

Employee participation and quality of the work environment: Cases from New Zealand

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Abstract

The article reports on an investigation of the association between direct and representative forms of employee participation and the quality of the work environment, including the psychosocial work environment. A multi-method research strategy was utilized in eight organisational case studies across four New Zealand industries: hotels, schools, aged care facilities and food manufacturing factories. The study finds that workplaces with strong forms of participation displayed high levels of work environment quality, but that this association was mediated by the nature of different forms of participation and their relationship with each other, as well as by industry characteristics. Representative participation plays a critical role, but in the absence of union representation, JCCs or direct participation can also play important roles. In other words, it appears to be either union or non-union participation but not both, that is associated with positive QWE outcomes.

These results support previous research suggesting that non-union forms of employee participation may displace or undercut unionism, but there is no confirmation that direct participation was associated with poor QWE outcomes as suggested by some recent literature. The research also contradicts European, particularly Scandinavian, evidence regarding the complementary role of direct and representative participation, including union representation, which may reflect the impact of differential national industrial relations regimes. Further research is needed at this level to examine the differential impact of various forms of employee participation on the full quality of work environment, including its psychosocial aspects.

Key words: quality of work environment, employee participation, representative employee participation, psychosocial work environment, workload and stress

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Introduction

A substantial literature links employee participation, especially in its representative forms, to quality of the work environment (QWE) and related concepts such as job satisfaction (see Markey & Knudsen, 2014). These connections, and a link between both participation and QWE with productivity, have a strong tradition in Scandinavian and socio-technical literature (Emery & Thorsrud, 1976; Gustavsen & Hunnius, 1981). More recently, these three-way connections have been made in discussions of high-performance workplace systems (HPWS) (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg & Kalleberg, 2000; Macky & Boxall, 2008; Boxall & Macky, 2009). In the Scandinavian and HPWS literature, employee involvement or participation is generally attributed with impacting positively on the work environment.

The concept of work environment is broad, including the physical, social and organisational context of work. Originating in the 1970s in Scandinavia, the concept of work environment expanded the narrower concept of occupational health and safety focusing upon physical work hazards, to encompass the “psychosocial work environment” (Knudsen, Busck & Lind, 2011:379). The psychosocial work environment designates how organisational job demands and social structures and interactions impact upon employees’ psychological well-being (Hvid & Hasle, 2003). This broader concept of QWE has gained currency as the recognition of psychosocial workplace problems has increased, particularly stress-related conditions (Busck, Knudsen & Lind, 2010).

The expansion of employee participation has been a contemporaneous trend in workplaces. The influence in particular of modern human resource management has fostered employee involvement, voice and “empowerment” through a variety of forms of work organisation that may be categorised as falling within the umbrella concept of employee participation (Markey & Townsend, 2013). Generally, these forms of employee participation can be characterised as direct or representative (Markey, 2001). Direct participation is concerned with the task or job, empowering employees to exert influence over their immediate work environment through job autonomy, task delegation or teamwork. Representative participation may occur through trade unions, employee representation on boards and various kinds of workplace committees, such as European works councils or joint consultative committees (JCCs) with employer and employee representatives. Occupational health and safety (OHS) committees are specialist forms of JCCs underwritten by legislation in New Zealand (Harris, 2004) and most developed countries.

There is substantial evidence suggesting that employee participation and influence in workplace decision-making can impact positively on the work environment (Blumberg, 1968; Heller, Pusic, Strauss & Wilpert, 1998; Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2000). In contrast, recent research has suggested that employees may be motivated and empowered, but simultaneously stressed by an increase in job complexity when more direct participation is implemented (Kalleberg, Nesheim & Olsen 2009; Busck, Knudsen & Lind 2010). However, the research specifically analysing the impact of employee participation on psychosocial aspects of the work environment is limited.

The effectiveness of participation and its impact on QWE is affected by a range of other variables, such as whether it is “full” or “partial”, the type of participation and the industrial relations climate. Both the scope of participative mechanisms, i.e., the range of decisions that are open to employee participation, and the depth of participation, i.e., the degree of influence allowed employees and/or their representatives, are significant parameters. Employee participation may also be manipulated by employers in “pseudo” forms (Blyton & Turnbull, 2004; Busck, Knudsen & Lind, 2010; Heller et al., 1998; Pateman, 1970). Direct forms of participation tend to be managerially-driven to improve productivity and profitability, and to be framed within a unitarist discourse of employee relations. Representative participation has greater potential to be concerned with broader strategic issues at an organisational or departmental level because of the structures of representative bodies and their collective basis, although the depth of participation varies in practice. Trade unions in particular operate within a more pluralist discourse acknowledging different interests between employers and employees, and may interact with other forms of representation, direct and representative, to extend their depth. However, research has strongly indicated in the liberal market Anglo countries that non-union forms of participation, such as direct forms or JCCs, have been utilised by employers adopting HRM strategies to undermine unionism (Markey, 2007; Wilkinson, Gollan, Marchington & Lewin, 2010; Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington & Ackers, 2004).

