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**Workforce Participation in Occupational Health
and Safety Management in Non-unionised
Workplaces**

**Report Number
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

The Health and Safety Laboratory (HSL) was commissioned to conduct research on workforce participation in occupational health and safety management in non-unionised workplaces. The aim of this research was to provide an initial insight, by means of a targeted case study approach, into issues surrounding workforce participation (WP) in non-unionised workplaces in Great Britain.

This aim has been addressed by undertaking a series of comparative case studies at eight workplaces. Specific objectives were to:

1. Obtain feedback on workforce participation from a sample of managers, health and safety specialists, health and safety representatives and workers regarding:
 - the process of participation;
 - their insight into ‘what works’ (and what doesn’t);
 - the levels of support and commitment for WP;
 - the levels of interest and support – e.g. from workers and managers; and,
 - barriers to WP.
2. Derive an insight into how WP approaches are being used in non-unionised workplaces.
3. Establish the extent to which workers participate in occupational health and safety (OHS) management.
4. Establish the prerequisites for effective involvement and consultation.
5. Conduct an appraisal of, and comment upon, the WP processes used within these workplaces.

MAIN FINDINGS

1. When comparing the cases, the level of systematisation in the promotion of WP was varied. However, when compared with the findings of other UK research in this area, most of these companies had structured approaches to consultation and the levels of participation were satisfactory, suggesting therefore that the cases may not be representative of many non-unionised workplaces.
2. All organisations had meetings where health and safety was reported to be a standard agenda item. Employee participation in meetings where OHS was the main topic of discussion, and management were in attendance, was generally restricted to employee representatives (reps) or line managers; though in some cases a selection of workers were involved. In two case studies, there was no formal workplace meeting between management and workers that was dedicated to the discussion of health and safety issues.
3. As one might expect, sites with a dedicated health and safety officer were able to demonstrate greater levels of commitment to health and safety; for example, more time

and resources were committed to the management of OHS. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the presence of a health and safety officer or advisor, whose job it is to provide expert technical input, provide advice and support, organise meetings and initiate discussions, can raise the levels of awareness across the workplace, but also raise the likelihood of employee involvement.

4. Within the larger organisations, the primary motivation for WP came from corporate level policies and procedures. Other major motivating forces behind WP were management representatives and / or safety officers. It was often the case that they would organise meetings, encourage participation and provide time and resources for WP. Despite reasonable levels of WP reported at most sites, there was no evidence that workers requested or initiated new participatory or consultative arrangements (e.g. work teams, safety circles and safety committees). This could be a characteristic of contemporary non-unionised workplaces. In most cases managers, health and safety officers, employee reps and workers were not aware of the relevant health and safety regulations. Of those that demonstrated some level of awareness, they did not have a detailed level of insight into the regulations, but recognised that there was a duty on the employer to consult. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the impact of health and safety legislation was negligible upon the nature or extent of participatory processes.
5. For the most part, methods of participation and consultation were conventional approaches: safety committees and team meetings / briefings were widely used. Only in one case were there significant efforts to introduce new methods and processes. Innovative examples from across the cases included the introduction of hazard identification reporting schemes, incentive schemes, behavioural safety initiatives, and near-miss mapping plans.
6. In most cases, efforts were made to communicate widely on OHS management issues; for example, through team briefings, toolbox talks and safety notices.
7. The degree to which organisations sought feedback from workers on any proposed changes in OHS arrangements was variable. Workers involved in the early stages of planning and consultation, typically members of a safety or planning committee, would be directly involved or informed. The wider workforce, in most instances, would rarely influence decisions and practical outcomes, with little advance information being given to employees about actions to be taken.
8. Predominantly informal relations and consultation were characteristic of these workplaces. Direct, informal communication, outside of set piece arrangements, between workers, managers, and their health and safety officers was widely reported as a favoured form of consultation. Although the utility of formal meetings was recognised, in most cases, a majority of participants considered that informal consultation represented an important means for raising concerns and discussing solutions.
9. Managers or safety officers from all companies claimed that their organisation had provided some form of health and safety training for employees. Training, for the most part, took place in-house, often in the form of induction training for new employees. Toolbox talks for manual workers were employed across the case studies, with one exception. Most of the companies recognised that the training of representatives of employee safety has a beneficial impact upon their effectiveness, and provided some level of training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need for further detailed research into employee involvement in the management of OHS in non-unionised workplaces. Although these case studies provide valuable insights, subsequent studies should aim to explore the issues in greater depth.
2. Research from the current study is based on the views of only a small number of respondents. There is a need to validate these findings on a larger sample of companies to establish the extent to which they are generalisable to other contexts.
3. Subsequent research should generate insight into the safety culture (risk attitudes, norms and behaviour) at the company level and its relation to levels of workforce involvement in the management of OHS.
4. The range of evidence contained within this report, along with findings from any subsequent studies, should form the basis of guidance material for organisations. A number of the barriers identified within this research require consideration, and should be addressed within any guidance materials.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The benefits that can be derived through Workforce Participation (WP) and the management of occupational health and safety (OHS) have been a topic of investigation and debate for several decades. Much of the recent interest in Great Britain stems from the recommendations for changes to the regulation of health and safety that were outlined in the Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Safety and Health at Work (otherwise known as the Robens report, Robens 1972). A fundamental recommendation of the report was to shift the emphasis away from government imposed control towards self-regulation, requiring that employers and their employees should collaborate to bring about safer worker environments. Subsequently, regulations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (HSWA (1974)) imposed obligations upon employers to consult with employees or their representatives on matters relating to their health and safety at work.

The HSWA (1974) lays down general principles on consultation and representation of employees. Changes to the health and safety regulations, between 1977 and 1996, established a legal framework which imposes a duty on employers to provide information, enable consultation, and to provide assistance for representatives of their employees. The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees (SRSC) Regulations 1977 came into force in October 1978. They apply where a recognised Trade Union chooses to appoint safety representatives. The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 (HSCCE regulations) were introduced to cover other situations, requiring that employers consult with employees not covered by representatives appointed in accordance with the SRSC regulations. The HSE guidance document 'Consulting employees on health and safety: a guide to the law' (HSE 2002) explains how, by law, employers must consult with employees on health and safety matters, and refers to additional relevant guidance.

Despite the dominance of non-unionised organisations there has not been a great deal of research into WP in non-unionised firms; even less into the specific issue of concern in this report - the wider consultative arrangements for OHS. Much of the available research literature on WP in OHS management is almost exclusively focused on unionised workplaces (see Shearn 2004); there being relatively less attention paid to WP in SMEs and non-unionised workplaces. Of notable importance, there is evidence to indicate that union presence enhances the willingness of workers to raise OHS issues (see Bohle & Quinlan 2000, 456-57). As non-unionism becomes increasingly widespread in British industry, more attention needs to be paid to non-unionised firms as a key unit of industrial analysis. Terry (1999) suggests that the majority of systems for workforce representation and consultation present in unionised firms can be found in non-unionised workplaces, as can the associated benefits of these systems (e.g. efficient workforce consultation). The current research is timely as it can address a shortfall in existing case study work, and provide contextualised insights into WP in OHS within non-unionised workplaces.

All of the companies involved in this study were organised to enhance some level of constructive consideration about risk and safety, and demonstrated positive attitudes to accident reduction. That said, there was a notable degree of variation between the companies, in terms of the breadth and scope of their safety initiatives.

1.2 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research was to provide an initial insight, by means of a targeted case study approach, into issues surrounding WP in non-unionised workplaces in the Great Britain.

This aim has been addressed by undertaking a series of comparative case studies at eight workplaces. Specific objectives were to:

6. Obtain feedback on workforce participation from a sample of managers, health and safety specialists, health and safety representatives and workers regarding:
 - the process of participation;
 - their insight into ‘what works’ (and what doesn’t);
 - the levels of support and commitment for WP;
 - the levels of interest and support – e.g. from workers and managers; and,
 - barriers to WP.
7. Derive an insight into how WP approaches are being used in non-unionised workplaces.
8. Establish the extent to which workers participate in occupational health and safety (OHS) management.
9. Establish the prerequisites for effective involvement and consultation.
10. Conduct an appraisal of, and comment upon, the WP processes used within these workplaces.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Interviews were conducted in order to establish the nature and breadth of views on the issues of interest. The case studies and participants in this study were selected on an opportunity basis. While there is no obvious reason for the views they expressed to be unrepresentative, it must be borne in mind that the sample size was by necessity small, and recruited on a voluntary basis. This approach was predicated by the prevailing resource constraints combined with the need for depth of investigation in a study of this type. In essence the study reported on here sought to understand salient issues rather than quantify the strength of identified issues, per se.

Participating organisations were identified via a number of intermediary organisations including trade associations. The HSL researcher requested their assistance in identifying organisations across a range of sectors, preferably those with high hazard work environments. Initial permission for access to each workplace was secured by telephone contact with the relevant health and safety specialists. Upon gaining access to the companies, the main target respondent group was experienced workers (including safety reps) and management representatives. In most cases the health and safety specialist selected the participants to represent the company and participate in the interview. The majority of the interviewees had at least two years work experience at the worksites that were the subject of this study. As a result, they were regarded as being familiar with the views of colleagues and the work experiences of other staff.

Insight into the nature and extent of WP was gathered through a series of interviews with workers (N=28), health and safety officers (N=10) and managers (N = 12) at a sample of companies (N = 8) from a range of industrial sectors. The main business activities of the case study companies included manufacturing (cases 1, 2 and 3), distribution (case 4), construction (case 5 and 6), and the supply of power generation equipment (case 7) and the manufacture of chemicals (case 8). Table 1 provides a summary of participants (by occupation) for each case study.

Table 1: Number of participants (by occupation) for each case study

	<i>Case #</i>							
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>
Workers and Health & Safety Representatives	5	4	2	4	3	3	4	3
Health and Safety Specialists	-	1	-	2	2	1	2	2
Management Representatives	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	1

2.1 INTERVIEWS WITH WORKERS, REPRESENTATIVES AND MANAGERS

2.1.1 The Interviews

A semi-structured interview approach was adopted as the primary method of data gathering (see Appendix 1). Eliciting data in a semi-structured format has the advantage of encouraging a freely associative interaction, allowing respondents to emphasise and articulate the issues they consider important, while at the same time providing a degree of commonality to the issues addressed, such that comparisons and contrasts can be drawn between respondents. This type of approach to data elicitation has been widely demonstrated as offering a potentially rich and valuable insight into individuals' experiences and their opinions. It allows the researcher to explore issues about which little is already known, whilst maintaining a desirable level of consistency between interview discussions, thereby allowing comparability between responses.

Semi-structured interviews, while based on predefined questions, have the advantage of maintaining flexibility for exploring issues which spontaneously arise during the course of the interview process.

