Title:

"A case study analysis of the employee voice mechanisms utilised within a unionized SME"

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Year: 2011

Qualification: Master of Business in Strategy and Innovation Management, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology.

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Date of Submission: 1 September 2011

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"Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the Master of Business in Strategy and Innovation Management Galway, Mayo Institute of Technology".

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Abstract

Using a case study approach, this thesis will seek to identify the employee voice mechanisms utilized within a unionized SME. The employee voice mechanisms in place will then be analyzed in terms of how effectively they are in providing employees with an input into decisions made within the organization. The perspectives' of both management and employees will be utilized for this purpose.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the reasoning and framework that forms this dissertation. Firstly, the justification for selecting this topic of interest will be discussed. The research objectives which form the central pillars of this dissertation will then be presented, followed by an outline of the remainder of the study.

1.2 Rationale

Employee voice is defined by Pyman et al (2006:53) as the way in which

> "Employees raise concerns, express and advance their interests, solve problems and contribute to and participate in workplace decision making".

Employee voice as a concept is relatively broad. For the purpose of this dissertation, the aspect of employee voice that will be focused upon will be the ability of employees to contribute towards decisions taken within the firm, whether at a workplace or strategic level.

Even though a company may be unionized, a variety of employee voice mechanisms can be utilized within it, as illustrated by Boxall and Purcell's definition of employee voice: - "a whole variety of processes and structures which at times enable, and at times empower, employees, directly and indirectly, to contribute to decision making in the firm" (Boxall and Purcell, 2003:162).

This variation in the array of mechanisms utilized within a firm can result in varying levels of employee involvement in organizational decisions. The popularity of non-union employee voice mechanisms has risen sharply over the last decade, primarily due to a decline in union membership and managerial opposition to unionization (Dundon and Gollan, 2007).

This dissertation seeks to uncover the range of mechanisms that exist within a unionized SME and analyze the mechanisms present in terms of how effective they are in providing employees with a robust input into decisions made within the firm.

Previous research centered on the topic of employee voice, has focused on comparing the SME organization to larger organizations. As the SME alone has frequently been overlooked as an entity, this dissertation will focus specifically on the employee voice mechanisms utilized within the SME organization.

A unionized SME has been chosen specifically as the research organization as it has been highlighted in previous research that that it is less common for smaller firms to have a union and if they do, it is likely that management do not recognize their presence when making important decisions affecting employees (Dundon and Wilkinson,2003).

Dundon and Gollan (2007:1184) cite Wilkinson et al (2004) in stating that the majority of research already conducted in relation to employee voice is over-reliant on managerial perspectives. As a consequence, employee perspectives on the employee voice mechanisms utilized within the organization will be utilized, as well as those of management, in order to prevent the research from being biased in favor of managerial attitudes and experiences.

1.3 Research objectives

In order to fully analyze and evaluate the research topic, a number of objectives have been outlined. The empirical research centers around a core, primary objective which provides the centre point for the research to be focused upon. A series of secondary objectives have been formulated to add depth to the research and enable the primary objective to be fulfilled comprehensively.

Primary objective:

➢ To identify and examine the employee voice mechanisms utilized within a unionized SME, in terms of their quality and effectiveness, utilizing the perspectives' of management and employees.

Secondary objectives:

➢ To identify any barriers to employee voice from developing and evolving within the company
➢ To discover attitudes that exists towards unionization within the company.

1.4 Dissertation Outline:

➢ The literature review that follows this chapter will summarize the main themes to be found within previous research conducted on the subject matter of employee voice within a unionized SME.

➢ In chapter three, the research methodology will be disclosed, justified and limitations acknowledged.

➢ Chapters four will contain a synopsis of the research findings obtained from the research organization.

➢ Chapter five will present a discussion of the research findings obtained and compare and contrast these findings to those sourced from existing research.

➢ Chapter six will present the recommendations and conclusions obtained from conducting this research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this thesis it was necessary to bring research ideas to the

"full range of intellectual resources delivered from....research literature"

(Coffey and Aklinsons, 1996:153).

This literature review provides the foundation for research objectives to be identified and consequently analyzed against. The following chapter presents a summary of the literature reviewed and themes that emerged from the literature.

2.2 The Meaning of Employee Voice

For the purpose of this dissertation the definition of employee voice utilized will be that as determined by Boxall and Purcell, whereby employee voice is defined as:

"The term increasingly used to cover a whole variety of processes and structures which at times enable, and at times empower, employees, directly and indirectly, to contribute to decision making in the firm" (2003:162), .

A number of direct and indirect employee voice mechanisms can be utilized within an organization. Each mechanism provides varying levels of voice to the employee. The power of voice that an employee is given also depends on a variety of internal and external factors such as "government legislation, managerial attitudes, employee attitudes, employee expectations, union demands and business pressures" (Dundon et al, 2006:492-3).

Employee involvement and participation represent two extremities of voice that may be found within any organization. Employee participation represents a strong form of voice. Salamon (2000:304) states that true participation requires both parties within the employment relationship to have "equal power to determine the outcomes of decisions affecting them". This is referred to as joint decision making. .

Employee involvement represents a lesser form of voice as "it relates to a set of practices that solicit employee ideas, while at the same time, preserving management's right to make decisions" (Rollinson and Dundon, 2007:230). Direct participation mechanisms are utilized to involve employees and can be found in both unionized and non-union organizations. Both direct and indirect employee voice mechanisms will be discussed in more detail in the "form" section below.

There are a number of benefits which have been associated with employee participation, which have been identified in earlier research. A synopsis of this research will be provided below.

2.3 Benefits of Employee Voice:

Rollinson and Dundon (2007) cite Budd (2004) in suggesting that "there need not be a contradiction between voice for enhanced competitiveness and its purpose as an extension of democracy at the workplace" (p.233). Coupar and Stevens (2005:39) affirm that: "within the pluralist framework, employee voice is seen as a right"…"within a unitarist framework, the validity of these processes is grounded in that concept of adding value to the organization…it is widely been established that there are business benefits associated from having a well-informed workforce who are involved in good two-way communication with their employer".

Coupar and Stevens (2005:44) cite Coats (2003) in affirming, "the employee's right to voice an opinion is not reliant on demonstrating added value to the business …it is about recognizing their right to be heard at their place of work, and their entitlement to an intelligent response" .Dundon et al (2002) note that having an involvement in decision making generates a better environment in which to work, as employees are more committed to the organization and communication in general is more free flowing

As affirmed above, the participation of employees in the decision making process within the organization is not only in the interest of the employee but also the company. Mowday et al (1982:650) define commitment as the intensity of employees "identification with and involvement within the organization". As studies have shown there is a direct correlation between the ability of individual employees within an organization being able to voice their opinions and concerns and their increasing commitment to the successful performance of the organization. While, Gennard and Judge (2002:232) note that a committed workforce is more

"likely to understand better what the organization is trying to achieve and be more prepared to contribute to its efficient operation". Blyton and Turnbull (1998:227) cite McGregor (1960) in concurring that employee voice initiatives stem "from the principles of 'human relations' management, the connection between communication and consultation and increased worker commitment, higher job satisfaction and motivation".

However, Rollinson and Dundon (2007:256) argue that it is unrealistic to assume that "if employees have a say on minor-task related matters there will somehow be a link to commitment or motivation". It is also difficult to "isolate the impact of just one aspect of management practice from other factors that can influence work behavior" (Dundon et al, 2002:23). Boxall and Purcell (2003:171) concur that it is difficult to find "hard evidence on the performance effects of voice systems" This dissertation will explore employee and managerial perceptions in respect of the employee voice mechanisms utilized within their organization. and in particular, their effectiveness in allowing them participation in the decision making process. Employees and management will also be questioned as employee levels of job satisfaction and commitment to the organization as a result of being involved to the extent that they are in respect of decisions made within the firm

Within every organization there will be a number of barriers to the establishment and evolution of certain employee voice mechanisms imbedded within its culture. These barriers can prevent the evolution of involvement into participation and will now be discussed below.

2.4 Barriers to the Establishment and Evolution of Employee Voice
The greatest universal obstacles to the successful establishment and subsequent success of employee voice within the business organization comprise of employee skepticism, managerial opposition and a lack of management having the appropriate skills to implement voice mechanisms effectively (Blyton and Turnbull, 1998, Wilkinson et al, 2007).

As discussed above, if employee voice initiatives are successful, the organization can benefit as well as the employee. Marchington (2001:242) affirm that management are "central to the effective functioning of employee voice mechanisms". Gollan and Wilkinson (2007) affirm that managers must initiate a change in the culture of the organization if employees are to participate effectively. Storey (2005:4) states that many employers find it problematic to believe that "economically viable ideas can stem from employees". Gennard and Judge (2002) expand this notion that they provide employees within the decision making process, the longer the decision making process will take to complete within the organization.

Management need to recognize that their employees form the backbone of their organization and that the greater the level of participation they are given as regards to decision making within the firm in particular, the more beneficial it will be both for the employees and the company itself.

Even if given the opportunity to be involved or consulted by management, the employees within an organization can also prevent employee voice from developing and evolving. Employee perceptions of management can severely impact the way in which they view the various voice mechanisms in existence within the firm (Wilkinson et al, 2007). The problem with employee voice is that many managers view employee voice in terms of what it achieves for the organization and not the employee and this becomes all too apparent to the organizations employees (Dundon et al, 2002). While Head and Lucas (2004:701) concur that many employers may be "unwilling to formally recognize the mutual nature of the employment relationship". Tebut and Marchington (1997) have asserted that if the mechanisms in place at present are relatively low in consultative power, employees may become accustomed to these low levels of involvement and lose interest in becoming further involved in the decision making process.

2.5 The nature of employee voice within the SME

Dundon and Wilkinson (2003:289) cite Storey (1994) in affirming that "there is no single or acceptable definition of a small firm" For the purpose of this dissertation, the European Commission definition of a small firm as having 10-99 employees will be utilised (cited by Wilkinson 1999). Dix and Oxenbridge (2003) note that information provision mechanisms utilized within the small firm are generally top-down and informal. Due to the small size of the organization, formal mechanisms of voice are deemed largely unnecessary (McMahon 1994). Gunnigle and Brady (1984) assert that direct mechanisms are most commonly utilized within the SME, resulting in employees generally being consulted on minor work-related issues.

Two opposing typologies attempt to characterize the employment relationship within the SME environment, which are - "small is beautiful" and "bleak house" (Dundon and Wilkinson 2003). Atkinson (2006:) notes that caution must be exerted when exercising these typologies, as they present a "one size fits all" approach Therefore, these are better utilized as a guide to the employee voice within an SME rather than a taken for granted assumption.

Dundon and Gollan (2007:1194) cite Dundon (2002) in asserting that "among many smaller non-union firms there remain exploitative employment relations", which they term the "Bleak House" SME. In respect of the "Small is Beautiful" SME typology, Dundon and Wilkinson (2003:302) note that while "it is often 'assumed' that communications in small firms are automatically good because of the flexibility and close proximity between the employee and owner-manager...this may be 'one-way' communication and based upon a 'need to know' approach defined by the manager"

Millward et al (1992) assert that small firms "have less access to union representation than employees in larger establishments" (Dundon and Wilkinson 2003:291). Dundon and Wilkinson (2003:296) affirm that "the hostility of owner-managers in general remains a powerful disincentive for workers to join for fear of managerial reprisals". While Cully et al (1998:15) note that "anti-union sentiments on the part of employers provide a considerable hurdle to overcome if unions are to win members and recognition" Hartley (1992) found that employees in smaller firms did not want to join a union, while Scott et al (1989) contradict this notion in asserting that while "workers in SMEs generally expressed positive attitudes towards unions" they generally accepted that they would not be *allowed* to join a union (Dundon and Wilkinson 2003:295).

2.6 The Quality and Effectiveness of Employee Voice Mechanisms

Dundon et al (2006:501) cite Marchington (2004) and Wilkinson et al (2004) in asserting that "the quality and effectiveness of voice arrangements is much more important than simply reporting the number of mechanisms found" In order to gain a deeper insight into the quality and effectiveness of the employee voice mechanisms found to be in place within the research organization, five elements will be examined: depth, scope, form, level (Blyton and Turnbull,1998) and frequency of participation (Marchington and Cox, 2007)

Both employee and managerial perceptions of the depth, scope, form, level and frequency of the employee voice mechanisms utilized within the research organization will be analyzed within the empirical research. The literature pertaining to the depth, scope, form, level and frequency of employee voice mechanisms within the organization, will now be discussed in further detail below.

2.7 Frequency of participation

Marchington and Cox,(2007) propose that the frequency in which each mechanism is utilized within the research organization is vital to consider as although a robust mechanism of voice may be in operation within the organization, it would be incorrect to assume that it is utilized to any great extent within the firm. Gollan (2000:384) notes that there is a "clear link between how often consultation occurs and its perceived value - with a lack of consultation contributing to perceptions of poor management among employees" Therefore, it is imperative that the frequency with which these mechanisms are utilized are determined, in order to calculate the quality and effectiveness of these mechanisms.

