"Collaborative Production" and the Irish Boom: Work Organisation, Partnership and Direct Involvement in Irish Workplaces*

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Abstract: A significant strand of recent social-scientific writing on Ireland has assigned great importance to various forms of "collaborative production": new forms of work organisation, partnership and direct employee involvement — even suggesting that their growing diffusion might have played a major role in Ireland's exceptional economic performance during the 1990s. This paper draws on the University College Dublin national workplace survey of employee relations to present an assessment of the degree to which new modes of collaborative production have gained ground in Ireland during the 1990s. While collaborative production is undoubtedly significant in many Irish workplaces, "exclusionary" forms of decision-making are shown to dominate the postures of establishments towards the handling of change. Arguments pointing to the "transformation", actual or imminent, of work practices and employment relations in Ireland are rejected. Change in Ireland is shown to have much in common with developments in other economies, particularly those characterised by "Anglo-American" institutional systems, which are not readily permeable to collaborative production in its various modes.

I INTRODUCTION

The 1990s have witnessed a radical change in the fortunes of the Irish economy. Ireland has moved from being one of the low-performing economies of Europe to being hailed as the "Celtic Tiger", registering rates of economic and employment growth far ahead of OECD countries and attracting levels of foreign direct investment envied by competitors. Spectacular and unexpected economic success has brought in its train a literature seeking to interpret the Irish story. A number of themes recur in this literature: the role of a plentiful supply of well-educated labour; the increasing irrelevance of peripheral location for industries based on information technology; the benign effects of neo-corporatist concertation on cost competitiveness and employer-union accommodation, and somewhat more prosaically, the advantages accruing from Ireland's prodigious success in garnering EU structural funds.

But figuring prominently also in this literature is an "upbeat" account of both the ways in which the productive base of the economy has been changing and the potential for further change as new forms of work organisation and new approaches to industrial relations and human resource management gain ground. Ireland is often now represented as a place where innovative approaches to work organisation, based on team work and flexible forms of work organisation, are common; where various forms of direct employee involvement are extensive, and where "partnership" arrangements between management and unions at workplace and enterprise levels are becoming more common and face a generally positive climate. These themes have received emphasis in a series of documents issued by public agencies and by trade union and employer federations. They also inform a number of important social-scientific and research-based accounts of the features and prospects of the "Celtic Tiger" (Sabel, 1996; McCartney and Teague, 1998; Sweeney, 1997; Tansey, 1998).

The Irish literature on workplace transformation has strong affinities with the recent UK literature on various forms of voluntary enterprise and workplace partnership (IPA, 1997; Guest and Peccei, 1997; Coupar and Stevens, 1998; Marchington, 1998; Ackers and Payne, 1998; Department of Trade and Industry, 1998). More generally, the themes of the Irish literature reflect an important strand of macro-level industrial relations commentary over the past decade. A range of writers have argued that economies competing on the basis of diversified, flexible and quality-focused product strategies faced the challenge of developing forms of employee and union involvement and joint governance variously described as "collaborative production", "partnership", "mutual gains" and a "new productivist covenant between capital and labour" (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Kochan and Osterman, 1994; Rogers and Streeck, 1995).

This paper seeks to contribute to the literature on voluntary forms of

partnership and employee involvement by examining and interpreting empirical data on the incidence, nature and context of both new forms of work organisation and of union-inclusive and employee-inclusive modes of handling change in Irish workplaces during the 1990s.

The paper is divided into six sections. Section II reviews three studies which are paradigmatic of the recent optimism surrounding the supposed ongoing or imminent transformation of the productive base of the Irish economy. Section III describes the main features of a large-scale workplace survey on which this paper draws to present a portrayal of innovation in Ireland in recent years. Section IV examines data on new forms of work organisation. Section V examines the incidence of partnership and direct employee involvement as ways of responding to change at workplace level in the 1990s. Section VI seeks to interpret the pattern emerging from Irish workplaces in the context of themes in the comparative literature on change in industrial relations and human resource management over the last decade. Section VII offers some conclusions based on the Irish case.

II "COLLABORATIVE PRODUCTION" AND THE IRISH BOOM

Three social-scientific studies stand out as paradigmatic of the positive view of the penetration and prospects of collaborative production in Ireland. In a wide-ranging review conducted for the OECD, Charles Sabel (1996: Ch. 2) seeks to contest what he believes to be the "official view" of recent Irish economic development, claiming that it fails to comprehend the degree to which enterprises were adopting the types of "decentralised production" principles and strategies best suited to a post-Taylorist economy. While Sabel's analysis is admittedly rather tentative regarding both the extent to which the "new collaborative production" had actually diffused across the Irish economy and the implications for labour markets and industrial relations, he suggests that it was safe to assume that its "impact is substantial" and that "a great deal" has changed "in the direction of the new methods" (Sabel, 1996, p. 29).[1] While noting also that unions were frequently marginal to new developments in production systems, Sabel urges on Irish commentators a new interpretation of workplace change based on a proper appreciation of the penetration and prospects of collaborative production — both within and between enterprises — in the new Irish economic order.

A second optimistic analysis of workplace innovation in Ireland is provided

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1. It should be noted here that statements made in respect of change by Sabel draw for their evidence from case studies and cross-sectional surveys: change in practice cannot therefore be inferred from levels of innovation.

by McCartney and Teague's (1997) research on new forms of work organisation and their human resource underpinnings in the food/drink/tobacco, electronics and banking and finance sectors. While representing an apparent change of perspective from Teague's earlier pessimism regarding the nature of workplace change in Ireland under the regime of tripartite national bargaining (cf. Teague, 1995), McCartney and Teague report that "it is clear that the vast majority of Irish firms are experimenting with workplace reorganisation" (1997, p. 196), comprising such discrete initiatives as job rotation, quality circles, total quality management and team working. The extent to which new approaches to work organisation have taken hold, they argue, reflects the strategic decisions of Irish firms to move out of low value-added, cost-competitive commodity markets into more quality-sensitive export markets (1998, p. 384).

A table comparing the incidence of high performance work organisation in Irish establishments with Osterman's (1994) estimates for US establishments, appears to suggest that new forms of work organisation, with the exception of team working, are *more* pervasive in Ireland than in the United States. These innovations, they find, are also likely to be associated with complementary bundles of human resource practices (1998, p. 391-396). McCartney and Teague conclude that workplace change can be seen as a "neo-Schumpeterian" response to Ireland's economic openness, and that "All in all, the evidence is that important, and in some cases, far-reaching changes are occurring to ground-level employee relations in Ireland. As a result, the improved economic performance currently being enjoyed by the country has solid corporate foundations" (p. 396).

These highly optimistic accounts of Irish economic transformation are discordant with findings emerging from a growing international literature pointing to the limited penetration of workplace innovation and associated modes of industrial relations across Europe, the United States and Australia (see Locke *et al.*, 1995; Regini, 1995; Ichniowski, *et al.*, 1996; Sisson, 1997). If employment in Ireland is indeed changing in the manner and at the pace suggested by writers like Sabel and McCartney and Teague, it represents a quite exceptional case — an "outlier" in the international economic order.

But the optimistic scenario is discordant too with the views and findings of other Irish researchers — as Sabel indeed openly admits. A number of Irish commentators have stressed the partial, piecemeal and fragile character of innovation in work organisation, human resource management and industrial relations across much of Irish industry; the uneven and far from widespread diffusion of new practices, and the uncertain prospects of innovation based on partnership with unions in the face of substantial barriers and not uncommonly deep resistance by employers (Roche and Kochan, 1996; Geary, 1999; Roche, 1998; Gunnigle, 1997; Roche and Turner, 1998, McGovern, 1998).

While some of this corpus deals with general aspects of change in industrial relations and human resource management, the studies that explicitly address partnership and new forms of work organisation sound a sombre note. Turner and Morley (1995, pp. 205-206) fail to find compelling evidence of a general shift towards a "distinctly new industrial relations" in their case studies of 17 manufacturing plants. Gunnigle (1997), reflecting on the case study and exploratory data available, wonders if enterprise partnership amounts more to "rhetoric than reality". D'Art and Turner's analysis of the attitudes of members of a general union towards workplace partnership concluded that in their eyes it was of very limited significance (as cited in Gunnigle, 1999).

