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Shop steward representation in contemporary Irish industrial relations: experiences, tasks, responsibilities and challenges

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UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

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**Shop steward representation in contemporary Irish industrial relations:
Experiences, Tasks, Responsibilities and Challenges**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, University of Limerick

ABSTRACT

Shop steward representation in contemporary Irish industrial relations: Experiences, Tasks, Responsibilities and Challenges

Shop stewards as workplace union representatives provide protection for workers concerning problems with their treatment by management at their workplace. This study set out to examine shop steward representation and the characteristics associated with the role in contemporary Irish industrial relations. There is limited and fragmented evidence to date in the Irish context of the factors and issues influencing the shop stewards' role in contemporary Irish industrial relations.

The research focuses on the experiences of shop stewards in the Pharmaceutical, Chemical and Medical Devices (PCMD) sector of SIPTU as they undertake the responsibility and tasks associated with the role of workplace union representation. A framework of representation is proposed encompassing key aspects of the shop steward role. Two key themes are identified as being central features in the examining the characteristics of shop steward representation; becoming and remaining a shop steward and the tasks shop stewards perform as workplace representatives. The study was based on a survey (n=123) and three follow up focus groups comprising of sixteen shop stewards.

The study finds that few members enter the role as highly eager or radicalised union members. Personal factors such as age, experience and workplace circumstances were key influences whereby such members were encouraged by others to take on the role. Positive experiences in the role such as union support, supportive management attitudes and the development of personal skills and knowledge in making a difference in protecting the members as the union representative impacts positively on the intention to continue in the role. The study highlights the importance of leadership as a key aspect of the day to day tasks of shop stewards. The nature of the experiences in the role and length of tenure are found to be significant influences impacting on the leadership style and tasks of the shop steward in facilitating opportunities for members to influence their working lives at firm level. The findings highlight more similarities than differences between predominant leadership styles (leader/follower) of shop stewards in discharging their communication and voice role. This is a corollary of the limitations and constraints imposed on the tasks of shop stewards by union members and management in the workplace as shop stewards deal with how best to protect membership preferences and wishes in a role that is voluntary and without formal leadership powers.

Collectively, these findings suggest a multifaceted set of characteristics and challenges associated with the task of workplace representation but points to an enduring resilience among shop stewards playing a key role in shaping the working lives of the membership at the work.

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and has not been submitted to any other university for any other academic award. Citations of secondary work have been fully acknowledged and referenced.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HSA	Health and Safety Authority
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
PCMD	Pharmaceutical Chemical and Medical Devices Sector
SIPTU	Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union
UK	United Kingdom
WERS	Workplace Employee Relations Survey
WRC	Workplace Relations Commission

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Chapter One

Introduction

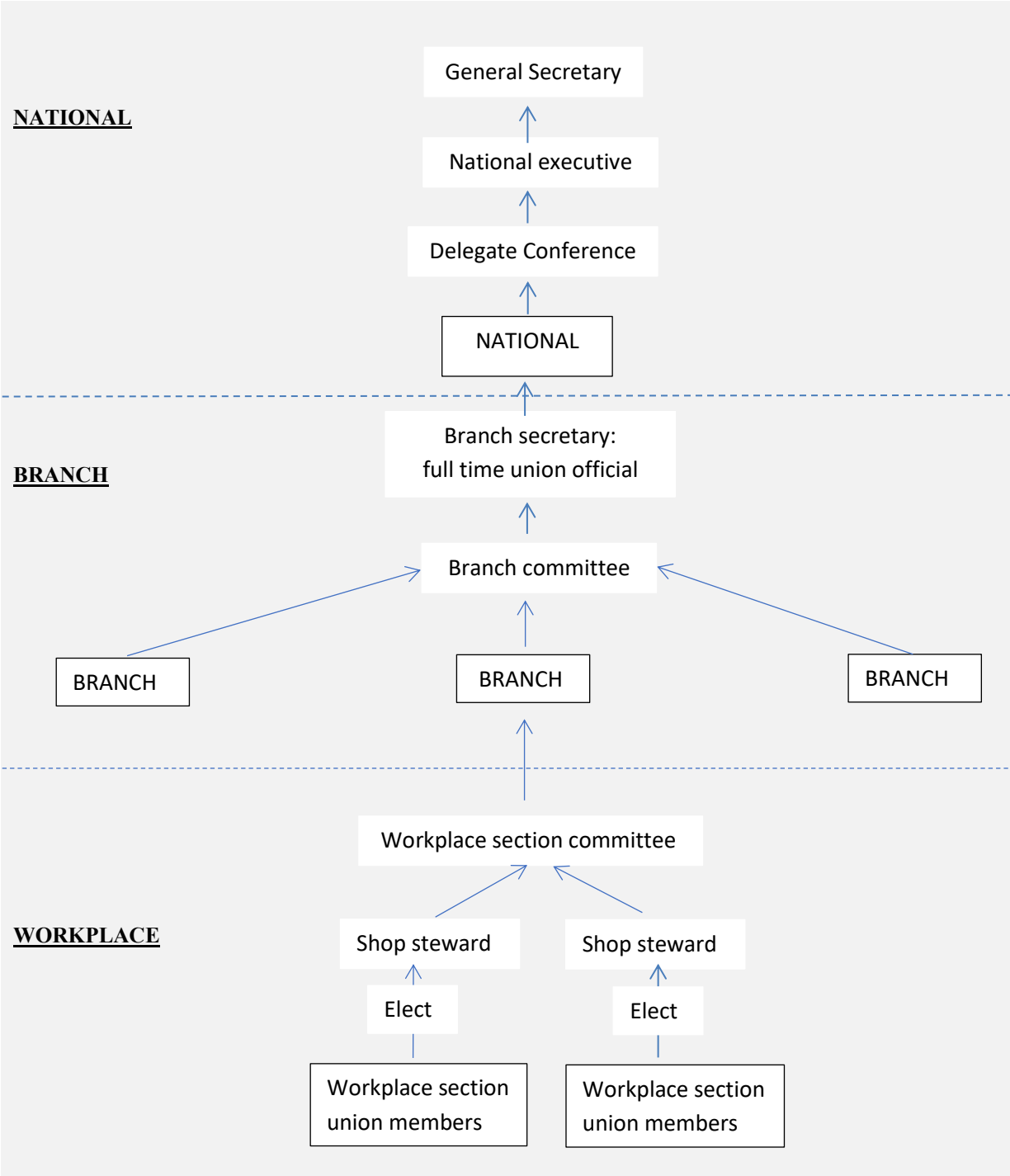
1.0 Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine shop stewards in their function as union workplace representatives in the Pharmaceutical, Chemical and Medical Device (PCMD) sector of SIPTU. A continuing and central function of trade unions in the twenty first century according to D'Art et al (2013:5) “is to increase the bargaining power of workers and allow them the right to representation in decisions affecting their working lives”. Independent trade union representation refers to employee voice that is not resourced or provided by the employer in which workers, through their union representatives, can raise concerns and have a say over the governance and operation of the workplace (Dundon, 2004). Indeed, such is the persistent and potential vulnerability of workers to more powerful employers that Irish trade unions continue to provide a role in protecting workers for over a century (D'Art et al, 2013).

1.1 Features of the shop steward's role

A particularly distinctive feature in this context is that Irish trade union representation similar to the UK model is typically organised around unpaid shop-floor level volunteer activists, generally referred to as shop stewards (Terry, 1995). Shop stewards are elected or appointed by fellow union members at the workplace to represent worker interests, liaise with fulltime union officials and keep members up to date with latest developments on union matters (Wallace et al 2013:53). As such, shop stewards have a dual role as employees of the firm but also have responsibility for organising union matters at the workplace (Moore, 1980). Consequently, the shop stewards' role is incorporated into a larger union organisational structure (figure 1.1) as part of an independent union organisation representing membership interests (Wallace et al, 2013).

Figure 1.1: Typical union structure



Adapted from Wallace et al (2013)

While Irish trade unions will have their own distinctive organisational structure, most have some common features of internal government (Figure 1.1) comprising of workplace, branch and national levels (Wallace et al, 2013). A basic characteristic of the internal organisational arrangements of trade unions is

to establish a high degree of democratic participation of its members (Salamon, 2000). As such the focus of most day to day trade union activity is based around the shop steward and the members at workplace level (Wallace et al 2013). The branch is the second common feature of trade union organisation and comprises of a group of trade union members in different organisations but working in the same geographical area or organised according to a specific type of worker (Salamon, 2000). Shop stewards have the opportunity to attend branch meetings, seek election onto the branch committee at the branch annual general meeting (AGM) and influence branch policy. A fulltime branch official employed by the union is responsible for the day to day administration and assistance to members within the branch. Finally, the implementation of national union policy is vested in National Executive Council and is responsible for carrying out the decisions of the delegate conference comprised of delegates including workplace representatives elected from branch committees, branch secretaries and National Executive Council (Wallace et al 2013).

The nature of Irish trade union organisation therefore highlights the workplace as an important context of Irish trade union activity and places considerable importance on shop stewards as a key actor in organising union tasks at workplace level. Terry (1995) highlighted shop stewards as an important union resource being ideally placed union representatives due to their closeness to the members and their knowledge of local issues in the workplace. Consequently, the position and key responsibilities of the shop steward's role in the union has been formally acknowledged and incorporated into the constitution of trade unions through the trade union rule book. For example, the SIPTU (Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union) rule book (2017) provides a description of the shop steward's role as the first port of call for members experiencing difficulties in their workplace and represent members in negotiations. Furthermore, the rulebook provides rules for the formal the appointment of shop stewards along with specifying the limitations regarding the shop stewards' authority stating,

‘Shop Stewards shall have no authority to authorise a stoppage of work, or to take action likely to lead to a dispute or to enter into any

written agreement on behalf of the Union or its members, without the prior approval of the Sector' (SIPTU, 2017-17).

