

Effectiveness of Staff Union's Participation in Decision-Making at the University of Cape Coast

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Abstract

This study examines the Effectiveness of the Staff Union's Participation in Decision Making at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) using descriptive survey design. The population for the study consisted of Ghana Association of University Administrators (GAUA), University Teachers' Association of Ghana (UTAG), Senior Staff Association (SSA) and Tertiary Education Workers' Union (TEWU) members. Census technique was used to select all the staff unions at UCC while proportional stratified sampling method was used to select one hundred and fifteen (115) respondents from the unions. William Kahn's Theory of Employee Engagement was used as the theoretical basis for the study. Data were obtained using self-structured questionnaire and analysed using frequency and percentages. Results reveal that employee unions' participation in decision-making is less organised, union executives exercise control over union decisions and management is unwilling to share decision-making with employees. Additionally, management is identified as an authoritarian imposing decision on unions. Finally, management sees employees as antagonists because of the fear of the unknown on the part of employees. Consequently, the study recommends that the management of the University should interact with employees to deliberate on issues in the

organisation and develop a policy to ensure all staff sentiments and opinions are subject to merit.

Keywords: *employee participation, staff union, decision-making, university management*

Introduction

Employee participation in decision-making has become a substantial theme in human resource management and is regarded as one of the significant impetus of employee unions, which many scholars have observed to be an emergent concept (Brinsfield, 2014). Several studies have shown that employees' participation in decision-making leads to increase in motivation, job performance and organisational growth (Gollan & Wilkinson, 2007; Kim, McDuffie & Pil, 2010; Bhatti & Qureshi, 2007). Besides, Komal (2013) suggested that worker participation is merely a managerial practice that can be used efficiently in certain situations to achieve goals and objectives. Accordingly, Ojokuku and Sajuyigbe (2014) were of the view that employee participation in decision-making has been organised as a managerial tool for enlightening organisational performance by

striving for the collective goals of employees and their employers. This is symbolised by way of consenting workers' effort in developing and achieving the mission and vision, formulating policies and procedures, remuneration determination, promotion and determining incentives.

Definition of Employee Participation

Employee participation in decision-making has been defined by Maree and Westhuizen (2010) as the totality of forms, that is direct (personal or by the employee) or indirect (through the representatives of the employees) by which individuals, groups, collectives secure their interests and contribute to the decision-making process. Elele and Fields (2010) classify employee participation in decision-making into direct employee participation with management and representative employee participation in decision-making through staff unions or associations. It can be deduced that employee participation in decision-making can either be direct (by the employee themselves) or indirect via their representatives such as GAUA, UTAG, SSA and TEWU.

Theory of Employee Engagement

William Kahn's attempt to analysing workplace behaviour in the early 1990s led to the proponent of the theory of employee engagement. His

research involved the studying of two different workplaces: the first in a summer camp and the second in an architecture firm. During his time in these organisations, he defined engagement as an employee's ability to harness their full self at work. Khan, however, identified three psychological conditions that enable employee engagement:

1. **Meaningfulness:** Does an employee find their work meaningful sufficient to the organisation and society to merit engaging their full self?
2. **Safety:** Does the employee feel secured bringing their full self to work deprived of risk or negative consequences?
3. **Availability:** Does the employee feel psychologically and physically able to harness full self at a particular moment?

The findings of Khan separate engagement from everyday hard work. A conscientious employee, who can harness full self, will demonstrate loyalty and ownership. Kahn likewise found that engagement is not stagnant rather an employee's experience of the workplace in different moments can cause fluctuations in engagement. In a 2015 interview with Workforce Magazine, William Kahn

summarised how managers could apply his theory indicating that employees need to be approached as true partners by involving them in continuous negotiations and processes about how to design and alter their roles, tasks and working relationships. This means that leaders need to make it safe enough for employees to speak responsively of their experiences at work.

Research conducted by Perry, Mesch, and Paarlberg (2006) revealed that employee participation is linked to decision making, since partaking leads to better decisions. This is because participation improves information and knowledge sharing, which are necessary for high-quality decision making. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has passed several policies vis-à-vis consultation and teamwork between employers and employees at the level of readiness since 1967. In essence, their recommendations state that suitable steps should be taken to promote employee inclusiveness at the level of an undertaking on matters of common interest. They as well claim that management should make information regarding health and safety regulations, the general situation of the undertakings, plans and decisions that are likely to affect an employee's situation available between managers and employee representatives (ILO, 1998).

