

# High Involvement Work Systems in Canadian Automotive Plants: Voice Mechanisms and their Consequences



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# Introduction

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- Since the 1980s there has been a significant restructuring of auto industry works practices e.g. from “Fordism” to “Lean Production” (Womack et al, 1990)
- Considerable academic attention in Canada during 1990s and early 2000s and its implications for employees and unions, but less since then....
- Yet evidence of a continued significant uptake of new work organization using “High Involvement/ Performance Work Systems” emphasizing ‘employee voice’ in US (Lippert et al, 2014; Cutcher-Gershenfeld et al, 2015) and Canada e.g. Work Class Manufacturing systems at Fiat Chrysler Canada

# High Involvement/Performance Work Systems

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“Typically, they include participatory teams and job rotation, high commitment practices such as problem-solving groups and extensive employee consultation, and complementary HRM policies such as generous training provision and job security measures. They also rely on co-operative industrial relations systems based on partnership between management and unions” (Danford et al, 2008, 152).

Can have some overlaps with ‘lean production’ methods, but are more holistic, favoring greater employee ***autonomy, participation and learning*** (Arundel et al, 2007; Danford et al, 2008; Totterdill, 2009; Beblavy et al 2012)

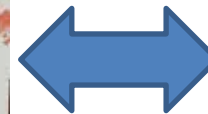
An organizational system empowered by ***employee voice*** (Lippert et al, 2014).

# Direct and indirect employee voice

## Direct employee voice



## Indirect employee voice



# HIWS and employee voice

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## Outcomes of voice in HIWS:

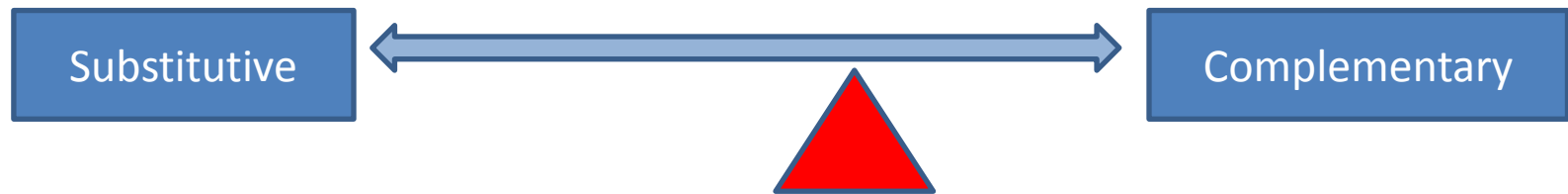
- Production efficiency: process and production innovation (Totterdill, 2015; Pini and Antonioli, 2015)
- Relational performance: ‘win-win’ for firms, unions, and employees (Huselid, 1995; Kochan et al, 1997; Applebaum, 2002; Gill, 2008)
- Critical evaluations: “win-lose” ... but under what conditions does voice in HIWS become “win-lose” or “win-win”? (Kumar, 2000; Godard, 2004; Danford et al, 2008).

# To be explored...

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What are the employee voice mechanisms in place? What is the ***extension*** of employee voice?

What is the balance between ***direct*** and ***indirect employee voice***?



# To be explored...

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- To what extent does this balance influence employees' perception of management, unions (employee representative committee), and of management-union relationship?



# Relevance of the research

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- Employee voice empowers unionized and non-unionized organizational performance when:
  - Solid unions/employee representation (Gill 2009): union supported by membership
  - the use of employee focused business strategies and/or the willingness of managers to co-operate with unions (Pohler and Luchak, 2014)
  - Employees and unions are confident that their employment is secure (Lui et al, 2009; Lippert et al, 2014)
  - Direct and indirect voice are deployed in a complementary way (European cases) (Nielsen and Lundvall, 2003; Pini and Antonioli, 2015)



# The case

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- ***Auto industry*** long a focus of lean and HIWS/HPWS implementation and challenge of managing work intensification with greater employee engagement (e.g. see Womack et al, 1990; Holmes and Kumar, 1997; Rinehart et al, 1997; Lewchuck, et al, 2001; Neirotti, 2015)
- High employee voice in Europe whereas greater “*reluctance*” in North America (Helper et al, 2012, 25; Lippert et al, 2014; Totterdill, 2015)
- Adoption of some forms of HPWS in Canada, is relatively wide spread (see Statistics Canada, 2003 a, b; Konrad 2006; Capoletti et al, 2007; Adams, 2008)... *but research not centrally focused on employee voice*

# Research strategies

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## Goals

- (i) Map the implementation of HIWS/HPWS practices in the Canadian automobile industry...
- ... with a specific focus on employee voice mechanisms
- (ii) In unionized operations, trace the balance between direct and indirect employees voice mechanisms by firm
- Measure the impact of the firm's voice balance on employees' perception of:
  - union,
  - management
  - union-management interaction

# Research strategies (phase I)

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## Phase I:

***Semi-structured interviews*** with HR managers and in unionized operations with local union executives

Map HPWS/HIWS implementation

*Voice mechanisms:*

- direct and indirect
- establishment/duration/end
- frequency
- participants
- topics
- effectiveness perception



# Research strategies (phase II)

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## ***Phase II: In one unionized plant, a survey of employees:***

Measure:

- Opinion about local unions (confidence in unions; union commitment; union leadership)
  - Scales from: Frangi et al 2014; Baberger 1999; Fullagar et al. 2004.
  
- Opinion about management (“us” versus “them”; management competence, efficacy, and employee support)
  - Scales from: Frangi et al 2017; Patterson et al. 2005; Ugboro, I. O., & Obeng, K. (2000).
  
- Opinion about union-management relationship (competitive-cooperative; for the organization – for “themselves”; open-closed to employees)
  - Scales to be developed drawing on Kochan and Rubinstein 2000; 2010; Oxenbridge & Brown 2004)
  
- Socio-demographic controls

## Possible future developments

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- Automotive sector wide:
  - Survey of HR management about employee voice mechanisms and firm efficiency
  - A survey in both unionized and non-unionized plants about employee perceptions of voice mechanisms and their impact on work performance and overall quality of work life.
  - Survey developed drawing also on WES
  - Possibility of longitudinal analyses and international comparisons (Italy and Brazil)

# Q&A

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***Thank you!***

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