Yet beyond the union rulebook governance of the shop stewards role, the environment in which shop stewards operate is a dynamic one requiring their involvement in a web of interactions with various actors associated with the governance of workplace industrial relations (Salamon, 2000). In particular the nature of management interactions is a central component of the shop steward's environment (Schuller and Robertson 1983). As part of their role, shop stewards engage in a variety of formal and informal interactions with management (Barling et al, 1992). The formal process includes collective bargaining over terms and conditions, grievance handling and dispute resolution formalised in written procedural agreements with management at workplace level (McKay and Moore, 2007). The legitimacy of the shop steward's role in this regard has been recognised under the voluntary code of practice on employee representatives published by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC, 1993). The code outlines guidance for employers and trade unions regarding the representative duties of shop stewards and the norms regulating the employers' treatment of workplace union representatives. This code of practice grants workplace representatives' sufficient access to facilities and time off to enable them to carry out their representative functions in the workplace.

Yet, within these formalised interactions, shop stewards are typically involved in more informal interactions with management as they continuously monitor the formalised workplace agreements (Warren, 1971; Terry, 1995). These informal exchanges occur when shop stewards address day to day issues such as the allocation of work or overtime allocation with managers without involving the formalised workplace procedures (Schuller and Robertson, 1983; Terry, 1995; Salamon, 2000). As such shop stewards are in a unique position to influence the tone of union-management relations at local level (Barling et al, 1992).

The role of the state and the regulatory framework provides a further feature governing shop steward's interactions with management at workplace level. The Industrial Relations Act 1990 established the Labour Relations Commission (now replaced by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) since Oct 2015) offering conciliation and mediation services for resolving workplace disputes where local resolution between union reps and management have been unsuccessful. The Industrial Relations Act 1990 regulates the way workplace union representatives deal with workplace disputes with their employer by specifying a requirement for the organisation of a secret ballot of members and provides guidance on workplace procedures to refer disputes to the Workplace Relations Commission/Labour Court prior to the initiation of any form of workplace industrial action (Wallace et al 2013). Finally, shop stewards have been encouraged by the health and safety committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to take an active role in making the health and safety of members a trade union issue under the regulations of the Safety, Health & Welfare at Work Act, 2005 (ICTU, 2016:7). Consequently, this wider regulatory environment creates the potential for the shop steward's role to move beyond the workplace as they on occasion refer disputes and represent member interests at hearings involving the WRC or Labour Court or make representations to health and safety authority (HSA) inspectors investigating employee complaints relating to workplace health and safety.

In summary these features of the shop steward's role in workplace industrial relations places them at the centre of a web of interactions with the membership, the union, employers and the state (Salamon, 2000). As such the shop steward's role is an integral part of the trade union hierarchy and plays an important role in Irish industrial relations in directly protecting the working lives of union members at workplace level (Terry 1995; Flood and Turner, 1996). This study focuses attention on the complex function of the Irish shop steward charged with the challenging responsibility of protecting workers and facilitating independent union representation of members in contemporary times.

1.2 Shop stewards and contemporary Irish industrial relations

However, some vulnerability exists in Irish trade union representation regarding the voluntarist system of Irish industrial relations. The voluntarist nature of Irish industrial relations means that there is little in the way of any significant legal support for the recognition of trade union representation at the workplace. One key concern for contemporary trade union representation in this context has been the continuing decline in trade union density and coverage of trade union representation across the economy (Walsh, 2015). Union density refers to the proportion of employees who are union members and is used as a quantitative measure of trade union strength (Visser, 2006; Wallace et al, 2013). Variations in union density rates signal changes in the legal-political, social, or economic environment of trade unions and the strength of union influence the over employment conditions of their members (Visser, 2006). On this measure, Irish trade unions along with their counterparts in Anglo Saxon countries such as the UK and Australia have experienced a steady decline in union membership density (D'Art et al, 2013). Estimated trends in Irish union density draw on a number of sources (DUES series on membership returns, ICTU membership figures and National household surveys) that trace a continuing and gradual decline in union density since the early 1980s, from an estimated high of 62% in 1980 to a currently estimated 28% (Roche and Larragy, 1990; Walsh, 2015).

The persistence of the decline since the 1980s is consistent with the signals of an increasing employer opposition to the presence of trade union representation in private sector Irish workplaces (Roche, 1997; Gunnigle et al, 2001; D'Art and Turner, 2013). An implicit assumption in this decline is that for enterprises in much of the private sector, trade unions are largely irrelevant and incompatible with modern management approaches required in a constantly changing and competitive market environment (Gunnigle et al, 2001; Dundon and Gollan, 2007). Furthermore, the voluntarist legal framework means the State has a relatively limited role in setting the terms of employment between workers and the more powerful employer at workplace level (Wallace et al, 2013). There is evidence to suggest this has further challenged the ability of trade unions to protect their members' workplace

circumstances even where unions are recognised (Roche et al, 2011). The economic crisis and collapse of social partnership in 2009 created a fragmented bargaining environment in which workplace unions faced more antagonistic and trenchant employers opportunistically marginalising the influence of workplace trade unions in the implementation of workplace changes (Roche, 2011). In this sense, the presence and influence of Irish trade union representation at the workplace is exposed and vulnerable to legislation, labour market conditions and more assertive employers favouring alternative forms non-union employee representation (Dundon and Gollan, 2007).

This is the relatively pessimistic climate of the current generation of Irish shop stewards operating in the context of persistently weakened trade union organisation. The credibility of unions in claiming to represent the workforce presents acute challenges regarding the ability of shop stewards to continue to be effective in regulating management treatment of employees at enterprise level. This is evident when compared with shop steward's counterparts in previous decades. Earlier studies in the UK focused on the association between the growth in trade unions and trade union militancy built on shop stewards mobilising members and delivering gains through strikes or the threat of strikes (McCarthy, 1968; Terry, 1986; Kelly, 1998). Similarly, in the Irish context the high rate of Irish work days lost due to strike action during the 1970s and 1980s underpinned perceptions of the strength and effectiveness of shop stewards to mobilise collective member resistance against management authority (Kelly and Brannick, 1983). Indeed, a trade union mark-up referred to as the extent to which terms and conditions in firms covered by trade unions exceed those firms without the presence of a union was the common currency of the effectiveness of trade union representation (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Blackaby et al, 1991). As measured by such indices, contemporary trade union representation in Anglo –Saxon countries appear to confirm a declining effectiveness over the past three decades (Darlington, 1994; Terry, 1995; Bryson, 2001; Waddington, 2013).

Yet more optimistic literature suggests that trade unions have at least some influence in arresting membership decline highlighting a renewed emphasis by trade unions regarding their organising and recruitment tasks (Simms and Holgate, 2010; Turner et al, 2011). The prevailing literature on shop stewards has long acknowledged the prominence of the shop steward as a means of membership recruitment at workplace level (Pedler, 1973; Partridge, 1977). However, an underlying context within this literature suggests that membership recruitment is not an isolated activity but is contingent on shop stewards winning visible gains in improved terms and conditions, defending members with grievances or protecting members from management (Terry 1995, 2003). In this regard attempts by unions to address declining membership highlights shop stewards as a key union resource in the recruitment of new members in the workplace (Simms, 2013).

Membership decline in Irish unions has been incorporated into discussions regarding the organising model of trade union recruitment (Turner et al, 2011). The organising model is commonly used to describe an approach that relies on unions facilitating local leadership at workplace level to provide effective union representation and increase union membership through workplace activism at grass roots level (Simms and Holgate, 2010; Turner et al, 2011). Consequently, issues of trade union effectiveness, union decline and trade union relevance in Irish industrial relations potentially undermines trade union ability to influence workplace industrial relations and recruit new membership (Turner et al, 2011). This inevitably raises questions relating to the current generation of Irish shop stewards regarding their role and how they sustain Irish union organisation and representation at workplace level. In this regard, this study focuses on shop stewards as they take on the role of the local level union representative and provide local union leadership in building membership relations with the union, encouraging membership participation and effecting positive changes in the working lives of members.

Yet there are few supplementary studies providing a portrayal of the nature of workplace trade union organisation from the shop steward's perspective in this present industrial relations climate. An investigation of the experiences, tasks, responsibilities and challenges facing shop stewards in supporting and shaping their member's welfare is particularly timely in this context. Given the paucity of studies of shop stewards in the Irish context there is a gap in our knowledge of the role of the shop steward as the trade union front line representative of workers at shop floor level. A study of the shop steward's role as workplace union representatives is central in understanding how the current cohort of shop stewards contributes to the continuing relevance of trade unions at workplace level.

1.3 Current research on shop stewards in the Irish context

On the surface, a study of shop steward's and their role as union workplace representatives seems so obvious and straight forward. Shop stewards' main role is aligned with trade union aims to protect the welfare of their members regarding their treatment by management at the workplace (Clegg, 1951; Flanders, 1968; Terry, 2003). However, shop stewards in Ireland have attracted limited scrutiny or scholarly inquiry and remain largely under researched in the Irish context. Our understanding of contemporary Irish shop stewards relies on research gathered over a generation ago (Flood and Turner, 1996). It is not clear as to why there has been such a research deficit into this aspect of Irish industrial relations. It may possibly result from a sustained period of stable centralised pay agreements from 1987 to 2008. For example, the characteristics of the social partnership agreements based on mutual gains and compromise rather than conflict and militancy arguably limited the extent to which shop stewards at local level were involved and integrated into the bargaining agendas set at national level (Roche, 2007).

Another possibility is that the significant decline in trade union density, shrinking union coverage and low rates of strike action during the social partnership era, particularly in the private sector, has possibly reinforced a perception that

workplace union representation no longer constituted a problem or a significant area of study. This gap in our knowledge of the shop steward's role is the main justification for undertaking this investigation into the ways in which present-day shop stewards in the PCMD sector of SIPTU navigate through the contemporary demands and challenges of independent union workplace representation.

