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Teamwork and its contribution to High Performance Workplace Organisation – Austria

This is the national contribution by Austria to the topic report on teamwork submitted by FORBA.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Q.0 Firstly, the correspondents are asked to describe shortly the surveys (dates, coverage, size and response rates, in case of qualitative surveys the leading methodology) used in answering the questions. Correspondents are asked to report on relevant available surveys such as:

Q.0.1 working conditions national representative surveys (quantitative methodology)

Issues of work organisation in general and team work in particular are not covered in the relevant Austrian representative surveys on working conditions. The working conditions surveys in Austria are carried out as supplementary modules of the Austrian Mikrozensus. The two supplementary modules carried out in 1999 and 1994 had a limited approach to working conditions focused on working environment risks and other stress factors associated with work-related illness. In the meantime, the supplementary or ad-hoc modules of the Austrian Mikrozensus dealing with working conditions are an integrated part of the European Labour Force Survey (LFS), carried out according to EU standards, which means that the European Commission defines the LFS ad-hoc modules, which are obligatory for all member states. Even though the topic of the ad-hoc module in 2004 was "Work organisation and flexible working-time arrangements" the module only covers flexible working-time patterns and their convenience for personal life and certain forms of employment but hardly anything on work organisation.

Another reason why there is no representative quantitative data on the extent of team work and its specifications in Austria is the fact that Austria was not covered by the large European quantitative surveys on this topic, such as the EPOC-survey or "New Forms of Work Organisation: The Obstacles to Wider Diffusion" (study by Business Decisions Limited for DG employment and social affairs, 2002)[1].

[1] Austria only appears in the qualitative part of this study in the form of three case studies.

Q.0.2 other establishment of company surveys (quantitative methodology - e.g. larger sample of employees; structured questionnaire used)

Quality of work in Call centres. Case study Austria within the *Global Call Centre Industry Project* by Annika Schönauer / FORBA, 2005 (Study 5):

The standardised management (telephone) survey carried out in Austria for the *Global Call-Centre Industry Project* on employment, HR policy and work organisation included 96 Austrian call centres, employing no less than a total of 9,100 agents.

Another study on "virtual team work"2 (study 3) used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. But the quantitative online-survey only covers 19 (!!) employees, so the results are very limited. The aim of the online questionnaire, which was structured and standardised was to gather information regarding the way virtual teams function. The survey was based on a model (with indicators and variables differentiated between input-process-output) worked out by Lurey/Raisinghani3. Most of the 19 respondents work in one large IT-company.

Q.0.3 qualitative studies (at different levels)

Studies where qualitative methods have been used to understand teamwork and its consequences.

Note: Please label each survey with abbreviation which will be used when answering next sections of questionnaire to indicate the source survey.

The problem is that it is not possible to compensate for the lack of quantitative surveys and studies by data and information from qualitative studies. Even in this respect, team work is not a hot topic in the academic community in Austria. We can refer only to four very limited studies. In addition two of these are from the mid 90s and cover only one individual case study.

New forms of work organisation: Case study Austria (Flecker, Krenn 1994 (Study 1)

This case study carried out 1994 by Jörg Flecker and Manfred Krenn focus on the implementation process of new forms of work organisation (with the elements functional integration, team work and continuous improvement process) at an Austrian plant of a German auto-industry group and is based on qualitative interviews on all levels of the plant from management to group workers and works council.

Team work in the banking sector, 1996 by Margret Beisheim (Study 2)

A doctoral thesis on the empirical basis of five case studies in the banking sector, but only one is located in Austria, the others are German banks. The case study based on

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[2] Eichmann Hubert, Grunt Gabriele, Mayr Andrea, Saupe Bernhard, Schwarz-Wölzl Maria: Virtuelle Teams. Räumlich verteilte Projektzusammenarbeit in Unternehmen, Open-Source-Gruppen und E-Learning-Kursen, Vienna 2003

[3] Lurey, Jeremy S. / Raisinghani, Mahesh S. 2001: An empirical study of best practices in virtual teams; in: Information & Management 38, 523-544

qualitative interviews at all levels of the bank deals with the implementation of Quality circles.

Virtual teams: Project cooperation on distance in companies, Open Source Groups and E-learning courses by Eichmann Hubert, Grunt Gabriele, Mayr Andrea, Saupe Bernhard, Schwarz-Wölzl Maria, 2003 (Study 3)

The qualitative part of the study consists of 10 interviews with managers, project leaders, project workers, works council in IT companies focusing on their experience with virtual team work.

