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Why is Learning from National Working Life Programmes not a Matter of Course?

Claudius H. Riegler

Public policy programmes in the field of working life reforms may be needed, but they cannot do more than supplement the genuine dynamics of the working life. They can influence people's perceptions of the problems and the work forms applied in organizing development. Power relations in private and public organizations, as results of business and societal trends, are obstacles to innovative and anthropocentric oriented reforms in working life. The more participative elements funded projects have been integrated, the more robust are their outcomes. National programme structures have to strive for the establishment of persistent local-level development coalitions, and to support collaboration of all actors concerned in development processes. International networking is possibly a learning facilitator.

The implementation of, and learning from, reform programmes from the 1970s to our time is analyzed, with a focus on personal experiences from research, project management and evaluation of Scandinavian and German programmes.

Key words: Public policy programmes in working life, programme evaluation, new quality of work, participation, local-level development coalitions

1. Introductory remarks¹

Two examples from Germany's and Sweden's automotive industry

In 1976, a national expert group of work psychologists in Germany stated that work cycles in industry of under 90 seconds were unhealthy, and should be avoided. Team work and non-line assembly boxes were at this time regarded as a remedy. This was even practiced in some European automotive plants, supported by huge amounts of investments and public funding. Nowadays (2008), work cycles of 22 seconds in the German (and worldwide) automotive industry have become usual again. According to an influential CEO from a regional German employers' association, production work in countries like Germany has to develop towards a strictly standardized and rationalized form, which is a complete contrast with the still practiced "German way of work organization" (which presumably never existed as paradigm and in reality) which the employers are requested to do away with (Gryglewski 2007). Another CEO, Pehr G. Gyllenhammar (former Volvo Car Corporation) argued in 2006 that job content (in Swedish industry) was back to the monotonous levels of the sixties from which the Scandinavian work organisational reforms once started, but that this was no positive development for neither business nor the wage-earners (Björkman 2006: 34).

¹ My background and actual position is fivefold connected with the issue of this exploratory text: As a researcher in a transnational R&D project within the German Humanisation Programme (HdA) in the early 80's, I initiated knowledge transfer from the Swedish programme activities with work organisation and occupational health issues to the German practice. As an evaluator, I participated in the 90's in evaluations of the Swedish LOM Programme (Naschold 1993a) and the Swedish Working Life Fund (Gustavsen et al. 1996, Riegler 1998). As an expert from the European Work & Technology Consortium in the latter half of the 1990s, I developed the 'high road' recommendations regarding work organisation to the European Commission (EWTC 1997). As a programme manager from 2001, I am implementing and monitoring two successive German programmes commissioned by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF 2001; BMBF 2007a). And in the same function I try to organize transnational learning from programmes in the WORK-IN-NET consortium of funding agencies in Europe (Zettel 2005).

The under-utilization of the outcomes of a national working life programme in Sweden

An evaluation of the activities supported by the Swedish Working Life Fund (ALF) between 1991 and 1995 came to the conclusion that “the work organization development in Swedish working life in the ALF period has been in line with those forms and patterns that have traditionally been pursued in Sweden, such as broadening of tasks, autonomy in the work role, and a flat organization” (Gustavsen et al. 1996: 164). One more conclusion of strategic importance was that “only if ALF can be seen as part of a broader development that continues after it ceased to exist, has the investment in ALF itself been worth while” (167). The programme activities had been successful, insofar as they proved that “support programmes do not achieve effects primarily by ‘telling’ the users what patterns they should attempt to imitate, but by influencing people’s perceptions of problems and the work forms applied in organizing development” (169). Twelve years after these statements, there were doubts if this continuity effect had been stable enough. When the activities of the fund in 1995 were finished, a library and a data-bank consisting of case studies from 25,000 change projects in private and public sector organisations in Sweden were built up. But these results were never used in a systematic way after the termination of this programme. Torsten Björkman, one of the Swedish researchers deeply involved in the reform activities of the 1970s and 1980s, two years ago made a harsh commentary: “The way we in Sweden have managed programmes for organisational innovations is to me particularly telling. For the biggest of all such programmes in our country, the Work Life Fund in the first half of the nineties comprising more than 25.000 projects of workplace innovations and improvements, the state invested ten billion Swedish crowns (i. e. 1 billion euro – CHR). When the programme reached its goals, demonstrating the diversity and widespread creativity in organisational innovations, all change agents in the regional fund organisation were dismissed, all funding discontinued. 25 000 reports were handed over to a library. No one with first hand knowledge of the Work Life Fund was left over to the library to answer the

