

**Social Integration and Workplace Industrial Relations**  
**Migrant and Native Employees in German Industry**  
**Intégration sociale et relations industrielles dans les entreprises**  
**Immigrants et salariés autochtones dans le secteur industriel en**  
**Allemagne**

**La integración social y las relaciones laborales en el lugar de**  
**trabajo**  
**Los empleados inmigrantes y nativos en la industria alemana**

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Article abstract

This paper tackles the question of how social integration of migrant and native employees takes place in German industry and what role workplace industrial relations play in it. Three company case studies in manufacturing based on expert interviews with management representatives and works councillors, interviews and group discussions with employees of different origin, employee surveys, as well as company statistics, were used to explore this issue. The paper analyzes the social structure of the investigated companies, examines the interaction of employees of different origin and the role workplace industrial relations play in fostering cooperation and social integration. The case studies show that migrants are more likely to be positioned in the lower ranks of the companies' social structure. Findings suggest, however, that this is primarily a consequence of the migrants having insufficient vocational training, which is probably the result of discrimination outside and at the threshold of the companies rather than a sign of direct discrimination within the companies. Nevertheless, the interviews and surveys show that there is employee resentment against people of different origin. There is a coexistence of resentment on the one hand and good cooperation on the other. Work requirements and the works councils' and managements' "internal universalism" (i.e. an orientation towards equal treatment of employees and the interdiction of discrimination within the companies) foster collegial cooperation among employees. German co-determination favours an employee model of interest representation which encourages individuals to choose a work-related identity and labour solidarity to assert their interests rather than identities related to ethnic groups. It is argued that this framework and the daily interaction of the employees eventually evoke feelings of collegiality and foster social integration.

# Social Integration and Workplace Industrial Relations: Migrant and Native Employees in German Industry

Werner Schmidt and Andrea Müller

**This article examines the social integration of migrant and native employees in German industrial workplaces and the impact of workplace industrial relations on it. Drawing on data from interviews with management, works councils and employees, employee surveys and company statistics from three manufacturing companies, it analyzes the positioning of employees of different origin within the companies' social structure, explores their social interaction and asks what role works councils play in fostering social integration of a heterogeneous workforce. Findings show that workplaces are not free from discrimination but, rather, "pragmatic cooperation" and collegiality prevail. It is argued that the legal framework of German co-determination and workplace actors' orientation towards universalistic rule application ("internal universalism") encourages individuals to constitute themselves as employees with common interests and foster social integration.**

**KEYWORDS:** social integration, ethnicity, workplace industrial relations, discrimination, Germany

## Research Questions

Current research on migration and integration in Germany primarily focuses on impediments migrants face in the German educational system and when entering the labour market (Diehl, Friedrich and Hall, 2009) or on the occurrence of resentments and racism (Heitmeyer, 2012; Thalhammer *et al.*, 2001). Studies dealing with the social integration of migrant and native employees in the workplace, however, are rare and contradictory. Flam (2007), for example, detects workplaces full of racism and xenophobia (see also the older studies Hergesell, 1994; Freyberg, 1994). Kartari's (1997) study shows a tendency to explain all difficulties as results of deficient intercultural

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knowledge, whereas Bischoff, Bruhns and Koch (2009) observe tolerant relationships between German and migrant employees. The variance of the findings may partially result from the fact that the research had been conducted in different industrial sectors and from empirical restrictions deriving from difficulties workplace access. Literature focused on diversity management, by contrast, has experienced a “boom” in Germany within the last decade (Meuser, 2013: 167; Vedder, 2009). Yet the main focus has been on gender and relatively little attention has been paid to migration issues (Tatli *et al.*, 2012; Krell, Ortlieb and Sieben, 2011). There is still, however, a lack of empirical investigation and “the need to gain more insight into how diversity is made sense of and experienced by a diverse workforce itself, rather than by (top) managers and policy makers” (Zanoni *et al.*, 2010: 17; Shore *et al.*, 2011; Bruchhagen and Koall, 2008). In Germany, this corresponds to the general lack of research on the integration of employees of different origin in the workplace.

Ortlieb and Sieben’s (2008, 2010) investigation of diversity strategies in Berlin companies and Losert’s (2010) study of workplace actors’ views on diversity management in financial services companies are noteworthy exceptions. Moreover, leaving the field of diversity management studies, the research of Birsl *et al.* (1999, 2003) and French *et al.* (2003) is worthy of mention. Drawing on in-depth case study evidence from a German Volkswagen plant, they conclude that their “findings do provide limited evidence to suggest that racial tensions may exist,” and point to the relevance of connecting the issue of workplace integration with IR research. As the main conclusion of the report, they state “that union presence and influence in the workplace are central to the implementation, enforcement and acceptance of equal opportunities policies” (French *et al.*, 2003: 52–54; Hinken, 2001).

Our study takes up this point and investigates the question of how social integration of migrant or native employees takes place in German industrial workplaces and what role co-determination plays in it. Our research is based upon the following assumptions:

First, we assume that when looking at the employees’ interaction in the workplace we would find a coexistence of resentful thinking and collegiality. Since “group-focused enmity” plays a not insignificant role in German society (Heitmeyer, 2012), we expect that resentments are also to be found in the workplace. However, referring to Allport’s (1954) well-known, albeit disputed, position that contact between groups reduces prejudices (Connolly, 2000; Hewstone and Brown, 1986) and to Hochschild (1983), who found that working conditions and regular interaction influence emotions, we assume that the employees’ contact at work has a positive impact on interaction.

Second, we choose a dual perspective that keeps in mind both interest and social recognition for our research (Schmidt, 2005; Voswinkel, 2001, 2012; Fraser, 2000). For sure, terms like “ethnicity” should be used with caution and be regarded as socially constructed and not as essentialistic, but identities cannot be ignored if interaction and group relations are to be understood (Akerlof and Kranton, 2010). Although ethnic or national identities generally play an important role, we expect that in everyday work life identities as employee or related to a specific job or profession come to the fore.

