

Rutgers University
School of Management and Labor Relations
Spring 2024 – Asynchronous Class



Democratic Workplaces 37:575:377:90

Course Description:

This course explores the concept and practice of workplace democracy. It will examine major examples of workplace democracy, contrasting these forms with prevalent models of workplace governance and ownership under capitalism. Linkages between workplace democracy and political democracy and the diverse historical roots of the concept, will be examined. The effects of its features on such outcomes as worker wealth ownership, racial equity, worker voice, and productivity will be explored. A variety of real-world examples of workplace democracy will be examined critically and in detail.

This will be a small asynchronous seminar with frequent discussion forums, film clips, guest speakers, and brief lectures by the professor. Students are expected to complete and reflect upon the readings and assigned videos and participate actively in discussion forums each week.

Course Time: ASYNCHRONOUS

Professor Adria Scharf, PhD Associate Director of Education and Collaborations, Institute for the Study of Employee Ownership and Profit Sharing at School of Management and Labor Relations

Professor Email: adria.scharf@rutgers.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays 12pm-1pm. Drop-in discussion, or email the professor to schedule a session. Every student is encouraged to make use of office hours over the course of the semester.

Book to be Purchased:

Ownership: Reinventing Companies, Capitalism, and Who Owns What. John Case and Corey Rosen, 2022. (Available through bookstore, and may also be available online through library.)

The professor will supplement this book with other readings and case studies from the Curriculum Library on Employee Ownership (CLEO) at <http://www.cleo.rutgers.edu> and other sources.

Required Videos:

“Our Share: Employee Ownership as a Wealth Sharing Tool”
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/employee-ownership> (You will need to create a Coursera account in order to access these videos. They are free.)

“The Take: Occupy, Resist, Produce!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-DSu8RPJt8>

School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR) Learning Objectives:

- Communicate effectively at a level and in modes appropriate to an entry-level professional (SMLR Goal I)
- Apply employment relations concepts and substantive institutional knowledge to understanding contemporary developments related to work (Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department Goal II)
- Make an argument about a matter in the field using contemporary and/or historical evidence (Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department Goal IV)
- Demonstrate an understanding of how to apply knowledge necessary for effective work performance (SMLR Goal VI)
- Apply concepts and substantive institutional knowledge, to understanding contemporary developments related to work (SMLR Goal VI)

Required Course Work:

Weekly Reflection (in bullet points)

- For each reading or video, write: The most important points from this reading/video were...
 - Write at least two clearly written detailed “bullet points” for every reading and video.
- For any part of this week’s readings and videos, write: A question I have is...
 - Write at least one clearly written “bullet” with a question. It could be a clarification question, or it could be a more substantive question.
- Respond to this week’s question(s) from the professor.
 - Answer the professor’s question(s) in ways that show you have reflected on the material. Be sure to provide a citation or reference the source of the point.

Submit your "bullet point reflections" via Canvas by Tuesday evening at 6 pm.

Tip: Read and watch the assigned material carefully and actively. As you are reading, make note of points of interest to you or questions you have to share in your Weekly Reflection.

Paired Presentations

Each week, a pair of students will present a detailed (videoed) summary of that week’s assigned readings. The presenting students will coordinate the presentation, and they can divide the readings between them as they wish. They may record a video, give a presentation (ppt. or Prezi), or utilize another format applicable to the assignment, so long as the presentation demonstrates engagement with the material and both members of the pair contribute.

Mid-Term Exam

For the mid-term, you will complete an exam that will include multiple choice questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, and short-essay questions.

Final Project

The final paper will be an in-depth project on a question of your choosing related to the course topic, which includes a clear articulation of the question, a literature review, your analysis, and your “answer” to the question. It must reference concepts or readings from the class and include citations. Students may submit a traditional paper. Alternatively, they may propose to the professor a different format for their project (for example, video, Prezi, or other). At the end of the semester, all students will record a presentation about their project, watch one another’s presentations, and comment on one another’s work.

Discussion Forums

Participate actively in discussion forums, having completed and reflected upon assigned readings and videos. Forum participation is part of the grade. *Participation is critical to this class. Active on time, participation in discussion forums expected.*

Grading:

Grades will consist of the following components of 100% of the grade:

% of Final Course Grade

Participation (on time) in Discussion Forums and other class participation 20%

Paired Presentation 5%

Reflections 15%

Quizzes 10%

Midterm Exam 25%

Final Project 25%

Total 100%

The grade range is as follows: A = 90% and above.; B+ = 85%-89%; B = 80%-84%; C+ = 75%-79%; C = 70%-74%; D= 60%-69%;F = less than 59%.

Academic Integrity:

The rights of students will be protected to ensure that test scores are related to competence in the subject matter. Therefore, all examinations will be carefully proctored. If cheating is detected, it will be prosecuted to the limit allowed by University policies. An academic integrity contract is attached to this syllabus. Students must submit a signed copy of the contract before the second class they attend.

