Supporting Shop Stewards with Communities of Practice (CoP)

Ulrich Schönbauer, Chamber of Labor, Vienna

Shop stewards traditionally participate in social, personnel and economic matters of their organisation. However, they have limited rights to intervene. For example, as regards the economic situation of the organisation, shop stewards only have the right to be informed and to give advice. In other matters, such as the introduction of control measures, employee representatives have an absolute power of veto: the employer cannot implement control measures without consent by the works council. A balance of interests is usually achieved through negotiation. Negotiation tactics therefore play a crucial role, in addition to legal rights.

The paper *Supporting Shop Stewards with Communities of Practice (CoP)* aims to demonstrate new ways to tap the full negotiation potential of shop stewards, which requires a new understanding of roles: shop stewards need to act as "collective entrepreneurs" rather than as "reactive employee representatives". They need to

- have a clear request and goal;
- assess the bargaining situation from the point of view of a systemic coach;
- exchange with their peers on promising strategies in the framework of communities of practice;
- identify the sub-system where they can create the biggest impact and develop concrete intervention strategies.

Two or three practical examples will demonstrate this new approach. Introducing a new systemic paradigm, this paper seeks to open up a new dimension of co-decision for shop stewards.