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THE METTLING REPORT

The Digital Transformation and the Workplace in France

http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/154000646.pdf (link to the report in French)

During his time as Deputy CEO in charge of Group Human Resources at Orange, Bruno Mettling was requested to conduct a study for the French Minister for Labour, Employment, Vocational Training and Industrial Relations. The resulting report entitled "The digital transformation and the workplace in France" was submitted in September 2015. It follows various reports on the topic since 2013, but it is the first study on the implications of the digital transformation for the workplace. This work was complemented by studies entrusted to several major consulting firms and a survey carried out among 4 500 young company managers. It is based on interviews with a number of leading figures in the trade union sector, but also with consultants, and has resulted in thirty-six recommendations.

*An opportunity to be seized - Risks to be prevented

The authors observe that the acceleration in the rate of digital innovation is unprecedented compared to previous technological revolutions.

"For the first time since the industrial revolution, the spread of technology and its uses has at least as much impact on individuals in their personal lives as it does on workers in their professional lives." This revolution, which is inevitable, goes beyond the use of new tools. At companies' level, it challenges "the methods of design, production and collaboration, which are also ways of thinking, working and organising". New forms of non-salaried work and employment are emerging. This phenomenon is radically changing the organisation of working spaces and times.

"The challenge for companies is therefore to anticipate the changes at work to mitigate the risks they entail, seize the potential they hold, and be capable of initiating others so that positive economic performance is accompanied by an improvement in the quality of life in the workplace."

Indeed, based on the findings of the Mettling report, while the digital transformation holds significant potential and opportunity, it also presents a number of risks that must be prevented, particularly by controlling the use of digital devices to achieve the necessary work-life balance, in order to combine adaptation, modernisation and protection.

*Digital transformation: six major consequences, thirty-six recommendations

The Mettling report highlights six major consequences of the digital transformation for the workplace: the widespread use of new work tools; the impact on professions and skills; the impact on the organisation of work; the impact on management; the emergence of new forms of non-salaried employment; and the change in the working environment of executives.

The report outlines thirty-six recommendations with the aim of supporting the digital transition.

The first batch of recommendations underlines the importance of professional training in the digital field. The report recommends placing the digital transformation at the heart of initiatives designed to enhance professional development and pathways between professions. A conscious effort must be

made to encourage conversion to the professions of the future; jobs and skills management planning (known as GPEC in French) must be made a priority in order to prepare for adaptation. Management methods must be adapted to support this transformation and "promote local management as part of the digital learning process".

The report also proposes measures aimed at using the development of digital technology to improve the quality of life at work. In response to the real threat to the health of employees who are exhausted due to being constantly switched on, the Mettling committee recommends introducing a right to disconnect, supplemented by an obligation to do so. It also recommends that a policy for regulating the use of digital tools be put in place within companies. The committee also recommends including the digital factor in the assessment and prevention of occupational risks, in addition to remuneration policies so as to take into account efforts made to align skills and qualifications with digital technology.

The Mettling committee also notes that stereotypes have led to the large-scale exclusion of women from new digital jobs, even though many of the jobs being eliminated are in professions that are traditionally dominated by women (marketing, HR, communication, etc.). It therefore recommends that digital learning should focus on promoting diversity and the feminisation of the digital economy in order to avoid the reproduction of a very imbalanced situation with regard to gender equality in the workplace.

The committee even goes so far as to propose integrating digital technologies into social dialogue and promoting access to the digital technologies of the various social partners in order to strengthen social dialogue in France and demonstrate to employees their ability to "combine adaptation, modernisation and protection".

*Consequence of the Mettling report: the "right to disconnect" now enshrined in French law

The proposals contained in the report were discussed at France's annual social conference in 2015, during which digital technology was the subject of a plenary session. The Mettling report provided an opportunity to reflect on the draft of the future "El Khomri" law of 2016 "on work, the modernisation of social dialogue and the safeguarding of professional careers", which includes, inter alia, a "right to disconnect".

Since January 2017, companies with a trade union representative are obliged to allow employees' exercise their right to disconnect from their digital work devices. This obligation, which is part of the mandatory annual negotiations in France (*négociation annuelle obligatoire*), should make it possible to precisely define the boundaries between employees' professional and private lives, since digital media have made this boundary increasingly blurred. This right should be established in the form of a collective agreement or a company charter outlining the measures taken by the employer to limit the use of digital devices to working hours alone.

Two years after the adoption of the law, an article in Les Echos paints a very mixed picture of the right to disconnect. According to the author, "while the creation of the El Khomri law was designed to encourage dialogue between companies and social partners on how employees exercise their right to disconnect, the collective treatment of issues associated with digital devices remains hesitant. (...) For 41% of French employees, no concrete action has been implemented in their companies. And only one in five employees has noted the implementation of a code of best practices for emails. Yet, 51% of them say that no one handles their emails when they are on holiday. As a result, 32% leave it to a team member to handle their emails, while 13% deal with them directly during their absence. The time spent using digital tools per employee has increased since 2016, particularly for executives. And, while for a

majority of employees, these tools provide greater flexibility in their working hours, many feel overwhelmed by an excess of information and the overlap into their private lives.

*The Mettling Report: *Transformation numérique et vie au travail* (The Digital Transformation and the Workplace in France)
http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/154000646.pdf (link to the report in French)
*Les Echos: *Droit à la déconnexion - Des salariés toujours submergés par le numérique* (The right to disconnect - Employees still overwhelmed by digital technology)
https://www.lesechos.fr/politique-societe/societe/0600206660205-droit-a-la-deconnexion-des-salaries-toujours-submerges-par-le-numerique-2224572.php (link to the article in French)

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