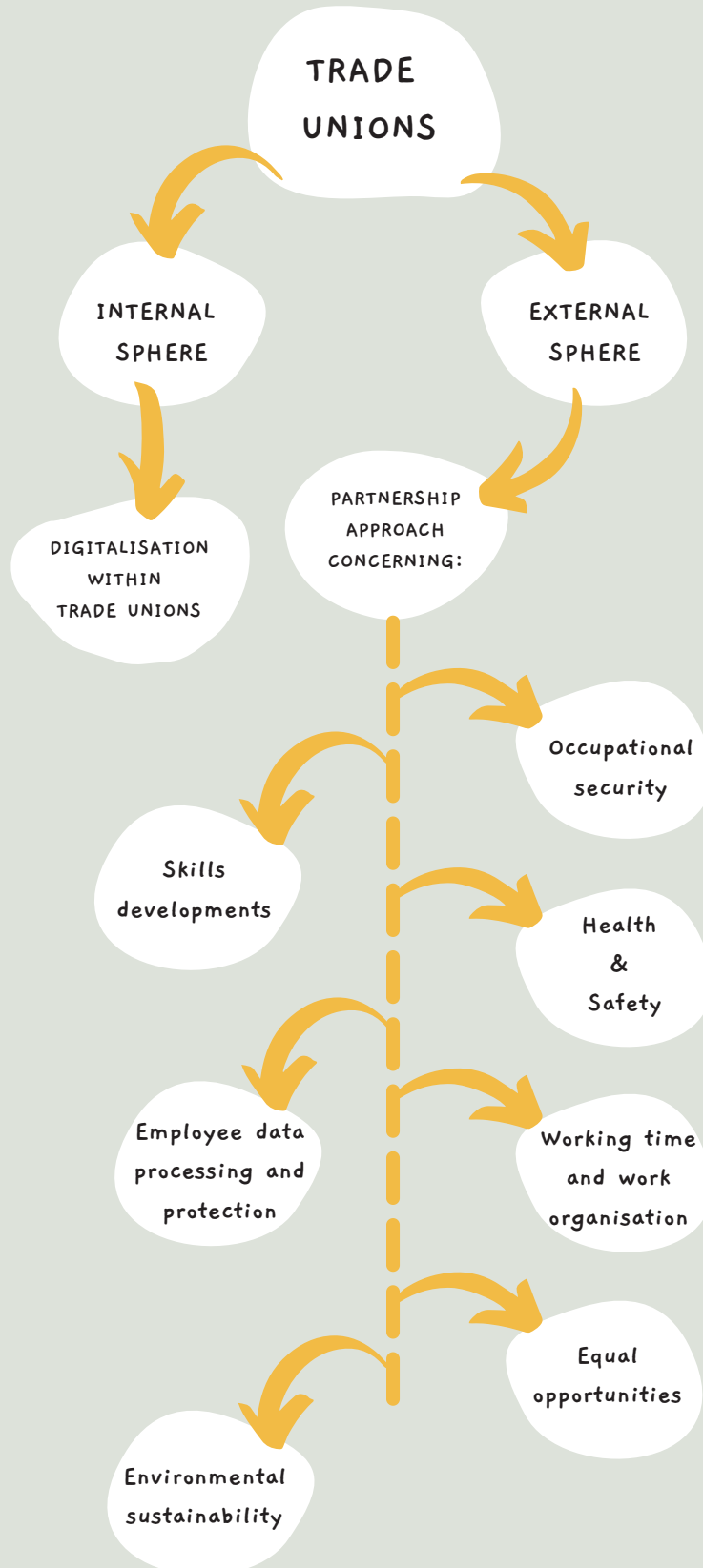


How to bargain upfront in the digital age?

DIGITALISATION



Trade unions can be impacted by digitalisation on both their external and internal sphere.

In their external sphere, concerning their relationships with businesses, acting upfront in the digital age implies for trade unions the adoption of a:

Partnership approach

- According to the Framework Agreement on Digitalisation signed by European social partners on June 22, 2020, an anticipatory and proactive approach to transformations at national and cross-national, local and company level should be adopted by trade unions and workers' reps.
- Workers' reps should be enabled to engage with employers in **phased innovation plans**:
 - starting with joint analyses and assessments of existing situations, also in collaboration with external experts and institutes, to get in-depth information in due time;
 - they should then contribute to prepare the ground for innovation by jointly delivering the skills needed to workers and managers;
 - they should outline shared developmental plans with testing phases, priority setting, time-bound phases and support tools;
 - and collectively monitor and evaluate the processes, thus implementing the necessary adjustments and follow-ups;
 - finally, workers' reps should make sure that productivity paybacks are equally distributed among the workers enabling them.

