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**Part-Time Employment, Gender and Employee
Participation in the Workplace:
An Illawarra Reconnaissance**

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Abstract

The growth in non-standard forms of employment has major implications for the effectiveness of employee participation mechanisms in the workplace, whether direct or indirect (representative). This seems to be especially the case with representative forms, such as consultative committees, because they effectively assume permanent or long-term employment and are not as easily accessible to part-time employees. However, the literature on participation rarely addresses this major contextual aspect.

The issue is of further significance since the majority of part-time and casual employees are female. Consequently, to the extent that non-standard employees do not have the same access to participatory mechanisms in the workplace that their full-time permanent colleagues enjoy, then women also are disproportionately excluded from participation.

This paper begins to redress the insularity in the literature by analysing survey data from the *Illawarra Regional Industrial Relations Survey (IRWIRS)*. It tests the hypothesis that the growth of non-standard forms of employment diminishes the access to participation in the workplace enjoyed by part-time workers in comparison with their full-time colleagues.

Introduction

The international trend in the growth and incidence of non-standard employment, and its highly gendered nature, is well documented. Similarly, interest in employee involvement or participation by academics and practitioners has seen the emergence of a rapidly growing body of literature. Despite the continued interest in each of these areas, the literature is noticeably silent when it comes to where the two areas intersect, that is, what the implications are for employee participation of the growth of non-standard employment. Given that non-standard employment is characterised by unstable work hours, relative job insecurity and lack of promotion and training opportunities, it could be assumed that non-standard employees may experience different levels of employee participation than their full-time, or 'standard', counterparts. Juliet Webster's recent article (2001) on this issue in relation to direct participation in the EU stands alone.

The literature lacks one clear accepted definition of non-standard employment, although a common feature of definitions is the idea that non-standard employment is a deviation from the 'standard working model' which developed most fully in the period of high growth and full employment post World War 2 (Burgess and Campbell, 1998:8; Campbell and Mathews, 1998:477ff). Rasell and Appelbaum (1998:31) define non-standard work as 'the absence of a regular, full-time, employee-employer relationship' (similarly, Zetinoglu 1994:436). The standard working model is most commonly defined as one of eight-hour days, Monday to Friday and Allen, Brosnan and Walsh (1998:31) note that it is 'explicitly a male model'. Hall and Harley (2000:18) argue that it is problematic to 'lump' all forms of non-standard employment into one category as research has traditionally done. (also Campbell and Mathews 1998).

However, notwithstanding this great variety, all forms of non-standard employment exhibit a common characteristic: they occupy a position peripheral to the organisation. The notion of a dual labour market sees a 'core' workforce characterised by stable work hours, relative job security and promotions and training opportunities, while the 'peripheral' workforce is characterised by just the opposite (Zetinoglu and Muteshi, 2000: 134, 137; Zetinoglu (1994:436). As Markey and Monat state:

the peripheral categories of workers may raise special problems to be dealt with by worker representatives, including unfair competition, ... or not being represented at all. ... Subcontractors, freelance workers, homeworkers, guest workers under some circumstances, and those who shift between short-term engagements with a number of firms are all liable to slip through the representative net. As this peripheral workforce grows, therefore, there is a real possibility that the ... primary labour force will be further distinguished from it by the exclusive privilege of representative participation and consultation (Markey and Monat 1997: 431-32).

Non-standard employment has been increasing in most industrialised countries over recent decades, although with significant variation in the scope and types of non-standard employment. Australia shows markedly higher rates among developed economies and has the highest incidence of part-time employment in the OECD (Bamber and Lansbury 1998: 332-33; Whitehouse, Lafferty and Boreham, 1997:33). Between 1982 and 1997, standard employment (as a proportion of all employment) declined from 66 to 54 per cent. More importantly, non-standard employment categories made up over 80 per cent of net employment growth from 1982 to 1997. In that period the non-standard employment share increased from 33 per cent to 45 per cent of the total labour force (Burgess and Strachan,

1999:125). Burgess and Campbell (1998:10) conclude that 'standard employment forms are losing their claim to be regarded as the "norm"'.

