INVOLVEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIP: A REVIEW OF THE DEBATE AND SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE IRISH CONTEXT

The 24th Countess Markeivicz Lecture, 22nd November 1999.

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INTRODUCTION
First of all, let me say that it is a great honour for me to be asked to give this year's Countess Markievicz Memorial Lecture and I thank the Irish Association for Industrial Relations for their kind invitation.

When the inaugural lecture of this series was given in 1976, I had just first encountered the subject of industrial relations as a B.Comm student in UCD: an excellent course then taught by a young and upcoming academic, Aidan Kelly. Many of you will know Aidan who has played a very significant role in promoting industrial relations as an important area of teaching and research in Ireland and was a source of great encouragement to me in those early days and, indeed, ever since.

Since then I have been involved in IR more or less continuously, as a teacher, researcher and - on occasion - a practitioner. In this lecture, I hope to take some licence to reflect on developments in Irish industrial relations over the period, to look at some recent research in the field, and to give what are essentially my personal views on particular aspects of industrial relations in Ireland.

The major theme running through my presentation is employee participation and involvement. My first industrial relations lectures at UCD addressed the issue of 'industrial democracy' with particular emphasis on developments in the U.K. and E.C. in relation to board level participation. The theme of employee participation and involvement continues to pervade discussion and research in industrial relations, although the precise focus has clearly changed over time. Recently we have seen considerable debate around the decidedly ambiguous concept of 'partnership'. The focus of my lecture is primarily on developments at enterprise level and I also hope to touch upon some of the broader social and political implications of the issues covered.

Let us begin by reviewing some background.

EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT: AN OVERVIEW
Employee participation and involvement may be broadly interpreted as incorporating any mechanisms designed to increase employee input into managerial decision making. It is often seen as the political democratisation of the workplace in so far as it facilitates the redistribution of decision making power away from management and towards employees (see, for example, Chamberlain 1948; Schregle 1974; Thomason 1984).

In evaluating developments in this area, commentators normally differentiate between *direct* and *indirect* forms of employee influence. We now briefly consider this classification.

DIRECT PARTICIPATION
Direct participation encompasses any initiatives which provide for greater direct employee involvement in decisions affecting their jobs and immediate work environment. Often captured under the rubric of 'employee involvement', direct employee participation may take a variety of forms such as briefing groups, quality circles, consultative meetings and team working. Direct forms of employee participation are normally introduced at management's behest, often as part of a change initiative whereby management transfers responsibility to employees for a limited range of job-related decisions, such as working methods or task allocation. Salamon (1998: 357) describes direct participation thus:

"This strategy may be referred to as descending involvement, in so far as management invariably initiates the development for its own purposes (involvement is offered) and, as part of the change, may transfer authority and responsibility from itself to the employees for a limited range of work-related decisions (methods of working, allocation of tasks, maintenance of quality, etc.). However, the content of the process is confined largely to the implementation phase of operational decisions already made by management. This approach is intended to motivate the individual employee directly, to increase job satisfaction and to enhance the employee's sense of identification with the aims, objectives and decisions of the organisation (all of which have been determined by management)."

INDIRECT (REPRESENTATIVE) PARTICIPATION

Normally termed 'representative participation', this is an indirect form of employee influence whereby employee views and input are articulated through the use of some form of employee representation (see, for example, Salamon 1998). Common examples in this regard include trade unions and works councils. Such employee representatives are generally elected or nominated by the broader worker body and thus carry a mandate to represent the interests and views of the workers they represent. They do not act in a personal capacity but as a conduit through which the broader mass of workers can influence organisational decision making. Representative participation is largely concerned with re-distributing decision making power in favour of employees. It thus seeks to reduce the extent of management prerogative and effect greater employee influence on areas of decision making which have traditionally been the remit of senior management. Representative participation is generally employee driven, coming from the demands of workers or their trade unions for a greater input into organisational decision making.

LEVEL AND SCOPE OF EMPLOYEE INFLUENCE

In addition to identifying different forms of employee influence, we can also point to key dimensions along which the nature of such influence may vary. One important area of variation in approaches to employee influence is the *level* at which such influence is exercised. Many of the current developments at enterprise level in Ireland focus on increasing direct employee involvement in decisions which affect their immediate work role. However, we may also find employee influence exercised at higher levels in the organisational hierarchy, such as at business unit level (e.g. collective bargaining) or corporate level (e.g. worker directors). Another area of variation in relation to employee influence is the *scope* of employee input. The dimension addresses the types of issues over which employees have opportunity to influence decisions. The most commonly used categorisation in this respect is to differentiate between influence at the operational level (immediate work/enterprise level focus) and strategic level (influence on the future nature and role of the organisation).

Let us now look more closely at the main ways in which workers or their representatives can seek to influence decision making in organisations.

MANIFESTATIONS OF EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

From the available literature we may identify three broad ways in which employees can influence decision making in organisations, namely (i) industrial democracy; (ii) employee participation and (iii) employee involvement. These various approaches differ largely in regard to their underlying philosophy or approach, the extent of employee influence on decision making, and the level of institutional 'sophistication' used to support each form of employee influence. Let us briefly look at each in turn.

1. Industrial democracy: Industrial democracy is generally understood to involve situations where workers exert primary control over decision making in organisations. Salamon (1998: 353-354) describes industrial democracy as follows:

> **"**Its central objective is the establishment of employee self-management within an organisation, whose ownership is vested in either the employees or the State and whose managerial function is exercised ultimately through a group, elected by the employees themselves, which has the authority over all decisions of the organisation, including the allocation of 'profits' between extra wages and reinvestment."

This approach is often viewed as the ultimate form of employee influence involving a fundamental re-structuring of control and power in industrial organisations towards employees.

2. Employee participation: In contrast employee participation represents a more evolutionary development aimed at extending collective employee influence beyond the traditional remit of collective bargaining, and particularly into areas such as operational and strategic decision making. The collectivist element is critical since employee participation involves increasing employee influence over organisational decision making via the adoption representative institutions such as works councils, trade union representation or other forms of elected employee representation. Employee participation is thus a indirect form of employee influence.

3. Employee involvement: Over the past two decades we have seen a significant shift in the employee influence debate away representative forms of participation and towards a greater focus on increasing the direct involvement of employees in decisions of immediate work relevance. Increasing direct employee involvement in decision making has been a particular feature of the Human Resource Management (HRM) literature (see, for example, Beer et al 1984), and in Ireland, has often been associated with HR practices in larger non-union firms. It embraces any means of increasing the direct involvement of workers in decisions affecting their work situation, such as work scheduling or quality monitoring. As noted earlier, some of the more common mechanisms used to operationalise employee involvement include empowerment, teamworking, briefing groups and quality circles.

