



Fourth European Working Conditions Survey: Qualitative post-test analysis

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Research project: European Working Conditions Survey

Introduction

The **Fourth European Working Conditions Survey** (EWCS) was conducted in the autumn of 2005 in 31 countries by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. An identical questionnaire, translated into the respective languages, was used across all the countries. Quality control was an important element in the course of this edition of the survey. Extensive quality control processes were undertaken not only in the preparatory phase but also during the data collection and processing stages. As one of these quality control measures, the Foundation decided to implement, for the first time, a qualitative post-test analysis on the EWCS, thus combining qualitative methods with quantitative survey research. This post-test analysis was carried out in five countries representing different European realities: Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Portugal and the UK. In each of these countries, 20 survey respondents were interviewed.

The main objectives of the post-test analysis were as follows:

- to serve as a quality control measure for assessing the quality of the EWCS 2005 questionnaire;
- to serve as a tool for interpreting the survey results;
- to serve as a tool for developing new questions;
- to help to understand the role of national infrastructure, cultural context and gender in shaping respondents' answers;
- to offer more information on the subjects of development at work and employability.

The focus themes of the post-test, namely development at work and employability, were chosen from among the key issues in current EU policy debate. The renewed **Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs** and the new **Employment Guidelines of the European Employment Strategy** have placed priorities not only on attracting and retaining more people in employment and on quality of work ('more and better jobs'), but also on improving the adaptability of workers and enterprises and increasing investment in human capital through the provision of better education and skills. The latest **Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (132Kb PDF)** stresses that each country should continue to make every effort to address these priority areas.

Rapid technological and organisational changes and flexibilisation trends necessitate both the capacity and opportunity of the workforce to adapt to these current processes. New knowledge-intensive services require not only higher levels of qualification but also new and broader qualifications – including occupational skills, social and communication skills, as well as labour market competencies. These skills are crucial from the point of view of workers' employability in today's globalised and flexibilised working life. The first Foundation paper **Quality of work and employment: Issues and challenges (397Kb PDF)** (Foundation, 2002) highlights that developing skills and competencies are also an essential part of improving quality of work and employment. The paper identifies four main aspects which should be taken into account in this respect, namely 'qualifications, training, learning organisation and career development'.

At the first stage of the post-test, interviews were carried out and analysed in the five countries involved in the project. National analysis was completed at two levels: first, assessing the technical quality of the questionnaire; and secondly, analysing such themes around the phenomena of development at work and employability, which emerged from the interview data. The national reports were compiled to present the findings of the analysis and to place them in the national context. At the second stage, this consolidated report aims to draw together the main findings of those five national reports, looking for common denominators in this respect and highlighting national differences where they emerged.

Methodology

The post-test interviews were conducted between the end of July and beginning of November 2006. The interviewees were selected from among those respondents of the EWCS 2005 who had given their consent to be contacted for a follow-up interview. In each country, 20 interviews were conducted. Workers of both sexes, different age groups, occupations, sectors and educational levels were represented in the samples. Even if these groups do not always reflect the structure of the original survey, the samples can be considered at least satisfactory for the purposes of the post-test.

The interviews were conducted by the national experts using a semi-structured questionnaire. Only a selection of the questions from the EWCS 2005 questionnaire were examined. The interviewing method used was an adaptation of the 'expansive cognitive interview' (Willis, 2005). The interviewees were presented a selected number of structured questions from the EWCS 2005 questionnaire – most notably questions with a connection to job development – and were encouraged to contemplate what they meant by their answers, to what kind of situations they referred to in their work and how they found the questions and responses alternatives – easy or difficult. The additional open-ended questions also sought to map the phenomena of job development and employability and their role in respondents' working lives. The duration of the interviews varied from 40 minutes to nearly three hours. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using Atlas.ti or NVivo qualitative data analysis software. For a more detailed description of the background and methodology of the study, as well as of the structure of the national samples, see Annexes 3 and 4. For the outline of the questionnaire, see Annex 4.

National contexts

In the following sections, the national context of the post-test countries will be briefly described in order to provide some background for the possible differences in interpretation of survey questions. The key employment indicators – employment, unemployment and part-time work – in this chapter display 2005 annual averages from Eurostat, as does the participation in lifelong learning, understood as having received education or training in the past four weeks, whether or not it is relevant for the current job. Sectoral structure is based on Eurostat's Labour Force Survey (LFS) spring 2005 results and the proportion of temporary employment contracts represents Eurostat figures from the first quarter of 2006. Educational levels of employees aged 25 to 64 years are calculated on the basis of Eurostat data from the second quarter of 2006. The descriptive part of the analysis is based on respective national post-test reports.

Austria

According to a country typology adapted from Esping-Andersen (1990) and used in the EWCS 2005 analysis, Austria belongs to the group of Continental countries, representing conservative welfare regimes. The employment rate is relatively high for men (75.4%) and for women (62%), but a significant proportion of employed women work only on a part-time basis (39.3%). Referring to Pfau-Effinger (2004), the Austrian report typifies Austria as a conservative state with a modernised male-breadwinner gender regime. Women with children adapt their employment to coincide with family responsibilities, which does not only mean working part time but commonly involves interrupting their careers to raise children. For these women, the return to the labour market after such a lengthy career break often leads to downward mobility in terms of less qualified work than previously. The employment rate for the older people aged 55–64 years is increasing in line with policies to limit early retirement, but it is still notably low, amounting to 31.8 % in 2005.

Temporary employment is not particularly prevalent in Austria (9.1%). Furthermore, gender differences are practically non-existent. The unemployment rate in Austria is relatively low, although it is slightly higher for women (5.5%) than for men (4.9%).

In Austria, about 5.1% of the employed population still work in agriculture, while 27% work in industry and a relatively large share (67.7%) in services. Two thirds (66.6%) of employees aged 25–64 years have attained an upper secondary or post-secondary education and one in five (19%) has a third-level education. The proportion of those with primary or lower secondary level education stands at 14.4%. On average, men are slightly better educated than women.

Lifelong learning has presumably started to take some root in Austria, with a participation rate of 12.9% just above the European benchmark of 12.5% by 2010. However, training takes place exclusively during regular working hours only for half of those employed. Moreover, this is mostly true for men. Altogether, 41% of employed women report that their training takes place outside working hours (Statistics Austria, 2006, p. 32), which can probably be explained by the high prevalence of part-time work among women – thus, for them, they have less time available at work for training. It is also the case in Austria that further training is concentrated mostly among the educated population.

Austrian labour market policy aims to attract more people into the labour market. This includes adoption of a policy of activation and raising the skills level of particular groups such as young people with a low level of education, older workers, women and long-term unemployed persons, as well as combating undeclared work. Budgetary provisions have recently been made for a skills training initiative to facilitate the entry or re-entry of young people and women into the labour market, particularly in line with the demands of the labour market and in health and nursing.

Czech Republic

As a new Member State, the Czech Republic belongs to the bloc of Eastern European countries. Only 56.3% of women compared with 73.3% of men are employed. However, the women who work mainly do so on a full-time basis, while the proportion of female part-time workers accounts for only 8.7% of women. Temporary employment contracts are not prevalent (8.2%), even if they are more common among women (9.7%) than men (7%). The employment rate of older workers is slightly above the EU27 average and continues to rise, having reached 44.5% in 2005.

The country has undergone drastic economical and political changes during the last two decades. The opening of the borders in 1989 brought along market-driven economy as well as foreign investments, and the accession to the European Union in May 2004 has opened up the country to even more intensive contact with foreign countries. These changes have also led to a pronounced restructuring of the labour market in many ways. The rapid technological progress has resulted in the introduction of new technologies and production processes. People with computer skills and knowledge of foreign languages are in high demand on the labour market, in addition to which new kinds of soft skills are required in the expanding services sector. These new demands are especially hard to meet by older workers. The concept of holding a single job for life has gone, and insecurity as well as the demand for flexibility have increased. The Czech national report notes a high work productivity among Czech workers.

The problem of unemployment has only emerged in the Czech Republic with the establishment of the market economy with a steep rise from 4.8% in 1997 to 8.9% in 2000. In 2005, the unemployment rate amounted to 7.9%. Women seem to be more vulnerable to unemployment than men (9.8% compared with 6.5%). The labour market also displays considerable regional differences in this respect.

Among the post-test countries, the Czech Republic displays a huge share of employed people working in industry (39.5%), while 56.4% of workers are employed in services and 4.1% in agriculture. Qualifications among workers aged 25–64 years are mostly of upper and post-secondary education level (78.5%) with 15% of employees having attained a third-level education. The proportion of workers with basic education is extremely low at 6.4%. Men are slightly better educated than women. In recent times, the educational level of workers has been increasing, but the Czech labour market is marked by an imbalance between supply and demand in the professional qualification structure.

Lifelong learning has no real tradition in the Czech Republic, which is clearly evident as only 5.6% of the working age population have participated in ongoing training. The Czech national report notes several shortcomings in the national education system and human resource development. Most notably, the report highlights the absence of an adult education system and a state policy covering this area, the absence of a further education financial support system, the insufficient participation in further education and the lack of public and private investment in further education. According to the Czech report, increasing attention is being paid to further education in terms of political debate and strategic documents, but not enough concrete measures have yet been implemented.

Finland

Finland is a Nordic social-democratic welfare state where the employment rate is relatively high both among men (70.3%) and among women (66.5%), with only a minor gender employment gap of 3.8%. In Finland, the employment of women and mothers has been for a long time regarded as their right, with the public day care system making this possible. The increase in the employment rate of older workers aged 55–64 years has risen drastically in recent years, from about 36% in the late 1990s to 52.7% in 2005. Compared with the European average, part-time work is not particularly common, not even among women (18.6%). Furthermore, part-time work is mostly taken on by students and part-time pensioners, but not because of family reasons. However, temporary contracts have led to a substantial gender

issue in the labour market, with 18.3% of female employees compared with 10.4% of men having a fixed-term employment relationship (on average, the rate is about 14.4%).

In the early 1990s, Finland was gripped by a deep economic recession resulting in an unemployment rate of 16.6% in 1994. Drastic cuts and resizing were made in the public sector in attempt to balance the state economy. Later, this recession was followed by an unequalled boom at the end of 1990s. The unemployment rate decreased to 8.4% with only a minor gender difference, giving a rate of 8.2% for men and 8.6% for women. However, this strong economic growth has brought with it a clear negative influence on working conditions for employees in terms of growing time pressures, mental strain, tougher competition and increasing uncertainties.

In Finland, 4.9% of the employed population works in agriculture, 25.9% in industry and a relatively large share of 69.1% in services. The educational level of Finnish employees is considerably high with clear gender differences at university level: almost half of female employees aged 25–64 years have attained a third-level education (46.8%) compared with 35.7% of men. Respectively, 40.4% of women and 57.8% of men have an upper or post-secondary education. Some 15% of employees have primary or lower secondary education.

Lately, the Ministry of Education (*Opetusministeriö*) has increased, in particular, training opportunities leading to technological, health care and social care qualifications on the basis of its continuous forecasts about demand for vocational education. However, labour shortages in some occupations – for example, the metal industry, construction and health care – is often a topic of public debate.

The percentage of those participating in lifelong learning is high at 22.5%. At policy level, efforts to encourage lifelong learning has begun already with the implementation of a national policy on early childhood education and care in the public childcare system, which also aims to promote social inclusion among children. The policy further faces reality in the public comprehensive school system, the high quality of which is shown in the internationally high scores achieved in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) programme. With free education also at university level, Finnish society offers, at least in theory, equal opportunities for all in terms of access to education irrespective of socio-economic background. A culture of lifelong learning has strong roots in Finland, where education, training and self-development are generally appreciated. The survey results also show that most Finnish employees consider the contents of their job as more important than pay and development opportunities are valued high above career promotion opportunities (Lehto and Sutela, 2005).

Portugal

In the post-test, Portugal represents one of the Southern European countries. However, compared with other countries in this group, the female employment rate in Portugal is relatively high (61.7%). Still, with the employment rate for men reaching 73.4%, the gender employment gap is clear. The employment rate among older workers is also high at 50.5%. Women mostly work on a full-time basis, whereas only 15.9% work part time. Temporary contracts are common (19.2%), but the gender difference (20.4% for women compared with 18.2% for men) is not as pronounced as for instance in Finland. Unemployment is more common among women (8.6%) than men (6.7%), the differences being particularly significant among the youngest employees.

Among post-test countries, Portugal displays the largest share of the employed population working in agriculture (11.8%), with 30.5% employed in industry and 57.7% in services. The educational level among Portuguese employees aged 25–64 years is low, but gender differences are considerable. While 22% of women have a third-level education, the respective proportion among men amounts to 13.4%. On the other hand, 71.3% of men as opposed to 59.5% of female employees have only a basic education. About 17% of all employees have upper or post-secondary education.

Along with the Czech Republic, Portugal emerges as a country where the idea of lifelong learning has not yet really taken root. Only 4.1% of the working age population participates in lifelong learning. However, the Portuguese national report observes a growing trend in the participation in professional training courses, especially among women.

At present, there is a general agreement shared by the government, the social partners and the public that the low level of education and occupational qualification among the Portuguese population is one of the main obstacles to sustainable development both in terms of social inclusion and cohesion, and also in terms of the path towards a knowledge and innovation society. It also has an impact in terms of increased labour productivity which reflects not only the low qualifications of the working population but also the lack of innovation in the various forms of work organisation.

Therefore, a number of present policy programmes set the priorities on reinforcing higher educational and qualification levels among the population, on the promotion of a culture of lifelong learning, on reducing the inequalities and restrictions in the labour market and mobilising the population towards a knowledge society.

UK

According to Esping-Andersen, the UK represents a liberal political economy. In the UK, employment rates for men (77.6%) and women (65.9%) are high but indicate a clear gender employment gap. The employment rate in the oldest cohort of workers (56.9%) also is one of the highest in the EU27 – the average for the EU amounts to 42.6%. Similarly, as is the case in Austria, a significant part of employed women work only on a part-time basis (42.6%). Only 6.4% of employees, characterised mainly as a low-skilled and low paid group disadvantaged in many respects, work under temporary contracts (6.4% of women and 5.6% of men).

The unemployment rate in the UK is one the lowest in the EU27 (4.7%) and the country is one of the few countries where the male unemployment rate exceeds that of women (5.1% compared with 4.3%, respectively). In the UK, as well as in the other countries, lower educated individuals are more vulnerable to unemployment.

Among the post-test countries, the UK displays the largest proportion of workers in the services sector with 76.5%, while only 1.4% work in agriculture. The proportion of those employed in industry in the UK (22.1%) is the lowest among post-test countries. The educational level is close to the EU27 average and the gender gap in this respect is narrow. Among employees aged 25–64 years, 34.5% have attained a university education, 42.6% have an upper or post-secondary education and one in five (22.3%) has no qualifications above the basic level.

With 27.5% of the working age population participating in lifelong learning, the UK scores high among the EU27 countries. The UK report observes that, in recent years, there has been a considerable emphasis on the delivery of more training and development in the UK, much of which has been couched within government-led skills policies and frameworks, even if the state has maintained an indirect interventionist stance at workplace level. An increasing participation in lifelong learning is assumed to have the potential to enhance economic productivity and global competitiveness.

Nevertheless, it is claimed that workplaces in the UK are facing a skills crisis with more than one in three employers refusing to train their employees, despite government incentives to assist them. Furthermore, barriers to learning such as overwork and a 'long hours' culture prevent employees from participating in training (TUC, 2006).

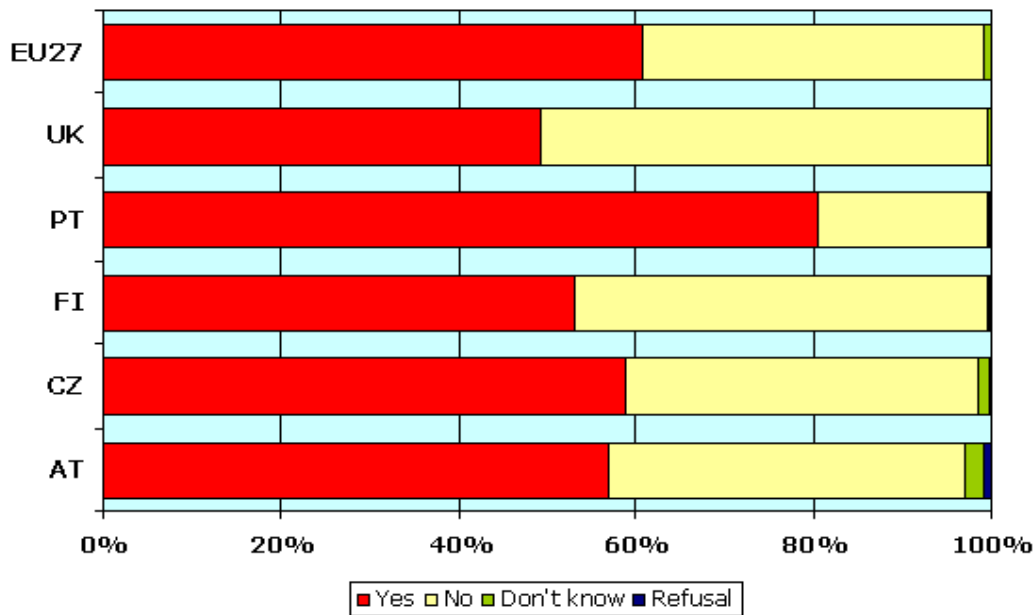
The UK displays a polarised high/low skills economy, which has been attributed, on the one hand, to structural factors (for example, the erosion of skilled manual employment, a concomitant rise in new technologies that de-skill certain occupations) which limit employer demand for higher-level skills and led a proportion of UK employees to become over-qualified or over-skilled for, or ‘skilled out’ of, their jobs (Payne, 2005). On the other hand, some commentators have pointed to the relatively low pay levels in the UK as a contributory factor towards a ‘low-skills equilibrium’ with regard to training and development (Keep and Mayhew, 2004).

Main findings

In this chapter, the main results of the interviews are presented. The first section presents a technical analysis of each question, reporting the possible ambiguities and translation problems detected in the questions as well as typical interpretations put to them. After each question or series of questions, a short summary assesses the overall functionality of the particular item. The second section sums up the main themes around development at work emerging from the interview data.

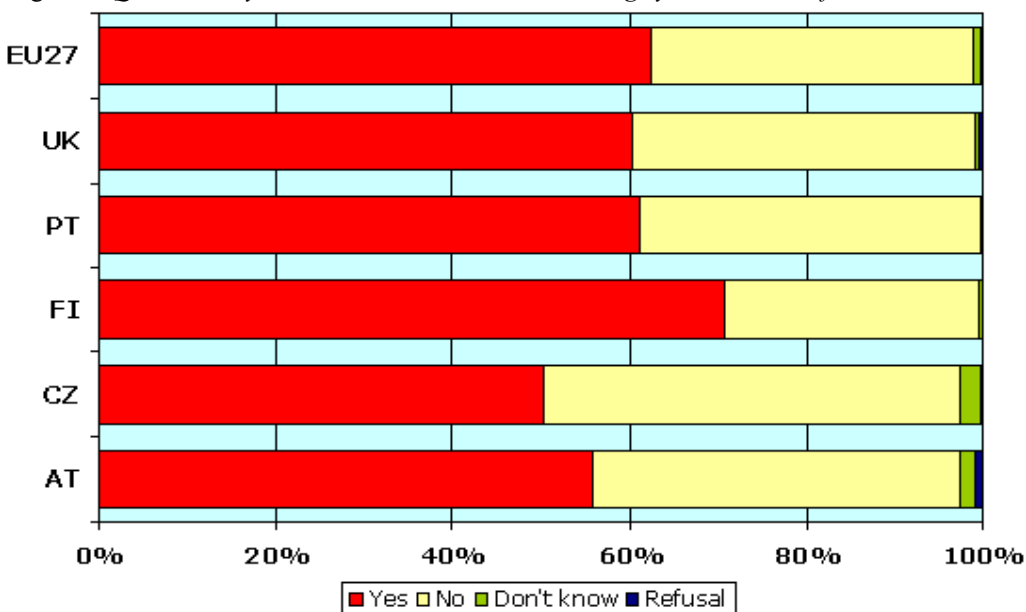
Questions 24A, 24B, 24C

Figure 1: Q24A – Are you able, or not, to choose or change your order of tasks?



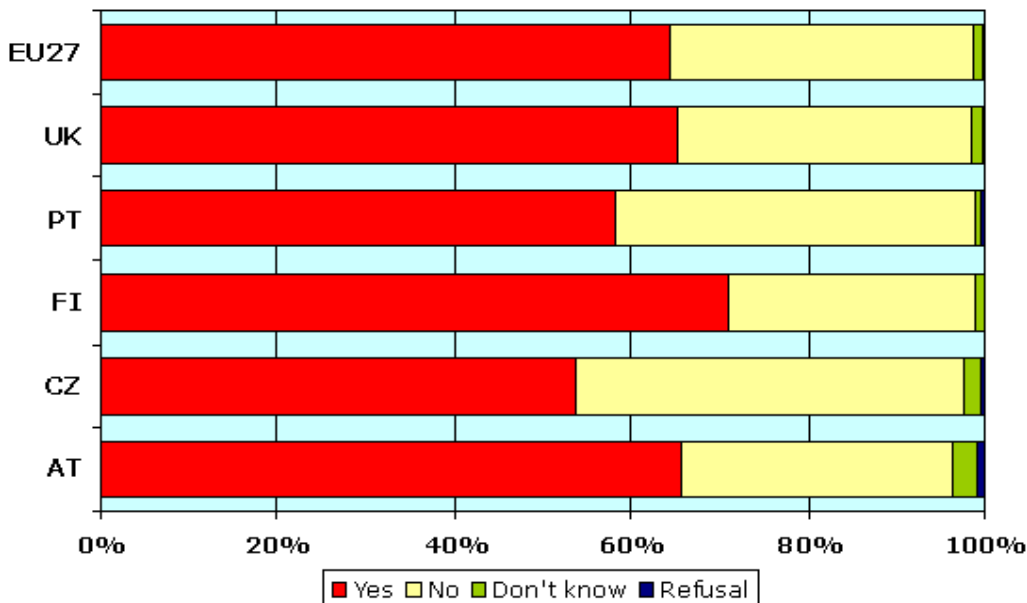
Note: Employees only.
Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 2: Q24B – Are you able, or not, to choose or change your methods of work?



Notes: Employees only
Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 3: Q24C – Are you able, or not, to choose or change your speed or rate of work?



Note: *Employees only.*

Source: *EWCS 2005*

Technical points

Question

The wording of the main question, on a worker's ability to choose or change different aspects of work, was well understood. As to the 'methods of work', some problems occurred in Austria, where the technically correct German translation (*Arbeitsmethoden*) appeared to be a somewhat more abstract term in the national context and is not usually used in everyday language.

'Speed or rate of work' emerged as problematic in all the translated versions. First, the word 'rate' was translated into Portuguese with a word unfamiliar to several respondents (*cadência*), especially for those of a lower educational level, which raised queries and doubts. Secondly, in addition to work speed and instead of 'rate of work', the Finnish and Czech respondents inquired about the term 'amount of work' and the Austrians queried 'scheduling of work'. Thus, two different items were actually asked about in these questions. This is well illustrated by the fact that four out of the 20 Finnish respondents (20%) stated that they were able to influence their speed of work but not their amount of work. Faced by this ambiguity, two responded 'no', one chose 'don't know' and only one chose 'yes'. In Austria, the question was answered according to the scheduling aspect of the item: being able to choose the time when a task is done. It is a common phenomenon that respondents pay more attention to the last word(s) of the question (Tourangeau et al, 2000).

Scale

A considerable number of interviewees across countries felt their autonomy was somewhat partial or relative: their ability to choose or change their work pattern depended on the specific tasks in their job. Thus, many responses would have welcomed more response alternatives to the questions than the mere 'yes' or 'no', thus adding 'to some extent' to the response choice. Especially those with low levels of discretion in their job seemed to vary in their responding, some opting for the affirmative, while some others opted in an identical situation for the negative response.

Interpretations

Q24A – Are you able, or not, to choose or change your order of tasks?

The item was often understood as ‘when to do what’, in other words the ability to prioritise certain tasks over others. Depending on the respondent, this autonomy was related to work activities that ranged from extremely small-scale tasks to much more strategic actions. Greater signs of autonomy were associated with more senior personnel in an occupational hierarchy.

Even while responding in the affirmative, most respondents brought up that there were more or less immediate constraints on their autonomy. First, the order of tasks might be chosen, but this order must fit into a defined timeframe. These timeframes ranged from daily to weekly or monthly schedules. As observed in the Austrian report, this kind of freedom is related to work with expected results, response times and even deadlines but no detailed prescriptions.

During the day, I have certain tasks that I have to do by a certain time. I can switch them as I need, or depending on how busy I am with telephone calls and sorting things out, but I have to do a specific task by a specific time. (Czech female canteen manager, aged 39 years)

Secondly, the autonomy on task order might also be limited to specific tasks in the job. For instance, a Portuguese female schoolteacher aged 31 years responding affirmatively noted that that she was not able to choose or change the order of her classes but she could choose when to have meetings.

Thirdly, for those who worked with people (for example, in care work, sales work, client services or teaching), the limitations on autonomy were based on the need to adapt to customer’s needs. For example, in education and day care, the days depend on the children and on the mood they are in, as well as how well they progress in their school work. For a Finnish female practice nurse aged 44 years, there was only a limited opportunity for individual variation in task order without upsetting her elderly clients who were used to familiar and routine ways of doing things. The Austrian report rightly emphasises the unpredictability of client interaction, which structures work beyond pacing and deadlines more than ‘just’ work design and organisational control would do it.

The sequence, no, it’s prescribed by the people, I don’t have any influence on that, because someone says they want to do this and that, or insure a car, the sequence is given automatically. I don’t have any influence. (Austrian insurance salesman, aged 47 years)

In Finland, many workers, especially those in white-collar jobs, emphasised how the possibility to prioritise was a necessity in their job. For instance, a female financial consultant aged 47 years described how she might have drawn up her schedules for the coming week, but then something may just intervene, something that bypassed everything, so that she simply had to be able to change her schedule.

The Austrian report also notes that people in some occupations face emergency situations requiring an immediate response, which structure the order of tasks occasionally or generally. For instance, in policing, nursing and firefighting, the emergency services need to set priorities in accordance with each situation. On the bi-polar response scale, the Austrian respondents whose jobs included this kind of prioritising, gave a ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘don’t know’ response to the survey question.

A UK skilled multi-disciplined craftsman aged 49 years responding in the affirmative, further described how he and colleagues, as a team, jointly decided on the priority of entire contracts for work, similarly re-emphasising a form of relativised autonomy:

We can categorise the importance of each job, and we decide whether the job that has come in that morning is an important one, then we drop the other job and we go and do that one. We just decide between ourselves. (UK multi-disciplined craftsman, aged 49 years)

Across countries, the respondents reporting that they cannot change or choose the order of their work tasks usually carry out routine or automated tasks, such as on a production line or other manual work, and significantly, in transportation. Their inability to influence task order was in some cases related to technical requirements, but also to safety regulations. Sometimes, the limits were found in their superiors' priorities and requirements which were in turn shaped by their organisation's strategic objectives or customer requirements – or, as emphasised in the Czech report, even in the unwillingness to delegate part of the decision-making process to their staff. However, in many cases, not even the foremen had much to say on the order of tasks.

That's the way it is, without some of those tasks the train would never leave. So if I wanted to change the order of those tasks, we'd never get anywhere. (Czech male train conductor, aged 42 years)

Some lower level job occupants in the UK sample combined their superiors' autonomy with their own, considering that they were able to choose or change their task order when in fact they were only responding to their superiors' orders to change it. On the other hand, the UK report observes that the relatively small degree of task order autonomy of some respondents in low-skill, highly repetitive jobs impacted in turn on the autonomy of their superiors: the latter had presumably fewer options in terms of task order with which to manage them.

Special attention should be given to the responses of those respondents whose job situations involved only a relatively low level of autonomy. The Finnish and UK reports note that these persons tended to respond to the bi-polar scale in different ways, some considering their minimal discretion as a possibility to influence task order, while some others did not count these small variations as any kind of discretion and thus responded negatively. The UK report contemplates whether some of these affirmative respondents – who were mostly women in the UK sample – tended to subjectively 'enlarge' the significance of any discretion they had in this respect, perhaps as a means of 'rationalising' or coping with a relative absence of autonomy.

Q24B – Are you able, or not, to choose or change your methods of work?

The respondents generally understood the methods of work to be the ways they undertook their work – except for the Austrian respondents who did not grasp the meaning of the concept (see technical points). In many cases, the autonomy was, again, perceived to be partial or relative, with those holding lower level occupations usually providing relatively 'minor' examples of choice compared with higher level job holders.

Depending on the job, work methods could mean a range of things: for example, what equipment, software or technologies were used, or as in the case of a Czech female teacher, aged 29 years, whether to teach in the classic way with pupils sitting on benches and the teacher dictating or whether to play some games with the pupils and let them learn that way. Work methods also comprised the ways the wider group of customers or staff were dealt with. In these cases, the choice of work method called for psychological insight, flexibility and even creativity. A Finnish male coach driver aged 48 years explained how, in his job, his working methods were about how to meet and treat the passengers as individuals and connect with them; in other words, 'whether you are present in what you do or if you just drive'. The first thing a Finnish female school assistant aged 27 years associated with the concept of working methods was to use

common sense, on top of which came alertness and the ability to read what the situation required and to act accordingly. A Portuguese female shop manager aged 31 years referred to her relations with the rest of the staff working in the shop and noted that, since people are different, ‘what works with someone may not work with someone else and then I will be changing my methods of work’.

Interestingly, the Portuguese report points out that, in relation to methods, some of the respondents specifically referred to the possibilities they had to improve their work performance by organising their work.

I think it is always possible to improve. A person is never satisfied with the way he/she does [the work] and, as time goes by, I also change my method according to the needs and according to what I'm learning. (Portuguese male accountant, aged 38 years)

Some respondents observed change in work methods over time. A Finnish male earth works excavator aged 39 years remarked that he had become ‘more lazy or more clever’ over time, trying to make more use of machines in order to minimise the amount of physical work. Some others draw attention to computerisation which has made certain tasks easier over time – on the other hand, however, the number of secretaries had also decreased, so that ‘one now has to do everything by oneself’.

The UK report interestingly observes that interviewees with different backgrounds interpreted that they had greater levels of autonomy over working methods in their job where they felt themselves to be or were recognised as ‘experts’. An Austrian accountant working in a tax consultant’s office considered that she had such a high level of work experience that she was in the position to simply ignore or make less formal some company standards and documentation procedures which she did not consider relevant.

I don't follow these things at all, really, because I hate it, all that documentation, I document – I have so much experience on the job, I document what's important and where I know it can cause difficulties later on. The rest of these standard procedures, I document zero, because I'm not bothered, pointless checklists or filling in something for no reason whatever. (Austrian female accountant, aged 39 years)

The interviewees who responded that they could not choose or change their work methods were typically lower status or manual workers doing relatively repetitive work where methods were often dependent on technological or automated production processes and where there was only minimal room for employee autonomy. In the UK example, employees with a low level of discretion were often working on a part-time basis.

Nevertheless, the Finnish report notes also a number of white-collar workers who reported quite a lot of autonomy with respect to the order of tasks, but much less in choosing their work methods. These interviewees were restricted by standardised procedures and company rules, which had to be followed, for example, when reporting new equipment purchases or reclamation or when granting a loan in banking. These detailed predescriptions were sometimes regarded as being part of the inflexibility of the work organisation, but in some cases they were required for safety reasons. Likewise, the Austrian report also connects ‘methods of work’ with prescribed or standardised procedures. However, the report concludes that in some cases they were shared, deep-seated good practices and localised standards that may or may not be negotiated and revised rather than strict procedures which could not be altered.

The UK report observes that, similar to the previous item, lower occupational status employees’ extent to choose or change their ways of working sometimes appeared to impact on their superiors’ own levels of job autonomy. Similarly, the Czech report notes that respondents in managerial positions realised that they were autonomous in the way they dealt with their staff, but they could not choose methods for technological procedures their staff worked with. On the other hand, the interviewees again sometimes combined their perceived discretion over choosing or changing work methods with that of their superiors.

In the same way as for task order, some of the respondents with only minor possibilities to change or choose their work methods, responded in the affirmative, while some gave a negative response.

Q24C – Are you able, or not, to choose or change your speed or rate of work?

For the majority of respondents, the speed of work was basically about ‘how quickly you choose to do the job’ within timeframes set by management, clients and/or wider environmental factors. Quite independently of the translation errors, a number of interviewees found it difficult to decide how they should understand the ability to choose or change the speed or rate of work in relation to their job. The Austrian report notes that in quite discretionary and objective-driven work situations, ‘task order’, ‘speed of work’ and ‘deadlines’ can be confusing, particularly client demands or problems requiring immediate action are less predictable than traditional Taylorist forms of work discipline used to determine changes to improve labour productivity.

Worker autonomy in this respect was also often partial or relative, which made it difficult for a number of respondents to use the bi-polar scale. In general, for workers in higher level occupations, the speed of work tended to be more ‘self-determined’ and related to a greater proportion of their working time and duties than those of less skilled or lower status workers in more routine and technology-based jobs. However, all respondents were subjected to some speed requirements in the context of organisational, client company and wider environmental considerations. For instance, a UK female teacher aged 54 years commented that her work speed has to ‘go with the school bell’; on the other hand, she described her considerable level of autonomy as a professional employee in deciding whether or not to spread work designed for one class over further teaching sessions – within the scope of the annual boundaries of the national teaching curriculum.

The UK report draws attention to the fact that workers in higher level occupations described, in this context, the ‘elasticity’ of their working time in terms of hours worked: by working varying hours, some respondents felt able to some extent to control their work speed or rate of work, while recognising that the slower they worked, the more hours they would need to carry out their duties. Lower status workers tended to interpret their ability to influence aspects of their job speed in relation to their contracted hours at the workplace.

In a similar way, many Finnish white-collar interviewees felt that in the short term they were able to choose or change their speed (or amount of work), but in the long run this was not possible. If they worked at a slightly slower pace on one particular day and omitted to carry out a specific task, it would however still have to be done at a later stage. This kind of limited autonomy is also described in the Czech report. In these situations, some respondents replied positively to the survey question, while some gave a negative response.

Again, in working with other people, the margins of one’s freedom of choice over speed or rate of work depended on the customer’s needs, colleagues’ ability to understand the explanation given in relation to a particular issue, or pupils’ ability to digest what they are taught. A UK healthcare support worker’s ‘Not sure’ reply related to a perception that in her job, ‘(t)here isn’t any rate or speed. You can’t hurry the patients ... you’ve got to go at their pace’. At least in the Finnish context, some of these interviewees therefore decided to respond in the affirmative, while some gave a negative response in relation to whether they were able to change or choose the speed of work and workload.

You can't compare working with a machine to working with another person... If someone's sensible, I can work with that person quickly, if not, that'll hold us up, and I don't have any choice, because I have to take into account that that person doesn't understand what I'm saying, or whatever. But a computer just does what I want. (Czech male network administrator, aged 23 years)

The Austrian report highlights that when customer frequency increases, discretion decreases. An Austrian male sales assistant aged 20 years tailored his speed of work to meet customer requirements. He balanced his workload according to those who put him under pressure to complete a task and those who do not.

Reflecting a similar attitude as the Austrian accountant in the previous example, two Finnish interviewees tried to manage pressurised work situations by simply omitting to do something they regarded less important. A male higher-education teacher aged 58 years had 'learned to say no', and a female crèche worker aged 37 years had decided to prioritise her work in pressurised situations, concentrating on her core task of taking care of children and postponing or even totally omitting the additional documentation work. However, this was not possible in all jobs.

Some interviewees perceived their speed of work as constant or already so high that they could not figure out how they might choose or change it. Indeed, a UK male farm employee aged 38 years, working as fast as he could during the current season, was unsure about whether the question asked related to whether he could work faster if asked to do so or whether he chose his own speed of work.

It's impossible to change [the speed or rate of work]. Impossible. Firstly, if you slow down, that's bad, that's really bad, because... Okay, you could change the rate of work, but only upwards, working faster. And that wouldn't be possible. Your hands couldn't keep up, and the machine couldn't take any more. (Czech male welder, aged 59 years)

The UK report once again highlights that a minority of lower status employees interpreted their capacity to choose or change their speed of work in relation to how management could direct them to speed up or slow down. The UK report also notes that several lower occupational level employees still considered that their jobs contained elements of autonomy in terms of work speed. For instance, a UK female checkout operator aged 53 years commented: 'It's up to us if we can go fast or slow because we're on the checkouts'. This answer reflects a perceived reality and/or subconscious efforts to inject autonomy into tightly controlled jobs.

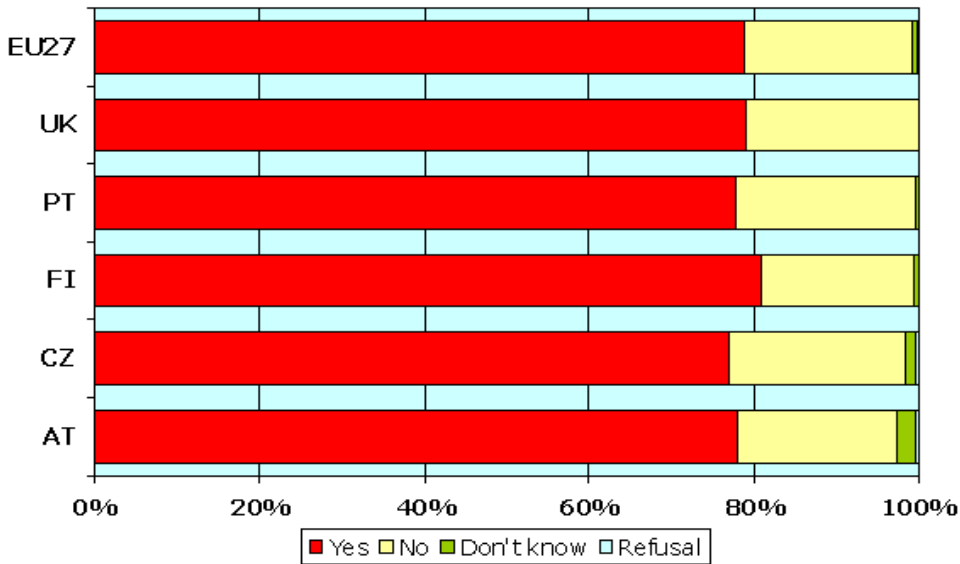
Summary

In sum, the series of questions seems to be understood in a relatively similar way across post-test countries. In Austria, problems emerged in relation to 'methods of work', translated technically right, but using an unfamiliar term. As for the UK, some respondents combined 'order of tasks' with other aspects of job autonomy. Furthermore, translations for 'rate of work' were not entirely accurate in the Austrian, Czech and Finnish cases, and the translation used in this context in the Portuguese version of the questionnaire was unfamiliar for some of the interviewees.

A potential problem with this series of question appears to be the bi-polar scale which does not take the extent of discretion into account. However, most respondents perceived their ability to choose or change different aspects of their job not as absolute but as partial or relative.

