Active Ageing through Social Partnership and Industrial Relations in Europe. Workshop Report for Spain

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The ASPIRE project. Thematic analysis of workshops with social partners. Report by Spanish team

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This report is the result of the thematic analysis of the contents of the following four workshops, carried out according to the proposed model:

Workshop 1 (W1)
Date: 8 March 2018
Participants: 1 manager, 1 human resources manager, 1 trade union representative, 2 workers Sector: Industry
Size: 100-500 workers
Public-Private: Private
Generational diversity: Average (no specific generational group predominates)
Gender diversity: Mostly male employees

Workshop 2 (W2)
Date: 22 March 2018
Participants: 1 manager, 2 trade union representatives
Sector: Education
Size: Over 500 workers
Public-Private: Public
Generational diversity: Low (heavy predominance of persons aged over 45)
Gender diversity: Male and female employees

Workshop 3 (W3)
Date: 23 March 2018
Participants: 1 manager, 1 human resources manager, 2 trade union representatives
Sector: Leisure, sports, tourism
Size: 100-500 workers Public-
Private: Public
Generational diversity: Average (no specific generational group predominates)
Gender diversity: Male and female employees

Workshop 4 (W4)
Date: 6 April 2018
Participants: 4 managers, 1 human resources manager, 1 trade union representative, 2 workers
Sector: Social health and social education services
Size: Over 500 workers
Public-Private: Private

Generational diversity: Low (predominance of persons aged under 45)
Gender diversity: Mostly female employees

The report is organized around the five research questions formulated in advance:

1.   How do different industrial relations (IR) structures facilitate and/or inhibit the dissemination and implementation of collective agreements on active ageing?

2.   How are age and employment perceived in workplace contexts within different IR systems?

3.   How do employers and trade unions respond to EU and national social activation policies in creating sustainable work opportunities for older workers?

4.   How are the interests of older and younger workers negotiated and reconciled through workplace level mechanisms?

5.   How are good practice and innovations in the dissemination of active ageing approaches shared between and within different national contexts and in Europe?

In the first part of the report these questions are addressed one by one. Then, in the second part, the report makes specific suggestions regarding the content and format of the training materials to be designed, based on the contributions made in the four workshops. Finally, in section 3, some brief reflections are offered as conclusions.

1. Responses to the research questions

1.1. QUESTION #1. How do different industrial relations (IR) structures facilitate and/or inhibit the dissemination and implementation of collective agreements on active ageing?

In each of the workshops the participants discussed the question of how industrial relations are facilitating or inhibiting the collective agreements on active ageing. All together, the issue of obstacles is more present than that of facilitators. Let's start there.

1.1.1. Obstacles

The obstacles perceived are more organisational than individual in nature. For example, questions related to the type of **workforce management**, **lack of awareness** about ageing in general —and active ageing in particular—, difficulties related to **legal or social policy issues**, trouble carrying out the necessary **adaptation of jobs** as workers grow older —ergonomy— and, finally, certain aspects of **Human Resources policies**.

In what way can **workforce management** be an obstacle to the introduction of an active ageing culture? Primarily, it is because of the difficulty of combining actions designed to facilitate active ageing and actions designed to maintain and improve productive processes and service provision. This, in turn, is closely related to one of the themes most frequently mentioned by the participants: the adaptation of jobs as workers grow older. This is not an easy thing to do: it seems it is difficult to find the type of workforce management that is right for the company and that will also make it possible to efficiently attend the needs of employees that are growing older:

> "many of those agreements, on conciliation, adaptation, are actually… incompatible, you might say, that is, if the measures are not applied very carefully, they are incompatible with the provision of a service with a certain degree of normality" (W2, hrm[1]).

Furthermore, a single company has multiple interests, and they are often contradictory: the type of workforce management that is good for one sector of employees may not be ideal for other sectors. This is perceived as a problem as well. And it is more or less problematic depending on the number of people involved: **how can a company properly manage an ageing workforce when it has a high number of employees, when the costs associated with any change in the form of management are high and when there is a wide range of contract types?** These are common concerns.