Given the scarcity of Irish studies in this area, much of the literature and empirical studies of the shop stewards' role necessarily relies on other Anglo-Saxon countries particularly the UK. In any case, prior to Irish independence in 1922, the organisation of UK and Irish trade unions share similar origins due to worker responses to the working conditions of the developing factory system brought about by the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century (Wallace et al, 2004). Both British and Irish trade unions shared the same model of union membership organisation in terms of organising around a volunteer shop steward at workplace level. Both systems of union representation are broadly structured around general, white collar and craft unions (MacParltin, 1997). In addition, British trade unions such as Unite still possess a significant presence in organising Irish workers. Moreover, the British enacted Trade Disputes Act 1906 governing industrial relations in both Britain and Ireland prior to the foundation of the Irish state, continues to influence a distinctive regulatory approach of relying on a voluntarist system of collective bargaining where there is union recognition (Wallace et al, 2004). Consequently, the British literature provides a reliable reference point for investigating the characteristics of the Irish based shop steward.

1.4 Developing an integrative framework

The role of shop stewards comprises a complex set of responsibilities and behaviours that makes up their role in workplace industrial relations. McCarthy and Parkers' (1968) study provided evidence of the practical duties of shop stewards. Shop steward duties in the study varied considerably but included tasks as collecting union subscriptions from members, bargaining with management over pay, work hours and the pace of work, handling disciplinary issues on behalf of

members, taking up grievances with foremen and being a major source of union communication (McCarthy and Parker, 1968:15-22). Subsequent studies focused on the characteristics and attitudes of shop stewards as factors related to shop steward occupancy and continued occupancy (Nicholson, 1976; Winch, 1980; McShane 1986) and in the Irish context by Flood and Turner (1996). Other studies have sought to highlight the social dynamics inherent in the position focusing on shop steward behaviours as workplace union leaders by developing typologies to explain variants of shop steward leadership styles (Batstone et al, 1977; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). Further related shop steward research explored the complexities and social nuances inherent in the leadership role. For example, Nicholson (1976) incorporated role theory, focusing on how the shop steward interprets the role expectations of the rank and file, the union and management. Partridge (1977) highlighted the role of the shop steward specifically in terms of the relationship between the shop steward and the workgroup to develop taxonomy of steward tasks that arise in the role as the relationship develops between the steward and their members. Schuler and Robertson (1983) and Green et al (2000) explored the nature of the relationship between shop stewards and their members by mapping out the difficulties inherent within the interactions between them at the workplace. More recent literature have sought to determine the strength of shop steward organisation in the UK against a background of a weakened role for trade unions and the extent to which shop stewards still remain the backbone of trade unionism (Terry, 1986, 1995, 2003; Darlington, 2009).

These perspectives reflect different facets of the role, the responsibilities, tasks and the challenges related to the shop steward's function in the workplace. As such no one approach alone can adequately account for the complexity of what shop stewards do as union representatives at workplace level. Thus, a weakness in the available literature is a lack of a core coherent framework in which the multiple tasks and demands of the shop steward's function can be sited. The approach here is to ground the central and core function of the shop steward in terms of its representative character. Shop stewards represent their union members enabling member interests and concerns to be protected and voiced in their particular workplaces (Terry, 1995). Indeed, the concept of representation is recognised as a

dominant and necessary condition of a modern pluralist society in the political literature of allowing citizens to have a say in matters that impact on the quality of their society (Chamberlin and Courant, 1983; Mansbridge, 2003).

The concept of representation is a core principal in modern pluralist democracies that enables a multiplicity of opinions and interests exist in society (Castiglione, 2001). Citizens in democratic societies are free to participate and organise themselves in associations in order to put forward their interests and concerns (Mansbridge, 2003). Consequently, membership of and participation in such associations provides citizen protection from isolation, creates a sense of collective identity and strengthens citizen voice in protecting their own interests (Mansbridge, 2003). A central component of democratic representation is that the protection of interests consists of two processes. Firstly, representation is based on someone who makes themselves present to stand for other citizens as their representative and secondly, as the actual tasks associated with acting on behalf of citizens to protect the interests of the represented (Pitkin, 1967; Mansbridge, 2003). Consequently, the representative character of shop stewards at workplace level is consistent with the wider concept of democratic representation in modern society.

The notion of representation is an implicit characteristic within the studies of the shop steward. Yet it is relatively neglected as an explicit framework in identifying shop stewards as a mechanism to assist workers to exercise their same democratic entitlement in the workplace as in wider society (Greenfield and Pleasure, 1993). Theoretically, this study attempts to explicitly align the shop stewards' workplace function to the notion of representation in a democratic society that regards representation as an effort by democratically elected representatives to build a more inclusive and participative society (Orr and McAteer, 2004). In this regard the representative function of the shop steward is a defining and unique characteristic of their role. Accordingly, this study attempts to incorporate previous analysis of shop stewards into an integrated framework of representation as a means or tool to organise and bring together diverse themes associated with the representative function.

1.5 Research aims and questions

This study addresses a deficit in the role of workplace representation in Irish industrial relations through an examination of the tasks, responsibilities and experiences of shop stewards in the Pharmaceutical, Chemical and Medical Devices (PCMD) sector of SIPTU. Since Flood and Turner's (1996) study of shop stewards in an Irish union over twenty years ago, a new generation of shop stewards face the enduring task of building and sustaining workplace union organisation to protect another generation of workers in a business environment that is increasingly rejecting the notion of independent union representation. Consequently, this current cohort of shop stewards continue to play a key role in protecting workers during a consistent and steep decline in trade union organisation across the Irish economy over the past thirty years (D'art and Turner, 2013). The overall research aim is to investigate the role of shop stewards in their function as independent workplace union representatives within the pharmaceutical, chemical and medical devices sector of SIPTU. Based on the representative character of the shop stewards' position, two specific research questions are explored;

- (1) What influences a union member to become and continue as a shop steward?
- (2) What representative tasks do shop stewards perform as workplace union representatives?

These two questions draw upon these themes as central to representation and focus attention on the shop stewards' function as composed of a complex set of behaviours and actions. The first question examines the factors influencing shop stewards to voluntarily undertake the responsibility to occupy and subsequently continue in a position that provides representation for union members. The second question examines the role of shop stewards in terms of their representative tasks as workplace union leaders. Shop stewards by virtue of the position, hold a key role in the union. This role holds a responsibility to lead and perform union actions on behalf of other rank and file members to create opportunities to influence workplace decisions that affect them (Pedler, 1973; Schuler and Robertson, 1983).

This research suggests that what shop stewards do in their role is best understood by these two key features of union workplace representation. Becoming and remaining a shop steward and the key tasks they undertake as workplace union representatives are the two principle themes of the empirical research in this thesis. In accordance with the two central questions, a series of more detailed questions were derived from the literature related to the main themes. The breakdown of the central questions into more fine grained and detailed questions (discussed in detail in chapter 4) ensured a more focused approach to the collection and analysis of the data.

1.6 Research design

This study adopts a multi-method approach in which an explanatory sequential design was used in line with the rationale behind the format of the overall research questions (Creswell et al, 2003). The apparent simple enquiry into the shop steward's role as a union representative uncovers a multi-faceted collection of technical and social characteristics of the representative position within the available literature. Thus, adopting such a design recognises an underlying complexity inherent in the responsibility of voluntarily protecting workers. In this sense, a coherent knowledge of what shop stewards do and the context within which shop stewards do it requires a multi-method approach in which neither a qualitative nor quantitative approach alone was deemed to be able to adequately answer this question (Creswell et al, 2003). The data collection method therefore involved a two-phase design. A quantitative data collection phase using self-administered questionnaires resulted in 123 usable survey responses out of a potential sample of 350 respondents. This was followed by a second phase of qualitative data collection of 3 separate focus groups totalling sixteen participants from the survey phase. The addition of a qualitative component investigating the experiences of shop stewards within their own workplace environment added significant depth to the understanding of the issues and themes raised from the quantitative data.

Focus groups were preferred over individual interviews as the interaction between the participants may stimulate more personal and illuminating disclosures as group participants discuss their experiences with others in the same social position (Krueger and Casey, 2009).

1.7 Organisation of the dissertation

The organisation of the dissertation is presented as follows. Chapter one has outlined the study's background and aims. Chapter two and three present a review of the literature covering the many aspects and characteristics of the shop steward's function. This includes factors that influence a union member's participation in the role and reviews the set of tasks that shop steward undertake as workplace union representatives. Chapter four provides an overview of the key issues identified in the literature review, develops an integrated framework of shop steward representation and presents the research questions to be examined. Chapter five considers the philosophical and methodological choices available to researchers when selecting an appropriate research framework and explains the research choices, design and data collection for this study. Chapter six, seven and eight presents the findings of the survey and focus groups to answer the questions developed from the literature review. Chapter nine draws together and discusses the key findings of the survey and focus group analysis and discusses the findings in the context of the research questions and previous research. Chapter ten presents the conclusion of the study and the key issues raised in the findings. The chapter concludes by identifying the contribution of the study, some of the limitations of the research and identifies areas of possible future research. The chapter ends with some closing comments.

Chapter Two

What shop stewards do; becoming and remaining a union representative

2.0 Introduction

The literature review on shop stewards has been partitioned into two chapters to facilitate analysis of shop steward representation within the available literature. This chapter reviews the existing literature on shop stewards as central to explaining the shop steward's function and the factors that influence becoming and remaining a union workplace representative. The review commences with the definitions of a shop steward and considers the nature of representation within the definitions. As shop stewards are drawn from the general membership, the chapter then considers the union members' path into the position of shop steward and explores factors that support or constrain the shop stewards continued participation as a worker representative. Chapter three focuses on the tasks performed by shop stewards in the performance of their duties. By virtue of the nature of the position in the union hierarchy, the literature characterises many elements of leadership inherent in the tasks of trade union representation at workplace level. The discussion considers these tasks as the relationships and responsibilities of the shop stewards' role in affording union members the opportunity to shape the policies and practices that determine the conditions of their employment.