New Forms of Work Organisation: The Obstacles to Wider Diffusion". Study by Business Decisions Limited for DG employment and social affairs, 2002 (Study 4)

In this European study, Austria was not included in the quantitative survey but represented by three case studies. The case studies are based on literature review and interviews (telephone and or personal interviews). But the standardised format of the two-to-three-page reports indicates that they were not in-depth case studies. The focus of the case studies was on obstacles and problems in the implementation process of new forms of work organisation (including team work).

As one can see from this overview, the empirical basis on team work in Austria is more than thin. Even at the end of the eighties and beginning nineties, where "team work" as a consequence of the MIT study was really a very hot topic only two small and limited studies were carried out in Austria. In recent years, where the general interest in this issue has not been very high, we find another two limited studies. That's why all the answers in this questionnaire are in scientific terms not far reaching and should be taken with a pinch of salt.

Q.1 National correspondents are asked to give question wordings and figures which deal with the incidence of teamwork in their countries.

Question wordings (Q.1a)

National representative surveys and quantitative case studies:

The only survey we can refer to is the online-questionnaire of study 3 and this does not contain any question referring to the incidence of virtual team work in the company, because only virtual team workers were invited to take part.

Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.1.b)

As indicated above, no quantitative data from national representative quantitative surveys concerning the **extent of teamwork** is available in Austria.

Content and main findings – company surveys, case studies or other qualitative research (Q.1.c)

Correspondents are asked to give the main findings emerging from the most recent case studies on the issue of **the extent of teamwork** (the summary and expert reflexion of existing case studies on that issue is required).

Study 1: In 1994, team work was implemented in all areas of the shop floor in the Austrian plant covered. In this respect, the Austrian factory was the most successful of all plants in the auto-manufacturing group. The management indicated that the very high percentage of skilled workers was the decisive advantage for the implementation of new forms of work organisation compared to other plants.

Study 2: In the Austrian bank, team work in form of quality circles was implemented. First, this is not a form of permanent team work. In the case study the work in the quality circle was limited with three hours per month and member, which is very few. Second, only one quality circle team per unit was implemented, which makes it clear that only a minority of employees took part. Third, there was a big difference in activity of the particular teams. In 1990, eight quality Circles were established, but six years later only of two them survived.

Study 3: It is indicated that project work (as a form of team work) is the dominant form of work organisation in IT companies. This means that nearly all IT workers are affected by team work. But not all IT workers are engaged in permanent team work. In fact, phases of individual work alternate with project team work. With regard to team work, IT employees normally have experience with different forms of project-based team work (virtual teams and teams in the plant). Often they are engaged in different project teams at the same time. Taking into account the relevant literature in the field of work organisation, in IT companies this result could be seen as typical for the sector.

Study 4: In none of the three case-study reports on Austria (two from the public service sector, one a small service company in tourism) is any detailed information on the character and the extent of team work indicated.

Q.2 Do in the national representative surveys or other surveys exist questions dealing with form and organisation of the team?

Question wordings (Q.2.a)

National representative surveys and quantitative case studies: We are interested how national representative surveys and quantitative case studies cover **form and organization of the team**. Correspondents are asked to give relevant existing question wordings to this issue.

Study 5: In the call-centre study, two questions regarding team work were included. These refer to the extent of different forms of teamwork in the call-centre sector.

Question wording:

What percentage of core employees are organised into self-managed or semi autonomous team? (That is, teams in which employees supervise their own work and make their own

decisions about tasks or work methods)?

What percentage of core employees participate with supervisors or managers in task forces, problem-solving groups, or quality improvement committees?

Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.2.b)

Correspondents are asked to give figures on the issue of **form and organization of the team** from national representative quantitative surveys. What is the incidence of different types of teamwork? Which types of teamwork are characteristic for different occupations, sectors, company size or type of ownership?

The findings of the CC-study (study 5) indicate that 28.5% of the core employees in call centres work in self managed or semi-autonomous teams, and 35.4% participate with supervisors or managers in task forces, problem-solving groups, or quality improvement committees. According to different types of call centre the distribution is the following: The highest percentage of employees in self-managed or semi-autonomous teams is found in inhouse call centres (33.4%) followed by external call-centre service providers (26.9%) and subcontracting companies which have a rather small proportion of 12.9%. Concerning quality circles and problem-solving groups the external call-centre service providers (51 %) are top followed by inhouse call centres (30.7%) and subcontracting companies (9.8%).

