

**Werner Nienhüser**

**What do People Think about  
Employee Participation (*Mitbestimmung*)?**

Conference „What Does Co-Determination do? What Can We Learn from Research? Was leistet die Mitbestimmung? Was sagt die Wissenschaft?“ Hans-Böckler-Stiftung / Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin,  
Thursday, May 12, 2016

# Outline

1. Background and research questions of the project
2. Methods
3. Selected results
  - Extent of knowledge
  - Content of knowledge
  - Evaluation of „*Mitbestimmung der Arbeitnehmer*“ / „Betriebsrat“
4. Summary / Discussion

# Research question and background

**„Attitudes“ towards  
Employee  
Participation  
(Mitbestimmung)?**

Funded by the Hans  
Boeckler Foundation

**Measurement of  
„Thinking“**  
- Likert scale questions  
- **Free verbal  
associations**

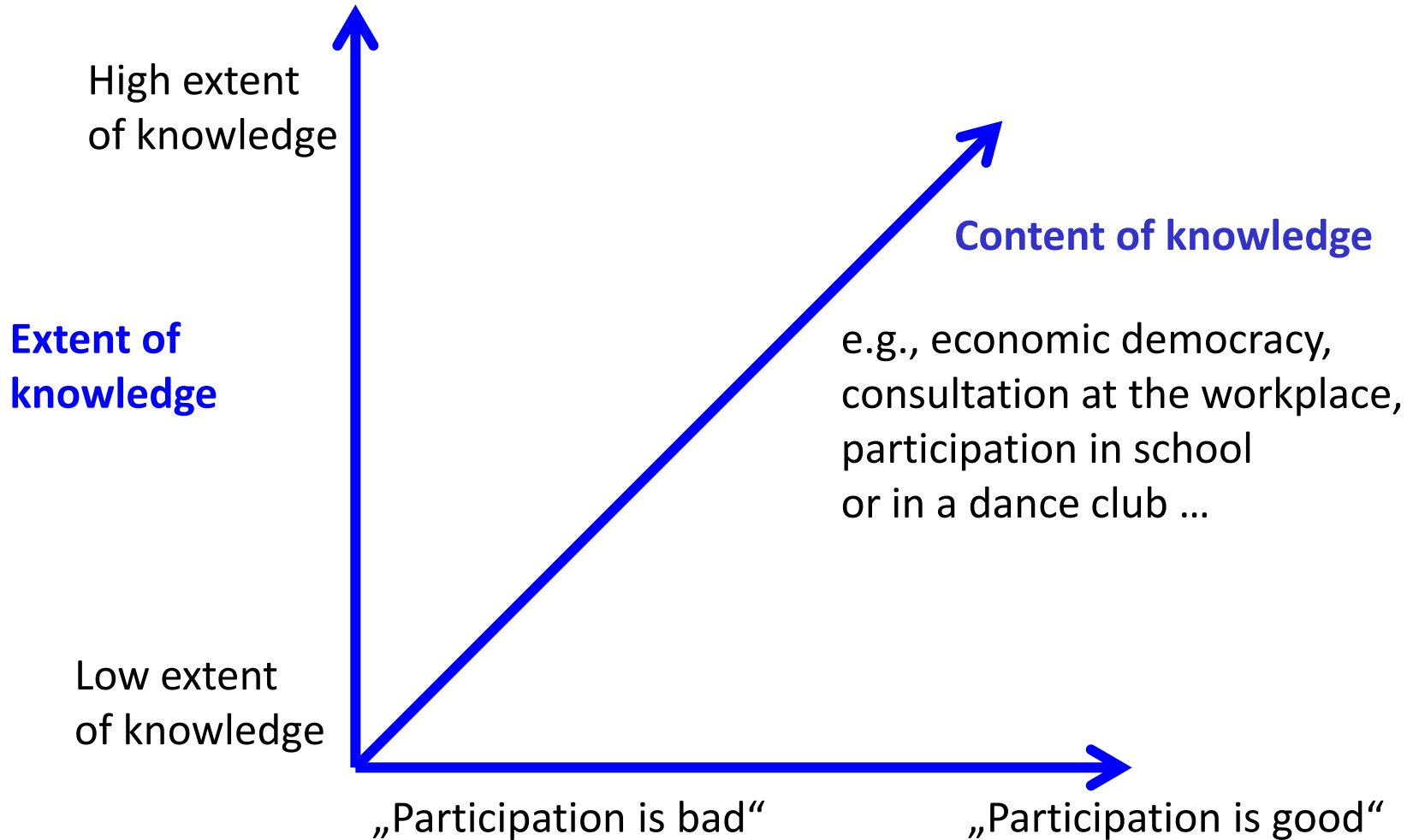
**Telephone survey  
(n = 3,203);** random  
sample, German  
population, age 15-65+

