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EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR: A CASE STUDY OF TRINIDAD VERSUS TOBAGO

Narendra Ramgulam, Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide an understanding of employee participation in the hospitality industry of Trinidad and Tobago. It will also seek to compare/contrast levels of employee participation on both islands. This paper discusses the concept of employee participation and captures the impact of employee engagement in the hospitality sector. It examines the viability of engaging employees as it relates to decision making in Trinidad versus Tobago, and makes recommendations, which includes policy propositions for the future. Additionally, an examination of global participation strategies in the hospitality sector are presented to determine whether Trinidad or Tobago can espouse these and embrace sustainable employee engagement in the future of its hospitality sector. From this qualitative study utilizing a thematic analysis, it was determined, that employee participation was beneficial to employee morale, and played a key role in employee output. It also justified in some cases where employee participation can be used to create and stimulate creativity in organizations. The findings also revealed that there was a conceptual difference between employee participation in Trinidad versus Tobago, and the extent of employee participation in these two islands differ culturally. It also embraces the notion of sustainable employee participation as the way forward and proposes an employee engagement model for the way forward.

JEL: M1

KEYWORDS: Hospitality Sector, Employee Participation, Sustainability, Trinidad, Tobago, Levels of Employee Engagement, Global Participation Strategies, Employee Engagement Model

INTRODUCTION

Tourism which also encompasses *hospitality* is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world and it contributes to economic, socio-cultural and environmental benefits to many countries (WTTC 2014; WTO 2015; Cooper *et al* 2005; Swarbrooke and Horner 2001; and Ritchie and Crouch 2003). The hospitality industry provides employment opportunities for both skilled and non-skilled individuals in the areas of accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, attractions and events subsectors (WTTC 2009). It is an industry that contributes heavily to labour and jobs; providing opportunities where employees play a critical role in the delivery of service. Due to the importance of being able to deliver good service, employees at times have direct contact with customers. They can also be empowered to participate in decision making. This study will explore the concept of employee participation on both islands. Trinidad and Tobago is a twin island Republic in the southern Caribbean and the culture existing on the islands are totally different due to different colonial masters and histories. Trinidad is fast paced and caters to business tourism, while Tobago is much more laid-back and caters to the leisure market. The aim of this paper is to get exploratory data on employee participation levels on both islands.

According to the literature (Bratton and Gold 2007; Sagie and Koslowski (2007), employee participation differs from culture to culture, and country to country. This case study examines the organizational culture

existing within the same country, that is, the practices in Tobago versus that of Trinidad as it relates to employee participation.

Boxall and Purcell (2008: 142) quote participation as "… *a process that allows employees to exercise some influence over their work and the conditions under which they work*". This definition of participation suggests that employees have some degree of power in the workplace and can have weight; it demonstrates a situation where employees are not as they were seen a few decades ago—as slaves of the organisation. But today are valuable assets capable of contributing and taking organisations forward. The concept and evidence of employee participation has certainly grown over the years, especially since the 1980s across the industrialised world. Boxall and Purcell (2008), in the UK forms of communication between management and employees are widely used with 91 percent of workplaces having face to face meetings. Ten years ago this was not the case. Firms are realizing that the environment today is much more competitive and intensive, and the solution is to engage employees in participative roles if they are to gain a competitive advantage.

Bratton and Gold (2007: 442) assert that the employee voice has been growing over the years especially in Europe and North America. Bratton and Gold (2007) lists three reasons why employee participation is important: *It forms a contribution to decision making*. In other words, tacit knowledge can be harnessed and used by the organisation in decision making. *It articulates individuals' satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the workplace*. It can let the company know if the employees are happy or not. Many data collection methods would include surveys. In the United States for example, it is not uncommon to find companies having assembly meetings or with today's information technology and globalizing world; information or views of the employees can reach managers at the click of a button. *It is a demonstration of a collective organisation* (one hand cannot clap). When employees participate, it gives management added strength. It shows that everyone is working together for a common good.

The concept of employee participation is not static, and there are different reasons for participation in different countries. Sagie and Koslowski (2007) cites a few examples of countries and the reason for fostering employee participation. In North America, the main reason was for maximizing profits; in Western Europe, legal requirements tugged towards employee participation like the German law which requires that an equal number of employee and stockholder representatives be on the board.; In Traditional societies, it was due to imitation; and in Japan- the reason cited for participation was mutual identification of employees and management. Many companies around the world are using their employees and human resources to gain a competitive advantage. Some companies are using a top-down approach to management where employees are told what to do. While other companies empower their employees in decision making, and this in turn makes the employee feel a sense of self-worth and part of an organization. Both of these strategies work depending on the culture of the organization.

In the proceeding sections, this paper will examine the literature on the subject matter of employee participation; it outlines what methodology was used to gather exploratory data; followed by the results and discussion section which discusses the findings in light of the literature review and proposes recommendations for the future. The conclusion at the end of the document summarises the key findings in this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines the various views and studies in the area of employee participation, the hospitality sector of Trinidad and Tobago and strategies employed by successful organizations globally.

