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TULIP-Project, Report from Finland
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Co-operation between trade unions and universities

1. Structure of trade unions

The structure of the Finnish trade unions is based on education and job specifications. There are three central trade union organisations in Finland with a total membership of approximately 2 million. The average rate of unionization in the Finnish labour market as a whole is about 75%. The central organisation AKAVA (www.akava.fi) represents the academically educated employees and its member unions organize the white collar workers of the public sector and the higher salaried employees of the private sector. STTK (www.sttk.fi) organizes well educated white collar workers both in the private as well as in the public sector. SAK (www.sak.fi) is the biggest of the central organizations (with app. 1 mill. members) representing mainly industrial, private services and public sector blue collar workers. The research department of SAK is mainly doing research on national economics and labour market and keeping contacts with relevant university research teams.

In the 2000's the focus of the development in working life has mainly been on the reconciliation of technology and work organizations, wellbeing at work and major productivity programmes in which the trade union experts are engaged in. These extensive programmes (trio <http://www.teknologiateollisuus.fi/index.php?&id=5344> , tykes www.tykes.fi/) include both research, development and training.

2. Trade unions and universities

The background organization of the Murikka-Institute is the Metalworkers' Union (www.metalliliitto.fi), affiliated to the SAK. It is the largest industrial union with about 166.000 members. The union has its own Research Department which co-operates in different projects with research institutions and universities. It upholds contacts with labour market researchers and organizes yearly research meetings on various themes linked to working life, national economics and trade unions.

The Murikka-Institute (www.murikka-opisto.fi) has university level contacts especially with the Work Research Centre of the University of Tampere (www.uta.fi/laitokset/tyoelama/) and the Pedagogic Faculty. We participate in working life research seminars and in adult education research meetings. The Murikka-Institute provides training schemes in work organization of companies and this has roused the interest of work researches. Two doctoral theses have been written about the so called democratic dialogue in the late 1990's (Koivisto, 1996; Kevätsalo 1999) and the issue has been treated in numerous university research publications. The principal of the Institute is currently writing a doctoral thesis in the University of Tampere on the training activities of the trade union movement.

3. The valuation of research knowledge in the Metalworkers' Union

Research and training have been chosen by the decision makers of the Metalworkers' Union as the most important sources in developing the working life and the supervision of the union members' interests. In a survey on union decision makers (Kalliola 2000; 2005) the Research Department of the Metalworkers' Union was singled out as the most important source of information on industrial change in the metal industry. The Union Research Department is acknowledged as a unit which gathers and analyzes information on the metal industry and on the changes in the surrounding world. The Murikka-Institute was considered the second most important channel of information providing development related co-operational training for enterprises undergoing changes. It also issues topical messages concerning the situation of different companies to the teaching staff who communicate this information further in their teaching and the organization at large.

The Murikka-Institute utilizes universities not only by having research connections with them but also in its training. The Institute uses university experts as part-time teachers. The teaching staffs of the Institute also make good use of the university supplementary training programmes for additional qualification as well as for studies to achieve academic degrees.

4. CASE: Development related co-operational training

The rise of the development related co-operational training of the Murikka-Institute in the 1990's co-occurred with strong structural changes in the Finnish industry and hit a favourable ground. Positive results in production and in workers' participation were favourable for this development. The development of the working community requires learning and re-evaluation of traditional positions in the production hierarchy. There are obstacles to this development which are mainly caused by interface problems between differentiated tasks in the company organization. These interface areas in the common development work are according to Järvinen et al. (2000) the following:

- crossing the line between planning and implementation
- the relation of strategic development to operative development
- co-operation between the company and its surroundings (network).

The development related co-operational training of the Murikka-Institute and the company based training in business economics and payroll systems are based on a dialogue between blue and white collar workers and the management as well as on the identification of common development targets and a common analyses of the competitiveness situation of the company. It is the task of Murikka in this context to gather different views, to guide the process, to raise trust and to promote an equal dialogue.

On the work place level the implementation of co-operational development is always influenced by the local co-operation relationships and the company's general attitude towards anticipating changes and the skills required for this. Problems in the development work are created by cultural, structural and functional (power) structures in the work place. For this reason the skills of the employees cannot be utilized in full in the working community (see e.g. Vaahtio 2002; Kevätsalo, 1999; Antila & Ylöstalo, 2002). Also the attitudes of the employees and their representatives towards commonly generated changes have been cautious and partly opposed to participation in the change (e.g. Kasvio 1995; Kevätsalo, 1999; Jokinen & Kevätsalo 2000). The power and hierarchy structures of the work organization still form a hindrance to utilizing the contribution of the employees.

Even in the new millennium about 40 % of the metal workers think that they could master more demanding tasks than they are currently engaged in (Antila, 2002).

Business economics training as a part of development co-operation

The trade union movement has responded to the employers' human resources management (HRM) policy by new openings which emphasize co-operation and participation in the development of the company (Kalliola 2005 ; Legge 1995). This development requires profound know-how in business economics and production development.

Understanding the economic information on the company is an essential part in the training of the co-operational development. For the personnel and shop stewards to be able to understand the implications of the changes they need to know how to analyze and draw consequences both of the changes in the operational environment and the economic situation of the company. The need to understand this information is emphasized by changes in collective bargaining. Despite the facts that national level agreements still have a bearing role in the Finnish labour market system the pressures towards local bargaining have been mounting. Therefore business administration training has been centrally offered both separately for the shop stewards and to the personnel on the company level.

Experiences gained from the co-operational development training have consciously been transferred to the remaining training of the Murikka-Institute and to benefit other union activities. This is largely capitalized to build up the training as well as to enlarge the database of the Institute. This has also helped to counteract divergence between the different activity sectors and training areas. We want to prevent a development that would lead to a total divergence between the experience and knowledge of the work places and the Head Office of the union (ref. Tuomi-Gröhn 2000). The Institute and the work place level easily gather two separate data reservoirs if the know-how received through training is not utilized in solving everyday work problems.

Case: Increasing shop steward's business know-how

The social partners, Technology Industries and Metalworkers' Union, agreed in the collective agreement of 2007 to increase the know-how of shop stewards in business economics. For this purpose the Murikka-Institute and the employer near School of Management have started to plan for a training scheme in business management for shop stewards.

As stated earlier, the problems of the developing work are based on cultural, structural and functional (power) structures in the work place. Business economics is thus not only mathematics but the interpretations of the economic situation are always linked to the empiric and cultural framework of people's everyday lives.

Therefore we aim to test in our training a drama laid out by the University of Vaasa called "Uncoil the tubing". The purpose is to raise discussion on important company development issues that are otherwise not so often addressed to inside the enterprises: How does reluctance to change affect innovations and how does work efficiency affect competitiveness. Sometimes braking blocs are found in as simple things as horizontal and vertical relationships. A prerequisite for solving problems is, nevertheless, to identify them first. In other words, our project consists of:

1. the Vaasa University drama "Uncoil the tubing"
2. management training for shop stewards
3. testing the drama in this training and
4. evaluating the training.

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