Transnational worker representation and transnational training needs: the case of European works councils

Doug Miller

The ongoing establishment of transnational information and consultation set in train by the European Works Council Directive of September 1994 is estimated to impact on approximately 25,000 employee representatives in some 1200 multinationals based in the EEA and beyond. This presents labour educators with enormous opportunities and challenges. Specific research questions which emerge in this context concern the extent to which such representatives have a set of generic and therefore transnational training needs in the area of skill, knowledge, and values/attitudes. Second, there is the extent to which existing methods of training needs identification are appropriate to detect and specify both individual and collective/organisational needs at this level. A third question concerns the prospects for transnational worker representatives to embed training needs analysis in their practice. This article attempts to shed some light on these questions.

1 Doug Miller, Division of Government and Politics, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8ST, UK; currently on secondment to the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation, Newcastle upon Tyne.

1 This article is based on research made possible by the LEONARDO da VINCI programme funded by the EU Commission. The LEONARDO programme supports the development of methodologies, materials and infrastructure in the broad area of vocational training. The author would like to thank the partners for their assistance and critical comments in particular, Nick Clark (TUC, UK), Boudewijn Berentsen (FNV, Netherlands), Maria Irace (CISL, Italy), Jean Claud le Douaron (ETUCO, Brussels), Willi Derbogen (Arbeit und Leben, Germany), John Stirling, and Bob Mansfield, Prime Research and Development.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 2001, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK and 350 Main St., Malden, MA 02148, USA.
Introduction

In September 1994 a statutory instrument known as Directive 94/45/EC on Information and Consultation in Community Wide Undertakings – the so-called European Works Council Directive – was passed within the European Union (EU). Formally this bound the 15 member states\textsuperscript{2} to legislate the means by which procedures for information and consultation were to be negotiated within multinationals operating within its economic space. The Directive constitutes by any standard a remarkable achievement on the part of organised labour. It has been estimated that in excess of 25,000 employee representatives will eventually be meeting at least once a year on a transnational basis to receive information from their management relating to the operation of the multinational in which they work. At the time of writing formal meetings (inaugural and ongoing) of European Works Councils (EWCs) had taken place in over 600 of the 1200 eligible multinational corporations MNCs under the terms of the Directive (European Works Council Bulletin (EWC) July/August 1999).

Formally such annual meetings between central management and the employee representatives are intended to provide a platform for the disclosure of information relating to company structure, performance, investment plans and consultation regarding their industrial relations ramifications. Early indications reveal, however, a widening of the agenda on these bodies to include personnel issues such as equal opportunities, vocational training and health and safety (Marginson and Sisson, 1998: 520–1). Although there is disagreement about the significance of such a development for industrial democracy (Streeck, 1997b; Wedderburn, 1997; Ramsay, 1997; Lecher and Rueb, 1999; Wills, 1999), for the first time transnational collaboration between workers has shifted from the international departments of trade union organisations to the level of the lay representative and has the potential for an unprecedented degree of structure (Turner, 1996) and permanency. This presents labour educators with enormous opportunities and challenges. Specifically, what are the new areas of knowledge, skill and personal competence which need to be addressed in this new form of transnational worker representation and critically, within such a multicultural and multilingual collective context, how are these to be determined and delivered?

European works councils: the training context

Such a development presupposes that there already exist rights and facilities to training in this area, a factor which unfortunately was not guaranteed under the terms of the Directive (Buschack, 1999: 389–90), and which has led to a very differentiated pattern of provision (Marginson, 1999: 271) and a compromised involvement for the trade unions (Miller and Stirling, 1998). Nevertheless, the European trade union movement has been able to develop a systematic approach to the delivery of training for EWC representatives via extensive use of European Commission Budget lines B3-4003/4 to prepare the way for the negotiation of voluntary agreements setting up EWCs in the period 1994–96. Many of the preparatory transnational meetings organised in this way incorporated training elements (Miller and Stirling, 1998: 45). Furthermore, the European Trade Union Confederation was able to invest in 1996 in a new education officer post at the European Trade Union College based in Brussels with a remit to develop training materials and methodologies, and deliver courses for specific sectors in the first instance. Beyond this, the European Commission had recognised the legitimacy of trade union education and employee representative training in particular by way of funding support (generally, but not exclusively, under the LEONARDO programme) for a range of projects between trade union

