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Publication Details

Markey, R, Hodgkinson, A, Kowalczyk, J and Pomfret, S, Gender, Part-Time Employment and Employee Participation in the Workplace: Comparing Australia and the European Union, Working Paper 01-07, Department of Economics, University of Wollongong, 2001.

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WP 01-07

GENDER, PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKPLACE: COMPARING AUSTRALIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Raymond Markey, Ann Hodgkinson, Jo Kowalczyk, and Simon Pomfret

ABSTRACT

The international trend in the growth and incidence of 'non-standard employment', and its highly gendered nature, is well documented. For ease of definition, and because of the nature of the available data, we focus upon part-time employment in this paper.

Employee participation may be defined as any workplace process which 'allows employees to exert some influence over their work and the conditions under which they work' (Strauss 1998). It may be divided into two main approaches, direct participation and indirect or representative participation. Direct participation involves the employee in job or task-oriented decision-making in the production process at the shop or office floor level. Indirect or representative forms of participation include joint consultative committees, works councils, and employee members of boards of directors or management. In the EU context statutory works councils are the most common expression of representative participation, but in Australia, consultative committees resulting from union/employer agreement or unilateral management initiative are the more common form.

All of these forms of employee participation raise important issues concerning part time employees. Effective participation has two further major requirements which also may disadvantage part timers. First, there is a general consensus in the participation literature that training is required for effective direct or representative participation. Secondly, effective communication between management and employees is required for participation, preferably involving a two-way information flow. The issue is of further significance since it has decided gender implications.

This paper seeks to redress this relative insularity in the literature by examining some broad trends in this area in Australia and the EU. It analyses survey data at a national level in Australia and compares with some survey data generated in the EU by the EPOC project and analysed by Juliet Webster along the lines which we suggest here. It tests the hypothesis that the growth of one non-standard form of employment, part-time employment, diminishes the access to participation in the workplace enjoyed by female workers in comparison with their male colleagues, and finds that the hypothesis is strongly confirmed. This has major implications for workplace equity, and for organisational efficiency.

GENDER, PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKPLACE: COMPARING AUSTRALIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Presented to the European Group for Organizational Studies 17th Colloquium, 5-7 July 2001, Lyon, France.

Introduction

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

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

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

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

Non-standard employment has been increasing in most industrialised countries over recent decades, although with significant variation in the scope and types of non-standard employment. Australia shows markedly higher rates among developed economies and has the highest incidence of part-time employment in the OECD (Bamber and Lansbury 1998: 332-33; Whitehouse, Lafferty and Boreham, 1997:33). Between 1982 and 1997, standard employment (as a proportion of all employment) declined from 66 to 54 per cent in Australia. More importantly, non-standard employment categories made up over 80 per cent of net employment growth from 1982 to 1997. In that period the non-standard employment share increased from 33 per cent to 45 per cent of the total labour force (Burgess and Strachan, 1999:125). Burgess and Campbell (1998:10) conclude that 'standard employment forms are losing their claim to be regarded as the "norm'".

Pocock (1998: 587) observes that in Australia, as in other industrialised countries, in the past few decades, most of the growth in new jobs has occurred not in full-time but in part-time employment. The total proportion of the labour force represented by part-timers has grown from 12 per cent to 25 per cent between 1973 and 1995 in Australia (Bamber and Lansbury 1998: 332-33; Whitehouse, Lafferty and Boreham, 1997:33). Casual employment occupies a significant position in this growth. In 1996, there were 1.84 million casual workers in Australia or around 26 per cent of all those employed. This is an increase from around 13 per cent of all those employed in 1982 (Pocock, 1998:586). The growth in casual employment is inextricably linked to the growth in part-time employment with two thirds of those who work casually also part-time. Part-time employment has increased from around 15 per cent to approximately one-quarter of all Australian employment between 1982 and 1996 (ABS, various years, 6203.0).

