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FROM THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE MOVEMENT THROUGH HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TO POST-FORDISM: A CRITIQUE OF THE NATURE AND DETERMINANTS OF DIRECT EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION

Focusing on direct employee participation, this paper argues that it is the frameworks within which participation has been introduced that have to be evaluated in order to develop a more conceptual understanding of participation itself. Through examining the Quality of Working Life Movement, Human Resource Management and Post-Fordism, the various waves of employee participation's over the past twenty years are placed in context.

It is argued that employee demands for increased levels of direct participation have largely remained unchanged over the years while management motivations, in contrast, have changed with emerging contexts and environments. The latter have developed from the reactionary days of the QWL movement to the current more strategic tenets of HRM and Post-Fordism.

A critique of direct participation from both the employers/management's perspective and the union movements/labour's perspective is provided and four plausible responses from the union movement, ranging from total opposition to pro-active agenda setting, are postulated.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Worker Participation has been defined by the Institute of Personnel Management (1990) as being "any means used by management to engage the support, understanding and co-operation of employees, or conversely any upwards exertion of power by shop floor employees in an effort to ameliorate their influence on decisions that were once the sole domain of management prerogative".

Guest (1979) suggests that the core essence of worker participation centres on the belief that individuals who work at a particular job should have a democratic right to some degree of influence and/or decision-making power in relation to matters which might affect them in their work environment. This whole argument hinges on the belief that workers, and the organisations in which they work, cannot be considered in total isolation. It is the mental and

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physical exertions and contribution of the employees that will eventually determine the level of success experienced by the organisation. Thus, the perceived benefit of participative management is that it can strengthen the employee contribution by providing for increased levels of job satisfaction, which, it is hoped will eventually equate to improved job and operational performance (Flaeger and Schroeder 1986)

It is common practice to sub-divide worker participation into two broad categories: direct and indirect participation. The main criteria for the dichotomy are loosely whether or not the initiative is based on individual or collective representation, whether the initiative is centred on tasks at the point of production or not and finally the direction from which the demands for participation are most prominent. Contributors such as Dickson (1983), Poole (1986) and Geary (1994a) all consider direct participation to be largely concerned with individual tasks and individualist communication mechanisms that are typically introduced by management. Geary (1994, p. 4) progresses a stage further by dividing direct participation into „delegative" and „consultative" participation. Consultative participation allows employees to make their views directly known to management via some of the communication methods described above. However, he points out that at no time does management retreat from the position of maintaining the right to accept or reject the views of employees as it sees fit. This view is supported by Pateman (1970, p. 70) who categorises this as „pseudo participation" because there exists no balance of power and employees' rights go no further than having the ability to influence rather than to veto. Delegative participation allows for greater discretion and autonomy for employees at the level of the job. At an advanced stage delegative participation could allow for groups becoming almost self managing in relation to issues such as scheduling, logistics and the actual method of carrying out the task.

Conversely, indirect participation allows employees to exert an influence, or in its most evolved form, to compete on an equal footing with management on a collective basis through chosen representatives in the process of organisational decision-making (Dickson 1983; Morrissey 1989). Salamon (1992) views indirect participation as being more power centred than direct participation because it has more in common with democracy than direct participation by virtue of the fact that it has the ability to challenge managerial prerogative by extending the degree of employee veto to higher echelons of the organisation and over a wider range of issues.

While these normative definitions are useful, arguably participation cannot be studied in its own right. Rather, it is the frameworks within which participation has been articulated and implemented that have to be examined and evaluated i.e. the Quality of Working Life Movement, Human Resource

Management and Post-Fordism. This approach allows us to focus on the extent to which participation has become a function of these environments and to isolate common denominations which have a significant role to play in determining the shape, scope and response to direct participation.

2. PARTICIPATION IN CONTEXT

This section puts in context the various waves of worker participation over the past twenty five years or so. It examines the Quality of Working Life (QWL) movement of the 1970's and early 1980's and the movement towards Human Resource Management (HRM) and Post-Fordist production arrangements in the mid 1980's and 1990's.

The QWL Movement

The QWL movement is the term used to describe a broad number of direct participation initiatives that draw their practical application from the work of Human Relations scholars such as Elton Mayo and Chris Agryis. It is based on the premise that direct participation leads to increased job satisfaction, which will lead to increased motivation, which in turn leads to enhanced productivity and quality (Blumberg 1968). Its twin tenets are to transmit information about company objectives and expectations and to encourage discretion and autonomy in job decision-making. It is seen as an antidote for the repetitive work methods and the assembly line mass production associated with Taylorism (Giordano 1988). QWL is a term synonymous with American literature more so than British or European, but the differences between QWL programmes and participation as we would perceive it is often a matter of semantics. It is the original context and the management motivation for its introduction that differentiates it from later breeds of participation rather than the actual vehicles of participation themselves, because it emerges that the innovations associated with HRM and Post-Fordist production techniques are identical to those of the QWL movement.

