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Direct and representative worker participation

Exploring reciprocal boundaries and areas for their interaction

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Worker participation in decision-making processes in traditional capitalist enterprises

may take two different **forms**:

	Representative worker participation	Direct worker participation
When	At the beginning of the Twentieth century	Since the middle of the Twentieth century
Why	<i>Industrial democracy</i> argument	<i>Business case</i> argument
How	Trade unions, works councils, co-determination, collective bargaining, etc.	Teamwork, suggestion schemes, tools for information sharing, etc., involving workers directly with no representatives
Frame of reference	Pluralism	Unitarism

BroadVoice – **Broadening the spectrum of employee voice in workplace innovation**

- **Objective:** to investigate the relationships between representative and direct worker participation
- **Duration:** 2023-2025
- **Cofinancing:** European Union
- **Coordinator:** ADAPT (IT) + Fondazione ADAPT (IT)
- **Partners:** CISL (IT) + Fondazione Tarantelli (IT), IPS-BAS (BG), LTU (SE), UL (SI), UvA (NL), WIE (IE)
- **Associated organisations:** ETUI (EU), ETUC (EU), Federmeccanica (IT), FIM-CISL (IT), ZDS (SI), KSS PERGAM (SI), FNV (NL), KT PODKREPA (BG), UPEE (BG), FCIW PRODKREPA (BG), SRVIKBG (BG), IDEAS INSTITUTE (IE), AWWN (NL), LO (SE)

From BroadVoice [Analytical Framework](#)

an operational definition of direct worker participation:

“encompassing practices and procedures which allow workers to exert some influence in decision making about work and the conditions under which they work (see, among others, Gallie et al., 2017; Heller et al., 1998), without the mediation of representatives (Della Torre et al., 2021)”

Key analytical dimensions of direct worker participation:

Objectives		Intensity	Scope	Modes of regulation	Contribution
Economic	Work management	Information	Operational/executive or task/job-role ('local')	Unilateral	Individual or group
	Innovation	Consultation and joint analysis	Managerial or HR ('medium')	Joint regulation (individual or collective)	Verbal or written
Social		Joint decision	Strategic ('distant')	Legal regulation	
Democratic		Worker autonomy			
Humanistic					
Dominance					

- Hybrid

Varieties of relationships between direct and representative participation:

Degrees of embeddedness of direct participation into representative participation	0 (disembeddedness)		1 (Low)	2 (Medium)	3 (High)
Types of relationships	Separation	Coexistence		Interaction	
Models of coexistence/interaction (inspired by Knudsen et al., 2011)	/	<p>HRM model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apathetic attitude of WRs 	<p>Bipartite (adversarial) model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Especially with a reactive/defensive attitude of WRs (though apathetic or obstructionist attitudes are also possible) 	<p>Cooperative model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperative attitude of WRs - WRs informed or consulted before DP introduction and contributing to instrumental measures 	<p>Democratic (participatory) model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proactive attitude of WRs - WRs intervening in the design of the content and or process of DP, as well as its monitoring

The effects of **direct participation** from a worker and organisational perspective, are better achieved and sustained when it interacts also with forms of **indirect/representative participation**

- Worker representatives can intervene in the “process” of adoption of direct participation, by strengthening and improving management communications around direct participation practices and ensuring that workers’ views are meaningfully included into decision making processes.
- Worker representatives can intervene in coordinating and monitoring the implementation of direct participation, by providing workers with the necessary skills, mitigating possible psycho-social vulnerabilities (like strain and stress) in direct participation initiatives and ensure that the net benefits of participation (e.g., in terms of economic rewards) to individuals is positive.
- Worker representatives can favour workers’ acceptance of direct participation and stimulate their concrete contribution, thus also contributing to economic achievements.

Innovation (especially in work organisation) **as a privileged area of coexistence and interaction** between direct and representative worker participation

because:

- direct participation is a key ingredient/output of work organisational innovation processes (lean-inspired models)
- direct participation is also used as a vehicle for change as it tends to accelerate organisational and technological changes, and to support company improvements in productivity, quality, flexibility and responsiveness
- representative participation is often subject to information and consultation on processes of change and innovation

depending on:

- national institutional framework and structured policies and programmes
- identity and ideological orientations of the actors
 - workplace-level associative and organisational characteristics
- structural and environmental conditions

Four selected workplace case studies

Cases	Components for household appliances (IT)	Household appliances (IT)	Workshop company (SE)	Automotive (IE)
National institutional framework	Tax reductions in case of collectively agreed DP; sectoral NCLA and local agreement promoting DP; rights of information and consultation for RSU	Tax reductions in case of collectively agreed DP; sectoral NCLA promoting DP; rights of information and consultation for worker representatives	Co-Determination Act (rights of negotiation, information and consultations); the Production Leap joint initiative to promote lean production	History of social partnership and tripartite developmental programmes; IDEAS institute of the trade union SIPTU still operating
Structural and environmental conditions	Medium-sized family-owned company. Tier 1 supplier. International markets and high standards. Investments in skills and research	Large plant of a multinational group. Investments in lean and Industry 4.0 technologies. Strong competitive pressures	Medium-sized manufacturer of components based on steel, aluminium. Mainly national market. Problems of efficiency	Small Tier 1 supplier, part of a multinational group. High standards required by international clients. Strong competitive pressures
Associative and organisational characteristics	Low TU density (FIM-CISL). 7 RSU members. Workplace CB on work organisation, participatory procedures. Links with local EA.	Low TU density (3 TUs). 11 RSU members. Company and workplace-level CB on work organisation, participatory structures.	90% TU density (mainly IF Metall). Local union club. Company-level CB.	100% TU density. Shop steward supported by SIPTU. Company-level agreement with SIPTU
Ideological orientations	TU's strong commitment to DP. Management open to DP and partnership with RSU	1 TU's commitment to DP. Favourable attitude by management	IF Metall supports investments in new organisational models	SIPTU interested in promoting DP and partnership with management. Management available to collaborate with SIPTU
Outcome	Mainly COOP though with elements of DEM	DEM (expert involvement)	COOP (consultant involvement)	DEM (expert involvement)

What can we learn? What do these cases have in common?

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