In a similar study, Ikechukwu and Chidinma (2017) surveyed the effects of employee participation on minimum wage determination, concerning the Nigerian Labour Congress. The major findings reveal that meetings with government representatives, collective bargaining process, exerting pressure and advising government are the major ways that the members of the Nigerian Labour Congress actively participate in minimum wage determination. In another study, Ojokuku and Sajuyigbe (2014) examined the effect of employee participation in decision-making on performance. The results show that, overall, employee participation in decision-making had a significant positive influence on organisational performance. Tamen, Chux and Allen-Ile (2014) also surveyed employee participation at the University of Technology in South Africa. Their findings suggest that while there is a desire on the part of the employees to be incorporated into issues of concern to them and their faculty, there seemed to be an obvious neglect of the contributions that staff members suggest.

Similarly, Bamidele and Ella (2013) studied the relationship between workers participation in decision-making and job fulfilment among academic staff in Nasarawa State University. The findings specified significantly that a strong positive

correlation existed between job satisfaction and participation in decision-making. Bhatti, Nawab and Akbar (2011) also examined the effect of direct participation on organisational commitment in Pakistan and the United States. The results indicate that in both countries types of employee participation are attaining popularity day by day, but unlike in USA. direct participation has a more significant and positive connection in Pakistan.

Similarly, Apostolou (2002) coined that the greatest means to obtain a genuine commitment from employee is to involve them in the project from the beginning. Even if the original ideas are not theirs, the process of designing, planning and assessing will automatically pull them into the stream of things. However, managers who try to get back some of that power ends up with sour, aggravated and disenchanted workers. Several studies have generally verified that there is a positive relationship between employee participation in decision-making and job satisfaction (Bhatti & Qureishi, 2007).

Wright & Kim (2004) researched the influence of employees' participation on job satisfaction in Connecticut US. The study employed a descriptive research design where a sample of 250 employees of various institutions was used. The results of the research

indicated that participative decision-making has a positive and significant effect on the performance feedback and enhances the occupational development of the employees by persuading their job satisfaction (Wright & Kim, 2004). Moreover, participative governance in the workplace is essential because the issues that are prevalent in the workplace are too complex and interdependent to be handled by a few people in authority (McLangan & Nel, 1995).

Ojokuku and Sajuyigbe (2014) in a study at Ladoko Akintola University of Technology–Oyo State observed that there was no industrial harmony since employee began their strike and the atmosphere remained creepy. It was found in the study that over 90 per cent of patients died due to strike actions and attributed persistent strikes to disagreements and rivalry among the various unions and regulators as a result of imposing decisions on the unions. Studies have attributed union agitations to the playfulness of employees' in decision making (Ojokuku & Sajuyigbe, 2014). However, lack of effective employee involvement in decision-making on the part of employers, including government, has resulted in employee unrest, slackness, high rate of absenteeism and turnovers in Ghana.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the staff union's participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast. Specifically, the study sought to determine the staff union influence of direct participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast, establish whether staff union representative participation has an impact on decision-making at the University of Cape Coast, and identify obstacles to the participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast. Based on the research purpose, the research questions that guided the study are:

1. How do staff unions describe the effectiveness of their participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast?
2. What is the extent of staff union representatives' participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast?
3. What are the obstacles to the staff union's participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to management and policymakers as it provides awareness information on the professed effectiveness of staff unions, in championing for continued improvement of terms and conditions of service for University

employees. Additionally, the findings would be relevant to trade unions on determining employees' terms and conditions of service for realistic and collective agreements. The findings would likewise buttress the relationship between employers and employees to adapt to mutual negotiations.

Method

Design

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Descriptive research is suitable when the research aim is to find characteristics, frequencies, trends, correlations as well as groups. It is useful when less is known about a problem. Before one can research why something happens, there is the need to understand how, when and where it happens.

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) define a population as a complete set of individuals, cases or objects with some common observable characteristics. The target population for the study was 4,034 consisting of the GAUA, UTAG, SSA and TEWU union members in the University. Census technique was used to include all the unions of the University of Cape Coast. A census is the procedure of systematically acquiring and recording information about the members of a given population. Census are necessary to adjust samples to be representative of a population by weighting them

as is common in opinion polling. Proportional stratified sampling method was used to select one hundred and fifteen (115) respondents from the total population of University staff. Stratified sampling is a method of sampling from a population which can be segregated into subpopulations (strata). The sampling segment of each stratum is equivalent to both the proportion and the standard deviation of the distribution of the variable (Hunt & Tyrrell, 2001).