2.1 The shop steward; definition

The term shop steward emerged in the 19th century and referred to the lowest level of lay union representation at workplace level within the trade union hierarchy (Warren, 1971). Reference to the term shop steward first appeared in 1896 (Warren, 1971). The term was attributed to the amalgamated society of engineers' appointment of craft workers in engineering shops to look after the interests of their

members at shop-floor level (Warren, 1971). In this sense there is a noticeable distinction between a shop steward and a fulltime union official. A full-time official is a full-time, paid employee of a trade union. A shop steward is simultaneously a lay union member and a company employee but in addition voluntarily takes on an unpaid but formal union position on behalf of their workgroup (Moore, 1980). The term 'shop steward' according to Heery and Noon (2001:328) is typically defined as, 'a lay trade union officer who represents co-workers at workplace level'. However, the label shop steward is also known by other more modern titles such as union workplace representative or staff representative (Salamon, 2000). The use of different terminology denotes what is essentially the same voluntary and unpaid position within a union but reflects different periods in which the literature examined the position or just different titles used by unions in different industries and sectors of the economy.

The terminology associated with the title 'shop steward' in many ways typifies a precise description of the responsibilities of the position. The term 'steward' is derived from an old English term used to describe an official who manages the affairs of a manor or household (Oxford English Dictionary, 2005). The term is also used in modern phraseology to denote a person whose responsibility it is to take care of something (Oxford English Dictionary, 2005). The term 'shop' is used in an organisational sense and denotes a location where workers are gathered during the course of their employment to perform their work tasks (Kovner and Lahne, 1953). Thus, the classical term 'shop steward' most closely denotes the fundamental responsibilities and tasks attached to this trade union position. The association between the 'steward' and the 'shop' therefore underlines the mainstay of their function to look after the day to day affairs of a group of workers in a specific setting such as a factory floor or office.

A review of the formal definitions of the shop steward underpins this notion. Clegg et al (1961:24) refer to the shop steward as 'elected by his fellow trade unionists in his shop to represent them to management'. For McCarthy (1967:4) the shop steward is, 'a trade union lay representative at the place of work'. More recent

definitions capture similar connotations. Salamon (2000:175) defines a shop steward as, “an employee who is accepted by both management and union as a lay representative of the union and its members with responsibility to act on their behalf in industrial relations matters at the organisation level”. Similarly, Rollinson and Dundon (2007:114) refer to the shop steward as ‘a general term used to describe lay representatives elected by specific groups of members in the workplace’.

While there is no single universally agreed definition of a shop steward, the above definitions do not disagree that the notion of representation is a common characteristic of the shop steward’s role. This is concisely expressed throughout by regularly referring to the shop steward as a ‘lay union representative’. Therefore, a relationship of representation exists in which shop stewards are union representatives and represent rank and file union members within in their particular workplaces (Terry, 1995). However little explanation exists within the definitions over exactly how shop steward representation may be understood and accomplished.

2.2 The concept of representation

The act of representation is most closely associated with inclusive democratic societies in which citizens have the freedom to act independently, to speak out, to associate with civil organisations and participate in influencing the conduct of public affairs (Mansbridge, 1999; Webb, 2008). Representation in a democratic context occurs when a representative speaks, advocates and acts on behalf of others as the elected or authorised representative (Pitkin, 1967; Castiglione and Warren, 2005; Dovi, 2006; Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2006). A central discussion within the political representation literature is guided by two interpretations of representation; descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967; Castiglione and Warren, 2005). Pitkin (1967:61) referred to descriptive representation as the physical presence of someone as standing for or taking the place of others as their representative. Standing for others presupposes that formal democratic arrangements in the guise

of elections are in place to give an opportunity for someone to present themselves and serve as a representative of their constituency. As such, the representative stands as a formally designated substitute for their constituents as they share common interests and are exposed to the same experiences as those they represent (Mansbridge, 1999).

Descriptive representation in this context is concerned with who are the representatives and how they are elected (Mansbridge, 1999). The focus is on the personal characteristics of the individual representative such as race, gender, age or level of education of the individuals who take on the responsibility of representing their constituency (Pitkin, 1967; Young, 2000). These characteristics are considered important in terms of the representative as being someone who can be relied upon to stand for and be elected to represent a particular group or constituency from which they are selected (Castiglione and Warren, 2005).

Substantive representation involves the tasks that the representative engages in by acting on behalf of and in the interest of the represented (Pitkin, 1967). In this context representation is considered as a series of tasks in which a representative advocates, informs and gives their constituents a voice in decision making processes where they might otherwise stay silent (Young, 2000). In a general sense, representation refers to an active form of guardianship in which citizens are provided with an intermediary by which their interests are organised, heard and protected on their behalf (Mansbridge, 1999). Moreover, the extent to which nominated representatives' act for others gives rise to a central debate in this literature as to whether representatives respond to constituents as a delegate or a trustee. Delegate type representation is centred on conforming to the expressed wishes and preferences of the constituents focusing on the sectional and short-term interest of the constituents (Pitkin, 1967). Trustee type representation refers to a more autonomous type of representation in which representatives exercise their own judgment in acting for the interests of the constituency (Mansbridge, 1999; Castiglione and Warren, 2005).

Consequently, substantive representation is predicated on how best to respond to and facilitate citizen access to decision making processes. The basis for substantive representation lies in the elected representative as a primary actor to facilitate adequate communication and discussion among the interest group to articulate group interests (Young, 2000). Subsequently the preferences or interests of the group are voiced by the representative and considered in the policy making process and decisions of policy makers (Mansbridge,1999; Young, 2000). From this perspective, the inclusion and participation of citizens in a democratic society is founded on two related systems of representation referred to as standing for (descriptive) and acting for (substantive) others (Mansbridge,1999). Each of these perspectives is relevant to the role of the shop steward as a workplace union representative and as such allows for specific and distinctive focus on shop stewards in their capacity as a union representative.

2.3 Developing a coherent framework of shop steward representation

Shop stewards as lay union representatives ensure that employees are treated in the workplace in a manner that is compatible with a democratic society (Turner and Ryan, 2016). As representatives of particular categories of labour, shop stewards advance opportunities to workers to have some influence over decisions that affect their working lives (Rigby et al, 2009; Turner and Ryan, 2016). Almost all shop steward definitions emphasise that the representation of union members achieves its most visible form through the presence of a shop steward at the workplace. A common reference in the definitions characterises the shop steward as an ‘elected representative’ or ‘elected directly by their fellow workers’. Trade unions therefore provide their members with a democratic mechanism to choose their own independent workplace representative. A dominant feature of union representation from a workplace perspective is the presence of a shop steward, independent from management to which union members can call on as their representative in the workplace (Greenfield and Pleasure, 1993). As such, descriptive representation as

the physical presence of someone standing for or taking the place of others as the representative is an important and relevant characteristic of the shop steward's role. This aspect of the role is typically depicted in terms of membership participation as a shop steward (Kelloway and Barling, 1993). The existence of trade union representation at the workplace relies on the voluntary presence and participation of a union member willing to become and remain in the position of shop steward. Indeed, trade unions as voluntary organisations require a certain level of membership participation to function (Flood, Turner and William, 2000). Membership involvement as a shop steward is the highest level of participation in the union that involves a contribution of membership time and effort without obligation or remuneration from the union (Moore, 1980).

The descriptions of the shop steward's role further suggest that the presence of a shop steward is not sufficient in itself to fulfil the role of trade union representation. A subsequent issue within the definitions centres on the actions performed by shop stewards on behalf of their membership. These actions have been conveyed in quite broad terms including, 'acting as worker representatives in individual and collective dealings with management' or 'responsibility to act on members behalf in industrial relations matters at the organisation level'. This key feature of the shop steward's role is an active one and the responsibility to act on members behalf on a daily basis involves acting in such a way to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of workers in the workplace. Substantive representation as the actions taken on behalf of group interests is an important aspect of the shop steward's role (Mansbridge, 1999).

As such, a second aspect of the shop stewards' role has been studied in terms of workplace union leadership (Batstone et al, 1977; Fosh, 1993; Green at al, 2000). This focus of the literature held that shop stewards have leadership qualities by virtue of being appointed to undertake responsibilities to perform trade union work on behalf of their members at workplace level (Green at al, 2000). An emphasis on the leadership characteristics of the role is associated with the interactions between the members and the shop steward in determining how to effect and manage union

membership input and inclusion in the workplace (Schuler and Robertson, 1983). One dominant feature of this relationship considers the leadership styles of shop stewards and how they interact with their members (Batstone et al, 1977; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983).

A third aspect of the role highlights the close contact that shop stewards have with the members as a workplace union communication mechanism (Schuler and Robertson, 1983; Jarley, 2005; Green et al, 2000). The importance of the shop steward as the foremost point of union contact for the members has been considered in terms union democracy concerning how shop stewards keep members informed, provide worker access to the union and encourage members to express opinions and participate in union affairs (Warren, 1971; Pedler, 1973; Jarley, 2005).

A fourth aspect of the shop steward's role places them in a unique position to directly influence the working conditions of the membership. The descriptions relating to 'acting as worker representatives in individual and collective dealings with management', highlights a key substantive feature of the role. Shop stewards as the workplace union representative challenges management in both formal and informal negotiations in resolving individual member grievances and winning improvements through collective bargained agreements around the conditions of work (McCarthy and Parker, 1968; Terry, 1995). The contemporary literature has focused on this aspect of union representation in terms of the voice function of trade unions as facilitating membership inclusion and voice into workplace decisions regarding their treatment at the workplace (Greenfield and Pleasure, 1993; Dundon et al, 2004; Geary, 2007).

In this regard, the concept of representation as a recurring feature in the descriptions of the role of the shop steward is considered in relation to descriptive representation (standing for) and substantive representation (acting for). Taken together, four aspects of the shop stewards' role, (1) member participation as a shop

steward, and the tasks including, (2) leadership: (3) communication and (4) voice, are the four key topics in the literature review that reflect the central features and responsibilities of shop steward representation in this research. The first aspect concerns membership participation as a shop steward and the factors that influences a union member to become and remain a shop steward. The second aspect considers the leadership function of the role and identifies individual differences in shop steward leadership style. The third aspect of the role concerns the shop steward as a union conduit for communicating with members in their place of work. This is developed by considering the concept of social capital as the network of social relationships that shop stewards build through communicating with union members in the workplace. Finally, the fourth aspect of voice considers the challenges and complexities associated with enabling members to have a say and influence their working conditions. Trade unions, in providing a formal mechanism for collective workplace representation ultimately rests on member willingness to participate in the union as a shop steward and to act on behalf of the interests of the members in the workplace. Table 2.1 summarises the key aspects of the shop stewards' role and relevant literature. Each of these key aspects identified are discussed further below.