Salamon (1992) and Banks (1970) cite the 1960's as the era when employees began to demand greater levels of participation/democracy at work. This they attribute to the economic prosperity of the time, the rise in social conscience movements and an increasing willingness and propensity to question those in positions of authority. Arguably, the Donovan Commission (1968) and the writings of the pluralist school of Industrial Relations scholars (see Fox 1966; Kerr 1964 and Clegg, 1975) also had an influence because they preached a doctrine that encouraged those in power to accept views and objectives that contrasted with their own and to draw up rules that were engendered in the

spirit of democracy and compromise and not totalitarianism. These factors, combined with the advancements in education and the influence of the media, resulted in people wanting to redress the obvious power imbalance that existed in the worker-management relationship. Marchington and Armstrong (1982) stated that participation was a means for employees to combat the remoteness of managerial decisions, decisions which yielded absolute power over the design of work, the methods of production and the degree to which employees could legitimately make representations to their employers in relation to these issues. Thus the emergent democratic imperative argued that the organisation should act like a sub-system of the larger society and that similar democratic principles of governance should apply.

Another closely related reason for increased employee demands related to the problems inherent in the widespread use of Taylorist/scientific work design methods. Such methods were introduced as organisations and their products became more complete and sophisticated and as increased consumer demand manifested itself in the need to move to mass production. Fox (1971), Lawler (1984) and Thompson (1989) all feel that this had the effect of alienating employees from their work, leading to reduced identification with both the end product and the organisation itself. Friedman (1977) argues that such job design, with its complementary piece rate system, reduced workers to nothing more that robots because it removed any possibility of offering intrinsic satisfaction to employees and instead appealed only to their economic senses. Thus one can easily see the attraction that job reforms, carried under the QWL banner, had for employees: more interestingly designed jobs, more discretion and more information.

The attitude of employers towards the QWL movement contrasts starkly with that of their employees. Oliver and Wilkinson (1992) feel that management's adoption of QWL programmes had less to do with concern for their employees' intrinsic well-being than with their own desire to negate the manifestations of employee dissatisfaction and rising aspirations. The 1970's and early 1980's in Britain were characterised by loose labour markets, union strength, industrial action, absenteeism problems and high labour turn-over. Management assumed a relationship between this behaviour and workplace conditions and soon the adoption of direct participation began. This move was purely reactionary and was based more on preserving order under the false veil of concern rather than on any genuine attempt to afford greater democracy to the industrial masses.

The context of this movement has strong parallels with the "normative disorder" or "anomie" that Fox and Flanders (1969, p. 249) pinpointed as an aspect of the pluralist regulation of the workplace. They recognised, as did many managers in the 1970's, that unsatisfied aspirations, especially those that

are steadily rising, are dangerous and are conducive to "disruption and dislocation" if they are not met. However, it will be shown that more often than not these aspirations were more manipulated rather than "met".

Human Resource Management

Human Resource Management (HRM) has signalled a new approach to the management of employees. It no longer views employees as liabilities but rather as assets/resources, a fact that centres around the belief that it is only through people that success can ever be achieved. Unlike its predecessor, traditional Personnel Management, it seeks to interlock with and facilitate the attainment of the broader business objectives of the organisation. There was a belief that traditional adversarial methods of managing people such as collective bargaining and all the trappings of pluralism were becoming dated and did not reflect the short-term responsiveness that modern businesses required. HRM provides this because of its emphasis on performance and adding value. Beer et al. (1985, p. 8-10) devised a model of HRM made up of four elements:

(A) Employee Voice. This provided for two way communication mechanisms which foster trust, commitment and resolve any differences on an individual basis. There is an inference here that trade unions are an unnecessary and unwelcome addition to this process. (This roughly equates to Geary's (1994b) "Consultative Participation").

(B) HR Flow. These are the management processes that are used to manage employees in order to gain the most value from them. It includes recruitment, selection, training and development, performance management etc.

(C) Reward Systems. These focus on the establishment of criteria for determining pay. HRM has brought Performance Related Pay, as an addition to normal pay, back into light in recent years. This will encourage performance via the "carrot" method, but its use would be difficult in the case of group work and might encourage unwelcome competition and individualism.