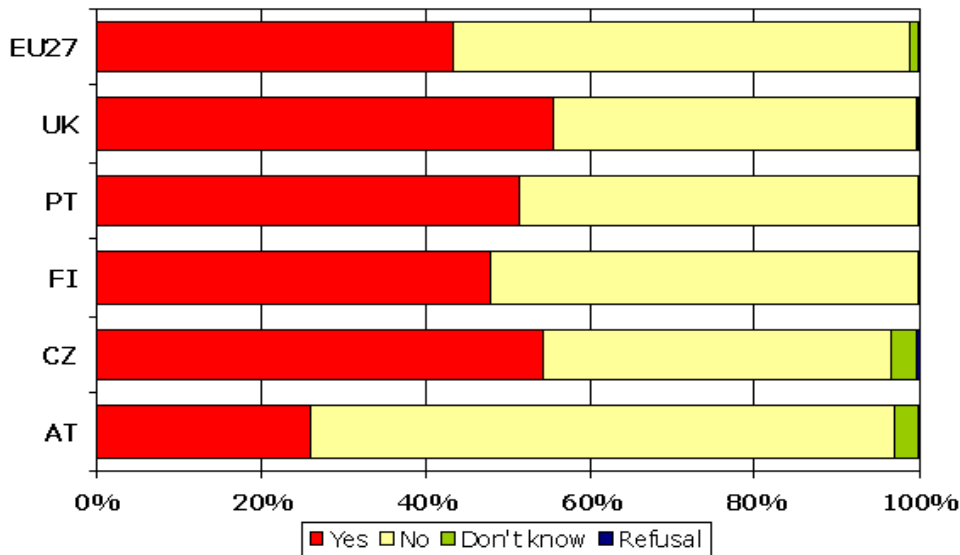
Questions 23C, 23D, 23E, 23F

Figure 4: Q23C – Generally, does your main job involve, or not, solving unforeseen problems on your own?



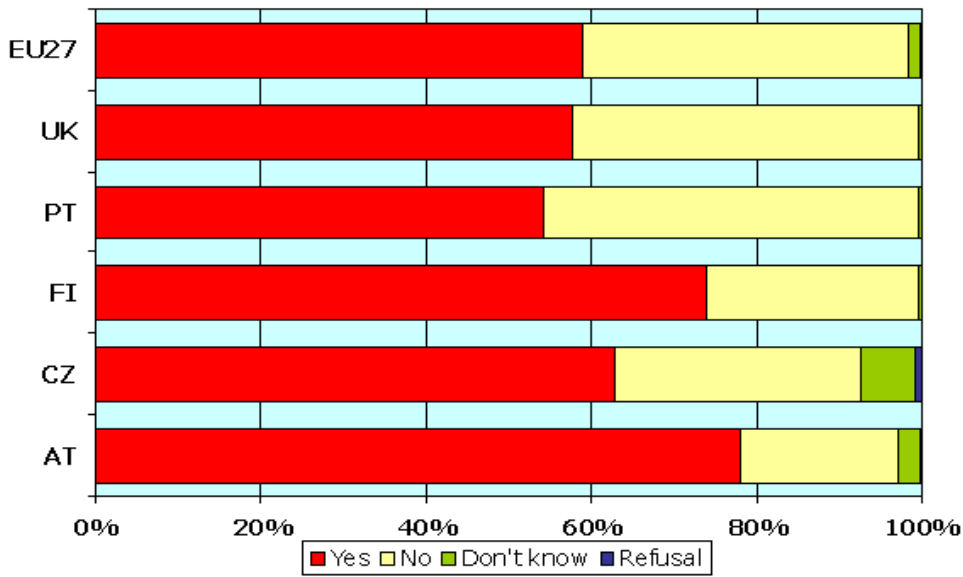
Note: Employees only.
Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 5: Q23D – Generally, does your main job involve, or not, monotonous tasks?



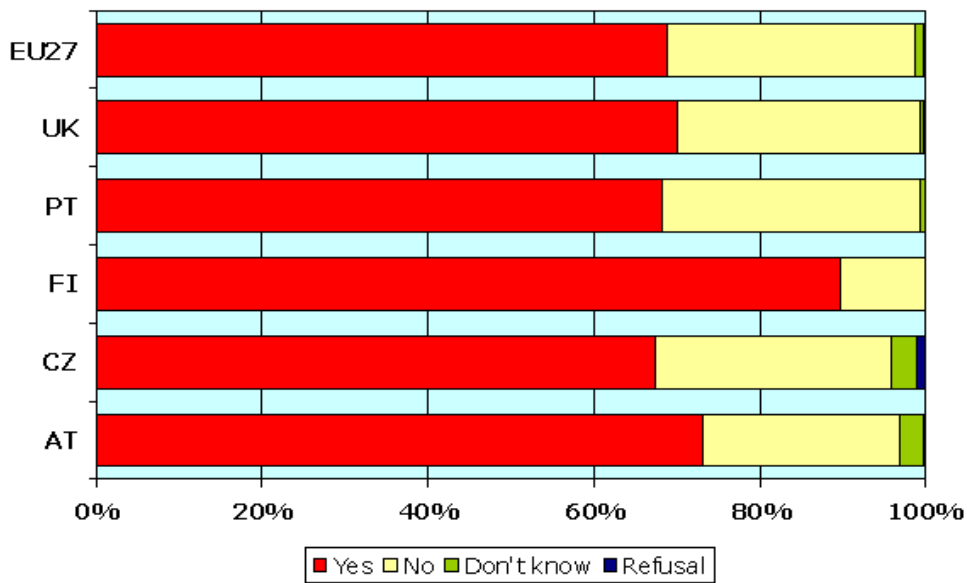
Notes: Employees only.
Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 6: Q23E – Generally, does your main job involve, or not, complex tasks?



Note: *Employees only.*
 Source: *EWCS 2005*

Figure 7: Q23F – Generally, does your main job involve, or not, learning new things?



Note: *Employees only.*
 Source: *EWCS 2005*

Technical points

Question

In this series of questions, the concept of complex tasks appeared to be quite difficult to understand – especially in the Czech Republic, where more than half of the respondents admitted that they were not very familiar with the term. This is reflected in the EWCS 2005 results with 6.5% of respondents giving ‘don’t know’ answers. Furthermore, the foreign word for ‘monotonous’ appeared unfamiliar for many Czechs. In Austria, the word ‘complex’ was translated with a word technically appropriate (*vielsichtig*), but not always used in everyday language. As a consequence, it was frequently confused with another term, literally ‘rich in variation’ (*vielfältig*), which led to descriptions of the variety of tasks included in one’s job.

With regard to the question related to solving unforeseen problems, the Austrian questionnaire used the translation ‘independently’ instead of ‘on one’s own’. This ‘independence’ probably elicits more positive connotations than ‘on one’s own’, the latter referring in some cases even to isolation and lack of support.

In Finland, the word used for ‘generally’ in the question body was often interpreted as temporal frequency (usually/often), which some respondents took very literally, for instance weighting that once or twice a week is not ‘generally’ but is rather often. On the other hand, many interviewees did not seem to pay little or no attention to this additional word and would agree on the ‘generality’ of measured aspects of work even when these occurred once a month. This led to a certain disparity in responses. The UK report also observes that the ‘generally’ term at the start of the question was ignored in a number of cases.

Scale

The bi-polar scale was mostly found functional in this context. A kind of mid-alternative response like ‘sometimes’ was missed only by a minority of respondents.

Interpretations

Q23C – Solving unforeseen problems alone

The ‘unforeseen problems’ were generally well understood as referring to unexpected difficulties or challenges in the course of one’s job. However, the concept ‘on your own’ provoked some contemplation, especially in situations where respondents tended to solve smaller-scale problems themselves but would seek assistance in the case where more difficult issues arise.

Examples of unforeseen problems concerned for example technical disturbances, changes in the environment (for example, weather conditions in caretaking, cleaning and piloting), sudden sickness of colleagues or other problems endangering the smooth running of the unit, uncompleted work instructions or unforeseen situations and emergencies. For those who worked with people, the unexpected problems were often linked to human relations, such as conflicts among personnel or having to deal with tricky requests from clients. A Finnish female financial consultant aged 47 years sometimes even had to evaluate whether an older person brought to a bank meeting by relatives actually was of sound mind and really aware of the consequences of the changes which were about to be made in their financial business.

The Austrian national report draws attention to the variation in urgency and in the time pressure these unforeseen problems exert. For medical and emergency personnel, this pressure is immediate, obvious and situational, but also in other occupations, the presence of expensive technology and/or impatient clients can turn a problem into an emergency.

The complexity and scale of the problems arising varied by the job status of respondents. For those in higher positions and more highly educated interviewees with high job autonomy, unforeseen problems often related to relatively significant or major matters in their job or workplace. In these cases, the ‘problems’ might be frequent and an integral part of the job description. Workers in lower skilled posts tended to outline localised, smaller scale difficulties. For instance, a UK male car park patrol officer aged 60 years described how he jump-started cars for people and looked under cars for a key that they have dropped. For such lower status job occupants, resolving unexpected tasks was often not part of their job description. However, many perceived them as a challenge and succeeding in resolving such problems gave them a feeling of achievement and satisfaction. The Czech report highlights, however, that when a superior demands that a worker deals with unexpected problems over and above their level of competence, this can lead to dissatisfaction with the job.

Even if almost all of the respondents recognised unforeseen problems in their work, some did not have to solve them on their own but simply passed the problem over to their supervisor or to technical assistants who took care of solving it.

Independent resolution of some problems. Well, that’s not something I do actually. When a machine breaks down, I make a call, and a technician comes and fixes it. If I had some problem with a customer, I make a call, the security guard comes and that’s the problem sorted out. (Czech barman, aged 29 years)

On the other hand, several blue-collar interviewees interpreted that that since they were trained how to respond to unexpected situations (such as by calling on their superiors for assistance) they actually solved the dilemma on their own when they transferred it to higher level staff member. Some others were not even allowed to solve problems on their own, even if they would have had the skills and willingness to do so. A Portuguese female assistant chef aged 51 years bluntly stated: ‘It is not up to me to make any decisions.’

However, the Finnish report also refers to a fundamentally different situation in this context. Several Finnish interviewees in white-collar positions with considerable job autonomy responded negatively to the survey question: they felt they did not have to solve unforeseen problems on their own since they worked in teams and/or they were always able to consult their colleagues when needed. However, in cases where these respondents asked whether their job included independent problem-solving, like in the Austrian version, they might have responded in the affirmative.

Q23D – Monotonous tasks

The concept of monotonous tasks appeared to be easily grasped in the other countries except for the Czech Republic, where the word used in the questionnaire sometimes caused problems and wavering among respondents. In some cases, it was interpreted as something strenuous and difficult, such as lifting heavy loads. This question was not included in the post-test analysis conducted in Portugal, due to a typing mistake.

A commonly shared view across other post-test countries associated monotonous tasks with highly repetitive, routine-based or mechanically performed work, assembly-line type of work, possibly of long duration. Even an interesting task can become monotonous, if one is forced to do it continuously, the Finnish earth works excavator pointed out.

The Austrian report interestingly observes that in some jobs of high autonomy, monotony was perceived less as a remnant of industrial times but as an increase in bureaucracy and documentation through the introduction of new procedures. This view was evident in the Austrian, Czech and Finnish reports in connection with monotonous ‘paper work’ and ‘bureaucracy’, for example in tax consultancy, nursing, teaching, day care, banking and even firefighting.

A number of respondents across countries would not describe their work as monotonous, due to the fact that they work with people who always are different. The ambiguity of interactive service work is illustrated by the Austrian male sales

assistant who considered his job as monotonous on the whole, as his set of tasks did not change, but on the other hand, the situations and customers were always different, and thus, the everyday work was not monotonous. However, a few interviewees sometimes felt their tasks were monotonous even if they worked with people. For instance, the Finnish female practice nurse referred to older people with dementia, who often tended not to remember anything but repeatedly asked the same questions.

Interestingly, the Czech, Finnish and UK reports raise a subjective perception: the idea of ‘monotonous’ is something which people are not at all interested in, thus something boring. Respondents with this attitude often admitted that their work included repetitive tasks which might be seen as monotonous by some others, but they, in contrast, at times enjoyed undertaking this type of work, which freed their minds to think of other things, and thus did not consider them to be monotonous tasks.

Finally, it should be highlighted that the bi-polar scale lacks the measurement of the extent of monotonous tasks, which typically is lower among higher status employees and higher among lower status employees. In any case, for most interviewees giving an affirmative reply, monotony is limited only to a part of their job.

Q23E – Complex tasks

In the Czech sample, after some initial difficulties with clarifying the meaning of ‘complex’, the respondents often regarded that complex tasks meant comprehensive, often long-lasting tasks that have to be dealt with from start to finish, and which lead to certain outputs. References to this kind of interpretation were not found in other national contexts.

However, interpretations considerably varied also in other countries. One of the interpretations, proffered by higher status and more educated interviewees in Finland and the UK, explained complex tasks as ambiguous situations or problems to which there was not necessarily any right solution. They were often ‘one-off’ situations, making any preparation for dealing with them necessarily generic in character.

Furthermore, some respondents associated complexity with unforeseen situations where one had to make quick decisions and simultaneously take several different issues into consideration; some interviewees even felt that complex tasks and unforeseen problems were the same phenomenon. In Portugal, the item was associated with being something which is not related to the usual content of the job.

Several blue-collar workers, particularly in Finland, saw complexity as something requiring a lot of precision and meticulousness following detailed instructions. Similarly, the UK multi-disciplined craftsman related complexity in his job to the specific technical work activity that he undertook around the ‘measurement of angles’.

For those whose job involved dealing with people, the item often meant complexity in social relations or the necessity of high social skills as well as technical knowledge of the job:

Complex..., I sometimes feel like a lawyer, like a priest, like a doctor, [...] that's how I feel. (Austrian insurance salesman, aged 47 years)

Some respondents associated complexity with ‘fixing machines’, some others related the concept to different dependencies that have to take into account when they relied on the work of others and vice versa.

The UK report also delineates a difference in interpretations according to whether complex tasks were considered to be immutably complicated or ‘learnable’. Essentially immutable tasks usually involved the application of specific knowledge and multiple skills, some acquired and some ‘innate’. In contrast, a number of employees associated

complexity with extensive tasks requiring skills beyond a worker's professional competencies or educational background; thus, the perceived complexity of a task diminishes once a worker gains experience or is trained to deal with it.

I have come to the conclusion that the complexity, that's not an obstacle, it is just a delay; if you ask for advice and someone comes to show you, you can overcome even a complex task. (Finnish male earth works excavator, aged 39 years)

Overall, interpretations of complex tasks tended to emphasise 'thinking' or 'intellectual' work. As one might expect, most employees of a lower status also estimated that there was little activity of this type in their jobs. Some of the respondents who replied negatively to the survey question clearly referred to the low level of demand in their jobs. A Portuguese male surveillance officer aged 27 years considers that his work 'is nothing, driving a car and entering buildings is nothing'.

Respondents' attitudes towards complex tasks also varied. Some interviewees defined complex tasks as something 'too difficult' or 'impossible to do' – namely something which is out of the reach of the respondents, which was the most common interpretation in Portugal. However, in most cases, complex tasks were appreciated as a positive challenge and a counterbalance to monotony.

Q23F – Learning new things

The interpretations of 'learning new things' differed in the contents and status of learning. First, interviewees differed in their interpretations of 'new things'. The UK report notes that especially younger, less experienced employees emphasised the learning of new skills and activities for their entire job. The Finnish report connects this kind of learning of entirely new skills to recent, unique changes in the tasks or position of a respondent: broader job descriptions and new responsibilities call for new competencies. Thus, it may not come as a surprise that among the Czech interviewees, in a country currently undergoing rapid changes, the concept of 'learning new things' was largely associated with new specific skills or information, learning to work with computers in general or handling new machines and equipment. In addition, keeping up with changing legislation was mentioned in the Czech report – more generally, joining the European Union and increasing foreign cooperation paved the way for learning new things.

However, in many cases, learning new things in a job was directly related to technical evolution and the need to keep up to date on such change. Learning new things could also mean learning in relation to 'evolving, gap-filling, knowledge-building' or 'topping up', as described in the UK report, namely refining one's skills and deepening one's understanding.

I learn new things but not very often a brand new thing. It's developing skills that you have, finding slightly new ways of doing things rather than totally brand new stuff. (UK female teacher, aged 31 years)

Secondly, differences in the interpretation of 'learning new things' were often closely related to the different status and ways of learning. In the Austrian and Czech sample the emphasis appears to be on training, self-learning or other more or less formal learning activities. This training often consists of discreet training events relating to some aforementioned changes at work which require totally new competencies. Taking a formal approach also applies to much of the gap-filling type of knowledge, often in terms of new or additional segments of information. In this context, the UK report notes how some respondents' interpretation of 'learning new things' concerned their job induction as opposed to subsequent time in their post. Some of them perceived that their learning opportunities had come and gone: after the period of induction training when they started their jobs, they could recall only very occasional instances of any form of learning activity at work.

On the other hand, learning new things could be perceived as a continuous and essential part of the job, as ongoing self-development and job improvement. In these cases, it often was about deepening a worker's understanding, updating knowledge, refining work methods and improving skills, including social skills, by increased work experience. Even if training and self-learning were also an important part of this ongoing learning, especially for white-collar workers, a large part of this kind of learning was seen to take place on a daily basis through practice and 'insight'. For instance, the UK male farm employee observed that simple tasks (for example, hanging a farm gate differently to improve the 'flow of cows') were 'picked up as [he went] along'. This kind of interpretation of learning as an 'anytime' activity appeared to be especially common in Finland, Portugal and the UK, while the Czech respondents seemed to make less reference to everyday work as a potential source of opportunities to learn something new.

I feel as if I learn something every day, something new ... I don't think that you would ever be on top of everything that you need to learn. (UK male installation engineer, aged 55 years)

And learning new, you just name it, it's about having your eyes open, all the time those small things, like which route to choose, even streets – aah, I see, you can drive that way, too – to choose lane, to adapt your rhythm to traffic lights, (...) To observe the client, your own methods, to keep eyes and ears and heart open. I mean this active attitude. (Finnish male coach driver, aged 48 years)

Quite literally, learning new things might almost be the actual contents of the job, like in the case of a Portuguese female researcher aged 30 years who commented: 'When we work in research and development everything is a new thing. We are ourselves developing a new thing: concepts, methodologies...The research work itself already implies new things.'

The UK report notes that 'learning new things' also occurred for a number of interviewees, particularly older and professional workers by teaching others or helping them to develop at the workplace, either formally or informally. For example, a UK male rolling stock engineer aged 59 years outlined how his mentorship of an apprentice engineer had caused him to reflect and 'learn' about how best to help other workers progress in their jobs, as well as about how he performed his own work.

As one might anticipate, lower status, more routine jobs were shown to involve less and more task-specific and routine-related learning than higher status or more senior posts. The Austrian report further notes that such learning is relatively routine in itself and does not lead to increased competencies but is just about new and ever-changing regulations, new products or services. Many respondents perceive the short shelf-life of such learning as somewhat wasteful, since the time spent on routine learning may get in the way of a more substantial improvement of skills. Some interviewees even confront the learning demands on the job with a more ambitious notion of 'real' learning which they locate outside of their current jobs:

I've learned how to take minutes [...] but that's nothing you learn but is just an experience you take on board. For me, learning is a new language or knitting or something really solid, but no. (Austrian female education administrator, aged 29 years)

Some respondents, basically in more routine jobs, perceived that their job included little or no learning, thus being 'always the same'. The small variations in working methods or materials were so minor that they did not count as learning.

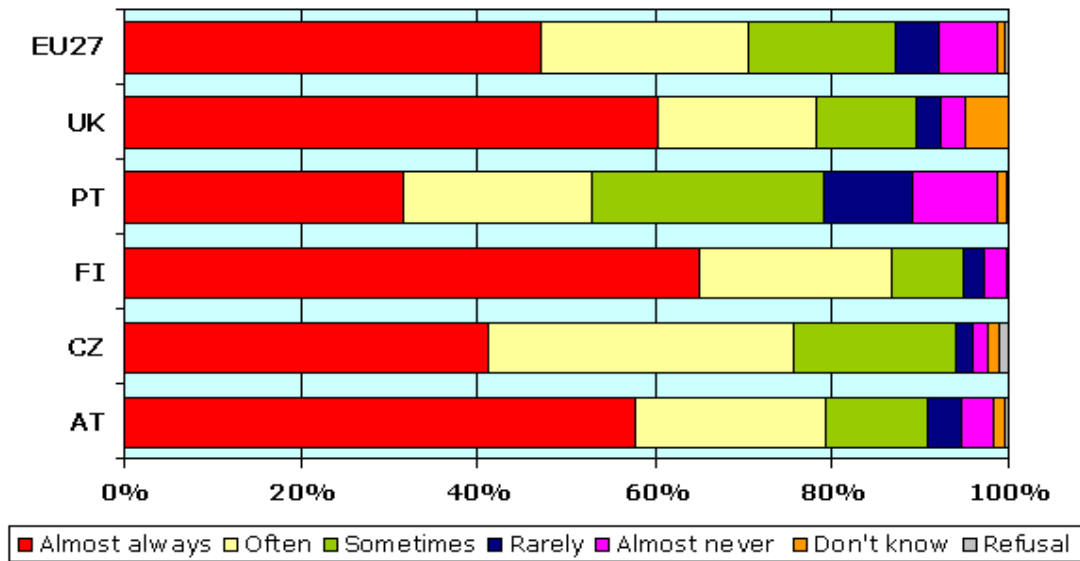
Almost all of those people whose work included learning perceived it as a positive thing. However, with an already existing high workload, having to also cope with learning new things was sometimes perceived as an excessive burden.

Summary

The series of questions and scale functioned well, although some respondents would have wished for more response alternatives to help them answer the questions. However, some problems emerged with the translations used for certain concepts. The Czech translations for ‘monotonous’ and ‘complex’ were not very well understood by some respondents, and in Austria, the translation for ‘complex’ elicited interpretations of various kinds of jobs. Several national reports also suggest the need to finetune the questions more clearly indicating the kind of phenomena to which the questions referred. The weak point in the Finnish version was the translation of the word ‘generally’, referring quite strongly to temporal frequency. A few interviewees reacted quite clearly to this word and started to unnecessarily complicate the issue.

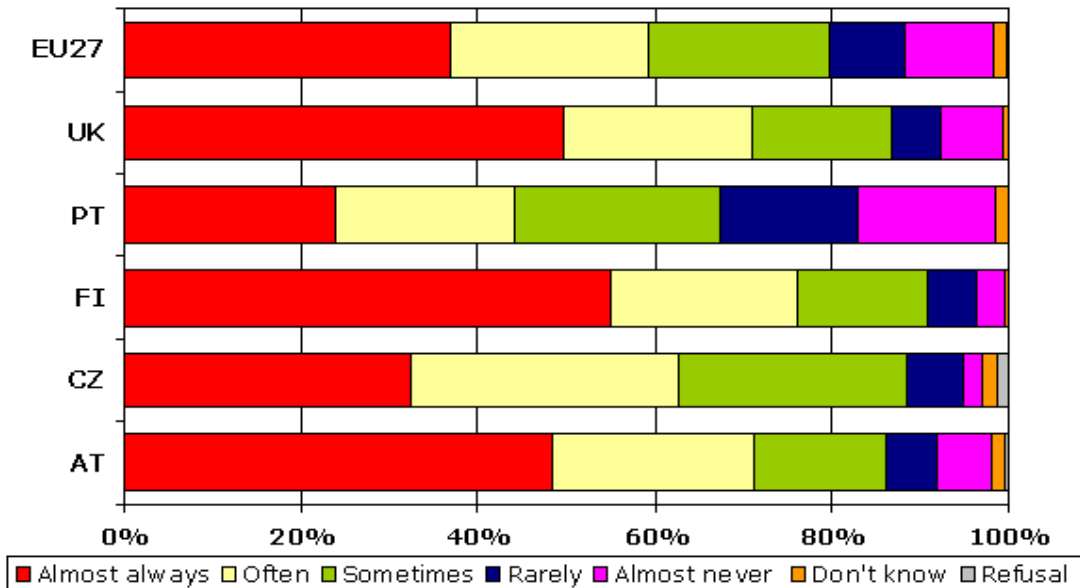
Questions 25A, 25B, 25C

Figure 8: Q25A – You can get assistance from colleagues if you ask for it?



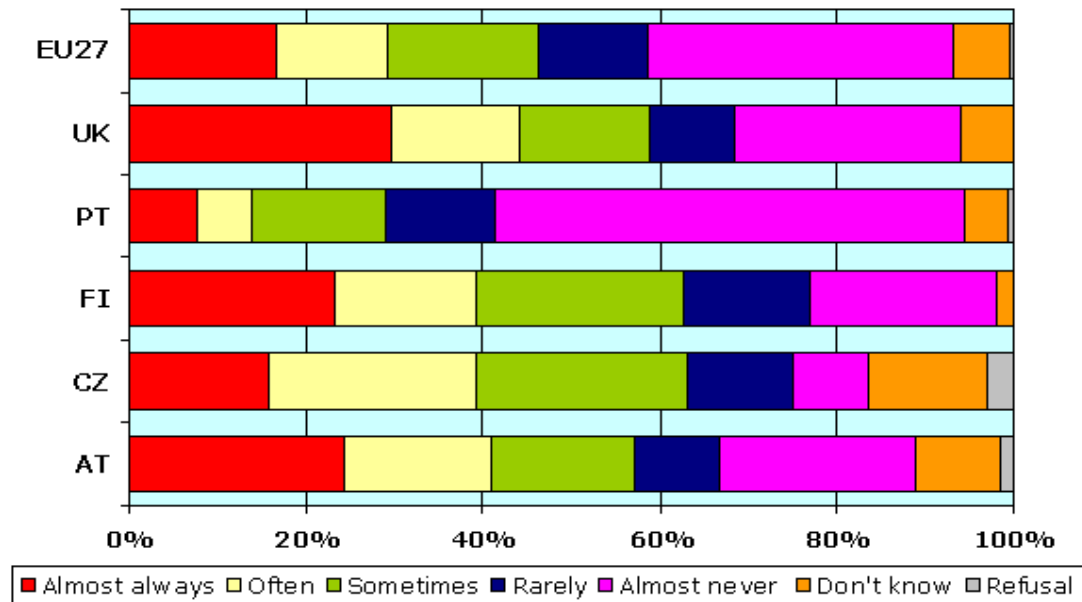
Note: *Employees only.*
 Source: *EWCS 2005*

Figure 9: Q25B – You can get assistance from your superiors/boss if you ask for it?



Note: *Employees by country.*
 Source: *EWCS 2005*

Figure 10: Q25C – You can get external assistance if you ask for it



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Technical points

The series of questions in relation to these parts of the questionnaire was generally well received except for the term ‘external assistance’, which created some confusion. Moreover, the lacking definition for ‘superior’ created some queries in terms of which level of superiority was meant – the immediate supervisor or higher level management. In the UK, a similar problem occurred in relation to the term ‘colleagues’.

In the Austrian version, the ‘assistance’ from a worker’s superior was translated into ‘support’. This is reflected in the Austrian responses highlighting rather the supportive aspect of assistance from superiors than concrete deeds.

It emerged that, in all of the post-test countries, the questions were understood in two different ways. The respondents either answered with regard to how often colleagues/superiors responded to their calls for assistance and in relation to how often they themselves asked for help.

Scale

The use of a response scale instead of a bi-polar scale was a good choice in this context. However, in the Czech case, a wrong range of answers was used for the entire Q25 A–M series of questions: almost all of the time; around three quarters of the time; around half of the time; around a quarter of the time; almost never. Furthermore, a number of respondents in all the countries noted that the extreme categories ‘always’ and ‘never’ were missing from the scale. The national reports also highlight that respondents were slightly confused by what should be the difference between ‘almost always’ and ‘often’, or between ‘rarely’ and ‘almost never’, which they felt to be practically one and the same thing.

Interpretations

Q25A – You can get assistance from colleagues if you ask for it?

Interviewees generally interpreted ‘assistance from colleagues’ in terms of help with their job duties, depending on the nature of their respective jobs.

Assistance could mean colleagues helping out with expertise or with practical advice in situations where there was something they did not know or somebody had more experience. In the UK sample, assistance was most commonly related to calls for technical support. The Austrian report notes that assistance also included getting a second opinion to safeguard a decision.

In manual and care work, in particular, assistance was in most cases associated with lending a hand with tasks – for example, lifting a heavy load together or providing help in accomplishing a task. It often was needed in situations of an occasionally high workload and working under time pressure. According to a Finnish female head nurse aged 57 years, collegial assistance could consist of borrowing and lending equipment and personnel among superiors.

The Finnish and Austrian reports also make reference to emotional support. The possibility to discuss problematic issues with someone – ‘To be puzzled together’ – was usually considered to be valuable, even if the actual problems would not be solved in these discussions.

In jobs where the work was firmly based on teamwork and cooperation assistance was seen in terms of working cooperatively, sharing tasks, reorganising schedules or simply discussing ideas and decisions together. In such cases, it was not necessary for workers to ask for assistance, since interdependency was a normal practice.

I can't say [how often] because we have always discussed these problems kind of all together, so you're not really even asking for help, but you get advice when you talk about some problem you have, and the others say what they think about it. You take some inspiration for yourself. (Czech female special schoolteacher, aged 29 years)

In addition, some other interviewees, whose work was not initially based on teamwork, noted that assistance was offered from colleagues without having to ask for it. They often spontaneously reported reciprocal assistance in a work environment with good social relations.

Say I need help with something, because I know that if she helps and then asks me I'll help her too. It's basically just tit for tat. (Czech female cleaner, aged 56 years)

Thus, when talking about assistance from colleagues, many interviewees also drew attention to the assistance they were able to give themselves. The Austrian report notes that some experienced workers who often found themselves being asked for help by others, rather than being able to ask others for assistance, found it partly enjoyable; however, it sometimes added to pressure at work, especially if they did not feel their expertise was appreciated by their employer.

The scope and frequency of assistance often depended on the standard of interpersonal relationships at the workplace. However, the potential problem was not always the lack of colleagues' willingness to help, but their limited availability or ability to provide assistance due to their lack of time or lack of competence. In this regard, the Austrian report highlights how some respondents could rarely get help from co-workers, with their ignorance adding to a general atmosphere of stress:

Rarely...what I don't know, the others know even less. (Austrian female civil servant, aged 57 years)

The concept of ‘colleagues’ was not a straightforward idea for all of the respondents. Some respondents working alone did not identify anyone who they would consider a colleague. Furthermore, the UK report notes how several interviewees, particularly from larger organisations, queried whom ‘colleagues’ referred to. As a result, they varied in their interpretations of such, from immediate colleagues to persons in other sections of the worksite or even in the wider organisation they worked for. The UK report further emphasises the networking activity and complex interrelationships that exist between the interviewees’ capacity to do their jobs and interactions with other members of the organisation. Several interviewees from larger organisations described a ‘chain-of-command’ for assistance whereby they sought help or advice from colleagues; if they were unable to help, more senior staff were approached for assistance.

The Czech report considers that respondents in management positions assessed ‘colleagues’ differently: some referred to their subordinates and some only indicated those employees who were outside their management scope, while some referred to personnel in other departments at the same level. The specific role of managers or senior staff was underlined by the Czech and UK reports as respondents in such positions find it difficult to ask for assistance from subordinates or other colleagues with less experience. In these cases, workers sometimes had to rely on ‘self-help’ reference sources, books and the internet:

I can't ask my staff management questions because they're paramedics, not management. And a lot of the information that you get privy to is confidential, so I can't ask them about that. I can ask them clinical stuff at the expense of making myself look stupid because I'm supposed to be the clinical manager. (UK male clinical manager, aged 39 years)

Q25B – You can get assistance from superiors if you ask for it?

For some respondents, the initial problem with the question was the lack of specification for ‘superior’, in terms of whether the immediate supervisor or company management were implied. In some cases, situations arose where several superiors changed shifts and respondents’ relationship with each of them might be quite different. Furthermore, the Czech and UK reports note the fact that respondents occasionally do not comply with the company hierarchy but turn to staff at higher management levels for assistance.

Assistance from superiors was seen to relate to formal and informal help with specific job duties and also organisational matters during the working day. However, the help sought from superiors was often less frequent and more clear-cut to that sought from colleagues.

The Finnish and Czech reports make a difference in terms of whether superiors were familiar with the content and methods of their subordinates’ work and whether they were physically a part of the work community or not. In the former case, the superior was often more competent than the colleagues and could be asked for concrete advice on what to do in problematic task-related situations.

[In the former workplace] he [the superior] was not really able to teach me anything more about turning... You rather asked your colleagues, from older colleagues, and got much more reliable advice... But in this case, the foreman has been working on these machines before, so it is a good occasion to ask him. (Finnish male turner, aged 30 years)

Sometimes the superior was more of an administrative superior and was not familiar enough with their colleagues’ work to provide expert assistance. A worker would basically turn to their superior only for help in matters of an organisational nature, or on issues that they were in charge of and that needed assistance to get the work done. This fact is well illustrated by the answers of a Czech respondent, which varied depending on whether expert help was meant (‘almost never’) or whether assistance was implied in the sense of organisational matters concerning the work (‘often’).

Nevertheless, both ‘types’ of superiors were at times sought for general or moral support, which may include even asking about the relevance or aim of a worker’s job. In most countries, assistance from superiors was also understood as their agreeableness or cooperativeness, for example, in relation to requests for days off, training, or even with regard to personal matters.

Receiving help from one’s boss in some cases included decisions or authorisation on various matters over and above the respondent’s authority – sometimes respondents also turned to their superior when they did not want to take on the responsibility for making a difficult decision. However, some interviewees thought that this kind of task is automatically part of the superior’s job and should not be described as assistance but rather as the superior’s duty.

Most respondents across countries found their superiors to be cooperative and willing to help, but many also referred to the limited availability of their superior. The Austrian report provides an example of how some superiors were able to make themselves unavailable for questions:

There are some superiors who never leave their office, not to go to the loo or along the corridor, and some are more outside, in the field, and you can ask them more practical matters. Another one says ‘don’t bother’, you don’t need to ask anything. (Austrian male firefighter, aged 52 years)

Moreover, the interviewees were not necessarily as satisfied with the usefulness of assistance from their superior as they were with that from their colleagues. Some respondents felt that their superior was not competent enough with regard to the content of the job. In some cases, the problem lay in the fact that, owing to the lack of resources, not even the superior could offer much help. Furthermore, some respondents highlighted the unhelpful attitude of superiors on occasion. These workers mentioned that assistance from a superior might always be offered when it is requested, but if workers felt belittled by the sometimes negative attitude of their superior, they felt more uneasy about asking for help. In such a situation, one interviewee chose the response alternative ‘sometimes’, while another respondent chose ‘almost always’.

Q25C – You can get external assistance if you ask for it

The term ‘external assistance’ was difficult to understand for some participants. Given the wide variety of the final, often hesitating, interpretations, the figures of EWCS regarding this question are rather disparate. More specifically, the figures do not always provide a picture of the entire extent of assistance employees may receive at work outside the scope of colleagues and superiors. For example, many respondents would classify ‘technology assistants’ from their organisation as a source of external help, while many others would not include them in this category.

From the interviewees who felt able to proffer some interpretation of ‘external assistance’, three major interpretations emerged across countries, which included namely the following groups:

- people working outside and independently of one’s own organisation, mostly experts in another occupational field, sometimes providing outsourced services, as well as suppliers of goods;
- personnel working for the same organisation but in a different organisational unit or department, particularly in the context of medium to large-size organisations;
- almost anyone who is able to assist in anything relating to the interviewee’s work: for example, trade union representatives, former colleagues, even customers as well as family members and friends. In nursing and teaching, even family members of a patient or parents of a pupil were considered.

The type of external assistance was in many cases technical assistance, such as repairing equipment or provide advice on computer skills. Such assistance could also involve administrative or consultative help or outsourced services. At

school and crèche, networking appeared important, and external assistance could include cooperation with parents, the school nurse, personnel in other schools or establishments, child welfare personnel, special education teachers and even the police.

Interestingly, a Finnish female senior government official aged 28 years drew the line at professional groups, not organisational or even geographical borders: for her, foreign colleagues in some EU projects were ‘colleagues’, while the computer assistants in her own organisation were considered ‘externals’. The most interesting interpretation, however, was offered by a couple of blue-collar workers in Finland and Portugal:

Q: What did you mean by almost never? Ans: Because it was not logical for me to go and ask for assistance from people who did not belong to the restaurant. That would not even be possible, because I could not leave the restaurant and ask for help from an outsider. (Portuguese female chef's assistant, aged 51 years)

Summary

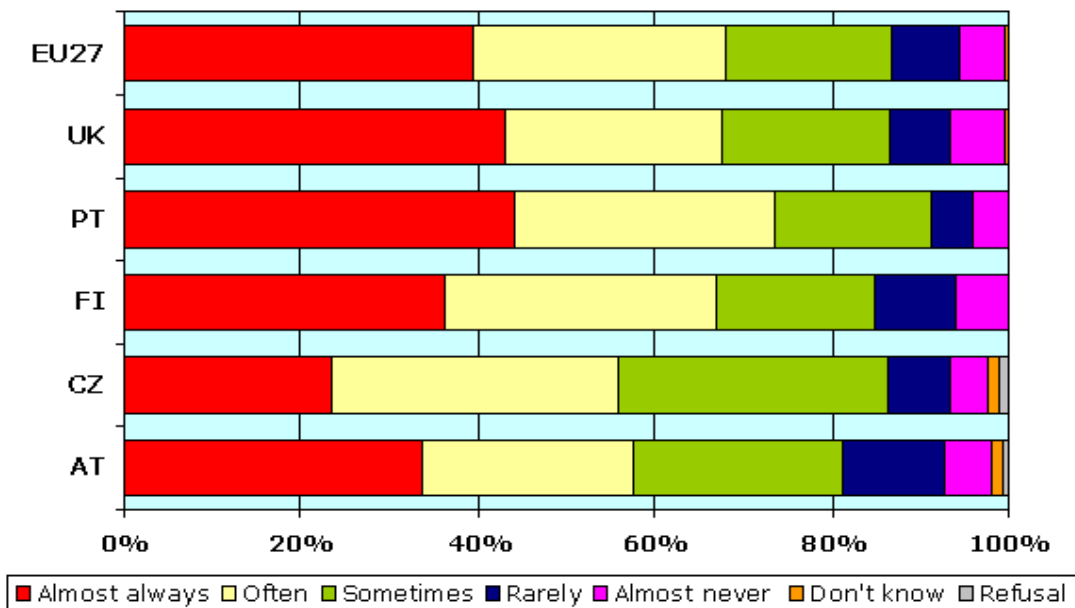
The series of questions was generally well-received. However, there was some conflation of how often the employees sought assistance in their work, and how often it was forthcoming from colleagues and superiors. The reasons for not asking for assistance, even if one needed it, can be quite interesting even if these questions will not unearth those reasons.

An inadequate definition of the term ‘superior’ in Q25B resulted in a number of cases to spontaneous questions from respondents about which managerial level was being referred to in the question.

The concept ‘external assistance’ did not work very well. It can be assumed that the EWCS results underestimate the amount of assistance from sources other than colleagues and superiors.

