

Analysing the forces shaping employee involvement and participation (EIP) at organisation level in liberal market economies (LMEs)

Mick Marchington, Manchester Business School, University of Manchester and Strathclyde Business School, University of Strathclyde
Human Resource Management Journal, Vol 25, no 1, 2015, pages 1–18

Employee involvement and participation (EIP) continues to attract significant interest from academics and practitioners alike, often in terms of so-called newer forms of employee engagement and informal consultation. However, although the history of EIP shows that multiple channels are the norm in most organisations, it is still rare for representative, direct and informal EIP to be discussed in the same study. This article breaks new ground by developing measures for the breadth and depth of EIP, as well as analysing the forces at and beyond organisation level which shape management choices about which forms to adopt and how to embed them more deeply in organisations. Data were collected from 86 interviews and associated documentary analysis at and beyond organisational level in four liberal market economies (LMEs) (UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand) in order to identify how forces at national and organisational level shaped the breadth and depth of EIP in 25 case study organisations. The article's main conclusion is that while institutional forces – such as legislation, government action and intermediary bodies – do have an influence in LMEs, the way in which management interprets more immediate organisational forces remains significantly important in embedding EIP within organisations.

Contact: Professor Mick Marchington, Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, Booth Street West, Manchester M15 6PB, UK. Email: mick.marchington@mbs.ac.uk

Keywords: employee involvement and participation; breadth and depth of EIP; embeddedness; institutional forces; contingency theory; management choice

INTRODUCTION

There remains significant interest in the concept of employee involvement and participation (EIP) and voice within the human resource management and employment relations literatures, nowhere more so than in the *Human Resource Management Journal* (see, for example, Cox *et al.*, 2006; Johnstone *et al.*, 2009; Holland *et al.*, 2012; Kaufman, 2015). While many publications focus on specific practices such as European Works Councils (EWCs) and joint consultative committees (JCCs), interest has grown in how multiple forms of EIP combine together to become embedded in organisations. This is important because EIP cannot be conflated into one generic phenomenon but is configured via multiple practices which last for different lengths of time and have varying levels of intensity. This was traditionally the case with representative and direct EIP (Dundon *et al.*, 2004; Danford *et al.*, 2009) but research now shows informal EIP co-exists alongside these (Townsend *et al.*, 2012; Marchington and Suter, 2013).

The notion of multiple channels of EIP is developed here, in terms of their *breadth* (the number of practices) and *depth* (the degree to which each form is embedded) within organisations (Cox *et al.*, 2006, 2009). Wilkinson *et al.* (2010) differentiate EIP into three broad forms – formal representative, direct formal, and informal – which is defined in the next section. Following Purcell (2014), employee engagement is integrated with EIP: structured practices such as surveys are included within direct EIP while less structured interactions between line

managers and their teams are regarded as informal EIP. Having analysed these different forms, we assess how the breadth and depth of EIP is shaped by (a) institutional and intermediary forces beyond the organisation, (b) product and labour market context, and (c) organisational structure and culture. However, because no simple iron law of contingency theory exists, outcomes depend on how senior managers interpret these forces in making choices about which forms of EIP to implement (Dundon *et al.*, 2004).

This article seeks to fill two major gaps in the literature by (a) providing a more precise articulation of what is meant by breadth and depth of EIP, and (b) examining how forces both at and beyond organisation level influence management choices about the shape of EIP. Following a literature review and an explanation of research methods, these ideas are tested against data collected at national and organisational levels in four LMEs (the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand). These countries were selected because of some commonality in EIP practices – JCCs, briefing groups and a growing focus on informality – as well as some differences at institutional and intermediary levels. The article finishes with a summary of the main conclusions and some implications for further research and for organisational practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Breadth and depth of different forms of EIP

EIP comprises representative formal systems, direct formal meetings and informal interactions. Until the 1980s, it was portrayed totally in its *representative* form, via bodies such as JCCs which provided opportunities for employee representatives to meet with managers to discuss issues not covered by collective bargaining – such as future plans, work organisation and welfare (Marchington, 1987). These varied greatly between organisations in terms of managerial interest, regularity, mode of representation and subject matter, and while some JCCs still comprise union representatives only, increasingly they now include both union and non-union employee representatives or are totally separate from union channels (Gollan, 2010). Other forms include EWCs in the UK and Ireland and partnership arrangements in all four countries (Marchington, 2015).

Direct formal EIP occurs when managers interact directly with their teams in a formal setting rather than via employee representatives. This has grown dramatically since the 1980s as employers sought better access to employees rather than relying on trade union channels, a move which coincided with declines in union membership thus raising questions about its purpose, with some feeling it had been designed to marginalise unions (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2010). Direct EIP comprises a range of formal practices such as team briefing, town hall meetings, problem-solving schemes, newsletters and blogs, and engagement/attitude surveys, some of which also provide opportunities for workers to raise issues. These practices are now widespread (Cox *et al.*, 2009; Lavelle *et al.*, 2010).

Informal EIP refers to ad hoc interactions between line managers and their staff which give opportunities for information-passing and consultation. Strauss (1998: 15) defines it as 'the day-to-day relations between supervisors and subordinates . . . a process which allows workers to exert some influence over their work and the conditions under which they work.' This has received limited attention but research suggests informal EIP is important at workplace level not just in small firms where formal practices are less likely but also in larger organisations as a way to build trust and commitment (Boxall *et al.*, 2007; Townsend *et al.*, 2012; Marchington and Suter: 2013). The distinction between informal and formal EIP is not totally clear but Strauss (1998: 17–18) regards any ad hoc conversations as the former while scheduled

communications or problem-solving exercises comprise the latter. Informal interactions are typically common in organisations where line managers are expected to be accessible and responsive to their teams (Schaufeli, 2014).