For operational reasons to do with the data employed we have focused mainly upon part-time employees in this study. Part-time employment is one of the two largest categories of non-standard employment, and it overlaps to a considerable extent with the other large category of casual employment. Furthermore, part-time work is the most feminised of all the categories of non- standard employment, and hence, the gender dimensions of this type of study will be more evident.

While the proportion of men working part-time in Australia has increased from 7 per cent of all those employed in 1988 to 12 per cent in 1998, most of the employment growth in this area has been among women. The female proportion of the part-time workforce reached 74 per cent in 1995, which actually represented a fall from 79 per cent in 1973 and 1985, because of the parallel growth in male part-time work. However, the proportion of women who work part-time grew from 28 to 43 per cent in 1998 (Pocock, 1998: 585; Bamber and Lansbury 1998: 332-33). Strachan and Burgess (1997: 322; also Junor, 1998: 79) note that between 1994 and 1995, 56 per cent of the increase in female employment occurred in part-time jobs. Pocock (1998:587) argues that the breakdown of casual employees is also 'disproportionately feminised'. In 1996, 55 per cent of casuals were women and 32 per cent of women were casually employed. This contrasts with 21 per cent of men who were employed on a casual basis. Furthermore, whilst the use of part-time and casual employment is now evident in most industries and occupations, it is concentrated in the 'feminised' industries of accommodation, cafes and restaurants, the retail trade, health and community service, recreation and personal services, and education (Pocock 1998:587; Morehead, et al, 1997:37-39).

Patterns of employment in the European Union have developed similarly to Australia, although the growth in part-time and non-standard work has not been as extensive. Precarious employment, defined as fixed-term and temporary work, accounted for 15 per cent of total paid employment in the EU in 1996, although considerable variation occurred within the EU. Spain and France had the highest proportions of their total paid workforces under precarious employment contracts, with 40 per cent and 22 per cent respectively, and Luxembourg and Austria had the lowest proportions, at 9 per cent each (European Foundation 1997/1:2). EU employees on precarious contracts also were far more likely to be employed part-time, with 36 per cent of temporary employees and 32 per cent of fixed contract employees working less than 36 hours per week, compared with only 22 per cent of permanent employees. The definition of full and part-time work varies between countries, but in 1996 20 per cent of EU employees worked less than 36 hours per week, and 14 per cent worked less than 30 hours (*ibid*: 5; European Foundation 1997/2:5). Again, considerable variation exists within the EU (not accounting for different definitions between member states): Italy's part-time workforce has remained constant at 6 per cent of total paid employment between 1973 and 1995, whereas France and Germany have increased from 6 and 10 per cent respectively to 16 per cent, and Sweden and the United Kingdom have increased respectively from 18 and 16 per cent to 24 per cent in the same period (Bamber and Lansbury 1998: 332-33)

The gendered dimension of this growth of part-time and precarious work in the EU is virtually as prominent as in Australia. Although women account for 42 per cent of all paid employees in the EU, they make up a disproportionate 48 per cent of employees subject to fixed term and temporary contracts. The gender disparity is much greater, however, in the case of part-time work, where women account for 75

per cent of all employees working less than 36 hours per week. Women are particularly over-represented in permanent part-time work, where they comprise 77 per cent of the total. Twenty-six per cent of women workers in the EU work less than 30 hours per week (European Foundation 1997/1:2-3; European Foundation 1997/2:5). The EPOC survey of workplaces throughout the EU, found that 'casualisation of work is also related to the gender structure of the establishments surveyed' (Webster 2001). Temporary contracts were slightly more likely to have increased in male-dominated workplaces (29 per cent) than female-dominated workplaces (27 per cent). However, part-time work was much more feminised, with 43 per cent of female-dominated workplaces[i] reporting an increase in part-time contracts, compared with the average for all establishments of 24 per cent. The industry concentrations of part-time work and female employment were similar to Australia, in retailing, financial services and education (Webster 2001; Bamber and Lansbury 1998: 333).

