

## EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT (EI) AND TRADE UNION REPRESENTATION AT WORK: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN MANUFACTURING FIRMS

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### Abstract

The study investigates whether in an Employee Involvement (EI) climate (characterized by employee involvement in work decision making, communication/information sharing, training and performance-based reward), employees' loose interest in trade union representation and employers become intolerant of employee unions. In doing this, a survey of 12 unionized manufacturing firms was carried out by means of a structured questionnaire. Data gathered were analyzed using descriptive statistics and person product moment coefficient of correlation for testing the research hypotheses. The results indicate that the prevalent EI climate had all attributes of EI but was relatively low in the decision-making attribute. Also evident are employees continued interest in trade union representation; a positive disposition of employers towards workers union as well as the point that both employers and employees find 'dual-channel voice" desirable. We recommend organizations direct more effort in encouraging more involvement of employees in making work decisions and sustain collaboration with workplace unions. These conditions should enhance sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Employee Involvement; Trade Union Representation; Direct Voice;  
Indirect Voice and Dual-Channel Voice.

### Background to the Study

Market imperatives have driven management in many organizations to embark on Human Resources Management (HRM) initiatives intended to enable improved performance by winning the hearts and minds of their employees. Many agree that in today's competitive landscape, successful organizations are proactive, flexible and responsive (Riordan et al.2005) and achieve these by aligning the management of people more closely with core management activities of the organization (Goss, 1995; Lucas et al 2008). It is argued that surviving in today's market-driven economy requires management to engage in competitive strategies which often include investments in advanced technologies, the potentials of which can be realized only if 'operating workers are highly engaged in technical problem solving' (Boxall and Macky 2009:5) and are committed to the firm (Guest 1995; Marching ton and Wilkinson, 2008). Concerted effort by organizations in this direction is expected to enhance sustainable development which has been described in a university of Cambridge document (published by the World Business Council for

sustainable development) as “concerned with meeting the needs of people today without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs” Although there is no clarity concerning the combination of Human Resource (HR) practices that would result in desirable outcomes, some scholars have specifically argued that employee involvement (EI) is one such initiative. EI is seen as employees' exercise of influence over how work is organized and carried out (Fenton-O'Creedy, 2001). Beer and his colleagues (1984) seem certain that EI is a key instrument in driving other HRM strategies. For Huselid (1995) and Lawler (1996), the promotion of EI enables organizational flexibility and responsiveness, much needed for success. EI, comprising power, information, knowledge and reward elements (Lawler, 1995; Randolph, 1995; Cummings and Worley, 2005) is seen as a mechanism designed to treat people 'right' so to reduce the sense of 'them and us'; increase job satisfaction (Cotton, 1993) and employee commitment to the enterprise (Guest, 1995). Unlike traditional top-down management, a program of EI recognizes the intrinsic worth of employees and taps into employees capabilities thus helping organizations develop and utilize their human resources (Lawler 1996; Riordan et al 2005). Successful EI effort is expected to positively impact organization's productivity by improving employee performance, motivation and attitudes (Huselid, 1995 Cummings and Worley, 2005).

#### Research Problem and Objectives

Much research has been carried out on the impact of HRM strategies generally on trade unions. Back in the 1980s and 90s debates about this raged and appear to still do. Some analysts see the policies and techniques as not sitting comfortably with active and independent trade unionism. Management is perceived to use HR initiatives to disrupt trade union organization and the collective bargaining process (Goss, 1995). Thus, Guest (1995:110) opined that for many UK firms 'industrial relations are no longer a contingent variable helping to shape... business policy'. More recently, Willman (2008) takes the view that 'voice' in the workplace is now an 'employer-generated phenomena'. In effect, the traditional role of trade unions as voice providers for their members is presumably emasculated. However, Goss (1995) draws attention to research in the UK which found examples of unions weakened by HR approaches as well as those strengthened by same. Further, there is evidence of 'dual arrangements' in large UK organizations wherein 'new HRM initiatives run in parallel with existing union institutions and procedures' (Goss, 1995:146). Thus, perceptions concerning the impact of HR initiatives on trade union are varied. Whilst some scholars see benefit for unions, others declare union annihilation and still others see a win-win scenario for both management and unions resulting from these initiatives.

