

Worker Participation in Management Decision Making Within Selected Establishments in Uttar Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with an investigation of the existing level of worker participation in management decision making within the Indian work environment. The study involved a survey in which a total of 217 non-management employees drawn from two work organisations in Uttar Pradesh (Flour Mills and Sugar Mills) were used as subjects. Interview schedule and in-depth interview were the main research techniques adopted for data collection, while percentage distribution and chi-square statistical techniques were used to analyse the data collected for the study. Results show that employees in both organisations demonstrate a high interest in participation in the decision making process within their respective workplaces. However, the actual level of involvement in management decision making demonstrated by the employees was found to be relatively low. There is significant relationship between education and employees' involvement in decision making at Flour Mills. In Sugar Mills, there is a significant relationship between age and employees' involvement in decision making, as well as between frequency of employees' consultation and organisational commitment. The study reveals a growing desire of non-management employees in the Indian work environment to exercise greater involvement in the decision making process of their enterprises.

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Introduction

The concept of worker participation represents a popular theme in the analysis of the world of work among scholars in the fields of Industrial Sociology, Industrial Relations, as well as management. It refers to any arrangement which is designed to involve low cadre employees (workers) in the important decision making within the workplace. This implies that rather than saddling only a group within the enterprise (for instance, management) with the responsibility of making decisions, all those who are to be affected by these decisions (including the workers) would be involved in its formulation and implementation.

In recent time, scholars have directed increasing attention to the issue of worker participation and its broader corollary, industrial democracy (Mankidy, 1984; Yesufu, 1984; Adewumi, 1989; Verma and Syha, 1991; Weller 1993; Kester and Pinaud, 1996; Adu-Amankwah and Kester, 1999). These concerns reflect a growing interest in finding ways to make work more meaningful and satisfying to the workers. This rests on the belief that the organisational goals of high productivity and harmonious industrial relations are best achieved when the higher level needs of the human elements (workers) are satisfied. Worker participation implies arrangements designed to involve workers in the enterprise's decision making process. This allows for workers' involvement in the initiation, formulation and implementation of decisions within the enterprise. The concept can also be understood in terms of a new approach to industry and society in which people want to be interested with the taking of decisions which have direct bearing on them. MacGregor (1960) contended that worker participation consists basically in creating an opportunity under suitable conditions for people to influence decisions which affect them. It is a special case of delegation in which the subordinate gain greater control, greater freedom of choice with respect to bridging the communication gap between the management and the workers. This serves to create a sense of belonging among the workers, as well as a conducive environment in which the workers would voluntarily contribute to healthy industrial relations.

The Problem

The spread of democratic value to virtually every society today has brought

the need to examine the implications of this trend to other spheres of life. With respect to the economic sector, employees are faced with the dilemma of how to cope with authoritative management in the workplaces while living in a democratic society which guarantees basic fundamental freedom. In addition, the denial of worker's active involvement in decision making is held to be one of the major causes of the problems which are manifested daily in the work lives of the modern employees. The implication of these to employees of increasing exposure to a monetised society, rising education and wider contact among people resulting from the break-up of artificial barriers was to shift these aspirations to a more satisfying work experience, greater control over the organisation of work, greater opportunity for personal development, and wider scope in exercise of initiatives. Specifically, the refusal of work organisations to recognise the human factor in industrial production through greater involvement of employees in its management decision making would tend to create several human problems in this setting. A worker is a social being who brings his personality, hopes, aspirations, anxieties, feelings and attitude to the workplace. He seeks satisfaction and meaning in his work as he does in other spheres of life. However, when he finds that his work does not provide him with the opportunity to realise his potentials (for instance, through strict management control) he tends to engage in negative behaviours like absenteeism, apathy, low commitment and low productivity. The implication of these negative tendencies resulting from strict management control has, therefore, raised serious concern among scholars interested in healthy industrial relations.

Objectives of the Study

The central objective of the study is to determine the level of worker participation in management decision making in the Indian industry. The specific objectives are to:

- ascertain workers level of involvement in the decision making process of their workplaces;
- establish the general attitude of workers towards worker participation in management decision making;

- determine factors which aid or hinder the observed level of participation; and
- investigate the implications of worker participation to workers and their organisations.

