



Expanding and Improving Workplace Democracy as a  
Prerequisite for Humanising Labour and the Work Environment  
DIRECT II - VS/2020/0101



# GUIDELINES

# FOR GOOD PRACTICE OF DIRECT PARTICIPATION

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# Expanding and Improving Workplace Democracy as a Prerequisite for Humanising Labour and the Work Environment DIRECT II

# Introduction

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Research undertaken in six EU Member States during the Direct 2 Project shows that the implementation of Direct Participation (DP), in its many forms, can be of benefit to individuals, to organisations and to the wider society. These Guidelines draw on the good practices in the introduction of digital technologies through DP from the enterprises, big and small, that participated in the DIRECT 2 project.

The use of DP seeks to encourage better use of the full range of knowledge, skills and life experiences of the total workforce, at all levels, within an enterprise. It strives to achieve this through encouraging and valuing every group's input and by seeking their active involvement in the decision-making process. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist organisations who wish to

explore how a culture of DP can be successfully introduced into enterprises, in particular when planning for the introduction of new technologies, such as manufacturing automation, robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), information and communications technologies.

It is imperative that any decision to explore the implementation of DP must be made and agreed jointly by both workforce representatives and management. This is a fundamental requirement of the process and must be clearly understood and agreed by all concerned. Both trade unions leaders and management will, naturally, have concerns about entering into 'unchartered waters'. Some of the potential barriers that are likely to impede the introduction of DP and how these might be addressed are:

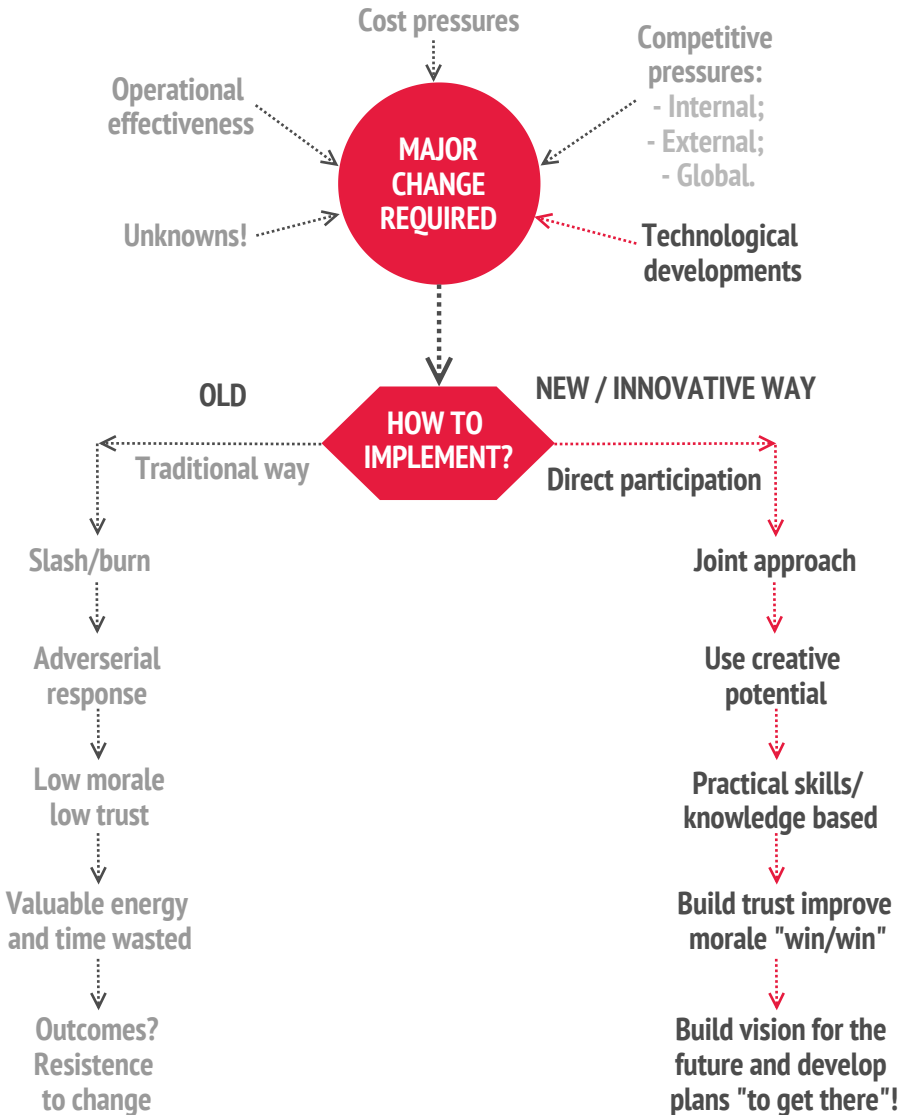
CHALLENGES	POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
A lack of real commitment to such a cultural change by one, or both, parties.	Commitment, support and encouragement for the process from all parties is essential – not just initially but on a continuous basis
Existing levels of trust may be low or non-existent	If this is the case, it will be very difficult to proceed. It will be absolutely necessary to build trusting relationships before attempting to introduce DP, so a joint understanding of the needs/requirements and expectations of both parties must be agreed in advance
The presence of unresolved legacy and historical employment relations issues	If not acknowledged, discussed and resolved, these can greatly influence and negatively impact on levels of potential engagement
In a multi-trade union situation, poor relationships between unions and, therefore, with company management	Such poor relationships need to be solved in advance of starting the DP process
A reluctance of any level of management to engage, in particular middle management who may feel they will be disproportionately impacted by the introduction of DP	Again, any reluctance or scepticism about DP needs to be addressed, so that it cannot be 'de-railed' at a later stage, thus setting back to whole process