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

Employee participation can divided into two main approaches, direct participation and indirect or representative participation. Direct participation involves the employee in job or task-oriented decision-making in the production process at the shop or office floor level. The most common forms of direct participation include problem-solving groups or quality circles, and decision-making work teams or semi-autonomous work groups. Both forms represent formalised means for management accessing of employee knowledge through small groups or teams of employees, but they differ in the extent of employee influence that they allow. Problem solving groups only make recommendations to management, and usually their focus is defined in a particular area or areas, such as safety, quality or productivity. Total Quality Management (TQM) extends the concept of isolated problem-solving groups to an organisation-wide structured process involving teams of employees and managers. Decision-making work teams generally enjoy greater discretion in organising their own work within broad guidelines with minimal direct supervision. They require a reorganisation of technology and work flow, multiskilling and training (Strauss 1998: 21-26).

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

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

Effective participation has two major requirements that also may disadvantage part-timers. First, there is a general consensus in the participation literature that training is required for direct or representative participation. A number of surveys have demonstrated that on-the-job training for casual employees occurs less frequently than for permanent full-timers. The differential access to training enjoyed by men and women, however, has exceeded any difference based on employment status, because of extensive occupational segregation. As Webster notes 'Traditionally, women have not enjoyed equality of access to training with men, and have also been deliberately excluded from skilled work and the training which accompanied it' (Webster 2001).

Secondly, effective communication between management and employees is required, preferably involving a two-way information flow. Some forms of communication are less likely to involve part-timers effectively. For example, meetings and social functions may be at times difficult for them to attend, the 'daily walk around' by management may not be at a time when all part-timers are present in the workplace, and staff bulletins placed in tea rooms may not be read as frequently by part-timers. We examine some of these possibilities below.

Methodology

The main data for this study is derived from the *Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS 95)* conducted from August 1995 to January 1996, involving 2001 workplaces with 20 or more employees throughout Australia. The main results were published in Morehead et al. 1997. *AWIRS 95* drew its sample from the Australian Bureau of Statistics register of all establishments in Australia, and the sample represented an estimated population of 37,200 workplaces throughout the country. Each survey consisted of a number of questionnaires administered to different respondents. We are mainly concerned with the questionnaires administered to employee relations managers and to a random sample of 19,155 individual employees from the 2001 workplaces (representing a response rate of 64 per cent). Each of these questionnaires asked a number of questions concerning participation in the workplace.

The employee survey directly asked respondents for their employment status, with part-time defined as less than 35 hours per week. Eighty per cent of the survey population was full-time, and 20 per cent part-time, whilst males accounted for 55 per cent , and females 45 per cent of the survey population. Ninety-two per cent of males were full-time employees, but 34 per cent of females were part-time. Females, therefore, accounted for 76 per cent of all part-time employees in the sample.

For the employee relations management survey workplaces were classified in one of two ways depending on the proportion of part-timers in their total workforce: over 25 per cent part-time, and up to 25 per cent. The average level of part-time employment in Australia is 25 per cent. Consequently, those workplaces with more than 25 per cent of part-timers may be classed as having a significant level of part-time employment, and those with less than 25 per cent as having a below average level of part-time

employment. Our hypothesis was that we should expect significant differences between the two classes of workplaces, and between part-time and full-time employees in the nature and extent of employee participation. Thirty per cent of our survey population of workplaces had more than 25 per cent part-timers in their total workforces.

For the purpose of direct comparisons we are extremely constrained by the different survey formats and types of questions in EU and Australian surveys. We have relied on a secondary source, Webster (2001) to draw some general comparisons between Australia and the EU. Webster's article is based upon the EPOC (Employee Participation in Organisational Change) survey of 5,800 workplaces in ten member countries of the EU in 1996 (see EPOC Research Group 1997). The EPOC survey was concerned with direct participation only, or more specifically group work, which was defined as a form of work organisation allowing employees 'increased responsibility to organise and do their jobs without reference back' to managers. Group work includes autonomous or semi-autonomous work groups and self-managed work teams, for which there was also data generated by the Australian (*AWIRS 95*) survey. However, EPOC did not concern itself with representative forms of employee participation which were included in the Australian survey.