The evidence so far adduced in favour of the optimistic position is far from compelling. Sabel's arguments are substantiated empirically by means of a small number of paradigmatic case studies, a small-scale survey of Q mark companies and a highly contestable reading of Irish research evidence assembled for the OECD (cf. Roche and Kochan, 1996). To test Sabel's arguments it will be necessary to estimate the degree to which "collaborative production" has taken root in Irish workplaces, both in respect of its diffusion and the extent to which it has penetrated management decision-making processes; that is, whether in fact it has now reached "critical mass". Its future prospects in each of these respects will also need to be examined. It needs to be acknowledged, though, that the data reported in this paper does not allow us to say by how much "collaborative production" has grown from a baseline of five or ten years ago, but this is, arguably, less relevant than its current level of penetration and future prospects, which we have measured.

McCartney and Teague follow Osterman (1994) closely in using the incidence of a range of discrete aspects of work re-organisation as an index of change and innovation. A well-understood problem with this approach is that it fails to delve behind terms like "team working", "quality circles" and "job rotation", which are used to describe diverse substantive practices, which depart from traditional work arrangements to greater or lesser degrees (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994; Geary, 1999). While Osterman (1994) interprets his data as providing evidence of substantial change and innovation in US workplaces, wide-ranging reviews of all relevant US research evidence to date reaches a more pessimistic conclusion concerning the depth and penetration of innovation in work organisation, industrial relations and human resource practices (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994; Ichniowski *et al.*, 1996).

McCartney and Teague's research is based on three sectors, two of which, electronics and banking and finance, are likely everywhere to be closer to leading-edge change than most other sectors. It is therefore inappropriate to compare data from these sectors with Osterman's estimates of high performance work practices across US establishments in all non-agricultural industries (excluding

non-profit organisations), and thereby to imply that Ireland is abreast or ahead of the US in the penetration of innovative approaches to work organisation. This may be the case, or it may not, but McCartney and Teague's research cannot settle the issue. Nor do data on the sectors chosen provide a sound or valid basis on which to claim that "most Irish establishments are actively reorganising work arrangements", or to advance related claims regarding the extent of industrial relations transformation (McCartney and Teague, 1997, p. 381).[2] The critical issue here then is to obtain better estimates of new forms of work organisation — given McCartney and Teague's skewed sample — and, more importantly, to investigate what these "labels" mean on further examination of their practical consequences for work organisation.

In short, McCartney and Teague appear willing to accept uncritically results based on a methodology excessively reliant on the simple enumeration of practices which may mask significantly different approaches to work organ-isation, and to generalise to the Irish economy results which are also derived from a sample in all probability characterised by a triple skew: first towards sectors in which change is likely to be more pronounced, second towards larger establishments in which again change is likely to be more pronounced and finally towards multinationals which by common reckoning are in the vanguard of innovation in work organisation, human resource management and industrial relations.

In a stimulating short article, Robert McKersie (1996, p. 12) speculates that the Irish case, with its strong trade unions and high level of investment by leading multinational companies, represented an ideal locale in which to test the premise that "strategic partnerships, coupled with modern human resource systems" could be the basis for a new and successful model of industrial relations. Such a proposition assumes that "strategic partnerships" and "modern human resource systems" are generally compatible bedfellows in the Irish case. The reality is considerably more complex. A significant number of multinational companies located in Ireland, particularly the plants of major US electronics

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2. Questions must also be posed about the provenance of McCartney and Teague's sample and about the confidence with which the results can be generalised even *within* the sectors chosen. While the 102 establishments in the sample are said to be representative of the chosen sectors in respect of size and age, to have cut the size threshold at 50 employees incurs a significant size bias. Most branches of financial service companies, for example, employ far fewer employees and would thus seem to fall outside the scope of the survey. Further, no details are provided as to the representativeness of the sample with respect to the incidence of indigenous companies and multinationals. Based on data that are provided, 57 per cent of the sample is comprised of non-Irish establishments and the sample of Irish establishments is also likely to contain a number of Irish multinationals. The apparent skew towards multinational establishments is clearly significant with respect to the provenance of the research results and their generalisability, especially beyond the sectors studied.

firms, use modern human resource systems to pursue union substitution as vigorously as in their home base — a point which McKersie concedes (see McGovern, 1989; Gunnigle, 1995). Others support partnership but resist instituting the kind of structures commonly thought to support "strategic partnerships" in plants and workplaces. Others still promote the idea of partnership but at the same time try to contain union influence in the workplace. Some it is true support strategic partnership and joint decision-making of the kind McKersie supposes might become the basis of a common pattern in Ireland. But these remain very much a minority. At a more institutional level, fear of provoking capital flight by multinational companies has dissuaded Irish governments from adopting legislative measures in support of collaborative production (see Roche, 1998).

The evidence relevant to testing McKersie's position concerns just how far management-union partnerships have diffused and, in particular, whether such arrangements have allowed for employees and their representatives to influence issues of a more "strategic" nature, as well as what the future prospects look like.

III THE UCD WORKPLACE SURVEY

In 1996-97 a research team at the Graduate School of Business at University College Dublin undertook the largest and most detailed survey conducted to date of management practices in establishments in Ireland. The study, *Irish Management Practice in the Changing Marketplace*, examined a range of areas, including industrial relations, human resource management (HRM) and work organisation, manufacturing/services management and buyer-supplier relations. The survey, a postal survey, covered workplaces in all areas of the private sector, with the sole exception of the construction industry, and also included commercial public ("semi-state") companies.

Workplaces in which separate managers were responsible for industrial relations/human resources and operations/services management received two questionnaires. A questionnaire covering industrial relations and HRM issues, and containing a set of basic questions on work organisation, was sent to the designated human resource/industrial relations manager.[3] Another questionnaire covering operations/services and incorporating more detailed questions on work organisation was sent to the designated production or operations manager. Workplaces where one manager was responsible for both areas (and

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3. The target respondent for the IR-HRM survey was the designated human resource managers with responsibility for the area at workplace level. In the great majority of cases the relevant managers were located at workplace level, but in some cases, for example in financial services companies, they were located at higher levels (regional/national) in the enterprise.

often other areas besides), received a composite but shorter version of both questionnaires.[4]

The results reported below on basic features of work organisation and on the incidence and focus of partnership and direct employee involvement are based on the combined responses of human resource/industrial relations managers *and* managers with a general brief covering human resource, operations and often other areas. This will be referred to in the text and at the foot of relevant tables as the IR-HRM Survey, as most respondents were, in fact, IR-HRM specialists. Data on more detailed aspects of work organisation provided by production/operations specialists will also be presented and text and tables will identify these data as deriving from the Production/Operations Management Survey.

The survey fieldwork was administered by the Survey Unit of The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), Dublin, in conjunction with the authors.[5] No reliable population list of Irish workplaces exists. Consequently a two-stage sampling strategy was followed. Stage 1 involved drawing a sample of enterprises from the enterprise population file maintained by the ESRI. The population for stage 1 comprised all enterprises in the sectors included employing more than 20 persons. Stage 2 involved inspecting the sample of enterprises to distinguish single and multi-establishment enterprises. For 39 per cent of firms, the enterprise and the workplace were not synonymous. All multi-establishment enterprises in the sample were then "decomposed" into their constituent workplaces using a range of sources and business directories, and in many cases following detailed discussions with managers in the enterprises concerned. The multi-site sample companies were then re-sampled and the selected workplaces were added to the single-establishment sample.

A disproportionate stratified probability sampling procedure was employed. As is standard in workplace surveys like the UK and Australian workplace industrial relations surveys, a proportionately higher number of larger enterprises were selected at stage 1. The overall survey response rate was 36 per cent — very much higher than common for postal surveys. The total effective samples of 450 workplaces, in the case of the IR-HRM Survey, and 273 work-

4. In the questionnaires completed by designated production managers and the managers with a general brief, questions relating to work organisation or industrial relations and human resource management were confined to practices pertaining to the largest occupational group in the establishment.

