

# GRUNDTVIG-LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS: “Fostering Cooperation and Intergenerational (IG) Learning” (FCIGL)

## - Situation in Spain -



Is there a problem awareness concerning intergenerational learning? (Is the term „intergenerational learning” known and are there specific measures in the organisation/companies? which ones?)

In general terms we can state that there is neither any kind of awareness problem concerning the intergenerational learning nor regarding its usefulness in the daily work developed in the companies consulted. Almost all human resources managers agreed on the existence of team work as well as on the heterogeneity of those teams. The differences come from the kind of enterprise and from the sector to which they belong. In some cases and depending on the working way, it is possible to find bidirectional learning, that is, from the younger workers to the older ones and vice versa. In other kind of enterprises the job that the workers have to develop is perfectly and clearly defined. In those cases the transfer of knowledge does not happen. A good example would be those companies where some workers are developing their work in technical and administrative departments and others are working on production departments.

In some enterprises we can find intergenerational learning developed in an indirect way, at informal level, and as a logical step before the whole integration of the new worker in the company. It is important to mention some curious data we have found, such as in the cannery industries, where there is still the figure of the *teacher*, in the shipyards, where the job is developed in pairs, which usually consist of a more experienced person and a less experienced younger one. In the electronic company the new engineers spend a period of time with others more experienced, etc.

In almost all companies we found older workers helping younger workers, informing and advising them while they are not familiarized with the company and/or the sector working way. For example, the Human Resources Manager from the international transport enterprise told us that their workers are used to knowing several job positions in the same department (even in other departments). The final idea of this *welcome plan* is that in case of a sick leave or any other problem any worker could carry out the work of his/her colleague.

We have also found enterprises where there is not any kind of intergenerational learning. The person in charge of controlling the production explains to the workers how they should work and if they are working rightly or not. In other enterprises the good operation is derived from the good existing communication among workers, but without any kind of help or direct support from the older workers to the younger ones and without any kind of contribution from the younger workers to the company working way.

Is human resource development seen as a value in the company/organisation? (Does the company/organisation support human resource development? Are there different offers to younger and older employees or are they supported equally?)

All human resources managers and enterprise managers agreed on the need of supporting the professional development of their workers. In almost all the enterprises, except one, there are training courses. Sometimes these courses are compulsory according to the Spanish legislation. Sometimes it is the worker who addresses the human resources managers and asks for information related to specific training courses.

It is important to differentiate in this point the kind of enterprises and the activity in which they are involved. The job carried out in a shipyard or in an enterprise devoted to produce machinery for ships is very dangerous and the proper national law establishes the obligatorily of providing some kind of courses for workers, in particular all those related to labor risk prevention. Also, they are obliged to update some competences periodically, for example the qualifications in weld.

Training is given equally to younger and older workers. It is not organized taking into consideration the age but the job developed. Some enterprises support the courses demanded by workers due to the fact that those courses arise from their interest and therefore their willingness to attend them is higher. In other enterprises the courses of digital literacy and computing update are addressed mainly to older workers due to the difficulties they find in its use. All interviewees stated the lack of collaboration and disposition of older workers, especially those that are near their retirement age (55/60 years), regarding to learn and participate in training courses. Younger workers are more interested in training courses, and they go so far as to ask for courses and training that the enterprise in which they are working cannot offer due to the fact that it belongs to a different sector.

Are there any differences in the working manner of younger and older employees? (E.g. Differences in using new technologies, differences in making suggestions for improvements, etc.)

The differences in the working way between younger and older workers are above all related to the use of new technologies. Sometimes these differences lead older workers to ask for a change in their job position where he/she does not need to work with computers, internet, e-mails, etc. This specific situation was found in the hotel, where a worker that had been working in the hotel reception asked for a change in their job when the new information and communication technologies appeared. In other situations older workers have to face the computerization of its enterprise, the inclusion of catalogues of products in the computer, the turnover, etc. In order to overcome these barriers several courses on information technologies and computing have been developed to train them.

One of the Human Resources Managers interviewed told us that whenever a new worker comes from another enterprise and explains the way in which he/she worked there, how he/she carried out the job, etc, that kind of ideas and suggestions are welcome and studied. Sometimes that working way is implemented during a period of time in order to check out their positive or negative results.

In the case of the electronic company the update and adequacy to the new technologies is essential, because the sector to which it belongs is very dynamic. Step by step almost all the enterprises have been adapting to the new technologies and also their workers. It is important to mention that older workers are more reluctant to changes meanwhile the younger workers adaptation is easier.