Classroom Conduct:

In discussion forums, students are encouraged to seek understanding and insight, ask questions, make connections between ideas, and build as appropriate on others' contributions (acknowledging classmates' contributions). Making links to texts and videos is also encouraged. Discussions will have a tone of respect.

Class Schedule

Week 1 January 14-20 Introduction: Democratic Workplaces

Learning Materials

- Course Introduction Video by Professor
- Three Video Clips

Activities

- Welcome Discussion
 - Introductions
 - Ice-breaker activity
- Discussion Forum
 - Post 1 (by Tuesday 6 pm):
In response to each of the three video clips, write one thing that struck you or a question you have.
 - Post 2 (by Thursday 6 pm):
Comment on posts by two classmates (comments may be written or audio).

Assignment (for next week)

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6 pm.

Week 2 January. 21-27 Dominant Models: How are Businesses Owned?

This week will review dominant models of business ownership under capitalism, in which business and property ownership, and the financial benefits and rights that ownership secures, are commonly reserved for the few or for outside investors rather than shared broadly with workers and other stakeholders. This week's and next week's reading and discussion sets the backdrop against which our discussions of workplace democracy will take place.

Learning Materials

- Video Lecture by Professor
- *Ownership: Reinventing Companies, Capitalism, and Who Owns What*
 - Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-22)

- A Preface to Economic Democracy, Robert Dahl
- Video: “How Business Ownership Usually Works”
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/employee-ownership/lecture/61AmJ/how-business-ownership-usually-works-ownership-models-in-business-adri-scharf>

Activities

- Discussion Forum
 -Post 1 (by Tuesday 6 pm)
 Respond to prompt: The reading argues for an economic system that spreads ownership of business more broadly. The authors describe this as “Capitalism for people.” In your view, would an economy in which workers are the primary owners of most businesses remain a “capitalist” economy? Why or why not?
- Post 2 (by Thursday 6 pm)
 -Comment on posts by two classmates (comments may be written or audio).

Assignment

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6 pm.

Week 3 January 28 - Feb. 3 Dominant Models: How are Businesses Governed?

This week will review dominant models of business governance under capitalism. Even in societies that describe themselves as “democratic,” many workplaces are governed by authoritarian regimes. Efforts to build democratic workplaces, however, have been undertaken throughout history by different movements, communities, and traditions.

Learning Materials

- Video Lecture by Professor
- Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It), Elizabeth Anderson:
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc775n0>
- Democratize Work, Isabelle Ferreras (selections)
- “Firms as Political Entities” animated video (5 min.):
<https://isabelleferreras.net/books/firms-as-political-entities/>

Activities

Discussion Forum

- Post 1 (by Tuesday 6 pm)
 Respond to prompt. Elizabeth Anderson argues that employees are subject to dictatorships at work because employers have sweeping authoritarian power. Do you agree or disagree with her premise that authoritarian workplaces are objectionable? Do you believe that all workplaces should be organized democratically? Why or why not?
- Post 2 (by Thursday 6 pm)

Comment thoughtfully to posts by two classmates (comments may be written or audio).

Assignment (for next week)

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6 pm.

Week 4 February 4-10 The Worker Cooperative

This week introduces the worker cooperative. By their design as worker-owned and governed businesses, worker cooperatives contrast with predominant business models. In cooperatives, worker-owners (who may be called cooperative members) share profits and

make significant decisions democratically, either directly or through a system of representation.

Learning Materials

- Video Lecture by Professor
- PT360: Vermont Physical Therapy Cooperative, Adria Scharf (Case Study) <https://cleo.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CASE-STUDY-PT360.pdf>
- CHCA, Sanjay Pinto (Case Study) <https://cleo.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CASE-STUDY-CHCA.pdf>
- Video: “Worker Cooperatives,” Esteban Kelly <https://www.coursera.org/learn/employee-ownership/lecture/aGv6A/worker-cooperatives-esteban-kelly-executive-director-of-us-federation-of-worker> (Register on Coursera.org if you are unable to access)
- Video: “What is a Worker Cooperative?” Roodline Volcy <https://smlr.rutgers.edu/employee-ownership-online-education/modules/Worker-Cooperative-module-1> (Register here to access: <https://smlr.rutgers.edu/employee-ownership-online-education-registration-form>)
- Video: “First National Study of Individuals in Worker Cooperatives” <https://www.coursera.org/learn/employee-ownership/lecture/KPPxB/first-national-study-of-individuals-in-worker-cooperatives-laura-schlachter>

Activities

- Paired Presentation (by Monday 6 pm)
- Discussion Forum (first post by Tuesday 6 pm; continue discussion)

Assignment (for next week)

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6 pm.

