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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Mapping employee involvement and participation in institutional context: Mick Marchington's applied pluralist contributions to human resource management research methods, theory and policy

Tony Dundon[1,2] | Adrian Wilkinson[3,4] | Peter Ackers[5]

[1]Department of Work and Employment Studies, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland

[2]Work and Equalities Institute (WEI), University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

[3]Griffith University, Nathan, Queensland, Australia

[4]University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

[5]Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK

Correspondence
Tony Dundon, Department of Work and Employment Studies, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland.
Email: Tony.Dundon@UL.ie

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Abstract

Our paper examines how the work of Mick Marchington integrated older forms of employee participation with newer patterns of employee involvement. The paper shows how Employee Involvement and Participation (EIP) is central to contemporary Human Resource Management (HRM) in four distinct ways: first is the 'theoretical' integration of pluralism into newer HRM approaches; second is the 'practical' insights gained from what was happening at organisational level; third is the contributions to ongoing 'policy debates' about fair work; and finally, his emphasis on 'context-sensitive methods' link macro, meso and micro developments. We refer to three specific projects and related periods: a Department of Employment funded project during the late 1980s and early 1990s which developed the waves and escalator concepts of EIP; a Chartered Institute of Personnel Development project concerned with employee voice and management choice in the 2000s, which gave insight to multiple meanings of EIP and strategic choice; and research concerned with the

Abbreviations: ACAS, Advisory, Conciliatory and Arbitration Service; CIPD, Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development; CMS, critical management studies; EA, employer association; EI, employee involvement; EIP, employee involvement & participation; ESOPS, employee-share ownership schemes; EWERC, European Work and Employment Research Centre; HRM, human resource management; I&O, *industrial and organisational (psychology)*; IPA, Involvement and Participation Association; IR/ER, industrial relations/employment relations; NZ, New Zealand; OB, organisational behaviour; OCB, organisational citizenship behaviours; TQM, total quality management; TU, trade unions; UK, United Kingdom; UMIST, University of Manchester Institute of Technology; WEI, Work and Equalities Institute; WRC, Workplace Relations Commission.

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notion of fair voice from comparative cases studies across different liberal market economies from 2008 onwards. By reflecting on these research projects and periods we present a potential framework that offers continued longevity for the future study of HRM.

KEYWORDS
employee involvement, employee involvement and participation, employee voice, HR profession, participation, pluralist HRM, qualitative

Practitioner notes

What is currently known?

- Employee voice is a broad term meaning different things to different people and organisations. It covers everything from informal face-to-face communications between managers and employees to negotiations with trade unions or works councils.
- The work of Mick Marchington has advanced our understanding of employee involvement and participation (EIP) in numerous ways, including the contribution of a wave's metaphor to better unpick meanings and application.

What this paper adds?

- The paper reflects on 3 decades of work by Mick Marchington, illustrating the importance of both content and context in critically evaluating both EIP and the field of human resource management (HRM).
- The paper develops a multi-dimensional and multi-method schema from Marchington's research contributions to advance a distinctive institutional pluralism to HRM as a social science field of study.

The implications for practitioners

- The paper presents a framework that may guide future research, policy and practice around HRM and fairer voice.
- The implications demonstrate the utility of a critical pluralist approach to both the study and application of HRM.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Mick Marchington first came to prominence as a human resource management (HRM) scholar in the 1980s, a period of dramatic change in Western economies and societies. Those years saw the foundation of the *Human Resource Management Journal* (HRMJ) in 1990, of which Mick would become the fourth Editor-in-Chief (Farndale et al., 2020). The 'neo-liberal' governments of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US were at the forefront of a global transformation to the world of work: out went economic planning of the Bretton Woods era, and in came a market-driven individualism, with managers increasingly intolerant of collective-based decision-making in industry (Dundon & Rafferty, 2018). This emerging neo-liberal project posed major challenges to the social sciences, especially for those focussed on the study of work and the management of people.