\textsuperscript{2} Germany, Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, Finland, Denmark, Greece, Sweden, Portugal, Spain and Austria constitute the member states of the European Union. Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway are additional members of what is known as the European Economic Area.
partners designed to enhance such a training infrastructure. We may mention here specifically GROUPREP – an on-line course for EWC representatives administered by the Danish LO;\(^3\) INFORCE – an on-line training and conference facility for EWC delegates led by the European Trade Union College;\(^4\) METE project to develop multimedia English for Trade Unionists and European Works Councillors (Porter and Tully, 1997); and KVAERNER – a project using the Norwegian multinational as a case study in the development of a language and communications network for EWC delegates in a manufacturing environment.\(^5\) Latterly, the Commission has seen fit to support a bid led by the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) to determine methodologies for training needs analysis.\(^6\) This project, which commenced in January 1998 and was scheduled for completion in the summer of 2000, has involved trade union partners from the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Italy. The stated aims of the project were to develop transnational methods for identifying the needs of EWC members and to develop curricula guidelines to meet those needs. These specific objectives derive from more strategic aims: the strengthening of the position and activity of European Works Councils; the development of a more professional approach in representation specifically within multinationals; the consolidation of a role for trade unions on EWCs; building the confidence of members/workforce in the EWC and the provision of an aid in negotiating training for EWC members.

The development of such a transnational methodology begged a fundamental question at the outset. What role can or should training needs analysis play in a worker representative body, where there is a collective rather than individual orientation of the representation of the interests of labour and where the evaluation of individual human performance in such a context is heavily circumscribed by the vagaries of external factors?

Does organised labour need training needs analysis?

Since training is an activity normally undertaken to serve the purposes of an organisation it can be said that such activity is goal-oriented – the aim being the enhancement of individual and collective human performance in the areas of knowledge, skill and personal competence. We may observe here an identity of interest as far as training is concerned between a conventional capitalist industrial organisation and any organisation of employee representatives (trade unions, works councils and now European works councils). Both are likely to have a concern to operate efficiently and effectively. Most certainly, trade unions, which in many European states also have the responsibility for training works councillors, have been keen to develop their representatives in order to enhance their performance so that the overall goal of advancing and protecting the terms and conditions of working people may be achieved. But here the similarity arguably ends – for three key reasons.

First, the role of a ‘lay’ employee representative is by definition voluntary. Although systems of workplace representation may vary across Europe with different entitlements to time off, facilities and training (Bridgford and Stirling, 2000), the ‘performance’ of such representatives cannot be subject to the normal ‘carrot and stick’ approach as is generally found in capitalist organisations. For employee representatives faced with the ever demanding and ever stressful task of managing employer-instigated change, the carrot of ‘altruism’ may appear tenuous by the day, while the ‘stick’ of de-selection at the next election may, given such circumstances, not come quick enough.

Second, the performance of employee representatives is exposed to greater forces

\(^3\) www.loskolen.dk
\(^4\) www.etuc.org
\(^5\) LEONARDO project N/96/2/0155/1/II.1.1.c/FPC to develop a method for implementing trade union communication networks in manufacturing industries.
\(^6\) LEONARDO ProjectUK/97/2/001228/P1/11.1.1.b/cont Methodology for Analysing Training Needs and Designing of Curricula for European Works Council Members.
than those which any individual representative can mobilise (Stirling and Miller, 1992). Performance targets – for example, substantial improvements in the terms and conditions of those one represents or the prevention of mass redundancies – cannot normally be delivered by an individual representative on their own, given the interplay of such a wide range of external factors. Consequently, determining training need, i.e. as a need for human performance improvement that can be best met by training of some kind (Peterson, 1998: 8), can only ever be a partial exercise at best.

Third, and related to the second point, in a trade union context, training often has a ‘political’ purpose whereby performance has to be viewed in a wider and collective rather than a narrow and individual sense. Since there is already an asymmetric power situation prevailing in many work organisations, the performance of an individual or group of representatives in any given bargaining situation may be greatly enhanced by the spontaneous action by those whom they represent. Thus, it is important to acknowledge from the outset that it is not possible to view employee representative training through the same lens as vocational training.

Determining training needs, then, in collective worker organisations must be viewed in this context. Indeed, where training needs analysis (TNA) has been embraced, it has taken a different trajectory in trade unions than that within conventional industrial organisations remaining a fairly ad hoc rather than systematic activity. Since historically trade union training evolved as a problem-solving tool for representatives in the first instance, there is an inherent pull to view TNA from a problem-based perspective, and to focus on ‘tooling up’ for representation rather than broader labour education (Spencer, 1998). Hence need orientates itself arguably very much to the particular features of the national system of workplace representation with different nuances placed on skill and knowledge requirements. Beyond such basic training for workplace representatives, courses may either be offered as a specific response to conference resolutions (training as part of a campaign) or as a response to demands from workplace representatives which may have been provoked either by changes in the legislation or new management practices. In some cases courses may be ‘supply-led’, as trade unions offer courses which deal with issues the organisation deems to be relevant (Stirling, 2000).