This study evaluates the impact of both direct and representative participation on QWE in a range of New Zealand workplaces. The remainder of the article surveys the literature on employee participation and its impact on the work environment, outlines the research design and methodology, reports the research results, and draws appropriate conclusions.

The Impact of Employee Participation on the Work Environment

The existing research indicates that the impact of employee participation on the work environment varies between different broad types of participation. The evidence for a positive impact on the work environment is strongest for representative forms of employee participation. British, Australian and Danish studies have found that worker representation and consultation in OHS and other committees produced better outcomes in OHS than management acting alone (Eaton & Nocerino, 2000; Walters, 2004; Walters, Nichols, Connor, Tasiran & Cam, 2005; Walters & Nichols, 2007). Similar studies have also suggested that trade union presence and workplace organisation positively impacts on OHS (Fairbrother, 1996; Bohle & Quinlan, 2000; Hasle, 2001; Markey & Patmore, 2011; Saksvik & Quinlan, 2003; Walters & Frick, 2000). Additionally, the presence of a broad framework of participative practice through unions and works councils as exist in European countries, is likely to impact on the effectiveness of specialised OHS committees (Harris, 2004; Knudsen, 1995). However, this body of evidence relates mainly to physical work hazards.

There is less evidence for a positive impact from representative employee participation upon the psychosocial work environment. The issues may be more difficult to define, often have more long-term cumulative impacts, have therefore been slower in gaining recognition, and potentially challenge managerial prerogative over work organisation, for example, over length of working hours and work intensity. Of course, employee

representative rights over physical work hazards also challenge managerial prerogative over work organisation, but recognition of psychosocial problems extends this contested sphere of control. Traditionally, OHS committees have focused mainly on physical hazards. Consequently, works councils in Europe may have taken up responsibility for the psychosocial work environment in many cases. On balance the research suggests a positive impact on the work environment, including the psychosocial work environment, from representative employee participation (Markey & Knudsen, 2014; Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

The evidence regarding direct participation is more ambivalent. Karasek and Theorell (1990) found health and well-being to be strongly associated with job control. However, a growing body of research now suggests that increasing influence at the task level is not necessarily associated with QWE improvements. Greater job autonomy frequently goes hand in hand with work intensification and increasing stress, team workers have been found to suffer greater stress than non-team workers, and high degrees of job autonomy may lead to responsibility for psychosocial problems being transferred to the individual worker (Busck, Knudsen & Lind, 2010; Kalleberg, Nesheim & Olsen 2009; Hvid & Hasle, 2003). Some of the HPWS literature also indicates that high levels of employee participation may lead to work intensification, fatigue and stress (Godard, 2001; White, Hill, McGovern, Mills, & Smeaton, 2003), or that a low road approach to HPWS may involve a bundle of workplace practices that simultaneously intensify work and include employee participation or involvement (Boxall & Macky, 2009). These results no doubt reflect that fact that direct participation is more directly tied to management objectives for improving productivity and efficiency than is the case with representative participation (Hyman & Mason, 1995; Markey, 2001).

Consequently, the relationship between direct and representative participation may be important in determining the impact on QWE. In major studies in Europe the two forms of participation have been found to be complementary (Markey, 2001; Hagen & Trygstad, 2009). However, in recent years direct participation has tended to displace representative participation in Britain and elsewhere (Kersley, Alpin, Forth, Bryson, Bewley, Dix, & Oxenbridge, 2006; Markey & Patmore 2011).

Representative employee participation is well-established in New Zealand in the form of OHS committees, the only legislatively mandated form of workplace employee representation. The Health and Safety in Employment Amendment Act 2002 required either OHS committees or worker representatives in workplaces with 30 or more employees, and smaller enterprises could have representatives if requested by workers or unions (Harris, 2004). From April 2016 the new Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 exempts small workplaces from the requirement to appoint OHS representatives if they employ fewer than 20 workers and are not in a high-risk sector (manufacturing, mining, construction, utilities, transport) (Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, Subpart 2, 62, para. 4; Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 Draft Regulations). This will have a substantial impact because 30 per cent of New Zealand employment is in small workplaces (StatsNZ 2015).