Rationale for the Study

The rationale for the study is anchored on the need to raise the productivity level of workers through appropriate motivational techniques. The involvement of workers in management decision making is considered as a means for inducing motivation in the workers leading to positive work attitude and high productivity.

The study is also deemed desirable in view of the benefits of worker participation to the organisation and the society at large. Worker participation has been seen as capable of providing workers conducive work environment, opportunity to exercise their innate potentials, and willingness to pursue the corporate goals of the organisation.

Review of the Literature

Worker participation has been explained as a plank of industrial democracy (Adewumi, 1991). Mills (1977) described the spread of industrial democracy to Western Europe in the 1970s as a story of capitalism in transition. In his words, in countries which are witnessing this transition, industrial democracy affects the nature, control and even ownership of private enterprise, the nature, control, power and bargaining areas of the labour union, and the roles and contributions and rights of the individual worker in contemporary and future industrial society [cited in Heisler and Houck, (1977: 116)].

The description mentioned earlier shows that industrial democracy affects many aspects of lives of different people in a modern society. This reason may explain the wide clamour for the introduction of worker participation arrangement in most countries.

Mills (1977) identified four basic forces underlying the clamour for industrial democracy. The first one was political in nature, pushed primarily by socialists, and moderate labour and political leaders. The

second was an industrial or economic force championed by innovative and socially-oriented management and at times, by unions. The third was an intellectual and theoretical force pushed by MacGregor (1960), Maslow (1964) and Emery, Thosrud and Trist (1964).

Growing public distaste, desire and disillusionment with traditional institutions and their leadership, growing aberrant social behaviours including crime and drug abuse generate a new demand for participative right of every kind including women's rights.

This fervour explains rising workers' demand for increasing influence in management decision making. The increasing interest in worker participation has been traced to a number of factors. First, is the real or anticipated political pressure which was designed to extend the popular democratic dispensation in the larger society to the economic sphere. Second is the growing pressure on the collective bargaining system arising from continuing difficulties from negotiating in the context of high inflation and in some instances increasing disenchantment with the dialogue of confrontation. Third, and more importantly, is the endemic problem within the modern industrial system which may tend to encourage employers to consider experimenting with different forms of participation. Lastly, the growing interest in participation was encouraged by the problem associated with denying powerful groups (for example, shop stewards and work groups) formal and legal means of exercising their rights. When such a situation arises, the workers concerned will employ informal bargaining methods and illegitimate facts to achieve their goals. To forestall these negative trends, the management is forced to introduce certain participation schemes (Mills, 2009).

The industrial democracy movement can be seen, therefore, as part of the Quality of Work Life Movement (QWLM) which spread throughout Europe during the early 1970s. A major impetus to this movement was provided by the Workers Constitution Act Passed by the German Bundestag in 1972. The Act imposed a mandatory Worker Council on every German enterprise employing more than five employees.

In the 1990s, the industrial democracy movement took the form of what Freeman and Rogers (1993:13) called employee representation. Like worker participation and other stands of industrial democracy, employees' representation connotes greater influence of workers in several

aspects of the work. It also involves restructuring management to meet the new demands of efficient management, international competition, rapid technological change, and changing work force expectation of work (Freeman and Rogers, 1993: 111).

A related concept to employee participation is joint Governance. The concept was developed by Verma and Cutcher-Gershanfield (1991) who defined it as:

An ongoing formal process where workers and their immediate supervisors or union and management bear joint responsibility for making decisions which may be narrow (for instance, involving a single issue) or it may be broader covering a wide range of issues.

Joint governance would then be taken to imply statutory arrangements that are meant to provide equal decision making power to subordinate employees. However, like other programmes with similar objectives, joint governance provides little opportunity for real decision making power to employees. Wellins-Byham and Wilson (1991) argued that in some joint governance programmes, workers are involved at the shop floor levels in issues relating to production and equality. However, in this instance, rarely were these workers provided with any concrete decision making power. In some of the programmes, employees were given advisory roles, which in few cases may confer them with an influential voice. But this is still far short of sharing decision making power which a full worker participation arrangement would imply.

