



The Changing Face of Employer
Collective Action in the United Kingdom
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Introduction

- UK trend in employers' collective organization:
 - Decline of historically dominant industry-based associations
 - Disbanding of associations
 - Withdrawal of large businesses from membership
 - Collapse & weakening of industry-wide collective bargaining
 - Industry-based associations remain dominant & significant
 - Renewal of employers' associations
 - Emergence of new types of employers' organization
 - Type of business
 - Private firms, employee-owned firms, social enterprises
 - *Issue-based*
 - *Employer Forums focused on equality, diversity & CSR*

Employer Forums

- Employer Forums
 - *Opportunity Now* (1991)
 - *Business Disability Forum* (1994; 2004)
 - *Race for Opportunity* (1995)
 - *Employers for Carers* (2000s)
 - *Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion* (2010s)
- Distinctive features
 - Membership composition & relationship
 - Functions and activities
 - Relationship to social movements
 - Relationship to law



etf
**employers
for carers**



enei
employers
network
for equality
& inclusion

	ON	R40	BDF	EfC	ENEI	All
Employers	188	146	295	64	147	499
No of inds	18	17	17	13	15	18
Sector	%	%	%	%	%	%
Private	78	71	65	52	57	65
Public	19	26	31	37	30	27
Third	3	3	4	11	13	7
Large >1000	83	85	78	75	71	73
Quoted	21	15	14	12	11	14
SME	1	1	4	19	14	9
London	60	61	58	52	59	51
Services	84	87	90	91	94	89

- Forum-member relationship
 - **Voluntary** based on service provision; tiered services linked to level of subscriptions; lacking disciplinary sanctions
 - **Value-adding**, rather than protective: strong articulation of business case
 - Embodies a notion of **corporate citizenship** rather than solidarity; leadership through ‘champion members’
- Champion members
 - ON 8%
Barclays, BT, GlaxoSmithKline, Home Office, PwC, RAF
 - R4O 6%
Army, Deloitte, Google, Mitie, Santander, Shell
 - BDF 5%
Allianz, BBC, EY, HSBC, NHS Scotland, Santander
 - EfC 2%
Carers UK, Centrica, Met Police, Sainsbury’s
 - ENEI 3%
B&Q, EY, NHS Employers, RBS

- Focus
 - Employer & customer relations
- Services
 - Advice
 - Consultancy
 - Training
 - Networking
- Representation
 - Lobbying
 - Consultation
 - Public relations
- Civil regulation
 - Formulation of employment standards
 - Support to attain standards
 - Evaluation of attainment
 - Accreditation
 - Benchmarking via survey
 - Reinforcement through awards & publicity



- Ten criteria
 - Commitment
 - Know-how
 - Adjustments
 - Recruitment
 - Retention
 - Products & services
 - Suppliers & partners
 - Communication
 - Premises
 - ICT
- Five indicators per criterion
 - Leadership
 - Framework
 - Delivery
 - Review
 - Advantage
- Assessment
 - Gold
 - Silver
 - Bronze

Relationship to social movements

- Trade union movement
 - Limited contact with trade unions
 - Absence of anti-unionism
 - Absence of collective bargaining
 - Forums do not provide ‘countervailing power’ to labour
- Identity-based social movements
 - Business adaptation to the rise of new social movements
 - Creation of Forums by social movement organizations
 - Age UK < Employer’s Forum on Age < ENEI
 - Carers UK < Employers for Carers
 - Secondment of social movement activists/representatives
 - Advisors & associates
 - Site of expression of NSMs rather than countervailing power

Relationship to law

- Employment law
 - Stimulus to formation of Employer Forums; not a functional alternative to law
 - Complex relationship to law:
 - Support and lobbying for new law
 - Default retirement age; medical questionnaires in selection
 - Forestalling regulation
 - Promoting & publicising self-regulation by business
 - Mediating regulation
 - Advice on compliance with law
 - Private regulation
 - Developing codes & standards that supplement law



Some reflections

- Corporate social responsibility
 - Dominance of ‘corporatist’ lens in studies of Employers’ Organizations: wage bargaining, skill formation
 - Experience of Employer Forums in UK suggests link to CSR
- Giant firms
 - Switch in Political Science from associations to giant firms; independent actors, corroding national business systems
 - Giant firms are central actors within nationally-based Forums; anomalous finding that requires explanation
- Strategic HRM
 - SHRM literature stresses role of firm as a strategic actor
 - Employer Forums points to the role of collective actors in forming & diffusing models of HR practice