The motivation for adopting this approach arose from the current deficit of knowledge about the WP within non-unionised contexts. Indeed, there has been little previous research conducted to address WP outside of unionised workplaces. Under such circumstances research remains fundamentally exploratory and should, in the first instance, aim to capture new insights about the phenomena in question, before quantification of findings by more formal means.

Interviews at all workplaces were conducted with (shop floor) operatives, office staff, line managers, safety representatives¹, health and safety specialists and management representatives. Face to face interviews were of between 20 to 120 minutes duration. The interviews aimed to gain a broad insight into WP. Emphasis was placed upon exploring:

- the nature of work tasks and the type of health, safety and risk issues within the workplace;
- the motivation behind WP initiatives;
- the availability of health and safety advice and training for workers;
- the focus of involvement of workers;
- the nature and extent of participation or consultation activities; and,
- any barriers to WP.

The interviews were conducted following the appropriate research conventions:

- Background information on the research and an outline of the interview were provided for participants.
- The questions were arranged into relevant sections. Initial broad based questions were followed by more specific, directed, questions or probes.

2.1.2 Additional Information

A walk around the company site was conducted in each organisation. This provided an opportunity to observe working practices and generally gather insight into the main activities and working conditions. Interviews were followed up with further telephone contacts, repeat interviews and requests for various documentation on health and safety policies, procedures and practices. Direct insights into the nature of communication were provided in most cases; this was facilitated by attending safety committee meetings, toolbox talks or other forums.

2.1.2.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

The transcript data collected during interviews with case study staff were coded and categorised by means of a thematic analysis. The analysis followed conventions outlined by the methodology commonly conceptualised as ‘grounded theory’ (Strauss & Corbin 1998). This approach provided a means of identifying a set of core issues while providing a framework against which the feedback from individuals and groups could be compared and contrasted.

¹ Throughout the discussion of the case studies reference is made to safety representatives (or safety reps). In all cases, lack of interested personnel meant that management had to encourage or persuade individuals to take on the role of a safety rep. Therefore, the safety representatives were employee representative volunteers appointed by management with the agreement of the workforce or a work team. In none of the cases did the workforce democratically elect the employee representatives. Nonetheless, the safety reps were considered by all interviewees to be ‘representatives of employee safety’ and acted as such during consultations with management.

Thus, the analysis performed here has attempted to identify, develop, and discuss the relationship between identified concepts and issues. Essentially, the data were organised into discrete categories according to their properties and dimensions, using description to elucidate those categories. The findings have been organised in terms of an understanding of prerequisites of WP strategies (e.g. Shearn 2004). Where appropriate, we have presented aspects of these strategies in relation to the phenomenon under investigation.

3 RESULTS

This study focuses on the WP processes at a sample of workplaces. Findings should be treated with a degree of caution as the sample represents a very small proportion of non-unionised workplaces representing a narrow selection of industrial sectors in the UK. With the exception of one case study, each workplace visited was one amongst several sites owned by a corporate body. Given that the culture of employee involvement and the industrial relations can vary between workplaces within a wider organisational entity, it was considered that drawing any assumptions about company activities at other workplaces would be merely speculative. The focus for this research was the site that was visited during the research process.

In all cases, the companies visited demonstrated an understanding of workers' risk exposure. There were, however, varying degrees of pro-activity in terms of employee involvement, and companies employed different approaches to securing and supporting the participation of workers and their representatives. The subsequent discussion attempts to draw out any discrepancies between levels of participation and the range of WP initiatives. Interviewees identified a number of contextual factors that can have an influence upon the levels of participation, e.g. company restructuring, management commitment and employee knowledge and understanding. By exploring the experiences of these organisations, the research identifies common themes in relation to what has contributed in undertaking WP in OHS management.

Findings are presented for each individual case study, followed by a discussion of WP, which provides insight into the approaches adopted across the cases. The discussion describes the process of WP and its relationship to OHS management. Furthermore, the discussion provides an understanding of the motivations for attaining greater levels of WP, and a comprehensive understanding of the prerequisites and utility of WP interventions.

Of the companies that provided accident data, ongoing improvements were reported in accident rates, and these improvements were considered to be an outcome of developments in OHS management and WP. It should be noted that although these findings are important, an assessment of the effectiveness of WP and the impact upon health and safety performance was not an objective of the current study. Throughout the research literature there exists a range of evidence that WP can bring about improvements in safety performance, and psychosocial and organisational development (see Biggins et al 1991; Reilly et al 1995; Walters 1996). However, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether this outcome relates to WP or other contending factors. With respect to measures of effectiveness, there are many factors that can influence safety performance. Readers should therefore recognise the limitations of inferring causal relationships from the research findings (see Hillage et al 2000; Shearn 2004; Walters et al 2005). For many commentators, a major motivation for the introduction of WP initiatives is the moral belief that workers ought to have the opportunity to become involved in collective decision-making at work. This position is broadly based upon shared values regarding the rights of workers in democratic societies (TUC / CBI 2001).

3.1 THE CASES – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following summaries of findings from each workplace provide background information for a subsequent discussion of WP in non-unionised workplaces. The findings identify levels of communication and participation, the main motivations behind WP, and the forms of consultation. The flow of information can take a range of forms (e.g. direct / indirect, informal / formal) that provide varying levels of access to decision making.

3.1.1 Case 1: Manufacturing – car components

1. Background:

No. of employees at worksite visited: 133.
The company has three other worksites across Europe.

This workplace has changed ownership on two occasions over recent years. Changes in company ownership have not led to new arrangements in the management of health and safety. However, a new management team is reported to have brought about a progressive management style along with improvements in industrial relations. The company operates in a highly competitive market, with the number of customers having declined in recent years.

2. Cross company communication:

With respect to health and safety, the workers' main points of contact are the team leader and the designated safety reps. A programme of training for a safety officer is underway. This key individual will be the main point of contact and source of guidance on workplace health and safety issues. Given the relatively small workforce, senior management do hold regular communication with employees on all work related issues. Both management and employees reported that cross company communication has improved over the recent period; for example, it was mentioned that employees have become less guarded when communicating near miss accidents. It was acknowledged that the company would benefit from further improvements.

3. Motivation behind WP:

The impetus to improve health and safety performance and communication has originated, for the most part, from the management team. The management team are conscious that poor industrial relations can result in poor communication with potential to reduce employee commitment to, amongst other things, health and safety performance. Consultation on all production matters is recognised as enabling a fuller debate, which can have the effect of ensuring that more of the available options and assumptions are questioned and tested. The introduction of a broad programme of safety training across the workforce and more formal opportunities for consultation are considered to have led to a better level of employee commitment and participation. The interviewees recognised the importance of removing communication barriers and facilitating a constructive dialogue as a foundation upon which to build improved health and safety performance. Health and safety training courses are reported to have raised the levels of understanding and commitment across the workforce.

4. Promotion of Participation:

- The company operates a monthly health, safety and environment committee. The committee has responsibility for overseeing all health and safety matters. It comprises a combination of management representatives, safety reps and operatives.
- Safety talks have been recently introduced to raise levels of awareness and encourage a wider level of debate and discussion.
- Safety notice boards are regularly updated with safety information and minutes from meetings.
- Health and safety training is provided internally and externally by professional bodies.

5. Levels of Participation:

At the management level, participation included attendance at safety committee meetings, safety talks and general health and safety management duties (e.g. devising risk control measures). The human resource manager takes close control of health and safety matters, although many of the recommendations arising from safety committee meetings would be delegated for action to subordinates. There was a reluctant acceptance by managers that not all employees desire a participatory role, and some are not committed to organisational and OHS goals. Nevertheless, measures are in place to improve this situation (e.g. by raising awareness through safety talks). Safety reps and team leaders are the employees with primary responsibility for the management of day-to-day health and safety matters. It was reported, however, that levels of commitment and participation varied between safety reps, and that in some cases they did not always demonstrate a willingness to hold that role. Similarly, levels of voluntary participation amongst employees were reported to be low, although individuals do raise important issues as they become apparent.

6. Main Barriers to WP:

For many of the operatives, work tasks can be highly repetitive and mundane. It was reported that this, can lead to low levels of commitment to any work related issues beyond the primary job responsibilities. Health and safety management was not always viewed as the primary objective by the workforce. Despite acknowledged improvements in workforce participation and improvements in the management of health and safety, it was recognised that levels of commitment were not widespread across the workforce. Where safety reps would prefer to take a more active role, it was considered that time constraints and production responsibilities acted as barrier, allowing them to perform only rudimentary consultative functions.

3.1.2 Case 2: Manufacturing – steel grids

1. Background:

No. of employees at worksite visited: 30.

The company has two other plants in Europe. The parent company owns manufacturing plants in Asia, Europe and North America.

This manufacturing business is owned by an American company which places a strong emphasis upon team performance and safety. The manufacturing facility at this site has been in operation for over seven years. During this period there has been significant improvements in safety performance. The sole customers for this plant are businesses owned by the parent company.

2. Cross company communication:

At this workplace there is a very high level of communication activity on health and safety matters. For example, throughout the worksite there are highly visible safety messages and signs reminding workers of the importance of risk management. Through a number of regular meetings, employees are encouraged to discuss safety measures. In addition to more informal types of communication, before the commencement of each shift, short safety meetings provide an opportunity for workers to discuss health and safety issues in the presence of a safety rep or line manager. The management take a proactive stance on health, safety and risk issues, and provide guidance, feedback and training to raise employees' awareness and understanding of risk control. Employee involvement is central to the management philosophy. There exists open communication on all work related issues, including company profits, profit sharing and safety. In addition to a traditional safety committee, the health and safety manager attends regular

shift meetings and maintains a high level of rapport with workers. The plant holds an annual safety week which includes social events intended to raise the profile of safety. Beyond the worksite, corporate safety communication is highly regarded, with bi-weekly tele-conferences implemented for management to share health and safety information and encourage a positive safety culture across the company.

3. Motivation behind WP:

Unquestionably, the corporate influence has provided a positive stimulus for health and safety management and workforce participation. The appointment of a corporate health and safety manager in 1999 has further contributed to both the global and local level commitment. The parent company enthusiastically promotes workforce participation, and has a history and culture of providing a supportive framework for works councils. The presence of a qualified health and safety officer at this relatively small worksite ensures that health and safety is high on the agenda. The management actively encourages involvement and participation at all levels and a statement to this effect is present within the company health and safety policy.

4. Promotion of Participation:

- A monthly health and safety committee meeting. The meeting includes a mixture of management representatives, safety reps and line managers.
- Monthly shift safety meeting (for each of three shifts) attended by the health and safety officer.
- A brief safety talk (toolbox talk), attended by shift workers, is held at the commencement of each shift.
- There is a wide level of employee involvement in risk assessments.
- Employees that complete near miss accident reports are entered into a quarterly 'prize draw'.
- Where uncommon work activities are undertaken, a risk assessment and plan of action will be outlined.
- Safety reps conduct weekly safety audits; these include checks of safety equipment, PPE provisions, and housekeeping.
- A safety suggestion sheet scheme is in place to promote the involvement of all employees. Those that submit a report through the card system are entered into a quarterly 'prize draw'.
- A wide range of internal and external training is available. Induction training is provided for all new employees and contract / temporary workers. Safety committee training is provided. Coaching is available to safety reps.
- Safety performance information is communicated using notice boards, and large LED displays, etc.
- Plans of the workplace are provided on notice boards highlighting locations of recent near miss accidents.