However direct participation tends to be quite an amorphous concept which may be used in organisations to describe a whole range activities, which vary considerably in their scope. In many instances, direct participation initiatives are principally confined to improving upward and downward communications with little provision for employee influence on the decision making process. However, some direct participation initiatives clearly impact on the decision making process and it is this dimension of direct participation which is of most interest from an industrial relations perspective. The term most widely used to describe this approach is *task participation* which Geary (1994: 637) describes thus:

> "Task participation is defined as opportunities which management provides at workplace level for consultation with and/or delegation of responsibilities and authority for decision making to its subordinates either as individuals or as groups of employees relating to the immediate work task and/or working conditions"

THE DEBATE SO FAR: A POTTED REVIEW

The movement for increased employee influence in organisational decision making has its roots in early attempts to achieve **worker control** dating from the industrial revolution period in the UK (see, for example, Coates & Topham 1968). These initiatives were based on a rejection of the new economic order based on capitalism and wage labour (which from the Marxist perspective created worker alienation and frustration as a result of divisions of labour, the removal of discretion and responsibility from the individual worker, and the creation of hostile social classes). The movement for worker control and self-management highlight an important element in the employee participation and involvement debate: whether it should aim at achieving a changed economic order through re-drawing the decision making mechanisms within organisations or, alternatively, attempt to bring about greater employee participation within the prevailing structure of industrial organisations. It seems that most recent developments in the area follow the latter route:

> "Industrial democracy has little currency in contemporary market-driven economies where any worker or activist concern for industrial control has been fragmented and displaced by defensive struggles to retain individual employment and to protect employment rights"
>
> Hyman & Mason: 1995: 8

Developments in relation to extending employee influence in organisational decision making have taken varying directions and proceeded at different paces in different countries. With the demise of the early movements for workers control, employee participation achieved its most concrete form through the extension of **collective bargaining**.

Collective bargaining has traditionally been viewed as one of the most effective means through which employees can bring their influence to bear on organisational decision making. In Ireland the growth of collective bargaining has served to extend employee influence, with trade unions acting as the principal mechanism for representing employee interests in the workplace and beyond. However, it has also been noted that collective bargaining in Ireland is generally adversarial in nature and, as such, has attracted the criticism that it is not an effective means of promoting more co-operative forms of management-worker participation (see, for example, Roche & Kochan 1996; Geary 1995). Another popular criticism of collective bargaining as a vehicle for extending employee influence is that collective bargaining agendas are often limited in the range of issues addressed. This argument refers to the tendency for collective bargaining to primarily focus on pay and conditions. It is argued that such a restricted and adversarial agenda is a limiting factor which prohibits the development of greater management-employee participation on issues outside the scope of 'traditional' collective bargaining. It is therefore plausible to argue that if collective bargaining is to increase its capacity to effect greater employee participation in organisations, it will become necessary to expand the scope of bargaining to incorporate broader issues of strategic and operational policy. These latter issues have traditionally been ones where management have sought to retain prerogative in decision making. In Ireland we have seen some developments in this regard, particularly in recent centralised agreements where we find that the scope of discussions between the so called 'social partners' is not just restricted to pay and conditions but address a range of broader social and economic issues such taxation, budgetary policy and employment creation.

Looking farther afield, many Western European countries witnessed some significant developments in the post World War Two era with various institutional arrangements developed to further representative participation. In this regard we can identify countries where such arrangements were given statutory support (such as Germany) and those which were based on collective agreements (Norway, Sweden, Denmark). While these developments fall considerably short of industrial democracy as described earlier, they generally entail institutional arrangements which provide for some degree of democratic control within what Salamon (1998: 354) terms "a reformist framework of limited modification of the capitalist managerial authority system rather than a fundamental restructuring (for example, co-determination through worker directors in Germany..)".

During the 1970s and into the 1980s, much of the focus of the employee participation and involvement debate took place at European Community (EC) level where various policy documents

concentrated on board level participation, works councils and disclosure of financial information. In the 1970s in particular, we witnessed a burgeoning debate on diffusing forms of representative participation largely, but not exclusively, along (West) German lines. Germany has a strong tradition of representative participation dating back to post World War II re-structuring and involving two main pillars, 'Co-determination' and 'Works Councils'.

Works councils have a long established tradition in many European countries, often enjoying legislative support and exerting considerable influence on the organisations in which they operate. Works councils are particularly associated with initiatives to extend representative participation in Germany and some other European countries and provide mechanism for formal employee representation at workplace level to facilitate consultation and discussion of enterprise related issues between workers and management.

While works councils have a long established tradition in mainland Europe, this is not the case in Ireland. Indeed, it is only as a result of two fairly recent developments that works councils have made their way into the vocabulary of Irish industrial relations. Firstly, we have developments at European Union (EU) level which have sought to establish *European works councils* as part of the EU's social agenda. As Blyton and Turnbull (1994) note, increasing employee participation and involvement over workplace issues represents a 'key tenet' of the Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights, generally known as the 'Social Charter'. An important dimension of the Social Charter was a 1991 draft Directive which proposed that transnational companies over a particular size be required to establish a *European works council*. In Ireland, this proposal reached fruition with the passing of the Transnational Information and Consultation Act, 1996. This Act provides for the establishment of a works council or employee forum in companies which employ at least 1000 workers across the EU and at least 150 workers in two or more member states. The role of European works councils (EWCs) as outlined in the EU Directive is to supplement national structures to secure information and consultation rights for workers on transnational company matters (for greater detail see Gunnigle, McMahon & Fitzgerald 1999; Kelly and Hourihan 1997).

The second way in which works councils have entered the Irish industrial relations vocabulary relates to company sponsored works councils among non-union firms. The establishment of such councils often forms part of a union substitution strategy, whereby management seek to satisfy employee desires for formal representation while maintaining a firm's non union status. Roche and Turner (1998: 72-73) describe this development thus:

> "A more direct substitute for union voice is a company based representation structure such as a staff association or works council sponsored by the company itself. How independent such structures are is often difficult to assess….However, a number of cases have occurred in recent years where a staff association or works council have taken a company to the Labour Court in disputes over pay and conditions indicating some degree of independence from management control. A notable feature of each of the cases is that the development of the representative structure occurred as a measure to block union recognition".

In contrast to the specific definition and prescribed role of European works councils, the precise structure and role of works councils established as part of a union substitution strategy is difficult to establish. Indeed, the whole concept of formal employee representation in the non-union sector remains somewhat of a 'black whole' with little available research evidence in the area. A key area of debate is the independence of such works councils, leading some critics to suggest that these councils generally remain creations of management with little capacity for independent action and are, in effect, staff associations (Roche and Turner 1998; also see Gunnigle, McMahon & Fitzgerald 1999).

Possibly the most widely debated form of representative employee participation entails the election of **worker directors** to the board of management of an enterprise (see, for example, Kelly 1989; Kelly & Hourihan 1997; Salamon 1998). The appointment of worker directors became widely

established in a number of mainland European countries after the Second World War. This was particularly the case in (West) Germany where the appointment of worker directors to the main (Supervisory) Board of companies was a critical feature of that country's system of 'co-determination' (see, for example, Visser and Van Ruysseveldt 1996). Carley (1998: 14) notes that twelve of the fifteen EU member states have legislation or 'generally applicable collective agreements' which provide for the appointment of worker directors in at least some enterprise categories. He suggests that countries with comprehensive legislation on worker directors include Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Luxembourg and Sweden, while countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain are similar to Ireland in that requirements for the appointment of worker directors are confined to the State sector.

In spite of a wide ranging debate over the years, and numerous policy documents dealing with board level participation, most of these proposed measures did not come into effect on any widespread basis in the UK or Ireland. In the face of considerable employer opposition, the more general trend was for the proposals to become substantially diluted allowing member states to adopt the approach deemed best suited to their particular needs/context. In Ireland the impact of the proposals was largely restricted to the appointment of workers directors to a small number of State owned organisations (see, Kelly & Hourihan 1997). The Worker Participation (State Enterprises) Act 1977 provided for the appointment of worker directors to the Boards of seven semi-state companies[1] and these provisions were later extended to include eight other (then) State owned organisations.