The diverse bodies of literature on the effects of HRM practices on trade unions are based on experiences in advanced industrialized countries and are not necessarily EI specific. And, we are not aware of studies in this area which are Nigeria - and/or EI-focused. As Boxall and Colleague (2009) make clear, cultural differences between the developed and less developed world could make all the difference in these experiences. Therefore, the problem of the study is located in the

need to investigate the extent to which Nigerian unions are able to hold their own in work organizations where EI is practiced. Our objective is to ascertain whether Nigerian workplace unions face difficulties on account of EI practices. That is, we seek to find out if it is the case that EI method for engaging the workforce effectively emasculates the collective voice of employees, represented by trade unions. We consider whether there is 'dual-channel voice' (Gollan and Perkins, 2009). We anticipate that because of the cultural inclination of supervisors to direct work (Oladunni, 1998; Nwuche, 2010), interest in employee's active involvement in work decisions would be low but incidence of dual channel voice, wherein both direct communication between employees and management and indirect communication through the union, would be the case.

### Conceptualizations and Hypotheses Development Understanding EI

EI is wedded in a notion that there exist strategies to optimize the utilization of labour and at the same time secure employee identification with the aims and needs of the organization (Salamon, 1992). EI is an approach to organizational improvement which signifies 'the growing emphasis on how employees can contribute more to running the organization so it can be more flexible, productive, and competitive' (Cummings and Worley, 2005:12). The aim is to move decision making lower down the organization, closer to where actual work takes place. Key elements of EI which are seen as mutually reinforcing are power, information/communication, knowledge and skill, and reward (Lawler, 1996; Cummings and Worley, 2005). That is, in an EI climate, defined in terms of employee perception of these elements (Riordan et al, 2005), workers are empowered to make more work decisions; are enabled access to information and knowledge they need to do so and are rewarded for so doing (Boxall and Macky, 2009).

Specifically, the power element refers to providing people with enough authority to make work-related decisions. Here, employees have increased responsibility and autonomy to organize and perform their jobs as they see fit (Cabrera et al, 2003). In this respect, EI attempts 'to reverse the Taylorist process of centralizing decision making and problem-solving in the hands of management' (Boxall and Macky, 2009:9). By involving employees management relinquishes some of its traditional control over work decisions providing employees the opportunity to influence outcomes. It serves to reinforce the message that employees are important for organizational success. A well-rehearsed case for EI is premised on the logic that those closest to a problem are more likely to know how best to tackle it. Getting employees involved in decision making enables them to bring their workplace experiences to bear on organizational decisions (Brown and Cregan, 2008) thus improving the quality and effectiveness of decisions as well as increasing employee commitment (Fenton-O' Creevy, 2001). Besides, being involved has the potential to satisfy employees need for creativity, achievement and self-actualization all of which should positively impact on efforts towards sustainable development. In this respect, it is notable that aside from emphasizing multidimensional outcomes as well as the interest and rights of people

long-term, sustainable development also points to “an all-inclusive approach to action which recognizes the need of people to be involved in decisions. . . .that affect their lives” (University of Cambridge programmed for industry, n.d.; n.pag).

Timely access to relevant information is necessary for employees to make quality decisions (Argyris, 1964; Randolph, 1995; Cummings and Worley, 2005; Riordan et al 2005). Without adequate information to make work decisions, there is a tendency for employees to be frustrated and demotivated (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). Just like having the power and authority to make work decisions, sharing information may also aid employees' commitment and hence better work performance. An information sharing climate exists when goals and plans are shared with employees (Riordan et al, 2005). It also exists even when 'management [merely] encourages employees to share their opinions regarding work-related concerns yet retaining the right to make all final decisions' (Cabrera et al, 2003). As Brown and Cregan (2008) similarly observe, having opportunity to even express an opinion is important to employees since it satisfies the desire to have one's opinion considered and, it can translate into greater acceptance of and commitment to decisions. For Marchington and Wilkinson (2009:99), open communication is important in so far as it not only ensures that employees are informed about organizational issues, but it also 'conveys a symbolic and substantive message that they are to be trusted and treated in an open and positive manner'. Besides, when informed, employees 'are almost compelled to act with responsibility' (Randolph, 1995:22) and for management, it provides legitimacy for its action on the basis that 'ideas have been put forward by workers and/or at least considered by them before decisions are ultimately made' (Marchington and Wilkinson 2009:99).

