

Chapter 14

Workplace Innovation Context in Poland: Between Structure and Agency

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14.1 Introduction

Our analysis explores the cultural and institutional context of the process of creating and implementing significant changes and innovations, as well as the effects of their implementation. We concentrate in this chapter specifically on workplace innovation (WPI) defined as a social and participatory process which shapes work organisation and working life, combining their human, organisational and technological dimensions (Howaldt et al. 2016: 3). We depart from the emphasis of the social need as a trigger for innovation and assume that the ability to fulfil the employees' needs at the workplace shapes the quality of working life.

Therefore, in this chapter we perceive WPI as a form of social innovation, understood as 'new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships

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or collaborations' (Murray et al. 2010). We show that workplace innovative measures are implemented under the existing social, institutional and cultural circumstances that, to varying degrees, can be conducive to the diffusion and implementation of innovations in organisations, and influence their effectiveness as tools that positively affect the quality of life and company performance.

We start with the outline of the cultural, institutional and economic context of innovation in Poland. Cultural and institutional patterns present in the Polish context contradict patterns supportive for WPI. It may be related to the post-communist background. Research suggests that employees in Central and Eastern Europe (including Poland) display external types of motivation typical for traditional bureaucracies, requiring close monitoring from the supervisors and do not feel responsible neither for problems solving nor for the pursuit of corporate mission (Marody and Lewicki 2010; Gadomska-Lila 2011).

In the empirical part of this chapter, we reconstruct workers' perceptions of the implementation of innovation in their organisations. We focus on specific relations between (1) attitudes and aspirations of employees at different levels, and (2) numerous aspects of formal and informal organisational structures, such as relations of dependency, hierarchy and leadership styles, conventional communication methods, reward and discipline systems.

14.2 Specificity of Institutional and Cultural Conditions of WPI in Poland

Polish enterprises are among the least innovative in Europe. The percentage of innovative enterprises engaged in technological (product and process) innovation in Poland stands at 16%, while those implementing non-technological (marketing and organisational) innovation account for 15.5% of all enterprises (Fig. 14.1). Poland occupies the penultimate position among European countries (Niec 2015). It may be related to the Polish post-communist background, e.g. communist legacy leads Polish employees to maintain external rather than internal motivation to work and to expect rules and regulations rather than experiment and make own decisions (Marody and Lewicki 2010). It also concerns Polish managers who are not likely to trust their employees enough to let them take risk (Gadomska-Lila 2011).

Experience from this communist economic system can contribute to lack of willingness and know-how to work in teams and in a context of cooperation. Another example of a consequence of the post-communist regime is that Polish employees seem to be not interested in interaction and building a workplace community (Marody et al. 2010) which is crucial for innovation development (Kohtamäki et al. 2004).

Low levels of innovation come with low labour productivity. The latter systematically increases through the years, nevertheless the productivity is still three times lower than the average of the European Union. Polish workers typically spend

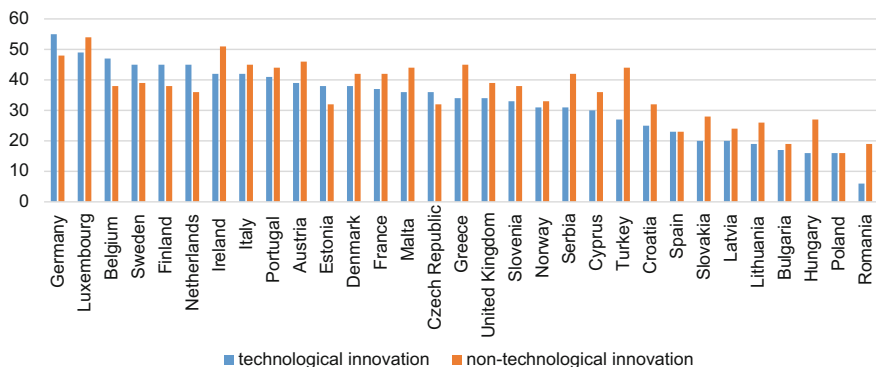


Fig. 14.1 Share of innovative enterprises in EU (technological and non-technological innovation combined). *Source* study based on Eurostat data (Niec 2015, p. 16)

39.9 h per week at work; in terms of working hours, they rank seventh among OECD countries and first among the Member States of the EU with the average 36.8 h per week at work; the lowest rate is found in the Netherlands—28.9 h (OECD 2014). This means that although Polish employees work long, their labour productivity is among the lowest in Europe.