5. It is important to note that over half of the survey fieldwork was completed before unions, employers and government concluded a national agreement in early 1997 containing proposals on the adoption of partnership and employee involvement in enterprises. A systematic examination of the most reliable source of ongoing developments in Irish industrial relations, the weekly periodical, *Industrial Relations News*, reveals that no widespread trend towards the adoption of partnership and employee involvement has been evident since the agreement was signed.

places, in the case of the Production/Operations Management Survey were then reweighted to restore the numbers of cases in each size stratum to their proportions in the survey population. All the data analysis reported on here was carried out in respect of the re-weighted samples. The resulting re-weighted samples are well representative of workplaces in the survey population and provide a reliable basis for statistical generalisation (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Sample Represententiveness: Population and Sample Distributions by Company Size and Sector**

Number of Employees	Population	Target Sample	Effective Sample	Reweighted Sample
	%	%	%	%
20-49	54	20	31	53
50-99	21	30	25	23
100-249	15	30	26	15
250-499	5	10	10	6
500 plus	5	10	8	4
Sector				
Services	56	55	51	53
Manufacturing	44	45	49	47
Total Number	4,062	1,328	450	927

IV NEW APPROACHES TO WORK ORGANISATION

In examining new approaches to work organisation we draw on a number of indicators, some of which were examined by McCartney and Teague (1997) (e.g., TQM, quality circles and teamwork). In addition, we provide estimates of the incidence of two other indicators of employee involvement: periodic or *ad hoc* task forces, and joint consultative committees (JCCs) and works councils (WCs). Both would normally be seen to constitute forms of consultative participation, with the difference being that the former is often regarded as a feature permitting employees *direct* involvement (as opposed to indirect representative participation) in the resolution of workplace problems. The latter, on the other hand, are more usually seen as an older, *indirect* avenue for consulting with employees and often as an accompaniment to collective bargaining (cf. Marchington and Armstrong, 1986).[6]

6. Although it should be noted that in recent years, works councils attracted renewed attention in Ireland particularly from trade unions and would have been seen very much as a desired form of employee voice within workplaces in negotiations in the run-up to *Programme 2000*.

The incidence of these practices is detailed in Table 2 below and their distribution compared with the findings of McCartney and Teague (1997). In respect of TQM, respondents were asked if their organisation operated a Quality Improvement Process with the rider that it need not have constituted a full-scale TQM programme. Notwithstanding this, the diffusion of TQM is surprisingly high and quite similar to the level found by McCartney and Teague. But in respect of the other two innovations — teamwork and QCs — the difference between the two sets of findings is stark. Teamwork was found in 59 per cent of workplaces in the UCD study, but in only 27.5 per cent of establishments in McCartney and Teague's study. The difference in the distribution of quality circles was in the opposite direction with a far greater incidence reported in McCartney and Teague than our survey.

Table 2: *The Incidence of Collaborative Work Organisation and Employee Involvement Practices*

	Percentage of Workplaces[1]
TQM[2]	71.1 (68.7)[5]
Team work[3]	59.0 (27.5)
Quality circles	15.0 (44.1)
Ad hoc task forces[4]	45.5
Joint consultative committees/works councils	12.7

N(unweighted) = 450; the data reported here are in respect of workplaces' largest occupational group.

Notes:
1. The percentages reported in this and all subsequent tables derive from the reweighted samples.
2. The data on the TQM item are drawn from a question asked only of IR/HRM managers (N unweighted = 329).
3. Teamwork was defined as instances where: employees work in formally designated teams, where the group is responsible for managing working arrangements.
4. *Ad hoc* task forces were defined as initiatives which: involve employees in the resolution of production or business problems through periodic/*ad hoc* task forces.
5. McCartney and Teague's (1997) results are in parentheses.
Source: IR/HRM Survey.

The incidence of *ad hoc* task forces is surprisingly widespread but, in comparison, the distribution of JCCS/WCs is significantly less so. This finding is consistent with other results from our study which we report on below; that is, direct forms of employee involvement would seem to be gaining ground on representative mechanisms of participation which, arguably, provide employees with a more significant say in organisational decision-making.

The Depth and Penetration of New Forms of Work Organisation

Thus far, the findings from the UCD survey confirm that experimentation with collaborative work organisation and employee involvement strategies in Ireland is impressive. But while the data reported on above is certainly useful in estimating the *incidence* of collaborative work practices, it is limited as an indicator of the *depth* and *scope* of change. For this we have to go beyond mere estimates of diffusion. To say that a workplace has team working, for instance, says little or nothing about its nature or implications for work organisation. To overcome this handicap we asked some detailed questions about the form of team working in the production/operations management questionnaire. We report on this data in this section of the paper, as well as using evidence from the recent EPOC[7] study, which examined various elements of direct participation in ten European countries. The incidence and depth of change in Ireland can therefore be compared with other European economies.

The UCD workplace survey found that team working was present in 57 per cent of workplaces. This figure, which is derived from the Production/Operations Management Survey, is remarkably similar to the one from the combined IR-HRM and Production/Operations Management Surveys (see Table 2 above). The EPOC survey found that in the area of "consultative participation", "temporary groups" such as project groups or task forces, were present in 36 per cent of firms and "permanent groups" like quality circles were used in 28 per cent of

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7. A highly innovative study, the EPOC survey was conducted in 1996 under the auspices of the European Foundation. The main objective of the study was to examine the nature and extent of "direct participation" (DP). "DP" was seen to constitute two forms: (1) *consulatative participation* – management encourages employees to make their views known on work-related matters, but reserves the right to take action or not; (2) *delegative participation* – management grants employees increased discretion and responsibility to organise their work without the requirement to refer back (for further details, see Geary and Sisson, 1994). Like the UCD survey, the EPOC survey was not just concerned with measuring incidence, but also took into account coverage, scope and penetration of "DP". It was a cross-national survey with the same instrument being used in ten European countries. We can thus reliably compare the extent of workplace innovation in Ireland with the other countries surveyed. The workplace general manager was invited to complete the questionnaire or to give it to a colleague who might have been better placed to respond to the questions asked. The size threshold for the larger countries was 50 employees but was lowered to 20 employees in small and medium-sized countries (including Ireland). For the larger countries (France, Germany, Italy, UK, Spain) the gross sample was 5,000 workplaces; for medium (Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden) and smaller countries (Ireland and Portugal) it was 2,500 and 1,000 respectively. Over 32,000 workplaces in the private sector and public services were surveyed. An overall response rate of 17.8 per cent was achieved. In Ireland, the survey achieved a response rate of nearly 39 per cent, 382 organisations in all. The findings were re-weighted to make adjustments for any distortions in the size and industrial sector of companies. All questions were asked in respect of the firm's largest occupational group. The only major shortcoming of the study was that, while it was designed to survey practice at the level of the workplace, in respect of Ireland at least no such population listing was available. The enterprise was thus the unit of analysis.

enterprises. This compared with a ten-country average of 31 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. "Delegative participation" organised around team structures was found in 42 per cent of organisations. This is above the average score of 36 per cent in the study as a whole coming third behind Sweden (56 per cent) and the Netherlands (48 per cent). From these estimates it would seem that direct participation is practised in about a third of Irish workplaces.

When coverage is taken into account, that is whether the participation initiative involved more than 50 per cent of the largest occupational group, the figures for Ireland compare favourably with other European countries. They are (the average ten-country score is given in brackets): temporary group consultation 73 per cent (48 per cent); permanent group consultation 71 per cent (48 per cent) and group delegation (i.e. team working) 58 per cent (47 per cent). Where participation is practised in Ireland, then, well over half, and in some cases nearly two-thirds, of enterprises involve more than half of the largest occupational group.

Taken on their own, these findings would suggest that new work practices are quite widely practised in Ireland, and in comparison to most other countries where similar research has been conducted, Ireland would rank amongst those countries at the top of any "league table" that one might develop. At this point — which is the point at which most previous Irish studies to date have stopped — the notion of Irish exceptionality can at least be countenanced. But the thesis of Ireland as an "advanced" or even exceptional case is quickly called into question when one digs a little deeper through the data. First, data from the UCD Production/Operations Management Survey reveals that employers' experimentation with team working is a relatively recent phenomenon, with only 19 per cent of workplaces having introduced it three or more years ago. It can only be safely assumed, then, that team working is only firmly embedded in a fifth of Irish workplaces; elsewhere, its introduction is too recent to make any firm claims as to its durability or permanence.

Second, there is the issue of the level of discretion permitted to employees under these new working arrangements. In workplaces using teams, respondents were asked whether management or team members played the leading role in deciding on a range of issues. The results are listed in Table 3.

