

SEISMEC

Supporting European Industry Success Maximization
through Empowerment Centred development

AGILE Guidebook for Worker Participation



SEISMEC has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101135884

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Document information

Grant number	101135884
Acronym	SEISMEC
Full title	Supporting European Industry Success Maximization through Empowerment Centred development
Topic	HORIZON-CL4-2023-HUMAN-01-51 – Pilots for an innovative human-centric industry
Funding scheme	RIA – Research and Innovation action
Start date	January 1 st , 2024
Duration	48 months

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How can organisations create technologies that truly incorporate employees' voice while also advancing organisational goals?

This is possible when employees are actively engaged throughout the technology design and implementation process. Through methods such as *co-design*, *value co-creation*, and *continuous feedback loops*, employees are not only end-users but co-creators of the systems that shape their work.

But what do these participatory practices look like in action, and how can organisations begin to adopt them effectively?

SEISMEC's method approach for worker participation moves beyond a purely technology-driven agenda to one that reflects Industry 5.0 values, where people and technologies evolve together in mutually beneficial ways. In this guide, we introduce a practical step-by-step approach that can help organisations facilitate more inclusive employee participation.

Step 1: Identify the model for worker involvement

There are four models of worker involvement in design:

1. designer representing workers (indirect interpretation),
2. designer consulting workers (seeking input while retaining control),
3. workers participating in design (collaborative involvement), and
4. workers as designers (worker-led solutions).

The choice depends on project goals, organisational culture, and management-employee readiness to engage.

Step 2: Determine the approach for collecting data and insights

Three data collection approaches can be used to understand worker needs: empirical (observation and interviews of real experiences), experimental (testing prototypes in controlled settings), and scenario-based (using hypothetical situations to explore responses). These approaches can be used individually or combined based on problem complexity and desired insight depth.

Step 3: Decide on the Mode of Worker Participation

Participation can take place through two principal modes: direct or indirect. The choice of mode depends on scale, feasibility, and the organisation's existing communication structures.

Step 4: Choose the specific method for worker participation

Seven participation methods have been highlighted including co-design (collaborative ideation), value co-creation (joint value generation), resonant co-creation (emotional alignment), lead user innovation (extreme needs collaboration), living labs (early adopter insights), explainable AI (transparent AI systems), and human-in-the-loop (human oversight in automated processes). Each method offers different strengths and should be matched to the problem context and desired participation level.

Considerations for effective worker participation:

Consider contextual factors

Participation strategies must align with organisational context, considering labour laws, management approach, and past research, while being adapted to sector-specific needs (SMEs benefit from informal processes, public sector requires structured frameworks). Power asymmetries must be actively addressed through facilitation techniques, anonymous feedback tools, and transparent information sharing. Strategies should be tailored rather than using one-size-fits-all approaches to ensure effectiveness across different organisational types and regulatory environments.

Employee education and training

Effective participation requires informed employees with skills in communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and design thinking. Workers must understand their rights and roles within participatory structures to contribute meaningfully.

Mentoring and peer learning

Mentorship and peer-learning programmes ensure continuity by having experienced workers guide newer participants, fostering knowledge transfer and sustained engagement. Peer exchanges encourage innovation and shared ownership of outcomes.

Feedback and communication channels

Organisations should establish formal channels like suggestion systems, digital platforms, and regular meetings to gather and respond to worker feedback.

Feedback loops must be closed by reporting actions taken, reinforcing trust and accountability.

Co-determination and work councils

Formal structures like co-determination and work councils institutionalise worker participation through legal mechanisms for influencing company decisions. Integrating participatory efforts with these structures enhances legitimacy and effectiveness.

Align risk perception across levels

Organisations must bridge gaps between employee daily risk perception and strategic organisational risk approaches through structured dialogue and clear communication of risk boundaries. Regular workshops, risk calibration exercises, and open forums help ensure alignment while empowering calculated risk-taking.

Align organisational goals with worker participation

Organisational goals must move beyond short-term productivity to integrate reproductivity (skills development) and human-centred design principles. Worker participation requires recognising collective representation roles like unions or works councils, ensuring participatory mechanisms complement established channels rather than becoming tokenistic.