**Sub-Sample: Working  
Population  
(Employees, self-  
employed, employers,  
apprentices)  
(n = 1,904)**

**Qualitative interviews  
(n= 41),** age 15-30

# What do we mean by „think of“?

## - Social-cognitive representation of *Mitbestimmung*



**Evaluation of *Mitbestimmung*** (affective-emotional dimension; attitudes in a narrower sense)

# Method 1: Likert scale questions

- **Attitudes towards workers's participation** (different batteries of questions)
- **Workers' participation** (*Mitbestimmung*)
  - ... fosters the cooperation within the firm.
  - ... reduces the speed of important managerial decisions.
  - ... enhances workers' job satisfaction.
  - ... is wrong, because the firm is owned by the employer, so he has to decide
- **What do you think, all in all: In Germany,**
  - should employers have more influence than employees,
  - or should employees should have more influence than employers,
  - or should both have the same amount of influence?
- **But: problems of “social desirability”?**

# Method 2: Free verbal associations

## Free Associations

1. What spontaneously comes to mind when you think of participation (“**Mitbestimmung**”)? (up to three words)
2. In Germany employees can participate in decision-making at work. What spontaneously comes to mind when you think of employee participation (“**Mitbestimmung der Arbeitnehmer**”)? (up to five words)
3. What spontaneously comes to mind when you think of Works Council (“**Betriebsrat**”)? (up to five words)

## Evaluations of the associations

For each word or sentence mentioned:

What do you associate with the words you have mentioned?  
Something positive, neutral, negative.

# Method 2: Free verbal associations

## Stimulus words

Participation (*Mitbestimmung*)

Employee Participation (*Mitbestimmung der Arbeitnehmer*)

Works Council (*Betriebsrat*)

## Example

Decisions take  
more time —

**Employee  
Participation**

More  
influence +

Union +

Percentage of positive  
associations  
(= 2/3) = 67%

## **Extent of Knowledge**

***How much* do people know about employee participation?**



# Knowledge of Participation (*Mitbestimmung*) - (Extent)

„Would you say, you have very good – good – not so good – no knowledge of the topic „Works Council

## Knowledge of topic Works Council (Percentage "Good/very good")



# Knowledge of Participation (*Mitbestimmung*) - (Extent)

No association with "Participation" ("Mitbestimmung") (Percent)