Pocock (1998: 587) observes that in Australia, as in other industrialised countries, in the past few decades, most of the growth in new jobs has occurred not in full-time but in part-time employment. Casual employment occupies a significant position in this growth. In 1996, there were 1.84 million casual workers in Australia or around 26 per cent of all those employed. This is an increase from around 13 per cent of all those employed in 1982 (Pocock, 1998:586). The growth in casual employment is inextricably linked to the growth in part-time employment with two thirds of those who work casually also part-time. Part-time employment has increased from around 15 per cent to approximately one-quarter of all employment between 1982 and 1996 (ABS, various years, 6203.0). For operational reasons we have focused upon part-time employees in this study, since they overlap with casual employment, and since these are the largest categories of non-standard employment.

While the proportion of men working part-time has increased from 7 per cent of all those employed in 1988 to 12 per cent in 1998, most of the employment growth in this area has been among women. The proportion of women who work part-time reached 43 per cent in 1998 (Pocock, 1998: 585). Strachan and Burgess (1997: 322; also Junor, 1998: 79) note that between 1994 and 1995 56 per cent of the increase in female employment occurred in part-time jobs. Pocock (1998:587) argues that the breakdown of casual employees is also 'disproportionately feminised'. In 1996, 55 per cent of casuals were women and 32 per cent of women were casually employed. This contrasts with 21 per cent of men who were employed on a casual basis. Furthermore, whilst the use of part-time and casual employment is now evident in most industries and occupations, it is concentrated in the 'feminised' industries of accommodation, cafes and restaurants and retail trade and education (Pocock 1998:587; Morehead, et al, 1997:39).

This structural change to the workforce clearly has implications for employee participation programs. Employee participation may be defined as any workplace process which 'allows employees to exert some influence over their work and the conditions under which they work' (Strauss 1998:15; similarly Davis and Lansbury 1996:3). The rationale for employee participation has shifted from a humanistic emphasis on quality of working life in 1960s and 1970s to the organisational efficiency argument dominant since the 1980s. This may be linked to intensified competition in a globalised environment and the need to respond to market forces (Markey & Monat 1997: 6-8). This has particular importance in that there is an argument that the peripheral workforce is often the first targeted when market forces require the cutting of production costs (Zetinoglu and Muteshi: 137).

Employee participation can be divided into two main approaches, direct participation and indirect or representative participation. Direct participation involves the employee in job or task-oriented decision-making in the production process at the shop or office floor level. The most common forms of direct participation include problem-solving groups or quality circles, and decision-making work teams or semi-autonomous work groups. Both forms represent formalised means for management accessing of employee knowledge through small groups or teams of employees, but they differ in the extent of employee influence which they allow. Problem solving groups only make recommendations to management, and usually their focus is defined in a particular area or areas, such as safety, quality or productivity. Decision-making work teams generally enjoy greater discretion in organising their own work within

broad guidelines with minimal direct supervision. They require a reorganisation of technology and work flow, multiskilling and training (Strauss 1998: 21-26).

Indirect or representative forms of participation include joint consultative committees, works councils, and employee members of boards of directors or management. Consultative committees are the most common form of representative participation in Australia, where they received considerable encouragement from the award restructuring guidelines adopted by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in 1988. These committees vary considerably in terms of organisational level of operation, composition, jurisdiction and powers. They usually have an advisory role to management, although sometimes they may have powers of codetermination over certain issues. Consultative committees may have jurisdiction over a wide range of matters concerning employment relations in the workforce, short of bargaining over wages but including investment policy, or their scope is restricted often to particular issues, such as safety, work organisation, grievances etc. They may be standing committees, or they may be ad hoc task forces with a specific brief for a specific time period; for example to deal with technological change or organisational restructuring (Strauss 1998: 28-29; Markey and Monat 1997: 1-26).

