

Varieties of industrial democracy- beyond neoliberalism or not?

The Special Issue Editors' response essay

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We, the co-editors of this Special Issue, aim to promote the expansion of organizational democracy within the global industrial system as a superior and more humane alternative to a neoliberal model incapable of seeing beyond short-term profit-maximizing no matter what the human or environmental cost. We want to reinforce dialogue and debates about the possibilities of sustaining and expanding industrial democracy and therefore social democratic institutions that are under sustained attack by the current neoliberal domination of the global economy. To support this effort, we asked three well-known experts on industrial democracy and on Action Research to write comment essays in response to our comparative paper. We proposed the following issues as guidance to the respondents and were fortunate in receiving thoughtful and challenging responses from all three.

- These are the prompts we sent to the respondents.
- If industrial democratic systems are not one-size-fits all, how can new efforts in this direction learn from the histories and structures of existing successful systems?
- It is clear in the cases that we presented that culture (ethos and worldviews) is an important resource and component in the success of such systems. How do new efforts build a culture that sustains an industrial democratic effort without hobbling its entrepreneurial capabilities and how does this cultural baseline evolve over time in response to changing circumstances?
- What do unionized environments and non-unionized cooperative systems have to learn from each other about the balancing of the interests of labor and capital in competitive enterprises?
- How are we to understand the complex and dynamic relationship between organizational cultures and socio-technical systems that such organizations are always trying to balance?
- Given the detailed agreements and complex structures to manage the relationships between labor and capital revealed in both cases, how can new startups or transformations of existing organizations learn from these structures of political and socio-technical participation and not have to repeat all the trial and error that led to the consolidation of the systems we have portrayed?
- Are there boundaries or scales beyond which industrial democratic systems cannot survive or to which neoliberal capitalist organizations are better suited or not?
- The responses we received were quite different but complementary in interesting ways. We have ordered our comments on the responses to create a narrative line through them and to offer readers a way to engage in the dialog about these issues.