DIRECT PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPATION: THE EVIDENCE TO DATE

The preceding discussion has noted how the debate on employee participation and involvement has evolved over time. In particular it has highlighted how the emphasis has oscillated between movements for industrial democracy (in essence, the most complete form of employee influence), through a focus on representative participation (e.g. worker directors or works councils) to, most recently, initiatives to increase direct employee involvement in decisions of immediate work relevance. Clearly these different approaches entail considerable variation in both the extent of employee influence and the means used to give effect to each particular approach:

> "the paradigm of employee involvement .. employee participation .. and industrial democracy ..is essentially one of ascending levels of control by employees over their work and organisations"
>
> Hyman & Mason 1995: 18.

Having summarily outlined the main modes and potted history of both representative and direct forms employee participation and involvement, let us look more closely at practice in Ireland. In the remainder of this paper, I will consider some of the available evidence on the nature and diffusion of these varying modes of employee influence. We begin by looking at task participation.

THE DIFFUSION OF TASK PARTICIPATION

As we have seen above, task participation involves the devolvement of greater control over work related decisions to employees whereby they become more actively involved in influencing decisions, contributing their opinions and in solving problems at the workplace level. Workers are thus required to assume greater responsibility for the general organisation and execution of work, while also being expected to concern themselves with broader enterprise objectives such as improving productivity, controlling costs and general organisational efficiency:

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[1] The original seven organisations were Bord na Mona, CIE, ESB, Aer Lingus, B & I, Comhlucht Suicre Eireann and Nitrigin Eireann and this provision was later extended to include Irish Steel, Bord Gais, VHI, An Post, Bord Telecom, Aer Rianta and the National Rehabilitation Board.

"With TP [task participation], then, employees are granted more control over their immediate work situation and are invited to participate in decisions that relate to the organisation of work at the point of production. Thus, workers may influence the manner in which work is allocated, the scheduling of work and when to take breaks. They are also actively encouraged to seek solutions to problems and to make suggestions that will improve the organisation's efficiency."

Geary (1998: 3)

Sisson (1994) identifies two key forms of task participation: (i) *consultative participation* whereby workers are given the opportunity to become involved in decisions and make their views known but are not involved in joint decision making; (ii) *delegative participation* whereby workers are empowered to make key decisions without the need for management approval. Delegative participation thus means that individual workers assume greater autonomy in their work.

Team-working is generally seen as an advanced form of delegative task participation whereby workers are entrusted with key decisions, such as those concerning the selection of team leaders, team members, team roles, and task allocation (Geary 1994, 1995, 1996; Sisson 1994).
The concept of teamworking has its traditional roots in movements designed to improve the quality of working life (see Morley et al 1998). Recent years have witnessed a significant increase in interest in work re-organisation and teamworking, with employers now the key instigators (Beaumont 1995a).

Probably the most important source of information on the extent and nature of diffusion of task participation is the *European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions'* (EFILWC) survey conducted in ten EU member states (see EFILWC 1997; Sisson 1997). Generally known at the EPOC (*e*mployee direct *p*articipation in *o*rganisational *c*hange) project, this study examined both the incidence of task participation and also the nature of such participation, particularly the scope and extent of autonomy afforded to employees. In Ireland, the EPOC study surveyed a sample of Irish companies, excluding those with less that 25 employees. The study achieved a response rate of nearly 39% (382 organisations), which represented the highest response rate among all the countries involved in the study (EFIWLC 1997; also see Geary 1998).

Looking firstly at the diffusion of consultative participation, the EPOC study found that what are termed 'temporary groups', particularly project groups or task forces, were found in 36 per cent of firms while 'permanent groups' such as quality circles were present in 28 per cent of firms. Turning to delegative participation, the EPOC study found that team-based structures were present in 42 per cent of respondent firms. Based on these findings, it appears that task participation of some form is present in around one third of Irish workplaces. Newly established firms were more likely to use task participation than their longer established counterparts.

In addition to examining the incidence of task participation, the EPOC study also looked at the nature and intensity of such participation, particularly delegative participation (incorporating team-working). The EPOC study utilised two measures in this regard: (i) the scope of team-working, which measured extent of employee's rights to solely make decisions in relation to their work; (ii) the extent of autonomy afforded to employees to select team members and to decide on which issues the team should tackle. The EPOC findings indicate that just 17 per cent of Irish firms which used team-working were characterised by a high level of team or group delegation.

These findings suggest that while task participation is reasonably well diffused in Ireland, most organisations rely predominantly on traditional forms of work organisation. Of particular note is the fact that the uptake of modes of work organisation which devolve a high level of autonomy to workers and work teams is very low. It thus appears that advanced forms of task participation are not common in Ireland (see Geary 1998).

Management-Employee Communications

An important theme in the contemporary literature on industrial relations is the suggestion that employers have shifted the focus of their communications with employees away from representative fora (especially trade unions) and towards direct communications with individual employees (see, for example, Salamon 1998; Bacon & Storey 1993):

> "Since the early 1980s there has been a shift in the emphasis of organisational communication away from 'disclosure' of information to trade unions in support of the collective bargaining process, and towards 'dissemination' of information to employees in order to secure their greater involvement in and identification with the organisation's interests and objectives"
>
> Salamon 1998: 365.

In some quarters, this shift is viewed as part of a managerial strategy to adopt a more individualist 'employee' relations orientation which may concurrently involve attempts to bypass or marginalise trade unions in the workplace (see, for example, Kochan et al 1986; Blyton & Turnbull 1994; Gunnigle, Morley & Turner 1997). Differences in organisational approaches to communications tend to focus on the nature and content of management–employee communications and the range of mechanisms used to facilitate such communications. The Cranfield-University of Limerick (CUL) study, carried out in 1992, 1995 and 1999, focused on two key aspects of the debate on management–employee communications: (i) the communications fora used by management in communicating with employees and (ii) the type of information communicated to employees using such fora (see Gunnigle, Morley, Clifford & Turner 1997).

In relation to communications fora, the CUL study examined trends in the modes used in the communication of major issues to employees. A particular area of interest here is the relative emphasis on collectivist vis a vis individualist fora (see McLoughlin & Gourlay 1992; Blyton & Turnbull 1994). Table 1 presents summary findings on the pattern of utilisation of three particular communications modes, namely (i) direct verbal communications; (ii) direct written communications and (iii) representative staff bodies (including trade unions).

Table 1: Changes in Management-Employee Communications

	Increased			Same			Decreased		
	1992	**1995**	**1999**	**1992**	**1995**	**1999**	**1992**	**1995**	**1999**
Rep. Staff bodies	16%	13%	19%	48%	51%	38%	12%	7%	7%
Verbal direct	55%	51%	56%	34%	42%	42%	1%	2%	1%
Written direct	39%	46%	49%	42%	43%	45%	4%	1%	3%

Source: Cranfield-University of Limerick Study.

These findings indicate a substantial increase in direct written and verbal communications with employees. In relation to the use of representative staff bodies, we find a relatively stable picture with the great majority of respondent organisations reporting no change in their level of utilisation as a communications device. Among those organisations reporting change in usage levels, a greater number reported that the use of representative bodies had increased rather than decreased. The aggregate data points to an increased level of utilisation of direct communications with employees. However, this is not occurring at the expense of traditional collective lines of communication through representative bodies (generally trade unions). While larger organisations were more likely to increase all mechanisms, private sector companies were more likely to have increased direct communications, when compared with their public sector counterparts (see Gunnigle, Morley, Clifford & Turner 1997). Furthermore, the increase in direct communication mechanisms appears to be occurring at a faster pace among unionised private sector organisations.