Lastly, all that workforce management is also facing challenges related to the indispensable training of employees and updating the workforce as employees grow older. For example, it is not always easy to find the right person to partially replace an older worker who should work fewer hours so that he/she can continue to perform the job suitably, in accordance with the ageing process. And if this **adaptation** process is not implemented, we

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[1] Human resources manager.

will end up with the situation moving in the opposite direction, away from active ageing: the worker is made redundant or is given permanent leave for health reasons. In some of the workshops it has even been pointed out that some workers are afraid of being let go if they show some health problem or limitations in their capacity for good performance. Obviously, such a sentiment denotes the complete non-existence of a positive vision regarding ageing at the company. In fact, what happens is that there is an almost total lack of awareness regarding such ageing:

> "that [issue of ageing] is something we have never talked about at our company, only to get workers out of the way via early retirement, so we can get in some new people, which also works out much cheaper for the company and that of course is an added value." (W3, u[2]).

In effect, one undeniable conclusion that can be drawn from the four workshops is that there is no awareness of the question of ageing. It is safe to say that **the topic of active ageing is practically absent from company agendas** —we know of only a few companies in which this is not the case—. What normally happened at each workshop was that just taking part in it allowed the participants, at least momentarily, to realize that there is an issue —ageing— that is more present than they had perceived in their ordinary day to day activity. Naturally, the raising of awareness should be a first step, followed by the establishment of action strategies on the issue:

> "before we can develop a technique or paths or protocols it is necessary to increase people's awareness, which is something that takes more than a day or a week, because in my mind the problem of active ageing, with all of its options, whether it is that of leaving the job market or one of the many others there may be, first of all there must be a very broad consensus and definition of the problem. Again, I think it is not just a matter of asking 'what is going to happen to me when I am 50, 60, 65, or 67 years old?'" (W3, hrm).

In our case it is clear that the training materials we are going to prepare must include resources with which to take this initial step: **how can a company envision and increase awareness of the ways in which ageing is becoming more and more of an issue in companies and of the consequences that this may have for the company's survival and development?** It will be necessary to promote basic literacy regarding the issue, very basic, from the outset.

Based on what we have learned in the workshops, the starting point we will face in the case of Spain when piloting training materials can be summed up as follows:

- the idea most present in the collective company imaginary is that the goal —up to now at least— has been to do everything possible to work the least time possible. Thus, the most immediate response to the ageing of employees is to create formulas by which **to encourage early retirements**, even though the legislation —which, by the way, is not at all well known— goes precisely in the opposite direction.

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[2] Trade union representative.

- the only practice carried out to date in relation to active ageing has been the attempt —more or less elaborate and successful, depending on the case— to **adapt certain jobs**, although this initiative has some times been taken as a response not to ageing but rather to poor health or the inability of the workers to continue doing their assigned tasks.

In the organizational sphere, this last question of adaptation —which is linked to ergonomy and job safety— has been the topic of a very significant part of the reflections during the workshops. Adaptation is perceived some times as an obstacle and some times as a facilitator. This ambivalence requires more in-depth attention. For now, we will address the question of adaptation viewed as an obstacle to the development of an active ageing culture. **Why is job adaptation an obstacle?**

- Because in certain cases **adaptation is perceived as a source of labelling** and, in consequence, as the precursor of perhaps being made redundant when labour instability is high —as it tends to be in Andalusia—. So, there are workers who are reluctant to begin the process of adaptation of their jobs. This leads unions to think twice before sitting down to talk about it with their respective companies. Clearly, this seems to be an aspect in which the ASPIRE project could intervene: changing the perception of the adaptation of jobs so that the process can be viewed as something positive, constructive, something to be supported.

- Because **the adaptation possibilities are limited by the demands of the productive process or service provision** —for example, there are companies that cannot get by without workers doing night shifts, and others that provide a service at the home of customers not always willing to collaborate in the introduction of the most appropriate adaptations—. The problem in this case is that **it does not seem feasible to adapt the jobs of everyone who may need it**; therefore, who will be left out and for what reasons? Adaptations become a potential area of conflict with clear intergenerational implications, as will be discussed a little further down.

  "the obstacles that exists [are that] many of those agreements, on conciliation, adaptation, are actually… incompatible, you might say, that is, if the measures are not applied very carefully, they are incompatible with the provision of a service with a certain degree of normality" (W2, hrm).