Concept of Employee Participation

Bratton and Gold (2007: 451) gives a distinction between the terms "*employee participation* and *employee involvement*".

> "*...employee participation involves workers exerting a countervailing and upward pressure on management control, which need not imply unity of purpose between managers and non-managers. Employee involvement is, in contrast, perceived to be a softer form of participation, implying a commonality of interest between employees and management, and stressing that involvement should be directed at the workforce as a whole rather than being restricted to trade union channels.*"

Sagie and Koslowski (2007: 3) claim that the term *employee participation* has diverse meanings. And can mean a number of things: it can mean that employees participate on the company board; hold shares or stocks of the firm; or participate from gain-sharing and other activities. One of the most common forms of participation in the literature is employee participation in decision making, and this paper will lean slightly in that direction. The boundaries between the terms (*employee participation* and *employee involvement*) are a bit fuzzy and hazy and many writers use the terms interchangeably. One of the main reasons companies exist is to make profit, and in order to become profitable, some organisations have looked at the external environment and developed strategies to move forward. Some strategies may entail new processes, and changing the way things were done. Edward E. Lawler III (1986: 3) states:

> "*Both company-wide programs of change and such specific programs as quality circles and attitude surveys share important common elements. These different programs all move one or more of the following further down in the organization: information, knowledge, rewards and power. This has the effect of allowing more people to participate in important decisions and activities, and because of this, these programs are often collectively referred to as participative approaches to management*"

Because power, knowledge, information and rewards are moving downwards towards lower levels, it changes the very nature of what work is and means to these employees at the lower levels as well as the higher levels of the organisation. And this can affect the jobs of everyone and can have a profound impact on the effectiveness of work in organisations. Tonnessen (2005) supports this point made by Lawler and says that organizations need to be innovative and by encouraging employee participation they can strengthen the workplace in terms of enhancing employee loyalty. On the theoretical side, employee participation can be looked at from two approaches, according to Joensson (2008); participation can be looked at as an instrument to enhance employee's attachment and loyalty to organizations, this is the *management approach*. The second approach is called the *humanistic approach*, and views participation as beneficial to human growth and satisfaction of social needs.

What are the Different Kinds of Participation?

Employees can participate in different ways and to different extents. Participation does not only refer to decision making. Although it may be the first thing which comes to mind; other forms of participation existed or were more prevalent like financial participation and feedback surveys but in recent times due to regulation and legislation—emphasis is on the right of employees to have a say and input in certain situations and also decision making power. Some forms of participation may bring more worker satisfaction than other forms depending on the employee and what appeals to them. Some forms of *Participation* identified by Sagie and Koslowski (2007) are:

Formal employee participation in work decisions, for example, voting. *Informal participation* in work decisions, where employees- although not part of the formal decision making process are able to influence the decision makers, and through them the final decisions. *Employee ownership*, in which the employees/workers influence is achieved by granting them shares of stock in the company. Morris et al (2006: 328) says that employee financial participation makes employees feel that they are part of the company and to create a feeling of involvement and interest in the company's future. *Consultation*, in which case employees have formal consultation roles through various mechanisms like quality circles in which bonuses are offered for improvements in labour productivity. *Representative participation* in decision making, where they are allowed to participate in the process of decision making through unions. Although Sagie and Koslowski (2007) in their book identified different kinds of participation utilized in the workplace by the organization and are listed above. Redman and Wilkinson (2009) classified participation into five broad segments.

The first classification is communication. This is a weak form of participation and implies a top-down approach where employees get information from management via emails, written memos, internal newsletters, company intranet and so forth. The disadvantage of this categorisation of participation is that it lacks objectivity, and a strong bias towards the ideologies and views of management exist. Sagie and Koslowski (2007) did not lay a category for communication.

The second classification is upward problem-solving. And this takes communication one step further by tapping into the ideas of employees for improvements as well as encourage a more cooperative industrial relations climate. Some examples include quality circles, focus groups, and employee suggestion schemes to name a few. The disadvantage is skewed toward management, since this classification is criticized as being 'unitarist' in nature. This is actually quite similar to the 'consultation' point identified by Sagie and Koslowski (2007).

The third classification is called task-based participation. And this category's focus is on the actual job rather than management's processes for participation. This category of participation is noted in the literature (Redman and Wilkinson 2009) as '*celebrated as a root to sustained organisational performance via employee commitment and motivation'*. Practices would include things like job enlargement and job enrichment. The disadvantage is that it often leads to work becoming more stressful and harder than job enrichment.

The forth category is team-working. This entails having self-managed teams within the organisation work towards achieving better organisational performance through people. Team-working is quite popular today in many organisations and forms part of the curriculum in many university courses. Working in teams prepares students for the world of work. The down side of team-working is that it puts pressure on members to conform to group norms.