Our third assumption refers to the basic knowledge that “social structure” and “social action” are interrelated (Giddens, 1984). Therefore, we expect that the character of social relations between employees is not independent of the social structure of the company and institutions matter. In particular, the so-called “German model of IR”<sup>1</sup> should shape the social interaction between employees in a specific way and foster social integration.

In order to verify these assumptions we will, firstly, analyze the social structure of the investigated companies. Secondly, we will look into the social interaction between employees of different origin and thirdly, we will examine what role workplace industrial relations play in fostering their cooperation and social integration.

## The Empirical Basis

Our analysis is empirically based on a research project, which was funded by the Hans-Böckler-Foundation and carried out in 2005 (Schmidt, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). In the course of this project we conducted three intensive case studies in manufacturing. The Companies A and B produced electronic modules (metalworking industry) and Company C car tires (chemical industry). Clean room work is typical for Companies A and B. Whereas in A production work (partially monitoring) prevails, in B research and development plays an important role. Company C is characterized by physically demanding production work. They employed 500, 700 and 1700 persons respectively. Employees with a migrant background formed a significant part of the workforce. All three companies were owned by foreign multinationals. Companies A and B were formerly parts of a big German company but belonged, at the date of research, to two multinational companies (MNCs) with headquarters in the USA. Company C was a subsidiary of a French MNC.

Our intention was to investigate typical German manufacturing companies. Although foreign owned, this applies to the three chosen cases in terms of managerial labour and personnel politics, workplace industrial relations, as well as pay and conditions. In all three companies a sectoral agreement was applied. They had elected works councils, including members who were of foreign origin,

which is common for German industrial companies. Most works councillors were trade union members and maintained close connections to their sectoral trade unions: The IG Metall (Industrial Union of Metalworkers) in the cases A and B and the IG BCE (Mining, Chemical and Energy Industrial Union) in case C.<sup>2</sup> In all cases, the relations between works councils and management were cooperative. Nevertheless, all three works councils can be classified as “effectively representing” (*vertretungswirksam*) within the typology of Kotthoff (1994). Our findings should be relatively typical for large and medium-sized German manufacturing companies.

The case studies are based on 28 one-on-one interviews with employees of whom 17 were migrants, 11 women, and 15 manual workers. Beyond this, several expert interviews were conducted with works councillors and representatives of the companies and 10 group discussions took place with 53 employees of whom 33 were migrants and 27 were women. Altogether we talked with 93 persons in 47 interviews and group discussions. All conversations were conducted by one of the authors, were digitally recorded and transcribed. Whereas the expert interviews were partly structured with the aid of guidelines, the interviews with employees had a more narrative character. Interviewees were encouraged to talk about their experiences with people of different origin at work and outside the company, about workplace cooperation and worker representation. The intention was to grasp typical experiences and patterns of interpretation from an employee’s perspective. The interviews were conducted with employees with both German and foreign backgrounds. For the group discussions we alternated between groups of mixed background, German or foreign background.

For the interview interpretation, each transcript was completely segmented into coherent text fragments and captioned with inductively gained, explanatory headings. This resulted in a text corpus of nearly 1,000 pages with about 1,500 fragments (still sorted interview by interview). With a small stock of preliminary keywords derived from the research questions (social relations, discrimination, etc.) and inductively from the examined transcripts, all fragments were brought into a basic structure. To avoid matching problems, the structure was complemented and further diversified. In a last step, action and interpretative patterns were identified by terms (e.g., “pragmatic cooperation”, “internal universalism”).

In addition, employee surveys were conducted in the three companies. Although our questionnaire was quite comprehensive with its 120 variables, we reached a satisfactory response rate (Table 1).

Of the respondents, 65 percent were of German origin and 32 percent were of foreign origin. Less than two percent had mixed German-foreign descent and

**TABLE 1**  
**Samples and Response Rates of the Employee Surveys**

Company	A	B	C	Total
Workforce (population)	500	700	1700	2900
Gross sample	345	320	600	1265
Response (net sample)	125	128	300	553
Response rate	36.2%	40.0%	50.0%	43.7%
Response rate in relation to workforce	25.0%	18.3%	17.6%	19.1%

about the same proportion could not be assigned to any of these categories. If respondents or their parents were born in a foreign country, we consider them to have a migration background, independently of their citizenship. We abstained from defining migrants on the basis of ethnic groups. Referring to ethnic identity would cause the problem that highly assimilated migrants with a self-conception as Germans would statistically disappear from the category "migrant." Consequently, the possibility of swift assimilation would be excluded per definition. Of the respondents with a migrant background, 85 percent were not born in Germany, but many grew up there and about half of them have earned their highest educational degree in Germany.

Table 2 gives detailed information about sub-groups within the companies' workforces and their representation in our dataset. Deviations between population and sample were reduced by weighting the samples for these criteria.

Completed with information from company statistics, qualitative and quantitative data were cross-examined in order to correct one-sidedness, to fill in gaps, and to get an integrated picture. Single findings, both qualitative and quantitative, were embedded in a context of meaning, which was reconstructed from interviews and group discussions. This process showed that the findings derived from the different methods are not contradictory and suggests that the picture we draw is quite accurate. Nevertheless, the results remain case study findings and are not representative of the German economy.

## Social Structure

The examination of the companies' pay structures reveals that, whereas only a few employees with foreign citizenship<sup>3</sup> work in administration or in research and development, many are employed as manual workers: 34.3 percent of the manual workers in Company A, 26.2 percent in Company B and 23.2 percent in Company C. For non-manual employees the numbers were considerably lower with 4.8 percent, 4.3 percent, and 8.2 percent respectively. On average, there

**TABLE 2**  
**Population, Response, Response Rates and Weighted Samples for Diverse Groups of Employees (percentages)**