The jurisdiction of New Zealand OHS committees has been focused mainly upon OHS and hazard prevention. This is similar to OHS committees' jurisdiction in other Anglo countries, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, in contrast with Scandinavian countries where broader psychosocial and work environment issues are in the remit of

committees (Markey & Knudsen, 2014), although this potential for effective representative participation often remains under-developed even in Scandinavia (Bruhn & Frick 2011; Frick, 2014). However, New Zealand legislation at the time of the research did include unacceptable behaviour, such as workplace bullying, in the jurisdiction of OHS representatives. The research design took account of bullying as a potential impact on the work environment.

Other forms of representative participation in New Zealand are more weakly based, although there is variation between sectors. Union membership density and collective bargaining coverage in the workforce as a whole are about 19-20 per cent. Both are concentrated in the public sector, where they represent about 49 per cent of the workforce, compared with 9 per cent in the private sector. Most collective bargaining occurs at an enterprise level, with multi-employer agreements covering only 20 per cent of workers covered by collective agreements, mainly in the public sector, especially education and health (Blumenfeld, 2010).

In a recent survey 40 per cent of employees reported coverage by JCCs of some kind, including OHS committees. This is a relatively high figure given the importance of the small business sector. However, general (non OHS) JCCs have no legislative base, and vary greatly in role and effectiveness. Often they appear to be established unilaterally by management, with employee representatives chosen by employers in over a quarter of instances (Boxall, Haynes & Macky, 2007). This managerial impetus, together with its frequent association with undermining unions, and union traditions of a “single channel” focus on representative participation through collective bargaining or state conciliation and arbitration systems, has created a lack of union trust in extra union forms of participation in the liberal market Anglo countries (the UK, Australia, New Zealand, the USA) (Firth, Keef & Mear 1987; Markey 2007). The New Zealand national regime of participation is far removed from European experience, where works councils have a legislative basis, are frequently associated with productive workplace relationships, and have collaborative relationships with trade unions for their mutual benefit (Markey, 2007; Rasmussen & Lind, 2003)

This overview of representative participation in New Zealand suggests that generally its scope and depth, and therefore, its impact on the work environment, is limited, although there are considerable variations at sectoral and workplace levels.

Research Design and Methodology

We adopted a multi-method case study approach, based on two organisations in each of four industries: hotels, education (schools), aged care, and food manufacturing. These sectors were chosen to cover a range of blue and white collar, and public versus private sector workplaces. Fieldwork was undertaken in 2009. Three sources of data were gathered from each case:

- Organisational documents relating to structures of participation, OHS working hours and shiftwork;
- Interviews with the chief executive officer, human resource manager where appropriate, a senior employee OHS representative, and one other employee

representative from union, JCC or OHS committee depending on whether there was a union presence or JCC;

- Survey of a sample of employees from each workplace.

Surveys were administered on site during work breaks. The survey response rates varied between 1 and 87 per cent for each workplace. The schools achieved the highest response rates. One of the food manufacturing sites had the lowest response rate because of a high proportion of casual part-time staff, shift work, short breaks and language difficulties which hindered reaching a larger sample. Some of these issues also hindered a stronger response rate at one of the aged care facilities. Lower response rates may have detracted from representativeness of the sample, but the results were triangulated with the other sources.

Quality of work environment in the survey was measured by 15 questions indicating four dimensions of:

- **total work environment** –one question:
 - Are you satisfied with the safety and comfort of your working conditions? (yes/no);
- **physical work environment** -3 questions:
 - Have you suffered a work related injury or illness in the last three years? (yes/no),
 - How often have you experienced violence at work in the last three years? (always/often/sometimes/rarely/never or almost never),
 - How often have you felt threatened at work? (always/often/sometimes/rarely/never or almost never);
- **workload and stress**, 6 questions with the same 5-point scale (always/often/sometimes/rarely/never or almost never)
 - Do you have more work than you can accomplish?
 - Are you required to work overtime?
 - How often have you felt really tired from work?
 - Does your work put you in emotionally distressing situations?
 - How often have you felt stressed at work?
 - Do you think your work takes so much of your energy that it effects your private life? And
- **job satisfaction** –5 questions:
 - My work is appreciated by management (strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree),
 - Thinking of all the changes to your job in the past 12 months or less, do you think you are generally better off or worse off than before? (better off/about the same/worse off),
 - Do you agree with the statement that ‘your workplace is a good place to work’? (yes/no/unsure),
 - Do you agree with the statement that ‘I often think of leaving my job’? (yes/no/unsure),
 - Has your satisfaction with your job changed during the past 12 months? (increased/no change/decreased).