The final category is representative participation. And the most appropriate example is via trade union representation. The literature says that this form of participation has been declining in recent years particularly in Europe. However, in a Caribbean context, it has intensified. Take for example, in Trinidad, trade unions are quite vocal and they ask employees to stay away from work or strike on certain days. Many immigration officers heeded that call in early 2014 when the main office was open on a half-day basis. There was also another instance where Caribbean airlines employees called in "sick" resulting in more than forty (40) flight cancellations (Trinidad and Tobago Newsday Newspaper 2014). Unions indeed still have strength and power in the employment relationship and can influence its members who they represent.
There are different degrees of employee participation as well. Bar-Haim Aviad (2002: 16) outlines three: *Pseudo-participation*. Mere feelings of workers that they participate in decision making, while in actuality no substantial changes are made in their roles or in the power structure of the workplace.

Partial-participation. A real state of workers' participation in decisions. However their participation is confined to minor issues in their immediate work situation or work group, and no structural changes are made to equalize workers' responsibilities and rewards versus managers.

Full-participation. A full entry of workers and their delegates to all levels of decision making at the workplace.

While pseudo-participation in the literature is quite scarce, it plays politics with the employees. Since it projects an image that they are doing something beneficial for the organisation and themselves, but in reality it does not take employee participation into consideration. Everything has been predetermined by those on top of the organisation. Examples of partial participation and full participation are more prevalent in the literature. The types of decisions that organizations need to make would also require different degrees of involvement. Boxall et al (2008: 149), "…*decisions on health and safety will often (and, in many countries, must by law) involve employee representatives in the evaluation of risks and their avoidance in current operations and in the purchase of new technology*." Therefore, the scale of employee involvement varies by the type of decision the organisation needs to make.

Joensson (2008: 596) "…*different forms of participation may imply varying degree of influence, termed* 'intensity of participation'*; participation may encompass the single employee, work groups or all the employees as a group, and participative decision may concern different issues*". This quotation drives the point that the intensity or amount of participation depend on the issue at hand. The difference between the types of participation and degrees of participation is, that the degree of participation gives an indication of the level of power which comes with participation, whereas the different kinds of participation talks about the different means by which employees are incorporated in the organisation and given a voice.

Trinidad and Tobago's Hospitality Sector

According to Invest TT (2015) both islands boast of natural attractions, historical sites, uniquely appealing food and warm hospitable people. The population of Trinidad and Tobago combined is approximately 1.3 million people. Trinidad is much larger and its main tourism product is geared towards the business tourism market because of its strong oil economy. It is very fast-paced and lively. Unlike Tobago, which is smaller and its main market is leisure tourism and eco-tourism. Because the markets are different for both islands, the hospitality establishments existing on both islands are tailored to their specific clients. Business type hotels like Hyatt, Marriott, Hilton and others will be found in Trinidad. While Tobago has the smaller leisure type properties with a few seaside resorts. The hotels in Trinidad for example are much larger in size than the ones in Tobago. Trinidad also offers a wider selection of dining and cultural diversity.

Historically, the colonial masters of both islands were different at one point in time, and this had an impact on the way things were done on both islands respectively (Nalis 2015). Tobago was more of a slavery island than Trinidad. Slavery was more intense and concentrated in Tobago, there were more slaves in a smaller geographic area and the top-down approach to management was used back then. Plantation owners would tell the slaves what to do and how to do it. In Trinidad, slavery was the same as Tobago, but it was dispersed over a larger area and the Spanish Government had a strategy in 1783 called the "*Cedula of Population*" which sought to encourage population growth by encouraging migration of French Planters to settle in Trinidad. This migration had cultural implications for the population of slaves in Trinidad. And many slaves in the 1820s understood plantation commands in different languages. There was also a mulatto race following the 1783 *Cedula* mushrooming. Mulattoes were the children of white plantation owners and black slave mothers (Spartacus Educational 2015). These mulattoes were in charge of some plantations in Trinidad and many of them were to an extent less harsh in terms of managing slaves on the plantation than the whites.

By the year 1838, slavery was totally abolished on both islands and while Tobago remained with a significantly black population. The population of Trinidad changed and there were small groups of French, Spanish, English, mulattoes, Amerindian and other groups; by the 1850s, there were Indian immigrants and small Chinese shopkeepers as well.

Today, no more plantation societies exist in Trinidad or Tobago. The economy has changed and while Tobago is focused on tourism. Trinidad's main products are oil, natural gas, manufacturing, and a strong business tourism sector. Statistically, the hospitality and tourism sector accounts for about 10.6% of the Gross Domestic Product (WTTC, 2014) and this figure is projected to rise given the government's current diversification developmental plan. This sector provides the best opportunities for inter-sector linkages to curb many problems such as revenue leakages via high spending on imports, and high food prices in society. In fact, tourism has been articulated as a strategy for diversification in the National Tourism Policy document of Trinidad and Tobago. A major success factor with Tourism—is the fact that it is a service industry—one that requires manual people skills. Employees and people are at the heart of success for the hospitality industry.