To what extent has the introduction of a transnational system of employee representation changed this situation? For the first time, training for employee representatives has to be seen in a holistic way. Since the locus is the multinational firm, where all the elected representatives from the constituent countries must now collaborate in one body, there is a strong imperative to be trained together, although this does not preclude a range of other training contexts in which individual delegates may come together7 (Buchholz, 1999: 44). With one or two notable exceptions, this perhaps represents a significant departure from national patterns of training provision (Miller, 1999: 356). Where TNA is required and, crucially, permitted, this can be conducted in a focused and democratic way. Furthermore, since representing workers in a transnational context is a new situation, this is likely to generate a potentially new set of training needs, particularly given the multicultural and multilingual mix in any given EWC (Buchholz, 1999: 42). Moreover, requests for ‘training’ from whole bodies of employee representatives to deal with a specific issue may mask a collective need for ‘coaching’ or facilitation through ‘live’ issues rather than address a collection of identical individual needs via training. Training needs analysis approaches must take these issues on board.

The research questions

Consequently, a number of interesting research questions emerge in this respect. First, do EWC representatives have a set of generic training needs in the area of skill,

7 Sectoral (organised by the relevant European Industry Federation (EIF), national organised by the confederation or national affiliate and bilateral courses).
knowledge, and values/attitudes? Second, if there is such a set of needs, what is it and, to what extent will existing processes or methods of training needs identification be appropriate to detect and specify both individual and collective/organisational needs at this level? Finally, what prospects exist for transnational worker representatives to embed training needs analysis into their educational and representative practice?

Research design

The first phase of the research programme sought to address the first research question and establish an overview of the range of possible training needs at this early juncture in the development of transnational employee representation. A sample of 100 European works council members, coordinators and experts were either sent semi-structured questionnaires by those national trade union centres involved in the project or administered them in training sessions in the UK, Germany and in Brussels. Of the sample of 87 delegates, 14 of the respondents were female. The national breakdown of the sample of delegates was as follows: 10 Italian; 10 German; 14 the Netherlands; 53 UK. In addition, servicing officers from 7 affiliates of the FNV in the Netherlands and 7 from CISL in Italy and a total of 8 experts (Italy 3, the Netherlands 2, UK 1 and Belgium 1) also responded. In order to approach the question from a number of different perspectives, the respondents were asked about their perceived role/function, initial/ongoing problems, the values they considered important in transnational representation as well as a specific question about their training needs. EWC delegates and national coordinators were asked questions about the key function(s) of a European works council and the main responsibilities of an individual delegate within this. Their responses can be grouped under the two general (in some cases overlapping) headings of ‘The development of worker participation’ – and ‘The development of transnational worker organisation’. The returns enabled us to generate useful preliminary data in relation to the question of generic training needs.

Methods for determining the training needs of EWC representatives

The question concerning role in the questionnaire yielded a series of statements which provided a preliminary map of potential training needs of EWC representatives. These are listed in Table 1.

The functional approach

This functional information was then mapped on to a database of standards developed by the TUC to determine the generic role of a workplace representative. This database draws on methodology developed in tandem with the British TUC for the purpose of accrediting the training of full-time trade union officers and voluntary workplace representatives (TUC, 1996; Capizzi, 1999). Although the concept of standards (with some national variations) is widely accepted and used in occupational profiling within the European Union (EU) (Kunzmann et al., 1998), the use of standards in trade union training and education to profile and accredit workplace representatives has been largely pioneered by the British TUC and is therefore not a concept which has wide currency within the European trade union movement. There is a strong temptation to label such a concept a ‘competence’ approach. However, ‘competence’ is a term which is bedevilled with conceptual imprecision which leads

---

8 The disproportionate number of UK returns can be explained by the fact that the opportunity was taken to acquire survey data at training sessions with delegates attending national seminars and in some cases specific company seminars in the metalworking sector.
Table 1: Perceived functions of an EWC delegate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Develop worker participation</th>
<th>Develop transnational worker organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>raise employee concerns</td>
<td>develop contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be consulted on major changes</td>
<td>inform employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influence decisions</td>
<td>exchange information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make sense of company strategy</td>
<td>coordinate trade union activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cross-check management information</td>
<td>Europe-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>track, monitor and assess developments in the company</td>
<td>integrate culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help shape company policy</td>
<td>coordinate international action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>move from a talking shop to a negotiating forum</td>
<td>publicise EWC issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>continuous comparison of terms and conditions</td>
<td>be positive regarding European issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strive for uniform policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>develop an early warning system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protect minimum rights by monitoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>act as a link between management and companies (subsidiaries)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promote the interests of one’s own company (subsidiary)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defend jobs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...to much confusion in the training debate (Mansfield, 1999). The TUC training standards arise very much from a functional analysis of the role of a workplace representative. The results of this analysis are reproduced in Table 2. Since the emphasis is placed on what a representative might reasonably be expected to do in that role, standards are expressed as statements commencing with verbs. The above list of functions of an EWC delegate was grafted on to the TUC database in an attempt to produce a list of generic standards for transnational representatives in a multinational corporation (MNC) governed by the EWC Directive. Each standard (or title) is complemented by a detailed breakdown of (performance) criteria, different operational circumstances and related knowledge requirements (see Figure 1).