All of these forms of employee participation raise important issues concerning part-time employees. Should part-time employees have specified representation on consultative committees, since some workplace issues may affect them differently to full-timers? Specified proportional representation seems to be rare, even with the statutory works councils of Europe. Without specified proportional representation we might expect full-timers to dominate representative positions because they will be available more often to perform these functions, and if the positions are elective, to become better known in order to become elected. Attendance at meetings may also be a problem. Most consultative committees meet during 'standard' working hours, but if part-timers become members of consultative committees the question arises as to whether their duties will be performed during their own time or during working hours. If they are paid for extra hours performing these duties, this represents a greater cost for employers, and the part-time employees may still encounter difficulties in participating if they have family commitments outside work, which is the case with many women part-timers. Similar constraints operate with teams, workgroups and quality circles, especially if they are composed of a mixture of full and part-time employees, since these also require meetings.

Effective participation has two major requirements which also may disadvantage part-timers. First, there is a general consensus in the participation literature that training is required for direct or representative participation. A number of surveys have demonstrated that on-the-job training for part-time and casual employees occurs less frequently than for full-timers (eg European Foundation 1997: 6). Secondly, effective communication between management and employees is required, preferably involving a two-way information flow. Some forms of communication are less likely to involve part-timers effectively. For example, meetings and social functions may be at times difficult for them to attend, the 'daily walk around' by management may not be at a time when all part-timers are present in the workplace, and staff bulletins placed in tea rooms may not be read as frequently by part-timers. We examine some of these possibilities below.

Methodology

The data for this study is derived from the *Illawarra Regional Industrial Relations Survey (IRWIRS)* conducted from September 1996 to February 1997, involving 192 regional

workplaces with 20 or more employees. *IRWIRS* replicated the *Australian Workplace Relations Survey (AWIRS)* 1995, the results of which were published in Morehead et al. 1997. Each survey consisted of a number of questionnaires administered to different respondents. We are concerned with two questionnaires: one administered to employee relations managers, and the second to a random sample of 1219 individual employees from the 192 workplaces (representing a response rate of 46 per cent).

The employee survey directly asked respondents for their employment status, with part-time defined as less than 35 hours per week. For the employee relations management survey workplaces were classified in one of two ways depending on the proportion of part-timers in their total workforce: over 25 per cent part-time, and up to 25 per cent. The average level of part-time employment in Australia is 25 per cent. Consequently, those workplaces with more than 25 per cent of part-timers may be classed as having a significant level of part-time employment, and those with less than 25 per cent as having a below average level of part-time employment.¹ Our hypothesis was that we should expect significant differences between the two classes of workplaces, and between part-time and full-time employees in the nature and extent of employee participation. Thirty per cent of our survey population of workplaces had more than 25 per cent part-timers in their total workforces.

The data concerning workplaces can only indicate the nature and existence of employee participation mechanisms in workplaces, but not the access of employees within them to these mechanisms. In workplaces with extensive employee participation structures it would still be possible for part-time and full-time employees to experience differential access to them. If there is any doubt concerning the strength of statistical significance for the data concerning workplaces, then the data from the survey of employees should offer some clarification, and in terms of access, is more conclusive for any differential between part and full-time employees.

Workplaces

In the first instance, employee managers were asked what communication methods they utilised in the workplace. Table 1 below shows the results for workplaces with and without significant levels of part-time employment, ie with over 25 per cent and up to 25 per cent part-timers respectively. Workplaces with over 25 per cent part-time employment were generally more likely to rely upon a daily walk around by managers, suggestion schemes and newsletters or bulletins, and less likely to rely upon staff surveys, electronic mail, formal meetings and social functions. To some extent this confirms disadvantage for part-time workers, in that where they are prominent in the workplace there is less access to the more extensive or active methods for their views to be heard by management, i.e. less employee voice. However, only in the case of electronic mail was this difference statistically significant. Examining formal meetings more closely, we found that there was virtually no difference between the two classes of workplace in terms of frequency.

¹ Distribution of the data over a larger number of categories (<25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, >75% part-time) was not satisfactory because of the small size of the sample.

Table 1. Communication Methods between Managers & Employees, by % workforce part-time

Method	0 - 25%	26+%
Daily walk around	86	90
Suggestion Schemes	25	31
Newsletters/Bulletins	48	56
Staff Surveys	26	21
Electronic Mail*	24	13
Formal Meetings	81	75
Social Functions	43	38
None of the above	1	2

Source: *IRWIRS* Employee Relations Management Questionnaire, QD.1. Multiple response allowed. Significant at 0.10 level, or 90%.