EIP practices vary in how broadly or deeply they are embedded within organisations. *Breadth* refers to the number of discrete practices within an organisation and, despite the possibility that different EIP practices could contradict one another, quantitative studies suggest impact is greater if multiple channels are deployed. For example, Bryson (2004) finds that combinations of direct and other forms of EIP have more impact than direct or representative EIP alone, while Cox *et al.* (2006) argue that multiple forms 'provide the potential for employees to be involved in different ways' as information received from line managers stimulates ideas for problem-solving groups and attitude surveys as well, gives employees greater confidence to speak up in meetings, and can be conveyed to employee representatives who deal with senior managers. According to Holland *et al.* (2012: 382), JCCs sit easily alongside direct and informal EIP practices and 'a plurality of voice mechanisms may be seen better to reflect the heterogeneous nature and needs of a contemporary workforce . . . and therefore lead to more effective EIP'.

Similar results appear in qualitative studies. For example, Butler *et al.* (2011: 20) found partnership helped to underpin direct EIP via explicit support from senior managers and union representatives which set the tone for behaviours throughout the organisation. In this case, direct EIP was used to 'reinforce the position of the unions rather than undermine them . . . while the involvement of union leaders in disseminating information to the workforce helped to engender high levels of mutual trust.' The role of informal EIP within multiple channels is noted by several authors; for example, Townsend *et al.* (2012: 348–50) suggest that while most resources go to formal methods at the hotel they studied, 'much of the real (valued) involvement comes from informal EIP', especially because line managers play such a 'critical role in acting on what they hear and providing feedback to those affected by the issue.' Combinations of informal and direct EIP is also seen as crucial by Marchington and Suter (2013) while Wilkinson *et al.* (2013) argue that employees believe multiple channels increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of EIP. In short, there is substantial evidence that breadth of EIP is important for embeddedness.

While breadth is a simple count of practices used, *depth* is more complex because it assesses how particular forms of EIP actually operate. Case studies show JCCs differ greatly in character between organisations, even in the same country or sector, as well as over time (Marchington, 1987; Pyman, 2014). Cox *et al.* (2006, 2009) use the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) data to show how depth of EIP varies in terms of frequency, continuity and method of selecting representatives for JCCs, time specifically allocated to questions in team briefing and the percentage of workers participating in problem-solving groups. This is particularly apparent in relation to direct and informal EIP. Townsend *et al.* (2012: 347–8) report on managers' views about the regularity of face-to-face interactions which demonstrate clearly that 'informality is king' and is more deeply embedded in workplaces where it is hard to organise formal meetings. Similarly, Marchington and Suter (2013) found restaurant managers spent lots of time alongside staff, listening to their views and passing on information because this was preferred to formal meetings, a finding supported by Sparrow (2014) in his research in other sectors. Briefing groups are also valued by line managers and staff for providing opportunities to share information and discuss issues relevant to their own needs, as are town hall meetings with more senior managers (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2013). Formal mechanisms for capturing employee ideas – such as problem-solving groups, suggestions schemes and engagement surveys – can be effective if they are well-embedded and taken seriously by managers, but they run the risk of being marginalised if seen to be cosmetic (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2010).

Given its longevity, much has been written about depth of representative EIP. In relation to JCCs, for example, Hall *et al.* (2011: 359) note that, in addition to regular meetings and independent elections to representative roles, depth is also enhanced by training and time off to liaise with constituents, provision of accessible and relevant information in advance, rotating the chair between management and employee representatives, and meaningful subject matter. While Holland *et al.* (2012) found union presence enhanced depth, Butler *et al.*'s (2011) study of a JCC at a non-union firm identifies similar processes embed consultation irrespective of unionisation. At the other extreme, JCCs that lack depth have also been noted, particularly those which lack purpose or fall into disuse (Marchington, 1987; Hall and Purcell, 2012). In this context, representative EIP is characterised by less frequent and irregular meetings, and a failure of senior managers and union representatives to attend due to more pressing issues. Moreover, if representatives lose touch with their constituents, representative EIP becomes shallower (Teague and Hann, 2010).

Forces shaping breadth and depth of EIP

While several authors have examined how EIP varies in breadth and depth between organisations, explanations about *why* there are differences are rare. Drawing on Marchington (2007), three sets of forces are reviewed here – institutional framework in the country examined, product and labour markets, and organisation structure and culture – to analyse how they shape the breadth and depth of EIP.

Given this study is focused on four LMEs with relatively limited 'hard' legislation on EIP, it means employers can generally fill the regulatory space available by choosing which practices to use (Dundon *et al.*, 2014). However, employers do not have unfettered free choice (Hall and Thelen, 2009) and some variations are apparent between the countries in terms of 'hard' employment regulation, the degree to which specific forms of EIP are promoted and the role played by intermediary forces – such as professional associations and organisations which have a specialist interest in EIP. Schneider and Paunescu (2012: 740) found the UK and New Zealand were less regulated than Australia and Ireland in 2007, but recent reforms to employment legislation and national institutions in the latter two countries has reduced that difference. EU legislation on information and consultation and EWCs means employers in Ireland and the UK are bound by the law to some extent, while the Federal Court in Australia has powers to fine employers for failing to consult workers properly. This provides some underpinning for representative EIP in these three countries. All four countries have used 'soft' government initiatives to persuade employers to adopt partnership, but all these are now defunct. These forces enhanced the breadth and depth of representative and direct EIP at the organisations where these were adopted (Teague and Hann, 2010). Intermediary forces have shaped direct and informal EIP, particularly in the UK via organisations like 'Engage for Success' (Marchington, 2015). However, it is important to stress the flexibility inherent in LMEs allows choices to be driven or legitimised by forces which impinge *specifically* on each employing organisation; see below.