5. Levels of Participation:

Interviewees indicated that the management provide a supportive work environment and encourage employee involvement and participation. The health and safety officer has regular direct involvement with workers and provides a high level of encouragement and support. This includes building support from workers for health and safety initiatives. Time allocation was considered to be adequate for the range of WP duties expected of workers. All appointed safety reps are volunteers that have demonstrated an interest in health and safety. The level of employee involvement in near miss reporting, risk assessment and risk control suggests that there is a positive safety culture across the company. For example, employees frequently provide suggestions for improvements in

risk control, many resulting in changes in the way that production is organised, with a number of employee suggestions being adopted at the corporate level.

6. Main Barriers to WP:

No significant barriers to effective WP were reported.

3.1.3 Case 3: Manufacturing – injection moulding

1. Background:

No. of employees at worksite visited: 66.

This worksite is the main place of work for all company employees.

This manufacturing business has been in operation for 22 years at this site. The main customers for this plant are UK companies, although the business is beginning to expand to Europe and beyond. At its peak the number of employees rose to 77.

2. Cross company communication:

The company does not appoint safety reps and there are no formal procedures for representative consultation. The workers' main point of contact on health and safety matters is their supervisor. For the most part, consultation is held on an informal, ad hoc basis. The level of employee consultation is considered to be satisfactory, and there is no mandate for a greater level of employee involvement. In the past, work councils, with health and safety as an agenda item, were organised on a regular basis, although lack of employee interest and support led to the abandonment of these forums. Recent involvement with the Investors in People Standard² has encouraged the introduction of team meetings that are attended by supervisors and employees. These meetings provide an opportunity for employees to discuss any work related issue with their supervisor. Workers are not formally required to report on health and safety matters other than for the recording of accidents and ill-health in an accident book. The Quality Manager undertakes a monthly site inspection. This walk around provides an opportunity for workers to voluntarily hold direct consultation with a management representative. It was reported by interviewees that communication between supervisors and managers was held on a regular and informal basis, and facilitates the reporting of hazards.

3. Motivation behind WP:

Given that there are no formal procedures for WP in OHS management and that the management interviewees considered that informal procedures were adequate for a workplace of this size, it can be said that there exists limited motivation for any form of WP that might equate with the definition provided within the HSCE Regulations.

4. Promotion of Participation:

- Weekly team meetings, although health and safety is not a permanent agenda item. The meetings comprise workers and their supervisor.
- Bi-annual company meetings, with health and safety as an agenda item. The meetings include representation from across the workplace.
- Supervisors conduct periodic risk assessments and seek advice and feedback from employees.
- The company implemented the Japanese '5s' (sort, systematise, sweep, standardise, and self-discipline) technique for better workplace organisation and management.

² Investors in People Standard is a widely recognised framework aimed at achieving successful leadership, management, employee involvement and development - Investors in People (2004) The Investors in People Standard. The Stationery Office Books: London. ISBN 0117061662.

This was a worker led initiative, which although productivity focussed, there are also health and safety benefits from addressing 'housekeeping' across the organisation.

- New employees are provided with induction training which includes health and safety topics. For workers undertaking new tasks, mini-inductions are provided.

5. Levels of Participation:

Management interviewees considered that their level of involvement in health and safety management is about right for a company of this size and nature. Supervisors similarly indicated that their own level of involvement in health and safety management is adequate for a company of this nature. The workers become directly involved in health and safety by providing recommendations for improvement or notifying more senior staff of potential hazards. In most cases participation in OHS management has been established on a reactive basis, with no apparent formal procedures for proactive intervention.

6. Main Barriers to WP:

Given that the workers are provided with few formal opportunities to provide feedback or formally participate in the OHS management, it seems reasonable to conclude that there is a low level of management commitment for WP in OHS management. Additional factors identified as barriers to effective participation are production requirements and the associated time pressure.

3.1.4 Case 4: Distribution – retail products

1. Background:

No. of employees at worksite visited: 106.

The parent company owns 12 companies in the UK.

The company has changed ownership over recent years, although the culture of the workplace and the focus on health and safety are considered to have remained relatively stable. The employee turnover is very low, with many employees having been with the company for more than twenty years. The business is owned by an Australian company which places a high emphasis upon safety performance.

2. Cross company communication:

Workers have regular communication with their supervisor and safety rep. Given the size of the workplace, the health and safety officer also maintains regular contact with most employees on a daily basis, and is available to provide advice and support. Employees identified that communication across the company hierarchy was of a high standard, and that this contributed to a positive work environment. Communication on health and safety issues across the workplace is maintained on a regular basis; for example, workers demonstrated a high level of awareness and understanding of how to assess workplace hazards and control risk. The health and safety officer recognised that the nature and timeliness of any communication with the workforce is of utmost importance. During the site visit the officer demonstrated a good rapport with work colleagues and demonstrated an understanding of their levels of interest and commitment. National level Health, Safety and Environment (HS&E) meetings demonstrate a co-ordinated commitment at the corporate level. Related communications with partner companies demonstrates a willingness to share experiences and initiatives, and to develop a health and safety strategy.

3. Motivation behind WP:

At the corporate level there is a positive commitment to providing a safe and healthy working environment for all employees. The company health and safety policy

acknowledges that employee involvement is central to a good health and safety management system. To this end, employees are encouraged to participate, and are provided with a number opportunities through which they can participate. At the local level, the health and safety officer has a good level of access to all workers, and encourages staff to take an active role.

4. Promotion of Participation:

- The company has an established national health, safety and environment committee, which meets quarterly, with representation from each of the company's operating divisions. Committee notes and key points are communicated to employees at each worksite via employee briefings, the company notice board and company newsletter.
- A quarterly local health and safety committee meeting is attended by workers, safety reps, the health and safety officer, and management representatives.
- Monthly employee briefings with line managers include information and action points on health and safety.
- A wide range of internal health and safety training is provided. Safety reps attend external safety rep training courses. Induction training, which includes health and safety, is provided for all new employees.
- Safety reps and the safety officer provide toolbox talks on topical health and safety issues.
- Safety reps conduct bi-annual, 50-point safety audits to address known or identifiable risks. The safety officer and a management representative must approve audits before they are signed off.
- Employees are involved in regular risk assessments.
- A hazard identification card scheme is implemented. All employees are issued with cards and encouraged to make submissions.
- A bi-annual health and safety newsletter is published and distributed throughout the company.
- Company notice boards contain regular updates on safety performance and other relevant information.

5. Levels of Participation:

A variety of approaches were in place for direct consultation on health and safety. Workers are well informed with many disposed to participate in health and safety initiatives. It was reported that the workforce submit approximately six hazard identification cards every month. Although the office workers are in relatively lower risk occupations than the shop floor operatives, they also received regular training and had their own safety rep. Maintaining the commitment of employees to health and safety improvement is recognised as an important objective. When suggestions are provided, the health and safety officer ensures that actions are taken or responses provided within a reasonable time frame.

6. Main Barriers to WP:

There were few reported barriers to effective WP, although levels of commitment to health and safety are said to be variable across the workforce.

3.1.5 Case 5: Construction

1. Background:

No. of employees based at worksite visited: 160.

The company has three regional worksites in the UK, and a number of peripatetic staff.

The growth of the company has resulted in the management of health and safety becoming disjointed and in need of revitalisation. With a view to overcoming perceived shortcomings, the company recently employed a health and safety manager with responsibility for co-ordinating health and safety management and improving safety performance. Improvements are ongoing and it is considered that programmes of training and better communication are gradually improving overall performance.

2. Cross company communication:

The company does not appoint safety reps as such, although line managers take on a similar role and have received training to enable them to fulfil this responsibility. In the first instance workers would contact their line managers if they wished to raise an OHS matter. There is a reasonable level of communication on OHS issues, especially for the workers in high-risk occupations. Most of these operatives work on relatively small projects where supervisors are not always present. The company utilises monthly toolbox talk discussions to raise OHS issues and update workers on any new or emerging issues. Having identified weaknesses in the manner of communication on OHS matters, the company has replaced what was recognised as a predominantly top-down style of communication with more open, two-way forms of communication and discussion. The site visited during this research was the company head quarters where a health and safety manager and advisor are on-site and can be contacted in person with any queries about OHS. Line managers reported that, given their proximity to health and safety staff, they do seek direct contact and draw on their expertise when in need of information or if uncertain about an OHS related procedure.

3. Motivation behind WP:

The introduction of a health and safety manager has resulted in new health and safety management procedures. For example, training was provided for line managers to enable them to fulfil new responsibilities for health and safety (in addition to their established operational responsibilities). The rationale being, with the appropriate knowledge and understanding, managers can apply leverage, and induce workers to become more involved in the management of health and safety. Customer companies are increasingly placing a greater emphasis on health and safety, although WP is not always stipulated.

4. Promoting participation:

- An inter-department monthly review meeting conducted with employee representation from each department. The meeting includes a mixture of management and workforce representatives.
- Monthly toolbox meetings are held for the safety critical operations staff (e.g. riggers).
- A quarterly health and safety bulletin is distributed to all staff and discussed at review meetings.
- A business management system includes health and safety considerations. It requires that method statements are communicated to relevant workers and that they are consulted on the content.
- Pre-start visits and quality audits of new worksites include health and safety checks.
- All health and safety information is documented on the company intranet.
- Notice boards provide workers with current health and safety information.

5. Levels of Participation:

Operations workers demonstrate a reasonable level of involvement in OHS management and provide relevant, mainly informal, feedback to line managers. The planning of new work and toolbox talks are the main opportunities for workers (typically line managers) to

raise OHS issues and directly influence the shape of work procedures. Office staff, by comparison, appear to have relatively low levels of participation and low levels of awareness of OHS issues. The health and safety manager reports directly to the board and keeps top-level managers informed on progress towards OHS goals.

6. Main Barriers to WP:

There are relatively few formal procedures in place for WP, especially for the office staff.

3.1.6 Case 6: Construction

1. Background:

No. of employees at worksite visited: 16.

Breakdown according to professions: 12 operatives (including plumbers, electricians and labourers), 2 project managers, 2 office support staff.

The company has a number of offices throughout the UK.

The site visited was a large multiple contractor building development. It was a relatively small project at an early stage, although the workload and the number of operatives were set to increase. In this instance the company was acting as a sub-contracting firm to a multinational construction company.