Questions 25F, 25H, 25I, 25J, 25K

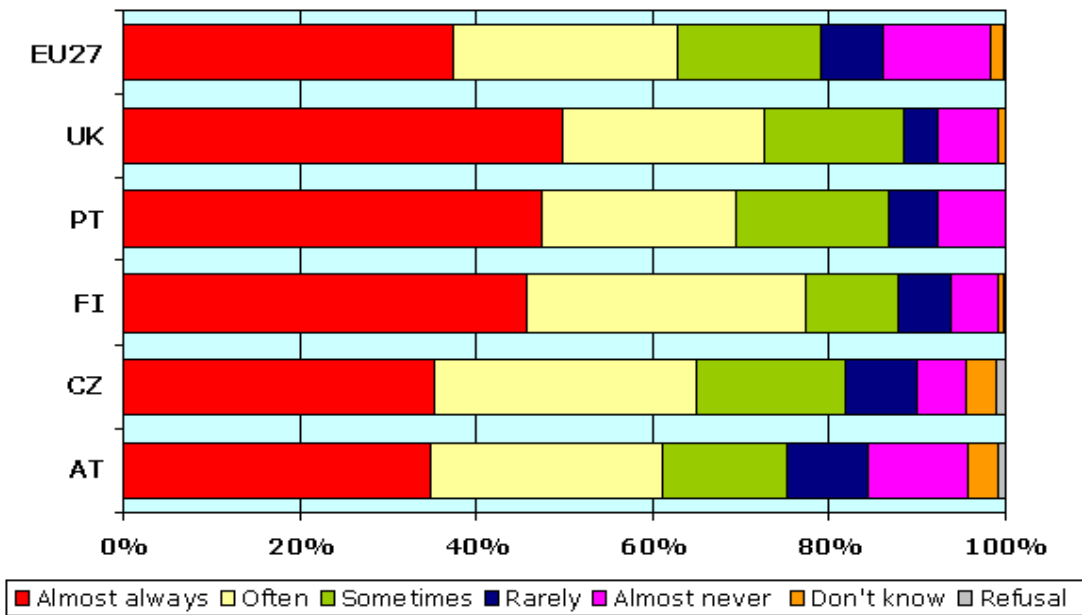
Figure 11: Q25F – You have enough time to get the job done



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

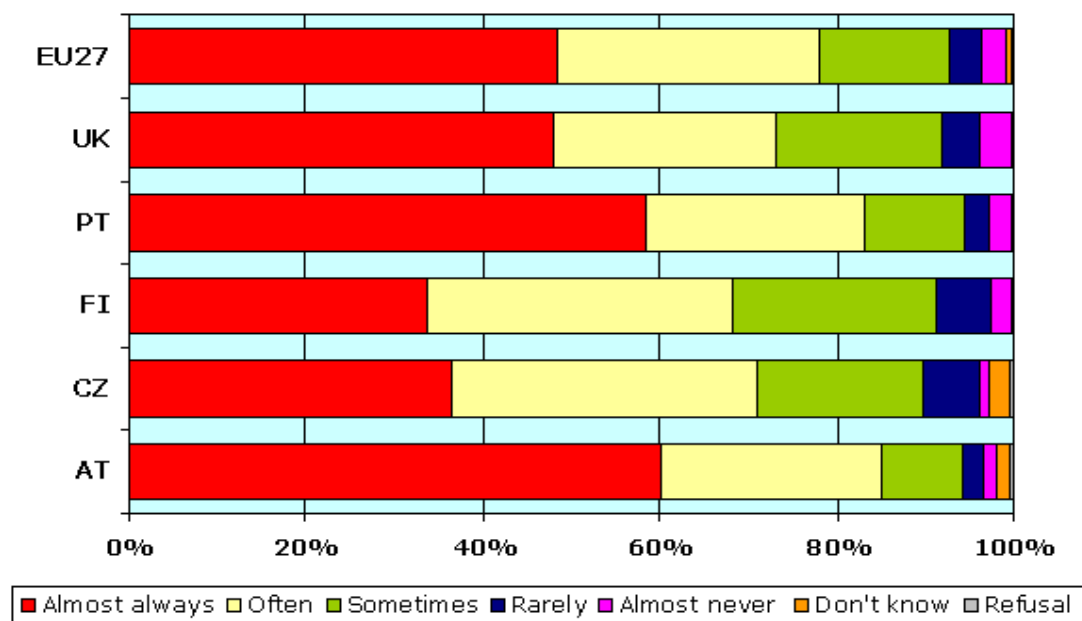
Figure 12: Q25H – At work, you have the opportunity to do what you do best



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

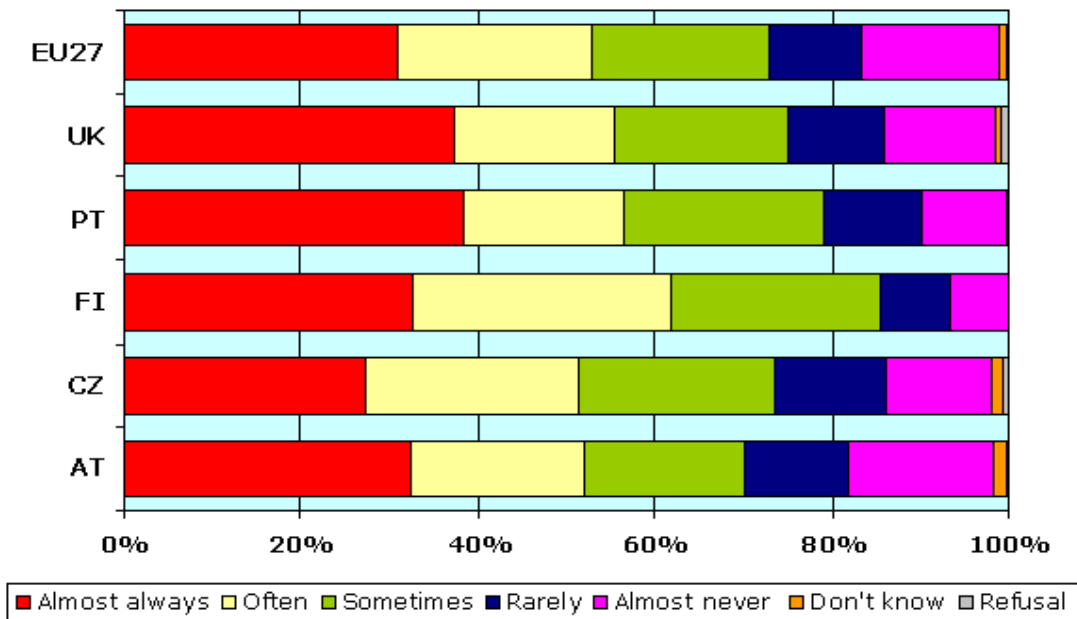
Figure 13: Q25I – Your job gives you the feeling of work well done



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

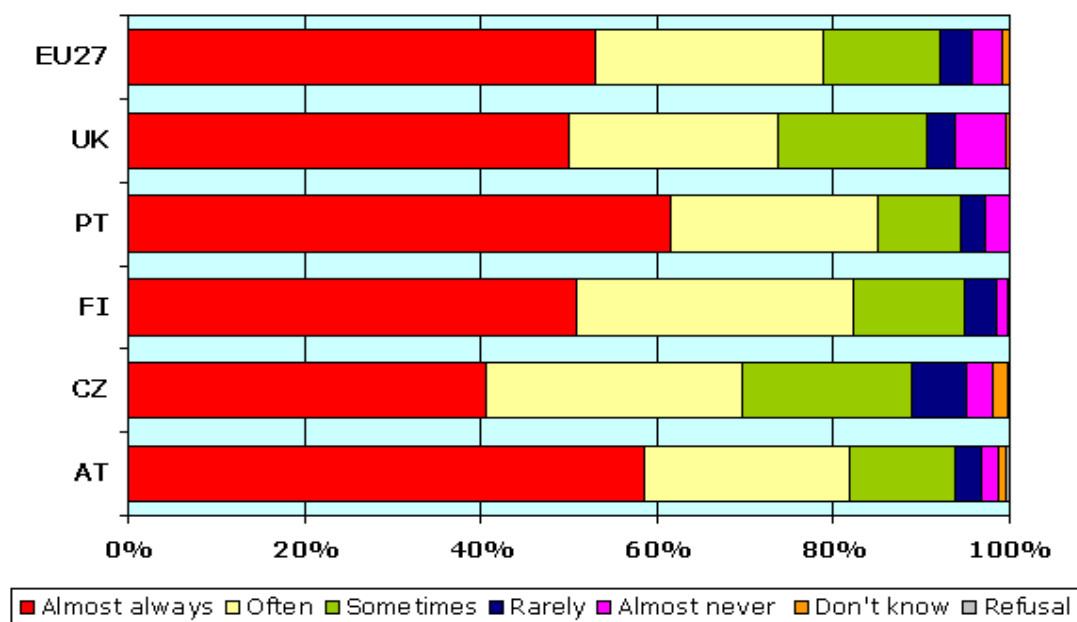
Figure 14: Q25J – You are able to apply your own ideas in your work



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 15: Q25K – You have the feeling of doing useful work



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Technical points

Question

Most of the interviewees found the questions of this series easy, well formulated and even enjoyed answering them. However, several respondents also felt that areas of work on which the questions focused were quite broad and/or complex in nature.

The translation of ‘useful work’ in the Austrian version of the questionnaire slightly differs from the others, implying the meaningfulness rather than usefulness of the job.

Scale

For scale, see Q25A–C.

Interpretations

Q25F – You have enough time to get the job done

This question generated some confusion for interviewees whose tasks did not consist of measurable amounts of work which could be carried out and finished, at least in principle. Some respondents also noted that they might have enough time to complete their work but not necessarily to the best of standards. Furthermore, some respondents highlighted the seasonal variation in workload and pace of work: for instance, the Portuguese female shop manager clarified that the particularly busy periods in the shop were Christmas and during sales.

A lack of time for accomplishing work was usually seen to derive from unrealistic deadlines, a high workload or specific work norms. The quantity of unforeseen tasks also had an influence on time management, especially when the pace of work was influenced by clients.

For professionals and managers, in particular, having an insufficient amount of time sometimes led workers to ask for assistance from colleagues or delegate tasks to subordinates, but even more typically, to longer working days. Indeed, the UK report notes that while many particularly lower status or lower skilled respondents interpreted the key term ‘enough time’ with regard to having adequate time to complete their job tasks within the agreed working hours, the interpretations of higher status respondents related to normal working hours plus varying amounts of extra time that they were willing to work. A UK male installation engineer aged 55 years stated: ‘You’ve got to work the hours to suit the job’.

In jobs where workers had a certain amount of autonomy, a lack of time to complete all the required tasks could also lead to prioritising, so that part of the work was left for later. Indeed, the Czech report notes that high status workers tended to claim that they had enough time just because they were able to schedule and plan their own work and to adapt their work speed accordingly. However, in the Finnish and UK situations, it seemed that even this kind of autonomy did not help much if the overall workload was too high.

For some workers, it was even possible to simply leave some of the job tasks undone. For others, it was neither possible to skip any of the required tasks nor to complete them less carefully. For example, in the case of a Finnish male pilot aged 37 years, having insufficient time to complete the pre-flight preparations simply resulted in the flight being delayed.

The Austrian childminder considered that she needed ‘enough time’ to do her job properly and generally was less stringent in her planning. Otherwise ‘things just go haywire. If I just rush through it and don’t take the time, then the children are restless and the day just goes all wrong.’

As mentioned above, in some jobs, the concept of ‘getting the job done’ remained particularly vague. The UK report notes that lower status jobs often entail such discrete ‘units’ of work which are possible to complete over the course of a day. In others, particularly services and process-oriented jobs, as well as in occupations comprising a variety of tasks, the beginning and end of the work were much more difficult to define. Two UK female schoolteachers aged 31 and 54 years described the teaching tasks that they usually achieved within a teaching session, as well as their ongoing ‘job’ of educating and looking after their students, a job which is never totally ‘done’. The Finnish male coach driver, having recently changed occupation, praised his current job where, even if the working days might be long, he had the possibility to finish all the work he was supposed to: namely, to fix the coach, drive the route, as well as clean the coach up. In his previous knowledge-work, the boundaries were more blurred: he used to think about his work also during free time and had a feeling of almost never being able to get the work finished.

However, clear ‘units’ of work were absent also in assembly line work or in shift work, where the next shift just stepped in and took over. The work continued exactly the same from one day to the next which meant that workers could never reach a point where they could say that the job was complete. Before finally answering this question, one respondent hesitated between ‘often’ and ‘almost always’ before ending up with ‘almost never’:

Well, you have those eight hours per day every day, and you get done as much as you can in that time. And then it goes on to the next day, until those four million [products] have been made. (Finnish female metalworker, aged 52 years)

Q25H – At work, you have the opportunity to do what you do best

The above question proved to be ambiguous for many respondents. To begin with, some interviewees were unable to formulate what they knew best, and a number of confused workers observed that they were supposed to be able to do everything there was to be done at work.

The question presumably was intended to ask whether respondents had the opportunity at work to complete the tasks they were best at or, in other words, whether the requirements of their work and their knowledge and skills corresponded. In Austria and Finland, this question seemed to be understood by the respondents in this way. In the three other countries, another alternative way of interpreting the question emerged: the respondents considered whether they had the opportunity to employ their knowledge and skills to the best of their ability or whether there were some obstacles to prevent them from doing so. In Portugal, this appeared to be the only way to interpret the question.

The workers who interpreted the question along the lines of having the opportunity to do what they were best at in their job, considered their responses against different baselines:

- having the opportunity to apply one’s formal education and acquired training and/or to have a solid work experience in the field;
- having the opportunity to make use of one’s characteristics and abilities, such as creativity or good social skills;
- having the opportunity to complete tasks that they really enjoy and find interesting.

In addition, positive feedback from customers or colleagues was in some cases referred to as an indication that one was ‘the right person for the job’.

In relation to using one’s natural talents, a UK female shoe buyer aged 31 years commented that, in her job, good training was important but one also needed a ‘creative flair’ and ‘intuitive feel for shoes’ to perform the work well. A Finnish male operator aged 42 years, despite being competent and having worked for a long time in his branch, responded that

he ‘sometimes’ had the opportunity, since he felt that he should have chosen a job where he could have made use of his good manual and social skills.

In Portugal, the respondents mostly questioned whether they were doing the kind of work they liked and, at the same time, whether they were doing the best they could in their job.

While responding, some interviewees made reference to particular tasks in their job or occupational field, while some others referred to work life or life in general. For example, a Finnish female special education teacher aged 42 years pointed out that she was more competent in children’s linguistic problems than mathematical problems. Furthermore, a Czech male train conductor, with a totally different reference, regretted that he could not apply his football skills at work.

The Austrian report points to the variety and unpredictability of tasks, which are inherent in some jobs. In policing and firefighting, the need to respond to emergencies gets in the way of specialising in one’s own preferences or best abilities.

You have to be able to do a lot of things; with us, you really have to be able to do anything. So, we are expected to do anything, be able to do anything and to make no mistakes. So nobody can do that, or nearly nobody, but you can specialise. (Austrian policewoman, aged 33 years)

The UK male farm employee explained his ‘almost always’ response by observing that he could avoid in his job tasks that would be outside his area of expertise, thus he focused only on what he was good at. On the other hand, the Austrian report notes that expertise can have its own pitfalls: a stressed Austrian female civil servant aged 57 years complained about ending up ‘with the whole rubbish, as a specialist for the exotic questions’ in her office.

The opportunity to be able to do those tasks a worker knows and likes best was in some jobs dependent on customer’s needs. Likewise, workers who responded in the alternative line as being able (or not) to do the work to the best of their ability often referred to various contextual considerations in this respect: namely, to company policy, norms, regulations, time pressure or even a lack of adequate material. In this way, the question overlaps with that of having enough time to get the work done (Q25F) as well as that of having the feeling of providing a job well done (Q25I).

Despite the differences in interpretation, it could be concluded that the responses to this question reveal general satisfaction with the opportunity to use one’s skills, competencies and special talents at work.

Q25I – Your job gives you the feeling of work well done

Most respondents found this question relatively easy to respond to. The question was commonly interpreted as having a sense of performing work to the best of one’s ability and thus of achieving something.

The most common source for this feeling was informal or formal feedback on one’s work from within and beyond the work organisation: namely, from clients, colleagues or superiors. Not only direct but also indirect feedback counted: for workers to see satisfaction among clients, pupils or employees in their charge gives the worker a feeling of doing a good job. However, in some jobs – such as those in emergency services, the police force or the civil service – it was rather the lack of complaints which contributed to the feeling of a job well done.

Some respondents referred to the visible results of their work or a job’s inherent rewards as the main reason for feeling satisfied. According to an Austrian male electrician aged 52 years, work well done basically signified ‘that it works without fault’. Some interviewees highlighted that work well done gave them a sense of closure and accomplishment: namely, to have attained the explicit set targets, to have met the deadline or stayed within the budgetary limits, or just to

have completed the day's work. In the UK sample, some more senior and usually male workers compared their work performance to that of colleagues and received satisfaction in this way.

In comparison with the other national reports, the Czech report states that the most common interpretation of this question related to the overall sense of satisfaction, more specifically to a comprehensive view of work well done, not only tasks done well, but satisfaction with social relations at work, the opportunity to help colleagues to solve problems and to promote one's own ideas.

For many respondents, the feeling of having achieved a job well done was disturbed by the lack of time available to complete the job: workers emphasised that they simply did not have enough time to perform the tasks to the quality they would have preferred. An Austrian policewoman aged 33 years highlighted her frustration at being occasionally unable to help in certain circumstances and having to disappoint citizens.

Q25J – You are able to apply your own ideas in your work

In general, this question appeared to be straightforward to answer. However, in the Czech Republic, it was understood in two different ways:

- whether the respondents were able to present and apply any ideas they had;
- how often they came up with new ideas.

The national expert found no explanation for this double meaning in the translation or wording itself. However, as was the case in the other countries, there seemed to be a possibility to interpret the question as the opportunity to propose one's own ideas at work or whether the proposed ideas were adopted in the workplace.

The UK report observes that the interviewees generally interpreted the phrase 'apply your own ideas' with regard to employing particular skills or creativity in their jobs; somewhat similarly, the Finnish respondents believed that these ideas usually related to choosing the most appropriate methods of work.

In some jobs, such as in schools or day care, the workers were even encouraged to come up with ideas constantly, although the ideas often were negotiated together in a team before they were adopted. An extreme example relates to the Finnish female special education teacher who had no books to teach the children but was obliged to produce all the necessary teaching material herself, with 'only the sky as the limit'.

Nevertheless, some respondents whose work was entirely dependant on the functioning of the machinery used and/or the speed of colleagues' work, stated that they could sometimes apply their ideas at work – in this case, the Czech male welder stated that he 'almost always' had this opportunity. Even if they had no scope for spontaneously varying the way they performed their work, workers felt that they could make suggestions to their superiors or their team on how some things could be done differently. These respondents usually worked in industry and felt that their management welcomed new ideas; the management of the company employing the Czech welder even offered financial rewards to workers for best improvements made.

Some workers hesitated in their response since they felt that they could certainly apply their ideas, but only within a certain framework. For instance, teachers had to stay within the school's and government's guidelines in their work, but inside that framework they had considerable freedom to choose their work methods and apply their creative talents.

The Finnish and UK reports observe that the opportunity to apply one's own ideas was typically associated with job autonomy, higher status and with jobs involving a variety of tasks and problem-solving opportunities. In contrast to this, the Austrian report notes that there is not necessarily any correspondence with the discretion the respondents report at work or their skills level.

In general, limitations on the opportunities to apply one's ideas at work often had to do with the type of job a worker had. As mentioned above, work in the processing industry or other jobs consisting of very basic and repetitive tasks would not allow much room for variation. In other jobs, legal boundaries would set limits on the use of creativity such as in the civil service or police force. An extreme example was, again, related to the work of the Finnish male pilot for whom the concept of 'applying one's own ideas' was completely out of the question for flight security reasons.

However, in some cases, factors limiting the use of discretion among workers were found to be part of the company's operational policy. Most notably, rules and procedures left no room for creativity. For example, in a private multinational company, common operational procedures were introduced across all branch offices and even in the various countries. One respondent felt discouraged by the inflexibility of a large public organisation:

Yes, I have lots of them, a lot of ideas, but they ... let's just say that when you get older you don't come forward so often with your own ideas anymore, because you know already that either they do not get through in the organisation or even if they do, it's such a long process until they are accepted that you have already forgotten all about it yourself, about the whole idea. (Finnish female head nurse, aged 57 years)

The Portuguese report notes that, in some cases, the reasons for not being able to apply one's own ideas at work were ultimately related to the attitude of an individual superior or boss. However, a UK male clinical manager aged 39 years outlined resistance to his training plans in the workplace not from the management, but from a 'core group of staff who just seem intent on throwing spanners in the works'. He believed that the reasons for this lay in their fear of learning or being removed from their 'comfort' zone at work.

Q25K – You have the feeling of doing useful work

Almost none of the interviewees had difficulty figuring out what was 'useful work' for them. At the same time, these interpretations varied in terms of establishing whom the work seemed useful for. Many respondents gave several different interpretations of useful work, which may, interestingly, reflect some national characteristics too.

The Czech report notes that the majority of workers responded in two ways. First, they viewed their work as useful for society or customers, when they contributed to producing quality products and services. But at the same time, the majority of workers also emphasised the usefulness of their work for the company, in contributing to the smooth running of the organisation and production processes and also in terms of making profits.

In contrast, in Finland, the work's perceived intrinsic meaningfulness – or the lack of it – was mentioned by the majority of interviewees, predominantly white-collar workers. The female special education teacher claimed that she would have a hard time trying to find some meaning to her life from work where all one thinks is whether they have succeeded in selling enough of some detergent. In a similar way, a Portuguese female gardener aged 32 years contemplated that, given the way the world is at present, being able to create a beautiful garden is fundamental for a person wanting to get up in the morning.

Furthermore, several Finnish respondents also brought up the usefulness of their work in relation to the organisational sense, which basically meant keeping the production process running or enabling colleagues to perform their jobs. Only one worker mentioned his financially beneficial input for the company.

In any case, as in the Czech Republic, a common interpretation across other countries was the usefulness of respondents' work for their customers. Positive feedback, direct or indirect, also had a major impact in this case. More significantly, the Austrian report notes moral or altruistic usefulness among workers.

I think, no matter if you're a pharmacist or a social worker or just there, if you can help people somehow and they then feel good, I think it's basically useful work. (Austrian female trade fair receptionist, aged 48 years)

In Finland, several interviewees considered their work's usefulness to be self-evident, considering their occupational branch to be useful: this covered teaching, day care, health services, emergency services and transportation. The Finnish male coach driver defined useful work as something which meets the natural needs of people instead of trying to push services or create artificial needs, as sales work often does.

The UK report considers that there may be a link between work which is not perceived by those who carry it out to be intrinsically satisfying or useful and a tendency to view its benefits in terms of its contribution beyond the workplace. The report notes various lower skill job occupants who stressed the usefulness of their work in extrinsic or instrumental terms that were personal to them (for example, in relation to income) and perhaps therefore also sought to emphasise their work's usefulness in more generic terms (for example, helping the general public). These kinds of implications do not really emerge in other national contexts.

The Austrian report considers that the question tends to generate socially desirable responses, as there is no point in doing work that is not useful. Indeed, one Czech interviewee considered that there is no 'useless work', since if it is not useful, it is not work.

Nevertheless, some respondents had difficulties determining the ultimate usefulness of their work. For instance, the Finnish male pilot thought that a medical doctor's work could be called useful, but when it comes to a pilot's work, he was not sure. He considered that his company, as a commercial enterprise, would fly anyone who pays for the ticket, but that people would probably get by without going to lie in the sun for a week. However, this potential 'un-usefulness' of his job did not undermine his work motivation, since he 'selfishly' enjoyed his work. The situation was different for the Austrian policewoman who was often called for the wrong reason and got frustrated by this misuse of her skills and time. The Czech barman interviewed considered the usefulness of his job as follows:

Well, if I give someone a drink, that's okay, but sometimes when I look at those losers ... I saw a man here who borrowed money to buy a house, and he spent all that money here [in the fruit machines]. I wasn't happy about that... But I don't make anyone do that, do I? But when I see him, well... (Czech barman, aged 29 years)

For other reasons, the Finnish female crèche worker had some ambiguous feelings. She considered her work important and useful, but at the same time she felt that her work was not fully appreciated in society, which thus undermined her work motivation.

Summary

The last three questions in the series in relation to work well done, applying one's own ideas in the job and the usefulness of the work carried out functioned quite well. Although the interpretations of whom the work was useful for varied to a large extent, this is probably not a problem for the purposes of the EWCS.

However, the first two sub-questions – namely in relation to having enough time to get the job done and the opportunity to do what one does best – generated some confusion among the respondents. Certain types of jobs do not comprise such measurable quantities from which one could say, even in theory, that the job is 'fully done'. Furthermore, sometimes the

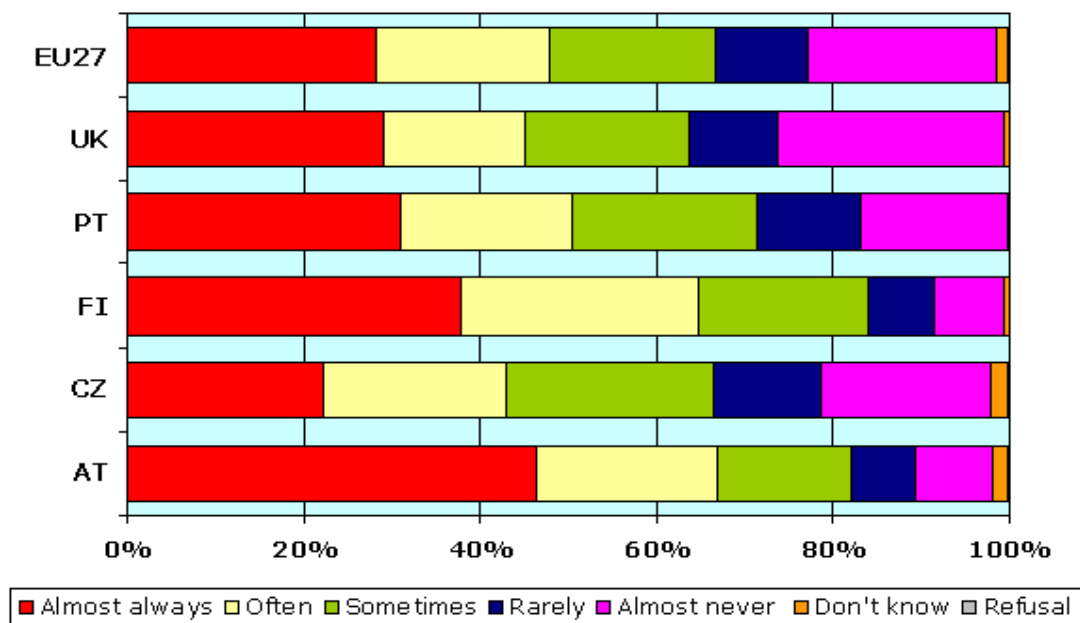
job could basically be ‘done’ in the given time, but not to the highest quality a worker would have hoped for. ‘The opportunity to do what one does best’ also generated some confusion; however, in all, this question seems to measure the general satisfaction among workers in relation to the opportunities available to use one’s own skills, competencies and talents at work. Depending on the respondent’s interpretation of the question, the restrictions in this context related to organisational barriers or a mistaken vocation.

The UK report notes that certain concepts from different questions in the series were seen to overlap and/or were combined by some of the interviewees – particularly in relation to ‘the opportunity to do what you do best’, ‘the feeling of work well done’ and ‘the feeling of doing useful work’. In general, the importance of feedback on employees’ well-being and work motivation emerged very clearly in connection with the questions in this series.

The response scale was functional, even if some interviewees would have liked to see the missing extremes on the response scale.

Questions 25L, 25M

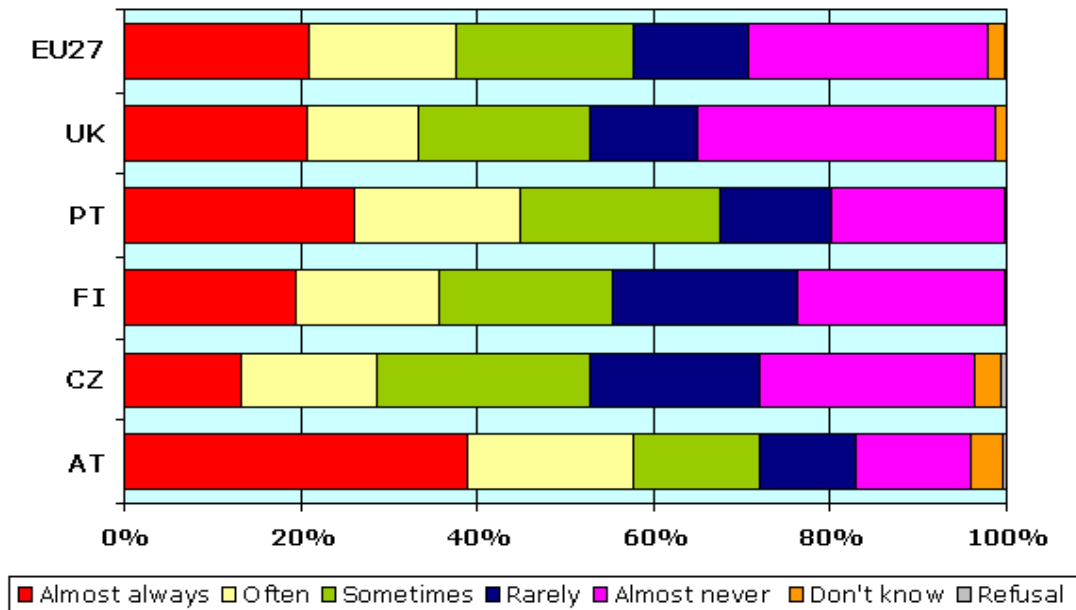
Figure 16: Q25L – *You find your job intellectually demanding*



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 17: Q25M – You find your job emotionally demanding



Note: *Employees by country.*

Source: *EWCS 2005*

Technical points

Question

As to the question on intellectual demands, some problems emerged in the Czech questionnaire. The word ‘intellectually’ was translated using the word ‘mental’ (*duševní*), which in the establishing pairing is the opposite of ‘physical’. Furthermore, this word derives from the word ‘soul’ (*duše*), which was confusing for some respondents. For instance, an assembly line manual worker replied in the affirmative to the survey question since she did not enjoy her monotonous work but considered it ‘hard on the soul’. For this reason, the Czech interpretations of the question differ somewhat from those in the other countries and the quantitative results are not really all that comparable.

In terms of the question on emotionally demanding work, the Finnish respondents notably had more difficulties in responding than others, due to the somewhat strange Finnish translation of the term ‘you have to use a lot of emotions in your job’. Only a few interviewees seemed not to react to this odd wording: the majority of workers reported difficulties in understanding the question or noted the poor use of language straight away.

Scale

For the scale, see Q25A– C.

Interpretations

Q25L – You find your job intellectually demanding

Respondents interpreted this question in various ways. However, apart from Czech workers, most interviewees referred to jobs that involved some degree of ‘(difficult) thinking’, ‘reasoning out’ or ‘the need to use one’s head’. Due to an ambiguous translation, the Czech respondents often identified the concept with mentally exhausting work, stress and tension, but also with monotonous and uninteresting work. Only six out of 20 interviewees related the question to work requiring thinking, analysis and new ideas.

A number of interviewees in the other countries interpreted the intellectual demands in their work as common sense or presence of mind. ‘Thinking ahead’ was described by some Austrian respondents who did not make decisions themselves, but had to closely follow developments and to a certain extent anticipate further actions that might need to be taken in their job:

I mean, you always have to think. But just figuring things out, we don't do that, or work on a project or something, we don't do such things. We do what the four bosses, more or less, figure out or come up with, let's say, because they aren't thinking, then we have to do that. (Austrian male firefighter, aged 52 years)

A number of interviewees went further in defining the concept as something which requires a certain level of versatility, problem-solving ability and understanding of larger ideas, planning and anticipation, whether at a theoretical level or in connection with practical issues.

Intellectual demands were also associated with the need to think quickly under pressures, often in practical, complex situations, particularly when working with people. The Finnish female crèche worker chose ‘often’ as her response but considered that the word ‘intellectual’ was not the proper term to describe her job, which rather required organisational skills.

Thus, intellectual demands differed depending on the nature of the work. Some workers such as those in teaching and sales work emphasised the need for psychological and communication skills, for so-called ‘emotional intelligence’, while some UK skilled tradespeople and specialists referred to technical demands in their job. Various interviewees mentioned the possibility to use, adapt and combine acquired skills and competencies, which relates in a way to the former question based on the ‘possibility to do what you do best’.

In some jobs, intellectual demands were conceived as an ongoing phenomenon. In contrast, some respondents conceived such demands to relate to a temporary phase in relation to unfamiliar facets of the job; the work would become less demanding as workers would gain more experience with those tasks.

Those few respondents who did not consider their work intellectually demanding typically held low status blue-collar jobs, where it was enough ‘to be able to read and do some arithmetic’ with ‘no need for academic degrees’, according to a Finnish female warehouse worker aged 29 years. In general, the interviewees considered it a positive thing to have intellectually demanding tasks in the job. It is most likely not easy to admit that there are no intellectual demands in one’s job. At least those two Finnish respondents, admitting that their work was rarely or hardly ever demanding in this way, also wanted to explicitly deny the importance of such demands for them personally.

Q25M – You find your job emotionally demanding

Emotional demands generally seem to bear more of a negative connotation than intellectual demands do: a common interpretation in most countries, except Finland, associated emotional demands with mental demands, stressful situations, high workloads, tight deadlines and negative emotions.

Respondents reported experiencing emotional demands in jobs involving frequent contact with customers, especially when they were upset or aggressive. In such jobs, workers were advised to suppress or control their emotions; staying calm while trying to calm others down was considered a challenge among respondents.

The UK report observes that perceived emotional demands also depend on whether a worker has the capacity to develop coping mechanisms to handle emotionally-charged situations: certain UK interviewees who undertook jobs that were generally considered to be emotionally taxing felt otherwise. The UK male clinical manager chose ‘rarely’ as his

response because although his work regularly involved highly stressful situations as a paramedic, he did not ‘allow’ himself to become emotionally involved with his work or patients whom he stayed with for an average of 30 minutes each.

I'm not emotionally attached to patients ... I deal with what I've got to deal with and then that's the end of it ... [If you can't cope with the job.] you're in the wrong job ... It doesn't benefit the patient, it doesn't benefit the Trust, it doesn't benefit you. You won't be able to crack on with the job. (UK male clinical manager, aged 39 years)

Brevity of customer contact was also cited by the UK female checkout operator as a key factor in her ‘almost never’ survey response. In this way, emotionally demanding work was seen to involve ongoing and personal contact with others who may be in a distressed state such as a counsellor, psychiatrist or teacher. Furthermore, the UK report notes that, similarly as with ‘intellectual demands’, there seemed to be a learning curve in respect of handling emotional demands which had the effect of reducing their demand on the worker rather than the removal of the demands themselves.

Emotional demands associated with work were also cited to be the result of conflicts with colleagues. A Finnish kiln operator aged 33 years considered it a particularly good thing that this question was included in the survey, since conflicts were so common in today’s pressured work life. However, he had personally hardly ever ‘had to use emotions at work’, since circumstances could usually be negotiated among colleagues.

The most prevalent interpretation of emotional demands among Finnish respondents – contrary to others, thus probably deriving from the particular translation – was the aspect of empathising. This is also prevalent in the Austrian report. Empathy is needed especially in care jobs and social work, as well as in almost any kind of interactive service work. In this context, the Austrian interviewees highlighted particularly tragic situations in their work: namely illness, accidents of young people in nursing, addiction and family violence in policing.

Another common interpretation for those Finnish respondents who ‘had to use a lot of emotions at work’ was to describe that they ‘worked with emotions’ and used them as tools, which is a view also evident in the Austrian report. Especially when working with children, workers have to put their entire personality on the line.

Interestingly, the Austrian male electrician and a Finnish male purchase manager aged 62 years implied how emotions could be used as ‘tools’ in another way, too: they considered that to occasionally get angry and ‘thump the table’ can be of assistance to get one’s request through when faced, for example, with bureaucratic delays.

In addition to the examples mentioned above, the unusual Finnish translation of this question proffered interpretations distinctly different from any other national interviews: some respondents mentioned that they were themselves ‘emotional’ persons and thus also showed their feelings at work, while others referred to using only basic communication among colleagues. The Finnish earth works excavator described ‘those basic emotions, like in normal life...we laugh – we don’t cry, though, but there are a lot of F-words in the air sometimes...’. Interestingly, several interviewees associated the question with the use of intuition, for example, when interviewing job applicants.

In general, ‘emotional demands’ were seen as a negative outcome in working conditions. However, the Austrian report also emphasises the positive competency of emotions, and in Finland, the alternative translation provoked more positive

connotations for ‘emotional work’ than the original meaning. The duality of emotions was illustrated also by the Portuguese female gardener, who described how her satisfaction of a job well done impacted on her emotions:

This deals with our emotion, that’s the way it is. Me, when I do a garden, I say, I like that garden I did. And then I am very happy. Of course that happens. But when, and that is the case most of the time, I do something I don’t like... there is no doubt, I get very upset and stressed. (Portuguese female gardener, aged 32 years)

Summary

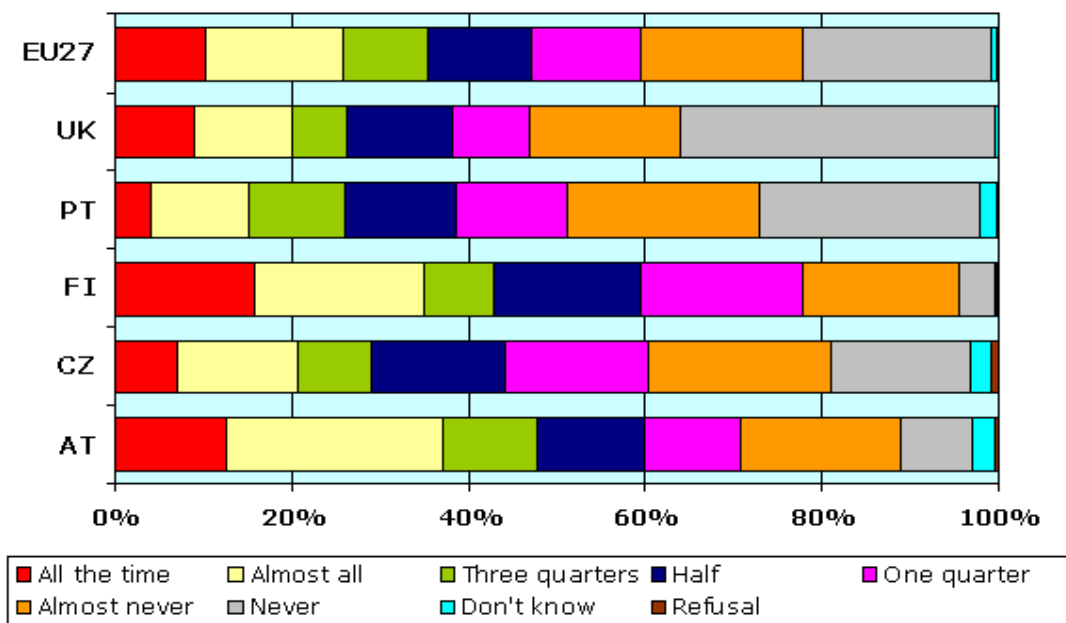
Due to the wrong Czech translation, most of the Czech respondents interpreted the question on intellectually demanding work in a completely different way than was originally intended; the results are not comparable with the other post-test countries. In the other countries, the subjective component was strongly prominent in the interpretations: intellectual demands can be relative and they may also be perceived as a temporary phenomenon before a worker becomes familiar with the job. However, the question works in terms of finding out whether the respondents subjectively feel they encounter challenging tasks and ‘have to use their head’ at work.

The peculiar Finnish translation for emotionally demanding work led to somewhat different interpretations than those arising in the other countries; in particular, the Finnish responses were more positive. The reactions elicited by the inappropriate Finnish translation highlighted the question of whether there might be scope for inserting questions in the survey concerning interpersonal conflicts at work as well as the positive competency of emotions at work.

Furthermore, two Austrian respondents would also have welcomed questions on the physically demanding aspects of their work.