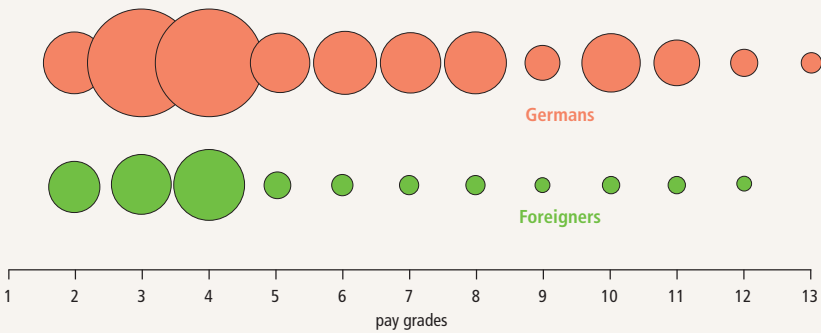
Company	A					B			C						
	Population <sup>a</sup>	Response <sup>b</sup>	Response rate <sup>c</sup>	Foreigner approach <sup>d</sup>	Migrant approach <sup>e</sup>	Population <sup>a</sup>	Response <sup>b</sup>	Response rate <sup>c</sup>	Foreigner approach <sup>d</sup>	Migrant approach <sup>e</sup>	Population <sup>a</sup>	Response <sup>b</sup>	Response rate <sup>c</sup>	Foreigner approach <sup>d</sup>	Migrant approach <sup>e</sup>
German manual males	11.7	16.0	37.0	10.8	9.6	15.1	21.9	24.6	14.4	12.5	65.4	53.0	14.2	61.6	46.0
German manual females	26.4	29.6	30.3	24.3	16.8	12.2	13.3	18.5	11.6	7.8	2.1	1.7	14.3	1.9	1.7
German non-manual males	28.8	21.6	20.3	26.5	19.2	50.3	32.0	10.8	48.0	29.7	10.1	22.3	38.7	9.5	20.0
German non-manual females	10.4	11.2	29.2	9.6	9.6	10.4	13.3	21.5	9.9	7.0	1.0	1.7	29.4	0.9	1.3
Foreign manual males	7.8	4.8	16.7	7.2	10.4	3.3	3.9	20.0	3.1	14.1	20.2	12.0	10.4	19.0	18.7
Foreign manual females	12.1	5.6	12.5	11.2	19.2	6.3	6.3	16.7	6.0	13.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Foreign non-manual males	2.2	1.6	20.0	2.0	4.0	1.6	2.3	25.0	1.5	4.7	0.6	2.7	72.7	0.6	5.0
Foreign non-manual females	0.6	1.6	66.7	0.6	2.4	0.8	2.3	50.0	0.8	7.8	0.4	0.7	33.3	0.3	0.0
Not assignable	0.0	8.0	–	8.0	8.8	0.0	4.7	–	4.7	3.1	0.0	6.0	–	6.0	7.3

<sup>a</sup> Population data based on company statistics (foreigners = migrants without German citizenship); <sup>b</sup> Response (= net sample, not weighted); <sup>c</sup> Response rate in relation to workforce; <sup>d</sup> Foreigner approach = weighted sample based on a distinction according to citizenship (foreigners); <sup>e</sup> Migrant approach = same weighted sample, but given figures according to origin not citizenship (migrants = persons with a migration background with or without German citizenship)

was about the same proportion of employees who had a migration background and held German citizenship. Figure 1 demonstrates (exemplified by Company C, which had a single status grading system) that foreigners are more likely to work as unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers (pay grades 2–5; grade 1 was not used) than Germans. This also applies to Companies A and B, and coincides by and large with representative statistics for Germany (IAB, 2009: 289).

FIGURE 1

**Pay Structure (Manual and Non-manual Workers) of Company C: Germans and Foreigners**  
(all employees, percentages)



Source: company statistics

There is little evidence of a connection between wage classification and discrimination based on origin. Asked whether their own pay grades differ from those of their colleagues who do the same work, employees with and without a migration background arrived at similar results (Table 3).

TABLE 3

**"Do you think that your wage grade is better or worse than that of other colleagues with the same work?" (percentages and mean)**

Company	A		B		C	
	Germans	Migrants	Germans	Migrants	Germans	Migrants
Much better (1)	0.0	1.6	0.0	5.5	0.6	1.8
Rather better (2)	12.9	7.0	4.5	13.7	6.0	11.6
Neither . . . nor (3)	60.5	69.8	67.5	41.6	58.6	59.7
Rather worse (4)	21.0	13.6	20.6	27.0	30.3	23.4
Much worse (5)	5.6	8.1	7.4	12.1	4.4	3.6
Mean	3.19	3.19	3.31	3.27	*3.32	*3.15

Significant differences of mean between both groups within companies are given (\* < 0.1; \*\* < 0.05; \*\*\* < 0.01).

Source: weighted survey.



These figures do not falsify the finding of harsh inequalities in status and income between German and migrant employees, but they show that these inequalities do not, or only marginally, result from discriminating grading decisions. This is because, first, in all three companies sectoral agreements require a rule-guided matching of job and pay; company or single line managers therefore have little room for manoeuvre. Second, the point of reference for grading decisions is the job and not the person (job evaluation). Of course, to assume that apart from the working tasks themselves there are no other factors which influence pay decisions would overestimate the accuracy of the sectoral agreement's application. A study about a sector-wide introduction of new grading principles in the metalworking industry in Baden-Württemberg (which coerced companies to examine existing grading structures) has shown that factors like seniority and loyalty influence pay decisions (Bahnmüller and Schmidt, 2009). However, the (mostly positive) deviations from the agreement were often granted to entire groups of workers performing a specific task (e.g., all workers at an assembly line) rather than to single workers. Sometimes this resulted from deals between works councils and management, who exchanged such upgradings against agreements on other contentious issues. Nevertheless, regulated job evaluation remains at the core of the grading decision. Finally, works councils have to examine pay decisions in order to ensure compliance with the collective agreement. Of course, the criteria of job evaluation itself are socially constructed by the negotiators and therefore can be called into question.

