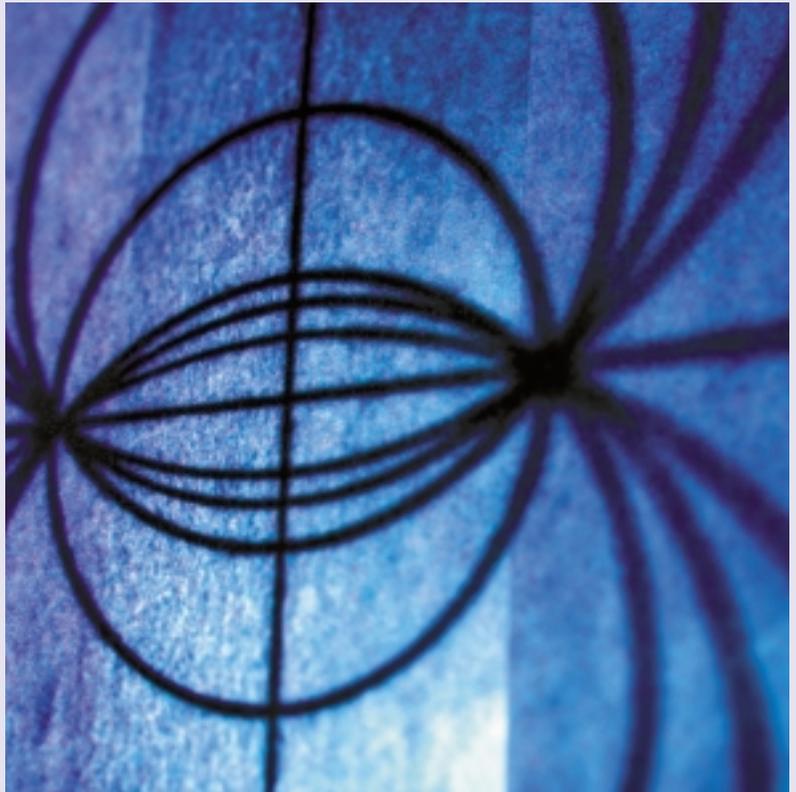




European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Quality of work and employment in Europe Issues and challenges



Foundation paper



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Foreword

The aim behind the Foundation papers is to highlight knowledge and analysis from Foundation research over many years in the areas of employment, equal opportunities, social inclusion, time use and diversity. The objective of the papers is to make past, present and future work of the Foundation relevant and accessible in a concise format. The subject of each paper will be linked to current social policy issues and provides therefore a timely contribution to the debate at European level.

Employment, and in particular quality of work and employment, is the focus of this paper. It covers four aspects identified by the European Foundation as key dimensions of quality of work and employment: career and employment security; health and well-being; skills development; and the reconciliation of working and non-working life.

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Director

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Introduction

Quality of work and employment has within a short time become a major subject of discussion, one which has been at the top of the European political agenda since the Lisbon, Nice and Stockholm summits. The reduction in unemployment has certainly played a role in this, creating tensions in some labour markets and occupations. Previously, during periods of low employment rates, the emphasis was on job creation. Quantity took precedence over the quality – the nature and content – of the jobs created.

Yet it is clear that, in the present context of tougher worldwide competition, Europe needs to focus on the quality of the jobs it offers, to give itself an edge over its competitors. And the recent European Summit in Laeken called attention to the close links between quality of work and productivity.

One of the challenges in the European debate is to arrive at a definition of what constitutes job and employment quality. The next task will be to select the indicators required for measuring progress in this area.

The Foundation has been making a contribution to these issues since the early 1990s. It did so first by initiating surveys on working conditions (1990, 1995, 2000), the purpose of which was to provide an inventory of working conditions in Europe and to enable changes and trends affecting work to be measured. Subsequently, it embarked on a more global analysis of job quality indicators, which resulted in 2001 in the creation, at the request of the Belgian Government, of a working group which was responsible for a report on quality of work and employment indicators and also undertook the organisation of a Presidency conference, 'For a better quality of work' (20-21 September 2001).

The European Commission presented a Communication on employment quality in June 2001, 'Employment and social policies: a framework for investing in quality'. In December 2001 the European Summit at Laeken adopted a first list of key indicators and contextual indicators, which will be included in the Employment Guidelines from 2002 and used for the

drafting of the national action plans. The Council indicated that this was a first step leading possibly to the adoption of additional indicators. It also stressed that the process was both evolutive and flexible. The Foundation, although not directly involved in the political arena, considers it appropriate to make a contribution to the debate.

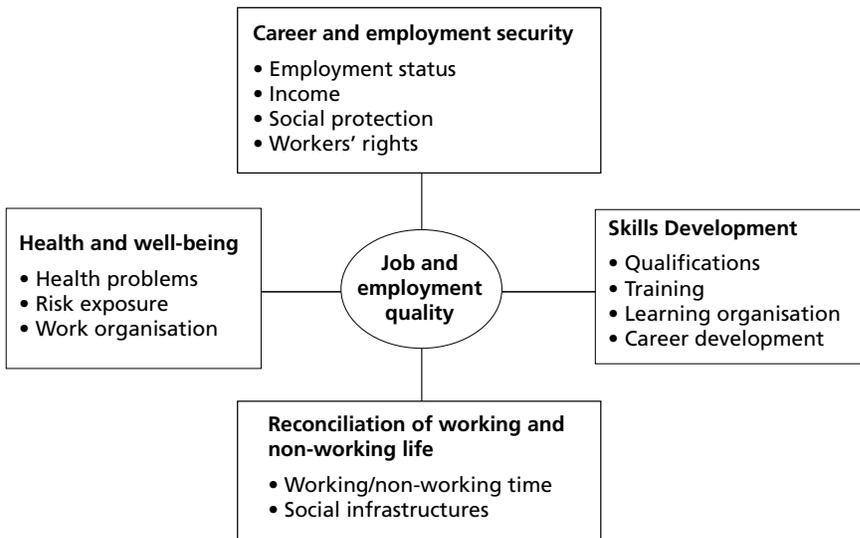
Taking as a starting point the Foundation's work over the past ten years (documented in the references throughout the paper), the purpose of this paper is to set forth and discuss the issues and challenges arising from the changing nature of work in Europe.

Quality of work and employment

The European Summit meeting in Stockholm in March 2001 adopted a list of eight criteria which are essential to the quality of work and employment, criteria that are discussed in detail in the Commission Communication of June 2001. The Foundation set up a working group, which proposed an analytical framework based on these quality criteria (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2001a and 2001b).