Table 2. Forms of Employee Involvement in the Workplace, by % workforce part-time

Form	0-25%	26+%
Autonomous workgroups	42	31
Quality circles	22	17
Joint consultative committees	38	35
Taskforces or ad hoc committees	32	27
None of the above	27	40

Source: *IRWIRS* Employee Relations Management Questionnaire, QD7. Multiple response allowed.

Table 2 demonstrates the incidence of different forms of employee participation in the Illawarra. All these forms of participation have become more frequent in Australian workplaces in recent years, particularly direct participation mechanisms. Team building is present in almost half, and joint task forces in over a third of all Australian workplaces with over 20 employees (Morehead et al. 1997: 188-89). The largest Illawarra response group had utilised none of the specified forms of participation, and those workplaces with a significant part-time workforce were much more likely to respond in this way. All forms of participation investigated occurred more frequently in workplaces where the part-time workforce was below 25 per cent. However, none of these variations were found to be statistically significant. When we investigated the impact of workgroups and quality circles, we also found that workplaces with a significant part-time workforce were less likely to report an impact upon workplace performance (79 to 88 per cent), and more likely to report impact upon ease of workplace change and product/service quality, than workplaces with an insignificant proportion of part-timers. However, again, these results lacked statistical significance.

The effectiveness of consultative committees as a representative form of participation depends in part upon the frequency of their meetings. Some significant variations did occur in this regard between workplaces with and without a significant part-time presence, although almost half in each category met at least once a month. In almost a quarter (24 per cent) of workplaces with 26 per cent or more of part-timers their committees met less than quarterly, compared with only 7 per cent of workplaces where part-timers made up less than 25 per cent of the workforce. Whilst 92 per cent of workplaces with low part-time employment had committees which met at least quarterly, only 77 per cent of workplaces with significant part-time employment met this frequently. This indicates that workplaces with significant proportions of part-time workers tended to have less active participatory mechanisms.

Table 3. Matters dealt with by consultative committee, by percentage of workforce part-time

Matter	0-25%	26+%
Financial Decisions	15	8
Introduction of new technology*	40	17
New product or service	24	25
Work Organisation**	60	38
Pay and Conditions	31	17
Discipline of Employees	26	13
Individual grievances	35	17
EEO and AA	26	17
OH&S	38	29
Other	11	8

Source: *IRWIRS* Employee Relations Management Questionnaire, QD22

* Significant at level of 0.05, or 95%.

** Significant at level of 0.10, or 90%.

Table 4. Impact of consultative committees on identified areas, % workforce part-time

AREA / IMPACT	0-25%	26+%
Workplace Performance		
- Improved	76	56
- No Change	24	44
Ease of Change**		
-Improved	83	61
-No Change	17	39
Product or Service Quality		
-Improved	61	50
-No Change	39	50
Communication- mgmt & emp'ees*		
-Improved	96	50
-No Change	4	50

Source: *IRWIRS* Employee Relations Management Questionnaire, QD.23

* Significant at 0.05 level, or 95%.

** Significant at 0.10 level, or 90%.

Table 3 also shows some differences in the matters dealt with by consultative committees. Significant numbers of part-timers in the workforce are associated with a lower range of issues which come under the jurisdiction of consultative committees. The weaker incidence of jurisdiction is statistically significant for two issues; introduction of new technology and work organisation, both of which are important areas for employee participation.

Table 4 reveals the impact of consultative committees on certain areas of the workplace. Across the board the perceived effectiveness of these committees was weaker in workplaces with a significant part-time workforce. For ease of workplace change and communication between management and employees this difference was statistically significant. These trends are a serious matter of concern for management.

