

ADAPT & EMPLOYMENT COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

A joint working document of the European Commission
and the Member States

the work of the future

THE
FUTURE
OF WORK

New Forms of Work
Organisation and
the Information Society

Employment & social affairs



Ministère de l'emploi
et de la solidarité



European Commission



background to ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT thematic activities

At the end of 1997, the Commission and the European Social Fund Heads of Mission from all Member States agreed a Common Strategy for Thematic Activities and Visibility which would apply to the final phase of ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT. This strategy was intended to strengthen the role of the two Initiatives in having a policy impact at European and Member State level. One major target for impact is the European Employment Strategy (EES) which was launched at the Luxembourg summit, in 1997. Broad priorities for the EES are established annually in the form of European Employment Guidelines. Then, these Guidelines are incorporated into National Action Plans for Employment (NAPs) that set out what each country intends to do to create more and better quality jobs, during the year in question.

The TFGs have met on a number of occasions during 1998-1999. They have taken account of the views and experience of project promoters and also those local people who have benefited directly from the new services and facilities that the projects have introduced. They have also consulted employers including SME managers, trade unionists and experts in the fields of guidance, employment, training, work organisation and local development. Many TFGs have promoted or organised national or European conferences and events. The results of their work have also been reflected in a series of publications of which this is one, and in information contained on a variety of European and national web sites (see list of addresses at the end of this publication).

A quick overview of the Initiatives shows that they have much to offer in terms of new approaches that have proved to be effective and successful in stimulating or retaining employment. It is easy to find a direct relationship between these approaches and most of the current 22 Employment Guidelines. Also, similar links exist with many of the policy orientations established in the NAPs of the various Member States. So, it was not surprising that the Commission and the Member States were anxious to explore the rich mine of good practice represented by the 3,846 ADAPT and the 6,230 EMPLOYMENT projects that have been supported through the Union. Nine broad priority areas were chosen and on each of these a Thematic Focus Group (TFG) was established. Each TFG involves those Member States which attach a priority to its theme and are committed to exploring and disseminating good practice in that field. The Commission is also represented on each group, which is chaired by a lead Member State, in some cases assisted by other Member States wishing to share this responsibility.

TFG	Theme	Bnl	Bfr	DK	D	GR	ESP	F	IRL	IT	L	NL	P	A	FIN	S	UKgb	UKni
1	Territorial approaches	○	○	○	○	○	◆	○						○		○		■
2	Integrated approaches for training	○		○	■	○							○			○	○	
3	New jobs		◆		○	○		◆		■		○		○	○	○	○	
4	Crossing the job threshold				○		○		○			○				■		○
5	New forms of work organisation	○	○	○	○	○	○	■	○	◆	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
6	Desegregation of the labour market	■		○	○	○			○					○	○	○	○	○
7	Employers and people with disabilities		○	◆	○				◆		■			○	○			
8	Empowerment of excluded people	○	○	○	○	○			○			○	○			○	■	○
9	Active involvement of young people			○	○	○				■		○	◆		○			

■ Lead Member State
 ◆ Assisting Member State
 ○ Other participating Member States

The work of thematic group
“**New forms of work organisation and the Information Society**”
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Warm thanks are due to all those who have assisted with this collective initiative to analyse
these experiences and summarise the ideas and conclusions derived from them.

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New Forms of Work Organisation and the Information Society

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Foreword

The subject of this document is “New forms of work organisation in the context of the information society”. It records the products of a broadly-based European thematic group. Chaired by its French members co-operation with their Italian colleagues, the group included the European Commission, European Social Fund departments and National Support Structures from the Member States, Europis, and – very importantly - promoters of ADAPT projects who contributed their practical experience to our work. Finally, there was a review seminar bringing together professionals and experts on work organisation nominated from each Member State. This shed new light on the issues and enhanced the final document.

Work organisation is a particularly important question for European firms and for European society as a whole. Particularly in the context of the creation of the single European market, the adoption of the EURO, structural transformations of the labour force, and the massive introduction of new information and communication technologies in the production process and management systems.

The European Employment Strategy further confirms the importance of all the issues surrounding the organisation of work. Its third pillar, “Adaptability”, directly asks the social partners to negotiate agreements, while the Member States are called on to introduce more flexible models of work organisation in their legislative systems.

The three themes identified by the focus group - flexibility in production, work organisation, working time, cooperation and networking, new training approaches - are, of course, very broad themes and raise questions that can be politically sensitive at both national and Community levels. The group was careful not to consider the theme from a theoretical or ideological standpoint, but rather to take a practical view. It undertook to analyse the approaches, methodologies and products developed by ADAPT projects, with a view to reflecting successful experiments in its discussions.

Promoters drawn from the most relevant projects were invited to take part in a seminar organised in April 1999 in Brussels. Its purpose was to enrich the group’s initial text on the issue with practical proposals for policy makers and development agents in general. The text was further developed at the review seminar in Brussels in October 1999. This second seminar had a two-fold objective: to strengthen the group’s recommendations, and to advise on means of increasing the visibility of the Initiative’s results.

The products of all these deliberations will be fully communicated at the transnational week in March 2000, as the culmination of the focus group’s work. The visibility strategy includes publications, a web site, and national and local events, all helping underline disseminate the added value of ADAPT projects for national and Community policies. Identifying and disseminating

this value-added is of great importance. It can contribute significantly to the implementation of National Action Plans and to the development of the European Employment Strategy targeted at fighting unemployment throughout the European Union and improving the flexibility and reactivity of the labour market.

The importance of the dissemination and the mainstreaming strategy goes beyond this objective, however. In 2000, EQUAL, the new Community Initiative for fighting discrimination and inequalities of all kinds on the labour market, will move into an operational phase. The lessons drawn from ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT will be of great value for its implementation. New and innovative transnational experiments in work organisation will be particularly significant in the effort to provide improved social and employment opportunities for all.

Annalisa Vittore
Head of European Social Fund mission
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Introduction

This report is the result of ADAPT transnational thematic work launched in 1997 at the ADAPT conference in Athens. It deals, as indicated in the Foreword, with new forms of work organisation developed alongside the integration of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). The approach is essentially pragmatic, not theoretical. For this reason, the definitions of the theories of organisation and change underlying the practices considered are not discussed. The report outlines how new forms of work organisation taking account of the impact of new information and communications technologies can best be stimulated and supported in enterprises, and particularly in small, medium-sized and micro-enterprises. It focuses on three specific mechanisms through which new forms of work organisation can be introduced:

- flexibility in working methods, conditions and time;
- new forms of co-operation and networking between enterprises;
- learning and training.

Whether the enterprise is considered from the outside or the inside, the real issue is the evolution of work, hence the title of this report. The report takes a holistic approach to the issue of new forms of work organisation and shows that there are many challenges, implications and responsibilities for all concerned, including, for example, a range of national authorities, support and development agencies, employers, employees and their representatives, and education and training provider systems.

The main message of the Green Paper “Partnership for a new organisation of work”¹ was that a better organisation of work, based on skill, trust and quality as well as a high level of involvement of workers, can make a valuable contribution to the competitiveness of European firms, to the improvement of the quality of working life and to the employability of the workforce. A new approach to organising work implies the replacement of hierarchical and rigid structures with others that are more innovative and flexible.

This can only be accomplished by organisations themselves, including their workers, workers’ representatives and managers. Public authorities, meanwhile, have an important role to play developing policies which ensure a balance between the interests of businesses and those of workers. Striking this balance is important, as ultimately the introduction and maintenance of new forms of work organisation imply greater adaptability both on the part of enterprises and on that of the individuals involved. This dual emphasis on the enterprise and the individual – in terms of responsibilities and implications – is a principle according to which the ADAPT thematic work has been undertaken, and according to which this report has been written.

Major changes in the ways in which work is organised must be seen in the context of ongoing and increasing rates of change at three interrelated levels: societal, in businesses and organisations and in the lives of individuals. Societal changes include rapid

technological developments and the consequent changes in lifestyles that these bring with them. Organisational or business changes include ‘globalisation’ of markets, with the consequent need for competitiveness on a scale never seen before, and assimilation of new technologies into organisations’ management and operations, with their consequent new skill requirements and the ever-increasing need for well-educated, multi-skilled and flexible workers. Individual changes include increased expectations related to conditions and quality of working life, expectations for greater involvement in organisational decision-making, and aspirations towards a better balance between work and family life.

A number of European approaches and attitudes relate to the changes described below, and set the scene for the adoption and acceleration of the modernisation of European organisations. Based on an acceptance that only a debate involving all those concerned can effectively address these issues, a real process of exchange and dialogue has been set up. It has led to a range of work, numerous meetings and reports. It is not possible to summarise them all here. Mention must, however, be made of advances made at the Luxembourg and Vienna Summits, in particular, placed the accent on the third pillar of the European Strategy for Employment, adaptability. This recalls the importance of the modernisation of work organisation and invites the social partners to play a key role in the process. The Telework expert group and the European Work organisation network (EWON) have been set up to clarify particular aspects of the process. Recent reports also show the link between the opportunities offered by the development of the new information and communication technologies and organisational change². A recent paper from the European Commission, “Modernising the Organisation of Work, a Positive Approach to Change”, invited the social partners to contribute actively to the advance of these processes leading up to the Helsinki Summit in December 1999.