The partnership approach should be applied to all different issues tackled by digitalisation:

1. Occupational stability

- More transparency in information and consultation processes is needed.
- **Information and consultation processes should start on due time** to allow workers' reps to participate with management in decision-making on large industrial plans, encompassing the introduction of new technologies and the analysis of their related impact on work.
- At the same time, at the local or national cross-sectoral level, better and shared solutions, with the involvement of trade unions, employers' associations and public authorities, are demanded to ensure smooth occupational transitions (through training, coaching and job placement initiatives) of workers made redundant as a result of structural changes.

2. Skills development

- There should be **workers' training programmes in companies when a new technology is about to be introduced** and periodic assessments of workers' tasks and skills to tackle their possible obsolescence.
- Job rotation for greater versatility and expansion of workers' roles should be promoted on corporate level;
- **Systems aimed at assessing and validating workers' competences** should be developed at the national level, in order to allow for better mobility across companies and sectors.
- Cooperation between workers' reps, management and educational institutions should be enhanced in planning curricula that effectively meet future industry's needs.

3. Health and safety

- With the support of OHS experts (incl. psychologists, ergonomists, occupational physicians, etc.), smart equipment should be made available in workplaces and work environments should be configured with a focus on humans and their safety and comfort.
- **Holistic and comprehensive intervention strategies** should be adopted, reflecting the multifactor causality (arising from both the individual and the workplace) of occupational diseases and accidents at work.
- A participatory approach should be put in place, including all levels of the workforce, in an effort to better identify relevant risks and find proper solutions.
- By raising workers' awareness of safer behaviour and collaboration with new technologies, workers' reps and managers should experiment with **new ways to prevent psychological diseases** following the virtualisation of work and the increasing interference between work and personal life.

4. Processing of employee data

- Workers' reps should deepen their knowledge on privacy regulation and data protection, possibly also thanks to the support of external experts.
- Greater involvement of workers' reps in decision-making processes concerning the collection and analysis of data should be ensured.
- The approach of 'negotiating the algorithm' should be put in place, to ensure that workers' representatives bargain over the collection of data, the ways of their use and the purposes pursued.
- The goal of collective bargaining in this field should not merely be the preservation of workers' privacy against attempts to monitor work, but also

greater worker participation in decision-making processes that are increasingly penetrated by data and their possible opaque use.

5. Working time and work organisation

- Workers' reps should have a say in and lend their knowledge to **the configuration of new work environments and working time arrangements which secure job quality**.
- They should have a role, along with management, in the definition and management of continuous improvement projects, in order to make sure that workers are not simply used but do benefit from the increasing managers' reliance on their cognitive skills and expertise.
- In so doing, workers' reps are expected to enable concrete participation and shared decision-making starting from the operational level.

6. Equal opportunities

- Workers' reps and managers should make sure new work settings are designed by **integrating the demographic perspective**.
- Periodical assessments of individual workers' tasks and abilities should be carried out, to allow planning their career development according to their specific needs, by also benefiting from the introduction of new technologies.
- Workers' reps and managers should also promote prevention measures against the risk of chronic diseases at work and training courses and information activities on gender issues.
- They should raise workers' awareness of these topics and **contrast potential discriminatory conducts** based on gender, sexual orientation, age and ethnic or social origin, by signing collective agreements in this field and drafting joint action plans with management.
- Within the framework of these plans, women should be adequately represented in workplaces at all levels of the hierarchical structure.
- There should be collective negotiations over the introduction of **work-life balance initiatives** to sustain the work of women, disabled and chronically ill people.
- Overall, workers' reps should be enabled to proactively contribute to the creation of equal organisations and a workplace culture supporting everyone.

7. Environmental sustainability

- Workers' reps should deepen their knowledge about the environmental impact of Industry 4.0-related technologies and raise workers' awareness of the role they can play in gearing modern production towards sustainability.
- Above all, **a strong sustainability culture** (overcoming the presumed trade-off between work, production and the environment) must be created in workplaces and workers' reps and managers should tailor training activities towards this objective.
- **More participatory rights at all levels** of industrial relations are also needed to allow workers and their representatives to be informed in due time about development strategies and play a concrete role in converging Industry 4.0 and environmental sustainability.
- This may entail, for instance, the revision of school curricula and company training courses and the provision of occupational transition programmes assisting workers potentially affected by radical company restructuring.
- Trade unions must thus adopt **a future-oriented perspective**, entailing partnerships and alliances with civil society actors and other key public and private stakeholders to design and build green industries and economies.

Digitalisation can also affect the internal trade union structure and organisation.

Digitalisation within trade unions

- Workers' representatives should make use of advances in digital technologies to support their actions as regards recruiting and organising labour as well as bargaining and engaging with employers and other social and political players.
- They should consider **digital devices as facilitators** of their role, in combination with more traditional and offline instruments and practices.
- The digital connection should be particularly enhanced to build and develop networks of workers on national and international scales.

If you look for concrete practices already implemented by trade unions and workers' representatives to deal with digitalisation in Europe, please visit the **BargainUp Digital Handbook on Workers' Reps 4.0**, available in eight national languages

→ <http://bargainup.adapt.it/digital-handbook-english/>

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<http://bargainup.adapt.it/>

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