

The Effectiveness of Worker Participation in Promoting Industrial Harmony- A Case of one of the Public Sector Organisations in Zimbabwe

فعالية مشاركة العمال في تعزيز الانسجام الصناعي - حالة منظمة واحدة من القطاع العام في
زيمبابوي

Esther Chiriseri¹, Hazel Mubango², George Madzivanyika³, Eresi Muzvondiwa⁴,
Ndabezinhle Mfandaidza⁵

^{1,3,4,5} Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Human Resource Management, Midlands State University
(MSU) Zimbabwe

² Women University in Africa, Harare, Zimbabwe

¹ chiriserie@staff.msu.ac.zw, ² hmubango@wua.ac.zw, ³ madzivanyikag@staff.msu.ac.zw,

⁴ muzvondiwa@staff.msu.ac.zw, ⁵ mfandaidzan@staff.msu.ac.zw

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Abstract:

Objectives: This study examined the effectiveness of worker participation in promoting industrial harmony at one public sector organisation in Zimbabwe.

Methods: To identify different types of worker participation initiatives, to assess employees' perceptions of industrial harmony, to establish key challenges affecting worker participation, and to evaluate the effects of employee participation on industrial harmony.

Results: The study found that public sector organisations in Zimbabwe use several mechanisms for worker participation, including workers' committees, suggestion schemes, and joint consultative forums. Worker participation was found to have a positive effect on industrial harmony by fostering mutual understanding, reducing conflicts, and improving collaboration between management and workers. However, the study also established various challenges hindering the effectiveness of worker participation, such as inadequate resources, lack of management commitment, poor communication channels, and resistance to change. Results also indicated that in as much as worker participation is a valuable tool for promoting industrial harmony, its success depends on addressing key organisational challenges and behavioural barriers. The findings contribute to the literature on promoting worker participation and industrial harmony.

Conclusion: The study offers practical recommendations for organizations seeking to enhance workplace harmony through inclusive and participatory practices.

Keywords: public sector; worker participation; industrial harmony; mutual understanding.

المخلص:

الأهداف: تقيم مستوى فهم الانسجام الصناعي، وتقييم طبيعة ونطاق مبادرات مشاركة العمال، وتقييم أثر مشاركة الموظفين على الانسجام الصناعي، وتحديد التحديات الرئيسية التي تؤثر على مشاركة العمال.

المنهجية: استخدمت الدراسة تصميمًا بحثيًا نوعيًا، باستخدام مقابلات متعمقة شبه منظمة مع 24 موظفًا ومديرًا فضلًا عن استعراض للوثائق التنظيمية ذات الصلة.

النتائج: كشفت النتائج أن لدى المنظمة عدة آليات لمشاركة العمال، بما في ذلك لجان العمال، وخطط الاقتراحات، والمنتديات الاستشارية المشتركة. وتبين أن مشاركة العمال لها تأثير إيجابي على الانسجام الصناعي، وتعزيز التفاهم المتبادل، والحد من النزاعات، وتحسين التعاون بين الإدارة والعمال. غير أن الدراسة حددت أيضًا مختلف التحديات التي تعوق فعالية مشاركة العمال، مثل عدم كفاية الموارد، والافتقار إلى الالتزام الإداري، وضعف قنوات الاتصال، ومقاومة التغيير. وتخلص الورقة إلى أنه على الرغم من أن مشاركة العمال أداة قيمة لتعزيز الوثام الصناعي، فإن نجاحها يتوقف على معالجة هذه الجوانب التنظيمية والسلوكية الرئيسية. وتسهم النتائج في المؤلفات المتعلقة بإشراك الموظفين والعلاقات الصناعية، حيث تقدم أفكارًا ثاقبة عن ديناميات مشاركة العمال في سياق سلطة حكومية محلية في إطار بلد نام.

الخلاصة: تقدم الدراسة توصيات عملية للمنظمات التي تسعى إلى تعزيز الانسجام في مكان العمل من خلال ممارسات شاملة وتشاركية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مشاركة العمال؛ الانسجام الصناعي؛ علاقات مكان العمل؛ إشراك الموظفين؛ الأداء التنظيمي؛ الحكم المحلي.