simplest questions. The theoretical model governing this strange behaviour had many names; one was ‘prairie fire’, another ‘chain reaction’. The expectation on the level of the Swedish Cabinet Office focused on spontaneity and ‘self-synchronisation’. They expected a virtual takeoff as a result of the programme, and did not invest anything in branding or commercialisation. Nothing like a chain reaction took place. A more adequate description would be that it all came to a *complete standstill*.” (Björkman 2006: 34 – my italics – CHR) Another 12 years later (in June 2007), the National Institute for Working Life was closed down and its library, still containing these 25 000 case studies, dissolved. Perhaps these documents can meanwhile be regarded as pure historical sources from a past epoch of exaggerated confidence useful for economic historians or the like. The fact is that they never were used in a systematic way. This was perhaps never intended. According to our knowledge about transfer or diffusion processes in the mid-nineties, our evaluation team stressed – going back to Kurt Lewin and colleagues’ experiments and conclusions –, that there was no mechanism saying that “good examples”, documented in reports and/or ex post accessible to everyone in databanks, would diffuse into the “world of experience” after having been more or less successful in the “world of ideas” (168) and a large number of field activities.

So it is obvious that the programme was used in a multifaceted way. We stated in our evaluation report that one has to take into account the emergence of “local-level development coalitions” (169). These could be called networks, enterprise co-operation, industrial regions, dynamic regions, productive structures, or something else. According to their growing importance since then, this is certainly what the Swedish programme really achieved (see NUTEK 2001). This is an innovation strategy in working life which is totally different from strategies in other countries, where programmes are run which are rooted in the outdated diffusion model of the regulatory state. This model is, at the level of learning, characterized by the dogma that learning processes (if needed) are organized around examples, and the way examples are to be followed. A quite fresh illustration for this tendency is the “International Monitoring” of the new German programme “Working – Learning – Developing competencies. Potential for innovation in a modern working environment” (BMBF 2007a). Here the largely out-

dated transfer approach is supported by an official research mission lasting until 2012. Problem solutions (of “dilemmata”) from Germany and abroad are to be “identified and adapted, refined and made usable for different user groups” (www.internationalmonitoring.de). It is probable that this type of programme monitoring will fail in its attempt to demonstrate why programmes are still needed.

2. Who needs programmes – and who does not?

One arrogant argument from the academic debate on the outcome and main findings of the Swedish LOM Programme (1985 – 1990) was that the old-fashioned Swedes (and Europeans by the way) needed programmes in this field, whereas the innovative Japanese did not. An American expert with profound knowledge of the Japanese system of innovation made an interesting contribution to the question whether programmes are needed for innovation. Robert E. Cole praised the Japanese system of innovation by pointing out that in this country there were no programmes at all but “continuous firm-level experimentation and innovation with quality improvement and participative forms – Japanese are not evaluating a programme; they are evaluating ongoing innovation in daily work activities” (Cole 1993: 128). Frieder Naschold as head of a team of four researchers from outside the programme and from the programme itself, together with a high-level evaluation group consisting of four persons from the German social partners, had stated that “Japanese *programmes* (my italics – CHR) simultaneously pursue a process and design orientation” (Naschold 1993a: 37). Cole argued against this comparison, and stressed the fundamental distinction that in the Japanese economy “we have a national infrastructure that co-ordinates learning, not only between high status experts, but also among ordinary employees. This is a concept of national infrastructure that goes far beyond anything that was contemplated by LOM or any other actors in Sweden or any Western country for that matter.” (Cole 1993: 130)

On the contrary, innovative firms in Germany today (like BMW) are supposed to have cleared a profit through participation in publicly financed programmes in the 80’s (Klotz in: DGB 2005: 32). This is also the case in

European working life programmes, as pointed out by several evaluators, among them Naschold (1993b), Mikkelsen (1997), Arnkil et al. (2003), Herrmann et al. (2007).