Further, employees need to possess the requisite knowledge and skills to make good decisions and for effective task performance. Organizations can facilitate EI by identifying knowledge and skill needs and then providing training and development programs for improving member's knowledge and skills. Employees themselves need to 'perceive that they have opportunities to develop the skills that accompany increased information processing and effective decision making (Riordan et al, 2005:474). For the organization, providing employees opportunities for continuous learning is expected to enhance the overall ability of the organization to respond quickly and flexibly to changes in its environment, an important driver of sustainable development. For instance, Ejere (2011:99) opined that relevant knowledge and skills help 'to produce economic value for driving sustainable national development'.

The reward element in EI recognizes that people generally do things that fetch them reward. EI can be reinforced by providing a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Intrinsic rewards such as opportunities for challenge, feelings of self-worth and accomplishment could be availed employees when they are provided opportunities for involvement. EI is further reinforced by extrinsic rewards such as pay and promotion when these are linked directly to performance

outcomes resulting from increased use of information and knowledge and, participation in problem solving and decision making (Oladunni, 1998, Riordan et al 2005, Cummings and Worley, 2005). In effect, an optimal EI climate seeks to maximize employees' contribution to corporate performance.

All four elements of EI are interdependent and 'must be changed together to obtain positive results' (Cummings and Worley, 2005:307). However, variations occur in the extent that different managements are willing to go in respect of each of the elements. For instance, information sharing may range from merely informing workers about issues to actually allowing them use the information to make decisions in their work schedule. As some analysts observe with regard to decision making, allowing employees free rein in high level decisions is a rarity (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; Lucas et al. 2008;). Further, rewards may be linked to performance at group level rather than at the individual level. These variations may influence the way employees perceive trade union representation.

#### Employee Involvement and Trade Union Representation

Marchington and Wilkinson (2008:404) remark that with EI, management is no longer keen on dutiful compliance but on 'employee commitment, working beyond contract and exercising initiative'. For them, involving employees is seen to yield a committed workforce who are likely to understand the organization's activities better and 'be more prepared to contribute to its efficient operation'. Lucas and Colleagues (2008:230) seem to agree that the process of information-sharing, for instance, 'may... enhance employees' commitment to the organization, leading to better work performance and lower employee turnover'. They reckon that being involved in decisions concerning how they do their work would potentially satisfy 'employee's needs for creativity, achievement and social approval, thereby contributing to self-actualization'. Strauss (1998:8) also concludes that employees 'having a voice in how they do their work may be also as important as how much they are paid for it' and Bryson's (2004) research data show that employees rate 'direct voice' as superior to collective voice. However, Cox et al. (2006: 255) drawing on evidence in the literature conclude that "in the absence of collective methods of representation, employees are apt to find direct forms less useful".

These views lead us to propose that:

H01: Giving employees opportunities to make work decisions will not reduce their desire for trade union representation.

H02: A work environment characterized by open communication and information-sharing between management and workers will not reduce the interest of workers in trade union representation.