Product and labour market forces shape the breadth and depth of all forms of EIP (Dundon *et al.*, 2004; Marchington and Kynighou, 2012). For example, Lavelle *et al.* (2010), Townsend *et al.* (2012) and Marchington and Suter (2013) confirm informal EIP is critically important in the service sector where there is close contact between customers, employees and managers and it is difficult to arrange formal meetings during working hours. However, as Butler (2009) shows, representative EIP can also play a key part in supporting direct and informal EIP at workplace level in service sector firms – irrespective of union presence – leading to greater breadth. Overall, Lavelle *et al.* (2010) argue representative EIP is broader and deeper in manufacturing

firms, and indeed WERS data (e.g., Van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2013) confirm this for the UK. In public administration, representative EIP is well established in health and local government across the four countries (Holland *et al.*, 2009; Van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2013), though in Ireland there are questions about whether partnership is deeply embedded at local level (Doherty and Erne, 2010). Organisations with stable product markets (e.g. long lead times in high value-added manufacturing) tend to have broader and deeper EIP than those at the mercy of unpredictable markets or supplying goods to powerful clients (Marchington and Kynighou, 2012). Unfortunately, it was impossible to test this proposition because the entire sample operated in either highly competitive markets or faced major cutbacks in government funding.

Danford *et al.* (2009) find that independent employee representation, and typically high levels of union density, enhances breadth and depth, particularly but not only for representative EIP. JCCs are more deeply embedded when employee representatives feel able to speak up at meetings and have the support of constituents, both of which are more likely if union density is higher (Lavelle *et al.*, 2010). Where unions are absent or their role is marginal, most studies suggest direct EIP will be broader and deeper (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2010), while studies on non-union firms indicate informal EIP is crucial (Townsend *et al.*, 2012; Marchington and Suter, 2013).

It is generally agreed that breadth is greater in larger organisations and establishments, especially for representative EIP (Boxall *et al.*, 2007; Holland *et al.*, 2009; Lavelle *et al.*, 2010; Van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2013). In comparison, informal EIP is supposedly broader and deeper in small organisations which lack formal practices (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2013), though these firms often lack the professional support needed to sustain EIP (Marchington and Suter, 2013). There are likely to be differences between large organisations made up principally of large units (such as supermarkets) where representative and direct EIP might be broadly and deeply embedded, and those with a large number of small, geographically dispersed units. In such circumstances, JCCs are unlikely to be well-embedded because representatives find it hard to attend meetings at a central site, so direct and informal EIP often fills gaps at workplace level.

There is substantial support for the idea that direct and informal EIP are shaped by 'strong' organisation culture and both the IPA (Involvement and Participation Association) and 'Engage for Success' argue a strategic narrative is crucial for effective EIP and employee engagement. Sparrow (2014: 104) believes transactional approaches to EIP, which provide short-term halo effects and higher engagement scores in surveys, can never embed EIP effectively because they are 'seen as something done *to* employees rather than involving them in the narrative.' By contrast, a transformational culture led by a committed Chief Executive with a clear set of organisation values which build respect, trust and integrity into day-to-day interactions can deepen direct and informal EIP (Crawford *et al.*, 2014). Kaufman (2013: 30–31) argues that *all* forms of EIP are more deeply embedded by 'management commitment to the process. In particular, people-oriented leadership at the top with trust and credibility at the rank and file level is crucial.' Both Dundon *et al.* (2004) and Hall and Purcell (2012) argue that breadth and depth of EIP is shaped by highly committed senior managers but, as most HR research shows, front-line managers also need to be effective leaders for direct and informal EIP to be embedded within organisations. Moreover, these managers need to be given responsibility for a range of HR issues, as well as learn how to respond better to employee ideas and communicate with them (Cox *et al.*, 2009).

The main conclusion, therefore, is that multiple channels of EIP are common, they vary in breadth and depth between organisations, and they are shaped by a range of forces at and beyond organisation level. The next section examines the research approach and methods used in this study.

RESEARCH METHODS

As a reminder, the principal research objectives were to (a) devise systematic measures of breadth and depth of EIP and (b) evaluate how forces at and beyond organisation level shaped breadth and depth of each form of EIP at the 25 case study organisations. Data were collected during 2012–2013 through interviews with 86 people and documentary analysis across the four countries. Since forces were examined at national/intermediary and organisation levels, two separate samples were constructed for interviews.

The first sample comprised actors beyond organisation level in each country: government departments such as the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in Ireland and the Department of Labour in New Zealand (DoL) and semi-autonomous bodies such as Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (UK) and the Fair Work Commission (Australia); peak-level employers and trade union bodies; professional associations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in the UK and Ireland; and organisations specialising in EIP such as Engage for Success (UK), Partnership Resource Centre (PRC) in New Zealand, National Centre for Partnership and Performance in Ireland and Workplace Partnership and Productivity Pilot (WPP) in Australia. The top part of Table 1 provides information on the 35 respondents at this level and their distribution between employers, trade unions, government and third party organisations. The key point about these interviews is that they involved organisations central to the development of EIP in each country and credible respondents with expert knowledge of the subject (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) who were well-placed to provide a strategic overview. The principal questions used in these interviews related to national initiatives to promote EIP and the role each organisation played in devising and disseminating EIP both on their own and in conjunction with other bodies.

The second sample involved interviews with 51 respondents from 25 different employers who were asked to identify how forces at and beyond the organisation had shaped breadth and depth of EIP. At some organisations, there was just one respondent, typically an HR director, but in most cases other managers and/or union representatives were included – with visits often lasting half a day. The bottom part of Table 1 gives the breakdown of respondents. No

TABLE 1 *Breakdown of respondents at and beyond organisation level*

Level at which respondents operate and country	Employers organisations and managers	Trade unions and employee representatives	Government and third party organisations	Total
Beyond level of organisation				
UK	2	1	7	10
Ireland	2	2	4	8
Australia	2	1	5	8
New Zealand	3	1	5	9
Total	9	5	21	35
At level of organisation				
UK	10	3	N/A	13
Ireland	9	3	N/A	12
Australia	9	1	N/A	10
New Zealand	14	2	N/A	16
Total	42	9	0	51
Overall number of respondents	51	14	21	86

interviews took place with shop floor employees, other than speaking to people on workplace visits, because the research questions focused on forces *shaping* the breadth and depth of EIP which were best answered by senior managers and, when available, union representatives. Accordingly, the interview questions asked for information about the organisation, its product and labour markets, and organisation structure and culture; its business model and HR philosophy; main forms of EIP subdivided into representative, direct and informal; the breadth and depth of EIP for each form of EIP used at the organisation; and main reasons for change or continuity due to forces at or beyond organisation level. Accordingly, interviews examined current practices within their historical context to assess the breadth and depth of EIP.

