

ETUI-ETUC Conference, 27-29 June 2016, Brussels

Shaping the new world of work – The impacts of digitalisation and robotisation

Panel 8: Psychosocial risks of future forms of work

Participants:

- Jean-Christophe Berthod, SECAFI
- Evangelia Demerouti, Technical University Eindhoven
- Martin Sonnberger, Porr

Discussant: Harald Wiedenhofer, EFFAT

Moderator: Jonas Rauch

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Since several years, one of the biggest health and safety challenges workers are facing in all sectors is psychosocial risks (PSRs).¹ One major reason – and thus challenge to tackle - is that the awareness of PSRs in companies is still often very poor and remained in a taboo sphere whereby it is the individual (worker) whom is considered weak and unable to cope with the demands of his/her job.

Any job (so irrespective of the activity, sector, etc.) requires the need to find a good balance between on the one hand “job demands” (physical, mental, workload, consumer demands, etc.) and the availability of “job resources” (e.g. work autonomy, support of colleagues and superiors, training, etc.) to enable the worker to properly fulfil their tasks/jobs. Although the overall impact of digitalisation and robotisation on PSRs is difficult to predict and will differ from job to job, clear is that their impact will lead to an increase on the job demand side (e.g. cognitive/mental demands, workload, mismatches in task-work design or task-skills, intrusions in private life, etc.) whereas the job resources may remain stable or even decrease (e.g. less support by (disappeared) supervisors, etc.) Major challenge and the same time priority action, according to Demerouti, is thus to turn digitalisation/robotisation into a resource and not (only) in a demand and this for both workers and their managers/supervisors.

Other priority actions to meet these challenges, are firstly to increase awareness of PSRs at all levels (European, national, sectoral, workplace) and, secondly, to promote and properly implement the existing coherent EU regulatory framework on H&S at the work place, and in particular the European framework agreements on work-related stress and harassment and violence at work.

Furthermore, and as the introduction of digitalisation/robotisation, is very likely to have a very diversified impact on the workplace leading at the same time to new tools to be used, a new work organisation, a new working environment, new ways of management, etc., preventing its negative impact in

¹ H. Wiedenhofer quoted a « European study of 2013 » indicating that the cost of these risks amounted to 617 billion euros/year. Unclear which study he referred to.

general and in particular in relation to PSRs requires 1) a holistic approach looking at the whole work process, 2) involving and drawing on the experiences of all actors (workers (representatives), managers and where relevant and needed external experts) and 3) to ensure that this “transformation” is negotiated with the social partners in the workplace.

In sum, preventing a negative impact of digitalisation/robotisation on health and safety and PSRs in particular requires to adapt the workplace to the worker and not the worker to the workplace!