Table 2.1: Summary of shop steward's role.

Dimensions of representation	Key aspects of the shop stewards role under analysis	Key characteristics	Examples from the literature
Descriptive representation			
	1. Participation: becoming and remaining a shop steward	Influencing factors such as age, socialisation, union orientation, willing or reluctant recruitment, stress, support and ability to cope in the role.	Nicholson et al, (1981): Winch (1981): Moore, (1980): McShane (1986): Flood and Turner (1996).
Substantive representation			
	2. Leadership	Shop stewards as follower or leader union representatives	Pedler (1973): Batstone et al (1977): Marchington and Armstrong (1983): Fosh (1993): Green et al (2000)
	3. Communication	Communication patterns and enabling union contact with the members.	Pedler (1973): Schuler and Robertson (1983): Jarley (2005).
	4. Voice	Enabling member influence to have a say on the wage effort bargain	Freeman and Medoff (1984): Terry (1995, 2003): Bryson et al (2006): Dundon et al (2004): Blyton and Turnbull (2004): D'Art and Turner (2006)

2.4 Participation: becoming and remaining a shop steward

Lay union member participation as a shop steward is one of several forms of participation in the union (Kelloway and Barling, 1993). Union participation has been used as an umbrella term referring to any involvement of members in a variety of union tasks (Paquet and Bergeron, 1996). Rank and file participation covers a wide range of progressive acts from merely joining a union, to attending / voting at union meetings, filing a grievance or more time-consuming levels of participation as serving on a union committee or serving as a shop steward (Kelloway and Barling, 1993; McShane, 1986; Nicholson et al, 1981).

Studies in union participation have sought to distinguish participation into broad categories determined by different levels of intensity of union involvement. McShane (1986) distinguished between three dimensions of union participation related to (1) attendance and involvement in union meetings, (2) voting in union elections, strikes and pay deals and (3) union administration. Fosh (1993) divides participation into formal or informal tasks. Formal participation refers to formalised union tasks such as attending union meetings, voting, using the grievance procedure and holding union office. Informal participation refers to a more casual type of participation such as talking about union issues with other union members, reading union literature or talking with union leaders (Kelloway et al, 1995:335). Kelly and Kelly (1994) categorise membership into easy participation, such as reading union journals, attending union meetings and difficult, for example, speaking at union meetings serving on a union committee or being a union leader. For Cohen (1994:751) union participation can be active or passive. Active refers to forms of union involvement that require a considerable personal contribution of the individual member to the union. Passive participation refers to ad hoc or occasional behaviours that require minimal personal investment by the union member.

Despite the varying labels and categorisations, Redman and Snape (2004:848) point out that these studies essentially highlight membership behaviours as identifying a distinction between those engaged in the highest level of participation

as in holding a union office (shop steward) and rank and file members who engage in all other limited forms of union participation. Overall, participation as a shop steward reflects a discretionary and distinctive form of union participation as it requires the member to take on more formal responsibility and voluntarily sacrifice more of their effort and time than other forms of union participation undertaken by rank and file members (Moore, 1979). Moreover, this distinctiveness extends beyond identifying the different levels of participation but also in identifying factors that explain why some union members are more likely to become involved in higher levels of union participation such as union administration, than others (Nicholson et al, 1981; McShane, 1986; Flood and Turner, 1996).

2.5 Factors influencing members to become shop stewards

Ideological commitment to the union has been considered as a factor in influencing higher levels of union participation as shop steward (Nicholson, 1976). Commitment in a general sense refers to the “relative strength of the individual’s identification with, and involvement in, a particular organization” (Mowday et al, 1979:226). From a trade union perspective commitment has been studied as both a psychological and behavioural dimension (Fosh, 1993). The behavioural dimension refers to the degree or intensity of membership involvement in trade union tasks. Psychological commitment refers to the extent to which members positively identify with and internalise the goals and beliefs of their union (Fullagar and Barling, 1989).

Based on this distinction Nicholson et al (1981) developed a measure of progressive membership involvement in the union. They distinguished five types of membership behaviour / participation based on a measure of union orientation in terms of membership attitudes towards the union. The five types were categorised in terms of increasing levels of behavioural and psychological union involvement, namely reluctant, card carriers, selective activists, apolitical stalwarts and ideological activists. Reluctant members did not want to be part of the union and

thus their orientation to the union predisposes them have little or no involvement. Card carriers and selective activists were sporadically active in the union. At the other end of the spectrum, ideological activists have higher levels of commitment to the union and are thus more inclined to participate in union tasks such as acting as a shop steward (Flood and Turner, 1996; Flood, Turner and Williams 1996).

Subsequent studies have sought to determine whether the level of member involvement in the union is related to ideological or instrumental reasons (Newton and Shore, 1992; Sverke and Kuruvilla, 1995; Snape et al, 2000). Instrumental orientation refers to commitment that is based on satisfying some individual self-interest (Newton and Shore, 1992). Any attachment to the union is merely a calculative one in which membership participation is typically linked to achieving some individual benefit in terms of union protection or economic betterment (Fosh, 1993). Ideological commitment refers to a personal belief in the purpose and values of collective representation beyond instrumental concerns (Sverke and Sjoberg, 1997).

In evaluating the validity of the instrumental and ideological union commitment scales, Sverke and Sjoberg (1997) found that instrumental commitment was associated with membership involvement in union tasks that require little time and personal effort. This is consistent with Nicholson et al's (1981) 'card carrier' and 'selective activist' member categories that show limited involvement in the union and only engage in an issue specific manner. In contrast, union members displaying ideological commitment are associated with more active and consistent forms of union involvement including those who take on representative positions in the union (Sverke and Sjoberg, 1997). Further support regarding the relationship between union related attitudes and participation rates have been found in the studies of Beynon (1973), Nicholson et al (1981), and in an Irish context Flood and Turner (1996). Their results indicate ideological union commitment as a distinguishing factor between rank and file members and shop stewards. Collectively, these studies indicate that a favourable ideological attitude towards the union is intimately related to participation as a shop steward.

Socialisation influences refers to the influence of ‘significant others’ in shaping a union members’ tendency to participate in the union (Nicholson et al, 1981:116). These include a combination of family and wider social networks as work colleagues, union leaders, friends and political affiliations as important socialising influences (Nicholson et al, 1981; Fiorito et al, 1986). Interest in the potential influence of a union member’s social context has received some support. Spinard (1960:241) argued that the likelihood of union involvement is considerably improved by an individuals’ social context and interactions with those that hold favourable pro- union sympathies. Favourable attitudes of parents towards trade unions rather than just parents being union members has been found to be moderately but positively correlated with rank and file participation in the union (Nicholson et al, 1981). Barling, Kelloway and Bremermann (1991) argue that having parents that were/are union members merely confirms that one or other of the members’ parents were/are members of the union but it does not automatically apply that the parents were pro-union or active. They argue that the significance of family influence is based on parental union attitudes and levels of activism which creates a psychological environment for the potential participation of future family members in the union. A review of the attitudes of young workers towards trade unions noted the historical importance of family union orientation as a conduit to ‘pass down’ or transfer collectivist/trade union values to generations of potential union members (Waddington and Kerr, 2002:303).

Yet, the extent to which the socialisation influences of family and friends is a factor in directly inducing members to become shop stewards remains uncertain. Flood and Turner’s (1996) study exploring the distinguishing characteristics between rank and file union members and shop stewards found that factors such as father’s union orientation and union friends had no direct effect on union office holding (shop steward). They suggest that the individual’s social context may indirectly reinforce and develop pro union values and union sympathy. Thus, the socialisation experiences associated with pro union family, friends and work colleagues may provide a potential pool of members that may be more likely to take on the role of the shop steward (Flood and Turner, 1996:96). Overall, the important influence of social groups whereby the individual is exposed to values and norms of union

participation is a consistent factor in explaining union participation in general and may have implications for higher forms of involvement in union tasks such as taking on the shop steward's position.

A number of studies have also found evidence of a relationship between higher levels of union participation and political activism. Fosh (1981) and Huszczo (1983) found moderate correlations between union participation and involvement in political associations. More specifically from a shop steward perspective, studies by Glick et al (1977), Nicholson et al (1981), Flood and Turner (1996) have found it is typical for shop stewards to have an interest in politics. Nicholson et al's (1981), study found that seventy-five per cent of their sample of shop stewards had a strong interest in politics. Flood and Turner (1996) found that office holders (shop stewards) were more likely to vote for a left-wing party than other less active rank and file members. The literature indicates therefore some support for the significance of political considerations in explaining membership participation as a shop steward.

The effect of demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, seniority and education has been used extensively in explaining membership participation in trade unions. However, past studies have shown an inconclusive and inconsistent set of results regarding the relationship between demographic factors and union participation in general. Anderson (1979), Huszczo (1983) and Klandermans (1986) found that demographic variables were weak predictors of union participation in general. Other studies however have found demographic factors explain differences between active and less active members in terms of their overall participation in union tasks. More active union members have been found to be older (Spinard, 1960; Fosh, 1981) and tend to be in the union for a longer period of time (Glick et al, 1977; McShane, 1986). Moreover, previous literature suggests that women are less likely than men to participate in union tasks and take on the shop stewards' role (Gordon et al 1980, Heery and Kelly, 1989, Schur and Kruse, 1992). However, Turner and D'Art's (2016) assessment of women in Irish trade unions found little difference between male and female members in relation to pro

union attitudes. A recurring explanation in this regard centres on the disproportionate role that women play in family and home responsibilities (Chaison and Andiappan, 1989). As such, the burden of two jobs, at home and at work (Hochschild, 1989) potentially acts as a barrier leaving little time for higher levels of union participation such as a shop stewards' role.