When juxtaposing the information about low labour productivity with data about low levels of employee participation in decision making processes WPI appears as a great opportunity. Harnessing workers' knowledge and skills to streamline organisational processes and raise the quality of working life seems to be a significant win-win solution. But the temptation to use 'ready to wear' models of WPI, especially those developed in Western European countries, should be resisted. On the one hand the barriers to the introduction of workplace innovation do not significantly differ from those observed elsewhere in the CEE (see e.g. for Hungary, France, Netherlands, Spain, UK: Makó and Illéssy 2015), namely: narrow and anachronistic understanding of innovation as a technological phenomenon. This is evident at different levels of policies supporting innovation in CEE Member States like Poland and Hungary; conservative and formal nature of public aid criteria; unfavourable cultural patterns, such as low propensity for risk taking among investors, excessive faith in the free market and competition as the sole sources of innovation.

On the other hand, this standard list should be supplemented with some information about barriers connected with the specificity of Polish socio-economic cultural and institutional context, which we consider especially unfavourable for implementation of cooperative, empowering and participatory initiatives at the workplaces, especially those aiming at improving the quality of working life.

First, in terms of socioeconomic context, Poland, along with other post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia) is implementing a distinctive model of capitalism called *dependent market economy* (Nölke and Vliegthart 2009) or *liberal dependent*

post-communist economy (King 2007). Dependent economies have comparative advantages in the assembly and production of relatively complex and durable consumer goods. These comparative advantages are based on institutional complementarities between skilled, but cheap, labour; the transfer of technological innovations within transnational enterprises; and the provision of capital via foreign direct investment. Combination of these factors heavily influences innovation patterns within Polish economy.

Local innovativeness in general is not incentivised—multinational corporations often import innovation into the region because they consider CEE economies as production places for semi standardised goods and services and not for research & development (Högselius 2003; Bendyk 2015). Additionally, since the comparative advantage of these economies relays upon low wages, the space for the quality of work improvement is limited. Indeed, Polish wages are one of the lowest in the EU. Median gross hourly earnings in Poland is 4,3 EUR and 7,7 PPS (Purchasing Power Standard) which ranks Poland 21st and 17th respectively, among EU countries with the average 12 EUR and 12 PPS, according to Eurostat.¹

An expected, negative influence of above mentioned factors on the possibilities to create, develop and implement WPI is potentially strengthened by a specific cultural feature of Polish enterprises marked by low levels of employee initiative and participation. Research interprets these phenomena as consequences of high power distance, propensity to adopt and accept autocratic leadership (Dunn 2004; Stocki et al. 2008), as well as generally low levels of social trust (Czapinski and Panek 2015). Interestingly the passive attitudes persist even in the cases when employer expects the initiative, cooperation among employees and autonomy in problem solving (Kochanowicz et al. 2007).

Research suggests that employees in CEE display external types of motivation typical for traditional bureaucracies, requiring close monitoring from the side of supervisors and exact adaptation to existing procedures. They do not feel responsible neither for problem solving nor for the pursuit of corporate goals (Mockańo 2016). Additionally, Polish workers find it difficult to reconcile cooperative attitudes with competitive and antagonistic perceptions of relationships among workers, especially those occupying different levels of the organisational ladder (Kochanowicz et al. 2007).