Levine and Tyson (1990) distinguished between consultative and substantive forms of participation. In consultative forms, employees provide information or advice, but management retains the right to make decisions. In more substantive participatory systems workers have greater autonomous control over methods and pace of work, and make decisions that substantively affect the production process. This distinction between consultative and substantive forms of participation is what Rubenstein, Bennett, and Kochan (1992) called 'off-line' versus 'on-line' participation. These terms distinguish between workers who make suggestions to management through problem-solving groups off the job and workers who make decisions with respect to work tasks or quality control as part of their daily work responsibilities (Kester, Zammit and Gold, 2002).

Studies have also focused on the effect of worker participation on organisational performance (Kelly and Harrison, 1992; Levine and Tyson, 1990; Lawler et al., 1992). These studies found that participation programmes have positive, or in some cases, ambiguous effect on productivity. Furthermore, employee participation and industrial relations practices may interact so that the sum of the effects on plant performance is stronger than the effects on the individual practices themselves (Cooke, 1994). Lastly, effects on productivity are expected to be greatest when the organisation adopts a coherent system of work organisation and industrial relations practices (Dunlop, 1958; Cutcher-Gersensfeld, 1991; Kochan and Useem, 1992). In the view of Kester, Zammit and Gold (2002), democratic participation is no longer primarily a battleground between capital and labour, implying a win-lose game, but a common challenge, a win-win game that forces all parties to reconsider the rules of the game and the roles of the actors.

With respect to the status of worker participation in the developing world, Mankidy (1984), and Kester and Schiphorst (1986) have argued that in these countries, labour relations are characterised by a break-up of existing patterns. In many of these countries, there is an increasing awareness that the labour relations produced in these countries are grossly defective. Trade unions are also seen as very weak in many of them. Lastly, on the ideological ground, collective bargaining is rejected because of its emphasis on the dependent wage labour position of the worker.

Kester and Thomas (1981) have demonstrated that there is a fast growing interest in the development of worker participation in developing countries. In their studies, they found one form of worker participation or the other in these countries. In some cases, worker participation was introduced as an essential part of the development strategy. For instance, in Tanzania, the idea of worker participation formed an important aspect of her socialist ideology. This is anchored on the notion of man centred development strategy.

In India, the institutionalisation of worker participation within the nation's industrial relations system was championed by several scholars. Fashoyin (1992), Adewumi (1993) and Imaga (1994) have suggested that worker participation in management decision making represents a means of

reducing industrial conflict, raising workers productivity and ensuring rapid socio-economic development.

Adewumi (1990: 7) contended that the Indian industrial relations system is guided by the underlying philosophy of industrial democracy. This implies the establishment of institutions and machineries through which management and workers meet on equal footing to discuss, consult and negotiate the terms and conditions of employment. In reiterating the principle of industrial democracy as the guiding spirit of Indian's industrial relations system, the National Labour Policy states,

If management must participate in decisions for determining the share of the worker from the results of the co-operative use of labour and capital, then the worker is equally entitled to participate in the decisions relating to share of capital, namely, profit and indeed all decisions hitherto arrogated to itself by the employer or management relating to the whole organisation and operation of the enterprise; determining objectives and policies, the relative share of the co-operating factors of production (Yesufu, 1992: 142).

Adewumi (1993: 76) argued that the only avenue for the realisation of the objective of worker participation in management decision making in India is through the collective bargaining machinery. However, it is evident that this machinery is very defective in India because of its restrictive nature. Consequently, such arrangements cannot confer effective participation rights to the workers.

Theoretical Framework

The human relations and participatory democratic theories are adopted to guide our study on worker participation in management decision making. The human relations theory stems from the understanding that the co-operation of workers is desirable for the attainment of the objectives of high productivity and industrial peace. It contends that workers would be better motivated if they are treated like human beings rather than as irrational objects. For instance, by making them have a feeling that the organisation accords them recognition by involving them in the decision making process. In the light of the theory, the worker is to be perceived in terms of his membership of a social group rather as an individual.

