

Black and White or Two Shades of Grey?

**Representation in Germany and the USA -- Some
Preliminary Findings from a Cross-National Survey**

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- **I. The Work & Happiness in America and Germany (WHAG) Survey**

- **A. Motivation**

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- - widespread concern over decline in union rep, especially in the USA



- interest in alternative forms of rep

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- + broader concerns for:

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- - the societal consequences of work and employment

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- + emergent literature on "happiness" and engagement in developed economies

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- -- e,g, the Sen/Stiglitz report

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- + Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*

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- + recognition of the importance of institutional environments and cultures to all
- of the above
- - especially the USA vs. Germany
-  **the Work and Happiness in America and Germany (WHAG) Survey**

- **B. Data Collection:**
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- - random digit dialing
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- - 1000 US workers + 1000 German workers
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- - over 17 yrs old,
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- - over 15 hours per week,
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- - at least 6 months with current employer
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- - fall, 2009, by:
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- - Eastern Research Services in USA
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- - Forsa GmbH in Germany
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- - 25 minutes in duration

- **C. Content**

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- 1) representation at work
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- 2) work and HR practices
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- 3) the nature and experience of work: fairness, dignity, justice, community, etc.
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- 4) happiness: job, personal relations, health, life in general
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- 5) engagement: job, employer, occupation, union, political, community
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- 6) "civic virtue": political participation, volunteer work, charitable donations
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- 7) numerous control/independent variables: age, gender, education, occupation, sector, family status, religion, ideology, values, etc.
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II. Today's Paper

A. Content:

Preliminary results on the representation questions:

- 1) the prevalence of alternative forms of representation in the USA,
- 2) evaluations of alternative forms of representation in the USA,
- 3) the prevalence of alternative forms of representation in Germany, in comparison to the USA,
- 4) evaluations of alternative forms of representation in Germany, in comparison to the USA,
- 5) frustrated demand for representation (both samples)
- 6) perceptions of employer opposition (both samples)
- 7) evaluations of the relationships between representatives and employers
- 8) confidence in rights at work (both samples).

- **B. The General Research Question:**

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- "Black and White or Two Shades of Grey?"

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- - the USA as "black"?

- - weak labour and employment laws, low union density, at-will doctrine

- + liberal market economy -- little economic role for unions, short-term,

- S-H value orientation

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- - Germany as "white"?

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- - strong representation rights at law, extensive restrictions on employer

- rights, labour courts

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- + coordinated market economy – strong economic role for both

- unions and works councils, long-term stakeholder value orientation

- OR:
- - the USA as "grey"?
- - mgmt established non-union systems?
- - identity associations?
- - erosion of the at-will-doctrine?
- - employer based "justice" systems and arbitration?
- - longer term "mutual gains" orientations?
- - professional HRMism? - e.g., neutrality re: the right to join a union
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- + Germany as "grey"?
- - declining union and works council coverage,
- - weakening of employment laws (e.g., job security)
- - increased stock market financing + competitive pressures
- - strains on the "social partnership"
- - growth of low pay service sector

- **C. Results - Highlights**

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- 1) the prevalence of alternative forms of representation in the **USA**,

- - 17% report union coverage

- - 34% report employer established systems non-union systems

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- - 80 % of employer established systems consult over wages and benefits

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- - 15% report identity associations

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- - 74% based on occupation

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- - only 7% based on ethnicity, gender, race, etc.

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- - 57% report at least one form of rep

- 2) evaluations of alternative forms of representation in the USA:
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- - employer established systems evaluated as favourably as unions:
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- - 51% report that reps stand up for workers to a great extent (vs. 54% for unions)
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- - 54% report that reps consult with workers to a great extent (vs. 41% for unions)
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- - identity/occupational associations evaluated somewhat less favourably

- 3) the prevalence of alternative forms of representation in Germany, in comparison to the USA,
- - much higher in Germany:
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- - 67% report covered by collective agreement (vs. 17% in US),
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- - 68% report a works council (vs. 34% with employer estab. system in US)
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- - little difference re identity associations (11% vs. 15%; similar breakdown)
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- - 84% have at least one form of rep. (vs. 57% in US)

- 4) evaluations of alternative forms of representation in Germany, in comparison to the USA,
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- - less favourable, especially re: employer systems vs. works councils
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- - 27% report that reps stand up for workers to a great extent (vs. 51% for US)
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- - 37% report that reps consult with workers to a great extent (vs. 54% for US)
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- - different expectations / structures / cultures???

- 5) frustrated demand for representation (both samples)
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- USA
- - only 22% of non-union workers would vote for a union (9% unsure)
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- - 42% of those w/o employer established system would like to have one (though
- only 14% say to a great extent)
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- Germany
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- - 33% of those w/o union coverage would like to have it
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- - 30% of those w/o works councils would like to have one
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- 6) perceptions of employer opposition
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- USA:
- - only 21% w/o a union attribute it to employer opposition (11% unsure)
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- Germany:
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- - 26% without collective agreement coverage attribute it to employer opposition
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- - but coverage = 67%
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- - 3% without a works council attribute it to employer opposition

- 7) relationships between representatives and employers
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- USA:
 - - 43% with union s report positive relation s, only 15% report negative
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- Germany:
 - - 32% with union coverage report positive relations, 9% report negative
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 - - 81% with works council report positive relations, 0% report negative

- 8) confidence in rights at work (both samples).
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- - higher than expected in USA
- e.g.:
- - 46% agree strongly that they have due process (23% agree somewhat)
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- - 49% agree strongly that something could be done if gender discrimination (27% agree somewhat)
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- - 31% agree strongly that that something could be done if unjust dismissal (27% agree somewhat)
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- - lower than expected in Germany,
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- - but higher than the US (by 10 to 15%) on all but one of six items (pay and bonuses)
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D. Conclusion (tentative)

- two shades of grey

E. Caveats

- multiple