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

Australian Workplaces

In the first instance, employee managers were asked what communication methods they utilised in the workplace. Table 1 below shows the results for workplaces with and without significant levels of part-time employment, i.e. with over 25 per cent and up to 25 per cent part-timers respectively. Workplaces with over 25 per cent part-time employment were generally more likely to rely upon a daily walk around by managers, suggestion schemes and to a slight extent, newsletters or bulletins. They were less likely to rely upon staff surveys and electronic mail, but relied about equally with other workplaces upon formal meetings and social functions. These results do not suggest a major disadvantage for employees in workplaces with a significant proportion of part-time employees, since formal meetings are very important for all workplaces. However, it is notable that the communication methods more prominent in these workplaces were less active and top-down in nature, whereas those more prominent in workplaces with insignificant proportions of part-time employment had greater potential for employee voice. To some extent this confirms disadvantage for part-time workers, in that where they are prominent in the workplace there is less access to some of the more extensive or active methods for their views to be heard by management (electronic mail and staff surveys), i.e. less employee voice.

Table 2 demonstrates the incidence of different forms of employee participation in Australia. All these forms of participation have become more frequent in Australian workplaces in recent years, particularly direct participation mechanisms. Almost a quarter of Australian workplaces had none of the forms specified, but all forms of participation except quality circles had a frequency of over forty per cent, and many workplaces practised more than one form. However, the differences between workplaces with or without significant proportions of part-time workers were significant. Semi or fully autonomous work groups, joint consultative committees and task forces were all far less frequent in workplaces with part-time workforces exceeding 25 per cent of their total employees, and these workplaces were also far more likely to have none of the specified forms of employee participation.

Table 1. Communication Methods by % Workforce Part-time (% workplaces)

Method	0-25% part-time workforce	26+% part-time workforce
Daily walk around***	81	86
Suggestion schemes***	27	39
Newsletters/bulletins	60	63
Electronic mail ***	26	24
Staff surveys	33	14
Formal meetings	84	85
Social functions	44	44
None of above	1	1

Source: *AWIRS 95*, Employee Relations Management Survey. *** significant at 0.01 or 99%.
Multiple response allowed.

Table 2. Forms of Employee Involvement by % Workforce Part-time (% workplaces)

Form	All workplaces	0-25% part-time workforce	26+% part-time workforce
Semi/fully autonomous work groups***	43	46	35
Quality circles	16	17	15
Joint consultative committees***	42	47	30
Task forces/ad hoc committees***	46	49	37
None of above***	24	19	35

Source: *AWIRS 95*, Employee Relations Management Survey. *** significant at 0.01 or 99%.
Multiple response allowed.

Table 3. Matters Dealt with by Consultative Committee by % Workforce Part-time (% workplaces)

Matter	0-25% part-time workforce	26+% part-time workforce
Financial decisions	16	17
Introduction of new technology	49	48
New product or service**	33	42
Work organisation*	76	71
Pay & conditions***	38	24
Employee discipline	24	20
Individual grievances**	35	27
EEO & Affirmative action**	35	27
Occupational health & safety	52	53
No authority/advisory only	5	6
Other matters	8	8

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Relations Management Survey. ***significant at 0.01 or 99%.
** significant at 0.05 or 95%. *significant at 0.10 or 90%.

Table 3 also shows some differences in the matters dealt with by consultative committees. Larger numbers of part-timers in the workforce (over 25 per cent) were associated with a lower range of issues that came under the jurisdiction of consultative committees. Although consultative committees in these workplaces were significantly more likely to deal with the issue of new products or services, they were significantly less likely than in workplaces with fewer part-timers to deal with work organisation, pay and conditions, individual grievances, or EEO and Affirmative Action issues.

The differences between the two types of workplaces in terms of the impact of consultative committees were not so great, as shown in Table 4. Only in the area of communication was there a significant

difference, with workplaces employing large proportions of part-timers being more likely than others to record no change as a result of the consultative committees.