The Organisation of Work: One might normally associate the use of team working with managerial efforts to reorganise the structure of work and, as part of that, to grant employees autonomy to manage work allocation, scheduling and pace. In respect of the first of these two items, less than half of the workplaces surveyed permitted team members to play the leading role, and in only 53 per cent of cases was control over pace of work vested in team members. While it would seem that responsibility for the organisation of work has moved from

management to teams in some workplaces, in the majority of cases control continues to reside with management.

Table 3: *Levels of Autonomy Permitted to Team Members*

	Percentage of Workplaces where Team Members Play the Leading Role
The Organisation of Work	
Allocation of work	41
Scheduling of work	47
Pace of work	53
Quality Management and Continuous Improvement	
Dealing with customers and suppliers outside this establishment	33
Addressing/resolving problems with employees from other teams	36
Responsibility for the quality of work	71
Making suggestions for improving work processes	90
Management of Attendance and Working Time	
Control of absence/attendance	32
Control of time keeping	51
Control of Team Boundaries and Team Composition	
Selection of team members	15
Selection of the team leader	24

N (unweighted) = 273
Source: Production/Operations Management Survey.

Quality Management and Continuous Improvement: Working in teams is often seen to provide employees with a means for identifying problems and empowering them to make suggestions and resolve difficulties. There is considerable evidence to show that teams have been given significant levels of autonomy in this field, particularly in regard to making suggestions for improving work processes (90 per cent) and responsibility for the quality of work (71 per cent). But the evidence would suggest that significantly less discretion is permitted to teams in dealing with problems which are shared by, or arise between, a number of teams. In only a third of cases were employees said to be given control in this

area. Similarly, in only a third of workplaces did teams exercise a significant say in dealings with external customers.

The Management of Attendance and Working Time: Arguably this dimension of team working and the items listed under the next head represent a critical litmus test of the level of autonomy management has been prepared to permit to employees. Where management are prepared to grant employees a say in defining and policing acceptable standards of time keeping and attendance this might be reasonably taken as a significant departure from traditional practice. Interestingly, in over half of companies team members controlled the management of time keeping. Control of attendance rested with employees in about a third of workplaces. From this evidence the management of discipline around two key aspects of work — the time one comes to work and attendance at work — is vested in work teams in a surprisingly high number of workplaces.

Control of Team Boundaries and Team Composition: Employees were given very little discretion over the selection of team members and team leaders; control rested very firmly with management. In only 15 per cent of cases were employees allowed to select team members, and in a little under a quarter of workplaces were teams in a position to choose their own team leader.

Another finding that merits attention is that team working was associated with a reduction in the number of supervisors in 45 per cent of workplaces, an indication perhaps that employees were acquiring tasks and responsibilities once performed by their immediate superiors. That 47 per cent of respondents reported that there was no such reduction does illustrate, though, that in many Irish workplaces teams operate *alongside* traditional hierarchical relations. The continued presence of supervisors and the limited discretion permitted to team members in most instances would suggest that conventional forms of authority relations continue to persist in most Irish organisations, *even* where team working has been introduced.

It would seem, though, that the "new workplace order" contains many elements, some of which a priori might not have been expected, especially in regard to the management of attendance and time keeping. Yet alongside this management would seem to exercise more control in other areas like the organisation of work where it might not have been anticipated.

One of the most novel features of the EPOC survey was its attempt to measure the intensity of team working. Two indicators were used: the first was the "scope" of team working which measured the number of rights of employees to make decisions on how they performed their work without reference to immediate management in areas like scheduling and allocation of work. The second was the degree of autonomy permitted to employees to choose their own team

members and to decide which issues the group might address. Where high levels of discretion are granted to employees this form of team working would approximate closely with what has often been referred to as "semi-autonomous work groups". Of those Irish enterprises using team working only 17 per cent were found to have a high level of intensity of group delegation; most (51 per cent) had a medium level and a third had a low level of intensity.

In yet another attempt to distinguish between forms of team working the EPOC team made a distinction between two forms: the first a "Scandinavian" model, the other, a "Toyota" or lean production model. The former permits more autonomy to team members; team members come from a variety of skill groupings and there is considerable emphasis on training. The latter, in contrast, places strict limits on teams' autonomy and employees' skills are largely of a generalist or routine kind. This distinction proved to be very illuminating in accounting for the different economic effects of team working. Organisations which used teams which came close to the Scandinavian model were considerably more likely to report improvements in organisational performance along indicators like reductions in costs and through-put times, improvements in quality and, most strikingly, in increases in total output. They were also more likely to indicate a decrease in sickness and absenteeism levels and reductions in the number of employees and managers employed.

In Ireland, the more advanced Scandinavian model was a very rare occurrence. It would seem then that, while team working is as widely diffused in Ireland as elsewhere in Europe, it is predominantly of a form that comes close to the Toyota model. Only 0.3 per cent of Irish companies have adopted the Scandinavian model, which compares with a ten-country average of 1.4 per cent and, not surprisingly, a high of 4.6 per cent in Sweden.

In summary, then, it can be claimed that work reorganisation is well advanced in only a minority of Irish workplaces. Change of a kind is evident in more workplaces, but any claim that Ireland is equal to, or ahead of, other countries is clearly found to be wanting, especially when one probes more deeply behind the distribution of practices.

V PARTNERSHIP, EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT AND CHANGE IN IRISH WORKPLACES

In examining partnership and direct employee involvement as modes of "collaborative production" it was decided to consider directly the extent to which management sought to handle workplace change in either of these ways as alternatives to more established or traditional modes of handling change, such as simply exercising "managerial prerogative" or engaging in conventional adversarial collective bargaining with unions. While structures for partnership

and forms of employee involvement are of course important issues, what matters most in considering employers' behaviour is the extent to which postures towards working with unions and employees have changed to embrace partnership or direct employee involvement where significant issues are at stake (see, Marchington, 1998). Moreover, relatively little is known about the types of structures and arrangements put in place to give expression to partnership with trade unions, as will be discussed below.

In respect of workplace change, a list of 12 items was presented to respondents, 8 of which were concerned with *operational issues*, such as changes to pay levels, working practices and so on, with the remainder focusing on issues of a more *strategic* nature like introducing new products and services, formulating business targets and formulating plans with respect to mergers/acquisitions and divestments. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had introduced changes in any of these areas over the five years preceding the survey, and, where they had done so, to indicate from a list of four possible approaches to managing or handling change which approach had been adopted. The four approaches to handling workplace change were:

1.   determined solely by management;
2.   decided through traditional collective bargaining with trade union(s) or on the basis of custom and practice;
3.   decided by involving trade unions to solve problems or seek consensus on a partnership basis;
4.   decided by management with the direct involvement of employees.

It is important to note that we were keen to identify the *predominant* approach used by establishments in introducing workplace change. As such, respondents were asked to specify only one of the four approaches outlined above for each relevant dimension of workplace change.[8] To take account of the possibility that postures towards change could have varied across categories of employees *within* an establishment, respondents were asked to identify their predominant approach in the case of the largest occupational group.

The wording used to describe what may count as the two modes of "collaborative production" require some comment. In defining "partnership" with

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8. To have permitted respondents to chose more than one option would not only have made it very difficult to provide estimates of, say, the presence of workplace partnership or collective bargaining in Ireland, but it would also have led to confusing and possibly contradictory results. For instance in the pilot study, where respondents were permitted to specify more than one option, a number of respondents ticked both the management prerogative and collective bargaining boxes. For these reasons, respondents were asked to specify which approach had predominated in their handling of each of the change items.

unions we decided against precise delimitation, in terms, for example, of structural arrangements or bundles of practices, both for the reasons outlined above, and fearing that such an approach would fail to capture possibly miscellaneous instances where the management of workplace change was being conducted with the active involvement of unions but outside the traditional collective bargaining arena. The definition adopted thus provides for a large number of possible scenarios where workplace partnership arrangements might be in use. This approach seemed advisable since virtually nothing was known about the incidence of partnership in Ireland and scarcely more about the forms and arrangements through which it was given expression by management and unions. But with this broad definition we were careful to lay stress on involving unions "to solve problems or seek consensus on a partnership basis". By providing this definition of a partnership approach we were making a clear distinction between the adversarialism and arms-length postures often associated with collective bargaining arrangements and efforts by employers and trade unions in recent years to move towards "win-win" forms of exchange. The option of looking at a very narrow form of workplace partnership would run the risk of excluding many firms, which are adopting workplace partnership arrangements, but perhaps of a "softer" or "looser" kind than works councils or other structural mechanisms. Thus while our definition and approach allows critically for an examination of the types of issues around which partnership has come into play, it says nothing of the *degree* of influence exercised by trade unions over such issues. By identifying and focusing upon terms such as "consensus" and "involving trade unions to solve problems" it has the benefit of capturing a large number of scenarios where employers and unions may be trying to develop new partnership arrangements and to use them for handling workplace change.

