



**JOINT IRISH / UK SEMINAR  
WELLINGTON PARK HOTEL, BELFAST  
5 AND 6 MARCH 2018**

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**SEMINAR REPORT**

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The Development of Direct Employee Participation and its  
Impact on Industrial Relations at Company Level (DIRECT)  
(VS/2016/0305)



## **Background**

The DIRECT project partners from Ireland, the IDEAS Institute, and the UK, Royal Holloway University of London, agreed to hold their national seminars together to explore the similarities and differences to the diffusion of direct participation in the respective labour markets and employment relations systems. This joint national seminar was held in the Wellington Park Hotel, Belfast on 5 and 6 March, 2018. It was attended by twenty-one participants from both Ireland and Great Britain (GB).

### ***Close links between two industrial relations systems***

Because of the close historical ties between the British and Irish trade union movements, going back to the nineteenth century when they were united under one Trade Union Congress, the Irish system of industrial relations has evolved from the British voluntarist model, based on an adversarial problem-solving approach. Indeed, for many years after Ireland gained its independence in 1922, both systems of industrial relation and the scope of legal powers given to trade unions were governed by the same set of UK 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century statutes.

The legacy of the industrial and political upheavals in the first decades of the twentieth century are still, to some extent, reflected in the trade union structures today. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) represents trade unions in both parts of the island of Ireland, therefore, it operates under two different legal jurisdictions and two distinct political and economic entities. Indeed, ICTU is unusual in that it also has ‘foreign’ (UK) unions as affiliated members, operating both in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) and Northern Ireland (NI). Many of these unions and, indeed, unions registered in RoI, including SIPTU,<sup>1</sup> have members on both parts of the island. It is also important to note that NI has evolved its own structures and particular system of industrial relations.<sup>2</sup>

The approach of business and management to industrial relations has also been dominated by the substantial trade links between the island of Ireland and GB since long before Irish independence, links that are still strong today. With these close business ties and with many subsidiaries of UK companies operating in Ireland, the traditional adversarial model of employment relations, with the emphasis on collective bargaining, has been the dominant system. This system has been re-enforced in recent decades by the establishment of subsidiaries of US companies, in particular non-union electronic, software and social media companies, in Ireland.

In the past, information and consultation structures, including direct participation, have not been central to the Irish system of industrial relations. However, there has been some change in this since Ireland became a member of the EU in 1973, with the emergence of more consensual employment relations, influenced by a series of legal instruments agreed at the EU-level, but the precept of negotiating ‘in a spirit of co-operation’ found in all EU

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<sup>1</sup> **Science, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union**

<sup>2</sup> The trade union confederations from Ireland (ICTU) and the GB devolved regions (TUC; Scottish TUC; and Walsh TUC) meet regularly to exchange information and liaise on issues of mutual interest.



information and consultation Directives is not an integral part of Irish or GB industrial relations.

**Seminar opening** (Chaired by Sylvester Cronin, IDEAS Institute)

In this context, the seminar was opened by Owen Reidy, Assistant General Secretary, ICTU, with responsibility for the NI office. He said that the holding of this seminar on the topic of direct participation was timely considering the changes taking place in NI, which is the poorest region within the UK. A quarter of workers in NI have incomes below the UK living wage and there has been a 10% cut by the UK Government in subsidy to NI in the past 10 years, resulting in a lack of necessary investment. There are two key problems with the NI economy, first, productivity is very low in comparison to the level in the rest of the UK and, second, there is no industrial strategy – manufacturing is shrinking, indeed, 1300 jobs were lost during the month of February alone.

He referred to the trade union *Better Work, Better Lives* campaign which includes calls for better workplace social dialogue, including direct participation. He said that in the context of the major economic and employment challenges there is an urgent need to the social partners and the devolved administration to come together to develop an industrial strategy for NI.

In welcoming participants on behalf of the Royal Holloway University of London, Michael Gold referred to the low levels of unemployment in GB, in contrast to NI. However, he said that many of the new jobs that have emerged in recent years are of low quality and low remuneration.