(D) Work Design. HRM encourages autonomy and discretion in relation to job design. (This roughly equates to Geary's (1994a) Delegative Participation.)

These, according to the model, are all designed in a manner which will lead to employee commitment, competence, a reduction in labour induced costs and congruence with overall organisational goals.

In a similar vein, Guest (1987, p. 512-515) has developed a model which varies slightly from the one proposed by Beer et al. (1985). He identifies four mutually reinforcing dimensions of HRM.

(A) Integration. HR issues should be considered in all organisational plans, and eventually the HR function should have an influence in the drawing up of corporate plans.

(B) Commitment. Employees must be managed in a manner that engenders commitment towards their job and the organisation. Again the hope is that greater levels of commitment will lead to enhanced performance.

(C) Flexibility/Adaptability. Demarcation lines must weaken, people must acquire new skills and adapt to new production processes and technology.

(D) Quality. Quality of products, of the staff, of suppliers and of any link in their value chain are viewed as being important. This represents the Total Quality Management (TQM) ethos.

Contributors such as Basset (1987), Legge (1989) and Kelly and Kelly (1991) have interpreted these models as the means by which management are now seeking to enter into new relationships with their employees which are based on greater levels of trust and congruence than ever before. They feel that because of this there is a strong unitarist feel to HRM and that management will use it to foster greater levels of commitment to goals that are to be commonly held. Townley (1989) and Marchington (1992) see direct participation as a means of achieving this goal. By allowing for a freer flow of information throughout the organisation, the objectives of the company, the means by which they must be achieved and the standards which have to be met can be more easily communicated. This is then complemented by developing a sense of commitment amongst employees by surrendering managerial prerogative at the point of production and allowing them more discretion and autonomy.

Peters (1987) has argued that participation is vital if HRM is to contribute anything to the success of the organisation. For too long, he feels management have stifled the natural innovation and enthusiasm of employees in a fog of bureaucracy and traditional control mechanisms. Direct participation, through problem solving techniques, quality circles and autonomous work groups can tap the minds of employees and unlock a wealth of neglected knowledge.

Another more sinister motive for participation in the context of HRM relates to the potential that it holds for management to circumvent trade unions. Storey (1992) feels that consultative participation could threaten collective bargaining if it was to infringe on issues that were previously the sole domain of bilateral union-management negotiations. Guest (1989) does not fear so much for collective bargaining as workers' allegiance to trade unions. He feels that the strong emphasis put on commitment to the job and the company is all but incompatible with the existence of allegiance to an external grouping of employee representatives whose interests and objectives are in no way comparable with the needs of management strategy. Lawler (1984) at the time postulated that because the introduction of participation was most common in non-union sites, that it would encourage a non-union stance by the management of future greenfield sites. A study by Gunningle (1992) has shown

that this has been the case in may of the newer plants in Ireland, especially those in the electronics industry.

Employee and trade union demands for increased participation in the 1970's stemmed from solid union strength which felt that it could battle any hidden agendas involved in its introduction. This power was weakened by a combination of decreasing union density, the hard line attitudes of right-wing governments and concomitant because of developments such as HRM and its whole non-union ethos. Arguably in the 1970's trade unions knew they were in a conflict situation and all management initiatives could be viewed with suspicion and management in a way that would limit damage to its employee. The problem with HRM in relation to direct participation is that it offers much the same as the QWL movement but is couched in a more strategic framework which has the effect of making its intentions less explicit. People still want more interesting jobs, but it is the possible cost that raises questions and results in deliberation.

Post-Fordism

Since the advent of the Human Relations school the economic sense of Fordism or Taylorist work design and methods of design have become more and more questionable. Mass production's once unassailable position is beginning to crumble because the market for mass produced goods has become saturated. Mass production is no longer technically or economically efficient enough to deal with complex new consumer demands which manifest themselves in quality and price differentiated products. Nor do western powers have the ability to compete with the emerging powers of south-east Asia such as South Korea, Taiwan and now China. Because of their lower labour costs and the effect that their feudal culture has on both labour relations and their attitude to work, they will, in time, corner the mass production market.

We as consumers now demand more quality and better performance than ever before and we demand it faster than ever before. Because of this, production techniques must add value and quality to products and be flexible enough to meet the rapidly changing consumer market. Fieldes and Bramble (1992, p. 564) argue that work design based on Taylorism could never achieve this because "it relied little on initiative" and was coercive in its management of employees and its control over the labour process.