This raises the significance of demographic variables as a possible factor associated with the position of a shop steward. Studies specific to participation as a shop steward report a consistent demographic pattern. The position of shop steward is male dominated (Lawrence, 1994, Charlwood and Forth, 2008, Unchurch et al 2002). UK based surveys undertaken over a period of some five decades indicate Seniority in terms of age is a consistent characteristic in becoming a shop steward. The age of a typical shop steward according to Clegg et al (1961) averaged at thirty-five years. Upchurch et al's (2002) study of union workplace representatives from a sample of three unions found that that seventy- two percent of their sample had an age of forty and above. Age was also found to have a significant effect on union commitment. Flood and Turner (1996) found that as age increased, union commitment increased. Increased age was associated with union tenure and thus more senior members may be more positively predisposed towards the union (Flood and Turner, 1996).

In a similar vein, seniority in terms of longer union tenure/ length of time as a union member is a consistent characteristic associated with those members holding the shop steward's position (Cully et al, 1999; Upchurch et al, 2002). This reflects McShane's (1986) and Nicholson (1976) finding regarding a seniority effect on union administration. Their evidence suggests the longer an individual is a member of the union the more likely they will be involved in union administration. Education effects have also been found to be associated with participation as a shop steward. Nicholson et al (1981) and McShane (1986:74) observed that higher levels of formal education increase the likelihood of involvement as a workplace representative. In this sense the consistent finding in studies specific to shop stewards that union members with a seniority status are disproportionately

represented among shop stewards highlights the significance of demographic variables. This is consistent with the literature suggesting that demographic characteristics of age/seniority and education increase the likelihood of rank and file members becoming a shop steward (McShane, 1986).

2.6 Recruitment into the position of shop steward

A number of studies have focused on how union members have come to assume the position of shop steward. Chinoy (1950) and Nicholson (1976) considered the factors related to becoming shop steward by focusing on how members were recruited into the position of union representative. One aspect regarding shop steward representation is that recruitment into the position is synonymous with democratic elections in which regardless of personal characteristics, any union member has the opportunity to put themselves forward for the position of shop steward.

A critical factor is the extent of an individuals' receptiveness or willingness towards taking on the position (Chinoy, 1950). In focusing on how union members became workplace union representatives, Chinoy (1950:161) suggests three predominant pathways. The 'accidental' member was reluctant to take the position but was persuaded because no one else would take it. The 'ambitious' member sought the position in order to further their own personal achievement /ambitions and the 'ideological' member accepted the position due to their strongly held union beliefs. Nicholson (1976) expanded on this and proposed that the path to becoming a shop steward can be either internally or externally influenced. Internal factors refer to some members being personally motivated to take on the position due to an ideological belief in the union or a sense of personal responsibility to the members. This is consistent with the union commitment literature suggesting that shop stewards are more likely to be ideologically committed to the goals of the union. Thus, taking on the shop steward's position is an extension of the individual's internal belief system.

External factors refer to influences distinct from the preferences of the individual in taking on the job of shop steward (Nicholson, 1976). These external influencers refer to instances where the member was somewhat hesitant or reluctant to take on the position but took it on nevertheless. In these instances, the individual was encouraged or pressured into accepting the position such as in accidental occupancy (no one else was willing) or popular occupancy (the member was the most popular or obvious choice among the group). In this sense, external factors suggest that a reluctant rank and file member who had no real ambition to take on the position may be elected as the obvious choice of the workgroup on the basis of their experience, knowledge and tenure as a union member in the organisation (Nicholson, 1976). In such cases the presence of a shop steward in the workplace may be associated with factors that are more socially determined by the membership rather than ideologically determined by the individual occupant.

Some evidence exists endorsing the view that ‘internal’ and particularly ‘external’ factors explain union members’ recruitment into the position of shop steward. McCarthy and Parker’s (1968) sample of sixteen hundred acting shop stewards found that only thirty-six per cent actually wanted the position, while the majority of occupants said they had to be persuaded to take on the job. McCarthy and Parker also observed that competition for the role was not highly active as seventy-one per-cent of shop stewards obtained the position in uncontested workplace elections. Schuller and Robertson (1983) found that 70 per cent of their sample of shop stewards entered the position without a contested election. Nicholson et al (1980) reported that forty-five percent of their sample entered the position unopposed, while sixteen percent were extremely reluctant to take the position. In a similar vein, Moore’s (1980) study reported that from a sample of one hundred shop stewards, sixty nine percent of respondents did not actively seek the position in the first instance. In an Irish context, Flood and Turner (1996) found from their sample of twenty-nine interviewed shop stewards that only eighteen percent initially wanted the job of shop steward. Moore’s (1980:91) assertion that ‘there is no great keenness on the part of trade union members to accept the role of shop steward’ is a consistent theme throughout the literature. Thus, while becoming a shop steward is essential to establishing the presence of union representation in the

workplace, the likelihood that recruitment into the position will consist of reluctant union members that were persuaded into the position cannot be discounted.

2.7 Continuing as a shop steward

The ongoing participation of rank and file members in their union is an essential factor in the effective functioning of a union and its capacity to represent member interests (Katz and Kahn, 1978; McShane, 1986; Flood and Turner, 1996). Membership participation in the union has been considered as central to the internal decision-making processes of trade unions as well as mobilising membership support in protecting worker interests regarding their conditions of work (Strauss, 1977; Anderson, 1978). While there is some literature on the factors associated with becoming a shop steward, there is considerably less regarding the factors that influence continued member participation in the shop steward's position. The voluntary nature of shop steward representation poses particular challenges as the position requires that the recruited member simultaneously perform union duties and their own work responsibilities as an employee of the firm (Moore, 1980).

Given the dual demand of the role, Winch (1981) suggests that the likelihood of an individual remaining as a shop steward is affected by the extent to which the occupants can cope with the pressures and demands of the position. Shop stewards need to manage inherently hostile and conflictual situations and relations between members and the employer within the work environment (Nicholson, 1976:20). Winch (1981) describes the shop stewards' role as operating at the sharp end of workplace relations where the pressures generated by the competing interests of management and workers converge. Moreover, the manner in which recruitment into the position takes place means that the occupants often have little preparation or training before they take on the job. Typically, shop stewards have to cope, evolve and learn the necessary skills while carrying out the job (Coyne, 1982; Martin and Berthiaume, 1993). Consequently, the role of shop steward is commonly associated with significant stressors regarding the occupancy of the position (Nicholson, 1976; Martin and Berthiaume, 1993).

A concern for trade unions therefore is the stability of tenure in the position as a high turnover rate may cause a problem in continually recruiting relatively inexperienced stewards and secondly discouraging prospective members from taking on the position (Winch, 1980). Nevertheless, the negative consequences associated with the position are not automatically detrimental to the occupant's continued presence in the position of shop steward. Indeed, studies into shop stewards that seek information on the background characteristics confirm a consistent pattern in the relative durability of the occupant's length of service as a shop steward (Nicholson, 1976; Flood and Turner, 1996; Upchurch et al, 2002). As such a number of factors have been identified as relevant to influencing the continued presence of union members in the position of shop steward.

2.8 Factors influencing shop steward tenure.

Stress in general refers to the emotional and behavioural reactions that occur to a role occupant as they react to changes in their environment (Hart and Cooper, 2001:94). The organisational behaviour literature summarises stress as the work-related characteristics conceptualised as role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload that give rise to unpleasant emotional states that people experience as a consequence of their work (Kahn et al, 1964; Hart and Cooper, 2001). Role conflict results from two or more sets of incompatible demands involving work-related issues (Kahn et al, 1964). Role ambiguity denotes the lack of predictability in a role and role overload refers to work expectations that exceed ones' capacity in some way (Rizzo et al, 1970). The unpleasant emotional states that may arise from work related stressors have been associated with negative consequences for the individual's health and well-being (Fletcher, 1988). These are manifest in strain indicators such as anxiety, frustration, self-doubt, anger and distress (Hart and Cooper, 2001). This may lead to a deterioration in individual behavioural reactions in work related aspects of the job such as poor job performance, absenteeism or eventually exit from the role (Hart and Cooper, 2001).

Role overload has been identified as a prominent stressor for shop stewards (Nicholson, 1976). Overload has been attributed to factors such as the sheer breath of tasks that shop stewards are engaged in their dual position as workplace representatives and as an employee. Shop stewards' experience of role overload has been reported in terms of the time constraints associated with fulfilling the demands of employee and representative. Nicholson's (1976) study reported that the majority of shop stewards experience at least moderate amounts of role overload. The number of members a shop steward has to deal with places greater demands on the shop stewards time (Winch, 1981). Moreover, Upchurch et al (2002) reported that shop stewards in their study had experienced a general increase and intensification of work as an employee, which resulted in making it more demanding and difficult to give time to union tasks.

Furthermore, there are no clear performance guidelines for the shop steward (Bluen and Barling, 1988). Shop stewards are exposed to role ambiguity by the unpredictable nature of the situations that shop stewards find themselves managing (Bluen and Barling, 1988). A study of over two hundred shop stewards concluded that shop stewards will experience at least moderate levels of role ambiguity (Martin and Berthiaume, 1993). This was due to the diversity of situations that require shop stewards to determine the right course of action to be taken for problems to which there may be no one right solution (Martin and Berthiaume, 1993). This can be magnified by a lack of appropriate training in the skills and knowledge required by occupants to perform the job (Nicholson, 1976; Martin and Berthiaume, 1993).

The predicted outcome for shop stewards is that occupancy of the position may increase their vulnerability to psychological (anxiety, worry) and physiological strain (headaches, loss of sleep), (Barling et al, 2005). The personal costs associated with workplace union representation can therefore have negative consequences in terms of finding volunteer rank and file members to take on the position (Moore, 1981). Since the position of shop steward is a voluntary one, those

shop stewards who experience the most personal discomfort in the position are most likely to leave the position which in turn has implications in terms of replacing shop stewards who have resigned from the post (Winch, 1980). Alternatively, shop steward satisfaction with their experiences in the position may create a greater willingness by shop stewards to tolerate the stresses and strains that are an inherent part of the job (Nicholson, 1976). Job satisfaction in general refers to the positive feelings about a job resulting from an evaluation of one's job experiences (Locke, 1976; Robbins and Judge, 2007). Central to this has been the influence and level of support for the shop steward from a network of relationships associated with workplace representation. Support from union resources is a related factor in this regard (Nicholson, 1976; Winch, 1981). More extensively trained shop stewards had longer service as a shop steward, were more satisfied with their role and experienced less role strain.