Work and organisations seem to be adapting in line with the European developmental model of a constantly renewed balance between competitiveness and social cohesion. It is not fanciful to think that this is a fundamental and distinctive European contribution to the construction of world models of work organisation.

In the Member States numerous initiatives have been taken. National Employment Action Plans clearly confirm the need to modernise the organisation of work and the integration of information and communication in the work and methods of enterprises. Responses to forces for change in new ways of working are reflected in policy and practice at European, national and local levels. There is, for example, increased emphasis on supporting adaptation to industrial change, supporting the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), new and more flexible and participative forms of work organisation, and anticipation of the social and

labour market dimensions of the Information Society.

In this rich context of ideas, initiatives and new systems, we will, in the pages which follow, examine in a practical way, the experiences and practices supported in this area by the ADAPT Community Initiative since 1995, in order to try to extract their main lessons. Relevant ADAPT pilot projects, as well as some projects from other ESF programmes, have demonstrated some effective responses – or solutions – to these challenges.

The practice cited is essentially positive. We have decided to focus on good practice from projects, and in particular on conditions for success, but we recognise that any experiment has its share of hesitation and failure. Also, we must remember that in most SMEs the process of change is neither as easy nor as extensive as one might think from what follows. Many companies persist with organisational models that are already obsolete. The introduction and development of new technologies is far from complete in European SMEs; investments in human resources are still too tentative. The difficulties and risks entailed in changing working organisation are touched on throughout the text and considered in greater depth in the chapter on impact.

We have, on this basis, identified in the chapter on main strategies a number of technical insights relevant to project promoters and, more widely, to all those involved in the process of change. A specific chapter is devoted to bringing together a number of recommendations aimed mainly at political, economic and institutional decision-makers, and providers of public and private funds. These recommendations should be seen as alarm signals from the grassroots, drawing attention to a number of measures, initiatives and programmes which could help the success of future processes of change.

In addition, the projects presented here concentrate mainly on workers with employee status in companies. The range of projects available did not permit us to go deeply into the question of atypical work where there is no question of a 'job for life', where contracts are of indeterminate duration, and where social advantages and subordinate relationships are unclear. Among the many forms of atypical work, some of which are represented amongst the projects studied, are included temporary work, limited period contracts, seasonal work, telework, self-employment when it is based on a relation of strong dependence on the client, multiple activity and job-sharing. To redefine the current borders of the labour market and its outlying areas, atypical work deserves a more thorough analysis than we have been able to make in this report.

¹ COM (97)128 final, 16.04.97

² References of reports:

- "Job prospects in the information society", Luxembourg OPCE, 1998
- "Home working, a working method for the future", Luxembourg OPCE, 1998
- "ADAPT and Objective 4 faced with the new forms of work organisation", CE -V/8-98-011-EN/FR-C
- "The Challenges facing European small firms", drawn from "the future of work, the work of the future", Athens Conference, 22-23 May 1997
- "Work organisation", documents from the conference held on 23 October 1997 in Luxembourg

Main strategies

The examination of projects drawn mainly from ADAPT but also from Objective 4 and EMPLOYMENT enables us to identify nine strategies which have facilitated successful change in organisations. These strategies, in combination, amount to indispensable success factors. The innovation in the ADAPT projects we cite, is found less in the novelty or originality of the approaches as such, than in the operational alchemy they develop. The following pages are an effort to throw light on their most notable achievements so that understanding of them can be transferred to other project promoters.

The introduction of flexibility must be seen as the trigger for change. This is why examples of introducing flexibility in either production methods or in working hours or locations are highlighted. The review seminar participants underlined nevertheless that flexibility itself is triggered by economic changes in the market; it is a means of improving the competitive position of companies. The seminar also raised the question of the compatibility of certain models of flexibility (lean production, just in time, etc.) with the 'European social model'.

Change can also result from new relationships between organisations, including enterprises, and from new forms of co-operation between organisations and their environment. Training can promote change across-the-board, and is also a means of enabling workers to adjust to it through continuing learning and education.

These three aspects of change are closely linked and are sometimes jointly pursued. The following strategies for successfully introducing new approaches to work organisation are based on combinations of them:

- increased awareness and commitment of all those involved, because they must all be firmly committed to the success of the processes of change;
- taking customers' requirements into account, so that new processes are also directed towards economic profitability, without which companies' continued existence would be jeopardised;
- the development of learning organisations, showing that the processes of production of goods and/or services and learning processes naturally overlap; the most efficient organisations are those capable of learning to teach those who are part of them;
- a partnership approach involving the mobilisation of organisations' human resources and external partners;
- approaches to change in territorial development initiatives;
- a European dimension, achieved through transnationality work, as a spur to the processes of change;
- self-assessment mechanisms supporting improvement and a process of continuous change;
- systematic consideration for the most vulnerable employees, guaranteeing their equality of opportunity;
- in short: a holistic approach taking account of the various

components of companies' development strategies, and of the individuals who go to make them up.

AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT

One of the main strategies adopted with a view to changing work organisation is the constant concern to "educate". This "education" is furnished through relevant information, interactive communication and an effort to increase the awareness of each individual, so as to assure his or her accountability and active involvement. In fact, experience shows that organisation means nothing unless it is supported by the individuals involved in it.

Experts and notably trade union spokesmen insist that it is absolutely necessary to involve every level of corporate hierarchy in change processes. Those involved in change processes vary in status, they have different strategies, interests, methods and objectives. Different groups play different roles in the change process. Generally employees, and particularly those furthest in the hierarchy from management, are more likely to endure change than to be its co-authors. They often exhibit rejection or indifference as a result. In themselves, these are obstacles which slow down the process of change and subsequently its implementation, and their effects can have a harmful impact on production, "social cohesion" and job satisfaction.

If the process of change could be clarified, these disadvantages would be less apparent. How can this be done? Perhaps by identifying the ins and outs of the process as precisely as possible. This would involve identifying the elements entailed in change, along with those that be unchanged, or only modified in a formal way—this is one use of the term 'benchmarking'. Employees may be hostile to anything that is not clearly described or indicated. Handling this hostility can be a specific task of those responsible for initiating change. Setting up good benchmarks enables managers of change to make their projects more transparent. Lack of transparency is rarely intended by initiators of change — usually it is simply the result of clumsy communication.

The project promoters involved all recognised the crucial importance of involving employees at all levels in the process of change. Nevertheless, they saw the need for specific initiatives to improve management awareness. In fact, the culture of education and training is by no means yet implanted in the mentalities of small company owners and managers. To make them aware of the need to include training in their thinking, they must be involved at the earliest possible stage in the conception of training initiatives, and they must see evidence that they result in increased returns for their companies.

In the early stages of their project, Cork Institute of Technology (A-1995-IRL-017) met with the senior managers and Human Resource personnel of local enterprises in order to raise their awareness of how the education sector could respond to their immediate business needs in a cost-effective way. More specifically, the Institute provided them with detailed information on qualification ladders, career paths, Accreditation of Prior Learning etc. and discussed the resources needed within the enterprises to support employee training and development. Individual staff in each enterprise were also identified to act as tutors and mentors, which helped to stimulate a learning environment within the business.

Organisational and individual commitment is also critical to the success of networking and co-operation. This commitment can be secured and sustained in a number of ways, including awareness-raising, encouragement of participation and withdrawal of public funding (matched by increased investment from SMEs). The ultimate aim is to achieve a sense of ownership, especially in SMEs. They should feel not only committed, but also responsible for the network/co-operation and its direction.

The 'ANTIOPE' project (CBENT, A-1997-F-728) laid the foundations for SMEs in the Tarn region to adapt to the Information Society. The networking took the form of awareness-raising and discussion evenings for SME managers, Web-based fora, and transnational study trips. This helped stimulate the free-flow of information and raise their awareness levels. Most importantly, it helped secure commitment to the network, thanks to the business development opportunities which it offered.

Organisational changes leading to increased flexibility require entrepreneurs and managers to take on key roles inside their companies. Their roles change as they incorporate participation and become involved in training and human resources development. Flexibility may mean cultural changes for companies. Entrepreneurs and managers must be able to manage this change, acquiring a clear understanding of the internal and external factors that make change necessary. Awareness throughout companies is essential, and can be achieved by ensuring that processes are transparent, and that when flexibility is introduced it is as a result of negotiation.

The S.I.A.V. project "Developnet Veneto" (A-1995-IT-166) experimented with a comprehensive approach to organisational change in enterprises, including the transfer of models of intervention to key people inside the enterprises and to training initiatives taking place between enterprises. The motivation and commitment of entrepreneurs and managers was found to be central to implementing flexibility, and to its sustainability in a company. Adopting new models based on shared responsibilities and performance evaluation, rather than on personal and

hierarchical relationships, requires changes in the mentality of all employees.

Practical recommendations:

It is important to secure participation of all in the change process. For this there must be clarity from the start about why a company needs to change its organisation, and what its aims are; negotiation is essential throughout the process, not only during its preparation phase. The process must be supported by a comprehensive communication strategy, giving everyone quality information on what is going to happen and why.