2. Cross company communication:

Channels of communication at this site were said to be representative of other construction projects where the company has involvement. The workers main points of contact for all work related matters including OHS were the supervisor (i.e. the designated safety rep) and foreman. In addition, workers can consult a representative from the principal contractor company. The supervisor and foreman have regular contact with the company's two project managers that are based on site. Although the site was relatively small, it is unusual for project managers to have regular contact with the operatives. The company also provides a roving safety co-ordinator that is responsible for providing advice or updates to workers, normally indirectly through the chain of command via project managers. It was reported that in respect of OHS matters there is an effective two-way dialogue of communication across the worksite, although information is conveyed via the consecutive tiers in the chain of command. Communication on OHS matters is regularly coordinated with other construction companies, especially the principal contractor. This input provides a second level of review and an independent check that procedures are being followed.

3. Motivation behind WP:

The company's project management system outlines audited policies and procedures; the system provides a set of core issues which have to be addressed while providing a guidance framework for the implementation of tasks. In the context of this discussion, the system is relevant as it identifies minimum requirements for input from workers. For example, there are compulsory induction courses for most projects, and workers are required to take part in scrutinising method statements and safety procedures³.

³ It is common practice for principal contractors to place a range of health and safety requirements upon subcontractors. As a consequence, construction companies that regularly work on multiple contractor projects have developed functionally equivalent safety procedures that include a requirement for some measure of WP in OHS management.

4. Promoting participation:

- Workers are required to sign-off updates to health and safety policies and procedures. In addition, each work site has a safety plan which workers are required to observe and implement.
- The foreman conducts weekly safety inspections; this includes checks of e.g. scaffolding and welfare facilities.
- A safety rep, or a representative of the principal contracting company, provides induction training (which includes safety awareness) before a worker is permitted to commence work on the site or a new project.
- Workers participate in an appraisal of project method statements and safety procedures.
- There is a weekly site meeting for workers and supervisors where safety issues can be raised.
- Weekly toolbox talks meetings attended by workers, supervisors and the foreman cover a range of topics.
- The company provides a number of training courses at their head-quarters.
- Supervisors are provided with in-house safety rep training.
- Safety notice boards are erected on site.

5. Levels of Participation:

The auditing of health and safety procedures is pervasive and ensures that all employees take on a participative approach to OHS management. Interviewees indicated that the appraisal of the method statement provides a useful opportunity for workers to discuss new work, identify potential hazards and methods for risk control. Induction training is extensive. Because of the common requirements of contractors and principal contractors, there was often a high degree of repetition during induction training sessions. Similarly, toolbox talks are regular and extensive. As an outcome of the level of training provision, workers have a high degree of awareness of the workplace hazards. Supervisors identified that workers demonstrate a reasonable level of commitment to safety practices, such as wearing PPE. However, occasional lapses were not uncommon. Interviewees also provided examples of worker recommendations for safer working practices: e.g. recommendations for alternative PPE, better welfare facilities, or lower risk equipment.

6. Main Barriers to WP:

It was considered by interviewees that not all workers were committed to having a participatory role in the health and safety decision-making process.

3.1.7 Case 7: Supply and maintenance of power generation equipment

1. Background:

No. of employees at worksite visited: 30.

The company has 14 worksites in the UK. The company owns plants in, Asia, Europe and North America.

Over the past two years, restructuring and downsizing of the company has resulted in a number of redundancies. Key workers, including safety reps, have left the company. To offset the gaps that have been created, existing staff are being trained and a network of safety reps is being re-established. During this period employee morale and commitment is reported to have dipped. Similarly, commitment to OHS priorities has diminished. A new health and safety management system suitable for the emerging company structure is being established.

2. Cross company communication:

All worksite employees are covered by one safety rep, the works foreman. The safety rep is permanently based at this site and easily accessible to all workers. Given the small size of the workforce at this depot, there are many opportunities for consultation between the workforce and the managers. This has led to a preference for health and safety matters being dealt with on an informal basis. On the other hand, the majority of workers based at this site are field engineers that spend most of their work time on customer premises. As one might expect, communication with these peripatetic staff is limited by their absence. The opportunity for face-to-face meetings or team meetings is somewhat limited. Nevertheless, the site manager ensures that they are well informed of any emerging health and safety matters, for example by posting information to their home address and maintaining communication by telephone. Two national health and safety officers pay regular visits to this site, and are known to many of the workers. On request, they provide advice and recommendations; they also provide regular safety bulletins for the site workers, information that is communicated through team meetings, or mail-outs to peripatetic staff.

3. Motivation behind WP:

Corporate publications provide evidence of a strong commitment to health and safety. The Health Safety & Environment policy also pays reference to engaging with employees and providing suitable training. Customer requirements can influence health and safety related practices, although it is uncommon that they would outline requirements for WP.

4. Promoting participation:

- The company has a national health, safety and environment committee, which meets annually, with safety reps from each main depot attending.
- Monthly employee briefings with depot foreman can include health and safety as an agenda item.
- Twice yearly team meetings with the depot manager and peripatetic workers (where viable).
- Workers carry out a quarterly 20-point safety audit at the site. The audit is checked and signed off by the regional manager.
- Peripatetic staff are involved in lone-worker risk assessments.
- There is an ongoing programme of training for safety reps.
- Managers are provided with training for health and safety.
- Company notice boards contain regular updates of health and safety information and committee meetings.

5. Levels of Participation:

Interviewees indicated that much of the OHS management was done on a reactive basis (following an incident or accident). However, a number of proactive interventions were mentioned (e.g. safety audits) and there is an intention to establish a more proactive approach in the wake of company restructuring. Employees identified that they were satisfied with the predominantly informal nature of WP in OHS, and maintained that the small size of the workplace allowed a good level of direct interaction with the management. The engineers considered that health and safety matters were an important component of their occupational training and that they had greater professional awareness of the risk factors. Office staff, by comparison, appear to have relatively low levels of participation and low levels of awareness of OHS issues. Evidence of management commitment was provided following the introduction of a recent company procedure: top-level management have agreed to undertake brief safety audits, with the assistance of

local workers, on occasions when they visit any company property (other than their main place of work).

6. Main Barriers to WP:

Company restructuring has been a significant setback to the effective management of health and safety. This is particularly the case for WP as many safety reps have left the company or were moved to different premises. Employees acknowledge that the absence of peripatetic workers can present a barrier to effective group health and safety consultation activities.

3.1.8 Case 8: Manufacture of Chemicals

1. Background:

No. of employees at worksite visited: 224 .

This plant is the largest of five plants in the UK. The parent company also has operations across Europe. Because this site deals with chemicals that have the potential to cause major accidents it is subject to the requirements of the Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1999 (COMAH).

As a result of increasing global competition the workplace has undergone periodic downsizing and restructuring.

2. Cross company communication:

Production team workers can report OHS issues to a shift safety rep or line manager. Safety reps can pass on information or consult directly with management representatives through a number of regular safety forums. When issues are raised, either through formal or informal communication, workers identified that management provide prompt responses. In short, there exists an effective chain of reporting. Workers can also have direct contact with one of two health and safety officers. During the visit the officers maintained a good level of rapport with workers and demonstrated a comprehensive knowledge of the workers' responsibilities and the level of WP. The health and safety officers regularly make representations to management, and indicated that support was always forthcoming. A full-time occupational health nurse works on site and is available to provide private consultation and advice to all workers. A company appointed doctor visits the site and provides additional advice and support. Workers identified that communication across the company hierarchy was reasonable for a workplace of this size, although industrial relations were considered to be in need of some improvement. Levels of communication beyond the workplace with other company sites were reported to be deficient, with little co-ordination and sharing of knowledge or experiences.

3. Motivation behind WP:

The business is subject to the additional statutory requirement to control the operations and processes that represent a major risk to the workers, the public and the environment under the COMAH Regulations. This requirement ensures that a co-ordinated approach to OHS management is implemented, and that employee involvement is widespread across the workplace. Workplace health and safety specialists ensure that existing WP initiatives are well represented by management and employees. It is their responsibility to ensure that workers are well informed and provided with regular reminders of their expected levels of participation.

4. Promoting participation:

- Quarterly Health Safety & Environment meetings are attended by management representatives, safety reps, and production representatives. The committee reports to senior management and workers.
- Bi-monthly safety rep meetings are held, where reps can discuss emerging issues and identify recommendations for management.
- Bi-monthly production / department safety meetings are attended by the production manager, safety reps, process workers and other worker representatives.
- Bi-monthly shift safety meetings which include toolbox talks. Minutes are circulated to workers and a health and safety officer.
- Daily safety checks, risk assessments and audits are performed by a range workers. Reports are typically approved and signed off by line managers or management representatives.
- Medical review meetings are attended by the safety manager, health and safety officers, occupational health nurse and company doctor. The primary function is to discuss new processes and measures for risk control.
- Contractor safety meetings are conducted with company representatives in attendance.
- Occasional safety climate surveys are carried out.
- Monthly health and safety reports are distributed across the workforce.
- An extensive range of health and safety information is provided on the company intranet.
- Health and safety notice boards contain regular updates on health and safety issues and topics.
- A wide range of OHS training is provided for workers. Safety reps attend external safety rep training courses.

5. Levels of Participation:

There has been a longstanding commitment to health and safety, an important aspect being WP. Given the range of highly hazardous operations on site, the workforce is involved in routine safety assessments, checks and procedures. In addition, there are a range of established safety forums through which employees can enter into consultation with colleagues and management. Production pressures, new shift patterns and time constraints were amongst a number of factors that are perceived to have affected workers' morale. It was reported that the attention to risk management has remained, although the level of WP in OHS initiatives has fallen. For example, a company wide behavioural safety system, that previously had high levels of employee involvement, is no longer in operation. There is an intention to re-invigorate the system or a similar functionally equivalent system in the future.

6. Main Barriers to WP:

The main reported barrier is the impact of company restructuring and resulting production pressures.

3.2 DISCUSSION

3.2.1 General Comments on the Cases

Management representatives at all of the organisations visited considered that their arrangements for assessing and controlling work related risks were adequate and appropriate, although in many cases there were acknowledged weaknesses. Similarly, they considered that the arrangements for WP, whether formal or informal, enabled a constructive and effective process of consultation. However, it was apparent that notable differences existed between companies in terms of the nature and extent of WP. All organisations had meetings where

health and safety was reported to be a standard agenda item. Employee participation in meetings where OHS was the main topic of discussion and management were in attendance was generally restricted to safety reps and line managers, though in some cases a selection of workers could be involved (cases 2, 4 and 8). In case studies 3 and 7, there was no formal workplace meeting between management and workers that was dedicated to the discussion of health and safety issues. When comparing the cases, the systematisation with which WP was delivered varied. However, when compared with the findings of other UK research in this area (e.g. Hillage et al 2000; Vickers & James 2004; Walters et al 2005), these companies had structured approaches to consultation and the levels of participation appeared to be satisfactory, suggesting therefore that the cases may not be representative of many non-unionised workplaces.