Our use of the term "direct employee involvement" was similarly deliberately phrased to capture all those instances where employers may be seeking to introduce change through the direct participation of employees. Thus, it is again a broad definition which was designed to capture initiatives as diverse as team working arrangements, quality circles, total quality management programmes, briefing groups, task forces and individual face-to-face consultations. We cannot obviously deduce from the data on how change was handled, the types of channels or processes established to give employees a role in management decisions; whether they were formal or informal; whether employees were permitted to exercise a veto over management's proposals, or whether involvement initiatives were simply designed to communicate and inform employees of proposed changes.

Before turning to the data on the incidence of partnership, involvement and more traditional modes of handling change, it is noteworthy that the level and scope of workplace change in Ireland in the 1990s is indeed very significant. While it is obviously difficult to estimate the *depth* of change from these data,

the level of workplace change and the range of issues addressed appear very significant. Evidently workplaces in the "Celtic Tiger" economy are indeed highly dynamic. The issue is the extent to which widespread change and restructuring in Ireland has been handled through various modes of "collaborative production", or whether "traditional" and more exclusionary forms of employee relations remain strongly embedded. It will be helpful to consider the results separately for unionised and non-union workplaces.

Unionised Workplaces

Table 4 details how workplace change was introduced in unionised companies. Partnership with unions was most widely used to handle changes to working practices (20 per cent), changes in payment systems (17 per cent) and changes in working time arrangements (16 per cent). Overall the incidence of partnership as a mode of productive collaboration was clearly very modest in unionised companies. At most one in five establishments have resorted to partnership to respond to change, but more commonly the numbers favouring partnership as a means of handling change issues were much lower. Partnership emerges as a strategy confined primarily to changes in operational areas and was rarely used as a means of handling change in more strategic areas.

The introduction of change through the direct involvement of employees was found to be considerably more widespread than the use of partnership arrangements. Its use was striking in the introduction of a number of changes in both operational and strategic areas: hardly surprisingly in the *introduction* of initiatives to involve employees (46 per cent), but also in such areas as changes in working practices (41 per cent), identifying ways of realising targets (40 per cent), changes in working time arrangements (38 per cent) and the introduction of new products and services (29 per cent).

Management preference for direct employee involvement over partnership with trade unions can fairly readily be explained. Direct involvement represents involvement very much on management's terms: through such measures as quality circles, objective setting and appraisal, briefing and communication, feedback and consultation measures etc. These types of practices have a long vintage in the management literature and their operation is well understood. If they fail to function as expected they can be rescinded, or simply allowed to atrophy. Partnership, on the other hand, involves giving unions access to areas of decision-making from which in the past they were excluded, and in this way underlining or strengthening the legitimacy and scope of union "voice". Models for successful partnership are much less familiar in the professional management canon. Partnership may commonly be seen to carry significant risks: "capture" of management decision-making by unchanged adversarial union postures bargaining, for example, or a possible slowing up of decision-making, or dilution

Table 4: *Approaches to the Handling of Workplace Change in Unionised Workplaces*

	Percentage of Workplaces Affected by Change Issue	No. of Workplaces Affected (Unweighted)	Approach to the Handling of Change			
			Management Prerogative %	Collective Bargaining %	Partnership with %	Direct Employee %
Operational Issues						
Changing pay levels	80	228	17	62	11	10
Changes in payment systems	59	155	21	40	18	22
Introduction of new plant and technology	78	228	48	13	11	27
Changes in working time arrangements	64	176	8	38	16	38
Changes in working practices (e.g. multi-skilling, work re-organisation, teamworking)	67	197	13	25	20	41
Changes in numbers employed	86	240	65	13	14	8
Introduction of initiatives to involve employees (e.g. quality circles, suggestion schemes, team briefing)	58	167	26	14	14	46
Revision of promotional structures and criteria	41	121	77	8	11	5
Strategic Issues						
Introduction of new products/product ranges/ services	76	219	62	2	8	29
Setting business targets for this workplace	78	229	71	3	3	23
Identifying ways of realising targets for this workplace	76	223	47	4	8	41
Formulating plans with respect to mergers/ acquisitions/divestments	39	112	92	1	2	6

Source: IR-HRM Survey.

of management authority. Should partnership arrangements not work out as management hoped they might, they cannot be so easily rescinded or ignored, being subject to collective agreements or accords with trade unions.

In the light of arguments concerning the depth and penetration of collaborative production in Irish establishments, what bears emphasis is that management prerogative or unilateral decision-making was the most common approach to the handling of workplace change in the 1990s. In respect of 7 of the 12 change areas examined, Irish employers were more likely to decide unilaterally on how change was to be effected than to adopt either mode of collaborative production, or to engage unions at arms-length through collective bargaining. Not surprisingly, the use of management prerogative was most common in those areas of decision-making which are of a strategic nature but decisions were also commonly made unilaterally in the case of more operational matters such as the revision of promotional structures and criteria (77 per cent), changes in numbers employed (65 per cent), the introduction of new plant and technology (48 per cent) and even the introduction of initiatives to involve employees (26 per cent).

When the two more "traditional" modes of handling change, managerial prerogative and collective bargaining, are combined, it emerges clearly that they predominate over collaborative production across a range of operational areas, often to a quite marked degree, and particularly so when it comes to strategic aspects of running establishments. In all but three of the 12 areas of change examined, more "exclusionary" ways of responding to change were much more commonly adopted than modes of collaborative production.

In summary, the data for unionised workplaces demonstrate quite clearly that employers in the main have continued to regulate the workplace through unilateral managerial control and collective bargaining. Workplace partnership had never been used to introduce change in more than a fifth of workplaces. In most instances, a little more than one in ten employers used it and it was rarely if ever adopted in strategic areas of management decision-making. In place of representative forms of employee participation, management would seem to be showing a clear preference for introducing change through mechanisms which allow for the direct involvement of employees, but more commonly to exclude any forms of employee participation and to maintain management's freedom and right to manage as they might see fit.

Non-union Workplaces

In non-union workplaces the management of change obviously did not allow for two of our options — collective bargaining and workplace partnership. Respondents were confined to choosing from two alternatives: management prerogative or direct employee involvement (see Table 5). Direct employee

involvement was particularly apparent in the introduction of changes in working time (80 per cent), working practices (62 per cent), not surprisingly, in the introduction of initiatives to involve employees (66 per cent) and in identifying ways of achieving targets (62 per cent). In the case of the remainder of the change areas, however, employers were less likely to use direct employee involvement than to introduce change through management prerogative. A surprising result, though, is the absence of any neat division between those items where direct employee involvement and management prerogative were practised. One might have assumed that the latter would have been much more pronounced in areas of strategic decision-making than in operational matters. This is not supported by the data. While use of managerial prerogative, for example, was virtually universal in respect of formulating plans for mergers, acquisitions and divestments, decisions were also commonly made unilaterally in respect of changes in numbers employed, revising promotional structures and criteria and changing pay levels.

In summary, the incidence of direct employee involvement in handling change is indeed significant in non-union Irish workplaces. But in eight out of twelve areas of change, and in all areas of strategic change, other than identifying ways of realising workplace targets, most non-union establishments relied mainly on managerial prerogative, and often by a wide margin over collaborative production.

Managers' Future Intentions

In a cross-sectional survey such as this it is only possible to identify the degree of diffusion of given practices in one period of time. In an attempt to overcome this constraint and in order to measure the likely future for workplace partnership and direct employee involvement, as well as the likely durability of current arrangements, we sought to examine employers' commitment to adopting these approaches when responding to workplace change in the future. Using, then, the same four approaches to those outlined in the previous question, we asked how managers would be likely to handle change over the next five years, assuming that they were faced with a range of change imperatives. The survey retained five change items which are operational in nature, and which affect different dimensions of the wage-effort bargain — change in pay levels and payment systems, the introduction of new technology, working practices and working time arrangements, and making significant reductions in numbers employed. One area of strategic decision making was maintained — developing new business targets. This number of items was considered sufficient to estimate the likely future penetration of partnership and involvement approaches based on current declared postures.