1 Introduction

Worker participation involves all the activities that are undertaken by the employees so that their voices can also be heard during decision-making in an organisation (Berg & Farbenblum, 2021). Further, worker participation encompasses various mechanisms, such as direct involvement in discussions, being represented in the workers' committee, and participation in management decisions (Triantafillidou & Koutroukis, 2022). Worker participation aims to foster a more democratic workplace, enhance job satisfaction, and improve overall organizational performance. Thus, worker participation refers to the various ways that enable employees to take part in all the industrial activities and decisions that affect their work.

Industrial harmony is a state of peaceful coexistence and cooperative relationships between employers and employees within an organization (Olufemi & Ojo, 2022). Similarly, industrial harmony is a state of peaceful existence in the workplace between the employers and the employees (Girigiri & Badom, 2021). Thus, industrial harmony is about peace and cooperation that is on a mutual basis within an organisation. Organisations should strive to uphold industrial harmony as it impacts organisational performance.

Worker participation is an effective technique for promoting industrial harmony, as revealed by statistics at global, regional, and national levels (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2021). Further, Murarka et al. (2021) assert that at the global level, there is a high recognition of worker participation and employee involvement in decision-making processes. Worker participation enhances better labour-management relations and improves organisational performance. Through worker participation, organisations may enhance the decision-making process. The impact of worker participation has become a global phenomenon, and in Germany approximately 73% of employees are covered by co-determination rights, allowing them to participate in organizational decision-making through works councils and board representation (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2022). In Sweden, about 90% of employees are covered by collective agreements, which include provisions for employee participation in workplace matters (Swedish Trade Union Confederation, 2023). Cultural resistance in some organisations with traditional hierarchies has been identified as the barrier to open dialogue and employee participation, despite a generally strong framework for industrial relations (Swedish Trade Union Confederation, 2022).

The United States recorded an average of 36% of employee participation rate which shows lower levels of participation compared to European counterparts (Gallup, 2021). In India, around 40% of workers feel they have a say in workplace decisions, reflecting a growing awareness of participation needs (International Labour Organization, 2022). Concerning labour disputes, India has witnessed a rise in labor protests and strikes, particularly in sectors like agriculture and manufacturing, due to demands for better wages and working conditions (International Labour Organization, 2022). Additionally, a significant portion of workers remain unaware of their rights and the benefits of participation, leading to lower engagement levels (Labour Bureau of India, 2023).

African countries like South Africa, Nigeria, and Tanzania have highlighted the potential of worker representation and participation in their structures to give employees a voice and safeguard their interests (Andersson et al., 2020). According to the (African Union Report, 2022), 48% of Sub-Saharan Africa countries' organisations are involved in some form of collective decision-making or labor representation. Approximately, 30% of those countries experienced significant collective job action in the form of strikes, lock outs, picketing, and sit-ins signifying negative employee relations (African Development Bank, 2021). South Africa has one of the highest rates of strikes in the world, often driven by wage disputes and poor working conditions (South African Federation of Trade Unions, 2022).

The Industrial Revolution has significantly affected Zimbabwe's industrial relations. From 1980, Zimbabwean organisations witnessed major strides in adopting the western philosophy of employee engagement and commitment through worker participation and involvement. This has been witnessed by high employee motivation, high productivity and commitment in organisations that have embraced such philosophies. Employee participation as enshrined in the Labour Act Chapter (28:01) give employees rights to join works councils, workers' committees, and trade unions. However, public sector organisations are portraying a different picture in relation to the concepts of employee participation and involvement due to the traditional hierarchical structures which prohibits the adoption employee participation and involvement initiatives.

In the year 2022 alone, 20% of Zimbabwean organisations reported a substantial number of labour disputes highlighting challenges in issues of achieving industrial harmony (Zimbabwe Labour Force Survey, 2022). In Zimbabwe, research has shown that effective worker participation can help address issues of employee disengagement and lack of involvement among shop floor workers (Gumbie et al., 2023). Ongoing economic challenges in Zimbabwe such as hyperinflation, have led to wage disputes and strikes, disrupting industrial harmony (Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, 2023). Further the restrictive political environment can stifle free expression and discourage workers from participating in decision-making processes (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Additionally, the Zimbabwe Labour Force Survey (2022) highlighted that management is adamant of employee participation and involvement.