In 1979, British trade unions had reached a peak with 55% membership and 75% collective bargaining (CB) coverage (Ackers, 2019). Within a few years trade union participation diminished, and a new managerial language

had emerged: Business Schools were offering courses in HRM, while slogans such as 'profit-through-people', or the 'search for excellence' were seen as reflecting a move towards greater individualism (Bacon, 2003; Storey, 1992). The Workplace Employment Relations Surveys (WERS) began to quantitively map these shifts to the world of work (Millward & Stevens, 1986). However, there was no simple or quick transition in how people were managed. Deindustrialisation led to the collapse of large-scale industrial heartlands, with a growing private service sector that was largely non-union. In the public sector, unionisation remained relatively strong, although with encroaching market values, the preceding post-war consensus of institutional cooperation waned (Purcell, 1993).

Mick Marchington led a number of key research projects examining the influence of the above contextual changes on how people were managed at work. These projects followed a distinctive social science approach within a 'sceptical case study tradition of industrial relations pluralism' (Ackers et al., 2006, p. 82). Other contemporaries who bridged the IR and emerging HRM academic fields included David Guest, Willy Brown, John Purcell, Keith Sisson and John Storey; the latter three were also former editors of HRMJ (Farndale et al., 2020). Despite the rhetoric of a new approach to HRM with humans as a strategic resource for competitive advantage, scholars with a more critical eye, such as Mick, have shown that there remains a harder undercurrent to managements' ideology of control. At times management would legitimise authority by 'commission', and at other times by 'omission' (Marchington & Loveridge, 1979, p. 182). Contemporaries have similarly suggested that the new HRM sought to 'discover how psychology could be used to raise productivity, engender employee cooperation, while at the same resisting unionisation' (see Harney et al., 2018, p. 111; Kiechel, 2012). Mick's contribution has been to unpick such new HRM ideas by linking macro-institutions and meso-factors to micro-situations. The approach was something which was very much part of the (then) Manchester School of Management (UMIST) tradition of critical social science analysis: examining management from a wider societal perspective rather than the more prescriptive Business School worldview which was interested in the machinery of corporate efficiency. In this sense, it drew some inspiration from both the Aston contingency school where Mick was employed in the 1970s and the labour process tradition which had an Aston-UMIST axis (at least up to the late 1990s before Critical Management Studies branched off from labour process).

Marchington led a series of major empirical projects, some including the current authors, which developed a distinctive mixed-method approach to map the changing experience of employee involvement and participation (EIP) over time and space. Mick's contribution to HRM was to explore both conflict and co-operation at work through detailed case studies, with strong comparative and longitudinal dimensions, while giving 'full recognition to the complexities of institutional context' (Ackers et al., 2006, p. 75). New theories emerged from these rich empirical studies, which have proved important to the development of a distinctive pluralist framing to HRM in Europe, Australia and beyond, and which differs from US and other prescriptive readings of the field (Kaufman, 2012). We suggest, moreover, that Mick's theoretical and methodological intervention in the social sciences has left an important living legacy on the field of HRM. In developing our case the article is structured as follows. Next, we summarise three major research projects led by Mick and reflect on the key contributions of each. From this we then present a broad and multi-dimensional framing of the subject area shaped by Mick's pluralist employee-centred contributions. The research projects we draw from are not the only ones from which he has shaped the field, and others in this issue comment on additional important research of Mick's.

2 | EMPLOYEE VOICE IN THE NEW WORKPLACE

2.1 | New development in employee involvement (the 1990s)

This first major study of Employee Involvement (EI) in Britain was funded by the Department of Employment (DoE) in 1989, led by Mick Marchington and John Goodman. Data were collected from 25 organisations from all the main economic sectors. This foray into non-union services and SMEs was itself quite an innovation at the time.