Yet, past evidence has indicated limited formal training for shop stewards which instead occurred as informal and incidental training arising from learning by doing approach (Nicholson, 1976; Bluen and Barling, 1988). Nicholson (1976:20) concluded that even the deployment of limited union resources were of 'incalculable value' in assisting shop stewards to cope with the demands of the job. More recent work, for example Terry (1995, 2003) and in the Irish context (Roche et al, 2011) highlight that shop stewards continue to be confronted with a range of new challenges and developments including intense globalisation, new regulatory changes and decentralised bargaining environments. Thus the 'incalculable value' of assisting and equipping shop stewards is still relevant for what continues to be a voluntary representative position. As such, contemporary managerial attitudes and priorities in highly competitive markets have been identified as an important factor in adding to the challenges for shop stewards (Terry, 2003; Roche et al, 2011).

The selective victimisation of shop stewards by management has been a recurring topic within workplace industrial relations in general (Winch, 1981; Hyman, 1975; Gall, 2009). Salient forms of victimisation have been identified such as being refused promotion, transferred to other work, given unsocial shifts, including dismissal (Gall, 2009). In the Irish context Murphy and Turner (2013) identified

frequent occurrences of management hostility towards union activists in the attempt to reassert managerial prerogative in union organising drives. Management support or marginalisation of workplace unions also impacts on the shop steward's role. Indications of management related attitudes have been identified in terms of the resources made available to shop stewards as providing employer resources as office/ phone facilities as well as support in terms of time off for shop steward training and union tasks (Terry, 2003; Roche et al, 2011). Flood and Turner (2006) indicated that shop stewards in their study who received support from management reported higher levels of satisfaction than those shop stewards who had to deal with more hostile and obstructive employers. Moreover, their correlation analysis Flood and Turner (2006) found that shop stewards who reported higher levels of role satisfaction were longer serving and had lower levels of ambiguity and strain. The day to day experiences of shop stewards positive or otherwise in terms of their perceptions of support emerge as factors that contribute to the shop stewards' decision to continue as a voluntary workplace union representative (Nicholson, 1976; Beynon, 1973; Winch, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996).

2.9 Chapter summary and research question 1

This chapter began by introducing various definitions of the shop steward in which representation has been identified as a core and distinctive characteristic of the shop stewards' role. From this point of view, shop steward representation means that firstly there is a union representative present in the workplace for members to call on as their representative. Secondly, that the representative actions of the shop steward facilitate and provides opportunities for membership participation in their workplace. This chapter reviewed the first distinctive feature associated with shop steward representation; becoming and remaining a shop steward. An important aspect here is shop steward representation is reliant on a lay union member's voluntary enrolment and sustained presence in the role. Table 2.2 summarises the main factors associated with membership participation as a shop steward.

Table 2.2: Summary of factors associated with member participation as a shop steward

Member participation as a shop steward	Factors	Key Features	Key literature specific to shop stewards
Becoming a shop steward	Union orientation Socialisation characteristics Demographic characteristics Political orientation recruitment and Internal / external forces	Associated with individual and social influences.	Chinoy 1950: Nicholson 1976: Nicholson et al 1981: Glick et al 1977: Moore 1980: McShane 1986: Flood and Turner 1996.
Continuing as a shop steward	Stress and Strain Satisfaction Union support /training Managerial attitudes	Associated with day to day experiences, resources and support to cope with the demands of the shop stewards' position.	Nicholson 1976: Winch 1980: Martin and Berthiaume 1993: Flood and Turner 1996: Gall 2009.

The factors identified in this chapter are relevant to the shop steward's role as factors that influence union member participation in becoming and continuing as a shop steward. These factors suggest that occupancy and continued occupancy in the role is associated with a broad range of personal influences, social factors and the ability to adapt a role that places considerable demands on shop stewards. The participation of the union member in the role is an important aspect of shop steward representation. What influences union members to become and remain shop stewards is therefore a crucial question addressed in this thesis.

Chapter Three

What shop stewards do; representative actions and tasks in the workplace

3.0 Introduction

Research focussing specifically on the actions of shop stewards have emphasised an assortment of tasks in the fulfilment of the shop steward's union responsibilities in workplace industrial relations. These range from grievance handler, spokesperson, information disseminator, decision maker and monitoring and negotiating agreements (McCarthy, 1968; Partridge, 1977; Schuler and Jackson, 1983; Terry, 1995). This literature highlights a wide range of actions and duties consistent with the substantive characteristics of representation to protect or advance the interests of the members. This chapter addresses these tasks in terms of emphasising the shop stewards' unique representative relationship with the members that furnishes members with a channel to influence decisions on their working conditions. In this regard leadership, communication and voice are three essential shop steward tasks that have significant implications in how they represent their members.

3.1 Shop steward representation in the workplace; leadership

The term union leader is a general term that refers to a formal position in the union including both workgroup union leaders (shop steward) as well as the regional or national union leadership (Pedler, 1973; Salamon, 2000; Greene et al, 2000). A common attribute among these descriptions denotes that acceptance of a leadership position is the highest form of union participation responsible for protecting union members and facilitating their involvement in union matters (Kelly and Heery, 1994). However, unlike leadership in business organisations, union leaders it is argued do not have the same prerogatives of authoritarian power over their

members (Hyman, 2007). Union leadership as part of a participative democratic organisation emphasises leadership as a process rather than a hierarchy as the decisions of union leaders are constrained by the opinions and approval of their members (Hyman, 2007). This union context is unique in terms of leadership research according to Barling (2014:176) as shop stewards are normally 'elected by a vote of those whom they represent'. Union effectiveness in terms of protecting membership welfare is conditional on union leaders managing member preferences and encouraging the consensus and approval of their members in the selection and protection of those interests (Hyman, 2007). Ultimately, union leadership is a process of influencing the members and organising their efforts towards the accomplishment of membership goals (Clarke, 2009:168).

Shop stewards are volunteer union leaders with the closest contact to the membership being directly involved in union tasks that organises and influences member expectations and goals at workplace level (Pedler, 1973; Moore, 1980; Green et al, 2000). How the shop steward leads depend on the extent to which shop stewards influence or are influenced by their members views and expectations (Pedler, 1973; Batstone et al, 1977; Clarke, 2009). Batstone et al (1977) categorised the leadership styles of shop stewards around two discriminating factors; whether shop stewards adopt a delegate- representative approach to the membership and the degree of commitment to trade union principles. The delegate representative dimension refers to the degree to which shop steward's influence their membership and dominate decisions about the most appropriate issues to be pursued (representative) or whether shop stewards simply respond to and follow the issues brought forward by their members (delegate). The union principles dimension refers to the steward's commitment to the purpose of trade union representation in terms of membership unity and social justice rather than specifically focusing on instrumental outcomes such as wages and conditions (Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). Based on the interaction of these two dimensions, Batstone et al (1977) identified four ideal types of shop steward behaviour, the leader, cowboy, populist and nascent leader.

In assessing the validity of their typology, Batstone et al (1977) examined the behaviour of one hundred and fifty-two shop stewards. In their study, relatively few shop stewards (seven in total) were classified as cowboys, defined as militant and concerned predominantly with maximising short-term gains. Fourteen shop stewards were classified as nascent leaders defined as committed to the wider trade union movement but acted as delegates in carrying out membership wishes (Batstone et al, 1977).

As such, the leader and populist stewards emerged as the two predominant types within their study with clear differences in terms of representative behaviour. Leader stewards were described as actively initiating, directing, communicating and reasoning with the membership as to what particular worker issues to handle defend or quash. The populist steward according to Batstone et al (1977) relies on the immediate interests and follows the instructions of their workgroup as the primary reference point of their actions. Populist shop stewards can be characterised as followers as they defer to the influence of the rank and file and generally stand back and express the mandate and desires of the rank and file to the employer (Marchington and Armstrong, 1983).

In practice therefore, the predominant discriminating factor depended on the extent to which shop stewards were leaders or followers in their relationship with their members (Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). Commitment to union principles has less impact on leadership types (Batstone et al, 1977; William, 1980; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). The 'union principles', dimension proved too vague and generalised to be useful (William, 1980; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). Moreover, there is little agreement as to what union principles actually are and this reduces the usefulness of this dimension of leadership (William, 1980; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). For example, a study of one hundred and thirty-five shop stewards found that there was wide variation over what shop stewards identified as union principals highlighting a range of responses from membership unity to better wages and conditions (Marchington and Armstrong, 1983:41).

Even so, Marchington and Armstrong (1983:39) found strong support for the leader-follower dimension suggesting that it makes a valuable contribution in analysing how shop stewards enact their leadership function on behalf of their members. However, it has been argued that Batstone et al's typology has been subject to further criticism suggesting that the typology of shop steward leadership behaviours is an oversimplification (Williams, 1980; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). These typologies according to Williams (1980:41) do not recognise the reality of shop steward's capacity to vary their style of leadership to suit different workplace circumstances and issues. Thus, shop stewards may display a variety of leadership styles over a period of time in the role.

An alternative approach to union leadership has focused on the participatory style and the collectivist outlook of local union leaders (Fosh, 1993). The participatory style of union leadership according to Fosh (1993:581) refers to union leaders that encourage frequent consultation, communication and involvement of the rank and file members in union decisions that affect them. The collectivist perspective refers to the extent to which union leaders view worker issues as a collective problem rather than treating issues as individual grievances and injustices (Green et al, 2000:76). This participatory leadership approach has been applied in the contemporary drive for union renewal (Simms, 2013). Union renewal refers to an organising approach to workplace trade unionism that emphasises increased membership activism and control over their own workplace issues rather than rely on external union officials to service or deal with membership problems at work (Simms, 2013). Central to the organising approach are local union representatives to renew and rebuild workplace union organisation by increasing the participation of members to defend and advance their interests at the workplace (Simms, 2013).