- Because, in a much more latent sense, **there are workers who believe that they must adapt to existing conditions —even if they are not the right ones for ageing well— because otherwise they risk running into problems with the company**. This alternative manner of adaptation leads to passivity in daily activity, preventing people from explicitly tackling the demands associated with implementing an active ageing culture in companies:

> "what you do not want is to generate more problems, so you say 'ok, I will adapt'. You do not generate more problems but that doesn't mean they don't exist, because they do" (W4, lm[3]).

We will now look at another one of the obstacles: **the legal context and social policy issues at the macro level.** To begin, it should be noted that people have very limited knowledge of this context: some people have vague ideas, have read one or two documents or regulations but, in general, it is perceived as something far away from ordinary business activity. **Unions lament the lack of legal instruments to help move towards the introduction of a culture of active ageing**; and the people running the businesses are not informed about them either, save exceptions. As mentioned earlier, active ageing is not currently among their most serious concerns. In addition, **businesses worry about who will pay for the possible costs of the active ageing measures** —for example, when the reduction of hours worked by an older worker requires another worker to be hired, or when older workers have more periods of medical leave—. Both unions and businesses admit that, to their knowledge, political initiatives favouring partial, active or flexible retirement have not

worked well. Why haven't they? Because there has been no pedagogical activity accompanying them, explaining what they are and their purpose and ultimate goal— lengthening working life—:

> "partial retirements have not worked in our company. I mean, there was an option, a choice that had to be made. The employee had to either work the partial retirement time continuously or, for example, it was done in just two months every year. Those who chose to do it in two months a year, well, neither the work they provided to the company was acceptable nor was it satisfactory for them to have to come back" (W3, lm).

In terms of labour law and hiring regulations, the **real cost of redundancies — sometimes less than what it costs to continue employing a senior worker— can also be an obstacle in the prolongation of working life**:

> "I have been in the collective bargaining negotiations at the provincial level […] and, really, I am telling you that the social partners do try to convey to those running the business that they should adopt some age-related adaptation measures, but they won't even consider it. Their argument is that making people redundant does not have such a high cost (W3, u).

The public or private nature of the company is also a factor that aids in understanding why the company has more or less difficulty adopting active ageing policies. We have heard the complaint that in public companies there is greater rigidity and more limitations when it comes to introducing measures related to, for example, recognition of a worker's trajectory and to the possibilities of hiring—when and how—:

> "a company in the public sector cannot set up measures that incentivise, for example, retirement, it cannot reward people for that. In short, it faces a series of limitations" (W3, hrm).

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[3] Line manager.

Then there is the question of the **public pension system in a society with high unemployment and a high level of job instability**. The dilemma has been mentioned frequently in the workshops: people who would benefit from being able to retire sooner — for health or other reasons— and cannot do so because of the loss of purchasing power that would come with receiving a pension instead of their salary. From another perspective, there are many workers who do not necessarily want to keep working but rather are obliged to do so because they have not been paying into the public pension system long enough to be able to receive a pension that is sufficient and will allow them to live with dignity. This situation gives rise to a kind of **forced active ageing** which, far from fomenting a positive culture in this field, places the concept in the position of yet another method of oppression by political authorities of workers:

> "A person is 67 and cannot retire because he or she has not been paying into the public pension system long enough to reach the minimum contribution required. The company finds itself in the situation of knowing that the person physically should not be working because it is hard work. But it understands that the person wants to continue working because with another year, another eight months, he or she will be entitled to the full retirement pension. So it tries to adapt the position to the extent possible. This does not change the fact that the person…well, it is true that his or her capacities aren't what they used to be and there is also a greater risk of a workplace accident" (W4, hrm).

> "the problem is that there are people who want workers to work longer but people will work longer if they are in the right condition to work" (W3, u).

Of course, when faced with this, the discourse of some managers has been the following: if legislators keep pushing back the retirement age, companies will find themselves more limited in their ability to find ways to reduce the work life of those who are in precarious health. It is as if governmental action on behalf of active ageing had in itself become an obstacle for properly attending those who, far from working more, need to do just the opposite. Because one thing that both unions and companies see clearly is the **enormous diversity of situations that make necessary a multiplicity of responses that the current regulations do not offer**.