**Transfer of knowledge – How does it happen? (How do people exchange theoretical background and practical experience? How is the initial training of new employees organised?)**

The transfer of knowledge is carried out in a different way depending on the kind of enterprise and its working philosophy. In most of the cases workers are very well trained and qualified. When they start in the company they only have to learn the way in which the work is developed there. Although their knowledge is valid, sometimes there are differences derived from the sort of job. Usually the welder knows to weld but obviously is not the same to weld in a civil work that in a naval work. Frequently they are advised and accompanied by someone who is more experienced.

Usually the more experienced worker is the older, but it is not always like that. Sometimes a young worker has a wide experience because he/she has started to work in the company very young and could be younger than the new worker whom he/she has to help and give advice. In other cases the situation is the other way round, the young worker has more knowledge than the older one, and as a consequence he/she is going to develop a more technical work, though less paid due to he/she has not the older seniority.

In general, in almost all the enterprises asked there is a period of informal learning during which the new workers are helped and advised by more experienced workers. In sum, the age is not the criteria used to achieve a successful transfer of knowledge.

**Working atmosphere (How can the relationship between the different generations be described, appreciation or divide?) Are there informal exchange possibilities?)**

In general terms, all human resources managers agreed on saying that the working atmosphere is good although sometimes there is some kind of frictions. The problems that can arise are not only due to age differences but they are also due to different kinds of characters. Some people get along with ones better than with others. Team work is a constant in the enterprises asked.

Only in two of them there is not team work in general terms. In those cases the relations among workers are part of the daily work and of the informal contacts, but they do not arise from the necessity of developing a work in a team to create a product. In the electronic enterprise they told us the importance of create a team and feel part of it so as to continue to work in the enterprise. However, in other enterprises the situation is different due to the work they have to develop or due to the sector to which it belongs.

When the relations between the workers are friendly, the possibilities of exchange information and knowledge in an informal way are more feasible. When younger workers can ask for help without fear to older workers and vice versa, the working atmosphere of the enterprise will improve considerably, the productivity will rise and



Is human resource development seen as a value in the company/organisation? (Does the company/organisation support human resource development? Are there different offers to younger and older employees or are they supported equally?)

Taken into account the participants' opinions we can state that the development of human resources is, in fact, perceived as an important value in the organizations. All companies are worried about giving the necessary training to their workers in order for them to update and increase their knowledge. Sometimes this training is offered by the own organization according to its needs, and others it is the result of the workers' demands.

All workers showed their interest in carrying out training courses, being this interest much higher in the younger employees. The reason is the necessity felt by younger workers of improving their curriculum, in order to find a new job in case of an eventual dismissal or end of the contract. In some groups the participants explained that the demand of training actions by workers is higher than those offered by the organization. In that situation it is impossible for all workers to carry out a specific kind of training/course the same year.

The courses focused on the use of new technologies, in particular when their application to the daily life is approached, have a strong demand. Things like, how to arrange an appointment with the doctor or how to do the shopping using Internet possibilities, stir workers' interest. In one of the groups the participants complained about the way in which the training is given. Sometimes they have to suffer long theoretical classes when they are really interested in practical applications. An important part of the training is given during the working days and in the organization premises. Concretely, those courses that are compulsory according to the Spanish legislation, as well as the courses offered under the organizations interest. Thus, the trainer has at his disposal all the machinery that workers are using every day to perform practical demonstrations.

Regarding those workers that are not interested in carrying out training courses, the participants agreed that the explanation is a wrong perception. They do not feel the training as something valuable for them personally; they do not perceive it like that. Although a specific training is useful for the enterprise while they are working there, it is also a value that workers will bring with them when they left the company and that could apply in a future job.

All workers agreed that the organizations do not make any kind of differentiation between younger and older workers regarding their participation in training courses. When a new machine is bought or a new working procedure is established, all workers that will use that machine or that will be affected by the new procedure, will assist to training courses independently of their age.

### Are there any differences in the working manner of younger and older employees?

There are differences in the way of working between younger and older employees. Almost all groups agreed that the differences were bigger long time ago, especially when people that today are 45 years started to work and learn. The treatment received from people older than them was very bad. They suffered rude words and penalties. There were not the technological advances we find today and the work it was harder and heavier. In that moment older workers were neither very helpful nor friendly and younger employees were used only for run and errand.



In some groups the participants mentioned the existing lack of interest by the younger employees. They said that younger workers do neither have the dedication nor the responsibility that older workers have towards work.