Questions 20B-A, 20B-B

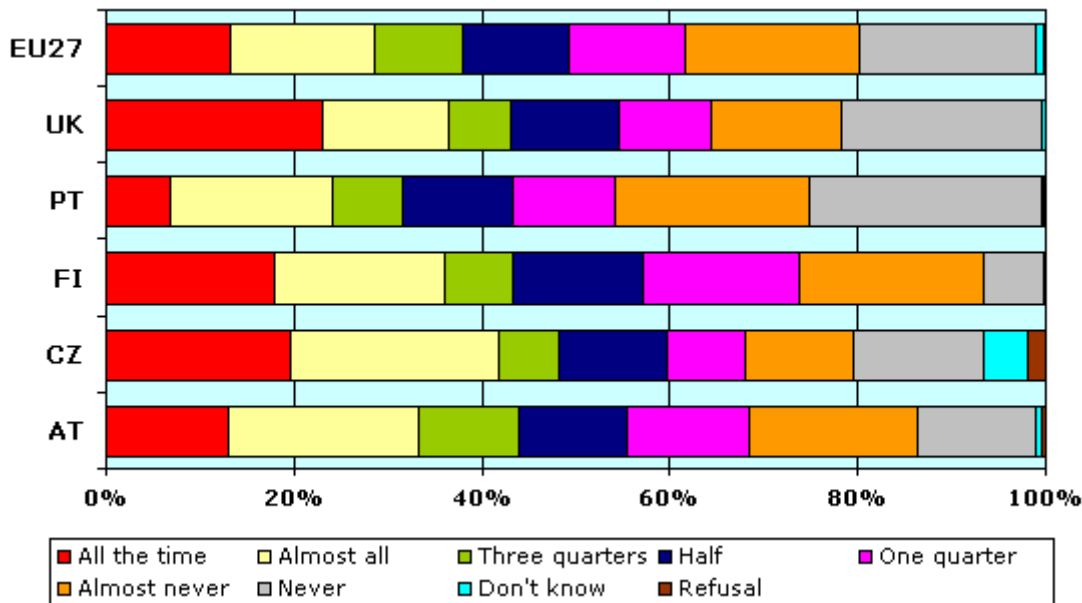
Figure 18: Q20B-A – Does your job involve working at very high speed?



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 19: Q20B-B – Does your job involve working to tight deadlines?



Note: *Employees by country.*

Source: *EWCS 2005*

Technical points

Question

Translation problems one again occurred in relation to these questions. In the Portuguese questionnaire, the unfamiliarity of the word for ‘speed’ (*cadência*) caused some problems for respondents identical to those described in relation to Q24C. In the Austrian version, ‘very high speed’ had become ‘high speed’, changing the severity of the meaning.

Since many of the respondents across countries considered that their work speed was applied only to certain facets of their job at particular times, whether seasonally or situationally influenced, many had difficulties averaging out their responses.

The concept of ‘tight deadlines’ emerged as somewhat ambiguous both in the translated versions of the questionnaire as well as in the original version. In general, the UK interviewees interpreted the item as insufficient time to perform the tasks, but it was also possible to interpret it as rigid or inflexible schedules with no necessary link to a high work speed. For example, in the case of a UK female school dinner assistant aged 35 years, tight deadlines appeared to relate to her set ‘mini-hours’ per week: while never working at very high speed, she almost always had to meet tight deadlines by virtue of the limited time available – a lunch hour each day – to undertake her duties.

The translations of ‘tight deadlines’ varied across countries. The term was translated as ‘fixed deadlines’ in the Czech version, as ‘working under deadline pressure’ in the Austrian version and ‘very rigid and very short deadlines’ in the Portuguese version. The Finnish translation was the closest to the original, also enabling the dual interpretation either as too short (in relation to workload) and/or very strictly set deadlines.

Scale

The reactions to the response scale varied somewhat across countries but left hardly anyone feeling indifferent. The scale was perceived either as too complicated and detailed or very good and precise. While some respondents wished for verbal alternatives (for example, ‘sometimes’) instead of fractions relating to the amount of time spent working at a high

speed, a few interviewees in Finland and the UK even expressed their preference for a more precise scale, including for example a response option reflecting between one half and one quarter of the time worked or one quarter of the time and almost never.

Interpretations

Q20B-A – Does your job involve working at very high speed?

The UK report sums up that the question was commonly interpreted as ‘working quickly’ but also as ‘working as much as one could’. Understood in the latter way, the definition of ‘high speed’ depends on the specific nature of the respondent’s work within certain parameters. These include a respondent’s job experience, the quality of work required, organisational/technological and regulatory constraints on working speed and client demands.

Moreover, the UK report observes that particularly for those involved in production line or intense, routine processing work, broader organisational factors framed the speed at which they worked. For example, the UK male installation engineer considered that he worked very quickly for half of his time but not for the other half, as he was restricted by the safety requirements of his work: ‘To build a bit of machinery, you have to think of the safety side of it. It affects the speed you work at’.

Sometimes boundaries are set as a result of quality standards:

Well, I can't work at high speed really. If I worked at high speed, then I'd do the work badly. Basically, I think that if I worked fast, then I wouldn't do the work as well as if I did it at my normal speed. (Czech female cleaner, aged 56 years)

A third interpretation provided by the UK report emphasised the item as a relative term, meaning ‘working faster than normal’, which implied that a notional working speed ‘norm’ was perceived to exist for the job. Interviewees who conceived that they worked faster for certain periods of time often referred to urgent matters that unexpectedly turned up and had to be resolved as a priority, causing the rescheduling of tasks and increased work speed. The Finnish female senior government official noted that sometimes, although work would be planned with a slightly less stringent schedule, it just took one person to fall ill and to be absent for a week to bring the work to a halt, after which it was impossible to catch up again.

For many respondents, increased work intensity and high-speed work meant relinquishing time for eating, breaks, private emails or chatting with colleagues. According to the senior government official, there was no time ‘for a single small screw-up, you just don’t have time for that’.

In some cases, the periods of working at a high speed were anticipated in advance and/or comprised a specific part of the job. Although the UK male clinical manager remarked that his job was ‘full-on’ from 06.00 to 18.00, his chosen response of ‘quarter of the time’ related more specifically to when he was ‘driving fast in my fast response car’.

For other respondents, this pace of work was or had become rather a ‘norm’; thus, it was not even self-evident to call it by any descriptive adjective:

At very high speed ... Well, we are working almost all the time – except for the breaks of course. So what is very high speed? A speed that ... we are working, there's no lack, no loitering, that's it. (Finnish male turner, aged 30 years, responding 'almost all the time')

The constantly high speed of work might be due to inflexible deadlines, market pressures, too high a workload, the constant need for updating one's information on top of one's normal work or direct control from outside. Some respondents typically felt that they had little or no influence on their speed of work.

Interestingly, the UK report notes the relation to job experience in this context. A female graphic designer aged 37 years attributed her ability to work quickly to the fact that she was in her post for some time and had gained job experience. However, her increased productivity had also meant that she was given more tasks to perform, thus requiring her to continue to work quickly. The designer's increased rate of working generally meant that she could 'get things done by the deadline rather than, when I first started there, I was panicking'.

The UK report also observes that where interviewees felt that they worked at high speed naturally – being 'a quick worker' – they then conceived that they did not have to work at a very high speed in their job. On the other hand, the Austrian cleaner who voluntarily worked quickly – since this allowed her more time – responded 'almost all of the time'.

Furthermore, the UK report draws attention to the distinction between whether a respondent perceived that they could undertake the work within 'normal' working hours and/or whether extra hours were needed to cope with the work (see Q24C).

Q20B-B – Does your job involve working to tight deadlines?

'Tight deadlines' were generally considered to mean undertaking tasks by a specific time or date. The connection with high work speed was clear in all of the post-test countries except the Czech Republic, due to the Czech translation referring solely to 'fixed deadlines'.

Deadlines – tight or not – meant very different things in various jobs. They could be present several times a day (for example, the daily routines in kindergarten comprised specific times for lunch, afternoon nap and outdoor activities) or they may be set further in the future. Furthermore, they could be repetitive and regular, thus well anticipated, as in the case of a Portuguese male postal services transport leader aged 47 years: 'We have the scales [regarding the departure and arrival of the vehicles], that is on the second. And we work on the second'. On the other hand, deadlines could be introduced more on an ad hoc basis, set separately for each project or task and even under changes. The UK report notes that higher status or skilled employees usually interpreted tight deadlines in relation to a variation of regular and more ad hoc timeframes, and in relation to a wider variety of tasks than lower skill job occupants.

More generally, interviewees emphasised various organisational considerations in relation to the nature of tight deadlines in one's job. In some cases, the deadlines to be met by workers were totally set from the outside, by the organisation or client, whereas in other cases especially the more senior or higher ranking respondents felt that they had a certain discretion in setting their own deadlines.

The UK report notes that another conceptualisation of 'tight deadlines' related to whether they were implicit or explicit in character. Certain (manual, structured and physical) work processes described by interviewees appeared to have limited leeway built into otherwise strict deadlines to prevent bottlenecks of work and other operational clashes.

Within the framework of the job [and health and safety regulations], you've got to have a certain amount of time. [For example, in loading], we have a two hour leeway so that transport won't come breathing down my neck as load coordinator to get that load out by one o'clock. (UK male warehouse worker, aged 46 years)

Generally, the scope for leeway appeared to enlarge as jobs became more senior or higher ranking and/or involved expertise. For instance, the Finnish male pilot stated that his task was to take care of the flight safely, which attributed

to him a certain discretion in this context if the preparations took a little bit longer for one reason or another. Moreover, if the flight company had set the schedules too tight, so that passengers consequently missed their connecting flights, the company would provide them with compensation, but no pilot would be blamed for missing deadlines.

Several interviewees said that they were under pressure and stressed because of tight deadlines and a high speed of work. For some respondents, tight deadlines contributed to longer working hours, and many reported that too high a pace of work increased the number of accidents and mistakes at the workplace. In working with people, respondents felt an additional pressure, because they had to try to hide their sense of pressure and tension from clients. However, the Finnish report observes that, especially in some lower autonomy jobs, deadlines were recognised, but they led to no particular stress among respondents: these workers simply considered that the managers who had taken on the contracts should have calculated the time better. It was not the employee's job to think about such things.

It should be emphasised, however, that the concept of deadlines was quite a problematic one in relation to specific types of job. For example, this concept did not suit the services sector, where 'deadlines' often refer to emergencies or clients waiting to be served. Deadlines were a difficult concept also in the school environment: respondents questioned whether deadlines should be related to the duration of one lesson or whether they should relate to semesters or a school year. Furthermore, in some other jobs without pre-defined units of work which could be completed – for example, shift work in the processing industry – the concept of 'deadlines' did not emerge. In such cases, deadlines equalled working hours or the length of a worker's shift. A Finnish female metalworker aged 52 years gave 'almost all the time' as her response which referred to working without interruptions until the coffee or lunch break. Likewise, the Czech barman perceived that his start and end work times were fixed, since 'I simply have to be at work from 10.00 to midnight, and on weekends from 14.00 to midnight.'

Summary

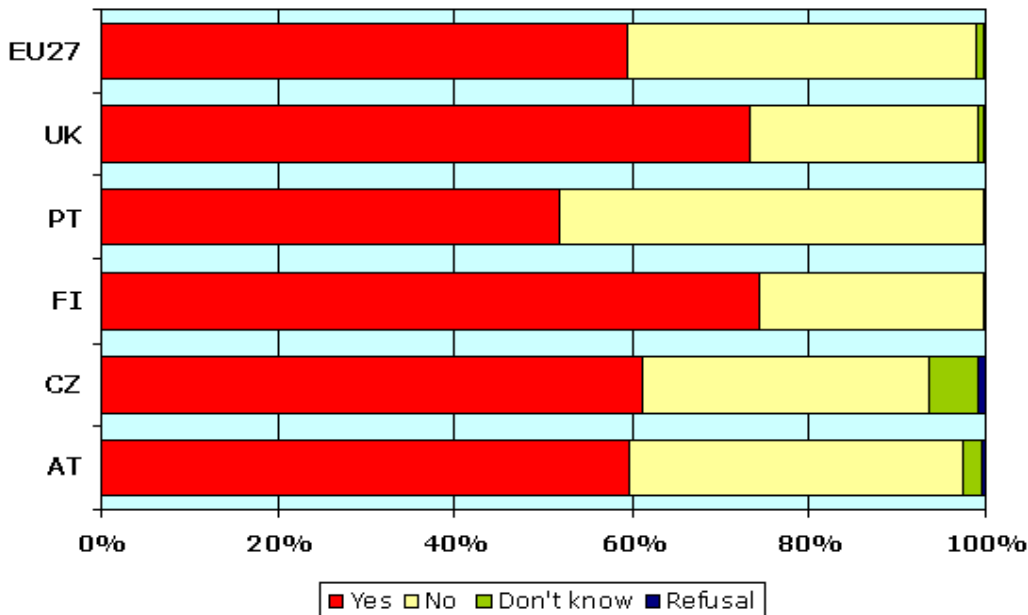
The question on speed of work functioned quite well, except for some shortcomings in the Portuguese and German translations. The concept of tight deadlines was more problematic. It could be interpreted as a shortness of time in relation to the amount of work to be completed, but also as pre-defined schedules without implications for work speed. The different language versions for these questions dealt with this duality in different ways, resulting in somewhat disparate results for the Czech Republic in particular.

In the interactive service, work deadlines emerged to be rather defined by emergencies and customer needs. In some jobs, particularly in shift work in production lines, deadlines were interpreted as normal working hours. For both of the dimensions of work intensity, the absence of a time reference in the general question proved somewhat problematic for those respondents whose jobs varied in intensity.

The reactions to the response scale varied but hardly left anyone feeling neutral about it: either it was welcomed as good and exact or it was deemed to be too complicated.

Question 26

Figure 20: Q26 – Does your job involve doing all or part of your work in a team?



Note: *Employees by country.*

Source: *EWCS 2005*

Technical points

Question

In the Finnish version, the question was translated as ‘Does your job partly or totally include working in a group (teamwork)?’ However, ‘working in a group’ is quite a vague and broad concept compared with that of teamwork, at least according to definitions in work organisational theory.

In the Czech translation, the verb ‘involve’ is missing, which is probably only a typing error and was corrected in the post-test interviews. However, for one reason or another, the Czech respondents seemed to ignore the specification ‘all or part of your work’ in the body of the question: the interviewees who worked in teams occasionally or very sporadically gave a negative answer. This did not occur in the other countries.

The lack of a definition for teamwork caused some queries in the Czech Republic and Finland in terms of what can be regarded as teamwork. Some respondents even changed their answers as they thought about the question while replying. Even if the respondents did not ask for clarification in other countries, their responses also reflected a relatively wide variety of ways of working together.

Scale

A considerable number of interviewees spontaneously gave descriptive responses like ‘Yes, includes a bit’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Well, in a way...’. Several workers expressed the wish for a wider range of response options to better reflect the nature and scale of their involvement in teamwork.

Interpretations

Q26 – Does your job involve doing all or part of your work in a team?

Respondents had different understandings of the concept of ‘teamwork’, namely as follows (in line with the ideas proffered by the Austrian report):

- Working together in an organised unit with fixed members being interdependent on each other in doing a job. Teamwork is usually introduced by the employer. A UK male warehouse worker aged 46 years commented that his ‘job works as a team because one part will not work or function without another part, and you’re all working together for the same objective’.
- An organisational unit which does not necessarily imply working together, but rather reflects an open door policy of the department that amounts to general help and cooperation. An occasional absence of one ‘team member’ would not affect the work performance of the others, and the informal cooperation is not officially termed a team by the employer.
- Informal and ad hoc teams comprising a greater mix of organisational members, including persons outside the work organisation. The formation of teams is often intermittent and task-related, particularly among more senior/professional employees. For instance, the Finnish female special education teacher described her participation in teamwork as being in regular contact with other teachers, parents, the school psychologist and the school welfare officer.

The UK report observes some variation in the number of teams in which the respondents were involved. This number reflected organisational size and complexity, as well as job/organisational purpose: more senior staff tended to be involved in a greater number of teams than others. The interviewees sometimes also referred to their role within the team, highlighting the status hierarchy that exists in some teams (with a team leader) but not in others (where each team member has equal status).

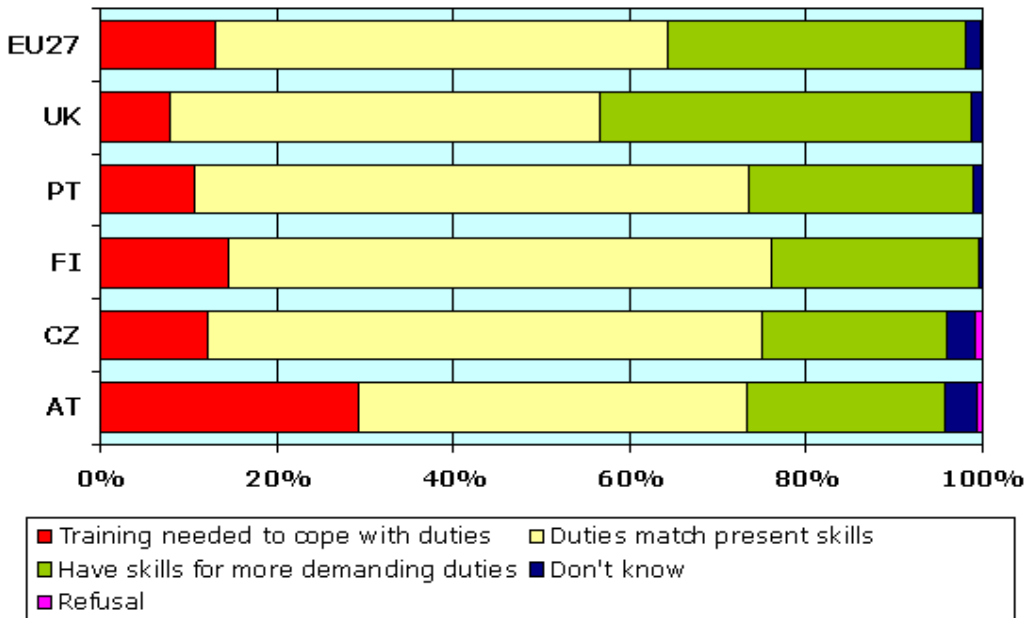
Most of the interviewees had a very positive attitude towards teamwork. The Portuguese female researcher even defined teamwork as ‘developing together, with other people’.

Summary

A missing definition of teamwork in the question body resulted in various, relatively broad interpretations of the item among respondents. Quite remarkably, many respondents spontaneously defined the extent to which they were involved in teamwork rather than going for the bi-polar scale: a wider response range could elicit more nuanced information without really making the responding much more difficult. With a response scale, the following problem might also be omitted: the Czech respondents seemed to overlook the ‘part of your work’ clause in the question and, as a result, those working partially but not predominantly in teams responded negatively, which led to possible underreporting. The Finnish version inquired about working in a group, with the specification ‘teamwork’ only in parenthesis, which may encourage reporting on a wider range of forms of cooperation other than ‘teamwork’.

Question 27

Figure 21: Q27 – Which of the following alternatives would best describe your skills in your own work?



Note: *Employees by country.*

Source: *EWCS 2005*

Technical points

In all of the post-test countries, except the UK, a number of respondents had problems with this question: the response alternatives were not perceived as mutually exclusive, which caused ambiguity. The second response alternative was commonly chosen as an averaged out response.

Interpretations

The UK report sums up the various interpretations of 'skills'. For some respondents, the term narrowly referred to formal qualifications and attained education, while for others, it concerned job-related 'abilities' including qualifications, training and the ability to apply one or both of these. Among other workers, 'skills' also encompassed 'creative talents' and/or job and work experience. The ambiguity in relation to the word 'skills' created hesitation in responding: some workers perceived that their formal qualifications were equivalent to the second response alternative, but taking into account the overall level of their work experience, the right answer would be the third response. For instance, the Portuguese report notes two totally opposite standpoints with regard to skills acquired by on-the-job learning. The female gardener, who was in the job for the last 12 years, considered that she would need further training because everything she knew she had learned on the job. In contrast, a male blacksmith aged 44 years saw no need for training, as he perceived that he had acquired all the necessary skills by himself, having started in an apprenticeship nearly 30 years ago.

Finally, the reasons for choosing the second response alternative relating to skills-match differed among respondents:

- feeling up to doing one's duties, which were neither too difficult nor too easy; at the same time, some respondents would feel they could handle more demanding duties in a different job and/or they would need extra training for instance in regard to changing technology;

- recognising that all of the response alternatives were particularly true, since one would be very competent in certain facets of the job but less so in others; the second response alternative was chosen as a neutral or averaged out response;
- feeling able to do more demanding work but is not interested in doing so, which is a relatively common attitude among workers, particularly among older respondents;
- feeling able to do more demanding work but no such duties were available at work.

The Austrian report further notes that respondents with strong professional identities tended to address the norm of ambition in a distancing move, suggesting that ‘more demanding’ is somewhat arrogant towards their current position and that hierarchical careers would take them away from the core aspects of their jobs that they really enjoy.

Interestingly, two Austrian and Finnish female respondents thought that choosing alternative three would appear arrogant and therefore satisfied themselves with the ‘more humble’ alternative two. However, the Austrian respondent in question, a female graphics designer aged 44 years, felt that favourable self-presentation and even overestimation of one’s abilities comes to the foreground in today’s working life.

For a UK female healthcare support officer aged 59 years and the Finnish female day care worker, correspondence meant to work ‘to one’s job description’ and ‘not to try to take on more duties and responsibilities on top of the basic duties’. The Finnish female special education teacher had difficulties in this respect, as she was unable to clearly mark off and define her job description. With a vague and broad job description, she felt that she managed to cope with her duties in some way, but to be able to cope well and thinking in terms of quality, she decided to choose alternative number one.

In Finland, almost all of the respondents who finally chose alternative three had previous or occasional work experience in more demanding duties and, compared with that level of experience, felt somewhat frustrated in their current job. In contrast, one Austrian respondent in a similar situation, who returned to a less demanding job than before after a career break to care for their children, was largely comfortable with this more or less conscious outcome of her work–life choices.

Similarly, the Austrian report highlights that a skill reserve is generally necessary and is considered as functional in jobs requiring emergency responses or troubleshooting skills. For instance, in the police force, it is often not desirable to use all the skills one has:

I can always use my competencies. [...] But it’s not okay. I don’t have to let a situation escalate, I could, but I don’t have to. (Austrian policewomen, aged 33 years)

In Austria, the respondents were somewhat reluctant to admit their training needs which they considered would indicate personal deficiencies. On the other hand, the Czech report notes that the alternative response was usually not picked by workers unable to do their work to the required standard, but rather by respondents whose evolving work required the ongoing development of new skills and learning of new things. Respondents with higher levels of education, in particular, replied that additional training is never a bad thing. Thus, in many cases, the choice of the alternative response emphasises the positive attitude of workers towards learning and development.

Because it keeps evolving, I think that you can hardly say – now I know everything. I think I’ll pick number 1. (Czech female chemical laboratory manager, aged 45 years)

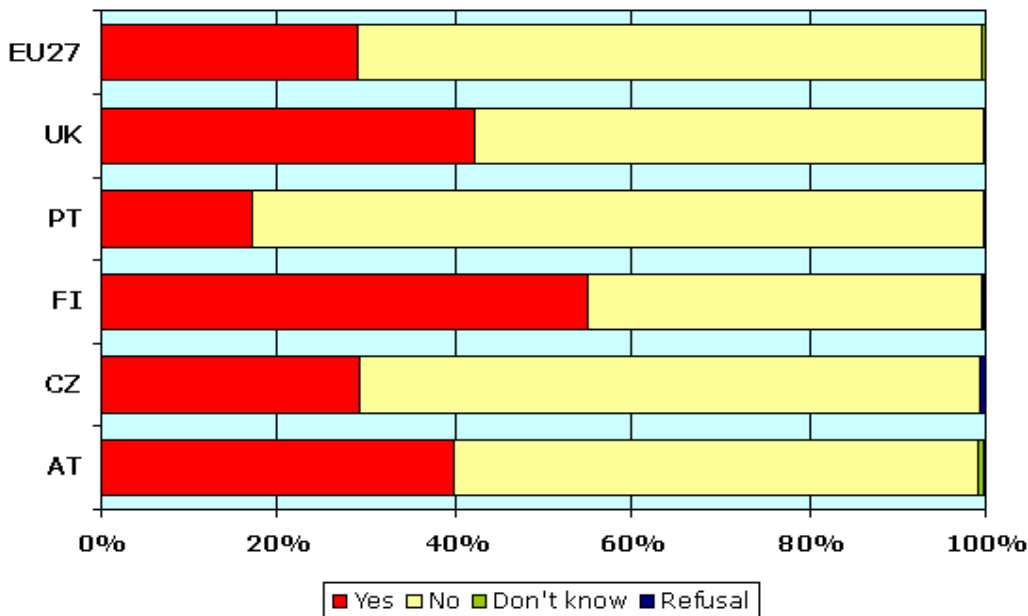
The Portuguese and UK reports draw attention to the lack of a temporal dimension in the question, despite the dynamic nature of the level of skills match. For instance, the UK male clinical manager in the National Health Service (NHS) stated that he would have selected the first option six months ago, the second option now and in a year's time would most likely choose the third answer.

Summary

The response categories in this question are not mutually exclusive. A considerable number of interviewees selected the second response alternative, not because it best described the relationship between their skill base and job tasks, but because it was the ‘least wrong’ or ‘averaged out’ alternative. Some respondents also chose it, even if feeling capable of more demanding duties, because they lacked aspiration for ‘career advancement’ or felt the formulation of the third response alternative too arrogant. At present, the question does not enable a full picture of the degree of correspondence between multiple skill-task relationships within one’s job. More significantly, the continuous demands for development and the updating of information is common in today’s working life and the choice of the first response alternative may thus indicate the evaluative nature of one’s job and the openness for development rather than actual underqualification of the respondent.

Questions 28A, 28B, 28C, 28D, 28E

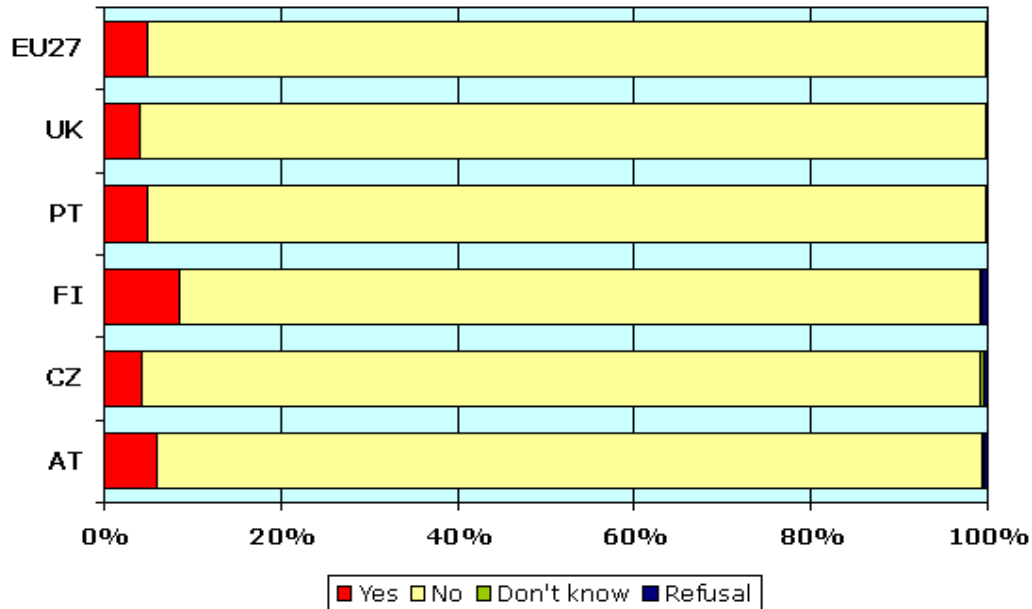
Figure 22: Q28A – Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills or not...Training paid for or provided by your employer?



Note: Since the target group of the post-test consisted only of employees, the notion ‘or by yourself in case you are self-employed’ was not used.

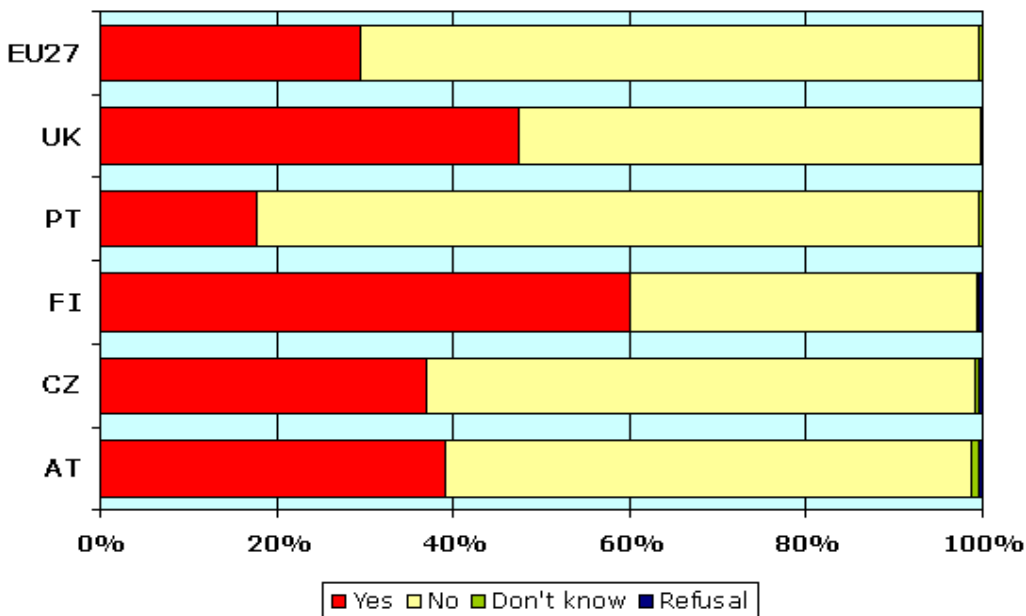
Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 23: Q28B – Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills or not...Training paid for by yourself?



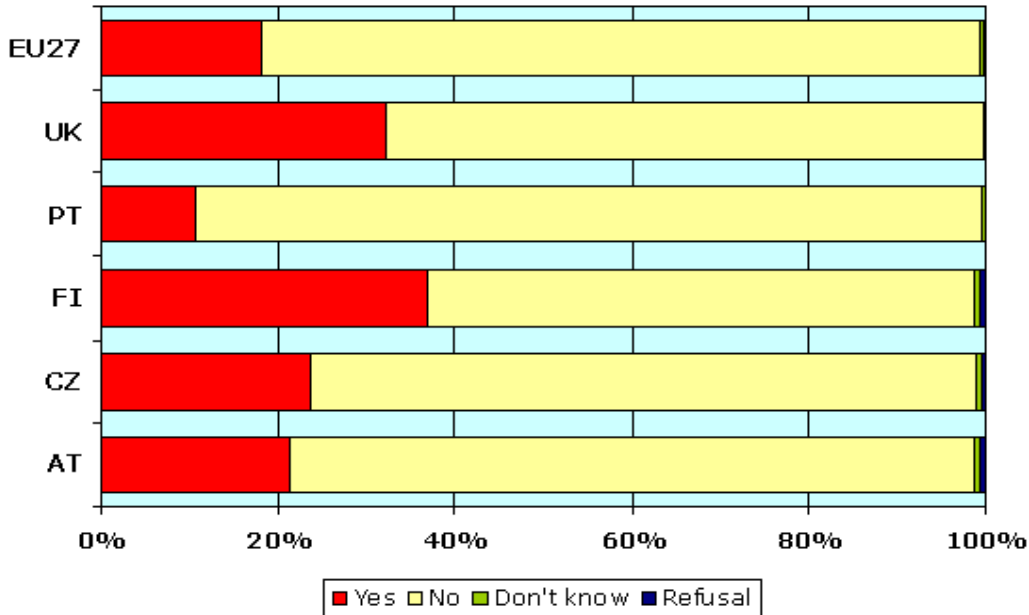
Note: Employees by country.
Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 24: Q28C – Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills or not...On-the-job training (co-workers, supervisors)?



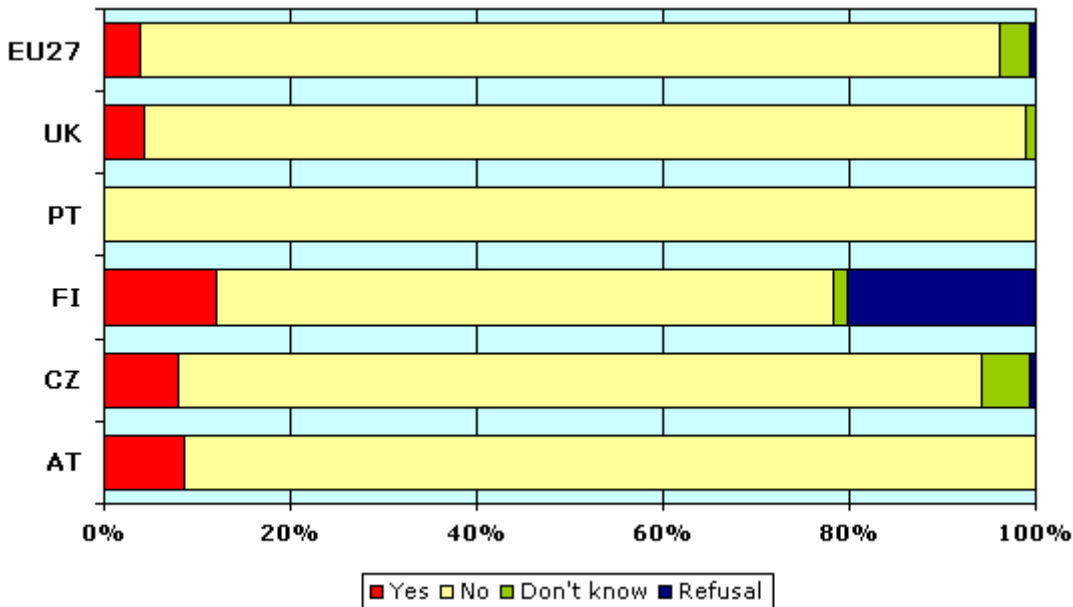
Note: Employees by country.
Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 25: Q28D – Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills or not...Other forms of on-site training and learning (self-learning or online tutorials)?



Note: Employees by country.
Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 26: Q28E – Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any other training?



Note: Employees by country.
Source: EWCS 2005

Technical points

Question

The first two sub-questions functioned well, but the next two (Q28C and Q28D) caused some confusion. In Finland and the UK, the reference to ‘other forms of on-site-training’ was the most difficult of all to interpret with a considerable number of interviewees being uncertain about what they should include in this case. In contrast, Austrian, Czech and Portuguese respondents noted no difficulties with this sub-question. It should be mentioned, however, that in the Portuguese version ‘on-the-job training’ was translated as ‘training at the company’s premises’ and the translation of Q28D omitted the reference to ‘on-site’.

In response to Q28D, the Finnish and Czech interviewees seemed rather to overlook the concept of ‘on-site’, while the last words ‘self-learning, online tutorials’ stole all their attention. This highlights the importance of common practices on how interviewers should deal with the issue of parenthesis.

The UK report notes that most interviewees did not perceive that they had undergone ‘other on-site training and learning’. However, several of them described, elsewhere in the interview, such development activities that could be classified as training or learning of this nature. This indicates that the incidence of ‘other on-site training’ might be underreported here.

In general, the interviewees across countries found it sometimes difficult to decide under which heading they should classify their training. Interpretations varied especially in relation to training on occupational health and safety, which most respondents talked about in response to Q28A, while others gave this answer for Q28C, and even some in relation to Q28D. Induction training also was varyingly reported in answers to Q28C and Q28D; product training paid for by the suppliers was mentioned mostly in response to Q28A, Q28C and Q28E.

‘Training to improve one’s skills’ was in most cases understood as training directly related to one’s occupation or job, but sometimes was also interpreted in a more generic way. However, one Czech interviewee did not consider training which would not improve his skills to be an inappropriate exercise. Having participated in a training course which he judged useless, he consequently replied negatively to the question. In any case, the further the interview situation progressed, the more it emerged that some respondents totally forgot about the initial definition of improvement of professional skills.

The UK report notes that several responses, particularly in relation to other on-site forms of training for workers, also stressed that interviewees’ interpretations of the questions may have shifted between interpretations of levels of training type provision and the take-up of such opportunities.

Scale

The yes/no dichotomy functions well with this type of question.

Interpretations

Q28A – Training paid for or provided by employer

This item was quite unanimously interpreted across the countries. In their responses, workers referred to formal courses or training sessions organised by some external actor, where all the costs were paid for by the employer, usually taking place during normal working hours. Some Austrian and Czech respondents also mentioned training for which the employer pays or provides the space for learning, but employees do the course fully or partly in their own time, even on

weekends. In the case of the Finnish financial consultant, training provided or paid for by the employer also included telephone conferences, where financial advisers gave lectures via telephone to several employees at the same time.

Different types of training paid for or provided by the employer mainly fall into the following categories, adopted from the Czech report and slightly modified here:

- Specialist training necessary for a particular job – this is necessary to be able to cope with certain tasks, machine or particular software, or to focus on specific products and goods etc;
- Training required by law or otherwise mandatory – this includes occupational health and safety training; training enabling the employee to pass some legally required examination; regular testing in professional driving or piloting; maintaining shooting skills among the police etc;
- Training designed to develop skills and abilities – this focuses on improving teamwork, dealing with clients, management of instances of bullying or harassment, language and computer courses; it also includes training designed to improve work organisation and encourage efficient use of working hours;
- Work force's development or recreation days, which emerged only from the Finnish sample.

Seminars and conferences were varyingly included or excluded in relation to training. The Austrian and Czech reports noted specific arrangements where by the employer pays for the training but the employee is subsequently contractually bound to work for the company for a minimum period of time.

Q28B – Training paid for by oneself

Respondents commonly considered this question to involve formal training opportunities financed by themselves and not located in their workplace. The UK and Finnish reports note that such training was usually targeted at one's current or anticipated job – making up for shortfalls in the employer-sponsored training – or aiming at achieving further qualifications. For instance, the UK male clinical manager in the NHS paid to attend a legal course for paramedics, reflecting an increasing litigious approach among patients in the UK following similar developments in the United States. In his position, he felt that he required knowledge above and beyond what others needed and the NHS Foundation Trust was willing to provide.

In the Czech Republic, the most frequently mentioned self-funded training courses, taken or being considered by respondents, were language courses. Some interviewees in Austria, the Czech Republic and Portugal considered whether to count their university costs here – these workers gave various responses to the question (such as 'yes', 'don't know'). Seminars were also mentioned by several respondents. The Austrian female accountant mentioned participating fortnightly in evening talks organised by her professional association; in this case, she had to drive 60km to the seminar and cover the driving costs herself.

The Finnish female special education teacher and a female childminder aged 37 years started to reflect upon what really should be included here – they considered whether studying philosophy or visiting an art exhibition be included in such training. The special education teacher pointed out that it was like drawing a line in water, since 'after all, everything that helps you develop, it is also reflected in your personality and your work'. Nevertheless, both respondents decided in the end not to count such activities as training.

The main reason given by respondents for not having paid for any training themselves was that they considered the training provided by their employer to be sufficient for their job. Further reasons given included the costs of such training, the time it would involve during non-work hours or the lack of need for or desire to take on such training.

As mentioned under the technical points above, in answering this question, some of the interviewees at least in Finland and the Czech Republic obviously forgot about the initial criterion on ‘improving professional skills’.

Q28C – On-the-job training (co-workers, supervisors)

Links between ‘on-the-job training’, ‘training paid or provided by the employer’ as well as with ‘other on-site training’ is reported by all the national reports, so are respondents hesitations on how to classify particular learning activities. In the Czech Republic, in particular, the concept of ‘on-the-job training’ sometimes meant nothing to respondents.

It seems that ‘on-the-job learning’ was interpreted in a variety of ways, with some respondents associating it with formal courses and targeted learning within the workplace or learning by observing other colleagues. New software and equipment were commonly mentioned in relation to this kind of training.

The Czech report observes that on-the-job learning was sometimes linked with meetings and/or non-systematic transfers of information concerning, for example, news from the field, legislation and problem-solving methods. In the Austrian context, it was often about ‘snowballing’, with one worker attending a regular course and then advising others colleagues; the boundaries typically were permeable with consultancy given by colleagues. In Portugal and the UK, the most common interpretation of such training concerned ad hoc one-to-one instruction and advice from colleagues and/or superiors.

