

May 2010

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### Recommended Citation

Zinggeler, Margrit V. (2010) "The Educational Duty of the German Chamber of Commerce," *Global Business Languages*: Vol. 7 , Article 9.  
Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol7/iss1/9>

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## THE EDUCATIONAL DUTY OF THE GERMAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

There are eighty-two German Chambers of Industry and Commerce, called *DIHK, Deutsche Industrie und Handelskammer*, in Germany. Each chamber is an entity in itself, independent, yet in close affinity with the government and its economic laws and regulations. As the Germans know two legal codes—*Das bürgerliche Gesetzbuch (BG)*, the general civil law and the *Handelgesetzbuch (HG)*, the law of trade and business—the duties of the German IHKs are twofold. Besides the advancement and promotion of national and international trade and business in compliance with environmental standards and business laws, the chamber is also obliged to organize and oversee the vocational education and training, which is a civil duty. Thus, there is a parallel dichotomy between the two legal structures and the two tasks of the chamber of industry and commerce. The duality is repeated in the structure of the professional education that includes practical on-the-job training and theoretical schooling. This dual system has a long history in Germany. Non-academic professions are learned in the workplace in combination with studies at specific professional schools (*Berufsschulen*) which the government helps to fund at no tuition cost for the apprentices. A basic apprenticeship lasts for three to four years. The success of the dual training system is manifested in the high quality of German workmanship, manufacturing and its products.

The general structure, function, and services of the German Chambers of Commerce and Industry need to be examined. A plethora of information about the chambers' activities can be found on the Internet.<sup>1</sup> Our critical analysis will focus on vocational, specialized, and continuing

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<sup>1</sup>The Website <<http://www.ihk.de>> offers information and links about the main activities of the German Chambers of Industry and Commerce in German language. A one-page summary can be found in English.

training which is mandated to the chamber of industry and commerce by the German government based on the *Berufsbildungsgesetz* (Law of Professional Education). This is contrary to the U.S. where professional certification is mostly in the hands of educational institutions.

According to § 1 of the constitutional law of the IHK, the chambers of industry and commerce have to promote all branches of business in their region in an impartial manner. They also support government offices with reports, proposals, and surveys.<sup>2</sup> Membership is mandatory for businesses, thus constituting a common interest and governance in the chamber's work. The German chamber is a public corporation and every member business has one vote in the assembly.<sup>3</sup> These member representatives elect the chamber's president, several vice-presidents, and the general manager during the annual general meeting. The general assembly is the highest democratic institution of the chamber. It defines the guidelines for the activities of the chamber and for the associated committees and task forces. The presidency is an honorary office, while the general manager and the staff in the various departments (so-called *Dezernate* or *Abteilungen*) are employees of the chamber.

This structure is illustrated with the example of the IHK Bonn/Rhein-Sieg. This chamber dates back to 1845 when 65 members of local trade organized an interest group that was formally constituted as the chamber of commerce in 1891.<sup>4</sup> Today, Dr. Klaus Stammen is the president. Reflecting growth, the chamber has now seven vice-presidents, two of them were already members of the presidency in the mid nineties. The general manager is Michael Swoboda. In the Department of Public Relations one person does public relation work and another is the editor of *Die Wirtschaft*, the monthly informational magazine that every chamber publishes with a lexically and semantically similar title.<sup>5</sup> A secretary helps with all clerical work in this department. The Department of Internal Affairs has one administrative manager, two secretaries, four employees for membership related business including data collection,

<sup>2</sup>*Leistungsverzeichnis der Industrie-und Handelskammer Bonn. IHK von A-Z*, 1.

<sup>3</sup>Farms, handicraft businesses, and the self-employed are exempt. There are over 3 million members in the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce, including retail businesses and hotels.

<sup>4</sup>Helmut Vogt. *Die Wirtschaftsregion Bonn/Rhein-Sieg im Industriezeitalter. Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen der Industrie-und Handelskammer Bonn, 1891–1991*. Bonn: IHK Presse, 1991, 88–89.

<sup>5</sup>E.g. the chamber in Mannheim publishes the *Wirtschaftsmagazin Rhein-Neckar* and the chamber in Reutlingen calls its publication *Wirtschaft Neckar-Alb*.

two specialists for finance and one for data processing, one employee in the registry and another employee in the in-house print shop.