In one key respect the TUC national standards had to be modified in order to match the somewhat limited role proscribed by the EWC Directive. Since the European Works Council is de jure an information and consultation body only, the role of a transnational representative is mapped without reference to any explicit negotiating function although it is acknowledged that information and consultation are on the same continuum as negotiation.

Using an approach common for managers in the UK (Management Charter Initiative, 1990), it has been possible to construct an interactive computer-based tool using the above database which permits an individual printout for each delegate indicating where training is potentially required in each of the functional areas listed above (see Figure 2).

The tool has been developed to assist EWCs in negotiating training provision and to help individual delegates identify specific needs in relation to key functional areas. Many of the standards describe quite generic representational skills which might be expected to be acquired and honed in a national context. Deficiencies in these crucial areas do arguably need to be identified by a TNA. The interactive part of the tool
Table 2: Functional map for an EWC delegate

Develop an Information and Consultation Strategy
A1 Develop international contact networks and exchange information
A2 Identify, analyse and use information sources
A3 Help to develop strategies for representation
A4 Develop and implement procedures and systems to support the representation of employee interests
A5 Promote the value and contribution of European Works Councils

Maintain the effectiveness of the representative function
B1 Communicate effectively with EWC counterparts
B2 Decide how to use the resources you have to do your job as European Works Council Representative
B3 Choose education and development programs for your own use

Represent the interests of the employees by contributing to EWC meetings
C1 Prepare for European Works Council meetings
C2 Contribute to European Works Council meetings
C3 Organise and service meetings and joint working parties
C4 Chair formal meetings and working parties
C5 Develop good relationships, and exchange information with other representatives

Inform the people you represent about issues which interest and affect them
D1 Obtain information about your company and use it to inform the people you represent
D2 Lead formal and informal meetings and group discussions
D3 Prepare and present information in formal meetings
D4 Obtain and modify information for publication in journals and newsletters

Represent the interests of employees as a trade union member
E1 Encourage members to follow policy decisions, to take part in policy-making and advise members on the interpretation of policy decisions
E2 Represent union policy and the interests of members in local, regional, national and international organisations
E3 Promote collective organisation within the company

also provides trainers with individual files so that they can establish an overview of the key subject/skill areas which need to be addressed.\(^9\)

It must be said that a number of critiques have been directed at this functional (standards) approach to training. First, there is the charge of reductionism. As Collins has argued:

> the reductionistic proclivity of competency-based adult education leads to the development of an interminable number of behavioural statements. This has brought into question the very notion that successful performance can be isolated, sliced up, and controlled, even if it were desirable... We do not have isolated experiences which are measurable like dissected units of space and external time. All of our experiencing takes place within a context which cannot be reduced into elements unconnected with past experience. (1987: 92)

A similar argument has been made by Grugulis (1998) with respect to management training, claiming that it is unrealistic to disaggregate such a role into ‘objective, explicit and unambiguously measurable elements of competence’ (ibid: 397). A

\(^9\) The interactive part of the tool can be viewed on the website at www.unn.ac.uk/academic/ss/government/leonardo.htm
Figure 1: Example of a training standard for an EWC representative

Figure 2: Performance rating to determine individual training need
second critique concerns the inter-relationship between the ‘hegemony of competence and the ideology of individualism’ (Alexander and Martin, 1995: 84). Methods of TNA which build on the standards approach may miss a crucial collective dimension particularly where employee representation is concerned.

Third, the prescription of functional performance criteria can have a disciplining effect on the individual, shifting the focus of the learner away from critical reflection and analysis (Edwards and Usher, 1994: 9). Finally, sets of generic standards for employee representation presuppose that transnational representatives constitute a homogeneous group. European works councils have, however, the potential to be highly fragmented bodies in which differences can occur along national, occupational, industrial, trade union and organisational hierarchy lines, and where national representatives come from considerably divergent traditions of workplace representation and trade union confederations of differing ideological and/or religious persuasion (Barisi, 1998). In the light of this, is such an approach possible and/or desirable? For example, is the function of the employee representative sufficiently homogeneous to transcend the many possible fault lines enumerated above? Can we talk in terms of a generic role?

