

SHARING DECISION-MAKING & SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE VOICE



Scottish Centre for Employment Research (SCER)

FITwork project
www.FITwork.org.uk



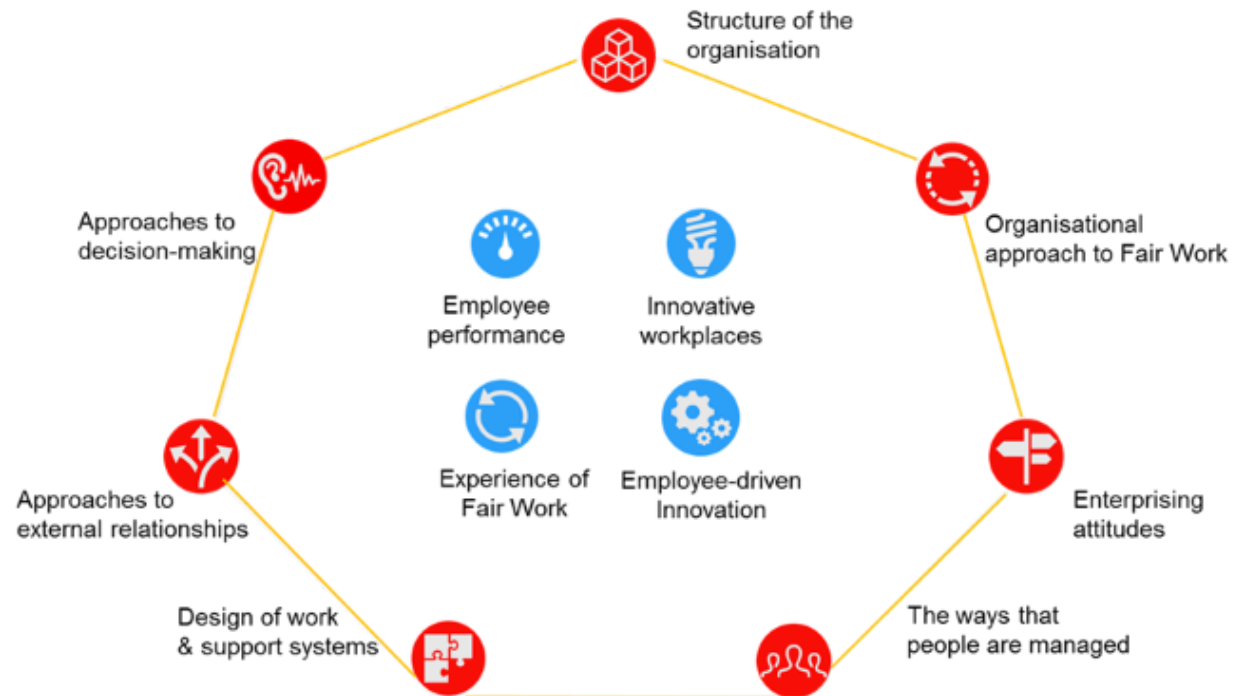
@InnovatingWorks

FITwork

The Fair, Innovative and Transformative work (FITwork) project focuses on workplace practices that enhance workers' ability, provide them with the opportunities to make an effective contribution at work, and that motivate them through the provision of fair work to deliver high performance, innovation and change.

Existing research points to key organisational features and workplace practices that are associated with higher levels of innovation. These features and practices span:

- How organisations are structured
- Approaches to decision-making
- How work and internal support systems are designed
- How people are managed
- Organisational approaches to fair work
- Organisational support for enterprising behaviours
- Approaches to external connections and networks



What do we mean by decision-making and effective voice?

Decision-making can take place at all levels of the organisation - from high level strategic decision-making to operational and job specific decision-making.

Decision-making processes can be formal (enshrined in company structures and policies) or informal (arising from managerial/supervisory relations and employee engagement).

Effective voice refers to practices that facilitate dialogue among employees, and between employees and management.

This requires structures and systems (formal and informal) whereby employees' ideas and views are sought, given, and listened to, and where there is the opportunity to offer constructive challenges to management. In unionised environments, collective bargaining and other trade union-facilitated engagement is important in providing a clear, effective voice.