3. Why programmes and to what end?

The fact is that public policy programmes targeting central aspects of working life and innovation are run all over the world, from Singapore via Finland to Canada. Ambitious programmes in this field have been created in a handful of European countries from the 1970s. Often they were set up in order to catch up with the fast development of the Japanese economy in general which, according to Cole, did not have any programmes, and the ‘Toyota Production System’ in particular. Germany, later on Sweden, Norway, and Finland established R&D activities in this field, and spent huge sums in this special R&D arrangement designed and administrated by the national state in order to give support to work organisational and human resource development. From the midst of the 1970s, a German programme policy in the field of the working environment (including organisational and occupational safety and health issues) developed. With the “Humanisation (of Working Life)” Programme (HdA), public support of organisational and human resource design activities was started in administratively well-defined forms. The German programme makers formulated a decisive criterion for state development support to projects run by companies which needed impulses for modernisation and innovation. This was that whether, once the singular project itself had been concluded, the enterprise was able to *continue* with autonomous development processes “*under its own steam*”. This *sustainability* of development processes within the enterprise beyond the duration of the project should be regarded as a basic argument for *continuing* with programmes. Sustainability was (and still is) the general legitimization for funding activities not only in this field.

But how can we measure sustainability? Even if it seems to be a quite natural ingredient in all programmes, a measurement of programme activities has not been usual. A programme manager of the European Commission recently confessed that only 10 percent of all programmes run by the EU

Commission were evaluated with regard to the results which they had achieved. In the rest of them, one programme is replaced by another, “and we are hoping that there will be an outcome” (Büscher in: DGB 2005: 40).

Thirty years after launching the HdA Programme, in 2007, the policy-makers of the new German R&D programme “Working – Learning – Developing competencies. Potential for innovation in a modern working environment” (BMBF 2007a: 8) explain the need for programmes in this field as follows: “There are still certain gaps in our knowledge about how innovation works, what stimulates it or what impedes it, particularly in relation to working environments and human resources development. Where knowledge is incomplete or outdated, there is a lack of practical solutions and preparation of informed political decision-making.” According to the authors, the new programme has three main targets: to close the knowledge gaps, to bring about a process of change and to inform and support political decision-making. It has to bring “solutions that are flexible enough to be adapted by the companies to their specific conditions.”

So programmes seem to have a clear legitimization and a solid basis to start from. But in which direction shall they move? And which instruments are needed to measure their impact?

4. What do we know about the context in which programmes are supposed to be successful?

I agree with Huzzard and Docherty (2006) that the logics for forms of work organisation that promote innovation and learning are well documented (the main interdisciplinary projects from the last period are the Hi Res Project, SALTSA, CENTRIM, INNFORM, INNOFLEX). It seems even to be accepted by some policy makers, and much work has been done in terms of conceptual development to support the basic argument. Yet the evidence suggests that such views are far from being generally accepted. We still know relatively little about what is required for companies to remain competitive over longer periods of time. Moreover, the focus of such efforts should not only encompass conditions at the workplace, but should, according to the authors, also see the employment relationship as being inextricably bound up

with external factors. These include the support frameworks of policy makers, the issue of work-life balance, and the linkage between value-creation at the workplace with the broader components of social capital.

It is furthermore right to criticize policy-makers from the EU Commission for their incoherent funding practice. According to the EU's Expert Group on Flexibility and Work Organisation in 1995, models for the future shaping of company structures and organisational competence have become one of the determining factors for the future competitive strength of European enterprises. Yet major EU policy instruments such as the European Social Fund paid little attention to the problematic nature of new forms of work organisation, ignoring the twin threats to employment and innovation posed by the 'low road' of cost-driven change on the one hand, and the 'no road' of inertia characteristic of many companies on the other. At best, EU policy measures supported individuals in developing new competencies relevant to the emergence of new forms of work organisation, but neglected the development of the organisational competencies which could make full use of the employees' talents and creative potential in the workplace.