'Responsive interviewing' (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) was used at both levels. This focuses on a few main questions (see above) before probing for further details and following-up on issues which emerge during interviews. This was supplemented by independent assessments of representative and direct EIP which were available at many organisations and results from engagement surveys. Interviews were transcribed immediately and stored until data collection for each country had been completed, at which point summary reports were sent to participants for them to check for accuracy and provide comments. Feedback was also received from the 'critical observers' – leading academics in the four countries – who provided an independent review of the material.

Analysis involved a coding protocol consistent with template analysis (King, 1998; Yin, 2009) which focused on hard and soft institutional and intermediary forces, and contextual forces with a direct influence on EIP at organisation level – product and labour markets, organisation structure and culture – and breadth and depth of all three forms of EIP at the time of data collection. Respondents were asked to provide specific examples of how forces at and beyond the organisation had shaped management choice about which forms of EIP to adopt and how these had been configured.

Breadth is measured by a simple count of the main EIP practices at each organisation; as these were outlined in the literature review they are not reproduced here. However, assessment of *depth* requires further explanation as the six indicators used by Cox *et al.* (2006, 2009) were limited to specific data collected in the WERS surveys on JCCs, team briefing and problem-solving groups. These only cover representative and direct formal EIP and exclude informal EIP and they exclude many of the practices picked up in case studies – such as EWCs, town hall meetings, employee engagement surveys and informal meetings between line managers and their staff. More seriously, it is impossible to appreciate the depth of EIP from surveys as Cox *et al.* (2009) acknowledge. In order to address this, depth is assessed for *each* form of EIP on a scale of 0–4, with 0 indicating it is not used at all; this occurred only in the non-union firms without any representative EIP because both formal direct and informal EIP were present in all cases. Drawing on literature analysed above, depth comprises four factors for *each* form: overt management commitment to EIP; evidence of employee independence; meaningful subject matter; and regularity, frequency and sustainability of EIP.

A few examples hopefully help to illustrate this. A score of 4 for *representative* EIP requires all the following to be in place: (a) senior managers chairing and/or attending meetings regularly; (b) independent employee representation on committees via trade unions and/or joint chairs for meetings; (c) strategic and forward-looking subject matter at meetings; and (d) regular and/or frequent meetings which have been sustained for some time. A score of 4 for *direct* EIP requires all the following to be in place: (a) a proactive approach by senior managers, reinforced by training and support for line managers; (b) opportunities for employees to contribute to meetings, have their questions addressed and ideas passed up the hierarchy; (c) relevant and meaningful subject matter at meetings; and (d) regular meetings which have been in operation for some time. In the case of engagement surveys, which are part of direct EIP,

independence relates to participation in surveys, proper opportunities to discuss results in work teams and a role for engagement champions, while sustainability refers to the frequency and regularity of surveys and pulse checks. A score of 4 for *informal* EIP requires all the following to be in place: (a) an overt commitment by senior managers, supplemented by workplace visits to talk with staff; (b) line managers explicitly seeking ideas, encouraging staff to use their discretion and actively listening to their concerns; (c) meaningful subject matter for team level; and (d) regular conversations with all staff rather than ad hoc interactions only when something has gone wrong. For each form of EIP, scores of 1–3 depend on the number of these factors active within the organisation. However, it is recognised these scores are not simply a mechanistic calculation but depend to some extent on judgements made by the researcher – in this case, one with substantial experience of EIP in theory and practice.

Finally we outline how the forces shaping EIP are measured; see Table 2 for details. Country is a simple proxy for the institutional framework operating there. Product and labour market

TABLE 2 *Organisation-level forces shaping EIP in the 25 case studies*

Case study and country	Sector	Degree of union organisation	Size (number of employees)	Dispersed small sites	Strong organisation culture	Policy to devolve HRM to line managers
UK						
UKPRV1	Mfg	Strong	Very large	No	Yes	Yes
UKPRV2	Mfg	Moderate	Very large	No	No	No
UKPRV3	Serv	Strong	Large	Yes	Yes	Yes
UKPRV4	Serv	Strong	Very large	No	Yes	No
UKPRV5	Serv	Weak	Very large	No	Yes	No
UKPUB1	Pub Ad	Moderate	Large	Yes	Yes	Yes
UKPUB2	Pub Ad	Moderate	Large	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ireland						
IRLPRV1	Mfg	Strong	Very large	No	Yes	Yes
IRLPRV2	Mfg	Weak	Large	No	No	Yes
IRLPRV3	Serv	Strong	Small/med	No	No	No
IRLPUB1	Pub Ad	Moderate	Large	Yes	No	No
IRLPUB2	Pub Ad	Moderate	Large	No	No	No
Australia						
OZPRV1	Mfg	Strong	Small/med	No	No	No
OZPRV2	Mfg	Strong	Small/med	No	Yes	Yes
OZPRV3	Mfg	Weak	Large	Yes	Yes	No
OZPRV4	Serv	Strong	Very large	No	No	Yes
OZPRV5	Serv	Weak	Very large	Yes	Yes	Yes
OZPUB1	Pub Ad	Strong	Small/med	Yes	Yes	No
OZPUB2	Pub Ad	Strong	Large	Yes	No	No
New Zealand						
NZPRV1	Mfg	Strong	Large	No	Yes	Yes
NZPRV2	Mfg	Weak	Small/med	No	No	No
NZPRV3	Serv	Moderate	Large	No	No	No
NZPUB1	Pub Ad	Weak	Small/med	Yes	No	No
NZPUB2	Pub Ad	Strong	Large	Yes	Yes	No
NZPUB3	Pub Ad	Moderate	Small/med	No	No	No

forces are measured by sector (manufacturing, private sector services and public administration) and the degree of union organisation (strong, moderate and weak). Organisation structure is measured by workforce size (very large = 5000+ , large = 500–4999, and small/medium = less than 500) and dispersion of employment across workplaces (yes and no). Organisation culture is measured by the degree to which the CEO actively promotes a shared vision and open agenda (yes and no) and a policy to devolve HRM to line managers (yes and no).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Breadth and depth of EIP