Hence cultural and institutional patterns present in the Polish context (and to the large extend in other countries of CEE region) contradict patterns supportive for WPI. Further we can expect that lack of employees' participation and the general pressure on the maintenance of low labour costs (typical for dependent market economies) results in highlighting organisational performance as a major goal of innovation and neglecting the goal of quality of working life improvement. Indeed, goals of implementing innovations in Polish SME are mainly profit increase, company development, market share increase or clients' expectations (Sieradzka 2014). These expectations are confirmed by some quantitative research conducted

¹<http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do> Accessed April 12, 2017

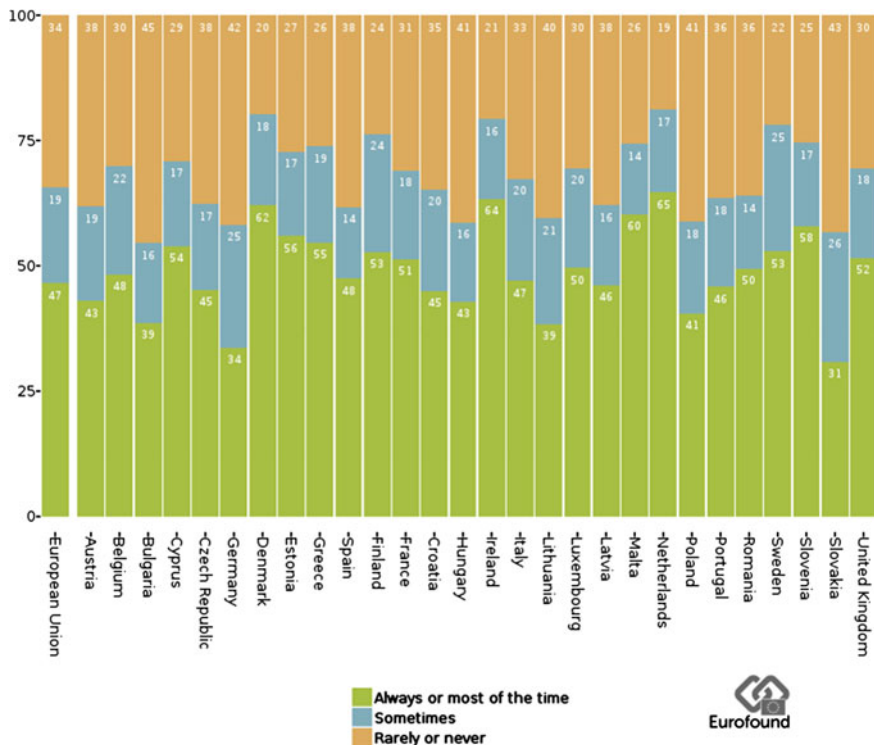


Fig. 14.2 Participation in improving the work organisation or processes, by country (%). *Source* https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pl/surveys/data-visualisation/european-working-conditions-survey-2010?locale=EN&dataSource=EWCs2010&media=png&width=740&question=y10_q51d_3&plot=euBars&countryGroup=linear&subset=bd_age&subsetValue=All. Accessed April 12, 2017

on WPI in Poland. European Working Conditions Study reveals that 41% of Polish employees has rarely or never participated in improving work organisation or processes (see Fig. 14.2) comparing to 34% EU-level average.

Considering the historically rooted passivity of workers, it is not surprising that 73% of Polish employees are satisfied with the way their opinions were considered when decisions were made about their work (European Commission 2014). This result ranks Poland even above the average EU-level (70% total satisfied employees).

Moreover, quantitative research conducted among Polish workers confirms that there is a significant relationship between social trust, attempts to introduce WPI and the outcomes of these attempts. A research conducted among 500 Polish service sector employees showed the relationship between social capital at work and WPI. Social capital at work was measured by levels of trust, solidarity and reciprocity that are shared among members of the same community, as well as networks, collective action and mutual responsibility (Kouvonen et al. 2006).

Lower levels of social capital at work were related to lower levels of all WPI factors analysed: strategic orientation on the environment, organising smarter, product—market improvement and flexible work. Simultaneously it was also found that lower WPI was related to lower employees work engagement, work ability and higher intent to leave work (Mockało 2016).