In reviewing the actual content of management–employee communications, the CUL study explored the extent to which senior management communicated formally with employees on business strategy and financial performance (see table 2). With respect to communications on

business strategy, the findings indicate a high level of communications on strategy with management and professional/technical grades but a much lower level of communications with clerical and manual grades. In the 1999 survey, just over a quarter (27%) of organisations reported that they communicate on strategy with manual grades. A similar picture emerges when we look at the pattern of communications on financial performance. Again we find significantly lower levels of communications on financial issues with clerical and manual grades. These figures are quite low given that, as we have seen above, an apparent general trend of organisations increasing direct communications with their workforce. It seems that such direct communications are predominantly concerned with operational matters and not strategic or broader financial issues (see Gunnigle, Morley, Clifford & Turner 1997).

Table 2: Formal Communications on Business Strategy and Financial Performance

Employee Category	FORMAL COMMUNICATIONS ON:					
	Strategy			Financial performance		
	1992	1995	1999	1992	1995	1999
Management	94%	95%	92%	93%	94%	90%
Profess./Tech	66%	72%	59%	60%	64%	59%
Clerical	42%	50%	39%	41%	50%	42%
Manual	39%	38%	27%	36%	39%	30%

Source: Cranfield-University of Limerick Study

In evaluating these developments we can posit two broad factors which underpin management attempts to increase the extent and scope of management-employee communications. Firstly, we can point to the perceived need to inform employees of developments in relation to the business and its environment. Secondly, increased and better communications are seen as an important means of eliciting employee support for organisation change initiatives. Our earlier evidence indicates that many organisations are placing a greater emphasis on direct communications with employees. Gunnigle's (1995a) study of industrial relations in greenfield sites found a pronounced management focus on greater and more direct communications with individual employees. This study found that a significant proportion of non-union firms (generally larger US-owned firms in "high technology" sectors) emphasised extensive management–employee communications as a means of developing a more individualist management style in industrial relations and maintaining non-union status. Much of this communication focused on keeping employees informed of the company's product market performance. For many of these companies, such information was used to emphasise issues such as market volatility, intensity of competition and requirements for high-quality and low-cost production/service. In effect, the provision of such information was used to inform employees on 'market realities' (as perceived by management). Direct communications was also seen as a means of increasing employee's sense of ownership and involvement in the organisation which, hopefully, would contribute to employee support for any change initiatives deemed necessary by management to meet the competitive challenges facing their organisations. Gunnigle's findings suggest that (at least in greenfield firms), while there is considerable emphasis on communicating relevant data to employees, the motive for such communications derives more from a commercial imperative than from any widespread desire to increase employee involvement. Thus, it appears that communications on business strategy and financial information were often used to condition employee attitudes and expectations by, for example, emphasising the need to maintain flexibility, to improve productivity, and more generally, to accept "market imperatives" (see examples in table 3).

Table 3: Management-Employee Communications in Greenfield Sites

> "We place a heavy emphasis on communications but with a purpose: we emphasise volatility of the business sector and need to keep cost low. The absolute need for complete flexibility is reinforced by the use of temporary workers. At quality meetings I go through quarterly results with all employees. There is a monthly plant meeting between myself and all staff and I also meet regularly with groups of 4/5 employees. Another element is what we call 'fireside chats': here the personnel manager takes around fourteen people into a 'conference' to talk generally about any issue over coffee. All of these have a purpose: it keeps people in tune with reality and on their toes."
>
> Chief Executive: Data processing equipment
>
> "Strong communications is a key device in seeking to avoid union recognition. We are very keen to communicate on business strategy — it keeps employees in the picture. The MD gives regular communication briefings in small groups and the (US) president gets together with all employees at least once a year."
>
> Financial Controller: Electrical and instrument engineering

Source: Gunnigle 1995a: 206

High Performance Work Systems, Direct Participation and Working Life

The concept of high performance work systems (HPWS) is very much associated with the new 'high tech' companies of the 1980s, and especially those which located at greenfield sites in attempts to establish a fundamentally different type of organisation and organisation culture. The essence of HPWS appears to lie in the adoption of a culture of continuous improvement and innovation at all levels in the organisation *and* the implementation of a range of work organisation and human resource practices to sustain and develop this culture, particularly teamworking, quality consciousness and flexibility. A particular argued characteristic of HPWS is a reliance on high levels of direct employee involvement in decision making (Lawler 1978, 1982, 1986).

In evaluating the impact of HPWS, an issue of particular significance is their effect on the work experience of employees. It is particularly important to address the coupling of initiatives to improve direct employee involvement *with* the application of management techniques designed to improve quality and productivity, especially Just in Time (JIT) and Statistical Process Control (SPC) systems.

The introduction of these initiatives is generally rooted in the premise that increased direct employee involvement and autonomy is <u>consistent</u> with the use of JIT, SPC or related techniques. Indeed the argument that direct employee involvement/autonomy mutually complements the use of SPC and JIT is often a key selling point in encouraging employees (and their trade unions) to co-operate in the introduction of such approaches. However, this is not necessarily the case. In her incisive review of the implications of techniques such as JIT and SPC for employees and their work experience, Klein (1989: p. 60) argues that such changes in production systems do not necessarily make for a more empowered workforce:

> "In Japan..where JIT and SPC have been used most comprehensively, employees are routinely organised into teams, but their involvement in workplace reform is typically restricted to suggestions for process improvement through structured quality control circles or *kaizen* groups. Individual Japanese workers have unprecedented responsibility. Yet it is hard to think of them exercising genuine autonomy, that is, in the sense of independent self-management".

Using examples from both the US and Japan, Klein argues that increased pressures and constraints on workers are a common by-product of such manufacturing reforms. While allowing for greater employee involvement and autonomy than traditional assembly line systems, they are not conducive to the high levels of employee empowerment often thought to accompany a shift towards high performance work systems:

"True, under JIT and SPC, employees become more self-managing than in a command and control factory. They investigate process improvements and monitor quality themselves; they consequently enjoy immediate, impartial feedback regarding their own performance....They also gain a better understanding of all elements of the manufacturing process.

On the other hand, the reform process that ushers in JIT and SPC is meant *to eliminate all variations within production* and therefore requires strict adherence to rigid methods and procedures. Within JIT, workers must meet set cycle times; with SPC, they must follow prescribed problem-solving methods. In their pure forms, then, JIT and SPC can turn workers into extensions of a system no less demanding than a busy assembly line. These systems can be very demanding on employees".

<div align="right">Klein 1989: 61</div>

This analysis challenges the thesis that high performance work systems necessarily contribute to an improved work experience for employees. In particular, Klein points to important aspects of the work experience which may regress or be lost as a result of reforms using SPC and JIT, namely:

1. *individual autonomy,* may be reduced due to the elimination of inventories under JIT, resulting in less slack or idle time which in turn limits the opportunity for workers to discuss issues, evaluate changes and make suggestions;
2. *team autonomy,* may be reduced because of the greater interdependency between groups due to the absence of buffer inventories, with resulting work pressures reducing the time available to consider broader changes in the work system;
3. *ability to influence work methods,* may be reduced because SPC sets strict guidelines for working methods and procedures.

However, this analysis does not necessarily mean that high performance work systems incorporating JIT and SPC cannot positively impact of the job experience of workers. Rather, it points to the fact that these techniques and systems may applied in differing ways. Thus, the issue of management choice is important. Equally important one could argue is the role of workers and trade unions in influencing management choice as to the nature of deployment of these new systems. It is plausible to argue that unfettered management prerogative in introducing so called high performance work systems can contribute to a regression in employment conditions and the work experience of employees. Klein (1989) argues that the key to improving employee involvement and autonomy while instigating high performance work systems is to provide for *greater collaboration between teams* and to allow *greater opportunity for teams and individuals to propose and evaluate suggestions* for changes in the work process and in the conduct of different jobs. It would appear that the optimal means of facilitating worker influence on the application of new work systems is through some combination of direct and indirect participation.