Worker participation is crucial for promoting industrial harmony and effective organizational performance (Christiano, 2022). However, in Zimbabwe, most public sector organisations have suffered heavy losses due to litigations from former employees. Most of these cases stem from unresolved labour issues, which may be a lack of worker participation. It is therefore important to investigate the effectiveness of worker participation and involvement in promoting industrial harmony. Employee involvement in decision-making, open communication, and collaborative problem-solving can significantly improve workplace relations and productivity (Rees & Brione (2024). A report on local government reform in Zimbabwe emphasized the need for local communities to actively participate in the design, implementation, and evaluation of development initiatives (Government of Zimbabwe, 2022). Therefore, examining the effectiveness of worker participation practices in the public sector could provide valuable insights into promoting industrial harmony and organizational performance in the Zimbabwean local government context.

In light of the above discussion, it is prudent for management to consider employee involvement and participation as crucial determinants of industrial harmony and organisational performance. Extant literature suggests that effective worker participation can contribute to improved industrial relations, reduced conflicts, and greater organizational commitment (Christiano, 2022). However, the extent to which worker participation can promote industrial harmony remains a subject of ongoing empirical investigation, particularly within the context of Zimbabwean public sector organizations (Gardell, 2020). Murarka et al. (2021) further asserted that worker participation enables employees to articulate their interests and concerns, fostering a sense of belonging and ownership that is crucial for maintaining industrial peace. Thus, to establish the extent of worker participation in Zimbabwean public sector organisations and how it affects industrial harmony there is need to ask some of the following questions, what are the various worker participation initiatives that are prevalent in the Zimbabwean public sector organisations, what are the employee perceptions of industrial harmony in the Zimbabwean public sector organisations, and what are the effects of worker participation on industrial harmony.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Worker Participation

Worker participation refers to the involvement of employees in the decision-making processes and management (Rees & Brione (2024). In unity, Bhaker and Sharma (2024) assert that worker participation is the mental and emotional engagement in the organisation's aims and responsibilities which improves a sense of community and helps improve organisational performance. Organisations should embrace worker participation as it empowers workers, enhances job satisfaction, and promotes a sense of ownership and commitment to the organization's goals (Gardell, 2020). When workers are actively involved in decision-making, they are more likely to feel valued and invested in the organization's success leading to improved industrial relations and harmony (Khassawneh & Elrehail, 2022). Conversely, a lack of worker participation can contribute to employee dissatisfaction, conflict, and poor industrial harmony ((Eze et al., (2022). Worker participation is constituted by several dimensions which include worker empowerment, teamwork and collaboration, and Collective bargaining (Rees & Brione, 2024) and these will be outlined in the following section.

2.2 Worker Empowerment

Worker participation involves the empowerment of employees to make decisions that affect them, and plays a significant role in promoting industrial harmony in the workplace (Gardell, 2020). Enhancing worker participation can be achieved by empowering workers through worker empowerment mechanisms such as giving employees right to access resources that enable them to accomplish their work, recognising employees when they successfully accomplish their tasks through financial and nonfinancial rewards and ensuring two-way communication between employers and employees to build trust and enhance empowerment (Alshemmari, 2023). Worker empowerment focuses on giving employees authority, resources, and opportunities that allow them to make decisions and take actions that affect their actions. Worker empowerment becomes successful when employees have the freedom to make decisions on their own, hence through empowerment employees may become self-reliant (Modise, 2023). Further, worker empowerment gives employees a voice in organisational issues leading to employee satisfaction as they feel valued by their organisations (Chandra & Lobo, 2023) which reduces conflicts as employees feel that they will be part of the organisation. Being self-reliant may improve the performance of the employees translating to organisational effectiveness and improved industrial harmony. Worker empowerment involves enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organisational members by identifying conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal both by formal organisational frameworks (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). According to Lundmark (2023) organisations may adopt psychological empowerment which enhances team well-being which increases employee performance and promotion of industrial democracy. Employees who are actively involved in decision making through empowerment feel valued and this leads to improved industrial harmony. Therefore, organisations should embrace information sharing, co-determination and consultation to enhance empowerment.