Table 4. Impact of Consultative Committees by % Workforce Part-time (% workplaces)

Area of impact	0-25% part-time workforce	26+% part-time workforce
Workplace performance		
- improved	64	67
- no change	34	33
Ease of change		
-- improved	72	71
- no change	25	28
Product/service quality		
- improved	57	63
- no change	42	37
Communication**		
- improved	82	80
- no change	16	20

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Relations Management Survey. ** significant at 0.05 or 95%.

Managers were asked the methods by which they informed employees about a number of specific issues. Their responses for future staffing and investment plans are shown in Table 5 below. Future staffing plans are of immediate interest for employees, and a high proportion of managers reported information flow in some form. Workplaces with a significant part-time workforce were more likely to not provide this information to employees, and where it was provided in these workplaces they relied more on the 'daily walk around' by management and meetings with supervisors, than did workplaces with less significant levels of part-time employment. For investment plans information was much less likely to be passed onto employees, but again this was more likely to be the case in workplaces with a significant proportion of part-timers in their total workforce. These workplaces were more likely than others to impart information concerning investment plans by newsletters or bulletins, and through meetings with supervisors. On the other hand, workplaces with small part-time workforces were more likely to impart information to employees through meetings with senior management and joint consultative committees for both issues, and through electronic mail for staffing plans.

The survey also enquired regarding special measures to ensure that information is received by part-time or shift workers, who may experience difficulty in accessing some forms of information sharing. In each case a large majority of managers with significant proportions of part-timers in their workforce reported that special measures were taken, as shown in Table 6 below. When managers were probed for details regarding the special measures adopted, the results remained optimistic, as demonstrated in Table 7. Here we can see that over 40 per cent of all workplaces held meetings at times to enable attendance by all employees. Workplaces with a significant part-time presence were more likely to rely on direct provision of information to employees, but also upon noticeboards which is less reliable than other forms of information dissemination. Workplaces with relatively insignificant proportions of part-time employees were more likely to utilise interpreters and translators.

Table 5. Methods by Which Employees Receive Information by % Workforce Part-time (% workplaces)

Method	Future staffing plans***		Investment plans***	
	0-25% part-time workforce	26+% part-time workforce	0-25% part-time workforce	26+% part-time workforce
Daily walk around	16	19	9	10
Newsletters/ bulletins	19	19	14	18
Electronic mail	4	1	1	1
Regular formal meetings/supervisor	26	30	12	14
Regular formal meetings/snr. managers	10	7	14	6
Work groups	1	1	0	0
Quality circles	0	0	0	0
JCCs	7	2	5	1
Information unavailable	17	20	43	48
Not applicable	0	0	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Relations Management Survey. ***significant at 0.01 or 99%.

Table 6. Whether Special Measures Taken to Ensure Information Is Received by Part-time Staff & Shift Workers by % Workforce Part-time (% workplaces)

Response	Part-time staff***		Shift workers***	
	0-25% part-time workforce	26+% part-time workforce	0-25% part-time workforce	26+% part-time workforce
Yes	41	79	45	63
No	29	19	13	12
Not applicable	30	2	43	25
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Relations Management Survey. ***significant at 0.01 or 99%.

Table 7. Measures Taken to Ensure Information Is Received by Part-time Staff & Shift Workers by % Workforce Part-time (% workplaces)

Measure	0-25% part-time workforce	26+% part-time workforce
Information given to employee***	47	55
Meeting timed so all can attend	41	41
Information displayed on notice boards**	37	44
Informal communication	30	31
Employees help each other	18	15
Interpreters/ translators***	14	8
Managers/supervisors inform staff	8	6
Other	5	7

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Relations Management Survey.
***significant at 0.01 or 99%. ** significant at 0.05 or 95%.

Australian Employees

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

In Australia in 1995, 66 per cent of casual employees received on-the-job training in the year prior to the survey, compared with 57 per cent of permanent, although the difference between full-time and part-time was not so great, 66 to 63 per cent. In those industry sectors where part-time and casual work are most frequent and most feminised– Hospitality, Retail, and Recreation and Personal Services – the least amount of training was offered by employers (Markey et al. 1998: 9; Morehead et al. 1997: 112-13). However, females were slightly more likely than males to receive training in the Australian survey. This was partly due to the relatively high level of training in the public sector, where females are well represented in the labour force.