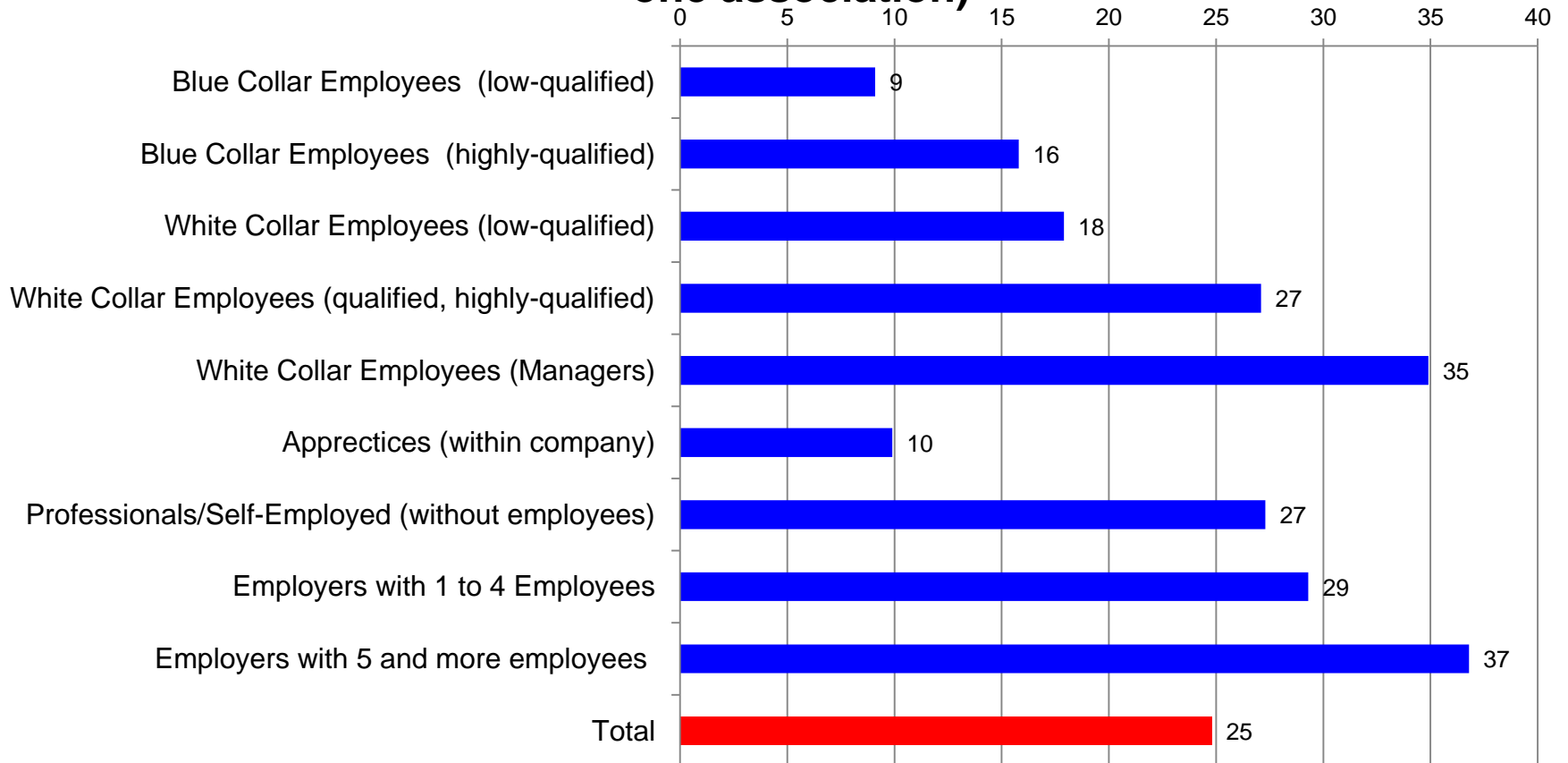


## **Content of Knowledge**

***What* do people know about  
(employee) participation?**

# Content of Knowledge

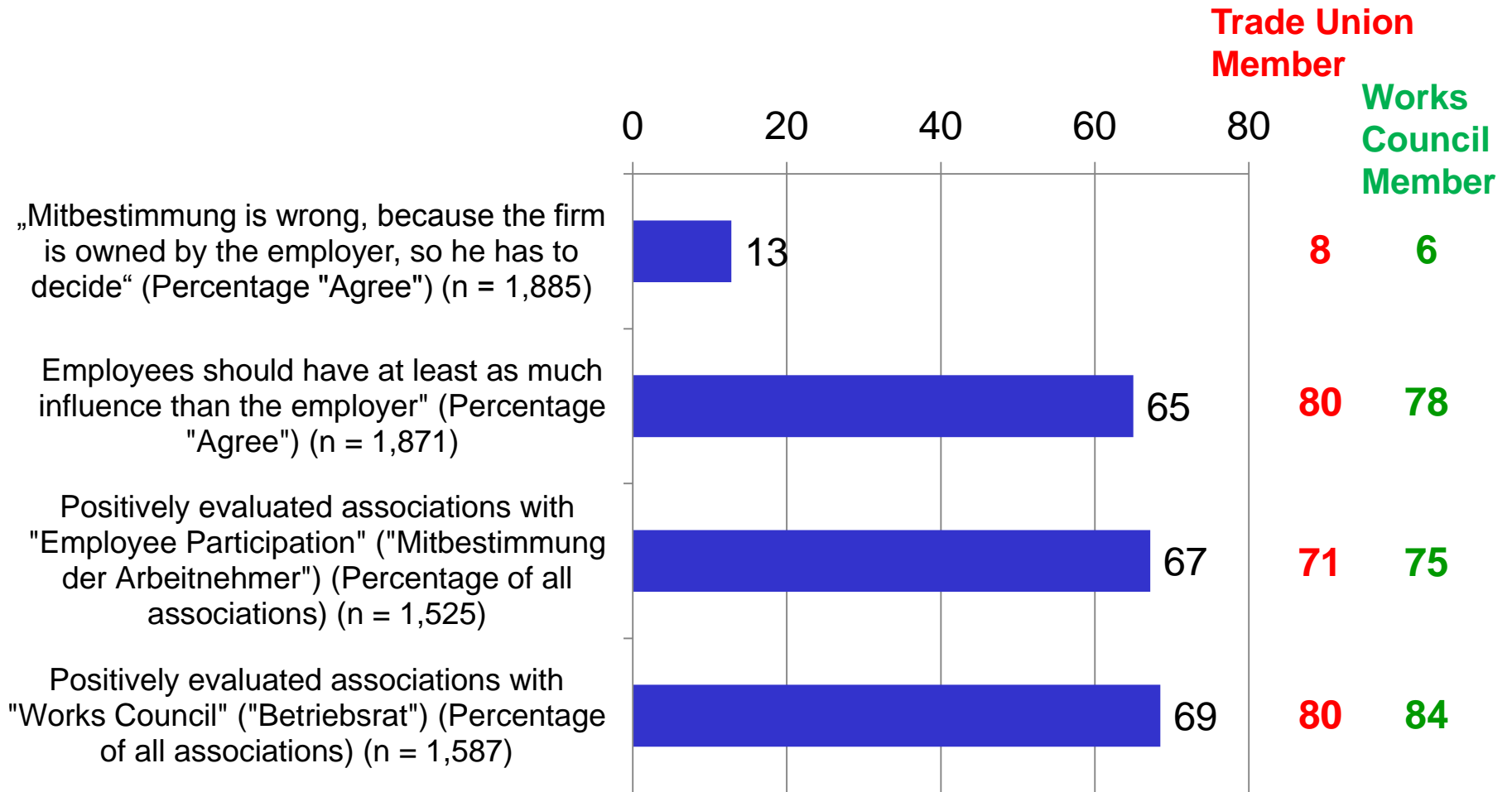
**Associations with "Participation" (*Mitbestimmung*) referring to the **context of work** (Percentage of respondents with at least one association)**