Quite differently, the Finnish respondents most typically interpreted on-the-job training as formal training sessions that took place for instance in an auditorium or showroom at the workplace. The trainer was often from within the organisation and had also taken part in training; the trainer was thus able to pass on the knowledge acquired from the training to other colleagues as ‘peer-to-peer training’. In addition to the Finnish report, the UK report also describes this kind of interpretation given by a few respondents.

Furthermore, several Finnish interviewees referred to informal situations of collegial assistance in their responses; however, although they responded affirmatively to the survey question, they stressed that ‘learning’ would be a more appropriate term to use in this context. Other Finnish interviewees explicitly emphasised that they did not consider these types of learning situations as ‘on-the-job training’.

In an extreme case, some Czech respondents believed on-the-job training included the situation whereby a worker would circulate information on the course they attended among co-workers in order to help potential candidates decide whether to take the course or not.

Some interviewees mentioned courses on first aid and industrial safety in this context, while some others had referred to training paid for by the employer. A few interviewees made reference to induction training for new recruits or those familiarising themselves with new machinery.

The Austrian and UK reports draw attention to the fact that some white-collar workers considered on-the-job training to be one prong of a variety of forms of training. An Austrian male materials administrator aged 39 years reported using a combination of a course and further on-the-job training and mutual consultation for the introduction of a new controlling software package. A UK male housing and support officer aged 27 years emphasised an overlap in the various types of training focused on by the questions in this series when he described how he had recently undertaken ‘on-the-job training which included e-learning and virtual learning’ by himself on his work-based computer.

Q28D – Other forms of on-site training and learning (self-learning, online tutorials etc.)

Interpretations of this question varied among respondents and also differed by country. In the Portuguese version, omitting ‘on-site’ in the wording of the translation led to some respondents mentioning learning activities which were not related to their job. Otherwise, the Portuguese workers mostly referred to their daily experience as a source of training and learning, while this response was given only on a few occasions in other samples.

This has to do with the definition of training...when you started giving the examples and talked about training...Daily learning, daily learning that's what we have in practice. (Portuguese male salesperson, aged 28 years)

In the UK, most of the activities reported by respondents took place during normal working hours, even if they varied in terms of procedure and form. Such activities included monthly safety meetings, targeted courses in the head office or familiarisation with work tasks. On the contrary, in Austria and Finland, these ‘other forms’ of learning were mostly mentioned as taking place outside working hours, more or less on a voluntary basis. In Austria, Finland and the Czech Republic – but not in Portugal or the UK – these activities commonly included reading professional literature, journals, instruction leaflets and manuals at home. The respondents in this case took on such activities out of their own interest or because they felt there was too much pressure at work to gather even the routine information. Moreover, Finnish respondents usually referred to learning activities that were not directly connected to specific work tasks, but were aimed at a more general education, even though they took place at the workplace.

The Austrian report draws attention to common internet browsing and downloading of reference material. For instance, the Austrian female childminder regularly used the internet for songs, rhymes and games for the children. In the Finnish and Portuguese versions, distance learning via the internet is also mentioned.

Furthermore, the Austrian report highlights the availability of e-learning material in some jobs, although this is not very popular. Respondents often lack the time for such training or the interest or initial knowledge to know where and how to begin. However, in some cases, online material and tutorials are the only training methods available to workers.

We have this kind of intranet system, where all our specifications are. There are no manuals, but everything one needs to know is there ... it is a kind of crazy ball pool, a quicksand, where everything is located and can be found there, as long as you happen to hit the information at the moment you need it. So there, that's the self-learning. (Finnish female financial consultant, aged 47 years)

According to a few Finnish and UK interviewees, learning was seen to take form also via trial and error. Workers refer to this as the ‘so-called “push the button technique”’ asking ‘what happens when you push this or that button’.

One of the Finnish interviewees talked in this context about a three-year course on a specialist vocational qualification he was aiming towards: the tailored course was paid for by the employer and organised by the adult education institute, consisting of a few days of intense teaching each month following by self-learning at home. One UK respondent outlined courses run by the company in conjunction with the local college, while another mentioned training provided by a different company but paid for by the employer. Thus, there was a clear overlap with the employer-sponsored training discussed as part of Q28A.

Those Finnish interviewees who sometimes gave training and lectures to colleagues and subordinates themselves included preparations for these training sessions in response to this question. In contrast, the UK respondents regularly teaching or tutoring others did not tend to report their teaching activities at this point.

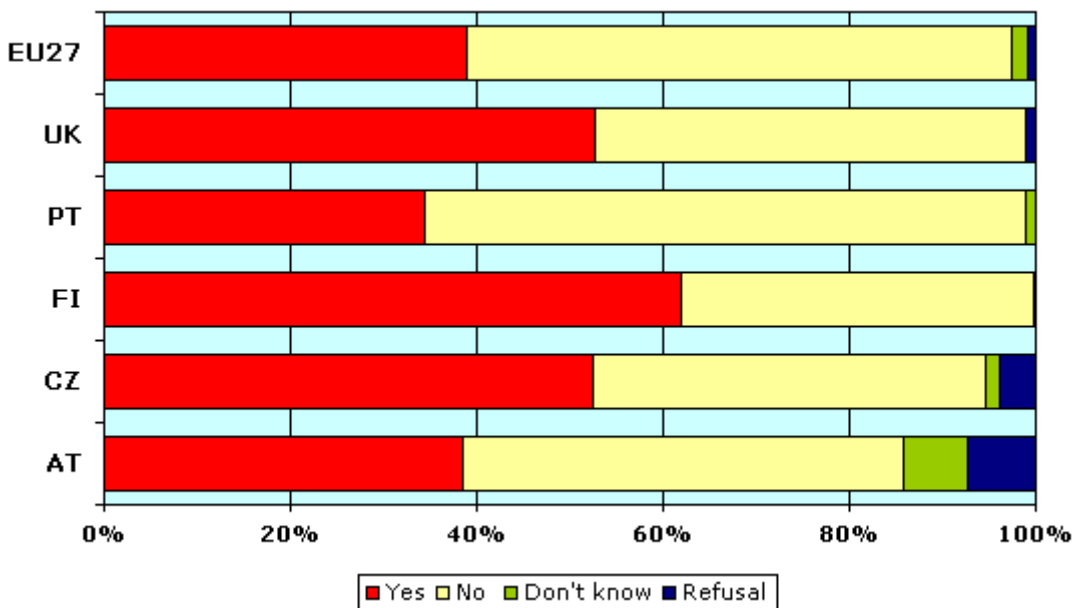
Other forms of work-related training were mentioned in a few cases. The Portuguese female schoolteacher who had a student with a rare psychological disorder did some research by herself, mainly on the internet, on the disease in question in order to be able to help her to work with the child to the best of her ability. A Finnish male shop manager drew attention to the product training for workers which was provided by the suppliers.

Summary

Questions 28A and Q28B on training paid for or provided by the employer, as well as training paid for by the worker, were well-received and elicited comparable responses. However, in terms of the questions relating to on-the-job training and other forms of on-site training, interviewees hesitated more often in their responses and their interpretations referred to quite disparate forms of training and learning, with some evident country-based differences, too. Furthermore, for many respondents, the categories seemed to overlap – in particular, employer-sponsored and on-the-job training were often linked. The UK report quite justly observes that the two first sub-questions in the series seek training information relating to its provider, while the latter two concern the nature of the training. The Austrian and Finnish reports suggest including references to self-initiated study in these questions. The bi-polar response categories were generally considered adequate, even if the Czech report suggests considering a response scale.

Questions 30C, 30D

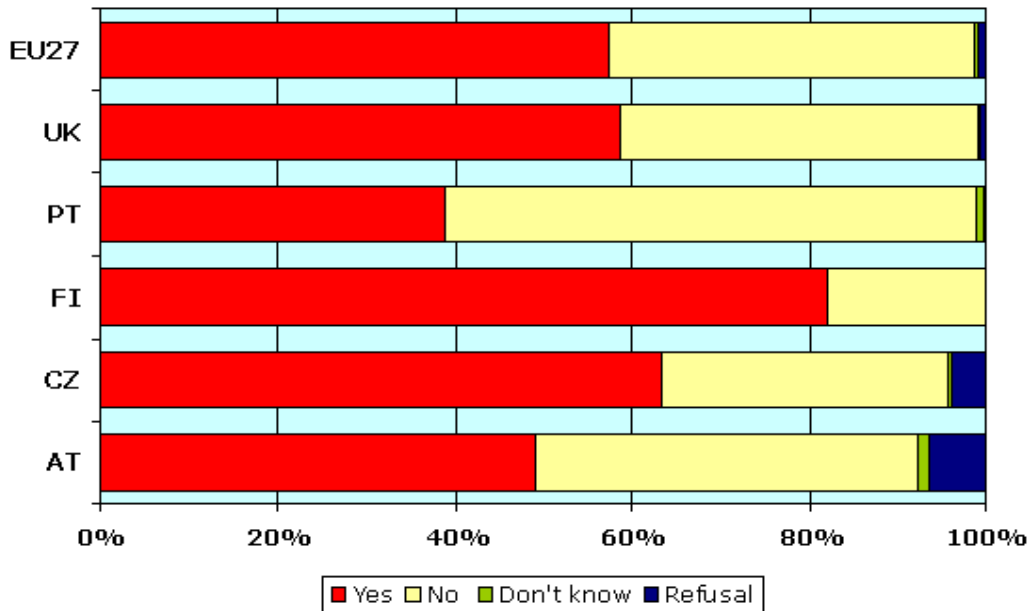
Figure 27: Q30C – Over the past 12 months have you, or not, been subject to regular formal assessment of your work performance?



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 28: Q30D – Over the past 12 months have you, or not, discussed work-related problems with your boss?



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Technical points

Question

'Formal assessment' emerged to be a well understood concept in Finland and the UK, where such assessment was also commonly in use. Among the Finnish respondents, the term was even associated with 'personal appraisal and development discussions', which makes sense, since such discussions are a common practice in Finnish workplaces. In contrast, in Austria, the Czech Republic and Portugal, 'formal assessment' was not a very familiar concept or practice in workplaces. In these countries, the term was interpreted in a variety of ways. The unfamiliarity is reflected in the high proportion of 'don't know' responses and 'refusals' for Austria in the EWCS 2005.

In Austria, the question related to discussions on work-related problems raised an element of surprise and scepticism among the interviewees. Something in the technically accurately translated wording seemed to be quite provocative in the given cultural context. This is evident in the significant proportion (6.5%) of 'refusals' to respond to the question. The Portuguese respondents understood the word used for 'discuss' as an argument or conflict rather than a talk, which may have led to a different understanding of the concept than intended. Furthermore, several respondents across countries noted that the question on discussions on work-related problems assumed that there had been problems at work. Finally, interpretations varied somewhat in terms of whom the term 'boss' was seen to refer to (see also Q25C). In general, respondents considered that the elements of the contents of the two questions sometimes overlapped: personal developmental aspects might be connected to the discussions on work-related problems with the boss as well, for example, in the case of approving training courses.

Scale

The yes/no dichotomy was considered adequate for both questions.

Interpretations

Q30C – Subject to regular formal assessment of your work performance?

In relation to this question, Finland was clearly distinguishable from the other countries with the widespread systematic assessment procedure in place, namely the personal appraisal and development discussions. In all, 15 out of the 20 Finnish respondents reported that it was normal practice to have such discussions with their immediate superior once or twice a year. These discussions centred around assessing the past and planning for the future as well as around assessing a worker's development and training needs. The general framework of the discussion was usually provided in a special questionnaire, which included questions also about job satisfaction and motivation, problems encountered and coping at work. Quite a few interviewees noted that the questions of the post-test interview reminded them of those discussed in the development discussions. The Finnish respondents highlighted that the discussions were a two-way line of communication. Only three respondents, all blue-collar workers in the private sector, had no kind of performance assessment.

In the UK, the situation was pretty close to that of Finland. About half of the respondents had been formally assessed in the last year. Most workers referred to explicit and regular occasions involving a superior where their work effort was appraised in a structured manner. In most cases, the assessment also examined any work-based difficulties encountered by the employee and to construct a work plan which included an assessment of and actions to be taken in respect of employee development. A number of interviewees outlined how the assessments were used to establish their pay levels and grades. On the other hand, the UK lower skilled/status job occupants interpreted formal assessment in terms of explicit and covert management observation or monitoring of their work performance. For example, the UK female checkout operator described how she and colleagues were formally observed by superiors once a month while they worked and then taken aside to be told how well they were performing. She was not told, however, when and for how long she would be observed. Those who perceived that they were not formally appraised tended to be workers in non-professional or lower skill occupations.

In Austria, formality was generally understood to be 'in writing'. Seven respondents spoke about regular performance evaluation taking place, but only five of them responded in the affirmative, with the others giving a negative or 'don't know' response. In addition to these respondents, two sales workers noted setting targets during performance evaluation.

Only four respondents in Portugal had undergone any formal regular assessment. In addition, the female schoolteacher recognised that these assessments normally exist, but had not been implemented in recent times due to the 'freezing' of careers in state schools.

In the Czech Republic, nine respondents responded affirmatively in relation to having formal assessment. However, only four respondents reported assessment (points or verbal comment) taking place according to some formalised assessment regulation or methodology.

Many Austrian, Czech and Portuguese respondents did not clearly distinguish 'regular formal assessment' from routine controls and general informal feedback; some workers even felt 'formally assessed' while actually referring to implicative feedback as the lack of negative feedback and management's trust in employees. In the Czech Republic, some respondents would consider assessment to be connected with pay and changes in its sliding components, while in Austria, workers believed assessment was part of a sanctioning process. It was not uncommon among respondents to interpret assessment as a non-transparent observing procedure, which could possibly be in operation in the workplace without employees being aware of it.

Well, I imagine it's a description, 'what is the employee like'? A personnel description like we used to have in an office. The superior's secret files [laughs]. That's my understanding. (Austrian female cleaner, aged 61 years)

Some respondents also talked about assessment which applied to work carried out collectively without taking into account the achievement of individual workers.

The majority of respondents in Finland, Austria and the UK who had ‘real’ regular formal assessment of their work performance considered it useful. The Finnish respondents appreciated the opportunity to come forward with their opinions and to see that their manager for once had enough time to discuss things. A Finnish male emergency response specialist aged 36 years expressed the opinion that having permission to speak one’s mind in these assessment discussions was the only way of determining how the work could be developed and processes made more efficient. The Austrians usually also found these discussions supportive, even if they did not generally consider them to be a solution to stressful work situations. In the UK, the main question regarding the usefulness of these assessments centred around whether assessments were subsequently used as feedback. However, few respondents were frustrated by the lack of tangible incentives associated with assessments.

Q30D – Discussed work-related problems with your boss?

The Austrian report highlights the problematic nature of this question. Interestingly, the particular problems pointed out are actually not different from the variety of ways the question was interpreted in other countries; however, it should be noted that neither the other respondents nor the interviewers seem to have perceived them as problems.

Austrian respondents note that it is not clear whether the question is about general everyday communication with superiors or institutionalised discussions like formal meetings, or anything in between. Indeed, in the other countries, both interpretations emerged. Furthermore, the Austrian report observes that the question may have a negative connotation (following the assessment question) and occasionally encouraged a defensive response: ‘I did not have problems’. However, this was also the case in the other countries, but the respondents did not seem to react in a defensive way. Thus, the pragmatic meaning of this technically well translated formulation seems to be somewhat different in the Austrian cultural context compared with the other post-test countries.

In general, the scope of ‘problems’ was understood differently. While some respondents referred to ‘some bigger conflicts’, the majority of workers considered the question to relate to any work-related matters, whether they were large or small scale, problematic or not, such as consulting the superior on everyday matters. Furthermore, these work-related matters were seen both as job/professional and organisational, as well as staff-related issues: namely related to lack of resources, coping at work, working hours, unclear job description, salary or technical problems. The UK report observes that many respondents believed that these discussions were a necessity for facilitating day-to-day working life.

Discussions with superiors might take place on an individual and informal ad-hoc basis but also through regular monthly, weekly or daily meetings of team or departments. The Czech report draws attention to job occupants who work in isolation and are characterised by a high degree of independence from others, such as a newspaper photographer and train conductor. These workers did not often take part in work meetings and were obliged to solve a number of problems on their own.

Interdependence of teamwork is illustrated in the UK example of the male warehouse worker for whom the normal practice was to first informally discuss work-related issues with an immediate group of staff during breaks; if the matter could not be resolved, the staff collectively brought it to the attention of their manager.

The low frequency of discussions with superiors may reflect, on the one hand, the low prevalence of ‘problems’ to be discussed, but on the other hand, it may also indicate poor communication with the superior and/or their unavailability to meet staff. The Finnish female senior government official reported no such ‘big problems’ that should have been discussed during the past 12 months, but considered that since she had an open relationship with her boss, issues would

definitely have been discussed if they had existed, and therefore responded ‘yes’ to the question. This response highlights, again, the relevance of the nature of worker–manager relationships and communication over the initial question, depending on whether any problems arose which required discussion. Several respondents highlighted the approachability or availability of their superior in connection with this question. Furthermore, given the 12 months reference time in the question, many respondents probably could not avoid discussion with their superior on at least one work-related problem, whether they perceived such discussions easy to initiate or not. Indeed, the UK report notes how in a few cases where respondents described how their organisations harboured a culture of mistrust and/or management were seen to have adopted an uncaring attitude towards employees’ welfare, work-related discussions tended to cover a more restricted range of issues and sometimes negative outcomes in respect of employee relations matters.

Summary

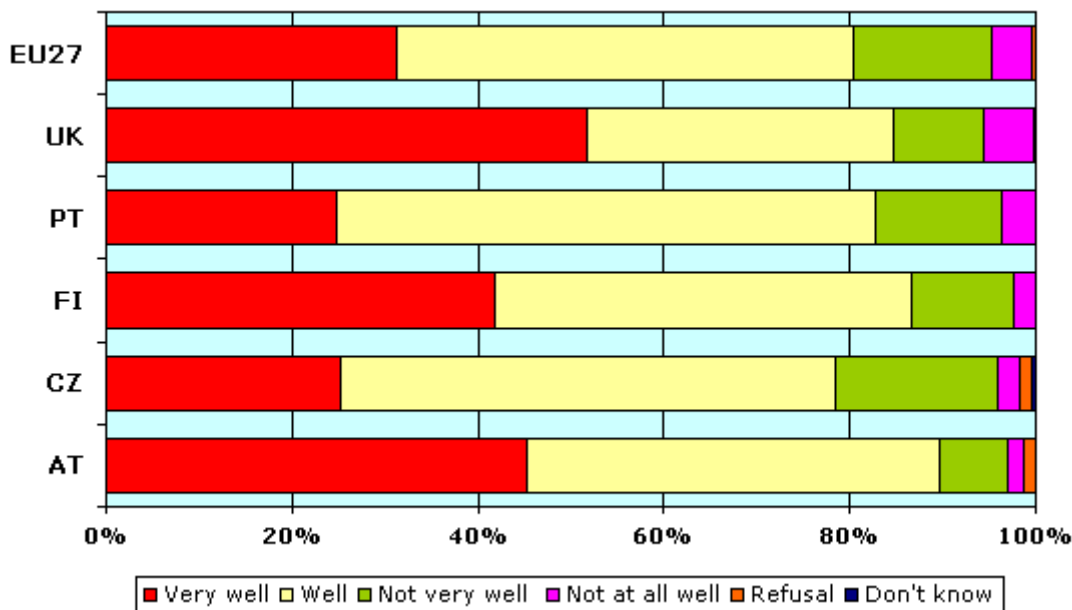
Huge differences emerged across countries in terms of the extent to which formal assessment procedures were in use in workplaces and, consequently, how familiar respondents were with the concept. In Austria, the Czech Republic and Portugal, several respondents often had no idea what was meant by the item; for these countries, an equal understanding can not really be assumed with this formulation.

The Portuguese translation of the question on discussions of work-related problems with superiors had a connotation of an argument or even conflict, which may have affected the responses. The Austrian report observes scepticism among interviewees in relation to this question: the wording seems to be somewhat provocative in the cultural context and it commonly led to vague interpretations.

In general, the interpretations of ‘problems’ ranged from daily matters to bigger conflicts. In any case, the reference period of 12 months might be too long in this context, if the overall aim is to investigate the level of communication between the respondents and their superiors.

Question 18

Figure 29: Q18 – *In general, do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work very well, well, not very well or not at all well?*



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Technical points

Question

In Austria, ‘social commitments’ was translated with words referring mostly to formal obligations such as taking part in social events or club meetings. On the other hand, the Finnish translation of the question referred to a significantly wider concept than the original, by ‘dealing with family commitments and private life outside of work’.

It should be noted that several respondents expressed that they liked being asked about the linkage between their work and non-work life and activities, finding it an important and topical issue.

Scale

The response alternatives functioned well.

Interpretations

The concept of ‘working hours’ was interpreted as the scheduling of normal working hours, sometimes with references to overtime, holidays (a lengthy period for teachers) and free weekends.

The reference to ‘family commitments’ was quite unanimously understood, although minor but revealing national differences emerged. For example, the UK report notes that family commitments were more often associated with childcare considerations than free time family activities. In Finland, with a functioning public day care system, respondents with small children emphasised the importance of the time they spent with their children and on ‘family activities’, rarely even mentioning practical childcare issues.

Interpretations of ‘social commitments’ were more varied. For Czech, Portuguese and UK respondents, social commitments typically involved friends and other people, as well as cultural or recreational activities such as theatre, cinema or hobbies; in few cases, educational aspects were also included.

However, the translation in the Austrian version of the questionnaire guided the interpretations towards a more formal and narrower sense, to participation in associations or political engagement and social commitments associated with these. Only a minority of respondents covered such aspects as friends, cultural events and caring for their family.

In contrast, the Finnish translation ‘dealing with private life’ covered practically ‘everything that is outside the work’. In addition to friends and free time activities, Finnish respondents also included all kinds of personal engagements and errands, such as dental appointments, shopping for groceries or servicing the car.

The UK report draws attention to the common view that family commitments were somewhat unchangeable while social commitments are more voluntary and thus represent flexible attachments to one’s life. For instance, for a UK male machine operator aged 41 years, early morning shifts were suitable for family commitments but not for ad hoc social activities in the evenings. In addition, other male shift workers in Finland and Portugal considered that they had more time for their family as a result of working night shifts, but on the other hand, meeting with friends was difficult for many respondents doing evening work, early morning shifts or irregular hours. Moreover, respondents with unconventional working hours sometimes complained that on their days off they usually were so tired that they did not have the energy to leave home.

In the Portuguese context, adhering to fixed times to stop working was considered important for allowing time with children. Somewhat differently, Finnish respondents doing day work with positively flexible working times were especially satisfied with their work–life balance. In the UK, five out of eight interviewees whose hours fit ‘very well’

worked on a part-time basis. On the other hand, the Austrian report points out how even part-time arrangements are not always suitable for making the most of family life because of their scheduling.

The Austrian report considers that the responses are strongly affected by national gender regimes and gender contracts (Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Several female respondents, particularly in Austria but also in the UK, had started to work part time after having children. In Austria, some of these women had interrupted their work career to raise their children and had returned to jobs requiring fewer qualifications than positions they held previously. Their positive responses on current work–life balance reflected their previous choices made to achieve a satisfactory balance between work and family life under the constraints of available childcare options, skill maintenance, demands for adequate jobs and, more generally, gender regimes.

More significantly, when Austrian male respondents were asked about their work–life balance, many tended to refer to their wives as judges: ‘You have to ask my wife about that’ (Austrian male insurance representative, aged 47 years). The same response emerged in the case of two male UK respondents.

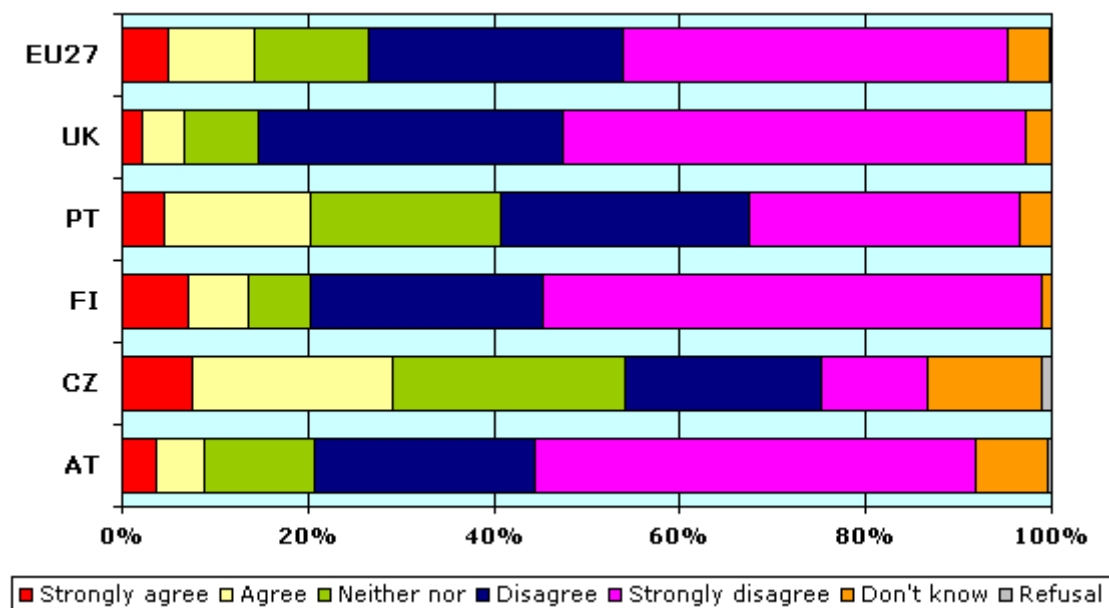
Summary

Despite the long wording of the question, it functioned relatively well and was welcomed by many interviewees. However, the translation in the Austrian version was remarkably narrowed, and the Finnish version clearly broadened the scope of the interpretation of ‘social commitments’.

It became evident that some interviewees had deliberately altered their working hours to better accommodate their non-work lives, which was also reflected in their responses. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that the question only measures satisfaction with working hours and other commitments, and not work–life balance from a broader perspective.

Questions 37A, 37B, 37C, 37E

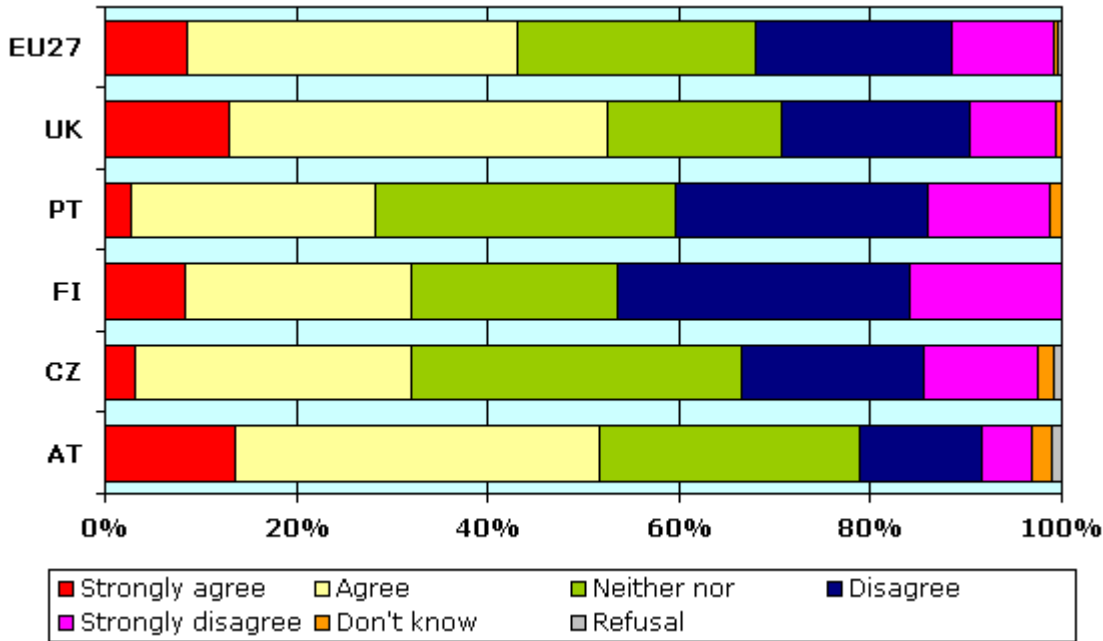
Figure 30: Q37A – How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements describing some aspects of your job... I might lose my job in the next six months?



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

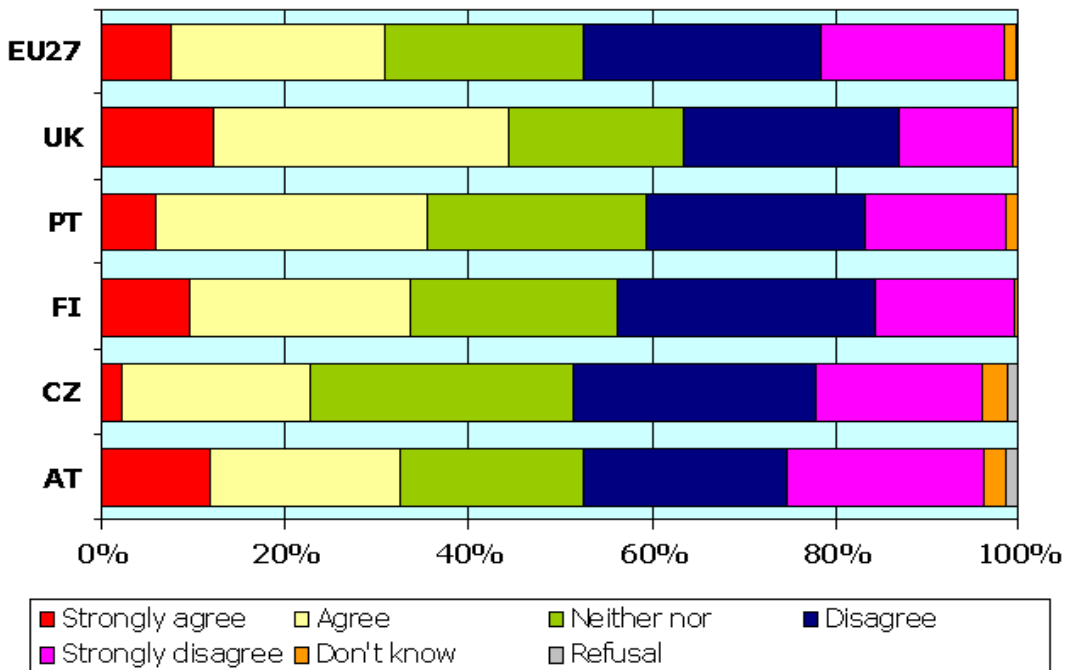
Figure 31: Q37B – How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements describing some aspects of your job...I am well paid for the work I do?



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

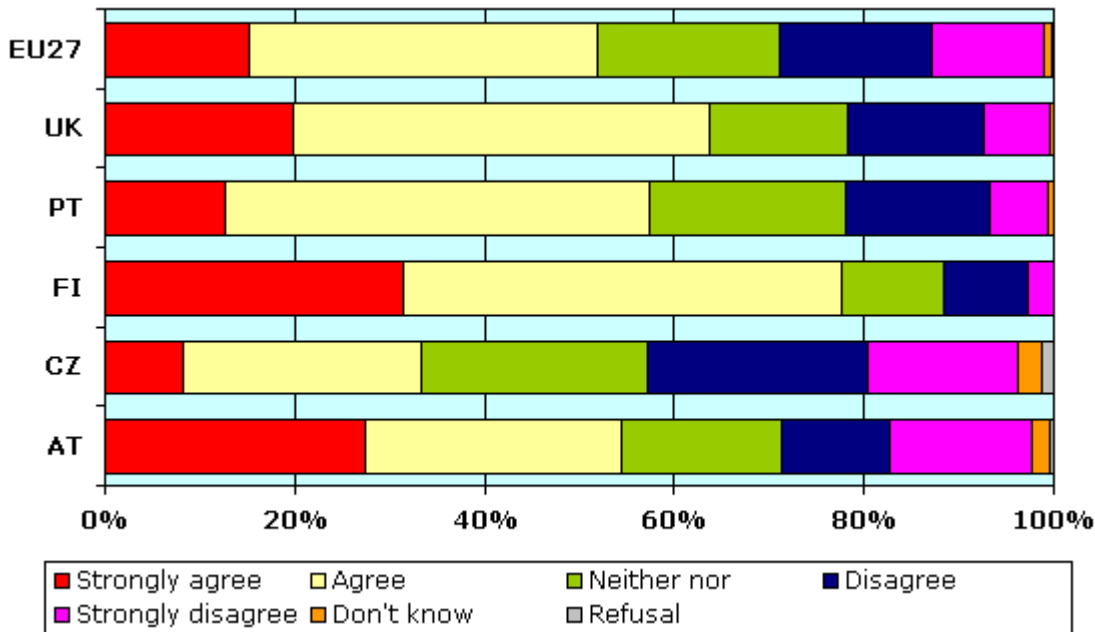
Figure 32: Q37C – How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements describing some aspects of your job...My job offers good prospects for career advancement?



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Figure 33: Q37E – How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements describing some aspects of your job...At work, I have good opportunities to learn and grow?



Note: Employees by country.

Source: EWCS 2005

Technical points

Question

The question on losing one’s job emerged to be nonsensical to most Czech respondents. Their frequent reaction was amazement, since of course ‘Anything can happen, and anyone can lose their job’. Evidently, in the Czech context, the formulation of the question was not very successful, since most of the respondents agreeing with the statement did not have a sense of insecurity regarding their job:

The way I see it, you can never tell what tomorrow will bring. I don't think about it at all in my job. For me, anything can happen. In my opinion, this could happen to anyone, anywhere, anytime. Q: Sure. Now if I asked you if you feel some insecurity regarding this job? Ans: No, not at the moment. Not at all. (Czech female, building materials dealer, aged 23 years)

In Finland, a pilot interviewed emphasised the word ‘might’ as it leaves room for such a theoretical possibility one could never totally disregard, in line with ‘In the next six months, I might win the lottery’. In the UK, a number of respondents indicated that their responses depended on organisational and/or industrial conditions staying the same. Thus, they also took into account the possibility posed in the question of losing one’s job, in contrast to a definitive statement (‘I will lose my job’).

However, it is interesting to speculate on what such a strong national deviation in interpretation is based on. The Czech national experts note that the Czech translation does not include the eventuality of the item, but the wording is rather ‘I may lose my job’ (or ‘might lose’). The question arose as to whether this is a matter of linguistics or national mentality, or whether the reasons for these reactions would be partly found in those drastic societal changes Czech people have testified to over the past decades, resulting in a totally different horizon for change (‘anything can happen’) compared

with societies with a more stable recent history. If so, the extent to which the same applies to other new Member States (NMS) having undergone similar changes should be considered.¹

Question Q37B on pay did not raise difficulties in the post-test countries. In relation to Q37C, a considerable number of respondents found the item on career prospects confusing, even irrelevant. In the Finnish version, there also was a translation error: instead of ‘prospects’, the question inquired about ‘abilities for career advancement’. In a few cases, this resulted in opposite responses than there would have been had the translation been correct.

In Q37E, there was some variation in the translation and interpretation of learning and growing opportunities. The Austrian version inquiring about opportunities to ‘further educate and develop’ guided respondents to report their formal training activities in particular. On the other hand, the Finnish translation ‘learn and develop’ probably encouraged the respondents to report on their informal self-development and self-actualisation. In the UK, the interviewees generally considered training in this context, but a significant number of them also interpreted the term ‘grow’ as upward mobility. The Portuguese report points out that a few respondents made a distinction between ‘learn’ and ‘grow’ – learning being closer to the work level and growing being closer to the personal level – while most of the Czech respondents considered the issue first and foremost as acquiring skills either needed in the current job or beneficial for their general employability on a broader scale. In any case, the item was basically interpreted as a positive indicator.

Scale

The scale functioned well.

Interpretations

Q37A – I might lose my job in the next six months

In general, most of the respondents, apart from those in the Czech Republic, felt relatively secure in relation to their immediate future: ‘There is no reason I would lose [my job]’. For the Austrians and Finnish public sector employees the only possible way to lose one’s job would have been as a result of severe professional misconduct. One specific case related to a Czech respondent contractually bound to work for his company for at least two years after having received costly training paid for by the employer.

In the Portuguese context, the respondents generally considered the type of employment contract they had in terms of job security, with those on temporary contracts feeling much more insecure than respondents with permanent contracts. Unfortunately, there were relatively few temporary employees represented in the other national data.

Generally, the question was interpreted in terms of organisational/industrial performance, and to a lesser extent based on personal performance, but again, often considered structural employment and market conditions.

A number of respondents referred to the good financial situation of their company as a reason for their negative response to this question. Some interviewees, in jobs less subject to market changes, trusted in the fact that the work would continue in their sector and workplace such as in health care, emergency services or transport. In addition, some respondents trusted in their ongoing employability due to the shortage of skilled workers in their occupational field – for example, these workers included a Finnish practice nurse and a UK multi-disciplined craftsman. Some workers felt assured as they were needed in their workplace, according to positive feedback they had received from managers.

¹ In the NMS10, 25.2% of respondents agree or totally agree with the statement, ‘I might lose my job in the next six months’. At EU level, the proportion is 11.3%.

Nonetheless, similarly to the Czech reactions, some interviewees across countries with diverse employee and personal profiles opted to 'disagree' instead of 'strongly disagree', or even for the 'neither agree, nor disagree' option, because they felt that the scenario on which the question focuses was always possible to some extent. It seems that these kinds of reactions were relatively more common among the UK respondents than in Austria, Finland or Portugal.

Respondents reluctant to exclude unlikely worst case scenarios related their 'you never know' attitude, for example, to potential economic crises as a possible risk in terms of job security. Some sectors, such as construction, were considered to be especially sensitive to economic fluctuations. There also emerged a broader sentiment that a worker can never be absolutely sure what will happen with their private sector job on account of increasing exposure of organisations to changing market conditions and globalisation: 'these days', the company may be sold at any moment and the new owners would make their own changes. Some respondents made reference to the more stable 'old times':

Go back 30 years, a job was for life ... with one company. There's no such thing as that anymore ... because everything's gone flexible, and new industries come and old industries die off. (UK male clinical manager, aged 39 years)

Only a few interviewees interpreted the possibility of job loss in relation to incompetence, even in hypothetical terms. Furthermore, almost all respondents, excluding the Czech workers, considered dismissal as the only way to lose one's job; in this case, several workers referred to potential health problems or difficulties in coping with the tasks required as the main reasons for dismissal. As mentioned above, the case of the Czech Republic was quite different. The respondents linked the possibility of losing one's job to any natural disaster which could strike: '(T)he firm could burn down, say. There are lots of reasons' (Czech male production manager, aged 33 years).

Q37B – I am well paid for the work I do

Interestingly, the UK report highlights that this question was most commonly interpreted in terms of an absolute amount of money or a high level of remuneration. In other countries, it was rather interpreted in relative terms against different baselines such as those listed below.

- Job demands: These included responsibility, physical demands, stress, risks involved, pace of work, real working hours, among others. Some respondents remarked that their job description, competencies as well as responsibilities had broadened in recent years, but their corresponding salary had remained unchanged. As a result, these workers felt frustrated with their employers.
- Attained education and other extra skills, including work experience and seniority: A Finnish female senior clerk aged 57 years with three years of education related to business and administration felt frustrated when she compared her lower pay level to that of the janitor at the same company who had no formal education.
- General pay level in the occupational field.
- Pay level in similar jobs in other sectors (namely public versus private jobs) or in other workplaces.
- Pay in different occupations: The UK female checkout operator felt that her pay level was relatively poor in comparison with the equivalent work undertaken by a bank cashier.
- Transparent pay system and fair treatment: A Finnish male purchase manager aged 62 years found it unsatisfactory that, even if his work made a significant contribution to the success of various projects, potential bonuses were distributed only among supervisors. The UK male rolling stock engineer did not consider it important to be well paid in a job; however, he felt that he should be fairly paid for his work, according to the philosophy of 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay'.

