

**Comparative Mapping of Production Processes
As a method for organising workers**



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Introduction

This booklet gives a description of “comparative mapping of the production process” as a method for organising workers. Where did the method come from? What are ideas behind this method? In what ways is the method used by workers to strengthen their workplace organisations? And, most important: how to do the mapping?

The aim of TIE is to create ties for communication and cooperation between workers and their union organisations, to stimulate democratisation of trade unions by workers starting and to enhance international solidarity between workers of the same multinationals and sectors. The struggle of workers is about their health, income and life. Therefore, TIE believes that to improve conditions in the daily lives of people, we have to focus on capacity building at the workplace.

The subordination of workers knowledge to the companies interests



Production methods like Fordism, Taylorism, Toyotism and the globalization of production subordinated workers to technological processes and deteriorated working

conditions. The employer is the one who thinks and organises the production process and the workplace. In many situations, workers lost control and have mainly become objects of exploitation.

Workers as agents instead of victims: understanding the production process

Changes in labour and the production system take place quickly. In order to understand these changes and their consequences for workers, workers have to analyse and reflect upon what happens at the workplace and formulate alternatives that serve their interests. They can check: how many pieces are produced per day? Where in the production line is the workload the highest? The formal information about profits and production of the company provided by the managers is often not the complete information. The knowledge of the workers is important and indispensable. Instead of using it to improve the profits and gains of managers,

workers can recuperate this knowledge to define priorities in their struggles and to organise together with their colleagues.



Comparative mapping of the production process

The method of production mapping was developed by TIE-Brasil, in cooperation with members of different trade unions in Brasil.

Mapping of the production process is a way to look at the productive system from the point of view of the workers. The main goal is to identify problems for workers that are caused by the ways the production process is organised. Together with their colleagues, workers collect the major possible amount of information about the production process, like: the number of employees, the amount of working hours, salary, suppliers of material and clients, breaks, holidays and absenteeism in each section of the company. On the

basis of this information they systematize and find out what are collective problems. Maybe something that has always been seen and defined as a lack of capacity of workers to do their job is something that is experienced by all the workers and is a problem inherent to the way the production is organised (see also examples below). By doing the mapping, workers can find out whose interests are taken care of and who profits and who does not. Workers start to understand why companies make strategic decisions (e.g. to outsource certain parts of the production process) and how the production is connected to resources in the local context (for example by analysing the supply of material and the transport of products). They can do suggestions or come up with alternatives that suit their interests.

The ways of gathering information are collective and participatory (like inquiries among colleagues or make a drawing of the company). In that way the cooperation and organisation of workers at their workplace is strengthened. Production mapping is a continuous process. The map will be extended, new information will be shared all the time.

How can we use production mapping in workers' struggle?

Production planning should be part of a broader strategy. It can be a helpful method to:

- To open perspectives, getting back control over the production processes by workers, evaluate

and re-organise the work, production and society from the point of view and the interests of the workers;

- To strategically collect information (it is important to integrate production mapping in the strategy of the trade union. So, this means organizing meetings, appoint responsible persons etcetera).
- To compare information with other employees and specific interest groups;
- To understand the historical evolution of specific productive processes and the strategy the company could develop in the future
- To observe innovations and changes in the production processes (in time)
- To understand the specific role of different sectors in the company and the role and position of the company in the international production chain
- To predefine which changes in the production process and labour conditions will be implemented to be able to formulate preventive measures and stimulate healthy labour conditions for workers.
- To propose changes in the production process that serve the interests of the workers.

Example 2, Brazil: Comparison of production processes by workers in an assemblage company (part of a TNC) and an external auto parts company.