DEVELOPMENTS IN REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPATION

Turning to developments in representative participation, undoubtedly the most significant development has been the sequence of social partnership type agreements between trade unions, employers and government at national level. This most recent sequence of centralised agreements in Ireland (1987-2000) is often characterised as representing a shift towards a more corporatist approach to industrial relations in Ireland (see, for example, O'Donnell & O'Reardon 1996; Roche 1997; Teague 1995; D'Art & Turner 1999). Broadly speaking, these agreements meet most of the requisite characteristics of 'corporatist' arrangements, namely: (i) the agreements are tripartite in nature and go beyond purely industrial relations matters to incorporate broader social and economic issues; (ii) they represent a negotiated exchange between the 'social partners' whereby the trade union side commits to co-operate with Government and employers to ensure members adhere to agreed pay norms and (iii) [as part of this exchange] unions and employers have direct opportunity to influence public policy decisions in areas of critical concern to their constituents such as employment, social welfare and taxation.

Diffusion at Enterprise Level

Despite the trend of 'social partnership' and apparent consensus with respect to the national interest, an important criticism of this period of centralised bargaining is the failure to extend the partnership approach below national level interactions. As Roche (1995) specifically comments, the Irish model of social partnership is somewhat narrow, involving only the top levels of the union and employer bodies and has not significantly impacted on developments in enterprise level industrial relations. As a consequence, Roche (1995: 28) describes the Irish model as 'truncated' social partnership, inferring that while a partnership orientation exists at the pinnacle of union and employer interactions, old fashioned adversarialism characterises employer-union relations at enterprise level. This apparent paradox is an important concern for the social partners. Institutions such as the National Economic and Social Council and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions have pointed to the potentially significant role of 'partnership' at enterprise level in contributing to improvements in both industrial relations and business performance. At national level we have seen the establishment of a National Centre for Partnership, based in the Department of *An Taoiseach*, while at European Union level, 1997 saw the publication by the European Commission of a green paper "Partnership for a New Organization of Work".

Advocates of partnership at enterprise level posit that integrative/collaborative approaches represent a more attractive alternative with their emphasis on exploring common ground and seeking solutions of mutual benefit for both employers and workers (see, for example, Kochan & Osterman 1994; Roche & Kochan 1996). These arguments often point to perceived deficiencies in the adversarial industrial relations model, in particular the apparent dominance of distributive bargaining on short term issues, and its emphasis on dividing limited resources. It is suggested that this approach leads the parties to develop adversarial positions believing that any gains can only be made by inflicting losses on the other party (Fisher & Ury 1996). Indeed, distributive bargaining reflects the very essence of the traditional pluralist-adversarial industrial relations model: claims, offers, bluff, threats, compromise, movement, agreement or conflict. In contrast, the so called 'partnership approach' is based on the premise that employers, workers and their representative associations should seek to jointly address industrial relations problems and develop mutually beneficial solutions (see, for example, Kochan & Osterman 1994; Beaumont 1995a). It is further argued that this new model allows both sides to break out of the traditional adversarial relationship through the adoption of a partnership model based on "mutual gains" principles as follows:

- employers recognise and facilitate worker and trade union involvement in strategic decision making;
- workers/trade unions commit themselves actively to productivity improvements;
- the gains of productivity improvements are shared between employers and workers;
- productivity improvements do not result in redundancies but rather employers actively seek new markets to keep workers gainfully employed.

The essence of this partnership thesis is that workers and trade unions actively pursue with management solutions to business challenges in return for (a) greater involvement in business decisions and work re-organisation and (b) greater financial participation resulting from the economic success of the enterprise.

Let us now consider the diffusion of partnership based industrial relations arrangements (PBIRA) in Ireland and review some of the implications for the future of industrial relations.

Partnership or Adversarial Bargaining? The evidence to date

There is a limited but growing body of empirical research which, either directly or indirectly, explores developments in enterprise level industrial relations in Ireland. Some studies look specifically at the issue of partnership while others entail more general reviews. We now consider some of this evidence.

The first Irish study to specifically address partnership based industrial relations arrangements (PBIRA) was that conducted by the Irish Management Institute (IMI) in 1997 (Hannigan 1997). This pilot study involved a survey of participants who attended a Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment/IMI Conference on the theme "Workplace 2000". This Conference addressed the issue of industrial relations partnerships with particular emphasis on the EU Green Paper, the role of the National Centre of Partnership and case experiences of organisations which had undertaken partnership initiatives. Inevitably, this survey is likely to represent a biased response as we would expect participants at such a conference to have some positive interest in developing or promoting workplace industrial relations partnerships. As such, one would anticipate that the survey would reveal a positive picture on partnership. Interestingly, this was not the case. The IMI survey explored a number of dimensions of partnership. Some of these might be considered direct indicators of the presence of PBIRA while others represent more indirect or contextual variables. Respondents were asked to indicate the presence of these dimensions in their organisation on a 1 to 5 scale (low to high). The mean scores are outlined in table 4.

Table 4: The Diffusion Partnership Based Industrial Relations: Some Initial Findings

Direct Indicators of Partnership	Mean scores (range 1 - 5)
To what extent do you believe that partnership exists in your organisation?	2.79
Sharing in rewards of success	2.50
Employee involvement in strategic decision making	2.10
Existence of formal partnership agreement	2.05
Indirect Indicators of Partnership	
Open two way communications	3.33
Employee involvement in decision making in work units	3.21
Top management commitment to partnership	3.07
Single status for all employees	2.95
Efficiency/Performance Indicators	
Employee responsiveness to customer requirements	3.81
Employee flexibility	3.67

Source: Hannigan 1997

In evaluating these findings in relation to the median value of 3, we find a reasonably clear picture. Firstly, the direct indicators of PBIRA all score below the median value. Therefore we can conclude that partnership based approaches are not well developed in the respondent firms. As the author comments (Hannigan 1997: pp.1-2):

> "…the key features of a partnership agreement, for example, employee involvement in strategic decision making and sharing in the rewards of success, are not present to any degree in this sample"

A second important trend discernible in the IMI survey, is that the variables which score highest are those which evaluate worker flexibility and responsiveness to customer requirements, i.e. indicators of employee performance/efficiency. Finally, we find that management perceptions of their commitment to partnership score higher than their evaluation of the extent to which partnership actually exists in their organisations.

A second and considerably more comprehensive source of information on the diffusion of partnership approaches is the UCD/ESRI Workplace survey (Roche and Geary 1998). While this study looked at a range of HR and IR issues, a particular area of focus was the management of change in Irish workplaces. To this end the UCD/ESRI study investigated twelve key areas of workplace change and, where change had occurred, examined the predominant approach used by establishments to handle workplace change. This study looked at four optional approaches to handling change: (a) <u>management prerogative:</u> i.e. change decisions made solely by management; (b) <u>traditional collective bargaining;</u> (c) <u>partnership:</u> engaging with trade unions to introduce change by

consensus; (d) <u>direct involvement</u>: decided by management with the direct involvement of employees. The main findings on workplace change in unionised workplaces are summarised in table 5 and in non-union workplaces in table 6.

