

EWCs as transnational organisations?

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EWCs: emergence of a European identity or still national bound actors?

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Emergence of a European identity or still national bound actors?

- ❑ General description of the problem: why is it so difficult to develop a European identity?
- ❑ Potential of EWCs is under-used
- ❑ Based on various research projects on the functioning of EWCs

European collective identity

- Identity as the central aspect of consciousness
- EWC: definition of their specific characteristics and their position in relation to other actors
- Awareness of the specificity of the EWC as a European-level body of interest representation (interests, values, objectives)

European-level action

- ❑ to influence and counterbalance central managements' strategies
 - ❑ need for a stable and consistent identity with the function of orientation and organisation in order to face challenges at European level
 - ❑ to develop a shared European-level strategy, i.e. to carry out common activities to achieve jointly defined objectives
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Twofold challenge

- ❑ Identification with the role as *European* employee representative shows to be particularly difficult
- ❑ to become a *real actor* of interest representation
- ❑ development of a specific *European* identity

Real actor of interest representation

lack of legitimisation:

- ❑ EWC directive/employers' associations
- ❑ Management
- ❑ National structures of interest representation
- ❑ Trade union organisations

EC Directive

- No effective body of interest representation
- Directive relegates EWCs to passive and subordinated role vis-à-vis management: neither negotiation nor co-determination rights (no right to strike)
- Negative impact on motivation and identity building processes
- ▶ Necessary to go beyond the EWC directive

Management strategies

- ❑ Neither consultation, nor negotiation
- ❑ Bypassing EWCs in case of restructuring processes (because of “national dimension”)
- ❑ Playing off production sites against each other (in case of restructuring processes)

EWCs and restructuring processes

- ❑ Most important issues: closures, cutbacks, relocation, mergers, take-overs, acquisitions
- ❑ In 80 % restructuring processes in the past three years
- ❑ Only 19.9 % were consulted before the decision was finalised
- ❑ Only 19.1 % of EWC representatives believe that the EWC is able to influence management
(Survey data J. Waddington)
- ❑ Only few extraordinary meetings

The role of the management: two approaches to EU-level action

- Identification of common interests: *voluntary* legitimisation by management (global agreements)
- Conflicting interests (in the context of restructuring processes): *enforced* legitimisation by management (as a result of EU-level action)

Different levels of common activities

Soft issues

- Joint working groups
- Framework agreements (EU/global)

Restructuring processes

- Common action/solidarity action
- "Share the pain"- European-level solidarity
- Alternative proposals

National structures of interest representation

- Diverging interests between national and EU level:
 - Microcorporatism/business unionism
 - EWCs might threaten national alliances with management
 - EWCs as an extension of national IR
 - Role of national labour law

Role of trade unions (I)

Ambivalent relationship:

- ❑ EWC designed as a structure of a two channel system (in which the second channel is missing): no role for TUs
- ❑ Important structure for the development of EU-level action
- ❑ General vs. particular interests: to overcome national microcorporatism (10 principles in the case of restructuring processes, e.g. European trade union coordination group)

Role of trade unions (II)

- ❑ National vs. European TUs (e.g. VW, Electrolux: to defend national membership)
 - EIFs are weak vis-à-vis national TUs
- ❑ Role of negotiation/collective bargaining is a TU prerogative (e.g. IFAs; performance related pay)
- ❑ Differences among national TUs (UK, Italy vs. Germany, NL, A ...)
- ❑ Representativity of EWCs – need for unionisation in certain countries and sectors

A European collective identity

EWC members faced with a common challenge

- ❑ the European level as the appropriate level of action
- ❑ *Capability to...* jointly assess the challenge and to autonomously identify common values and interests
- ❑ agree in a following step on common objectives
- ❑ define and carry out a shared strategy

Dimensions of identity building

- Individual dimension
- Collective dimension
- Dimension of interaction
- Horizontal dimension

Individual dimension

- Development of the subjective factor
Development of individual capabilities
 - language and the development of a collective identity
 - intercultural learning
 - consultation needs competences
 - creating awareness
 - contradictions between different roles (membership at local level)

Dimension of the EWC as a collective body

- ❑ Internal functioning
(e.g. communication and working structures; involvement of all delegates)
- ❑ Internal cohesion
(mutual trust: contradictions between different roles; outcome of learning processes and practical experiences)
- ❑ Autonomy
(need for extension of rights and resources)

Dimension of interaction

- ❑ External relationships: capabilities of integration, cooperation, coordination, mobilisation

(need for TU support)

- ❑ Legitimation

(e.g. institutionalised rights, national structures of interest representation, national and European trade union organisations, management)

Horizontal dimension

- Resources

(e.g. training, external experts, travel, translation – but also a better use of already existing rights)

- Time factor

(European identity as the outcome of medium or longterm processes)

Going beyond the directive - why GME and Ford?

- Ford, General Motors Europe (US-based)
 - EWCs: balanced composition (country of origin factor not so strong)
- It is never a stable result – each time it has to be reached again
- In other cases: national solutions (Volkswagen, Audi, BMW, DaimlerChrysler)
 - EWCs: dominance of parent company
 - Risk: EWC as an appendage of national IR

Conclusions

- ❑ EWCs operate in a situation characterised by a lack of rights and resources
- ❑ TUs, especially at national level, need to come to a common understanding how to use EWCs and which competences to delegate to EIFs

Thank you very much!