with major international brands, exporting approximately 80% of its production. The company follows a vertically integrated production model with a high level of automation (90%) and has established a research centre that collaborates with universities to explore new technological solutions.

Case 2M is covered by both national and company-level collective bargaining and has a unitary workplace labour representation (RSU), fostering a constructive and trust-based industrial relations climate. The recently renewed company-level collective agreement includes a three-year innovation plan aimed at improving business processes and implementing a new software system. Five working groups have been established to focus on specific areas such as organisational efficiency, quality, and safety.

The company has implemented various worker participation practices: workshops, focus groups, and working groups that include RSU representatives, company managers and expert employees. Mechanisms to collect worker suggestions have also been introduced, as well as team leaders in departments who are responsible for collecting ideas of improvement in organizational efficiency and ergonomics.

On account of the agreements signed in 2019 and 2024 regulating participatory innovation paths, industrial relations do play a crucial role in establishing direct worker participation within the company. For the union, direct worker participation aligns with its traditional mission to empower workers, enhancing their sense of belonging and satisfaction. Therefore, the union supports and monitors organisational changes, acting as a mediator between company goals and worker concerns, which deepens trust and communication within the workforce. However, the union's influence is more impactful in the implementation phase, where representatives help workers appreciate the initiatives' value, and in the monitoring phase, ensuring workers see the benefits over time. The recent restructuring of the bilateral commission into specialised working groups aims to enhance workers' active involvement by leveraging their specific expertise and addressing prior imbalances in knowledge and preparedness. However, the lack of sufficient competences and time appears as a persistent barrier to both workers and their representatives' effective involvement in participation initiatives.

Though lacking targeted monitoring mechanisms, participation practices seem to have produced good economic results and strengthened worker engagement. Challenges, however, remain such as a lack of motivation among some employees. The company and worker representatives share the goal of further improving responsiveness to employee needs and expanding the culture of participation both internally and within the local community.

Table 1. Case M2 in brief

Company characteristics	Company context. Case 2M is an Italian medium-sized family-owned company specialising in the production of household appliance components, such as safety systems and program selectors for washing machines. Operating in the B2B market, it collaborates with major international brands, exporting approximately 80% of its production.
	State of innovation. The company follows a vertically integrated production model with a high level of automation (90%) and has established an Academy for worker training and a research centre that collaborates with universities to explore new technological solutions.
Industrial relations	Trade union density rate at the company level. 10/15%
	Workplace labour representation structure characteristics. The representation of workers has been essentially through FIM-CISL for at least the past 20 years, with a RSU established as early as the 2000s, and today composed of seven members.
	Company-level collective bargaining. It is conducted by management with the RSU and the local trade union branch. Key areas of labour-management discussion include organisational work processes, innovation and participatory strategies, particularly related to performance-related bonuses and bilateral working groups, as well as occupational health and safety and welfare.
Direct worker participation	Direct participation as the subject of organisational tools. 1) Workshops on key projects on areas like digitalisation, sustainability and psychological wellbeing where all workers are involved in consultation and joint assessment procedures;

	<p>2) Focus groups to address quality control and product integrity, though apparently mainly involving senior staff; 4) Structured work teams and team leaders for collecting workers' ideas for improvements in fields like organizational efficiency and ergonomics; 5) Suggestion schemes e.g., through Kaizen boards on production lines as well as informal communication between operators and department heads or team leaders; 5) Surveys with all workers on issues like wellbeing and mobility; 6) Individual autonomy over the content and organisational of work mostly developed in Administration. These practices are largely unilaterally designed by management, although mixed working groups recently established should play a role in planning further workshops.</p> <p>Direct participation as a vehicle for workplace innovation</p> <p>Many of the above practices are also mentioned in an Innovation Plan designed by management in 2024 in agreement with worker representatives. The Plan refers to the objective of revisiting key business processes and integrating a new software system to connect different areas of production. To this end, the Plan outlines a series of initiatives aimed at facilitating this significant change from both an organisational and HRM perspective (incl. workshops, focus groups, the collection of workers' suggestions). In addition, it mentions a joint labour-management commission (composed of worker representatives and manager), already established in 2019, and now articulated in 5 working groups, also with the participation of individual workers with expertise and interests in the specific issues. These working groups should meet periodically to monitor and analyse the development of the Innovation Plan, with specific reference to the issues of OEE, quality, sustainability, welfare, safety, to propose improvements and plan training actions in these areas.</p> <p>Bottom-up consultation and joint assessment over executive and managerial issues are the most developed procedures. Partly, joint determination over minor issues.</p>
<p>The role of industrial relations in direct worker participation</p>	<p>The impetus to formalise existing practices of worker engagement within the first joint Innovation Plan arose from a seminar organised in 2018 by the local employers' association Assolombarda. Since then, worker representatives are asked to approve Innovation Plans, designed by management and entailing the development of direct participation practices. Therefore, worker representatives are largely informed of the implementation of direct participation practices. However, they do not concretely intervene in the design of these practices. They are part, though, of a joint labour-management commission (further articulated in five working groups) with the aim of monitor the advancement of the Innovation Plans also by assessing workers' suggestions, proposing further ideas of improvement and planning further workshops and training initiatives. To get contributory incentives, the Innovation Plans designed by management and approved by worker representatives are attached to company-level collective agreements regulating a performance-related pay scheme signed by worker representatives.</p> <p>Model of integration b/w direct participation and industrial relations</p> <p>Halfway between hybrid (cooperative) and democratic (participatory) model, since on the one hand worker representatives (especially, the local trade unionist</p>

	<p>signing agreements with the company) boast a proactive approach vis-à-vis direct participation, on the other hand they hardly provide concrete inputs to the definition of direct participation practices and are mainly informed about their introduction and at best involved in their monitoring.</p>
	<p>Breadth and depth of participation</p> <p>Worker participation in Case 2M boasts a good degree of breadth and depth. As regards the breadth, industrial relations and direct participation are both well developed over diverse and complementary topics, and are linked with one another. As regards the depth, some participation practices boast a high degree of institutional embeddedness as agreed via collective bargaining and a shared Innovation Plan.</p>
Difficulties	<p>1) Workers' lack of motivation; 2) Lack of monitoring mechanisms assessing the economic impact of direct participation practices; 3) Lack of workers and their representatives' sufficient competences and time to more effectively engage in organisational dynamics.</p>
Impacts	<p>Though lacking targeted monitoring mechanisms, participation practices are perceived as essential by management to have an accurate idea of the company's needs. However, the innovation objectives set in 2019 have been achieved on time and good productivity results have been reported in the last year though partly influenced by the production standstill of the pandemic. Workers seem generally happier and more engaged, although there is no shortage of voices against it.</p>
Future prospects	<p>The company and worker representatives share the goal of further improving responsiveness to employee needs and expanding the culture of participation both internally and within the local community.</p>

