

Workplace diversity in multinational companies and trade union inclusion strategies

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FP7-PEOPLE-ITN-2012 |

Project number 317321 ChangingEmployment

Research questions

An analysis of the 'public service multinational', firms engaged in delivering public contracts in the UK and Belgium:

- *how are diversity policies developed in a 'public service multinational' and to what extent is the implementation specific to the organisation type?*
- *what role do workplace diversity policies play in developing union activists in public service contracts?*

We employ ... across 36,000 sites. The challenge when promoting diversity and inclusion—to live it, to make it happen—is how you embed that all across the different levels. That is a massive challenge... The priority is that people feel included; they have to feel convinced that they are respected for who they are.

(Senior manager, company HQ)

Background

- Increased use of private sector contractors in public service provision – particularly multinational providers
- Increasing prevalence of 'diversity issues' in public discourse
- Challenges presented by the national path dependencies implicated by diversity and inclusion
- Diversity and inclusion is a unique area of investigation in that all parties support the notion and therefore the conflict arises from trying to define the terms and co-opt the debate
- Has the potential to act as a platform for trade union activity in privatised services and a renewal of the movement more broadly by involving new types of workers and members

Two dimensional comparison

The contracting out of tasks and indeed the staff themselves to a multinational private contractor facilitates a comparison between:

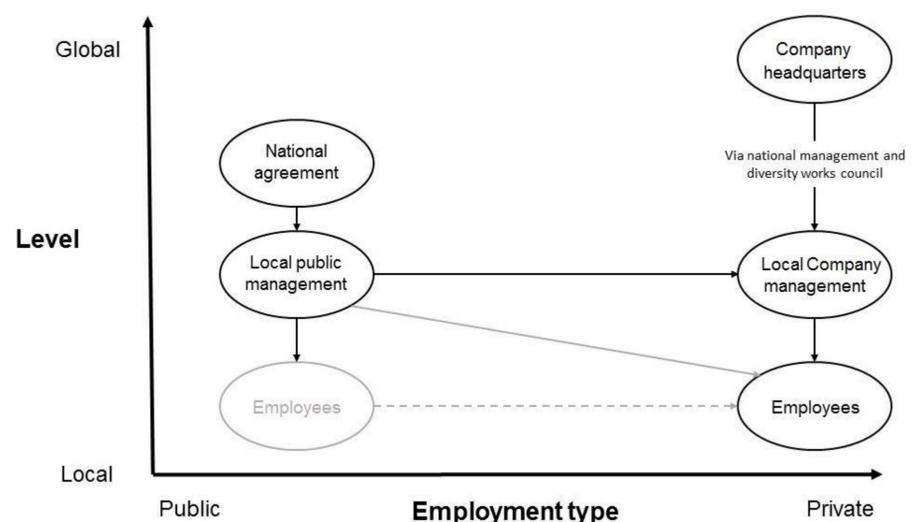
- Countries
- Employment type

The dissemination of overarching objectives and strategies from HQ—in this case from France—must therefore be adapted/adopted accordingly to specific environments.

Privatisation and shifting management

Privatisation of bargaining units in the public sector leads to 'centralised fragmentation'. This is because contracts are tendered out in smaller segments to deliver particular services, which leads initially to fragmentation of bargaining. However, as these small contracts are taken on by larger companies there is a 're-centralisation' under private management rather than the previous public one. The process is incremental and by stealth.

The graphic below shows the changes in the specific contracts that form this case study.



Initial findings

Diversity and Inclusion

Both the company and the unions within face their own challenges in relation to the diversification of the workforce. We can therefore identify two distinct variations from the perspective of the unions:

- *Subjective diversity management:* refers to diversity management as a **subject** of consultation with potential conflict between conceptions of what its objective should be and what an inclusive workplace looks like.
- *Objective union inclusion:* refers to the inclusivity of the union itself. Do workplace representatives/shop stewards and those involved in dialogue represent the mixed backgrounds of both the membership more broadly, and does that membership then match the characteristics found in the broader workforce?

Values vs practice

A series of contradictions confront unions in the company in relation to inclusion

- National vs corporate
- Public (principle) vs private (preference)
- Individual vs collective



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