The promotion of quality of work and employment means:

- ensuring career and employment security;
- maintaining and promoting the health and well-being of workers;
- developing skills and competences;
- reconciling working and non-working life.



In the light of these four objectives, this paper sets out to assess the current situation in Europe and to highlight a number of avenues for further debate.

Context

In order to obtain a better understanding of current changes and the problems arising, various elements of the context need to be taken into account (Paoli, 1991 and 1996, and Merllié & Paoli, 2001).

The structure of employment

This has changed and is continuing to do so. There is an ongoing shift away from jobs in agriculture and industry towards jobs in the services sector.

The profile of the working population

The main features of change in the working population are the ageing of the workforce and an increased proportion of women in the labour market.

The nature of work

Two phenomena have greatly influenced job and employment quality. First, companies, and the work they do, have become more open to the outside world (more direct contacts with customers), which has resulted in a greater emphasis on market, rather than industrial, constraints. Second, the use of information technology is growing, although there are great differences from one country to another (the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries and the United Kingdom are leading the field).

The labour market

The growth in temporary work resulting from the greater incidence of fixed-term contracts and temporary agency work has been a feature of the 1980s and 1990s. Contrary to general opinion, salaried employment is not only still the norm (82%) but also accounts for an increasing share of the total compared to self-employment, contradicting the notion that salaried employment has had its day.

Enlargement of the European Union

This is an aspect that has yet to exert an influence but cannot be disregarded. The first survey conducted in 2001 by the Foundation in twelve candidate countries highlighted a number of significant differences between these countries and the EU Member States (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, to be published). These differences are partly due to structural variations: for example, the candidate countries have a higher proportion of workers in agriculture and a lower proportion in services compared with the EU. They also result from

a work organisation that is more industry- than market-driven, i.e. there is a weaker interface between work and client, more hierarchical distribution of responsibilities and less worker autonomy. These features can lead to more acute work-related health problems and lower job satisfaction.

Overview of Foundation research

Ensuring career and employment security

There are four main aspects to be taken into account here:

- the terms of employment and the dual labour market, with the repercussions on the quality of work and employment;
- workers' rights, particularly with regard to information/consultation/participation and equal opportunities;
- earned income;
- social protection, and in particular the mechanisms for covering workers that facilitate better career paths throughout working life.

Employment status

The increase in temporary work – salaried employment under fixed-term contracts (FTCs) and temporary agency contracts – is an established feature of the labour market, although cyclical fluctuations may occur. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) from Eurostat highlights this phenomenon. Between 1994 and 2000, the proportion of employees under fixed-term contracts increased from 8.9% to 15.1%. Eurostat makes no distinction between fixed-term and temporary agency contracts.

The work of the Foundation (Letourneux, 1997, Platt, 1997, Benach & Benavides, 1999, Goudswaard et al, 2002, and Benach, to be published), confirmed by numerous, more qualitative studies, highlights a strong correlation between these forms of employment and poor working conditions, as well as poorer health in general. People working in these jobs can be seen to be over-exposed to all risk factors (see Figures 1 and 2).

It is important to note that effects resulting from structural variables such as age and occupation partly explain this situation: employees on fixed-term contracts and temporary employees are more likely to be allocated those jobs where exposure to health risks is higher. All other things being equal, however, it can be said that in these jobs the worker's precarious status is an aggravating factor.

Figure 1 Status and working conditions: physical risks

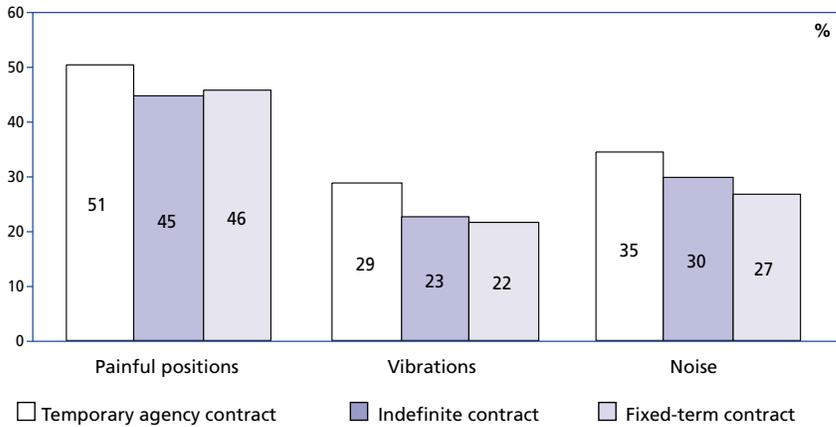
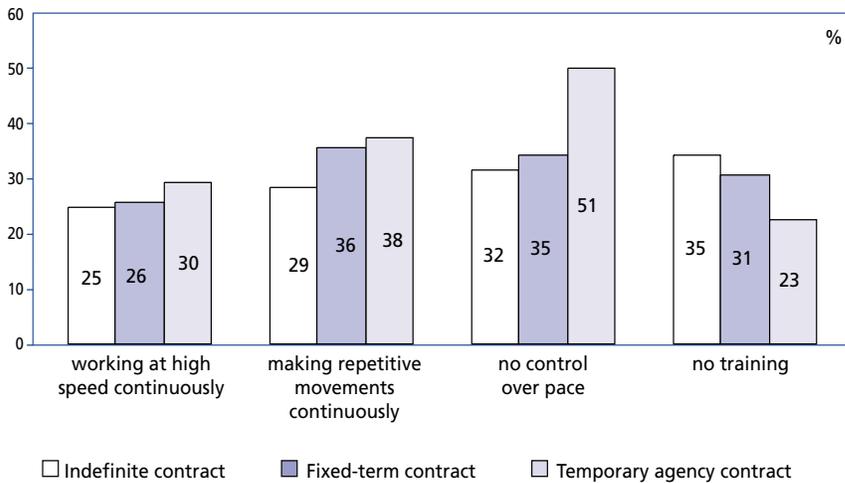


Figure 2 Status and working conditions: work intensity



This is an important consideration and suggests that an improvement in legal provisions is probably necessary and this should be combined with a general action plan to improve working conditions in these jobs.

A second aspect that is frequently discussed relates to individual career paths and whether these forms of employment are a stepping-stone to permanent jobs. A Foundation study on temporary agency work in Europe (Storrie, 2002) highlights the unfortunate lack of any reliable information in the Member States on this subject and the figures put forward by the temporary agencies are difficult to verify.