CUSTOMER FOCUS / NEEDS-BASED APPROACH

Companies, and specially SMEs, endeavour to remain or to become competitive in a particularly tight competitive context. Being competitive means responding as effectively, quickly and appropriately as possible to customers' needs. For this, companies and/or their external advisors, including training organisations, must be capable of analysing needs which are not always expressed, then of constructing a response reflecting precise objectives, the company's means, its environment and the deadlines for completing the work. The human skills available in a company are one of the key elements in this analysis. Employees must also acquire skills in relating to others since they are increasingly likely to be in contact with clients. Similarly, intermediate organisations providing support and training are developing more client-centred approaches.

The adoption of flexible models and techniques is a response from markets and enterprises to the widespread need to satisfy customers' demand for good products and services. Flexibility of employment (including working time redistribution and flexible forms of contracts) and flexibility of production (just-in-time, Total Quality Management, lean production, etc) combined with information technology can help enterprises boost their competitiveness, thus satisfying clients' needs and keeping costs low.

The VDAB project 'CLOTHILD' (A-1997-Bnl-521) aims to examine flexibility in organisations where the production has been decentralised, materials must be delivered on a just-in-time basis, new technology has been applied and small runs in production (i.e. not mass production) have been introduced. By undertaking an in-depth company analysis, which includes a detailed study of the various aspects of organisational management, the project has developed an approach which increases company competitiveness. This approach involves re-arranging departments, re-organising employees' tasks, and providing communication and technical training.

To be viable and sustainable in the long-term, networks and new forms of co-operation need to result from a process identifying and meeting the specific needs and agendas of the participant organisations. Without this customer focus, organisational commitment is likely to be short-lived, and in the case of SMEs, probably non-existent. The key word throughout is 'benefit': the network, and the customer-focus which underpins it, must yield benefits for all the stakeholders. For SMEs, these benefits must be presented in business terms, and where possible, offer short-term results.

Barnet College's 'UPBEAT' project (A-1997-UKgb-579) has employed a collaborative approach to economic development by setting up a strategic partnership between local authorities, further education and business support agencies. The partnership has worked closely with a network of town centre SME retailers, all of which are threatened by out-of-town shopping developments in the area. The SMEs are assisted through on-line and physical networks (outreach centres) which provide tailored and easy access to training, guidance and business support.

Training organisations must also have a customer-oriented approach, even when they are public establishments. In fact, if training is not fully adapted to identified needs, its results will be mediocre. In a search for quality, training organisations devote a large part of their resources to identifying the needs of their customers.

The DAFCO/OPCA2 (A-1997-F-809) project is focused on the development of open training for rural agricultural co-operatives in Southwest France. Isolated co-operatives, workers and independent workers experience difficulties gaining access to training and applying it. Setting up a network of a number of distance training access points throughout the region successfully helped isolated enterprises and atypical workers access the courses and assistance they needed.

Practical recommendations:

New forms of collaborations and partnerships, new liaisons, new ways of working together, are emerging for those in employment, changing the nature of many traditional relationships such that of the 'customer and supplier'. Collaboration and networking, and building on existing networks, are important means of addressing SMEs' training needs and answering to them with a 'win-win' approach.

THE LEARNING ORGANISATION

The adaptation of the working population to more flexible forms

of work, governed by new forms of co-operation and networking, calls for the development of learning organisations in which work and learning take place side by side, and complement each other, enabling individuals and groups to adapt rapidly and intelligently.

As participants in the review seminar emphasised, the approach is addressed to employees in what can be called the 'hard core' of today's labour market - those with traditional jobs. How best to develop skills of atypical workers is, however, an open question. Is not 'life long learning' a key part of the solution?

Networking offers a forum in which different cultures, knowledge bases and languages can interact. This interaction, if dealt with positively, can spark new ideas and a learning process which benefits the network/co-operation, as well as the participant organisations. It provides a means of addressing the skills needs of the individuals involved as they are articulated. Learning (and training) can also be viewed as a response to, as well as an outcome of, networking and co-operation.

The 'Learning Region' project (A-1995-A-018) in Austria uses the competence network approach. The competence network can be described as an enterprise-based, regionally-integrated network which combines and develops skills to enable all participants to become more competitive. It draws in regional organisations, and is based on the exploitation of common and complementary resources and services. The project has developed such a network for the industrial plan engineering and constructing sector. This involved several structures and offered the participants the opportunity to co-operate at different levels and degrees of intensity, depending on their needs and potential. Thus, the learning process was both dynamic and multi-faceted.

In order to remain competitive in a turbulent and constantly changing environment, flexible enterprises need internal organisations which facilitate learning in all its many aspects. A system of skills and competence must be developed to solve problems, based on understanding, integrating and developing new managerial and organisational techniques. In a learning organisation the approach to learning treats training as a resource and a tool to mobilise other resources.

The CEFORALP project (A-1997-F-982) works with SMEs in the service sector, where competition is fierce and economies of scale are difficult to achieve. New work organisation and the development of learning organisations were used as a means of enabling the service SMEs to remain competitive. For the promoter, SMEs can achieve important objectives by applying the "lean production" concept: good, stable quality, greater flexibility, shorter deadlines, lower prices, multiple skills and adaptability of the personnel. Based on these, the

concept of “lean organisation” takes account of a company’s strategy and gives a structure to its organisation, to adaptations of supply to demand, and to flexible and multiple skills. The last of these is vital to economic competitiveness, which is the final goal of “lean production”. It puts the accent on developing the skills of everyone in the company (operators, supervisors, and management) and opening up new job and promotion opportunities. Advice, assistance and continual assessment are the other fundamental elements of this approach.

The concept of training must be brought closer to the concept of learning. Since SMEs have particular difficulty allowing their employees time off for training, training must be delivered, as often as possible, at the workplace, and must be integrated into working processes. The speed of change must be adapted to an individual’s speed of learning.

The French project CEDOP Formation (A-1997-F-770) set up autonomous production teams amongst car equipment manufacturers. Rather than develop a large-scale training programme, with its inherent disadvantages (particularly the lengthy time-lag between training and its practical application), the project gradually designed and provided training as the new way of organising work was being introduced. It operated on the basis that it is important to make everyone in an enterprise aware of the learning possibilities offered by their jobs on a daily basis, and to help them see the difficulties they encounter as opportunities for learning.

Practical recommendations:

Multiple tasks and multi-skilling are the keys to training in a changing environment; training should be delivered in the work place and should be innovative; ad hoc tools should be developed as needed. The measurement of individual and group performance must be improved. A style of managing must be developed which facilitates self-management. Better facilities for anticipating changes must also be developed, particularly in a context characterised by the pressures of coping in a short-term culture. Conditions must be created for application on a daily basis of knowledge, skills and attitudes learned through training and development, and an increase in awareness of learning potential in jobs themselves, as well as a strengthening of learning potential and capability in the workplace.

PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

The partnership approach is essential to gathering the widest possible support, thus strengthening the potential for innovation. The idea is not to find the lowest common denominator bringing partners together—on the contrary the objective is to try to increase their creativity around a common project.

Although partnership is implicit within networking and co-operation, it cannot be taken for granted. Above all, it should bring together organisations (including SMEs), each of which can visibly contribute to and benefit from the network/co-operation, working towards a common ‘vision’. Moreover, partnerships need to be fostered at an individual, as well as organisational level. This means providing a supportive and dynamic environment in which individuals (i.e. organisational representatives in the network) can interact and develop fruitful relationships. Emphasis should be put on the major role that can be played by certain specialised departments in universities and research institutes in supporting the process of change in small and very small businesses.

‘MAC-AGRO’ (University of Helsinki, A-1995-FIN-028) brought a range of organisations involved in the agro-food sector into regional networks or ‘teams’. Each of the partners had something to contribute and something to gain: the SMEs were keen to establish links with others in the agro-food sector; the educational and training institutes and teachers wished to develop direct links and co-operation with companies; and the public authorities were hoping to gain more information on SMEs’ real needs, and so develop new business support tools and services. The University of Helsinki’s overall conclusion was that the networks not only lowered the threshold for contacting other players in the same field, but also established personal contacts.

Introducing flexibility into companies involves fundamental changes inside and outside the enterprises themselves. Innovative co-operation models between enterprises, and SMEs in particular, can be a response to their common innovation, marketing, and training needs. Inter-company networks can be a way to address problems created by the change in demand from the market and in the organisational structure inside the enterprise.

Controlware Benelux NV (A-1997-Bnl-588) has set up a 24 Hour Helpdesk which is used by SMEs in the telecommunications sector. To maintain round-the-clock operations, whilst remaining within the framework of legal working time, the Helpdesk is based on remote working, flexible work time and the use of flexible employment contracts. Where there is excess demand for work, the Helpdesk can identify SMEs with spare capacity. A co-operative agreement between the telecommunications SMEs involved enables skills and resources to be pooled, and ultimately ensures that the Helpdesk can function.

Training organisations responding to the specific needs of SME must not content themselves with off-the-shelf courses and products. Having identified as closely as possible with the company what its real needs are, the training programmes responding to it must then also be conceived and produced in close consultation.