Younger workers are more focused on demanding their rights, and when they are not sure about the salary or the working conditions they give up work automatically. In one of the groups participants over 45 years that are in charge of controlling working teams stated that they prefer women workers over 50 years old. These workers do not have any family charges, their sons and daughters are older, their husbands are retired and thus they are more patient to develop the tasks, and they are not devoted to the finishing time.

Younger participants stated that the situation explained above is not true in all cases, and they argued that the older workers should open their minds towards the changes and get adapted to the new days. They said their older colleagues are always remembering how bad they lived, how hard was to start to work, how the way of working had changed and how today everything is easier. However, in other group the workers have not detected that generational difference. Their work has been changing year by year; but the adaptation to new technologies and to a new way of working has been carried out in a slow and not traumatic way. For that reason, they did not find a before and an after with such enormous differences.

In one group, younger participants commented the impossibility of giving new ideas, as well as the reject that some changes produce in workers used to working in a particular way a lot of years.

Fortunately, this situation is not common in all the organizations; in some of them, the suggestions made by younger employees are very welcome. One group explained that their organization carries out periodically meetings where the workers are asked to explain their ideas in order to improve the production process as well as the working atmosphere. In other group, the older participants stated they were in favor of learning from the younger ones new techniques and ways of working that imply an easier and less hard work.

**Transfer of knowledge – How does it happen? (How do people exchange theoretical background and practical experience? How is the initial training of new employees organised?)**

The transfer of knowledge is different in each organization depending on the sector to which they belong and on the kind of work developed. In almost every case that transfer take place from the most experienced worker to the less experienced. Where the work to develop requires some specific knowledge, workers that come directly from the technical schools or from the universities have an important advantage.

The only thing they have to learn is the specific way of working in that organization. In this sense, we have found some differences between the groups. In some of them, the employees stated the good cooperation obtained from the older workers or from the responsible person to teach and advise the younger without fear or any kind of reticence. Older workers do not have either any problem in learning from the younger when a new worker is in charge of developing an important project.

On the contrary, in other organizations, especially where the work developed requires low qualifications; there are big problems to teach younger workers. Sometimes older workers are reluctant to show the right way, because they fear to lose their job. In some circumstances, when a younger worker is promoted s/he has to suffer the disapproval of older colleagues.

In other group the participants commented that the transfer of knowledge took place in a greater extent before than nowadays. The reason is that years ago, the worker who started in a company did not have any kind of knowledge and a teaching/learning stage was much more necessary. The methods and techniques to teach were very criticized as well. Older workers did not explain rightly the tasks to do and when a mistake was made the reprisals were very strong. From their point of view learning should be based on standing hours and hours working, as well as corporal punishment

In some organizations we found the existence of tutors/teachers that are in charge of helping, advising and orienting the new workers who start in the enterprise.

Obviously the most difficult issue is to achieve the transfer of knowledge from younger to older workers, usually that transfer is developed at the other way round. In almost all the organizations we have detected that when a worker does not know how to do something he/she often asks someone more experienced, independently he/she is younger or older; though usually the most experienced is the older one.

**Working atmosphere (How can the relationship between the different generations be described, appreciation or divide?) Are there informal exchange possibilities?)**

The participants from all groups agreed on the good working atmosphere existing in their organizations. Sometimes there are some discussions caused by the daily work and by eventual stressful situations. All of them agreed that the great number of hours they spent with their colleagues leads them to create friendly and confident situations that sometimes can result in a reproach, which, does neither go beyond nor lasts. In most of the organizations teamwork is developed, and all the participants emphasized the need of collaboration of all team members to achieve the optimum results. Generally there is not any kind of fear to ask for help.



Regarding the integration of new workers in the organizations' structure, it was said that sometimes there are difficulties for new workers when they try to enter into groups already constituted, where their members understand each others perfectly due to the fact that they have been working together for many years.

In these cases, when a new worker is not pleasant for them, they will try to throw her/him out. In other group, we found that the exchange of colleagues throughout the years means something positive for workers. It allows them to learn something different from each one of them improving their way of working and their performance.

In general, regarding the possibilities to exchange knowledge in an informal way all agreed on its existence. They also stated the good disposition to learn and the enthusiasm showed by younger workers allowing the older ones to teach them.

To sum up, despite the fact that very few participants have heard about the concept of intergenerational learning, all of them agreed that it does take place in their organizations in an informal and discontinuous way. All of them recognized the necessity that younger and older learn and teach each other, what will be positive for both, the organizations' objectives and the worker's interest.