A majority of Australian employees experienced changes in work practices in the year prior to the survey, and the male/female differential was very marginal. However, full-time employees were significantly more likely to do so than full-timers:

- 59 per cent of full-timers saw changes in the way the workplace was run compared with 51 per cent of part-timers (male 57 per cent; female 56 per cent);
- 48 per cent of full-timers experienced changes in the way they did their job compared with 37 per cent of part-timers (male 46 per cent; female 45 per cent); and
- 45 per cent of full-timers saw changes in the type of work they did compared with 32 per cent of part-timers (male 42 per cent; female 43 per cent) (Morehead et al. 1997: 272-73).

Of those employees who had experienced any of these changes, 94 per cent of males were full-time, 71 per cent of females were full-time, and 29 per cent of females were part-time. Table 8 shows whether they considered that they were consulted by employers about the changes. Part-time employees were significantly less likely to report being consulted, for both males and females, although for males the difference was greater.

Table 8. Whether Employees Consulted re Workplace Change, Australia

Response	**All employees***		**Male employees***		**Female employees***	
	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %
Yes	60	47	60	41	61	49
No	32	40	33	45	31	38
Not sure	3	4	2	5	3	4
No change	5	9	5	9	6	9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Survey. *significant at 0.01 or 99%.

Table 9 summarises how employees were consulted regarding workplace change. A majority of all types of employees relied upon consultation by supervisors, and the same or similar majorities of full-time employees also relied upon discussions with higher level managers and meetings. However, part-time employees were much less likely to be consulted by higher level managers and unions, or through meetings, but more likely to rely on information from fellow workers than full-timers. The male/female differential in these responses was not great, except that females were more reliant on fellow workers than males, and less likely to be consulted by senior managers and unions, whether full or part-time.

Table 9. How Employees Were Consulted re Workplace Change, Australia

Consultation method	All employees		Male employees		Female employees	
	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %
Supervisors discussed	53	56	52*	57*	56	55
Higher managers discusses	53***	40***	54***	42***	51***	39***
Other workers told	24***	29***	22**	27**	27*	30*
Union discussed	16***	10***	18*	13*	13***	9***
Workplace notice/newsletter	24	24	23	24	25	24
Meetings	55***	48***	55***	47***	56***	49***
Other	4	3	4	3	4	3

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Survey. ***significant at 0.01 or 99%.
** significant at 0.05 or 95%. *significant at 0.10 or 90%.

Over half of all Australian employees considered that they were given a fair chance to have a say regarding changes in their workplace in the year prior to the survey. The male and female proportions were virtually equal (53 per cent and 54 per cent respectively), although full-time employees were slightly more likely than part-timers to respond positively (54 per cent to 51 per cent). In any case, it represents a significant issue for management that almost half the workforce on average considered that they did not have a fair chance for a say in workplace change. Table 10 analyses the reasons why employees considered that this was the case. The main reasons offered by employees as a whole related to a lack of consultation by management, but for full-timers these reasons were far more important than for part-timers. Almost half of part-time employees offered their actual employment status as a reason, and a significant number indicated that they could not attend meetings. The results were in the main similar for males and females regardless of employment status. One exception to this was that females as a whole were slightly less likely than males to consider that managers do not consult them, but they were also slightly more likely to consider that decisions were simply made by managers; these differences tend to balance each other out, since as reasons for not being consulted they are similar in meaning.