When asked to comment on WP and the levels of access to decision-making, workers were generally supportive of the management viewpoint that arrangements were adequate. In some instances workers considered that the focus on employee involvement was more than adequate and could result in repetition and ultimately antipathy.

As one might expect, sites with a dedicated health and safety officer were able to demonstrate greater levels of commitment to health and safety; for example, more time and resources were committed to the management of OHS. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the presence of a health and safety officer or advisor - whose job it is to provide expert technical input, provide advice and support, organise meetings and initiate discussions - can raise the levels of awareness across the workplace, but also raise the likelihood of employee involvement.

The risk status of industries is a factor that has been postulated to influence the propensity of workplaces to facilitate WP, especially where management and employees perceive that participation can be a major influence to help detect and abate work hazards (Eaton & Nocerino 2000; Leopold & Beaumont 1983). It follows that where the inherent risks to the workplace are low the need for WP might be less apparent. This general supposition gains support from the current research, in the respect that employees in occupations that are commonly judged to be lower risk, for example administration staff, had in most cases lower levels of participation and training in OHS. In a number of the cases, participation and training of office staff was effectively absent.

3.2.2 Organisational Arrangements

With the exception of forums where a cross section of the company were present, information was usually communicated through the organisational chain of command, e.g. via the worker - safety rep - line manager - safety officer - middle manager - senior manager. The appointed safety rep or line manager would be the workers' first point of contact on health and safety matters – line managers frequently being automatically assigned safety rep responsibilities. As one might expect, in smaller workplaces the separation between workers and senior managers was less apparent. However, the opportunity for direct communication between workers and managers varied between cases.

3.2.3 The Motivating Forces Behind Workforce Participation

Within the larger organisations, the primary motivation for WP came from corporate level policies and procedures. Highly organised corporate entities can be a major influence on day-to-day operations at their company sites. This was especially the case for companies that originated overseas: with non-unionised works councils being a strong tradition in other countries - notably across Europe where there is a robust legal framework on consultative rights – these companies have a history of working with work council structures, and facilitate similar

arrangements in their UK premises. Most participants acknowledged the value of corporate level influence.

Other major motivating forces behind WP were management representatives and / or safety officers. It was often the case that they would organise meetings, encourage participation and provide time and resources for WP. In the smaller companies with no influence from a corporate entity (Cases 1, 3 and 5), representative structures and formal consultation arrangements were instigated at the management level. Without exception, formal arrangements required management approval; there were no instances where employees were provided with their own budget or resources to support consultative arrangements.

Despite reasonable levels of WP reported at most sites, there was no evidence that workers requested or initiated new participatory or consultative arrangements (e.g. work teams, safety circles and safety committees). This could be a characteristic of contemporary non-unionised workplaces. Given the historical association between representative structures and trade unionism in the UK, it is apparent that non-union representatives do not enjoy the same level of protection that union representatives have, and they often see themselves as weaker worse resourced and trained than their union counterparts. Furthermore, across the non-unionised workforce there would not be the same level of political organisation, and outcomes would be based on co-operation rather than collective bargaining (Terry 1999, p. 17-8).

Management interviewees identified that regulation and enforcement were key motivators in the area of OHS management. In addition, most managers were concerned about their business's exposure to liability, based on their perception of an increase in litigation within the UK. However, interviewees did not identify that this was a problem that had directly affected them or their business. In comparison, the impact of HSC Regulations was negligible. In most cases managers, health and safety officers, safety reps and workers were not aware of the HSC Regulations. Of the few managers or safety officers that demonstrated some level of awareness (N=4, Cases 1,2,5 and 8) they did not have a detailed level of insight into the regulations, but recognised that it was a duty of the employer to consult.

Despite the presence of legislation which imposes a duty on employers to consult with employees about workplace hazards, it is apparent that its impact is limited. Although legislation provisions provide a useful framework for building agreements concerning WP, it is rarely the single motivating force for initiation and wider proliferation. A recent postal survey of UK companies found that only a minority of employers were aware of regulations relating to employee consultation on health and safety (Hillage et al 2000, 69). With respect to current case studies, the presence of the legislative framework was rarely acknowledged, and could only be considered a relatively minor influence upon the nature and extent of WP.

A number of the company representatives referred to difficulties stemming from market competition, and that the time and resources available for OHS management and WP can be compromised. One business identified that where adverse competitive pressures arise, industrial relations can become affected, with commitment levels for WP declining. Another potential external influence comes from the customer and supply chains. Interviewees identified a number of changes in OHS management that originated from these outside influences. However, there was little evidence that this influence had any direct impact upon participatory arrangements.

3.2.4 The Nature of Involvement and Consultation

A core element of the current research was to gain an insight into the range of WP methods adopted within non-unionised workplaces. Despite significant differences between the

workplaces (e.g. the range of work tasks, workplace size and organisation, etc), there were notable similarities in the forms of employee involvement. For the most part, methods of participation and consultation were conventional approaches: safety committees and team meetings / briefings were widely used. Interviewees identified little evidence of any originality in their approaches. Only in case study two were there significant efforts to introduce new methods and processes. Innovative examples from across the cases included the introduction of hazard identification reporting schemes, incentive schemes, behavioural safety initiatives and near-miss mapping plans. The introduction of novel schemes demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement, but it does not guarantee greater levels of participation. On the other hand, in case study two where there was most evidence of innovation, workers demonstrated high levels of commitment to WP and made positive references to the range of initiatives that were in place. It should be acknowledged there were many antecedents to WP (e.g. good industrial relations, extensive training provision and a high level of management involvement).

The type of involvement and consultation is likely to be influenced by a number of factors, including the nature of the work, the workplace, the preferences of the management or staff, and the availability of time and resources.

In most cases, efforts were made to communicate widely on OHS management issues; for example, through team briefings, toolbox talks and safety notices. However, the degree to which organisations sought feedback from workers on any proposed changes in OHS arrangements was variable. Workers involved in the early stages of planning and consultation, typically members of a safety or planning committee, would be directly involved or informed. The wider workforce, in most instances, would rarely influence decisions and practical outcomes, with little advance information being given to employees about actions to be taken. In smaller workplaces, the proximity of workers to managers facilitated regular consultation – although this consultation was rarely related to health and safety matters and did not generally result in greater levels of involvement in OHS management.

3.2.5 Bottom-up and Top-down Approaches

Through the interview process workers provided a rich insight into their understanding of WP and provided detailed anecdotal descriptions of the approaches that their organisations have adopted. When asked to describe their organisations' approaches to WP, the majority of workers identified two prominent methods that are employed. Although they were not referred to in these terms, they can be classified as 1) bottom-up involvement, and 2) top-down communication. The HSC Regulations 1996 acknowledge this distinction; in terms set out within the Guidance:

‘[the] difference between providing information to your employees and consulting them, which the HSC Regulations 1996 require, is that consultation involves listening to their views and taking account of what they say before any decision is taken.’ (Reg 3(7))

3.2.5.1 Bottom-up Involvement

Safety committees

Safety committees were implemented at most sites visited (except cases 3, 6 and 7, although cases 6 and 7 did have regional or national safety committees). This forum is the main opportunity for the management and workforce to formally discuss and negotiate on health and safety matters. Generally, the committee has responsibility for overseeing all health and safety matters. Meetings tend to comprise a mixture of management representatives, safety officers, safety representatives and other workforce representatives (e.g. line managers and workers).

The frequency of meetings was variable, with meetings being convened between every month and six months. In most cases a management representative would chair the meetings and designate individuals to carry out action points. Typical meeting agendas include: a discussion of safety statistics; hazard reporting; OHS progress of issues under review; legislative changes; risk assessments; and, new objectives. Workers interviewed identified that a constructive working relationship existed during meetings. The main barriers to fulfilling objectives or carrying out action points included costs and time constraints. It was clearly the case that the availability of resources, especially time, varied across the cases. However, despite participation being based on previous indications of interest, levels of commitment and participation amongst workers and managers varied (see also Section 3.2.6.2 below). In most cases, minutes of the meetings were displayed on workplace notice boards or discussed at team briefings.

Team meetings

Team meetings (or other functionally equivalent meetings) were widely adopted to provide line managers, safety reps and workers with an opportunity to discuss operational issues and health and safety matters. It was unusual for senior managers to be directly involved in these meetings. Despite not being present, OHS agenda items would typically originate from senior management or an health and safety officer. Workers can raise new OHS issues during these meetings. However, it was reported that, in most cases, workers would informally raise any OHS concerns, when the issue was first apparent, at an earlier point. These meetings, across the case studies, provided an opportunity for workers to be notified of emerging issues or enabled workers to provide feedback and opinion. Where OHS issues were raised they tended to be passed on verbally rather than documented through minutes. In two cases, minutes were routinely passed on to a manager or health and safety officer (case studies 2 and 8).

In a few instances, interviewees considered that team meetings provided little opportunity for a workforce response or recourse for two-way communications (i.e. where the meetings were used as a team briefing). In these cases communications were perceived as top-down communications from the senior management via the line manager or safety rep. These sentiments can be captured as follows:

“Well, the whole thing is, it doesn’t mean that the team meeting is a question and answer. ... You can get one or two go, ‘and another thing, and another thing’, But it’s not a discussion it’s a briefing. We don’t work in a democracy.” (Case 7, Employee #2)

Subsequently, when issues were raised there was no process to formally document or pass on messages to senior staff, etc. However, interviewees indicated that most serious issues would be passed on or communicated verbally at some subsequent point.

In some cases, workers identified that the safety rep, when reporting on communications from other members of the workforce, can act as a gatekeeper, selecting the items that they considered were important or relatable. This practice was described by one safety rep:

“The safety officer might come back and say, we had one with a guy that hurt his back. She said, ‘do a team brief on manual handling’, which I’m not going to do. I might talk to the guy that hurt his back, but I’m not going to insult the guys by teaching them how to pick things up.” (Case 6, Safety Rep #3)

It could be the case that safety reps also select the issues raised during team meetings that they consider important and appropriate for passing on to more senior members of staff.

Risk assessments and audits

There was no common pattern of involvement in risk assessments and audits. Within each workplace the tasks could be undertaken by a range of staff or a team. In most cases, a safety rep and/or line manager was responsible for carrying out assessments and audits. It was less common for operatives to be directly involved. However, several managers, health and safety officers and safety reps recognised the value of employee involvement in conducting risk assessments and safety audits; it was identified that workers can possess some relevant 'lay' insight which has potential to enhance the process. In a number of cases the following opinion was identified:

“The way I think of risk assessment, one person can never do it. All my assessments are conducted with people that do the job.” (Case 4, Safety Officer #1)

When employees were involved, it was generally on the basis that their levels of knowledge and expertise were required to fulfil the task. In the cases where workers did undertake risk assessments and audits, levels of involvement were relatively low, as they require only a small number of workers with only occasional participation (e.g. often less than once a year). The following description characterises the variability in levels of engagement:

“The risk assessment process on site for the general shop floor activities - I would say they don't get involved enough. ... So the pilot plant aspect, they do quite well with the COSHH requirements of the local tasks, but then again, I know another area of the site, we could ask a member of staff, and he will never have seen one. So we have got both ends of the spectrum, some never see them, yet they are there, and they are drafted and accepted, and signed, and recorded, but the workers never sees them.” (Case 8, Safety Officer #1).