14.3 Research and Methodology

14.3.1 Purpose of This Research

Our goal is to further explore the role of social trust and employees' participation in the processes of innovation creation, development and implementation. We assume that unfavourable features of Polish cultural and institutional context for WPI deliver a good opportunity to reflect on the role of these factors. Research on WPI related organisational processes and causal relationships between different organisational factors 'producing' innovation was focused on best practices and innovation leaders (Hogan and Coote 2014). But the incongruity between the original cultural, institutional and organisational context and the participatory and empowering nature of WPI can impede the introduction of changes prescribed by various WPI models and hence influence the possibilities to achieve the goals like the rise in organisational performance and the quality of working life.

Even authors developing WPI models based on best practices warn to use them as a blueprint or recipe book and indicate that "even within more flexible structures, mistrust and disempowerment can be embedded in the systems and processes that shape decision-making, resource allocation, standard operating procedures and performance management. They can reflect a culture of centralised control and micro-management which requires careful dismantling (Totterdill et al. 2016).

Yet, the issue of cultural, institutional and organizational context unfavourable for WPI, as well as issue of its dismantling remains under researched. Our research problem is exploring failed and mixed experiences of WPI introduction which aims at contributing to both theorising and the practical implementation of WPI.

14.3.2 Research Questions

To investigate how the innovating process aiming at the improvement of the quality of working life and of organisational performance (i.e., WPI) does unfold in an average Polish enterprise on the level of local perceptions and practices we choose a qualitative, interpretive approach facilitating in-depth understanding of social processes (Silverman 2013). In qualitative research the understanding is acquired through reconstruction of worldviews and practices displayed by the participants of

a given social situation. We regard expressions of regulative, normative, and cognitive structures as institutions; institutions are standards as to what is to be held to be normal, what must be expected, what can be relied upon, which rights and duties are attached to which positions, and what makes sense in the community or social domain for which an institution is valid (Offe 1998, p. 200). We choose an institutional perspective as a departure point since it addresses the core of our considerations: question of how specific features of organisational environments like values, norms, rules and beliefs influence perceptions and practices within organisations itself (Hatch and Cunliffe 2006).

While observing innovation process we focus on the issues of employee participation. It is crucial since WPI “enables employees to participate in organisational change and renewal and hence improve the quality of working life and organisational performance” (Oeij et al. 2015). That is also why we treat employees’ needs and problems as a departure point of innovation process in our research. We assume that if the quality of working life is to be improved, the needs and problems employees are implicitly addressed as well. That is why employees’ participation is needed from the very beginning of the innovation process.

In line with our institutional approach we assume that employees’ ability to participate may be influenced by the individual’s attitudes to innovation (e.g. importance of innovation and innovation processes, trust they may or may not have towards other co-workers and managers) and by the formal and informal organisational structures (e.g. norms, procedures, routines connected to performance assessment, incentives systems, organisational hierarchies). Hence, we ask the following research questions: What is the role of employees in the process of designing and implementing workplace innovation? What is the impact of formal and informal organisational structures in this process? While our research is on innovation, it is not exactly on workplace innovation, but on innovation and change in which we studied the role of employees. We nonetheless speak of workplace innovation or workplace related innovation, because one of the central aspects of WPI is the engagement and involvement of employees in the innovation process (Totterdill et al. 2016), and that is what is exactly the case in our Polish study.

14.3.3 Data Sources and Methods

There were two phases in the research. As a start, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews (I) with managers and four focus group interviews (FGI) with 32 employees from diverse companies that were engaged in workplace related innovation and organisational change to reconstruct a general narrative about innovation and change within organisations. In line with the conceptualisation of WPI as a form of social innovation and the intention to reconstruct local understandings and practices, research tools were prepared to explore the process of innovating with the focus on:

- (a) needs and problems as triggers of innovation (what are the most pressing problems? do workers try to address them, if yes how, if not why? what were the most significant innovations influencing their workplace?);
- (b) participatory aspects of innovation process (how does the process look like? who initiates innovation? how does the employee involvement look like on different stages of the process? who cooperates and communicates with whom with what result?);
- (c) outcomes of innovations (what were the most important outcomes of the process? were the problems solved/needs addressed? examples of successful and unsuccessful innovations).