Department I is responsible for Industry, Planning, and Environmental Protection. It consists of six specialists and two secretaries. This department works closely together with the Technical University in Aachen. For example, the chamber supports financially both the Computer Science and the Mathematics Department at Aachen University. Law and Tax issues are the domain of the four employees in Department II. Their goal, of course, is low business taxes for local industry and businesses. Department III, Transportation, Trade, and Export, is currently headed by Kurt Schmitz-Temming with the assistance of two additional specialists and supported by two secretaries.

An interesting observation is that all managers in the IHK Bonn-Sieg are male, while secretaries and data entry personnel are all female with the exception of just a few female specialists. One of these female specialists, Hannelore Grengos, is in department III where she examines hotels and inns as part of her responsibilities.

Before describing the largest division of the IHK Bonn-Sieg, Department IV, *Berufsbildung* (Vocational Education and Training), a few words about department V, which facilitates trade fairs, the internationally famous German *Messen* (trade exhibitions) should be said. The largest trade exhibitions are in Hannover, Berlin, Frankfurt a.M., Munich, Düsseldorf, Leipzig, Hamburg, and Nuremberg. Since these important trade fairs are export-oriented, Department V deals with global trade issues accordingly, such as international trade regulations and customs. Also, it collaborates with the international chambers of industry and commerce and the consulates. The secretary of this department also collects data for export statistics.

Department IV, Vocational Education and Training, works closely with over 1600 companies which train over 5000 apprentices in the Bonn area. "Die Betreuung der Ausbildungsbetriebe gehört zu den wichtigsten Aufgaben in der Berufsbildung."<sup>6</sup> (One of the most important tasks (of a chamber) is the support and control of the training companies.) The 82 IHKs are obligated by the *Berufsbildungsgesetz* (Education Law) to carry out the vocational training of young people in Germany. Expert training consultants of the IHK support the industry and businesses in the region around Bonn that train apprentices in a large variety of trades and

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<sup>6</sup>*Leistungsverzeichnis der Industrie-und Handelskammer Bonn. IHK von A-Z, 7.*

professions. They help the companies and businesses to define training options and to find suitable applicants. They inform the employers about recognized vocational programs and the relevant curriculum. These IHK training consultants not only advise apprentices and staff in training centers but also parents and everybody who seeks advice about professional training, including continuing education and career changes. The education and training department has established task forces, so-called *Ausbilderarbeitskreise*, which are specialized for the different training areas, like business administration in industry, retail and wholesale, the technical professions, and service-oriented fields. Also, trainers themselves need to learn continually in order to be effective teachers. Therefore, the IHK organizes trainer seminars (*Ausbilderseminare*) on new technologies and educational methods. Continuing professional development is another large domain of department IV. Many courses are offered to fulfill requirements for someone to become a master of a trade or a specialist in specific professional fields. Foreign language training and certification is yet another educational service that the IHK offers. The IHK is also the test center for these kinds of examinations.

Department IV, Vocational Education and Training, is the largest unit in the IHK Bonn-Sieg. The manager of this department, Wolfgang Brunwig, has many years of experience in this position, overseeing all aspects of vocational education and training. He is the supervisory chair of the school for masters in industry, in the city of Troisdorf, and the *Gemeinschaftslehrwerkstätten und Fortbildungszentrum für den Bezirk der Industrie-und Handelskammer Bonn e.V.*, (Community Vocational and Continuing Training Centers, Bonn), a facility in the city of Siegburg with over 60 vocational training centers for apprentices of the metal and electronic industry. Jürgen Hindenberg is responsible for examinations and testing in addition to managing the IHK Bonn/Rhein-Sieg Society of Continuing Education. Nine expert specialists deal uniquely with mid-term, final, and diploma examinations according to industry branches and professions, e.g. business administration, technical and communication professions. Two secretaries help with the extensive administration of the testing services. Four experts advise and control the training centers in industry and businesses. Michael Gerlarch oversees the professions of managerial merchants in retail, the automotive industry, drugstores, bookstores, music stores, florists, gas stations and

general sales. Richard Stegemann oversees diverse training sites for technical professions in architecture, construction and metal industry, the textile, chemical, photo, and printing industry, the electro-technical and IT industry, media, transportation, the food industry, and even the entertainment industry. Dario Thomas is the business administration expert advising businesses in the typical German category of *kaufmännische Berufe-Kaufmann/Kauffrau*, administrative specialists in the area of inventory, trade and export, real estate, tourism, sport and fitness, advertising, event planning, and the publishing sector.