A score out of 40 was calculated for each dimension. For responses on a 5-point scale scores of 40, 30, 20, 10 and 0 were allocated for each response, with 40 being the most positive and 0 the most negative response, and the total was divided by the number of responses. For responses on a 3-point scale the scores were 35, 20, 5. And for one response requiring a yes/no answer the scores were 30/10. From these scores an index was created for each dimension and from that an overall index for QWE. This method follows the practice of the Danish National Research Institute for the Work Environment (Kristensen et al. 2005). As higher scores in general indicate a more positive work environment, scoring for workload and stress questions was reversed since the most positive response was "negative" (e.g. the most positive response to the question about feeling stressed was 'never/almost never'). The same method was applied to direct participation, OHS committees and JCCs.

Direct participation

The degree to which employees felt empowered by direct participation was measured by the following six questions:

- Do you have possibilities to learn new things in your job? (always/often/now and then/rarely/never or almost never),
- Do you have significant influence on how much work you do? (always/often/now and then/rarely/never or almost never),
- I have significant influence on how my work is done (strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree),
- I should have more influence at my place of work (strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree),
- I get information on important decisions in due time (strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree),
- If your work changed in the past 12 months, were you consulted about the changes? (yes/no/unsure).

OHS representation

OHS representation was measured on the basis of four questions:

- Is there a health and safety committee at work with employee representatives? (yes/no),
- How are employee representatives chosen? (everyone votes 40/employees volunteer 30/ management decides 0/other 10),
- If you have raised an issue with the OHS committee was it dealt with satisfactorily? (yes/no),
- If you have raised an issue with the OHS committee how quickly was it dealt with (immediately/in 1 month or less/2-4 months/more than 4 months/not dealt with).

Other representative committees

Effectiveness of non-union and non-OHS representative participation was evaluated on the basis of four questions identical to those for OHS committees.

Union representation

Union representation was not a subject of the survey, but data regarding union membership density was elicited from interviews. A score out of 40 was also allocated on the following basis:

- 90%+ workplace membership 40
- 70-85% workplace membership 30
- 50-70% workplace membership 20
- <50% workplace membership 10
- <10% workplace membership 0.

Cases

Schools A and B were co-educational state secondary schools that were highly unionised. School A was large with 1,000 students and 60 teachers, based in the major city of Auckland. School B was smaller, with 650 students and 45 teachers, based in a smaller town.

Management at the two schools manifested different styles. Both schools had joint staff management forums, such as staff and department meetings. However, at School A there was a greater range of forums and management was committed to participative decision-making, with the timetable and class sizes determined by staff. At School B decision-making was more management led and initiated.

In terms of OHS representation, management and staff at both schools exhibited a poor understanding of the HSE Act. At School B the OHS committee had not met for more than a year. In contrast, at School A the OHS committee had previously resolved a dispute through a hazard notice, and it was considered more important than the union at workplace level.

The aged care facilities were both run by charitable trusts, with boards of trustees, female general managers, and active unions. Rest home A was located in a small city, and Rest home B in a small town. Each organization employs 75-80 mainly female care givers. Rest home A, however, has a higher proportion of registered nurses, and Rest home B a higher proportion of management positions. When interviewed, the general manager at Rest home A only had twelve months experience, compared with eleven years for her equivalent at Rest home B.

OHS committees at both aged care facilities predate the 2002 Act that made them mandatory. This stems from the nature of the industry, whereby auditing of aged care facilities is required for external accreditation upon which public funding is dependent. Auditing of risk management is also required if these facilities seek to reduce employer levies for OHS. Both committees include staff from all departments, and have a strong hazard focus.

However, as with the schools, different management styles impacted on effectiveness of representative participation. The Rest home A manager was very supportive of the union, and manifested an inclusive decision-making approach through the union, OHS committee and other committees, such as staff and department committees. The OHS committee had a high profile, a significant degree of autonomy and longstanding

members. In contrast, at Rest home B, the OHS and other committees tended to defer to management and to have a primarily communication focus.