Further, Marchington and Wilkinson (2008) see the EI agenda as different from those of employee participation popular in the 1970s. They suggest that employee participation was premised on the principle of employee rights; was partly union-initiated; and was based on collectivist principles with unions playing a central part. On the other hand, EI is rooted in the economic efficiency argument. It is management-initiated with little reference to trade unions; it is individualist, stressing direct communication with individual employees. This is in diametric opposition to what the trade union stands for. It is notable that traditionally, trade unions are seen as providing advantages for workers who join principally for economic goals. Unions are meant to protect and promote workers interests. They negotiate with employers, seeking to achieve economic benefits for workers as a collective as well as to 'exert a wider control over the work environment and the labour process' (Hollingshead and Leat, 1995:88). Also for Ootobo (2005:111) unions seek to 'limit employer's ability to make arbitrary judgment in job assignment, promotion ... discipline and discharge and [seek] ... representation on management decision making bodies'. By means of agreed procedures, as they relate to seniority and grievance for example, trade unions seek some measure of control over work decisions. But it is suggested that with EI, 'the need for the union as a protective device against arbitrary management behaviour is likely to be reduced' (Guest 1989:404).

Under an EI climate, management desires a committed workforce, speaks directly to individual employees rather than indirectly through trade unions as representatives of workers. Managers perceive unions as being resistant to necessary change and union recognition leads to reduction in the firm's 'ability to respond quickly and flexibly to market pressures and opportunities' (Torrington et al. 2008:499). For management, the official 'good practice' is no longer to negotiate and consult with recognized trade unions (Storey and Sessions, 1993). It prefers its own communication channels and perceives indirect representation of workers by the trade union as an obstacle to the preferred direct relationship with employees (Bryson, 2004). Guest (1995) had queried the future of industrial relations in a human resource (HR) strategy that relies on employee commitment. It is argued that employees' commitment to the firm which is a central thrust of EI may move trade unions and industrial relations in general from the Centre to the periphery of corporate concerns. In effect, unions are likely to lose out in an EI climate. Hence we propose thus:

H03: The interest of management in EI will not significantly reduce their interest in dealing with employee union.

### Research Methodology

As the focus of the study was on unionized firms, we managed to secure access for the study in 12 unionized firms out of the 44 manufacturing firms registered with the manufacturer's Association of Nigeria (MAN). Rivers State, Nigeria. The study was a cross-sectional survey carried out in May 2013. Survey data were collected by means of a questionnaire, 25 copies of which were given to

both senior and junior employees in each of the 12 firms. Of the 263 copies of the questionnaire retrieved, 232 were usable. The questionnaire elicited demographic information as well as respondents view on the study variables. Items were designed using measures from extant literature. 15 items in the questionnaire, adapted mainly from Fenton-O'Creevy (2001) and Riordan et al (2005) studies were used to assess EI attributes and perceptions/attitudes. 12 items developed from the literature measured trade union representation and relationship with management. Sample items for the independent variable, EI include: "I am allowed to make decisions concerning my work tasks"; "I have good access to information I need to perform my job tasks"; "My organization provides training opportunities to enable employees acquire required skills and knowledge for effective task performance"; and "A part of my pay is tied to my performance at work".

Similarly for the dependent variable, representative items include: "there is a union in my workplace"; "the trade union in my workplace strives to protect the interest of members"; "in my organization, management treats the union as partners for the achievement of corporate goals" and "management in my organization prefers to consult with groups of employees rather than deal with the trade union". Responses from items covering the study variables were scored on a 5 point Likers-type scale which ranged from strongly agree (5) to "Don't Know" (1). Thus, with a mean score of 3, we consider the level of agreement to a statement above average if the mean score is above 3 and below average if less than 3. Data generated were analyses by determining weighted and mean scores for the study variables. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson product moment coefficient of correlation.

## Results

The weighted and mean scores for items designed to assess EI features and perceptions are presented in Table 1. As is evident, mean scores of all the items are above average which suggests the existence of an EI climate in the organizations. However, the mean score of item which assessed whether employees influence organizational policies and strategies which, in our view, is the foremost indicator of employee involvement in decision making in only very slightly above average (3.03) while that which explored whether management is in charge of decision making and direction of work scores well above average (4.16). Also notable is the evidence that management communicates with employees directly as well as through their trade union (3.90).

Table 2 presents perceptions on trade union representation and relationship with management. Aside from the item which assessed whether management preferred not to deal with union which score is below the mean (2.80) and that which assessed whether management discourages trade unionism, among employees which is only slightly above mean (3.07), the mean scores of all the other items are well above average.