Table 10. Reasons Employees Were Not Given Fair Chance for Say Regarding Workplace Change

Reason	All employees		Male employees		Female employees	
	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %
Decisions made by managers	57***	51***	56	49	60***	60***
Decisions made outside workplace	52***	43***	53***	41***	48	44
Discussion only between management & unions	15***	11***	17	14	12	10
Part-time/casual – no chance for involvement	2***	47***	2***	46***	3***	48***
Couldn't attend meetings	4***	8***	5	7	4***	9***
Managers didn't consult	42***	31***	44***	34***	38***	30***
Other	7*	6*	7	5	8*	6*

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Survey. ***significant at 0.01 or 99%. *significant at 0.10 or 90%.

The level of influence that employees have on their jobs, or their input into them, can be in a number of different spheres. Tables 11-13 below record employees' response to this issue for the type of work done, how the work is done and decisions which affect them in the workplaces. There was some variation overall in the responses to these questions, with the greater proportions believing that they had a lot of influence on how their work is done, and the lowest proportions considering that they had a lot of influence over decisions which affect them. Generally, however, part-timers were less likely to consider

that their influence was high, and more likely to rate their influence as 'a little' or none. The male/female response was essentially determined by their employment status.

Table 11. Level of Influence over Type of Work Done, Australia

Level	All employees***		Males***		Females***	
	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %
A lot	28	22	28	22	27	22
Some	36	32	36	31	37	32
A little	19	21	19	23	19	21
None	18	25	18	24	17	25
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Survey. ***significant at 0.01 or 99%.

Table 12. Level of Influence over How Work Done, Australia

Level	All employees***		Males***		Females***	
	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %
A lot	50	41	49	39	51	41
Some	31	31	31	30	30	31
A little	13	17	13	19	13	17
None	7	11	7	12	6	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Survey. ***significant at 0.01 or 99%.

Table 13. Level of Influence on Decisions Which Affect You, Australia

Level	All employees***		Males***		Females***	
	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %	Full-time%	Part-time %
A lot	14	9	15	10	12	9
Some	31	26	30	24	31	26
A little	30	32	30	32	32	32
None	25	33	25	34	25	33
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: *AWIRS 95* Employee Survey. ***significant at 0.01 or 99%.

EU Comparisons

In the EU in 1996 the gap in access to training was even greater than in Australia between temporary workers and permanent employees, with temporary employees being only a third as likely to undergo training as their permanent colleagues (European Foundation 1997/1: 6). However, the EPOC survey found that men and women received similar periods of training to prepare for direct participation. Male only workplaces were actually less likely to receive training for group consultation or delegation, because they were largely in industrial sectors – Mining and Construction – which had low levels of direct participation. Nevertheless, Webster notes that

> it is in the *topic* of training where gender inequality is revealed: some sex-typing appears to be taking place in the exposure of men and women to training for particular skill sets. That women are still predominantly trained in 'soft' skills which help them to function better as employees who smooth the interpersonal relations of the workplace, suggests some essentialist assumptions are often made about training to which they are most appropriately exposed.(Webster 2001).

Based on EPOC data, Webster also demonstrates that workplaces with growing part-time workforces are equally as likely as others to practise direct participation, and that female-dominated workplaces are no less inclined than male-dominated workplaces to practise direct participation. In fact, male-only and male-dominated workplaces are far less likely to practise direct participation, largely again because of the industry concentration of such establishments in Mining and Construction. Male and female-dominated workplaces are equally as likely to practise delegative forms of participation, but workplaces with a female presence in the workforce (mixed and female-dominated) are a little more likely to practise face-to-face consultation than male-only or male-dominated workplaces. Webster suggests that this is largely

the result of women's concentration in the public sector, where face-to-face consultation, together with performance reviews and appraisals, are far more common than in the private sector.

However, this analysis is based on workplaces, which 'do not equate to workforce members' (Webster 2001). As Webster notes, 'this level of analysis does not tell us whether male and female employees within establishments are treated equally'. EPOC data relating to the coverage of direct participation mechanisms within workplaces indicate that about 25 per cent deny female employees equal access to direct participation in proportion to their share of the labour force (*ibid*). According to the EPOC survey, the proportion of females in the largest occupational group involved in group consultation was below 50 per cent in two thirds of workplaces, and 47 per cent of workplaces had less than 10 per cent of women in the largest occupational group involved in group consultation. For group decision-making, women made up less than half of the largest occupational group involved in 62 per cent of workplaces, and less than 10 per cent in 52 per cent of workplaces (European Foundation 1997/3: Q.31, Q.46). These trends strongly suggest that women do not enjoy the same access as men to direct participation within workplaces.