The data outlining breadth and depth of EIP are presented in Table 3. The breadth of EIP at each organisation ranged from three at NZPRV2 to eight at four UK organisations, with a mean of

TABLE 3 *Breadth and depth of EIP at the 25 case studies*

Case study	Breadth Total	Breadth Rep EIP	Breadth Direct	Breadth Informal	Depth Total	Depth Rep EIP	Depth Direct	Depth Informal
					0–12	0–4	0–4	0–4
UK								
UKPRV1	8	3	4	1	11	3	4	4
UKPRV2	8	3	4	1	7	2	3	2
UKPRV3	8	2	4	2	9	3	3	3
UKPRV4	8	3	3	2	9	4	3	2
UKPRV5	5	1	3	1	8	3	3	2
UKPUB1	7	1	4	2	8	3	3	2
UKPUB2	7	2	3	2	9	4	3	2
Ireland								
IRLPRV1	7	2	4	1	9	3	4	2
IRLPRV2	5	1	2	2	4	1	1	2
IRLPRV3	4	1	2	1	4	1	2	1
IRLPUB1	5	2	2	1	7	4	2	1
IRLPUB2	5	2	2	1	5	2	2	1
Australia								
OZPRV1	6	2	3	1	9	3	4	2
OZPRV2	6	2	2	2	7	3	2	2
OZPRV3	7	1	4	2	6	1	3	2
OZPRV4	7	2	4	1	8	3	3	2
OZPRV5	6	0	4	2	6	0	3	3
OZPUB1	7	2	4	1	7	3	3	1
OZPUB2	5	2	2	1	4	1	2	1
New Zealand								
NZPRV1	5	2	2	1	7	3	2	2
NZPRV2	3	0	1	2	4	0	1	3
NZPRV3	6	2	3	1	6	2	2	2
NZPUB1	5	1	3	1	5	1	2	2
NZPUB2	7	3	3	1	7	3	3	1
NZPUB3	6	1	3	2	6	2	2	2

six, which compares well with results from other studies. Direct EIP always accounted for at least as many practices as representative EIP, and usually more, but informal EIP was less widespread; this makes sense because informal EIP was generally regarded as 'the way we do things here' or was embedded through support from CEOs and active implementation by front line managers. Three examples illustrate breadth of EIP. UKPRV4 had representative EIP via an EWC, a multi-tiered JCC structure and partnership working; direct EIP featured team briefings, question and answer sessions with senior managers and annual engagement surveys; and at informal level, there were face-to-face interactions between line managers and staff plus visits by senior managers to sites with the highest and lowest engagement scores. In contrast, NZPRV2 had no representative EIP but did have team briefs, and a culture of open communications and monthly BBQs for all staff. The company had run an engagement survey several years ago, but it was deemed too expensive to repeat. The mode of practices was five, of which OZPUB2 was typical; it had JCCs and forums with employee delegates, town hall meetings and a regular blog from the CEO, and line managers were undergoing training to improve their skills in informal EIP.

Depth of EIP varied from 4 to 11, with a mean of 7. As with breadth, depth was also highest for direct EIP followed by representative and informal forms, but the differences were not as marked. EIP was most deeply embedded at UKPRV1; representative EIP operated via a multi-tier JCC system, chaired by the relevant senior manager, which met regularly, had independent employee representation via several unions and an agenda organised around key business issues; direct EIP involved weekly briefing sessions which lasted up to two hours with at least half the time reserved for discussion, team-working was central to the production system, the long-standing engagement surveys had been supplemented by task groups at departmental level, and there was an anonymous hotline direct to the CEO. Informal EIP involved line managers devolving decisions to teams of skilled workers ultimately responsible for product quality and liaison with customers. By contrast, at IRLPRV3, representative EIP comprised ad hoc meetings between the general manager and the senior shop steward, direct EIP occurred via weekly team briefs – which were not well-attended due to the shift system and customer pressures – and a suggestion box which was rarely used, while informal EIP was dependent on how line managers chose to interact with employees.

Forces shaping breadth and depth of EIP

The forces shaping breadth and depth of EIP in each case study organisation are analysed in turn, starting with forces beyond organisation level in the four countries; these comprise hard legal regulation, 'soft' governmental initiatives and intermediary forces (Marchington, 2015).

Overall breadth and depth were highest at the UK organisations, as was each form of EIP. All seven UK cases had a long history of joint consultation, in line with successive WERS surveys in both the private and public sectors. Two (UKPRV2 and UKPRV4) had EWCs and several operated high-level business forums which performed a similar function (*e.g.* UKPRV1), so legislation on EWCs clearly shaped representative EIP for some private sector organisations. While most organisations felt the information and consultation regulations had minimal impact on EIP as they were already at or beyond what was required, UKPRV5 acknowledged the legislation had 'helped to sharpen up our practices a little'. Both public sector cases operated in line with wider representative EIP systems in health and local government, in the former part of a multi-tier JCC structure including government involvement at national level. Direct and informal EIP was shaped by intermediary forces occupying space left vacant by the lack of legal regulation; while bodies such as the CIPD and the IPA have been long-term proponents of direct EIP, 'Engage for Success' has recently flourished with support from employers and

trade unions. This 'movement' receives financial and non-financial contributions from members and relies heavily on practitioners to populate its website with case studies and run activities. All the UK respondents knew its work and several were members of its taskforce. Not surprisingly, engagement practices were evident at all the UK organisations, and direct and informal EIP was deeply embedded, having moved beyond the use of surveys alone. For example, UKPRV3 had appointed 100 'engagement champions' drawn from different locations to embed the process, UKPUB1 published survey results on the website so patients could compare NHS Trusts and UKPUB2 operated a staff forum to give feedback direct to senior managers.