2.3 Teamwork and Collaboration

Teamwork is defined as a small group of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they are mutually accountable (Van et al., 2022). Team collaboration, which emphasises, synergy and combined effort of employees to accomplish shared objectives is a critical dimension of worker participation (Shresta et al., 2023). Effective teamwork and collaboration between management and employees is also crucial for industrial harmony. Collaborative environments through teamwork encourage diverse perspectives when addressing challenges and organisational continuous improvements leading to effective solutions (Galeazzo et al., 2021). Therefore, fostering a culture of teamwork and joint problem-solving can contribute to industrial harmony growth and continuous improvement, especially in the public sector organisation.

2.4 Collective Bargaining

The role of trade unions and collective bargaining in promoting industrial harmony cannot be overlooked. (Eze et al., (2022) found that the trade unions in the public sector organization play a crucial role in representing worker interests and facilitating constructive dialogue between management and employees, leading to improved industrial harmony. Worker participation can be undertaken through formal and informal meetings by worker representatives such as the trade unions and workers' committee members. Thus, collective bargaining is another important dimension through which worker participation can be enhanced (Shresta et al., 2023). Meaningful worker involvement in collective bargaining and other decision-making processes can be an effective strategy for promoting industrial harmony at the workplace (Schnabel, 2020). The literature review suggests that the effectiveness of worker participation in promoting industrial harmony at this organization is closely linked to the empowerment of workers, the fostering of teamwork and collaboration, and the involvement of trade unions in collective bargaining. By implementing strategies that address these key dimensions, organisations can enhance industrial harmony and improve overall organizational performance (Garnero, 2021).

2.5 Industrial Harmony

Industrial harmony takes its roots in industrial democracy and denotes general agreements on working relationships between the employer and the employees which benefit the organisation (Uzoamaka et al., 2022).

Further, industrial harmony is the state of peaceful and cooperative relations between employers and employees within an organization (Onimole et al., 2020). In addition, industrial harmony covers industrial democracy, excludes work discontent, and exists when the workers and the employers are given a fair opportunity in matters that affect their performance and the smooth operations of the organisation (Girigiri & Bandom, 2021). Thus, industrial harmony implies the existence of peace and democracy which manifests in reduced industrial conflicts and limited litigations due to teamwork, collaboration, and management partnership. Thus, industrial harmony implies the absence of strikes from the unions which might affect organisational effectiveness (Uzoamaka et al., 2022). Industrial harmony is crucial for organizational productivity, employee well-being, and overall business success. Harmonious industrial relations are a result of workers and employees working together and accepting that they are all partners in the workplace and working together to achieve the goals of the organisation (Onimole et al., 2020). As a result, public sector organisations should aim to improve industrial harmony through various worker participation initiatives. Nwokocha (2015) opines that for organisations to reduce conflicts and enhance industrial harmony they should create joint committees for collective bargaining and create a work culture based on teamwork and collaboration, and participative management. Thus, it is also ideal for the public sector organisations to treat their employees as partners thereby reducing conflicts and enabling industrial harmony.

2.6 Challenges affecting worker participation in organisations

The implementation of worker participation initiatives can be affected by several challenges. Implementing worker participation initiatives can be affected by a lack of financial resources. Organisations with limited financial resources might face challenges when training their workers on worker participation initiatives (Girigiri & Bandom, 2021). Kouakou (2022) asserted that bureaucracy is a challenge affecting worker participation. Decisions take ages to be implemented, and this makes worker participation difficult. Pandey & Kumar (2020) posits that there is a challenge of attitudes, apathy, and hostility among employers and employees. Further worker participation can be affected by managers who find it difficult to let their subordinates participate in making decisions as they feel this may undermine their authority (Obiekwe et al., 2019). Girigiri & Bandom (2021) noted a lack of strong and effective labour unions in most organisations especially those in the public sector, which are characterised by multiple labour unions which have compromised worker representation and participation.