Any value for the employee that might be derived from their involvement in conducting assessments and audits (e.g. ownership of the process, degree of autonomy, and responsibility for reporting hazards) was not widely recognised by the interviewees. Related tasks were considered to be uninteresting and a distraction from their main production responsibilities.

In a number of instances the sole responsibility for conducting assessments and audits was placed on a manager or safety officer. This was often the case where processes and operations were straightforward, or where these individuals had the requisite knowledge or insight.

Responsibility for generating and maintaining related reporting systems often rested with the safety officer or manager. The provision of training for risk assessments was not always provided for employees (Case 3 and 4). Where training was provided - typically for safety reps, line managers, safety officers and managers – these individuals were nearly always responsible for conducting risk assessments. Within the construction sector (Cases 5 and 6) workers are commonly involved in method statement reviews. This involves a run through the tasks for new jobs, and includes an assessment of risk factors and safety procedures; interviewees considered that, despite being broader in their scope, they had similar characteristics as risk assessments. These reviews were widely considered to be a valuable opportunity for line managers and workers to jointly discuss a range of work process issues for new jobs.

The measurement of safety performance (using near miss and / or accident data) in a manner that would facilitate continuous review and improvement was in place in all cases, although the quality of the assessments and the review process was variable. With the exception of safety officers, little evidence was provided across the cases that workers played an active role in this process. However, workers were commonly provided with aggregate safety information during team briefings or safety committee meetings, or information was presented on notice boards. In

a few isolated cases workers showed an interest in the accident rates and demonstrated some pride when the rates were lower than other workplaces within the company⁴.

Hazard Identification Card Schemes

Hazard Identification Card Schemes, for reporting of safety issues, near misses and recommendations for safety improvements, are another formal method that can provide workers with some degree of influence over the management of OHS. In the two cases where related schemes were in place (Cases 2 and 4), the health and safety officers considered that levels of participation were modest. They were also of the opinion that providing an anonymous scheme (this was optional) for workers to report unsafe practices and working conditions could remove fears of recrimination when bringing issues to the notice of their employers, especially on topics that they might otherwise cover up (e.g. damage to equipment, accidents, failure to follow procedures). In addition, related schemes can send the implicit message that the management encourage employee comment and involvement, whatever the reason, and that it can be provided on their own terms. For these schemes to be successful, the safety officers reported that a response from a senior person, within an agreed time frame, was necessary to maintain levels of interest. In Case two, it was considered that a connected incentive scheme (i.e. entry to a 'prize draw' for all submissions) had raised levels of interest and participation, and that this resulted in a substantial increase in the number of near miss reports. The research literature highlights a number of drawbacks of incentive schemes. For a detailed discussion see Weyman (1998).

Behavioural Safety Schemes

Only one company had experience of implementing a Behavioural Safety Scheme (Case 8), or any related schemes that focus on both positive and negative aspects of safety behaviour. In this case, the scheme was no longer operational due to a range of factors; notably, company downsizing, repeated restructuring of the company, and reduced levels of employee commitment.

Informal communication

Direct, informal communication, outside of set piece arrangements, between workers, managers and their health and safety officers was widely reported as a favoured form of consultation. Although the utility of formal meetings was recognised in most cases, a majority of participants considered that informal consultation represented an important means for raising concerns and discussing solutions⁵. In exploring interviewees own preference for informal consultation, it emerged that the need for formal measures for WP was not always apparent. There were a number of reasons cited for favouring informal consultation. For example, it can be part of a process to build or maintain positive interpersonal relations:

“I think maybe I am not one for the structure and processing too much. I mean there are processes and structures there. But I like the fact that the guys come to us and they don't feel that we are far removed. I do say, I appreciate how lucky we are. I have got a good bunch of lads working for me. ... We do get on well.”
(Case 5, Line Manager #2)

In addition, as implied by this manager, formal processes, which can lead to the bureaucratisation of safety culture, are evaded where there is a preference for developing ad hoc

⁴ For smaller companies, comparisons could be made with average rates within their industrial sector. However, none of the companies had sought related information and made any comparisons.

⁵ In a recent survey of a range of unionised and non-unionised workplaces (Hillage et al 2000, 57) more than 50 per cent of employers considered that consultation is best done informally outside of set piece arrangements.

strategies to deal with context-specific problems. Furthermore, formal procedures commonly involve direct contact with a more senior colleague, which can present barriers and moderate more constructive communication:

“I’m not sure that everyone wants that sort of thing [set piece arrangements], they’re quite happy just to keep it informal. Some people feel that when senior management figures are around, it is a bit daunting.” (Case 1, Employee #1)

“But it [team meetings] gives the lads a chance to talk behind closed doors. They have got shared interests and everything else. And they can bring things up in relative comfort not have a manager sat in front of them. Because no matter how open door policy we are, people will always not say certain things in front of the manager. Fear of reprisal, that is a problem one. Fear of dislike, whatever it may be.” (Case 8, Safety Rep #2)

One antecedent of informal consultation between workers, safety officers and managers appeared to be their proximity within the workplace. Informal consultation across the company hierarchy was most common in small workplaces, where work colleagues were in daily contact, or where the organisational layout enabled closer ties. Similarly, within some workplaces safety officers and managers used walkabouts as a means to facilitate informal chats with workers. The perceived openness of safety officers or managers would be a key factor in the realisation of any intended goals when seeking informal feedback from workers. Where these communications are effective, it was reported that they could reveal issues that might otherwise go unreported (e.g. near misses or emerging risks).

“That is why, when I go round, I do chat to people, and you can chat to the people about things like health and safety. Sometimes that little thing pops out in the conversation. We can pick it up because they don’t think it is a major thing and they don’t think it is worth telling you about. And you can do something about it. The big things, you usually spot, the obvious things.”(Case 3, Manager #2)

Similarly, team meetings can be used as a means for more informal discussion between managers and workers, where the agenda is open and the meeting aims to generate dialogue rather than follow a formal agenda:

“So for me the half hour safety meeting can bring a lot more up than some of the HS&E team meetings. And plus there is just me and them, and I try to make it very informal, and you get people to raise a few more issues that way.” (Case 2, Manager / Health & Safety Officer)

Organisational safety awareness is fundamentally a collective endeavour which depends on the sharing of knowledge and insights. To this end, informal communication was identified as a necessary day-to-day means for communicating health and safety issues across the workplace, and a means of engaging workers. However, informal participation processes include, in most instances, only a very limited range of viewpoints; and there is no guarantee that those present will have the requisite knowledge to judge whether the issues discussed require any immediate action. The most apparent weakness, wherein managers and workers freely exchange ideas, is the absence of any obligation for managers to act on related advice or requests. However, these weaknesses may be observed in formal participatory systems and are likely to relate to the characteristics of the organisation and its members.

The distinction between formal and informal systems is not always clear-cut, both systems can have characteristics of the other system: formal systems can create informal arrangements, and

formal approaches can be imposed on existing informal participatory arrangements; in practice, there is often a degree of overlap between approaches. The respective shortcomings of both models has led most commentators to agree that the most pragmatic paradigm is likely to be a synergetic and negotiated process combining elements of both bottom-up and top-down models (Hale & Glendon 1987). In the context of the workplace it is difficult to imagine anything other than a two-way dialogue of continuous communication, i.e. a cyclical process, as either extreme would be effectively unworkable or politically undesirable.

Identification of OHS issues by workers

A number of examples that were provided as evidence of workers’ contribution to OHS management are outlined in Table 1.

Table 2: Example of workers’ contributions to OHS

<i>Case #</i>	<i>Example</i>
1. Worker	“Most recent - we reported problems with the pallets, with rats and Weils’ disease. That brought the introduction of personal gloves.”
2. Safety Rep	“There’s been a few innovations originating from here. The high-vis jackets for visiting drivers, that was from the shift team.”
3. Manager	“[The lean manufacturing project] was led by two supervisors and they involved virtually all the operations staff, painting, decorating, make the whole thing work. And it is a much safer, a much cleaner environment. This is the second project, and again, it’s in the stores, and we said, we stood back. This is all their doing, we have had nothing to do with it at all.”
4. Worker	“If you do something wrong, like pull a pallet on a drum, someone will shout at you because they’re aware of it, that you’re doing something wrong.”
5. Safety Rep	“If they feel that there is something is not right and they have got any problems with it at all, they stop the job and we sort it out till they are satisfied and then they crack on with the job.”
6. Safety Rep	“If we are using substances that can be harmful, that’s when they start to get involved. If they are using adhesive that is a bit strong, they will start to ask questions.”
6. Manager	“If they feel there is something that will make the job safer and they will come and we listen to it, and if it is, we actually have them changed. If they are out there and the see another trade using a piece of equipment that makes life easier, and they will bring it to our attention, and we go and have a look.”
7. Worker	“There are examples where people identify problems. One guy recently was found not wearing eye protection. That was reported as a near miss. Most will regimentally fill in accident forms.”

3.2.5.2 Top-down Communication

For practical purposes, the level of involvement on safety committees and work councils, etc. has to be limited. It becomes necessary, therefore, to address the workforce in a top-down manner with the intention to instruct or provide information. In its strictest sense top-down communication does not meet the democratic aspirations of many WP schemes. Nevertheless, top-down communication is arguably an efficient manner of engaging the workforce and

conveying messages that require particular actions on the part of the worker. It can also provide a foundation upon which participation can be built.

Team safety briefings

Team safety briefings were regularly employed in Cases 2, 4, 6 and 8. These briefings provided an opportunity for line managers and safety reps to raise emerging issues, reinforce earlier instructions or highlight issues that were received in formal communications from managers or safety officers (e.g. accident rates, incidents and new procedures and policies). Participants considered that the value of these communications was variable. Even when workers were required to provide written confirmation that they had received information, some doubts existed whether workers had really absorbed the message, or whether messages have a lasting impact. Communicating the information verbally does, however, provide an opportunity to identify those having problems understanding the content, with an opportunity to ask for an explanation.

Notice boards and safety bulletins

Notice boards and/or safety bulletins, etc. were provided at all workplaces. The notice boards contained current health and safety information, committee meeting notes, accident rate information and guidance, etc.

Intranet

The use of an intranet for the archiving of OHS information was utilised in Cases 5, 6, 7 and 8. For workers that have access to the company's intranet, all company related health and safety information can be viewed on-line. The intranet might include archives of committee meeting notes, presentations, safety information, regulatory guidance, etc.

As with all sources of information there is a risk that employees do not find the time to familiarise themselves with regular updates. Furthermore, conveying information in written form does not guarantee that workers have read and understood the content. Interviewees provided some limited evidence that workers do read notices and discuss the content.