Managers were asked the methods by which they informed employees about a number of issues. Their responses for future staffing and investment plans are shown in Table 5 below. Future staffing plans are of immediate interest for employees, and consequently a high proportion of managers reported information flow in some form. Nevertheless, part-timers were less likely to receive information than full-timers, and were more reliant on newsletters/bulletins as opposed to personal contacts with management than were full-time employees. Investment plans are a far more sensitive issue for managers, who were less likely than with staffing plans to pass on information generally, but part-timers were much less likely than full-timers to be informed on this issue. Neither set of differences in this Table, however, was statistically significant. The other issues investigated were workplace performance, product or service quality, customer or client satisfaction, and occupational

health and safety. None of these revealed any more than marginal differences in information flow to part and full-time employees, but in each case it was clearly in the interest of management to keep all employees well-informed.

Table 5. Methods by which non-managerial employees receive information about future staffing and investment plans, by percentage of workforce part-time

Method	Future staffing plans		Investment plans	
	0-25%	26+%	0-25%	26+%
Daily walk around	24	13	12	3
Newsletter/Bulletin	15	25	8	8
Electronic mail	1	-	-	-
Regular formal meetings–supervisors/employees	37	31	17	6
Regular meetings - senior mgr /employees	5	4	18	14
Work groups	-	2	-	-
Quality circles	-	2	-	-
Joint consultative committees	9	4	7	5
Information unavailable	9	19	38	64
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: *IRWIRS* Employee Relations Management Questionnaire, QD.24.

The survey also enquired regarding special measures to ensure that information is received by part-time or shift workers, who may experience difficulty in accessing some forms of information sharing. In each case a large majority of managers with significant proportions of part-timers in their workforce reported that special measures were taken, as shown in Table 6 below, and these results were statistically significant at a 90 per cent confidence level. However, when managers were probed for details regarding the special measures adopted, the results were less optimistic, as demonstrated in Table 7. Here we can see that workplaces with a significant part-time presence were more likely to rely on informal methods of communication than others, a method of information sharing which is inherently variable and unreliable. Workplaces with a significant proportion of part-timers were also slightly more likely to rely on the employees themselves passing on information, and ironically, slightly less likely than those with a more full-time workforce to attempt to hold meetings at times suitable for all.

Table 6. Whether special measures are taken to ensure that information is received by part-time and shift workers, by percentage of the workforce part-time

Response	Part-time workers		Shift workers	
	0-25%	26+%	0-25%	26%+
Yes	36	79	41	60
No	16	17	6	4
N/A	48	4	52	35
Total	100	100	99*	99*

Source: *IRWIRS* Employee Relations Management Questionnaire, Q25. Significant to 0.10 level, or 90%. *Rounding of figures has produced a result less than 100 per cent.

Table 7. Measures taken, by percentage of workforce part-time

Measures	0-25%	26+%
Info given directly to employee	56	55
Meeting timed so all can attend	43	38
Info displayed on notice boards	57	63
Informal communication*	29	48
Employees help each other	25	30
Interpreters/translators	7	10
Other	32	28

Source: *IRWIRS* Employee Relations Management Questionnaire, QD27.* Significant at 0.10 level, or 90%.

Employees

The employee survey included a question on training and two sets of questions which related to the degree of participation of employees in the workplace. The first set involved participation in the process of workplace change, and the second was concerned with the level of influence employees felt that they had in their job.

In the Illawarra in 1995/6 58 per cent of casual employees received training compared with 63 per cent of full-time, a lower differential than usual (cf. 66 to 57 per cent for Australia in 1995). In those industry sectors where part-time and casual work are most frequent – Hospitality, Retail, and Recreation and Personal Services – the least amount of training is offered by employers (Markey et al. 1998: 9; Morehead et al. 1997: 112-13).

A majority of Illawarra employees experienced changes in work practices in the year prior to the survey, but full-time employees were significantly more likely to do so than part-timers:

- 52 per cent of full-timers saw changes in the way the workplace was run compared with 45 per cent of part-timers;
- 45 per cent of full-timers experienced changes in the way they did their job compared with 32 per cent of part-timers; and
- 42 per cent of full-timers saw changes in the type of work they did compared with 29 per cent of part-timers (Markey et al. 1998: 24).