The food manufacturing workplaces also differ in a number of important respects. Both had ethnically diverse workforces, but Food manufacturing A was a relatively small New Zealand owned operation with 65 employees, whereas Food manufacturing B was a foreign owned subsidiary with 1,900 employees, 350 of whom were casual. Food manufacturing A was non-union, whereas Food manufacturing B was 70 per cent unionised. Direct participation was strong at each workplace as a result of teamwork, though this was more extensive at Food manufacturing B. At Food manufacturing A the OHS committee representatives were chosen on the basis of the job position, rather than being elected. Other committees operated at both sites, but Food manufacturing B's were more structured, operating at department and site levels.

Both hotels are part of large international chains, with overseas owners in France and the US, regional offices in Australia, and hierarchical management structures. Hotel A is based in the city of Auckland, and hotel B in the capital, Wellington. Both hotels are in the upper end of the sector: Hotel A is rated 5 star, and B is 4 star. Hotel A had a staff of 90, whereas Hotel B had 330. These hotels had typically high labour turnover characteristic of the sector: Hotel A, had an annual labour turnover rate of 45 per cent, and Hotel B of 50 per cent in 2009. These compared with at least 60 per cent for the sector generally, although this has since trended downwards to 33 per cent because of the recessionary environment (NZTRI, 2007; Markey, Harris, Knudsen, Lind, & Williamson 2014: 9).

In terms of non-union forms of representative participation, both New Zealand hotels have reasonably effective OHS committees, but with narrow jurisdictions and some limitations to accountability and representativeness. Although numerically dominated by employees, the Hotel A committee includes the Chief Engineer and HRM manager. The Hotel A employee representatives are a mixture of volunteers and nominees, often 'shoulder-tapped' for the role according to the HRM manager. The Hotel B OHS committee seems more representative, in that employee nominees are called for and elected by staff. Interviewees indicated that there was no issue with getting people to nominate, although the General Manager considered that some 'shoulder-tapping' occurred. The Hotel B committee is also chaired by the executive secretary to the General Manager. The jurisdiction of both committees is confined essentially to hazard identification and reduction, but both management and employee representatives considered them effective in this sphere. For both New Zealand hotels OHS committee staff representatives are paid to attend meetings outside normal hours, and committee membership is viewed by employees as an opportunity for networking and access to management. Hotel B has more extensive training opportunities, during introduction to the committee, and an online training module for all staff. Both hotels also operate a range of other committees focused on quality improvement and social activities. These committees tend to be organised either around specific functions such as sales or front line reception, or they are cross-functional, drawing managers and employees from throughout the hotel, for example, environmental committees and exchange committees.

Survey Data

The scores based on employee responses regarding quality of the work environment are shown in Table 1. Separate scores are shown for total work environment, physical work environment, workload and stress and job satisfaction, with an overall index score comprising all these factors. The workplaces are ranked according to their overall QWE index score.

Overall, the QWE index score indicates strong trends on an industry sectoral basis. The rest homes and hotels scored in the top four, and their scores for all components of the index were consistently high. The schools and food manufacturing workplaces were in the bottom four. The schools scored lowest by far for workload and stress, and this drags their overall QWE index score down.

Table 1: Quality of Work Environment (QWE)

Workplace	Total WE	Physical WE	Workload & stress	Job satisfaction	QWE index	N.
Rest home A	30.0	35.6	24.5	31.0	30.3	6
Hotel A	30.0	35.9	23.0	31.3	30.1	9
Rest home B	28.9	26.4	25.5	28.1	27.2	19
Hotel B	28.0	28.7	20.3	25.0	25.5	20
Food manufacturing B	25.0	26.4	22.3	21.5	23.8	13
School A	28.3	27.0	15.2	24.4	23.7	23
School B	22.8	26.4	11.3	23.1	20.9	26
Food manufacturing A	21.7	24.9	17.3	18.1	20.5	17

Table 2 indicates scores based on employee responses regarding aspects of direct participation, with an overall index. The workplaces are ranked according to their overall index score. These results are very mixed between the workplaces. The hotels again score highly in the overall index; highest for Hotel A and third for Hotel B. Rest Home B also scores highly overall again, ranking second. School A scores fourth in the overall index, whilst the Food manufacturing workplaces occupy the two lowest positions.

However, there was considerable variety in the components of the index for direct participation. Hotel A scored highest for learning possibilities, influence on work organization, consultation regarding organisational change and equal highest for receiving information from management and. It also scored second for influence on workload and needing more influence (i.e. second lowest proportion of employees needing more information). Hotel B was ranked first for influence on workload, and School A ranked highest for influence on workload. Food manufacturing B scored lowest on learning possibilities, influence on workload and work organisation, and second lowest on receiving information from management.