Selection of interviewees followed a two-stage procedure. First selecting organisations experiencing innovation/ organisational change in their latest year, and then selecting an employee who was engaged in the innovation process. Since our purpose was to observe typical rather than extreme patterns (Patton 1990) we did not seek for neither success nor failure stories. To account for variables typically influencing organisational processes, practices and perceptions (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) we diversified the sample according to the size of the organisation (beneath and above 50 employees), location (big and small and big city—above and below 100 thousand inhabitants), and industry (production and services). When selecting the interviewees within organisations we used their position within the organisational hierarchy (line employees, middle and senior management) as a criterion. We have conducted four FGI with eight participants (per interview) being front line employees and representing different organisations (in sum 32 employees from 32 different organisations) and ten semi-structured interviews with middle management representatives (10 participants from different organisations).

In the second phase, to deepen our knowledge with a context related information we have conducted an exploratory field research. Using the same selection criteria, we have chosen four organisations which were observed during a one-day field visit, in each of them two interviews were conducted (with a top-level manager and a line worker). Further we have conducted participatory observation with a shadowing technique (Czarniawska 2007) in eight organisations. Eight top-management representatives were accompanied ('shadowed') and interviewed by a researcher during their working day. Protocols were organised around the process of innovation and implementation with a special focus on the role of individuals and formal and informal organisational structures. Table 14.1 summarizes our data selection and methods.

Interviews and observation notes were transcribed. Predetermined codes, based on theoretical categories describing the process of innovation, were used to order and analyse the empirical data (Miles and Huberman 1994; Creswell 2014). Chunks of data were bracketed according to a. expressions of needs/problems at the workplace (as the starting point for innovation); b. descriptions of ideas, their generation and communication; c. perceptions of implementation method and d. implementation effects. Through the analysis we used data triangulation and methodological triangulation (Denzin 1978). First one was used in order to compare

Table 14.1 Basic information on the methodology of the qualitative research

Method	Sampling criteria	Number of managers/employees
Focus group interview (FGI)	Industry (production and services) Position (front line employees) Location (big cities)	4 groups \times 8 participants = 32 participants (employees)
Individual in depth interview (IDI)	Industry (production and services) Position (middle level management representatives) Location (small and big cities)	10 interviewees (managers)
Participant observation (shadowing)	Industry (production and services) Position (top management rep.) Location (small and big cities)	8 locations \times 1 participant = 8 participants (employees and top managers)
Mini-case studies (interview and a field visit)	Industry (production and services) Position (top management and front line employees) Size of the company (beneath and above 50 employees)	4 organisations \times 2 interviewees in each = 8 participants (top managers)

perspective of line employees, middle and top management representatives, as well as to juxtapose descriptions coming from those employed in services versus production and small versus big enterprises. Methodological triangulation enabled us to confront individual accounts of innovation process with data coming from observation of organizational practices.

14.4 Results of the Empirical Analysis: From Needs Through Implementing Innovations

In line with the social innovation approach (Murray et al. 2010) we began by analysing interviewees' statements relating to the need for change in terms of behaviour, processes or the material dimension of the workplace. The problems spontaneously discussed by the employees and managers were emerging around three major areas:

(a) Work organisation:

- excessive bureaucracy that hinders and drags out the process of fulfilling the simplest needs;
- low level of autonomy, preventing e.g. the introduction of flexible working hours;
- inadequate work organisation by the management (failure to respect working hours and the right to breaks, mismatch between tasks, working time and capabilities of an employee; incorrect settlement of overtime; improper delegation of work in the situation of redundancies and/or absences);

(b) Management procedures:

- communication: not listening to the opinions and ideas of employees, lack of a rapid and more effective change introduced as a response to the needs of employees;
- incentives systems: lack of salary adjustments, unfair remuneration for overtime work;

(c) Changes regarding the physical work environment:

- technology changes, equipment—its replacement and/or more effective maintenance;
- general working conditions—failure to adapt the workspace and offices to the needs of employees, e.g. replacing open spaces with smaller offices, comfortable temperature, parking spaces.