Voice can be exercised through formal channels of representation and also through day-to-day work practices where workers are invited to communicate and make an active contribution to leadership and task-level decision-making.

Why is decision-making and effective voice important for innovation?

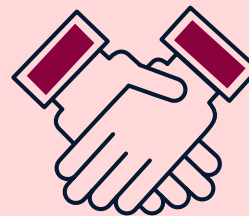


Dialogue and structure for consulting and negotiating is key to understanding and defining fair arrangements between employers and workers.

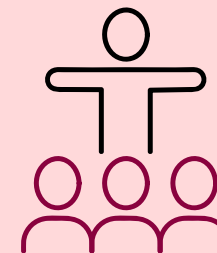
Opportunities for effective voice are central to fair work and underpin - and can help deliver - other dimensions of fair work.



Centralised and closed decision-making can close off new ideas and narrow thinking, thereby failing to tap into unused information, expertise and insight.



Any platform for employee voice can help to resolve conflict, facilitate involvement and idea sharing thereby with potential for positive individual and organisational level outcomes.



Where employees see themselves as having a real stake in a business, decision-making at every level can provide an opportunity to engage and empower employees to harness their knowledge to current and future business challenges.

What do we know about decision-making & effective voice?



International research clearly establishes that workers want some form of 'voice' at work to help them deal with problems and also to engage co-operatively with management to improve their working lives and firm performance.

There is evidence that participatory work environments and mechanisms for employee voice are associated with higher levels of innovative behaviour.

There is a positive association between workplace involvement strategies - where employees report opportunities to express their views on initiatives - and both job satisfaction and commitment.

Research suggests that workers rate collective voice exercised through a trade union most highly in relation to concerns over pay, discipline and grievance.

National surveys suggest that voice at task level, followed by participation in decision-making, impact most on job satisfaction and psychological well-being. However, in the UK, formal opportunities for workers to participate in organisational decisions have remained static since 2006 and fewer workers report having the opportunities to make a contribution in 2011 than in 2001.



Strict hierarchy breeds caution amongst managers, encouraging decisions to be referred upwards with consequent loss of productivity and responsiveness.



Effective worker voice and representation can also support wider social priorities in terms of equality of opportunity.

Jointly agreed decisions are easier to implement and more likely to be adhered to.

Employee voice beyond task level involvement is important - evidence suggests that lean systems have not expanded employee participation in decision-making significantly.



Examples of practice



One small technology company has made deliberate efforts to involve employees more in company decisions as part of the move towards employee ownership. It engaged staff in a series of business planning activities where the whole team was involved in identifying opportunities for the business, and engaged staff to think about the strategic direction of the organisation.

One small manufacturing firm put specific measures in place to ensure employee voice in work layout and design. Prior to the move to a new larger facility, employees came to the new site, were involved in planning the layout and have had opportunities to revise the layout since the move. This produced positive business and employee outcomes, was welcomed by management, and the company is now looking to further employee involvement.



Employee suggestion schemes can be quite a passive form of voice, but need not be. A small financial services firm has developed the idea of employee suggestion schemes specifically to enhance employee voice and to improve the innovation process. Staff participate in 'all team' ideas workshops twice a year. An online survey is conducted in advance of the workshop to garner feasible suggestions within specified cost parameters. The whole group then prioritises these and the workshops focus on their feasibility and development. Staff decide collectively which ideas to progress, and these are then allocated resources and developed, and for individuals are connected to the reward and recognition process.

In one small digital services company, strong employee voice is encouraged to guide the direction and implementation of projects. Management encourages this through a 'collective problem-solving' approach within small, skilled teams. Employee voice is less obvious at a strategic level and staff input is largely limited to suggestions for creative or process efficiency improvements.



Employee voice can be formal and informal. At one large food and drinks company, a formal employee forum brings together representatives from each area of the business on a monthly basis. The forum's purpose is to feedback to staff about the business operations and also to seek co-operation in implementing initiatives, for example, the adoption of the Living Wage.