Hampson et al. (1994) and Woods et al (1975) suggest that the contingencies of modern demand behaviour will require a workforce that are flexible and expedient in its application of skills and that are offered the opportunity to utilise their own discretion in the execution of their job. If this represents what is required then it follows that treating workers as mature and responsible individuals, who are capable of making sensible contributions, is a positive step

towards exploiting any opportunities that the conditions may give rise to. Thus the possibilities for direct participation at the point of production are quite real in such cases. The whole ethos of this advanced type of manufacturing has some very clear parallels with the concept of Strategic HRM, insofar as it represents a classic example of where employees are actually trained and utilised to add real value to the organisation and to facilitate the achievement of very tightly considered objectives. Oliver and Wilkinson (1992, p. 176) have highlighted how HRM initiatives have fitted well with some modern production methods:

(A) Both place a high value on product quality;

(B) Both have a customer/market driven ethos;

(C) Both believe in the measurement of employee performance;

(D) Both align their reward system to performance; and

(E) Both are willing to give employees discretion over their job and the right to consultation.

Before concluding this section, it is worth teasing out some of the main issues that have come to light. In keeping with Torrington's (1989) analysis, it is quite clear that the current wave of interest in direct participation is based primarily on the fact that employers want to get the maximum levels of performance possible from their employees. By delegative participation they tap the knowledge bank of their workers via suggestion schemes and increased autonomy, and via consultative participation they build a culture of commitment, or "enterprise consciousness" as some commentators have referred to it. This is altogether different from the QWL movement because management has not been reactive but rather proactive and has introduced direct participation on its own terms and not as a response to trade union pressure or a dissatisfied workforce. In contrast, employee motives generally remain the same as they were thirty years ago. Because of this contrast in motives, a similar conflict in relative values can be predicted.

3. DIRECT PARTICIPATION: A CRITIQUE

When one considers the variety of needs and motivations for the introduction of direct participation, as expressed in the preceding section, it is not surprising to find a suitably varied range of views on how direct participation works when it is introduced. This section highlights some of the more common and frequent criticisms from both the management and labour/trade union sides.

The employer side

Criticisms of direct participation from the employer side are predominantly concerned with power or more accurately, with the erosion of it. Taking

a macro view, Kelly (1985, p. 41) advances a line of argument which views participation as an unstable process which could only bring problems to any organisation that should choose to introduce it. He argues that it is only "a minor concession of power" which has no great beneficial effect on the organisation. It will serve only to increase employee expectations and aspirations. If these cannot or will not be met, the struggle between management and labour will intensify. Thus the choice for management is to either fail to introduce participation, an action which would be as likely to produce normative disorder, or to introduce it without the genuine intention of acting on it and treating it neither as a useless gesture nor as an opportunity to exploit employees.

Ackers et al. (1992) take a more micro view and examine the attitude of line managers and supervisors. These two groups, they feel, are often opposed to the introduction of any direct participation initiatives, especially those at the point of production. Firstly, they feel that it is "soft management " insofar as management are allowing their prerogative over the production process to become eroded and are distributing among employees information about the state of the company that would never have been released in the past.

The second reason centres on the fear that their own jobs and duties might be being downgraded or even eliminated. This obviously stems from the fact that many participation initiatives allow for greater levels of autonomy and discretion over planning, materials and how the job is actually done. In the past these areas would have been predominantly the duties of the supervisor and the relevant line manager.

The Labour and Trade Union side

From a Labour perspective one of the more common criticisms of direct participation is that rather than enriching and developing the lives of workers, it actually causes a disproportionate intensification of effort which leads to greater levels of stress and control. Contributors such as Goldthorpe et al (1968), Ramsey (1985), Wall and Licheron (1977) and Thompson (1989) have all cast doubts on the presumption of the human relation school which associates increased participation with increased motivation which in turn leads to enhanced productivity and quality. Rather, they feel that it has more to do with fallen demarcation lines, deskilling of craft based jobs, tighter inspection via newer technology and multi-skilling. Employees will have no other choice but to accept such developments because they are an integral part of modern production techniques and cannot be viewed in isolation. Thus management interest could be merely in pumping any possible surplus value out of employees. It is precisely this view that prompted Braverman (1974, p. 87) to refer to the disciples of the human relations school as „the maintenance crew for the human machinery".