It can be seen from Table 2 above that the functional descriptions with one key exception 10 transcend national differences and attempt to impose a structure upon the role. Does this impose too rigid a schema on the role of the representative and thereby ‘discipline the subject’ (Edwards and Usher, 1994)? If the method of selection of so-called EWC delegates has been varied (Marginson et al., 1998: 36–40), and led to a situation where a not insignificant proportion of EWC members with little experience of representation or organisational support has been catapulted into a position where significant demands are made of them, then arguably discipline is precisely what is required. Even Collins acknowledges that ‘competency based systems can be readily brought to bear as an organising mechanism’ (1987: 92).

Furthermore, since it is by no means guaranteed that even seasoned workplace representatives can meet the challenges posed by this new body, a systematic approach which identifies core skills and provides the basis for identifying specific individual training needs could assist EWCs in establishing a basis of organisational effectiveness. Certainly in the case of the identification of language training needs, a functional analysis is central to the communicative approach developed by the European Trade Union College (1995, 1997a).

It is important to stress that the notion of standards has been de-coupled from the notion of accreditation. Whereas the functional map in conventional vocational training usage in the UK would normally be converted into learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the purpose of accreditation, here it serves primarily to provide a picture of basic representative responsibilities in a transnational context. Since the accreditation of representative training is not accepted policy or practice in trade union education in the majority of member states (European Trade Union College, 2000), we are only interested here in the extent to which such an approach can be of any value in assisting representatives in identifying their training needs and in assisting providers in planning EWC training.

This said, we are still left with one residual critique of this approach which needs to be confronted. The functional approach presupposes that trade unions/EWCs and other worker bodies are ‘professional’ in their approach to representation and training, and see the purpose of such bodies so clearly that they take the identification

---

10 In one key respect the list of ‘generic’ standards fails the test of transnationality – the inclusion of standards relating to aspects of trade union representation. Since this system of workplace representation is not mirrored in the EWC Directive, which is based on models of employee rather than trade union representation found elsewhere in Europe, performance criteria emphasising trade union representation, such as those contained in the database, may have no currency in those multinationals where the EWC is non-union or has non-union members. To some extent this critique can be countered since even in those member states of the European Union where trade unions are not the prime institutions of workplace representation, e.g. France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, dual systems of representation see to it that trade unions provide key organisational support.
of their training needs seriously. Certainly, while there are indications across the
trade union movement in Europe that this is the case (Stirling, 2000), we have, as
far as unions are concerned, no empirical evidence to suggest that this is yet the case
on the ground. Significantly, where the model was introduced to members of a UK-
based EWC, which we shall call Forumco, those who showed most interest were
those delegates who were non-union and in managerial roles within the company.
Given major constraints on representatives’ facility time and, significantly, a current
situation in which EWCs may appear to offer nothing of value to representatives as
industrial relations institutions, then the perceived need to be trained may — cru-
cially – not be ‘felt’. As Collins has argued:

The practical nature of this world, and the various realms of reality within it can be properly
understood only through the explication of relevance. It is fundamental to understanding how
we form, and choose between, our projects of action . . . the task of the adult educators [is] to
facilitate learning situations which correspond to the relevancy structures of the participants’
experience of their life-world. The curriculum emerges relevantly in the context of the partici-
pant’s immediate problems, their aspirations, and their past experiences. (1987: 91)

This raises the question whether a complementary TNA tool can be developed which
focuses more on a problem-based learning approach (Boud and Feletti, 1998).

Problem-based TNA

Our questionnaire sought to elicit the experience of EWC delegates in relation to
operational problems, and their perceived training needs. Based on a crude tally of
the frequency of mentions of specific problems occurring in early EWC meetings,
Table 3 could be said to constitute an initial set of operational problems.

Buchholz has conceptualised operational problems slightly more more extensively
as: setting the agenda, facilities/resources, language, quality of EWC rights, cultural
differences, operational limitations, the lack of training, the absence of an information
strategy, lack of participation from some delegates, and lack of knowledge of other
countries (1999: 43). However, this listing reveals a problem at the heart of this
approach which causes difficulties for trainers who are dealing with full EWC bodies.
This is the conflation of training topics with issues which can only be addressed organisationally or even politically. Consequently, it is necessary to generate a much more
focused and detailed list of specific training needs. We have reproduced this using
data from our survey broken down in terms of skill, knowledge and interpersonal
skills (see Table 4).