Assessment

- Quiz 1

Week 5 February 11-17 The Unionized Worker Cooperative

Unions and worker ownership at first glance may seem contradictory. However, the two approaches to worker voice co-exist and can complement one another. Union representation provides a means to bargain with management, and access to union benefits, while worker cooperatives provide democratic control over governance.

Learning Materials

- AlliedUp: A Worker-Owned Healthcare Staffing Cooperative Transforms Temporary Work, Minsun Ji (Case Study)
<https://cleo.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CASE-STUDY-ALLIEDUP.pdf>
- Shifting Power Meeting the Moment, Worker Ownership as a Strategic Tool for the Labor Movement
[https://cleo.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Shifting Power Meeting the Moment.pdf](https://cleo.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Shifting_Power_Meeting_the_Moment.pdf)
- Video: Worker Ownership and Unions (Sanjay Pinto)

Activities

- Paired Presentation (by Monday 6 pm)
- Discussion Forum (first post by Tuesday 6 pm; continue discussion audio).

Assignment (for next week)

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6 pm.

**Week 6 February 18-24 Democratizing Internet-Platform Companies in New York:
The Drivers Cooperative and Up & Go/Brightly Franchise**

What if Uber drivers owned their own platform or app? This week examines how more democratic approaches to work have begun to emerge in parts of the digital gig economy.

Learning Materials

- “How the Drivers Cooperative built a worker-owned alternative to Uber and Lyft,” Fast Company <https://www.fastcompany.com/90651242/how-the-drivers-cooperative-built-a-worker-owned-alternative-to-uber-and-lyft>
- Voices from the Field: Can Co-ops Displace the Gig Economy? <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/voices-from-the-field-can-co-ops-displace-the-gig-economy/>
- The Drivers Coop website (Review under "About") <https://drivers.coop/>
- Brightly Coop website <https://brightly.coop/>
- Video: Up & Go: A Cooperative Story <https://cleo.rutgers.edu/articles/a-cooperative-story-n-8-up-go-new-york-usa/>
- Video: “How to Build a Taxi Cooperative,” Erik Forman, Co-founder, The Drivers Cooperative <https://youtu.be/VOqVVHEAf2w>

Activities

- Paired Presentation (by Monday 6pm)
- Discussion Forum (first post by Tuesday 6pm; continue discussion)

Assignment (for next week)

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6pm.
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Week 7 February 25-March 2 Review of Semester to Date

Learning Materials

- Video Lecture by Professor (Review Course to Date)

Activities

- Small Group Mid-Term-Prep Activity

Assignment (for next week)

- Review Practice Questions for Mid-Term
- No new Learning Materials (Reading/Video) required this week. Review content covered to date. Complete “Mid-Semester Reflection” by Tuesday evening at 6pm

Week 8 March 3-March 9 Mid-Term

March 11-15 Spring Break

Week 9 March 17-23 The Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP)

The Employee Stock Ownership Plan or ESOP is the most common form of broadbased employee ownership in United States, covering more than 10 million employees. In an ESOP, employee ownership takes the form of a retirement plan. Unlike stock-sharing programs designed to reward top management, ESOPs are required by law to cover most employees aged 21 and older who 1,000 hours in a year, with few exceptions, enabling lower tier employees to become shareholders.

Learning Materials

- Video Lecture by Professor (including preview of Final Project)
- *Ownership: Reinventing Companies, Capitalism, and Who Owns What* - Chapter 5
- “Here You Earn It: Employee Ownership at Parksite, Inc.” (Case Study)
https://cleo.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CASE-STUDY-PARKSITE-INC._ADRIA-SCHARF.pdf
- Central States Manufacturing
https://cleo.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CASE-STUDY-CENTRAL-STATES-MANUFACTURING_Adria-Scharf.pdf
- Video: “Where do Most Employee Owned Firms Come From?” Joseph Blasi
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/employee-ownership/lecture/Nk9Qu/where-do-most-employee-owned-firms-come-from-joseph-biasi-distinguished>
- Video: “How Can Regular Employees Buy a Business?” Joseph Blasi
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/employee-ownership/lecture/mQd9L/how-can-regular-employees-buy-a-business-joseph-biasi>
- Video Series: Tracy Till, Founder of ESOP Company (Video Series)

Activities

- Paired Presentation (by Monday 6pm)
- Discussion Forum (first post by Tuesday 6pm; continue discussion)

Assignment (for next week)

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6pm.
- Submit draft Final Project topic and at least two sources of information (e.g., journal article, book, video, interviewee) that you plan to draw on for this final project.

Week 10 March 24-30 Worker Ownership as a Wealth-Building Tool

Wealth inequality is growing. One face of wealth inequality is the concentration of wealth among the very wealthy. The other face of wealth inequality has to do with the pervasiveness of asset poverty, or what we might call “wealthlessness,” the fact that large segments of the population including the

working population, own little or no cushion of wealth. The racial and gender dimensions of both of these aspects of wealth inequality are stark. Might building more democratic workplaces be part of the solution?