Organizations in Trinidad & Tobago have also proactively responded by adopting voluntary initiatives to manage their employees and ensure that they get the most out of them while meeting and surpassing targets and objectives. Specifically, multinational companies that have subsidiary operations in Trinidad, such as Marriott, Hilton and Hyatt are protecting their global customer image and value by ensuring that their Human Resource strategy initiatives are adopted by their subsidiaries to give them a competitive advantage. The employees in Trinidad are encouraged to use their initiative and be part of the decision making process. In Tobago, the strategy seems to be a top-down approach where the owners/managers like to have control and ensure a certain standard, so employees are not really given a lot of room in decision making.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Employee Participation in Organisations

Lawler III (1986) outlines some pros and cons associated with employee participation. Participative management offers some advantages:

1. It can create organisations where people at all levels think for themselves and manage their own work, (less direct supervision may be needed).
2. When people work and use both their hands and minds, they usually take more care about how they do their work, and this leads to higher quality products that are internationally competitive.
3. Being internationally competitive suggests that they are contributing and belong to a productive society in which work positively contributes to the quality of people's lives.
4. When people take pride in their work and they are more productive, this can assist firms in being competitive in international markets and be admired for their management skills. As in the case outlined by Lawler III (1986), where in the 1960s a book on the dominance and effectiveness of American management was a best-seller in Europe (*The American Challenge*, Servan- Schreiber, 1968), just as in the early 1980s a book about Japanese management was a best-seller in the United States (*Theory Z*, Ouchi, 1981).
5. By pushing information, power, knowledge and rewards down the organisation, this can affect the way people are treated down the organisation; with respect, democratic rights, dignity etc. And not treated like robots as suggested in scientific management practices. Scientific management was coined by Frederick Taylor in 1911 and his focus was that the work of lower level participants in organisations should be specialized, standardised and simplified. While this was appropriate at a point in time and ensured efficiency and productivity in organisations (it was a best practice) because it suited the environment then (both the company's and the external). But it did not encourage employees to use discretion, be flexible or foster any sort of motivation or be

empowered. It was top-down in nature and thinking, coordinating and controlling were left to top management.

6. Knowledge is very important and can prevent major mistakes from happening if it is allowed to move down to lower-level members.
7. By pushing and encouraging participation by lower level employees, it can lead to innovations when it comes to problem-solving, and can lead to the development of skills which the employees did not have before.

The literature points that scientific management worked for a period of time until the external and internal environments had different requirements. Take for example, legislations and regulations today act as a guide and framework for companies to operate and not put any undue pressure on workers or take advantage of them. Today, people are treated with respect and individual rights are enshrined in constitution. Although there may be laws and regulations, some companies continue to treat workers in an unfair manner and propagate slavery conditions. Many companies around the world continue to use a top-down approach because this works for them and gives them an advantage. But there are other companies who choose to empower their employees by allowing participation to flow downwards and upwards (organic structure organisations) and this works as an advantage for them. Change happens when there is a compelling reason to change. Laws force companies to change their ways and promote fairness, sometimes best practices can be adopted by companies and made to fit with their environmental conditions and that would work for them. Some negative impacts of employee participation in organisations are:

1. It is not guaranteed to work, some employees are happy just coming to work doing what they have to do and going home.
2. Employee participation places new demands on everyone in the organisation. Employees now have to do things which they were not doing before; this can be a "black-box" for organizations.
3. Non-participative work structures gave employees the opportunities the opportunity to think about off-the-job activities and have an exciting personal and social life (Lawler 1986).
4. Employee participation may not be the right thing to do in some organisations which have a culture of being top-down/bureaucratic. In North Korea for example the ideology of *Juche* permeates the citizens and they are accustomed with being told what to do. Almost every aspect of their lives is determined by the government and this determines almost all aspects of political, economic and social life in North Korea (Kim et al 2007). This has been working for generations in North Korea and to change this ideology and culture right away is not the best strategy, since the employees will be asked to do something which they never did before.
5. Developing new skills and responsibilities for lower level participants might mean increasing their salaries. When people are trained or have new abilities, they can accomplish more and are more of an asset; therefore they should be compensated accordingly.
6. Participation takes time and can slow down decision making because a number of people have to understand and accept the decision.
7. Lawler (1986) says that if training and new experiences are part of the program expectations for personal growth and are not realized, frustration and dissatisfaction may result.

Global Employee Participation Strategies

The concept and evidence of employee participation has certainly grown over the years, especially since the 1980s across the industrialised world. Boxall and Purcell (2008), in the UK forms of communication between management and employees are widely used with 91 percent of workplaces having face to face meetings. Ten years ago this was not the case. Firms are realizing that the environment today is much more competitive and intensive, and the solution is to engage employees in participative roles if they are to gain a competitive advantage.

