

01

How to make
your meetings more
successful

Introduction

Since 1994, employees of multinational companies have been entitled to information and consultation at European level. In 2001 an extra dimension was added with participation rights in companies that have adopted the European Company statute (SE).



Today, about 20,000 employee representatives are members of a European Works Council or an SE Representative Body, participating in at least one meeting per year where they should receive information about all questions that concern the group as a whole or at least two subsidiaries in different Member States. They must be consulted at a time, in a manner and with a content that allows them to undertake an in-depth study and express

an opinion that may be taken into account in the decision-making process.

These workers' rights are now firmly established in different European directives and their transposition into national law. Millions of euros and tens of thousands of working days are invested in the organisation of regular meetings and yet a big majority is rather unsatisfied with the outcome of all these efforts. Nor are complaints

heard on the employee side alone, for they are usually shared by management.



This booklet aims to respond to these concerns by offering some practical tips on how to make your European meetings more useful, more efficient and more successful.

1. Before the meeting

It may sound like a cliché, but it is nonetheless very true: a successful meeting starts with a thorough preparation. Indeed, the success of European workers' involvement cannot be measured by the length or content of the annual meeting, but depends entirely on what is done during those 360+ other days of the year.



tip 1 **think European!**

The information and consultation rights are very strong in some countries, but almost non-existent in others. This creates an imbalance, especially if you are playing only on your home field. Try to look further than your national horizon, consider what might be interesting for your colleagues in other countries, and share what you have. If you all put your pieces together, there's a good chance that you will gain an impression of the truly European picture behind it.

tip 2 **keep your eyes and ears wide open!**

Local works councils or trade union delegations should be the primary sources of information, but there are other possibilities. Talk to your colleagues and to workers' representatives from other companies in your sector, participate in trade union meetings, read the newspapers,

watch business reports on TV. And don't forget the internet: enter the name of your company in a search engine now and then and you have a good chance of discovering news of which you were not yet even aware.

tip 3 **communicate!**

Communication is the oil that keeps the engine of a European Works Council running. A structural approach can be to develop a communication network, with the Select Committee as a spider in the centre of the web, coordinating all flows. But it should also come spontaneously. A short "what's up?" or "happy birthday!" is always welcome and strengthens the ties between the representatives of the different countries. You don't speak the same language? Then use a (online) dictionary or ask for help from someone who does. But do keep the communication lines open, 365 days per year.

2. Setting the agenda

"Our meetings are always the same: one useless high-tech presentation after the other and then quickly back to the airport."



tip 1 check and use your agreement!

Who is responsible for drawing up the agenda? What subjects are explicitly mentioned? How much time do you have for the information and consultation procedure? Your agreement is the most important document; it has been negotiated and signed with your management. So use it! If you can propose agenda items, then don't let this chance pass you by. If you should receive all documents two weeks before the meeting, then make sure that this deadline is respected. Your agreement does not mention any such rights? Then try to improve things in practice, show your interest and never give up.

tip 2 be selective!

An agenda with twenty items and no discussion time is useless. It is better to have only five items, with plenty of time for questions and answers. If you receive all documents before the meeting, then there is no need for an extensive presentation. If you have a long list of subjects, then determine your priorities. Ask yourself what is really important, what is the "hottest" topic. What do you absolutely need to know? Avoid very general questions; you might not get the answer you were looking for. Be precise, concrete and well prepared.

tip 3 be proactive!

If you have discovered a transnational project, then don't wait until your management puts it on the agenda. If something similar is happening in two countries within a short interval of time, then it is very likely that there is a European strategy behind it. Remember that a "possible impact" does not necessarily mean there should be negative consequences for two countries. It could be negative for one and positive for the other. If you want to have some influence on the decision-making process, then you should make sure the subject is placed on the agenda as early as possible.

3. Preparation and implementation

"Our meetings were rather chaotic in the beginning, but it is much better now, since we started to decide who will ask what questions and try to find a common position at the preparatory meeting."

You communicated well throughout the year and the agenda was prepared jointly; now it's a matter of making sure the meeting itself runs smoothly. It is the responsibility of each member to read critically all the documents circulated in advance. At the preparatory meeting, additional questions should be listed, missing information can be identified, and spokespersons can be designated. Ideally, you should also have a debriefing meeting, where new elements can be evaluated and official opinions drafted. Ask for the assistance from experts and trade union coordinators.



tip 1 speak with one voice!

Divide and rule: the ancient Romans knew this principle and it still applies today. If you want the workers' voice to be heard, it is advisable to agree on joint positions wherever possible and to appoint one or a limited number of representatives who will express this opinion in the meeting. Avoid internal bickering in the

LET'S PLAY EUROPEAN WORKS COUNCILS

1 WELCOME
to the game!

The purpose
of the game:
to represent
your colleagues
at European
level.
Beware of
the traps...