In an earlier parallel survey carried out by the European Trade Union College,
delegates in some 30 European works councils were asked about their perceptions
of the functioning of the EWC and about their training needs. This threw up a dis-
crepancy between what we might term the objective (collective) needs of the EWC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Most frequently mentioned operational problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Setting the agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Inter-cultural problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Differences in systems of representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Company information too complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Other*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *These encompassed essentially organisational/political issues – absence of EU-wide harmonised
set of rights and facilities for employee representatives and managerial control/resistance in the process of information and consultation.
Table 4: Individual training needs identified by EWC delegates in survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Interpersonal skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td>presentation skills</td>
<td>cultural awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU laws</td>
<td>computing skills</td>
<td>presentation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workplace representation</td>
<td>understanding</td>
<td>stress management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding and using laws of other member states</td>
<td>accounts</td>
<td>‘learning to let go’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>factory visits</td>
<td>research skills</td>
<td>assertiveness skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>setting agendas</td>
<td>discussion techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management strategies</td>
<td>results-oriented thinking</td>
<td>nurturing militancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Safety</td>
<td>stress management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>history of the parent company</td>
<td>negotiating techniques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMU</td>
<td>discussion techniques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>global economics</td>
<td>developing a work plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socio-economic background</td>
<td>statistical analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge of EWCs elsewhere</td>
<td>project management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding day-to-day systems of workplace representation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politics of individual countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparative company law</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal pricing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘organisation science’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge of markets and competitors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sectoral analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concrete knowledge of limits of the Directive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and the individual subjective assessment of need as expressed by each delegate (ETUCO, 1999). Thus, a second key question in the survey was to gain some assessment from delegates as to the collective training needs of the EWC as a whole.

The initial responses to this question are reproduced in Table 5.

Table 5: Collective training needs of an EWC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Interpersonal skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>understanding company strategies</td>
<td>teambuilding</td>
<td>intercultural training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organisation of work</td>
<td>advisory skills*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding economic information</td>
<td>working jointly with management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>production and marketing communication strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding the agreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Ability to draft and present counter-proposals/alternative analysis of company problems.
Testing the methods

The second research question focused on the development and piloting of different approaches to training needs analysis in different companies with different circumstances. A major operational problem for trainers is that unless specifically requested, TNA is likely to be undertaken at the end of a training programme, where considerable time pressure prevails and, where, as has been our experience, training budgets may only make provision for interpreting and not document translation. Consequently, a method has had to be developed which can facilitate efficient identification of needs and which can overcome the problem of translation. One of the key methodological approaches in multicultural education is often the use of visualisation. Working with graphic designers we developed a topic-based tool which focuses on the two key areas of developing the social dialogue (employee participation) and building EWC organisation. Taking the most frequently mentioned training needs in Table 4 above, a grid was produced which represented these issues in graphical form leaving spaces for the participants to write in the description (using the interpreter) in their own language. An example is reproduced in Figure 3.

Once the list was completed, EWC members were given the opportunity to prioritise 3 issues/topics for which they required training. An early version of the tool was used with Forumco and the results formed the basis for meaningful consultation with the select committee to plan training for the full EWC. A development of the tool now includes a visualisation (see Figure 4) to enable trainers and EWCs themselves to process out the information collectively. This consists in delegates entering their marks in the appropriate concentric circle near the centre to denote their order of priority of issue.

This tool is currently being piloted with a number of EWCS and at seminars for trainers and coordinators (ETUCO/AFETT, 1999). We still await the findings concerning its value in assisting delegates in collectively determining their training. Significantly, they have received a critical reception from trade union coordinators from national confederations and European industry federations who are responsible for EWCS. The critique consists of two main strands. First, there is still some resistance

![Figure 3: Training needs analysis grid](image-url)
to worker representatives being viewed as individuals with specific learning/training needs of their own. As an Italian education officer put it:

I don’t think that the unions should think that we will solve the problems from an individual point of view. No. What we need is a union strategy based exactly on what the unions want, how the unions want to solve the problems and we need to organise this in a structural way . . . [to] use training to meet needs which are individual needs I don’t think . . . is enough. And I don’t think that . . . individual learning [will] change the situation. and solve some of the main issues of the European works councils.

Similarly, a European Industry Federation officer had the following to say:

I must say I have a problem with this kind of training needs analysis approach, for this is a method which will give everyone the possibility to express himself or herself on his or her needs and they will sum their needs and . . . we’re going to have someone who will say ‘oh well, you know my English is not too bad but I’d like to be more fluent in English’, but maybe this is a personal priority but I think that personal priorities should in a way meet also collective priorities.