The third aspect relates to responsibility. If it is accepted that a significant element of job creation takes place in these forms of employment (and the Foundation's work suggests that only slightly more than half of recent jobs – held for more than a year – are permanent jobs), the question is: who is taking responsibility for the health of these workers and their training?

Workers' rights

There are two aspects to be considered here. The first relates to equal opportunities between men and women. There is still a great deal of segregation in the workforce, both horizontal, with men and women not occupying the same type of jobs (see Figure 3), and vertical, where they are in the same occupations, but with men more often in the senior positions (see Figure 4). This segregation is also reflected in income distribution (see Table 1), with a higher proportion of women among the lower paid, even after the figures have been adjusted for working time differences (Merllié & Paoli, 2001).

Figure 3 Men and Women in the same labour market

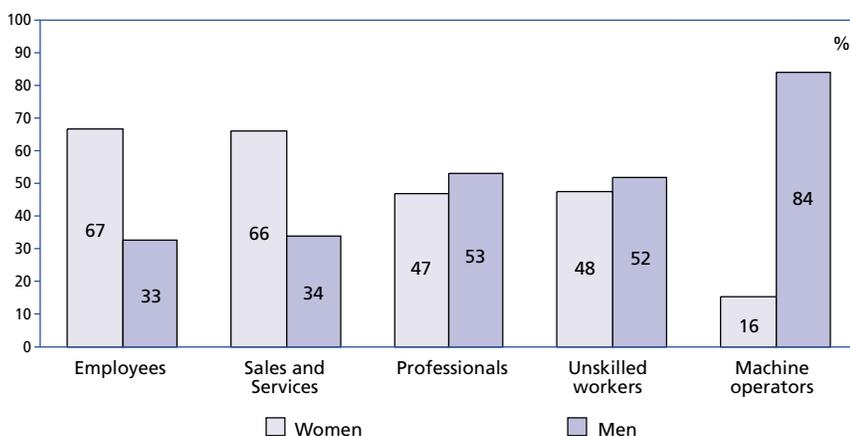
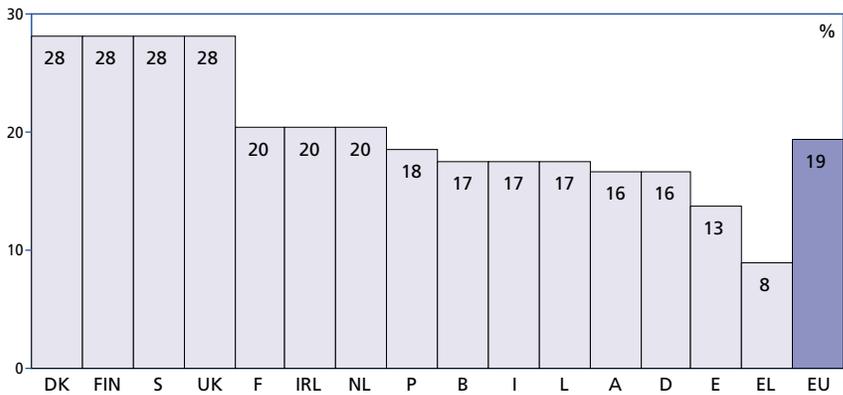


Table 1 Income levels classified by gender (%)

Income level	Women	Men	Total
Low	26	9	16
Low-medium	24	19	21
Medium-high	17	22	20
High	10	22	17
No answer	23	29	26

Figure 4 Workers for whom the immediate superior is a woman (by country)



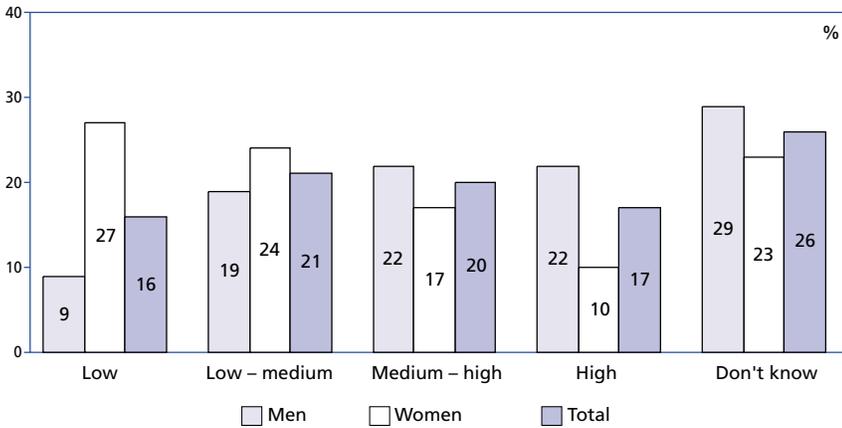
The second aspect relates to information and consultation. Information on occupational risks has improved: in 2000, 86% of workers felt they were well informed, compared to 81% in 1995. Involvement in organisational change, where 71% of workers say they are included in discussions when changes take place, reveals important differences between countries (much more developed in the Netherlands and in northern Europe) and among certain categories (much less developed among non-permanent workers) (Merllié & Paoli, 2001).

Income

The data on incomes (Letourneux, 1997 and Platt, 1997) highlight the following trends:

- 16% of workers fall into the low-income bracket, and this corresponds to figures from other sources such as Eurostat;
- significant income gaps between men and women, in part reflecting job distribution (see Figure 5);
- a correlation between low wages and precarious status. About 17% of employees are in the low-wage category, of which one third are principal breadwinners, as compared with 13% of those on open-ended contracts, 30% on fixed-term contracts and 40% of temporary workers. On the other hand, 53% of those on fixed-term and 49% of temporary contracts are the principal breadwinners. This suggests that the various dimensions of precariousness (legal and economic) are cumulative.

Figure 5 Income scales by gender



Social protection

The labour market in most Member States became increasingly flexible during the 1990s, at a time of low employment rates, when job creation was a priority, and in the context of globalisation, where it was important (and still is) to adapt swiftly to the market. Since the Lisbon Summit in March 2000, the focus has shifted to the need to reconcile job flexibility with job security, i.e. the ‘flexicurity’ concept. Flexibility represents a challenge to social protection. First there is the challenge of insuring citizens throughout their working lives, and then the challenge of increased flexibility that can be triggered by social protection systems, for example, through activation measures linked to minimum income policies, which can lead to increased precariousness.

