

Understanding and overcoming the limits of European Works Council networks: the case of BMW and GM

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Structure

- The BMW dilemma
- Conceptual understanding of networking and the challenge of identity
- The importance of information communication technology: the case of General Motors

BMW Dilemma: low-high-low-high trust

- International Nationalism: 1996 -1998
 - EWC relations
 - Low trust
 - National chauvinism
 - EWC meeting format
 - Predominance of plant reports
 - Limited interaction
- Rover working time account agreement (1998)
 - Access “to” and access “of” the EWC chair
- Threat to Longbridge (1999)
 - extraordinary supervisory board meeting
- Break-up of Rover (2002)
 - network weakness
 - Low trust
 - National chauvinism
 - supporting the Phoenix bid

Conceptual understanding of networking and the challenge of identity

- Membership dependent on common values/interest definition
- Networks are an amalgamation independent interests and identities
 - Rover/BMW
 - Germany/UK
 - Plant

Kelly's Definition of a Network

- The Atom is the past. The symbol of science for the next century is the Net... Whereas the Atom represents clean simplicity, the Net **channels the messy power of complexity**... The only organization capable of non-prejudice growth, or unguided learning is a network. All other topologies limit what can happen. A network swarm is all edges and therefore open ended any way you come at it. **Indeed, the network is the least structured organization** that can be said to have any structure at all... **In fact a plurality of truly divergent components can only remain coherent in a network.** (Kevin Kelly, 1995 Out of Control: The Rise Neo-biological Civilization)

Summary: conceptual definition of a network

- An amalgamation of diverse interests
 - Potential assistance
- Assistance is conditional
 - neither assured
 - nor sustainable
- The EWC challenge: developing a common sense of identity

Information Communication Technology & the EWC Identity Challenge

- Challenging labour parochialism through ICT
 - Undermines the abstract and impersonal nature of cross-boarder relations
 - Speedy and co-ordinated responses to crises
 - Promotes trust – Constant contact
 - Transparency

GM EWC: an active European structure

- GM just another BMW: dominance international nationalism
- The lessons of Luton
 - Challenge to German hegemony
 - Emergence of European-wide committees and working groups
 - Intensification of communication between meetings and plants
- The development of a rapid communication structure
 - Newsletters
 - Cell-phone
 - Mobility
 - Challenging faceless plants
- Azambuja: the ICT test case
 - Three level strike structure
 - Staggered strike strategy
 - Burning airwaves (the one hour response)
- ICT and the Panopticum effect: peer pressure

Conclusion

- BMW Dilemma: best case scenario for most EWCs
- Beyond conditional support: the Identity challenge
- Utilising ICT