This partnership with the company is essential throughout the process: identification of needs, design and production of tools, setting up the programme, assessment.

The MIRI@D 'Reflex-Contact' project (A-1997-F-802) involves five Chambers of Commerce working directly with enterprises, using new information and communications technologies (ICTs), and bringing learning and working closer together. The project is developing a flexible and responsive training approach by co-operating with companies to jointly produce learning models better adapted to new work situations and designed to develop and strengthen autonomy, responsibility and the capacity of individual trainees in a team to learn.

Practical recommendations:

A participatory approach is essential in each phase of the creation of flexible organisations. Local authorities, social partners, companies and trainers need to work together in a practical way.

network of companies. It provided project support and training by setting up a task force of consultants and executives from major public enterprises and local authorities in the region. The companies in this task force form a sponsorship committee which responds to the specific needs of employees and managers of small and micro-businesses in all sectors.

On this point, the review seminar recalled the European philosophy on the convergence of territories and underlined the need to take account of the risk of promoting the development of some of them to the detriment of others.

Practical recommendations:

Round tables or local discussion groups should be created or linked together in order to secure support and involvement of all key partners in a territory for a sustainable project. If territorial public authorities provide political impetus, relay structures (departments of universities, local agencies ...) can transmit these initiatives to companies to get them further involved.

TERRITORIAL APPROACH

Most ADAPT work organisation projects are integrated in broader territorial development projects which are very aware of the economic, social and environmental context in which they evolve.

The territorial approach has diverse practical and policy implications and demands specific research. A separate focus group was constituted by the Commission to look into these issues, and has produced very interesting results. For this reason we have contented ourselves here with presenting the territorial approach as one strategy among others.

The territorial approach mobilises a broad spectrum of economic, social and institutional agents around a development project. They invest it with a common identity based on an environment, its history and its culture.

Territorial approaches in ADAPT projects mostly involve collaboration between SMEs, large companies, public institutions, local authorities, training organisations and development and/or consultancy agencies.

The French project "Manche Expansion" (A-1997-F-556) for example, has developed this kind of scheme. The 'Manche' department wanted to help companies in the region to anticipate the organisational evolution associated with the new forms of work prompted by ICTs (telework, teleservices, telebenefits), to develop existing markets by improving the competitiveness of SMEs and micro-businesses by pooling them in a network with large companies, and encourage expansion within the 'Manche' by developing networking and distance work. To achieve this, it encouraged the creation of a territorial

TRANSNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

No further proof need be given of the leverage effect of transnationality, although it is accepted by all that this is difficult to construct and the results are not always up to the initial ambitions. It is often the most innovative, dynamic and open organisations which co-operate the best transnationally and internationally. ADAPT projects confirm the strategic benefits of going beyond the often described limitations of competition, by developing the habits and methods of collaboration.

On an issue like training delivery, thanks to the growing use of the new communications and information technologies, transnationality can easily be used by partners with shared objectives to locate appropriate methodological know-how.

The purpose of the SNTF project (A-1997-F-793) is to deliver training to workers in ski resorts so that they can keep up with technological progress in their sector. The project therefore locates training which can meet their needs in response to rapid technological change. In this particular case, the training, which involves simulation of technical situations, is delivered from Germany to trainees in France via video-conferencing.

Many of the challenges faced by SMEs today are pan-European. With the help of ICTs, SMEs can network and co-operate transnationally to meet these challenges, and explore new opportunities.

Coventry University (A-1995-UKgb-649) worked with SMEs who wished to access information, advice and feedback on entering and competing in EU markets.

Through networking, they had the opportunity to meet and discuss with other SMEs and owner/managers, learn best practice and access new markets and other supplier networks. The company Professional Engineering, for example, joined the network through their supply chain links with Rover and their genuine eagerness to improve their business potential in Europe. As a result of the network, Professional Engineering gained access to another network in Italy. They also provided a work placement to an international student to raise the profile of the EU within the company, and are currently setting up partnership companies elsewhere in the EU.

Transnational co-operation can also make a useful contribution to the implementation of flexible patterns and approaches in enterprises. This can be achieved through the fruitful exchange of practices and methodologies which in some cases enable organisations, particularly enterprises, to fit different cultural and contextual approaches to their own systems, providing pointers for improving the quality of their own services.

The Greek FANCO (A-1995-GR-020) and Danish Mammut Workwear SA (A-1997-DK-530) companies used ADAPT to develop a common experimental plan to improve workforce working methods with the aid of quality control and communication styles and tools. By setting up pilot exchanges and staff placements between their companies, they were able to increase workers' and enterprises' awareness and understanding of European and international markets. Staff exchanges led to transfer of knowledge and methods, such as the introduction of the FANCO Quality System in Mammut, and the improvement of FANCO's communication methods in the light of Mammut's experience.

Practical recommendations:

Benchmarking against successful experiences elsewhere can be very useful; the use of experts combined with key people inside the company may help the transfer of knowledge. More broadly, despite implementation difficulties, project promoters should maintain their ultimate goal of transferring their experience to transnational partners and their local policy makers.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As the process of change is continuous, the analysis, assessment and questioning of the needs and responses that are provided must be a constant concern. The combination of these various elements allows an organisation to develop favourably and to resolve any difficulties which may gradually appear.

Networking and co-operation between enterprises should be recognised and supported as a dynamic and evolving process. It should be allowed to adapt and respond positively to changing

circumstances, so as to remain a means to an end, rather than a static end in itself. Monitoring and evaluation are techniques which, if introduced from the outset, can help drive this process of self-reflection and improvement, and ultimately ensure a network's sustainability.

The 'Bootstrap' project (Halmstad University A-1995-S-019) consisted of three networks dealing with manufacturing SMEs, female entrepreneurs and the public sector respectively. The project aimed to stimulate organisational development by generating a continuous dialogue between network members. Halmstad University observed that the unit of change was no longer the individual enterprise but the network itself, consisting of several enterprises and other bodies in the region. Within and between networks a development process started where people in enterprises and organisations were able to discuss problems, targets and solutions through seminars, conferences, discussion groups and other fora. The outcome of the process resulted in internal projects in individual enterprises. The organisation of such activities in the form of networks resulted in a sustainable process of development.

Implementing flexibility in companies should result from a holistic approach. This is a gradual process which demands a consensus between employees and employers. Joint methods (decided by both parties) and follow-up and assessment measures could accelerate and ensure results. Most enterprises find it difficult to acquire tailor-made tools and techniques to measure the real effects on productivity, on the structure of the workforce, on awareness and commitment, and on customer orientation and quality of introducing flexible work patterns.

Several projects such as CEFORALP, FANCO and SIAV tried out ways of introducing flexibility into enterprises, transferring logical methods of intervention and motivating them to aspire to incremental improvement. They evaluated effects (even side effects) of changes introduced in companies. In the Greek experience an initial pilot application to test out the effects of introducing flexibility proved to be effective in measuring the extent to which change brings about change.

Assessment of the impact of training must incorporate new data and adapt to on-the-job learning. Systems must be found, therefore, to assess the skills acquired, regardless of the learning method by which they have been acquired. Recognition of acquired learning is being developed in several Member States in relation to different sectors and needs.

Cork Institute of Technology found a way of integrating accreditation of prior learning (APL) with the Accumulation of Credits and Certification Scheme (ACCS) into its programme provision for technicians in

three participating enterprises. All students were invited to use their prior experiential learning to apply for subject exemptions in order to accelerate their progression to qualification. This enabled the learning scheme approved by the National Council for Educational Awards to be validated. There were implications for the trainers and teachers, and the Institute's staff development programme had to be revised to include new topics as syllabus development, learning outcomes and APL mentoring.

Practical recommendations:

The process of implementing change must be holistic, but gradual. It must also be incremental because results must be continuously monitored and evaluated so as to measure the extent to which change brings change. Information on results must be given to everybody in order to secure permanent consensus; to measure results, ad hoc tools and procedures must be developed.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Changes in work organisation have strong repercussions, not only on systems but also on individuals. In introducing these changes, by developing the use on the job of the new communications and information technologies, it is the responsibility of employees and of employers to ensure that they do not create new phenomena of exclusion. Some of this responsibility can fall to state authorities and even to citizens. The apparent difficulty of taking effect account of the equal opportunities principle suggests that the results of experiments by project developers in avoiding the exclusion of the most vulnerable employees, for example those with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills, should be better circulated. The issue of equal opportunities for women when workplace organisation is changed is of great concern, especially in a context of introducing and maintaining flexibility.

Networking and co-operation provides an opportunity for disadvantaged or under-represented groups to access information, resources and opportunities that would otherwise be remote or unavailable. It also provides a supportive environment and contributes to breaking down fears and barriers which underpin inequalities in the labour market. The success of these networks relies on there being trust, communication, and measures which directly address the needs of the target group.

The 'Breaking through Barriers' project (N-1997-S-510) set up a Business Advisors network for women entrepreneurs in municipalities across Sweden. The advisors' role was to advise, support and provide inspiration for potential and established women owner/managers. The complementary knowledge of the advisors (who included teachers, quality assessors, IT technicians and economists) provided a unique opportunity for fears and barriers to be broken down. The network also organised

training seminars and activities to directly address the development needs to the women owner/managers. In the words of the project, building networks is a case of 'wanting, daring and growing'.