- Aspired lifestyle: The UK report mentions how some, particularly more senior and career aspiring male interviewees related their response to whether they could afford to buy what they wanted.
- Livelihood problems: The Czech, Austrian and Finnish reports considered whether income levels allow workers to make a living at all in a society where everything was perceived expensive. A number of Austrian female respondents worried even about their future in this context: in particular, one worker worried about her old-age pension, while another was concerned about her children's future education.

Other baselines highlighted in the various national reports included the average pay level in the region (Czech Republic) or in the whole country, in other neighbouring countries or even in the EU as a whole (Portugal), pay levels of women (Austria) and, finally, working conditions (Czech Republic).

Some used even multiple baselines, such as the UK male farm employee. Before opting for the 'agree' response option, he commented: 'Am I paid well for the hours I do? Probably not. Am I paid well in relation to the performance of the business? Yes, probably.' Likewise, the Austrian policewoman considered that she was well paid compared with women in other jobs, but less so in relation to working times, stress levels and the danger her job involved.

Q37C – My job offers good prospects for career advancement

This item was mostly interpreted as the likely promotion of respondents in their current workplace. Only few respondents tended to consider the possibility of career advancement beyond their current organisation.

The difficulty posed by this question was often the fact that, even theoretically, there was nowhere to advance to in the work organisation, due to the flattening of organisational hierarchies, the small number of job vacancies – for example, if a worker left or died – or the small size of the company. Some respondents also felt that they had already reached the 'top of their career', while some only saw the availability of virtual careers which means they are given the title but salary and job content remain the same.

More significantly, a considerable number of respondents saw no possibility for career advancement in their particular profession. In many cases, workers did not wish for career advancement since promotion would have meant a less interesting job. Moreover, it would move them away from the specialist work they enjoyed to either administration or management tasks and to 'paperwork' which was not appealing for them.

I can't be a photographer, then senior photographer and then most senior photographer. That's simply not possible here. I just join the magazine as a photojournalist and I stay there as a photojournalist. But I can't be the photojournalists' boss, because then I'm not a photographer; I just sit there and do paperwork. (Czech female photographer, aged 52 years)

However, in some cases, the respondents identified obstacles to career advancement deriving from organisational practices. For instance, the UK female schoolteacher aged 31 years commented that the opportunity to progress to a senior leadership team had diminished in her case mainly due to her contractual status and family commitments – she had met a 'glass ceiling' as a part-time working mother. The UK male warehouse worker described his company's practice of advertising jobs externally rather than promoting someone off the floor to a management role. He felt that such limited opportunities for career moves created an impasse to his own career advancement and resulted in his involvement in training new recruits.

The Austrian, Czech and UK reports, in particular, recognise the impact of being older on perceived career prospects in two ways: several older respondents felt that their 'time window' had already closed in terms of available prospects, but, on the other hand, most older workers also emphasised that 'at this stage of life' they did not care for advancement

anymore, some being more concerned with their approaching retirement. Thus, respondents who had most career advancement opportunities in these samples were most likely young professionals who worked in medium to large-sized organisations.

In Finland, several respondents emphasised the necessity for further education in order to get even a theoretical opportunity to promotion; although, in other countries, this issue was only mentioned on occasion. This may partly be due to the Finnish translation referring to ‘abilities’ instead of ‘prospects’ but most likely also reflected the national context with a strong emphasis on formal qualifications. Some respondents with a limited job description felt that their abilities could increase only through receiving further education, rather than through any more work experience. On the other hand, some blue-collar and lower level white-collar respondents felt very competent, but recognised that further formal qualifications were required for higher posts – thus, this contrasts to the UK warehouse worker mentioned above who complained about the company’s reluctance to promote someone off the floor to a management position.

In a similar way, ‘career advancement’ also for the Austrian childminder would require further studies, but would also mean a total change of occupation that she was not interested in.

Why should I go to school every other night and maybe become a speech therapist or something, and then I sit there, practise speaking with the children and think, ‘please, why am I doing this? I was so happy in my job. (Austrian female childminder, aged 52 years)

Several Finnish and Portuguese interviewees, who were having difficulties ascertaining what career advancement could mean in their job, expanded this concept from the idea of climbing the hierarchical ladder to personal development and self-satisfaction.

It is about always having the opportunity for development. (...) (‘Neither agree nor disagree’) Because lately the company has been disregarding this aspect, I mean, there is not that training we had some time ago. (Portuguese male train engineer, aged 41 years)

A Czech male dispatcher aged 36 years considered the term to mean the possibility of greater participation in decision-making processes within the company, which need not be accompanied by promotion to a higher position. In the case of the Finnish coach driver, the change from knowledge worker to coach driver – a move that would objectively be called downward mobility – meant ‘career advancement’ in the sense that he enjoyed his current work much more than his previous role.

Q37E – At work, I have good opportunities to learn and grow

As described under the technical points, the various interpretations of this item among respondents differed quite significantly between the post-test countries. Furthermore, the Czech report observes two ways of interpreting the question: while some workers rated the theoretical opportunity – even though they themselves did not make use of this opportunity – others rated only what they themselves made use of.

The Czech report further draws attention to the two ways of assessing the opportunity to learn and grow at work, which are also referred to in the other national reports. The report questions whether this learning is only fundamental for the current job or whether learning and growth opportunities also bring something extra which could, for example, be applied to a different profession or job. For some respondents, the opportunity to learn more generically is not limited to their future employability, but also enhances personal growth and life in general. However, in this respect, respondents have varying ways of interpreting what counts for them and what does not. Some interviewees speculated that every job,

especially when it involves continuous customer contact, at least offered workers the opportunity to ‘grow as a human being’, but were not necessarily sure whether this was the issue addressed by the question.

Another dimension focused on by this question is related to the status of learning. The Austrian translation (‘further educate and develop’) draws attention to formal learning and development opportunities, which are also emphasised in the Czech context and referred to in the other national reports. The Czech respondents also commonly assessed whether their work provided them with enough time for self study.

How I understand it is that I have the possibility of those seminars, right, training, and also I have enough time at work to study myself, to study certain stuff. That opportunity definitely exists here. (Czech female chemical laboratory manager, aged 45 years)

However, in Finland and Portugal, the usual way to consider this question was to interpret it in terms of informal ongoing aspects of work. These respondents emphasised that learning and developing is just a question of attitude: it might be about considering familiar tasks from a different perspective, about critically and openly looking at one’s own performance as well as that of others; about taking an innovative approach to performing one’s tasks and learning on the job. Interestingly, some Finnish respondents made no reference to their training opportunities in this context, even if they have previously described good access to in-house training.

Learning is an ongoing process, you can’t always be prepared, the circumstances vary and you have to be humble to listen and learn. (Finnish male pilot, aged 37 years)

We live in constant learning. That is really bad for us when we believe that we do not have anything else to learn. (Portuguese female shop manager, aged 31 years)

A number of respondents felt ambiguity and even frustration in relation to this question: they recognised, in principle, opportunities to learn and develop in their job, and which they may also have been interested in. However, to take advantage of these opportunities was not a simple decision. They considered that working time and their current workload would not allow for training, or were concerned that the acquired new skills would only result in a higher workload.

Summary

Q37A, which reflected on losing one’s job in the next six months, raised considerable problems in the Czech Republic where the most common reaction to it was one of amazement: respondents considered that, of course, anything can happen, even a natural disaster. It is interesting to speculate, whether the drastic changes in the society in the past decades have a bearing on this attitude, and in that case, whether a similar tendency can be found also in the other NMS. In any case, the Czech results are not comparable with the other countries.

Q37B focusing on being ‘well paid’ functioned without difficulties. In short, this question can be interpreted in relation to respondents’ satisfaction with their pay.

Q37C, on career prospects, emerged to be particularly confusing for respondents in Finland, with the incorrect translation – ‘abilities’ instead of ‘prospects’ – most likely making things more difficult to comprehend. Career advancement was generally understood as climbing the hierarchical ladder in one’s work organisation, something for which many respondents saw no possibilities even in theory, given the type of their job or the structure of their work organisation. Quite a few respondents also spontaneously replied that they did not even want to advance in terms of

hierarchy, since this would mean moving away from the work they enjoyed and taking on ‘paperwork’ that they had no interest in doing. These interviewees often perceived the question irrelevant and difficult to respond to.

In relation to Q37E on opportunities to learn and grow, variations in translations, as well as in interpretations, emerged which led to somewhat disparate results.

Respondents considered that the response scale was sufficient. However, the UK report notes that the middle option (‘neither agree nor disagree’) was at times used to convey a ‘neutral’ feeling and at others as a ‘default’ option for indicating a lack of understanding of and/or feeling of inadequate information with which to reply to a question.

Key themes

The selected EWCS 2005 questions covered various aspects concerning development at work. However, the qualitative approach revealed that there was much more to these specific aspects than the simple survey questions could grasp. In the following sections, special emphasis is placed on issues around development at work, emerging from the national interview data, which would not be evident by observing the survey results.

Opportunities for development

The Communication from the Commission ‘Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality’ (European Commission, 2001) identifies six key elements for coherent and effective education and training strategies. One element involves introducing a ‘learning-for-all’ culture where workers become aware that learning at any age is essential in the new knowledge-based economy.

The EWCS 2005 results present an overview of employees’ perceived opportunities to learn and develop at work. However, the survey does not reveal much of the dimensions of this phenomenon nor the value employees currently attach to these opportunities. In the post-test data, it became evident that the majority of employees across countries highly appreciated if their work included stimulating and intellectually challenging tasks (although not too onerous) and possibilities to use their full potential and creativity, which consequently offered them opportunities to learn and develop in their work. This finding is further enhanced by the fact that the interviewees in lower skilled, routine-based jobs commonly tried to seek elements of challenge in their often monotonous tasks.

Development opportunities often also contributed to job motivation and job satisfaction, directly or indirectly. Following a positive circle, motivated employees also want to develop further in what they are doing and consciously look for opportunities to do so. Thus, in showing motivation, they also are provided with such opportunities by their management more often in comparison with other workers, which reflects the notion of the ‘Matthew effect’ of Merton (1968) that ‘the rich get richer and the poor get poorer’.

However, clear differences emerged among interviewees with respect to their awareness of the significance of professional and personal development, as well as in their motivation for such development. Differences were clearly apparent between higher level/higher educated and lower level/lower educated interviewees, the former generally being more orientated towards developing their skills. On the other hand, better educated employees usually also have better abilities to identify their needs for further development and to take advantage of development opportunities – being already used to learning and teaching routines facilitates further learning.

In addition, some national differences also became evident. These differences most likely reflect the cultural values and the concern given at the national policy level to education and lifelong learning, as well as the depth of culturally embedded separation of ‘work’ and ‘life’, which all may shape individuals’ aspirations and values without people being even conscious about this influence. For instance, the Czech report notes how the lack of tradition of lifelong learning in the country and the lack of systematic, active political measures taken in this respect are reflected in many interviewees’ low motivation and unclear understanding of the significance of lifelong learning for their professional and personal lives. Similarly, the Austrian report refers to the tradition in German-speaking countries to cultivate the private sphere as the sphere of true human fulfilment and authentic self-expression as a possible explanation for the moderate work ambition and the valuation of alternative ‘life worlds’ of many of the Austrian respondents. On the other hand, almost all Finnish interviewees have a positive and active attitude – including those in blue-collar jobs – towards continuous learning and development, as well as a strong tendency to consider development opportunities at work as a value in itself (without explicit references to employability, pay or career advancement, or even to improved work performance). These aspects are most likely a result of the respective cultural values, high educational level in the country and concrete measures taken at policy level towards lifelong learning, as well as the culturally narrow gap between ‘work’ and ‘life’ in Finland.

Furthermore, while the motivation for development is crucial in this context, motivational factors varied. In some cases, the need for further development was emphasised as a necessity for good or improved work performance. Some respondents, most notably in the Czech Republic and the UK – and often in lower status jobs – were motivated to develop their skills primarily to enhance their employability. The Czech and the UK reports also note how respondents refer to their further development with regard to enhancing the company's competitiveness. Finally, further development was also viewed as a value in itself, a source of fulfilment and pleasure. It should be noted, however, that in many cases these interests go hand in hand. Interestingly, general professional pride, as well as the perceived usefulness of work, also had some influence across countries not only on work motivation but also on a worker's motivation to develop further. Such interviewees wanted to perform their work to the best of their ability, irrespective of their work status. The Czech report further emphasises the importance of knowing one's goals and to have a dream to pursue.

In any case, orientation to develop should be seen and understood as an outcome of a more complex combination of personal circumstances and structural constraints, such as previous careers and experiences, age, realistic prospects, structural and organisational limitations. For instance, previous careers and advancements appear to be favourable aspects for sustaining training and learning orientation while disappointments and downward mobility are not so encouraging. On the other hand, even a previously monotonous job could have acted as a motivator to developmental job mobility.

A kind of resignation and lack or at least lowering of expectations was found among interviewees facing poor or non-existent development opportunities in their job and finding their positions 'set in concrete'. Reasons for this could be the nature of their routine-based jobs but in many cases rather some organisational aspects, such as the lack of a staff development strategy, negative attitudes of the management or recent reorganisations which were perceived to have downgraded opportunities to develop. Another organisational factor, which emerged in the respondents' answers and which strongly affects development opportunities of workers, is the negative impact of work intensification.

For most respondents, gender did not emerge as a major factor in the analysis, but had nevertheless some bearing particularly in the Austrian context, but also in the UK, reflecting the respective gender regimes. This was evident in the choices some women had made more or less voluntarily, under structural and cultural constraints, with respect to their work-life balance arrangements: namely, career breaks and part-time working, which often resulted in downward mobility or professional stagnation. These two reports also highlight the change of career aspirations and expectations over time among many women, which can be seen in the way some women have 'happily settled' in relation to the downward mobility they have experienced as a result of combining work and family life. In the UK report, anecdotal evidence shows career blockages for women with dependent children in such work organisations which make little or no provision for their non-work commitments, for instance in terms of arrangements of working hours. However, in the UK context, higher status women perceived that these obstacles were eventually surmountable when their work-life balance arrangements changed and if they still felt oriented towards pursuing a career path.

The impact of age will be dealt with more closely in the next section.

The impact of age

Ageing of populations has become a key challenge for all countries across Europe. Current EU policies aim to retain older people as active participants in employment and using their full potential for as long as possible.

In the post-test countries, the issue of age was often raised. Age was found to have bearing on development at work and employability. In this regard, younger interviewees were often more career-orientated but, at the same time, more vague in their aspirations than their older counterparts; older respondents sometimes perceived that their 'time window' had

already closed in terms of development or career opportunities. However, the extent to which age affected development varied by samples, most likely reflecting broader cultural and national contexts once again. The Austrian report observes a widespread notion that, when they are older than 45 years of age, workers have little to expect in terms of advancement and/or enrichment of jobs. Even if they chose to take further training, this is seen more as an end in itself or a form of compensation for the lack of perspective than a way of enhancing their development. The Czech report notes that older employees have the most difficulties in adapting to the drastically changed job requirements, in some cases out of fear and resistance towards the new and unknown. Particularly in this context, the Czech report emphasises the importance of good examples – from colleagues, friends or even the media – showing that certain skills and knowledge need not be considered unattainable for older age categories either.

In Finland, active policy measures have been taken since the late 1990s to support older employees' ability to cope and well-being at work, including their development opportunities. New ways of organising work such as age-management and different rehabilitation measures have been developed. In addition, new pension legislation has been effective since the beginning of 2005. All these measures, together with an ever increasing educational level, have made it easier and more attractive for employees to stay longer in employment (Lehto, 2007). This finding is probably also reflected in the fact that the issue of age was not emphasised as strongly in the Finnish post-test sample as in the other countries. Indeed, references to age were made in the Finnish example, but rather in terms of lack of aspirations for hierarchical career advancement 'at this stage of life' and not that much as an age-related impossibility to be promoted; on the other hand, career aspirations were rarely mentioned in the Finnish sample overall. More significantly, age was not associated with reduced opportunities to learn, train and develop further. Admittedly, a few older Finnish interviewees referred to their qualifications in relation to their age, considering it too late to undertake extensive further education which would have been required for a higher post or for a total change in their line of work. Nevertheless, they were generally ambitious to develop further their competence in their current job through training and self-learning. In one particular case, the interviewee was almost eligible to retire, but he wanted to continue working and to gradually slow down, since he considered his job and respective development opportunities to be rewarding.

Different concepts of learning

The Communication from the Commission on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001) underlines that this concept should be understood to encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. However, in the post-test data, it emerged that remarkable differences exist in how the various respondents tended to perceive further 'learning' and developing, and, consequently, the opportunities available to them. For example, the Czech and Portuguese reports note that respondents often had somewhat vague ideas about what this might include, but finally, when asked, perceived further development mostly in terms of targeted learning either in the form of training courses or self-learning. In the case of 'learning by doing', the Czechs mostly referred only to communication skills. In contrast, the Finnish interviewees strongly emphasised the role of one's own activity and ability to see and seize development opportunities offered by daily work, along with formal training activities.

On the whole, there was evidence across countries that job situations involving problem-solving, challenging tasks, intellectual demands, as well as varying and multifaceted tasks offered opportunities for ongoing development, and also motivated workers to develop further in order to be able to respond to these challenges. Furthermore, respondents often recognised that they were able to learn in situations where they received assistance from their colleagues or superiors in work-related tasks. However, when directly asked, in another context, about learning and development opportunities at work they would not necessarily come up with these responses. Thus, the UK and Czech reports note a clear underreporting, for instance, in connection with the training questions: even when respondents were directly asked about 'other forms of on-site training and learning' (Q28D), many of them did not mention such informal learning activities they had been referring to in other contexts during the interview, such as self-learning. The UK report also highlights that several interviewees, in both lower and higher status jobs, were involved in teaching or tutoring other staff members,

and indicated that via these occasions they promoted not only other workers' development but also their own at times. However, the same UK respondents usually would not report these activities in connection with Q28D, contrary to their Finnish counterparts in a similar position.

Furthermore, differences emerged in relation to whether some skills acquisition or learning was perceived only as task-related and even short-lived, or whether it was conceived as developmental, 'real' learning contributing to increased competencies and enhanced employability. The interviewees took this difference into account to various degrees when assessing whether their work offered them learning opportunities. In particular, the Austrian report highlights how respondents often felt that routine training, such as learning about new products and services, took time and capacity away from other, more general skills development.

According to the Austrian and UK reports, respondents of different ages considered their learning somewhat differently. As mentioned above, younger interviewees were often somewhat vague and unspecific about their actual possibilities and perspectives and tended to seek general development opportunities. In contrast, older workers rather emphasised more targeted, 'top up' training provisions. Moreover, older workers also had a clearer vision of which kind of training would be the most useful for them.

Obstacles to application of own ideas and creativity at work

Jobs of a static, repetitive nature and/or with highly automated processes, common for many employees in blue-collar positions, hardly offer any opportunities to do things differently nor necessarily require learning new things. However, the Portuguese and UK reports draw attention to the organisational constraints concerning the opportunity to apply one's own ideas and creativity at work; this obstacle was mentioned by a significant number of Portuguese respondents in particular. Both reports note how the respondents were often at a loss to understand why their ideas and latent talents were not applied to a greater extent. The Czech report also volubly describes organisational barriers and restrictive approaches to active employee participation in many companies. It further highlights the waste of workers' potential in companies which do not realise that creativity could be a considerable source of their own further development and do not recognise that their own employees could be a source of development and innovativeness. The report associates companies which are reluctant to explore new ideas or unconventional methods of problem-solving with authoritative management styles.

Another obstacle to the use of creativity and one's own ideas emerges in connection with the inflexibility of some large and bureaucratic organisations. Anecdotal evidence also shows that, in the case of international organisations, a requirement to apply the same identical procedures across the countries and outlets set further restrictions in terms of local needs and peculiarities not taken into account in job development and the design of training courses. The Austrian report also makes reference to the effects of outsourcing in the case of a couple of respondents who attributed a reduction in their discretion, transparency and motivation in their jobs to the fact their jobs were outsourced.

In general, employees in higher positions have relatively more job autonomy, which allows them to apply their ideas at work and thus to try out different ways of performing tasks in order to find the best work methods and to develop their work further. They generally also have better opportunities to receive work-related training; not only do they receive offers of more training but, as experts, they also are in a position to assess and articulate their developmental needs and to pursue them. Regarding teamwork, the UK report further notes that higher status employees are also more likely to be engaged in multiple teams at work and to have contact in this way with superiors, including those with responsibility for staff development. This proximity to organisational decision-makers further increases their likelihood of being 'brought on' through participation in learning activities.

However, as mentioned above, standardised procedures do not always leave much room for individual creativity even in white-collar jobs, although ever varying environmental factors and different situations, in which these standardised procedures are implemented, might offer possibilities to develop and learn. More importantly, a significant obstacle to the use of one's full potential and creativity particularly in white-collar jobs is found in the intensification of work and increased pressures. The Austrian report highlights how job discretion is necessary to respond to changing environments and uncertain demands, but it is not always sufficient to provide chances, time and space for job autonomy in a wider sense that supports self-actualisation, learning and developing at work.

More significantly, the UK report suggests gender differences in job autonomy and the Portuguese report mentions the possibility to use creativity at work: women in the respective samples seemed to have fewer opportunities in these respects than men. This gender perspective does not necessarily become evident in the analysis of the current survey results, where the extent of autonomy (for example, whether it concerns smaller-scale or more strategic tasks) does not show. Furthermore, in the Austrian and Finnish data, the work intensification described above applies especially to the female-dominated public sector.

These findings, particularly in relation to the obstacles to innovativeness posed by managerial attitudes and work intensification, are quite alarming, taking into account that, at policy level, knowledge and innovation are highlighted as engines of sustainable growth in European competitiveness and productivity.

Perceived importance of career advancement

The theme of perceived prospects for career advancement emerged to have many sides to it which the simple survey results do not highlight. The question was mostly understood in terms of promotion in organisational hierarchy. It elicited many ambiguous reactions, since first of all, in several occupations there simply was no possibilities to advance in hierarchy, not even in theory. The question arose, for example, in relation to how a special education teacher could advance in hierarchy, and if she would then become a 'more special education teacher'.

Furthermore, many of the interviewees stressed that they did not even want to get promoted, since this would have meant moving away from their current job they enjoyed to less attractive, bureaucratic tasks. Some respondents, especially higher level job occupants with a considerably high workload already, had a somewhat sceptic view of the potential impact of career advancement on their well-being, since they perceived that advancement would result in more work pressure and stress.

The Austrian report refers to this casual attitude towards career advancement, on the one hand, as an 'art of living' orientation where employees have either a professional content-orientation to their work, regarding their work as a 'mission' (care professionals), or have other non-work priorities in their life. On the other hand, the report queries the extent to which some interviewees deny the importance of hierarchical advancement just because of the lack of such opportunities; in this regard, it considers a 'sour grapes' attitude (Elster 1987) among workers as they ask themselves 'why want something I'm not going to get anyway?'.

The Czech report also points to cultural reasons for playing down the importance of career advancement. In fact, in the Czech context, 'career person' has a seemingly negative connotation. This remark displays, again, the potential impact of cultural context on responses; for instance, in the Portuguese sample, most respondents admitted that career advancement prospects would be an important motivating factor for them. Furthermore, the Czech report notes a clear gender difference in this regard: in the Czech sample, all of the respondents stating that career advancement was important for them were male; in contrast, the respondents perceiving their career prospects to be limited were mainly women.

The Czech report considers that lack of career ambition or prospects may lead to an insufficient motivation to take part in further education, particularly in the case of low qualified or older workers. The UK report also refers to similar situation. In the Finnish report, the issue is seen in a different light, which may reflect national variations. The Finnish data revealed that career aspirations, in terms of promotion in hierarchy, were lacking as well, but this usually did not mean a lack of motivation for development; on the contrary, respondents rather emphasised that they did not aspire to hierarchical promotion but, instead, wanted to develop in their current role. The same attitude emerged to some extent also in the other samples. In the Austrian context, this emphasis on the importance of learning and development is also regarded as a kind of intrinsic compensation for the other career development limitations in many jobs.

Furthermore, in a number of cases, the lack of advancement opportunities was related to a flat organisational structure that no longer offers traditional hierarchical ladders. The Austrian report considers that, in these situations, careers paths for the younger set of respondents had often become more uncertain; even those who had advanced a few steps in their career have had to face limited perspectives and an increasing cost of further advancement. On the other hand, at least in the Finnish context, the flattening of organisational structures had had a particular positive impact on the professional development of many of the interviewees in terms of increased discretion, responsibility and job enlargement.

The relativity of such a concept as prospects for upward mobility is well illustrated by the Finnish survey findings, according to which some 50% of employees consider development opportunities as highly important, while only 10% consider it as important to advance to a better position at the workplace (Lehto and Sutela, 2005, p. 34). Indeed, some post-test respondents ended up interpreting career advancement in terms of self-fulfilment, self-development and enjoyment at work. Viewed from this angle, even something which objectively would look like downward mobility might be interpreted as career advancement if it results in more enjoyment and opportunities for self-fulfilment at work.

Job mobility

One of the priorities in the European Employment Strategy is the removal of obstacles to worker mobility. At present, the EWCS questions do not reveal much on the theme of job mobility; for instance, only a small minority of post-test interviewees responded to the question on career prospects (Q37C) not only in terms of upward mobility in the current work organisation, but also in terms of changing their workplace. On the other hand, even when directly asked about their willingness to change jobs, most respondents seemed not to be very convinced by the idea of the ultimate benefits of job mobility. Although some workers had from time to time considered changing jobs, the thought of doing so was usually rather vague and few workers had acted on this idea.

The lack of thoughts on job mobility was usually related to respondents' relative satisfaction with their current job: even when criticising certain facets of their work, respondents usually found that other aspects of their work compensated for these shortfalls, such as job content, a nice workplace atmosphere or working hours to facilitate a positive work-life balance. The UK report notes that even anticipated positive changes to one's personal circumstances – for example, a shorter commuting time – were not regarded as sufficient to prompt active job seeking, when a worker was otherwise satisfied with the contents of their job.

Furthermore, respondents with secure jobs were not eager to easily give up this security in today's insecure labour market. Several Finnish respondents who thought about trying out something else would have preferred to do this in a secure way, in taking leave of absence from their current job, so that they would be able to return to their current job after a period if time if they wanted to.

Another clear reason for the reduced willingness to consider a change of job was the perceived lack of alternatives. In particular, older and lower qualified respondents sometimes felt stuck in their positions to an extent but did not really rely on their employability either.

The UK report further notes that those who have already made a number of job changes indicate less propensity than others to move. Meanwhile, the Austrian and Finnish reports refer to a couple of respondents with some willingness to change job but who have put their goals on hold due to time and money restrictions.

For respondents who recently had changed or were considering changing jobs, the reasons given often were related to working conditions, including working hours and pay. In a few cases in Austria and Finland, job mobility meant or was regarded as a total change of occupation.

Some national differences emerged in this limited data. In the Czech sample, recent job changes were the most frequent: seven out of the 20 respondents had changed jobs in the past 10 months, thus since the gathering of data for EWCS 2005. In five cases, the choice to change job had been voluntary, while it was involuntary in two cases. In the Portuguese sample, the willingness to change jobs was perhaps emphasised more than in other samples. The Portuguese workers with the strongest willingness to change jobs did so as they considered that they were overqualified for their work.

The Czech report further notes that respondents consider that staying in the same position for too long thus reduces their motivation to learn new things and think up new ideas. The report further suggests that a change of job could be beneficial in these cases. Indeed, some respondents across countries believed that, in order to develop via multifaceted tasks, they should change jobs sooner or later. The UK report associates this finding especially with young professionals and higher level employees who feel the need to build up their service and experience record by looking for broader experience in other jobs. Some interviewees, notably in Finland and Portugal, expressed the idea that their development opportunities in their current job would eventually be ‘used up’ some day, at which point, they should change jobs.

However, it also became evident that mobility between companies was not necessarily the only way to achieve opportunities for development and job variation. Job descriptions could be enlarged and developed, and one could also actively seek one’s way to different kinds of tasks within their current work organisation. Indeed, several Finnish interviewees had already explored this option in their current workplace and many others expressed their willingness to look into this kind of mobility within the work organisation rather than being so eager to change employer.

Indeed, instead of solely emphasising the importance of increasing job mobility, it might also be worthwhile to consider the added value for employers. In this regard, employers gain from such committed employees who want not only to develop themselves to improve their individual employability, but also to develop their jobs and work performance in a sustainable way within the work organisation, for the profit of all the parties involved.

Learning and developing – a two-fold issue

Regarding learning new things and developing at work, it is interesting to note that in spite of the generally positive connotation associated with these aspects, in reality they also have two sides to them. It emerged that, in some cases, the necessity of learning new things was perceived as a burden, especially when these demands were continuous, the overall workload was already high, there was not enough time to absorb and adapt to the new information or sufficient training or guidance was not available. According to many interviewees with a longer perspective on working life, these kinds of demands had been growing at work at the same time as, for instance, staff levels had been decreasing. The mere question relating to a job including learning new things says nothing about these context-bound perceptions.

In terms of these findings, it is alarming to note that some Czech, Finnish and UK interviewees even considered that, in some cases, their ongoing development would lead to work intensification. New competencies and skills acquired through training and learning (or work experience) would subsequently result in receiving additional duties – and often without related compensation. The UK report notes that these consequences were especially problematic for those

young, higher skilled employees for whom the workload was already high, working hours were long and family commitments were important. Thus, they sometimes resulted in a reluctance among workers to engage in further development.

Interestingly, specialisation into some particular subject at work may offer good possibilities to develop a worker's competencies in that area. However, when the tasks and the worker's competencies become more specialised, it is no longer possible to get advice from colleagues or superiors; at worst, one becomes 'imprisoned' in one's specialist position without real opportunities to develop in varying task areas. This can also have a negative bearing on employability.

Work organisation, management style and role of superior

Organisational culture with a positive attitude towards learning and development emerged to be of utmost importance when considering promoters for developing one's competencies at work. In an optimal case, this includes a systematic and strategic management approach towards staff development and training and formal knowledge-sharing practices. However, the UK report observes that, in practice, staff training was in many cases not centrally positioned in the stated organisational aims and related general business strategies; a number of organisations seemed to rely on a traditional approach whereby staff are expected to 'learn as they go', even when new technologies were introduced into the workplace and altered certain job tasks. Furthermore, the report notes indications that management attitudes in private sector workplaces seemed, at times, to foster reticence or a lack of concern with development and learning to a greater extent than in the public sector.

Generally, in the Finnish and UK cases, the public sector organisations were easily distinguishable from the private sector companies in this respect, providing a more systematic approach to staff development and more training opportunities. In the Czech Republic, a significant difference was detected between domestically-owned and fully or partially foreign-owned companies, the latter providing better opportunities for staff development.

Moreover, the Czech report draws attention to the importance of satisfying basic requirements, such as a good working environment and satisfactory remuneration. Only after these requirements are fulfilled, the interest to dedicate oneself to professional and personal development becomes a reality. Similarly, when asked about the role of the employer in terms of development opportunities, many Portuguese and also several Finnish respondents referred to the improvement of working conditions, work facilities or work security.

The Austrian report observes that ongoing reorganisation can present both the opportunity and the necessity to learn. However, it also notes that, in these situations, the careers of younger respondents have often become more uncertain, especially as a result of the flattening of organisational structures. The report considers it possible that the attraction of job-related learning and development does not increase in periods of reorganisation, especially for those employees who have something to lose and little to gain. Somewhat differently, in the Finnish context, the flattening of work organisations had mostly a positive impact on interviewees' positions, as described above.

In terms of organisational restructuring involving merger activity, the UK report notes how this can result in the paring down or increase of the organisational budget/resources available for the provision of development opportunities. The consequences were positive in cases where a respondent's own organisation was merged with a larger company with an organisational culture geared more towards development and providing more training options.

The Czech report raises the authoritative management style as one of the main barriers to development at work. In contrast, participative and communicative management styles receptive to employees' ideas were highlighted as an

important promoter of different kinds of learning and innovation in all the reports. A supervisor or manager willing to listen to employees is valuable both for the employees and the work organisation. Practical ideas, related, for example, to improvements in existing work methods might often come ‘from the floor level’, namely from the employees performing the actual work who know the ‘real’ conditions better than the management. However, it is up to a worker’s most immediate superior whether they are willing to be open to these ideas and ready to take them into consideration. At best, the ideas coming from the workers themselves lead to real job development and improvements of operations.

When a manager is familiar with the contents of employees’ work, it is possible that the workers will ask them for assistance in these matters. Even in cases where only an administrative superior is present or in situations when the superior is not, for other reasons, able to provide assistance in relation to specific problems, workers still find that their encouragement and supportive attitude is helpful in dealing with stressful situations. Regular work meetings are important occasions for employees to highlight their problems or ideas concerning ways in which the job could be developed, but easily approachable and available superiors can be contacted any time. However, the Austrian report notes how the flattening of hierarchies may occasionally get in the way in this context, resulting in a limited number of superiors being available to consult and solve problems. In any case, superiors who were actively interested in the well-being and development needs of their subordinates were appreciated, as was their efforts to establish an encouraging atmosphere where it was not considered a shortfall for a worker to admit training needs.

Many respondents perceived their superior to be an important facilitator or obstacle in getting access to training, since much depended on their recommendation or permission. Thus, a superior’s negative attitude towards training is considered a major obstacle for workers. At the extreme, a UK interviewee mentioned how staff fear asking their superior for development opportunities lest their requests will be construed by management as a sign of their ‘incompetence’, not as initiative and organisational commitment.

Feedback from superiors

The importance of feedback for a worker’s motivation and development was highlighted in all the reports. Furthermore, in all the reports, the majority of respondents considered that they did not receive enough feedback from their superiors. The Czech report distinguishes feedback as performance assessment, on the one hand, and professional development assessment, on the other hand. Regular formal occasions of performance assessment were perceived important, especially when they included discussions on employee development issues. A lack of or insufficient feedback was not only considered de-motivating, but also as a further hindrance for development: informal and vague feedback does not allow the employee to gain any lessons for improving work performance nor recognising their strengths and, consequently, gaps in their work which need to be addressed. By failing to provide feedback focusing on professional development, the employer also lacks sufficient tools for promoting the need or the requirement for skills development among employees. On the other hand, even if such regular formal assessments existed, where also the employees’ development needs and aspirations were dealt with, the outcome was not positive if these discussions were just a formality without effective managerial follow-ups or actions based on them.

On the other hand, the Czech report emphasises the significance of the individual’s ability to deal with negative feedback and learn from it. Likewise, several Finnish respondents highlighted the importance of being humble and self-critical, to learn from mistakes and not to pretend that one knows everything, which was considered crucial for further development.

Organisational rewards or acknowledgement – such as financial incentives, official praise or career advancement opportunities – of development endeavours, increased competences and extra efforts to actively come up with new ideas or voluntarily take on more demanding or responsible tasks were perceived important and motivating aspects particularly among lower status employees. Lack of recognition seemed to lead to stagnation and passivity among employees. For higher status employees, it was more often the case that they received intrinsic rewards from their development.

Social relations

The significance of good social relations for development at work emerged from the interview data in several different contexts. Encouragement, support and assistance from co-workers, as well as mutual learning and sharing of ideas, significantly contributed to job satisfaction, the ability to cope with the work and further development, creating an ambience of togetherness and, in many cases, a work community that promotes learning. Furthermore, mutual collegial assistance in terms of covering for absences was often needed so that others could participate in training. The UK report notes that, particularly in larger organisations, the existence of a ‘chain-of-command’ approach to problem-solving provided employees with more than one source of possible support for developmental or other purposes. The significance of a friendly workplace atmosphere was emphasised often in cases where no formal but only informal knowledge-sharing practices were in use, where there was vulnerability to problems in interpersonal relations, competition and jealousy.

Teamwork and multi-skilling

The positive impact of teamwork on self-development and job enhancement was strongly emphasised in the interview data. The benefits were associated with the sharing of knowledge and learning from each other, team spirit, multiplication of new ideas, revelation of employee strengths and weaknesses and enabling coverage for such an enhanced learning relationship between employees and a training colleague or supervisor, as well as improved information flow. The UK report observes cases, where a team approach facilitated the process by which a group of employees could take the initiative and jointly approach management about possible development opportunities. Furthermore, teamwork could have the effect of encouraging a more equitable division of labour, thereby freeing up some employees’ time for development initiatives. Interestingly, the UK analysis also shows that the respondent’s role in the team, the type of team (for example, in terms of whether the workers in the team had equal status or whether a team leader was appointed) as well as the number of teams the respondent was involved in may have had an impact on the individual’s development.

However, it also became clear that, to achieve these positive outcomes, it was not enough for the management just to tell the employees that they should become involved in teamwork. A well functioning team calls for clearly set common targets, commitment from all the team members and functioning social relations, otherwise team meetings just turn out to be a waste of time. Other possible downsides of teamwork were related to increasing competition between team members for development opportunities, the occasional need to slow one’s work speed to suit that of the slowest team member, and particularly for higher-status employees, the reduced opportunity and associated development of working as they might wish.

Job rotation offers a welcome route to more demanding tasks and development at least in jobs where the basic tasks do not offer much opportunity to learn new things. Even in cases when job rotation did not result in more demanding duties, it could be perceived as a stimulating distraction. On a more general level, multi-skilling and the opportunity to vary one’s duties in the organisation was perceived as development.

Work intensification

The Foundation paper on quality of work and employment states that the intensification of work undoubtedly is one of the most significant trends in recent years. It is striking how strongly the issue of work intensification also came to the fore as an obstacle to development opportunities in all of the national reports, especially among white-collar interviewees. The Czech report emphasises that a slight element of time pressure at work is not always an entirely negative factor but may work as a stimulus for good work performance. However, the interview data reveal that when

the time pressure and workload become too much, both factors influence employees' work performance, development opportunities and orientation in various ways. In some cases, these factors prevent workers from making full use of their potential and applying new work methods or learning opportunities at work. Several respondents felt that, due to the lack of time and despite all their efforts, they did not have the opportunity to complete even the core tasks as well as they would have liked and to the best of their ability. As a result, this has consequences for their professional pride and often led to feelings of frustration, despair and sometimes even reduced work motivation. This connection can be observed also in the EWCS 2005 quantitative data, according to which the feeling of having enough time to get the job done strongly correlates with the feeling of work well done.

In these situations, participating in training has knock-on effects in terms of intensifying one's work or causing it to overlap even more into non-work life; furthermore, it is difficult to adapt the learning acquired through training at one's own work. Lack of time also hinders self-learning during working hours. Quite often, self-learning initiatives such as familiarisation with manuals and reports must be completed in any case by workers; therefore, such learning is often completed at home with possible implications for work–life balance. The UK report observes how interviewees in these situations often opted for shorter 'top up' training sessions at work; even if none of these respondents expressed a total disinclination to develop on account of this additional workload, some indicated that due to their overload they were 'not unduly fazed' by the inadequate provision of training at times. This naturally creates a further obstacle in terms of their attitude towards active promotion of development and learning.

The Foundation paper recognises negative consequences of the intensification of work. It draws attention to issues such as the incidence of stress and musculoskeletal disorders, and even an increase in violence and harassment at work. On the basis of the post-test results, it becomes evident that reduced opportunities for skills development should be added to this list. These negative consequences become ever more serious when considering that skills development is acknowledged as one of the main aspects in the promotion of quality of work and employment; this is also the case when looking at the desired growth in competitiveness and productivity of the European labour market. These factors are extremely crucial also from the point of view of people's employability.