Conclusions

On balance our original hypothesis was confirmed by the Australian survey results for workplaces and employees. These results offer strong evidence that part-time employees do not share the same level of opportunities for employee participation which are enjoyed by full-time employees. To the extent that part-time employment is predominantly a female form of labour market activity, therefore, women do not enjoy the same degree of opportunities for employee participation that men do. These trends appear to be similar for the EU.

Australian workplaces with a significant degree of part-time employment (over 26 per cent of their total workforce) demonstrated a fairly consistent pattern of weak participation in comparison with workplaces with less significant proportions of part-time employees. In terms of communication, which is an essential pre-requisite for effective employee participation, these workplaces were characterised by a lower likelihood of employees being informed about issues of concern to them, and to some extent a lower incidence of more extensive and active forms of communication. These differences were not great, and workplaces with a significant part-time presence in their workforce were more likely to take measures to overcome difficulties which part-timers may experience participating in meetings and other activities. However, workplaces with significant part-time workforces were substantially less likely to have instigated any form of employee participation, direct or indirect, even if where they were in place, these mechanisms had similar impacts in critical areas of workplace performance concerning the interests of both management and employees. In the case of consultative committees, the evidence suggests that they covered a lower range of issues in workplaces where part-timers are a significant part of the workforce than in those where they are not.

The Australian employee data more strongly confirmed the differential between full-time and part-time employees. It indicated that casual employees were less likely than others to receive on-the-job-training, which is an essential ingredient of effective participation, although the part-time/full-time differential was more marginal and females received slightly more training than men because of their concentration in the public sector where training is more widespread than in the private sector. However, part-time employees were significantly less likely than full-timers to consider that they had been consulted about major issues relating to workplace change and the nature of their work, and they considered that their part-time status itself was a hindrance to their having an input to the workplace change process. Part-time employees were more likely than full-time to report relying upon consultation of a passive or top down variety (newsletters/bulletins and supervisors) rather than enjoying equal access to senior managers, unions and meetings. Part-time employees also exhibited a lower tendency to consider that they had influence in important areas of workplace and job organisation. In this sense they manifested a lower level of the sense of empowerment in the workplace.

Australian male/female participation patterns generally followed employment status. The only noteworthy exception to this was that females were less likely to report being consulted by senior managers and unions regarding workplace change, and more likely than males to rely upon fellow workers for this information. Thus, for the Australian case we may generally deduce the gender pattern of participation from the employment status, full or part-time. In the EU case, because of the nature of the data, we deduce that part-time employees largely exhibit the same pattern of participation as do females, since the part-time workforce is so predominantly feminised.

Notwithstanding the limitations for direct comparison with the EU, we can see that the trends are similar in these areas, at least regarding direct participation. The similarities are clear in the limited male/female differentials in training, and in the absence of strong differences between feminised/part-time workplaces and others. In both the Australian and EU cases, the difference occurs within the workplace, where females and part-time employees do not enjoy the same access to participatory processes as do males and full-timers.

The issue seems important enough, and the evidence sufficient, to warrant more extensive research. As a matter of equity in the workplace it is undesirable that part-time employees should have less access to the industrial citizenship and empowerment offered by effective employee participation. Since the part-time workforce is predominantly female, the patterns discovered here have major implications for effective implementation of gender equity in the workplace. And finally, if a growing proportion of the workforce is excluded from full access to employee participation mechanisms in the workplace, this represents a significant failure for best practice strategic HRM which claims that employee involvement is a major ingredient for the optimising of workplace efficiency.

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[i] Female-dominated workplaces are those where the largest occupational group is 68 per cent or more female, and male-dominated workplaces are those where the largest occupational group is 67 per cent or more male.