2.8 Depth of participation:

The depth of participation an employee is granted varies from shallow to deep. It varies depending on the mechanism implemented and refers to the employees ability to be involved in the decision making process. A greater depth of participation is obtained when employees, "can influence those decisions that are normally reserved for management" (Dundon and Wilkinson 2006:385). On the other hand, participation may be minimal where employees are only informed of decisions taken by management (Pateman 1970).

A conceptual model depicting the five stages of employee participation depth (below), which increases as one moves from left to right was created by Blyton and Turnbull (1998). Depth varies from "no involvement" to a point which participation begins which is "joint consultation", whereby employees are consulted before any decisions are formulated (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:224). For Ramsay (1980) "joint decision making" represents the stage as depicted on the model below, whereby management allow employees true participatory power (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:224). Joint decision making represents the collaboration between and employees giving them the opportunity to "exert *influence* rather than simply be *involved* in the decision-making process" (Blyton and Turnbull, 1998:.224). Pateman (1970) suggests that anything short of joint-decision making can be deemed as "pseudo-participation", whereby employees have little or no involvement in the decision making process within the organization.

The ultimate depth of participation is "employee control" over management decisions which is usually "confined to areas of task management" (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:224).

Table 2.1:

A   B   C   D   E
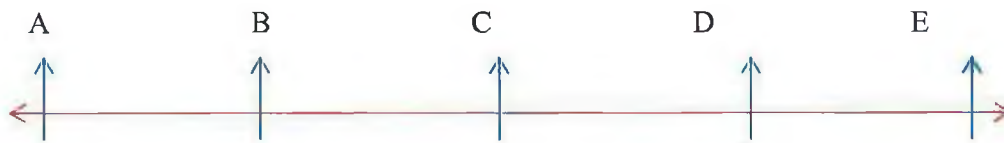
(Bltyon and Turnbull, 1998).

2.9 Scope of Participation:

The scope of participation present refers to "the type of subject matter dealt with, ranging from the trivial to the strategic" (Marchington and Cox 2007:179). Trivial issues are characterized as low level decisions, while higher-level strategic issues concern "broader questions about organizational goals" (Marchington and Cox 2007:179). Blyton and Turnbull (1998) note that management ultimately have the power over what issues they give employees an input in.

2.10 Level of Participation:

Dundon and Wilkinson (2006:385) note that the level of participation concerns whether a decision is made at "work-group, department, plant or corporate level". Boxall and Purcell (2003) affirm that management endeavor to reduce employees influence on major organizational decisions which will impact on their situations greatly and instead allow them instead to have an input in respect of more trivial matters within the organization. Lewis et al (2003) concur that the lower the level of employee, the less input they have and are given as regards organizational decision making, in respect of strategic issues in particular..

2.11 Form of Participation:

Form may be characterized according to whether a mechanism is formal or informal, direct or indirect (Dundon and Gollan 2007, Dundon and Wilkinson 2006). Formal mechanisms are used by management on regular intervals, whereas informal mechanisms are more ad-hoc in their implementation.

Bryson (2004:220) suggests that there are three avenues for employee voice, union and non – union representatives and through direct voice mechanisms. Indirect voice mechanisms involve an intermediary, which is either a trade union member or employee representative (Rollinson and Dundon 2007). Direct voice mechanisms focus on employees and management sharing their views directly with the other party. Rollinson and Dundon (2007) note that the channel of voice used within organisations is shifting dramatically with direct mechanisms replacing more indirect mechanisms. Blyton and Turnbull (1998:236) have noted that direct mechanisms are largely individualist in nature; tend to be "soft on power" and are "designed principally to integrate employees into the organization". Fenton-O'Creevy and Wood (2005) discovered that direct mechanisms utilized alone, minus the occurrence of indirect participation approaches conveyed lower levels of employee involvement in the company decision making processes. Ramsay (1997:316) argues that "employees tend to find the greatest relevance and interest in direct forms which deal with issues immediately and visibly affecting them".

2.12 Direct voice mechanisms

Flood and Toner (1997) assert that in order to adequately replace union voice, the direct mechanisms in place must be quite substantial. Geary (2006:22) found in 2005 that "employees in non-unionized workplaces were more likely to have used direct voice mechanisms" Bryson (2004:234) notes that "not all direct-voice mechanisms improve perceptions of managerial responsiveness...regular meetings with senior management and problem-solving groups are associated with greater managerial responsiveness, whereas briefing groups are not, perhaps because briefing groups, by definition, are less intensive interventions".

2.13 The "four-fold schema" of Direct Participation Mechanisms

Marchington and Wilkinson (2000:345) put forward a "four-fold schema" framework that identifies the four principal categories of direct participation mechanisms, which are downward communications, upward problem solving, task participation and team working and self-management

2.14 Downward Communications:

This represents the most 'dilute' form of employee voice mechanism utilized within an organization as it "does not challenge the existing status quo" within the company (Marchington 2001:235). Yet, basic levels of communication are necessary for the organization to function effectively. Rollinson and Dundon (2007:237) assert that "in order to be able to manage its employment relationship, a flow of information is vital for an organization, and good communication is often a precursor to deeper forms of employee voice". While Kersley et al (2006) note that the use of downward communication techniques have increased in recent years, with over ninety percent of organization sutilizing some form of face-to-face communication with employees.

Direct communications are "limited in degree and scope, largely because communication is downward" and basically represents the one way transmission of information from management to employees (Marchington and Cox 2007:181). Marchington and Cox (2007:181) assert that "this can be viewed as nothing more than a neutral device to inform workers about specific issues or as an instrument to reinforce management prerogatives by shaping worker expectations. "Management inevitably controls what (and when) information will be passed to employees", which places their effectiveness from en employee viewpoint in doubt as "the information communicated is invariably selected by management" (Blyton and Turnbull 1998:.238). Dundon and Wilkinson (2006) assert that information is usually conveyed to employees when decisions have already been decided upon, giving employees little or no input in the decision making process.

2.15 Upward Problem Solving:

Rollinson and Dundon (2007) note that this mechanism differs from downward communication as employees actually come face to face with their employers. Marchington (2001:182) notes that this method of employee voice is designed to "tap into employee knowledge and ideas, typically through individual suggestions or through ad-hoc or semi-permanent groups brought together for the specific purpose of resolving problems and generating ideas" Batt (2004) notes that these mechanisms tend to be bolted-on, rather than central to the work process. Dundon and Wilkinson (2006:387) affirm that these mechanisms are utilised as they "increase the stock of ideas available to management as well as encourage a more cooperative industrial relations climate". Such mechanisms may prove to be short lived, as once a specific problem is solved, the group may become obsolete. Also,

management are under no pressure to utilize any suggestions made by employees, as decisions are not reached but ideas and opinions are listened to. Any decisions that are made tend to be shallow in range and depth as they generally relate to work related decisions. Employees too may become pessimistic to the benefits attained from such mechanisms as management are seen to use their ideas, yet the employees see little recognition or reward in return (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992).

2.16 Task Participation

Geary (1994:637) defines task participation as the "opportunities which management provide at workplace level for consultation with and /or delegation of responsibilities and authority for decision making to its subordinates either as individuals or as groups of employees relating to the immediate work task and /or working conditions" Dundon and Wilkinson (2006:387) note that "the objective here has been to focus attention on the actual job rather than the managerial processes for participation". Wallace et al (2004:326) suggest that employees "are encouraged to become actively involved in influencing decisions, contributing their opinions and in solving problems at workplace level".

Sisson (1994) differentiates between two types of task participation (as cited in Wallace et al 2004). Consultative participation is where "workers are given the opportunity to become involved in decisions and make their views known but are not involved in joint decision making" (Wallace et al 2004,:327). Delegatative participation is where workers are "empowered to make key decisions without the need for management approval.", meaning that "individual workers assume greater autonomy in their work" (Wallace et al 2004:327).

Task participation can also be classified as horizontal, whereby employees move around their station to take part in different tasks and vertical, whereby employees are promoted to a higher level above their current position (Marchington and Wilkinson 2000). Employees engaged in vertical participation mechanisms benefit from a higher level of participation as they are involved in low key managerial decisions (Marchington and Wilkinson 2000). Dundon and Wilkinson (2006:387) note that "the objective here has been to focus attention on the actual job rather than the managerial processes for participation" While these practices are utilized to counter the degradation of work (Proctor and Muller 2000) and are often perceived by management in particular, as the route to increased employee commitment and satisfaction (Wood and DeMenezes 1998), these objectives are not often achieved. Firstly, employees may not be suited to the tasks they are given, whether they are moved vertically or

horizontally, with many employees unwilling to come forward that they feel that they are not suitable for the position available. Dundon and Wilkinson (2006:387) note that the outcomes of such mechanisms often result in "work intensification rather than job enrichment", while, Delbridge et al (1992) affirm that employees often work significantly harder for the same amount of pay in return.

2.17 Team working and Self-Management

This employee voice mechanism allows employees a greater amount of participation than the other mechanisms discussed (Marchington 2000). This mechanism involves working without direct supervision and allows employee control over working methods, team members and their overall management of their daily work schedule (Marchington 2000). Such mechanisms persuade employees to enhance their organizational skills and to learn how to multi-skill effectively.

Marchington and Wilkinson (2000) quote Barker (1993) who asserts that this system of working places great pressure on the employee to continuously perform and increases employee stress levels to a considerable degree. The notion of the self-managed team can serve to place more stress and constraints upon the employee than management ever could. Geary and Dobbins (2001) concur that the pressure placed upon the employee by both management and their colleagues can be immense.

2.18 Indirect forms of voice

Marchington et al (2001:28) propose five categories of indirect participation mechanisms which are: joint consultation, partnership, work councils, trade unions and non-union representation. Such mechanisms are seen to be "power-centered" as they "bring about greater employee influence in areas that have traditionally been the remit of senior management" (Wallace et al, 2004:302).

These mechanisms express the collective views of the workforce to management, using employee or trade union representatives, who are chosen by the workforce (Gunnigle et al, 1999). The effectiveness of the employee representatives depends on the employee representative in question and the extent to which they take on employee views and in return relay information back to them (Boxall and Purcell, 2003).

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2.19 Joint Consultation:

This mechanism involves employee representatives and management meeting together to consider issues that are of mutual concern and interest to both parties (Marchington et al 2001:28). Bennett (1997:85) asserts that "management retains control over the decision-making process, but seeks to utilize the energy and initiative of the workforce by involving it in decision-making activities". This mechanism is evident where unions are present as well as where they are absent.

2.20 Work Council

The process of joint consultation may take a number of forms, the most common being that of a European Works Council (EWC). Salamon (1999) asserts that such a mechanism can foster a greater co-operative relationship between employees and management as it facilitates consultation and discussion at an enterprise level. Wallace et al (2004:292) assert that the role of works councils "is seen as primarily consultative and representing a broader range of employee opinion than trade unions alone" Wallace et al (2004:292) cite Salamon (1998) in noting that works councils have three main strengths - they "provide a mechanism through which management and employee representatives can jointly consider issues of mutual concern"…"are representative of the entire workforce" and "provide a forum through which management and employees can address both strategic and operational issues". Wallace et al (2004) note that many works councils were set up as part of a union substitutions strategy. Wallace et al (2004) cite Roche and Turner (1998:295) in asserting that "these councils generally remain creations of management with little capacity for independent action" There is also no legislative requirement for an organization to set up such a structure.

2.21 Partnership Schemes

Marchington et al (2001) note that this method focuses on a spirit of co-operation between the parties involved. The adversarial relationship that is usually present between management and employees is left behind for the purpose of this voice mechanism. Salamon (1998) argues that a move towards more collaborative partnership agreements require both employee and management perceptions of each other to change. Marchington et al (2001:28) notes that this mechanism requires "a high commitment to information sharing" from all parties within the employment relationship. Dundon et al (2006) note that in Ireland this mechanism was primarily utilized in the form of social partnership which centered on pay issues. Roche (1997) agrees that this spirit of partnership has failed to translate efficiently into the enterprise level of the organization.

2.22 Union Representation

Bryson (2004:239) notes that union voice is present where there is a "trade union(s) recognized by employers for pay bargaining, a joint consultative committee meeting at least once a month with representatives chosen through union channels, or a union representative on site, whether the workplace has a recognized union or not"

Collective bargaining "has traditionally been viewed as one of the most effective means through which employees can bring their influence to bear on organizational decision making" (Wallace et al 2004, :291). Collective bargaining is noted for being adversarial in nature as it places management against employees and vice versa, whereby on occasions the presence of third party can be more of a hindrance to the harmonious relationship between employees and management than a cohesive influence (Kelly and Hourihan 1997). Willman et al (2007:1131) note that "unions no longer provide the quality of voice employers require", prompting a surge in weaker forms of voice

Collective bargaining is generally associated with issues such as pay, working conditions and redundancy. Wallace et al (2004:291) note that "collective bargaining agendas are often limited in the range of issues addressed". This restricted agenda is a "limiting factor which prohibits the development of greater management-employee participation on issues outside the scope of collective bargaining" (Wallace et al 2004, 291).