Of those employees who had experienced any of these changes, 91 per cent of males were full-time, 61 per cent of females were full-time, and 39 per cent of females were part-time. Table 8 shows whether they considered that they were consulted by employers about the changes. Part-time employees were significantly less likely to report being consulted, for both males and females, although for males the difference was not statistically significant because of the small numbers involved.

Table 8. Whether employees consulted re workplace change, by full-time & part-time status & gender

Response	All employees*		Male employees		Female Employees*	
	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%
Yes	58	49	58	48	58	49
No	32	35	32	36	32	35
Not sure	3	2	3	3	3	2
No Change	8	14	8	14	7	14
Total	100	100				

Source: *IRWIRS* employee survey, Q24

* Significant at 0.05 level, or 95%.

Table 9. How employees were consulted re workplace change, by full-time & part-time status & gender

Consultation Method	All employees		Male employees		Female Employees	
	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%
Supervisors Discussed	46*	58	44**	60**	48	57
Higher Managers Discussed	55*	44	56	53	53**	42**
Other workers told	24	26	21	27	28	26
Union discussed	17*	8	20	10	13	8
Workplace notice/newsletter	22*	33	22	33	24**	34**
Meetings	59*	47	56	53	63*	45*
Other	3	3	3	3	4	3

Source: *IRWIRS* employee survey, Q25. * Significant at 0.05 level, or 95%. ** Significant at 0.10 level, at 90%

Table 10. Reasons employees weren't given fair chance for say re workplace change, by full-time and part-time status and gender

Reason	All employees		Male employees		Female employees	
	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%
Decisions made by managers	64	54	63*	36*	65	61
Decisions made outside the workplace	47	46	46	39	47	49
Discussion between management and unions	14*	6*	15	13	13*	4*
Part-time/casual – no chance for involvement	1	36	2	36	1	36
Couldn't attend meetings	4*	13*	5*	13*	3*	13*
Managers don't consult	42	33	42	32	41	34
Other	8	6	9	13	6	4

Source: *IRWIRS* employee survey, Q27.

* Significant at 0.05 level, or 95%.

Table 9 summarises how employees were consulted regarding workplace change. Part-time employees were much more likely to rely on supervisors and newsletters or bulletins than were full-timers, but much less likely to be consulted by senior managers, unions or through meetings. These differences were all statistically significant and broadly affected males and females similarly, depending on their employment status.

Almost equal proportions of full-time (54 per cent) and part-time employees (50 per cent) considered that they had been given a fair chance to have a say about the workplace change affecting them, although 59 per cent of male part-timers considered that they had not been given adequate say. In any case, it represents a significant issue for management that almost half the workforce on average considered that they did not have a chance for a say in workplace change. Table 10 analyses the reasons why employees considered this was the case. The main reasons offered by all employees related to a lack of consultation by management. However, over a third of part-timers offered their actual employment status as a reason, and a significant number indicated that they could not attend meetings. The results were similar for males and females regardless of employment status.

The level of influence that employees have on their jobs, or their input into them, can be in a number of different spheres. Tables 11-12 below record employees' response to this issue for the type of work done and how the work is done. Generally, part-timers were less likely to consider that their influence was high, and more likely to rate their influence as 'some', 'a little' or none. The male/female response was essentially determined by their employment status, and most of these results were statistically significant. A similar pattern emerged for the issue of start and finish times at work, as well as for the way in which the workplace is run, with the exception in the latter case that male part-timers were more likely to consider that they had a little influence and less likely to consider that they had none.

Table 11. Level of influence on/input to type of work done, by full-time & part-time status & gender

Level	All employees*		Male employees**		Female Employees*	
	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%
A lot	26	18	27	23	26	16
Some	33	33	32	28	32	35
A little	18	22	17	31	22	19
None	20	21	22	15	18	23
N/A	3	6	3	3	3	7
Total	100	100	101	100	101	100

Source: *IRWIRS* employee survey, Q29A.

* Significant at 0.05 level, or 95%.