On closer examination, the unequal allocation of jobs to Germans and migrants is primarily not a consequence of discriminatory practices in the companies, but a reflection of differences in vocational training. The lower positioning of migrants in the grading structure (Figure 1) correlates with less vocational training (this is supported for Germany by Lang (2004); Brynin and Güveli (2012) observe similar tendencies in the UK). In Company C, 87.9 percent of Germans have completed vocational training, which in Germany usually lasts two-and-a-half or three years, compared to 65.3 percent of migrants. The situation in the other two companies is quite similar. However, there are three restrictions on the link between vocational training and pay grades. First, manual workers of all origins are often better trained than necessary for their job. Second, the grading criteria for job evaluation are sophisticated and include various other characteristics rather than making a simple distinction between skilled and unskilled. Third, as already mentioned, wage classification is primarily based on the requirements of the job (job evaluation) and not on the person who holds it. This implies that the likelihood of evaluating a job differently depending on an employee's origin is low (especially for frequently occurring jobs), and also that researchers cannot examine deviations between job and grading without evaluating each job independently.

Table 4 shows that migrant employees in positions for un-/semi-skilled workers as well as in positions for skilled manual workers (*Facharbeiter*) are not as well

TABLE 4

**Completed Vocational Training and School Education for Manual Workers  
(all companies, percentages)**

Job position and vocational training					Job position and school education				
Job position	Un-/semi-skilled		Skilled		Job position	Un-/semi-skilled		Skilled	
	Germans	Migrants	Germans	Migrants		Germans	Migrants	Germans	Migrants
<b>Vocational training</b>					<b>School education</b>				
None	14.9	39.4	0.0	10.5	None	0.0	10.0	1.2	2.4
Vocational training (VT) ( <i>Lehre</i> )	84.3	58.8	97.7	89.5	Secondary school ( <i>Hauptschule</i> )	77.7	49.5	69.8	37.8
- applicable VT	24.0	23.9	90.7	68.4	Intermediate school ( <i>Realschule</i> )	20.4	28.1	21.6	44.0
- inapplicable VT	60.3	34.9	7.0	21.1	High school ( <i>Gymnasium</i> )	2.0	10.8	7.4	13.4
Academic degree	0.8	1.8	2.3	0.0	Don't know	0.0	1.5	0.0	2.4

Inapplicable VT means a completed VT for a job other than the job currently performed.

Source: weighted survey.

trained as their German colleagues working in comparable jobs. Thus, although migrants have less training (which may result from external discrimination) and fill lower positions, there is no, or at most inverted, discrimination concerning the matching of training and job.

Although selection decisions, training opportunities and internal career decisions sometimes have a discriminating character, as the literature suggests (e.g., Acker, 2006; Bradley and Healy, 2008; Ortlieb and Sieben, 2011), our interviewees mentioned such problems with respect to only a few individual cases.

However, although inequality in job and status between Germans and migrants seems to originate primarily from the societal environment, externally caused differences continue to have effects within the companies. Differences in qualification get translated into differences in the allocation of jobs. Table 4 shows that despite migrants having received less training than Germans in comparable positions, they have a better school education. Whereas for the majority of Germans a completion of secondary school is sufficient for a skilled manual job, the majority of migrants in comparable positions hold an intermediate school or high school degree. Obviously, it is markedly easier for school leavers with a German background to convert school education into vocational training. This means that discrimination occurs not only in the societal environment, but also at the threshold between the societal environment and the companies that offer vocational training (Kaas and Manger, 2011).

## Social Relations

In accordance with statements from personnel managers, works councillors, and German employees, migrants see their incorporation into lower paid segments of the internal social structure primarily as a result of insufficient qualification, and not as a result of pay discrimination. A more general question, asking for the frequency of discrimination in the companies, reveals that discrimination does occur, but most migrants report they “never” or “seldom” experienced disadvantages due to their descent (Table 5). Depending on the observer’s expectation, these figures may sound more or less negative, but in any case it seems to be inadequate to speak of widespread or severe internal discrimination. The interviews and the group discussions support these figures. Everyday life at the workplace is characterized by cooperation rather than by conflict between individuals of different origin particularly in Companies A and B. This also applies to Company C, even though groups of origin play a more important role there.

**TABLE 5**

**“Do you have the feeling that you have been disadvantaged in your company because of your descent?” (migrants only, percentages)**

Company	A	B	C
Never	67.9	63.1	41.4
Seldom	24.1	34.6	43.1
Often	5.0	2.4	13.6
Almost daily	3.0	0.0	1.9

Source: weighted survey.

We call this kind of social cooperation between migrant and native employees “pragmatic cooperation” for which the mutual recognition induced by day-to-day interaction in the working process is an important ingredient. The functional requirements of the working process alone, however, do not guarantee mutual recognition. The history of labour reveals numerous examples where the functional requirements of production and discriminating practices coexisted (Tilly and Tilly, 1998). Thus, mutual recognition emerges probably only if it is provided that all employees, independent of their origin, work under the same employment conditions.

Allport (1954: 281) suggested that prejudices “may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional support (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere), and provided it is

a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity." These conditions are fulfilled in our case companies: internal rules and the expectations of management aim at fostering cooperative action, and most employees who work together on a daily basis have a similar status. Common objectives in organizations are not only regarded as necessary for the working process, but our interviews showed that employees mostly also identify with them. Finally, because most employees work closely together for a long period (the mean of seniority in the companies is 18,5 years), an additional condition, which Pettigrew (1998) sees as necessary for inducing the positive effects of contact, is fulfilled.

However, the practices of interaction are on a more equal footing and of a more non-discriminatory nature than persisting prejudices would suggest. In our interviews and surveys we could find a discrepancy between the collegial daily interaction at work and the workers' resentful opinions. Some conclusions from Hochschild's (1983) study about "the managed heart" may help to resolve this apparent contradiction. Cooperation and everyday contact at the workplace require employees to recurrently display emotions in a verbal or nonverbal way. The endeavour to give just the outward appearance of being a good colleague evokes actual emotions of collegiality. Following Hochschild, we call this a process of "deep acting." In order to mitigate cognitive dissonances resulting from discrepancies between role expressive acting and pre-existent emotions, the latter get adapted and remodelled little by little into feelings that are adequate to the work role. This adjustment process reduces over time the discrepancy between a true and a false self, which otherwise would, as Hochschild has diagnosed, become a burden for the individuals.