Brewster et al (2007) note that the "external voice" of the union is what makes this form of voice more substantial than other methods of representative voice, as the union representative is not dependent on management for their livelihood. He noted that employees prefer to utilise avoid personal confrontation with superiors and that they have attributed great enthusiasm towards mechanisms that allow them to shape the agenda to be discussed. While, Boxall and Purcell (2003) asserted that the effectiveness of the union representative largely depends on their ability to effectively transmitting information from the employees and management and vice versa.

2.23 Non-union representation:

Bryson (2004:240) notes that non-union representative voice is present where there is a non-union employee representative and/or a "joint consultative committee meeting at least once a month with representatives not chosen through union channels" Golan (2007:10) asserts that such mechanisms can take a number of forms, specifically, "peer review panels, safety committees, works councils, consultative councils/committees or joint consultative committees". Such structures represent all employees within the workplace and there is no link to a trade union whatsoever (Gollan 2007). Taras and Koffman (2006:515) define such a representative as "one or more employees who act in an agency function for other employees in dealings with management over issues of mutual concern, including the terms and conditions under which people work"

Kaufmann and Taras (2000:2) assert that "these representational groups not only serve management interests in improved productivity and communication, but also ensure that employee interests in equitable terms and conditions of employment are factored into management decision making"

Taras and Kaufman (1999:14) assert that non-union forms of representation are "no easy substitute for unions, and employers who believe they can use NER (non-union employee representatives) for this purpose are seriously deluding themselves" .Yet, such mechanisms are largely management initiated. Butler (2004) assert that employee representatives are no match for unionized voice as they do not have the power and autonomy to fully represent their case fully to management. Watling and Snook (2003:8) asserts that non-union representatives were viewed "living in the pockets of management"

Gollan (2007:181) cites Kaufman and Kleiner (1993) in noting that non-union representation is not rated as being particularly effective from the standpoint of employees due to "a lack of true independence from management, and lack of effective sanctions such as the ability to use industrial action against management and "other forms of concerted activity to put muscle behind its collective voice"

2.24 The decline in trade unionism

Dundon et al (2005:308) refer to Dundon and Rollinson (2004) who assert that "non-unionism portrays a situation where trade union recognition is absent as a means to determine either in whole or in part the terms and conditions of employment" This "does not mean that there are no trade union members present" within the organization (Dundon et al 2005, 308).

Dundon (2002) states that the critical components determining this decline are not easily recognizable, yet employer's aggression towards the prospect of unionization may be a leading factor. Willman et al (2003:30) assert that the probability that a company will unionize is reliant on three factors: employee willingness to join a union, employer's willingness to allow employees to join a union and the union's willingness to work within the company

Terry (1999:18) concurs that the non-union phenomenon of late now "represents a lot of workplaces and a large number of employees". The decline in trade union membership has advocated an upsurge in the popularity of direct voice mechanisms in replacing indirect forms of communication between management and staff (Geary 2006, Millward et al 2000). Kaufman and Taras (2000) note that non-union voice can be as robust as union voice in protecting the interests of employees' (as cited by Haynes, 2005). Hammer (2000:183) concurs that non-union voice mechanisms may be deemed effective by employees as they give them the opportunity "to make decisions about how, and sometimes when, his or her work should be organized and carried out"

Dundon and Golan (2007:1194) affirm that "in an economy of falling union density and a growing climate of "never membership", non-union voice methods are likely to become further embedded and reinforced by a managerial discourse that seeks legitimization and authority". Upchurch et al (2006:408) note "management has a strategic choice over its employee relations regime, and the choice made by management has severely constrained the options for real employee involvement and participatory working". Union substitution and union suppression will now be discussed below.

2.25 Union substitution:

Union substitution" refers to the removal of "the triggers to unionization within the relevant organization" (Flood and Toner 1997:259). Dundon and Gollan (2007:1190) note that this process "assumes employees create an alternative form of employee representation, which employees will prefer to a union". Ramsay (1977) originated the "cycles of control" theory which assumes that in times of assumed pressure from organized labour, such mechanisms are introduced only to be discarded when this is reduced (Marchington et al, 1992). This occurs primarily within large companies who have large budgets available to impose voice mechanisms that are non-union in nature (Kochan et al, 1986).

Bryson (2004:213) notes that "the rise in non-union voice has resulted from a shift toward *direct* voice". Gallie et al (1998:109) note that "direct participation has the indirect effect of reducing employees' sense of the necessity of union membership". Wallace et al (2004:295) note that indirect participation mechanisms such as works councils and staff associations may also be utilized "to satisfy employee desires for formal representation while maintaining a firm's non-union status"

Dundon (2002:236) refers to Edwards (1995) in affirming that "the absence of industrial discontent or union membership 'may' point towards some level of commitment or trust between an employer and employees". This may also be as the result of a "fear of management and an abuse of managerial prerogative" (Dundon 2002:236). Gall and McKay (2001:102) note that this is where "the employer tries to supplant the union role by attempting to show that the union is unnecessary by resolving, or being seen to resolve, provenances and establishing 'independent' and non-union related mechanisms for resolving grievances and giving expression to employee voice". Gallie et al (1998:218) note that "direct participation has the indirect effect of reducing employees' sense of the necessity of union membership". Dundon et al (2006:505) notes of mechanisms used by union-substitution managers that "most schemes are direct, rather than via employee representatives, and most are shallow regarding the scope of consultation".

2.26 Union suppression:

"Union avoidance/suppression" can be defined as "the strenuous resistance of union organizing drives including the use of coercive tactics by managers to stay union-free" (Flood and Toner 1997:259). McLoughlan and Gourlay (1994) note that small firms are more likely to suppress union demands. Dundon (2002:238-243) affirms that this is due to the lack of available resources "to offer substitutes for collectivization" and is also due to the overt hostility of management towards the prospect of unionization .Gall and McKay (2001:99) notes that the "most obvious tools" utilized by union fearing managers are "sackings, dismissals and redundancies" which illustrate to employees "naked displays of their power".

Dundon et al (2006) note that union bypassing is characteristic of SMEs. It was found that the influence of owner-managers is "an important variable that weakened the extent of employee input"(Dundon et al, 2006:507). Taras and Coping (1998) note that using such strategies may actually serve to enhance the expectations of employees and lead to a call for union recognition. Therefore, management must utilize substantial amounts of resources in order to continually marginalize the union, which they describe as the "catch 22" situation of non-unionism (Flood and Toner 1997).

2.27 Conclusion

The issues and conflicting explanations encountered in the literature review require one to carry out independent empirical research which will be discussed in the following chapter

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction:

The term methodology represents a "coherent set of rules and procedures which can be used to investigate a phenomena or situation" (Kitchin and Tate 2000:6). In the introductory chapter the research questions were set out, here the "procedures" utilized to set about answering these questions will be outlined.

3.2 Research Objectives:

In order to fully analyze and evaluate the research topic, a number of objectives have been set out. The empirical research centers around a core, primary objective which provides the centre point for the research to be focused on. A series of secondary objectives have been formulated to add depth to the research and enable the primary objective to be fulfilled comprehensively.

Primary Objective:

- To identify and examine the employee voice mechanisms utilized within a unionized SME, in terms of their quality and effectiveness, utilizing the perspectives' of management and employees

Secondary Objectives:

- To identify any barriers to employee voice from developing and evolving within the company

- To discover attitudes that exists towards unionization within the company.

3.3 Research Organization

For the purpose of this dissertation, a unionized SME within the retail sector was studied. The research organization chosen was Anthony Ryans. Anthony Ryans was established in 1909. It is a family owned retailer and has several outlets situated within Galway City. Anthony Ryans employs ninety five employees.

3.4 Research Process:

Saunders et al (2003) proposed the idea of the "research onion", with each layer of the onion being symbolic of essential steps within the research process. Using this framework, the research approach for this dissertation was decided upon. A case study analysis will be utilized as this allows the researcher to focus on the chosen research organization in depth. The research will be a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. It will interpretivist in nature and both qualitative and quantitative research methods will be utilized to gather the primary data. Interviews and questionnaires will be utilized to collect the data needed to fulfill the outlined research objectives. The target population for the interviews will be management and the employees will be given the questionnaires to complete. Each aspect of the research approach will now be discussed in more detail in order to convey why the above research frameworks and mechanisms were chosen.

3.5 Research Philosophy:

The research philosophy represents a view of how the world is constructed. Cooper and Emory (1995:22) assert that "how one sees the world affects the kind of questions asked and the answers that can be accepted as explanations" Bryman (2004) asserts that there are two primary opposing viewpoints regarding the research, interpretivism and positivism. Both will now explore both in more detail as the philosophy chosen will ultimately impinge upon the remainder of the research process as its sets out its basic framework.

3.6 Interpretivism and Positivism

This view "requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman 2004:13). Interpretivists believe that reality is socially constructed and that the researcher must understand the reality of the subjects they are studying (Saunders et al 2003). Such a viewpoint deems that one must "arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds" (Neuman 1991,:76). Qualitative data is mainly utilized to ascertain this knowledge, as it allows a richer and deeper quality of information to be collected and analyzed (Silverman 2005).

Positivism "advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality" (Bryman 2004:11). Positivism focuses on hard facts that are quantifiable in nature (Remenyi et al 1998). This method requires highly structured methodologies to enable the replication and quantifiable observations that are typical of statically analysis (Gill and Johnson 1997). This method presumes that the research situation can be controlled to increase the validity and reliability of results obtained (Saunders et al 2003). Quantitative data is utilized to obtain factual evidence as it is not subject to researcher interpretation and is therefore, more reliable and factual (Bryman 2004).

This dissertation is focused on an interpretive philosophy, which will allow the researcher through the interview with management and employee questionnaires to gain an in-depth knowledge of employee voice within the company, which is necessary to answer the research objectives set out at the beginning of this process.

3.7 Research Design

Vogt (1993:196) asserts that the research design "is the science of planning procedures for conducting studies so as to get the most valid findings" Bryman (2004:27) asserts that the research design "provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data" There are three main approaches that can be employed by the researcher.

3.8 Causal:

This type of research "proves a cause and effect relationship between two or more variables" (Domegan and Fleming 1999:57). The researcher must know exactly the variables to be studied and must "be able to control outside factors and their influence on the variables being manipulated" (Domegan and Fleming 1999:57).

3.9 Exploratory

Exploratory research involves "establishing trends, patterns and ranges of behavior that are unknown" (Domegan and Fleming, 1999:55). It centers on the generation of hypotheses (Domegan and Fleming 1999:.55). Qualitative data is utilized as this allows the issue at hand to be explored in great detail.

3.10 Descriptive

This type of research is centered on describing what is already known to an extent, in that the idea being tested is not new (Domegan and Fleming 1999). Hypothesis testing is a central component of this type of research (Domegan and Fleming 1999). Robson (2002:59) notes that the purpose of this research design is "to portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations". Cooper and Schindler (2003:146) affirm that it serves to find out "the who, what, where, when or how much"

For the purpose of conducting this type of research, both qualitative and quantitative types of data are utilized as both allow for descriptions and quantifications to be made (Domegan and Fleming 1999). Such a method can be longitudinal whereby data is collected over a number of points at time or cross-sectional, where data is collected on a 'once off' basis, creating a 'snapshot' of a particular "point in time" (Domegan and Fleming 1999,:56).

3.11 Research design utilized

The research design is heavily influenced by the research objectives and the research philosophy employed by the researcher (Bryman 2004). Therefore, the research design employed for the purpose of this dissertation will be a combination of exploratory and descriptive research.

It will be exploratory as it intends to "explore, chart and identify" (Domegan and Fleming, 1999:57). It will be largely response driven as the SME organization has not been studied in any great detail from the perspective of the employee and employees.

There will also be an element of a descriptive research design employed as this dissertation will also attempt to describe employee and employer perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of employee voice mechanisms in place, as well as quantify the level of quality of voice these mechanisms allow (Domegan and Fleming, 1999:57). The questions being used in the interview will be prepared in advance. The interviews will be recorded for future reference. Questionnaires will be issued to all employees, with the exclusion of management. The questionnaires will include open ended and closed questions. All information obtained from interviews and questionnaires will be kept confidential. For the generation the secondary data, a literary review of the voice mechanisms utilized within both unionized and non-union organizations with a focus on SMEs will be conducted to establish a body of knowledge which will guide the research objectives of this dissertation. A cross-sectional

case study will be utilized as the research organization will be studied across one specific point in time.

Types of Research Approaches

3.12 Deductive verses Inductive:

The deductive research approach develops "a theory and hypothesis and designs a research strategy to test the hypothesis" (Saunders et al 2003:85). It is referred to as moving from the broad to the defined (Hussey and Hussey 1997). The inductive approach, on the other hand, is where data is collected and a theory is then developed (Saunders et al 2003:.85). For the purpose of this dissertation, it is preferable to utilize a combination of both techniques as while, the majority of this dissertation will be inductive in nature, elements will also be deductive. As Ashton (1971) asserts "the whole discussion as to whether deduction or induction is the proper method to use in the social sciences is, of course, juvenile" (as cited by Taylor and Edgar 2003:222).