Continuing with an IR case study tradition while using paired comparisons within an industry setting was also a novel method, especially as many of the leading academic journals started privileging positivistic methods and the promotion of large-scale quantitative data sets. Nonetheless, the comparative method combined the *depth* of qualitative case-studies with the *breadth* of a large-scale cross-sector sample (Marchington et al., 1992). By contrast, many quantitative studies merely counted the number of companies claiming to practice techniques like total quality management (TQM), without exploring what this meant in practice in individual organisations and, crucially, how this integrated with established institutions like trade unions and CB (Wilkinson et al., 1992). Paired comparison also related changes within organisations to larger sectoral shifts (Marchington, Wilkinson, Ackers et al., 1993).

There were six main findings from this research that added a more informed multi-level analytical framing to EIP and subsequently HRM. First, the range of EIP techniques was found to be broad and incorporated four categories (or clusters) of practices: *representative participation; downward communications; financial EI*; and *upward problem-solving*, hence extending the single focus beyond unions and CB. A great strength of the study was to see the various techniques within their socio-economic and political contexts. Second came an interest in the HRM strategy behind the new EIP mechanisms. Contrary to the view of HRM as an exclusive unitarist project intent on by-passing and weakening trade unions, this study reported how management, workers and unions at times adapted to competitive pressures to carve out collaborative spaces to improve quality control and customer care: the objective being to help grow the cake rather than bargain over a zero-sum share. Third, the popular management labels attached to company initiatives, like TQM or Team Briefing, were a poor guide to how schemes were enacted in different organisations. What was a trivial gimmick in one company, might become a serious, well-resourced initiative in another setting. In short, content and context mattered (Cooke, 2018).

Fourth, the research built new theory. Specifically, EIP spread in *waves*, driven by both external influences, such as state policy and product market competition, and the internal agency of management, consultants and/or trade union objectives. This open-ended, contingency theory contrasted with Harvey Ramsay's cycles of control model, suggesting that despite the growing power ascendancy of employers, the motives for EIP varied over time and space (Ackers et al., 1992). Importantly, some workers (and unions) felt there was some added value in the new EIP landscape: they contributed not only to organisational decisions but also by being able to express their concerns to management (Marchington, Wilkinson, Ackers et al., 1993). Fifth, the research found that the new EIP agenda did not always deliver the gains in employee commitment predicted by popular management gurus (Marchington, Wilkinson & Ackers, 1993). But nor was direct EI a 'phantom' of good employment relations, as suggested by Ramsay (Ackers et al., 1992). Finally, these research findings signalled a newer HR strategy, with the different *waves* of EIP mechanisms found to be running alongside one another. A key contribution from the DoE research period was the 'Marchington et al. Escalator' of participation, depicting the extent to which workers can (and cannot) have a genuine say in matters that affect them at work (see Figure 1 below).

The escalator concept, capturing the depth of EIP, allowed for a more holistic and open-minded exploration of the varied actual relationships between CB and the newer HRM techniques. For example, subsequent studies have examined engagement, non-union voice, informal EIP, partnership or employee-share ownership schemes, among other mechanisms, and in doing so extend our understanding about shallow and/or deep voice. These have bridged the collectivist traditions of IR with a new HRM agenda of the time, applying a critical social science approach.

2.2 | Management choice and employee voice (the 2000s)

The second Marchington-led EIP project came at a time when the world of work was witnessing further socio-political shifts. Indeed, the terms participation and involvement became replaced by that of employee voice; itself reflective of changing expectations and increasing managerial power and assertiveness over the form of participation.