**The European Commission funded DIRECT project – partners and results to date**



The definition used in this DIRECT project was that adopted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) in the 1990s. Kevin P O'Kelly, DIRECT project 'external expert', who was Eurofound Research Manager with joint-responsibility for the Employee direct Participation in Organisational Change (EPOC) project, outlined in his presentation:

- a. The background to the DIRECT project and the seven partner organisations
- b. The methodology and stages adopted for the study
- c. The work so far, including the reasons for holding this joint national seminar
- d. The EPOC definition and some findings from that Eurofound study which are relevant to the DIRECT project
- e. What each partner organisations has achieved to date
- f. The next steps to completing the project by end-2018.



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## ***SIPTU and Direct Participation***

Gerry McCormack, Deputy General Secretary, SIPTU, give a presentation on the background to social dialogue in RoI and the series of seven National Social Partnership Agreements from 1986 to 2008. These national agreements were negotiated every three years between the Government, trade unions, employer organisations, farming organisations and civil society NGOs. The agreements covered, not just workers' pay and working conditions, but also a range of national social policies, such as housing, health, education and training, infrastructural investment, etc. Unfortunately, at the start of the global financial and economic crisis the Government withdraw from the last of this very successful series of agreements, *Towards 2016*, in 2008.

One aspect of the later national agreements was the inclusion of a series of local social dialogue agreements, that lead into the development of workplace innovation and were evolved further into enterprise-level direct participation arrangements. This development was also in the context of a range of employee involvement legislation at the EU level, such as the Directive on workplace information and consultation, European Works Councils (EWCs) and employee board level representatives in European Companies (SEs) (referred to in RoI as worker directors). With regard to EWCs, Mr McCormack noted that SIPTU found these useful for getting advanced information of transnational company policies and proposed changes and as an early-warning system.

He also outlined the impact of the economic crisis on SIPTU. The union lost 40,000 member during the financial and economic crisis. During the decade of recession its focus was on preserving the jobs of its remaining members. It is estimated that every job lost in the economy cost the State €20,000, so the preservation of employment was prioritised.

Consequently, SIPTU adopted a policy of not initiating disputes but of working with companies in trouble to assist them protect employment through the introduction of joint workplace innovation arrangements. The objective was to make Irish companies more competitive and to preserve Irish jobs. However, for this to be successful all parties had to 'buy-into' the process – i.e. senior and middle management, the workforce, the trade unions, etc. The IDEAS Institute is a key player in this strategy by providing training for all levels within participating companies.

Mr McCormack finished by highlighting the challenge of 'sustainability', i.e. keeping the workplace innovation process going! He said that Kirchhoff Automotive is an excellent example of a continuous application of workplace innovation throughout its operations.



### ***DIRECT project – experiences with direct participation in the UK***

In their joint presentation, Michael Gold and Chris Rees, Royal Holloway University of London, described the two case studies they are undertaking as part of the DIRECT project, in a) Toyota Motor Manufacturing UK, based in Derby, i.e. the *Toyota Way*; and b) Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, i.e. the *Leeds Way*. The presentation compared the application and experiences of both approaches to direct participation.



**Toyota Motor Manufacturing UK** employs 2,500 (known as ‘members’) in its Derby plant and another 500 at the engine manufacturing facility in Deeside, North Wales. Ninety per cent of the combined workforces are employed in production and the rest (10%) in administrative and support roles. There is one trade union, UNITE, and 55%

of employees are members. The workforces in both sites are represented through the twelve member (plus UNITE convenor) Toyota Members’ Advisory Board (TMAB). Issues, such as: information and consultation arrangements, pay round negotiations, health and safety and dispute resolution can all be included on the TMAB agenda.

Internal communications is considered as ‘king’ and is undertaken in four ways:

- Roadshows by directors
- Briefing meetings for each shift
- ‘Cascade’ briefings – 10/10: 10 minutes at 10 am and 10 pm each day
- Videos and notice boards.

Both plants are run along classic Japanese management systems – Kaizen (continuous improvements, including on health and safety issues); quality circles (meetings of work-teams), just-in-time inventories, etc. Refining the production process is ‘employee-led’, not ‘engineering-led’ and, as part of their employment contracts, every employee is required to recommend two improvements every month.