A Foundation study (Goudswaard & de Nanteuil, 2000) shows that flexibility, which has an influence on both working conditions and employment conditions, comes in many forms – internal and external, quantitative and qualitative (see Table 2) – and that these, far from being mutually exclusive, tend to reinforce each other. Social protection is therefore no longer associated with one particular form of flexibility, but rather with a series of different types of flexibility, linked to the interruption of professional life brought about by periods of training, unemployment or domestic work or following periods of part-time or full-time working, and in other cases by a combination of flexibilities, such as part-time working plus fixed-term contract plus teleworking in the same contract.

Table 2 Different forms of flexibility

	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
EXTERNAL	<p>Employment status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • permanent contract • fixed-term contract • temporary agency contract • seasonal work • ad hoc working <p><i>numerical and/or contractual flexibility</i></p>	<p>Production system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • subcontracting • outsourcing • self-employed work <p><i>productive and/or geographical flexibility</i></p>
INTERNAL	<p>Working hours and pay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction/adjustment of working hours • part-time work • overtime/additional hours • shift work • night/weekend working • irregular/unpredictable hours • changes in pay (individualisation, variable fraction, etc.) <p><i>time and/or financial flexibility</i></p>	<p>Work organisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘job enrichment’ • teamwork/semi-autonomous teams • multitasking/multiskilled • delegation of responsibilities • project groups <p><i>functional and/or organisational flexibility</i></p>

Promoting health and well-being

Under consideration here is health in the broad sense, encompassing physical and mental health and, as stated in the ILO definition, ‘the promotion and maintenance at the highest degree of the physical, mental and social well-being of workers’. In addition, the ‘sustainable’ aspect of work has to be taken into account, i.e. the possibility of being able to remain attached to the labour market throughout one’s working life.

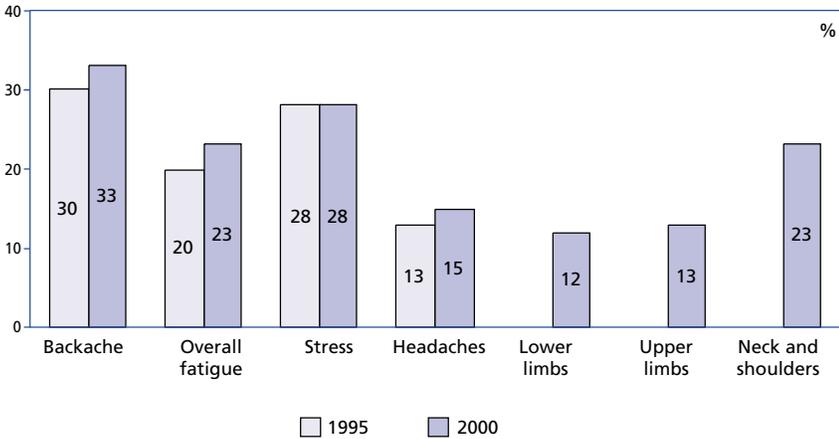
On this basis, it is obvious (Paoli, 1996 and Merlié & Paoli, 2001) that the health problems (see Figure 6) most often associated with work are:

- musculoskeletal: the Foundation studies point to the scale of what has already been called an ‘epidemic’. In 2000, 33% of workers reported back pain, compared to 30% in 1995, and 23% reported pain in the neck and shoulders. These are admittedly self-reported statements, but a crosscheck

conducted in the United Kingdom in 1995 with practising physicians to verify the results of a similar study validated workers' statements;

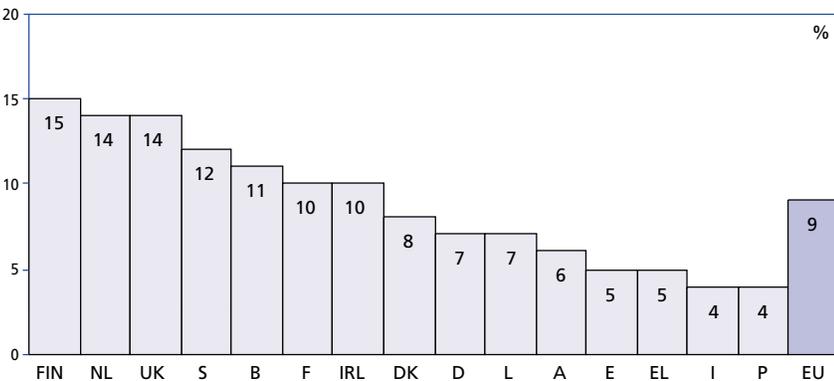
- psychosocial: the Foundation study found that 28% of workers reported occupational stress in 2000.

Figure 6 Work-related health problems



In addition to these problems, there are others that are not health related in the strict sense but have direct and indirect effects on health and on the quality of life at work, such as harassment and other forms of workplace violence. Nearly 10% of workers claim to have been harassed at work. There are wide gaps between countries, and the highest rates are to be found in countries where public debate on these issues is most active (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 Workers subjected to intimidation (by country)



Reasons for health-related problems at work

One reason for the prevalence of such problems is that the actual nature of work has changed, due largely to new technology and increased commercial constraints, bringing workers into more direct contact with the client and causing increases in time pressures.

Secondly, there is the persistence of traditional exposure factors (physical environment, work station design), which are not being reduced as much as one would imagine, given that these problems have been extensively documented and are relatively simple to deal with (often attributable to a single cause).

Thirdly, organisational choices have a direct impact on working conditions and health. In this connection (Letourneux & Thebaud-Mony, Dhondt, and Oelj, to be published) it is clear that there are still organisations of the traditional type where repetitive and stressful work is the norm. Despite changes for the better, one third of workers say that they have no control over the way their work or tasks are organised. They also say that they are required to perform repetitive tasks and repetitive movements, while 40% perform monotonous tasks, although there is an improvement here, with a significant reduction in monotonous work. The analysis highlights a close correlation between repetitive work and musculoskeletal disorders, a correlation that becomes closer as intensity of work and workload increase.

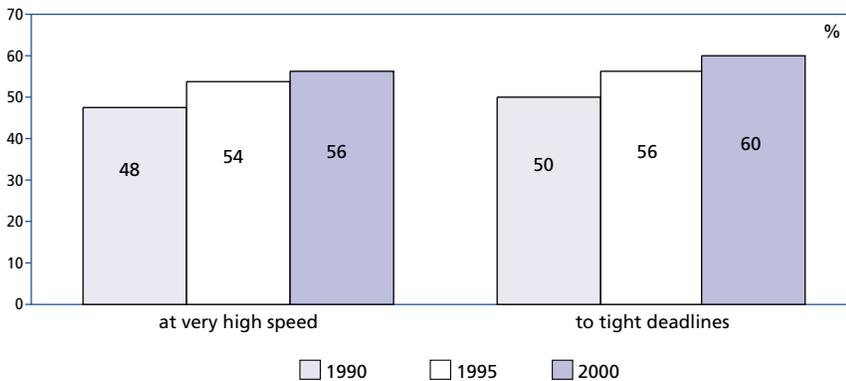
There is also evidence that organisational changes do not always meet expectations. The restructuring operations that have affected the meat processing industry throughout Europe are an example of this (Nossent et al, 1995a). The disappearance of small slaughterhouses, where each operator performed a complete cycle of tasks, in favour of larger production units, has resulted in division of labour and worker specialisation. Repetitive working and increased time pressure have caused a sharp increase in musculoskeletal disorders and de-skilling of the workers.