General Electric (GE) **(**www.ge.com)   General Electric has been one of the premiere companies reported by *Fortune Magazine* in March 2009. GE seeks to lead in the workplace and marketplace integrity by respecting the human rights of everyone touched by their business, and by enforcing legal and financial compliance.

These commitments are detailed in their integrity policy, *The Spirit & The Letter*, which every employee supports with a signed pledge. They are further enabled by their ombudsperson process, which encourages any employee to report integrity concerns without fear of reprisal. Because of strategies like these, and engaging employees to participate, General Electric has been on the top ten companies list worldwide. According to their website, "*GE regularly engages with employees to understand their opinions on their relationship with the company and to tap into their unique perspectives in their fields of work*". They are using the tacit knowledge of their employees to gain a competitive advantage.

*Wal-Mar*t (www.walmartstores.com), Wal-Mart stores have been one of the top companies in the USA, and have continued to grow and appeal to many shoppers even in times of recession. There is the annual Associate Opinion Survey which is done by the company and this give a good indication of how employees are feeling and it gives the company an avenue to implement some suggestions of the employee. Since the company set up an office of diversity in 2004, their associates- at all levels and from all backgrounds- have access to additional opportunities to be engaged within the company. "Mentor Me" programmes, inclusion training, and different resource groups within the company all contribute their ideas and learning. Their feedback and involvement help create a better environment in making Wal-Mart better. Each month, the company hosts town hall meetings for people to learn more about what's going on as well as ask questions and give feedback. After each meeting associates can give feedback and suggestions through the Wal-Mart intranet site. Wal-Mart has an open door policy; this means that any associate can share views, feedback, concerns or ideas with any manager or any executive at any time. Wal-Mart appreciates and values employee involvement and their organic structure is testament to that. There is a chain of command but information and communication flow freely upwards, downwards and across.

IBM (www.ibm.com) "*As companies struggle to keep costs down and streamline operations, they can find themselves losing ground in the equally important battle to hold the loyalty of customers and employees. Virtual workplaces—online "spaces" where people can find each other, communicate, collaborate and share documents—provide ways for organizations to gain ground on both fronts. By connecting employees and integrating them into the flow of on demand business, they allow businesses to save money, while benefiting from the responsiveness and intelligence that only human interaction can provide.*" According to the IBM website, the company has built its foundation in sync with the quotation above and included employee participation as the strategy that is required to assist businesses to compete in a turbulent environment. Their strategy is maps itself on '*bringing employees together is what virtual workplaces are all about. Along with process integration and data integration, people integration is one of the pillars of on demand business. When employees can find each other, communicate and pass along experience, regardless of departmental, functional or geographic boundaries, organizations as a whole can realize huge gains in productivity and responsiveness. And when employees can gather into online communities centred around their areas of expertise (like SCM, CRM, and HR), they can focus on solving business problems, rather than chasing each other down through phone calls, e-mails and other isolated communication methods*'. (www.ibm.com)

Where the Hospitality sector is concerned, some employee participation strategies used are: Hyatt. According to Bemporad (2012), companies need to take inspiration from Hyatt: the hospitality company's corporate responsibility platform, Hyatt Thrive, leverages the power of peer-to-peer influence and social networking to connect and empower 300 Green Teams worldwide. Employees use a Facebook-like interface to post photos, questions, and even presentations about their local sustainability efforts. By providing employees with a virtual workplace, and providing them with information, it actually equips their

employees to fit into their strategy which is tied into company productivity and efficiency. To support employees' involvement online Hyatt teams with its employees to support organisations and causes in the community where the employees live and work. In other words they are rewarded for their involvement in the company's work culture. Mc Donald's Restaurants. Ayupp and Chung (2010) reports that McDonald's Restaurants, has suggestion schemes; autonomous work groups and they have also removed some levels of management to make decision making faster and to empower employees. Hilton and Marriott Hotels also follow similar strategies to McDonalds. Where they empower employees to make decisions and encourage their employees to feel valued and part of the organization.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research offers empirical information (Neuman 2006, Willis 2007, and Punch 2005), deep insight and richness of detail (Neuman 2006; Minichiello and Kottler 2009; Willis 2007; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; Anfara and Mertz 2006; Punch 2005; and Outhwaite and Turner 2007). A qualitative research methodology was primarily selected to gather exploratory data in the area of employee participation in the hospitality sector in Trinidad and Tobago. This was necessary to get rich detail and probe the topic. A thematic analysis was then used for collating similar themes that emerged in the interview process. The data collected from a structured questionnaire was administered to seven key industry professionals who are located in the areas of: Ministry of Tourism (MOT); THA Division of Transport and Tourism (Tobago); Bureau of Standards; Trinidad Hilton; Trinidad Hyatt; Magdalena Hotel in Tobago, and TTHTI (Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute). Interviews were done with seven stakeholders representing the key institutions identified, and interviews ranged from 30 minutes to seventy-one minutes. Snowball sampling was used. All stakeholders were keen to be part of the process and share their knowledge as it related to employee participation in their organization.During the course of the interviews several variables emerged that were linked to the employee participation concept. These variables include: employee experience; educational qualifications of the employee; and shifting organizational procedures due to globalization.