Since the mid nineties, a Service-Center has been added. Marita Barabino is the team leader of a group of five information specialists who also deal with the “red tape” of the right form for the right business and relevant regulation.<sup>7</sup> Last but not least, a Committee of Education and Training is compiled proportionally to the member industries, the employers, and teachers.

In summer 2001, the Education and Training department of the IHK Rhein-Neckar in Mannheim<sup>8</sup> was very concerned that all young people who wanted to enter into an apprenticeship would not find a training center. The chamber praised the increase of contracts (*Lehrausbildungsverträge*) in the last four years, yet urged the members of the chamber to create more opportunities for the increased number of youth who finished the required schooling of nine or ten years and who are ready to learn a trade. Again, the chamber appealed to the German commitment to industrial excellence! “Nur mit bestens ausgebildeten Nachwuchskräften kann unsere Wirtschaft im internationalen Wettbewerb mithalten.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the chamber organized *Last-Minute-Lehrstellenbörsen*, three-day long information events, in its modern IHK building. Here, representatives from industry and businesses could personally talk with the students and prospective apprentices. With these and similar measures, apprenticeships rose by 15% to more than 15,000 in the state of Baden-Württemberg last year. A large increase was registered in the fields of information and media. Yet companies report difficulties finding qualified apprentices for technical professions.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The information is compiled from *Leistungsverzeichnis der Industrie-und Handelskammer Bonn. IHK von A-Z*, the brochure *Wegweiser durch die Kammer* and the website of the IHK Bonn/Rhein-Sieg, <[http://www.ihk-bonn.de/ihk\\_bonn\\_r\\_s/011102113927.php](http://www.ihk-bonn.de/ihk_bonn_r_s/011102113927.php)>.

<sup>8</sup>An additional office of the IHK Rhein-Neckar is in Heidelberg.

<sup>9</sup>*Wirtschaftsmagazin Rhein-Neckar*, 7–8/2001, 19.

<sup>10</sup>*Wirtschaftsmagazin Rhein-Neckar*, 7–8/2001, 46. See also <<http://arbeitsamt.de>>.

While many young people hope for an apprenticeship, others come to the end of their vocational training in Spring 2002. All apprentices in the Rhein-Neckar area who want to take the rigorous, final examinations had to register with IHK by September 15, 2001. This deadline also applies to people who did not have a training contract, so-called externs, who can try to pass the final exams.

Also in the region of Mannheim, E-Commerce is of great importance. The IHKs and the AHKs (the *Außenhandelskammern*, the international German chambers of commerce in 76 countries) established an Internet E-Trade-Center (<http://www.e-trade-center.com>) to help with new business contacts. Locally, the IHK Mannheim offered three seminars in September and October 2001: 1. *eProcurement—Modernes Einkaufsmanagement nicht nur für C-Artikel*. 2. *Steuern im elektronischen Geschäftsverkehr*. 3. *eLogistics—Distribution und Transport von Waren im Zeitalter des eBusiness*.<sup>11</sup>

While vocational schools have no tuition costs and apprentices even earn a small monthly salary, continuing education is a business for the IHK since it offers courses for a fee. *EDV*—(computer) courses are very popular ranging from € 150 to 450 per class. Courses in sales, human resources, rhetoric, and personal development (from € 175 to 350) are also in demand. Furthermore, the IHK offers a great variety of specialist (*Fachmann/-frau*) and master's classes as preparations for additional professional examinations.<sup>12</sup> After the successful practical and theoretical *Meisterprüfung*, which has a very high standard, these experts receive a so-called *Meisterbrief* (letter of master accreditation) and they are now allowed to train the next generation of apprentices, they truly are masters! To illustrate this, 26 candidates took the *Küchenmeister* (chef) master examination at the IHK Rhein-Neckar. They were examined by volunteer expert chefs from quality restaurants and hotels. Subsequently, 20 male and 1 female students received their master chef's certification in April, 2001.<sup>13</sup>

Companies in the Mannheim area which do not have certain training tools or who want to add a specific training element can receive individualized solutions through the *Berufsbildungswerk (BBW)* in

<sup>11</sup>1. E-Procurement—Modern Purchasing Management not only for C-Products. 2. Taxes in Electronic Commerce. 3. E-Logistics—Distribution and Transport of Goods in E-Business.

