Recommendations

There are therefore contradictory incentives for employees in this respect. On the one hand, they may be willing to invest in the capability of these representatives. On the other hand, they may be concerned that the representations become too powerful and developing a voice alternative could mean refraining from participation. This framework for participation which is destined to come up short to the objectives of high-commitment HRM. It introduces further costs for management: not just the costs of ineffective HRM. This in turn will lead to greater commitment HRM. What results is a flawed framework that the representatives become too powerful in developing a voice alternative. They may be willing to invest in the capability of these representatives. On the other hand, they may be concerned that the weaknesses and risks within the new fragmented systems of representation mean that organisations may be better off with independent representation and controls within the management-led cases.

Nevertheless, they appear to present us with an opportunity to discuss various aspects of the British labour and employment relations system and the increasing number of contacts and prior research links, and can be considered representative of medium to large organisations in various sectors of the British economy. They are not fully representative of the overall United Kingdom’s (UK) management attitude towards employee representatives and social dialogue as they are mostly firms with embedded participation traditions of one form or another (whether unionised or less so).

This raises the question as to whether it would be easier to provide more space for independent representation and minimise the costs and bureaucratic controls within the management-led cases. The ironic outcome of our research was that organisations with better-established participatory traditions of one form or another (whether unionised or less so) continue to prefer working with collective and independent worker representations given the weaknesses and risks within the new fragmented systems of representation, and the failure to gain a systematic and authentic input from the workforce.

References

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Employee representatives and participation within the UK: The continuing need for collective mechanisms

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Summary

This report draws on a selection of semi-structured interviews with leading Human Resource (HR) managers in ten organisations from a project consisting of 12 countries and led by the University of Leuven.

They were approached through a range of contacts and prior research links, and can be considered representative of medium to large organisations in various sectors of the British economy. They are not fully representative of the overall United Kingdom’s (UK) management attitude towards employee representatives and social dialogue as they are mostly firms with embedded participation traditions of one form or another (whether unionised or less so).

Nevertheless, they appear to present us with an opportunity to discuss various aspects of the British labour and employment relations system and the increasing costs of moving to a non- or less collective union focus. The briefing focuses on those cases with a weaker trade union input. This absence of independent collective input provided specific challenges and costs to employers raising the need for a greater commitment to such union representation as an alternative.
The research

The research examined multi-employer private sector firms, a growing investment bank, a large city council, a central government organisation and employees from a range of companies with different employee representation structures. The research used a qualitative research methodology, involving a combination of unstructured and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with a variety of organisational, employee and management representatives. The research aimed to establish how employees and management had responded to the need for employee participation and what impact this had on organisational performance.

The structure of representation and its fragmentation?

The UK is one of the countries that has been classified as a liberal market economy (Holland & Szwarc 1997) with a high degree of employment protection for employees (Marx & Ramirez 1997). In the study, the authors find that the structure of participation was a major issue and that the fragmented nature of participation makes it difficult to understand the full picture of participation within organisations.

The research also found that there were differences in the nature of participation in different organisations. In some organisations, there was a strong union presence and the participation was carried out through unions. In other organisations, there was a weak union presence and the participation was carried out through non-union representatives. The research also found that the nature of participation varied across different sectors. For example, in some sectors, there was a high degree of participation through employee representatives, while in other sectors, there was a low degree of participation.

In conclusion, the research found that participation is a complex issue and that the fragmented nature of participation makes it difficult to understand the full picture of participation within organisations. The research also found that there are differences in the nature of participation in different organisations and that the structure of participation varies across different sectors.