2.7 Related Studies

Ogbonda (2023) investigated how organisations can enhance employee involvement and participation and they found that when employees or their representatives participate in grievance settlement, product design, they see the decisions as their own and this helps to reduce conflicts thereby enhancing industrial harmony. Another study Rees & Brione (2024) that worker participation played a significant role in promoting industrial harmony and overall organizational performance. Therefore, it is important for organisations to empower their workers through information sharing, consultation, and co-determination processes. In another related study, Christiano (2022) examined the impact of worker participation on industrial harmony in the public sector in Zimbabwe and found that organisations with higher levels of employee participation experienced better communication, reduced conflicts and enabled management and employee collaboration. Onimole et al., (2020)'s findings corroborate with Ogbonda (2023) who established that effective employee involvement and participation is built on effective communication system which enables management and employee participation. Thus, effective communication, team work and collaboration are key ingredients for worker participation and improved industrial harmony. Another study Chandra and Lobo (2023) established that worker participation is essential for the development of industrial democracy, which enhances inclusion, respect, and cooperation between workers and management ultimately reducing workplace conflicts. Thus, it can be deduced that worker participation plays a significant role in enhancing industrial harmony.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Industrial Relations Theory, which emphasizes the importance of cooperative and harmonious relations between employers and employees for organizational success (Poole, 2021). The industrial relations theory can be viewed from three perspectives namely the unitary perspective, pluralist

perspective and systems perspective (Bayar, 2017). The unitarist approach to industrial relations believes that employers and employees operate as a team there is no need for third party intervention or union intervention as they are able to deal with their differences as a team (Mzangwa, 2015). The unitarist approach advocates for harmony in the work place. Thus, organisations in favour of unitarist approach involve employees and management in the affairs of the organisations, they are strong advocates of employee participation. As a result, empowering employees through worker participation is guided by the unitarist approach which advocates for harmony, team work, effective communication between the industrial relations partners and therefore it is the most relevant perspective for worker participation. Additionally, the Participative Management Theory, which highlights the benefits of involving workers in decision-making also provided the basis of the study (Khassawneh & Elrehail, 2022). Wang et al. (2022) purport that participative leadership encourages and supports employees to participate in the decision-making process of organizations leading to increased motivation, high morale, loyalty and productivity. Therefore, if public sector organisations Zimbabwe allow participation of employees in decision making process, they may enhance industrial harmony. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of this research also came from provisions of the Labour Act Chapter (28.01). The main objective of the Labour Act is to promote social justice, democracy, and industrial harmony in the workplace. As highlighted by section 2A (1) (e) of the act the purpose of the act is to promote participation of employees on issues concerning their welfare in the organisation. The research used some of the sections from the Labour Act Chapter (28.01) which are part of the conceptual framework concerning worker participation specifically section 4, 5, 7, 24 and 25. These sections allow workers to contribute in decision making and pursuing their welfare in good faith and joyously and hence this will result in industrial harmony.

Section 4 of the Labour Act allows employees the right to join trade unions and workers committee without fear of harassment by the employer and where there is breach the injured party shall apply for an order to stop the violation or be paid damages. Another section is section 5 which is concerned with protection of employees' right to harmonies the workplace. Section 7 states that no employee shall be stopped from seeing or accessing a workers committee during working hours for the purpose of airing any grievance, negotiating any matter, or advancing or protecting the rights or interests of employees hence by doing this industrial harmony is advanced. Section 24, workers committee will represent employees in matters affecting their rights and interests. Section 25A advocates for a works council in every establishment and the works council should have an equal number of shop floor employees and managers to pursue the interests of employees. These labour laws are there to protect and allow employee participation in decision-making at the same time advancing their interests.

3 Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach utilising interviews and focus group discussions. Li & Zhang (2022) point out that the main focus of qualitative research is to understand, explain, explore, discover, and clarify situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs, and experiences. A single case study design was adopted as the study wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of worker participation in industrial harmony (Brown & White, 2023). The case study is known to help understand the problem under study using a real-life situation hence it was the ideal study design to adopt. A sample of 24 managerial and non-managerial participants was used to solicit for their views. Among the 24, 17 were drawn from the non-managerial participants and 7 from managerial participants. The sample size was dependent upon data saturation, which suggests that collecting data until no new information or themes emerge ensures a comprehensive understanding of the research constructs under investigation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Considering the resource and time constraints of the study, a sample size of 24 participants was deemed sufficient. Convenience and stratified random sampling were employed and convenience sampling was selected because of their convenience, accessibility, and proximity to the researcher (Stratton, 2021). Unstructured interviews and 6 focus groups with 4 members each were used to obtain the views of the managerial and non-managerial participants. Focus group discussions provided a platform for participants to engage in group dynamics, facilitating shared experiences and diverse viewpoints (Bryman, 2020). To come up with a sample the convenience sampling technique was adopted as it allowed the researcher to access, the participants who were easily accessible. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews involving one-on-one