The process of "deep acting" can hardly be deliberately avoided as partially it happens "behind the back" of the employees. However, its outcome depends on the weight and the unambiguousness of the role expectations in the workplace as well as on the width of the gap to be bridged between these expectations and the employees' pre-existent attitudes and emotions. Thus, if companies abstain from demanding that their staff behave in a collegial manner, or the resentments and prejudices of employees are very pronounced and deep-rooted, the emergence of "pragmatic cooperation" can fail.

In our cases, not every single employee participates in this mode of interaction. A minority among German employees does not speak highly about "foreigners." Occasionally, they show their distance with jokes and jibes as interviewees told us, particularly in Company C. Our surveys confirm these findings (see Table 6).<sup>4</sup> However, when native employees are asked about migrants in general and not about their opinion of their colleagues the answers become more negative.

TABLE 6

**“Does it happen that colleagues, assistants, or superiors make silly or negative remarks connected with your descent?” (migrants only, percentages)**

Company	A	B	C***
Never	66.0	64.0	37.3
Seldom	23.1	36.0	36.5
Often	8.0	0.0	24.3
Almost daily	3.0	0.0	1.9

Companies A and B differ from Company C significantly.

Source: weighted survey.

According to “contact theory” one would expect that employees with a lower status develop more positive attitudes towards migrants than others, because most migrants are to be found in lower positions as well and contact occurs more frequently. Yet, in contrast to this concept, German manual workers’ attitudes are on average more disapproving towards foreigners than those of all German employees in the companies examined (see Table 7). However, whether the level of education is actually the decisive reason is more uncertain than it may seem, because education, external labour market position, and the internal positions in the companies are intertwined. The history of German anti-Semitism shows that hostility against others is not necessarily connected with low education. Real or assumed competition on the labour market may possibly be of more relevance.

“Pragmatic cooperation” is neither an enthusiastic welcome to diversity nor an expression of complete assimilation. Only a minority of German employees expresses happiness with diversity, whereas a significantly higher number of

TABLE 7

**Three Statements about “Foreigners”<sup>a</sup> (Germans only, percentages)**

How do you rate the following statements?		I fully agree (1)	I rather agree (2)	neither ... nor (3)	I rather disagree (4)	I fully disagree (5)	Mean
Unemployed foreigners should have to leave Germany.	All	15.4	19.0	29.4	21.2	15.0	3.02
	Manual	18.5	24.3	30.1	17.2	9.9	***2.76
So many foreigners make me anxious.	All	13.6	23.0	35.5	14.1	13.7	2.91
	Manual	15.9	22.2	40.2	11.5	10.2	**2.78
Many foreigners do not adapt enough in Germany.	All	31.2	48.5	12.9	5.0	2.5	1.99
	Manual	35.1	45.4	13.2	3.2	3.1	1.94

<sup>a</sup> Colloquial for migrants. Significant differences are given for manual and non-manual employees.

Source: weighted survey.

migrant employees rate “the fact that people from many different countries work in the company” positively (Table 8). Moreover, contradictions between attitudes and emotions persist because individuals act at various social places. When leaving the workplace, employees are confronted with other role expectations, and outside the company they often have little contact with persons of other backgrounds. “Deep acting” works, but remains largely bound to the role and the social space of its emergence.

TABLE 8

“How do you rate the fact that people from many different countries work in the company?” (mean)

Company	A		B		C	
	Germans	Migrants	Germans	Migrants	Germans	Migrants
<b>Manual Employees</b>						
Mean	***3.07	***1.97	**2.57	**2.00	***2.68	***1.94
<b>Non-manual Employees</b>						
Mean	2.46	<sup>a</sup> 2.11	2.32	2.24	2.34	<sup>b</sup> 1.84

Items range from 1 = “very good” to 5 = “very bad”; displayed are significant differences for employees with and without migration background; <sup>a</sup> = few cases.

Source: weighted survey.

Quite frequently our interviewees referred to the difference between internal and external, the relevance of societal spheres or, as they liked to say, internal and “private” or, less frequently, “societal.” The threshold between the world of work and the private sphere limits not only the societal importance of “pragmatic cooperation”-type relations, but it also eases the requirements of cooperation within the workplace. Difference gets externalized. Not only resentments but cultural differences in general are regarded as a private matter, which does not belong to the world of work.

Because “pragmatic cooperation” depends on specific conditions, a change in the latter impedes its proper functioning. Interviewees told us about a few cases in which the “pragmatic cooperation” of a specific group or a pair of employees temporarily collapsed. In most cases labour market competition played a role. A conflict arose, for example, because a better job had been given to a German worker and the career expectations of an employee with foreign origin were disappointed. In other cases, as a consequence of extraordinary circumstances, employees exceptionally did not respect the boundary between internal and external, drawing on resentments of otherwise external discourses coming from the media, family, or peers in order to justify their own positions in internal conflicts.

In some interviews the character of “pragmatic cooperation” as a limited form of acceptance, which includes only colleagues in the workplace, became apparent. Interviewees emphasize that they abstain from rating the behaviour of others at the private or societal sphere at work.

[...] we are at work here, everyone knows what to do. And what happens in private life/ these are two entirely different things again. Whether someone's Turkish mother is wearing a headscarf or a coat, I really don't care. We are at work here, do our work here and that's it. The private sphere, what happens there/there are many things I actually disagree with. However, that has nothing to do with [...] Yes, we are at work here [...] we get along with each other, and this is the main thing. (German worker, Company C)

Noncompliance to the unwritten rule of keeping the internal and the private sphere separate is often regarded to be responsible for the occurrence of all kinds of conflicts. Sometimes the separation of distinct spheres fails because of serious external conflicts. As such, interviewees reported that the wars in former Yugoslavia caused tensions among employees of Serbian and Croatian origin, and the terrorist attacks of 09/11 led to severe conflicts between German and Turkish employees. Then it seems, as one of our interviewees described, as if a lever had been turned. The admission of external conflicts at the workplace can cause a collapse of “pragmatic cooperation.” If this occurs, considerable efforts need to be made in order to repair collegiality. However, in our case companies such interruptions of “pragmatic cooperation” happened only rarely.