TABLE 1: Weighted scores and means of EI features and perceptions

		SA (5)	A (4)	D (3)	SD (2)	U (1 )	Total Response	Total Weighted Score	Mean
	<b>EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT FEATURES</b>								
1	Management has interest in involving employees in making work decisions.	295	324	135	78	8	232	840	3.62
2	Employees in my organization have influence over how they carry out their work.	210	392	162	56	10	232	830	3.58
3	I am allowed to make decisions concerning my job tasks	200	340	180	90	2	232	812	3.50
4	In my organization, employees share work decision making with management.	130	324	171	122	7	232	754	3.25
5	Employees in my organization influence organizational policies and strategies.	140	160	252	136	11	231	699	3.03
6	In my organization, employees are given opportunities to express their opinions but management take the decisions and directs work.	530	348	51	30	7	232	966	4.16
7	I really prefer my boss to decide and direct my work tasks.	290	308	195	54	5	232	852	3.67
8	In my organization, management communicates directly with employees.	295	340	150	72	2	232	859	3.70

9	I have good access to information I need to perform my job tasks.	335	424	42	60	15	232	876	3.78
10	In my organization, management shares information with employees	405	340	21	92	13	232	871	3.75
11	I receive sufficient training to do my job.	335	356	111	64	7	232	873	3.76
12	Management in my organization takes education and training seriously.	275	400	114	68	5	232	862	3.72
13	In my organization, employees are rewarded for good performance.	210	360	120	82	19	232	791	3.41
14	In my organization, extra efforts by employees are rewarded.	175	220	201	96	25	230	717	3.12
15	A part of my pay is tied to my performance at work.	205	356	135	42	32	228	770	3.38

Decision: Mean score > 3.00 (Accept); < 3.00 (Reject)

TABLE 2: Weighted scores and means of perceptions on Trade Union Representation/Relationship with Management

		A (5)	S (4)	D (3)	D (2)	S (1)	Total Response	Total Weighted Score	Mean Score
	<b>TRADE UNION REPRESENTATION/RELATIONSHIP WITH MGT</b>								
1	There is a trade union in my workplace.	645	296	24	14	14	232	993	4.28
2	Most employees belong to the union.	280	260	168	96	5	230	809	3.52
3	The trade union in my workplace strives to protect the interest of the members.	400	348	42	60	21	232	871	3.75
4	I do have time and interest in trade union activities in my workplace.	250	376	84	84	16	230	810	3.52
5	I am loyal to the union in my workplace.	240	384	96	72	16	228	808	3.54

6	I feel a sense of commitment to the union.	270	296	111	84	23	230	784	3.41
7	In my organization, management treats the unions as partners in the achievement of corporate goals.	230	336	66	88	28	224	748	3.34
8	Management in my organization discourages trade unionism among employees.	190	208	156	136	22	232	712	3.07
9	Management in my organization prefers consultation with groups of employees rather than deal with the trade union.	140	176	180	92	50	228	638	2.80
10	In my organization, management prefers to deal directly with individual employees rather than through the union.	265	196	159	74	39	231	733	3.17
11	The trade union's continued presence in my organization is to the employees' advantage.	360	360	60	36	26	226	842	3.73
12	The union in my organization participates with management in determining employees pay and working conditions.	230	256	162	68	26	224	742	3.31

Decision: Mean score > 3. (Accept); < 3. (Reject)

Table 3 : The correlation between Employee Involvement in work decisions and interest in Trade Union representation  
Correlations

		Employee involvement	Trade Union Rep
Employee involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	-.906*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.034
	N	5	5
Trade Union Rep	Pearson Correlation	-.906*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	
	N	5	5

\*.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 4: The correlation of Information sharing between management and workers and interest in Trade Union representation**

**Correlations**

		Info sharing	Trade Union Rep
Info sharing	Pearson Correlation	1	-.711
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.178
	N	5	5
Trade Union Rep	Pearson Correlation	-.711	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.178	
	N	5	5