Content and main findings –company surveys, case studies or other qualitative research (Q.2.c)

Correspondents are asked to give the main findings emerging from the case studies or qualitative research on the issue of **form and organization of the team**. What is the incidence of different types of teamwork? Which types of teamwork are characteristic for different occupations, sectors, company size or type of ownership? (summary and expert reflexion of existing case studies on that issue is required).

Study 1: In the auto-engine factory, the teams are more like discussion groups than real team working groups. That means that it is not team work in the sense of a team cooperation in the work process but more in the sense of quality circles. The regular team meetings are focused on the improvement of the production process also including aspects of working conditions.

Study 2: Whereas in the motor-engine plant all employees on the shop floor were affected by the team meetings, this is not the case in the bank. Here, the participation in the quality circle is voluntarily; the concept design only contains one quality circle per department and the time was strictly limited. This means that whereas in the first case study the team meetings were an element of a new structure of the work process, in the bank is more like an additional element to the old work organisation.

Study 3: Various forms of team work are in practice in the IT sector. The basic form is project team work which means to work out a specific project in a cooperative way over a fixed period in a fixed team. This is the main form of work organisation in the IT sector.

Project team work can assume the form of virtual team work, if the members of the project team are located in different plants and also the form of cross-functional teams. It depends of the content and the aim of a project. In the study there is no information on the extent of these different forms of team work. But the qualitative interviews indicate that rising cost pressure and business competition leads to an increase in virtual team work. The IT companies are trying to use the lower labour costs in the central and eastern European countries or even in India by outsourcing certain tasks in a project to the plants there, so that virtual team work is becoming more and more common. A second motivation for this trend is to use the advantages of different time-zones (for example in India) to force the pace of project work. Three quarters of the respondents to the online-survey in this study work in international virtual teams.

With regard to cross-functional teams: 12 out of 19 respondents stated that they are working in virtual teams with cross-functional composition of the members.

Q.3 Does teamwork increase autonomy of employees in decision making about their work? Which degrees of self-regulation can be distinguished?

Please give also figures showing association between teamwork and individual worker's autonomy. In this respect crosstabs of autonomy (YES/NO) and teamwork (YES/NO) are required.

Question wordings (Q.3.a)

National representative surveys and quantitative case studies: We are interested how national representative surveys and quantitative case studies cover autonomy of members in a team (See examples above). Correspondents are asked to give relevant question wordings to this issue.

No wordings available

Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.3.b)

Correspondents are asked to give figures on the issue of autonomy in a team eventually autonomy at work from national representative quantitative surveys (crosstabs are preferred, correlations, other reported associations).

We cannot provide any quantitative data referring to autonomy in team work.

Content and main findings – case studies or other qualitative research (Q.3.c)

Correspondents are asked to give the main findings emerging from case studies or qualitative research on the issue of teamwork and autonomy. We are interested in to what extent the growth in autonomy within the team results in better group performance and higher job satisfaction (the summary and expert reflexion of existing case studies on that issue is required).

Study 1: As mentioned above, the team concept in the motor-engine plant does not contain autonomy in the work process itself, but some elements of participation. The team speaker

is elected by the team members and the team has the competence to plan their members' leave periods, co-determination in further training matters and to decide on workplace rotation within the team. The case study shows very clearly that the character of the work determines to a high degree the extent to which these competencies can be realised by the teams. On the assembly lines, where the cycle hardly leaves any room for manoeuvre for the workers, they were unable to use the opportunities of the team concept. This example shows very clearly that in terms of autonomy you cannot combine a delegation of competencies and responsibility to (discussion) teams with an unmodified repetitive Taylorist work system like assembly lines. But the findings from other studies suggest that this is common practice in car industry. This neo-Taylorist approach was described by a German car manager: Springer (1999),[4] as a new type of "standardised team work", which means a synthesis of repetitive work and "semi-autonomous" team work.