Go straight to
square **9**

2 FOR



7 Tick, Tock... **6 AT LAST!!!**

Ms BŁG
wasn't given
enough time
to finish what
she had to say
and Mr TILT is
continuing his
presentation

RCBY
ITACBO
WRSWNM
NOMINOM
LALALALA
OHCE
TVRA
M



Go back
to square **5**

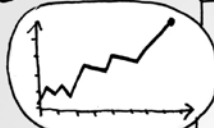
blah blah
blah blah
blah blah



Ms BŁG,
Swedish
colleague,
is not
afraid to
speak up...

Go to square **7**

9 WUPS!



Mr TILT
is going
into too
much detail
about his
company.
That's not exactly
what we're here for...



Points lost! Go back to square **6**

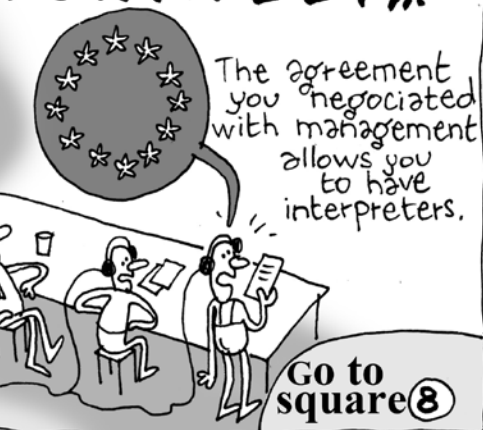
8 BONUS

Your trade
union
coordinator
helped you
win some
extra
points!

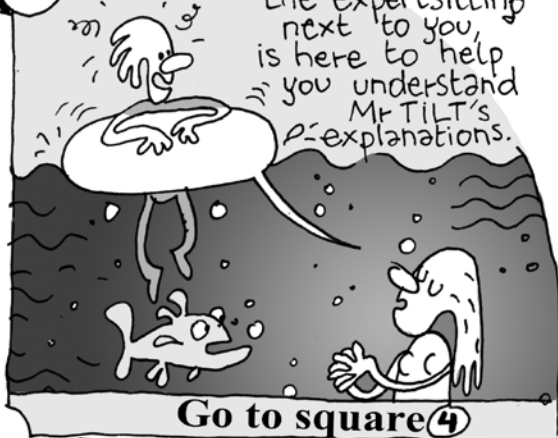


Go to square **10**

UNATELY...



3 OUF!



Go to square 4

5 EXCUSE ME?!?



Go back to square 2

4 WELL DONE!!



Go to square 11

10 WHAT?!?



Go back to square 3

11 THAT'S GREAT!



Go to square 12

12

Carry on with the good work and don't forget: there are plenty of well organised people out there to support you. Your commitment can help you to bring change...

GOOD LUCK!

Juan

presence of management! If necessary, ask for a timeout so you can settle any disputes internally before continuing the meeting.

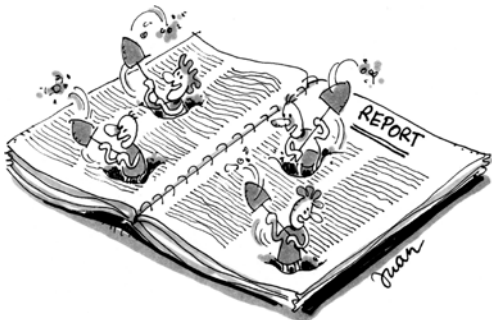
tip 2 claim your consultation rights!

Don't wait until management kindly requests your advice about a certain project. Even if they don't ask for it, it is your right to express an opinion about any measures envisaged and this opinion should be taken into account. However, take your time to prepare your position and make sure it is supported by at least a majority of the representatives. Don't just say 'yes' or 'no', but find strong arguments and suggest alternatives. Experts and trade union coordinators can help you with this mission.

4. The aftercare

"Some colleagues think that I go to these meetings just to have a nice dinner and visit interesting cities. They are always surprised to hear that we actually discuss issues which concern their very own workplace."

As soon as the plenary meeting is closed, the preparation for the next one begins. Making the transnational dialogue successful requires a sustained effort. It is a shared responsibility of all members to ensure a proper monitoring of what has been discussed. Indeed, being a European representative is not a kind of honorary office or social tourism. You are there to represent the interests of your colleagues. It is your duty to report back to them and to your respective trade unions about the content and outcome of the meetings.