Finally, the development of 'new' forms of work organisation – organisations based on greater worker responsibility, increased multi-skilling and work that both demands and provides more qualifications – is not necessarily resulting in improved working conditions, in so far as these organisations (often referred to as 'lean') are also associated with more intensive working. That in turn leads to an increase in stress and musculoskeletal disorders, and a higher on-the-job accident rate. On the other hand, there is an increase in job satisfaction as work has become more interesting.

Intensification of work

The intensification of work (Gollac, to be published) is undoubtedly one of the most significant trends of recent years. Although average working hours are shorter, work is carried out faster (see Figure 8). This intensification affects all countries in the Union, all sectors of industry and all occupational categories, although the increase has been sharper in some cases than in others. This intensification may be explained by decreased workload tolerance in a work environment where the content of work has become more complex. However it can also be explained by more 'objective' factors, of which at least four – which can combine in variable relative proportions – are worth singling out: the changes in work organisation referred to above; the reduction of the workforce in a context of restructuring and budgetary constraints (see the study on the hospital sector, which illustrates this intensification resulting from de-staffing, Nossent et al, 1995b); increased market pressures, and the reduction in working hours. With regard to the last, it is impossible to disregard the quest by companies for increased productivity as a payback for the reduction in working hours (Taddei, 1998).

Figure 8 Working at very high speed or to tight deadlines



Intensification of work comes at a price. It is directly linked to the incidence of stress (Kompier & Levy, 1994, and Dhondt, 1997) and musculoskeletal disorders (see Table 3). There is also a link with the phenomena of violence and harassment at work, the logical consequence of increased time pressure, which is more and more difficult for individuals to handle.

Table 3 Health problems related to working at very high speed

%	Backache	Stress	Muscular pains in neck and shoulders	Injuries
Working continuously at high speed	46	40	35	11
Never working at high speed	25	21	15	5

Working hours

Apart from more general aspects linked to quality of life and discussed in the next section which deals with working time, both the length of working hours and the way they are organised have an impact on health (Boisard, to be published). There is evidence of an increase in health problems associated with long working hours. Some working time arrangements, such as shiftwork and night work, may also be damaging to health. The effects of these forms of work have been the focus of many studies by the Foundation (Corlett et al, 1988, and Wedderburn, 1990 and 2000).

Ageing, work and health

There are two aspects to be considered in the ageing of the workforce. First, there is the phenomenon of age-related exclusion, resulting from an imbalance between working conditions and capacities which deteriorate with age. Second, work itself may result in premature wear and tear of the body. Analysis shows that, although slightly more than half of workers are underexposed to all work pressures, by contrast some 10% are overexposed to them.

A Foundation study (Molinié & Volkoff, to be published) also reveals some worrying trends. Because of the increasing scarcity of workers in the youngest age category, workers in the middle age group (35-45 years) find themselves more and more subject to heavy physical work. Furthermore, because of age-related selection criteria, some types of work tend to rule out older workers (nightwork, working to deadlines, working with new technology).

Action to reorganise the working environment is needed to prevent premature wear and tear and allow people to remain at work. This is even more important in view of the fact that forecasts for the future predict an increase in the proportion of workers over the age of 45.

A review of corporate policies (Kuhn & Volkoff, unpublished), designed to maintain and develop skills and safeguard health, highlights three main lines along which these policies should be developed:

- modifications in work organisation and the division of tasks (teamwork, implementation of task rotation, tasks being transferred from production or assembly line to smaller units, etc.);
- re-organisation of working hours, such as progressive reduction of working hours, flexible working hours, etc.;
- training schemes (individual assessment of existing skills and needs, trainer role allocated to older workers and so on).

Precarious status and health

There is a clear correlation between precarious forms of employment and health, which has already been highlighted above (Letourneux, 1997, Platt, 1997, Benach & Benavides, 1999, Goudswaard et al, 2002, and Benach, to be published). These results have been confirmed by an analysis of key literature (Quinlan, 2001) on the effects of labour market flexibility on health and safety. Whatever the methodology used, virtually all the studies demonstrate a negative correlation between precarious employment and health.

Differences between men and women

Segregation of the sexes leads to an unequal distribution of working conditions. Women are less exposed to the 'traditional' risks that characterise blue-collar jobs in the manufacturing and construction industries, associated with the work environment and workstation design, as well as long working days, nightwork and shiftwork. Women are more likely to be in 'people-oriented' service jobs, to work part time and to have only limited independence in their work. They are more exposed than men to discrimination and intimidation by their colleagues at the workplace and by people outside the company. Women are generally required to juggle the demands of their jobs on the one hand and domestic tasks and caring for children and other relatives on the other (Fagan, to be published, and Kauppinen, 1997).

Sectoral differences

Finally, even a simple analysis cannot fail to overlook the differences which occur between sectors (Andries, to be published). Overexposure to risk situations is no longer confined to the traditional sectors such as construction or the manufacturing industry. In the services sector, it is

notable that sectors such as transport and catering have significantly less favourable working conditions than the average.

Reconciling working and non-working life

Making it easier to reconcile working and non-working life is an essential condition, both for encouraging entry into the labour market and for enabling people to remain at work. This is important given that employment rates in the EU are significantly lower than they are in the United States, for example, and that in Lisbon the EU set itself the goal of achieving an overall activity rate of 70% – and 60% for women – by 2010. It is a question of being able to remain at work despite the changes in one's private life (motherhood or fatherhood, training, sabbaticals, etc.) on the one hand and being able to carry out non-work-related tasks and obligations while maintaining a job (leisure activities, child-rearing, temporary/permanent care of dependants, etc.) on the other, all against the demographic background of an ageing population and an increasing number of single-parent families.

The work of the Foundation indicates two key areas where debate and action are needed in order to promote this reconciliation of working and non-working life. The first of these areas relates to the double workload and the second to time management. The question of social support structures (such as crèches, other child-minding systems, etc.) made available to the public is one dealt with in detail by many other bodies and which, although crucial, is not covered here.