## **Evaluation of Participation**

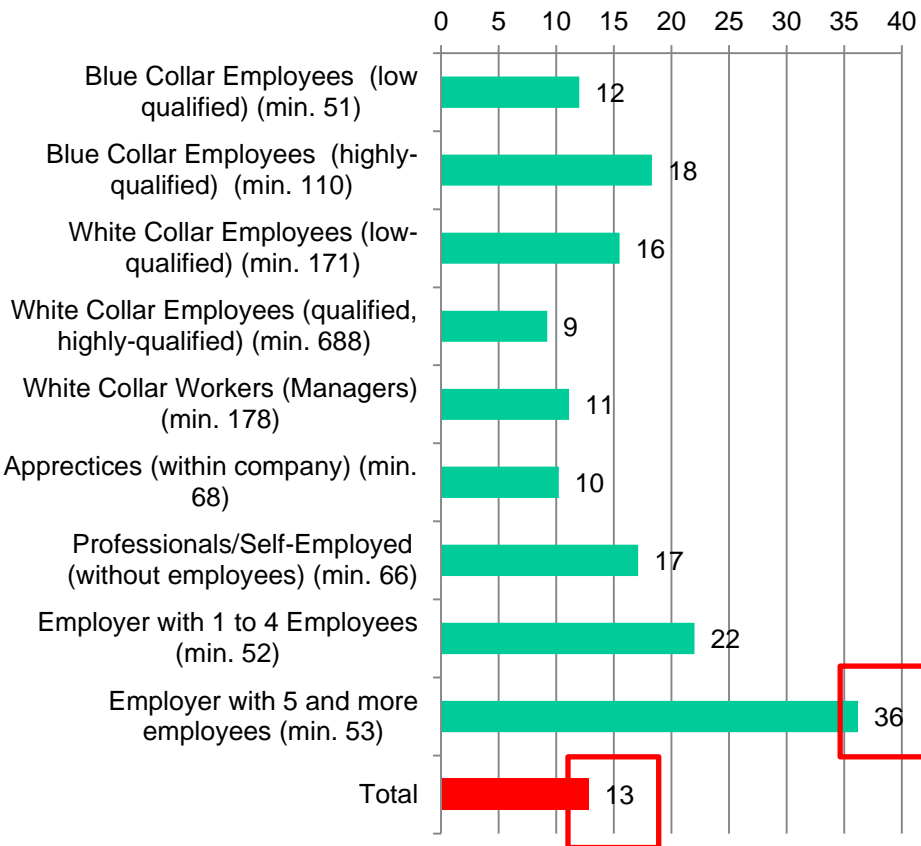
***How do people evaluate  
employee participation?***