A key part of the introduction of DP is a process of joint training sessions. Considerations regarding the number of potential participants, their experiences with previously

failed initiatives and the levels of previous educational attainment across the entire organisation need to be factored into any agreed implementation

plan. These factors will influence the design, volume, extent and schedule of any training required. There are two approaches that can be adopted by management

when the introduction of new technologies, resulting in changes to workplace arrangements, are planned, as set out in this diagram:



Getting buy-in from all players is important - it is preferable to work with volunteers rather than compelling employees to

participate. Having a nationally recognised qualification can be an incentive to get the participation of employees.

## Introduction

The time demands of providing training and the availability of supporting resources to implement DP must be taken into consideration. The costs of providing cover for employees attending training should not be

overlooked. Companies have, in the past, acknowledged that the actual cost of delivering training is the least of the costs incurred. It is also worth considering the 'lost opportunity' of the real cost of not introducing DP.

# Opportunities for Implement Direct Participation

Opportunities to introduce the concept of DP can arise from many different circumstances, such as:

**Competitive Pressure:** This pressure can come from external sources, such as a once competitive product or service that is losing existing market share because of cost and/or product competitiveness. This may be the trigger for an enterprise to seek cost reductions through such actions as waste

elimination, process improvements and/or workforce costs, such as redundancies or a reduction in incomes.

Pressure can also come from within a multi-site organisation, as sister plants in other locations or countries may be producing more-for-less, so there may be internal unit-cost issues to be addressed. Such internal multi-site competitiveness may well trigger internal pressures

to match and/or improve on the performance of sister plants.

Irrespective of whether the competitive pressure is internal or external, some form of cost reduction exercise seeking process improvements and/or waste reduction must be implemented for the survival of the site. Incremental improvements can best be effectively achieved by tapping into the knowledge, skills and experience of the entire workforce.

Introduction of a new plant and/or new technologies: When new plant and/or new technologies are been installed in a well-established production area, it makes good business sense to ensure that optimum returns on this investment are delivered. Design engineers/consultants who have very little understanding of the production or service process are often responsible for designing new work areas, so, very often the results can be:

- 1) That lighting considerations may not be fully understood
- 2) Access to and from machinery for raw materials and finished product or service is not adequate
- 3) Operator and maintenance access may be difficult.

These are just some of the difficulties that can be encountered

if the layout of a work area does not include inputs from operators, material handlers and maintenance technicians and others employed there. The most effective layout can only be designed when these inputs are sought and acted upon. DP allows for the valuable contributions of all involved to be included in determining the optimum area layout.

Production operators, material handlers and QC/Laboratory workers can make positive, constructive and practical contributions to the optimum design and layout of a production area to facilitate new plant, new technologies and new office layout.

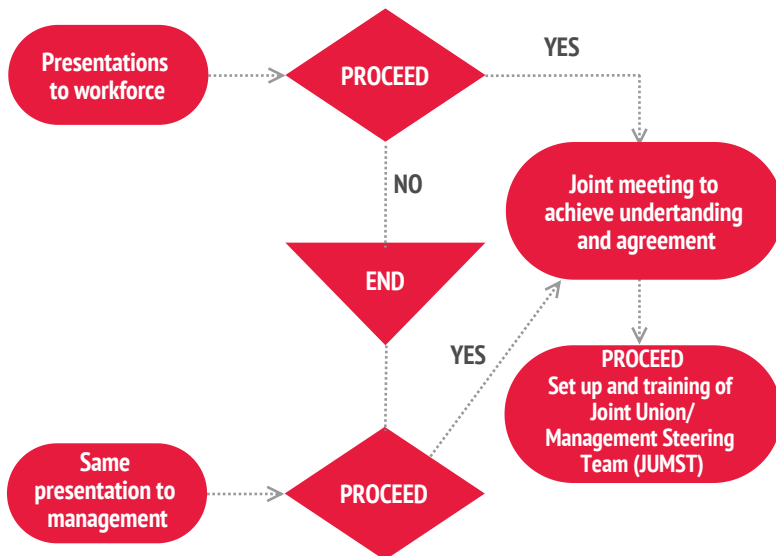
Visionary and Enlightened Leadership from both management and worker representatives can be the catalyst for the introduction of DP. Strong and committed leadership is required from both sides in order to ensure the 'buy-in' of middle and supervisory management and of the workforce. It is inevitable that old style/traditional managers and shop stewards will experience some difficulties when faced with the challenges brought about by DP. Hence the need for appropriate and supportive training that will highlight the potential benefits for all and thus will encourage new thinking and positive workplace attitudes.