Giving delegates individual choice in TNA, while democratic, may lead to misconceptions in relation to the collective needs of any EWC. As a French coordinator of trade union representatives on EWCs put it in relation to the high number of responses in the European Trade Union College survey specifying a need for language training:

The key to the problem is not necessarily language . . . and we go round in circles currently because what really worries me . . . is that language seems to be the number one requirement when it should be the strategy of companies. This means that we don’t have a purpose, we do not make sure that we’re able to start with an analysis of reality, set ourselves objectives, and then from that point on figure out the training. I think that we are doing things the wrong way round

Second, there is the question of the ad hoc nature which training can take without a more focused TNA. As a German EWC co-ordinator put it:

We have a phrase in German: ‘Wer das Ziel nicht kennt, der findet den Weg nicht’ (‘if you don’t know what you are trying to achieve you won’t find the way’) . . . we have to identify our objectives and then this training is just a tool, that is not an end itself but a means to find the way,
the fastest way to achieve our objectives . . . if you ask [EWC delegates] what training they want you may have 20 different items and you . . . are still on the same level where you started.

Similarly, a European industry federation officer said:

I think we should . . . start from the precise objectives, what we want to achieve and then with the kind of training . . . we need. Because I think otherwise we’re just going to lose track of training and not have a dynamic approach . . . at the level of the European works council the workers’ representatives can decide on objectives they should achieve. And I think it’s on the basis of these objectives that we can organise the training. But I believe that we need a collective discussion. We need individual reactions. Everyone of us has to decide exactly what should be achieved through the works council but then we should discuss the objectives which should be met through the works councils.

If, from a trade union perspective, functional and/or problem-based training needs analysis lacks a collective, and — crucially — goal-related dimension, then the question arises concerning the extent to which such a tool should be developed. First, it must be noted that the application of functional analysis or issue/topic-based TNA does not preclude collective debate within an EWC to determine the precise nature and content of the training. Indeed, in Forumco the issue-based tool was used with a full EWC at a pre-meeting, analysed in conjunction with the select committee of the Forum and the analysis was then presented to the full EWC at the following pre-meeting (this particular EWC meets twice yearly). Delegates found the exercise very useful. Second, it can by no means be guaranteed that there will be a trade union presence (official or otherwise) at an EWC, and that, where such a presence exists, it is capable of presenting any coherent policy line. Apart from a strengthening of the consultative role of an EWC which has been requested in the revision of the Directive (Buschak, 1999: 387), the trade union movement is not clear what it wishes to achieve with them (ETUCO/AFETT, 1999). The lack of direction is to a certain degree understandable. From the very outset there has been ambiguity in the purpose of EWCs which derives from the political compromises struck during the passage of the Directive (Hall, 1992; Streeck, 1997a, 1997b; Wedderburn, 1997). Keeping the trade union at arm’s length from these institutions has provided a political duality (Weston and Martinez-Lucio, 1998: 555) – even for those organised EWCs – between what each EWC might want to achieve for the employees in that specific MNC and, what the multiplicity of trade unions may wish to achieve for their members in such an MNC. In addition, there is the critical question concerning what precisely in this context is meant by trade union – European Industry Federation, dominant national confederation(s) or union(s) in the HQ country, or the collective embryonic organisation of transnational lay trade union representatives brought together in such a forum?

Most certainly, as Hyman has argued, any ‘project aiming to create a new model of organic solidarity must recognise and respect differentiations of circumstances and interests’ (1997: 529). Consequently, the arrival at a ‘union line’ or perspective on the direction a particular EWC may take will require considerable ‘internal social dialogue’.

This is by no means to argue that organised EWCs are bereft of any purpose. Indeed, a number of perceived functions/objectives have emerged thus far, see Table 1 above and Table 6. Contained in these lists are, somewhat unsurprisingly, historical trade union objectives of building international worker organisation to resist plant closure and extend consultation into the realm of multinational collective bargaining. Yet these objectives may not only be frustrated by national legislation and the vested economic interests of some of the EWC delegates themselves, but may not enjoy the full support of the official European trade union organisations because of the fear of ‘company egotism’ and its distorting effect on sectoral bargaining in a national context (Marginson and Sisson, 1998: 522–3).
Table 6: Possible goals of an EWC

1. Get information from central management
2. Develop a two-way dialogue with management
3. Give information to central management about what is happening locally
4. Establish information and consultation as early as possible i.e. before decisions are made
5. Develop information and consultation as a continuous process
6. Improve international contacts
7. Repair gaps in national representation
8. Develop a database of terms and conditions within the MNC
9. Expose differences (e.g. gender) within an MNC
10. Exchange information and best practice
11. Spot misinformation from management
12. Develop early warning systems e.g. in the case of restructuring plans
13. Use the information in national/local consultation
14. Develop European company-wide collective bargaining
15. Prevent social dumping
16. Develop joint initiatives e.g. on vocational training
17. Develop joint alternatives to management decisions
18. Develop international workers’ representation to initiate common actions and/or harmonise terms and conditions

Source: After Stoop (1999)
Note: This list is an amended version of Stoop’s list following consultation with a group of EWC delegates.

