

**A Summary of Key Results from:
The Survey of US Workers and Managers in Richard Freeman and Joel Rogers,
What Workers Want (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999)**

Summarized by George Cheney, University of Utah

- The Worker Representation and Participation Survey (WRPS) was an enormous project conducted in 1994-95, through Princeton Survey Research. It involved three phases or waves: a set of focus-group interviews with workers and managers in similar occupations, a half-hour national telephone survey with 2,400 workers (statistically sampled), and a mail/telephone follow-up survey with 800 of the original respondents. Note that the sample size for the Wave I questionnaire is roughly 1,000 more people than the figure commonly used for US national opinion surveys by polling organizations.
- The authors claim the study to be “the most extensive analysis of American worker attitudes toward workplace relationships and power in more than twenty years” (p. 3).
- The focus-group interviews revealed an eagerness on the part of workers to discuss conditions in their work(places) and their relationships with managers. Out of these initial contacts, the Wave I Questionnaire was developed.
- A typical question in the Wave I Questionnaire was: “Now I want to ask about your involvement in decisions on the job. Overall, how satisfied are you with the influence you have in company decisions that affect your job or work life. Would you say you are . . .
--Very satisfied
--Somewhat satisfied
--Not too satisfied
--Not satisfied at all
- In Wave II, respondents were asked to reflect on a set of advance materials about different procedures and structures for resolving problems in the workplace. Then, they were asked a series of questions about such options as arbitration, committees for workplace standards, etc. In particular, they were asked to express preferences about different methods of resolving workplace difficulties and disputes.
- Respondents were divided between non-supervisory and supervisor personnel, based on the national proportion of one in ten or eleven employees being a supervisor of others. One of the most interesting aspects of the research methodology was that select questions addressed to non-supervisory employees were rephrased for managers. So, while workers were asked “how seriously” they thought their managers took their suggestions on improving quality and productivity, managers were asked “how helpful” they found their employees’ suggestions.
- Results for non-supervisory employees included:
 1. “American workers want more of a say/influence/representation/participation/voice at the workplace than they

now have.” Workers see this as a route to both greater productivity and a higher quality work life. They want more participation in both individual and in group form.

2. “Workers want cooperative relations with management. Workers want some measure of *independence and protection of that independence* in their dealings with management.”
 3. “Workers believe that *management resistance* is the primary reason they do not have their desired level of influence at the workplace.”
 4. “Unionized workers strongly support their unions.”
 5. “Workers generally welcome management-initiated employee-involvement (EI) programs and other advanced human resource policies, but most think that these programs do not go far enough in devolving authority to employees.”
 6. Workers exaggerate their statutory rights at workplaces.” They often think that actions which seem unfair—such as firing an employee without any reason—are also illegal.
 7. Most workers want an organization that is run jointly by employee and management.”
 8. The vast majority of workers want the option of resolving problems concerning legal rights at their workplace through arbitration, and most said that they would use such an alternative dispute-resolution system rather than going to a court or an administrative agency.”
 9. Given a choice between improving their position at the workplace through labor-management committees, unions, or other employee organizations that collectively bargained with management or increased government regulation, about 25 percent of workers would choose union or unionlike organizations, and about 15 percent would opt for more regulation.”
- And, here’s a summary of what managers had to say:
 1. “Managers broadly confirm worker assessment of their unwillingness to share power. Many are anti-union. Many oppose programs that would keep them from making the final decisions about workplace governance.”
 2. “At the same time, much of management favors a more substantial employee voice in joint committees. Perhaps most striking, nearly one-half of all managers said that they favored employees electing their own representatives to such committees.” (pp. 4-7)
 - Discussion Questions:
 1. *How do you interpret these results?*
 2. *Do you think we’d find the same results today? If not, how might they be different?*
 3. *If you were to ask several questions of a similar sample of workers and managers, what would those be*