**Table 5: The correlation of management's interest in EI and their interest in dealing with Trade Union**

**Correlations**

		Mgt interest	Deal trade union
Mgt interest	Pearson Correlation	1	.224
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.776
	N	8	4
Deal trade union	Pearson Correlation	.224	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.776	
	N	4	4

The 1st hypothesis (H01) proposed that 'giving employees opportunities to make work decision will not reduce their desire for trade union representation'. The result of the analysis, presented in Table 3, suggests a negative correlation between giving employees opportunity to make decisions and their desire for trade union representation. That is, the more employees get involved in work decisions, the lesser their desire for trade union representation. With a p-value of 0.034 which indicates that the result is statistically significant at 0.05 levels, we reject the null hypothesis. We accept that giving employees work decision making opportunities will reduce their desire for trade union representation.

On the other hand, 2nd hypothesis (H02) which states that 'A work environment characterized by open communication and information sharing between management and workers will not reduce the interest of workers in trade union representation' was accepted. This is because although the result showed a negative correlation between open communication/information sharing and interest of workers in trade union representation, the analysis also yielded a p-value of 0.178 which is not statistically significant at 0.05 level.

Finally, the 3rd hypothesis (H03) postulated that the interest of management in EI will not significantly reduce their interest in dealing with employee union. Result here (Table 5) supports the hypothesis. It shows a positive correlation between management's interest in EI and their interest in dealing with the union. Also, a p-value (0.776) is not statistically significant at 0.05 level and this enables us accept the null hypothesis.

### Discussion and Conclusions

EI is about enabling employees exercise influence in the workplace as individuals. It concerns non-managers being allowed to take work decisions in areas traditionally considered the responsibility and prerogatives of management (Wall and Lischeron 1977; Brown and Cregan 2008; Nwuche, 2010). Aside from the work-decision attribute, other attributes of EI include access to information, knowledge and skill to enable effective decision and reward for positive performance outcomes (Lawler, 1996; Cummings and Worley, 2005; Riordan et al, 2005). On the other hand, trade union presence enables employees exert influence as a collective. The objective of this study was to ascertain the presence of an EI climate in Nigerian manufacturing organizations and whether this, if it exists, influences employees interest in workplace unionism and management's interest in dealing with unions.

The result show that EI climate exist in the organizations studied although managers seem overly in charge of decision-making and the direction of work. This is in consonance with the argument that involving employees in work decisions represents a fundamental shift in the nature of the employment relationship which may not go down well with managers (Brown et al 2008). A close look at Table 1 show that employees' involvement in decisions is less of the influencing organizational goals and strategies and more of expressing their opinion regarding work concerns. As is apparent, the EI climate is such that management decides and directs work whilst employees make do with improved information access, training and adequate reward for their effort. In any event, results of the study do not suggest this model of EI reduces interest in trade union representation. On the contrary, research evidence show above average mean scores for interest in union activities; loyalty to the union and recognition of the advantage of union presence in the workplace. Further, the results of tests of association are mixed but on balance show that the existence of EI elements do not reduce interest in trade unionism. Perhaps, the quality of EI influences interest in trade union representation. It seems reasonable to anticipate employees' interest in trade union representation in an EI climate wherein management prefers to hold on to work decision making power. On the other hand, a high involvement climate which combines sharing responsibility for decision making with adequate information access, training and reward (Lawler, 1995; Cummings and Worley, 2005), is likely to yield greater trust in management and less interest in trade unionism. Although the result of hypothesis 1 supports this argument we believe that not being so involved in work decisions, as was the case in the organizations studied, fans the ambers of employee interest in trade union representation.