Embedding TNA into EWC practice

What is clear is that EWCs are at the start of a learning process. The pattern of this learning process will depend, even before a trade union presence is entered into the equation, on the structure and strategy adopted by the management of the MNC and specifically, the extent of differentiation in business activity and level of integration in business organisation (Stoop, 1999). Most certainly it will be vital for any EWC to engage in a discussion about a set of realistic objectives, which are likely to relate to its own organisation and activity. Goal-based TNA (which does not preclude the subordination of individual to broader collective needs) is thus likely to be a unique and ongoing process for each body (Miller, 1999), the outcome of which may be crucially dependent on the particular composition of the EWC and its select committee. Significantly, none of the four approaches to TNA presented here are mutually exclusive. Table 7 does, however, show the relative strengths and weaknesses of each.

Given the ad hoc nature of EWC training, it is likely that problem-based identification of training needs will prevail, laying the process open to greater management involvement in the definition of the problem (Weston and Lucio, 1998: 556). Some agreements on training demonstrate a readiness on the part of employers to concede training clauses to meet their own agenda (Miller and Stirling, 1998: 39). Significantly, it is not possible to plan, organise, implement, and evaluate a problem-based curriculum (Engel, 1998: 23). This poses significant challenges for trainers working with individual EWCs. For practical purposes it is likely that effective and democratic training needs identification and analysis will be dependent on whether collectively the members of each EWC perceive a real need to be trained. This in turn will be contingent upon the extent to which an EWC has the capacity to bring about real change. This presupposes also that EWCs have sufficient control over the management of the training process – a factor which is by no means guaranteed by the EWC.
Table 7: Relative strengths and weaknesses of the four approaches to TNA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Individual needs met</th>
<th>Collective needs met</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional TNA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Focus is on competence. Collective needs may be met only indirectly. Individual needs may not be accurately assessed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-based TNA</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Objectives not overt. Conflation between training topics and organisational issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic-based TNA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Collective needs met only by group consensus on focus of the training. Objectives of the EWC not overt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-based TNA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Problem is achieving collective agreement as to the goals of the EWC?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Directive (Miller and Stirling, 1998) or its upcoming revision (Miller, 1999; Buschack, 1999).

Conclusion

Having clarified the peculiarity of training needs analysis in a worker representation context, this article posed three key questions at the outset. Do EWC representatives have a set of generic training needs in the area of skills, knowledge and values and attitudes? What methods of training needs identification are going to be appropriate in a multicultural and multilingual context? What prospects do transnational worker representatives have for embedding TNA into the practice of trade union activity and education?

We may conclude that a generic set of problems and training needs do exist for transnational representatives and training teams may indeed attempt to modify transferable training programmes (Lim and Wentling, 1998). However, because of the complexities of transnational representation, training cannot nor should not be laid down in the form of a core curriculum because of the unique nature of each EWC and the multiplicity of levels at which relevant training could be delivered. Second, a critical review of four approaches to TNA in the context of employee representation (as laid out in Table 7) reveals a tension between individual and collective needs. Hence a multifaceted approach is likely to be necessary to enable representative bodies to focus more fully on the collective and individual knowledge, skills and personal competences necessary to render themselves more effective in their task. Third, on the question of the practical realisation of TNA in EWC bodies, it can be said that this is an activity which is generally underdeveloped and appears to be subject to a measure of resistance from trade unions. This is particularly the case where the focus of TNA is much more the assessment of individual rather than collective learning needs. From a trade union perspective this is understandable but problematic, given the absence of a consensus on the goals of EWCs and the absence of a more focused strategy on training in the revision of the European Works Council Directive.
Appendix: abbreviations

EEA  European Economic Area  
EIF  European Industry Federation  
ETUC  European Trade Union Confederation  
ETUCO  European Trade Union College  
EU  European Union  
EWC  European Works Council  
MNC  multinational corporation  
TUC  Trades Union Congress  
TNA  training needs analysis

References


European Trade Union College (ETUCO) (1997b) Enquiry on Training Needs of Workers’ Representatives in European Works Councils (Brussels: ETUCO).


© Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 2001.  The case of European works councils 51