Learning Materials

- Lecture by Professor
- “Building the Assets of Low and Moderate Income Workers and their Families: The Role of Employee Ownership,” Janet Boguslaw, Lisa Schur, et al (2019)
https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/Institute_Employee_Ownership/rutgerskelloggreport_april2019.pdf
- “Race, Equity and the Transformative Power of Employee Ownership: A Conversation with Todd Leverette”
<https://medium.com/fifty-by-fifty/race-equity-and-the-transformative-power-of-employee-ownership-493d1fb41132>
- Video: Wealth Inequality By the Numbers
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/employee-ownership/lecture/WczwQ/wealth-inequality-by-the-numbers-animation>

Activities

- Paired Presentation (by Monday 6pm)
- Discussion Forum (first post by Tuesday 6pm; continue discussion)

Assignment (for next week)

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6pm.

Week 11 March 31-April 6 The Worker Takeover

The phenomenon of worker takeovers of factories and other businesses has a long history both in the United States and in other countries. Can workers run factories without “bosses”? How? What are the most successful examples? What do these experiments in worker control tell us?

Learning Materials

- *The People’s Hotel*, Katherine Sobering (selections)
- Video: The Take <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-DSu8RPJt8>
- Video: New Era Windows
<https://becomingemployeeowned.org/companies/new-era-windows/>

Activities

- Paired Presentation (by Monday 6pm)
- Discussion Forum (first post by Tuesday 6pm; continue discussion)

Assessment

- Quiz 2

Assignment (for next week)

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6pm.

Week 12 April 7-13 Scaling Up: Mondragon, The World’s Largest Cooperative Network and Ecosystems for Workplace Democracy in the United States

Networks, ecosystems, and institutional supports matter for scaling and sustaining more democratic models. This week will examine large-scale examples of democratic workplaces, including the Mondragon federation in the Basque region of Spain, with 80,000+ workers.

Learning Materials

- “Co-ops in Spain’s Basque Region Soften Capitalism’s Rough Edges” *New York Times*
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/29/business/cooperatives-basque-spain-economy.html>
- “How Mondragon Became the World’s Largest Co-Op” *New Yorker*
<https://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/how-mondragon-became-the-worlds-largest-co-op>
- Industrial Commons: “Rooting Economic Change: Value Chain Networks”
- ESOP Holding Companies

Activities

- Paired Presentation (by Monday 6pm)
- Discussion Forum: By Tuesday 6pm, share 1-2 paragraphs (or equivalent) from Part I of your final project (“Why your topic matters”). Comment in response to at least two of your colleague's posts by Thursday at 6pm.

Assignment (for next week)

- Complete Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and Weekly Reflection by Tuesday evening at 6pm.

Week 13 April 14-20 Why So Few Democratic Workplaces? Barriers

If democratic workplaces are feasible and have advantages, why are they the exception and not the rule? This week will examine barriers to democratic governance and democratic ownership at work.

Learning Materials

- Video: Lecture by Professor
- Ownership: Reinventing Companies, Capitalism, and Who Owns What –

- Chapter 7
- “Reflections on Barriers to Growing Employee Ownership”
<https://www.fiftybyfifty.org/2021/07/reflections-on-barriers-to-growing-employee-ownership/>

Activities

Discussion Forum

- Post 1 (by Tuesday 6pm)
Respond to prompt: This semester we have examined a number of different approaches to democratic workplaces. Thinking about your own experiences and your own community, in your view which of the ideas we have discussed have potential for widespread adoption? Why? Which seem most highly democratic? Why?
- Post 2 (by Thursday 6pm)
-Comment on posts by two classmates (comments may be written or audio).

Assignment (for next week)

- By next Tuesday evening at 6pm, prepare a presentation previewing your final project: In 5-10 minutes, state your final project question and why it matters. Sketch evidence, findings, or examples that address the question. State your preliminary conclusion (or answer to the question). Reference at least two readings or speakers from the class, or other specific sources of information, in your presentation. Prepare slides or other tools to help clarify and clearly communicate. This presentation may be recorded as a video, or presented as narrated slides, or presented in some other medium, so long as the information is presented clearly.
- No new Learning Materials (Reading/Video) and no Weekly Reflection due next week.

Week 14 April 21-27 Presentation of Final Projects

Activities

- Watch all classmates’ presentations (by Thursday at 6pm)

Discussion Forum

- Post 1 (by Thursday 6pm)
Comment on each classmate’s presentation
- Post 2 (by Friday 6pm)
Respond to four or more classmates’ comments on your presentation (comments may be written or audio).

May 4 Final Projects Due

- Students will have a choice for this final project. Students may write a paper or propose to the professor to present the information through a different medium.