The double workload

For many people, the working day (or week) does not end when work ends. A second working day often begins at home (household tasks, education of children, care of elderly/dependent relatives etc.) (Merlié & Paoli, 2001). A full assessment of this workload should take due account of all time expended, such as time spent on paid work, time spent on travelling between home and work, time spent on domestic tasks and so on. It is clear that not only does the working population spend a great many hours on these essential, but unpaid and, incidentally, not very socially rewarding, tasks, but also that the double workload is distributed in a completely unbalanced way between men and women (see Table 4).

Table 4 Who does what at home?

(% of respondents doing it for 1 hour or more every day)

<i>At home, who:</i>	Women	Men
takes care of the children and their education ?	41	24
does the cooking ?	64	13
does the housework ?	63	12

Time management

Several aspects of time organisation should be taken into consideration:

- length of working hours;
- flexibility of working hours;
- predictability of working hours;
- organisation of 'urban' times;
- modular organisation of working hours over the whole working life cycle.

Length of working hours

Average working hours in the EU are falling. In 2000, these averaged 38 hours per week for all workers and 36 hours for employees only, a reduction arising from the fall in the proportion of those working very long hours and an increase in the proportion of those working short hours. However, these averages conceal significant extremes (Kompier & Levy, 1994). Thus, while 17% work part-time, this category includes 32% of women and only 7% of men. Part-time working is also more widespread in some countries than in others. For example, 33% of people work part-time in the Netherlands, where it can be said that there is a culture of part-time working for women, and as few as 5% in Greece. Men tend to work the longest working weeks (more than 45 hours).

The question is to what extent these working hours correspond to people's preferences, given that a number of studies have highlighted the fact that men would prefer to work fewer hours (their ideal number would be about 37 hours), while a not insignificant proportion of part-time workers (women for the most part) would like to work longer hours. Overall, 32% of part-time workers would like to work either more hours – the most frequent case – or fewer hours (Fagan, 2001, Bielenski et al, to be published, Lilja and Hämäläinen, 2001).

Flexibility of working hours

Averages are a poor reflection of differences in working time duration, and an even worse indication of the organisation, and more particularly flexibility, of working hours (Boisard, to be published). The working week of five eight-hour days has, in a sense, had its day, in so far as irregularity is now an increasingly typical feature of working time organisation. Of course, fixed, regular weekly hours are still the most widespread pattern, but a large proportion of the workforce work 'atypical' working weeks: 19% of employees work at least one night a month; 47% at least one Saturday a month and 24% at least one Sunday a month. The variable working week is also widespread, with 37% of employees not working the same number of days each week and 24% having different working weeks within a month. Another striking change is the increase in swing-shift working (altogether 22% of employees do shiftwork).

Predictability of working hours

Another phenomenon worth monitoring closely is predictability, i.e. the period of advance notice of weekly working hours, or change in schedule. When such notice is too short, sometimes just one one day in advance, it can be difficult to adjust non-working duties, such as childminding. This increased flexibility of working hours is not in itself either negative or positive. It is positive for both workers and their employers if it is negotiated and accepted. If it is imposed, and especially it is unpredictable, it is likely to have adverse repercussions on life outside work.

Collective bargaining (and public debate) demonstrates the growing importance of this subject, as illustrated by information collected by the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO, to be published). It is evident, though, that the problems are still very quantitative and focused on the reduction in working hours, both collective, as a result of legislation of the type establishing the 35-hour week, and individual, as a result of part-time working. This is the case, even though the range of potential forms of time management (job sharing, career breaks, extended holiday periods, flexible retirement, etc.) is wide and other, complementary approaches could be considered (services provided by companies or their agents such as child-minding, laundry, etc.).

Organisation of 'urban' times

Public debate and collective bargaining have tended to disregard other forms of social time (school, services, leisure activities, etc.), sometimes referred to as 'urban' time. If it is accepted that working time now structures the very organisation of society, it is also true that this transformation is having a major impact on society itself. The fragmentation, deregulation and reduction of working hours are having considerable repercussions

outside the workplace and this calls for a re-assessment of time schedules – working and non-working – with a view to improved synchronisation and, ultimately, a better quality of life.

Isolated experiments have been conducted, notably in Italy (Modena, Bolzano, and other cities) and also in France (Rennes, Saint-Denis), Germany and the Netherlands (Boulin & Muckenberger, 1999). These experiments are interesting from two perspectives. First, they introduce new players into time negotiation (associations and women's groups in particular) and move the negotiation away from its traditional location: the company. Second, they are paving the way for two types of not necessarily contradictory policies: a bottom-up approach, with the establishment of 'time offices' at local authority level, as in Italy (Italian legislation allocates mayors a coordinating function in these matters), and a top-down approach such as a central 'time office' at national level, as in the Netherlands.

Organisation of working hours over the working life cycle

Paradoxically, although time flexibility is increasing with regard to short periods (day, week, month and year), the organisation of time over the whole working life seems to be more rigid. Specifically, older employees do not work shorter hours than younger ones. Many of them work 45 hours a week or more, even though the majority express an interest in working shorter hours towards the end of their careers (Fagan, 2001). Moreover, change is required to make it possible to take account of events such as the birth of a child, a year's sabbatical, etc. and, more generally, policies of 'chosen time'. 63% of employees report having no influence over their time schedules.

Skills development

One of the issues in work and employment quality is how to enable individuals to deploy and improve their skills. This involves the development of learning organisations, which enable workers to improve their knowledge and receive recognition for it, both formally and informally.

Changes in occupations

The proportion of workers in the higher skilled job categories (managers, professionals, technicians) has increased significantly between 1992 and 2000, from 31% to 36% (Labour Force Survey/Eurostat). This increase reflects an overall improvement in competences in the EU.

Skills and work organisation

In general terms, it is clear that the 'new forms' of work organisation and changes in the nature of work require higher levels of qualification as well

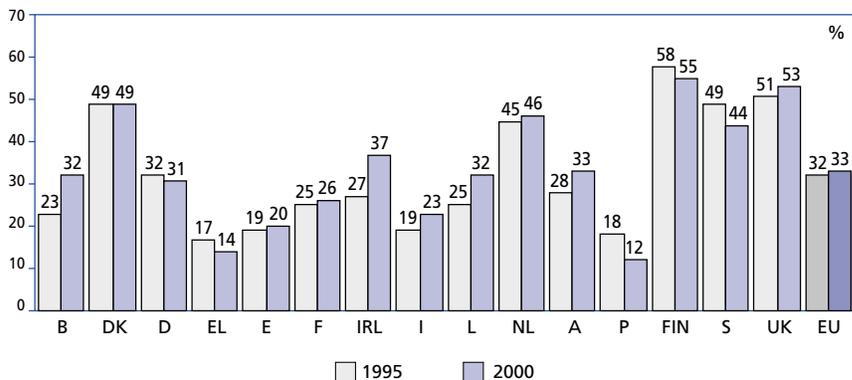
as new qualifications. The latter do not refer exclusively to occupational skills but also cover human or social relations and communication skills.