Consequently, his behaviour is seen as a response to group norms rather than simply being directed by financial consideration. Workers should then be expected to react to group norms so that when they are given the opportunity to take part in management decision making, they are likely to respond positively to organisational issues.

The democratic participatory theory emphasises on conditions which are necessary for effective participation and functions performed by participation to the individuals and society. For instance, Rosseau (1956) contended that through participation in decision making, the individual sense of freedom is increased since it gives the worker a very real degree of control over the course of his life and structure of his environment. Again, it serves to increase the value of individual freedom by enabling him to be his own master.

Mills (1965) sees the industry as an area where the individual could gain experience in the management of the collective just as he could in government. The theory views the political arena as a kind of market place in which individuals constantly attempt to maximise the benefits and minimise losses they could gather from the political process. It assumes that man is selfish in the sense that each participant would be motivated by the desire to protect or enhance his own personal interest. The theory assumes that increased participation is likely to increase the feeling of political efficiency that ordinary citizens possess. This helps to increase the potential so that their actions can have an effect on public policy and lead to a greater sense of control over their communal lives. In essence, greater participation in one sense of life leads to greater participation in other spheres, i.e. the workplace (Pateman, 1970).

Methodology

The study adopted the case study approach for the purpose of conducting an empirical investigation on the issue of worker participation in management decision making in the India work environment. The study was conducted between the months of October 2012 and November 2013. Main data were collected both through the primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data were derived from the questionnaire and in-depth interview methods, while secondary sources were acquired from

company records, bulletins and other official documents. The adoption of these tools helped to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was in three sections—the first contained questions on respondent's personal data, the second on the level of worker participation, while the third was based on worker participation structures.

The study population comprised of workers in two selected organisations in Uttar Pradesh, namely, a Flour Mills and Sugar Mill. A total of 227 subjects drawn from the two selected establishments constituted the sample for the study. The subjects were selected through a combination of clustering and systematic sampling methods.

Hypotheses

The following testable hypotheses were formulated to guide the attainment of the research objectives. There is a relationship between employees' socio-economic status and the level of involvement in decision making such that:

1. An employee in higher job position tends to exercise more involvement in management decision making than another in lower job position.
2. An employee who possesses higher educational qualification would tend to have more influence in management decision making than other who possesses lower educational qualification.
3. A young employee would more likely demonstrate more involvement in management decision making than his older counterpart.

Findings and Discussions

As evidenced from tables 1 to 8 the demographic composition of the subjects reflects that the majority are male, middle aged with low educational qualification. This finding is a reflection of the structure of the Indian industrial labour force in which middle age male workers are more represented than their female counterpart. It also reflects on the occupational status of the subjects of the study, all of whom are lower cadre workers.

Findings on respondent's frequency of involvement in the decision making process of their organisation as reflected in Table 4 shows that

respondents in the two study organisations demonstrated generally low measure. However we found that employees in Sugar Mills have a higher frequency of involvement than those in Flour Mill.

Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents

Sex	Flour Mill		Sugar Mill	
	No.	%	No.	%
Male	60	66.6	77	56.2
Female	30	33.4	60	43.8
Total	90	100	137	100

Source: Author Field Work, 2013

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Flour Mill		Sugar Mill	
	No.	%	No.	%
30 years or less	35	38.8	53	38.7
Between 30–40 year	41	45.6	65	47.4
41 years and above	14	15.6	19	13.9
Total	90	100	137	100

Source: Author Field Work, 2013

Table 3: Respondent Educational Qualification

Educational Qualification	Flour Mill		Sugar Mill	
	No.	%	No.	%
Primary Sch. Cert.	2	2.2	6	4.4
Sch. Cert and Equivalent	38	42.2	43	31.4
OND/NCE Certificate	30	33.3	64	46.7
First Degree	11	12.2	16	11.7
Post Graduate	9	10	8	5.8
Total	40	100	137	100

Source: Author Field Work, 2013.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Frequency of Involvement in the Decision Making Process of the Workplace

<i>Frequency of Involvement No.</i>	<i>Flour Mill</i>		<i>Sugar Mill</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
Not at all	25	27.8	14	10.2
Occasionally	43	47.8	76	55.5
Often	20	22.2	45	32.8
No Response	2	2.2	2	1.5
Total	90	100	137	100

Source: Author Field Work, 2013.