By the time of this fieldwork, New Labour had recently come to power in Britain and the idea of 'fairness not favours' was being promoted through an agenda of 'social partnership' between employers and unions. A new

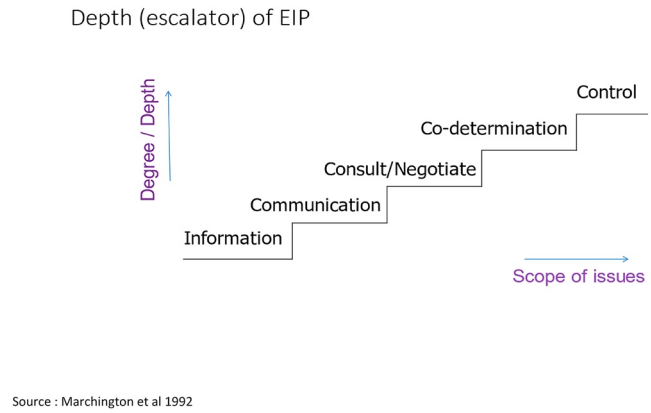

FIGURE 1 The Escalator of EIP. EIP, employee involvement and participation. *Source*: Marchington et al. (1992)

Employment Act (1999) established legal provisions for trade union recognition, alongside European Directives to enhance worker voice with European Works Councils (EWC) and rights for employees to be informed and consulted on a range of business matters. The policy direction was very much sympathetic to both newer EIP techniques and trade unions, hoping to link both to efficiency and competitiveness. The research, funded by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), looked more explicitly at *management strategy* concerning EIP choices. The research involved 18 case study organisations and provided both a comparative (UK and Republic of Ireland sample of cases) and stronger longitudinal focus, with a sub-sample of 7 companies revisited from the DoE study reported above (Marchington et al., 2001).

The research made four contributions to EIP and HRM. First, the change in state policy towards partnership influenced employer behaviour, extending the waves theory with multiple meanings of voice using both collective and individual mechanisms among some employers who saw them as complementing one another, rather than as competitive channels for EIP (Dundon et al., 2004). Of note was the dynamic nature of employee voice arrangements shaped by external policy drivers, but also management choice being constrained by various factors, some internal and others exogenous to the organisational context. The research added a more fluid shape to the meanings of EIP and worker voice.

Second, EIP had become 'normalised' and routinely embraced by a new generation of managers, many of whom rationalised employee voice in relation to broader strategic goals. This included managing workforce diversity and embracing an agenda of inclusion (Wilkinson et al., 2004). Third, strategic choice was very much shaped by employer ideology. While some employers were overtly hostile to power-sharing through trade unions, others were more sophisticated in articulating their preferences for direct and individual channels of EI. Managers were generally more resistant to conflictual, rights-based views of employee voice, preferring to stress versions that 'added value' to the business organisation (Dundon et al., 2005).

A final finding was about new strategic responses from some trade unions. Those unions in the competitive private sector, were acutely aware and tuned into changing conditions that posed difficulties around partnership. It was reported that some trade union representatives felt that too adversarial an approach with employers could result in counter management resistance; while too weak and unrepresentative, they risked becoming a redundant element in the company's EIP mix (Ackers et al., 2005). Partnership was one way of squaring this circle for some union activists on the ground: it gave them legitimacy to speak-up for members while ensuring they had access to management decision-makers. The research contributed to partnership as a complex and uneven set of techniques, showing that some trade unions were innovative in how they adapted to a New Labour agenda where partnership was charged with adding commercial value to a business through a mix of direct and indirect channels (Ackers et al., 2005).

2.3 | Towards a fair voice agenda: Changing regulatory spaces for HRM (2008 onwards)

The third research project advanced new insights concerning 'fair voice', which contributed to debates about the changing patterns of labour market regulation. Mick's research at this time became increasingly more comparative and international with projects examining EIP across liberal market regimes of the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand (NZ) (Marchington, 2015a, 2015c). The contextual factors to the research are also important. On the one hand, conservative and then Conservative-Liberal coalition governments in Britain sought to present a caring face to employment policy (for example, including support for a national minimum wage previously introduced under the Labour government, along with parental leave and other individual employment rights). On the other hand, however, the extent of imposed austerity cuts raised concerns about the scale and growth of inequalities in employment and across society (see Grimshaw & Rubery, 2012). Such concerns were also applicable in other countries experiencing the impact from a global financial crisis from 2008, in Ireland, Australia and New Zealand as comparative areas for Marchington's research across liberal market economies (Cooper & Ellem, 2008; Geary, 2015; McDonough & Dundon, 2010). It was during this time that Mick was a key inspiration in the creation of a new Fair Work Research Centre (FairWRC)[1] at the University of Manchester, becoming its first Director in 2008. Mick retired from the University of Manchester in 2011 and worked part-time with Strathclyde University until 2015. He continued to research and write about fair voice in the years 2008–2015 in part with funding from the Leverhulme Trust.