Training

The effectiveness of participation will be closely tied to the levels of the participants' knowledge and experience. The criteria for an inclusive approach, therefore, emerge as a result of participation in particular social settings, and will generally be predicated on technical safety expertise or experience-based expertise. Research findings suggest, therefore, that in many cases, training is a prerequisite for participation. Furthermore, training has been found to influence participants' commitment to make health and safety changes. In a context where there are regulatory requirements for training, this issue is of particular relevance; a key requirement of the HSC Regulations is that representatives of employee safety are entitled to training at the employer's expense and to paid time off to attend such training for the performance of their functions.

The more complex tasks of safety reps can require greater levels of experience and skill. Most of the companies recognised that the training of safety reps has a beneficial impact upon their effectiveness, and provided some level of training. Managers or safety officers from all companies claimed that their organisation had provided some form of health and safety training for employees. Training, for the most part, had taken place in-house, often in the form of induction training for new employees. Induction training with content designed to promote hazard identification and risk control was commonplace. This provided a primary means to impart knowledge to new employees or existing employees undertaking new tasks. In relatively few cases was there any evidence that training followed any systematic approach to education, often being based on the insights of an experienced worker. Toolbox talks for manual workers

were widely employed across the case studies (with the exception of Case 3). These talks tended to follow the format of a briefing session (e.g. on topics such as PPE requirements and safe working practices), with instruction from safety reps, line managers, or safety officers. Six of the companies (Cases 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8) provided training courses run by external health and safety specialists. External training was, in most cases, provided for safety reps or line managers.

There was a general consensus that training does result in a more risk aware workforce and can inculcate mechanisms of change, however there was some dissatisfaction with the quality and delivery of the in-house training and toolbox talks.

3.2.6 Preconditions of Effective Worker Involvement

3.2.6.1 *Industrial relations and communication*

Within all organisations there is a potential for conflict that may be manifested in argument, competition and non-co-operation. Many contemporary, progressive management practices aim to overcome related barriers through the explicit provision and development of collaborative, consensual processes in the workplace (Rahimi 1995; Weinstein 1998). For the purposes of this research it was important to instigate a cursory investigation of industrial relations, as relations can impact upon the levels of communication and co-operation across the company, and in the absence of a union can directly affect the scope for a collective structure with independent status. Despite all management representatives operating ‘an open door policy’, it became apparent from the interviews that industrial relations within the companies varied to some degree. In general, workers would readily communicate with a management that they trust or with a management that was not identified as a cause of any dissatisfaction. Most notably, the levels of informal communication between workers and managers were ostensibly greatest in the companies where workers identified that the management was highly approachable (Cases 2, 4, 7 and 8).

“I find all the management in the company very approachable. The regional director will always talk to you. You can’t get anymore approachable. Even the ones at the board level.” (Case 7, Safety Rep #2)

The safety officers that were not management grade likewise maintained better levels of communication where they had gained the employees trust and confidence. To some degree personality of individuals, as with any social context, and their representational and negotiating skills could have an impact upon the nature and extent of communication that suit the predominantly informal relations that characterised these workplaces.

A number of managers and safety officers made the point that improvements in communication on OHS matters were implemented to compensate for previous inadequacies, which had a negative impact upon the levels of WP, and it was perceived that this changed underlying attitudes of ‘them and us’. The following quote usefully demonstrates the significance of the implicit messages that are received during communication on OHS matters:

“When I first joined this organisation the health and safety team were a ‘holier than thou’ part of the business, and what they said was gospel, and if they spoke it had to be done. They were not very approachable. Particularly the staff, the operational staff, were a little bit overawed by that sort of approach and it wasn’t very effective. We have turned that round now and I can walk on any site, any office, sit down at anybody’s desk and have a conversation about health and safety, and it would be an open, and frank, and honest conversation. And it has made a

massive difference in the organisation. So it is about being approachable, I see it as a service to the business.” (Case 5, Health and Safety Manager)

A number of workers identified that OHS was not always treated as a serious issue. This sentiment was echoed by a number of managers and safety officers, often remedied by persistent encouragement and camaraderie:

“That will be <Name>. I must admit he’s a bit on the ball with that. He does it all for our own good and things like this. If you ask anyone they’ll say, ‘argh, health and safety and all this business’ [pulls an expression]. But that’s his job and that’s what he’s there to do. I think at times we might make fun of it, but at least some of it goes in, and a bit of it will stick there. He does his job.” (Case 4, Worker #3)

The importance of an effective safety rep or manager was also reported to be integral to gaining workers’ trust and support. There is evidence that managers and safety reps can become distanced from their ‘constituents’, thereby raising questions concerning their level of engagement and commitment. These problems can be acute should workers detect that their knowledge and understanding of the work related risks is deficient, and presents a very real risk that health and safety will become devalued. Some level of training would be required in workplaces where representatives (and their colleagues) do not have the required insights for advising on or managing the control of workplace hazards:

“And if [the line manager] has got training support, they are stronger and without being seen as being weak, or ill informed, or whatever. And also, we invest in them to develop that because it is no good just giving them training, you have got to go and help them practically implement that.” (Case 5, Safety Officer)

Similarly, providing effective training for the workers themselves is integral to gaining their support and commitment for WP in OHS management. A number of management and worker interviewees identified that problems can arise if training and information does not truly engage the workers. Toolbox talks are a good idea in principle, but they need to be well designed if they are to improve chances of having a lasting impact. The value of toolbox talks was questioned by a number of interviewees, especially where the content was not engaging or where the messages were frequently repeated. In many cases where toolbox talks were utilised, individuals that had no specific training in presentation skills designed and delivered the content. In particular, interviewees identified they were not always confident about the best way to engage workers when delivering toolbox talks. In a number of cases, employees did not feel confident that they could present information in a way that was not demeaning to the workers’ intelligence.

“I don’t get them to sit down because they start to lose interest. About 10 minutes into it they will start to lose interest. On manual handling some of these guys have been doing it for 20 years.” (Case 4, Safety Officer #2)

“Yeah, but you’re talking about skilled men, how do you teach them to pick things up? I just find toolbox talks on manual handling insulting. I just say, ‘do you know what you did wrong? Right, don’t do it again’. If you think it is too much for you, just ask for some help. He had a back problem.” (Case 7, Safety Rep)

Furthermore, many of the employees interviewed could not recall details of health and safety training (e.g. toolbox talks) or briefings that they had received over recent months. Employee training can be a positive measure to reinforce messages, but the effectiveness of communication can relate to the time and resources that are applied. This research indicates

that training was not always effective, and where it is not gauged correctly can lead to antipathy and rejection of the overall message. Many smaller firms have more limited resources to invest in training, and related problems are likely to be more acute in these circumstances.

A number of companies identified the importance of identifying effective training courses. In some instances, typically in the companies with reasonable resources for OHS, a company representative would assess the quality of training before subscribing their workers. The benefits of effective training were confirmed in a number of cases:

“[Health and safety training for safety reps]... On a course like that you go with some trepidation. You think, oh Christ, death by boredom for five days. And he really made what could have been a boring, mundane subject very interesting. Plenty of course participation and it came over very well and a lot of guys took a lot from it.” (Case 5, Line Manager #3)

Participation by itself is an unviable proposition unless workers can realise some degree of influence over decisions and practical outcomes. Recognising the value of employee contributions, a number of interviewees asserted the importance of maintaining communications, and providing timely feedback.

“Giving them some recognition as well, for when they do it, and feedback. People put things in and you don’t get back to them. For them it is like a black hole. They have thought of something, they have written it down, put it in to you, but if you don’t get back to them, they won’t do it again. They won’t give you other ideas so feedback is important.” (Case 2, Health & Safety Officer)

“... the problems that the lads are having to put up with everyday of the week that they identify. So they can see a trip hazard removed. If they can see manual handling situation rectified, if they can see a chemical spillage, or leak, or problem resolved, it is promotion from within the production area itself. So that does build a better relationship and it does build better relations.” (Case 8, Safety Officer #2)

3.2.6.2 Levels of commitment

In nearly all interviews the participants spontaneously directed the conversation onto the topic of management or worker commitment. In particular, the safety reps identified that without the commitment of management and employees there would inevitably be poor levels of communication about important health and safety matters and progress toward practical solutions would be obstructed. The success of all WP initiatives rests upon the tangible commitment of management. Equally, employee commitment is essential if WP initiatives are to be effective. Based on related findings in the research literature, these issues are not confined to non-unionised workplaces (Shearn 2005, Shearn & Gould 2005), although there may exist some subtle differences in non-unionised workplaces.

Comparison of the points of view expressed by managers and workers reveals differences in the commitment to procedures, safety policies and participation per se. Most management interviewees described an approach that required co-responsibility, identifying that organisations need to act collectively to attain safe working practices. For their part, this could involve the implementation and standardisation of work practices to prevent ad hoc strategies in risk management. The workers, for their part, were expected to follow procedures and recognise the relevance of training, information and procedures. This bureaucratisation of safety was counter-intuitive for workers in many instances. Where workers were highly experienced in the tasks they undertake, there was a tendency to establish short cuts or establish

arguably more efficient practices when carrying out tasks. The differences give rise to specific perceptions, a plurality of safety cultures, attitudes, and forms of knowledge, which each group activates as it responds to risk.

In respect of WP, the levels of commitment varied across the organisations. This research highlights that participation was not effective where employees do not desire a participatory role, are not committed to organisational and OHS goals, or do not perceive the initiative to be within their sphere of interest. The presence of management commitment to participatory initiatives was an important prerequisite. In all cases, the existing participatory processes had received management backing. However, where this commitment was not present, formal participatory processes were effectively absent.

Management Commitment

All management representatives stated an aspiration to promote the concept of social learning within the workplace with respect to OHS management. To varying degrees, the management representatives appeared to be health and safety conscious, although not all could identify any proactive measures of risk management. Some level of management commitment was demonstrated through the allocation of specific resources or through the inclusion of senior level management in participatory processes. In nearly all cases the management representatives claimed that the company practices an 'open door policy', suggesting that workers can freely approach management, at a time of their choosing, to discuss any work related issues. Workers generally concurred that direct access to managers was on offer, but that they would not always choose this direct route for communication. Furthermore, in the companies where health and safety was not high on the agenda, workers indicated greater reluctance to approach managers directly.

For WP initiatives to be effective they must be backed up by a positive management culture that can demonstrate a commitment to health and safety. If used in isolation, their impact is likely to be minimal and may even be counterproductive, in terms of the implicit messages which are communicated to operational staff, with regard to the perceived level of priority placed upon health and safety by the company and its management. The need for evidence of management commitment was a recurring topic. Although related comments were not widespread, it is clearly the case that management need to carefully observe all safety rules. A number of workers identified that some management representatives were prone to enter restricted access whilst not wearing compulsory PPE, reinforcing perceived inequalities across the workplace and establishing a real risk that health and safety can become devalued. In a few isolated instances, safety reps were not always allocated the necessary time and resources to effectively fulfil their duties. This was most apparent where production pressures were high.