It is worth noting that these topics prevailed in FGI with front line employees regardless of the industry (production, services) or location (large cities, small towns). The attempts to innovate within all these three areas become point of relevance in subsequent discussions and narratives lead by interviewees.

14.4.1 Generating and Implementing Innovation: Top Down versus Bottom up Initiatives

The studied organisations lack an effective system encouraging two-way communication that would allow employees to talk openly about their needs, and—according to research participants—if such systems have been put in place, they do not work properly. Even if employees have expressed a need for change, their voice is not heard, which discourages them from becoming actively involved. Employees under research feel that they have no influence on changes and actions taken by their firm and that their opinions are not considered. Following quotes relating to the phase of ideas development illustrate this problem: “*Nobody pays any attention to employees’ ideas. We have no influence on anything. For the management,*

we are anonymous". (FGI 4, BC, S)². "*We used to share [problems and ideas], but... there was never any response*". (FGI 2, BC, S).

In addition, according to the FGI participants trade unions do not act as intermediaries in the bottom-up communication of the needs and problems experienced by the employees. The employees attitude towards unions is therefore ambivalent. Among interviewees trade unions have an image of organisations acting only on behalf of their members. Despite having considerable bargaining power, trade unions do not represent employees who are non-members. They do not offer support or provide information that employees would expect.

The relationship between regular employees and middle management is perceived by those employees as highly conflictual, also when the processes of innovating are concerned. One of the crassest illustrations of this antagonistic vision is a narrative about managers "stealing" the ideas of employees depicted by the interviewees as a quite common phenomenon. "*We tend to keep our ideas to ourselves, because the manager snitches them and presents as his own to company owners from Denmark. So, let's say, if he gets four questionnaires, he's got a whole bunch of achievements or successes ready to use*" (IDI 8, SC, P).

Furthermore, employees tend to avoid taking initiatives for change with a risk of being loaded with additional responsibilities and in case of initiatives failure, with a risk of being held entirely accountable for the negative consequences. Involvement does not bring tangible benefits, e.g. it is not taken into account in the employee performance review. Neither does it translate into promotion or a pay raise. "*There is the so-called annual assessment. (...) I am required to [complete a questionnaire and] demonstrate what I have achieved in a given year, what I have changed, and so on (...) Our questionnaires are then only forwarded to the HR Director, and eventually end up in the trash bin.*" (IDI 8, SC, P). The same interviewee continues: "*As our ideas do not affect our salary, it makes no sense to go the extra mile.*"

Given the negative experiences of those who have attempted to make changes, the strategy of not suggest improvements in the workplace has become the predominant attitude among employees under research. They are afraid to act, react, and report problems and needs. They fear that their active attitude may be interpreted as demands and eventually lead to their dismissal. Employees know from experience that taking initiative may turn against them. It is hard for them to unite and take joint action. When directly asked about the reasons, they refer to the Polish mentality, reluctance to participate in collective action, negative experiences of those who have taken initiative. "*Everybody wants changes, but nobody wants to speak to the boss about it.*" (FGI 2, BC, P).

Consequently, much of the innovation processes observed during the field visits and innovations that are implemented, have been initiated by senior staff and firm

²The coding (FGI 4-BC-cost control specialist-rail transport) indicates the research method (FGI—Focus Group Interview, IDI—In-Depth-Interview, Sh - Shadowing, Mini Case—MC), observation number (e.g. FGI number 4), location (BC—big city, SC—small city), industry (S-services, P production), size of the company (used only for MC—SE as small enterprises: beneath 50 employees and BE: above 50 employees).

owners. Even more; they have consulted shop-floor employees. Interviewed employees complain that ‘usually’ information about changes to be introduced reaches them as rumours. It is only later that they receive an official notice by e-mail or in writing. Ideas have rarely been presented to them, for instance by their superiors, let alone discussed. In organisations under research it is common practice to oblige employees to sign declarations asserting that they have become familiar with information about changes and their implementation.

From these examples, we draw the following tentative conclusion. Given the lack of procedures facilitating cooperative idea generation and development and the lack of proper communication channels, or their misuse, employees’ ideas either go unnoticed or are not appreciated in the process of change and innovation.