Table 5: *Approaches to the Handling of Workplace Change in Non-Union Workplaces*

	Percentage of Workplaces Affected by Change Issue	No. of Workplaces Affected (Unweighted)	Approach to the Handling of Change	
			Management Prerogative %	Direct Employee Involvement %
Operational Issues				
Changing pay levels	89	142	62	38
Changes in payment systems	53	84	51	49
Introduction of new plant and technology	72	117	52	48
Changes in working time arrangements	61	103	20	80
Changes in working practices (e.g. multi-skilling, work re-organisation, teamworking)	61	100	32	68
Introduction of initiatives to involve employees (e.g. quality circles, suggestion schemes, team briefing)	70	113	33	67
Changes in numbers employed	92	150	81	19
Revision of promotional structures and criteria	49	85	76	24
Strategic Issues				
Introduction of new products/product ranges/services	84	135	56	44
Setting business targets for this workplace	83	135	68	32
Identifying ways of realising targets for this workplace	83	130	38	62
Formulating plans with respect to mergers/acquisitions/divestments	47	82	97	3

Source: IR-HRM Survey.

Table 6: *Intentions as to the Handling of Workplace Change in the Future in Unionised Workplaces*

	Approach to the Handling of Change			
	Management Prerogative	Collective Bargaining	Partnership with Union(s)	Direct Employee Involvement
	%	%	%	%
Operational Issues				
Changes in pay levels	16	41	22	21
Changes in payment systems	18	24	27	31
Introduction of new technology and new working practices	16	12	22	50
Changes in working time arrangements	7	21	27	45
Making significant reductions in numbers employed	28	24	28	20
Strategic Issues				
Developing new business targets for the workplace	46	7	9	38

N (unweighted) = 282
Source: IR-HRM Survey.

Starting with unionised workplaces, a number of the findings in Table 6 deserve comment. First, employers would seem to be indicating a clear preference to rely less on collective bargaining in the near future as a means for handling workplace change and to rely more both on partnership with unions and direct employee involvement — both roughly in equal measure. Interestingly, direct employee involvement recorded the highest score for three of the change items listed (changes in payment systems, 31 per cent; introduction of new technology and new working practices, 50 per cent; changes in working time, 45 per cent). In respect of the other means for handling change, not surprisingly collective bargaining was cited most often for changing pay levels; management prerogative for developing new business targets, and finally, workplace partnership for making significant reductions in numbers employed. Second, management prerogative is as likely to remain as entrenched over the next five years as is currently the case, except for when it comes to handling change in two areas: introducing job losses and developing new business targets.

Third, the areas in which employers see workplace partnership to be of particular benefit were areas close to the wage-effort bargain: changes in payment systems, working time arrangements and managing job loses. Close on a third of respondents indicated that they would favour partnership if they were to introduce change in these areas. The proportion of respondents who

reported that they would resort to a partnership approach in the case of developing new business targets is still modest at 9 per cent.

While the intended use of partnership arrangements across both operational and strategic aspects of change would seem to be significantly higher than at present, partnership nevertheless seems likely to be favoured for handling operational challenges in no more than about one in four workplaces, and the prospects of partnership embracing strategic decision-making appear little brighter than at present. It is clear that the incidence of direct employee involvement is also likely to increase significantly, with substantially higher proportions of workplaces likely to involve employees directly in both operational and strategic decision-making. Overall, higher proportions of establishments still intend to rely on unilateral decision-making, or collective bargaining, rather than collaborative production, to handle change in three of the six areas examined in the assessment of future intentions.

While the range of approaches available to non-union employers is again more confined, a broadly similar pattern was evident in the non-union sector. In comparing the results in Table 5 with Table 7, intentions to rely to an increased extent on direct employee involvement are particularly marked when managers countenance having to make significant numbers of employees redundant, and, to a lesser extent were they to face further technological change, changes in payment systems, changes in working practices and developing new business targets for the workplace. Notwithstanding this, however, in non-union companies the use of management prerogative looks set to prevail over direct employee involvement in areas such as changes in pay levels, making significant reductions in numbers employed and in developing new business targets.

Table 7: *Intentions as to the Handling of Workplace Change in the Future in Non-Union Workplaces*

	Approach to the Handling of Change	
	Management Prerogative %	Direct Employee Involvement %
Operational Issues		
Changes in pay levels	52	42
Changes in payment systems	44	54
Introduction of new technology and new working practices	23	77
Changes in working time arrangements	16	84
Making significant reductions in numbers employed	61	39
Strategic Issues		
Developing new business targets for the workplace	56	43

N (unweighted) = 163
Source: IR-HRM Survey.

Accounting for the Uptake of Collaborative Production

Up to now the paper has presented data on the general incidence and prospects of various modes of collaborative production in unionised and non-union workplaces. This section examines whether collaborative approaches to the handling of change are related in any consistent manner to a series of workplace characteristics. These comprise sector (comparing advanced manufacturing, financial and professional services and other service industries with traditional manufacturing), size (greater than 100 employees), US-ownership, and whether a workplace was a new or "greenfield" site (defined as in operation at that location for no more than 10 years). The analysis uses logistic regressions to estimate the effects of these variables on the odds that workplaces show a preference for collaborative production in the handling of change issues. Separate estimates are presented for workplaces where unions are recognised and for non-union workplaces. In the case of unionised workplaces partnership and direct employee involvement are combined to provide an overall indicator of an employer preference for a collaborative approach rather than an "exclusionary" approach to handling change. It needs to be borne in mind that the incidence of collaborative approaches, as a whole, to particular *strategic* change issues is so low that the issue of accounting for variability becomes almost redundant.

The results presented in Table 8 show some influences having an impact on specific areas of collaborative production. For example, US-owned workplaces are considerably more likely to adopt "task-based" forms of collaborative management, as indexed by a higher incidence of such techniques as work teams, TQM, and *ad hoc* task forces in all workplaces, as well as quality circles in unionised workplaces (see Geary and Roche, forthcoming). Non-union workplaces undertaking advanced manufacturing or delivering financial and professional services are also more likely to have adopted various task-based forms of collaborative production. But the overriding result to emerge from Table 8 is the lack of any consistent pattern in the incidence of modes of collaborative production in respect of the variables examined. In other words, thus far in its history at any rate, the adoption of collaborative production appears largely random with respect to its sectoral penetration, relationship to workplace size, US-ownership and with respect to whether workplaces have commenced operations over the past decade. Surprisingly perhaps, no consistent preference for collaboration production as a mode of handling change is apparent in the relatively more highly skilled advanced manufacturing and financial and professional services sectors, nor in newer greenfield workplaces, commonly thought to be in the vanguard of new approaches to work organisation and employment relations. Nor do the often-cited US unionised and non-union exemplars of various types of collaborative arrangements represent anything like a generalised distinctive US-effect.

Table 8: *Examining Possible Influences on the Adoption of Collaborative Production*[a]

	Unionised Workplaces: Odds ratios[b]							Non-Union Workplaces: Odds Ratios[b]						
	New Work-places	Advanced Manufac-turing	Financial and Professional Services	Other Services	US-owned Work-places	>100 Employees	Ns (Unweighted)	New Work-places	Advanced Manufac-turing	Financial and Professional Services	Other Services	US-owned Work-places	>100 Employees	Ns (Unweighted)
Work Organisation:														
Formally designated work teams	1.7	1.1	2.3	1.1	2.7*	0.6*	228	0.6*	7.5**	7.3**	2.7**	3.1**	1.2	121
Total quality management	2.5	1.5	1.4	0.2	C	1.5	188	1.1	0.9	0.7	1.0	10.8**	4.5*	88
Quality circles	0.7	0.3	2.0	1.8	8.8**	0.6	212	0.9	6.5**	12.5**	5.5**	1.3	2.4*	115
Ad hoc task forces	1.2	0.7	0.8	1.1	2.4*	1.8*	222	0.7	1.6	32.3**	1.1	14.4**	1.5	119
Joint consultative committees	0.3*	0.7	5.1	1.6	1.6	6.4**	214	0.2**	1.5	0.0	0.4	2.7	2.7	116
Operational Issues:														
Change in pay levels	1.1	1.8	0.8	0.8	0.3	0.6	202	0.4**	0.9	0.6	0.5**	0.1**	0.8	118
Change in pay systems	0.3**	1.1	0.3*	0.9	0.5	0.9	138	0.2**	2.2	0.2*	1.0	0.5	0.6	69
Change in technology	1.2	1.3	0.7	1.1	0.7	0.7	201	0.6	1.3	8.9**	2.4**	0.5	1.5	99
Change in working time	1.5	2.1	0.5	0.9	0.6	0.4**	157	1.0	C	0.3*	1.7	0.8	1.3	85
Change in work organisation	0.5*	0.9	0.2**	0.6	0.9	0.6*	173	0.9	2.1	0.9	1.7	1.3	1.8	81
Changes in numbers employed	3.7**	0.7	0.2*	0.3**	0.9	0.8	212	0.4*	3.9**	0.0	2.5**	0.5	1.2	122