Table 5: Respondents Involvement in the Decision Making in Administration of Social Facilities

<i>Frequency of Involvement</i>	<i>Flour Mill</i>		<i>Sugar Mill</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Not at all	38	42.2	59	43.0
Not at much	32	35.6	54	39.4
Much	20	22.2	24	17.6
Total	90	100	137	100

Source: Author Field Work, 2013.

This variation could be explained by the relatively higher educational status of respondents from the Sugar Mill. In addition, in this company there are a larger number of professionals who are more willing to seize the opportunity of participation in management decision making.

Results of in-depth interviews conducted with some respondents attest to our findings. When asked about the extent to which he is involved in the making of decisions within the company, an insurance clerk in the insurance underwriting office of the Sugar Mill replied:

“The management in this company does not consider it as its duty to contact junior employees on how decisions are made.”

A factory operator in the Flour Mill has this to say when asked the same question:

“I am always busy in the factory, may be this is why I don't know about decision making.”

It is possible to observe the obvious variation in reasons advanced by the two informants on why they demonstrated low involvement in management decision making. While the informant from the Sugar Mill expressed that his low or lack of involvement was due to management unwillingness, the respondent from the Flour Mill indicated that he was not much involved in management decision making because of his busy schedule work.

It is also interesting to know that a number of the respondents indicated that they had no interest in participating in the management decision making of their workplaces. This category of employees demonstrated a non-challant attitude towards their involvement in the management decision making. As a respondent in the Flour Mill says:

“I am in this company to work and earn my salary. I have no business with decision making. I am not paid for such job.”

An opinion like this reflects the instrumental orientation of some of the workers in the two study establishments. Being mostly junior workers, these respondents tend to demonstrate more interest in earning a living from work rather than to satisfy the higher order needs of self expression through participation.

However, in spite of this tendency, our findings show that a substantial proportion of respondents in both study organisations reported that they are involved either regularly or occasionally in the management decision making process of their companies. In the words of a respondent in the Sugar Mill:

“Management in this company does not hesitate to involve some of us in the decision making process whenever it is necessary.”

This opinion is similar to the one expressed by a Foreman in the Flour Mill:

“As a senior staff, I and other Foremen in the various units are made to contribute to the decisions in matters relevant to our department.”

Views like the one above show that respondents have some measures of involvement in the decision making process of their organisation.

Table 6: Relationship between Respondents Educational Level and Involvement in Management Decision Making

Organisation	Educational Level		Involvement in Decision Making	
	None	Casionally	Often	Total
<i>Flour Mills</i>				
Low	6(50%)	4(33.3%)	2(16.6%)	129(100%)
Moderate	7(10.3%)	34(50%)	27(9.7%)	68(100%)
High	1(5%)	5(25%)	14(70%)	20(100%)
Sub-Total	14(15.6%)	43(47.8%)	33(36.7%)	90(100%)

$\chi^2 = 3.74$. d.f. 4; $P \geq 05$

<i>Sugar Mills</i>				
Low	4(18.2%)	14(63.6%)	4(18.2%)	22(100%)
Moderate	10(9.4%)	57(53.8%)	39(36.80%)	106(100%)
High	2(22.2%)	5(55.6%)	2(22.2%)	9(100%)
Sub-Total	16(11.7%)	76(53.5%)	45(32.8%)	137(100%)

$\chi^2 = 3.74$. d.f. 4; $P \geq 05$

Table 7: Relationship between Respondents Age and Involvement in Management Decision Making