In Ireland, similar forces shaped representative EIP at IRLPRV1, where the European-wide business forum – involving the HR director and union representatives – met twice a year for what the former felt 'was very good as a sounding board and for hearing different ideas' which supplemented more frequent local forums. Although the national partnership structure in Ireland had become less significant by the time of data collection, it was still 'alive' in the public sector according to national-level respondents. It was deeply embedded at IRLPUB1 where a government-funded partnership facilitator worked in a system which had joint chairs, equal numbers of management and union representatives, meetings set well in advance and highly active sub-groups working on issues devolved from the main committee. Both respondents from IRLPUB1 felt some very difficult issues had been resolved through partnership. At IRLPUB2, however, EIP faltered following the demise of partnership; the JCC was now solely for nursing staff, there was no obligation to hold team briefings and informal EIP had not really taken off. In New Zealand, NZPRV1 continued with the system set up by the PRC – a 'soft' governmental initiative that ran between 2005 and 2012 – which was enthusiastically endorsed by HR, line managers and union respondents for 'generating an open and trusting environment which had helped secure the company's future.' Union representatives also sat on the Board of Management. In Australia, legislation requires employers to consult about major workplace changes likely to have a significant impact on employees and to allow for representation as soon as practicable *after* a decision has been made; the Federal Court has fined employers (for example, Queensland Rail) for failing to comply with these requirements. The FWC respondent was convinced the clause had shaped EIP, and several others mentioned it had been incorporated into their collective agreements; for example, the HR Director at OZPUB1 felt it 'provided a sound base for consultation which clarifies what we do' while his counterpart at OZPRV2 regarded the clause as 'an integral part of the relationship which enables proactive consultation.' While there was nothing similar to 'Engage for Success' in the other three countries, meetings had been held in Ireland, but it was not mentioned by a single organisational respondent. In short, it was apparent institutional forces helped to stimulate representative EIP in each country, but it relied upon management to be embedded more deeply, while direct and informal EIP had been shaped by intermediary forces in the UK much more than elsewhere.

With regard to product market forces, previous findings suggest representative EIP would be broader and deeper in manufacturing and public administration while direct and informal EIP would be more important in private sector services, especially where employees have direct contact with customers. However, breadth and depth of EIP did not appear to vary between sectors either within or across countries as the following examples illustrate. NZPUB2 had a relationship agreement with the unions 'to cover areas of common interest and workplace productivity', and a joint statement was issued about the importance of employee engagement. Representative EIP occurred through regular formal and informal meetings and direct EIP was embedded through a confidential email system to the CEO, frequent road-shows with staff and

an annual engagement survey. OZPRV1 is a manufacturer employing similar numbers to NZPUB2 where representative EIP was embedded via an enterprise bargaining agreement which included 'proactive consultation on key issues' according to management and union officials. Breadth and depth of direct and informal EIP was apparent via daily business boards where line managers and their teams met to discuss product quality and results from engagement surveys, amongst other topics. Similarities also arose where breadth and depth of EIP was much weaker. For example, IRLPRV2 had a monthly JCC, chaired by the HR manager, with an operationally focused agenda while team briefing was sporadic, having 'taken a back-seat due to more pressing business issues.' The company used an engagement survey once some years ago. A similar story emerged at NZPUB1 where, despite being regular, JCCs were not integrated into wider organisational issues, direct EIP was principally downward communications, and an attitude survey had been done once but not repeated. In short, sector had little impact on breadth and depth of EIP.

By contrast, degree of union organisation did shape EIP, particularly representative EIP, but this depended on management's willingness to work with trade unions. There were many examples where both parties seemed keen to sustain consultation because constructive relations existed between management and unions. A union official identified UKPRV1 as an organisation where consultation provided benefits for all involved, a view echoed by the HR Director. Similar stories arose at IRLPRV1, OZPUB1 and NZPRV1, not only at organisational level but also by national level respondents in each country when they were asked to provide examples of deeply embedded EIP. Although breadth of direct EIP showed similarities across the sample, it tended to be deeper where degree of union organisation was high, showing that multiple channels are commonplace, and direct EIP is seen as critically important. Scores for depth of direct EIP were typically similar to, if not higher than, for representative EIP at unionised organisations, but no one mentioned the former was being used to marginalise the latter. By contrast, depth of informal EIP was higher in the non-union firms. OZPRV5 is a good example where direct and informal EIP compensated for a lack of representative EIP, both in terms of breadth and depth; these included monthly town hall meetings, round table team talks, weekly CEO blogs and annual engagement surveys, as well as a major drive to train line managers to involve their teams more effectively. Another non-union firm (UKPRV5) promoted informality by using first names on all badges and discussing issues in teams during working hours to encourage higher levels of trust within the organisation.

Workforce size correlated with overall breadth of EIP. Very large organisations utilised multiple channels of representative and direct EIP, though there was no clear difference between size-bands for informal EIP. A similar picture emerged for depth, though informal EIP was more deeply embedded in very large organisations where efforts had been made to foster trust at team level. For example, OZPRV4 supplemented its representative structures with direct EIP practices such as daily cascades and team briefs by shift managers, consultation with an employee panel on new initiatives, annual engagement surveys, wide use of social media and substantial investment in leadership training for line managers. The senior HR directors at OZPRV4 recognised the company faced challenges in trying to involve a diverse workforce (in terms of occupation, shift systems and location) which had stimulated the development of direct and informal EIP. Similar efforts had been made at UKPRV2 where the EWC was jointly chaired by one of the union representatives, but this was complemented by team meetings to discuss quality and productivity, a suggestion scheme and regular surveys. Additionally, informal EIP was regarded as vital to counter a paternalistic and bureaucratic culture, with major efforts to train line managers in how to involve their teams. By contrast, EIP in smaller organisations lacked breadth, even when there were higher levels of union organisation; for

example, at NZPUB3, direct and informal EIP was being strengthened following an agreement between management and unions to 'encourage openness and develop genuine constructive and professional engagement with each other.' Problem-solving groups had been set up to work across teams and results from employee surveys were discussed at local level.

