

Trade Unions and Digitalisation: A Comparative Study of Union Influence in Banking in Norway and the UK

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Recent years have witnessed intense debate around digitalisation and its potential impact on work and employment. A key question is whether trade unions are able to shape the use and implementation of digitalisation so that workers benefit. Much extant literature focuses on the 'platform' economy and organising 'gig' workers. The industry 4.0 debate takes in established manufacturing workplaces, with studies suggesting some unions in Germany, Italy and the Nordic countries are seeking to influence the process of digitalisation through engagement and action at a national policy level, as well as in the workplace. However, there are few focused studies on services sector trade unions, their approaches and strategies and how they engage at different levels.

This paper reports on initial findings from a Leverhulme-funded comparative study of trade unions approach to digitalisation in Norway and the UK. Cross-national studies in countries with contrasting institutional environments where unions have varied power resources, are particularly lacking, despite their potential to shed light on the conditions and factors that make a difference. The paper explores union strategies in the banking and finance sector, with a specific focus on digital technologies relevant to customer service and lower level administrative grades. Drawing upon qualitative interviews with national officers and workplace reps in two trade unions, the study examines how these unions seek to influence firstly, the national 'debate' on digitalisation and policy development, and secondly, the way union reps influence technology use in the workplace. Lessons are drawn in terms of the conditions which support or impede union influence and how this might support union learning and strategy development.

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