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

- widespread concern over decline in union rep, especially in the USA
- interest in alternative forms of rep
- broader concerns for:
  - the societal consequences of work and employment
  + emergent literature on "happiness" and engagement in developed economies
    -- e.g., the Sen/Stiglitz report
    + Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*
• + 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:

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

1) representation at work

2) work and HR practices

3) the nature and experience of work: fairness, dignity, justice, community, etc.

4) happiness: job, personal relations, health, life in general

5) engagement: job, employer, occupation, union, political, community

6) "civic virtue": political participation, volunteer work, charitable donations

7) numerous control/independent variables: age, gender, education, occupation, sector, family status, religion, ideology, values, etc.
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:

"Black and White or Two Shades of Grey?"

- 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

- Germany as "white"?

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

+ 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
  •
  • 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

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

- 17% report union coverage

- 34% report employer established systems non-union systems

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

- 15% report identity associations

- 74% based on occupation

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

- 57% report at least one form of rep
• 2) evaluations of alternative forms of representation in the USA:
  • employer established systems evaluated as favourably as unions:
    • 51% report that reps stand up for workers to a great extent (vs. 54% for unions)
    • 54% report that reps consult with workers to a great extent (vs. 41% for unions)
  • 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:

- 67% report covered by collective agreement (vs. 17% in US),

- 68% report a works council (vs. 34% with employer estab. system in US)

- little difference re identity associations (11% vs. 15%; similar breakdown)

- 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,

- less favourable, especially re: employer systems vs. works councils

- 27% report that reps stand up for workers to a great extent (vs. 51% for US)

- 37% report that reps consult with workers to a great extent (vs. 54% for US)

- different expectations / structures / cultures???
• 5) frustrated demand for representation (both samples)

• USA
  - only 22% of non-union workers would vote for a union (9% unsure)

• - 42% of those w/o employer established system would like to have one (though only 14% say to a great extent)

• Germany

• - 33% of those w/o union coverage would like to have it

• - 30% of those w/o works councils would like to have one
6) perceptions of employer opposition

- USA:
  - only 21% w/o a union attribute it to employer opposition (11% unsure)

- Germany:
  - 26% without collective agreement coverage attribute it to employer opposition
  - but coverage = 67%
  - 3% without a works council attribute it to employer opposition
7) relationships between representatives and employers

USA:
- 43% with union coverage report positive relations, only 15% report negative

Germany:
- 32% with union coverage report positive relations, 9% report negative
- 81% with works council report positive relations, 0% report negative
8) confidence in rights at work (both samples).

- higher than expected in USA
  e.g.:
  - 46% agree strongly that they have due process (23% agree somewhat)

- 49% agree strongly that something could be done if gender discrimination (27% agree somewhat)

- 31% agree strongly that that something could be done if unjust dismissal (27% agree somewhat)

- lower than expected in Germany,

- but higher than the US (by 10 to 15%) on all but one of six items (pay and bonuses)
D. Conclusion (tentative)

- two shades of grey

E. Caveats

- multiple