Table 5: Handling Workplace Change in Unionised Establishments

OPERATIONAL ISSUES	HOW CHANGE IS HANDLED (%)			
	Management Prerogative	Collective Bargaining	Partnership	Direct Involvement
Pay Levels	17	62	11	10
Payment Systems	21	40	18	22
New Plant & Technology	48	13	11	27
Working Time	8	38	16	38
Work Practices	13	25	20	41
Numbers Employed	65	13	14	8
Employee Involvement	26	14	14	46
Promotion Structures & Criteria	77	8	11	5
STRATEGIC ISSUES				
New Products/Services	62	2	8	29
Setting Business Targets	71	3	3	23
Identifying ways of realising targets	47	4	8	41
Plans re. mergers, acquistions or divestments	92	1	2	6

Source: Roche and Geary 1998.

The data on workplace change in unionised establishments clearly indicates that partnership approaches are very much the exception rather than the rule. It also appears that where partnership is used, this occurs more in relation to operational than strategic issues. In contrast, we find much higher levels of utilisation of direct involvement in handling workplace change, both in relation to operational and strategic issues.

Looking at non-union establishments (table 6), we find much greater use of direct employee involvement. This occurs in relation to both strategic and operational issues. Nevertheless, management prerogative remains the most widely practised means of effecting workplace change and particularly so in regard to strategic issues.

Table 6: Handling Workplace Change in Non-Union Establishments

OPERATIONAL ISSUES	HOW CHANGE IS HANDLED (%)	
	Management Prerogative	Direct Involvement
Pay Levels	62	38
Payment Systems	51	49
New Plant & Technology	52	48
Working Time	20	80
Work Practices	32	68
Numbers Employed	33	67
Employee Involvement	81	19
Promotion Structures & Criteria	76	24
STRATEGIC ISSUES		
New Products/ Services	56	44
Setting Business Targets	68	32

Identifying ways of realising targets	38	62
Plans re. mergers, acquistions or divestments	97	3

Source: Roche and Geary 1998.

The UCD/ESRI study also looked at how employers hoped to handle future workplace change. Respondents in unionised establishments indicated a clear preference for either partnership approaches or direct employee involvement rather than collective bargaining, especially with regard to operational matters. Respondents in non-union establishments revealed a strong preference for greater use of direct employee involvement.

A third source of data on the incidence of partnership arrangements is the *Cranfield-University of Limerick (CUL) Study* discussed earlier (see Gunnigle, Morley, Clifford & Turner 1997). It should be noted that this study did not attempt to explicitly examine the incidence of partnership. We therefore rely on some proxy measure considered indicative of partnership approaches. An important pre-requisite for employee participation is the provision of information on enterprise performance. The CUL study explored the extent to which senior management communicated formally with employees on business strategy and financial performance (see table 2 earlier**).** We saw that in 1999 just 27% of participating organisations reported that they communicate on strategy with manual grades. This result is surprisingly low even allowing for an expected differential in the level of communications on strategy between higher ranking and lower ranking employees. A similar picture emerges in relation to the extent of communications on *financial performance.* The CUL study also examined the extent to which organisations facilitate increased employee participation through institutionalised arrangements in the form of joint consultative committees and work councils. The findings indicate a limited uptake of such arrangements with just one quarter of participating organisations reporting the existence of joint consultative committees or works councils. Such consultative arrangements are more widespread in the public sector with 38% of organisations reporting the existence of some form of institutionalised participation, compared with 21% of private sector organisations. The great majority of organisations with a works council or joint consultative committee were unionised (53 of the 63 organisations).

An additional source of information is Gunnigle's (1995a & b) study of industrial relations in greenfield sites, also considered earlier. This study found a similar picture to the CUL study. While there was considerable evidence of managerial attempts to introduce a modicum of direct employee involvement, partnership approaches were not a common feature of industrial relations in these new firms.

Overall, these studies provide scant evidence of trade union involvement in strategic decision making. They also point to the limited impact of direct employee involvement. It appears that the predominant focus of direct involvement initiatives is on facilitating the involvement of individual employees and small groups on issues of immediate work relevance. These initiatives seem to be primarily concerned with encouraging greater employee "voice" on issues of immediate job related interest rather than employee "influence" on higher-level management decision-making.

THE TRADE UNION STANDPOINT
A significant aspect of the debate on employee participation and involvement in Ireland concerns the role of trade unions. Traditionally the Irish trade union movement did not seem particularly committed to initiatives to increase employee participation and involvement (see, for example, Morrissy 1989). Indeed apart from support for greater disclosure of information, the conventional trade union approach to employee participation was marked by a considerable degree of apathy. Such apathy has strong links to the doubts many trade unionists harbour about the implications of employee participation and involvement for the union's role in collective bargaining. Salamon (1998) identifies a number of factors which may explain trade union opposition to employee participation and involvement initiatives, particularly direct participation:
- Management's tendency to emphasise the intrinsic rewards (such as increased job satisfaction)

emanating from organisation change initiatives and to 'play down' the significance of extrinsic rewards.

- A suspicion that the primary objective of organisation change initiatives is productivity improvement and cost reduction rather that increasing employee participation and involvement, and concern that such moves may lead to downsizing.
- A suspicion that organisational change initiatives may lead to a dilution or removal of traditional demarcation lines between groups of workers.
- A suspicion that direct participation represents a management desire to undermine existing representative arrangements, with a consequent diminution in the role of trade unions in workplace industrial relations.

Our earlier discussion with respect to employee communications provides some support for such union reservations. For example, Gunnigle's (1995a) greenfield site study indicated that management's objectives in increasing direct communications with employees were primarily aimed at conditioning employee attitudes and expectations to appreciate 'market realities' and accept the need for high levels of flexibility and productivity.

In spite of such reservations, recent years have seen a marked change in trade union approaches to employee participation and involvement. The Irish Congress of Trade Union policy documents, *New Forms of Work Organisation* (1993) and *Managing Change* (1995*)* posit that trade unions need to take a more proactive role in influencing the planning and implementation of new workforce management strategies (ICTU 1993, 1995). These reports place a particular focus on task participation at enterprise level. They note the importance for trade unions of developing, and actively participating in, employee involvement initiatives at workplace level:
"Involvement with management in the implementation of ..initiatives will be the key to ensuring that the interests of ..members are met"

ICTU 1993

They also identify key aspects of employee participation and involvement which trade unions need to address, particularly the joint monitoring of participation initiatives at workplace level, involvement of trade unions in the internal communications processes of organisations, access to and understanding of business information, and union involvement in high level business decision making.

A Rank and File Perspective
Looking beyond the policy level and the 'official' trade union line, there is a dearth of independent research evidence on the role and reactions of trade union members to participation and involvement initiatives. However, a recent paper by D'Art and Turner (1999) provides some insights on this key constituency. Their work draws on a survey of members of a large general union in Ireland. A total of just over 2000 members were surveyed in forty three organisations and the survey achieved a response rate of 29%.

We noted above that the ICTU has sought to encourage partnership arrangements between unions, employees and management at firm level to complement developments at national level. The current *Partnership 2000* agreement makes specific provision for the promotion of partnership at workplace level. However, it provides for considerable flexibility with regard to the nature of such partnership: the agreement does not seek to "impose any single structure or model of partnership" and recognises the need to "tailor the approach to fit different employment settings" (*Partnership 2000*: 63). The agreement does however identify a number of issues which partnership at workplace level might embrace, notably employee co-operation in organisation change, changing forms of work organisation and financial participation. D'Art and Turner's (1999) study considered the diffusion of six specific workplace initiatives[2] and union member's perceptions of their impact in

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[2] (i) union management committees, (ii) team working, (iii) profit sharing, (iv) share schemes, (v)

fostering partnership with management.

