Guidelines
on work organization and skills

A EU research project led by

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SODIMA
Social Dialogue for the Future of Manufacturing

European Commission

SoDiMa – Social Dialogue for the future of Manufacturing

Digitalization and automation in the manufacturing sector are among the most important challenges for the social partners representing companies and workers. Trade unions and employers' associations are facing today a difficult and rapid transition (due to Internet of Things, Big Data, Collaborative Robotics, 3D Printing, Artificial Intelligence) which must be governed so that it does not generate the loss of millions of jobs, as several studies have predicted.

The objective of the parties must be to reconcile the protection of work with that of greater competitiveness and productivity for companies. This is why new skills, training and work organization are as fundamental as urgent aspects to deal with. Yet these are elements that cannot be achieved unilaterally by any of the parties involved.

For this reason, the SoDiMa project sets out to put social dialogue at the center of the transition towards the manufacture of the future and wants to do it right at the European level, by strengthening the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Metal Industry answering to the challenges of the EU document. A new start for social dialogue, its activities and its visibility with new and innovative results and activities. The reinforcement of the Committee and the involvement of countries with different maturation levels of digital manufacturing will favor the exchange of good practices and the development of guidelines that can help individual states to increase both business innovation levels and workers' skills.

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These guidelines were foreseen before the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic which had a strong impact on both the organization of work and the demand for skills and, in general, on the digitization processes of businesses and work. This is why their content has been revised and updated in light of the global pandemic scenario. The guidelines are one of the results of the "Social Dialogue for the future of Manufacturing" project funded by the DG Employment of the European Commission which involved several European countries and social partners at national and European level. They aim to provide some recommendations resulting from workshops and interviews conducted as part of the project with employers' associations, trade unions and VET providers and are structured in three parts: work organization, skills and social dialogue committee. For further information on the issues touched on, please refer to the position paper "Organization, skills and social dialogue: towards digital manufacturing" always produced within the project activities.

1) WORK ORGANIZATION

- Digitization means the reduction of the centrality of the two elements around which manufacturing was built in the last century: space and time. However, the pandemic has shown us that the introduction of remote working is not enough to change work organization. These transformations need to be accompanied, through social dialogue and through new industrial relations at all levels, so that they can lead to reconciling flexibility, productivity and quality of work. The flexibility of space, which we have experienced in recent months, can be enriched by the flexibility of time, by experimenting new ways of organizing working hours, safeguarding the *right to disconnect* and enhancing work-life balance where possible.

- The pandemic has shown everyone the centrality of the health and safety of workers for the whole of society. The dematerialization of work requires thinking about new ways of ensuring health and safety within boundaries that no longer coincide with those of the company. At the same time, it is necessary to identify strategies and methods shared between social partners to manage any consequences deriving from excessive exposure to technologies, also thanks to new flexible working schemes.

- Digitization increases the space for alternative work arrangements, i.e. forms of worker-company collaboration via online platforms. We must not ignore the phenomenon or try to remove it from business contexts but work to make it a form of work that can reconcile rights and flexibility. Industrial relations actors can regulate these issues with greater results than national laws that cannot represent a multifaceted scenario.

- The hierarchical structure of companies often collides with the needs for changes and flexibility required by the market as well as with the heterogeneity of today's workforce which has a varied demographic composition and different needs. It is important to identify ways that can lead to more horizontal organizational structures in which concepts such as transparency, responsibility, continuous improvement, sharing of tasks and goals can find space, of course within the regulatory and contractual contexts of different countries. To do this, the dissemination of *High Performance Work Practices* must be strengthened in many ways, especially through the dissemination of good practices.

- With digitalization, and in particular with the introduction of technologies such as machine learning, the relationship between man and machine can change. The central role of the worker in production processes must always be safeguarded by ensuring that they have the

skills to be able to organize this relationship as complementarity and not a substitution or submission of man to the machine. Only in this way the introduction of new technologies can lead to real added value for all components of the company, capital and labor, by reducing the manual workload of workers and increasing the intellectual and cognitive component.

- The introduction of technology can lead to deep reorganization of the employment structure in companies. The principle to be safeguarded is that of maintaining employment stocks as much as possible and, in the case of reductions, favoring accompaniment towards retirement and/or schemes of professional retraining that can reduce the risk of long-term unemployment.

- The new organization of work in the face of digitization also means the capacity for renewal of the very structure and schemes in which work is governed. An effort is needed to update the professional profiles, to review, through an update of the instruments that regulate them, the roles that both blue-collar and white-collar profiles cover and rethink the necessary skills.

2) SKILLS

- There is no true technological innovation without innovation in human capital. The risk is the dispersion of skills and the generation of new technological unemployment. It is necessary to spread the awareness that there is no a technological destiny already written but that much of the future will depend on how the transition will be managed and governed, especially through the training and retraining of workers. These both in front of the introduction of new technologies and in the context of continuous learning processes.

- The distinction between hard skills and soft skills must be overcome in the training processes within companies. The complexity of production processes and the evolution of work organization requires greater complementarity between doing and being and this must be translated into a new pedagogy in which companies can be the main character. The experience of the pandemic and the impact on working methods has clearly shown this in the example of remote work for which soft skills are not enough but these work in dialogue with the technical-specialist requirements of the various jobs.

- If learning is a continuous process, there is a need for greater integration between the different places where this occurs: the school and the companies. It is therefore necessary to strengthen, according to national regulations which, where necessary, must be renewed, the forms of dual training and VET. The concrete collaboration between companies and the training actors can help in identify new professional profiles required by the market and the necessary skills as well as introduce new ways of training and accompanying workers in the companies themselves.

- Training is one of the main ways to develop protections on the labor market that technology is making more and more unstable. Internal training in companies therefore also has a social role and has a responsibility towards the entire labor market. In this sense, it is necessary to raise awareness of forms of public support for quality training courses offered to workers, also taking advantage of periods of non-work and in preventing of the possible employment impacts that the pandemic may have.

- New remote training methods have been at the heart of the practices that the pandemic has helped to spread. These tools need to be supporter to strengthen the training opportunities of workers in order to be able to make available flexible training tools, this combined with supporting workers in learning the basic digital skills that allow them to be used.

3) SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEE

- One of the main added values of the Social Dialogue Committees is the opportunity to share insights from each country, compare different experiences and find new ways for facing the same challenges in different contexts. This is possible only with a full participation and involvement, of the largest number of countries, to motivate national partners in this participation is crucial.

- The motivation of national partners starts with the alignment of information and knowledge. In this sense, a timely and continuous sharing, also through a communication strategy via social media, of documents that are concise but complete is functional to achieving this goal.

- A concrete approach, of analysis and deepening of the topics covered is generally appreciated by national stakeholders both because they find inspiration for the solution of national problems and because it could facilitate the achievement of a shared position.

- The digitization process, also taking into account the different levels of advancement between member countries, can create new inequalities or increase existing ones, for example between older and younger workers, between employed and unemployed, between those who are qualified / graduated and those who are not it is. On these issues, the social partners at European level can play a decisive proactive role in collecting best practices and identifying possible solutions.