There were, and there are, obstacles across Europe which have prevented wider dissemination of what we know from national programme activities in single project and network structures about forms of work organisation that foster innovation. These obstacles are:

- destructive restructuring practices by financial investors in favour of short-termed profit gains, instead of long-termed strategic capacity building (human resource policies, research budgets, in-sourcing R&D, etc.);
- deregulation of labour markets in favour of external numerical flexibility, thus making redundant especially elder and less skilled employees and, in general, reducing the incentives for personnel policies to develop internal functional flexibility
- neo-liberal policies which advocate approaches of organisational change which go back to the traditional mindset of controlling and cost-cutting through downsizing, creating precarious jobs and dismissals. They result in shrinking innovation capacities by extending times of operation and

working times, speeding up delivery times and intensifying time pressures, limiting wages and salaries.

The “European Work & Technology Consortium” (EWTC 1997) had recommended a realistic range of priorities:

- Clear commitment to taking sides in favour of the ‘high road’ and against short-term ‘low road’ approaches
- creation of a European public sphere of knowledge, capturing and distributing experiences from workplaces within an integrated process of collective and cumulative learning
- strengthening the third task of universities, enabling them to provide managers and employees with knowledge of evidence-based practice in more effective and relevant ways
- building centres of excellence at regional level to promote the development and dissemination of new forms of work organisation
- encouraging more proactive roles for trade unions and employers’ organisations
- creating more opportunities for inter-company exchanges of experience through the establishment of learning networks.

From these priorities we had identified a number of urgent research themes:

- identifying the components of ‘high road’/high involvement/high performance/sustainable workplace
- studying how organisations move from the ‘low road’ to the ‘high road’ (process aspects)
- the diffusion issue: why knowledge about the ‘high road’ doesn’t diffuse and what we might do to help it to do so
- what is happening in newer, as yet unstudied industries? These may be knowledge intensive, but in many cases some of the newer service sectors are ‘low-tech’ in nature
- critical approaches , for example

‘high road’ rhetoric versus ‘low road’ reality
innovation and involvement as disciplinary technologies
the role of gender in innovation processes and practices.

As a recapitulation, I would like to summarize: the problem is that these questions to a large extent are a matter of both power relations in private and public organizations and process robustness. There is a big gap between rhetoric and reality, and positive changes often are not sustainable. On the contrary, they often are retarding. Companies even refrain from new, ‘high road’ forms of work organization, and return to their old models of production, as we have seen from the statement made by former Volvo CEO Pehr G. Gyllenhammar, an experienced industrialist, as well as from research carried out in different parts of the world (e.g. Széll et al. 2002).

5. Do monitoring standards lead to a transfer of knowledge and sustainability of change activities?

A starting point of the new German programme (BMBF 2007a: 9) concerns the choice of instruments for improving efficiency: “To respond adequately to the changes taking place in working environments, the Ministry’s funding programme must itself be able to learn and innovate. Thus, as a *learning* (my italics – CHR) R&D programme, it employs modern methods of knowledge-based management and early strategic diagnosis to ensure that political decisions can be optimally prepared and implemented. This means that results achieved by the programme in the future will also be taken into account when making decisions on further implementation of the programme and will influence the way research and development tasks will be enlarged and deepened.” In order to strengthen the potential of learning from the programme outcomes, announcements will address long-term aspects based on planning intervals that are typical for science. Feedback will be integrated into the process by means of systematically recorded “lessons learned” and other instruments deployed in knowledge management. “This feedback will show political decision-makers where decisions and regulations etc. are needed.” For this reason, “open programme structures are indispensable for a learning programme. At the same time, they require learning loops in order,

for example, to further develop suitable funding instruments or to safeguard programme priorities.” These qualities shall be guaranteed through

- impact analyses and strategic audits for the Ministry’s funding programme as a whole, the aim of which will be to generally assess the funding activities with regard to their direct and indirect effects and to improve the programme strategically
- meta-studies on individual funding priorities, the result of which will be integrated into the current priorities
- regular international monitoring processes, which will serve to place research activities in an international context and will be the basis for critical discussion concerning the development of the Ministry’s funding programme.