Demands and pressures at work

The special demands and pressures, but also the positive aspects, associated with interactive service work were emphasised in many different contexts in the data collection. It also emerged that, in many cases, the survey questions did not quite match the special characteristics of customer work. Concepts such as deadlines, speed or rate of work, or employee's own discretion over certain aspects of work were difficult to interpret in relation to work which is not driven by the tight regimentation of timing, methods and procedures but rather by demands from customers and other partners in service interactions, as well as by results. In working with people, situations are often difficult to anticipate and they may also change quite rapidly. It is not sufficient for workers to have the technical skills and know-how required for tasks, but social skills, psychological insight and flexibility are also needed. These factors structure work and often act as a source of pressure, but on the other hand, also of appreciation: several interviewees mentioned the feeling of usefulness and meaningfulness of their work as a result of customer contacts. Positive feedback from customers compensated in many cases for the lack of recognition from one's employer or superior. Furthermore, even in those national contexts where learning was narrowly understood mainly as targeted training, social skills were an exception in this regard, since many respondents recognised that they could be and were developed on a daily basis through work. Indeed, several respondents believed that working with people offered ongoing opportunities to develop personal and social skills.

The Austrian report concludes that public sector and services sector employees often work 'on the frontline' (Frenkel et al, 1999) and find that their job demands are less 'organisational' in character than conferred situationally by the environment of a work organisation. Ad hoc troubleshooting and emergency responses are also often integral parts of

such jobs. However, monotony re-occurs in relation to bureaucratic demands, as well as the need for documentation and quality assurance, which have increased in many occupations. The report notes that, even if these developments are not all new, they concern an increasing proportion of employees and occupations in today's working life.

Training

The EWCS results reveal the share of employees who have participated in training, but otherwise do not unveil much further information in this regard. When the interviewees discussed their training opportunities and participation, issues which seemed to be of central importance were the obstacles to participation, the perceived utility of training and the most suitable forms of training in different, specific personal and organisational contexts. Indeed, these themes also fall under the principles underpinning lifelong learning and its effective implementation as emphasised in the Communication from the Commission on lifelong learning (European Commission, 2001).

Availability of employer-sponsored training opportunities varied considerably across countries, sectors and employee groups. Throughout the various countries, interviewees referred to training costs as a reason for insufficient training provision. Indeed, in some cases, there may be a lack of money available for investing in staff training, which in the Czech report is associated especially with smaller organisations in the services sector. However, in other cases, 'the lack of money' is more or less directly related to the lack of interest on the employer's side to invest in training and learning, which reflects employers' short-termism and approach to profit maximisation. The UK report notes that there seems to be relatively little cost or benefit analysis of developmental returns for an organisation over the long term. The Czech and UK interviews highlight in some cases even the lack of introductory training on starting a new job or when changing position. However, insufficient initial training can lead to overall job dissatisfaction, increased stress and a poor work performance.

The data also reveal that higher status and higher educated respondents tended to have better training opportunities than those in lower status jobs and/or with lower educational levels. Temporary employees, included foremost in the Portuguese data, had particular difficulties in gaining access to training. The Austrian report also observes that part-time workers rarely had enough time to train during their working hours. On average, public sector organisations across countries scored better in terms of training provision than private sector companies. Reduced provisions of training initiatives were reported particularly among the UK and Finnish interviewees in the private sector, but the Austrian and Portuguese reports note this result in relation to the public sector. The UK report observes that this scaling down of training tends to have a de-motivating effect on the employees concerned, which provides a further obstacle to organisational development.

A typical result for many public sector organisations in the various countries was that the obstacles to training participation derived, in addition to long waiting lists, from the cutbacks of staffing levels, leading to situations where there was no possibility for volunteers to participate since they could not leave their colleagues in an unfavourable predicament. Low staffing levels resulted in increased time pressure and heavy workloads, which had further implications for employees' possibility to apply their own ideas, draw on their creativity and to complete their work to the highest quality. As a result, workers became frustrated with these outcomes which, in turn, did not create suitable ground for development.

As indicated above, several interviewees emphasised that it is not only the provision of training which counts but also the provision of such organisational circumstances which allow them to take advantage of development opportunities – for example, the work organisation, staffing and working hours. Employees should be provided with sufficient time to take part in development initiatives, to participate in training and to self-study at work so that the development endeavours do not result in an extra burden on top of the existing workload. The organisation of working hours may

prove to be a hindrance to participating in training, especially when combined with long commutes or in the case of shift work.

Furthermore, the crucial point emerged to be not necessarily the quantity of training options but rather the quality of such training. When staff were not asked about their needs or their needs were not taken into consideration, the training set up did not meet the requirements of the target group and/or the acquired skills and knowledge could not be put in use at work, the respondents perceived this as a waste of training resources. Workers were frustrated having to attend these kinds of training courses, being removed from their work tasks, and regretting the huge amounts of money wasted. The UK report further notes the existence in some organisations of an employee 'group need' approach to training, which could mean that individual employees were could not receive training when and as they required it. These findings should not be neglected, since respondents' negative experiences in these respects tended to have wide-ranging consequences. As a result, their motivation to participate in further training often declined, even if the same persons would happily learn more in their work, through practice.

In all, respondents seemed to find training tailored to their individual and work-related needs the most beneficial. On the other hand, higher-status employees and those in expert positions emerged to have better abilities, as well as opportunities, to judge and articulate their specific training needs. These workers also found that their needs were more commonly taken into account by their employer than the requirements of lower status employees. Especially in the latter case, the management's concern, involvement in predicting and mapping out training needs among staff and to sufficiently brief them about development opportunities is crucial. Among lower status workers, in particular, there was some uncertainty as to when and what form some development options would take – for example, based on job 'enrichment' or re-specification in relation to new technologies; this uncertainty in itself presented an obstacle to workers' learning and development opportunities. Furthermore, the UK report notes difficulties especially (but not only) in the case of higher status or senior employees who faced a changing skill based required for their jobs, or aspects of the job, due to broader organisational and environmental changes. It was thus more difficult for their employers to keep on top of their dynamic training requirements, particularly in the absence of a strategic management approach to staff development.

In relation to the content of training initiatives, the Czech report observes with concern that only a small proportion of such initiatives seemed to be designed to develop skills and abilities that could also be applied in other jobs and thus would enhance respondents' employability. In the Czech context, training was basically targeted at specialist subjects or was required by law.

According to the UK report, organisational policy and practice with respect to employee development did not cater for employee diversity and their personal circumstances. The Finnish and Austrian reports both observe that in relation to some groups of employees, especially blue-collar employees with a low educational level, a highly theoretical way of implementing further training may become an obstacle to development. These respondents, even if they would be willing to learn, are put off by the idea of books or the 'school bench' approach; workers find such learning situations uncomfortable due to the restrictions on physical movement, as they are required to spend a day sitting in class. This group of respondents preferred hands-on experience, but the wish to combine practice with theory and to have the opportunity to try out newly-acquired skills as soon as possible was also emphasised by many other respondents.

According to the UK report, age also seems to have an impact on the preferred forms of training. In the UK sample, older interviewees with a quite clear vision of their targeted training needs tended to opt for internally provided, experimental and peer-related and/or self-driven learning opportunities. Work-life balance arrangements as well as workload also had implications for preferred training types.

The UK report interestingly notes how some employees, particularly higher status/skilled and professional workers, shared the view that the more creative aspects of their jobs were ‘beyond’ training and thus could not be readily learnt or acquired through training. One needed natural flair, competence or aptitudes to conduct these aspects well. This view lessened the perceived utility and value of training in comparison with work experience and ‘innate’ ability in relation to such.

Technological advancement in workplaces often appeared to promote development and learning through self-learning and interactive tools (for example, computer software packages and online tutorials), further complementing more ‘traditional’ means of self-help development and learning.

Interviewees’ views on the responsibility for development at work varied to some extent. For the most part, the question relating to responsibility was seen as two-fold: the employer was considered responsible for providing development opportunities, but the employee had responsibility to be active and take advantage of these opportunities. Somewhat logically, the interviewees in Portugal – the country with the lowest training provisions – mostly referred to the employer’s responsibility for organising development opportunities, while in Finland – the country with the best training opportunities – the interviewees primarily highlighted the employee’s own responsibility to be active in their own development. In reality, this latter group took for granted that the employer would provide opportunities for development and meant by their statement that employees should really take advantage of these opportunities.

Individuals’ financial situation also impacts on the decision to take up any training. One of the reasons workers decided not to undertake self-funded training was due to the cost of such training courses, and the respondents mostly also shared the perception that work-related training should be paid for by the employer. However, the UK report also refers to interviewees’ insufficient awareness of alternative training opportunities.

Impact of ownership type

The Czech report observes a clear distinction between foreign and domestic-owned companies in relation to opportunities for further education. Companies with foreign capital seem to have much more systematic strategies for employee education in use than Czech-owned companies. This applies to the employee selection for further education, the courses offered, the opportunities available to use the acquired knowledge and skills in practice and, just as importantly, the feedback from participants of educational activities or certified courses. The report notes that, according to other studies (Dokulilová et al, 2006; Ishikawa, Makó and Warhurst, 2006), companies with foreign ownership more frequently have new forms of work organisation implemented within their organisational structures, which leads to higher levels of active participation or improved opportunities for employees to share their knowledge with each other.

The different working conditions and environments in companies with domestic or foreign owners are fundamental factors for studying the different aspects of work, particularly in the NMS. However, this does not only apply to those countries. Although it is not evident from this data, for instance in the Finnish context, the type of company ownership (domestic or foreign owned) is also found to make a difference in relation to certain aspects of working conditions – although in the Finnish context, foreign ownership is not necessarily associated with improvements in this regard in comparison with domestic ownership (Lehto and Sutela, 2005).

Work–life balance

The European Commission report on equality between women and men (2007) identifies work–life balance as a key area in achieving greater gender equality. However, the report highlights multiple barriers for women in this respect, including lack of childcare provisions, financial factors, career setbacks, the risk of losing one’s skills, the difficulties of

returning to employment and the pressure to conform to stereotypes. This view is also enhanced by the results of the post-test in connection with developments at work and work–life balance. The most drastic affect of this is seen in the impact that career breaks had on the labour market position of some Austrian women. Furthermore, in the UK sample, a few women had almost voluntarily settled into less demanding part-time jobs in order to combine work and family life under the contextual constraints.

The Austrian report rightly considers that family and other non-work commitments should not be counted as personal characteristics or obstacles to development as such, since their actual impact is so interrelated with respondents working times and other arrangements. Similarly, the UK report emphasises that, in case the work organisation does not accommodate employees' non-work commitments, development opportunities can be constrained if they are off-site, lengthy, outside work hours and likely to lead to a build up of work duties. Indeed, the Finnish interviewees did not perceive problems in relation to work–life balance with regard to the training provided or paid for by the employer, since this training was first of all considered to take place during working hours and, secondly, public day care provision and warm school lunches also offer parents the possibility to work full time. Nevertheless, the impact of family and non-work commitments arose also in the Finnish case, mostly in relation to self-learning outside working hours and extensive further studies. In this regard, the Finnish report looked at the time available to workers, the possible energy required to devote to such endeavours on top of work and family commitments, and the financial situation of workers. With regard to the latter, the finances of those workers with a family to provide for do not allow for a study break (with a relatively low compensation level).

The care obligations for older family members did not really emerge from this limited data. On the other hand, the Czech report interestingly highlights that family can be an obstacle to further development also for grandparents who are helping with their grandchildren.

Employability

During the interviews, the respondents directly referred to their perceived employability to varying degrees. The Czech and UK reports placed most emphasis on this issue, in connection with the training and learning opportunities at work. Indeed, employability is an important issue, particularly in the Czech Republic where political, economic and technological changes have so drastically changed the labour market in the recent years and where the regional differences in unemployment are high. In the UK, the issue was topical especially among low-skilled workers in the private sector. Several respondents consciously distinguished between whether the development opportunities at work were targeted at such skills and competencies which would only be of use in their current tasks or whether the acquired skills would be of use also in different jobs. Respondents were particularly motivated to undertake development endeavours which would enhance their employability on a broader scale; although, at the same time, they perceived that such training was available to a lesser extent than task-related training. Overall, lower-skilled workers, principally in the Czech, Portuguese and UK samples, were quite disappointed not only with their training opportunities but also with the development opportunities offered by their employers or the chance to use their full potential. The UK report notes that, despite the fact that training provision has increased in the country in recent years, the interviewees commonly shared perceptions that the bulk of state-led and employer development initiatives relate to 'supply side' development as opposed to 'demand side' initiatives such as job enlargement, which would offer opportunities to develop and enhance one's employability on a daily basis.

The Austrian report also notes that the respondents rarely put much trust in their employers' abilities to develop their skills and options in the direction they wanted to go. In the Austrian context, age particularly comes to the fore. For these respondents, age and the expectations and norms related with it so far seem to present considerable constraints, partly reflecting the national labour market policies having, until recently, favoured early retirement. The report observes how older workers, who have survived several rounds of organisational change, downsizing and downward mobility (in the

case of women), consider their positions to be 'set in concrete' and the fact that they tend to defensively hang on to them. Although they feel their jobs are secure, more satisfying alternatives either do not appear or seem too risky and fanciful, especially if it would mean giving up a tenured position in an insecure labour market. The report observes that the time window associated with advancement experienced by older workers in Austrians appears to be quite narrow, between the ages of 30 and 45 years: the youngest respondents seem to have vague ideas about their aspirations and possibilities in flexibilised working environments, while those born in the late 1930s and the 1940s feel that they have either completed the training required of them or are stuck in their current roles.

Among the Finnish respondents, the picture presented was somewhat more positive as the majority of respondents were relatively satisfied with their development opportunities at work, including training, and most workers perceived these opportunities to also enhance their employability, at least within the same line of work. Some respondents also were of the view that should the development opportunities of their present job be 'used up' eventually, they should find their way into another job in the same branch. However, reflecting the national context, the significance of formal qualifications to employability became evident to a greater extent than in the other national samples. Several respondents acknowledged that to advance to a higher post in their work organisation they would have to attain a further qualification. Many interviewees were not in any way attracted to a higher post as it would have been totally different from their current job, which they found enjoyable. However, some workers perceived that such a qualification would only have led to a different job title and maybe a slightly higher salary, but it would not change much in their present job description. This group of workers, despite actively undertaking 'lighter' development endeavours in their current job and being proud to perform their tasks to the highest quality, did not feel motivated or able at their current life stage to undertake the extensive training required for higher qualifications; the respondents approaching retirement age considered they were too old for such training. Several respondents also felt that the competencies they had were mostly developed through work experience, and that formal education had only offered basics on which they had built up their professional skills through developing at work and further training. On the other hand, a large proportion of Finnish respondents had undertaken, were currently undertaking or seriously planning to undertake extensive further studies in the middle of their career. These endeavours had resulted in or were aimed towards a total change in the workers' line of work or upward mobility within the current line of work.

Conclusions

One of the objectives of the post-test was to assess the overall quality and functionality of the EWCS 2005 questionnaire and to provide information contributing to further development of the survey.

This said, it should be borne in mind that the post-test interview outline was only a section of the original questionnaire, including just a number of selected questions from it. Furthermore, the relative order of these questions was changed at various points in order to allow for more fluency during the post-test interviews. As a result, the textual context of the post-test 'questionnaire' was different from the original survey questionnaire. This may have affected the responses: in particular, when questions are unclear or ambiguous, the respondents commonly try to derive the meaning of the question from the context factors, one of them being the textual context, meaning the rest of the questionnaire (Braun, 2002; Ahola et al, 2002).

Secondly, the overall context of the post-test interviews differed significantly from the original survey interview situation. The post-test interviewees were briefed that the theme of the interview was development at work, which may have guided the responses. The method of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches also made a substantial difference: this time, the interviewees were encouraged to take their time and to develop their responses, to give specific examples from their working life and even to contemplate the theme of the particular question on a more general level.

Thirdly, the post-test was carried out among employees only, although the original survey also included self-employed persons. The results on the functionality of specific questions may have been different in the case of self-employed workers.

However, bearing in mind these conditions, it could still be argued that the post-test interviews reflect relatively well the overall quality and functionality of the survey questions measured.

Given the challenges of the cross-cultural survey, in general, and the wide scope of different countries covered by the EWCS 2005, in particular, the selected questions worked out very well in the five post-test countries representing rather different living and working conditions. It is also encouraging that most shortcomings are directly related to the translation of the questionnaire, which is a problem that can be relatively easily addressed in the future.

Some of the problems stemming from the translation were such that they could have been detected by a more careful comparison of the original text and the foreign language version. Some others, however, would actually have been fully revealed only by cognitive pilot interviewing in respective countries (see Annex 2). This is the case when the words used are a technically appropriate translation of the original term, but in practice they remain unfamiliar for some respondents. Based on the experiences from the post-test interviews, it can be assumed that, when faced by unfamiliar words, the respondents do not always ask for clarification. They often do not want to show their possible lack of knowledge in front of the interviewer and therefore might choose an answer they consider to be appropriate. They also might think they know the meaning of the word even if they associate it with something completely different than originally intended, making so called 'silent misinterpretations' (DeMaio and Rothgeb, 1995).

The Czech translation of the questionnaire was the most problematic. Due to translation problems there are three questions – namely Q23E, Q25L, Q37A – for which the overall results might not completely reflect the intended phenomena in the Czech Republic. In other cases and language versions, the problems were relatively minor.

Further objectives of the post-test analysis were to serve as a tool for the interpretation of survey results and to help to understand the role of national infrastructure, cultural context and gender in general in shaping respondents' answers. It can be concluded that, while the questions often elicited a variety of interpretations depending on the informant's specific context, they still generally succeeded in measuring the intended dimension. The impact of the national infrastructure

and cultural context (e.g. availability of public child care, policy measures taken in regard of promotion of lifelong learning, the practice of regular formal work performance assessment at work places) stood out in various connections. In contrast, gender was not found to have any strong connection with the ways the different questions were interpreted and responded to in this study. Instead, it can be argued that across the countries the most important factors shaping respondents' interpretations of the questions and their responses to them was their type and status of job. For instance, concerning different aspects of work or 'unforeseen problems', lower status job holders tended to refer to much smaller-scale tasks than higher status job holders. Furthermore, interactivity and customer contacts make service work more unpredictable – therefore in the case of such concepts as 'deadlines' or 'ability to choose or change', it is more difficult to relate to certain aspects of work in this area compared to respondents with more routine or even automated tasks.

In any case, it is important to remember that the EWCS only measures averages, as quantitative surveys do. National reports emphasise on several occasions that the interviewees' forced-choice responses were just 'averaged out' responses in situations where the reality was much more complex than any survey could ever grasp. For instance, the respondents felt that certain facets of or tasks in their job would have corresponded to a specific response alternative, but other facets or tasks would have required a different response. Furthermore, the characteristics of the job were sometimes felt to be quite different depending on the point in time being referred to, with differences emerging in relation to the situation and season. The more variety of tasks the job included and the more variation there was in the circumstances of that job, the more difficult it became to select just one response alternative; people working in jobs with repetitive tasks found it easier to respond to the questions. This is, however, one of the general weaknesses in survey methodology and is not unique to the EWCS.

Technical points and suggestions for improvement

The translation problems and suggested improvements are presented in detail in Annex 5. The following sections focus on a few specific questions in terms of other technical details or interpretations, and suggestions for possible improvement are given.

Q24 – Are you able or not to choose or change your order of tasks / methods of work / speed or rate of work? Yes / No

Several interviewees in various countries emphasised the partiality and/or relativity of their autonomy while responding to this question; many respondents also spontaneously expressed their preference for a response scale. Given this evidence, it would be beneficial to use a four or five-point scale instead of dichotomy in this question. It would make the answering process easier for the respondents, who currently have a double task: first, they must assess the extent to which they have autonomy, and secondly, whether this amount equals a 'yes' or 'no' response on the bi-polar scale. In addition, the scale would give a more nuanced and more accurate picture of reality. In particular, those respondents who have only a relatively low level of autonomy, choose either 'yes' or 'no'. For them, it would probably be easier to be able to respond 'rarely' or 'sometimes' than to express a total lack of autonomy by giving a negative response.

In reporting the results of the EWCS, the relativity and partiality of autonomy should be stressed. An appropriate way could be, for instance, to report that 'X% has autonomy (over their different aspects of work) at least to a certain extent'.

Q23 – Generally, does your main paid job involve, or not...solving unforeseen problems on your own / monotonous tasks / complex tasks / learning new things? Yes / No

In the Czech Republic, the words 'monotonous' and 'complex' were not easily understood by some interviewees. In relation to the word 'monotonous', the problem can be solved by a more appropriate translation. With regard to the word 'complex', the Czech national experts cannot provide a more understandable term, but recommend that the term be described and explained using more appropriate words. In addition, the latter term was not always well understood in its intended meaning in Austria.

More generally, the Austrian and UK national reports draw attention to the vagueness of items in the series of questions and the wide variety of interpretations they produce. Both reports suggest improving the questionnaire with a more defined formulation. This could be done for instance by involving a guiding definition or examples of each concept, as has been done in question Q28D in relation to ‘other forms of on-site training and learning (such as self-learning, online tutorials, etc)’. The Austrian report also suggests asking for factors that are implied by complexity, such as dependencies to/from others and fulfilment of differing requirements.

It may also be worthwhile to consider whether the adverb ‘generally’ is needed in the body of the question. In the Finnish sample, the translation (referring quite strongly to temporary frequency in Finnish) created some confusion, but at the same time several respondents, also in other countries, seemed to completely neglect the adverb.

Q25 – The scale in the series of questions: Almost always / Often / Sometimes / Rarely / Almost never

Due to a technical mistake, the extreme alternatives ‘always’ and ‘never’ were missing in the EWCS 2005 questionnaire and several respondents took note of this. A number of respondents perceived that ‘rarely’ and ‘almost never’, as well as ‘almost always’ and ‘often’, are practically the same concept. In the Czech report, a wrong response scale was used for the entire series of questions.

Q25A-B – You can get assistance from colleagues/superiors, if you ask for it?

Across countries, these questions were generally understood in two different ways, namely in relation to:

- how often the respondents sought assistance in their work;
- how often they were provided (or took up) assistance when they asked for it.

Both of the interpretations were common, which naturally leads to somewhat disparate responses. Furthermore, the reasons why some interviewees did not or could not always ask for assistance, even if they would have badly needed it, revealed a lot in terms of the work organisation in general. In response to this, it could be worthwhile to consider whether the ‘if you ask for it’ clause could be replaced, for example, by ‘if you need it’.

On the other hand, some interviewees also referred to the fact that their superiors or colleagues were not always able to give worthwhile assistance even if they would have been willing to do so, perhaps because of a lack of competencies or resources. It was important, nevertheless, that they offered encouragement and support to co-workers. In this respect, a translation in the Austrian version where the ‘assistance’ from one’s superior had been changed to ‘support’ makes more sense.

Q25C – You can get external assistance, if you ask for it?

The concept of ‘external assistance’ created some confusion and hesitation in the post-test countries. Depending on the intended meaning, the question could be formulated as ‘external to your work organisation’ or ‘some other kind of assistance’. The latter formulation would also include into the question series, for instance, technical assistance from other departments in the work organisation, which is not usually classified as ‘assistance from colleagues’.

Q26 – Does your job involve doing all or part of your work in a team? Yes/No

Several interviewees in the various post-test countries spontaneously responded to this question by referring to the extent to which their tasks involved teamwork (for example, ‘Yes, a lot’, ‘Includes a bit’). Thus, it might be worthwhile considering whether a response scale should be in use in this case instead of the ‘yes/no’ dichotomy.

A short definition of what is meant by teamwork would also be appropriate, making the responding easier and reducing the varied interpretation of 'teams'. For instance, the respective question used in the Finnish Quality of Work Life Survey (FQWLS) also includes the definition of the word 'team': 'Do you work in a permanent work group or team that has common tasks and possibility to plan its work?'

Q27 – Which of the following alternatives would best describe your skills in your own work? I need further training to cope well with my duties / My duties correspond well with my present skills / I have the skills to cope with more demanding duties

The alternatives are not mutually exclusive, which sometimes caused problems for the respondents. As a consequence, several interviewees 'averaged out' their responses or chose 'the least wrong one'. It might be more useful to split this question into two parts, as follows:

- I need further training to cope well with my duties – Yes/No;
- I have the skills to cope with more demanding duties – Yes/No.

Q28 – Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills or not? A: Training paid for or provided by your employer / B: Training paid for by yourself / C: On-the-job training (from co-workers, supervisors) / D: Other forms of on-site training and learning (e.g. self-learning, online tutorials etc.)/ E: Other (spontaneous)? Yes/No

Some variation and overlapping emerged in relation to the 'title' under which the interviewees should classify the training or learning they had been involved in. Sub-questions Q28C and Q28D elicited responses referring to very different kinds of learning activities. Some respondents were not sure whether self-initiated study such as reading professional literature should be taken into account. However, since it was quite a common activity, it would be a good idea to explicitly mention it in the formulation. Some UK respondents drew attention to the fact that the first two questions were related to the training provider, while the next two questions concerned the form of training.

Thus, sub-questions Q28C and Q28D could do with some finetuning. On the other hand, it is worthwhile to consider whether it would be sufficient to have three sub-questions instead of four or five, namely questions:

- on training provided or paid for by the employer;
- on training paid for by oneself;
- on other kinds of work-related training and learning activities.

There seems to be some inconsistency in the way sub-question Q28E is dealt with in different countries by the administrators. Only 'other' training activities which are spontaneously mentioned should be recorded here. While in other post-test countries the distribution of responses to Q28E totals 100% for the alternatives 'yes/no/don't know', in Finland, 20% of all responses are recorded as 'refusals', which is most likely the result of a coding error.

30C – Over the past 12 months, have you, or not, been subjected to regular formal assessment of your work performance? Yes/No

Respondents failed to completely understand the term 'regular formal assessment' in its intended meaning in Austria, the Czech Republic and Portugal. For instance, among the Czech sample of participants, several respondents who had been subjected to arbitrary assessments replied in the affirmative, but after closer analysis it seemed that only four of them had been subjected to any kind of 'formal assessment'.

Q30B – Over the past 12 months, have you, or not, discussed work-related problems with your boss? Yes/No

This question was well received in all countries except Austria, even if some interviewees pointed out that they did not have any ‘problems’ to discuss. Thus, a negative response may indicate that there had not been anything the respondent would consider a ‘problem’ but, on the other hand, it may also indicate that such problems existed but the superior was not available/approachable or ready to discuss them with the staff. In any case, given the long reference time of 12 months, the question is not an extremely informative one. Regarding communication with a superior, it seemed to be of more relevance for respondents if the superior was easily approachable and available when the subordinate wished to discuss certain issues.

Q37A – I might lose my job in the next six months? Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree

This question was not always completely understood by Czech respondents, who often considered that it could be answered only in the affirmative, since ‘anything can happen’, even a natural disaster. The Czech responses do not measure the actual probability of losing one’s job and are, thus, not exactly comparable with the other countries. Since this kind of ‘you never know’ attitude, even without any actual fear of job loss, sporadically emerged also in other countries, it might be worthwhile to consider re-formulating the question perhaps along the lines of the following: ‘It is probable that I will lose my job’.

Q37C – My job offers good prospects for career advancement? Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree

This statement proved to be somewhat difficult to answer and occasionally provoked ambiguous reactions. Career advancement was mainly understood as climbing hierarchical ladders. Due to the type of occupation or flat organisational structure in different companies, many respondents did not see what career advancement could represent in their work, even in theory. Furthermore, many respondents considered that hierarchical career advancement was of little or no importance for them – on the contrary, many did not even want to advance in their jobs since it would mean moving away from the job they enjoyed or an increase in their workload. Against this background, the results of this question should not be used as an indicator of job quality or job satisfaction. On the other hand, the concept of career advancement, often narrowly viewed as upward mobility, might need to be reconsidered in broader terms, focusing also on such aspects as job enlargement, increased responsibility and development at work instead of just hierarchies.

Q37E – At work, I have opportunities to learn and grow? Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree

Due to some inconsistencies in foreign language translations, this statement seems to measure relatively different phenomena in the various post-test countries. Even without translation problems, the term ‘grow’ caused some uncertainty among UK respondents.

Use of parenthesis

A general remark regarding the technical aspect of the questionnaire relates to the occasional use of parenthesis in questions – such as Q28C, Q28D, and Q26 in the Finnish version. The interviewer manual gives no clear instructions on how to deal with these parentheses: whether the interviewer should always read contents aloud or only if the respondent requires more details. Furthermore, even if common instructions would be provided, it is not certain that all of the interviewers across the various post-test countries would remember to follow them in the same way. However, at least the Finnish and Czech post-test interviews, in which the specifying contents of these parentheses were read aloud in the first place, indicate that it makes a difference. Quite a few interviewees seemed to have difficulties with the last specifying words of these particular questions; for example, the words in parenthesis – such as ‘online tutorials’ in Q28D – caused problems such that respondents almost ignored the concepts used earlier in the question – for example, ‘on-site training’ in this example. This is a commonly known phenomenon in survey methodology (Tourangeau et al, 2000).

It would probably be better to avoid the use of parenthesis as much as possible. In cases where they appear necessary, the interviewers should have clear instructions on how to deal with them.

Suggestions for further themes to be covered

Finally, the objectives of the post-test also included the aim to serve as a tool for developing new questions and to offer more information on the subject of development at work and employability. The EWCS 2005 questions covered a variety of basic issues with regard to development at work, such as opportunities to learn new skills and progress at work, participating in training and the various features of work which can be considered developmental. It seemed to be a good idea to have several questions focusing on one theme from slightly different angles. However, as indicated above, there is still a lot more to these phenomena. In line with emerging themes, some subsequent areas to be covered in future surveys are suggested below. Almost all of these suggestions are raised in more than one national report, reflecting their general relevance in regard to development at work.

- Orientation to develop – The themes of orientation and motivation are of crucial importance while considering development at work. Furthermore, it could be claimed that an intrinsic motivation to progress at work is of major importance considering the actual endeavours put into action and followed through. This is why the national reports suggest including questions in subsequent surveys about the value orientation of the respondents in terms of further development and expectations about their job. The questions would try to investigate the levels of motivation among respondents to progress further at work and their willingness to take up any training offered by employers.
- Different concepts of learning – The differences in the scope of what is understood by further development and learning at work are reflected in the survey responses measuring the extent of such development opportunities. It may be interesting to know more about what different groups of employees consider as development and ways to progress and develop in their work.
- Constrained application of own ideas at work, creativity and possible gender differences – The national reports suggest the incorporation of questions which would seek information about respondent's untapped skills and how and why organisations inadvertently hold back workers' development opportunities in this regard. This might shed some light on the potential for employees to augment their sense of job satisfaction, work motivation and level of employability. Furthermore, it would be important in future surveys to try to find ways of eliciting such possible gender-related aspects with regard to job autonomy, creativity and use of one's full potential as the present analysis suggests.
- Importance of career advancement – The post-test results indicate that it would be quite misleading to use question Q37C on perceived career prospects as a straightforward indicator of either quality of work, job satisfaction or development opportunities in the secondary analysis of EWCS. Furthermore, the theme appears to be one of those where national and cultural contexts play a significant role. Thus, in future surveys, it would be rewarding to obtain information on the perceived importance of career advancement among the respondents and perhaps also on perceived barriers to such progression.
- Learning and developing: a two-fold issue – Even if generally positively perceived, learning new things can sometimes become an additional burden for workers and thus lead to work intensification. These context-bound themes around learning and developing at work suggest the need to consider further the impacts of development on employees, especially in terms of their job satisfaction and motivation to develop over time. This might underline in practical terms the need for organisational assessments of employees' development requirements that take account of the connection between the form and intensity of development opportunities, and employees' capacity to avail of these.

- Management, role of superior and feedback – The analysis provided by the post-test suggests that there seems to be a call for additional questions focusing on workers’ superiors. Such questions should relate to subordinate communication, such as on approachability and availability of the superior, expressions of support and interest also in the employees’ further education and growth, as well as on the sufficiency of feedback. The three current questions (Q25C, Q30A, Q30D) addressing this issue do not evidently reveal enough information. Q30A was not included in the post-test questionnaire: ‘Over the past 12 months, have you, or not, had a frank discussion with your boss about your work performance?’.
- Social relations – It seems that there is room for an additional question or two on social support and encouragement from the work community and the impact of these on work. Furthermore, a question on the incidence of conflicts between colleagues should be added.
- Teamwork – Given the significant impact of teamwork on development at work emphasised in the post-test data, it may deserve a closer examination. At present, the EWCS questionnaire includes three questions on teamwork: whether the respondent wholly or partially works in a team (Q26B), and if yes, whether the members of this team can decide themselves on the division of tasks (Q26B1) and choose the head of the team (Q26B1B). To begin with, for comparative purposes, it would be reasonable to include some kind of common definition for teamwork in the question. It would also be interesting to include a question on the possible positive influence teamwork has on workers’ qualifications and skills development, as well as possibly mapping the different specific forms of teamwork.
- Time intensification – Direct questions on the connection between work pressures and worker motivation, as well as opportunities to further develop at work, would enable a quantitative investigation of the link between these phenomena, indicated by the post-test findings.
- Training and work organisation – Analysis of the post-test data indicated that various personal and organisational features form not only concretely facilitating/obstructing but also importantly motivating/de-motivating influences on workers’ participation and willingness to participate in training. There is a need for more information on employees’ perception of the accessibility, quality and utility of different forms of training, including induction training. This kind of information would be useful for defining strategies on how employees can be further encouraged to develop within their jobs and how to avoid training resources being wasted.
- Type of ownership – Taking into account the increasing internationalisation and the impact of ownership on a company’s working conditions in a wider sense, it would seem crucial to include a differentiation of the type of company ownership (foreign or domestic) as a fundamental classification characteristic in the next edition of EWCS.

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Annex 1: Abbreviations and country codes

Abbreviations used in the report

EWCS European Working Conditions Survey

LFS Labour Force Survey (Eurostat)

OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Country codes

EU15 15 EU Member States prior to enlargement in 2004

NMS10 10 New Member States that joined in 2004

EU27 27 EU Member States – includes Bulgaria and Romania as of 1 January 2007

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
FI	Finland
FR	France
DE	Germany
EL	Greece
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LV	Latvia
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
PL	Poland

PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SK	Slovakia
SI	Slovenia
ES	Spain
SE	Sweden
UK	United Kingdom

Country groups

Continental countries: AT, BE, DE, FR, LU

Eastern European countries: CZ, EE, HU, LT, LV, PL, SI, SK

Southern European countries: CY, EL, ES, IT, MT, PT

Annex 2: Methodology

Background to post-test analysis

When analysing survey results, researchers can never be totally sure about what the respondents have actually meant by their responses. In cross-cultural surveys, the respective cultural and national contexts also make difference as how questions are understood and responded to. Moreover, especially while studying such a rapidly changing phenomenon as working life, there also is a strong possibility that the old questions already used in previous surveys do not highlight the essential characteristics of new phenomena. This is why the idea of a qualitative post-test analysis, consisting of in-depth follow-up interviews, was developed by the Foundation already in the preparatory phase of the EWCS 2005. The aim was to improve the high quality of the EWCS by using methodological triangulation, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. To anticipate this project, the EWCS 2005 respondents were asked whether or not they would consent to be re-contacted for the purposes of a follow-up interview.

In practice, the aims of the post-test analysis presented in the introduction can roughly be divided in two: First, to assess the overall quality and functionality of the EWCS 2005 questionnaire from a technical point of view and thus to provide information contributing to further development of the survey. Second, to deepen and enrich the analysis of the survey results obtained as well as to map subsequent, emerging themes around the phenomenon of development at work and employability. These objectives are approached from two perspectives, from a gender perspective as well as from a cross-cultural perspective, with the overall aim of understanding more about the role of the national infrastructure and cultural context in general in shaping respondents' answers.

Methodology

Triangulation

Qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined in a variety of ways. In survey research, pilot interviewing with cognitive interviewing methods has already for long been practised as a quality control measure in the attempt to find shortcomings of the survey questionnaires. It is not uncommon in research to use multiple data collection methods, for

instance to complement survey results by different kind of qualitative data, in order to enlarge the interpretation and understanding of the research phenomenon. However, marrying qualitative methods with survey research can also be done in such an analytical way that it benefits both the development of the survey questionnaire and the interpretation of results. Anna-Maija Lehto (1996, 2005) has listed the benefits of such an approach for survey research as follows:

- can be directed to new phenomena, concepts and theories;
- helps to diversify results obtained on averages;
- diversifies question formulation and interpretation of results by exploiting meanings;
- brings results closer to everyday life, subjects' activities and experiences (life entity, groups);
- can combine processive descriptions with cross-section data;
- facilitates describing change;
- can study the relationship between local and general.

Examples of such a triangulation in work–life research can be found from Finland and France. In relation to the Finnish Quality of Work Life Survey 1997 carried out by Statistics Finland, qualitative interviews were carried out before and after the actual survey. Prior to the designing of the questionnaire, interviews were conducted to test some existing questions and to elicit more information about new themes to be introduced in the questionnaire in order to design new questions. After the survey fieldwork, a research project was launched to support further interpretation on two specific themes, namely time pressure and gender equality. The findings of this post-test analysis were further exploited in the designing of the 2003 survey questionnaire. This experiment of combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods made it possible to focus on the problematic features of the conventional survey. Among other things, it facilitated finding new features in the examined phenomena, analysing the meanings given to the concepts used in the survey, getting closer to the respondents' everyday lives and recognising the processive nature of phenomena. (Järnefelt & Lehto 2002, Pulkkinen 2002a, Pulkkinen 2002b, Sutela 2006).

In France, a similar triangulation was carried out in the form of a post-test analysis on the Working Conditions Survey 1998 (DARES). Two themes were studied qualitatively: accidents at work; and work organisation and working times. Regarding accidents at work, the results of the post-test analysis confirmed that some accidents at work are not officially reported and thus remain invisible in statistics. They also brought to light the impact of organisational characteristics of work, as well as that of social relationships, on the conditions under which accidents happen. However, it was not possible from structured survey questions to examine the processive nature of conditions leading to accidents or the role of social dynamics and context factors behind them (Daubas-Letourneux & Thébaud-Mony, 2001) As to the other theme, working times, the post-test analysis revealed, among other things, the scope of variety in realities to which different respondents were referring while choosing the same response alternatives. It also revealed shortcomings of the Working Conditions Survey questionnaire in respect of studying the variety of working times (Gadbois et al, 2000.)

The Finnish and French examples show that combining the qualitative and quantitative approaches in the same survey entity is possible and that the combining can be implemented in an interactive way, not just as parallel data collection methods. In these cases, triangulation not only revealed matters of major relevance in questionnaire design but also information useful in the interpretation of the responses, contributing to the overall quality of the surveys.

Cognitive interviewing

The qualitative interviewing methods in the above mentioned Finnish and French studies had a lot in common with what is called ‘expansive cognitive interviewing’ by Gordon B. Willis (2003) or ‘ethnographic interviewing’ by Eleanor R. Gerber (1999). An adaptation of this method was also used in the post-test analysis on the EWCS 2005. However, even if most of the techniques are similar to this expansive cognitive interviewing method, the perspective of the Finnish and French studies as well as that of the EWCS post-test were wider, especially in terms of the final aims of the research.

Expansive and ethnographic interviewing are based on cognitive interviewing, a commonly used procedure in survey questionnaire evaluation. Cognitive interview techniques are particularly used to study the manner in which targeted audiences understand, mentally process and respond to the materials the researcher/interviewer presents. A special emphasis is put on potential breakdowns in this process. However, it should also be noted that it is not always possible to put any cognitive ‘tag’ on the problems observed, since in some cases these problems do not have a strong cognitive focus but are rather termed structural or logical problems. In this way, cognitive interviews can identify potential problems and provide useful information on the need to improve or modify certain problematic questions. Cognitive interviews are often tape-recorded or video taped and analysed in order to find out at which stage of responding a problem occurred. It should be borne in mind, though, that the practice of cognitive interviewing does not in itself result in improved questionnaires. It serves as ‘question inspection’ and identifies possible problems, but there is still a way to go before solving all the problems. (Willis, 2005)

The basic methods used in cognitive interview are the ‘think-aloud’ method supplemented by verbal probing. In the classic think-aloud method the respondent is asked, while answering the question put by the interviewer, not only to answer that specific question but also to vocalise all of his/her thoughts. However, as mentioned, the think-aloud method is used very often in combination with verbal probes, where the interviewer follows up by probing for other specific information relevant to the question or to the specific answer given, using probes which either can be designed prior to the interview or emerge during the interview, triggered by something that the subject has said (Willis, 2005, p. 46).