An important part of the Japanese workplace philosophy is that *Kaizen won’t work if it threatens jobs!*, so there is a guarantee of ‘no redundancies’. Consequently, the *Toyota Way* has resulted in long-term stable employment – there is very little turnover in the two plants and many of the staff (in particular managers) have been with Toyota since the plant was set up in 1992. However, as a type of recruitment filter, 10% of employees are recruited through an employment agency. If they perform satisfactorily then they can become permanent



Toyota employees. Under this approach, 20% of agency workers are not retained, while there is just a 2% turnover of permanent employees.

One key area of employee/management conflict highlighted in the case study is around another aspect of the employment contract – workers may be required to work overtime at the end of each shift with only one or two hours' notice, if instructed to do so. This results in shift workers never knowing when they will finish, or get home, which impacts on their family and social lives! However, notwithstanding this contentious issue, the case study found that there was a high level of mutual respect between the workforce and the management.

The second case study looked at **Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust**, which introduced a *Toyota Way* system hospital staff. This provided the research opportunity to explore if a Japanese form of management can be successfully transferred to a very different type of organisation and sector – a service based, public sector, structure.

The Leeds Teaching Hospital Trust has approximately 17,000 employees and was subjected to big budget cuts in the past ten years and, as a result, faced serious challenges to its patient care and services. To overcome the resulting problems, in 2013 the CEO decided, with financial support from the NHS, to initiate a bottom-up process of including all employees in identifying the hospital's 'values'. This new approach included:

- With between 50 and 100 new employees joining the workforce every week, the CEO undertook to induct all new employees into these 'values'
- The introduction of townhall type meetings
- A form of *Kaizen* adopted to the needs of the Trust
- Rapid improvement weeks
- Safety meetings
- Recognising staff for 'good ideas', with a focus on reducing waste and not on cost-cutting.

There are fourteen employee representative organisations and trade unions for the 17,000 employees and these organisations were also fully involved in the process of change and the introduction of the *Leeds Way* from the start through the Staff Council. The process was a lot more flexible than the more rigid Toyota approach, with all staff involved in improvement and with regular 'Rapid improvement weeks' to identify areas where better services to patients could be delivered.

A series of staff surveys between 2012 and 2017 to assess how the *Leeds Way* was working, showed significant progress. In particular, there was a reduction in outsourcing of services to 2.4% of payroll costs – for example, in catering, cleaning services, security and estate facilities are all now provided 'in-house'.

#### **Case study comparisons:**

The Toyota Way  
Greenfield site

The Leeds Way  
Brownfield site

Assembly-line production process

Complex range of services and staff  
Qualifications



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Continuity of management	Dependent of senior staff (project 'champions') remaining in place – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What happens if 'champions' move on? Would priorities change?</li> </ul>
4 Control of recruitment process	Complex recruitment arrangements – levels and occupations
5 Low turnover of staff	Fluid workforce – employment opportunities within NHS across UK
6 Roll of local labour market – Toyota is a major employer in Derby	

Finally, it is noted by the RHUL colleagues that *hospitals are far more complex than car plants!*

### ***DIRECT project – Workplace innovation in Ireland***

Following on from the presentation by Gerry McCormack, SIPTU, Tony Murphy, outlined the IDEAS Institute approach to introducing workplace innovation.

The IDEAS Institute is the research and training wing of SIPTU and its training courses are all accredited and meet European qualification standard. Its purpose is to facilitate change in enterprises through *genuine* employee involvement.

The work of the Institute with Irish enterprises follows on from a commitment in the National Social Partnership Agreement, *Towards 2016*,<sup>3</sup> to set up a High Level Group to develop a strategy for the manufacturing sector. In the Group's reported in 2008 it is noted that

*Successful firms will engage in developing a participative culture, where management and staff work collectively to ensure the success and longer term sustainability of the firm to the benefit of all.*<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, in November 2011, a Joint Policy Initiative to implement workplace innovation in the SIPTU Manufacturing Division was adopted at a Strategic Manufacturing Conference. To implement this strategy all stakeholders, including the relevant Irish State agencies would be involved and the key policy objective was to save jobs -

*... we must change, develop and improve, if we are to ensure survival and growth into the future ...*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Towards 2016: Ten-year Framework Social Partnership Agreement* Dept of An Taoiseach, 2006, page 20

<sup>4</sup> [http://edepositireland.ie/bitstream/handle/2262/76799/forfas080402\\_manufacturing\\_report.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://edepositireland.ie/bitstream/handle/2262/76799/forfas080402_manufacturing_report.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>5</sup> *Applied Benchmarking for Competitiveness – A guide for SME owner/managers* R Keegan and E O'Kelly, Oaktree Press, Cork (2004)



He noted that change is difficult (*pretty scary stuff!*), so workplace innovation is a challenge to all players within a company. All those involved need to understand and 'buy-into' why workplace innovation is being introduced and why change is necessary. At the outset, there is a need to 'win hearts and minds'!

