



How to successfully involve workers on the board

Summary

The French agreement of 11 January 2013, established between social partners and relating to protecting employment, institutes worker representation on boards of directors and supervisory boards in companies employing over 10,000 people worldwide or over 5,000 in France. Companies with more than twelve directors must involve two worker representatives, otherwise

one. Worker directors already exist in current or former state-run companies, but this is the first time that the measure has been extended to private companies of a certain size. For the 300 or so companies and groups affected, the measure constitutes a major innovation.

The aim of the initiative is to improve social relations within companies and thus help improve their economic resilience. However, many stakeholders and their representative organizations have been wary to adopt the measure, which remains controversial.

France joins twelve European countries, including Germany, Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, all of which have established employee representation in the management bodies of private companies of a certain size. The success of this “innovation”, initially proposed by signatories of the agreement, is in the interest of all. It will require both company management teams and trade union organizations inventing new practices, necessarily different from those applicable to employee representation bodies.

The presence of worker representatives on boards of directors and supervisory boards raises several questions, divided into two distinct parts in this document. The first part takes the form of a debate: an overview of the origins and background of the measure in France and Europe (chapter 1) is followed by an examination of the hopes and fears raised by the measure, along with reasoned conclusions that can be drawn from consultation between the parties involved and former and foreign practices (chapter 2). The second part looks at the practical side: now that the measure is a legal obligation, what particular points should companies and trade union organizations focus on to ensure that it is carried out in the best possible conditions (the guide).

This document was put together by a working group based on a literature review and a series of interviews with participants conducted from autumn 2013 to spring 2014.