Generally, the scores for influence on workload were low for all workplaces, and higher for influence on work organisation in all cases. The scores for needing more influence were also relatively low across the board, indicating that all workplaces had substantial numbers of respondents desiring greater influence; Rest home A scored most positively in this regard, i.e. fewest employees desired more influence.

Table 2: Direct Participation

Work place	Learning possibilities	Influence on workload	Influence on work org'n	Need more influence	Information from m'gmt	Consult re change	Index
Hotel A	37.8	21.3	35.6	16.7	30.0	31.7	28.9
Rest home B	36.3	19.4	27.9	16.1	31.1	26.7	26.3
Hotel B	30.5	24.5	30.0	12.5	27.0	26.3	25.1
School A	31.3	24.8	27.4	14.4	24.8	26.4	24.9
Rest home A	26.7	20.0	31.7	20.0	30.0	20.0	24.7
School B	29.6	20.4	31.9	13.8	25.0	16.6	22.9
Food man. A	27.7	23.6	27.5	16.4	16.2	22.5	22.3
Food man. B	20.6	18.8	26.9	14.7	22.4	21.8	20.9

Results for OHS representation are shown in Table 3. The index indicates how effective OHS representation through committees was according to employees, with the workplaces ranked by score. The first column records results from a question as to whether an OHS committee existed in the workplace. Interviews indicated that they existed in all cases except School B, which scored lowest here. However, where they existed each case should have scored 35. The fact that none did indicates varying degrees of uncertainty amongst employees, and some limitation to the effectiveness of the committee. In the second column the highest scores were attained for committees whose employee representatives were elected, and the lowest where management chose them. From interviews we knew that representatives were elected in most cases, although a degree of shoulder tapping also occurred. Where employee representatives were elected the case should theoretically have scored 40, but none did. This indicates that elections may not always have been the sole source of employee representatives and that there was a degree of uncertainty amongst employees, both of which detract from the committees as representative forms of participation. The other questions relating to dealing satisfactorily and in a timely manner with issues are more straightforward.

Food manufacturing B, Hotel A, Rest home A, and School A all scored highly overall. Food manufacturing B scored very highly for the method of choosing employee representatives and had the highest overall score. This no doubt reflected the well-

developed committee structure at site and department levels. Hotel A and Rest home A scored highly in all categories except the method of choosing employee representatives, which dragged down their overall index scores. In Hotel A this confirms the selection of employee representatives through “volunteering” or “shoulder tapping”, as indicated in interviews. In Rest home A it may be an indication of long term lack of change in the composition of the OHS committee. School A’s overall index score was dragged down only by how satisfactorily the committee dealt with issues according to employees. Hotel B and Rest home B had relatively low scores for how employee representatives were chosen, dragging down their overall index, even though interviews indicated an election for representatives at Hotel B. Food manufacturing A scored lowly in terms of satisfactorily dealing with issues and timeliness, and School B naturally scored lowly across the board.

Table 3: Occupational Health and Safety Representation

Work place	OHS C'tee	How representatives chosen	OHS Dealing satisfactorily with issues	Timeliness dealing with issues	Index of OHS representation
Food man. B	28.8	35.7	27.1	28.8	30.1
Hotel A	30.0	26.7	30.0	32.5	29.8
Rest home A	30.0	24.0	30.0	35.0	29.8
School A	30.0	30.0	26.4	31.0	29.4
Hotel B	28.0	25.0	28.3	30.0	27.8
Rest home B	24.4	20.7	31.4	31.4	27.0
Food man. A	28.2	28.3	20.0	20.0	24.1
School B	15.0	21.0	15.0	10.0	15.3

In Table 4 the same analysis occurs for JCCs. Hotel A, School A and Food Manufacturing B all again scored highly overall for the index of effective JCC representation, as did Rest home B. The last two workplaces in terms of effective JCC participation retain the same rank order by score as with OHS participation, with School B the least effective in both incidences. The combined index for representative participation was highest for Hotel A, Food manufacturing B, School A and Rest home A, closely followed by Rest home B.

Table 5 shows the ranking of workplaces on the basis of the level of union membership. The schools were clearly the most unionised, in a sector where overall union membership density is about 90-95 per cent. The other sectors were far less unionised and more mixed in the degree of unionisation, with one workplace in each sector being more unionised than the other. Hotel A and Food Manufacturing A had no union members.