Instrument, Data Collection, and Analysis

A self-administered questionnaire was designed to collect relevant information from the study's participants. The questionnaire was divided into three segments with each segment eliciting data on the variables of interest. Reliability of the research instrument was determined by the use of Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha that yielded 0.838. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences was employed to aid the analysis of the data. The data

were presented using frequency, percentages, chart and tables.

Results and Discussion

The survey sought to examine the effectiveness of staff union's participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast. Three key objectives guided the direction of the study. Through the data analyses and discussions, an attempt is made to address all issues encapsulated in the objectives. This part of the paper, therefore, presents and discusses the findings relating to the research questions of this study as follows:

Research Question 1: How do staff unions describe the effectiveness of their participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast?

The respondents were asked to tick the option that best describes the effectiveness of employee unions' participation in decision-making at the University. Figure 1 shows the extent of participation in decision-making by the employee unions at the University of Cape Coast.

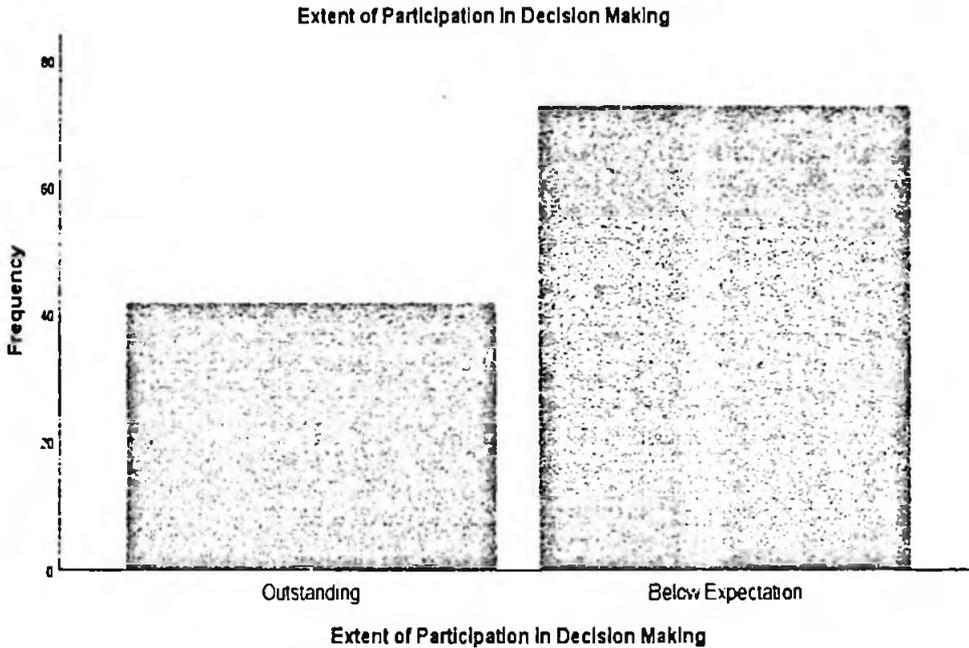


Figure 1. A chart showing the effectiveness of participation in decision-making at the UCC

The graph shows that 73 representing 63.5% of the respondents described the effectiveness of participation in decision-making by GAUA, UTAG, SSA and TEWU as 'Below Expectation'. Finally, 42 representing 36.5% indicated that the effectiveness of participation in decision-making as 'Outstanding'. This means that management of the University of Cape Coast need to make suitable administrative policies that will improve staff unions' participation in decision-making.

Research Question 2: What is the extent of staff union representatives' participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast?

The respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement or disagreement regarding the influence staff union(s) have on decision-making at the University of Cape Coast. Table 1 shows the extents of staff unions' participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast.

Table 1

Extent of Staff Unions' Participation in Decision-Making at the University of Cape Coast

Statements	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)
Unions participate in formulating policies	20 (17.4)	13 (11.3)	82 (71.3)
Unions put in effort towards the implementation of policies	91 (79.1)	10 (8.7)	14 (12.2)
Union views/efforts are organised	22 (19.0)	16 (13.0)	77 (67.0)
Union executives exercise control over union decisions	79 (68.7)	12 (10.4)	24 (20.9)

Note: n = 115, n = Number, % = Percentage

Table 1 shows that in response to the statement "Unions put in effort towards the implementation of policies" 79.1% of the participants responded agree with 12.2% disagreed and 8.7% remained neutral. Moreover, in responding to the statement "Unions participate in formulating policies", 71.3% responded disagree with 17.4% agreed and 11.3% remained neutral. Besides, in responding to the statement "Unions view/effort are organised" 19.0% responded agree as 67.0% disagreed and 13.9% remained neutral. Finally, in responding to the statement "Union executives exercise control over union decisions" 68.7% agreed, 20.9% disagreed and 10.4% remained neutral. In general, this study supports the existing literature that leaders who engage employee to create benefits for an institution as partaking improves the performance of an institution and reduces role conflicts, uncertainty, absenteeism and turnover amongst employees (Greasley, Bryman, Dainty, Price,

Naismith, & Soetanto, 2008; Mendes & Stander, 2011).