A number of writers (Wood 1988; Lever-Tracy 1990 and Oliver and Wilkinson 1992) have questioned the correlation between increased motivation and participation on production and quality involvement initiatives. They feel that in many cases it was the control strategy operated by management over the labour process that had the greater effect. Although "formal supervision" may have lessened in many cases, employees can still be systematically monitored by individualised end of line inspections, quality control inspectors and even their peers on the production. Wood (1988, p. 108) adds that participation offers no respite against the actual pace of production either. He states that "the line still controls speed tighter than ever". This is because whatever autonomy and discretion is allowed via direct participation is built around a computer production programme and not vice versa. Thus the worker has no choice but to follow the lead of the computer. Another interesting point that the authors raise is the effect of delegative participation on the role of custom and practice on the shop floor. They point out that over the years, through either fractional bargaining or habit, the norms that have developed have provided a means by which employees could informally participate in the development of work practices. For example in pre-JIT days, employees could use the build up of buffer stocks to allow slow downs at certain times if desired. However, because the demands of modern production methods are so explicit in terms of expected productivity and quality levels, much of this discretion is eliminated and management's grip on the labour process is further tightened.

Lever-Tracy (1990, p. 183) examines this aspect and highlights that not only has management control tightened because of the erosion of custom and practice, but also because management is tapping employees for more information. She points to the danger "of workers passing on knowledge, that when kept secret, had given them some respite from speed up and job loss". Thus in an ironic sense it could be argued that it is the employers and not the employees that are gaining increased levels of discretion and information. Trade unions are faced with two contrasting challenges with the advent of direct participation. Firstly, if trade unions are not involved in the planning or implementation of direct participation they may be by-passed by management, resulting in a dilution of their power base. This power base is threatened in two main ways:

(A) Recent trends have shown that union density has decreased dramatically under HRM and modern production techniques. Millward et al. (1992, p. 70) have shown that between 1984 and 1990, union density decreased from 66 per cent to 53 per cent. They postulate that this was not caused by any great increase in de-recognition but rather because many traditional companies were adopting US style approaches to labour relations which are in general hostile

to trade unions. This tallies with the studies by Foulkes (1980) and Kochan et al. (1986) who found strong resistance to trade unions as common trait amongst companies which espoused the HRM approach.

(B) The other fear is that direct participation, especially consultative, serves only to duplicate the channels of representation and communication that unions have traditionally centred their energies on. In this way participation actually marginalised collective bargaining by dealing with many issues on an informal basis via consultative techniques before they can get to the bargaining table. The danger here is that union representation via collective bargaining may become so marginalised and weak that it may weaken worker inclinations to joining trade unions and]or form a set of modified allegiances in which unions may have a minor role to play (Strauss 1972; Poole 1986; Guest 1989; and Marchington 1990). Delegative participation can further develop this process as part of a planned "soft" HRM approach may lead to a situation where because of the improvements in job design, the employees begin to feel a greater affinity towards the organisation and greater commitment in the pursuit of its goals. In the emerging order the employee finds himself caught between his commitment to the union and his commitment to the organisation (Walton 1985; Guest 1989). The great fear is that the union will win the battle of hearts and minds.

The second danger stems from trade unions' involvement with management in the operation of direct participation programmes. The fear is that the union could be enhancing the legitimacy of managerial decisions while at the same time not achieving anything in the way of eroding managerial prerogative for the good of its members. There is a danger that to some union members, the constant and close relationship with management could lead to a situation where the actions of the two parties would become indivisible in the context of managerial decisions. Commentators such as Blumberg (1968), Strauss (1972), Ramsey (1977) and Marchington and Armstrong (1982) point out that if management and union views and objectives become too congruent of each other, their relationship may become too cosy and allow management to move into a situation where they can strive to achieve long-term ideological goals that do not rely on innovations at the point of production. In this situation, unions have placed themselves in a situation where they are being canvassed by both management and its members, causing a conflict of interests. Fox (1985) feels that in such circumstances, it is the union and its members that sacrifice most in terms of risk but fare worst in the exchange of benefits. For him, too close a relationship would result in unions taking on board considerations about costs, profit margins and productivity. The socialisation would eventually reach a stage where the union is little more than an extension of management power. This behaviour by unions in the eyes of both Flanders

(1970) and Hyman (1975) is counter-intuitive. They argue that the welfare and protection of their members should be the primary and guiding responsibility of any trade union, not management or not the government. If such a scenario as described above were to develop it would be a classic example of what Hyman (1975, p. 65) described as a trade unions' "power over, but not power for" its members.