Table 8: *Examining Possible Influences on the Adoption of Collaborative Production*[a] *(Continued)*

	Unionised Workplaces: Odds ratios[b]							Non-Union Workplaces: Odds Ratios[b]						
	New Work-places	Advanced Manufac-turing	Financial and Professional Services	Other Services	US-owned Work-places	>100 Employees	Ns (Unweighted)	New Work-places	Advanced Manufac-turing	Financial and Professional Services	Other Services	US-owned Work-places	>100 Employees	Ns (Unweighted)
Introduction of involvement programmes	1.5	1.4	0.5	0.6	0.5*	0.8	150	2.4*	0.9	0.4	1.0	8.6**	0.8	90
Changes in promotional arrangements	0.1	9.6**	1.5	2.1	0.6	2.1	111	0.5	4.2*	0.0	1.6	2.4	2.1	69
Strategic Issues:														
New products/ services	1.8	0.9	0.6	0.9	1.2	0.6	195	0.5	1.2	17.6**	3.1**	0.6	1.5	107
Setting business targets	0.9	1.5	0.9	1.3	0.9	0.6	203	1.2	1.5	0.4	1.0	0.8	0.6	112
Identifying ways of realising targets	0.4**	1.2	1.5	2.0**	1.0	1.2	198	0.7	2.1	5.5**	2.3**	0.8	1.9	107
Plans with respect to mergers, acquisitions and divest-ments	7.9**	1.0	0.0	0.2	2.0	2.0	101	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	63

[a] With the exception of the Total Quality Management item, all items measure the use of collaborative production as the main mode of handling change with respect to the largest category of the workforce.

[b] Independent variables are specified as outined in the text. In the case of the sectoral variable, the reference category is traditional manufacturing.

[c] Odds ratio is improbably large and has a large standard error.

* Significant at the 0.05 level.

** Significant at the 0.01 level.

Source: IR-HRM Survey.

These findings in turn raise the question of how collaborative production *has* emerged in some workplaces but not in others. Here, we feel it important to distinguish between partnership involving trade unions and direct employee involvement. The case study evidence suggests that partnership is most likely to emerge in uncommon sets of circumstances, involving such combinations of factors as commercial crisis, or impending crisis, actual or imminent reorganisation of businesses, a broadly positive pre-existing employment relations climate, powerful and visionary senior human resource executives and influential and pioneering union officials (cf. Roche and Turner, 1998). It is common enough perhaps to find one or several such factors in play, but less common to find a range of them in combination. The dynamic driving direct employee involvement may be the mirror image of that driving partnership with unions. The various techniques and approaches associated with direct involvement are much better known in the professional management literature, and they have been well tried and tested in workplaces nationally and internationally. As such, workplaces judging that the business environment warranted organisational innovation — however they may otherwise differ with respect to external and internal forces — may have been predisposed to adopt forms of direct employee involvement. In consequence, no clear-cut pattern with respect to sector, scale, or other major distinguishing features of workplaces, need be expected.

VI THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF INNOVATION: IRELAND IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

It will be helpful to present a general summary of the pattern of the findings before considering the Irish case in comparative context. The overall incidence of new forms of work organisation in Irish workplaces is indeed impressive, but closer analysis reveals that the changes which have occurred permit employees limited discretion and narrowly circumscribed decision-making authority. The incidence of partnership with trade unions is very modest indeed and only in exceptional cases are unions involved in strategic decision-making. Partnership is most common in areas close to the wage-effort bargain and thus likely to be subject to union influence. Direct employee involvement is common in unionised establishments and employers show a clear preference for this mode of collaborative production over partnership with unions. The findings indicate that unilateral management decision-making remains the most common approach to handling change in unionised workplaces, and that management prerogative and collective bargaining combined by far predominate over collaborative production. In non-union workplaces, while the incidence of direct employee involvement is again significant, unilateral management decision-making is predominant. Managers' future intentions point to the further diffusion

of collaborative production and, in particular, of direct employee involvement. But management prerogative looks set to remain entrenched in the handling of about half the issues examined.

We would argue that the pattern of findings for Ireland revealed in this study indicate that Ireland has much in common with larger Western economies. Studies generally report a significant incidence of experimentation with new forms of work organisation and new approaches to management-union and management-employee dialogue and collaboration (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994; Regini, 1995; Locke *et al.*, 1995; Sisson, 1997). It is also common to report management intentions to rely to greater degrees on new forms of collaboration in the future. But these studies also emphasise that the pattern of change nearly everywhere is piecemeal and fragmented, with strong areas of continuity and inertia even in workplaces experimenting with new modes of collaborative production.

The detailed findings for Ireland and the picture of recent change emerging from the comparative literature, indicate that Ireland cannot be viewed in any sense as being in the vanguard of workplace change along collaborative lines. Thus our findings support the conclusions of pre-existing "sober" accounts of workplace change in Ireland by showing the limited penetration and depth of partnership and new forms of work organisation. Nor does the Irish case present itself as an "ideal locale" for the emergence of partnership. Nor can the argument reasonably be sustained that the transformation and performance of the "Celtic Tiger" economy of the 1990s can be attributed to any decisive degree to collaborative production (see McCartney and Teague, 1997, p. 381-382 and p. 396; Sabel, 1996: Ch. 2). As emerges from the data reported in this study, change and dynamism are indeed widespread in Irish establishments, but they are more likely to have been driven through by unilateral management decision-making than by collaborative production in any of its various forms.

The comparative literature on recent change in industrial relations systems and human resource management, can also be used to develop a framework for understanding the forces assisting and retarding change in Irish workplaces and for "locating" Ireland analytically against other national cases in the 1990s. Locke *et al.* (1995) propose six major sets of factors to account for cross-country differences in levels of diffusion of new forms of work organisation and associated patterns of employment relations:

1. pre-existing patterns of work organisation;
2. state postures towards innovation;
3. the "climate" of industrial relations;
4. the priority accorded to human resources in firm governance;
5. the competitive postures of firms, and
6. prevailing bargaining levels and arrangements.

The study implies that a broad distinction can be made with respect to levels of innovation between "Anglo-American" systems and "Continental-Japanese" systems. The latter are viewed, on balance, as having been more receptive to changes favouring collaborative production in their attempts to adjust to the new international economic order. This framework can be used to portray the Irish pattern of adjustment to intensified competition.

1. *Pre-existing Patterns of Work Organisation*: In terms of work reorganisation, Ireland's "starting point" is a Taylorist tradition of job specialisation, overlain in unionised companies by a tradition of control linked to employment and skill protection.

2. *Innovation and the State*: Government support for innovation in Ireland can best be portrayed as a positive but largely non-interventionist and "hortatory" posture. The National Centre for Partnership, established under the national tripartite agreement, *Programme 2000*, operates as a voluntary catalyst for partnership and employee involvement.

3. *The Industrial Relations Climate*: The climate of industrial relations has historically been adversarial, but in recent years the Irish trade union movement has strategically reoriented its policy to favour partnership and new forms of work organisation. The continuing decline in density being experienced by Irish unions has bolstered their support for partnership in the workplace. The postures and policies of employers are more ambiguous. The Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC) has a declared policy of favouring partnership and employee involvement, but it is clear that sharp divergences of view exist among its membership on the desirability of partnership with unions. IBEC might also be disposed to weigh in the balance its support for partnership against the advantages that might be seen to accrue to employers generally from a continuing decline in union organisation. As such, a national-level consensus between the "social partners" that partnership and involvement should be fostered translates far from easily or directly into strong backing for "collaborative production" at workplace level. IBEC, The Irish Congress of Trade Unions and state agencies have collaborated on several change programmes aimed at fostering partnership and involvement, but these have directly involved only small numbers of companies and the prospects of the wider diffusion of the models developed remain uncertain.