<sup>12</sup>Master courses last 1.5 to 2.5 years or 500 to 1100 contact hours.

<sup>13</sup>*Wirtschaftsmagazin Rhein-Neckar*, 7–8/2001, 45.

Neckargemünd. This vocational training center accepted eleven apprentices from a Heidelberg textile company to receive further specialized training to become industrial electricians in September 2001. These supportive programs are coordinated with the curriculum at the relevant vocational schools and the training companies. Students receive an additional certification besides their diploma.<sup>14</sup>

The third German chamber of industry and commerce to be discussed here is the IHK Reutlingen, also in the state of Baden-Württemberg, the most prosperous German industrial region in the southwest. Reutlingen is a city of about 100,000 inhabitants, and many international companies have subsidiaries in this charming city. I had the opportunity to participate in a lecture for members of the *Marketing Club Neckar-Alb* in the building of the IHK. More than 50 professionals, mostly managers of area businesses listened to Marc Rüger's rather provocative thesis of emotion-oriented customer management.<sup>15</sup> Events like this are not only educational but serve as a networking platform.

As at all IHKs, many continuing education and master courses are also offered in Reutlingen, reflecting the need of industry and business in the area such as a *Bilanzbuchhalter* (accountant) program with 500 contact hours for full time employees that lasts two years and costs € 2,500. A master course for inventory specialists, 1100 contact hours costs € 3,500 and runs for 2.5 years. The most expensive course, € 4,340 for 1100 contact hours during 3 years, is a master's class for metal technology. Many employees finance their continuing education leading to a specialized certification from their own pockets. Only about 20 % receive funds from their employers.<sup>16</sup> This is indeed an interesting fact since learning a profession in the dual system is free, yet continuing education, which greatly serves the employers, is costly. The incentives are better career opportunities and a salary increase. In spring of 2002, about 100 participants of nine different IHK continuing education programs received their diplomas in Reutlingen, thus qualifying themselves for middle management positions in industry and businesses.

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<sup>14</sup>*Wirtschaftsmagazin Rhein-Neckar*, 7-8/2001, 42.

<sup>15</sup>Marc Rüger is a *Diplom-Kaufmann* working at one of the famous *Fraunhofer Institute* where significant research in German *Arbeitswirtschaft und Organisation* (Economics of Employment and Organization) is conducted.

<sup>16</sup>*Wirtschaft Neckar-Alb, Magazin der Industrie und Handelskammer Reutlingen*. March 2002, 34.

The IHK and the *Gefahrgut-Büro* in Albstadt work collaboratively to offer workshops for safety in waste management. These are one or two day workshops, which often include an examination. They cost from € 165 to 500.

Twenty seminars for members and non-members that are offered at the IHK Reutlingen for a fee of € 60 to 290<sup>17</sup> during fall 2002 have, besides computer and sales seminars, very interesting topics: e.g. *Englisch am Telefon* (Telephone English), *Das erfolgreiche Trennungsgespräch* (The Successful Severance Conversation) and even *Small Talk*. A reoccurring seminar deals with German orthography and the continuous struggle of the Germans with writing reform.

A new educational program of the IHKs in Baden-Württemberg is the practical dialogue between business and science, called *POTENZIALE*. The objectives of the program, which consists of visits to a university or private research institute, are to further and facilitate an information exchange between companies, applied technology, and theoretical and empirical research. Ten such visits are planned from March to October 2002.

Due to the dual function of the German chambers of commerce and industry—promoting business and trade on the one hand and the supervision and administration of vocational education on the other hand—German commerce and industry profit enormously. They have a well-educated and highly specialized workforce. The traditional dual system of professional schools and apprenticeships, is the basis of German economic strength as the third largest exporter in the world after the US and Japan.

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<sup>17</sup>The cost is higher (€ 72 to 350) for non-members.