The question of equity in terms of the benefits that accrue to the organisation in terms of enhanced productivity and quality due to direct participation and the rewards offered to employees for facilitating their inception has always been a debated one. Guest (1979) and Ramsey (1985) see an equitable quid pro quo as the only basis for the provision of a fair reward system. The argument here centers around the reasons why a worker should supply an idea which may save a company thousands of pounds, while he receives little by way of a reward. While Thompson (1989) recognises this issue, he is also worried about the level of individualism that might arise in payment systems associated with delegative participation. He comments on the renewed interest in performance-based pay and likens it to the piece rate system of Fordism and worries that the cause of management would be supported by a system that would propagate a spirit of competition amongst the workers and result in a dilution of the spirit of collectivism. Obviously this demand for financial and equitable reward systems contrasts greatly with the Human Relations school who would have us believe that the reward was intrinsic, and the Neo-Fordism school of Japanese management which advances that workers should be constantly striving to improve quality and productivity levels without managerial prompting or financial inducements.

Guarantees of job security and the preservation of craft/skill based jobs rank high in the mind of many union officials and members. O'Hehir and O'Mahony (1993) and Storey and Edmonds (1992) have commented on the fact that direct participation has the potential to reduce numbers by virtue of the fact that its effective implementation has the possibility of "doing more with less". They firmly believe that without strong union policing and firm assurances from management that job security will be guaranteed, workers in all areas of employment will be under threat. They especially fear for craft workers. Because of multi-skilling and flexibility, more and more general workers are gaining skills and carrying out tasks that were once the sole preserve of craft workers.

It can be said then, that the view taken of direct participation by many contributors has been that it is purely a functional type of participation, far more interested in economic goals than the development of employees. Wall and Licheron (1977), Clegg (1975), and Kelly and Kelly (1991) all note the opportunistic operation of participation. It is seen as spurious humanism

whose introduction is largely dependant on its usefulness initiating corporate competitiveness alone. It is the "Janus" of industrialism. On one side it espouses the development of the whole individual while on the other, structuring the means of this development on its own terms. It is a means to an end and rarely nowadays designed to meet the intrinsic needs of employees. Cressey (1993, p. 90) sums it up most succinctly when he describes delegative participation as being "stripped of the ethical and humane doctrines from which it was engendered". Management have allowed them to be introduced because they have no intention of giving away an inordinate amount of power. It is fair to say that it is in management's interest to allow subordinates some level of power in order to subdue any possible conflict (Hyman 1988 and Beaumont 1990).

However, in the midst of all the gloom, Geary (1994b) makes the very pertinent point that because modern direct participation is explicit in its aims, it leaves little room for abuse and manipulation. The likes of JIT, TQM and other variants of lean production make no effort to disguise the fact that it is productivity, quality and faster response times that act as their central motivations in their application of participation. He argues that they have shown their hand and it should make it easier for trade unions to respond to their actions.

Arguably therefore Marchington and Armstrong's (1982, p. 66) prediction that workers would give their co-operation to participation "at a very calculative level" is justified. There is too much scope for potential manipulation of employees. If the moves behind the initiatives are not honourable and utilitarian in nature, their inception could just as easily become a lightening rod for the expression of the problems that were cited for its inception in the first place. However, it would be unrealistic to automatically assume that all direct participation initiatives are centred around manipulation. This state more than likely rests on a continuum somewhere between the "zoo" theory and the "pseudo-participation" model. If this is a fair assumption, a number of influencing factors and motivations will likely determine the viability, shape and success or participative initiatives.

4. ANALYSIS: DETERMINING FACTORS AND THE RESPONSES TO DIRECT PARTICIPATION

By examining the contexts in which direct participation have been introduced and the various criticisms of how it operates or could operate, it is possible to isolate a number of themes or factors which have a strong influence on the resistance or co-operation of employees and trade unions and thus the

implementation and outcome of the initiatives in question. This section focuses on some of these determining factors and advances some possible responses.

Determining factors

Management support at senior, middle and supervisory levels is vital to the success of direct participation initiatives. Marchington et al. (1993a, p. 48) point out that in many cases participation can be the brain child of one individual manager who acts as a "champion" and a facilitator. It reaches a stage where the whole system revolves around them, with the result that other managers do not become familiar with the programme's operation. The whole process is just seen as another managerial idea and does not become part of the prevailing culture. Should this individual ever leave for one reason or another, the whole thing would collapse. Thus it is vital that participation is more than just championed by individual managers.

Ackers et al. (1992) and Geary (1994b) see the negative attitudes of some line managers and supervisors as a large stumbling block towards achieving successful participative management. If these people do not have their fears addressed, the introduction of participation will cause a battle even before it is implemented.