It is questionable that instrumental guidelines can guarantee the success of a programme, as they were recommended by an evaluation report on the German programme “Innovative development of work – The future of work” (BMBF 2002), commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Herrmann et al. 2007). An “International Monitoring” has meanwhile been organized, which started in May 2008 with some strategic conferences. But this approach, with its main accent on efficient knowledge management, lacks an important dimension of implementation, namely the aspect of power. All recommendations which stress in a more or less one-sided way the information gap, or the problem of knowledge transfer in reforming working life, do not really contribute to enhancing people’s capacity to learn from programmes, i.e. the “how” and “what” of production (Bleicher/Drinkuth: 116).

6. Learning for whom? – The organisational level

Programme activities in all Western countries in the field of working life innovations, occupational safety and health etc. aim at a surplus for *people* and *organisations*. The improvement of working conditions is supposed to be based on a stable learning situation. A programme should even have an adequate concept of structural change, i.e. one in which initiated projects

continue to run once the programme has come to an end. What is a threat to the further use of programme outcomes? We know that processes initiated by a programme can not be controlled in the longer term. The innovative processes are broken off too soon.

In the Swedish LOM Programme for example, learning at programme level was intended as cooperative learning processes. The German employer side evaluators noted that “an important aspect in assessing the impacts of a programme is the stability of the changes over the longer term” – and the percentage of projects continuing of more than 30% was “an indication of the effectiveness of the instruments which LOM has introduced” (Hirschbrunn/Kuhlmann: 111). It was astonishing that the aspects of a learning management system were also predominant for the German trade union side evaluators. “Programmes such as LOM should be so constituted as to be sufficiently powerful to create new and modify existing structures. Otherwise the risk is that positive solutions will be lost during the course of the programme or do not come to full fruition due to the limited life-span of the programme” (Bleicher/Drinkuth: 115)

The lack of instruments to accompany the programme was a main point of criticism. We noted that in spite of the success of the initial conferences, in the final analysis project actors were left very much on their own. The most serious gap was the lack of forms of supervision to accompany the processes: a permanent feedback from supervisors on the difficulties and obstacles arising in the course of the projects, and joint efforts to generate results and approaches which would have had a stabilising effect on processes within the projects. Multipliers to diffuse the results generated by projects were not effectively sought for and appropriate personnel were not trained. The potential represented by the participation of Sweden’s collective organisations was not fully exploited. While management was active in initiating projects it provided too little support once they were running. The unions, too, while they supported the programme and individual projects, exercised little steering influence on how they were run. Additionally, insufficient attention was paid to the international aspect, in particular the aims of learning from other programmes, and understanding the strategic dimension of the LOM Programme within international contexts.

This corresponds with the “objectifying” attitude of some German trade unions toward the implementation of the German programmes even after 2000. In a conference in 2004, mainly the “system” aspect (R&D expenditures had been lagging behind other OECD countries) was stressed. A recommendation to the politicians was that R&D expenditures should grow again compared to the level of the 1980s (DGB 2005: 21). Ulrich Klotz, work organisation expert at the Metalworkers’ Federation, recommended at the same conference a strategy change of goals, methods, and focuses for public and enterprise innovation policies through a “keen shifting of available resources” (Klotz in: DGB 2005: 33). His union advocates the promotion of people instead of existing technology, i.e. those who are the sources of every innovation. Open innovation processes are the strength of European economic development and should be improved. Participation in all business decisions of strategic importance is needed in order to give employees security that the uncertainties of the innovation process will not mainly become a burden for them.

7. Learning for whom? – The level of the people

This brings me back to the above-mentioned rollback of cycle times in modern industrial production processes where 22 seconds cycle times seem to be the new old standard. Have programme outcomes affected people’s everyday working life? Do they perhaps only legitimize change activities in companies which in reality are an instrument to adapt people to objective constraints (like cycle times in industrial manufacturing)? This leads me to look at the strategic importance of measures in this field of R&D. On which level are programmes in our field really important? I think there was a consensus that the LOM Programme was an expression of an ambition to strengthen “the innovation supportive state” (Gustavsen 1993: 164). Problems were mounting with decentering of steering systems, broad mobilisation in working life (and not only in the political sphere), direct participation as the chief source of legitimacy also behind general solutions, linguistic resources as central to participation and so on. All this was to be achieved in a post-Keynesian – or post-modernist – economic context.

