

**Workers of the world unite!
Improving the effectiveness of
international trade union communication
with particular reference to EWCs**

BESIG conference 2009

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developing people internationally



Structure 1

General:

1. Profiles of trades unionist who work internationally
2. The cultural challenges they face
3. Current organisational strategies
4. ETUI-REHS (the European Trade Union Institute)
5. Training delivered by York Associates

Structure 2

With specific reference to European Works Councils:

1. Communication challenges facing EWC employee representatives
2. A template for effective EWC communication
3. [Case studies]
4. [New EWC legislation]



1. Workers of the world: General introduction



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1.1.Profiles of trades unionist who work internationally

Potentially all, because of free movement of labour:

1. Grass roots members
2. Shop stewards, health and safety reps, ULRs
3. Worker directors
4. European Works Councillors
5. Full- and part-time local, regional and national officials

1.2. Cultural challenges

- Linguistic
- Political
- Cultural / historical / legislative
- Communicative

1.3. Current organisational strategies

Confronting the membership crisis:

- Changing the culture from M,P and S
- Confederal: European and international
- Mergers, e.g. Unite (UK) and United Steelworkers (USA)
- Virtual: international emailing campaigns
(e.g. www.labourstart.org)

1.4. ETUI (the European Trade Union Institute)

Supporting trades unionists and TU trainers through provision of:

- language and communication training courses for trades unionists and EWC reps
- materials development
- annual workshop for invited trade union trainers


Contact: Vidia Ganase (vganase@etui.org)

www.etui.org

1.5. Trade union training at York Associates

- The annual Yorkshire School →
(n.b. learner profiles)
- Building international links and exchanges →
- Study missions

Lexis / professional communication skills /
professional exchange



2. Workers of the world: training for European Works Councillors



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2.1. EWC communication challenges

Why EWCs?

- Better information from the company
- Better consultation with management
- Better links with other employees
- Better conditions across Europe
- Better business performance

Challenges for Councillors

- “I don’t know any of the others”
- “They don’t seem like real trades unionists to me”
- “Most of them never say anything in the meetings”
- “I’m not going to make a fool of myself in front of all those people”
- “I don’t like their politics”
- “Some of them are much too friendly with management”
- . . .

Who do EWC reps communicate with?

- With EWC colleagues
- With the people they represent
- With management

What skills do EWC employee reps need?

- **Language skills** – which language/s?
- **Communication skills** – meetings, presenting, writing, telephoning, conference calling; listening
- **People skills** – networking, relationship building and maintenance, motivating
- **Technical skills** – email, word processing, Excel, PowerPoint
- **Business skills** – understanding balance sheets, reading business documents

2.2. A template for EWC communication

Critical success factors for EWCs – the employee rep perspective:

- Results and relationships: networking
- Time and commitment
- Leadership and motivation
- Resources – human, financial, technical
- Organisation
- Communication
- Training

The classic model

- Working group planning meeting
- Employee reps pre-meeting
- The annual EWC meeting
- Employee reps post-meeting
- Reporting back to the workforce
- Meetings appraisal feedback loop

Getting started

- Employee reps' kick-off
- Relationship building
- Defining objectives and processes
- Forming a steering group
- Signing an agreement
- Reporting back
- Defining strategy
- Forming SIGs (Special Interest Groups)
- Producing working papers
- Maintaining the system

The best practice strategy: focus on results

To identify issues, look at the mission statement:

- Trade union rights
- Working time
- Equal opportunities
- Health and safety
- Environmental protection
- Parental leave
- Training
- Relocation and reorganisation
- Employment forecasts
- Corporate strategy and investment
- Pensions
- Stress
- Diversity
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More EWC success factors

Working in a collaborative context:

- Management commitment
- Themed meetings
- Fast follow-up
- Stable management and employee representation (low turnover)
- Agenda setting
- Training
- Clearly defined information channels
- Two-way communication
- Frequent meetings, efficient meetings

References

- *European Works Council – LRD (Labour Research Department) guide*
- *Worker Representation in Europe – LRD (Labour Research Department) guide*
- *Benchmarking Working Europe 2008 – ETUI*
- *How to Establish Trade Union Communication across Borders in a Multinational Corporation – a handbook: the Kvaerner project*

Thank you.



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