Although employees (especially migrants) possess different cognitive strategies to lessen negative experiences, like singularizing the latter as exceptions, and behavioural tactics to sugarcoat as well as to de-escalate conflicts, sometimes a rupture cannot be avoided. The mechanism that we refer to as “singularizing interpretation” (e.g., by claiming that a bad experience was an exception or that all people are different) then loses ground, and the opposite pattern of “symptomizing interpretation,” which is to interpret negative incidents as symptoms of a fundamental problem, will gain in importance. Once a switchover from one interpretation pattern to another has taken place, the issues at stake – even past ones – appear in a completely different light. Problems and conflicts, in the first instance considered to be exceptions, are then regarded as symptoms of a general hidden pattern of ethnic competition and discrimination, the tip of an iceberg. However, even though “pragmatic cooperation” depends upon certain preconditions and can become precarious under certain circumstances, this form of collegiality is the predominant mode of interaction in everyday work.

## Workplace Industrial Relations

In the companies investigated, two features of workplace industrial relations are of particular relevance for the relationship of heterogeneous employees. First, management and works councils tacitly agree in applying the same rules to all employees, irrespective of their origin. For most interviewees equal treatment was a matter of course and no formal agreement between the actors was necessary. It seems adequate to speak of universalistic rule application. Second, management and works councils reject and fight internal discrimination based on descent. Right wing extremism, xenophobia, or ethnic conflicts were not allowed. Little tolerance was shown towards violations of the principle of equal treatment and, if considered necessary, punitive measures were taken, although informal admonitions usually served their purpose. Equal treatment and the interdiction of discrimination at the workplace can be subsumed under one basic principle, which we call "internal universalism." The adjective "internal" indicates the spatial limitations of this universalistic rule.

Internal universalism bears a further restriction, which follows from the universalistic rule application itself. The application of equal rules to employees with different backgrounds causes unequal effects if the rules are not abstract enough to include cultural differences. Christmas holidays for all employees, regardless of their belief, are an example of this problem. If one takes into consideration that fast-breaking at the end of Ramadan is a regular working day in the companies and Muslims have to apply for individual leave, the inequality implied in internal universalism becomes evident. Equal treatment for diverse employees does not overcome inequality as long as the allegedly universal rules have been determined by mainly one cultural group.

The chairman of the works council from Company A insists on a rigid form of equal rule application. In his view, paying much attention to national or ethnic backgrounds could entail the risk of fostering group differences that otherwise would successively diminish. Like the majority of German companies (Süss and Kleiner, 2005), neither Company A nor B has a policy of diversity management, but both are willing to accommodate certain cultural needs of employees like pork-free meals in their canteens and tolerating Muslim prayers during working hours. Company C applies the principle of universalism as well, but there are also tentative references to the diversity concept. For example, at staff meetings the personnel manager regularly emphasizes the internationality of the labour force in a positive way. He regrets that the works council does not have a "foreign workers committee" (Ausländerausschuss) anymore, which used to work according to the motto: "They [the foreigners] have other problems and other difficulties" (personnel manager, Company C). Although nowadays the company's works council abstains from having a special committee, because migrants



are influential in the works council itself, some works councillors are particularly engaged in supporting migrant workers. In all three companies manual workers with a migration background were more content with the politics of the works council than their native colleagues: The mean on a scale from “very happy” = 1 to “very unhappy” = 5 amounts to 2.84 (Company A), 3.32 (B), and 2.98 (C) in the case of Germans manual workers compared to 2.54 (A), 2.99 (B), and 2.80 (C) for manual workers with a migrant background.

“Internal universalism” and “pragmatic cooperation” are interdependent: whereas “internal universalism” is the algorithm for “pragmatic cooperation” on the one hand, viewing co-workers primarily as colleagues facilitates the efforts of collective actors to enforce universalism on the other. Besides collegiality, which emerges in the course of the workers’ daily interaction, external circumstances constitute a further precondition for “internal universalism.” The external impacts are by and large the same for all three cases. Wages and working conditions are basically set by a relatively effective institutional framework of collective agreements and labour law. The fact that the investigated companies are embedded within such a framework, which itself is oriented towards universalistic rules, supports or enforces the prevention of discrimination in the workplace.

Moreover, the Works Constitution Act gives employees the right to elect works councils that are endowed with noteworthy co-determination rights. This opportunity structure fosters the representative collective action of the labour force. An individual employee who wants to influence the behaviour of a line manager or the organization as a whole has, at best, a chance to be successful if concerns are articulated through the works council. Kotthoff (1994) describes “effectively representing” works councils as having a considerable impact on internal social integration.

It is the social integrator of the labour collective, too. It is the representative of the collective, not only the representative of the collective’s interests. It is the embodiment of “collective consciousness.” It keeps the collective together, gives it self-certitude and meaning, i.e. identity. (Kotthoff, 1994: 271, translated by the authors)

Works councils of this type not only influence management decisions but also the labour force. An expression of this can be seen in the role the works councils play as a mediator in conflicts between employees, which is particularly important for migrant workers (Table 9). In particular, migrants who are less fluent in the German language, often older migrants, assess mediation by works councils as above average. Works councillors normally follow a pattern of de-ethnicization as a means of mediation (e.g., by arguing that conflicts at work “have nothing do with one’s origin,” and that “in any case someone’s origin is a private matter and has nothing to do with the workplace”). In compliance with “internal

universalism," the contesters are treated as if they were solely employees and not members of a particular ethnic group; thus the boundary between internal and external social space is utilized again. Remarkably, this way of conflict resolution is quite successful and migrant workers judged their experiences with it as supportive rather than as cultural dominance of the majority. De-ethnicization represents a special application of "internal universalism."

Although societal differentiation with the world of work as a particular sphere enforces a distinction between individual and employee, it is the specific model of industrial relations that determines the way in which interests are being constituted and articulated. Because German co-determination does not differentiate between persons of different origin, the "employee mode" of interest constitution predominates within workplaces: individuals articulate their interests as employees rather than as members of ethnic or cultural communities. From a perspective of social recognition and group identities this is not self-evident, especially because resentments and particularistic orientations are indeed a societal problem. An ethnicity-oriented interest representation is therefore a latent possible alternative. Without the institutional framework – works councils and trade unions with universalistic orientation – the constitution of collective interests based on descent would have a head start over the employee model because pre-existing identities could serve as resources for constituting interest groups.

