Worker Voice in America: A Current Assessment and Exploration of Options

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Abstract:
This paper reports the results of a nationally representative survey of the workforce on the state of worker voice in America using a National Opinion Research Center (NORC) household panel. The survey both updates the Freeman and Rogers 1995 survey and one conducted by the Department of Labor in 1977 and goes beyond the scope of these previous efforts to assess worker interest in a wider array of issues including workplace/personal issues, personnel/collective bargaining issues, and higher level organizational values and related issues. We also expand the array of voice options to capture internal firm-provided options like supervisors, coworkers, ombuds systems, grievance procedures, joint committees along with unions and the newer examples of worker advocacy like online petitions, occupational associations, protests, etc. Preliminary results show that workers want a voice on this full set of workplace issues, there continues to be a gap between their desired and actual voice (voice gap similar to Freeman and Rogers term “representation gap”), there is a considerably higher level of interest of non-union workers in joining a union than in the two prior national surveys, and there are significant variations in the preferences, rates of use, and satisfaction with different voice options. The bottom line conclusion is that today there is no “one sized shoe” (voice option) that fits all workers or all issues.