Two distinctive contributions emerged from the fair voice research. The first is the interplay of 'formal' and 'informal' EIP. Building on related streams of research which extended the depth of voice by measuring the 'embeddedness' of practices across different sectors (Cox et al., 2006, 2007), the importance of informal voice was identified with new case studies in the hospitality sector. This was a context shaped by intense market pressure, work precarity, very localised customer preferences and a sector dominated by many small firms (Marchington & Suter, 2013). These findings extended work on both the depth of EIP using the notion of embeddedness, and non-union voice within small informal work settings, many of which lacked the existence of a designated HR department, or the participation mechanisms of the type included in the earlier and larger case studies. Here voice was about relationships as much as systems. As a result, the role of line managers was especially important in mediating tensions between formal or embedded rules on the one hand, and informal practices for voice on the other, especially in situations with a high intense customer-interface. However, as Mick's research found, informal voice is not in itself an entirely satisfactory substitute for formal systems of EIP. Due to the varying capabilities of line managers, informal voice did not guarantee that line managers would involve workers or get them to participate in organisational processes. Even when workers did participate, the depth of voice could be fragile and easily wane given its dependence on individual managers (Marchington & Suter, 2013, p. 308).

The second main finding from the fair work research contributes to the concept of 'regulatory space'. Three patterns of regulation were found to both facilitate and constrain fair voice arrangements, with differing impacts on HRM. One related to 'hard' regulation, or statutory laws. Here, a pattern of hard regulation evident in Marchington's comparative case study research across the UK, Ireland, Australia and NZ was that some important legal developments for EIP had a limited outcome, at times owing to counter-mobilising and lobbying forces by some key employers and their associations when interpreting hard rules. For example, EWC regulations had little direct impact in several cases as managers had scope to adapt or minimise the details of regulatory requirements in actual practice, as found in cases in the UK and Ireland (Marchington, 2015a). Furthermore, hard regulations were moderated, to some extent, through the power of corporate lobbying and institutional choices which influenced policy outcomes on the ground (Dundon et al., 2014). In the UK, managers regarded collective forms of workplace level partnership as mechanisms to add value to business objectives (Ackers et al., 2005). In Ireland, national level partnership was predicated on voluntary principles, rather than specified statutory instruments, as had been more firmly established in other coordinated European economies. In Australia, the Federal Court could impose fines on employers who failed to consult workers, although action against employers was in practice very limited. To this end Marchington and

Dundon (2017, p. 95) concluded that while hard regulations can influence 'the *take-up* of representative voice they cannot shape the fairness of the *processes* accompanying it'.

Another pattern concerns 'soft' regulation and how structures which are typically voluntary are enacted and played out at workplace level. Soft regulations do not mandate employers to inform or consult workers, and include government funding initiatives to promote partnership or facilitate better workplace collaboration. State bodies might include the Advisory, Conciliatory and Arbitration Service (ACAS) in the UK, Workplace Relations Commission in Ireland, or the Fairwork Commission in Australia. In some instances, recommendations and voluntary codes by the like of ACAS have been shown to help improve trust and relationship-building between managers and workers (Stuart et al., 2011). In the Australian and NZ evidence, managers were found to be willing recipients of advice from these softer institutional bodies (Marchington, 2015c). However, risks prevailed as initiatives were often of a short duration and evidence of extensive voice tended to wane over time (Marchington, 2015a). The final regulatory pattern is the role from 'intermediary' forces, or what Edwards et al. (2002, p. 6) referred to as a 'large gap in the missing middle', between formal public policy and what happens in a workplace. Such 'intermediary forces' include groups who have an interest in voice and employee engagement, such as employer associations and professional bodies, including the CIPD, Involvement and Participation Association, or Engage for Success. On these issues, Mick found some positive impact across different liberal settings, particularly at workplace level (Marchington, 2015a, 2015c). For example, workforce engagement initiatives went further than a staff attitude survey and included appointing employee representatives to company committees, training for better inclusion and diversity, and extended voice schemes. However, and drawing on the 'Escalator of Participation' discussed earlier, it was concluded that intermediary forces have a shallow depth and narrow scope for EIP. For example, initiatives tended to be channelled into direct and individualised voice mechanisms focussed on trivial matters, rather than more extensive representative EIP.