Overall the level of diffusion of these new workplace initiatives was not extensive: 39% reported that none of the six initiatives had been introduced in their workplace and only 29% reported more than two of these initiatives present in their workplace. Initiatives to give employees greater control over their work were experienced by the lowest number of respondents (11%), while the numbers experiencing the other initiatives averaged around 30% of respondents.

As we can see from table 7, D'Art and Turner's (1999) findings indicate that such new initiatives have had a mixed impact on levels of co-operation between workers and management. With the exception of team working, over half of respondents reported no change in the levels of management-employee co-operation as a result of any of these initiatives. With regard to union-management committees, profit sharing and initiatives to give employees greater control over their work, the proportion of respondents reporting increased management-employee co-operation was similar to the proportion indicating decreased levels of co-operation. Schemes which provided for greater disclosure of financial information to employees were perceived to have the most positive impact on management-employee co-operation: 32% of respondents reported an increase in co-operation compared to 13% who reported that co-operation had decreased. In the case of team working and share schemes, 32% and 24% respectively reported increased levels of co-operation compared to 19% and 14% indicating decreased levels.

Table 7: Impact new workplace initiatives on levels of co-operation with management

	Union management committees	Team working	Profit sharing	Shares available to employees	Greater control over your work	More financial information
Co-operation decreased greatly	10%	6%	8%	9%	12%	8%
Co-operation decreased	12%	13%	9%	5%	9%	5%
No change	52%	48%	64%	62%	57%	55%
Co-operation increased	24%	28%	17%	22%	20%	27%
Co-operation increased greatly	2%	4%	2%	2%	1%	5%
N	100% (316)	100% (300)	100% (253)	100% (301)	100% (226)	100% (293)

Source: D'Art and Turner 1999.

An important theme in the arguments put forward by union leaders in support of partnership based industrial relations arrangements at enterprise level is that such initiatives will have beneficial outcomes for rank and file trade union members in terms of their experience of work and will foster greater partnership between management of employees (ICTU 1993, 1995). It is also argued that partnership will serve to strengthen union organisation in the workplace and give workers a fairer share of a company's economic success (see D'Art & Turner 1999). Table 8 summarises D'Art and Turner's (1999) main findings on trade union member's perceptions of the outcomes of new workplace initiatives.

Table 8: New initiatives and organisational outcomes

	Job related outcomes	Institutional outcomes	Rewards

schemes to give employees more control and (vi) schemes to give employees more financial information.

	Influence in deciding how your job is done	Amount of work you have to do	Feelings of a 'them and us' divide	Influence of trade union in your workplace	Fairer share of profits to workers in your firm
Decreased greatly	10%	1%	5%	12%	12%
Decreased	14%	2%	12%	26%	10%
No change	60%	32%	53%	47%	63%
Increased	15%	42%	18%	13%	15%
Increased greatly	1%	23%	12%	2%	0%

Source: D'Art and Turner 1999.

This information is extremely revealing and provides important insights into the outcomes of changes in work organisation for both individual workers and for organised labour at workplace level. Looking firstly at individual worker autonomy in their jobs, we do not find a particularly promising picture. The great majority of respondents (60%) felt that the influence they had over how to do their job remained unchanged. However, almost a quarter (24%) felt their level of influence had actually decreased and only 16% felt it had increased. In contrast, we find that most respondents (65%) reported that their work burden had increased, 32% indicated no change and only 3% felt it had decreased.

Nor do we find a particularly positive picture when we look at the impact of new workplace initiatives in fostering increased partnership at enterprise level. A basic premise of the partnership argument is that it serves to reduce or eliminate 'them and us' attitudes and moves the industrial relations agenda from adversarialism to co-operation (see, for example, Kochan & Osterman 1994; Roche & Kochan 1996). D'Art and Turner's evidence does not support this premise. While just over half the respondents (53%) reported no change, almost one third (30%) felt that the 'them and us' divide had actually increased while 19% reported that it had decreased.

Turning to the perceived impact on the role of trade unions at enterprise level, we find that just less than half the respondents (47%) felt this had not changed as a result of the introduction of new workplace initiatives. However, where respondents felt that the union role had changed, this was most likely to result in a decrease (38%) rather than an increase (15%) in trade union influence. Finally, with regard to the share of profits going to workers, while most (63%) felt the situation had not changed as a result of new workplace initiatives, a greater number of respondents (22%) reported that the share of profits going to workers had decreased than increased (15%).

Taken together this evidence suggests that the experience of trade union members with respect to new workplace initiatives has either been one of no change or had mostly negative implications both for individual workers and for trade union influence in the workplace. Of course, as Turner and D'Art point out, it is plausible to argue that this (perceived) decline in union influence at enterprise level is unrelated to new workplace initiatives and may be traced to broader economic and social change[3]. Nevertheless, these findings raise serious questions about the impact of new workplace initiatives on trade union influence and organisation and gives some substance to those who have argued that such initiatives serve to undermine and marginalise trade union influence at workplace level (see, for example, Salamon 1998; Gunnigle 1998). In evaluating their findings, D'Art and Turner conclude that the development of a "genuine sense of partnership at firm level has not occurred to any significant degree" in the companies surveyed. This finding is confirmed in table 9 which addresses the broad question of co-operation. This indicates that the majority of respondents either believe that co-operation has declined (37%) or remained unchanged (40%).

Table 9: Partnership and Co-operation between management and workers at firm level

Co-operation between management has declined to a great extent	14%

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[3] In the Irish context, see McGovern 1989; Gunnigle 1995a; Gunnigle, Morley & Turner 1997.

There is less co-operation in this workplace than before	23%
Nothing has changed here	40%
Co-operation has increased to some extent	22%
Co-operation has increased greatly	1%

Source: D'Art and Turner 1999.

ACHIEVING PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT: HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?

It is widely suggested that all parties in industrial relations can benefit from increased employee participation and involvement. For example, it is suggested that employers need a flexible and committed workforce which will respond to change and perform at high levels of productivity and that this can be facilitated in part through employee participation and involvement initiatives (see, for example, Beer et al 1984). From an employee perspective, it is argued that their input into decisions affecting their working lives is a very legitimate goal, allowing them greater control and discretion in their jobs (Hackman & Oldham 1980).

However, the achievement of real and effective participation within organisations remains as problematic as ever. Employers commonly argue that business confidence and discretion in decision making must be maintained to encourage investment and expansion while at the same time suggesting that barriers to worker involvement should be removed and employees given a worthwhile say in decision making on immediate work related issues. This perspective is commonly used to encourage employee involvement in shop floor issues while legitimising the retention of management prerogative in higher level business decision making (Gunnigle & Morley 1993; Gunnigle 1998; Salamon 1998).

We have noted that while the main focus of representative participation has been on worker directors and works councils, direct participation has emphasised the involvement of employees in decisions affecting immediate work related issues. A particular concern for trade unions is the impact of these various participative forms on collective bargaining and the union role at enterprise level. We earlier noted the reservations which many trade unionists harbour in relation to employee participation and involvement. In particular we have seen that a traditional principle of collective bargaining has been the trade union 'right and ability' to oppose management (see Salamon 1988: 375). Consequently, initiatives which seek to integrate workers or trade unions in the decision making process are often viewed with suspicion since they may serve to reduce trade union independence and capacity to oppose. Trade unions will also be keen to ensure that any participative forms complement rather than compete with established collective bargaining institutions and oppose approaches aimed at undermining the union role at workplace level.