Table 4: Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) Representation

Work place	JCC	How reps. chosen	Dealing satisfactorily with issues	Timeliness dealing with issues	Index of JCC representation	Combined index of OHS & JCC rep'n
Hotel A	30.0	21.3	30.0	30.0	27.8	28.8
Rest home B	30.0	23.6	26.7	30.0	27.6	27.3
School A	24.3	23.3	30.0	32.5	27.5	28.5
Food man. B	26.3	28.3	26.0	28.0	27.2	28.7
Hotel B	24.7	24.2	23.3	30.0	25.6	26.7
Rest home A	30.0	12.5	30.0	30.0	25.6	27.7
Food man. A	22.7	30.0	20.0	16.7	20.4	23.2
School B	20.0	19.1	14.0	20.0	18.3	16.8

Table 5: Union representation by membership density

Workplace	Index score	Rank
School A	40	1
School B	30	2
Rest home A	20	3
Food manufacturing B	20	3
Rest home B	10	5
Hotel B	10	5
Hotel A	0	7
Food manufacturing A	0	7

Discussion

Taken as a whole the results are complex, but some clear trends do emerge at the level of individual workplaces and industry sectors. In the first instance, the relationship between various forms of representative participation is interesting. In half the workplaces there was a substantial degree of similarity in rankings for all forms of representative participation. School A and Food Manufacturing B were in the upper half of rankings for all forms of representative participation, hence their combined representative participation scores were the highest, as shown in Table 6. This indicates what has been described as relatively “democratic” workplaces in terms of employee participation (Markey & Knudsen, 2014). In contrast, Food Manufacturing A and Hotel B were consistently ranked in the lower half of workplaces for all forms of representative participation; overall Table 6 shows that Food Manufacturing A was the lowest ranked for representative participation and Hotel B was ranked third lowest. In each of the other cases two of three forms of representative participation were similarly or identically ranked. These results may indicate a degree of mutual support between different forms of representative participation.

Table 6: Ranking for QWE, Direct and Representative Participation

Workplace	QWE rank	DP rank	Combined REP rank
Rest home A	1	5	3
Hotel A	2	1	7
Rest home B	3	2	5
Hotel B	4	3	6
Food manufacturing B	5	8	2
School A	6	4	1
School B	7	6	6
Food manufacturing A	8	7	8

In the workplaces where only two forms of representative participation were similarly ranked there may have been a trade-off between union and non-union forms of participation. Hotel A and Rest Home B were both ranked highly for representative participation through JCCs (and in Hotel A's case also for OHS representation), but they were ranked lowly for union representation. Rest Home A and School B were ranked highly for union representation, but lowly for JCCs. OHS committee representation ranking was not consistently associated with high or low rankings for JCCs or unions, but unlike them OHS committees have a statutory basis. Since both union and JCC representation are largely a matter for management strategic choice, it is more likely that they may contrast in their viability in different workplaces.

Similar observations may be made concerning the relationship between direct and representative forms of participation. In most cases the overall ranking for these different forms of participation bore an inverse relationship to each other. Only School A ranked in the top four for all forms of participation, and Food Manufacturing A ranked lowly for all forms of representative and direct participation. On the other hand, Food Manufacturing B ranked in the top four workplaces for all forms of representative participation, but ranked lowest for direct participation. Conversely, Hotel B ranked third for direct participation, but in the bottom four for all forms of representative participation.

In the remaining four workplaces it was principally union representation which contrasted with the level of direct participation, and the level of non-union forms of representative participation were similar to those for direct participation. For example, Hotel A and Rest Home B ranked highest for both direct participation and JCC representation (and also second for OHS representation in Hotel A's case), but were ranked in the bottom half of workplaces for union representation. Conversely, in Rest Home A and School B the level of union representation was comparatively high, but both JCC and direct forms of participation were comparatively weak. These results tend to suggest that direct participation and non-union representative participation may complement each other.

There were significant associations between QWE and participation, but they were also not straightforward. The top four ranked workplaces in terms of QWE were also ranked in the top four for either direct or overall representative participation, but not both. Conversely, the two bottom ranked workplaces for QWE were also near or at the bottom of rankings for both direct participation and overall levels of representative

participation. Direct participation was more important in terms of its association with QWE in three of the four highest ranked workplaces for QWE, and only at Rest Home A was the high overall ranking for representative participation associated with a high QWE ranking. In two cases, Food Manufacturing B and School A, low rankings for QWE were associated with high rankings for overall representative participation; at School A the direct participation ranking was also high.