When it is decided to introduce change within a workplace it can be done by:

- Rational discussion – this rarely works
- Power (most common approach) – generate opposition
- 'Hearts and minds' – preferred option but requires real leadership.

Interventions by the IDEAS Institute use a combination of the positive elements of all three approaches by adopting a joint trade union/management approach and it is organised as follows:

- A joint steering committee is set up to oversee the process
- Joint team training to develop the 'vision for the future'
- A joint steering group is responsible for monitoring progress and providing support.

This 'winning' philosophy:

*Builds TRUST and UNLOCKS the CREATIVE POTENTIAL within the ENTIRE WORKFORCE!*

The IDEAS Institute training approach is set out in Figure 1 below.

In academic literature seven areas of waste in production have been suggested -

Transport  
Inventory  
**Motion**  
**Waiting**  
Over production  
Over processing  
Defects

The IDEAS Institute adds an eighth to this list, which it argues is the greatest waste of all – **Skills**

and its focus is on tackling the waste of SKILLS in the companies it works with.

The IDEAS Institute is working with fourteen enterprises at present, and these very often result from local SIPTU officials alerting the Institute to problems in a company.



## Case Study - Kirchhoff Automotive



This case study was presented by John Roulstone Production Manager in the Letterkenny, Co Donegal, site, which is one of the companies thirty plants in eleven countries, employing 10,000 worldwide. The company makes components for the automotive sector and has a turnover of €1.6 billion per annum. The Letterkenny plant is a very small part of this global multinational, employing just 57 workers with a turnover of €10 million.

With regard to workplace innovation, in 2009, as part of a company/union agreement and a series of pay agreements, a Kirchhoff Ireland Steering Committee (KISC) was set up. This led to a number of internal developments designed to change the work culture – the

agreed *vision* was to still be operating in Letterkenny in 2015! The IDEAS Institute undertook a data collection operation and evaluation and developed an appropriate training programme for the workforce, in conjunction with Letterkenny Institute of Technology. The IDEAS Institute has remained involved in the evolution of workplace innovation in Kirchhoff Ireland since 2010.

In 2011 a group-wide ‘lean production’ system was introduced, following an assessment by external consultants. While it might have worked in other company plants, this mix of Japanese type working methods and German consultants didn’t go down well in Donegal, so this ‘lean-production’ experiment was dropped. However, in 2012 the first steps to the development of team working, which, in turn resulted in the first *managerless* department and an autonomous working culture within the plant (in 2015).

In 2017 a number of innovations to move towards ‘autonomous working’ were introduced, such as:

- Shop-floor management meetings
- Monthly workforce performance communications
- Regular team development meetings
- Cross-functional improvement workshops.

An example of how this consultative approach works is in the Tool Shop, where all work is delegated to the seven staff members. There hasn’t been a manager in this area of the plant since 2016 and the tool-makers jointly make all the production decisions and sign-off



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on the finished stamping dies. Management, including the Production Manager (John Roulstone), now only hear about this part of the production process if there is a problem.

The next steps in moving fully towards workplace innovation are:

- Removal of team-leaders/departmental management and the further introduction of team-working – to survive the plant has to move to a self-management model
- The introduction of ‘departmental champions’
- Continual up-skilling – EDP programme
- Develop online IT systems
- Continually re-assessing and optimising the internal communication systems.

For workplace innovations to be a success, communications is the key!

### ***Direct participation in UK enterprises – The role of the IPA***



Patrick Bri ne, Head of Policy and Research, Involvement and Participation Association (IPA), UK, outlined the work of the association on promoting employee involvement since its foundation in 1884. He distinguished between various aspects of employee involvement and, in particular, direct participation, which is at the task level, and representative participation, which is at the strategic level.