Gender implications are highly relevant to the introduction of production and organisational flexibility in companies. Change in work organisation may re-establish the balance between men and women in enterprises, and may create new friendly working conditions for female workers, avoiding barriers which make women's participation in the life of the enterprise difficult. On the other hand, new forms of organisation may have side effect of reducing female jobs and creating new jobs mainly addressed to men.

Minimising the side effects of a change in work organisation was central to FANCO's experience. As a consequence of decentralising production in the Greek textile sector, some traditional female jobs were transferred to low-cost countries. New jobs deriving from the work reorganisation were addressed mainly to male workers. FANCO avoided job-losses by anticipating and analysing the problem at the initial phase of the project. FANCO developed a methodology aimed at minimising the exclusion of women in recruitment and training policies for new jobs. The methodology includes the neutralisation of selection criteria, a comprehensive communication strategy, transparency in the selection process, training and on-going evaluation. These measures were integrated in the Business Plan for 1997-2000, and the result of this anticipatory action was an increase in the number of female workers in the company today.

The "Palme – Femmes du littoral" project (A-1997-F-813) run by CEASM in France has helped create a network of groups of wives of fishermen and marine fish farmers. Through the network the women were able to organise themselves to represent themselves before public bodies in order to define the skills required for their work, and develop a common training scheme. The aim and the result of the project was first of all achieve a legal status for producers' wives in the regulations governing the work of the sector, and second to establish agreed skills needs and develop distance learning and self training tools. The development of ICT tools, an intranet and a web site, has been very important to the network and its transnational work.

Making training accessible means ensuring that it is relevant and can be delivered to the largest target group possible, and particularly to those who are most vulnerable. New information and communications technologies, because they enable training to be individually customised, play an important role in offering this group access to training, and meeting its needs.

The experience of the Swedish RÅKAS' project (Y-1997-S-503), funded both through OBJECTIVE 4 and YOUTHSTART, strongly confirms that people from different generations approach computers with different feelings and degrees of comfort. It is well known that young people generally bring much better knowledge of computers than older people to their work, partly because they are used to using them as a game. The project involves helping young people to transfer their ability, know-how and relative ease with computers to older people and so help the fight against the exclusion of older workers.

re-organisation, using tools like a Handbook and a Website.

Introducing flexibility to companies is a long, on-going process which involves every part of the enterprise. When the approach is holistic, the effect can be positive. This must combine communication and awareness raising actions, transferring good practice, a training strategy, and the development of a monitoring and evaluation system to measure the effects of flexibility on the organisation. Since results must be continuously monitored, the approach has to be incremental and gradual.

Practical recommendations:

The principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all workers should always be in mind. It is important to ensure greater mixing of education and training in courses where appropriate. Basic literacy and numeracy skills should be taught, especially to older workers and early school leavers. Learning and training must be enjoyable and relevant to learners. Ultimately, more personalised education and training provision should be encouraged.

The German RKW's (A-1995-D-024) experience confirms that implementing flexible working time in companies requires parallel redesign of work organisation, management structures and style, information flow, and training and wage systems. The approach necessitated training to re-skill the workforce and communication of the benefits gained to staff at all levels.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

Whether they concern networking and co-operation, flexibility, or training, these approaches cannot be considered separately from companies' overall strategies, from the ways in which they are organised, or from the people who work in them. The new forms of work organisation being adopted in companies underline the fact that changes in one element of the system have repercussions for all the others.

When an organisation changes the way it organises its work and plans its training accordingly, it is very important to ensure that this training is not restricted to those directly concerned with the changes to work organisation. A special emphasis must be laid on training supervisory staff.

Networking and co-operation cannot be fostered in isolation. They raise questions and issues which must be addressed as part of a global strategy for change. In practical terms, this may mean improving the ICT infrastructure of SMEs so that they can fully engage in electronic networking and co-operation. Or, it may involve helping create a more co-operative culture within an SME, before or at the same time as examining its external relations. Whatever the action, communication between all affected parties, at all levels, is of paramount importance.

According to Waterford Crystal (A-1995-IRL-016), training cannot be a solution on its own. It must be integrated into an organisational process. As a result, customising training for individual learners and for individual companies is likely to make incorporating change more successful.

Practical recommendations:

The approach involves an complete diagnosis of a company's organisation, working methods, and its functioning at all levels; this must be transparent and structured, and its results must be shared throughout the company.

The background to the 'EURO-MANAGER' project (AMU-Center Aarhus, A-1997-DK-539) was the increasing demand for organisational change in SMEs in Aarhus, moving away from hierarchical structures towards semi-self-managing production groups. The project set out to improve this process for staff at all levels by creating a network to disseminate and share knowledge and best practice. In launching this re-organisation, the AMU-Center thoroughly analysed the technological and human resources of each of the SMEs, often as a result providing training, support and/or consultancy services. The network provided a means of capturing and communicating the experiences of SMEs undergoing

Implementation of changing processes

PHASES

As mentioned in the previous pages, the implementation of new forms of work can be analysed in the light of a continuous improvement process. To maintain every chance of success, the strategies presented should correspond to a rigorous methodology. This methodology notably includes the optimisation of a long-term process involving a number of phases. It was also noted by the review seminar that it is also essential to associate local authorities with new activities, and to evaluate the impact of these methodologies on the local environment. It goes without saying that these projects call on a whole panoply of tools to support this activity.

A diagnosis phase is the departure point, followed by a planning phase where objectives and a programme of actions is drawn up; an implementation phase, where responsibilities are defined, training is provided and a communication strategy is implemented; a monitoring phase, where the work is audited and corrective measures taken; and a review phase, based on the results of the monitoring and new objectives which have emerged, and leading to a new planning and implementation phase. The system is dynamic, it progresses over time and loops around these phases.

ADAPT projects implementing new forms of work organisation have worked through a number of these phases, and have developed a range of tools and stratagems to help implement them. Mindful that each project has a life cycle, promoters have planned flexibly. The following example incorporates this need for planning, even though its approach is of the 'top-down' variety. It should be emphasised, however, that a 'bottom-up' approach would go further towards ensuring a project's long-term success.

In the first French Lean Production project (CEFORALP), focused on the industrial sector, work was done, in a 12 month period, in each of the 58 participating companies. The process started with the project using a range of assessment and diagnosis tools to identify, in collaboration with the company, strategic and operational objectives, which were developed into an action plan. Each company was then helped to implement the action plan, and the managers and operators were given the information and training they needed in order to play their part. Monitoring then enabled the final results of the Lean Production process to be considered. Furthermore, the approach of training in-company 'facilitators' enabled the business to continuously pursue objectives based on Lean Production, even after the project's funding had ended.

The cyclical process is clearly evident in networking and co-operation activities:

The Learning Region project (Karl-Franzens University, Graz, A-1995-A-018) has worked on the 'dynamic co-operation model which offers the possibility for each

of the companies involved to participate according to its individual potential and therefore decide on the co-operation intensity and field/goal. Furthermore, the model is very 'vivid' system which means that is open for new or changing participants and therefore offering additional or different potentials. This also represents a main necessity to continuously develop company networks further.

The Bootstrap project (A-1995-S-019, Centre for Working Life Research and Development (CAU)) has encouraged participating SMEs and regional actors to formulate collective strategies. This has been achieved through the organisation of strategy fora which enable those involved to discuss relevant issues. The project highlights the importance of transferring the strategy into concrete actions through the networks. This is achieved through seminars, conferences and other forms of discussion arena with broad participation. In addition, project groups and task groups discuss solutions and work out ways in which they can be implemented.

These strategies are, as we have seen, implemented over a period of time, and in a clearly defined, phased process. It therefore makes sense to reflect on what is required to make these strategies as effective as possible. There follow some examples illustrating the human resources (players involved) and the instruments and tools used (especially the new ICTs).

ACTORS

Introducing new forms of work organisation provokes changes in roles and skills for everyone: in-company and external trainers, managers, supervisors and workers. Completely new roles appear as well: like mediators, assessors and project co-ordinators.

Effective management is vital to a network, and from this a new role appears to be emerging, that of the 'networker'. This role is in fact several roles - co-ordinator, facilitator, moderator, innovator and change agent – all combined into one. Another role which is pivotal, particularly in work with SMEs, is that of the 'local champion', an individual or organisation who is a leader in the field, and whose reputation and personal networks raises the credibility and profile of the network, and thus helps to attract and retain SMEs. This leader is either a member of one of the companies in the network, or a partner institution. For example, an agent from a university can play this role.

The 'Network Learning Region Chemnitz' project (Chemnitz University of Technology, A-1995-D-087) has supported seven inter-linked networks, each with a networker. The networker helped develop the ground rules of the network, covering issues like information processes, decision-making and legal structures. The networker was also responsible for the human resource and organisational development. In practical terms, the

networker offered different models from other projects and literature, provided feedback, conducted evaluation and helped stimulate further discussion. The approach was bottom-up, the networker acting as a facilitator, rather than as a leader. In fact, in cases where the networker took on too strong a leadership role (making decisions and acting on the network's behalf), the network members became increasingly passive, and this led the network itself to die.