** Significant at 0.10 level, or 90%

Table 12. Level of influence on/input into how work is done, by full-time & part-time status & gender

Level	All employees*		Male employees		Female Employees*	
	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%
A lot	46	39	45	37	49	40
Some	32	26	33	28	30	26
A little	14	20	14	22	14	20
None	6	10	7	8	5	10
N/A	2	4	2	5	3	4
Total	100	99	101	100	101	100

Source: *IRWIRS* employee survey, Q29B.

* Significant at 0.05 level, or 95%.

Table 13. Level of influence on/input to decisions affecting employees, by full-time & part-time status & gender

Level	All employees		Male employees**		Female Employees	
	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%	F-T%	P-T%
A lot	13	11	13	10	14	12
Some	30	27	30	30	29	26
A little	30	34	28	39	34	33
None	25	24	26	15	22	26
N/A	2	4	2	7	3	3
Total	100	100	99	101	102	100

Source: *IRWIRS* employee survey, Q29E.

** Significant at 0.10 level, or 90%.

Table 13 shows a different response to the previous ones, in that there was little difference between full and part-timers. Both are far less likely than with other issues to feel significantly empowered ('a lot' of influence). Male and female responses also followed similar patterns except that male part-timers were significantly less likely to feel that they had no influence and more likely to consider that they had 'a little' than either male full-timers or females as a whole. However, although this was statistically significant it did not indicate a significantly higher level of empowerment.

Conclusions

On balance our original hypothesis was confirmed by the Illawarra survey results for workplaces and employees. These results offer strong evidence that part-time employees do

not share the same opportunities for employee participation that are enjoyed by full-time employees. To the extent that part-time employment is predominantly a female form of labour market activity, therefore, women do not enjoy the same degree of opportunities for employee participation that men do.

Workplaces with a significant degree of part-time employment (over 26 per cent of their total workforce) demonstrated a fairly consistent pattern of weak participation in comparison with workplaces with less significant proportions of part-time employees. In terms of communication, which is an essential pre-requisite for effective employee participation, these workplaces were characterised by a lower likelihood of employees being informed about issues of concern to them, a lower incidence of more extensive and active forms of communication, and weaker substantive measures to overcome any difficulties which part-timers may experience participating in meetings and other activities. Workplaces with significant part-time workforces were less likely to have instigated any form of employee participation, and where they were in place, these mechanisms had weaker impacts in critical areas of workplace performance concerning the interests of both management and employees. In the case of consultative committees, the evidence suggests that they met less frequently and covered a lower range of issues in workplaces where part-timers are a significant part of the workforce than in those where they are not. Not all of these results were statistically significant, but they were sufficient to indicate a definite pattern. The consistency of this pattern also strengthens its overall impact.

The employee data confirmed this differential. It indicated that casual/part-time employees were less likely than others to receive on-the-job-training, which is an essential ingredient of effective participation. Part-time employees also were significantly less likely than full-timers to consider that they had been consulted about major issues relating to workplace change and the nature of their work, that a significant proportion of part-timers experienced difficulty in attending meetings, and that they relied more on consultation of a passive or top down variety (newsletters/bulletins and supervisors) rather than enjoying equal access to senior managers, unions and meetings. Part-time employees also exhibited a lower tendency to consider that they had influence in important areas of workplace and job organisation. In this sense they manifested a lower level of the sense of empowerment in the workplace.

It is possible that this pattern of survey results is partially influenced by the distinctive industry structures and culture of the Illawarra. This region is characterised by a higher level of secondary industry activity than the national average, as well as higher levels of gendered occupational segregation. Industry analysis suggests little difference between secondary and tertiary sectors, however, and male/female participation patterns follow employment status. The issue seems important enough, and the evidence sufficient, to warrant more extensive national research.

The issue is critical for three reasons. First, as a matter of equity in the workplace it is undesirable that part-time employees should have less access to the industrial citizenship and empowerment offered by effective employee participation. Secondly, since the part-time workforce is predominantly female, the patterns discovered here have major implications for effective implementation of gender equity in the workplace. And finally, if a growing proportion of the workforce is excluded from full access to employee participation mechanisms in the workplace, this represents a significant failure for best practice strategic HRM which claims that employee involvement is a major ingredient for the optimising of workplace efficiency.

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