14.4.2 Goals and Outcomes of Innovation Processes: Between Declared Objectives and Instrumentalisation

Interviewees’ narratives about innovations are rather cynical. In their opinion innovations are not implemented by the management with a view to improve an organisational performance. The way they describe context of innovation processes suggest that innovation and change is instrumentally applied as a disciplining tool and/or legitimizing the position of newly employed managers. The latter aspect can be illustrated with the following quotes from line-workers: *“‘Innovations’ are implemented all the time [sarcastically], particularly when a new manager is appointed.”* (FGI 3, BC, S). *“From my perspective, it seems that, at the moment, the director’s son is trying to show off, to make his mark, secure his position within the company and make sure he won’t be marginalized.”* (MC, SC, LE).

The use of innovation by managers for the purposes of raising employees control results in a tendency to associate innovation with downsizing or increased responsibilities. One of the interviewees says: *“The introduction of a new system will improve working time organisation and we have been told that it will be implemented and that one person will be kicked out (...), unless he or she will be needed in another department.”* (FGI 3, BC, S). It is particularly interesting that the instrumental use of innovation to discipline employees is also referred to by middle management representatives. One of them explains the practice of innovation implementation in a following way: *“[when an innovation is introduced], employees are not spoken to directly and reassured that their position is not at risk. This kind of uncertainty is good: it is a psychological trick used to make employees aware that someone watches over them at all times, that their mistakes can be frowned upon and that they always need to do their best and remain on guard.”* (IDI 9, SC, S).

The use of innovation as a discipline tool generates stress when used in conjunction with an authoritarian management style, i.e. the mobilisation of workers through fear. From the view point of FGI participants this tendency is evident in the

case of those who have been promoted internally: they are depicted as particularly cruel and strict. Interestingly, workers emphasize that managers usually have good intentions and are trying to be supportive. This apparent contradiction is exemplified with the following quote: “*in a large group, he puts on a show and humiliates the staff; however, he is accommodating and kind when dealing with individual employees; (...) he is a bit of a despot who has introduced strict discipline, but does it in good faith and with the company’s growth and development in mind.*” (FGI 3, BC, S). One can hypothesize that this contradiction is rooted in the lack of appropriate training or mentoring in human resource management directed to those who have been promoted to managerial positions.

14.5 Conclusions: Trust and Participation Between Structural and Individual Influences

Our considerations were organised around an issue of transplanting solutions like WPI models developed in Western European countries into environments that lack cultural infrastructure on which the “original” can rely (Offe 1998). The existing body of research on Polish socio-economic environment shows that there is a significant shortage of this cultural infrastructure in Polish enterprises. We have expected that Polish companies do not apply workers’ participation when they innovate. From our research, we can tentatively conclude that this indeed seems to be the case. Among major reasons we could list a lack of participatory approaches and a lack of cooperative experiences. The results clearly indicate the lack of social trust on the employees’ side and on the managers’ side regards innovations.

Further, we have expected that the lack of employees’ participation and the general pressure on the maintenance of low labour costs (typical for dependent market economies) results in highlighting organisational performance as a major goal of innovation and neglecting the goal of quality of working life improvement. If this is true – how are WPI processes enfolded in these unfavourable conditions? In answering this general question, we have focused on the role of employees and formal and informal organizational structures in the process of designing and implementing workplace innovation.

In line with the institutional approach we assumed that employees’ ability to participate may be influenced by the individual perception of innovation and innovation processes, trust towards other co-workers and managers and by the formal and informal organizational structures (e.g. norms, procedures, routines connected to performance assessment, incentives systems, organisational hierarchies). Through focusing on mediocrity—as opposed to focus on good practices and innovation leaders—there was a possibility to grasp the impact of structural and individual elements on shaping innovative activities. Consequently, we were able to specify which structures and individuals jointly produce undesirable, or even adverse effects. We have intentionally focused on these negative patterns since our

aim was to explore under researched area of cultural, institutional and organizational contexts unfavourable for WPI.