A key to the success of all employee participation is ‘information’ right through the organisation and a two-way communications strategy. He gave some examples of where this approach has been successful – e.g. Lewisham Council, London, and the Leeds

Teaching Hospital Trust, already referred to in the RHUL presentation.

He referred to the impact of social media on workplace communications, where e-mails are now used as a key form of management communicating with the workforce – the WERS survey in 2011 had already found the 49% of workplace communications was by e-mail.<sup>6</sup> This use of technology undermines trust in management within the workforce.

This presentation also presented three case studies that demonstrated how things can go badly wrong when employee involvement arrangements are undermined. These show that

<sup>6</sup> 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/336651/bis-14-1008-WERS-first-findings-report-fourth-edition-july-2014.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336651/bis-14-1008-WERS-first-findings-report-fourth-edition-july-2014.pdf)



direct participation is necessary, but it is not sufficient and is just one aspect of the employment involvement mix.

### **Workplace Innovation**



The final presentation of this joint seminar was by Peter Totterdill, UK Work Organisation Network and Director of Workplace Innovation Ltd. He is also co-leader of the European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN), established by the European Commission <sup>1</sup> and joint author of the EUWIN guide to workplace innovation.<sup>1</sup>

He said that the seminar was very timely as workplace innovation is currently a topical subject, addressing national and EU policy priorities, including productivity, skills utilisation and development, product and service innovation and improving mental health in the workplace. Research findings

published over a period of some seventy years demonstrate convincingly that the introduction of empowering workplace practices, including direct participation, leads to significant gains in productivity (between 20% and 60% in some studies) and other performance indicators, including employee engagement, health and well-being.

However, the question remains – *if it is so effective, why isn't everyone doing it?* Survey evidence appears to show that only 15% of companies operating within the EU are estimated to use workplace innovation practices systematically throughout the organisation. Of the fifteen 'old' EU Member States, 17% (approximately) of both Irish and British workers are employed in 'learning jobs'. <sup>7</sup> The Member States with the highest percentage are Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden.

The major obstacle to the introduction of workplace innovation is the reluctance of management to relinquish control within the enterprise or to admit that it would improve productivity and output. One production manager in a UK engineering company was quoted:

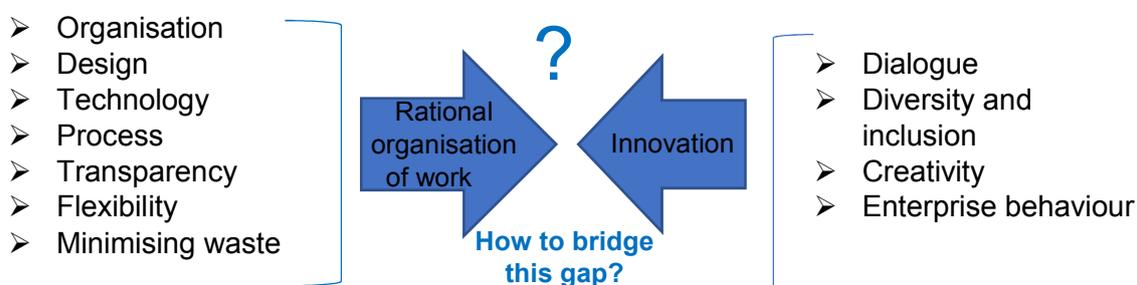
*If there was a better way of doing things, don't you think I'd have thought of it already?*

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<sup>7</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> European Working Conditions Survey, 2015 European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), Dublin (2015)



Industry 4.0 and the challenges of digitisation add further urgency to the question. There is a powerful technological narrative around the potential of automation to remove repetitive work and enhance the rational organisation of work, but this sits uneasily with new ways of unleashing human potential through open innovation and employee-driven innovation based on dialogue, reflection and inclusion:



To bridge this gap between technology and workforce potential. European workplaces need to create a culture of innovation based on synergies between: ‘voice’ at the strategic level, regular opportunities for productive reflection, creative thinking and continuous improvements; re-structuring of the organisation as a whole to reduce hierarchy and remove silos; self-management teams and individual job discretion. This approach an essential part of the *Essential Fifth Element*:

*... an integrated approach to workplace innovation, creating high performance, engagement and great places to work. It builds workplaces where people at all levels can use their knowledge, talent and creativity to the full.*<sup>8</sup>

Prof Totterdill conceded that a systematic approach to workplace innovation can be complex and difficult to achieve. However, he outlined a number of organisations that have introduced innovative workplace practices:<sup>9</sup>

- Southern Health and Social Care Trust, Northern Ireland, introduced multi-disciplinary teamworking in its maternity services
- Work teams in the UK Met Office were ... inspired by external influence, a small core of innovators began a process of ‘guerrilla’ tactics exploiting the organisation’s grown up attitude towards managerial responsibility and decision-making to drive the process forward, firstly by visiting other businesses including Google and Innocent and learning from the experiences they found there... the drivers of innovation weren’t thinking about the opportunities it represents but the problems it could solve
- In Red Gate Software ‘Down Tool Weeks’ enabled staff to step back from the day job to develop their own ideas for new products and ways of working

<sup>8</sup> See:

<http://www.goodworkplaces.net/Default.aspx?PageID=13734666&A=SearchResult&SearchID=1043885&ObjectID=13734666&ObjectType=1>

<sup>9</sup> These examples and more can be seen on <http://freshthinkinglabs.com>



- In the Devon and Cornwall Police Force – an innovative forum representing a broad cross-section of staff generated great ideas for improving the service at a time of financial stringency. Electric bicycles, for example, are a great way of improving visibility while ensuring that officers can cover enough territory in remote rural areas
- British Geological Survey – ‘flattened’ management structures and broke down ‘walls and ceilings’ in order to enable greater cross-functional working and flexibility
- Bombardier – the CEO championed shared leadership, empowering jobs and teams, changing line management culture, incentivising improvements and innovation and listening to employee ‘voice’
- In Innocent Smoothies innovation is an everyday behaviour with employees actively encouraged to suggest ways to improve the business, whether it be new products and business streams or better ways of working
- General Electric – ‘rank and yank’ performance reviews were ended under pressure from its millennial employees and replaced by a combination of caching conversations, apps and enhanced opportunities for personal development
- Bristan, a bathroom accessories manufacturer, introduced elements of workplace innovation, such as: self-organised teams, learning and development, continuous improvement, representative participation, empowering leadership, a trust-based culture.

Since the beginning of 2016 Workplace Organisation Europe has also been working with Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and the Highlands & Islands Enterprise, to promote and resource workplace innovation in a diverse range of Scottish companies.<sup>10</sup> An example of a company in the Scottish Enterprise Workplace Innovation Engagement Programme is DS Smith, a global packaging company with 27,000 employees in 37 countries. Its Lockerbie site employs over 200 and, in 2016, it used a number of Workplace Innovation’s Diagnostic tools that focussed attention on the core issue of poor communication and a lack of feedback within the site. The aim was to improve communications about the quality of operational processes between different production groups and to get the staff on the factory floor involved in decision-making for the business. Since going through the process, an internal survey has showed the engagement score increased from 20% to 88% and the application of WI’s diagnostic tool was the catalyst in making this happen.

### ***Debate and conclusions***

- 1 The definition: there were some comments on the definition adopted for the DIRECT project, which is based on the definition used by the Eurofound EPOC project, and there was some discussion on whether individual consultation processes were, in fact, direct participation as these would be considered normal worker/supervisor engagement.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of this work can be found at [www.workplaceinnovationscotland.net](http://www.workplaceinnovationscotland.net)



- 2 Generational shift in management practices: on the basis that direct participation and workplace innovation are ideas that are topical and their 'time has come', it was discussed as to whether there is a greater interest and application of these management methods among younger managers, in contrast to an older, hierarchical oriented, management cohort?
  
- 3 The role of education: there was some debate on the role of business schools and third-level education in exposing students to this involvement approach to management. The participants involved in such education agreed that innovative management techniques are taught, but it is very often a challenge to break-down well established cultures within enterprises. Consequently, the top management, CEO, etc. are key to introducing change and ensuring it is successful.

Kevin P O'Kelly  
23 March 2018