It is possible to distinguish between two types of ‘flexible’ organisation, characterised by a high degree of decentralisation:

- organisations based on managerial decentralisation and with a relatively low level of operator autonomy: these are known as ‘lean’ organisations or ‘lean production’ systems;
- organisations based on managerial decentralisation and a relatively high level of operator autonomy, especially by means of autonomous or semi-autonomous groups: these are known as ‘sociotechnical’ organisations.

The first type is noted both for more stressful working conditions owing to a combination of high demands/heavy workload and low autonomy and for relatively low qualifications and few opportunities for learning on the job. The second type is noted both for less stressful working conditions owing to a combination of high demands/heavy workload and autonomy and for relatively high qualifications and more opportunities for learning. Ultimately, then, the modernisation of work organisation, which means the establishment of organisations based on increased decentralisation of functions and greater flexibility of production, is not necessarily bringing about an improvement in working conditions or the development of skills. Thus not all flexible organisations are of the ‘learning’ type nor are making a contribution to social progress (Letourneux & Thebaud-Mony, Dhondt, and Oelj, to be published).

Figure 9 Employees who have undergone training within the past 12 months



Training

34% of employees say that they received training given by their employers during the last 12 months, the average period of time spent on training being 4.4 days per person. Looking beyond this European average, there are huge differences between countries, with a greater emphasis on training in northern Europe (and in the Scandinavian countries in particular) and wide discrepancies between the different forms of employment (see Figure 9). Employees on fixed-term contracts and temporary workers receive less training than permanent staff. This is bound to give rise to problems, bearing in mind the increase in the number of such jobs in Europe in recent years and the stated political objective of basing our competitiveness on a high level of qualifications.

Discussion and proposals

The Foundation hopes to contribute positively to the debate on the best ways to anticipate and manage the changes described in this paper and their possible consequences on the quality of work and employment. The aim is not to provide solutions for all the problems listed, nor to prescribe what should be done, as the definition of policies is the concern of policy makers, the European institutions, public authorities, and social partners, in particular through social dialogue. It is, rather, to draw attention to and make more available practices in the Member States highlighted through Foundation research.

The guidelines are set out in three sections:

1. Guiding principles;
2. Fields of application;
3. Instruments to support action.

1. Guiding principles

Foundation research has highlighted the fact that appropriate and workable solutions can be found for most of the problems described in Part 1 above when the needs and requirements of each of the parties involved – companies, workers, citizens, local authorities, etc. – are taken into account. This necessitates both a detailed assessment of these needs and requirements, and the existence of procedures and structures for information, consultation, coordination and negotiation. The findings of the many research activities undertaken since the establishment of the Foundation on direct and consultative participation provide ample proof of this. They also point to the fact that there are no standard recipes, but rather ad hoc solutions to be used on a case-by-case basis, which take into account local or national specificities.

2. Fields of application

Several issues have been identified where debate and discussion at EU level could usefully be pursued.

Understanding the impact of organisational change

Decisions on work organisation have an impact on equal opportunities, the terms of employment, competence development and the reconciliation of working and non-working life, especially through the organisation of

working hours, as we have seen in the first part of this paper. These choices sometimes have a negative impact on aspects of quality of work and employment. This points to the need to strengthen and develop negotiation on organisational choices. It is also necessary to develop reliable tools for identifying the social consequences of changes in work organisation and for integrating job quality issues into corporate management practice.

Broadening negotiation on working hours to include social time

In view of the reduction in working hours in comparison with time spent on other aspects of life, it is paradoxical that reflections about time always begin with working hours and that, indeed, they are very often restricted to working hours alone. The collective reductions effected here and there could provide an opportunity for broader thinking, and negotiation, about the organisation of time in general, at least towards a better synchronisation of working and non-working hours. The few, scattered but generally successful, experiments undertaken so far demonstrate the interest aroused and suggest possible avenues to explore. After all, even though these experiments have taken place at local level, their effects have often been boosted by action at national level which provide a framework for the activities undertaken (Boulin & Muckenberger, 1999). A similar impetus could also be envisaged at EU level.

Occupational health policies: three major challenges

Bearing in mind the existing problems and trends already outlined – both an increasing complexity of problems encountered (multifaceted and of a psychosocial kind) and the greater spread of workers and responsibilities (SMEs, subcontracting, contingent work, etc.) – occupational health policies face three major challenges (Piotet, 1996, and Paoli, 2001).

The first relates to a redefinition of the control mechanisms. In the light of the new problems and situations, traditional systems based on the rule/control/penalty system have, in a sense, reached the limit of their effectiveness, especially in view of the fact that resources allocated to supervisory bodies have often not been increased. The consideration given in some countries to the implementation of ‘internal control’ systems, where the responsibility for defining and implementing appropriate policies is transferred to companies, while the task of the the supervisory bodies is to verify that the necessary procedures have been put in place (and not to examine results), is one of the avenues which could be further explored in the future.

The second challenge relates to multidisciplinary: the prevention and treatment of more complex problems call for a combination of forms of expertise within the preventive services (medical, of course, but also

ergonomic, technical and organisational expertise). Thus, some countries have called for the necessary combination of a doctor, an engineer, an ergonomist and a specialist in organisational matters. This kind of approach is sounding the death knell for preventive services focused exclusively on occupational medicine.

The third challenge is to move forward from reparation/compensation to prevention, and relates primarily to insurance systems. This kind of transition, the purpose of which is to prevent risks before they materialise, requires the development of methods and tools that allow these risks to be assessed ex-ante. Such approaches have been the subject of experiments in Europe (Cartier, 1996), based on a model sometimes seen in North America.

A change in status for precarious employment

Although some of the deterioration in working conditions for those in precarious employment can be attributed to structural effects, the fact remains that, objectively, these categories of workers are more exposed to risks in work and the cumulative effects of precarious factors. An improvement in their situation would have to involve general action to improve the quality of the jobs to which workers in these categories are assigned.