In general, we perceive **a mixture of lack of information** —in the distance, beyond the national level, there are glimpses of a Europe that is imposing active ageing but without the blessings of those who must implement it— **and lack of support** —there are few specific and viable instruments to use—. Of course, **there is an imperious need to communicate and explain what this is all about**. The ASPIRE project can contribute in this area: the unions and companies are very willing to join this collaborative project because they feel that the ageing problem —yes, they view it as a problem— is rushing at them head on.

The last of the basic obstacles identified are factors related to **human resources policies**: rigidity in the types of contracts, social dialogue difficulties—lack of fluid communication with unions, in some cases—, absence of horizontal mobility or internal promotion systems that help people visualize an occupational career in the company, insufficient training and motivation among workers. It is not that human resources managers are trying to put obstacles in the way, but that in their daily management activity obstacles

exist, like the ones cited, that are not conducive to active ageing. These obstacles are not just of an organizational nature: they are also individual. For example, the low motivation of workers to consider extending their work life —in a context in which the predominant message has been, and to a certain extent still is, just the opposite—:

> "We have not fomented motivation. We have a collective agreement. The general retirement age is 65, but in our agreement, […] retirement is at 60, so starting at fifty-something you start to count, I have five years left, six years left. When you're thinking about that you are not motivated to receive training or do anything at all" (W1, lm).

Our training materials must address this last question: **how to motivate workers who have been socialized in the culture of early retirement, to help them understand and be willing to consider possibly extending their work lives?** In the context of Andalusia, and considering the comments made in the workshops, this question is central.

And since we have just mentioned **individual obstacles**, we will end this part of the report talking about them: the lack of economic resources —which makes some workers continue working even in conditions not favourable to their well-being—, lack of health —a precarious state of health does not encourage one to think about active ageing at work—, or a high level of stress —the harshness of the tasks performed weighs upon worker motivation, who are looking forward to freeing themselves of the yoke— and the fear of possibly being made redundant —which can inhibit collaboration with the company if it decides to consider adaptations or mobilities—. These are the issues commonly cited as the brakes that slow the advance of active ageing.

1.1.2. Facilitators

Turning now to the elements perceived as **facilitators of the culture of active ageing**, the scenario described by unions and businesses can be summarized as follows: again, it is mostly **organisational factors** that can best pave the way. Specifically, and in descending order of importance, in the four workshops the following issues were mentioned: the **progressive increase of awareness** —to the extent that it is happening—, the **adaptation of the job and working conditions** —which is viewed as an obstacle when it cannot be done or is not done in the right conditions, but when it is viewed from the other side, it is clearly a facilitator— and **workforce management** —with measures such as the strengthening of the role of the older person training younger workers, recognition of experience and promotion of older persons, educating the workers on this issue, planning in regard to the age evolution of the workers, or the extension of contracts so as to improve the contributions paid into the public pension system—. In one case emphasis was placed on the importance of having a company culture that does not discriminate on the basis of age:

> "in this company no one has ever, ever suffered age discrimination. Never. Quite the opposite, in fact. We have seen people aged over 45, 50 or 55 who had a problem, risk of social exclusion because they couldn't find a job, and we gave them the chance. And we go both ways, to very, very young people

who wouldn't get a chance in other places and to very, very old people who wouldn't get a chance anywhere else either" (W4, hrm).

Without a doubt, and in consonance with the lack of awareness —conceptual and practical— about the issue, **the action most often perceived as favourable to active ageing is job adaptation**. The four participating companies have given examples of what they have done in this area:

> "there are areas in which there have been --either because of the company's culture or because the dynamic popped up for one reason or another-- some type of meeting, some type of actions, especially positive actions, not simply concern about it, but rather actually coming up with formulas that make it possible to adapt this last stretch of the life of the worker, because obviously it must be adapted" (W3, hrm).

Here we will borrow that "obviously" from the last quote to introduce the other lever that today is considered a fundamental facilitator with which to foment a culture of active ageing: **raising awareness about the issue**. In this regard we have the impression that the ASPIRE project has come at a good time: there is high receptivity not only to talking about the issue but also to looking for ways to prevent ageing from becoming a serious problem. Our training materials must be capable of orienting unions and companies about why and how it is so important to raise awareness about ageing in the work world:

> "until now it has not been something that was on the table. This element appears precisely at this time because we have so many older workers. It is about creating that culture, about people absorbing the culture of active ageing and putting it at the centre of their negotiations. So that both the unions and the companies start taking this seriously" (W2, hrm).

