

How is quality of work connected to the competitive strength of companies?

Report from EUWIN's Rouen Workshop: 6th November 2014,
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Workplace Innovation is already on the agenda of French companies, social partners and public agencies. In an exciting development, the French National Agency for Improvement of Working Conditions, **ANACT** together with EUWIN gathered 400 business representatives, to discuss how quality of work helps to support the innovation efforts of companies.

The main outcome was a firm commitment from the Region of Haute-Normandie to build on the connection between better quality of work and innovation. At the end of the day, Mr **Nicolas Mayer-Rossignol**, the President of the Regional Council, confirmed that the region will continue its focus on these issues. The region has supported the ARACT H-N in this effort and will continue to do so in the future.

Broad support for workplace innovation in the region can also be seen from the event's diverse organising committee: organisers working with EUWIN and ARACT H-N included the regional CARSAT (the agency for workplace health and pensions), La Direccte (the employment regulation and development agency), Seinari (the innovation agency), Grandde (the business development network) and the regional council. A better proof of commitment for workplace innovation cannot be given. The fact that 400 participants subscribed to the event demonstrates high interest in the region for this topic.

The Rouen event was organised so that in the morning sessions participants could follow some general discussions and panels where they heard about local research by the ARACT and CARSAT as well as national and international comparisons. In the afternoon participants could choose to participate in one of eight 'ateliers' so they could work on innovative solutions together with experienced trainers and international company representatives.



The agenda for the day was set by **Christian Barraud**, President of Aract Haute-Normandie and **Jean-Yves Yvenat**, Director of the CARSAT Normandie. Mr Barraud pointed out that minimal innovation effort by French companies should be addressed by improving quality of work. Only workers that have the autonomy to help improve companies can help advance this situation in France.

That there is room for improvement on quality of work was shown by **Patrick Raillard**, director of ARACT Haute-Normandie, and **Herve Lauberie**. When their Barometer results showed that workers are in need of better working conditions they formulated an agenda for Haute-Normandie for the coming years.

Nathalie Greenan (CEE), **Julien Pelletier** (ANACT), **Steven Dhondt** (EUWIN) and **Arnaud Asselin** (CARSAT) discussed possibilities for using organisational innovation as a means to improve the innovation performance of companies. Nathalie Greenan stressed that learning organisations are the way forward for France. Julien Pelletier insisted on experimentation among companies to find organisational solutions. Steven Dhondt argued that French workers and employers should not 'resign' from their future; they have the capabilities to compete in the international setting.



Most inspiring for the audience was of course the comparison of experiences between national and foreign companies. In the programme, a comparison was made between French and Finnish participative approaches. **Annu Tuominen** (Normet) and **Alejandra Martinez** (BICG) showed what Europe has to offer: their experiences were proof that participation not only improves quality of work, but leads to better performance.

In the next session, **Jacopo Romei** (Cocoon Projects) showed the audience that organisations without hierarchy are possible; his solutions attracted a lot of attention from the audience.

The next session attracted equal interest. **Amaury Legrain** of the Belgian Social Security Ministry (FOD) explained the major workplace innovations that the agency had completed. One of the results was that telework improved the performance of the agency enormously. Some benefits were unexpected, for example the ministry was able to save a quarter of its housing costs (€8 million per year), an unexpected but welcome result in times of austerity.

The organisers also came with some innovative approaches to generate a lively debate during the day. Members of the audience were able to react to the presentations in the morning in film sequences. These sequences were then used in the afternoon for a discussion with **Christian Allies** (Aract Nord-Pas-de-Calais) and **Mieke Van Gramberen** (Flanders Synergy). This method helped to generate a new lively discussion with the audience. After this session, the audience participated in the eight 'ateliers'. Flanders Synergy demonstrated the Tzatziki Game to give the participants a real life experience of how work organisation can shape the experience and innovative performance of participants.

In other sessions, participants took up their questions with the national and international companies. A separate session with social partners discussed what role they could take to stimulate the relationship between quality of work and innovation. It was clear that the experience and strategies of trade-unions and employer organisations are quite different. The CGT stressed that the degradation of work in the past years form an important barrier against supporting more programmes for workplace innovation. Other unions were of the point of view that more innovation is needed in Haute-Normandie, and that examples of better quality of work are the way forward. **Dries Delissen** from the Belgian ACV described how the Belgian union is dealing with the innovation challenge outlined in the first part of the day. He argued that there is indeed a need for unions to reinvent themselves.

The final words of the conference were from **Bernard Ollivier**, President of ANACT who stressed that French companies need to take into account real added value by workers. He also stressed that work-life balance remains an important issue to secure quality of work. The ANACT and ARACTs will remain committed to these tasks. EUWIN will visit other ARACTs at the end of the year. The collaboration between EUWIN and its new ambassadors in France is likely to show benefits in 2015 and beyond.

More details, including videos from the conference, can be found [here](#).



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