But on the other side, we should be cautious not to exaggerate the factual importance of R&D programmes: “What drifts down from higher levels of society to people responsible for efforts like the LOM program is that work and organisation development are *secondary* issues, largely to take the form of ‘technical adjustments’ to whatever policies or specifications emanate out of the central political bodies” (ibid.; my italics – CHR).

So people, the employees in the private and public sector of a modern economy, are both actors and objects of measures which are pushed through programme activities. When they define the success of a special programme measure, they look at health and well-being at work, work-life balance, satisfying working conditions including the spheres of responsibility and trust. For them it is a decisive momentum that a new culture is only possible when it is introduced through a process of shared learning, in which all actors are given the opportunity to participate not only in shaping the new organisational structures, but have to be involved in the entire cultural change process. These questions were at the heart of the LOM Programme as one of three orientations, namely “Co-determination” (besides Leadership and Organisation). They are an integral part of all known programmes in this field, but they often become wrinkled and do not really foster empowerment of the people concerned.

Participation and bodies of co-determination are preconditions and supporting instruments of successful innovation processes. They give employees employment stability and positive working conditions which are indispensable for a sustainable company development.

In the same direction, focussed on the needs of people in working life, is the strategy of the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Fischer 2008: 20). The quality of work, i.e. “Good work”, becomes more important. Work tasks are developing while the work load becomes heavier. Engagement and motivation of the employees can only be improved if there is a cooperative working environment and a corporate culture which support motivation and participation in business processes. Creativity and engagement in innovations are only possible if employees are getting respect for what they are doing at the workplace and in real life.

8. Which role do external evaluations play?

We noted earlier in this exploratory text the self-criticism of the EU Commission: 90 percent of all EU programmes in the field of research and innovation were in practice continued or replaced by follow up programmes without an evaluation of the outcome of the predecessor. Meanwhile, systems for quality assessment and evaluation of research are getting a more demanding as well as more important role, even at a European level.

At the level of national programmes, the findings from the (unpublished) Peer Review Report as part of the evaluation of the German Programme “Innovative development of work – The future of work” are especially interesting. Josef Hochgerner from the “Centre for Social Innovation” (Vienna) and his evaluation team recommended in 2004 a more practical adaptation of measures in favour of the “learning programme” and a further development of the balance between scientific and practical (applied) orientation, a basis for continuity in the logics of funding and a reinforcement of the strategic competence within the Ministry (for Education and Research).

Another point was to reflect and to carry out a new type of research on innovative transfer methods, to follow a more experimental type of transfer which was more supportive to new transfer methods, and through this even accept the failure of some highly innovative projects. Such knowledge about failure could generate win situations allowing for applicable transfer solutions. Under the present German programme “Working – Learning – Developing Competencies” some of these suggestions have been implemented. Meta projects have been established in every thematic field of the programme, aiming at developing genuine transfer strategies to support the transfer of results from individual projects. The meta project established in the thematic field “Preventive health and safety in working life” has up to now been quite successful in organizing public presentations of project activities.

The Peer Review Report recommended new transfer methods by establishing monitoring meetings of all project coordinators after the programme period, a test of advantages and disadvantages of “best practice” activities, and strengthening the social partners’ engagement in disseminating results and methods. It even recommended regional work research centres and a co-

ordination with other regional innovation programmes and made connections with international examples. As a positive measure for strengthened transfer activities, resources should be allocated to the social partners in order to integrate business, employers' and employees' associations.

9. What has been done recently to improve the implementation of the German programme?

Are there experiences with institutional or financial criteria during the lifetime of programmes which enable people to organize programme learning? In the new German programmes the funded projects have to adapt their utilization plans once a year. That means that during a project new aspects (and resulting new strategies) are taken into account before a project has come to an end. This instrument is an obligatory rule and is generally implemented.