The theoretical contribution from this third area of Mick's research is a rich dynamic of various regulatory forces at play beyond the firm, and how these forces shape both formal but also informal voice on the ground. Important again is the centrality of context, situation, and processes to enact policy into real world practices. Using these research contributions from the above three projects, we next present an overarching multidimensional framing about how people are managed more broadly, which we believe provides long term value for both practice and future research.

3 | DEVELOPING A PLURALIST MULTI-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO WORKER VOICE

In this final section we suggest a framework based on our synthesis of the Marchington-led research contributions. This draws together multiple research methods, various voice practices, and the range of outcomes for organisations, workers and unions that offer a mapping beyond EIP to the study of how people are managed more broadly. The framework in Table 1 starts with the various approaches and academic disciplinary boundaries to the study of HRM and EIP (Barry & Wilkinson, 2021; Nechanska et al., 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2020). These include (1) *Industrial/Employment Relations; (2) HRM; (3) Work Sociology/Labour Process;* and *(4) Organisational Behaviour (OB)* (including *Industrial and Organisational (I&O) psychology*).

In Table 1, the first column reflects the 'purpose and rationale' for giving workers a voice, showing how it can differ widely between academic disciplinary boundaries. For example, *Industrial/Employment Relations* scholars are concerned with the processes and institutions that enable joint rulemaking. Traditionally, Industrial Relations has had an 'ideological orientation' (column two) towards collectivist channels for voice, with an interest in 'dominant actors' such as the state, trade unions and employer associations, often via CB 'mechanisms' at different 'levels' such as national, sectoral and organisational (columns three to five). The 'regulatory sphere' (column six) for IR has been concerned not only with hard laws but also intermediary agencies that encouraged the parties to make their

TABLE 1 A multi-dimensional plurality to worker voice

Disciplinary/Academic perspective	Purpose and rationale for voice	Ideological orientation	Dominant contextual factors	Indicative voice mechanisms	Depth and level of voice	Regulatory sphere	Typical methods
IR/ER	The joint regulation of work rules	Collective and pluralist	Institutions Role of the state	CB JCC EWCs	National. Sector. Organisation	Hard (state) and intermediary (agencies, TU/EAs)	Mixed multi-agency: Case studies WERS
HRM	Improving organisational performance	Unitarist or pluralist Collectivism and/or individualism	Product and labour markets	EI Unions Non-union EIP	Organisation. Sector. Team. Individual	Soft (minimal self-reg). Intermediary (agencies, TU/EAs)	Mixed—mostly managers: Org level surveys
Labour process	Control and resistance	Radical and collective	Financialisation of capitalism	CB. JCC. EWCs	National. Sector. Workplace	Hard (state) and intermediary (agencies, TU/EAs)	Sociological: Case studies Workplace
Organisational behaviour (inc industrial & organisational psychology)	Constructive suggestions to improve unit or organisational functioning (and OCB legitimacy)	Unitarist and individual	Management choice. Market freedoms	Individual EI	Organisation. Team. Individual	Soft (minimal self-reg)	Positivist: Psychology surveys experiments

Abbreviations: CB, collective bargaining; EA, employer association; EI, employee involvement; EIP, Employee Involvement and Participation; EWCs, European Works Councils; JCC, Joint Consultative Committees; OCB, organisational citizenship behaviours; TU, trade unions.

own agreements as part of a voluntarist bargaining tradition (Clegg, 1979), and much of Mick's work drew on these traditions.