4. *Corporate Governance and Human Resources*: The status of human resource issues in corporate governance in Ireland is not in general highly pronounced. Worker directors have been elected to the boards of commercial state-owned

companies since the 1970s, but Ireland possesses no works council system mandated by legislation or collective bargaining. In a study of all "greenfield" sites established in manufacturing and internationally traded services over the period 1987-92, Gunnigle and Morley (1997) found that only one in five was characterised by high levels of strategic integration of human resource management into competitive strategy. In their composite measure of strategic integration, the lowest-scoring dimension of all was the degree to which industrial relations considerations impacted on broader business policy decisions. In the UCD workplace survey, a somewhat more positive picture emerged. Just over one in three managers claimed that human resource concerns influence the "choice and implementation of business strategy"; approximately the same proportion of managers suggested, however, that human resource concerns had little influence on business strategy. Overall, therefore, the non-existence of institutional systems for worker or union involvement, mandated by law or collective bargaining, and the pattern of survey evidence reflect a reality in which the large majority of enterprises and their establishments are neither constrained nor disposed to assign priority to human resource issues in the governance of the firm or the workplace.

5. *The Competitive Postures of Firms*: While "national" competitive strategy, as outlined in a range of policy documents by public agencies, favours competing on the basis of quality, innovation and skill, in reality, considerable variation exists in firms' competitive postures both across and within industrial sectors. In the key electronics and pharmaceuticals sectors, dominated by multinational companies, competitive postures are commonly — though by no means universally — focused on quality and innovation in addition to price. Attempts by public agencies to persuade companies in these sectors to invest significantly in research and development in their Irish plants have met with limited success. Much of the work done in Ireland involves routine production, or routine fabrication and software localisation in the electronics sector (see McGovern, 1998). In the important Irish food industry, national policy also calls for product innovation and higher levels of penetration of "upstream" consumer export markets, particularly in Europe. While the sector harbours areas of significant product innovation, based on biotechnology and proactive marketing, it remains heavily wedded to basic food processing and distribution. Key service industries like tourism remain reliant on relatively low-wage employment and high levels of part-time and seasonal employment. Large areas of retailing and "blue-collar" services are also characterised by similar employment practices, as very often are small indigenous companies (see Roche, 1998). Financial services companies have been in the vanguard of quality and innovation-focused strategies as the industry experienced more intense competition following on from deregulation.

In the publicly-owned utilities, EU-led deregulation and growing commercial-isation have resulted in a range of competitive responses: some companies seeking to drive down costs as a major priority; others seeking to compete on the basis of quality.

National policy aspirations aside, it would be invalid to describe the economy as dominated in employment terms by sectors and firms strongly wedded to competitive postures emphasising quality, innovation and customisation.[9] Of particular relevance to the competitive postures adopted by firms and associated employment practices is Ireland's "voluntary" system of industrial relations. Firms are free to choose any combination of employment practices, or any employment model within very wide parameters. Over the past decade, the scope available to companies to craft their employment relations as they choose has increased significantly. The State and its agencies have felt constrained to move away from a long-standing policy of encouraging incoming multinationals and indigenous companies to concede union recognition and support collective bargaining. In the FDI sector, in particular, there has been a strong growth in the incidence of multinational companies committed to policies of "union substitution", sometimes backed by "soft" human resource practices, but sometimes also backed by "union suppression" and relying on fear and anxiety to discourage unionisation — the two postures, of course, are by no means mutually exclusive (McGovern, 1989; Gunnigle, 1995). In consequence, Ireland now possesses a highly fragmented industrial relations system (Roche 1998). Different employment models coexist side-by-side, and no compelling constraints exist to push firms in general towards quality and innovation-focused competitive postures, supported by collaborative employment relations, as they seek to respond to more intense international competition.

6. *Bargaining Levels and Arrangements*: Growing fragmentation also has bearing on the role of national-level tripartite bargaining in the diffusion of new forms of work organisation, partnership and employee involvement. Locke *et al.* (1995, p. 368) argue that strong national or industry-level bargaining arrangements can provide a "supportive institutional umbrella" for labour-management co-operation and innovation in specific enterprises and workplaces. As outlined above, even after a decade of neo-corporatist concertation, and the inclusion in the current national agreement of proposals akin to a framework agreement on workplace innovation, deadlock, stalemate and ambivalence characterise the

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9. A question in the workplace survey asked establishments to indicate whether they produced products or services wholly or mainly customised to the requirements of different markets or customers. In all, 40 per cent of the sample responded that this was their product strategy.

activities of the social partners at workplace level much more than active collaboration to promote productivity coalitions.

When Ireland is thus located in comparative and analytical context, its adjustment to international competition emerges, on the whole, as strongly characterised still by responses of Anglo-American systems, which have shown themselves to be less receptive or permeable to innovation and collaborative production than many Continental European systems. The Irish case further appears to share with Anglo-American systems a tendency for much innovation to be piecemeal and fragmentary (see Roche and Kochan, 1996).[10] Systematic programmes of innovation, in the minority of establishments where they occur, also tend to be more heavily skewed towards modes of collaborative production offering low and tightly circumscribed degrees of "voice" to employees and unions (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994; Geary, 1999).

VII CONCLUSIONS

Some recent social-scientific writing on Ireland has assigned great importance to various forms of collaborative production, sometimes even suggesting that their growing diffusion might have played a major role in Ireland's exceptional economic performance during the 1990s. This paper has questioned the degree to which new modes of collaborative production have gained ground in Ireland during the 1990s. While collaborative production is undoubtedly significant, exclusionary forms of decision-making are shown to have dominated the postures of establishments towards the handling of change. Suggestions of "transformation", actual or imminent, realised through various forms of collaborative production, are rejected, and change in Ireland is shown to have much in common with other economies, particularly those characterised by "Anglo-American" institutional systems. Thus our work, drawing on the first Irish workplace survey, gives substance to the sober reflections of a number of previous commentators whose work on partnership has of necessity drawn largely or exclusively on case study evidence or exploratory survey work (Gunnigle, 1997; Turner and Morley, 1995).

More generally, the Irish case adds to the weight of evidence against "functionalist" modes of macro-theorising which propose a direct correspondence between changing forms of competition and resulting forms of employment relations in industrial economies. Various "post-Fordist" models of economic organisation depend on such a postulate. These models fail to comprehend the

10. Though here the evidence for Continental European systems may not be all that different (see, for example, Regini, 1995: Ch. 7; Sisson, 1997).

extent to which firms in advanced economies may continue to eschew collaborative production and rely on traditional exclusionary management practices to engender the levels of dynamism they require (see Cappelli *et al.*, 1997). The forces shaping "trajectories" of adjustment and response to new patterns of competition across nations — engendering that is, "path dependency" in the way change occurs — are also relegated to "residual categories" in macro-paradigms of changing economic forms. Different "historical starting points" and institutional patterns become at most mediating influences that add local detail and coloration to economic responses. The writers on Ireland, whose work we examined here showed little concern with institutional forces, their effects on the diffusion of collaborative production, or their impact on the prospects of wider diffusion in the future. Nor do such models, with their focus on all-encompassing "transformations", appreciate the extent to which firms within national boundaries appear capable of a diversity of responses to new competitive forces, or that the range of responses and associated employment models may be widening in advanced industrial societies. If national institutions continue to be "hollowed out" by competitive forces, the consequence is likely to be a greater diversity of competitive postures and employment models within nations rather than the dominance of any one "post-Fordist" economic form, supported by collaborative production (see Roche, 1998; Darbyshire and Katz, 1997).

Rejecting arguments that advanced economies adjust "organically" to competitive forces through product strategies favouring collaborative production, a number of writers have argued that the institutionalisation of collaborative production is predicated on supportive institutional systems (Streeck, 1992; Kochan and Osterman, 1994; Appelbaum and Batt, 1994; Pfeffer, 1994). A failure to take adequate account of institutional forces, combined with an inadequate empirical base, limits the stream of "upbeat" writings on collaborative production and the Irish boom.

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