Looking more closely at the components of representative participation in each workplace, high rankings for JCC representation were more likely than high levels of trade union representation to be associated with high levels of QWE. As with direct participation, three of the top four ranked workplaces in terms of QWE were also the top ranked for JCC participation. Only Rest Home A was highly ranked for all forms of representative participation, and QWE.

However, the picture changes somewhat if we focus on the sectoral industry level of analysis. At an industry level there are strong associations between high ranking for QWE and participation, especially representative participation. In three of four sectors the higher ranked workplace for QWE was also more highly ranked overall for representative forms of participation: rest homes and food manufacturing on the basis of union and OHS representation, and schools on the basis of all forms of representative participation. The higher ranked hotel for the level of QWE was also ranked higher for direct participation and JCC representative participation.

Both participation and QWE outcomes displayed patterns based on industry sector. The schools were by far the most unionised workplaces, and the hotels were both highly ranked for direct participation. The hotels were also highly ranked for QWE, whereas the schools ranked lowly for very poor workload and stress scores affected by general industry trends.

These patterns indicate that industry characteristics strongly influenced outcomes for both participation and QWE at the workplace level. Both rest homes and both hotels are in the top four ranked workplaces for QWE, in contrast with both schools and food manufacturing workplaces being more lowly ranked. It is not entirely clear why rest homes would score relatively highly for QWE, and this warrants further study. The low rankings for QWE at both schools are mainly a result of very low scores for workload and stress, or psychosocial work environment, although one is ranked highly for all forms of participation. Changes in work practices in schools have been acknowledged to contribute to high levels of workplace stress, regardless of participation (Knudsen, Markey & Simpkin, 2013). Bearing in mind that our measures are based on subjective evaluations, the surprisingly high assessments for QWE and participation given by employees in the hotel industry may reflect low expectations for QWE as well as non-union forms of participation. The sector is known for its rather tough working conditions, and a substantial part of the jobs are occupied by young temps and part-timers (NZTRI, 2007); perhaps they experience that jobs in the industry are better than they had feared. Thirdly, the food manufacturing workplaces are by their physical nature likely to offer poorer work environments, and seem to be prone to more direct management control of work processes which limit employee discretion in direct participation. Food manufacturing A also had a very low score for psychosocial work environment.

Conclusions

Overall this study finds that workplaces with strong forms of participation tend to display high levels of work environment quality, but that participation is not the only factor influencing QWE. A number of complexities were revealed in this association. In particular, the association between participation and QWE was mediated by the nature of different forms of participation and their relationship with each other, as well as by industry characteristics.

The incidence and practice of direct and representative forms of participation tended to vary inversely; where representative forms overall were strong direct forms were weaker, and vice versa. Only a couple of workplaces had wide scope and depth of participative practices; notably School A where all forms of representative and direct participation were strongly practiced. However, there was a stronger link between direct participation and JCCs, which tended to coincide where unionisation was weak. This indicated strategic management choice between union and non-union forms of participation, either as a result of deliberate union avoidance or an attempt to compensate for lack of employee voice in the absence of unions. In a couple of cases, notably food manufacturing and to some extent with rest homes, the degree of unionism varied significantly between individual workplaces in the sectors, indicating the likelihood of management's strategic choice. In other cases, however, the level of unionisation reflected a sector wide trend; towards high union membership density in schools, and low union membership in hotels. To some extent these results support previous research suggesting that non-union forms of employee participation may displace or undercut unionism.

The forms of employee participation also appeared to have a differential association with QWE, but it is necessary to recognise the importance of industry characteristics in mediating the relationship between participation and QWE, the type of participation and the ranking of QWE itself. If we focus on results within industry sectors, substantial representative participation was usually associated with better QWE. Union representation was particularly important at a sectoral level in determining better QWE. The one exception to this trend, in hotels where union representation is very weak generally in the sector, non-union JCC representation as well as direct participation were associated with good QWE.

Most importantly, at an industry level there is confirmation of an expectation that a good QWE is associated with a high degree of participation. Representative participation plays a critical role, but in the absence of union representation, JCCs or direct participation can also play important roles. In other words, it appears to be either union or non-union participation, but not both, that is associated with positive QWE outcomes.

This result is significant for two reasons, although it is not possible to generalise from a collection of case studies. First, there is no confirmation that direct participation was associated with poor QWE outcomes as suggested by some recent literature. Second, the research contradicts European evidence regarding the complementary role of direct and representative participation, including union representation. This suggests the importance of national regimes of employment relations. Further research is warranted to explore these relationships.

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