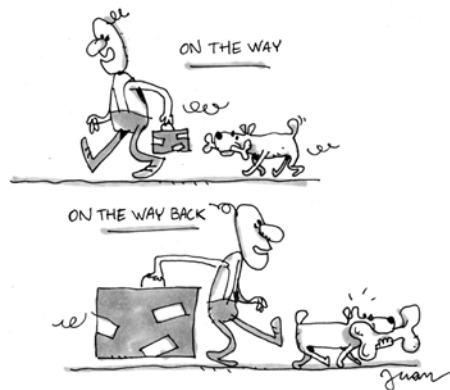


tip 1 strike while the iron is still hot!

Have all agenda items been discussed? Have all questions been answered? If some issues are still open, then you might consider organising working groups assisted by experts who can dig into the matter further. Does it concern an urgent or extensive project? Then do not hesitate to ask for an extraordinary meeting. A thorough, complete and sincere dialogue supported by the necessary resources, will benefit all parties.

tip 2 be visible in the workplace!

It is important to keep in touch with the colleagues you represent. They should always be consulted before every meeting and properly informed afterwards. This can be done through different channels: a joint publication, national leaflets, a dedicated intranet webpage or even by organising staff meetings. It is best to seek an agreement at European level to guarantee access to all sites and available time for all members in every country.



5. See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil: the issue of confidentiality

If management refuses to accept a particular point on the agenda, don't just put up with it. Find arguments why it is important to discuss the matter or integrate it into another, larger

subject. But what if you do get the information but are required to regard it as confidential? Although it is rather unlikely that you will receive extremely sensitive facts and figures, it can be useful to accept the confidential label. It helps to build trust, while offering a chance of becoming involved at an early stage and gaining some real influence. Nevertheless, don't accept it until you have an answer to four essential questions.



question 1 why?

Confidentiality should never be used simply to impose silence on the workers' representatives. There must be objective criteria as to why something has to be kept secret. Would it harm the company if it became public? Could it endanger a commercial deal?

question 2 who?

The information should never be limited to the people who happen to participate in the meeting. Who else is covered: the deputy members, experts, staff members who will suffer the consequences, trade union officers, local representatives, etc.?

question 3 what?

It should be very clear what information exactly is to be considered confidential. If you receive a whole pack of documents, it is hard to believe that everything is secret.



question 4 how long?

Nothing is secret for ever and leaks often come from the management side rather than from the employees. Try to agree a time frame within which the confidentiality will be respected, making sure this does not exclude you from an early involvement.

6. You are not alone

"My trade union organises special meetings and training every year. That really helps me to feel stronger as a European representative."

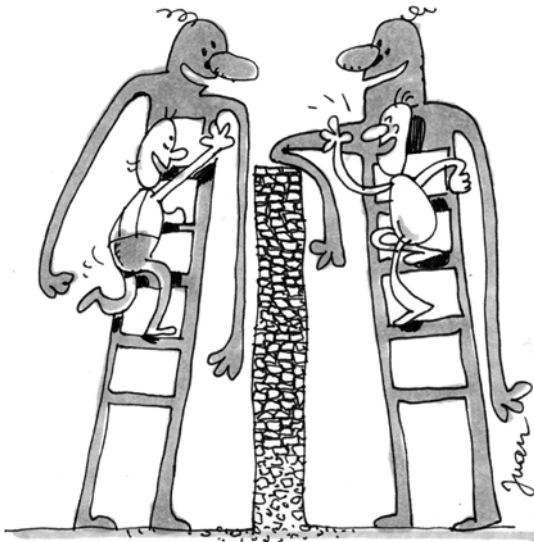
Feeling lost? Searching for inspiration? Need support in facing up to a very complicated situation in your company? Do not despair, for there is always help at hand. Indeed, a European workers' body is part of a wide network of people and organisations that can provide the necessary assistance and help to ensure your success. To keep it simple, they can be grouped in three different levels.

level 1 the inner circle

Look around you. Speak to your colleagues from the other countries. Don't forget to keep the deputy members posted. The Select Committee, chairman and/or secretary are responsible for coordinating the activities between the meetings. Where appropriate, also ensure a permanent exchange with board-level employee representatives.

level 2 the contact circle

European Trade Union Federations can help by appointing coordinators. Many local trade unions organise meetings and training for their European delegates. You should inform the local workers' representatives and staff in general about your work. In return, they can be an interesting source of information for future European discussions. A thorough local preparation can be useful to consider transnational issues from a different angle.



level 3 the support circle

Experts can help you analyse financial data, understand the group strategy and even develop alternative projects. The European Trade Union Federations organise conferences and workshops. The ETUI and other worker-friendly organisations offer made-to-measure training, provide specific knowledge and develop dedicated materials. A lot of background information can be found on websites such as worker-participation.eu and ewcdb.eu. Finally, an exchange of best practices with representatives from other multinational companies can be quite enlightening.