3.13 Qualitative and Quantitative

Qualitative research is concerned with "a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman 2004:20). It "refers to the meaning, the definition or analogy or model or metaphor underlying something" notes Cooper and Schindler (2003:152). The emphasis is "placed on the generation of theories"; therefore it is more suited to the inductive approach (Bryman 2004:20). The information gathered is rich in meaning. Such a method greatly increases the researchers understanding of why things are as they are and why subjects act as they do within this world (Bryman 2004). As Ghuari et al (1995:85) note "research problems focusing on uncovering a person's experience or behavior or where we want to uncover or understand a phenomenon about which little is known....require qualitative research"

3.14 Quantitative

Quantitative research is more centered on numbers making its results less open to interpretation and variance. It "assumes the meaning and refers to a measure of it" (Cooper and Schindler 2003). Such data is more generalizable to the general population and establishes cause and effect relationships. Such questions are easier to answer from a respondent point of view, easier to code, yet, not as meaningful and rich in quality (Bryman 2004).

Data Collection Methods:

3.17 The case study method- Semi structured interviews:

A semi structured interview was conducted with the general manager of Anthony Ryans. Hannabuss(1996:23) cites Patton (1990) who asserts that "we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe". A semi structured interview was deemed to be suitable for the purpose of this dissertation as the topics to be covered, the people to be interviewed and questions to be asked were all determined beforehand" (Ghauri et al 1995). A highly structured interview would not be suitable for the purposes of this dissertation as it would not allow for any development or probing on key issues. Unstructured interviews on the other hand are too lacking structure which may result in the yielding of poor, unstructured data.

Saunders et al (2003:250) notes that this method is particularly useful as they "provide you with the opportunity to probe answers, where you want your interviewees to explain, or build on, their responses". Ghauri et al (1995:65) note that such a mechanism allows one to build "a more accurate and clear picture of a respondent's position or behavior" .Yin (1994) asserts that as it is conducted on a one-to-one basis, a rapport is built up between the interviewer and interviewee which yield more detailed and truthful information than if no rapport existed.

A major drawback to this method is that the results obtained are not easily replicated; therefore, the reliability of such mechanisms is always in question (Bryson, 2004). Marshall and Rossman (1999) note that the findings from a cross-sectional study are not intended to be replicable as they were collected at one point in time, which may have altered slightly or significantly with time. Yin (1994) asserts that inaccurate and poor recall of information can also influence the results obtained significantly. Sekeran (2003) asserts that the situation in which the interview takes place can also influence the results. While, Brannick and Roche (1997) assert that interviews in general are heavily reliant on the individual being interviewed.

Ghuari et al (1999) assert that such research instruments are subject to interviewer bias, whereby the interviewer may influence the answers given in some way. This can be overcome somewhat in the "careful design of the technique itself" (Ghauri et al, 1995:26). For this reason, both the questionnaire and interviews were piloted prior to their general administration. Cooper and Schindler (2003) assert that the respondent must possess the adequate information levels in order to answer the questions presented.

3.18 Survey Research

Survey research involves asking questions of respondents and then codifying these answers to make them generalizable to the population in some way. Such a mechanism is useful for collecting data from a large amount of subjects easily (Saunders et al 2003). This mechanism was chosen as it primarily utilizes quantitative methods of data collection which are useful for ascertaining numerical statistics and ascertaining the strength of association between variables (Saunders et al 2003, Bryman 2004).

3.19 Survey Research - Questionnaires:

Domegan and Fleming (1999:158) assert that "a survey methodically gathers information from respondents by communicating with them" A survey can be conducted "in telephone, by telephone or by post" (Domegan and Fleming 1999:158).

The questionnaires utilized for the purpose of this survey were self-administered questionnaires that comprised of open ended and closed questions. Open ended questions are those that the respondent can reply to in their own words and no limit is placed on the response choices (Domegan and Fleming 1999). These were utilized as they "elicit a wide range of responses" (Domegan and Fleming 1999). This was needed to gain a greater insight into the perceptions of employees within a limited timeframe. The downsides of such a method is that employees may not want to take the time to fill in these questions and they take up a substantial amount of researchers time and energy when being coded (Bryman 2004).Bryman(2004) also points out that observer bias, as it is heavily reliant on the meaning that different parties ascribe from the data.

Multiple choice questions were also utilized whereby, the respondent is presented "with a question and a set of alternatives that will be mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive" (Domegan and Fleming 1999:242). The respondent must choose the answer that best expresses their opinion. Domegan and Fleming (1999:242) note that "they are generally easier for both the interviewer and respondent". They "are almost essential for securing adequate co-operation in self-administered surveys" (Domegan and Fleming 1999:.242).

Self-completion surveys do have their drawbacks. Bryson (2004) notes that such a method is limited in that the researcher cannot probe or prompt respondents in regards to the answers they give. Therefore, respondents may provide no or little information regarding specific areas. The trust between the interviewer and interviewee is also non-existent which also means that respondents may be more protective of the opinions they are willing to express. Also, due to time constraints placed upon employees, they may not have the time to fully complete a questionnaire. Therefore, in order to help overcome such issues, an envelope was provided for privacy issues and all questionnaires were confidential. The respondents were allowed to take home the questionnaires and were given three days to complete them. A telephone number and e-mail address was also provided on the cover page of the questionnaire should any respondent have a problem that they wanted to raise. The surveys were administered to all employees excluding management.

3.20. Time Lines:
The research question calls for the research objectives to be studied at a single point in time, utilizing a case study approach. Therefore, a cross-sectional study will employed. This is convenient for the purpose of this research as time constraints were limited.

Reliability and Validity:

Bryman and Bell (2003:343) assert that "reliability and validity are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research" The main types of reliability and validity are: "external reliability, internal reliability, internal validity and external validity" (Bryman and Bell 2003:.343). Each of these will now be discussed separately.

3.21 Reliability:

Bryson (2004:70) asserts that "reliability is fundamentally concerned with issues of consistency of measures" .External reliability is concerned with the degree to which the study can be replicated (Bryman and Bell 2003).

As noted above, a case study situation conducted within an organization cannot easily be replicated as interview responses differ according to the people who answered specific questions and also their frame of mind on the day (subject or participant error). Employees especially, may be wary of what they say about management for fear of being found out and act in a different manner as a result (subject or participant bias). Therefore, qualitative data is not easy to replicate (Bryson 2004).

Bryson (2004:71) notes the key issue here "is whether respondents' scores on any one indicator tend to be related to their scores on the other indicators". Observer bias may also have the same effect, whereby the researcher must interpret the qualitative data collected and may only hear what they want to hear. In order to combat this, the interview was taped using a tape recorder. Therefore, the researcher could then concentrate on the tone and expressions of the respondent, which helped to ascertain their true meaning.

3.22 Validity:
"Validity is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about" (Saunders et al 2003:101).

Internal validity is where there is a "good match between the researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas developed" (Bryman and Bell 2003, 288). Prior to setting the research questions, a through literature review was developed and a body of evidence gathered. This prior knowledge of the topics under consideration was vastly important given the fact that semi structured interviews were being used. These mechanisms require the researcher to develop a strong body of knowledge with which to conduct and explore issues deeper.

External validity can be defined as the degree to which findings can be generalized (Bryman and bell 2003, 288). Bryman (2004) notes that qualitative data is not easily generalized. As a relatively small sample was utilized to conduct this research, generalizing the results to the wider population may not be possible (Bryman 2004).

3.23 Limitations
The researcher identified a number of limitations that hinder this research project. A main synopsis is presented below.

As noted above, the data collected is subject to observer bias and while every effort is made not to fall prey, every researcher must interpret the data in some way or another. Bryson (2004:285) also notes that this type of data is subject to "lack of transparency", whereby "it is sometimes difficult to establish…what the researcher actually *did*".

The employee questionnaire is also subject to respondent fatigue, response error and a poor response rate. Yet is easy and quick to administer and allows a wide range of respondents to be questioned. The research was limited by the lack of time allocated to the project, which made conducting this research on a larger scale impossible. If conducting similar research in the future, a sample of employees from within the firm would also be interviewed. A greater number of managerial staff would also be interviewed. Financial constraints also posed a large hindrance to this research from being conducted on a grander scale.

3.24 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the research design was influenced by the research topic, the research objectives and the philosophical outlook of the researcher. A number of possible research strategies were assessed according to their applicability to this research project. After much deliberation, both a qualitative approach generating deep, rich data utilized as well as , quantitative methods in the form of closed ended questions within the employee questionnaires were also chosen for ease of reference for the researcher and also the respondents.

The following chapters include the results from the interviews conducted with the general manager of the research organization and also the results of the employee surveys. The findings are presented with the research objectives in mind.

Chapter 4 Research Findings

4.1 Introduction:
This chapter presents a summary of the key results obtained from both management and employees of the research organisation.

4.2 Part A: Employer Findings
It is vital to establish exactly how top management within a unionized SME perceive the quality and effectiveness of the employee voice mechanisms in place, as they are usually the instigators of such mechanisms. For the purpose of this dissertation, a unionized SME within the retail sector was studied. I conducted a formal interview with the manager of the Anthony Ryans flagship store located in Shop Street. Below is a summary of my findings obtained from the interview which was conducted with the general manager of Anthony Ryans Ltd.

Objective 1: To identify and examine the employee voice mechanisms utilized within a unionized SME, in terms of their quality and effectiveness.

Objective One

Question 1
Q1: What does an employee having a 'voice' mean to management within Anthony Ryan's?"

In relation to the meaning of employee voice, John stated *"within Anthony's Ryan's employee voice is where employees communicate their views/grievances to management themselves freely without the fear of repercussions"*. He also asserted that it represented the process of *"management involving staff in the decision making process"*. He noted that *"it's the process where employees have sufficient means and avenues to express their concerns and opinions to management which effect the organization"*.

Question 2
Q2: What employee voice mechanisms are utilized by management within Anthony Ryans to consult or inform staff?

John stated that *"within Anthony's Ryans we use a wide array of employee voice mechanisms to allow meaningful input into the organization from all levels of staff"*.

John noted that *"all staff receive an employee handbook when they start working with us. The booklet is addressed personally to the said employee, and contains details regarding all aspects of the organization"*. John also stated the importance's of walking the shop floor daily *"during the course of the working day I will walk the shop floor to communicate with employees on a wide range of work related issues. I believe that face to face communication is vital"*. *"I operate an open door policy with all my employees this is personally very important to me"*

The following are the employee voice mechanisms that are in place within Anthony Ryans and which were identified by John:

Employee handbook

Individual employee meetings

Departmental meetings

Open door policy

Union representation

E-mail

Notice board

Memos

Comment cards

Suggestion box

Annual reports

Quarterly reports

Question 3
Q 3: What issues do these mechanisms cover and do they offer employees a substantial enough voice?

John stated "we *view our workforce as an integral part of our organization; they are the public face of the company and meet with our customers daily. Failure to listen to employees timely and effectively would be detrimental to the organization*".

John also stated *"the voice mechanisms available to our employees offer them many options to communicate with management both formal and informal avenues". "An unhappy employee can lead to an unhappy customer". "The mechanisms which are in place allow the employee to voice their opinions and ideas in an efficient way"*.

John asserted that employees only have a say over work related matters. John affirmed that *"the business organization which we operate in is neither 100% a democracy nor is it a dictatorship, it is instead a combination". "At the end of the day, the top level managers decide what direction the business is heading towards and all strategic decisions are our sole responsibility"*.

Question 4
Q4: What mechanisms does management consider to be the most effective from the employee's point of view?

John stated that he had a preference for regular meetings with employees usually conducted in the form of individual employee meetings and departmental meetings. John notes that these mechanisms would be regarded by him to be the most effective mechanisms in the eyes of employees *"regarding to our departmental meetings, the occurrence of these have increased greatly, which gives ample opportunity to all employees to raise any issues"*.

The departmental briefings are most commonly used by departmental managers who initiate the meetings. Management only initiates such meetings if they have some urgent issues to discuss. John did state however that management were now holding these meetings on a more frequent basis and were now usually conducted one a month within each department.

John noted that the companies "open door" policy was also a standout point of the voice mechanisms offered. But on further probing admitted that its effectiveness depends largely on

the employee in question utilizing it *"to talk directly to the manager it takes a lot of nerve and confidence that a lot of people don't have"*.

Informal employee voice mechanisms are heavily relied on within this organization. The general manager states that *"usually I will talk to the departmental managers and they instigate the changes in the relevant departments …there is largely a one-directional flow of information within the organization in relation to strategic change"*. The company is also heavily reliant the interpersonal communication between employees, as John states *"once you go into the shop floor and inform a member of staff it is spread through the organization in a matter of minutes"*.

Question 5
Q5 What in your opinion do employees consider to be the most ineffective mechanism and the least utilized mechanism?

John felt that e-mail correspondence was severely under-utilized within the company as although he and other managers would forward communication to staff by email, not all staff, particularly the older members of the workforce are proficient in using this type of communication. He also stated that *"on several occasions employees had missed important communications as they neglected their email accounts on a regular basis"*. The notice board was also viewed by John as being a relatively ineffective mechanism as *"it relies on the employee actually reading the notice board and then interpreting the information among themselves, which on more than one occasion has led to confusion among employees on certain issues"*. John stated that the non-union members within the company did not feel the need to become unionized as they felt that certain issues took longer to resolve when a third party was involved, which they has stated to him personally.