Workers at the axes department of the TNC in a town in Brazil found out that the management of their company had plans to outsource a part of the production of axes to an external company for auto parts. To understand the motivation of the company they sought contact with the workers of the auto-parts company and made this comparative mapping:

Assemblage company:

Production of axes

- 2000 workers
- 500 axes per day
- Daily productivity is 0.25 units per worker

Auto-parts company

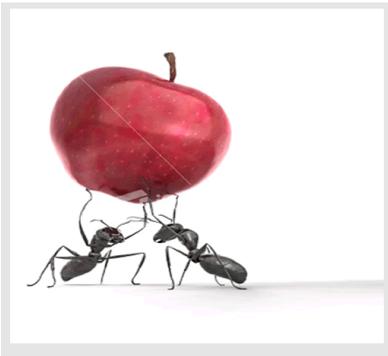
Production of axes

- 35 workers
- 1050 axes per day
- Daily productivity is 30 units per worker

Through this mapping it became clear that while the daily productivity per worker in the assemblage company was 0.25 units per day, the daily amount of axes produced per worker in the auto-parts company was 30. In comparison, the production in the auto-parts company was far more higher than the production in the assemblage company. This not only had to do with a difference in workload (in which workers of the auto parts company had less free time) but also with a neglect of company management to improve production machinery and facilities in the assemblage company. Instead of accepting the deal for outsourcing the workers association at the auto-parts company pushed the management only to accept the relocation of the

production unless workload was decreased. The workers of the assemblage company, on their turn, were able to prove the inefficiency of the production of the company and to lobby for a renewal of the machinery to avoid more outsourcing of the production

Example 3: DSM, Chemical company, the Netherlands, understanding individual problems as effects of structural errors in the design and policy of the company:



After a meeting in which he was introduced to the method of mapping of the production process, Wim Dekkers, a Dutch trade union activists brought some of his direct colleagues (all of them safety inspectors in different

parts of the company) together to collect and systematize information about their daily activities. During this process he realized the importance of sharing information that comes from first hands of the workers. While they were sitting together and questioning their daily tasks and lay-out of the company, soon a problem came up that was experienced by all of the workers present: a section of the company exists of three big parts and in each part two safety inspectors are responsible for monitoring the health and safety

situation. In case someone is ill one of these six persons was appointed responsible to monitor health and safety in another part of the company as well. These are places where they did not work often and they are not up-to-date about the recent situation, structure and risks. All six inspectors experienced this problem, but all of them thought that it was a personal failing. They thought it to be a problem that had to do with their own self-esteem and capacities and not with decisions of the managers. By sharing this problem, however, they realized that this actually is a shared problem, a collective experience which has to do with the fact that there is a structural lack of health and safety inspectors and that there is no back-up in case someone becomes ill. They introduced the problem to the representing trade union and they took it up in negotiations with the management.

Example 5, Ford company Russia: Mapping of the production process as an inspiration to critically reflect on the activities of the trade union

In summer 2006, Aleksei Etmanov (at that time vice-president of the local union at the Ford company St. Petersburg, Russia) participated in an international event for workers of different Ford companies around the world, organized by TIE-Brazil. During this meeting they were introduced to the method of comparative mapping of the production process. By exchanging information about the production process, amount of workers, the amount and price of produced cars and the salaries in the different companies, Aleksei Etmanov

realized that things had to change in his company. Although in both companies the production process had the same set up and the price of cars at the international market was the same, the salary (compared with costs of houses, food etcetera) was far more lower in Russia. The company in Russia could pay them more. Etmanov realized that he needed concrete proof to show his colleagues that they had to struggle for better labour conditions. He started going to the supermarkets in Brazil to write prices, and made drawings of the company together with his Brazilian colleagues. When he came back in Russia, soon he was elected as new president of the trade union and the workers were eager to start organizing actions to improve their conditions. The federation they formed part of (FNPR), however, did not want to help them out. They found it dangerous and challenging, as the Ford workers were doing something that has not been done in former USSR Russia for 70 years: mobilising the workers to take their fate into their hands and to organise actions and demand better labour conditions (instead of expecting this to be done by trade union officials). They signed out at the FNPR and joined the VKT (which was a smaller more progressive federation). Later they set up their own 'interregional trade union of automobile workers'. In December 2007 they organised an intensive strike. It was the first one in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the end they were recognized as negotiation partner by the management and were able to achieve better collective agreements, an increase in

salaries and conditions. Their example has been followed by different other groups of workers in multinational (mainly car-) companies in Russia, like Volkswagen and Renault.

Through this booklet and the training we hope to inspire you to have some new thoughts and to challenge you to find ways to adapt the method of comparative mapping of production processes to your context. Please note, production mapping is not a blue-print. It is more meant to serve as a source of inspiration and can be applied to different context, according to the situation of the union and the daily problems of the specific groups of workers...

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