# Implementation

As outlined above, the decision to proceed must be made/agreed jointly by both worker representatives and management. Both sides will have their own particular concerns about proceeding, so initial awareness

training is recommended to ensure that the entire process is fully understood and fully supported. The following flowchart outlines a general approach to be considered when introducing the concept of DP.

## FLOWCHART OUTLINING THE PROCESS FOR EXPLORING VIABILITY OF INTRODUCING DIRECT PARTICIPATION INTO AN ORGANISATION





A detailed and comprehensive presentation, explaining how the process works and what is involved for everybody in its implementation, should be designed and presented separately to workforce / unions leaders and to the senior management team. Delivering separate presentations is important because both sides will have different concerns and questions about the process. This format allows both sides to explore the concept of DP and express their concerns in a safe environment.

When both sides have heard the presentation and have had all their concerns addressed, they should then be allowed some time to consider the possibilities. This may require going back to their constituents to gauge support for the process. Further discussions may be required to fully clarify all the issues involved, to answer any outstanding concerns and to outline the potential outcomes / objectives. A major investment in time to fully acquaint all staff with the details of how DP will be implemented is worthwhile at this crucial initial stage.

# Possible Approach to the Introduction of Direct Participation

## Role of the Joint Union / Management Steering Committee (JUMST)

No Further Action: After the initial awareness-raising period, informed decisions can be made by both sides whether or not to proceed. If either party chooses not to proceed, the process is at an end.

However, some resulting benefits may indirectly accrue from this non-adversarial engagement. For example, industrial relations and trust levels may be improved, but effectively this attempt to introduce DP has ended.

Continue: If both parties do agree to proceed, then a joint meeting should be convened to agree the next actions. It is at this stage that the JUMST is selected and set up. This should be a small group (no more than 8 or 10 influential leaders from both sides) which will provide the governance, guidance and support to the implementation of the DP process. The members should be advocates for DP and be prepared to lead by example. Senior management must be represented on the JUMST and must actively support the process.

The JUMST should now work on the detailed implementation of DP and should be trained on how to work together in a new, positive and constructive way. This may be the first time a group such as this has ever sat down together in a non-adversarial setting.

Formal training for the JUMST members might include:

- Participating in a series of carefully selected team-building and trust-building exercises
- Agreeing a joint statement that realistically sets out the current situation within the organisation and the challenges and risks it is facing into the future
- Developing a joint vision of

where the organisation needs to be, such as the creation of an agreed ideal state to jointly strive for within an agreed timeframe

- Arriving at a preliminary understanding of what is required to close the gap between the current state and the agreed ideal state and agreeing on how to make the joint vision a reality
- Developing a joint presentation to be given to the whole workforce that clearly outlines the process, agreed by the JUMST, to proceed with the process and how this can be achieved by working together into the future
- Agreeing the formation and training of work-teams that can be tasked with identifying and resolving particular problems within their own area of work, such as waste reduction, improving or making the work-team workplace more efficient, improvements in ergonomics, the reduction of the work-related stress, the quality of work within the teams, work-life balance, etc. Work-teams must be empowered to deliver continuous improvements in their work area
- Developing and delivering a

- programme of training for all employees that will encourage them and, more importantly, empower them to actively participate in reaching the agreed joint vision for the enterprise.

#### Activities of the Joint Union-Management Steering Committee

When the JUMST is fully trained and operational, the following are suggestions for some of the activities it might engage in:

- Active and consistent promotion of and provision of support for the agreed joint vision
- Continuous engagement to assist individual workers and teams to complete continuous improvement projects. Teams might be formed in every workplace area and team members encouraged to use their knowledge to deal with waste and inefficiencies
- Agree the formation of teams and schedule the training schedule
- Foster and lead, drive and be advocates for the culture change across the enterprise
- Monitor and support the progress of teams by continually assessing and reviewing how they are developing as effective teams. It is important that work-teams are just not 'one-project wonders'! It is key to the success of DP that teams are continually engaged in problem solving
- Provide practical support to all the work-team as they strives to deliver continuous improvements in each work area
- Consider team 'self-selection' for new projects. For example, in the case of a particular problem that might require forming cross-team expertise to find a solution and solve the problem
- Agree how regularly teams might report back to the JUMST. This should be as frequent and as regular as possible. The JUMST must also be available to provide support and advise to teams that might be experiencing difficulties
- Agree how regularly teams might also report back to their peers and work colleagues. It is important that everyone is kept informed of how the DP process is progressing, so teams should have the opportunities to share their 'stories' with work colleagues and other teams and the JUMST might also consider how this reporting-back might be organised

- Consider when and if any new interventions are needed to re-energise the process. It is necessary from the JUMST to continually review progress and, when necessary, to take corrective action
- Consider how to ensure sustainability of the entire process and to consolidate the real gains made by the work teams
- Have continual and consistent engagement with the workforce to maintain their interest and commitment
- Continually review the training requirements of the teams and key leaders within the enterprise. This might, on occasions, mean specialised training programmes to continue to build on the strengths of the work teams and to expand their ability to deal with complex issues.

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