> "within 10 or 15 years the profile of workers is going to change completely and the company has to be prepared, we cannot adapt to it afterwards" (W4, hrm).

1.2. QUESTION #2. How are age and employment perceived in workplace contexts within different industrial relations systems?

First of all, the perceptions related to active ageing that have been recorded in the workshops are few and not well-developed. As a backdrop, active ageing is understood to be something related to ageing well, but —with just a few exceptions— the participants were unable to go into detail. In fact, at some workshops the participants, lacking an opinion of their own, even asked us about the meaning of the term.

This lack of familiarity with the concept coexists with a very deeply implanted idea mentioned earlier: **to age well you have to stop working as soon as possible**; if this is not the case a rather worrying question arises—what is going to happen to us as we grow older? —. This vision, as would be expected, is more present among workers and their union representatives than among managers.

> "You go through life, you start working and that is the last thing on your mind. You keep going and then a moment comes, I don't really know at what age. You realize: this affects me. I think that before that moment, in other places as well, [the topic of ageing] is not relevant to you. It's something that will never come. I think that here workers, until we reach that particular moment, [we do not think about the issue]. The important thing in the end is the time you have left, the sooner you retire the better, as soon as I retire I'm finished here" (W1, w[4]).

> "and if machines are able to do the work [...] and if robots are able to do the work, why is it that we cannot apply this measure [early retirement]? Yes, I believe that is a measure that would really be beneficial to society as a whole. Maybe it would be too expensive" (W2, hrm).

> "people, in general, see the idea of active ageing as a way for the government to punish companies because it doesn't have the money with which to pay pensions. [...] they have to find instruments to make us work more years because we are dying later and later. The government needs money with which to pay pensions" (W3, u).

In the second place, and as a general message, **the question of age, of ages, is not very present in the day-to-day activity of workplace contexts.** The workshops have been an opportunity to reflect on the issue; the impression we have is that in many cases these reflections were developed spontaneously, as the workshop invited the participants to share their thoughts. Which aspects of this relationship between age and ageing were most often mentioned? Here is a sample:

- **The value of experience, connected to the multiplicity of ages and the relationship between different generations at the company:**

> "the idea would be to try to bring that together, to join experience and skill to youth and the desire to learn, and channel it all towards a better way for people to age actively at the company" (W3, w).
> "what is interesting is to put together experience and the new people coming. It is fundamental. It's

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[4] Worker.

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the most basic thing. If you don't manage to put together experience and the new people who want to learn neither group will be motivated" (W1, w).

"to feel valued, both economically and by the company" (W1, w).

"associating age with the issue of skills and competencies, understanding that it might be the people who are older in the company, in the service provided, that are better prepared to deal with certain issues that are more complicated or conflictive" (W4, lm).

"how can that job be adapted so that the worker doesn't feel like he or she is no longer able to do the job or handle the workload like before, compared to the younger workers who are there, eager to conquer the world?" (W4, lm).

- **The diversity of jobs does not allow for a uniform response to the topic of ageing:**

"the idea in the end is to give the company and its workers a tool that enables workers to be active for more years. In the end, what we're moving towards is an attempt [to keep people working longer], since we are now living longer and longer. I believe that is the direction we are going, but I still think it depends on the work you do" (W3, u).

"I think active ageing is very personalized to each company, to each activity" (W3, u).

- **Ageing well involves combining both physical and mental well-being:**

"the need to keep the workforce in good physical and mental shape" (W2, u).

"by adapting it is possible to achieve a good physical level and a good intellectual level can be maintained over time, but people need to know that an adaptation is necessary. People are not well informed about this matter and in general it has not been done" (W3, lm).

- **Active ageing should be a voluntary option, to be chosen when the right conditions are in place:**

"How do we sell that idea [of prolonging people's work life]? How is it sold? It is very difficult, but if it must be done in the end, we will have to do it in a way that people feel motivated, they feel they are highly regarded. It has to be voluntary. […] this is a voluntary matter that cannot be imposed on anybody" (W1, u).

