

# [Union revitalisation](https://assignbuster.com/union-revitalisation/)

### To what extent can we argue that there is union revitalization in Europe and North America

### Introduction:

Union revitalisation and decline are particularly hard to define, especially from a Comparative perspective. In order to better understand the phrase, we need to discuss the concept at a broader level the by focusing on different problems faced by all union movements in the industrialized world. According to Carola M. Frege and John Kelly some of these problems are more quantifiable than others and are partly drawn from empirical evidence and partly from mobilization theory, loss of membership, either collectively or in specific segments of the labour market (e. g. Young workers), declining capacity for mobilization – based on members reluctance to participate in union activities, institutional changes (such as reduction in bargaining coverage or a weakening of links to political parties etc. (Carola M. Frege and John Kelly, 2003: 7-9). So Union revitalisation can be defined as a range of efforts made by unions to deal with these problems. The discussion for this essay is based on that unions have some tact on how to react to their shifting environments, It leads to the following questions that need to be answered:

1. What type of actions are unions taking in different countries in order to deal with the issues they face?
2. How can we explain cross-country differences?
3. How effective are these actions in helping to revitalize the labour movements of the unions in Europe and North America?

The analysis is based on five countries (Germany, Italy, Spain, UK and USA), thus providing a

wide range of institutional settings, union structures and identities and union responses. Two

of the countries are liberal market economies (the UK and the USA), one is a coordinated

market economy (Germany) and two have been classified as ‘ Mediterranean’ economies which are Italy and Spain(Carola M. Frege and John Kelly, 2003; 9; 7).

The term union revitalization is multidimensional so it needs to be analyzed by its various dimensions along with the different strategies developed for revitalization.

### Dimensions of Union Revitalization

Union activity is dimensional and extends to politics, society and the market, unions in different countries face different problem which leads a versatile union activity , so union revitalization works along different dimensions in different countries.

They are as follows:-

1. Membership
2. Economic
3. Political
4. Institutional

### Membership Dimension

l Union revitalization is this dimension consists of 3 measurable factors:

* An increase in membership numbers
* An increase in membership density
* A change in the composition of union membership

### Economic Dimension

This involves bargaining power, the ability to achieve wage and benefit improvements and more broadly labour’s impact on the distribution of wealth. This dimension implements the use of traditional and innovative methods in other to increase economic leverage (Frege C. M. and J. Kelly , 2004).

### Political Dimension

Unions improve the effectiveness of their efforts to influence the policy-making process, either through traditional or innovative methods. They interact with crucial actors at all levels of government (elections, legislation and implementations) including supra-national bodies such as the European Union (Frege C. M. and J. Kelly , 2004).

### Institutional Dimension

This dimension addresses union’s organizational structures and governance, and also comprises of unions capacity to adjust to new perspectives, internal enthusiasm to embrace new strategies and a sense of introducing something new and ‘ fresh’ to the union that is not adequately captured by the other three dimensions (Frege C. M. and J. Kelly , 2004).

### Strategies of Union Revitalization

1. Labor-management partnership
2. Union Restructuring
3. Political action
4. Coalition-building
5. International solidarity
6. Organizing

### Link between the Dimensions and Strategies

1. Organizing àMembership Dimension
2. Labor Management Partnership àEconomic Dimension
3. Political Action à Political Dimension
4. Union Restructuring à Institutional Dimension
5. Coalition Building à Institutional Dimension
6. International Solidarity à Institutional Dimension

### Organizing:

The primary focus of organizing is to increase the membership number but it can also enhance the work place representation which can add in to the unions mobilizing capacity and its labour market power (Carola M. Frege and Kelly, J., 2003).

German unions are using a more traditional approach for organizing quite different from the u. s style organizing. German leadership officially declared organizing as a main strategy to cope up with the membership loss. Although there is a decline in the membership but the figures indicate the recruitment of new members by the unions, this suggests that geman unions are showing a concern for membership decline but they have not yet developed a coherent organizing strategy actually needed for revitalization (Martin Behrens, Michael Fichter and Carola M. Frege 2003).

Italian union seems to pay less attention to the organizing strategy although they have improved their service capacities to attract new members(Lucio Baccaro, Mimmo Carrieri and Cesare Damiano, 2003).

In spain unions rely less on membership number because usually government finance them, as a result Spanish unions have the lowest levels of the membership in europe. however in spain elections are held after every four years, so trade unions strength is not much assessed by the rate of membership in Spain but by the outcomes of election

British unions has started to focus on organizing since mid 90, s, In Britain organizing is done primarily in two ways , firstly by going further than just recruitment , involving the workers themselves in the process of collective organization and secondly be merely focusing on recruitment through representation offer and services. TUC now has a influence of U. S organizing model and has started to focus more upon organizers as the watchword by the academy is “ organizing is about organizers”, Besides this British union has faced some internal and external constraints as well in organizing like opposition from existing members, inter union competition etc(Edmund Heery, John Kelly and Jeremy Waddington, 2003).