WERS surveys have shown consistently that JCCs are less likely in smaller *establishments*, so a comparison was made between organisations comprising relatively large sites (e.g. 500+ employees) and those with many sites employing less than 20, even where there is a large HQ. Dividing the sample in this way found the latter having slightly greater breadth, especially in terms of direct EIP, though depth was similar. Some examples illustrate how breadth and depth of EIP differed between these contrasting organisational forms. OZPRV3 employed 3000 people at 300 dispersed sites, with over half employing five workers or less. A centralised JCC system dealt solely with health and safety so substantial emphasis was placed on direct and informal EIP at the sites – tool box talks occurred regularly, as did annual road-shows – delivered by senior managers and often by the CEO – at area level where all staff were given time off to attend. However, it was also recognised EIP could only become embedded if more issues were devolved to front line managers. The degree of dispersion at NZPRV3 meant that, while both parties valued representative EIP, there was a greater emphasis on direct and informal EIP, including monthly video updates from the CEO, local discussion groups and extensive use of the intranet. Similar patterns emerged at OZPRV4, UKPRV3 and several of the local authorities (e.g. IRLPUB1, NZPUB1 and UKPUB2) where the dispersed workforce never went to HQ. In each case, line managers adapted a core brief to include local issues and relied on social media or newsletters to keep the workforce informed. All the respondents in these organisations specifically mentioned they were tackling problems of isolation at dispersed workplaces by greater devolution to team level.

Strong organisation culture has been widely cited as a key influence on depth of direct and informal EIP, but while this was apparent in this sample it also applied to depth of *representative* EIP because long-standing co-operation was seen as crucial by senior managers. Breadth and depth of EIP was greater where the CEO had publicly stated his or her commitment to values such as open management, integrity and trust; this applied to all forms of EIP. Moreover, in cases where there was several evaluations of culture (e.g. from line managers, union officials, other reports on the organisation or from engagement surveys), there was broad agreement about the type of culture which existed. At OZPRV5, a sustained effort had been made to embed its published set of values which emphasised respect, integrity, listening skills and engaging with co-workers at all levels. No representative EIP existed but the CEO did weekly blogs and other senior managers led town hall meetings around the country. The 360 degree appraisal system required managers to demonstrate their commitment to involvement by gathering concrete examples from staff showing how this had been achieved in practice. Another non-union firm, NZPRV2, had deeply-embedded informal EIP via a long culture of open communications sustained by the family still managing the business. Board members attended monthly BBQs to interact with staff from the shop floor and the research and development unit. Similar values were also promoted by CEOs at unionised organisations – such as UKPRV1, IRLPRV1 and OZPUB1 – reflected in the depth of representative and direct EIP as well as a stronger focus on informal EIP. For example, the new CEO of UKPUB1 had worked with an academic to build a quality improvement strategy which involved asking staff to submit ideas for change and using focus groups to identify stories showing how organisational values were put into practice. This had a major impact on informal EIP, but it did not marginalise the joint partnership forum for which employees elected their own secretary to work alongside the HR director in setting agendas and following-up the activities of work groups.

Finally, data suggest that devolution of HRM to line managers increased the breadth of direct EIP and the depth of direct and informal EIP, but there was little difference for representative EIP. At UKPRV1, there was a clear emphasis on teams taking responsibility for quality within its high-skill manufacturing process. Although line managers already had major responsibility for EIP, the HR director said 'what really matters is that employees are engaged with their own jobs and feel they have discretion to deal with internal and external customers ... Managers are now expected to provide an environment in which problems can be solved on the shop floor.' Several organisations provided leadership training for front line managers to encourage staff to use their discretion. About a quarter of the sample had added 'engagement' to their list of key performance indicators for line managers, which was then checked in the 360-degree appraisals. At UKPRV3, line managers were coached on how to improve EIP and, according to one of the HR specialists, 'engagement scores are taken into account when people go for promotion ... they are asked to show how they have dealt with issues raised in surveys.' This also occurred in the public sector as UKPUB2 and NZPUB3 had both initiated leadership training exercises for middle and front line managers which focused on how to involve staff during periods of radical change.

In summary, as Table 4 shows, the findings confirm breadth and depth vary across the sample, both in aggregate and in relation to different forms of EIP. Respondents provided many examples indicating how forces at and beyond organisation level – through hard employment regulation, soft governmental intervention and intermediary bodies – helped to shape EIP in the organisations. But this impact was not universal, depending both on organisational characteristics and the willingness of employers to adopt and develop different forms of EIP in their organisations. On the other hand, numbers employed and degree of union organisation had a significant impact across the sample while other forces – such as product market pressures, establishment size, organisational culture and devolution of HRM to line managers – were equally important but depended more on management choices about which forms of EIP to use and how deeply these should be embedded in their organisations.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This article adds significantly to our understanding of formal and informal EIP (Townsend *et al.*, 2012; Marchington and Suter, 2013), particularly by showing how channels of representative, direct and informal forms of EIP combine in organisations. While tensions do arise between them, different forms of EIP generally work in conjunction to provide benefits for all stakeholders. In addition, the article articulates a precise measure of *depth* for each form of EIP, which extends Cox *et al.*'s (2006, 2009) widely cited research (Butler *et al.*, 2011; Hall *et al.*, 2011; Holland *et al.*, 2012). The four factors identified here – management commitment, independent employee voice, meaningful subject matter, and regularity, frequency and sustainability – were applied to each form of EIP at the case study organisations to produce an overall score for depth. While acknowledging this evaluation does require a detailed understanding and analysis of EIP in organisations, it does provide a much more systematic framework for future studies.