"simply pushing back retirement age alone is not sufficient. We have to think about adaptations, ways to adapt to that change so that it is possible" (W3, lm).

"[it is necessary] to have a situation in which older people feel useful and want to carry out these measures" (W2, hrm).

1.3. QUESTION #3. How do employers and trade unions respond to EU and national social activation policies in creating sustainable work opportunities for older workers?

The obvious consequence of the lack of awareness and familiarity with the issue at hand is that the **degree of response of the social partners to active ageing policies is very, very low, practically non-existent**. We can safely say that we are just beginning.

What responses have we found during the 4 workshops, as isolated and preliminary as they may be?

- Adaptation of the job to ensure, to the extent possible, better health conditions in the performance of the activity.
- Preparation of reports about the occupational health of workers to see what type of adaptations to jobs would be necessary. This response is more the result of concern for health maintenance than for ageing.
- Procedures to lower retirement age (with the understanding that doing so will help younger workers achieve greater well-being). Partial retirement is a good example of this.
- Preferential attention to older people to combat the job exclusion they tend to suffer.
- Improvement of contract conditions —changing to full-time work, for example— so that persons of a certain age can increase their contribution to the public pension system and thus have a better pension when they retire.
- Use of a replacement contract, which are used when replacing a semiretired worker.
- Social action programmes that promote leisure activity and sports.

What should be done, in the opinion of businesses, unions and workers, to prepare and become more able to respond to the challenge of ageing in general and of active ageing in particular? This is what workers, union representatives and managers had to say:

- Find formulas for adapting the last stage of the work life of workers.
- Build consensus among the social partners regarding the need to pay attention to active ageing.
- Combine experience and youth for the benefit of all generations at the workplace.
- Raise awareness of businesses: although making an older worker redundant may be efficient, the losses are greater than the gains.
- Set up a permanent working group at the company, to address the topic.
- Try to make the real age of retirement closer to the legal age, since the former is still much lower than the latter.
- Study financing mechanisms with which to pay for the costs of promoting active ageing.
- Improve communication and dialogue between the social partners:

  "[it is necessary to] actively listen to the needs of workers, according to their personal circumstances" (W4, hrm).
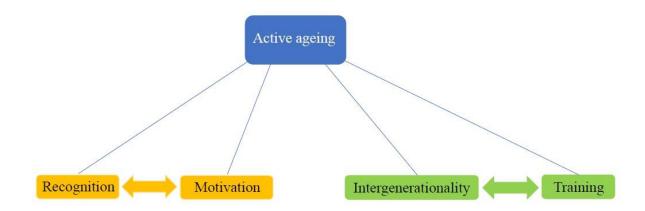
Lastly, a specific allusion to the strategy of **recognizing the value and experience of older workers**. In three of the four workshops this question has been addressed. Participants acknowledged that it is good to be able to give recognition to workers, as they grow older, for their contributions, their trajectory, their accumulated experience. Some companies have done something along these lines, others have not. Furthermore, this recognition is linked to the **motivation** necessary to continue forming part of the production environments—instead of choosing to retire, when the time has come—. And both factors —recognition and motivation— are related in turn to the proper management of a **multigenerational workforce**. And it is precisely this contact among generations that will help forge a path towards **training and recycling**, so necessary to ensure that workers can keep contributing throughout their entire work life:

> "The expert worker or the older worker, once he is aware that he has to learn the new stuff, that what he knows is old, [it is good] if that person […] is recognised by the company. These people are our trainers in a way. They have that prestige, and I think for these people it is very gratifying. The personal consideration they receive, that they are spoken to with respect, that the company directors know their names and they call them to ask them about certain things" (W1, hrm).

> "If you are not motivated to learn, many other positions that exist start to seem less interesting. Because you know you are clumsy and you even brag about it. And at your age. […] Younger people come from below you and have a much easier time learning, a lot more training than others do. And therefore experience itself is no longer valid" (W1, hrm).

The following figure shows the connection, in pairs, of the four factors just discussed:

4. QUESTION #4. How are the interests of older and younger workers negotiated and reconciled through workplace level mechanisms?