In USA unions seems to be focusing on organizing but the statistics shows that only few unions ar actually concentrating on the organizing activity, a combination of support from national union and local rank and file mobilization is used to have a successful organizing activity(Richard Hurd, Ruth Milkman and Lowell Turner, 2003).

### Labor-management partnership

It helps unions to protect their protect their bargaining institutions by having a partnership with the management, if the unions succeed to have better terms and conditions for employment they can add in to the impression of unions among non union employees.

Social partnership as a tool for Union Revitalization:-

In United kingdom it was hostile in the beginning due to the political and economic environment but there has been a remarkable change in 90, s when there has been a number of agreements between unions and management but it has not much impact on the industrial or working relations(Edmund Heery, John Kelly and Jeremy Waddington, 2003).

In Italy there have been National tripartite pacts, strong union driven legal workplace representation, and tremendous coverage of collective bargaining agreements lead to considerable effect of Social partnership(Lucio Baccaro, Mimmo Carrieri and Cesare Damiano, 2003).

Labour-management partnership is a recently developed conceptin spain, sought to prevent social conflict and legitimize its democratization course via social pacts with employers and unions.

### Union Restructuring

Structural adjustment is a common element of revitalization efforts, it can positively affect these areas, firstly can strengthen union organization, it can help to unions to gain political power and union labor market by reducing inter union competition, thirdly restructuring can motivate other workers to join union on seeing increase in power and resources(Carola M. Frege and John Kelly, 2003).

A common policy encouraging new affiliations has been observed in United Kingdom, Germany and the United States, While Italy and Spain have greater influence on the pattern of expansion, Regarding Union Administration there is no major difference in all countries, with the exception of Italy and Spain.

### Political action

Political action involves unions involvement in government policies, it provides unions with the power resources resulting in better labour legislation (Carola M. Frege and John Kelly, 2003).

The five country analysis on political revitalisation exhibits different tendencies.

In the United Kingdom political revitalisation through unions has been heightened by the Labour party coming into power since 1997 , As research has shown that conservative party’s policies were more inclined towards the decline of unions , but the scenario is changing with time and unions made a decision in 2002 to cut the financial support of the labour party (Edmund Heery, John Kelly and Jeremy Waddington, 2003).

Spain and Italy use negotiation with government over welfare reforms and labour market as their main political strategy. In Germany unions were successful in putting some new demands regarding collective bargaining, However Spanish, Brutish and American unions were not that successful in making bargaining reforms due to employer strategies (Carola M. Frege and John Kelly, 2003).

In the U. S during the Bush administration political lobbying, union certification and membership saw a swift decline due to some anti-union decisions(Richard Hurd, Ruth Milkman and Lowell Turner, 2003). In Italy and Spain the combination of strikes, social pacts have consolidated the union’s political influence and membership. In sum, political action has been a essential strategy for all five unions, although the results have been very different across the countries.

### Coalition-building

International Solidarity encompasses the role of incorporating social order in Union revitalisation, relative issues bordering to the environment, globalisation, and justice.

In the U. S coalition Building is the central component of revitalization, Anti globalisation and anti-sweatshop are the examples of coalition building(Richard Hurd, Ruth Milkman and Lowell Turner, 2003). In the U. K Union coalition started by political exclusion by conservatives(Edmund Heery, John Kelly and Jeremy Waddington, 2003). These are some factors which also contribute to the Coalition :

1. Diminishing Resources
2. Expanding interest representation
3. Activism and leadership
4. Union Identity
5. Availability of partners
6. Political opportunities

In all, while coalition or solidarity are not the same for each country it is likely to increase as there is an increasing need to balance work life with that of social movements across countries.

### International solidarity:

Although the unions are national based but their voluntary participation in cross-national networks helps them to exchange information, coordinate political and bargaining agendas . In this way they exchange information on employers, working conditions and industry regulation. It can also enhance union’s political power through lobbying efforts of international union bodies (Carola M. Frege and John Kelly, 2003).

Many of the American unions have developed multinational capabilities for corporate campaign in support of organizing drives and collective bargaining. Such campaigns begin with the analysis of targeting corporation for weaknesses and pressure points, corporate campaign strategy often leads to coalition with unions and political actors in other countries, Such campaigns are much pursued in the industries with multinational capital structures and where the employers are more anti union. American unions sometime use traditional approach in support of unions from other countries, e. g international association for machinist refused to service aircrafts of British airways during a 1997 strike of BA flight attendants(Richard Hurd, Ruth Milkman and Lowell Turner,).