When asked to rate the frequency of the employee voice mechanisms in place, John stated that meetings are held on a regular basis and that the "open door" policy is always in operation if employees have anything that they need to discuss with him.

Question 6

Q6: Identify the topics that employees within the company are informed, consulted or not involved in at all".

Table 4.1:

Topic	Informed	Consulted	Neither
Level of Competition Faced by the Company	✓		
Plans to Change the Structure of the Company	✓	✓	
Plans to Introduce New Technology	✓	✓	
Any Changes to Products/Services	✓	✓	
Company Finances/Budgets	✓		
Sales	✓	✓	
Working Practices	✓	✓	
Turnover Rates	✓		
General Housekeeping Issues	✓	✓	
Government Legislation	✓		

Question 7

Q7.Are the reasons behind organizational changes ever explained?

The general manager states that *"I feel that it is essential to explain the reasons behind change occurring within the organization as for an employee to come on board with the new direction, they must understand firstly why the change is necessary".*

Question 8

Q8: Do employees ever make suggestions regarding their working environment and practices?"

It was noted that they do, but it depends on the person. John noted that he is a staunch advocate of the open door policy in operation within the organization but did admit that it takes a certain type of personality to come to him directly with an issue or grievance *"some of the best ideas in recent years have come from staff as they are the individuals that are interacting with the customer on a daily basis".*

He did also note that there were a number of mechanisms in place for the employee to make their opinions heard such as the suggestion box, through to the availability of a union representative within the firm. Team/departmental meetings are also being held on a more frequent basis within the firm and John notes that this provides a forum where employees can raise suggestions, talk through issues with him and team members and he can also ask for opinions or input on various developments occurring at the time. He also conducted a daily walk around the shop floor, which he felt gave employees the opportunity to come to him with any ideas or problems they had.

The employees provide suggestions regarding their immediate working environment and wider organizational matters and encouraged to do so. He did however affirm that decisions taken towards the strategic direction of the organization were always taken by management. He stated that *"not everybody gets all the information, workers downstairs never know precise figures or all the decisions that must be made".* The more senior the employee the more they were consulted on these issues and greater the volume of information that was provided to them.

Question 9

Q9: Could you please determine whether the following statements applied to the employees within the organization, as a result of being involved in company decision making:

A) Increased employee satisfaction with their jobs,

B) Increased employee commitment to the organization,

C) Improved performance of employees within the organization,

D) Enhanced trust levels between management and employees

E) The relationship between management and staff is considerably better.

F) All of the above.

The managing director does exert caution is asserting that trust levels are not significantly raised as *"no worker completely trusts their manager, that is part of working life but we hope that by involving employees as much as we possibly can, we will build a more harmonious relationship with our staff "*.

Objective Two

Question 10

Q.10 In your opinion, what hinders employees from being more involved in company decision making?

John envisaged a number of barriers existing within the company which hinder employees from being more involved in company decisions. One of the main barriers from John's point of view was the lack of interest from some employees in contributing to actions taken within the firm *"they want to get in, do their job and go home"*. He also considered the fact that being an SME, it was not feasible for a dedicated HR department to be in operation and this may affect the ability of employees in voicing their opinions and concerns to management as effectively in other organizations which have a dedicated HR department. John also stressed the fact *"when having a conversation with an individual employee, it has sometimes become apparent that the employee is saying what he thinks he should be saying as opposed to what he actually feels"*.

Objective Three

To discover the attitudes that exists towards unionization within the company:

John noted that the company is a member of the MANDATE trade union. Membership currently runs at sixty percent of employees being member of the union. Membership is comprised of mainly those employees that have been in the company for a longer period of time and is also formed from the more mature members of staff *"some members of our staff have been working with us for over twenty years, it is mainly this category of the workforce that are union members....more recent and younger recruits rarely join the union on commencing employment"..." the general consensus among these employees is that they feel that it is easier to come to us directly instead of using a third party to air their grievances".*

Question 11

Q: 11 what are the attitudes that exist towards unionization within the company from the perspective of management?

John stated *"personally I have no issue towards unionization; currently I am a member of the union, as are all management staff within the organization... I feel that it would be hypocritical of me to enforce a conflicting view on my employees".* However, John did feel that the wealth of employee legislation introduced in recent years and the company's own voice mechanisms has reduced the relevance and the need of unions amongst employees as most the needs are serviced by the above. He also stated that he himself prefers to discuss issues directly with employees as *"to-ing and fro-ing from one party to another can significantly increase the time it takes to resolve issues, implement particular plans and get things done in general".*

Part B: Employee Survey Results:

A response rate of 65% was obtained from the sample of 60 employees surveyed. Below are a summary of the results obtained utilizing the framework of the research objectives.

Objective 1:

To identify and examine the employee voice mechanisms utilized within a unionized SME, in terms of their quality and effectiveness.

Question 1

Q.1: Which of the following statements represents having a 'voice' within the company to you?

A) Voicing your opinions/views to management yourself

B) Management involved in significant two way communication with staff

C) Being informed of any decisions/developments by management

D) Union representation regarding employee interests to management

E) Employee voice is non-existent

Fig: 4.1
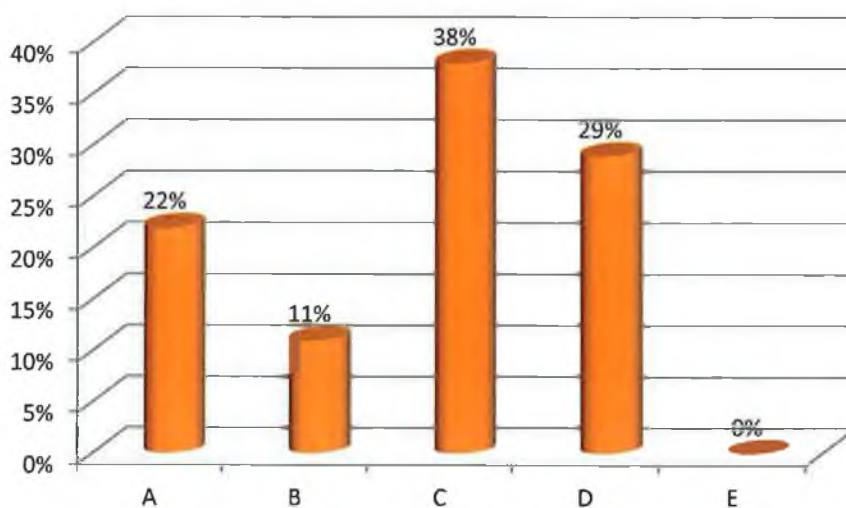
Question 2

Q.2: From the list below please identify the employee voice mechanisms that exist within your organization:

Table 4.2

EMPLOYEE VOICE MECHANISM	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES AWARE OF MECHANISM
Employee Handbook	39
"Open Door" Policy	22
Notice Boards	30
E-Mail	39
Individual Meetings	39
Team/Department Meetings	39
Union Representation	26
Large Scale Staff Meetings	39
Memos	13
Suggestion Schemes	15
Comment Cards	9
Formal Grievance Procedures	22
Quarterly Reports	39
Annual Reports	39

Question 3

Question 3: (a) Which of the above mechanisms would you rate as being particularly effective and ineffective as employee voice mechanisms within the organization?

Table 4.3

EMPLOYEE VOICE MECHANISM	effective	Ineffective
Employee Handbook	30	9
"Open Door" Policy	16	23
Notice Boards	7	32
E-Mail	16	23
Individual Briefings	26	13
Team/Department briefings	32	7
Unionization	21	18
Large Scale Staff Meetings	13	26
Memos	4	35
Suggestion Schemes	7	32
Formal Grievance Procedures	23	16
Quarterly/Annual Reports	12	27

(b) In respect of the mechanisms you have rated as being EFFECTIVE, why do you feel that these mechanisms are particularly effective in involving you in organizational developments and decisions?

Respondents stated a preference for more formal mechanisms such as the team/departmental meetings as they provided them with information directly related to their job and also gave them an opportunity to air their views while having the support of other colleagues on hand. The presence of the union was also noted as being particularly effective as employees did not have to go directly to management with their issues so could stay anonymous both from management and other colleagues. The employee handbook was ranked highly by employees as it allowed them to gain an insight into the overall framework of the company and also outlined all procedures and processes in detail.

(c) In respect of the mechanisms you have rated as being INEFFECTIVE, why do you feel that these mechanisms are particularly ineffective in involving you in organizational developments and decisions?

Overall, memos and notice boards were seen as being relatively ineffective in actively involving them in organizational decisions as they represent one way communications from management but only deal with every day and relatively unimportant issues. Some staff pointed to the fact that such mechanisms can often lead to certain more vocal members taking up the message incorrectly and can often lead to more confusion within the company than if such issues were discussed in a formal setting.

Suggestion schemes were also viewed as being largely ineffective as although it was good that their opinions were being listened to, they felt that often their ideas were not acted on by management *"sometimes what is discussed is forgotten about and not put into action"*.

Large scale staff meetings were also viewed as being ineffective as some respondents felt that it was not an appropriate setting for them to discuss their grievances, opinions or suggestions. Respondents preferred instead to discuss matters among their team/department as they felt that their opinions would be better heard.

Those that were not members of the union felt that its presence served to delay the decision making process within the organization and also stated that they would rather speak to and receive information from management directly instead of going through an intermediate. One respondent stated *"you never know where you stand by relying on information from others"*.

Question 4

Question 4: (a) From the list below, please identify whether you are informed, consulted or not involved in at all by management?

Table:4.4

Topic	Informed	Consulted	Neither
Competition Faced	39	0	0
Change of Structure Company	39	20	0
Plans to Introduce New Technology	39	18	0
Any Changes to Products/Services	39	25	0
Company Finances/Budgets	39	0	0
Working Practices	39	16	0
Housekeeping Issues	39	29	0

The above feedback denotes that the majority of staff within the organization are well informed of all developments occurring within the company as well as on their working practices. It is noteworthy that very little employees felt that they were actually consulted on wider organization issues but were consulted on issues directly related to their job.

(B) In your opinion, is there genuine consultation between management and employees in respect of decisions taken within the organization?

As illustrated in the results above, fewer employees felt that they were actually consulted on developments occurring within the company. One respondent stated *"management ultimately make all of the decisions related to the day to day running of the company, our opinions don't matter as they will listen to us but at the end of the day they decide what is best for the company and what measures will be taken"*. Another stated *"I feel that consultation is all one way, by the time we are "consulted" they have already made up their minds regarding the actions they will take"*. It is noteworthy that although fewer employees felt that they were consulted than informed, the majority of union members within the company feel that they are consulted on both issues relating to the job and on wider organizational matters.

Question 5

Question 5: Do you want to have a say on the following decisions?

Fig 4.2

A) Yes, in all matters regarding the organization

B) Just on decisions which affect me

C) None of the above
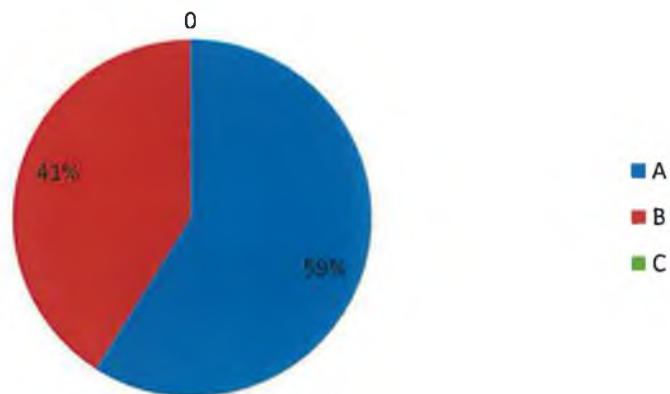
As illustrated above, all employees wanted to have a say in respect of decisions taken with the firm. 23 respondents wanted to have an input on decisions only affecting them directly, while 16 respondents wanted to have a say on wider organizational matters.

Question 6

Question 6: In general, when management make changes to your work situation, when are you involved in the decision making process?

Fig 4.3
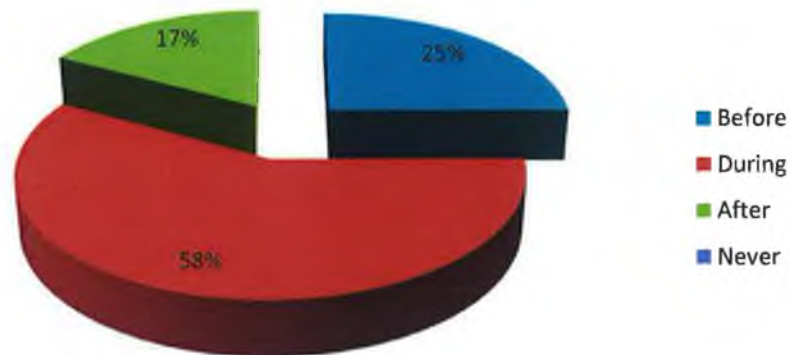
Question 7

Q.7: Do you ever make suggestions to management regarding your work situation?"