interactions with participants, allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to the effectiveness of worker participation in promoting industrial harmony at the workplace (Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Semi-structured interviews enabled researchers to delve deeply into participants' experiences, allowing for rich and detailed data collection (Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The flexibility of this method allowed for probing and follow-up questions, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of participants' perspectives (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020). Focus group discussions were also carried out with 6 groups with 4 members each to complement the interviews. To analyse the collected thematic analysis was used and this included coding and categorization of the data, followed by the identification of themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants' narratives (Li & Zhang, 2022).

4 Results and Discussion

The study used the thematic approach to analyse the data gathered. Thematic analysis is identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Ayre & McCaffery, 2022). Data was analysed using objectives based on stated findings.

To identify different types of worker participation initiatives:

The study found that worker participation initiatives include workers' committees, collective bargaining negotiations, and works councils. The study also revealed that collective bargaining was done at the national level through the use of trade unions and that collective bargaining was done once towards the end of the year and was mainly based on issues to do with salaries. Participants indicated that works councils were advice-giving and counseling organs and works council meetings were expected to benefit non-managerial and managerial employees. Furthermore, works council meetings were meant to resolve conflicts between the employer and employees. The findings collaborate with what is enshrined in the Labour Act (28:01) that a workers' committee is another way employees can pursue their interests or make their voice heard through representatives of workers' committee. The situation was different at the organization under study. The workers' committee is there and represents employees though on trivial matters as the workers' committee is comprised of representatives who cannot effectively represent employees hence leading to domination by management on works council meetings since they poorly present and interpret issues of concern. This impacted industrial harmony negatively as employee welfare and problems were not properly addressed. Onimole et al., (2020) remarks that collective bargaining is the process whereby workers organise collectively and bargain with employers regarding the workplace. Owusu et al., (2023) supported that a trade union is a continuous association of wage earners to maintain or improve the conditions of their working lives. Section 4(1) (a)-(c) gives employees the right to join, form a trade union, and engage in lawful activities of a trade union for the advancement of employee interests. Rees & Brione (2024) concurs that employee voice can be seen as the ability of employees to influence the actions of the employer through works council which provides the means for management to consult employee representatives on matters of mutual interest. Section 25A of the Labour Act (Chapter 28.01) allows workers the right to take part in a works council meeting through workers' committees. However, the Works Council outcomes are not that effective at this public sector organization in terms of representing employees because the workers' committee representatives are less educated hence this compromises their negotiation skills and their firmness concerning issues affecting employees. Section 25A (4) (a) - (d) provide a platform for both parties to handle issues affecting them in the workplace, and handle challenges that employees encounter in the execution of their duties. By so doing, industrial harmony is pursued. The researchers are in congruent with a study by Rees & Brione (2024) that when workers are actively involved in decision-making, they feel more valued and invest in the organization's success, leading to improved industrial relations and harmony. (Eze et al., (2022) posits that organizations with higher levels of worker participation and involvement experienced better communication, reduced conflict, and improved collaboration between management and employees (Machingauta, 2022).

To assess employees' perceptions of industrial harmony:

The understanding of participants regarding industrial harmony was diverse. It was highlighted that industrial harmony was the unity that existed among organizational employees. It was a situation whereby everyone is

happy at the workplace and there are less conflicts. The above findings are converging with (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2021)'s assertion that industrial harmony is the state of peaceful and cooperative relations between employers and employees within an organization. Industrial harmony also entails encouraging employee voices to be heard thereby creating workable environments. However, it was revealed that some participants were not sure what industrial harmony meant. Accordingly, Chakraborty & Biswas (2021) viewed the dimensions of industrial harmony as effective communication, conflict resolution, and a collaborative work environment. The researchers concur with the findings that industrial harmony is a situation where there is harmony between the employer and employees, ensuring that employee voices are heard in order to create a harmonized workplace. The findings are also supported by law provisions of the Labour Act Chapter (28.01) Section 23 (1) which highlights that 'employees employed by any one employer may appoint or elect a workers committee to represent their interests'. Statutes promoting for workers to pursue their interests enhance industrial harmony as they equip employees with the right and authority to participate. The researchers' views converge with a study by (Avgar, 2021; Kaufman, 2020) that fostering positive workplace relations has become an imperative for organizations seeking to enhance productivity, employee morale, and overall competitiveness. The study found that in as much as workers' committees exist in public sector organisations in Zimbabwe, there are comprised of employees from the low levels and hence they are dominated by management. Therefore, the quality of representation may be affected which negatively impacts industrial harmony as employee welfare is not properly addressed.