Calderdale College's project ('STEP TRAINING', A-1005-Ukgb-065), illustrates the pulling-power of the 'local champion'. An SME in Yorkshire became receptive to the objectives of the project and made full use of the ICT training and support available. This ultimately led to the alteration of the company culture, with a commitment to create a paperless office. As a result, the company used the project model to establish a Yorkshire business-to-business network on the Internet, called Yorkshire Busnet. Because the lead SME was visibly motivated by the desire to establish a competitive edge and assist other Yorkshire businesses, the network quickly attracted local SMEs. The lead SME became very successful in managing the network and went on to create a virtual business park featuring up to 200 businesses.

Effective strategies to introduce flexibility into a company involve a range of different people taking on new roles requiring new skills. Key people inside the company are of fundamental importance to the process of spreading the positive effects of change throughout the organisation. Their role, combined with the contribution of external experts and facilitators, can ensure that involvement at every level of the company is promoted and supported, ensuring that benefits are sustained, and skills transferred to workers.

Many projects, like SIAV and CEFORALP, faced the problem of finding ways to increase and spread the knowledge and skills that employees had acquired from training throughout the whole company. One effective approach was to train key people inside the company who were responsible for everyday problem-solving. These people then served as 'conduits' and helped circulate the benefits of training and new organisations skills throughout the business.

A similar experience was recorded in the Instituto Tecnológico de Galicia project (A-1997-ESP-688) which also worked with key workers, particularly managers, developing information and communication policies and raising awareness throughout the company. The approach that was adopted involved transforming key people from being transmitters of commands into becoming local managers and generators of results. To do this, management skills development models were used.

The Comune of Forlì project (A-1997-IT-830) experimented involving companies, local development agents, social partners and local institutions in designing and developing practical solutions for company problems based on successful strategies already tested in other companies.

It is difficult nowadays to speak of trainers or tutors as such. The notion of training or tutoring function is more pertinent, since the job is more commonly done by a team, in or out of the company, using both company staff and assistance from the training provider. This new approach to delivering training results in the training function being shared. ICTs play a role in this because network systems facilitate information-sharing, and training courses that are designed with new ICTs can be more easily adapted by other trainers for other objectives.

This essential co-operation between trainers means that they have to construct learning materials they can transfer between each other. Without these, it would be impossible to put all the material together or to find ways of exchanging ideas and experience, in a word, to co-operate.

The problem, as Miri@d has shown, is that most trainers are not used to working with new ICTs. Thus, for example, it is difficult to start working using an intranet as a medium, because the tradition of co-operation in the training function is not strong. Training centres therefore have to follow the same process as companies, introducing new work organisation, changing mentalities, and training trainers. The function of training is more than a teaching function. Miri@d found that new functions (both technical and related to mediation) need to be recognised.

In the SNTF project, video-training is mainly used for trainers themselves, so that they can exchange experiences and work together. The mountainous Pyrénées region is very large, and they would lose too much time if they had to meet physically. Without new ICTs, it would then be much more difficult for them to work together. Furthermore, amongst the large number of ski-resort partners in this project, training is provided jointly by the training body and managers in the ski-stations who have themselves been trained for the purpose.

TOOLS

The creation of instruments and tools has been a major preoccupation of ADAPT projects. As proof of this, the product directories set up in various Member States record a diverse range of project outputs. ADAPT has been used by the organisations whose projects have been selected to finance their research and development. Among the plethora of change-assisting tools, especially those addressing the new communications and

information technologies (CD-ROM, internet sites, video-conferences...), projects strongly emphasise the need to set up assistance and monitoring, including legal advice, to help those involved to conceive and realise these tools.

New ICTs offer a range of networking and co-operation opportunities. Nevertheless, they should not be over-used to the detriment of other means of communication and exchange. At all times, an appropriate balance needs to be struck, depending on a range of factors like geographical location, time available and group dynamics. Two important considerations are the ICT capacity and competence of the SMEs involved in the network. They often need upskilling and/or technical support in order to make full use of ICTs in their networking and other co-operative activities.

The Technikum Joanneum GmbH organisation ('Cluster-Netz', A-1995-A-502) founded their networking activities on a Web-based knowledge and training management system, despite the fact that, at the time, none of the participating automotive SMEs used on-line systems. As well as providing flexible courses, the system stored company and sector-specific information. By way of example, company photographs of production processes were built into the training system and used by trainees when practising presentations and/or learning about production processes in a foreign language.

The passage from being an organisation based on personal and hierarchical relationships to becoming one based on sharing responsibilities and performance evaluation needs new cultural and managerial attitudes from owners and managers. Moreover, adopting flexible working models in companies requires innovative planning, tools, problem-solving, and agreements capable of enabling the benefits of what has been achieved to be sustained over time.

To develop a partnership between SMEs in the fishing sector, MISTRAL (A-1997-GR-572) designed a participatory approach linking local authorities, fishermen and larger companies. The core of this approach was the development of an annual wage scheme (or family wage scheme), aimed at offering free fishermen and their families, part time or temporary employment in the fish farms.

This experience was similar to B.I.B.'s (A-1997-D-553) choice to encourage flexible organisation as a means of increasing company competitiveness. B.I.B.'s approach was based on a framework established by the social partners who reached an agreement on wages in a context of remote co-operation and geographically independent work.

The CANA project (A-1997-F-764) has organised a reduction of working hours in the 35 SMEs in the group. To do this, and particularly since it began as one of the pioneers in the field, the company had to adjust its action plan several times. A particular effort was made to adapt monitoring tools and indicators used previously, and to design specific new tools for this kind of work organisation, in particular for negotiating agreements with social partners. This constant effort to improve was what made the project a success, enabling some 400 net new jobs to be created, whilst improving employee job satisfaction.

All project promoters strongly underlined the importance of remembering that there is no 'miracle' or panacea to be found in new information and communications technologies. They do, of course, open up numerous possibilities in different situations, and they may be relatively easy to operate, but to be efficient and effective, they must be carefully and appropriately designed and used. Some of these tools are intended to improve the direction of the project itself (monitoring and assessment tools), others are learning tools designed for the ultimate beneficiaries of its activities.

There are two particularly important supporting functions associated with training with new ICTs. The first one is IT (information technology) support, which mainly involves technical or administrative help with using computers and networks. The second is training and learning support, which involves accompanying the person who is learning with new ICTs, answering questions and guiding him or her through an individual learning or training programme. Particular attention must be given to support facilities for tools intended for atypical workers.

The essence of the Wood Technology project (A-1995-IRL-032) was to find training supports for technological changes. Wood Technology is an enterprise-based response aimed at addressing the skills shortages which were impeding the introduction of new technology-based processes that would support the introduction of new techniques and new products into the indigenous Irish wood sector. To achieve this, they developed new training material, and created new delivery mechanisms, including new information and communications technologies.

Waterford Crystal's 'From Traditional Craft to Techno Craft' project pays great attention to training in new technologies, because in this enterprise, change is largely driven by the introduction of new technology in the work process. The project was centred on core skills that could enhance the adaptability of the worker, and thus the adaptability of the company. On-site IT training formed a fundamental part of this training, and self-training with computers supported these and other training courses.

Members of the review seminar launched the idea of looking more deeply into these practices. This would mean analysing problems and errors in implementation, and the solutions found to solve them. For example, what would happen if one of the phases described previously were to be omitted? What effects would a poor degree of awareness of one of the categories of agent have on the whole activity? What tools could be used to measure transversal acquisition of skills, or the quality of professional relations?

The impact of processes of change

The effects of the processes of change on work are felt at both individual and organisational levels. They can be negative or positive. Of course, promoters, like the members of the review seminar, recalled that using the strategies and methodologies described ensures that the changes implemented will have a positive impact at all levels. Since it was decided to demonstrate good practice, effects that were more negative were not clearly analysed in the text. Nevertheless, descriptions of project experience made it possible to warn against negative effects.

In the first place, individuals risk being excluded from these processes, especially from those which fail to take the needs of specific target groups into account, and from those which have been developed without sufficiently associating the employees concerned or their representatives. Integrating the implications of the Information Society involves particular risks of excluding individual workers, unless if it is accompanied by mechanisms which encourage extension of the new opportunities on offer to the whole workforce.

Moreover, a job which is more flexibly designed, has more flexible working hours and conditions may erode the boundaries between work and personal life, and have a serious impact on social life. This can result in the lives of individuals and families being heavily and lastingly disrupted. Mechanisms, which encourage greater day-to-day autonomy and room for initiative, may lead to increased and more sophisticated performance monitoring, and as a result excessively increase stress at work. Changes aimed at establishing greater flexibility in enterprises may ultimately result in social gains being brought into question by adverse effects on working conditions and pay. Lastly, they may threaten employment, by aiming to reduce jobs excessively in the interests of an apparently more efficient system of organising work.