Organisation	Age Group			Involvement in Decision Making
	None	Occasionally	Often	
<i>Flour Mills</i>				
30 yrs or less	6(17.1%)	21(60%)	8(22%)	35(100%)
31-40 yrs	4(10%)	18(45%)	18(45%)	40(100%)
41yrs and above	3(21.4%)	4(28.6%)	7(50%)	14(100%)
Sub-Total	13(14.6%)	3(48.3%)	33(37.1%)	89(100%)
$\chi^2 = 6.6$; d.f. = 4; $P \leq 05$				
<i>Sugar Mills</i>				
30 yrs or less	4(18.2%)	27(51.9%)	16(30.8%)	52(100%)
31-40 yrs	10(9.4%)	42(64.6%)	17(26.2%)	65(100%)
41yrs and above	0	2(36.8%)	12(63.2%)	14(100%)
Sub-Total	15(11.1%)	76(53.5%)	45(33.12%)	136(100%)
$\chi^2 = 6.61$; d.f. = 4; $P \leq 05$				

The study also indicated other factors which could influence employee involvement in management decision making. Tables 4 to 8 show the relationship between age, education and job position, and respondents'

level of involvement. As shown in Table 6 given earlier, there is a statistically significant relationship between respondents' educational attainment and their involvement in management decision making in the Flour mill, while such relationship was absent in the Sugar Mill. This finding demonstrates that the respondents' measures of involvement are related to their educational qualification in the Flour Mill. In this company, while those who possess low educational qualification exercise low measure of involvement, those with higher education demonstrated equivalent level of involvement in management decision making.

Table 8: Relationship between Respondents Job Position and Involvement in Management Decision Making

<i>Job Position</i>	<i>Involvement in Decision Making</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Often</i>	
<i>Flour Mills</i>				
Low cadre	8(21.6%)	20(54.1%)	9(24.3%)	37(100%)
Middle cadre	3(7.5%)	16(40%)	21(52.5%)	40(100%)
High cadre	1(16.7%)	3(50%)	2(33.3%)	6(100%)
Sub-Total	12(14.5%)	39(47%)	32(38.5%)	83(100%)
$\chi^2 = 7.5$; d.f. = 4; $P \leq 05$				
<i>Sugar Mills</i>				
Low cadre	8(16.0%)	30(60%)	12(24%)	50(100%)
Middle cadre	5(6.4%)	43(55%)	30(85.5%)	78(100%)
High cadre	0	1(33%)	2(66.7%)	3(100%)
Sub-Total	13(9.9%)	74(56.5%)	44(33.6%)	137(100%)
$\chi^2 = 6.54$; d.f. = 4; $P \leq 05$				

It is evidenced from these findings that an individual's educational qualification could influence the level of involvement he could exercise. This finding is not surprising since those with higher educational qualification tend to have more knowledge about management decision making, and are also more likely to seize the opportunity to be involved in the affairs of their organisations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study it could be concluded that workers in the study establishments are generally not much involved in the management decision making within their respective establishments. On the other hand, the workers generally demonstrated high interest in management decision making. The study therefore confirmed that while the workers demonstrated positive attitude towards involvement in decision making, the actual level of involvement they exercise is negative. However, we found that workers in the Sugar Mill demonstrated more involvement in management decision making more than their counterparts in the Flour Mill. This implies that workers in the service sector are more involved in management decision making than those in the manufacturing sector of the Indian economy.

Workers who are subjects of the study generally demonstrated the willingness to accept the responsibility of involvement in management decision making whenever such opportunity arose. However, many hold the view that management decision making is the preserve of the management. This implies that while the workers are willing to accept the responsibility of greater involvement in management decision making they are not ready to challenge the management in this regard. Another conclusion reached from the study is that respondent's level of income in management decision making has an implication on certain organisational factors. Specifically, the commitment level demonstrated by the workers is a factor of the extent of influence they exercise in management decision making.

Finally, from the respondents' assessment of management attitude towards workers participation, it could be concluded that the management in the Indian work enterprises are not favourably disposed towards granting workers a significant measure of involvement in management decision making. This finding would lead us to conclude that a lot needed to be done to change the current negative disposition of the Indian management towards workers involvement in management decision making. More importantly, the current obstacles against effective workers participation in India could be tackled through:

- Enlightenment programmes for workers on their rights to seize the opportunity of involvement in decision making;

- Provision of monetary and other incentives for workers to encourage them sustain the current interest in participation;
- Liberalising management structure so as to allow for greater workers involvement; and Training programmes for workers in management functions as a way of properly equipping them on their decision making role.

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