Temporary agency work, in particular, poses more specific problems such as the definition of responsibilities (especially as regards the prevention of occupational risks or the responsibility for training/skills development) and the issue of job security (how to combine flexibility with security). One possibility would be to break the link between the contract of employment (with the temporary agency), and the contract-governing placement (with the user company). While the placement contract is by its nature temporary, the contract of employment could be permanent. In the Dutch and Swedish systems, for example, some temporary agency workers are in permanent employment. Furthermore, equal treatment of in-house and temporary workers by the user company would facilitate an improvement in risk prevention (Storrie, 2002).

Reducing inequalities between men and women

As was highlighted earlier, there are major inequalities between the sexes, both at work and outside it (double workload). These imbalances are largely the result of gender segregation in the labour market, a segregation that is on the decrease in some occupations (Merllié & Paoli, 2001). An analysis of the labour market in the candidate countries to the EU (where there is a higher proportion of women in employment, a more balanced distribution of the sexes between occupational categories, and less vertical segregation) tends to suggest that there is nothing inevitable about these imbalances

(European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, to be published).

It has been seen that forms of vertical (or hierarchical) segregation are to some extent the result of work organisation. The solutions are to be found in the workplace, involving both the development of collective bargaining and the implementation of equal opportunity plans affecting every aspect of company life (hiring, careers, training, health, pay, etc.) (Bleijenbergh et al, 1999). A number of companies are pointing the way ahead in this area (Olgiatti & Shapiro, 2002).

Adapting the work to an ageing workforce

One of the objectives of European employment policy is to increase the number of workers over 50-55 years who are in employment. Two types of scheme could be envisaged: institutional measures designed to keep ageing workers in employment or to encourage the unemployed to find a job, such as labour market activation measures, financial and fiscal incentives, collective bargaining, etc. (Walker, 1997 and 1999); and organisational change at company level designed to keep individuals in work or attract specific categories of people (Wedderburn, 1990). Improving job quality is certainly the best way of achieving these objectives. It has been shown that low employment rates are generally an indication of insufficiently attractive working conditions.

Evaluating the impact of job-creation programmes

An idea that might be considered to encourage the creation of quality jobs in Europe would be the systematic inclusion of a quality of work and employment assessment in all job creation schemes (Platt, 1997). This could be the case in particular for national action plans.

Developing a systemic approach

A company-based approach tends to disregard the complex relationships constituted by work systems (or production systems), in which subcontracting and specialisation relationships between companies are formed. The risk, then, is that improvements in one company could lead to deterioration in working conditions in another workplace, or even deliberate transference of risks or other inferior working conditions. Theories about 'core labour versus peripheral labour' (Atkinson, 2000) should be supplemented by the division of work between companies. Studies by the Foundation have highlighted a concentration of qualified jobs, high wages, better working conditions and more stable employment conditions in the upstream (design) and downstream (marketing) companies of the production chain, irrespective of their size. These factors argue in favour of

a chain-based approach that would lead all the companies of the chain in the same direction of positive change.

3. Instruments to support action

Various tools or instruments could be usefully consolidated or developed to support and feed the debate, and possibly support action and negotiation.

Developing relevant indicators

The measurement of quality of work and employment to date has been based on indicators that greatly oversimplify reality and give a poor indication of the extent (transformation of jobs, feminisation of work, ageing, interaction with new players) and complexity (more psychosocial problems, multifactorial causes, such as stress) of the changes and problems affecting work. However, the indicators commonly used (occupational accidents and listed occupational illnesses) are, apart from their limited scope, essentially the reflection of male-dominated traditional industrial work. New indicators (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2001a) need to be defined and applied, both at macroeconomic level to measure progress and support the definition of political action and at microeconomic level to assist collective bargaining (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2001a and b, and Dhondt, 1997). The discussion has started at European level and needs to be supported by appropriate information.

Developing and reinforcing monitoring instruments

The definition of priorities and the development of action and research programmes need to be supported by detailed quantitative and qualitative knowledge of the situations, trends and changes in work and employment. The Foundation contributes to such monitoring by maintaining three instruments:

- A monitoring instrument on quality of working life based on regular questionnaire surveys to workers (Paoli, 1991 and 1996, Merllié & Paoli, 2001), which is soon to be supplemented by a systematic and regular collection of similar national data and also by a company panel survey;
- The European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO), which collects and analyses information on collective bargaining in Europe;
- The European Monitoring Centre on Change (EMCC) recently set up to support the capacity of key actors to understand, anticipate and manage change. A European company network will support the observatory.

These instruments will be extended in due course to candidate countries to the EU.

Using socio-technical project management tools

The changes that are taking place (technological development, shorter working hours, etc.) all offer opportunities to address these issues. The formulae are known and tested, although the solutions will always be specific to each undertaking, favouring the use of 'sociotechnical project organisation' methods (du Roy, 1990, and Wedderburn, 1994), where the interests of the various parties concerned (production, maintenance, distribution, etc.) are taken into account from the outset.

Providing financial incentives

The allocation of financial resources, either from existing funds or from ad-hoc budgets, could support the development of exemplary or cutting edge initiatives by companies and by local or national actors in the field of quality of work and employment. Such schemes should be designed, in particular, to promote:

- in general terms, the negotiated and participative management of change;
- an approach to the issues that is both integrated (for example, links between social time and working time) and collective;
- the development and use of innovative tools, methods and procedures to support change and negotiation such as monitoring and evaluation indicators.

The focus could be quality of work and employment criteria, more particularly:

- the elimination of inequalities;
- better reconciliation between work and non-working life;
- the development of learning organisations;
- the safeguarding and development of physical and mental health and well-being;
- the development of sustainable jobs.

Conclusion

This review of Foundation research on quality of work and employment has drawn on a very broad base of criteria, as demonstrated by the conceptual framework used. That framework, however, is based on the quality of work and employment criteria defined by the European Summits and the Commission's Communication. On the basis of this review and of the proposals made above, the Foundation intends to pursue its mission to foster the debate, in particular through the organisation of seminars and conferences.

This exercise demonstrates how much information is available in the Foundation, but it also highlights grey areas that will certainly have to be tackled in future work programmes. Subject to a debate taking place in the Administrative Board of the Foundation, several issues could be addressed more thoroughly:

- the relationship between quality of work and employment and social protection (initial research on this topic is currently underway);
- lifelong learning and competence development;
- the economic dimension of quality of work and employment and working conditions;
- the levels and distribution of incomes, as they are a key element of quality of work and employment.

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