> "and the intergenerational relationship. I don't know if the intergenerational relationship is so important. We are not just talking about a series of individuals, we are talking about a generality that the entire group above supports all the new generations and the groups below, or that they support each other mutually. I think that would be very interesting" (W1, hrm).

In the four workshops a lot of time was spent discussing intergenerational questions, especially in terms of possible conflicts:

> "how can the interests of older workers and younger workers be reconciled? Up to now, very little has been done and it has not been done well. But now it is time to start taking things seriously, because otherwise the problem is going to be huge" (W2, u).

Looking at the situation as a whole, the conflictivity between generations is rooted mainly in the three following processes:

- **Transfer of knowledge:** there is often poor coordination between the accumulated experience of older workers and younger workers' need to be taught.

> "I feel that there are two groups of workers that […] at least in my company have not sat down at the table [to talk about] how to manage [experience and learning], and that as a result we find ourselves with two problems that in reality could be a solution" (W3, u).

> "The worker says 'I am not getting involved; whoever comes behind me will just have to learn. obody taught me and I learned all right'. That is the idea most people had. I think that now everything has changed a bit" (W1, lm).

- **Assuming responsibilities:** young people's desire to move forward in the company, to show initiative and progressively assume more responsibility and protagonism, is sometimes detrimental to older and more experienced workers.

> "the [young] people who arrive think that since they can do the work twice as fast as you and get much more done, they feel there is a gold medal to be won from the boss and that will make them fight for the job you have, when in fact what happens is that the worker [who is older] and uses the [right] method has to come after the one who is trying to win a gold medal, doing the work that the other didn't do properly. And that is something we don't know how to value" (W3, u).

> "Am I going to feel bad when I can no longer perform certain tasks or my capacity is not the same, when I have next to me people who are 10 or 15 years younger and who are ready to conquer the world? Will they value that more than they value me? Will I be less important for my bosses? I do ask myself these things" (W4, lm).

- **Hours and salary:** there is a clash between the need of some older people to maintain or even expand the hours they work so as to be entitled to a better retirement pension, and the right of younger workers to growth and stability — with full-time employment and salary— at the company.

> "those women have been working all their lives but they [did not have a formal contract and thus] have not contributed to the public pension system. Now they have found a company that gives them a proper contract and they want all the hours they can get because they want the highest possible category because they want to receive a pension. […] there are younger workers who say […] 'I am not going to work fewer hours just because I am younger, they should have found this job sooner'" (W4, u).

If the existence of conflicts is clear, the actions taken in response are not that clear. We believe that here the ASPIRE project has an opportunity to intervene, providing specific ideas for the management of these intergenerational conflicts. From the workshops we have gleaned that **initiatives involving mentoring, job sharing or multigenerational work teams are practically non-existent**. The conclusion is that there is a lot to do. In some cases, when an intergenerational conflict arises, union representatives enter into a dialogue with the company to try to find solutions. The existence of these conflicts is a latent issue that, to the surprise of some managers, is becoming manifest earlier than expected:

> "that generational clash I was talking about was something I expected to see in 10 or 15 years, with the arrival of a generation that has completely absorbed teleworking, for whom being physically present isn't….I didn't think the conflict would arrive so soon" (W4, hrm).

5. QUESTION #5. How are good practice and innovations in the dissemination of active ageing approaches shared between and within different national contexts and in Europe?

This final question is, unfortunately, the easiest to answer: **the few good practices considered as such are not shared.** What is more, we have no direct and detailed knowledge of cases of good practices for active ageing at the workplace being carried out by other companies. One thing is true, however, **there is a general interest in learning about such good practices**; in consequence, it would seem evident that the training materials we prepare should include examples of such practices.

What good practices do the social partners from the four collaborating companies think have been incorporated or which do they remember having used in the past? Briefly, they are as follows:

- Adaptation of the job: shifts and hours, management of the arduousness of the tasks, reduction in number of hours, changing jobs within the company, etc.
- Measures to take care of workers' occupational health.
- Training to update skills.
- Positive discrimination when hiring older people.
- Improvement of contract conditions —starting to work full-time, for example— so that older employees can increase their contribution to the public pension system and thus have a better pension when they retire.
- Use of partial retirement so that workers can leave the company gradually as they grow older, without harming the service provision offered by the company.
- Recognition within the company of the value of the experience and trajectories of older workers.
- Social action programmes to promote leisure activity and sports as healthy habits, both physically and socially.