Also, the study found that open communication and information sharing would not reduce interest in trade union representation. This finding is similar to Brown and Cregan's (2008) who, in their study found that information sharing on its own would not reduce organizational cynism. Of utmost importance is employee involvement in decision making. We share their view that having access to information may essentially be management's way of ensuring that its decisions are well understood by employees. On the other hand and against the background of cultural realities (Oladunni, 1998), it seems plausible to conclude that for the employee, the 'boss' sharing information is a cultural aberration that leads him/her to have a perception of influence in work. In any event, we believe that access to information may be motivating to employees and may enable more effective performance of job roles but may not necessarily accord employees much sense of power and authority in the workplace, a gap that is readily filled by the trade union. Thus, the prevalent EI climate makes trade union representation necessary so to enable employees exercise some measure of control over their work environment. Further, our hypothesis that the interest of management in EI will not significantly reduce their interest in dealing with the employee union was accepted. Evidently, the results do not suggest that the trade union faces difficulties in the workplace on account of EI nor does it suggest any inclination of management towards trade union suffocation. Contrary to Storey and Sisson's (1993) view, good relations with unions still appears to be seen as a "good practice" in these organizations and management is not abhorrent of representation of workers by the trade union. As the results show, while management maintains a model of EI climate and at the same time likes to deal with individual employees, it seems quite comfortable treating the unions as partners in the achievement of corporate goals. Put differently, the results suggest that management, like the employees, find both 'direct' and 'indirect' voice desirable, evidently giving credence to Golan and Perkins' (2009) 'Dual-channel voice' thesis.

We remark also that the results appear to be compatible with views in extant literature which attempt to explain why employers really need to work with unions in the workplace. For instance, Torrington and colleagues (2008: 499) opine that in recognizing trade unions, employers have 'employee representatives with whom to discuss, consult and negotiate so that communication and working relationships can be improved'. As Marchington and Wilkinson (2008) also make clear, reaching agreement with union representatives provides legitimacy to management decisions and enables achievement of long term stability in employee relations. It seems easier for management to persuade the union to observe procedures rather than deal with individual employees. They opine that 'trade unions perform functions that can assist in the management of employee relations' (2008:392). In a similar vein, Cummings and Worley (2005:193) conclude that 'unions can be a powerful force for promoting change particularly when a good relationship exists between union and management'. In effect, management may well need unions to drive commitment at work. To seek to quash the trade union would be counterproductive and likely to adversely affect organizational success. It does seem to make more sense for management to adopt a positive disposition toward employee unions in spite of its interest in EI.

We note finally that an EI mind- set seems not to inhibit management from working in partnership with employees and their representative unions. As the forgoing suggests, EI touts employee involvement in work decisions, ostensibly improving work peoples' self-worth; encourages open communication and information sharing thus improving quality of decisions; emphasizes training for knowledge and skills thereby enriching the human capital base of organizations; and lastly recognizes the importance of reward which serves to motivate employee performance. These elements, we also believe, positively impact organizational productivity and meet the needs of most work people. Their presence coupled with good relations with workers union undoubtedly support the all-inclusiveness touted by the sustainable development thesis. That is, taking these observations into cognizance in the management of Nigeria workplaces will obviously enhance sustainable national development.

### Recommendations

1. Organizations should direct more effort at improving the quality of EI climate by encouraging increased involvement of employees in making work decisions
2. Management should continue to collaborate and maintain partnership with unions so as to engender healthy industrial relations in the workplace.

### Limitations of The Study and perspectives for Future Research

We acknowledge some limitations of the study. The first concern stems from the methodology. Access was gotten to collect data only in twelve (12) companies. This relatively small number coupled with the point that the study was an industry-specific, one snap-short survey limits the conclusions we can draw and the generalizability of the results. Secondly, we give a note of caution in our analysis of trade union representation. The study did not explore the extent to which the observed interest in the trade union was on account of the quality of EI climate to the exclusion of factors like, for instance, the acceptance/approval of existing union leadership. Also, we did not extend our investigation to include important yardsticks for measuring interest in the union such as whether union meetings were well attended and whether the membership contribute to union decision making (Salamon, 1992; Farnham and Pimlott, 1995). Nonetheless, we believe these limitations do not fundamentally negate the results of the study in so far as the intention was primarily to investigate whether EI would result in trade union relegation in the workplace. However, future research should consider increasing the number of organizations studied and adopt a longitudinal approach. This is more likely to capture variations in EI climate over a period and enable investigation into whether such variations affect levels of interest in trade union representation over time. In addition, future research should widen the scope of investigation so as to ascertain the real reasons for the claimed interest in workplace unionism.

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