# Evaluation of Employee Participation

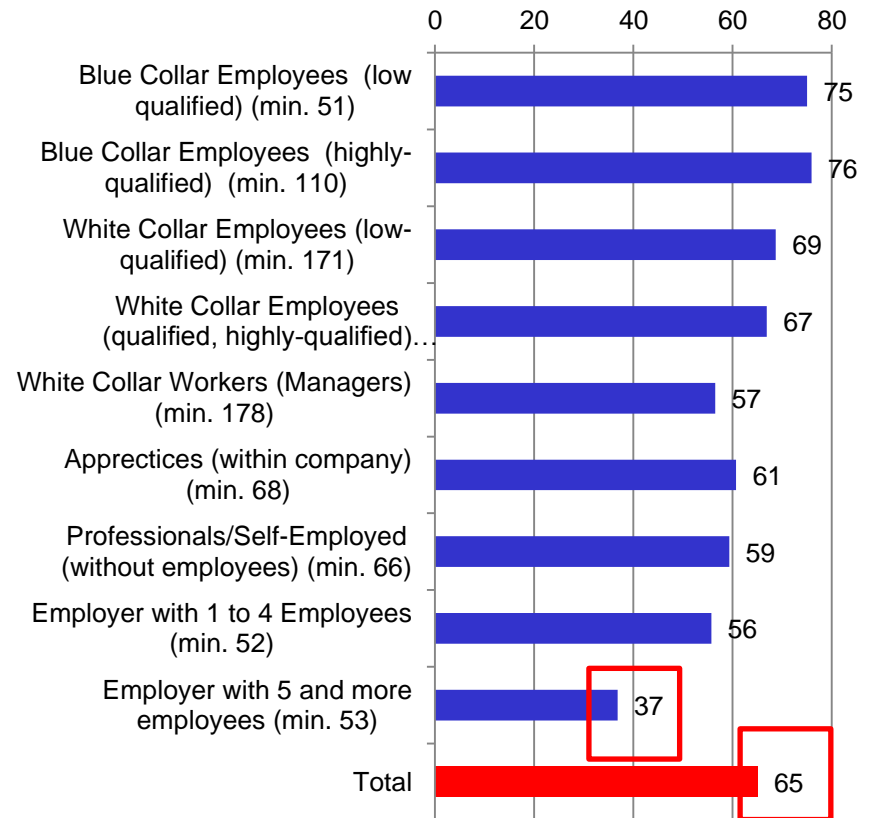


# Evaluation of Employee Participation

**„Mitbestimmung is wrong" (Percentage "Agree")**



**Employees should have at least as much influence than the employer (Percentage "Agree")**



# Evaluation of Employee Participation



- Positive associations "Employee Participation" ("Mitbestimmung der Arbeitnehmer") (Percentage of all associations)
- Positive associations "Works Council" ("Betriebsrat") (Percentage of all associations)



# Summary

## Question

**Extent of Knowledge.**  
*How much* do people know about employee participation?

## Answer

Ø Good knowledge topic Works Council = 40%  
Blue collar workers  
Prof./employers without employees = 27%

**Content of Knowledge.**  
*What* do people know about (employee) participation?

Ø At least one association referring to the context of work = 25%  
Low qualified workers; apprentices ≈ 10%

**Evaluation of Participation.**  
*How* do people evaluate employee participation?

Ø “Employees should have at least as much influence than the employer” = 65%  
Blue collar workers ≈ 75%  
Employers ≥ 5 employees = 37%

# Summary / Diskussion

- Little knowledge about employee participation
- Thinking is characterised by a loose cognitive coupling of participation and work
- Employed population (and population in general) evaluates participation as very positive
- Large differences in evaluations regarding distribution of influence between employer and employees
- → „Mitbestimmung“ as such may be „taken for granted“, but not the strength of „Mitbestimmung“
- → different evaluations reflect a conflict between capital and labour

**Thank you very much!**

**Website of the project:**  
**[www.einmit.de](http://www.einmit.de)**

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*Some of the results you can find here: Nienhäuser, Werner / Glück, Esther / Hoßfeld, Heiko (2016): Einstellungen zur Mitbestimmung der Arbeitnehmer – welchen Einfluss haben Mitbestimmungserfahrungen? In: WSI-Mitteilungen, 3, S. 161-171. The article can be downloaded for free: <http://media.boeckler.de/Sites/A/Online-Archiv/18571>*

# Sub-Sample

	Frequency	Percent	Percent
Blue Collar Employees (low-qualified)	77	4,0	4,3
Blue Collar Employees (highly-qualified)	145	7,6	8,1
White Collar Employees (low-qualified)	247	13,0	13,8
White Collar Employees (qualified, highly-qualified)	819	43,0	45,7
White Collar Employees (Managers)	210	11,0	11,7
Apprentices (within company)	90	4,7	5,0
Professionals/Self-Employed (without employees)	84	4,4	4,7
Employers with 1 to 4 Employees	62	3,3	3,5
Employers with 5 and more employees	58	3,0	3,2
<b>Total (1)</b>	<b>1792</b>	<b>94,1</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Working, but unknown status	112	5,9	
<b>Total (2)</b>	<b>1904</b>	<b>100,0</b>	