In a similar vein others note that it is vital that participation programmes are accompanied by appropriate and complementary styles of management. Scott (1994) points out that if new style "people friendly" initiatives are introduced into an organisation where adversarial and conflictual relations are the prevailing norm, they are doomed to fail. Employees are not fools and will soon recognise the contradiction between the two, and whatever goodwill had been aroused will soon be replaced by suspicion. Eaton (1994) adds that it is the traditional manner of doing things in the organisation and the past history of industrial relations that will determine the shape and outcome of participation and not vice versa.

Training and development are seen by Marchington et al. (1993b) as a vital element in ensuring that both management and employees are fully informed and prepared for the extra demands and responsibilities that participation demands of them. They suggest that training in problem solving techniques, planning, administration, brain-storming and communication techniques would serve to facilitate more fluid change in the organisation and clarify people's conceptions of their roles and the expectations of management.

Katz (1988) and Akers et al (1992) point to cyclical changes as a major influence on the operation of direct participation on two fronts. Firstly, rising unemployment, combined with higher inflation and the resultant drop in real wages, had the effect of lowering union density and subsequently their power to veto managerial prerogative. Secondly, the competitive markets in which

organisations now operate mean that technological change and complemen-
tary alterations in work design are very often the only chance of making
profits, or even surviving in many cases. Thus unions ability and legitimacy to
challenge management are limited.

One of the most commonly noted factors in the literature is the issue of
trade union involvement in the generation, implementation and maintenance of
participation programmes. Cressey (1993) and Lawler and Mohrman (1987)
encourage unions to take on board the problems of management. They point
to examples of motor manufacturers world wide where unions and manage-
ment have found a balance of interests which has resulted in outcomes for the
common good. At the same time they see the sense in unions policing initiatives
because it reduces the risk of managerial abuse and consequently when the
risks are seen to be minimised by union involvement, employees will be more
inclined to enter into the spirit of the programme with greater levels of trust
and enthusiasm. Sisson (1993) has argued that union involvement is vital
because he feels that management neither have the resources nor the confidence
of the employees to introduce it on their own.

The integrity of the collective bargaining and grievance systems is an
important factor in gaining the support of the unions. Wood (1988) and Eaton
(1994) warn that trade unions will rebel against management if they are seen to
be attempting to circumvent these by drawing them into the HRM mix or into
some other individualist framework.

Structural changes in the environment of trade unions have played a large
role in determining their ability to resist or shape participation. In relation to
Britain in the 1980's, Basset (1987) speaks of how the growing public
intolerance of trade unions, the increase in white collar service industries as
opposed to manufacturing ones, the increase in the amount of women at work
and the tougher more business-like employer ideologies have all resulted in
lower density and reduced power. In this context, he feels that unions have very
little choice but to bend to the will of the employers. He cites these factors as
the reason for the so called "new realism" of the 1980's where no strike clauses,
pendulum arbitration, increased participation and single union deals became
more common.

Drago (1988) and Storey and Edmonds (1992) indicate that employment
guarantees are a prerequisite for union co-operation in participation pro-
grammes in many cases. There is often the perception that if delegative
participation does achieve the efficiency that it strives for, that there may be
resultant increase in compulsory redundancies. Such guarantees will provide
for a smoother passage.

The final issue relates to that of the exchange between increased levels of
employee effort and innovation and any pursuant increases in productivity

and/or quality. Guest (1979) and Ramsey (1985) feel that if there is not a just exchange, participation will fail because employees are very adept at weighing up the wage effort bargain. Consequently, if they see any imbalance they will rectify it and revert to traditional behaviour.

5. RESPONSES TO DIRECT PARTICIPATION

Having presented arguments for and against participation and having identified critical deterministic arguments, it is pertinent to examine how these attitudes and arguments can be translated into strategic employee/union responses. Our research points to four distinct approaches to direct participation that can be adopted by the trade union movement:

    (A) Total opposition.
    (B) Pro-active involvement.
    (C) Total co-operation.
    (D) Taking the initiative.

Total opposition

It was the firm conviction of Clegg (1960, p. 21) that trade unions should never enter into collaborative relations with management. His pluralism was based on the principles of democracy. The industrial relations system was to function as a subset of the larger political society. Central to this was the belief that the industrial relations system should derive its very existence from the conflict between the governed and those in power. It was based on this singular belief that he urged unions to stay away from management or otherwise "there would be nobody to oppose them". O'Hehir and O'Mahony (1993) more recently echoed this view as a possible response. This response, like any other, is strongly dependant on the situational factors at hand. If the union can be confident that the introduction of direct participation amounts to nothing more than a means of subtle manipulation hidden under the veil of enlightened management, this may well be the most appropriate response. The choice will be made by analysing some of the factors highlighted in the previous section. Obviously the ability to block an initiative will depend greatly on the negotiating power of the particular union involved and the allegiance of its members to it. However, it must be remembered that in certain circumstances the preservation of the status quo may be less attractive than the perceived disadvantages of direct participation. For example management may be able to demonstrate that job losses would be inevitable without its introduction to support production systems.