Mick's contributions bridged most closely the '*IR/ER*' and newer '*HRM*' spaces shown in the first two rows of Table 1. Building on IR traditions Mick's work paved the way for broader and more pluralist interpretations to the study of HRM, with a continuation of the longitudinal and cross sectoral IR/ER mixed methods case study approach. The classic definition of Industrial Relations as the 'joint regulation of work rules' (Clegg, 1979) was developed alongside HRM, recognising market demands and socio-political shifts shaping the choices made about how organisations 'managed the employment relationship' (Marchington & Wilkinson, 1996). For example, as union membership declined, and employer associations diminished in terms of their role, other EIP mechanisms, including non-union voice forums, required consideration. This HRM perspective was evident in Mick's co-authored *HRM at Work* textbook (Marchington et al., 2021), with its seventh edition published the year he passed away, and his co-edited *Oxford Handbook of Participation in Organizations* (Wilkinson et al., 2010). Newer political and 'ideological orientations' emerged for worker voice, such that direct individual EI became important in its own right across different sectors. Furthermore, commercial pressures paved the way for a market-led 'rationale' in which voice was often premised on improved organisational performance. In this space Mick maintained a pluralist tradition of interest in union and representative voice, while not simply dismissing non-union or direct EIP as of no value and unworthy of investigation (Wilkinson et al., 2013). The depth of voice spanned organisational levels, including teams and individuals, with a mix of regulatory forces, especially soft and intermediary agencies.

Table 1 also includes the *Labour Process* tradition, shifting attention to more radical forms of analysis inspired by Marx and Braverman (1974), concerned with sociological understanding of control, resistance and identity at work within a financialised capitalist system (Thompson, 2013). Mick frequently recognised this in relation to socio-political developments across time and place as forces shaping EIP (Marchington, 2015a, 2015c). These issues also resonate with debates between Mick and Harvie Ramsay. The latter's macro-orientated 'cycles of control' thesis pitched towards the working class a whole (Ramsay, 1976), when employers would only grant workers a voice when managements' authority was under threat from growing collective worker power. In contrast, Mick's meso/micro analysis focussed on 'waves of participation', where mechanisms overlapped and coexisted at the organisation level, even when workers' capacity to challenge management was reduced due to evolving capitalist market forces (Marchington et al., 1992, 2001; Marchington, Wilkinson, Ackers et al., 1993).

The *OB* perspective on EIP and HRM was becoming more prominent in the HRM literature towards the end of Mick's career, summarised in the final row of Table 1. Mick's work was critical of the *OB* focus on voice as a form of employee organisational citizenship behaviour, or its micro approach which often ignored other influences that were central to Marchington's analysis, including regulations, trade unions, voice for the purpose of more inclusive or democratic work regimes along with the role of key labour market institutions. The 'ideological orientation' (column two) of OB is unitarist and primarily interested in pro-social voice, which can then be seen as pro-organisational voice adding improvements for management and/or the organisation, and whereby worker grievance and complaints about fairness or management are excluded from definitions of employee voice (Barry & Wilkinson, 2015). This OB approach, unlike Mick's work, does not recognise workers' independent goals or their interests as being different to those of the employer. In Mick's review piece for the journal *Human Resource Management Review*, he argued HR is in 'danger of chasing rainbows' because it is too preoccupied with profit and appeasing the boardroom. Mick explicitly makes the point in the paper that he purposely draws on many non-US sources to showcase scepticism and develop a critique based on employment regimes that differ markedly from the dominant US model (Marchington, 2015b, p. 177). While OB can have a macro focus and has had a long record of policy-directed research (Troth & Guest, 2019), the dominant approach concerning worker voice has been micro-oriented and not interested in structures nor the

importance of voice in relation to social legitimacy. This contrasts with Marchington's work premised on pluralism and how agency and structure interact through processes and actions. As Mick suggests:

> Voice is probably the area of HRM where tensions between organizational and worker goals, and between shareholder and stakeholder views, are most apparent because it connects with the question of managerial prerogative and social legitimacy (Marchington, 2004, p. 233).