Although from an international perspective the German model of industrial relations is still comparably stable, there is a constant decline in the coverage rate of labour agreements: in 2010 only 42 percent of companies and 53 percent of employees in western Germany and 22 percent of companies and 31 percent of employees in eastern Germany were still covered by sectoral agreements

TABLE 9

**"Is the works council important for mediating between colleagues in case of conflict?"  
(manual workers, percentages and mean)**

Company	A		B		C	
	Germans	Migrants	Germans	Migrants	Germans	Migrants
Very important (1)	11.8	31.8	3.4	28.0	16.8	25.6
Rather important (2)	24.9	29.6	19.7	33.2	38.1	32.7
Neither... nor (3)	28.7	27.3	38.8	19.8	20.5	28.8
Rather unimportant (4)	32.0	9.3	24.7	19.0	18.9	10.8
Completely unimportant (5)	2.7	2.0	13.5	0.0	5.7	2.0
Mean	**2.89	**2.20	***3.25	***2.30	*2.59	*2.31

Displayed are significant differences concerning descent.

Source: weighted survey.

(Addison *et al.*, 2012). A further erosion of the institutional framework would weaken the established mechanisms of interest constitution, and the hitherto effective modus of internal social integration could be led into crisis. Because it is rational for individuals to prefer strategies which promise to be successful, alternative modes of interest articulation could gain further importance. However, up to now the described model is relatively stable.

## Conclusions

We have examined the social integration of migrant and native employees in German industrial workplaces and the role workplace industrial relations play in it. We have found that the fact that migrants mainly occupy lower positions is a consequence of insufficient vocational training or difficulties at the labour market rather than discriminatory practices in the companies. Although the workplace is not free from discrimination, pejorative attitudes and ethnicized conflicts, in day-to-day interaction the employees primarily relate to each other as colleagues and pragmatic cooperation proved to be the prevalent form of interaction. Universalistic rule application (“internal universalism”) as it is practised by management and works councils provide the frame for this workplace social integration. Moreover, the institutions of German co-determination encourage individuals to constitute and articulate themselves as employees with common interests rather than as members of groups with particular interests.

However, universalistic interest representation and the constitution of an unsplit workforce entail both advantages and disadvantages for integration and equal treatment. On the one hand, “internal universalism” and “pragmatic cooperation” support a perspective in which conflicts and difficulties at work are interpreted in a context of social status or class (i.e. they foster labour solidarity). On the other hand, this model seems to be quite blind to real existing structural ethnic inequality.

Would a change to a more particularistic model improve the situation of migrants and diminish social inequality?

Within the framework of Thomas and Ely’s three paradigms of diversity initiatives, the policies of our case companies seem to show some similarities to the “discrimination-and-fairness paradigm,” which is characterized as having “idealized assimilation and color- and gender-blind conformism” (Thomas and Ely, 1996: 5). Awareness of ethnic differences, of course, is necessary to remedy structural ethnic inequality, but emphasizing differences also entails the risk of fostering ethnic conflicts in which it could be easier for a powerful majority than for minority groups to assert its interests. A backlash against minorities’ interests could thus be an unintended result of a particularistic approach.

Moreover, it is questionable whether diversity management concepts, being voluntary employer initiatives, will be retained if, in times of crisis, cost-saving opportunities are sought (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998: 981). Politics based on group identity bear the risk of dividing the workforce and further weakening the power of works councils. Stringfellow argues that “diversity management can be used as a strategy to take equality and anti-discrimination protection out of the sphere of social dialogue, making employee representatives less able to combat the potential dangers of diversity management (reducing people to their ethnic origin, reinforcing stereotypes, prioritizing business objectives, fair-weather policies, empty public relations exercises)” (2012: 341).

However, a “strict” universalistic approach is not without risk for generating conflicts either. A sudden change of perspective could lead to the “discovery” of persisting pronounced ethnic inequality. Whereas from the perspective of “internal universalism” unequal positions are acceptable if differences are a consequence of qualification and performance, and as long as all employees are internally treated as equal, from the perspective of a comparison of ethnic groups, such inequalities seem completely intolerable. Ethnic conflicts would probably be the consequence in such a case as well.

We assume that for Germany a version of “internal universalism,” which does not ignore employees’ real existing differences and is enriched by supportive measures for all employees with low levels of training and a relatively low internal status within the company social structure, independent of their backgrounds, and is backed by laws which respect trade unions and workers’ self-representation, could be more stable and sustainable than a diversity-supporting policy.

Although our paper has contributed to remedying the lack of empirical research on social integration of migrant and native employees at German workplaces, describing integration mechanisms and their preconditions, it is limited to the sphere of well-regulated work. Further interesting insights could be expected if empirical research was expanded to the situation of (migrant) workers in non-standard employment, in other sectors and countries (Zeytinoglu and Muteshi, 2000; Hardy, Eldring and Schulten, 2012).

## Notes

- 1 For introductory literature to the “German model of IR” see Baethge and Wolf (1995); Müller-Jentsch and Weitbrecht (2003); for public services: Keller (1999).
- 2 Works councils are elected representatives of a workplace’s labour force, based on the Works Constitution Act (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*) and distinct from trade unions. Nonetheless, individual works councillors are often trade union members, and in many cases works councils and trade unions work closely together. Works councils are bodies with “specific informatory, consultative and codetermination rights in personnel, social and economic affairs” (Frege, 2002: 223). In 2009 they represented 45 percent of employees in the western German and 38 percent in the eastern German private sector (Ellguth and Kohaut, 2010).
- 3 The statistics of the investigated companies use only the categories “German citizenship” and “foreign citizenship” but not “migration background” (Table 2).
- 4 The question presented in Table 6 was inspired by the study of Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 326), as well as the following one: “Because of your descent, does it happen that people in your workplace treat you as less competent or able than you deserve to be treated?” Migrants answered predominantly that this would occur “never” or “seldom” (Company A 90.4 percent, B 93.3 percent, C 83.9 percent); older employees report this type of discrimination slightly more often.