At the same time, the advantages that may accrue to individuals from these processes of change are fortunately as extensive as the risks they may entail. Those involved may considerably benefit from becoming adaptable to new ways of working. In effect, they learn how to learn, and so substantially increase their present and future employability. They gain much greater room for autonomy, responsibility and creativity, factors which, by definition, enhance their work satisfaction. Furthermore, teamwork is reinforced, and along with it individual and collective skills. Finally, more creative organisations manage individual and collective time in new ways, improving the relationship between work, leisure, the family and social life.

These opposed risks and benefits need to be controlled in processes where collective negotiation and social dialogue play a key role. Individual objectives can also be considered. Imposed processes of change seem doomed from the start because they do not have the support of those concerned in them. At the same time, it is a matter of urgency to inform all citizens about these processes of change, and raise their awareness of the options they can offer to them.

As for organisations, they risk being considerably destabilised by changes in hierarchies, inappropriate existing working relationships, skill shortages, and experiments with new, time and energy-consuming ways of doing things. On the other hand, unexpected opportunities are opened up, not only for survival in the context of competitive environments and new technologies, but also for sustainable development.

The process of change can result in significant advantages for both companies and their employees. In fact, are efficiently organised companies, capable of reacting to circumstances, not likely to be the best equipped to develop robustly in a strong competitive environment? Are they not likely to be the best prepared to avoid reproducing the curse of labour market exclusion?

Policy recommendations

These do not claim to deal comprehensively with the wide range of the issues dealt with in this paper. They have been brought up by ADAPT project promoters or by National Support Structures echoing their views, are based on observations and experience, and take the form of a selection of recommendations to decision-makers.

These recommendations, based on identified success factors, are intended for policy makers, particularly in the fields of education, training, and employment at Community level, as well as national, regional and local levels. The objective of these recommendations is to contribute to the goal of improving the employment situation in Europe.

Members of the review seminar affirm that the commitment of the social partners is essential for the success of the change process. They play a fundamental role in removing obstacles and overcoming resistance to change, which is often due to a lack of communication, by identifying benchmarks of stability and by redefining collective identity.

We decided to present these recommendations in three categories corresponding in our opinion to the main themes underlying this report: Flexibility, Cooperation and Training.

Concerning change processes (internal changes) in companies and organisations:

- flexibility should be seen as a means of increasing companies' competitiveness, improving productivity and creating better working and living conditions; flexibility should not be seen as a goal in itself;
- implementing flexible production, organisation and working hours requires adaptation of contractual labour laws and wage systems;
- discrimination can be avoided by improving and harmonising local, national and European social legislation;
- human resource development needs investment that can be supported by fiscal means;
- policies are needed to support the transfer of good schemes for implementing and maintaining flexible organisations;
- securing flexibility is a long-term, on-going process which needs to be supported by collective agreements and adult training facilities; the concept of lifelong learning should be translated into a practical concept, and incentives provided for its wide-ranging implementation.

Concerning change processes within groups of organisations or companies (external changes):

- networking is a key issue for the modernisation of work organisation; it enables SMEs to look outside themselves, and to extend their relations with other organisations. It is essential to undertake both local and regional dissemination of good practice;
- encouraging SMEs co-operation with other professional

organisations, training providers, universities and employment agents, should help support the overall goals of enhancing their competitiveness and increasing the employment they provide;

- there is a need for a well-structured learning process around the current diverse methods of financing measures and programmes to support SMEs; at best, there is currently only minimal co-operation between funding from European, national and local sources; one overall funding authority could be structured by regional authorities helped by representatives of all labour market groups and organisations, replacing the present approach which tends to target specific groups, and therefore hinders the development of holistic networking;
- current approaches to promoting co-operation between SMEs have indicated that funding could be targeted in different ways to achieve more effective and extensive networking and co-operation;
- the short life spans of current funding schemes seriously constrain the ability of networks to be successfully established and to become self-maintaining;
- one effective method of promoting co-operation could be the provision of 'networkers'; they could initiate, present, counsel and support co-operation in the management of networks during the first three years after their establishment.

Concerning internal and external changes:

- new information and communication technologies, as aids not only to work but also to training, enable ongoing support and assistance in change processes to be developed and put in place; training and learning for new forms of work organisation and new information and communication technologies must be stitched seamlessly into the work and structure of companies – they must become an integral part of what a company does, and be part of and clearly linked to its business strategy;
- in the context of territorial approaches, the participation of institutions and public sector in local focus groups and local round table discussions can help improve the ways in which companies organise their work;
- practical and successful experiences, including active labour market policies, training, training needs analysis and territorial development policies, should be reflected in national and local development policies;
- training for trainers, as well as for managers, should take in the need to be able to recognise and accredit prior learning, and the requirement to be able to improve the way they facilitate the learning of new skills;
- the strategies mentioned, and their reflection in national and European policies, must be adapted to take account of non-salaried workers and those in all forms of atypical work; specially-designed "life long learning" is likely to be a key element.

Conclusions and perspectives

This document leaves the reader with a clearer view of what is at stake in the development of the Information Society. Identified in 1997 as a priority for the second call for ADAPT projects, the relevance of the issue was confirmed both by the strong response from prospective projects, and from the declared interest of at least eight Member States.

Since then, Member States have set out strategies and mobilised resources, particularly in relation to contractual policy, to help the Information Society become a reality. At Community level, it has become one of the eight priority fields for Objective 3 of the European Social Fund from 2000-2006.

How can the ideas reflected in this document be exploited, and will work on them be pursued in the longer term?

First, there will be a series of discussions and meetings, particularly focused on the transnational week in March 2000. Accompanying this, there is a Web site www.europes.be/future, open to all. This provides direct access to useful contacts, information on current events, and access to case studies and reports which were used to compile this summary report. Further materials will be added.

The planned Community Initiative EQUAL should reflect some of the recommendations offered in the document.

Finally, three aspects of the issue have now become are now part of national priorities

First, how can the ideas behind flexibility of work organisation be adjusted to meet national and European circumstances? We expect a great deal from the experimental innovatory projects which will be financed under EQUAL—we hope they will develop approaches which challenge traditional approaches and open the way to change.

Secondly, how can we improve current support facilities, which are frequently numerous but widely handicapped by lack of transparency and visibility? Once again, we hope that EQUAL among other initiatives and programmes, will furnish a more appropriate framework. Promoters will need to be allowed to concentrate on developing their projects' innovations, and not simply on satisfying administrative requirements.

Thirdly, the integration of ICTs in the workplace raises a number of issues, particularly those of the vulnerability of workers with low levels of qualification, and the situation of independent workers. How can we prevent exclusion? What skills should people be encouraged to acquire? What types of professional experience should be given recognition? How should they be recognised? What priority should be given to ICT literacy at the workplace?

And how can social dialogue be guaranteed a role as work organisation changes in response to the Information Society? How should we manage the relationship between individual and collective interests?

We hope very much that the work we will be doing in the months and years to come will provide part of the response to these questions.

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It is up to you to play...

Throughout this report, we have first drawn attention to the European context in which fundamental change processes in the organisation of work are being developed.

We have then tried to organise observations and statements made by those involved in these changing processes, and to understand from them the main strategies they have used, how these change processes are working, who is involved in them, and what mechanisms have been created.

We have then briefly summarised the risks and benefits to individuals, as well as for organisations engaged in such processes. From all of this there emerge a number of technical recommendations of relevance to everyone engaged in changing the ways in which work is organised, and a further series of recommendations addressed to decision-makers and dealing with some critical issues on which they could usefully intervene.

We sincerely hope that the paper will have helped you advance your thinking a little. Put another way, that it will have encouraged you to continue experimenting, to examine the results of what you have done in greater depth, to apply the practical lessons that can be drawn at present, to disseminate actively the results of innovation, to reflect on the future of work and to embark immediately on the work of the future.

It is up to you to play then, in a Europe that could be more flexible, more reactive, more participative and maybe also fairer both to groups and individuals.

Executive summary

New forms of work organisation involving new information and communication technologies (ICTs) tend to be introduced through one or more of three mechanisms:

- flexibility in working methods, conditions and time;
- new forms of co-operation and networking between enterprises;
- learning and training.

Major changes in the ways in which work is organised must be seen in the context of ongoing and increasing rates of change in society, businesses and organisations and in the lives of individuals.

MAIN STRATEGIES

Flexible working, new relationships between organisations, new forms of co-operation between organisations and their environment and new approaches to training all trigger change. Strategic responses can include:

- increased awareness and commitment of all those involved;
- taking customers' requirements into account;
- the development of learning organisations;
- a partnership approach;
- guaranteeing equality of opportunity;
- a holistic approach taking account of the various components of companies' development strategies, and of the individuals who go to make them up.

Awareness and commitment: It is necessary to involve every level of corporate hierarchy in change processes. Employees are more likely to endure change than to be its co-authors. They often exhibit rejection or indifference as a result. The culture of education and training is by no means yet implanted in the mentalities of small company owners and managers. They must see evidence that they result in increased returns for their companies. Awareness throughout companies is essential, and can be achieved by ensuring that processes are transparent, and that when flexibility is introduced it is as a result of negotiation. It is important to secure participation of all in the change process.