7. Setting the example

A good agreement does not solve all the problems. Nor is it a guarantee for a perfectly smooth running European workers representation. But it does provide a solid foundation upon which an efficient, effective, useful and successful practice can be constructed. Negotiations are always a matter of give and take, finding compromises that are acceptable to all parties. Although this is usually a complicated and tough process, the result can be very rewarding. As a last series of tips, here's a selection of "best practice" articles that can really help to make your European meetings more successful.

example 1 ABB Employees Council Europe, 27.03.2001

"Between meetings, information shall be exchanged among members. Primary means of communication are Lotus Notes, e-mail, the telephone and fax. The members have to ensure that translation assistance is available within their companies in case a fax or memo in the English language is received. The members shall report within their national bodies on the matters discussed at ABB ECE meetings and convey suggestions and reactions to the ABB ECE."

example 2 AXA Group European Works Council, 6.10.2005

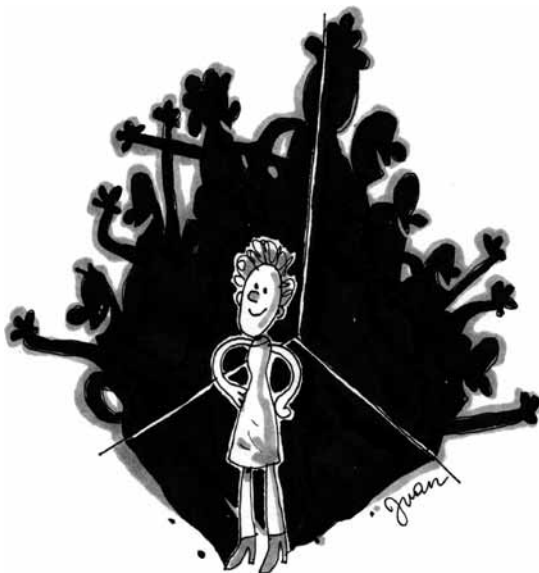
"Management agrees to provide all documents early enough to allow GEWC members to make comments or ask questions within a reasonable period of time."

example 3 GdF Suez European Works Council, 6.05.2009

"Permanent working groups are formed, to promote cooperative social dialogue. The task of these working groups is to promote information, consultation and social dialogue, as well as to analyse subjects specific to each activity sector in greater depth, particularly relating to strategy, and from an economic, financial and social (working conditions, safety and health) point of view. Two meetings per year are planned. Working group meetings are preceded by a preparatory meeting and followed by a briefing meeting, for the specific purpose of drafting a report for the EWC."

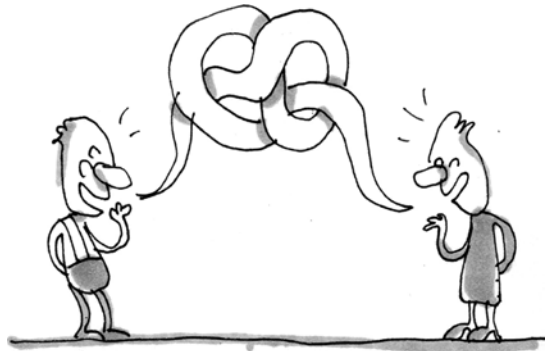
example 4 Barclays Group European Forum, 29.05.2002

"BGEF Forum members will be responsible for representing the views of their respective constituencies. In addition, they are responsible for gathering the views of their respective constituency members and liaising with relevant national works councils."



example 5 Tyco International European Works Council, 22.02.2007

"The employee representatives and the deputy representatives must, in the exercise of their functions, have access to telephone, fax, e-mail, computer and photocopying facilities. Where such access is not available, local management will work with such representatives to facilitate access during working time."



example 6 American Standard Companies European Works Council, 8.03.2005

"Management may impose a requirement of confidentiality if there are reasonable grounds to do so. A statement shall be issued as early as possible prior to the matter in question being dealt with, indicating the grounds for imposing the requirement, what written or oral information is covered, for how long it applies and whether there are any persons with regard to whom such confidentiality doesn't need to be maintained."

example 7 Electrolux European Works Council, 7.11.2006

"EWC members can send their positions, questions and remarks on the draft agenda and any particular topics they would like to focus on. Where a country has more than one representative, these representatives can discuss together for at least 3 hours the draft agenda. A similar procedure can be used for countries that are clustered together."

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