In contrast, employers often view employee participation and involvement as a means of engaging the whole workforce (not just those represented by trade unions) in organisation change initiatives aimed at improving the competitive position of the organisation. The contrast between these union and management perspectives is captured in the following quote from Salamon (1998: 389):

> "Management favours task-centred, direct forms of 'involvement' based on increasing the commitment of the individual employee; trade unions favour power-centred, indirect forms of 'participation' based on the established representation role of trade unions to increase employee influence in management decision making"

We have earlier seen how changes in the political, social and economic environment have led to a shift in the participation and involvement debate away from representative participation and towards direct participation (employee involvement). This shift is related to an increasing employer focus on improving organisation performance and competitiveness on dimensions such as productivity, quality levels, and customer service. At the macro level, Governments and other supra-national bodies (such as the European Union) have also become preoccupied with economic and competitiveness issues, again placing a strong policy focus on organisation and sectoral level performance. Hyman and Mason (1995) identify two optional management strategies in seeking

increased productivity and performance. Firstly, management may adopt a 'coercive' approach which seeks to force organisational change and improved performance through threats of lay-offs or closure. Secondly, they may pursue an 'integrative' approach which seeks to foster common interests between workers and management using direct involvement and thus achieve improved performance through employee commitment and support.

However, the achievement of direct participation appears as problematic as representative participation. Marchington et al (1993) identify four common problems associated with direct participation (employee involvement): (i) lack of continuity, (ii) absence of middle management support and commitment, (iii) adoption of inappropriate systems and (iv) employee scepticism. Salamon (1998) notes that middle and senior management may sometimes be a greater obstacle to direct participation than employees or trade unions.

CONCLUSIONS
While it might be suggested that the different forms of participation and involvement described in this paper should be viewed as options in a participative mix, any combination of which may used in different national, sectoral or organisational contexts, it is clear from our discussion that the different actors in industrial relations have particular preferences in terms of their desired approach. While the current thrust of many workplace initiatives is on direct rather than representative participation, Salamon (1998: 389) is unambiguous in his contention that most appropriate approach is one which combines direct and representative participation:

> "The most effective structure of employee participation within an organisation is one which combines direct employee involvement in decisions relating to their immediate work situation with indirect participation at the strategic level on major organisation decisions, while not undermining the collective bargaining representational role of established trade unions."

However, the imposition of particular models has proved problematic and the current thrust of many national and EU policies is allow for a high degree of flexibility in the modes of participation and involvement to be adopted. Salamon's (1998) emphasis on indirect participation at the strategic level paralleling greater direct participation on immediate work related issues is in very much in line with ICTU policy but appears to have made limited in-roads in practice. I must therefore warn, as in my 1998 paper, the prospects for strategic management-union partnership seem remote for the following well established reasons:

1. Employers have traditionally been extremely reluctant to share decision making power, most particular with regard to strategic decisions. A particular instance in Europe was the widespread employer opposition to the introduction of worker directors during the 1970s and 1980s while currently we are witnessing increasing employer opposition to works councils as a institutional form of employee representation.

2. An important related reason for employer recalcitrance in sharing decision making power, is a fear that it will inhibit quick and decisive decision making and consequently reduce the organisation's capacity to deal with competitive challenges and respond to changes in the business environment

3. Stock markets tend to favour 'strong' executive control and the development of strategic partnerships may not be viewed positively. This is particularly the case among 'high technology' stocks. An issue with especial resonance in Ireland is the great difficulty likely to be encountered in developing partnership arrangements in foreign owned companies. In the great majority of such firms strategic decisions are made at corporate level - at a significant remove from the Irish subsidiary. As such it may be particularly difficult for Irish trade unions to develop strategic partnerships in such situations.

The prospects for partnership arrangements at a strategic level are somewhat brighter among indigenous organisations and, particularly, in certain areas of the public sector. Here we have seen some significant developments. Trends in the ESB, Eircom and Aer Rianta indicate that many of

the appropriate institutional arrangements are in place, such as board level worker representation and reasonably well developed sub-board level structures. However, it is also clear that partnership in these organisations is at a very embryonic stage and its prospects are dependent on how these organisations cope with imminent competitive challenges in their respective product markets. It is also dependent on the impact of privatisation and strategic alliances. Such developments are likely to mitigate against the development of strategic partnership, particularly with regard to representative participation. For example, it is questionable whether the utilisation of worker directors, as provided for in many semi-state organisations, will endure should these organisations become privatised.

In evaluating the merits of recent developments in relation to partnership based arrangements between employers and trade unions, , it appears that both sides face a fundamental choice on the nature of workplace industrial relations: Should worker/trade union involvement be confined to joint consultation or extended to joint regulation? From a worker/trade union perspective, joint consultation initiatives run the risk of remaining essentially 'symbolic', whereby workers/trade unions have no real influence but become associated with decisions where they possess no right of veto. Employers may be equally reticent to enter into joint regulation initiatives because it may lead to a slowing in the decision making process.

Looking specifically at the diffusion of partnership based industrial relations arrangements at enterprise level in Ireland, our analysis points to a number of important trends (also see Gunnigle 1998):

1. Firstly, the available evidence suggests that partnership approaches are not well developed in Ireland. Where partnership exists this tends to take the form of operational management-union partnerships dealing with work re-organisation. Most of these are based on a consultative rather than joint decision making principles.

2. There is, however, widespread evidence of employer initiatives to facilitate higher levels of direct employee involvement in operational decision making. These initiatives often form part of drives towards total quality management or world class manufacturing. Such initiatives are generally aimed at involving the individual worker and do not necessarily include trade unions.

3. The extent and nature of direct involvement initiatives in the non-union sector is difficult to estimate. Nevertheless, it is clear that a number of non-union firms do provide for a level direct employee involvement, particularly in relation to operational issues affecting work organisation, such a job content, scheduling, and allocation of duties.

4. At a policy level the trade union movement has been to the fore in calling for public policy interventions to legislatively underpin partnership arrangements at the enterprise level. However, the position of employers and their representative associations is more ambiguous. While the Irish Business and Employers Association (IBEC) have made some encouraging noises in favour of enterprise level partnerships, their approach appears largely based on voluntarist principles. Essentially, the employer position is based on the premise that while it would be good to have some exemplars of well developed partnerships, it is up to individual employers to decide on their chosen approach. Thus partnership is not seen as an ideal approach but rather as one of a number of options for employers (including union avoidance) for dealing with enterprise level industrial relations.

5. Fundamentally, ICTU and IBEC appear to differ with regard to what they perceive as a legitimate 'partnership' initiative at enterprise level. While ICTU interpret partnership at firm level as allowing workers and trade unions a say in strategic decision making and a share of company profits, IBEC place greater weight on operational partnership and direct employee involvement programmes such as those dealing with team-working and quality initiatives.

6. Based on the evidence from D'Art and Turner's (1999) survey of trade union opinion, there appears to be a strong perception that power has shifted towards the union centre. This survey found that most respondents felt that the influence of the ICTU at national level had increased in the areas such as unemployment and taxation. However, they also felt that the capacity of trade unions to gain recognition from employers had decreased.

7. Turning to the workplace level, members generally felt that the influence and effectiveness of their trade union had decreased. As we have seen, an important ICTU policy pillar has been to prevent any such decline in workplace influence by promoting partnership arrangements between unions, workers and management and thus simulate national level 'social partnership' at firm level. Based on the available evidence, this strategy does not appear to have succeeded in promoting a sense of partnership, or indeed, in increasing union influence at workplace level.

8. Looking more generally at the nature of an employees' work experience, we find considerable evidence that the period since the 1980s has witnessed a regression in the quality of work life as many workers are expected to undertake increased workloads and experience an intensification in the pace of work. However, it also appears that while employees believe they are working harder, in most instances this has not been paralleled by an increase in their influence over day to day activities.

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