The role of the European union funding and development of quasi-market set has created new types of international networks, that along with the development of European work council within the key companies have steadily given rise to a new set of trade unionists involved in formal international action, However these networks are not socially and politically integrated in a traditional manner. There is a cooperation with Portuguese unions through inter-regional trade union committees but with limited effectiveness.

German unions have been active in initiating cross border agreements to exchange information and coordinate bargaining policy. In the “ Doorn declaration” 1997 unions from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands & luxemborg accepted bargaining targets based on trends in price and labour productivity. German unionists have made a number of agreements on wage bargaining and labour market issues with different countries, These initiatives reflect a growing awareness among German unionist of the importance of European perspective in collective bargaining with employees(Martin Behrens, Michael Fichter and Carola M. Frege, 2003).

Many British trade unions advocate different organizing models in which the conflict between the employer and employee is used, yet they support the version of European social partnership in which the employer is viewed as a collaborator who seeks for mutual benefits. The European contacts of British unions primarily result from engagement in formal institutions such as European trade union confederation, European work council and European industry federations, British trade union participation in European work’s council is vital and it may result in new form of cross national solidarity. Nevertheless, European work’s council participation does allow union representatives to gain experience and knowledge of industrial relations practises. Direct link between individual unions and their continental counterparts remain sparse, several held seminars with other European unions to increase understanding of different policy approaches but rarely have developed into formal arrangements. An exception is the agreement with a German mining and chemical union(Edmund Heery, John Kelly and Jeremy Waddington, 2003).

### Conclusion:

According to Robert, H., K. Sarosh, et al.(2009) the ability to regenerate collective bargaining is of great importance for union renewal rather than the increase in union members. Some major difference in strategies of these countries for union revitalization have been observed specifically in organizing and political action and the policies made by government and employers also make the difference, Modest membership growth and some political influence has been observed in united kingdom due to the increase in organizing activity, Similarly an increase in membership was seen in United states as well again due to some organizing activity along with the political influence through local and international alliance with the social with the social movements. In Germany there was focus on the use of collective bargaining to improve the terms and conditions of employment along with some political action to achieve new works council legislation, German unions made up some agreements regarding wage coordination but the structure was not supportive enough to enforce these agreements.

. In Spain the political action is the activity of unions with some efforts to improve collective bargaining while facing employer resistance, It was same in Italy with some political action along with some internal restructuring and rank and file support (Carola M. Frege and John Kelly, 2003). Although all these countries are making use of different strategies for the revitalization of unions but the results are still modest in nature.

### References

* l Presentation slides for “ To what extent can we argue that there is union revitalization in Europe and North America”
* l Carola M. Frege and John Kelly, Union Revitalization Strategies in Comparative Perspective, European Journal of Industrial Relations 2003; 9; 7
* l Martin Behrens, Michael Fichter and Carola M. Frege, Unions in Germany: Regaining the Initiative?, European Journal of Industrial Relations 2003; 9; 25
* l Lucio Baccaro, Mimmo Carrieri and Cesare Damiano , The Resurgence of the Italian Confederal Unions: Will it Last?, European Journal of Industrial Relations 2003; 9; 43
* l Edmund Heery, John Kelly and Jeremy Waddington, Union Revitalization in Britain, European Journal of Industrial Relations 2003; 9; 79
* l Kerstin Hamann and Miguel Martinez Lucio, Strategies of Union Revitalization in Spain: Negotiating Change and Fragmentation, European Journal of Industrial Relations 2003; 9; 61
* l Richard Hurd, Ruth Milkman and Lowell Turner, Reviving the American Labour Movement: Institutions and Mobilization, European Journal of Industrial Relations 2003; 9; 99
* l Eaton A, and Kriesky J. (2001). “ Union Organizing Under Neutrality and Card Check Agreements” . Industrial and Labour Relations Review, 55/1: 42 -59.
* l Baccaro, Hamann and Turner ‘ The Politics of Labour Movement Revitalisation: the need for a revitalised perspective’
* l John McIlroy ‘ Ten Years of New Labour: Workplace Learning, Social Partnership and Union Revitalization in Britain’
* l Chapters one and five in Healy, G., E. Heery, et al., Eds.(2004) the future of worker representation. Future of work. Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan.
* l Robert, H., K. Sarosh, et al.(2009). “ No Panacea for Success: Member Activism, Organizing and Union Renewal.”, British Journal of Industrial Relations, 2009
* l Frege C. M. and J. Kelly (2004) Varieties of Unionism. Strtegies for Union Revitalization in a Globalizing Economy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004