The challenge of lifelong learning for German trade unions and works councils

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Outline

1. Research focus

2. Looking back - the meaning of education/qualification in the unionist labour movement

3. Employee representation and the challenge of lifelong learning
   - Lifelong learning and the human capital approach
   - Beyond the human capital approach: a multilevel bottom-up perspective

4. Provisional empirical indications

5. Back to the future - preliminary conclusions
1. Research focus: co-determining lifelong learning

What role do works councils and trade unions play in the conceptualization and implementation of lifelong and lifewide learning?
2. Looking back - the meaning of education/qualification in the unionist labour movement

- **Aristocracy of labour: important components of gaining (bargaining) power**
  - Identity
  - Skills (Employability)
  - Solidarity

The truth is that craftsmanship was not only the criterion of a man’s identity and self-respect, but the guarantee of his income... The small-arms fire with which the artisans fought the big guns of the employers derived its effectiveness from the ramparts of skill which protected it as well as the solidarity of the marksman. (Hobsbawn 1984: 262)
3. Employee representation and the challenge of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning and the human capital approach

- *Lifelong learning* as a voluntary and self-motivated rational choice concept
- Individual training strategies
- Equal access for all (meritocracy)
3.1 Employee representation and the challenge of lifelong learning

Beyond the human capital approach: a multilevel bottom-up perspective

- Contextualization of learning opportunities with regard to structural inequalities (e.g. Bourdieu)

- Regulation of lifelong learning against the logics of deregulation, individualization and marketization
3.2 Employee representation and the challenge of lifelong learning - a multilevel bottom-up perspective

Further education
- University
- Training college
- High school
- Primary school

Lifelong learning
- Access

Educational level
- Formal learning
- Non-formal learning
- Informal learning

Areas of codetermination
- Work life balance
- Sustainability
- Learning
- Pay
- Health and safety
- Rationalisation

Migrant background
- Gender
- Age

Lifewide learning
4. Provisional empirical indications

Correlation analysis of the WSI – works councils survey

Interviews

- Trade unions: DGB, IG Metall, IG BAU, IG BCE und ver.di
- Researchers: DUW, UDE, IAB

CRIMT 2014 International Conference, Montreal, 14 May.
4.1 Secondary analysis of the WSI- Survey 2010

Hypothesis 1: The higher the percentage of unskilled and semi-skilled employees, the more likely a works council is to address the question of further vocational training. → significant

Hypothesis 2: In the cases where works councils address the question of vocational training, the higher the percentage of unskilled and semi-skilled employees, the more likely a works council is to deal with the issue in a more intense way. → not significant

Interpretation: Lifelong Learning – an incomplete works council journey
4.2 Secondary analysis of the WSI- Survey 2010

Hypothesis 3: The stronger the trade union presence within a company, the more likely a works council is to address the question of further vocational training. ➞ not significant

Hypothesis 4: In the cases where works councils address the question of vocational training, the stronger the trade union presence within a company, the more likely a works council is to deal with the issue in an intense way. ➞ significant

Interpretation: Lifelong Learning and unions – leaving the works councils behind
The question of responsibility

“It is without any shadow of a doubt the responsibility of the employer - simply because their company will profit from this know-how.” (IG BAU union officer)

“The pressure is on the employer to do something. They want skilled and highly qualified employees and if a situation does not arise whereby we experience a mass flux of qualified immigrants, and this will not happen, I expect a situation to occur whereby employees will be able to choose at will the vocational training programs they want.” (IG Metall union officer)
4.2 Provisional empirical indicators – interviews

Works councils and the question of LLL

“Works councils have codetermination rights which until now have only been rarely, very rarely applied. This has to do with two important factors: Firstly, they are over-stretched. Secondly, there is the difficulty that this field is very diverse.” (Researcher)

“Lifelong learning is always difficult for trade unions when this involves the works council level. Ok, we can produce fantastic brochures here in Frankfurt [IG Metall headquarters] … but when works councils pass this on to the workforce, they say ‘You are crazy. I do not want to learn anything new, I have learnt enough already and I am certainly not going to take another exam’.” (IG Metall officer)
5. Back to the future: Preliminary conclusions
Thank you for listening