The research used a two-level data collection process to examine how breadth and depth of EIP is shaped by forces at and beyond the organisation in different countries. This is very unusual as most research either focuses solely at the institutional or the organisational level. The approach used here addresses a major problem faced by institutional analysis by capturing the intricacies of how EWCs and JCCs operate within different countries, examining how breadth and depth varies between organisations and how management choice shapes which

TABLE 4 *How forces at and beyond the organisation shape breadth and depth of EIP*

Level at which forces operate	Type of forces in existence	Impact of forces found in this study
Forces beyond organisation level which shape EIP	Hard employment regulation such as EU or national legislation	Breadth of rep EIP in some firms shaped by EWCs in UK and Ireland but depth depends on management choice. Minimal impact of I&C Regulations. Federal Court decisions had shaped some rep EIP in Australia.
	Soft governmental intervention such as support for partnership	Partnership initiatives shaped rep and direct EIP in some organisations in each country but declined in influence following removal of government support.
	Intermediary forces such as professional association and specialist bodies promoting EIP	Professional associations and employers and unions at peak level shaped EIP in all countries but hard to evaluate precise impact on direct and informal EIP. 'Engage for Success' influenced direct and informal EIP in UK organisations.
Forces at organisation level which shape EIP	Product market forces: type of competition and sector	Little evidence EIP practices vary between sectors though rep EIP less likely and informal EIP more likely in service sector firms.
	Labour market forces: independent employee voice	Depth of rep EIP shaped if employee representation strong but still dependent on management choice. In non-union firms informal EIP had greater depth.
	Organisational size	Breadth and depth of direct, representative and informal EIP greater in large organisations but depth strongly shaped by management choice.
	Organisational dispersal and size of establishments	Little overall difference in EIP but some attempt in organisations with dispersed sites to devolve issues to establishment level but depends on management choice to counter isolation with direct and informal EIP.
	Organisation culture	'Strong' organisation culture shaped depth of rep, direct and informal EIP, particularly when CEO took an active role in promoting open communications.
	Devolution of HRM to line managers	Devolution associated with greater breadth and depth of direct and informal EIP, especially if 'engagement' was a criterion for performance management of line managers.

forms of EIP to adopt. It also ensures that direct and informal EIP is given equal prominence to representative EIP, which makes sense given the growth in these forms in recent years, and it analyses how organisational forces shape management choice. At the same time, it overcomes the failure of micro-level approaches to look beyond the organisation, while also adding analytical bite by differentiating between the role played by hard and soft institutions and

intermediary bodies in occupying space available within LMEs to shape EIP at organisation level (Dundon *et al.*, 2014).

In short, this article combines both institutional and organisational analysis to explore how forces at different levels shape the breadth and depth of all forms of EIP. Table 4 shows that while institutional variety between relatively similar countries helps to account for some of the differences in breadth and depth of EIP, the way employers interpret global messages also leads to similarities between organisations (from the same or from different sectors) operating under different regimes. Accordingly, the relatively limited role of legislation in LMEs gives management space to respond to forces from beyond organisation level as well as make choices about the shape of EIP which reflect differences in organisation culture and structure and the product and labour market circumstances in which they operate. This means employers may find value in adopting EWCs, partnership, JCCs and briefing groups – or indeed, employee engagement – because these can be adapted to ‘fit’ their own circumstances and do not prescribe a uniform model.

Undoubtedly, this article has limitations like any other, some of which can be addressed in future research. It might be seen as too ambitious in trying to analyse so many variables – country, sector, organisational context, multiple forms of EIP – and future research could focus solely on one or two sectors in each country to provide a more fine-tuned comparison. Second, although 86 interviews were conducted at and beyond organisation level, it can always be argued a larger sample offers a sounder base upon which to draw conclusions. However, the fact that data were collected at and beyond organisation level and the credibility of the respondents (*e.g.* senior civil servants, key figures at employers’ organisations/trade unions, heads of policy units and HR directors) ensured the findings were valid and reliable. Third, it would have been useful to interview more union/employee representatives to provide a further check on whether EIP delivered mutuality. However, given the research focus of this article was on forces shaping EIP at organisation level, it was felt appropriate to interview managers because they were better placed to give knowledgeable answers. Although some data were collected from non-managerial staff and from independent evaluations of EIP, this could be developed further in future research.

Hopefully policy makers and practitioners can use ideas from this article to improve EIP at organisation level. For the former, the role occupied by ‘soft’ forces in stimulating different forms of EIP could be sustained to prevent the funding tap being turned off by new governments because it does not fit with their ideological preferences. The continuing success of organisations which have taken advantage of support for partnership shows it can be successful, and more could be gained by working in conjunction with professional associations and movements such as ‘Engage for Success’ to embed EIP more deeply. Practitioners with an interest in developing sustainable models of EIP should also find useful material here as some of the organisations were leading proponents in the field, and had well-embedded combinations of EIP practices. As with all aspects of HRM, however, EIP should not be adopted merely to tick the relevant boxes because, without commitment from managers, employees and trade union representatives, it will never be more than a passing fad. Conversely, by embedding EIP more deeply within an organisation’s culture, it can help to provide benefits which far outweigh the costs.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the ‘critical observers’ (Peter Ackers, Peter Boxall, Tony Dundon, Russell Lansbury, Bill Roche and Keith Townsend) who commented on my reports. Most of these also helped with access as did Paul Gollan, Eugene Hickland and Adrian Wilkinson.

Thanks also to the anonymous reviewers who helped to improve this article considerably. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the financial support provided by the Leverhulme Trust through its Emeritus Fellowship scheme (EM-2011-052).

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