The formulation of the questionnaire entailed adapting relevant questions found in the literature (Redman and Wilkinson 2009; Bratton and Gold 2007; Boxall and Purcell 2008) with a view to addressing and exploring the area of employee participation. The questionnaire comprised of three sections with all open-ended questions. The first section asked questions pertaining to employee participation and its importance. The second section raised questions relating to the pros and cons of it. Finally, the third section solicited responses on issues pertaining to strategies and recommendations regarding the way forward for hospitality organizations in Trinidad and Tobago.

During the interview process, triangulation was employed to ensure data was reliable and valid. According to Neuman (2006), triangulation can take the form of simply rephrasing a question from the semi structured list and asking the interviewees the same question phrased in different way. Once the answers to the triangulated one, as well as the original question was the same, it means that the data can be considered accurate. The paper will also shed light on the various strategies employed by global organizations and discuss whether these could be applied to the industry in Trinidad or Tobago.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Employee Participation

Trinidad and Tobago is one country but the organizational dynamics existing on both islands are quite different. All stakeholders that were interviewed mentioned that the organizational culture as it relates to employee participation were different. Five stakeholders specifically used the phrase "*top-down*" when talking about employee participation in Tobago. In a Trinidad context, employee participation was viewed

as very participative and "*engaging*" by all seven stakeholders. Does it mean that Trinidad will always be more successful and effective?

Sagie and Koslowski (2007) argue that in some organisations employee participation can make a difference to organisational effectiveness but that depends on the culture of the organisation which determines if employee participation is a feasible option. Different societies may attribute different meanings to participation, and the meanings in one country would be different to what it would mean in another country. The point here is that employee participation can create opposite effects in different countries. An organisation within a country that has a history of being told what to do and being conditioned cannot shed that culture easily as in the case of Tobago. Take for example if an organisation has to perform a highly repetitive simple task, participative management may not fit or be a "best fit" in that circumstance. Lawler III (1986) gives an example; "*...most banks have individuals who encode checks at the rate of over a thousand an hour. Again, effectiveness depends on non-thinking repetition.*"

However participation as outlined earlier can assist in empowering employees as well (Ivancevich 2007). It gives employees a feeling of well being and a sense of achievement when they get things done. Ivancevich (2007: 125) gave a case study example of Southwest Airlines and how they were competing through its people:

> "*...the passenger on an Oklahoma City flight headed to an important business meeting with no necktie. Flight attendant Jennifer Smith manages to find him a tie before the flight has even landed. Southwest Airlines is an organisation that has built its business and corporate culture around the tenants of total quality management and customer service. Focus on the customer, employee involvement and empowerment and continuous improvement are the company's strategic focus.*"

By fostering a culture of employee involvement and customer service, Southwest Airlines has developed some of the best employee-management relations in the industry. The company has never had a labour strike. So this is another benefit of employee participation in the literature- it can foster better relations with employees and management.

Four of the stakeholders that were interviewed said that they were rewarded by their company when they participate, and make the organisation more effective; as in the case of service industries like hospitality, when employees are more willing and able to use discretion. This discretion can create a favourable image and lead to return business especially if the employee gets it right, just like the case example of Southwest Airlines earlier. But at the same time, power without knowledge, information and rewards will lead to poor decisions. And maybe this is why in Tobago, decision making is not pushed down the channel.

Participation motivates employees and the literature backs this up by propagating the ideologies and theory of Maslow. Maslow points out that individuals have multiple needs, some of which can be satisfied by rewards like pay, recognition, promotion and other things. Motivation theory is important but individuals must see connections between their performance and rewards. Boon et al (2007: 940) agrees with this point and adds "*employee participation is linked to empowerment and team working, but also focuses on the self esteem an employee has and how they rank their own skill levels and success within an organisation. If all these are managed to produce positive results, this should yield positive job involvement for individuals*". But the counter side of that argument is identified by Lawler III (1986) " *...an organisation may clearly tie a number of very positive rewards to a particular level of performance and still find that the individuals are not motivated to perform at that level simply because they do not perceive that they can achieve the performance.*" And as a result, you do not have employee participation to the fullest degree by members or to no degree in organisations.

Manolopous (2008: 15) did a study on employee motivation, and it was established that in the Greek public sector, extrinsic rewards such as salary and job security were more motivating than intrinsic rewards, like the opportunity to be creative and "make a difference". This shows that in some cultures and organisations, employees are motivated by different things. Employee participation has been affiliated with the notion that it has very important implications for the effectiveness of participative management approaches because these approaches change at least part of the formal structure in organisations. Participation and employee involvement as stated before can be good for organisations, and it can have instances where it would not work. Pseudo participation was seen as being ubiquitous in Tobago, and due to the hustle and bustle of Trinidad's busy climate- partial participation was seen as prevalent there. Five stakeholders also mentioned that participation depends on the issue at hand, the type of task, the type of employees, and the level of education.