Fig 4.4
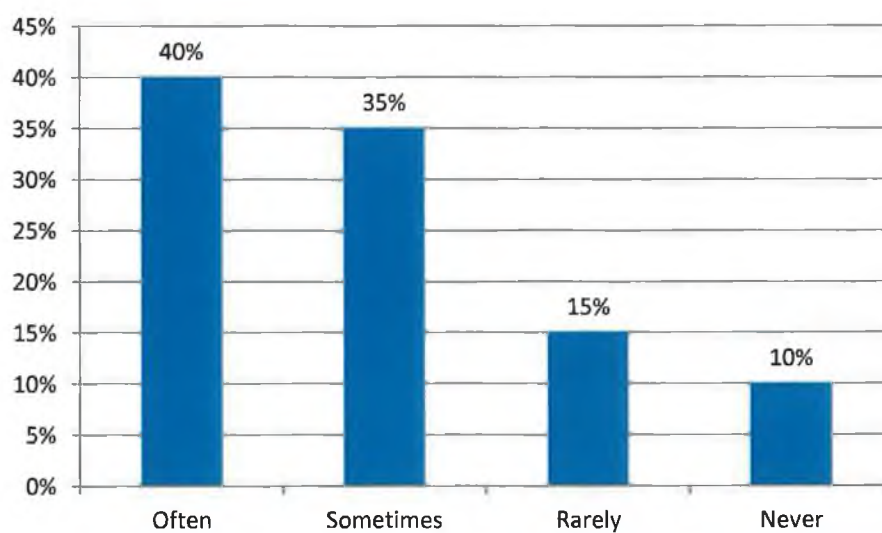
Question 8

Q.8: Do you ever make suggestions to management regarding the way in which the organization is run?"

Fig 4.5
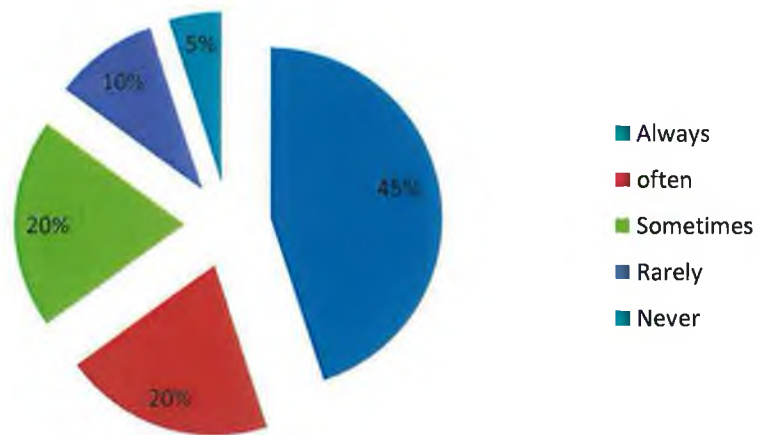
Question 9

Q.9 Do you feel that management utilize these suggestions?"

Fig 4.6
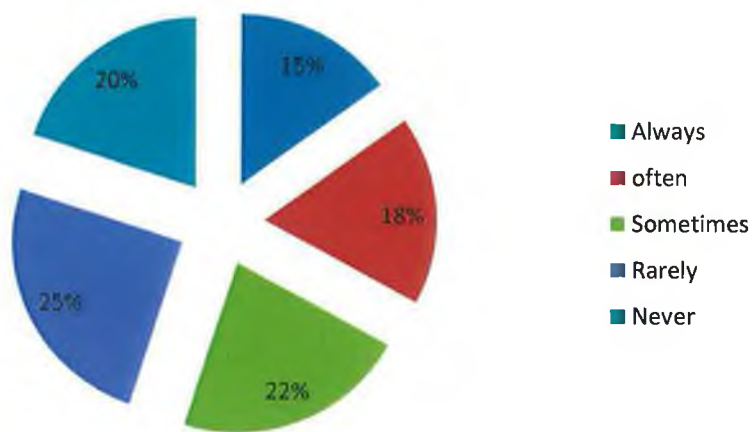
Question 10

Q.10 In general, how often are the reasons behind changes made to the way in which the organization and the way it is run in general, explained to you?

Fig 4.7
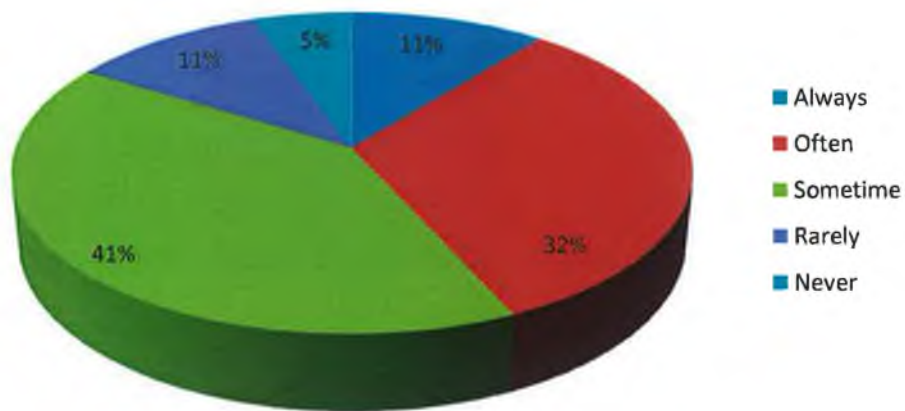
Question 11

Q.11: Please determine whether the following statements apply to you, as a result of being involved in company decision making?

Fig:4.8

A) Increased job satisfaction,

B) Increased commitment to the organization,

C) Improved job performance,

D) Enhanced trust levels between management and employees

E) The relationship between management and staff is considerably better.

F) All of the above.

G) None of the above
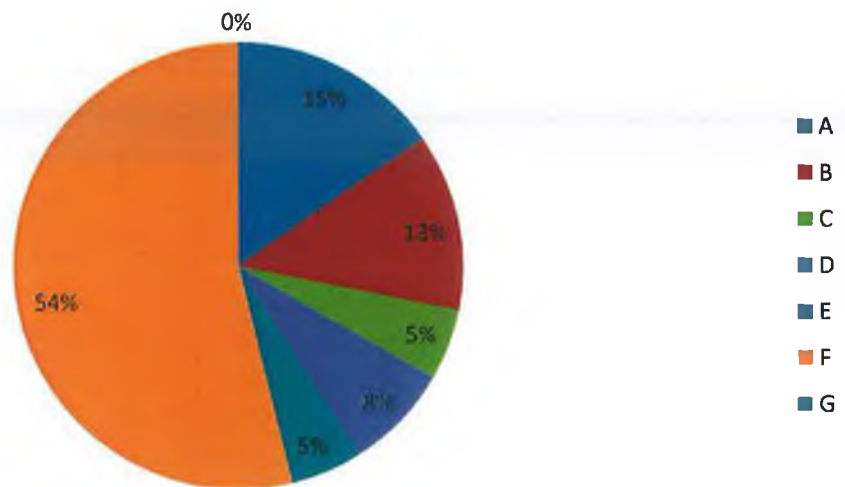
Objective 2:

Question 12

Q.12 What prevents you from being more involved in the decision making process within the organization? (n=39)

Fig 4.9

A)Inadequate voice mechanisms in place	7
B)Managerial control over decisions	26
c)My personal attitude towards management	6
D)My position within the organization	25
E)Peer pressure from co-workers prevents me from voicing my true opinions	13
F)Length of service in the firm	16
G)No interest in being involved	3

The main barrier identified by the employees was that of managerial control over the decisions they are given the opportunity to have an opinion or input in. One respondent stated *"at the end of the day, the manager creates the game, defines the rules and decides the outcome".*

The next barrier identified by employee respondents was that of the position of the employee within the company. It was suggested that the higher your position within the organization, the more your opinion is actually valued by management and the more they ask for your opinion length of time an employee has served within the company. The general consensus was that the longer you are in the company, the easier you can express your opinions to management.

Objective3:

Question 13
Question 13: Are you currently a member of a trade union?

Fig 4.10
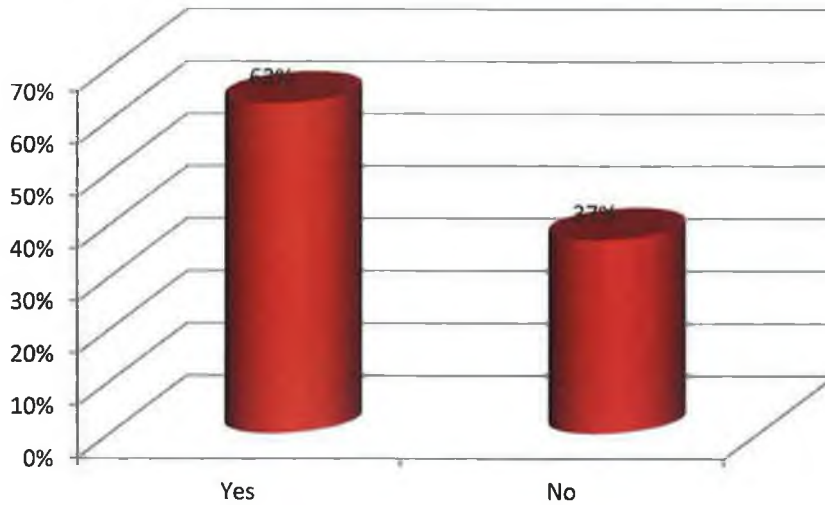
Question 14
Q. 14 If you are part of a union do you feel that this gives you more of a voice than your non-union counterparts?

Fig 4.11
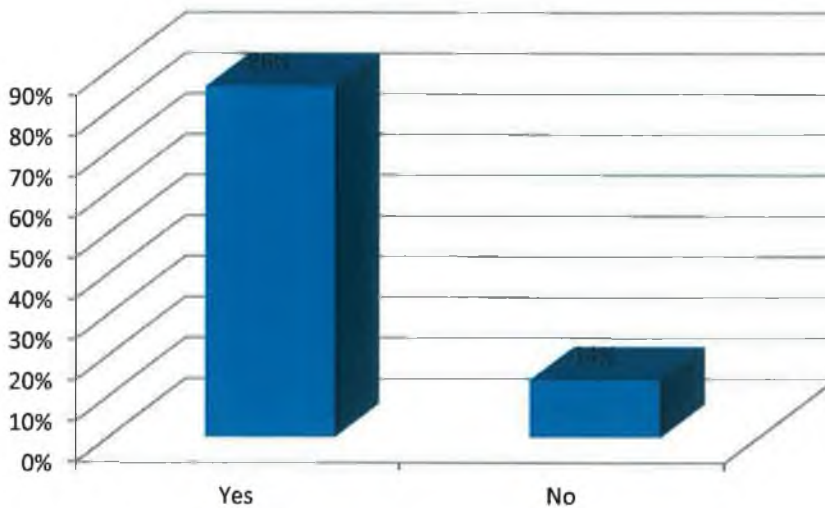
Question 15

Q.15 (a) If you have a problem, are you more likely to go to your union representative or your manager first?

Fig 4.12
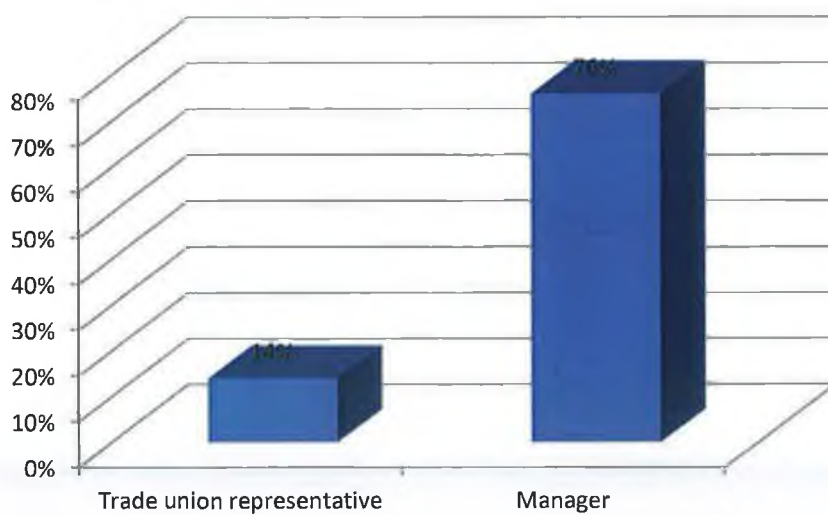
(b) Why? Unionized employees stated that if a problem they will more likely than not go to management first. If the issue is not resolved by management, they will seek help from their union representative on the matter. Some respondents expressed a preference for seeking help from an external source rather than going to management directly as they feared repercussions. It was also found that more minor issues are expressed more readily to management.

Question 16
Q.16 If you are NOT a union member, what prevents you from joining a union?

The general consensus among employees was that being part of a union would not give them more involvement in decisions that affect them directly or indirectly as they can already speak to management regarding any issues that affect them either on a one to one basis or in the team/departmental briefings. There was a consensus among non-union members that the process prolongs talks between management and employees and that even if the union was not involved the outcome would remain the same. A number of employees stated that although they are not members of a union, the decisions that the union and management reach will impact them also. While others felt that the union and its members spend too much time arguing over trivial matters

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction:

The findings obtained from both the management interview and employee questionnaires highlighted similarities and contradictions in the literature reviewed. Below is a synopsis of the findings in comparison to the literature reviewed.