In which way are learning processes and an exchange of experiences organized bottom-up between different levels of actors (projects, public policy programme administration, national policy-makers, European policy-makers)? In the new German programme (BMBF 2007a), an exchange of experiences between projects (in the form of regular meetings of 'focussed groups') is obligatory. These meetings give an input to the funding agency which summarizes recommendations and communicates them to the ministry. The concept of "learning programme" makes this learning process obligatory or at least a normal procedure. "Learning loops" should be implemented between researchers, programme administrators in the funding agency and the ministry up to European institutions (because there is co-financing through the European Social Fund for these purposes).

According to the above mentioned (unpublished) evaluation report on the German Programme "Innovative development of work – The future of work", learning means generating new knowledge. Learning arenas are related to content, practice, and politics. As a goal a constructivist learning programme has to be realized that gives the opportunity to continuously develop instruments and criteria aiming at "community cultivation".

It is therefore no use to wait until the end of a project or programme, and then measure the outcome of a programme in practice. The expected outcome has to be estimated earlier, adapted to the different perspectives of a “community”. They should be gathered regularly, composed in a “trend monitor” that enables programme representatives to check these trends with developments in the wider societal context.

In addition the evaluators recommend a combined strategy consisting of repeated adjustments during the course of the project (“corrective steering”), the use of qualitative checks at certain points of inquiry (time and process points), and cyclically organized learning, validated by appropriate criteria during the ongoing process.

For an additional improvement or corrective steering, active preparations have to be made. This should not be regarded as “last minute interventions”. Programme success is highly dependent on setting priorities and on developing a sufficient number of relevant research questions.

10. Is international networking a learning facilitator?

From the perspective of people, the Scandinavian programmes, nowadays mainly those in Finland, are more successful than the German ones. This depends mainly on their resources. We have only partially made conclusions from thousands of case studies for our programmes and the underlying project management. The new German programme (2007a) is, according to trade union experts in Germany, too small to have critical mass effects (Klotz in: DGB 2005: 33). But we can still learn from examples abroad (Riegler 1998, 2003) – and we do it in the future with a new quality. The first steps are joint calls for international R&D projects:

The EU Commission is at present funding a 5 years cooperation network (WORK-IN-NET) consisting of 10 national ministries and funding agencies in the field of work organisation and innovation (Zettel 2005). These partners will start a new phase of their collaboration by launching a joint call. This is part of a wider tendency in the organisational development in European working life, a development taking place through demand-driven research intertwined with workplace development. The idea is to direct people’s

attention to the potentials of a new way of thinking and action. The so-called 'high road strategy for competitiveness' has been at the forefront of most regional attempts to make business performance, quality of working life, and organisational innovation coincide, even though the 'low road' strategy based on cost reduction still dominates in practice.

In the long run, the opportunities for Europe to be competitive by exclusively using the 'low road' strategy (low wages, cost reduction, etc.) will not be successful. In contrast to the cost reduction strategy, the 'high road' strategy strives to increase value and is seen as a win-win situation for employers and employees. This is in line with the sustainability perspective where value creation is central, at individual, organisational and societal level. There is also a recent shift in perspective, where the challenge is to address not only individual and organisational issues, but also societal questions within the framework of the workplace. In times when labour markets are severely segregated, and cohesion is called for, labour market problems turn up as issues to be dealt with inside firms and organisations. For societal reasons new design of work and workplaces are thought of as means to include the excluded (e.g. unemployed young persons, various ethnic groups and immigrants, people with disabilities), to retain an ageing work force, and to reduce gender segregation of the labour market.

Many people, both practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers, have over the years demonstrated skill and capability when it comes to combining the quality of working life with prosperous companies and high quality public services. Divergence created through differing conditions and contextual frameworks can, through interplay and interaction, develop to higher levels by networking and connectedness. The basic assumption is that it is a prerequisite to develop organisational conditions and corporate processes that will accelerate economic growth as well as growth of employment and expand the ambitions of quality of working life.

Taking the 'high road' takes the workplace (organisation) as point of departure. This includes interaction with other organisations, as being part of larger innovation systems, value chains and so on. In the frame of a 'high road' strategy, the endeavour is to build actionable knowledge about how to create innovative and efficient workplaces in the knowledge based society,

producing high value for customers and owners on a long-term basis. Theoretically we know a lot about what factors an innovative and efficient workplace consists of, but in practice we know less about how to actually create the conditions needed for innovation, competitiveness and growth.