Customer focus / needs-based approach: Being competitive means responding as effectively, quickly and appropriately as possible to customers' needs. Public and private training organisations must also have a customer-oriented approach. Collaboration and networking, and building on existing networks, are important means of addressing SMEs' training needs and answering to them with a 'win-win' approach.

The learning organisation: To remain competitive, flexible enterprises need to be organised to facilitate learning. A system of skills and competence must be developed to solve problems, based on understanding, integrating and developing new managerial and organisational techniques. The concept of training must be brought closer to the concept of learning. Since SMEs

have particular difficulty allowing their employees time off for training, it should be delivered at the workplace, integrated into working processes. The speed of change must be adapted to an individual's speed of learning. Multi-skilling is the key to training in a changing environment. The measurement of individual and group performance must be improved. Self-management must be developed. Better means for anticipating change must also be developed.

Partnership approach: Partnerships are essential to gathering support and strengthening the potential for innovation. Inter-company networks can address problems created by changes in demand and changes in enterprises' organisational structures. Training organisations, having helped companies identify their real needs must then conceive and produce training programmes in close consultation. A participatory approach is essential in each phase of the creation of flexible organisations. Local authorities, social partners, companies and trainers need to work together in a practical way.

Territorial approach: A territorial approach invests a development project with a common identity based on an environment, its history and its culture. Territorial approaches in ADAPT projects mostly involve collaboration between SMEs, large companies, public institutions, local authorities, training organisations and development and/or consultancy agencies. Round tables or local discussion groups should be created or linked together in order to secure support and involvement of all key partners in a territory for a sustainable project.

Transnational co-operation: Many of the challenges faced by SMEs today are pan-European. With the help of ICTs, SMEs can network and co-operate transnationally to meet these challenges, and explore new opportunities. Transnational co-operation can also make a useful contribution to the implementation of flexible patterns and approaches in enterprises. Benchmarking against successful experiences elsewhere can be very useful; the use of experts combined with key people inside the company may help the transfer of knowledge.

Continuous improvement: As the process of change is continuous, the analysis, assessment and questioning of the needs and responses that are provided must be a constant concern. Implementing flexibility in companies should result from a holistic approach demanding a consensus between employees and employers. Assessment of the impact of training must incorporate new data and adapt to on-the-job learning. Systems must be found, therefore, to assess the skills acquired.

Equal opportunities: The issue of equal opportunities for women when workplace organisation is changed is of great concern, especially in a context of introducing and maintaining flexibility. Gender implications are highly relevant to the introduction of production and organisational flexibility in companies. Change in work organisation may re-establish the

balance between men and women in enterprises, and may create new friendly working conditions for female workers, avoiding barriers which make women's participation in the life of the enterprise difficult. On the other hand, new forms of organisation may have side effect of reducing female jobs and creating new jobs mainly addressed to men. Making training accessible means ensuring that it is relevant and can be delivered to the largest target group possible, and particularly to those who are most vulnerable. It is important to ensure greater mixing of education and training in courses where appropriate. Basic literacy and numeracy skills should be taught, especially to older workers and early school leavers. Learning and training must be enjoyable and relevant to learners. Ultimately, more personalised education and training provision should be encouraged.

Holistic approach: Networking and co-operation, flexibility and training must all be considered along with companies' overall strategies, organisation and employees. This may mean improving the ICT infrastructure of SMEs so that they can fully engage in electronic networking and co-operation. It may involve helping create a more co-operative culture within an SME. When an organisation changes the way it organises its work and plans its training accordingly, it is very important to ensure that this training is not restricted to those directly concerned with the changes to work organisation. A special emphasis must be laid on training supervisory staff. There must be a complete diagnosis of a company's organisation, working methods, and its functioning at all levels; this must be transparent and structured, and its results must be shared throughout the company.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGING PROCESSES

Phases: A continuous improvement process involves diagnosis, planning, implementation, monitoring, and review leading to fresh planning and implementation.

Actors: New forms of work organisation change the roles and skills of in-company and external trainers, managers, supervisors and workers. Completely new roles, like mediators, assessors and project co-ordinators, appear. Networks breed the new role of 'networker'. This is in fact several roles - co-ordinator, facilitator, moderator, innovator and change agent - combined into one. Another role which is pivotal, particularly in work with SMEs, is that of the 'local champion', spreading the positive effects of change throughout the organisation.

Tools: Among the plethora of change-assisting tools developed by ADAPT projects, especially those addressing the new communications and information technologies (CD-ROM, internet sites, videoconferences...), projects strongly emphasise the need to set up assistance and monitoring, including legal advice, to help those involved to conceive and realise these tools. New ICTs offer a range of networking and co-operation opportunities but depend on the ICT capacity and competence of the SMEs involved in the network. There are two particularly important supporting functions associated with training with new ICTs. The

first one is IT (information technology) support. The second is training and learning support.

THE IMPACT OF PROCESSES OF CHANGE

Integrating ICTs involves the risk of excluding individual workers. A job, which is flexibly designed and has flexible working hours and conditions, may erode the boundaries between work and personal life. At the same time, the advantages that may accrue to individuals from these processes of change are fortunately as extensive as the risks they may entail. It is a matter of urgency to inform all citizens about these processes of change, and raise their awareness of the options they can offer to them. Organisations risk being considerably destabilised by changes in hierarchies, inappropriate existing working relationships, skill shortages, and experiments with new, time and energy-consuming ways of doing things. On the other hand, unexpected opportunities are opened up, not only for survival in the context of competitive environments and new technologies, but also for sustainable development.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Internal changes in companies and organisations: proposals for seeing flexibility as a means of increasing companies' competitiveness, improving productivity and creating better working and living conditions, for adapting contractual labour laws and wage systems, for avoiding discrimination by improving and harmonising local, national and European social legislation, for supporting human resource development needs by fiscal means, for the need to support the transfer of good practice in implementing and maintaining flexible organisations, and for supporting flexibility through collective agreements and lifelong learning.

External changes affecting groups of organisations or companies: proposals for networking as the key to modernising work organisation, for encouraging SMEs to co-operate with other types of organisations, for providing learning related to methods of financing and programmes to support SMEs, for targeting funding to achieve more effective and extensive networking and co-operation between SMEs, for extending the life spans of current funding schemes, and for providing 'networkers'.

Internal and external changes: proposals for encouraging new information and communication technologies as aids to training, ongoing support and assistance in change processes, for the participation of institutions and public sector in local focus groups and local round table discussions to help improve the ways in which companies organise their work, for reflecting practical and successful experiences in national and local development policies, for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning, and for adapting policies to take account of non-salaried workers and those in all forms of atypical work.

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Adapt and Employment in brief

ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT are two Human Resource Initiatives which are led by the European Social Fund. Both Community Initiatives started in 1995 and some projects will continue until the end of the year 2000. Projects were selected following calls for proposals in 1995 and then again, in 1997. Member States manage these Initiatives in partnership with the European Commission and National Support Structures and EUROPS, the Commission's technical assistance office, assist in their implementation.

The principles underpinning both Initiatives are:

- **transnationality**: projects must be partnered with projects in other Member States which are focused on similar or complementary priorities;
- **innovation**: projects must experiment with new ideas or methods, or with new combinations of existing ideas, methods or collaborators;
- **local involvement**: projects should involve a range of local individuals and organisations and focus this combined resource and experience on developing their innovative ideas;
- **multiplier effect**: the experiences should be recorded, evaluated and widely disseminated through expert and professional networks, and to the public.

The ADAPT Community Initiative aims to transform the way in which companies, especially small firms, the organisations which support them, and workers themselves, respond to industrial change. In terms of the methods used, the 1997 projects have placed a greater emphasis on the use of new information and communication technologies and the building of the information society.

Almost 4000 projects have been or are supported under ADAPT, financed jointly by the European Social Fund and public and private sources in their Member State. The total ESF contribution for the five years of the ADAPT Initiative is over 1.6 billion euros.

The EMPLOYMENT Community Initiative targets groups of people who face special difficulties in the labour market. It has four inter-related strands: NOW to improve the situation of women in the labour market; HORIZON for people with disabilities; INTEGRA for socially excluded people; and YOUTHSTART for young people. EMPLOYMENT aims to identify new solutions to the problem of unemployment in the European Union by funding pilot projects: to contribute to the development of human resources; to improve the working of the labour market; and to promote social solidarity and equal opportunities.

More than 6000 projects have been selected for funding from the EMPLOYMENT Initiative, with a total contribution from the

European Union of more than 1.8 billion euros.

The impact of the ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT projects is reinforced by grouping them in transnational partnerships so that the lessons learnt in one Member State can be taken up and used throughout the European Union. This learning across frontiers was further strengthened by the joint strategy for Thematic Activities and Visibility, which is described in the Introduction to this report. In this final phase of the Initiatives, every effort is being made at national and European level to ensure that as many individuals and institutions as possible know about, and can benefit from, the legacy of ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT.

All of these Thematic Activities have also informed the design of EQUAL, the new ESF Community Initiative, which will operate from 2000 to 2006. This Initiative will build on the achievements of ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT, as it is intended to promote new practices to fight labour market discrimination and inequality of all types, particularly through transnational cooperation.

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