Participative governance in the workplace is essential because the issues that are prevalent in the workplace are too complex and interdependent to be handled by a few people in authority (McLangan & Nel, 1995). Similarly, an organisational environment where employee or unions are involved in planning as well as implementing policies can help to reduce resistance to new change efforts, encourage subordinates' commitment to the changes and enable subordinates to cooperate with management to achieve the goals of the organisation rather than tagging them as antagonist (Weber & Weber, 2001).

Research Question 3: What are the obstacles to the staff unions' effective participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast?

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement or disagreement regarding the obstacles to staff unions' effective

participation in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast. The results are presented in Table

Table 2

Obstacles to Effective Participation of Staff Unions in Decision-Making at the University of Cape Coast

Statements	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)
A lack of interest in participation from Management	67(58.3)	8(7.0)	40(34.8)
The unwillingness of Management to share decision-making with employees	74(64.4)	17(14.8)	24(20.9)
Management hesitates to accept employees as valuable partners in making decisions	67(58.3)	19(16.5)	29(25.2)
Management Perceive unions as antagonist	61(53.0)	21(18.3)	33(46.7)
Fear of unknown on the part of Management	67(58.3)	19(16.5)	29(25.2)
Dishonesty being perpetrated by the Management	69(60.0)	17(14.8)	29(25.2)
Management imposing decision on staff union	63(54.8)	14(12.2)	38(33.0)

Note: n = 115, n = Number, % = Percentage

Table 2 shows that 64.4% and 20.9% of the respondents agreed and disagreed respectively with the statement 'Unwillingness of Management to share decision-making with employees' whilst 14.8% remained neutral to the statement and 58.3% agreed to the statement "Fear of unknown on the part of Management" whilst 25.2% disagreed and 16.5% remained neutral to the statement. Moreover, 53.0% of the respondents agreed in addition to strongly agree to the

statement 'Management Perceive unions as an antagonist' conversely, 46.7% disagreed to the statement and 18.3% remained neutral. On average it can be noticed from Table 2 that most of the statements were responded to positively.

In general, this finding is in line with some researchers' assertion that engaging all stakeholders in the decision making of an organisation is an extension of the principle of democracy in the workplace and is

often referred to as industrial or workplace democracy as reported by most human resource management practitioners (Davis & Lansbury, 1992; Lessing, Schepers, & Valoyi, 2000). In support of this view, Gianni and Giuseppe (2010) state that the essence of democracy is participation and anyone who refuses it is an autocrat. Besides, this finding identifies itself with Nwoko and Emerole (2017) that studied the effect of employees' participation in decision making on organisational performance and found that there is a positive relationship between employees' participation in decision making and work commitment of the employees in the institution.

This shows that respondents agreed that the above-listed items are the obstacles to the participation of the employee in the decision-making process at the University of Cape Coast. The result is similar to the findings of the most studies that the fear of unknown and unwillingness of management to share decision-making with employees are the key obstacles to the participation of the employee in the decision-making procedure (Ikechukwu & Chidinma 2017; Bamidele & Ella, 2013). In the opinion of Branch (2002), one of the main social organisational utilities of participation is that it offers the possibility of determining conflicting interests through negotiation, rather than by the imposition of authority on employees or unions.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the effectiveness of the staff union's participation in decision making at the University of Cape Coast. Based on the results, the study concluded that the level of union members' participation in decisions making in the University of Cape Coast is below expectation. This implies that employees and their union executives are to some extent given a fair hearing in issues that affect their safety and security. The study also confirmed that unions to some extent participating in decision making. Finally, several obstacles hinder effective participation of employee unions in decision-making at the University of Cape Coast.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following for implementation.

1. Management of the University should make it a part of its policy to ensure that staff unions such as GAUA, UTAG, SSA and TEWU participate in formulating and implementing policies.
2. University Management should also increase interactions with employees through staff meetings to recognise union members' view/efforts in the organisation.

3. Employees should be permitted to make their contribution when necessary without being seen as antagonists.
4. University Management should avoid imposing decisions on unions but should be given a fair hearing on issues.

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