To establish key challenges affecting worker participation:

Participants revealed that the HR department did not have support employee participation initiatives such as empowerment, team working and team briefings to promote industrial harmony. This concurs with Ngololo (2024)'s assertion that industrial harmony is the state of peaceful and cooperative relations between employers and employees within an organization. The dimensions of industrial harmony include effective communication, conflict resolution, and a collaborative work environment (Chakraborty & Biswas, 2021). The researchers concur with the findings that industrial harmony is a situation whereby there is harmony between the employer and employees, ensuring that employee voices are heard by management thereby creating a harmonized workplace. The Labour Act Chapter (28.01), Section 23 (1) highlights that 'employees employed by any one employer may appoint or elect a workers committee to represent their interests'. Statutes promoting for workers to pursue their interests enhance industrial harmony as they equip employees with the right and authority to participate. The researchers' views are converging with a study by (Avgar, 2021; Kaufman, 2020) that fostering positive workplace relations has become an imperative for organizations seeking to enhance productivity, employee morale, and overall competitiveness. The worker's committee is there and represent employees though on trivial matters because the workers committee is comprised of low-level representatives, with low level qualifications, hence dominated by management. This negatively impacted industrial harmony as employee welfare were not properly addressed.

The HR department need to improve and come up with instruments which create a conducive environment for employees to participate for example management initiatives derived from the Employee Voice model, Ngololo (2024). The framework states that employees are important in influencing organisational decisions hence the need to participate fully in issues concerning them to promote industrial harmony. This is congruent with a study by Pandey & Kumar (2020) who purports that workplace diversity present opportunities and challenges for industrial relations, embracing diversity, promoting inclusivity and providing equal opportunities for all employees foster a culture of respect and contribution to harmonious relations. Findings revealed that the HR department is not seen as a business partner in the organisation hence sometimes sidelined on meetings done at corporate level. The HR is only there to execute what has already been discussed hence HR is seen as administrative manager and is limited in presenting issues that affect employees since most of the time HR is sidelined from corporate level meetings. Lack of resources failed to create a conducive environment in the sense that sometimes when employees need training, they fail to attend external trainings due to lack of money and most workshops are not usually done locally (Girigiri & Badom, 2021). It was also revealed that there was resistance from management fearing challenges by employees on decision making hence they did not want to negotiate in good faith. Furthermore, it was revealed that there was a challenge of bureaucracy. It was highlighted that decision making take ages to be implemented and this made workers

participation difficult. The findings are converging with a study by (Pandey& Kumar, 2020) that there is hostility of the employers and employees in their day to day dealings and there is lack of strong and effective labour union and multiplicity of labour unions in most of the enterprises.

To evaluate the effects of employee participation on industrial harmony:

Findings revealed that employee participation contributed immensely towards industrial harmony leading to effective attainment of organisational goals. Participants supported that if employees were involved in decision making they feel to be part of the organisation and will go an extra mile towards accomplishment of organisational goals. It was also revealed that employee participation yields employees' innovativeness and productivity (Huu, 2023). (Eze et al., (2022) highlighted some of the positive effects of worker participation as increased employee morale, innovation, employer brand and improved organizational performance. The findings are supported by (Eze et al., (2022)'s assertion that employee voice can be seen as the ability of employees to influence the actions of the employer. Chinglunsana, Keruniyan & Sendhu, (2021) concurs with the Participative Management Theory on the benefits of employee participation with the aim of enhancing industrial harmony. Despite the positive effects of worker participation, Pandey& Kumar (2020) asserted that lack of employee participation in decision making impact employee morale, reduced productivity, a rise in conflicts and high levels of labour turnover. In addition, there is hostility of the employers and employees in their day to day dealings and there is lack of strong and effective labour union and multiplicity of labour unions in most of the enterprises. Other participants revealed that management had less consideration to workers committees. Management in public sector organisations do not support employee participation because they want to maintain their status quo and shop floor employees relied on decisions and instructions (Eze et al., (2022). It was further highlighted that employee participation had only improved communication through representatives like workers committee members who would relay information to employees, though trivial (Pandey& Kumar, 2020). The study also revealed that the HRM in public sector organisations did not offer much support towards worker participation due to lack of management support. It was also noted that there was no participative management theory at this organization in question. The researchers view that there is need for effective communication and maximum employee participation in order to promote industrial harmony and effectively attain organisational goals.