4 | CONCLUSION

The three research projects we refer to above spanned Mick Marchington's career, and at least one of us was involved in each. These Marchington-led studies are notable for mapping a pluralist and empiricist middle way between two a priori political perspectives. On the one hand, Mick's work helped to critique the trend towards a unitarist and prescriptive vision of HRM, often dominated by US sources with a managerial interpretation of HRM as something to drive company performance. On the other hand, his research also questioned a Marxist dismissal of non-collective forms of EIP as being small beer and deemed not worthy of scholarly investigation. This middle-way injected the study of HRM with a nuanced plurality that also reflected Mick's engagement with professional and real-world practice at the organisational level, as evident in his roles as Chief Examiner and later Chief Moderator of HR standards for the educational syllabi of the CIPD. The multi-dimensional framing to the study of EIP and subsequently the academic discipline of HRM provide the intellectual tools to unpick management fads, ensure robust social science analysis of practices and processes from varying actor perspectives, and to question the validity of overblown claims linking new HRM (and EIP) directly to alleged improvements in employee commitment, engagement and company performance often peddled by consultancy firms.

The Marchington framing of the subject recognised that so often causation would run the other way: successful workplaces find it easier to involve employees. Also, by identifying obstacles, such as half-hearted top management commitment, middle management inertia, union resistance and, in some instances, transient superficial sloganising about 'all things involvement' or 'talent management', his intellectual framing identified how HRM may be seen for what it is and how it could be made to work better and more fairly.

In summarising Mick's contributions to HRM research, theory and policy, there are several key legacies which have a lasting imprint and future advice to guide scholars and practitioners. First, his research has shown the value of conducting contextual research over time in real places, rather than generating all-purpose normative theories of participation from the thoughts of Karl Marx or Tom Peters (Ackers et al., 2006, p. 84). Second is the principle of fairness in voice and HRM towards better policy-driven outcomes through research. For example, a key guiding factor in the problems and issues Mick researched is refusing to rule out the potential efficacy of new and emerging EIP schemes, whether based on collaboration and partnership with employers and trade unions or via non-union voice channels, before examining the evidence. Third is how Marchington helped to maintain a social science tradition of case study research methods by drawing on a diversity of contextual factors and institutional structures that embed a pluralist hallmark on the academic subject domain of HRM. These three take-away summaries from Marchington's contributions provide both an intellectual and practical footprint that enable others to continue to redefine and critique the many emerging fad and fashions in HRM for many decades to come.

Moreover, Mick's applied pluralist method has tempered the rush to quantitative research or short snap-shot attitude surveys. While the WERS aerial photograph is important, it fails to reach the local processes by which employee participation succeeds or fails, thus failing to capture the experience in context. Equally, the isolated best-practice case-study risks losing the larger picture and the scope to generalise across occupations and organisational situations. By mapping EIP across both space and time, the Mick Marchington method combines both a depth and breadth: 'by its openness to new empirical insights, the contextualised case study method has a unique capacity to build, refine and test a range of theoretical paradigms' (Ackers et al., 2006, p. 84). Rather than fly so

high—theoretically or methodologically—that life on the ground appears the same everywhere; or dig a case study hole so deep that you can't see out of it, the Marchington approach was to enrich the macro, embellish the meso and to connect with micro lived experiences that matter to those in work and employment.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

ORCID

Tony Dundon https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1308-5333

ENDNOTE

[1] FairWRC subsequently merged with the European Work and Employment Research Centre (EWERC), also at Manchester, to create the Work and Equalities Institute (WEI).

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