<u>Is Employee Participation in the Workplace the Way Forward?</u>

All seven stakeholders pointed out that because of globalization, the working culture in Tobago will change. Globalization has been referred to as the collapse of time, space and boarders which make countries seem even closer, issues which affect one country have a ripple effect and can impact on other countries as well. Information technology has been one of the factors which bridged the gap between countries and fostered a 'global village'. Because of globalization, movement of people and goods is easier today than it was ten years ago; information flow is at the click of a button. And as a result, organisation's best practices are converging and being applied in different countries where it did not exist before. The stakeholder from the THA (Tobago House of Assembly) Division of Transport and Tourism stated that some organizations (four in particular) in Tobago are putting "*participation strategies*" on the front burner in their organizations hoping it would lead to higher levels of efficiency. This recent trend is due to the impact of globalization in Tobago. Sagie and Koslowski (2007) exclaim that the power of the American economy and its advantages in communication capabilities gives its view of participation an advantage over alternatives. Many companies from traditional societies imitate the American form of participation without ever internalizing it.

The Caribbean context is a good example of what Sagie and Koslowski (2007) were trying to say. In the Caribbean, many of the developing nations follow the practices of those from the developed world. So it is not uncommon to see islands like Barbados, Trinidad, Antigua and other countries following and mapping themselves along the lines of the developed countries like USA, Canada, and UK. What might also assist and act as a catalyst, is the fact that people in the Caribbean have strong ties to those in the developed countries. A cultural Diaspora exists, and if one were to ask a Trinidadian if he/she has a friend or relative in the USA for example…the answer would be 'yes'. The point here is that having ties to developed countries enhances the ability to acquire information about what's happening there and how that information can be used to gain a competitive advantage.

Law and regulation in some countries will influence how things are done there. And in recent times laws have certainly influenced and paid attention to the workplace (OSHA) and the employee voice. Some companies have to conform to new ways of operation, while others have been practicing it for a while. Eamets et al (2008: 223), "*Despite the lack of specific legislation on employee financial participation, research how that individual Estonian enterprises use various financial participation scheme-employee share and profit sharing.*"

Joensson (2008) and Tonnenson (2005) have agreed that employee participation is important and signals inclusion and status in the organization for employees. Tonnenson (2005: 196) in particular asserts and gives the example that Scandinavian countries have a long tradition of promoting employee participation and workplace democracy. Research is being carried out in a ten-year research programme (on employee participation) called "Value Creation 2010" and aspires to contribute to improvement in that direction.

Bhatnagar (2007: 17) "*Employee engagement can contribute to employee retention since it involves giving your workforce a sense of participation, freedom and trust*." This can motivate employees by giving them a feeling of self worth, and they can stay longer at the company. Problems associated with employee turnover and costs to train new employees are ameliorated if employees are allowed to participate. Townsend et al (2008: 24) supports this point and goes further to explain that employees can in fact be the source of competitive advantage. "*The employees of virtually every organisation in the world refer to their place of work as "my company" when they are at home. Taking advantage of that natural feeling of ownership by extending trust and empowerment to all employees and giving them a means to be engaged in the continual improvement of everything the organisation does is in the best interest of the employer, the employees, and their customers.*"

Morris et al (2006: 338), says that companies are trying to keep employees in their company for long periods of time, since they realize that employees hold the key to success of the organisation and the performance of the organisation to achieving its targets and goals. Management has used many types of incentives to keep employees from leaving and to ensure that employees are satisfied. "*The use of specific forms of incentive-based pay represents quite simply, managerial efforts to secure if not compliance, at least tacit consent, with the emphasis on the maximisation of shareholder value.*" This means that shareholders (including employees holding shares) will be encouraged to remain with the firm to maximize their shareholdings.

Employee participation has certainly grown over the years in some countries and is continuing to grow. Alison Ward (2008: 12) explains that employee participation has been growing, "*During the previous three years HR has facilitated an increase in pan-European employee engagement levels by an average of five percent each year*". The article goes on to explain that there is a direct correlation between employee engagement levels and business performance in Europe.