Objective one:

To identify and examine the employee voice mechanisms utilized within a unionized SME, in terms of their quality and effectiveness, utilizing the perspectives' of management and employees.

5.2 Employee Voice Mechanisms in Place:

There are a wide variety of employee voice mechanisms in place within the research organization. These mechanisms comprise of both formal and informal and direct and indirect mechanisms. The large range of mechanisms found within this SME contradict the research of Wyer and Mason (1999) who asserted that generally a handful of employee voice mechanisms are present.

Management showed a preference for both formal and informal methods of communication with employees, which contradicts Rollinson and Dundons research which affirms that more direct methods of involvement are rapidly replacing more indirect mechanisms that may be in place within the firm (2007). It was unusual that the general manager interviewed was a member of the union but also preferred more informal meetings with staff as well. He was also an advocate of the company's "open door" policy and perceived his daily informal interpersonal interactions as being particularly important. This correlates to Wilkinson's (1999) research which affirms that given the choice managers have a preference for more informal mechanisms of communication when interacting with their employees. Employees showed a preference for more formal mechanisms of communication, preferring team

meetings in particular as well as union representation, especially in regards to more sensitive issues, such as salaries or general working conditions. Union members felt that they had a greater level of voice within the firm than their non-union counterparts. This contradicts Galle at al's (1998) research which asserted that the greater the variety of direct voice mechanisms an employee was provided with the lesser of importance they gave to the union as a voice mechanism.

Team meetings were viewed as being particularly effective for both the unionized and non-union employees and correlates with Hammers (2000:183) research where he affirms that non-union voice mechanisms may be deemed effective by employees as they give them the opportunity "to make decisions about how, and sometimes, when his or her work should be organized and carried out".

Formal employee voice mechanisms such as departmental meetings and union meetings are held on a regular basis within the organization, which contradicts McMahon (1999) Dix and Oxen bridge (2003) finding s which denote that formal mechanisms are not often utilized by the SME.

5.3 Meaning of Employee Voice:

The perspectives of employee and management in respect of what an employee having a voice truly means was in a lot of respects the same, in that they both identified voice as employees voicing their ideas/grievances to both management and their employee representatives. It is also significant that management agreed with employees that "voice" also represents the company's employees having an input in the decision making process whether directly or indirectly through their union representative. While employees felt that they did have an input into organizational decision making, it was mainly through receiving information not on a two way level between employees and management directly. In fact, the employees rated being informed of decisions made by management the highest when asked what employee voice means to them, as opposed to being involved in significant two way communications. Employees did not rate

Management on the other hand, felt that at present, employees were actively involved in the decision making process, through team meetings, union representatives and the open door policy, to name but a few mechanisms.

This correlates with Blyton and Turnbulls (1998) research which denotes that management and employees often have different interpretations of what employee voice really is.

Effectiveness of employee voice:

5.4 Form:
Both direct and indirect voice mechanisms are utilized within the research organization. This disagrees with the research of Geary (2006) who asserted that direct mechanisms are utilized solely within the SME.

Direct Mechanisms:

I will now discuss the direct mechanisms in place within the organization in relation to Marching ton and Wilkinson's (2000) "four fold schema" framework.

5.5 Downward Communication:
There are a number of downward communication mechanisms within this organization. This correlates with the research of both Wilkinson (1999) and Bryson (2004). These mechanisms largely allow employees to be involved in the decision making process but give the employee minimal input.

Both management and employees agreed that formal communication mechanisms such as departmental and team meetings provided employees with ample opportunity to discuss any issues with management that they may have concerns over, whether it relates to certain aspects of their position or the company in general.

Employees did however show a reservation towards larger scale meetings as they felt that their voice was not heard and the majority would have reservations about voicing their true opinions in such an open environment. These mechanisms inform employees but do not give them the opportunity to significantly influence the decision making process within the firm.

As can be seen above, not only is it due to the fact that the communication of information is top down but also because employees may not want to discuss their views in such an open setting. Employees did note that employee peer pressure did prevent them from being more involved in organizational decision making. This supports Fenton-O'Creevy and Woods (2005) findings that direct employee voice mechanisms yield lower levels of employee involvement within the decision making process.

However, the employee handbook was ranked highly by employees as it allowed them to gain an insight into the overall framework of the company and also outlined all procedures and processes in detail. This supports research conducted by Gennard and Judge (2005189:) who stated that "employees only perform at their best if they know their duties, obligations and rights and have the opportunity of making their views known to management on issues that affect them".

It is also noteworthy that both managers and employees viewed e-mail, memos and the notice boards as being relatively futile communication mechanisms. Managers preferred to interact with staff either directly or through an intermediate as they found that often messages were misinterpreted or as is the case with email, certain messages were not read in time, causing more disruption in the long run. The suggestion scheme run by management allows employees to have anonymity while still making their point clear to management. The general manager viewed this as an important mechanism within the organization. Employees on the other hand, felt that they could only have a say in respect of more mundane matters utilizing this method of communication and also that in many instances their opinions were not taken on board by management. This correlated to the research of Sewell and Wilkinson (1992) who asserted that employees felt disengaged when they offered their suggestions but received no recognition in return and also that of Bryson (2004) who stated that not all direct voice mechanisms improve perceptions of managerial responsiveness. .

The perceptions of inefficiency of a number of the direct mechanisms utilized within the firm at present affirm the research of Marchington and Cox (2007:238), who state that direct communications "can be viewed as nothing more than a neutral device to inform workers

about specific issues or as an instrument to reinforce management prerogatives...management inevitably controls what (and when) information will be passed to employees, and its objectivity is likely to be in some doubt since the information communicated is invariably selected by management".

5.6 Upward Problem Solving:

Management are of the opinion that the open door policy within the organization provides staff with the opportunity to air their views to management on a one to one basis, making the resolving of issues easier and more efficient. The general manager has stated that all staff are welcome to express their opinions and concerns to him without fear of repercussions. However, upon further probing, the general manager interviewed did state that it takes a certain type of person to go straight to the manager. The employee research undertaken echoes this sentiment. A large amount of union members, which would be comprised of those who are the more longer serving and elder members of the workforce prefer to go through a third party to air their views as they have the opportunity to remain anonymous. Whereas, the more recent recruits and younger employees who are mostly not members of the union members felt that it was easier and less time consuming to discuss an issue with a manager than to go through an intermediate. The general manager explained that he made time in his schedule every day to conduct a walk around the shop floor to talk to employees. He attributed great importance in this as he saw it as a means for employees to talk to him and gain direct feedback from him straight away, in respect of any issues they had. Employees found the informal "open door" policy that the general manager has in place to be less effective than more formal mechanisms, as employees felt that it was difficult to voice their opinions or concerns on a one to one basis. Some felt that the more formal the mechanism utilized the easier it was to make their opinion count, while others preferred to have the protection of an intermediary to relay their opinions to management for them.

5.7 Task Participation:

Task participation in the form of delegate participation is utilized. Employee respondents and the general manager have noted that when introducing new technology/work practices it is a collaborative experience with both parties being involved in the consultation and execution process. This concurs with Wallace et al's (2004:326) which states that employees "are encouraged to become more actively involved in influencing decisions, contributing their opinions and in solving problems at the workplace". The general manager did note however that management are solely responsible for the creation and implementation of strategic decision making which agrees with the research of Dundon and Wilkinson (2006:387) that the objective of task participation is to "focus attention on the actual job rather than managerial processes for participation". Employees have stated that they would like the opportunity to become more involved in organizational decisions that affect the company as a whole and not just focus on decisions related to their position. This disagrees with research conducted by Ramsay (1997:316) whereby he argues that "employees tend to find the greatest relevance and interest in direct forms which deal with issues immediately and visibly affecting them".

5.8 Team Working and Self – Management:

Team working and self-management is not in operation within this organization as all departments have a supervisor and a general manager. There is no real autonomy as to who works where or over working methods utilized.

Indirect Mechanisms:

I will now discuss the indirect mechanisms utilized within the research organization:

The only indirect mechanism utilized within the company is the trade union. As noted above, the majority of employees whether members of a union or not prefer to speak to management first if they have a problem. However, if they feel that they will be reprimanded by management or if they do not receive the outcome they desire from management, they will approach their union representative. Union members within the organization perceived that they have more a voice within the company than their non-union counterparts. This correlates with Wallace et als (2004:291) research which notes that collective bargaining "has traditionally been viewed as one of the most effective means through which employees can bring their influence to bear on organizational decision making". As noted above, union

members within the firm prefer to utilize their union representative as they are seen as an "external voice", which will not judge or reprimand them for voicing their opinions, which adheres to the research of Brewster et al (2007).

5.9 Depth, Scope and Level:

Employee respondents noted that the higher your position within the organization, the more your opinion is actually valued by management. This concurs with the research of Lewis et al (2003).

Dundon and Wilkinson (2003) assert that managers within the SME organization offer employees little involvement within the decision making process as they feel that they are best placed to make all the necessary decisions connected to the livelihood of the organization. Within the research organization there was an element of this sentiment whereby managers had sole responsibility for strategic decision making within the firm but managers did give employees the opportunity to consult with them on issues that affect them directly such as in respect of new work practices or technology. The employees noted that they were consulted before, during and after on these types of decisions but would prefer to have some level of consultation in place regarding decisions made regarding other issues besides their working practices.

It is significant that certain employees feel that they are consulted and others do not. Employees feel that the position an employee holds within the firm greatly impacts the information they receive from management and the issues they are consulted on. It was also felt that the longer an employee has been in employment within the company, the more information they receive informally from management and also their opinions are utilized on a far regular basis. This points to the "small is beautiful" typology as suggested by McMahon (1994), whereby relationships can be quite close and tight knit within smaller firms, therefore the higher he employees position or the longer they have been in the firm, the closer they are perceived to be to management in the eyes of their employees. This SME is not characteristic of all of the elements of the "small is beautiful" typology as all employees were involved in workplace level decisions but not all had an input into organizational decisions. This also concurs with research undertaken by Marchington and Wilkinson (2000) who asserted that where employees are promoted internally within the firm, they benefit from a higher level of participation as they are more involved in low key managerial decisions.

Management are aware of the fact that many employees are reluctant to come forward with their suggestion and problems, yet generally wait for employees to come to them to discuss them. The general manager interviewed noted that his door was always open, yet did acknowledge that many employees would rather go through an intermediary than to him directly.

The employees access both direct and indirect forms of employee voice. Therefore, consultation is conducted with employees on all matters relating to their job. Employees have no influence on strategic decisions taken by management and have expressed an interest in doing so, during this research. If one were to place the research organization on Blyton and Turnbulls (1998) employee involvement continuum, the company would be placed between "joint consultation" and "joint decision making". As employees are actively consulted on issues that directly affect them yet have relatively little input over more strategic matters within the organization.

Table 5.1
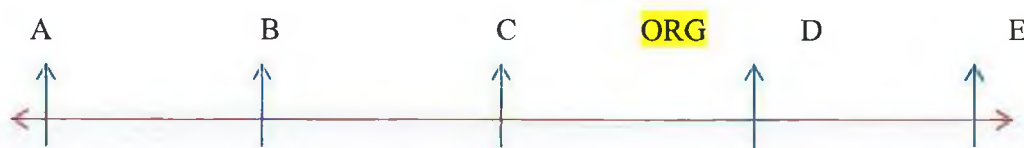
Source: Blyton and Turnbull (1998)

5.10 Advantages of employee voice:
It is clear from the research findings that employee voice has advantages for both management and employees within the organization. Employees stated that they are more invested and involved within the organization as a result of the employee voice mechanisms in place. This disagrees with the research of Salamon (1998) and Gennard and Judge (2002), whereby there was no noted increase in satisfaction or commitment levels as a result of involving employees. The research of Scott-Ladd and Marshall (2004) is affirmed as they asserted that if involved in decision making within the firm, employees become more interested in the jobs and in turn, work harder. Employees also noted that they had a better relationship with management as a result of being involved which correlates with the research of Salamon (1998:362) who asserted that involvement schemes serve to "improve the

technical quality of decision, increase the acceptability of those decisions, encourage employee identification with the success of the organization and improve job satisfaction".

Objective Two
Objective 2: To uncover any barriers to employee voice from developing and evolving within the company:

The main barrier identified by the employees was that of managerial control over the decisions they are given the opportunity to have an opinion or input in. Employees noted an express interest in being more involved within the decision making process within the organization and expressed an interest in being involved in more strategic decisions Employees are actively involved and consulted on issues affecting them on a day to day basis and now want more involvement in other far reaching decisions which affirms the research of Tebutt and Marchington (1997), whereby employees received just information, which quelled their interest over broader organizational decisions. This also correlates to research undertaken by Ram and Holiday (1993), whereby employees feel that their opinion is not being listened to by management. This sentiment was evident in the research whereby employees felt that although they make suggestions on a regular basis, their ideas or not implemented by management on a regular enough basis and if they are, they receive no recognition of that fact from management.

