

b uilding the workplace of tomorrow



“ *Demographic changes and the reorganisation of workplaces do not stop at political borders. This allows us to enter into a new European dimension of collaboration.* ”

Innovation in work organisation is important to both employers (with its potential to increase productivity and competitiveness) and employees (creating better jobs and better social conditions). Information remains fragmented on how best to adapt workplace organisation to developments in information and manufacturing technology, and to factors of social change. The WORK-IN-NET Coordination Action (CA) will collect and analyse information on existing national programmes, opening the way for joint, transnational initiatives in the future. Only by increasing the quality of work, the creativity of employees, and the flexibility of work organisation will Europe be able to meet the demands of the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

Modernisation of the workplace is vital if the European Union is to achieve the goal set by the Lisbon European Council – to be the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010, capable of sustainable economic growth and with greater social cohesion. Successful performance depends on many workplace factors. IT applications are perhaps the most obvious, but also crucial are changes in social conditions and work organisation. These include availability of skills, the ageing of the workforce, equality of opportunity for women and minority groups, lifelong learning, and many more.

A new broom is needed

Organisational innovation generates what the Commission refers to as ‘high-trust, high-performance’ workplaces, and is essential to reap the full benefits of new technologies. The WORK-IN-NET CA focuses on work-related innovation by bringing together 12 partners from seven countries, with another seven possible future partners. The partners are ministries or project management agencies, all involved in the funding of research and innovation. They will consult other interest groups via national coordinators, and also with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, and the European Agency for Safety and Health.

The aim of WORK-IN-NET is to set up sustainable communication links between national research programme managers on work-related innovation, and to raise awareness of its value. The focus will be on the key themes of innovation in human resource management for improving the quality of working life and productivity, corporate social cultures for innovative work organisation, and forming broad alliances for implementing sustainable regional innovation. Information will also be shared with the other Member States of the EU where innovative work organisation is less advanced, contributing to reducing the economic and social differences between north and south, and Eastern and Western Europe.

Two ways of working

WORK-IN-NET will take two complementary approaches throughout to improve the coordination of the national research programmes in this area. The ‘RTD management approach’ is concerned with establishing joint and transnational research programmes to develop innovative methods of work organisation. In parallel, the ‘RTD thematic approach’ will set up pilot models, primarily to identify the key challenges affected by strong interactions between markets, social partners, work-related organisations and public bodies. Each theme will be examined against the broadest background of work in relation to societal and other issues, such as sustainable (economic) development and aspects of the environment.