So the focus of this transnational joint venture is to establish a European R&D collaboration in the field of work organisation and working life. This is as a start done through co-operation that will focus upon and explore the main question: *How do companies work in practice to create organisational conditions that promote innovation, competitiveness and growth?*

Within this overarching issue, other questions can be focused on new ways to organise work but also new ways to understand and act upon the current situation. What are the ideas for organising work, and what alternative ways are there to think about workplaces when a high road strategy is the target? Organisational conditions include quality of working life issues, and are seen as means that may promote innovations, competitiveness and growth.

The collaboration will illuminate the main questions from a multiple European perspective (different regions, branches, managers, employees, etc.) and from a variety of perspectives.

Is preparing a joint European call under national programmes a way out from our dilemma that learning from programmes is no matter of course? I do not know. But we should test it. Experiences from benchmarking exercises presented in the WORK-IN-NET consortium (Alasoini et al. 2005) give strong arguments for the efficiency of this type of transnational learning.

11. Is it possible to learn from public policy programmes?

Now I come back to the initial question whether it is possible to learn from programmes. The example with the re-emergence of taylorist cycle times in European industries demonstrates that learning from programmes is difficult, and often does not take place at all. The example with the neglected library and data bank in Sweden shows that knowledge often is split up and/or used in different ways if there are no strong advocates who can prove the meaning of achieved results.

Programme activities when undertaken in an isolated atmosphere are not really successful. They need a strong supportive structure consisting of communities of researchers, working groups of employees and works councils' representatives, circles of visionary managers and consultants and innovative programme managers within the funding agencies. The Swedish LOM Programme for example was partly successive in building up such a "milieu".

Interventions by public policies aim at combining better working conditions for employees with an improvement of competitive and sustainable business conditions. The results of the "virtualisation programme" in Germany for example, which were elaborated and spread by 16 different projects, show that there is a need to support efforts in actively designing the social factors associated with technical and organisational change in business and society (BMBF 2007b; Riegler 2008). Even the results from projects supporting R&D on the introduction of E-business in a number of firms and research institutions showed that strategies, but even tools and manuals, were needed in this transformation process in order to give employees and their representatives new knowledge and competence for proactive measures (BMBF 2004).

This is in accordance with the findings of members of the WORK-IN-NET consortium concerning the qualities of the funding system. This "must be able to allow for radical reorganisation as well as continuously induce incremental improvement, with tangible responses to the evolving revelation of strengths and weaknesses in performances, applying across the range of university functions, including education, research, and the establishment of relations with wider society, whether in the form of big business, SMEs, or other actors. It is important to strengthen the link between such research and the policy sphere, so as to enable more effective implementation of measures that are relevant for addressing crucial impediments to improvement in specific cases" (Andersson 2006).

In Germany, we can probably find supportive structures in the "Initiative New Quality of Work" (INQA) which the German Federal Ministry of Labour (and Social Affairs) has been administrating for a couple of years. This "initiative" is not a programme, rather a network of thematic working

groups loosely connected by a secretariat. It corresponds with the overall strategy of the ministry which is threefold: to demonstrate examples of good practice, to support networking and to give financial support to research on the connections between corporate culture, employee motivation and business success (Fischer 2008: 20).

It is most likely possible to learn from public policy programmes when they are embedded in strong participative structures supplemented through innovative corporate cultures. This is documented by activities for empowerment of employees elaborated by trade unions, analysed for example in the “Handbook of Organizational Learning & Knowledge” (Drinkuth et al. 2001). The activities with the “Index Good Work” coordinated by the German Trade Union Federation (DGB 2007) are an example. This initiative is based on grass root activities within the German Metalworkers’ Federation, which have been developed continuously since the end of the 1990s. And these activities have a prototype in the initiative “Good Work” which the Swedish Metalworkers’ Federation had started already in the beginning of the 1980s, representing a support structure for both the LOM Programme and the Swedish Working Life Fund.

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