Pro-active involvement

In some cases, after considering all factors and possible consequences, a union might eventually agree to the introduction of participation. It has been suggested by Wallace (1992), O'Hehir and O'Mahony (1993) and Eaton (1994) that the main motivator is often the fact that the introduction of direct participation is inevitable and they see themselves as being in a better position to represent their members from the inside rather than peering blindly from the outside. However union co-operation and support would often be conditional on a bilaterally negotiated agreement which would set ground rules for and limits on the scope of any participative techniques. The union would typically want to negotiate a major role in influencing the scope and contents of such initiatives, including the people to be involved, facilitators and other relevant persons. Wood (1988) comments on how this has been common practice in many companies in the United States since the whole participation debate began, especially in relation the preservation of the integrity of the collective bargaining process. It was common practice to have expressed agreements drawn up which would state the issues that were to be in the sole jurisdiction of collective bargaining, including grievances and promotional disputes etc. The union will more often than not also determine the financial implications for workers if production does rise subsequent to the introduction of delegative participation techniques.

Craft unions might also argue for limitations on job rotation and multi-skilling in cases where they may constitute a threat to craft skills. Once these contingencies have been agreed and participation initiatives have been implemented, the union must then ensure that management promises are being honoured. Wallace (1992) views the shop stewards or other employee representatives as being the key in-house monitors in this respect. As these will be operating at the coal-face of participation, they will be best able to monitor its progress and also to promote it amongst fellow workers if necessary. The great strength of this approach is that it will allow the unions to bring management to the table if the implementation of the programmes are in any way repugnant to the terms of their agreement.

Total co-operation

We can identify at least two scenarios where trade unions may have no other choice but to acquiesce to the demands of management. Firstly, it has been suggested (Basset 1987 and Katz 1988) that in economies where the union density of the workforce is falling steadily and where non-union plants are becoming all too common, unions may have to accept participation on management's terms in order not to marginalise the movement any further by

making unionised labour even less attractive to hire. The second issue relates to the presumption that unions may recognise that the preservation of the status quo might be a worse scenario than the adoption of direct participation, even with all its negative connotations. In a company that is failing badly, it may be one of the last gasp chances to improve its viability. In such cases the true value of Poole's (1975, p. 37) notion that participation is a function of latent power and values (motives, ideologies etc.) is recognisable. Here, the union has neither the bargaining power nor a justifiable motive for opposing the introduction of participation. Obviously entering into such an agreement is fraught with danger, particularly as the perceived actions of the union may be seen as nothing more than pandering to management. If no jobs are lost the union will be a saviour, but if there are compulsory redundancies they will be seen as facilitating management's goals of getting more out of less. Thus the perception from the floor may be that relations have become too close and more in line with collaboration and collusion rather than simple co-operation.

Taking the initiative

The final approach we can identify is for unions to take the role of initiator and for them to demand participation on its own terms. The traditional role of the union has always been that of cake divider and protector of the working man, but as the nature of work and the needs of employee's change, arguably a broader obligation has arisen. Although participative initiatives do arouse suspicion, and understandably so in certain situations, a new agenda has become prevalent. As employees become better educated and are exposed to an ever increasing number of media, the onus will be on trade unions to help members to attain more interesting jobs and to gain increased decision-making powers over their jobs, while at the same time safeguarding their interests. Kochan, Katz and Mower (1984) found that in many cases employees recognised that sponsorship of QWL initiatives by trade unions opened up greater opportunities for personal advancement in the organisation. Some QWL programmes, especially these based around the job, afforded employees the chance to gain satisfaction and reach goals that would not have been possible in the context of their past job settings. Fieldes and Bramble (1992) suggest a more reactionary rationale for the adoption of this response. They feel that if unions do not put an indelible stamp on direct participation initiatives at an early stage, they will eventually be corrupted by management to become part of "Neo-Fordist" system which would have more in common with the relentless styles of Japanese management.

Obviously, as a prerequisite to such a strategy it would be imperative that the unions have considerable resources in terms of employee support and bargaining power. A history of sound industrial relations and a management

style with a strong pluralist orientation would also facilitate this. If the union was successful in introducing participation, it would be probable that it would be designed, implemented and monitored in a similar fashion to that described under the proactive approach.

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