And now, what practices are not used but are considered good and seem to inspire a predisposition to use them?

- Increase the effort dedicated to the training of employees, so that they can better adapt to a continually changing workplace.
- Introduce age as a variable in the analysis of leaves-of-absence and reincorporations by workers at the company.
- Perform a study specifically on the promotion of active ageing.
- Make active ageing part of the social dialogue and discuss it at the bargaining tables, perhaps using regulations on occupational health as a way to broach the topic.
- Prevent discrimination on the basis of age by implementing actions to raise people's awareness in this area.
- Organise participatory working committees to draw up active ageing measures.
- Put in place multigenerational teams focused on knowledge transmission. Create economic compensation as a factor that will motivate workers to extend their work life.
- Planning, in the medium and long term, with regard to employee ageing and the best decisions to make in this area.
- More and better communication between businesses, managers and workers on this issue.
- Install physical fitness equipment for the workers.
- Provide psychological support services to motivate employees in the area of active ageing.

2. Content and format of training materials

From all of the foregoing it can be deduced that, when it comes to deciding on the contents of our training materials, it would be ideal if they include the following:

- An explanation of the idea of active ageing and its connection with production environments.
- A presentation of the most relevant regulations and public policies in each specific environment that can be useful as references and also as tools for introducing the culture of active ageing in the workplace.
- Practical tips about personal care —physical, psychological, economic and social—for people growing older.
- Reflections on and specific examples for increasing awareness about the importance of paying attention to the ageing of a company's workforce.
- Ideas for bringing the issue of active ageing to the negotiating table, alluding to how other companies have done it.

- Practical strategies for tackling intergenerational conflicts and promoting solidarity among different generations of workers.
- Specific measures against age discrimination.
- Description of successful cases, at the national and international levels, of active ageing cases that may be inspiring.
- Specific mention of the topic of motivation and active ageing in the table of contents.
- Information about how actions that promote active ageing are being financed in other regions and countries.

As regards format, it seems that a combination of face-to-face and online work might be the most appropriate. Of course, all of this must be taken with maximum flexibility so that each company can make use of the materials in the way best suited to its specific culture of change.

3. A few final thoughts

The sociodemographic trend that predominates in Europe at this time calls for the prolongation of people's work lives. In this regard, efforts are being made, on the one hand, to encourage people to work more years and, on the other hand, to eliminate the mechanisms that result in many workers aged over 50 leaving the job market.

Although the four collaborating companies demonstrate that they have on certain occasions made decisions related to the ageing of their workers, some of the premises upon which these decisions were based are totally contrary to the aforementioned objective. Often, for example, the measures are conducive to workers —frequently below the official retirement age— being able to take an early retirement or an incentivized leave-of-absence, in order to make way for younger employees.

However, working to promote active ageing does not consist only of prolonging work life. It also involves presenting and making use of mechanisms that facilitate adaptation and adjustment by the worker during the final stage of his or her time at the company. Among these mechanisms, the social partners agree unanimously that one of the most vital is **information**. This information, as indicated above, would include explaining the concept of active ageing and its connection with production environments. It would also include presenting and disseminating the most relevant regulations and public policies that might be useful in introducing the culture of active ageing in the workplace.

That information exists but it must be interpreted and transposed to the real circumstances of companies and of society as a whole. Only in this way will people start to be aware of and have sensitivity to the ageing of workers and the need to take steps to improve their quality of life.

In any case, in the context of southern Spain, at this point in time, it is an enormous challenge to convince the social partners of the value that prolonging workers' work life may

have, especially since up to now what has been done is quite the opposite. However, thanks to the workshops held, responding to this challenge has now been added to the agendas of the businesses with which we have worked. But, besides providing information and raising awareness, it is necessary to be familiar with and adapt strategies that are effective for the real situation of each company, that effectively respond to the needs of an ageing workforce and that do not distort the system of production or service provision in any way. The training materials that the ASPIRE project prepares should be exactly that, a means to make the relevant information known. The social partners collaborating in the project have great expectations around the idea that providing them with this type of information will be the next step taken by the project.