Some employees felt skeptical of the power of the union in voicing their interests effectively, while others did not want to participate at all in company decision making as they felt that management will ultimately abide by their agenda regardless of what input they receive from their employees.

The next barrier identified by employee respondents was that of the position of the employee within the company. It was suggested that the higher your position within the organization, the more your opinion is actually valued by management and the more they ask for your opinion length of time an employee has served within the company. The perception among many employees was that the longer you are in the company, the easier you can express your opinions to management. The research also highlighted that he union members themselves,

who are generally the longer serving and mature members of staff actually preferred to speak to their union representative over management, in respect of more important matters at least.

Objective Three
5.11 To uncover attitudes existing towards unionization within the company:

The research organization is unionized and 60% of its employees are members of a union. The union is comprised mainly of older, longer serving employees. All members of management are also union members. The general manager interviewed stressed that all employees are given the opportunity to join the union. This goes against the research of Hartley (1992) and Milward et al (1992) who assert that smaller firms are less likely to be unionized. The fact that management staff are all union members also disapproves Dundon and Wilkinson's (2003:296) finding that "the hostility of owner-managers in general remains a powerful disincentive for workers to join

Unionized employees have stated if a problem is not resolved by management, they will seek help from their union representative on the matter. Other respondents feel more comfortable in seeking help from an external source rather than going to management directly. This disapproves somewhat Kaufman and Taras (2000) research which denotes that other voice mechanisms can be just as robust as union voice in protecting the interests of employees. However, younger employees who are also mainly non-union members assert that the presence of a union slows down the decision making processes within the firm and is outdated as a means of communication.

5.12 Conclusion:
The conclusions and recommendations ascertained from the research findings and discussion will now follow.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions and recommendations

The main aim of this study was to identify and examine the employee voice mechanisms utilized within a unionized SME, in terms of their quality and effectiveness, utilizing the perspectives' of management and employees. From conducting this research a number of new contributions towards the existing body of literature were identified. Below is a summary of these findings, in conjunction with recommendations for both further research and employee voice within the SME in general.

Objective One:

To identify and examine the employee voice mechanisms utilized within a unionized SME, in terms of their quality and effectiveness

The research conducted has identified that there can be a combination of formal, informal, direct and indirect mechanisms within the unionized SME organization. The presence of both the informal voice of a union and more formal mechanisms such as departmental meetings did not pose any threat to management as all management staff were actually union members themselves and fully understood the positive aspects of having a union within the firm. The general manager strove to involve employees in the organization as far as working level decisions were concerned. He understood that the more mechanisms in place within the organization the greater the opportunity that staff have to communicate across their views and opinions to management, as one mechanism may be effective for one employee but may be unthinkable for another employee to utilize.. This is illustrated in the fact that longer serving employees preferred to utilize the union instead of management's open door policy to air their grievances, particularly in respect of more sensitive issues. They also preferred more formal mechanisms such as departmental meetings. More recent recruits to the organization tend to not join the union in place and prefer more informal and direct mechanisms of communication to get their point across.

Management within unionized SMEs must be aware that both formal and informal mechanisms must be employed within their organization to allow effective communication on wide range of issues. As highlighted by the research undertaken, a company's workforce is comprised of many different personality types, each will have their own personal preference for the mechanism with which they choose to make their voice heard.

Management actually felt that some direct mechanisms were ineffective as communication mechanisms as they led to confusion among employees, as opposed to information sharing. While the general manager did express a preference for informal chats with management as this makes the resolving of issues more efficient, he also understood that some employees preferred other mechanisms. This approach should be utilized by employer-managers and management in general within SME's, as previous research has shown that all too often management dictates the mechanisms that will be utilized, with little regard for their employees. Management within unionized SME's must recognize that an unmotivated and unappreciated employee can affect the overall success of the organization and must strive as a consequence to visualize the needs of their employees as well as their own needs when introducing employee voice mechanisms within the firm.

Overall, employees put forward their suggestions on a regular basis and showed a desire to be actively informed and consulted not only in respect of their job but also on wider, more strategic issues. This correlates with existing research whereby the greater the level of employee voice an employee has, the greater the participation they crave, Employees expressed opinions that they could through one avenue or another air their grievances and become involved in the decision making process in respect of their immediate environments and this satisfaction translated into their satisfaction with their jobs, commitment to the organization and relationship with management. Management were also aware that the more they consult with employees over job related decisions , the lower turnover rates were likely to be and the more committed their employees would be as they are actually aware of the reasons why specific actions are being conducted.

Further research is required to fully investigate whether this unionized SME is the exception or the rule, in respect of the number and variety of mechanisms in place and employee and managerial perceptions of the various employee voice mechanisms in place. A comparison between a number of unionized SME organizations would suffice. The unionized SME could also be compared to a non-union SME, specifically in respect of the aforementioned mechanisms in place and perceptions of their quality and effectiveness in proving employees with adequate levels of input within the decision making process.

Objective 2:
To identify any barriers to employee voice from developing and evolving within the company.

The research identified two main barriers to employee voice from developing and evolving within the company from the viewpoint of the general manager. The first barrier was identified as skepticism among employees towards utilizing these voice mechanisms, as some have no interest in being involved in workplace decision making and this will not change no matter how many mechanisms are implemented within a firm. The second barrier identified was the lack of a dedicated HR department within the firm as this meant that all employee voice matters were his responsibility, if there was a dedicated HR department present more time could be given to certain initiatives. The manager also recognized that many employees feared expressing their opinions to him individually as they feared there would be repercussions for doing do.

Employees identified the fact that managers ultimately the control the agenda when it comes to what decisions that have involvement and participation in. Some feel that although are able to contribute greatly to the decision making process within the firm, it is management who decide what is discussed, when and what the outcomes of such consultation will be. They also felt that the longer an employee served within the firm and the higher their position within the company, the greater input they were given on wider reaching decisions. They also felt that the opinions of these staff were more seriously as they had a rapport with management.

Management and employees both need to recognize that the organization depends on management and employees to work together towards a shared goal. It is essential for a company not only to consider the employee voice mechanisms it utilizes carefully but also to identify any potential barriers within the firm from true participation from occurring within the firm from both the level of management and employees. It is important for the SME organization to recognize that barriers to employee voice do not only exist within larger organizations. The manager recognized that some employees had no interest in being involved and maybe should probe this further.

Objective 3:
To discover attitudes that exists towards unionization within the company.

It was found that the presence of a union was welcomed by both management and employees within the research organization. This goes against a large body of existing research based upon the SME in particular, whether unionized or non-unionized, which stated that management do not want the presence of a union within the organization Employees would prefer to speak to management regarding a suggestion or issue before seeking union representation. Although it was found that longer serving employees, who were also more likely to be unionized, preferred to bypass management when they felt that there may be confrontation or conflict with management over the issue. It was also found that the more recent recruits into the firm do not feel the need to join the union and also prefer to discuss issues with him face to face. Unionized members of the organization also felt that they have more of a voice within the organization than their non-union counterparts. Further research needs to be undertaken to establish whether these unionized members felt they has more of a voice due to their length of time serving the company, their position within the company or because of the union itself.

Further research needs to focus on the variation in demographics of union members within the SME organization, for example to explore if younger and more recent recruits to the SME are less likely to join the union within the firm and why. The perceptions of younger versus more mature employees of the various voice mechanisms in place within the organization need to be analyzed within the SME to provide a deeper insight into employee perspectives of the effectiveness of employee voice mechanisms within the unionized research organization.

Conclusions:
The research conducted on the perceived quality and effectiveness of the employee voice mechanisms in place within the unionized SME, has yielded a more positive picture of the level of consultation that employees have within the unionized SME than previous research has conveyed. There were a range of mechanisms found to be in place within the organization and management recognized that these mechanisms cannot be used in respect of a "one size fits all" approach. As demonstrated from the research, if employees are provided with an ample opportunity to participate in workplace decisions, they will in turn be more committed and proficient in their positions. Managers in general need to recognize that simply involving employees is not sufficient. Employees must be involved in real consultation with management in relation to the decisions made for true employee voice to be in place. This will involve a range of mechanisms, both indirect and direct and the participation of both management and employees.

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Appendix

Management interview question

Q1: What does an employee having a 'voice' mean to management within Anthony Ryan's?

Q2: What employee voice mechanisms are utilized by management within Anthony Ryans organization to consult or inform staff?

Q 3: What issues do these mechanisms cover and do they offer employees a substantial enough voice?

Q4: What mechanisms does management consider to be the most effective from the employee's point of view?

Q5: What in your opinion do employees consider to be the most ineffective mechanism and the least utilized mechanism?

Q 6: Identify the topics that employees within the company are informed, consulted or not involved in at all?

Topic	Informed	Consulted	Neither
Competition Faced			
Change of Structure Company			
Plans to Introduce New Technology			
Any Changes to Products/Services			
Company Finances/Budgets			
Working Practices			
Housekeeping Issues			

Q7: Are the reasons behind organizational changes are ever explained?

Q8: Do employees ever make suggestions regarding their working environment and practices?"

Q9: Could you please determine whether the following statements applied to the employees within the organization, as a result of being involved in company decision making:

A) Increased employee satisfaction with their jobs,

B) Increased employee commitment to the organization,

C) Improved performance of employees within the organization,

D) Enhanced trust levels between management and employees and

E) The relationship between management and staff is considerably better.

F) All of the above

Q10: In your opinion, what hinders employees from being more involved in company decision making?

Q11: What are the attitudes that exist towards unionization within the company from the perspective of management?

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Employee questionnaire

Question 1: Which of the following statements represents having a 'voice' within the company means to you?

✓ **Please tick appropriate box**

A) Voicing your opinions/views to management yourself

B) Management involved in significant two way communication with staff

C) Being informed of any decisions/developments by management

D) Union representation regarding employee interests to management

E) Employee voice is non-existent

Question 2

From the list below please identify the employee voice mechanisms that exist within your organization

EMPLOYEE VOICE MECHANISM	✓ Please tick
Employee Handbook	
"Open Door" Policy	
Notice Boards	
E-Mail	
Individual Briefings	
Team/Department briefings	
Union Representation	
Large Scale Staff Meetings	
Memos	
Suggestion Schemes	
Comment Cards	
Formal Grievance Procedures	
Quarterly Reports	
Annual Reports	

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Question 3

Which of the above mechanisms would you rate as being particularly effective and ineffective as employee voice mechanisms within the organization?

✓ **Please thick appropriate box**

EMPLOYEE VOICE MECHANISM	effective	Ineffective
Employee Handbook		
"Open Door" Policy		
Notice Boards		
E-Mail		
Individual Briefings		
Team/Department briefings		
Unionization		
Large Scale Staff Meetings		
Memos		
Suggestion Schemes		
Formal Grievance Procedures		
Quarterly/Annual Reports		

(Part B)

In respect of the mechanisms you have rated as being EFFECTIVE, why do you feel that these mechanisms are particularly effective in involving you in organizational developments and decisions?

_____

_____

_____

_____

(Part C)

In respect of the mechanisms you have rated as being INEFFECTIVE, why do you feel that these mechanisms are particularly ineffective in involving you in organizational developments and decisions?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 4

Which of the following you are informed, consulted or not involved in at all by management?

   ✓ **Please thick appropriate Box**

Topic	Informed	Consulted	Neither
Competition Faced			
Change of Structure Company			
Plans to Introduce New Technology			
Any Changes to Products/Services			
Company Finances/Budgets			
Working Practices			
Housekeeping Issues			

(Part B)

In your opinion, is there genuine consultation between management and employees in respect of decisions taken within the organization?

_____

_____

_____

Question 5

Do you want to have a say on the following decisions?

A) Yes, in all matters regarding organization

B) Just on decisions which affect me

C) None of the above

Question 6

In general, when management make changes to your work situation, when are you involved in the decision making process?

   ✓ **Please tick**

Before

During

After

Never

Question 7

Do you ever make suggestions to management regarding your work situation?

   ✓ **Please tick**

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Question 8

Do you ever make suggestions to management regarding the way in which the organization is run?

   ✓ **Please tick**

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

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Question 9

Do you feel that management utilize these suggestions?

✓ **Please tick**

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Question 10

In general, how often are the reasons behind changes made to the way in which the organization and the way it is run in general, explained to you?

✓ **Please tick**

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Question 11

Q9: Please determine whether the following statements apply to you, as a result of being involved in company decision making:

A) Increased jobs satisfaction

B) Increased commitment to the organization,

C) Improved job performance,

D) Enhanced trust levels between management and employees

E) The relationship between management and staff is considerably better

F) All of the above

Question 12

Are you currently a member of a trade union?

Yes

No

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Question 13

If you are part of a union do you feel that this gives you more of a voice than your non-union counterparts?

Yes

No

Question 14

Q.14 (a) If you have a problem, are you more likely to go to your union representative or your manager first? Please tick

Union

Management

Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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15 If you are NOT a union member, what prevents you from joining a union?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 15

What prevents you from being more involved in the decision making process within the organization?

✓ **Please thick appropriate Box**

Inadequate voice mechanisms in place

Managerial control over decisions

My personal attitude towards management

My position within the organization

Peer pressure from co-workers prevents me from voicing opinions

Length of service in the firm

No interest in being involved