In other countries like North Korea, participation in the workplace does not fit into their culture and how they do things. Cultures change over time to adapt to the environment and while one cannot predict the future. Based on the research and literature, one would maintain the view that some organizations would not benefit from employee participation, and would support the counter side of the argument as well- where participation is a way forward and can bring many benefits if managed properly.
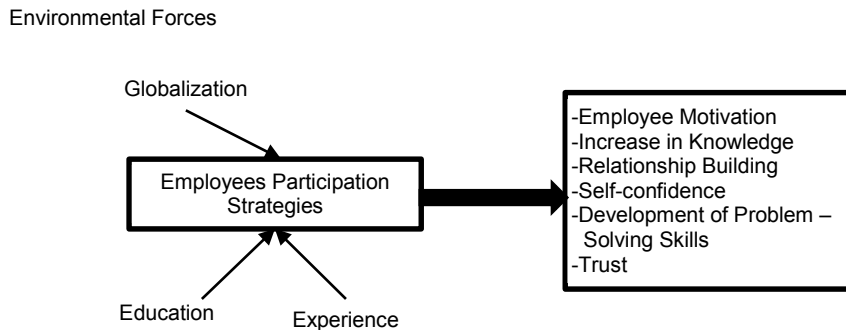
Future Strategy and Recommendations

All stakeholders agreed that the *employee participation* trend is one that is growing rapidly in Trinidad, and it is slowly making its way into the human resource practices in Tobago. Once it is seen as something beneficial and managers in Tobago start seeing the benefits of trickling power down to employees, it will certainly grow. One recommendation proposed was to have management workshops in Tobago that deals with the different aspects of employee participation, and showcase how it can be beneficial. Six stakeholders agreed that employee participation is linked to the following outcomes: employee motivation, increase in knowledge, relationship building, self-confidence, development of problem solving skills and trust. This is displayed in Figure 1.

All stakeholders felt that globalization, education and experience would have an impact on employee participation strategies used in hospitality entities. It was felt that with experience, and as employee experience grows with time- employees can be encouraged to participate more in decision making. Education and increased knowledge can also lead to more engagement by employees. Globalization and the increase in multinational companies such as Hyatt, Hilton and other brands and their best-practices can certainly be used as a model to have employees participate in decision making.

It was unanimously agreed that employee participation is certainly an area that can lead to competitive advantage if it is fostered in the right environment. Some strategies for Trinidad entail following the strategies of the global hospitality brands like Hyatt, McDonalds and Hilton. Where they make use of: online social networking to engage staff; suggestion schemes; autonomous work groups and they have also the removal of some levels of management to make decision making faster and to empower employees.

Figure 1-Benefits of Employee Participation Based on Stakeholder Views

Environmental Forces

Globalization

Employees Participation Strategies

-Employee Motivation
-Increase in Knowledge
-Relationship Building
-Self-confidence
-Development of Problem –
  Solving Skills
-Trust

Education   Experience

This figure displays the projected benefits of employee participation in hospitality establishments according to the stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

This paper gave an insight into the area of employee participation, which has been one of the trends in human resource management, and the different practices associated with employee participation (Redman and Wilkinson 2009) have been shaped by environmental forces in different countries, such as; different political, economic and legal climates. It has surely grown over the years and cases substantiate how useful it can be. Some of the largest companies have employee involvement programs which give weight to employees. Trinidad and Tobago were focused on as two separate islands with each having a unique history and culture. Both islands differed in their general approach towards employee participation, and Tobago was not as liberal as Trinidad when it came to engaging employees.

Employee participation can take different forms and be rewarding for employees. Some cultures do not propagate the ideology that employees need to participate. In fact there are a few disadvantages for participation in the work place which were discussed. While the future is uncertain, more and more organizations are involving employees in the organization and encouraging participation. It may be encouraged for different reasons, but the fact is- that it has been growing.

Boxall and Purcell (2008), Sagie and Koslowski (2007) point to the fact that while employee participation continues to grow in the western world and how it operatesin Trinidad-it does not mean that it should be cast in stone as the best way for all organisations. It depends on the culture and type of job. While in some places, laws are influential in employee participation, for example; "*The European Court of Justice, in a series of rulings, has established that all workers have the right to be consulted and trade union exclusivity can no longer be sustained.*" (Boxall and Purcell 2008: 146).

There cannot be any conclusive answers as to if employee participation is the universally best practice for organisations today, just as there can be no finite universally accepted code of ethics. But what can be predicted is that the traditional societies are following the modus operandi of the developed countries with the most power. The United States of America, and European countries have been some of the benchmarked countries which smaller less developed countries take aim at. And if this trend continues

then employee participation in many countries around the globe will continue to spread and become adopted even in cultures where it did not exist before.

This exploratory research work has some limitations. For example, the sample size examined is small and one should be very careful when generalizing. Another limitation is that this study did not examine the other variables of employee engagement or participation. Cost and time were also constraints when this study was undertaken. Additionally, the results and findings were somewhat restricted given that the literature search found little empirical work on employee participation in Trinidad and Tobago.

This study leaves room for future research to be done in the area of employee participation in Trinidad and Tobago, for example quantitative studies can now be done to gauge the scope of change in Tobago. Other studies can also be done to gauge other variables and how they mediate or moderate the concept of employee participation on both islands.

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BIOGRAPHY

Narendra Ramgulam is a Tourism Lecturer at the Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute. His research interests include Business Tourism, Sustainability studies, Anthropology, Globalization and Management in the 21st Century. He can be reached at the Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute, Chaguaramas, Trinidad. Narendra can be contacted at nramgulam@tthti.edu.tt or n.ramgulam@gmail.com