The bank case study illustrates a similar phenomenon in a service-sector context. The limited approach of the quality circles, which found its expression in an extensive regulation for the work of the QCs, minimised the space for autonomy for its members. In this case it was a combination of (isolated) participative elements with the unmodified bureaucratic organisational structure of the bank. On the basis of the untouched bureaucratic hierarchy, the participation approach of the QCs was doomed to failure from the outset.

In study 4, the information on the degree of autonomy for the employees in team work is very superficial. The authors stated that in all three cases the teams are responsible for solving all operative problems, quality assurance and for the achievement of stipulated objectives. But against the background of the very limited description of the cases it is difficult to interpret what this really means for the autonomy of the team workers.

Q.4. To what extent are workers satisfied with team based way of working? Can you also report on association between overall job satisfaction and teamwork presence? Does teamwork increase overall job satisfaction?

Question wordings (Q.4.a)

National representative surveys and quantitative case studies: We are interested how national representative surveys and quantitative case studies cover satisfaction with teamwork. Correspondents are asked to give relevant question wordings to this issue.

No data available.

[4] Springer, R. (1999): Von der teilautonomen zur standardisierten Gruppenarbeit. Arbeitspolitische Perspektiven in der Automobilindustrie, in WSI-Mitteilungen 5/99, pp.309-321

Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.4.b)

If direct question on satisfaction with teamwork is available, please give the figures. Correspondents are also asked to give figures on the issue of teamwork (YES/NO) and job satisfaction (SATISFIED/NOT SATISFIED) from national representative quantitative surveys (crosstabs are preferred, correlations, other reported associations).

No findings available.

Content and main findings – case studies or other qualitative research (Q.4.c)

Correspondents are asked to give the main findings emerging from the most recent case studies or qualitative research on the issue of teamwork and job satisfaction (the summary and expert reflexion of existing case studies on that issue is required)

The issue of job satisfaction does not play a role in the available qualitative studies.

Q.5 Does in your country exist any evidence about interconnection between teamwork presence and higher work intensity and probable work overload?

Please report on the results from any available sources (both of qualitative and quantitative nature).

Question wordings (Q.5.a)

National representative surveys and quantitative case studies: We are interested how national representative surveys and quantitative case studies cover the problems of interconnection between teamwork introduction and higher work intensity and higher stress exposure. Correspondents are asked to give relevant question wordings to this issue.

No wordings available.

Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.5.b)

Correspondents are asked to give figures on the issue of interconnection between teamwork introduction and higher work intensity and higher stress exposure from national representative quantitative surveys. Please use both figures from direct questions and also figures form higher level analysis e.g. teamwork (YES/NO), higher risk of stress occurrence (YES/NO) (crosstabs are preferred, correlations, other reported associations).

No findings available.

Content and main findings – case studies or other qualitative research (Q.5.c)

Correspondents are asked to give the main findings emerging from case studies or qualitative research on the issue of teamwork and higher exposure to overload and stress. Is the work intensity or paste of work higher within organisations which have introduced the work in teams? (the summary and expert reflexion of existing case studies on that issue is required)

In the motor-engine plant (study 1) case study we were able refer to an employee survey commissioned by management dealing with the new work organisation. One of the results was that the new forms of work organisation led to work intensification and an increase in time pressure caused by manpower shortage and technical problems. To this extent, it is very difficult to connect team work directly with these effects. It is more the whole concept of the new working structures, in which team work or better team building is one element in connection with new business strategies which leads to these problems.

Also in the virtual team work study, IT workers, who all are involved in project team work as the dominant work organisation form in IT services (and of course in virtual teams), state that there is a high and still rising pressure of work. In their view this comes from shortening of product development circles in Software-development and an increase in short-term projects in general, increasing international as well as internal competition (due to reorganisation processes).

Taking these aspects into account it is very hard in general to isolate the effects of team work on working conditions, in particular on work intensity and work overload. In nearly all cases, the different forms of teamwork are embedded in a broader concept of change aimed at increasing productivity and cost reduction. So it seems to be not the specific form of work organisation or team work but more the overall circumstances (business strategies etc.) which causes problems of work intensity and stress.

Q.6 What is the impact of teamwork on learning environment in organization?

In this question we are following the assumption that teamwork is creating environment for shared responsibility, knowledge and both continuous professional and personal development. We are interested in learning and professional growth opportunities of employees working in team in comparison to the other workers.

Question wordings (Q.6.a)

National representative surveys and quantitative case studies: We are interested how national representative surveys and quantitative case studies cover the problems mentioned above. Correspondents are asked to give relevant question wordings to this issue.

