

Workplace Social Dialogue as a Form of ‘Productive Reflection’

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This paper takes another look at the concept of employee participation in European Workplaces. It does so by combining a review of the research literature and case study material to describe contemporary practice inside enterprises, and documents the variety and differentiated forms of workplace social dialogue that exist. That review and research suggests that whilst the more formalistic kinds of structures have declined in recent years, interest in and the operation of workplace social dialogue have burgeoned. The article investigates how participative structures are adapting to current enterprise reality and use the term “productive reflection” as another way of describing the process of participation. This draws attention to the possibility that dialogue can take place within different spaces and at different levels of the organisation. The article suggest that, for it to be effective, productive reflection requires a number of pre-conditions, including equality of esteem and high levels of trust relations between actors.

Key words: employee participation, workplace, social dialogue

Introduction

This paper emerged out of work undertaken for the European Foundation to consider the role of social dialogue in European workplaces. The concept paper that emerged from that work sought to provide the basis for questions to be posed to managers and worker representatives in the 2012 European Company Survey. In the course of the research, two key conclusions regard-