Individual employees' responses, even if initially inconsistent with the roles imposed by the structure (see attempts at influencing change) eventually succumb to expectations contained within structures, as the latter "reward" behaviour that is in line with expectations and punish behaviour that deviates from the accepted formal and informal norms which presuppose the passivity of employees. Examples of this mechanism include situations in which ideas shared by employees are never responded to (obstructed bottom-up communication channels), employees discover that their line managers have appropriated their ideas (no direct channels of communication with senior staff), new ideas generate new obligations (inadequate work organisation management processes within a specific post and failing coordination between posts), or the risk of defeat, while the initiative itself is rarely rewarded. Lack of positive incentives and the predominance of negative stimuli further deepen the passivity of employees, characterized by their reluctance to cooperate and an antagonistic attitude towards line managers and the employer.

In these circumstances, the very notion of workplace innovation has negative connotations among lower-level employees in Poland, because the management uses it instrumentally. Innovations are not introduced to improve processes or working conditions, but rather to strengthen the manager's position within the organisation, e.g. when a new manager enacts changes in the department to legitimize their appointment for the position and to discipline employees, or when failure to adapt to discretionary changes introduced and controlled by managers is punished with low assessment scores, or even dismissal. Within this mechanism attempts to introduce WPI yield results very different from these assumed by a model developed based on best practices, usually performed in Western European countries.

14.6 Discussion and Further Research

Qualitative research is used here to provide contextual understanding of social processes in which participants of these processes shape their worldviews and make sense of surrounding reality. Therefore, our findings do not reflect an overall picture of innovation processes in the population of Polish enterprises nor they provide conclusive information about prevailing attitudes and behaviours among the employees of different levels. Hence our ability to draw conclusions about frequency of phenomena under research is limited. We can only infer about their relative commonality at the background of quantitative and qualitative research presenting specificity of Polish context when processes of innovation and employee participation are concerned.

Nevertheless, an analysis of qualitative data enabled us to notice significance of certain structural and individual factors in the process of WPI development and implementation which can be explored in further research to draw theoretical generalizations about the nature of processes under research. Themes addressed in

the study can be interpreted as a feedback mechanism between formal and informal rules of operation of the organisation and individual actions taken by its members. At the forefront, there is negative feedback from the point of view of innovation processes: interviews, observations and case studies unveil how specific types of organisational structures, the system of assigning and executing tasks in the workplace shape individual attitudes—among leaders and their subordinates alike—that are unfavourable to the development of workplace innovation.

Qualitative research focused on everyday practice related to change and innovation in a variety of organisations has helped us to understand innovation processes in terms of structure and agency. The first category captured formal and informal rules, procedures, cognitive and behavioural patterns intertwined in the process of innovating. The second category encompassed individual responses and practices to these rules. We contribute to the existing literature on workplace innovation by emphasizing interaction between individual and organizational levels of analysis, thus setting the stage for thinking about workplace innovation in terms of a phenomenon produced by the interaction of structural and individual factors. Some conclusions on the role of employees and formal and informal organizational structures in the process of workplace innovation design, implementation and institutionalization can be drawn when we compare the results of quantitative and qualitative research, in which we are involved now as a next step of our research project.

Further research verifying the validity of the ‘structure-agency WPI model’ could also include multiple case analysis with a case selection based on a maximum variation logic (Patton 1990). The variation should refer to the structural (e.g. organic and mechanistic systems) and individual aspects (e.g. passive versus active employee attitudes, different types of leadership) as well as to the outcomes of WPI (successful versus unsuccessful). Another possible venue of exploration is a comparison of WPI initiatives displaying in organisations functioning within different institutional and cultural environments, since both structures and individuals within an organisation are influenced by the characteristics of these environments (Hatch and Cunliffe 2006).

In theoretical terms our model contributes to deeper understanding of WPI because instead of focusing on different aspects separately or through investigating correlations between these aspects and WPI, what is more common in quantitative research (e.g. Oeij et al. 2012), as it focuses on their interaction displaying in time. In other words, we propose a framework to understand not whether certain factors are connected and with what significance, but how and why—through what kind of processes—they become connected.

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