5 Conclusions

- The study revealed that worker participation comes with positive outcomes on maintaining industrial harmony.
- It was noted that there is need for management support in relation to employee participation so as to maintain industrial harmony in public sector organisations in Zimbabwe.
- It was revealed that organisational inefficiency and lack of commitment is caused by low employee participation in decision making.
- The study revealed there is need to link public sector organisations with employee participation in order to overcome structural barriers.
- A number of participants indicated that lack of involvement of shop floor employees in decision making issues contributed to a low organisational performance. There is need for leaders to consult their subordinates and use their input to come with better quality decisions.
- Fewer participants supported that management acknowledges and implements the decisions made by the shop floor workers. For this reason, shop floor workers expressed that they were not satisfied with the levels of involvement in decision making, as they felt marginalized. Pertaining to the manner in which decisions were made in the organization, workers acknowledged that there was need for management to create more trust between themselves and workers. Suspicious or guarded communication tended to reduce mutual trust to the point of impersonality and self-interest as opposed to the need to focus on organisational goals. It is evident that a shift to joint governance between the employees and management should be the ultimate goal for this public sector organization, which is to continue to provide quality service to meet the needs of its stakeholders.

5.1 Recommendations for effective worker participation in promoting industrial harmony

The study recommended that:

- Public sector organizations should promote the concept of worker participation in decision making through workshops and seminars.
- Public sector organisations should consider encouraging top management staff to take short courses concerning employment relations.
- There is need for re-organisation of labour unions so that these organisations may be more democratic. Unions leaders must be elected among the workers themselves and they must have positive and dynamic approach.
- There is need for public sector organizations to recognize labour unions. Management should recognize the importance of labour unions in increasing the production and productivity of the enterprise. Management must realize that their plans, policies and programs cannot be coordinated and implemented successfully without active cooperation of the unions.
- Public sector organization should implement changes in traditional and institutional systems. Management's traditional approach like workers' committees should be abolished, joint management councils should be converted into shop councils.
- There should be uniformity in the duties, scope and procedures of joint management councils.
- Public sector organisations in Zimbabwe need to arrange for training of both employers and employees so that they may implement the scheme of worker participation in management effectively.
- Public sector organisations should adopt a two tier system of worker participation in management in single plant enterprise and three tier system should be adopted in multiple plant system.
- There should be a national collective bargaining in all enterprises of public sectors and such committees may be established at industry or regional levels.
- Production committees should be merged with joint management councils or shop floor management councils.
- The government should declare a clear, specific and detailed policy so that various schemes of workers participation in management may be coordinated and implemented effectively.
- Public sector organisations need to share information between top management and shop floor employees if employee involvement in decision making is to add value to organisational performance.
- There is need for public sector organisations to employ the participative model of management, which acknowledges the role of individual employees and their teams in decision making. The model promotes consensus style of management whereby employee teams can participate in decision making and to solve problems that affect them, their jobs and the organisation at large.
- Management in public sector organisations need to employ some strategies related to levels of worker participation and involvement to counter poor performance, hence the need for this research paper. By targeting the people involved in the implementation of any intended change, worker participation and involvement helps to ensure that the whole change process is owned by everyone in the organisation, hence the need to carry out this investigation.

In conclusion, industrial relations is critical in establishing and maintaining harmonious workplaces that drive productivity, employee satisfaction and organizational success. By using understanding, the diverse components of employees, agencies can proactively address challenges, foster powerful communication and create surroundings wherein employees feel valued, reputable and prompted. Nurturing positive industrial relations is an ongoing process that requires continuous efforts, collaboration and a commitment to the wellbeing of all stakeholders.

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