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## SUMMARY

### Social Integration and Workplace Industrial Relations: Migrant and Native Employees in German Industry

This paper tackles the question of how social integration of migrant and native employees takes place in German industry and what role workplace industrial relations play in it. Three company case studies in manufacturing based on expert interviews with management representatives and works councillors, interviews and group discussions with employees of different origin, employee surveys, as well as company statistics, were used to explore this issue. The paper analyzes the social structure of the investigated companies, examines the interaction of employees of different origin and the role workplace industrial relations play in fostering cooperation and social integration. The case studies show that migrants are more likely to be positioned in the lower ranks of the companies' social structure. Findings suggest, however, that this is primarily a consequence of the migrants having insufficient vocational training, which is probably the result of discrimination outside and at the threshold of the companies rather than a sign of direct discrimination within the companies. Nevertheless, the interviews and surveys show that there is employee resentment against people of different origin. There is a coexistence of resentment on the one hand and good cooperation on the other. Work requirements and the works councils' and managements' "internal universalism" (i.e. an orientation towards equal treatment of employees and the interdiction of discrimination within the companies) foster collegial cooperation among employees. German co-determination favours an employee model of interest representation which encourages individuals to choose a work-related identity and labour solidarity to assert their interests rather than identities related to ethnic groups. It is argued that this framework and the daily interaction of the employees eventually evoke feelings of collegiality and foster social integration.

KEYWORDS: social integration, ethnicity, workplace industrial relations, discrimination, Germany

## RÉSUMÉ

### Intégration sociale et relations industrielles dans les entreprises : immigrants et salariés autochtones dans le secteur industriel en Allemagne

Cet article porte sur l'intégration sociale des immigrants et des salariés autochtones dans le secteur industriel en Allemagne et sur le rôle que jouent les relations industrielles dans ce processus. Il se fonde sur trois études de cas réalisées dans des entreprises du secteur manufacturier à partir d'entretiens avec des représentants du patronat et des comités d'entreprise, d'entretiens et discussions de groupe avec des salariés de diverses origines, de sondages auprès de salariés ainsi que de sta-

tistiques fournies par les entreprises. Cet article analyse la structure sociale des entreprises étudiées, examine l'interaction entre salariés de différentes origines et le rôle joué par les relations du travail lorsqu'il s'agit d'encourager la coopération et l'intégration sociale. Ces études de cas montrent que les immigrants sont le plus souvent positionnés dans les échelons inférieurs de la structure sociale de l'entreprise. Mais, selon nos recherches, cela semblerait dû avant tout au fait que les immigrants bénéficient d'une formation professionnelle insuffisante, ce qui résulte probablement d'attitudes discriminatoires à l'extérieur de l'entreprise ou en marge de l'entreprise, au niveau de la formation, plutôt que d'une discrimination directe au sein de l'entreprise. Les entretiens et les sondages pointent toutefois un certain ressentiment des salariés envers les gens d'origine différente. Ressentiment et bonne coopération semblent en fait coexister. Les exigences du travail et l'« universalisme interne » des comités d'entreprise et de la direction (une tendance au traitement égalitaire des salariés et l'interdiction de la discrimination en entreprise) encouragent une coopération collégiale entre salariés. La codétermination à l'allemande favorise chez les salariés un modèle où les individus sont encouragés à opter pour une identité fondée sur le travail et sur la solidarité entre travailleurs, plutôt que pour une identité ethnique, lorsqu'il s'agit de défendre leurs intérêts. Selon cet article, ce contexte général et l'interaction quotidienne entre salariés finissent par susciter des sentiments de collégialité et stimulent l'intégration sociale.

MOTS-CLÉS : intégration sociale, ethnicité, relations du travail, discrimination, Allemagne

## RESUMEN

### La integración social y las relaciones laborales en el lugar de trabajo: Los empleados inmigrantes y nativos en la industria alemana

Este documento aborda la cuestión de cómo la integración social de los trabajadores migrantes y nativos se lleva a cabo en la industria alemana y qué papel juegan las relaciones laborales en el lugar de trabajo. Se han realizado estudios de casos concretos de tres empresas de la industria manufacturera basados en entrevistas con expertos representantes de la dirección y consejeros de empresa; entrevistas y grupos de discusión con los empleados de diferente origen, encuestas con empleados, así como estadísticas de las compañías sirvieron de base para investigar este tema. El documento analiza la estructura social de las empresas investigadas y examina la interacción de los empleados de diferente origen y el papel que desempeñan las relaciones laborales en el trabajo sobre el fomento de la cooperación e integración social. Los estudios de casos concretos muestran que los inmigrantes tienen más probabilidades de ser situados en los niveles inferiores de la estructura social de las empresas. Los resultados sugieren que esta discriminación es consecuencia de un entrenamiento profesional insuficiente de los migrantes, lo que es

probablemente el resultado de una discriminación fuera del medio de trabajo y al margen de las empresas y no se trata de un signo de discriminación directa dentro de la empresa. Sin embargo, las entrevistas y las encuestas indican que hay resentimiento de los empleados en contra de las personas de diferente origen. En las empresas coexisten el resentimiento y la buena cooperación. Los requisitos de trabajo y el "universalismo interno" de los comités de empresa y de los dirigentes, es decir, una orientación hacia la igualdad de trato de los trabajadores y la prohibición de la discriminación en las empresas, fomentan la cooperación colegial entre los empleados. La cogestión alemana favorece un modelo de representación de intereses del empleado que incita las personas a elegir una identidad relacionada con el trabajo y la solidaridad de los trabajadores para hacer valer sus intereses en lugar de identidades relacionadas con los grupos étnicos. Se argumenta que este marco de trabajo y la interacción diaria de los empleados evocan finalmente sentimientos de compañerismo y fomentan la integración social.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** integración social, etnicidad, relaciones laborales en el lugar de trabajo, discriminación, Alemania