In the literature on cognitive interviewing (e.g. Sudman et al, 1996, Tourangeau et al, 2000, Ahola et al, 2002), the underlying assumption seems to be that every interviewee could give, in theory, the correct and ‘true’ answer to every survey question if only – by improving the questionnaire – the researchers could help the interviewee to understand, to recall, to judge and to edit the right answer in a proper way. A response error is understood as representing the discrepancy between a theoretical ‘true score’ and that which is reported by the respondent. Willis (2005, p. 17) lists a variety of reasons why survey questions produce these response errors: people may not have the information the researcher is seeking, they may not remember it or it may be something they would rather not talk about. The problem can also be related to communication: questions can simply be too difficult to understand.

However, as Willis (2005, p. 104) points out, ‘it does no good for our question to be understood if it is the wrong question’; it is not enough to know how to ask but also what to ask. In order to design a good questionnaire the researcher needs a solid grounding of the targeted phenomenon. Contemplated from a sociolinguistic perspective, response error occurs largely because questions fail to communicate the designer’s intent – in particular, they fail to achieve appropriate grounding. Sometimes the problem may also be that the survey question simply does not fit into the respondent’s life. In this way cognitive interviewing can provide important information and more comprehension of the phenomena. (Willis, 2005, p.30)

As means to achieve this, Willis (2005) adapts the term ‘expansive interview’ from Beatty, Scecheter and Whitaker (1996). According to Willis, an expansive interview is a means to extend our understanding of the phenomenon under study and the way which the survey questions we are testing address that phenomenon. So, information on cognitive processes is not enough, but the researchers should also be able to determine whether the question matches the

respondents' life situation. In this approach, the research subjects are seen as substantive experts in the area of interest of the study and they are encouraged to give expanded description of that area (Willis, 2005, pp. 103–104.)

In order to achieve this deeper understanding of the phenomenon, Willis encourages the use of elaborative probes, as opposed to reorienting probes which focus back toward answering the tested question. Elaborative probes focus attention towards a more complete verbal report, often to determine details about the interviewee's life that are relevant to evaluating the survey questionnaire. The aim in elaborative probing is to strive to determine whether even precise, codable answers are meaningful and, if not, why not. Even a simple probe, 'Can you tell me about that?', can be extremely useful in this regard and expands the conversation beyond the strict confines of the question itself (Willis, 2005, pp. 104–105)

This is an important perspective, which applies as well to the Finnish and French experiments described above regarding the post-test analysis on EWCS 2005: when a respondent fails to answer in a particular question in the way the researchers intended her/him to answer, this is not automatically considered as a 'response error'. The different interpretations of the question as well as the respective responses to it are just a proof of the diversity of meanings respondents give to certain phenomena in different contexts. More significantly, one of the interesting features of the EWCS post-test analysis is to find out more about these interpretations and the contexts behind them. Thus, in addition to these checking functions there also is another function: expansive or elaborative probing serves as a data-collection instrument.

Challenges of cross-cultural research

With 31 countries covered, the EWCS 2005 is a cross-cultural survey par excellence. Hence, also in the post-test analysis of the Fourth edition of the survey, the challenges of cross-cultural research are addressed.

If conducting a good monocultural survey is a challenging endeavour as such, the problems seem to magnify in cross-cultural surveys – and new ones will be added, as pointed out in the *Cross-cultural survey methods* (2003), edited by Janet A. Harkness, Peter P. Mohler and Fons J.R. Van de Vijver. The editors of the book stress how essential it is for comparative survey research to draw on findings and strategies from other disciplines.

The major challenge in cross-cultural surveys is the fact that questions not only have to be valid, they need to have comparable cross-national validity. The main problem in this respect is the fact that concepts may not be identical or comparable and that an instrument appropriate in one context may not be adequate in another. Furthermore, due to structural differences, exactly equivalent objects or entities may not exist across countries (Van de Vijver, 2003.)

When characteristics compared are physical attributes – like the mean length of two populations – the relationship between the measurement and objects/constructs to be compared is simple. Nevertheless, when more abstract constructs or attitudes are measured, the task becomes more complex. The relationship between measurement and construct might be disturbed by various sources; the relationship is not directly causal but probabilistic. When, for example, empathy or conformity is measured in two culturally different populations, the differences in results may not reflect actual degrees of empathy/conformity, but the populations may differ in the social desirability of demonstrating empathy or conformity (Van de Vijver 2003, p. 143.)

Furthermore, the differences in population structure across countries can be significant; for example, the educational level in target countries can differ a lot. If the samples are 'matched' on education, at least some of these samples are not representative of their countries any longer. In random sampling schema, educational differences are likely to emerge, and the question may then arise as to what extent these differences influence the results achieved (Van de Vijver 2003, p.151.)

However, the comparability problems mentioned are less likely to occur between countries where the language, level of development and culture (including religion, shared history, geographic proximity, etc.) are close to each other. Thus, there are probably less equivalence problems in a survey comparing Sweden and Norway than in one measuring differences between Norway and Portugal. And then again, challenges of achieving comparable survey results between Norway and Bangladesh are harder to achieve than between Norway and Portugal. (Smith 2003, p. 86.)

Sources of bias

As approaches to comparative research, Van de Vijver (2003) names two common types:

The first is a structure-orientated approach which addresses questions as to whether an instrument measures the same construct across culture. Is, for example, religion a construct that conveys a similar meaning in different countries and cultures?

The second approach is level-orientated. It addresses cross-cultural differences in average scores. When comparing levels across countries, it cannot be taken for granted that the measures show structural equivalence nor that scores can be directly compared across cultures.

There are a number of factors which challenge the comparability of measurements across countries. Van de Vijver and Leung (1997; 2003, p. 146) identify three types of bias in cross-cultural research:

- **concept/construct bias** (nonidentity of theoretical concepts across groups, e.g. only partial overlap in the definition of the construct across cultures, or poor sampling of all relevant behaviours i.e. short instruments);
- **method bias** (e.g. incomparability of samples, ambiguous instructions for respondents and/or guidelines for administrators; differential response styles due to social desirability or the use of extremes or 'don't know' responses);
- **item bias** (anomalies at the level of the item, e.g. poor translation and/or ambiguous items or nuisance factors, e.g. the item may invoke additional traits or abilities).

Van de Vijver stresses that bias can affect all stages of a project. Thus, ensuring quality is a matter of combining good theory, questionnaire design, administration and analysis. Since cross-cultural surveys deal with a variations in context, this means that salient alternative explanations and hypotheses multiply and so do the sources of error and bias. Smith (2003, p. 90) affirms that large and /or unanticipated cross-national differences should always be suspected as the results either of unintended variation in some aspects of measurement or as failure to achieve functional equivalence – this is the case even if procedures appear comparable and translations would seem to have been carefully executed.

When questions are unclear or ambiguous, the respondents try to derive the meaning of the question from the context. Braun (2003, 60) lists three different types of context factors having direct impact on responses:

- The textual context is the rest of the questionnaire, in particular those parts already processed (introductory text, similar questions, the sequence of questions, characteristics of response scales);
- Personal experience variables context (socio-demographic characteristics, respondent behaviour including psychological and physical states, external conditions);
- The cultural context (of utmost importance especially in cross-cultural research. This is also the most interesting in terms of the post-test analysis).

Translation

The impact of translation should not be underestimated. Translation problems connected to cross-cultural questionnaires often represent intrinsic differences in both the languages and the cultures from which the languages are derived, in the connotations of words. Furthermore, a concept easily represented in one language may not have a suitable corresponding term in another language (Harkness, 2003.)

Braun (2003, p. 67) says that poor translations of good questions mean that respondents read and respond to a question they should not have been asked. On the other hand, even well-translated questions can have different readings in different cultures. These items are especially problematic for cross-cultural implementation, since respondents 'read' the questions differently and answer accordingly. In order to convey the same meaning in different countries, Braun suggests that details in the formulation of a question may require changing. This could mean including specifying additional informational components, eliminating elements that can activate schematic representations in only some countries or modifying formulations that might be regarded as provocative.

Harkness (2003, p. 48) refers to Katan (1999) while emphasising the importance of pragmatic meanings in translations. Pragmatic meaning is meaning in context – it is what words mean in use in a given context for whoever is involved. Survey questions only have meaning in context; especially in the case of cross-cultural surveys, these contextual considerations are cultural considerations. As a consequence, paying more attention to pragmatic meaning in translation means paying more attention to culturally appropriate meanings.

Some recommendations

The editors of *Cross-Cultural Survey Methods* reckon that the 'keep things the same' approach is the most commonly adopted approach in cross-cultural studies, whether it comes to questions asked, in mode, fielding procedures or data management. This approach is also in use in the EWCS. However, even though this approach does not automatically guarantee the quality and comparability in comparative research, there is not enough research so far so that any other course could be really recommended on the basis of evidence. (Harkness et al, 2003, pp. 8–9.)

Overall, some recommendations given in the *Cross-cultural survey methods* (2003) by various authors can be listed as follows:

- Involve researchers and respondents from different countries and language groups in the project from the earliest stage and collaborate fully (Braun and Mohler, 2003).
- Invest in careful development work, even parallel development. Cross-cultural developments need, for example, to turn attention to question crafting and cognitive research findings in relation to translated versions, not just to source questionnaires. Crafting and cognitive characteristics also travel through translation (Harkness et al, 2003, p. 34).
- Pay special attention to the quality of translation. The fact that words do not match up across languages is often less of a problem than that concepts do not match across cultures – what may seem to be linguistic differences are in fact very often culturally anchored differences. Thus, it is strongly recommended that translated questionnaires should be tested as seriously as source questionnaires (Harkness, 2003).
- Extensive pretesting and piloting in each country. Ask-the-same-question approach (ASQ) requires designers to establish questionnaire adequacy in all pertinent structural contexts before fielding. Questions may be culturally anchored and difficult to export via translation alone.
- 'More is better': findings should be cross-validated by using multiple indicators in order to enhance scale reliability and overcome linguistic artifacts.

- Invest in extensive training of the interviewers as well as in detailed manuals and instructions.
- At the analysis stage, ‘go behind the numbers’: in interpreting responses, researchers have to consider that these are not context-free measures
- Take care to document of all survey phases. Also original questionnaires used in every country should be documented so that researchers can consult them when seeking to understand results (in particular the differences in results) across countries.

In addition to these recommendations, Van de Vijver (2003) suggests using non-standard instrument administration (e.g. think-aloud) and cross-cultural comparison of nomological networks as well as examining connotation of key phrases (for example, the similarity in meaning of frequently employed terms such as ‘somewhat agree’). Harkness et al. (2003) point out that in monocultural survey research, such attempts as the use of cognitive research in order to enhance the quality of survey data have had a lot of impact. However, in cross-national research, this development has gone largely unnoticed – so far.

It can be argued that many of the activities recommended above have already, more or less, become reality in the design and implementation of the EWCS 2005. However, the qualitative post-test analysis contributes strongly to some of the remaining items recommended. Furthermore, as to the drawing on cognitive research in cross-cultural survey research, the EWCS post-test analysis seems to be one of the pioneers in this field.

Post-test project

The qualitative post-test analysis on the fourth EWCS was launched in the kick-off meeting in Dublin, May 2006. Soon after the meeting, the basic themes for the post-test, development at work and employability, were finalised. The project plan was refined and the outline for the semi-structured interview questionnaire drafted and tested on two pilot interviews in Finland. The training session for the team took place in Prague in July 2006. In Prague, the team also pilot interviewed each other with the respective language versions of the draft questionnaire, which turned out to be a beneficial exercise indeed. On the basis of this piloting, the final questionnaire outline was agreed upon. The criteria for the selection of the 20 interviewees – half of them women, half men – were commonly set: the samples should represent employees of different age groups, occupations, sectors and educational level. It was agreed that geographical representation was not necessary but there should be some variation in this respect, too.

After the Prague meeting, the field work began by selecting the potential interviewees in respective countries, from among those respondents of the EWCS 2005 who had given their consent to be contacted for the follow-up interview. However, in order to elicit such samples, the national experts proved to have different stand points. The number of potential interviewees (employees having given their consent for follow-up interview) varied from about 100 in Portugal to over 600 in Finland. Another problem was posed by the timing of the project. The field work could be started in the end of July and was supposed to over by the end of September. However, the month of August (in Portugal also September) is the most popular holiday period in the other post-test countries apart from Finland (July), and this had implications for the contactability of the interviewees as well as for the working time of the interviewers.

Furthermore, it very soon emerged that there were some shortcomings in the quality of the contact information in all the other countries except Finland. The potential interviewees were selected along the above-mentioned criteria but otherwise randomly from the EWCS 2005 national datasets. They were sent a contact letter in their national language where they were informed about the nature and purpose of the post-test analysis and told that they would be soon contacted by the national expert for the set-up of the interview. Already at this point it emerged in Austria, Czech

Republic, and the UK, as well as in Portugal that contact details were sometimes erroneous or incomplete and it was not always possible to track down, for example, missing telephone numbers. Furthermore, when the national experts some days later started to contact the persons who had been sent the contact letter, it emerged in a couple of cases that these persons claimed that they had not even participated in the EWCS 2005.

Moreover, some reluctance on the part of the contacted persons to take part in the post-test interview was reported in the other countries except in Finland, where all the persons from the initial sample were willing to participate. Faced by these unexpected difficulties and given the tight timeframe, the other national experts had to start to contact the new potential respondents directly by telephone.

Finally, most of the countries had to compromise the sampling by the initial criteria to some extent. Basically, 10 men and 10 women were interviewed in all of the countries except for Austria, which had a sample of 9 men and 11 women. All the samples covered different age groups, occupations, work experience, sectors and educational levels. Even if these groups do not always reflect the structure of the original survey, the samples can be considered at least satisfactory for the purpose of post-test (Annex 3).

Interviews

The interviews followed a semi-structured questionnaire (Annex 5) and the method used was an adaptation of ‘expansive cognitive interview’ (Willis, 2005). The interviewees were presented with a selected number of structured questions from the EWCS 2005 questionnaire and they were encouraged to reflect on what they meant by their answer, to what kind of situations they referred in their work life and how they found the questions and response alternatives: easy or difficult to answer. The additional open-ended questions also sought to map the phenomena of job development and employability and their role in the respondent’s life. Some of these probes were anticipated probes from the post-test questionnaire, some emerged from the interview situation. The EWCS questions were presented as they had been translated in the different language versions of the original EWCS 2005 questionnaire – also in those few cases where the translations were deemed erroneous. This was done in order to gauge the impact of translation on the survey results. In addition, however, the interviewers often presented the respective questions with a more appropriate translation in order to find whether the responses would differ.²

The first interviews were conducted at the end of July in Finland and the last ones in Portugal, in the beginning of November, reflecting the differences in the extent of difficulties encountered during the field work. The interviews usually took place at the interviewee’s home, in a few cases at their work place or other premises. In one specific case in the UK, where the interviewee was not at home at the originally scheduled time, it was agreed to carry out the rescheduled interview by telephone due to the considerable travelling time involved.

The duration of the interviews varied from 40 minutes to almost three hours. The average interview times varied by country from about one hour in Portugal and Austria to one hour and a half hours in Finland. The Czech respondents were offered a financial reward of CZK 500 (EUR 17.6) for the interview, the Finnish, Portuguese and the UK respondents were told they would receive the summary of final research findings. All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

² In some cases it emerged that the different translation versions tended to elicit quite opposite reactions. In others, while a better translation made responding easier it did not really have an impact on choosing the alternative response.

The Finnish and the UK report reported that the questionnaire seemed to function quite well and interviews ran fluently, in spite of this somewhat unconventional interviewing method combining forced-choice survey and open-ended/probe questions. Interviewees usually enjoyed the chance to elaborate on their more specific responses. However, the Austrian interviewer reported that this hybrid interviewing method occasionally made interviewing uncomfortable, especially for interviewers trained in interpretive methodology, although the respondents generally were cooperative. The Austrian report also notes that some less educated respondents reacted rather defensively to probing, feeling that they were being tested to see if they were clever enough to understand the item.

There naturally were individual differences as to how volubly the interviewees were ready to describe their job situations or assess the questions, more educated interviewees being – on average – more talkative and outspoken in commenting on the questionnaire. With the interview theme targeting at development at work, the respondents' actual opportunities and experiences in this area had naturally also a bearing on the fluency of responding.

Analysis

The team got together at the end of September 2006 in Dublin, towards the end of the fieldwork period, to share their impressions and experiences of the interviewing as well as to agree on the practicalities in analysing. The national experts were using Atlas.ti, Nvivo or MaxQDA2 qualitative data analysis software for the analysis. For this purpose, a basic code sheet was built on the basis of the questionnaire outline and agreed upon. It was also agreed that the national experts would add further codes in their coding lists during their analysis in line with emerging themes from the material.

However, at the time of the September meeting, the field work situation was still problematic for Portugal, which had the smallest pool of potential interviewees from the beginning and considerable reluctance on the part of the contacted persons to participate in the post-test. Thus, the post-test team and the Foundation agreed that the Portuguese national team would also interview individuals who did not respond to EWCS in 2005. Putting this solution in practice by 'snowballing' for suitable interviewees, the Portuguese team succeeded in conducting 20 interviews by the beginning of November, including seven respondents of EWCS 2005.

The coding, analysis and writing of the national reports took place in autumn 2006. At the meeting in Helsinki in the beginning of November 2006, the national experts were able to present their first findings and to share their ideas and experiences at this stage. The final meeting in Dublin in March 2007 provided an occasion to discuss and comment on the draft comparative analysis report and to discuss the methodology of the project.

Team

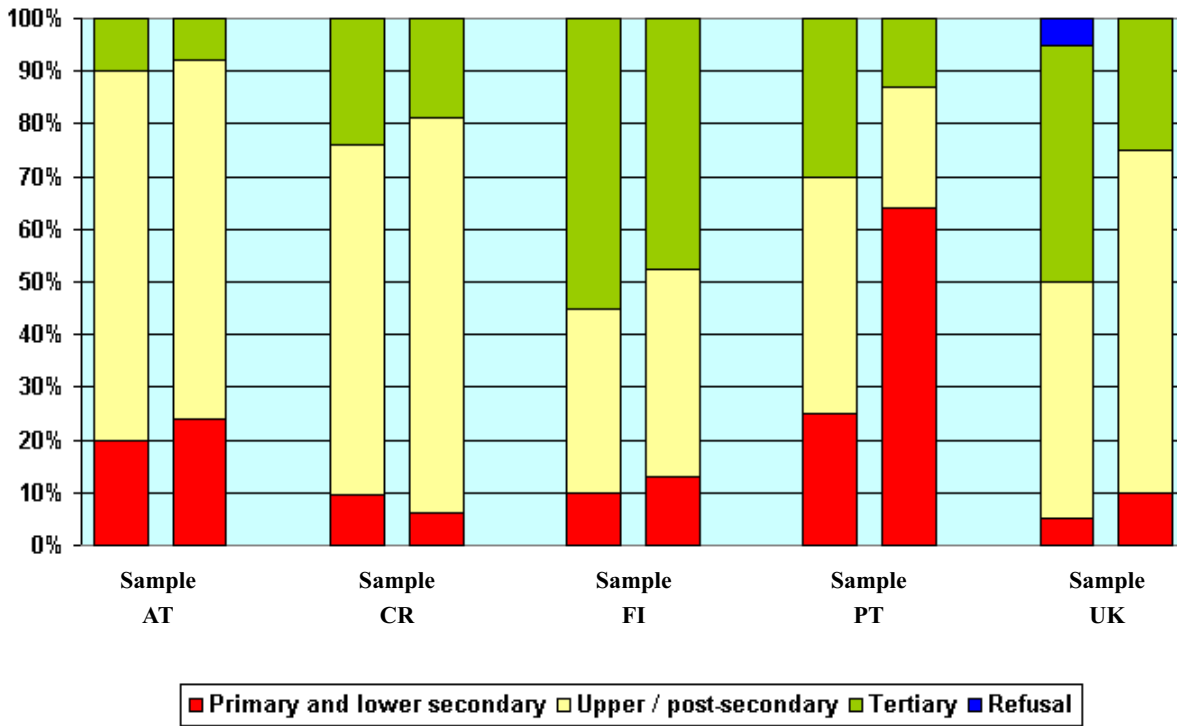
The strength of this project was a well-functioning team and the opportunity to have frequent meetings. These meetings offered valuable occasions for active discussion, change of ideas and experiences as well as opportunities to agree on the practical baselines at respective stages of the research. In the actual post-test interviews, the national respondents frequently brought up the developmental benefits of teamwork – indeed, it can be claimed that those benefits also became reality in this project.

The co-ordinator of the research consortium was the Czech Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA). Hanna Sutela was responsible for the design of the survey with the consultative help of Dr Anna-Maija Lehto, both from Finland. The names of all the national experts are listed in Annex 2.

Annex 3: National samples

Age	Austria		Czech republic		Finland		Portugal		The UK	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Less than 25	Sales assistant		Network administrator	Building materials dealer	Shop manager		Shop clerk			
25 - 39 years	Job centre clerk	Caretaker	Machine engineer	Special school teacher	Earthworker	Warehouse worker	Secretary	Car mechanic	National account manager	Financial analyst
	Materials admin	Nurse	Barman	Canteen manager	Turner	School assistant	Administrative assistant	Surveillance officer	Housing and support officer	School teacher
		Policewoman	Dispatcher	Warehouse worker	Kiln operator	Child minder	Nurse	Supermarket section manager	Farm employee	Graphic designer
		Accountant	Production manager		Pilot	Senior government official	Shop manager	Salesperson	Clinical manager in NHS	Receptionist/ secretary
		Education admin			Emergency response specialist		Researcher	Accountant		Shoe buyer
							Call-centre operator	Psychologist		School dinner assistant
							Gardener			
40 - 54 years	Archive clerk	Graphic designer	Train conductor	Petrol station service	Coach driver	Practical nurse	Assistant cook	Train engineer	Machine operator	School teacher
	Electrician	Nurse	Clerk	Lab technician	Operator	Metal worker		Postal services transport team leader	Multi-discipline crafts person	
	Insurance salesman	Receptionist	Security	Chemistry laboratory manager		Special education teacher		Locksmith	Warehouse person	
	Sales manager	Day mother	Foreman at railways	Accountant		Bank counsellor		Technical designer		
Over 55 years	Firefighter	Cleaner	Worker-welder	Photographer	Purchase manager	Senior clerk			Car park control officer	Healthcare support worker
	Teacher/admin	Civil servant		Cleaner	Higher education teacher	Head nurse			Installation engineer	Supermarket assistant/checkout operator
									Rolling stock engineer	Supermarket shopfloor general assistant

Figure 34: Educational level among the national samples of the post-test and the EWCS respondents



Source: EWCS 2005

Annex 4: Interview outline

At the time of the EWCS interview you told that you were working as a XXXX in a public sector organisation/private company/.... and you had a permanent/fixed-term etc. contract. Is this still correct? What is your occupation?

(If changed, find out about the occupation/profession, employer sector and employment contract; In any case, find out the exact occupation, since we have only the very rough categories!)

Could you shortly describe your typical working day (=your tasks, your job?)

To start with, I would like to ask you:

How satisfied are you with your current job?

READ OUT:

1 - Very satisfied

2 –Satisfied

3 - Not very satisfied

4 - Not at all satisfied

8 - DK/no opinion (spontaneous)

9 - Refusal (spontaneous)



- Could you tell me more? /To what aspects were you referring to/ What makes you to feel this way?
- Give the interviewee time to contemplate this question. Let's see if she/he spontaneously mentions the opportunities (or the lack of them) to develop oneself as a factor increasing or decreasing her/his satisfaction.
- If these opportunities are not mentioned spontaneously, probe whether the interviewee was thinking about his/her opportunities to job develop or the lack of them.
- If not referred spontaneously: Ask which factors contribute to dissatisfaction at her/his work; what are the most acute problems with his/her work/working conditions.

Q24 Are you able, or not, to choose or change...?

READ OUT	Yes	No	DK	Refusal
A – your order of tasks	1	2	8	9
B – your methods of work	1	2	8	9
C – your speed or rate of work	1	2	8	9

Ask these one by one, and most preferably only after the whole set :

- Where these response alternatives enough (yes/no)?
- What did you understand by 'choose or change'?
- Could you tell me more; what does the word 'order of tasks' / 'methods of work' / 'speed or rate of work' mean to you (in your job?)
- YES: In what way can you choose or change your XXX, what does it mean in practice?
- NO: What is your opinion, why can't you choose or change your XXX – what makes it difficult/impossible?

Q23 Generally, does your main paid job involve, or not ...?

READ OUT	Yes	No	DK	Refusal
C - solving unforeseen problems on your own	1	2	8	9
D - monotonous tasks	1	2	8	9
E – complex tasks	1	2	8	9
F – learning new things	1	2	8	9

- How did you find these questions?
- Where these response alternatives enough (yes/no)?

For each:

- YES: You answered that your work involves ‘solving unforeseen problems on your own’ / ‘monotonous tasks’/ ... What did you mean by this/ can you tell me more/ how does it show / what does it mean in practice/ what kind of problems?
- NO: You answered that your work does not involve solving unforeseen problems on your own/ monotonous... . What do you understand by this question? Could you tell me more?

For Q25F, also:

- YES: How do you feel about this, learning new things at your work? Is it sometimes too much / Does this learning new ever become as a pressure or not?
- NO: Are you comfortable with the fact that your job does not involve learning new or would you prefer to...?

Q25 For each of the following statements, please select the response which best describes your work situation.

SHOW CARD Q25 WITH SCALE - ONE ANSWER ONLY PER LINE!

READ OUT	Almost always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost never	DK	Refusal
A - You can get assistance from colleagues if you ask for it	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
B - You can get assistance from your superiors / boss if you ask for it (MODIFIED)	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
C - You can get external assistance if you ask for it (MODIFIED)	1	2	3	4	5	8	9

- How did you find these questions? / What did you think about these questions?
- Was it easy or difficult to use this kind of response scale?

For each:

- You said that you can get assistance from colleagues/superior/external assistance (sometimes) if you ask for it ...Could you tell me more...? What kind of assistance this is? From which colleagues? How does this show in practice? Is this assistance normally useful?
- Why is it that you get assistance from your colleagues only rarely/almost never if you ask for it? Would you need it more? Do you ask for it? Why not?
- (Did you mean by your answer ‘sometimes’ that you only ask sometimes...or that you get assistance, if asked, only sometimes?)

Fourth EWCS: Qualitative post-test analysis

- Do you ask for it often? If not, how come?
- You chose ('sometimes'). Could you tell me more, what do you mean by it, how often is 'sometimes'?

SHOW CARD Q25 WITH SCALE - ONE ANSWER ONLY PER LINE!

Q25.... please select the response which best describes your work situation

READ OUT	Almost always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost never	DK	Refusal
F - You have enough time to get the job done	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
H - At work, you have the opportunity to do what you do best (NEW)	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
I - Your job gives you the feeling of work well done (NEW)	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
J - You are able to apply your own ideas in your work (NEW)	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
K - You have the feeling of doing useful work (NEW)	1	2	3	4	5	8	9

- How did you find these statements?
- What did you think about these response alternatives – easy or difficult?

For each:

- Could you tell me more? What did you mean by.... in practice?
- Why not always/ why only sometimes/rarely...? What are the obstacles, in your opinion?
- How important is it to you, that you (can apply...); How important would it be for you that you (could apply...)?

SHOW CARD Q25 WITH SCALE - ONE ANSWER ONLY PER LINE!

Q25.... please select the response which best describes your work situation

READ OUT	Almost always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost never	DK	Refusal
L - You find your job intellectually demanding (NEW)	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
M - You find your job emotionally demanding (NEW)	1	2	3	4	5	8	9

- How did you find these statements? Response alternatives?
- What do you mean by your answer, can you tell me more...?
- What do you understand by intellectually/emotionally demanding?
- Do you think that it is good or bad that your work is/is not intellectually/emotionally demanding? How important is it/would it be that your job is intellectually demanding?
- How stressful is it for you that your work is intellectually/emotionally demanding?

Q20B And, does your job involve ...?

SHOW CARD Q20B WITH SCALE - ONE ANSWER ONLY PER LINE!

READ OUT	Almost always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost never	DK	Refusal
A – working at very high speed	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
B - working to tight deadlines	1	2	3	4	5	8	9

- Was it easy or difficult to answer to these questions?
- Was it easy or difficult to choose among these response alternatives? (Why was it difficult?)
- What does the word ‘working at very high speed’/ ‘tight deadline’ mean to you (in your job?)
- What did you mean by your answer; could you tell me more?
- In what way does your job involve working at very high speed/ to tight deadlines, what does it mean / how does it show in practice?
- What do you think are the reasons, why do you have to work at very high speed / to tight deadlines?
- Have you noticed any consequences?

IF THE SUBJECT HAS A LONGER WORKING CAREER, YOU CAN ASK ABOUT THE POSSIBLE CHANGE IN THIS RESPECT:

- Have you noticed any change in this respect in your job (in the past years)? (What are the reasons behind this change, what do you think?)

Q26.B Does your job involve doing all or part of your work in a team?

1 - Yes ----- > **CONTINUE WITH Q26.B1.**



2 - No ----- > **GO TO Q27**

8 - DK/no opinion (spontaneous) ----- > **GO TO Q27**

9 - Refusal (spontaneous) ----- > **GO TO Q27**

How did you find this question? Were the response alternatives enough? (yes/no)

- YES: What does the term ‘work in team’ mean to you (in your job?) Could you tell me more?
- What does it mean / how does it show in practice that you work in team?
- NO: What do you think, would it be possible to work in teams in your job, what could it be? If it would be possible, why do you think your work is not involving teamwork? Would you like to?
- Do you find that teamwork in your job is (would be) a good thing considering job development / self development at work or not? / What are your experiences, does teamwork promote or hinder job development?
- Can you tell me more/ what do you mean by your answer ...?

(MODIFIED)

Q27 Which of the following alternatives would best describe your skills in your own work?

SHOW CARD Q27 WITH SCALE - ONE ANSWER ONLY PER LINE!

1 - I need further training to cope well with my duties

2 - My duties correspond well with my present skills

3 - I have the skills to cope with more demanding duties

8 - DK/no opinion (spontaneous)

9 - Refusal (spontaneous)

- How did you find this question? Was it easy or difficult to choose between these alternatives – how come?
- You said that... can you tell me more...What does this mean in practice...how does it show...in what kind of situations...?
- In general, how do you feel, can you make enough use of your competencies, skills, creativity in your job? If not, what kind of problems are there, what are the obstacles...?

(MODIFIED)

Q28 Over the past 12 months, have you undergone any of the following types of training to improve your skills or not?

READ OUT	Yes	No	DK	Refusal
A - Training paid for or provided by your employer?	1	2	8	9
B - Training paid for by yourself (NEW)	1	2	8	9
C - On-the-job training (co-workers, supervisors) (NEW)	1	2	8	9
D - Other forms of on-site training and learning (e.g. self-learning, online tutorials etc) (NEW)	1	2	8	9
E - Other (SPONTANEOUS)	1	2	8	9

KEEP THESE CONCEPTS AS BROAD AS POSSIBLE, WE WANT TO SEE AND HEAR WHAT ALL KINDS OF TRAINING // DEVELOPMENT THERE CAN BE

- What do you understand by the definition ‘training to improve your skills’? What is it/ what would it be in your job?

For each:

- What do you understand by this kind of training?
- YES: You told that you have attended training [paid for or provided by your employer / on-the-job....]. Can you tell me more?
- YES: Was it targeted to the particular skills you need in your tasks, or was it more generally useful?
- YES: What do you assess, how well could you make use of this training in your own work?
- NO: You told that you have not assisted in training paid for or provided by your employer. Can you tell me more, how come? Would you have needed some training this kind?

Try to find out the reasons behind not having participated in training – was the respondent not given the opportunity to participate in training she/he would have needed, could she/he not use the opportunity provided e.g. because of family reasons, time pressure at work...Did she/he not want to use the opportunity / was not interested / felt that did not need any/this kind of training...?

Here you could stop for a while and encourage the interviewee to contemplate about the possibilities for training in his/her job and his/her willingness to take part. If there has been training, has it been useful? What is the obstacle of not getting training – inequality in possibilities to obtain training, based on what? What about the relation between training and competencies / learning on job / importance for the motivation and job satisfaction...

Q30 Over the past 12 months, have you, or not...?

READ OUT	Yes	No	DK	Refusal
C - Been subject to regular formal assessment of your work performance? (NEW)	1	2	8	9
D - Discussed work-related problems with your boss?	1	2	8	9

What did you think about these questions?

What do you understand by this?

Q30C:

YES: You said that you have (not) been subject to regular assessment of your work performance. Could you tell me more? How did you feel about it?

YES: Did you discuss about your job development /development or training opportunities or needs during this assessment (or in some other context, when?)?

Q30D:

- You said that you have (not) discussed work-related problems with your boss. Could you tell me more?
- YES: Were these discussions out of your own initiative? What kind of problems were discussed? How often do you discuss normally? Has it been useful?
- NO: How come have you not discussed? Would you have liked to? Would there have been need for such discussions? On which matters?

Q18 In general, do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work very well, well, not very well or not at all well?

1 - Very well

2 - Well

3 - Not very well

4 - Not at all well

8 - DK/no opinion (spontaneous)

9 - Refusal (spontaneous)

- What do you think about this question? Can you repeat me what the question was about, in your own word?
- What do you understand by ‘family or social commitments outside work’ ?
- You answered....Can you tell a bit more?
- What about further training and competence development? Did you think of it? How does it fit in with your work-family-balance?

WE CONSIDER THIS QUESTION BASICALLY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF HAVING OPPORTUNITIES/TIME/ENERGY IN REGARD TO SELF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING.

Q37 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements describing some aspects of your job?

SHOW CARD Q37 WITH SCALE - ONE ANSWER ONLY PER LINE!

READ OUT	Almost always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Almost never	DK	Refusal
A - I might lose my job in the next 6 months	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
B - I am well paid for the work I do	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
C - My job offers good prospects for career advancement	1	2	3	4	5	8	9
E - At work, I have opportunities to learn and grow	1	2	3	4	5	8	9

- Have you any comments on these questions? What about the response alternatives?

For each:

- Could you tell more?
- What do you mean by agreeing/disagreeing / neither agreeing nor disagreeing? Can you tell more...
- What are the problems in this respect, in your opinion?
- Q37B: How important is it/ would it be that you are/would be well paid?
- Q37C/D How do you understand ‘good prospects for career advancement’/ ‘opportunities to learn and grow’?

How important are prospects for career advancement for you? Can you tell more...

And how important is it for you to develop in your job? Can you tell more...

Probe also something like this:

If you think about endeavours to develop (your)self /oneself in your job, on the one hand, and the salary, on the other, do you find that these efforts have had/would have any impact e.g. on (your) salaryor are they/would they be compensated in some way? In this respect, has it been/ would it be rewarding to attend to further training / to develop your competencies? Have you had/ Would you have any returns of it? In what way? Is it enough in your opinion?

Do you sometimes think changing jobs?

- Can you tell me more? What makes you feel like this (wants to change/does not want to?)
- (To what kind of job/employment would you like to change?)
- Probe for are the opportunities to job development or the lack of them connected to this wish to change / not to change job?

At the end of the interview, encourage the subject to contemplate what would be, in his/her opinion, the best ways to develop in his/her job or to develop his/her job?

What could he do him/herself in this respect?

What could the employer do to promote development opportunities?

Is it up to oneself or is the responsibility of the employer to provide training? What kinds of training.

Etc...

Finish by asking whether there would still be something to add in relation to themes discussed / the questions etc...

Annex 5: Translation problems

The question	Country	Problematic term	Translation	Potential problem	Suggested translation
Q24B Your methods of work?	Austria	Methods of work	die Arbeitsmethoden	Unfamiliar word	'das Vorgehen bei der Erledigung einer Aufgabe'
Q24C Your speed or rate of work?	Austria	Rate of work	'das Arbeitstempo oder die Einteilung Ihrer Arbeit'	Wrong translation: 'scheduling of work'	'das Arbeitstempo
	Czech	Rate of work	'Rychlost nebo objem'	Wrong translation: 'scheduling of work'	'rychlost a tempo vaší práce'
	Finland	Rate of work	'työnopeuteenne tai työmääräanne	Wrong translation: 'scheduling of work'	työnopeuteenne tai työtahitme
	Portugal	Rate of work	'cadência	Unfamiliar word	o ritmo ou a velocidade do seu trabalho
Q23A-F Generally, does your main paid job involve, or not...?	Finland	Generally	Yleensä	Refers strongly to temporal frequency, often/usually	Yleisesti ottaen
Q23D Solving unforeseen problems on your own?	Austria	On your own	selbständig	translated as 'independently', associated more positively than the original concept	
Q23D Monotonous tasks?	Czech	Monotonous	monotónní	Unfamiliar word	'jednotvárné' or 'stereotypní'
Q23E Complex tasks?	Austria	Complex	vielschichtig	Unfamiliar word, conflated with another, literally 'multifaceted'	
Q25B You can get assistance from your superior, if you ask for it?	Czech	Complex	unterstützt	Unfamiliar word	Needs additional information
Q25K You have the feeling of doing useful work	Austria	Useful	sinvoll	Wrong translation: 'support'	hilfe bekommen
Q25L You find your job intellectually demanding	Austria	Intellectually demanding	duševní	translated as 'meaningful'	nützlich
Q25M You find your job emotionally demanding	Czech	The whole statement	duševní	Wrong translation: 'mentally demanding' or 'hard on soul'	intelektivě
Q20 B_B Working at very high speed?	Finland	At very high speed	You have to use a lot of emotions at work	Elicits different (more positive) connotations than the original statement	Työnnä on tunnetasolla vaativaa
Q20 B_B Working to tight deadlines?	Austria	tight deadlines	Ein hohes Arbeitstempo	Missing word 'very'	Ein sehr hohes Arbeitstempo
	Portugal	tight deadlines	'Arbeiten unter Termindruckcadência'	Unfamiliar word	velocidade
	Czech	tight deadlines	pracovat na pevně dané termíny	A slightly different meaning, 'under dead-line pressure'	
	Portugal	tight deadlines	de prazos muito rígidos e muito curtos	Wrong translation: 'fixed dead-lines'	prazos apertados

The question	Country	Problematic term	Translation	Potential problem	Suggested translation
Q28C On-the-job training (co-workers, supervisors)?	Portugal	on-the-job	formação no local de trabalho”	Translated as 'training at company's premises'	Formação em posto de trabalho (colégas, supervisores)?
Q28D Other forms of on-site training and learning (e.g. self-learning, on-line tutorials, etc)?	Portugal			Missing the word 'on-site'	Outro tipo de formação ou aprendizagem no local de trabalho (por ex: auto-aprendizagem, se-minários na internet, etc.
Q30D Discussed work-related problems with your boss?	Austria	the whole statement		Possibly provocative wording in the cultural context	
	Portugal	discuss	'discussão'	The term used refers to argument and conflicts	'conversou' or 'falou'
In general, do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments out-side work very well, well, not very well or not at all well?	Austria	Social commitments		Translation 'social obligations' a much narrower concept than the original one, refers to formal obligations not including firends, neighbours etc.	
	Finland			Translation 'dealing with your private life' is a much broader concept than the original one, referring to 'everything outside work”	
Q37C My job offers good prospects for career advancement	Finland	Prospects	valmiudet	Wrong translation: 'abilities'	näkymät
Q37E At work, I have opportunities to learn and grow	Austria	learn and grow	mich weiterzubilden und weiterzuentwickeln	Translation 'further educate and develop' associates with formal training	