Worker Commitment

Research has regularly confirmed that employees do not always desire an active role in health and safety management, and commitment will be different for different people and situations. Indeed, it is commonly identified amongst the research literature that a wide range of variables impact upon people's reactions to risk, and their commitment to the mitigation of its consequences.

"Just usual things, 'God it's hot' or 'the ceiling is too low so I took my hat off'. Just the usual things that are never going to change." (Case 6, Safety Rep #3)

"I don't think that everyone is overly interested. Because I think it's one of those things where everyone thinks it's never going to happen. Everyone is aware of what to do and how to deal with things. The company as a whole is very hot on

health and safety. But I don't think it's everyone's first priority to be honest.”
(Case 4, Worker #2)

“Obviously they're extremely interested in their own health and safety so from that point of view then I would say, yes. There are times when they want to get the job done, health and safety issues may get ignored.” (Case 3, Line Manager)

“I have worked in quite a few factories. It is not too bad here; they do try and get people involved. But you have always got the battle against people's attitude. They don't want it, they don't want to make an effort and they don't want to get involved. It is OK if somebody else is doing it but they are not too keen to stand out there themselves and do it.” (Case 1, Safety Rep #1)

Further evidence of low levels of commitment was provided, all companies experienced difficulties when appointing safety reps. Although some individuals demonstrated an interest and commitment, interviewees drew attention to the difficulty of obtaining committed individuals in many cases. The appointment of line managers as safety reps was common across the cases. As these individuals already have (often paid) responsibilities to consult workers and managers, it was considered that this was an effective way to ensure a person would fulfil their new responsibilities. That said, not all line managers desired these additional duties, and did not feel self-assured when fulfilling those duties.

Equally, there were examples provided of workers demonstrating a commitment to participation in health and safety management (see Table 2).

4 CONCLUSIONS

This report has presented findings from a study of non-unionised workplaces, to identify the principles behind workforce participation initiatives in occupational health and safety. Findings from the case studies reveal a range of practices in WP and provide insight into issues surrounding the development and maintenance of WP. Overall, the cases presented here are considered to have high levels of WP for non-unionised workplaces, with a range of forms implemented. Most of the cases discussed here appear to meet the requirements of the HSCE Regulations. Based on survey evidence, further research based on a larger sample of case studies would be expected to identify a greater proportion of businesses that do not meet the basic requirements of the HSCE Regulations.

The range of representative and consultative structures are similar to those identified by research conducted in unionised workplaces. In practice it is anticipated that they will operate in a similar mode although non-unionised workforces may have fewer rights for bargaining and vetoing decisions.

The key findings are as follows:

- When comparing the cases, the level of systematisation in the promotion of WP was varied. However, when compared with the findings of other UK research in this area, most of these companies had structured approaches to consultation and the levels of participation were satisfactory, suggesting therefore that the cases may not be representative of many non-unionised workplaces.
- All organisations had meetings where health and safety was reported to be a standard agenda item. Employee participation in meetings where OHS was the main topic of discussion, and management were in attendance, was generally restricted to employee representatives (reps) or line managers; though in some cases a selection of workers were involved. In two case studies, there was no formal workplace meeting between management and workers that was dedicated to the discussion of health and safety issues.
- As one might expect, sites with a dedicated health and safety officer were able to demonstrate greater levels of commitment to health and safety; for example, more time and resources were committed to the management of OHS. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the presence of a health and safety officer or advisor, whose job it is to provide expert technical input, provide advice and support, organise meetings and initiate discussions, can raise the levels of awareness across the workplace, but also raise the likelihood of employee involvement.
- Within the larger organisations, the primary motivation for WP came from corporate level policies and procedures. Other major motivating forces behind WP were management representatives and / or safety officers. It was often the case that they would organise meetings, encourage participation and provide time and resources for WP. Despite reasonable levels of WP reported at most sites, there was no evidence that workers requested or initiated new participatory or consultative arrangements (e.g. work teams, safety circles and safety committees). This could be a characteristic of contemporary non-unionised workplaces. In most cases managers, health and safety officers, employee reps and workers were not aware of the relevant health and safety regulations. Of those that demonstrated some level of awareness, they did not have a detailed level of insight into the regulations, but recognised that there was a duty on the employer to consult. It seems

reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the impact of health and safety legislation was negligible upon the nature or extent of participatory processes.

- For the most part, methods of participation and consultation were conventional approaches: safety committees and team meetings / briefings were widely used. Only in one case were there significant efforts to introduce new methods and processes. Innovative examples from across the cases included the introduction of hazard identification reporting schemes, incentive schemes, behavioural safety initiatives, and near-miss mapping plans.
- In most cases, efforts were made to communicate widely on OHS management issues; for example, through team briefings, toolbox talks and safety notices.
- The degree to which organisations sought feedback from workers on any proposed changes in OHS arrangements was variable. Workers involved in the early stages of planning and consultation, typically members of a safety or planning committee, would be directly involved or informed. The wider workforce, in most instances, would rarely influence decisions and practical outcomes, with little advance information being given to employees about actions to be taken.
- Predominantly informal relations and consultation were characteristic of these workplaces. Direct, informal communication, outside of set piece arrangements, between workers, managers, and their health and safety officers was widely reported as a favoured form of consultation. Although the utility of formal meetings was recognised, in most cases, a majority of participants considered that informal consultation represented an important means for raising concerns and discussing solutions.
- Managers or safety officers from all companies claimed that their organisation had provided some form of health and safety training for employees. Training, for the most part, took place in-house, often in the form of induction training for new employees. Toolbox talks for manual workers were employed across the case studies, with one exception. Most of the companies recognised that the training of representatives of employee safety has a beneficial impact upon their effectiveness, and provided some level of training.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need for further detailed research into employee involvement in the management of OHS in non-unionised workplaces. Although these case studies provide valuable insights, subsequent studies should aim to explore the issues in greater depth.
2. Research from the current study is based on the views of only a small number of respondents. There is a need to validate these findings on a larger sample of companies to establish the extent to which they are generalisable to other contexts.
3. Subsequent research should generate insight into the safety culture (risk attitudes, norms and behaviour) at the company level and its relation to levels of workforce involvement in the management of OHS.
4. The range of evidence contained within this report, along with findings from any subsequent studies, should form the basis of guidance material for companies. A number of the barriers identified within this research require consideration, and should be addressed within any guidance materials.

6 APPENDICES

6.1 APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1 Introduction

- What is your job title?
- How many years have you worked for the present employer?
 - And how many years at this site?
- How many sites are owned by this company?
- What is the main business activity at this site? (e.g. products and services)
- Approximately, how many employees and contractors work at this site?

2 Background of OH&S activities

- Do you use any information sources for guidance on H&S?
- Do any of your suppliers or contractors provide guidance on H&S?
- Are outside H&S experts called on for advice?
e.g.
 - Consultants, H&S specialists,
- Are any other sources of H&S information that you draw upon?

3 Driving Forces behind WI

- What prompted the company to introduce workforce involvement?
e.g.
 - belief that H&S is managed effectively when everyone is involved
 - to detect and abate work hazards
 - improve communication between management and workers
 - to increase stock of ideas
 - to overcome specific problems
 - change in organisational structure
 - Does the company have a H&S policy?
 - Is WI mentioned within the company's H&S policy, or other mission statements?
 - Are you aware of employer's regulatory duty to consult at a collective level?
i.e.
 - The safety reps and safety committees Regs 1977
 - The H&S consultation with employees Regs 1996?
- IF YES
 - Have the Regulations for Consultation played any role in guiding and shaping WI?

4 Locus of Involvement

- Do you have safety reps?
 - What are the main duties of safety reps?
- Are the management co-operative in enabling H&S reps to fulfil their duties?
- Do managers review or authorise safety reps' / workers H&S recommendations?
- Can individual workers choose to have direct and personal involvement in decision-making relating to H&S?
 - Can workers shape or veto decisions?
- In what aspects of health and safety are the workforce involved?

e.g.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Producing safety reports and assessments (coshh, comah)• Identifying safety issues• Accident investigation• Safety audits• Equipment design & testing• Equipment procurement• Development of safety management systems• Development of H&S policy
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- Are there any contractors or agency workers on site?
 - Do they have any input to H&S agendas?

5 Development of WI

- What are the main types of consultation activity used at this work site?

EXAMPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• safety committees• work teams, safety circles, tool box meetings...• staff meetings• attitude surveys• team meetings• newsletters / memos / briefings• informal discussions
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- How did you decide on the particular forms of participation?
 - Were the workforce involved in decision making?
- What were the primary goals of WI?
- What level of H&S training and information is provided the workforce?
 - What individuals have benefited from training (e.g. workers / managers)?

6 Arrangements & Examples of WI

COMMITTEES AND GROUPS

• Thinking about individual examples of group consultation approaches: [FOR EACH EXAMPLE]

• On what basis are individuals appointed to group activities?

- e.g.
- those with a vested interest
 - expertise
 - election
 - management appointed
 - volunteer

• Is a wide range of workers involved?

- Are senior management involved, and on what basis?

• Which individuals chair or lead the group?

• What is the typical size of the group or work team?

- What size appears to be most effective?
- How often do teams meet to discuss H&S?
- How long are meetings? Are the work groups given adequate time to specify plans and agendas?

• What issues are discussed?

• What are the main activities and outputs?

• Do all members demonstrate commitment to the group?

- How are disagreements overcome?

• What discretion do work groups have in making and implementing decisions?

- Are there occasions when ideas are not implemented?
- If yes, for what reasons?

• Is H&S training provided for group members?

• Is participation considered to be worthwhile amongst employees?

• Do the groups communicate their activities to the wider workforce?

• Is the work group given support from managers? Are progress and outcomes reported to management?

COMMUNICATION OTHER THAN GROUPS

- Now thinking about arrangements for types of communication other than committees and work teams:

- In what ways does the management keep the mass of employees informed of health and safety matters?
- Can workers freely communicate H&S issues to reps or committee members?
 - Is this communication usually informal, or does a procedure exist?
 - Do reps respond to suggestions from workers about health and safety?
 - Do they deal effectively with H&S problems that have been brought to their attention?
- Are workers H&S training needs regularly assessed? What is the level of provision?

WI BARRIERS

- Are there any barriers to effective communication (within and beyond groups)?
(e.g.)
 - Low awareness of the issues
 - Poor commitment to H&S
 - Time and cost, e.g. consultation slows progress
 - Attitude of workers / managers
 - Low levels of agreement
 - Complexity of H&S issues
- Are any measures taken to overcome any barriers?
- If you were advising a company that was about to introduce WI, what recommendations would you provide?
- Lastly, are there any other issues, that I've not covered, that you think would be relevant to this study?

7 REFERENCES

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