No wordings available.

Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.6.b)

Correspondents are asked to give figures on the issue of interconnection of teamwork and learning opportunities from national representative quantitative surveys. Do team members use the opportunity to enhance their professional skills in workplace training more than other employees working in different organizational structures? (crosstabs are preferred, correlations, other reported associations).

No data available.

Content and main findings – case studies or other qualitative research (Q.6.c)

Correspondents are asked to give the main findings emerging from case studies or other qualitative research on the issue of teamwork and learning. We are interested in what is the extent of sharing the knowledge within the team. Do employees working in teams have better opportunities to learn new things in the job than other workers?" "Is learning environment within team more stimulating?" (the summary and expert reflexion of existing case studies on that issue is required)

One aim of the new forms of work organisation in the motor-engine plant (study 1) was functional integration, which meant that indirect production tasks like quality assurance and ongoing maintenance were integrated in direct production work. The effects regarding the enhancement of professional skills was different. Whereas in the mechanical production department the job enlargement led to a job enrichment, for which 40 workers received certificated further training (as electricians or motor mechanics), in the assembly department there was no job enrichment. The workers there received only an internal further training totalling eight hours for the integration of quality assurance tasks into their assembly work.

In the two case studies (study 4) in the public service sector, increased education and further training directly connected with the implementation of new forms of work organisation took place. The employees become more active in making suggestions for training programmes for themselves, which was not common before. But the training in most cases was very job-specific or focused on the use of information technologies. The authors stated a lack of general skills training, which they consider as very important for the long-term success of high-performance work systems.

(Q.6.d)

It is assumed that teamwork contributes positively to job enrichment and job enlargement (for definition and concept see page n. 8). As these two job characteristics consist of different attributes of work and cannot be measured directly, they must be operationalised. **Can you find in your national studies (both quantitative and qualitative) any reported association between teamwork, job enrichment and job enlargement?**

Q.7 Team effectiveness subjectively perceived

It is probable that when answering this question you will be very limited and there will be no question wordings in representative surveys. For all that we can find at least some evidence how workers asses productivity of company or particular department after being involved in the teamwork (See an example).

Question wordings (Q.7.a)

National representative surveys and quantitative case studies: We are interested how national representative surveys and quantitative case studies cover the problems what is the impact of teamwork introduction on team effectiveness (from the subjective point of view). Correspondents are asked to give relevant question wordings to this issue.

No wordings available.

Content and main findings – national representative surveys (Q.7.b)

Correspondents are asked to give figures on the issue what is the impact of teamwork introduction on team effectiveness subjectively perceived (crosstabs are preferred, correlations, other reported associations).

No quantitative findings available.

Content and main findings – case studies or other qualitative research (Q.7.c)

Correspondents are asked to give the main findings emerging from case studies or other qualitative research on the issue of team effectiveness subjectively perceived (the summary and expert reflexion of existing case studies on that issue is required).

In our case studies the issue of subjectively perceived team effectiveness was not analysed.

Q.8 Please reflect briefly on the existing governmental documents, policies, programs or social partners agreements discussing implementation of new work organization forms with emphasis on teamwork at national level.

The national state level is an important aspect concerning the support of new forms of work organisation. But an overview on initiatives in the member states show that the situation is very different. A study on this topic (Brödner/Latniak, 2003) shows that there is a big north-south-difference in Europe. In the northern countries like, Denmark, Sweden and Finland plus Germany various programmes to support the implementation of new forms of work organisation in different ways were established. But in Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain no activities on this issue at national level existed..

The existence of such programmes is a good indicator of the importance of new forms of work organisation at national level. In Austria, new forms of work organisation were not and are not a hot topic for the government and the social partners. Taking into consideration another result of the Brödner/Latniak study, this is surprising: the study indicates, that support programmes that focus on changes of work organisation were established mainly in member states with traditionally cooperative industrial relations between the social partners (Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Finland). In this respect Austria is the exception that proves the rule. Even if we have one the highest corporate social partnership in Europe, the question of the development of new forms of work organisation has not played any role in the industrial policy or in social partner

agreements both at national and sector level in Austria. As mentioned above in Austria exist neither data on the extent of new forms of work organisation nor support programmes. There has so far been no public debate on this issue in our country.