Contrasts between transactional and transformational leadership approaches have also been applied to descriptions of trade union leadership (Clarke, 2000). The transactional/transformational leadership approaches start from a business leadership perspective in advocating the notion of increasing the performance of subordinates. These theories are then applied interchangeably into a union context

and focus on the effects of union leadership behaviour on union member's attitudes to their union (Metochi, 2002). Transactional leadership refers to leadership as characterised by a relationship between the leader and the group which is based on transaction and compliance. The leader compels compliance and involvement of the group through both rewards and punishment (Clarke, 2009; Schultz & Duane, 2010). This is contrasted with transformational leadership that is based on transforming the culture of the group / organisation through an emphasis on communication and the development of shared ideas, issues, values and goals (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Clarke, 2000). Studies by Fullagar et al (1992) and Kelloway and Barling (1993) have examined the impact of transformational leadership on union members' attitudes to the union. The findings suggest support for a relationship between transformational union leadership and the strength of membership identification with the union.

The leader / populist approach, the participative and collectivist approach as well as the transactional and transformational approach suggests that there is room for a variety of perspectives on the tasks of shop stewards as union leaders. Table 3.1 summarises the key characteristics of the union leadership approaches. Yet common to these approaches is that leadership of the rank and file is considered a central activity associated with shop stewards influencing and organising their efforts towards the accomplishment of membership goals (Clarke, 2009). Overall, the union leadership literature places particular emphasis on the democratic relationship between the shop steward and their members in terms of how shop stewards respond to and manage the preferences and wishes of union members in the workplace.

Table 3.1: Summary of union leadership styles

Union leadership type	Descriptions
Leader	Leading /influencing members and deciding which issues to pursue.
Populist	Follow membership wishes, act as a spokesperson to comply with and carry out member demands
Participatory	Emphasis on communication, consultation and involvement of union members
Collectivist	Emphasis on issues and grievances as an opportunity for the collective participation of members
Transactional	Emphasis on the compliance of members through rewards and punishment
Transformational	Emphasis on eliciting willing support and participation from members through personal qualities as vision, communication and encouragement.

Source: Green et al, 2000

3.2 Shop steward representation in the workplace; communication

The shop steward as a union leader has been frequently described as the main point of contact or union communication channel for membership access to union information and decision making (Pedler, 1973; Partridge, 1977; Schuler and Robertson, 1983; Jarley, 2005). Jarley (2005) argues that a close-knit union community is predicated on a network of union leadership communication. As such the communication function is a key aspect of the shop steward's leadership actions. Thus, without internal channels for membership views and opinions union leaders have little opportunity to influence and shape membership expectations and address membership grievances and injustices (Jarley, 2005).

The concept of shop steward communication is a somewhat imprecise concept but constitutes a wide range of membership interactions. Various forms of membership communication channels have been linked to the shop steward's representative responsibilities from putting union information on notice boards, having informal chats with the members, hearing individual member grievances and holding formal mass meetings with the members (Warren, 1971; Pedler, 1973; Partridge, 1977; Schuller and Robertson, 1983). The opportunities provided by shop stewards for their membership to participate in trade union tasks suggests that shop stewards as a union communication mechanism are of some social importance in the workplace (Schuller and Robertson, 1983). Shop stewards have been described as the 'focal person' (Warren, 1971:54) or the 'linking pin' (Pedler, 1973:53) in managing and creating a network of connections between the union and the members (Partridge, 1977). Creating a network of union membership connections in contemporary times has expanded beyond traditional forms of union communication to digital modes of communication related to the use of social media such as union websites, twitter and facebook (Bryson et al. 2010). These digital forms of communication offer more flexibility in allowing union leaders to communicate with members that are difficult to reach due to the nature of their job and assist in accommodating the membership with easier access to union leaders to communicate their opinions on union policy matters (Diamond and Freeman, 2002).

Other recent interest in union leadership connectivity with the membership centers around the development of social capital based on the notion of building strong networks of social relations among the union membership (Johnson and Jarley, 2005; Jarley, 2005). Putnam (1995: 67) defines social capital as 'features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'. People create a network of social interactions and connections with each other and these interactions are used to influence and enable some form of societal good for the members of a social network (Jarley, 2005:3). The concept of social capital has a broad application in society, from understanding how social networks develop and operate in rural and city-based communities to identifying the formation of social capital between workers in a specific firm (Onyx and Bullen, 2000; Bandiera et al, 2007).

3.3 Shop steward communication and social interactions

Several different forms of social capital relationships can be identified. ‘Bonding social capital’ refers to the development of connections and interactions among people within homogeneous groups who share similar values and social identity (Putnam, 2000:22). Similar social identities and values facilitate the members of a group to interact or to ‘bond’ and form mutual trust relationships with each other. Strongly bonded social networks are useful in marshalling the members of a community to collaborate in the solving of community problems and provide emotional support in attaining interests important to the members of the group (Saundry et al, 2012).

‘Bridging social capital’ refers to relationship connections between heterogeneous groups with differing social, ethnic or occupational backgrounds (Putnam 2000: 22). The emphasis on ‘bridging’ indicates that diverse groups are disconnected from each other by differing social backgrounds and access different sources of information (Saundry et al, 2012). An important component drawn out in the descriptions of bridging social capital is the key idea that diverse groups can expand their linkages in order to exchange and attain access to new knowledge, values and information beyond the socially bonded network (Woolcook, 2001). The potential gains from a wider network of interactions are alluded to by Putnam (2000), as diverse communities can participate or ‘build bridges’ with each other for their mutual gain.

Other interpretations of social capital have been developed around the concept of structural cognitive and relational components (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Structural social capital refers to the overall pattern of connections that links a social group (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Structural social capital emphasises the frequency and type of formal and informal contact methods that serve as instruments to create connections between the members of that community. The cognitive dimension is related to the extent to which the members of the community experienced a shared vision, norms of behaviour and a common understanding

between them. Relational social capital refers to the quality of interpersonal relationships such as trust, solidarity and reciprocity that develop as the result of ongoing interactions within the group (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998).

While different terms are used to describe the various types of connections that exist within a group or community, a common theme centres on the notion that the social part of social capital resides in the relationship between the members of a community. These relationships are based on social connections through frequent interactions within groups that provide 'capital' in the form of information, trust and a sense of togetherness (Saundry et al, 2012). Sharing this capital in turn facilitates group actions that have the potential to achieve better outcomes for the community or organisational groups (Putman, 1995). Thus, the idea of community and facilitating group interactions within them is a central feature of social capital.

Jarley (2005) suggested that as trade unions organise and encourage member activity at workplace level, trade unions should focus on efforts to build close social networks of communicative relationships among their membership. Jarley (2005:18) stresses the importance of union leaders in building personal relationships through frequent interactions with workgroup members in order to create a strong union presence in the workplace. The upshot is that employers will have little incentive or be compelled to interact or engage with workplace unions that do not have a vibrant and cohesive union community that cannot be mobilised to attain their workplace interests (Jarley, 2005). Moreover Jarley (2005) argues that member / leader interactions should not rely exclusively on instances where members raise workplace injustices to the union leadership. This is deemed as an inadequate communication approach to build and sustain a cohesive union community as strong leader-membership connections and communications can atrophy and become inactive in periods of industrial peace where there are few disagreements or disputes occurring between workers and the employer (Jarley 2005:11).

Yet, the employment relationship is characterised as a continuous, indeterminate and an open-ended exchange relationship in a market economy (D'Art and Turner, 2002). Periods of industrial peace still require the maintenance of order and stability (Hyman,1979; Edwards, 1986: Blyton and Turnbull, 1994: D'Art and Turner, 2002). In a relationship characterised by a continuous tension and antagonism around competing interests between the employer and employee, shop steward communicative interactions with their members over the wage-effort bargain remains a relevant and persistent function of the shop steward's role. In this vein, providing membership with access to a union mechanism that enables workers to have a voice and exert some influence over workplace injustices contributes to the maintenance of order and stability between employers and employees in the workplace (D'Art and Turner, 2002).

3.4 Shop steward representation in the workplace; union voice

An important feature of union representation is to act as a voice intermediary for members in their dealings with the employer (Geary, 2007). Shop stewards endeavour to create tangible and concrete voice conduits that permit members to have a say in workplace matters that affect them (Freeman and Medoff, 1984). The standard account of voice has been defined by Hirschman (1970:30) as, "any attempt at all to change rather than escape an objectionable state of affairs". In this context the notion of voice has at its core the opportunity for individuals to secure improvements in their particular situation. Freeman and Medoff (1984:8) refer to employee voice 'as the use of communication to bring actual and desired conditions closer together'. Boxall and Purcell (2003:162) define employee voice as, 'a whole variety of processes and structures which enable and at times empower employees directly and indirectly, to contribute to decision-making in the firm'. More generally, Bryson et al (2006:438) refer to employee voice as, 'any formal mechanism by which workers can communicate their views to management'. In the main, the definitions of employee voice is associated with any opportunity where employees can 'have a say' in influencing in management decisions that affect their

workplace circumstances (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008; Boxall and Purcell, 2011).

In the industrial relations literature employee voice is often associated exclusively with trade union representation and collective bargaining (Dundon et al, 2004). Trade unions are seen as the most effective representative voice mechanism to express employee grievances and involve employees in influencing management decision making in the organisation (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; McCabe and Lewin, 1992). Alternative approaches identify a growing interest in employee voice as workplace arrangements that offers employees an opportunity for some form of consultation with management about their issues and views (Wilkinson et al, 2014). In this guise, employee voice is generally based a direct and individual exchange between the employee and employer that does not give the employee any significant power to bargain or influence management decisions (Dundon et al, 2004). However, as Dundon et al (2004) point out the two alternative forms of employee voice are not necessarily mutually exclusive as both approaches can be utilised in contemporary organisations.

However, the pluralist interpretation rejects out of hand these employer controlled versions of employee voice such as suggestion schemes, attitude surveys, problem solving groups and non-union consultative forums (Wilkinson et al, 2014). Such schemes can be implemented or withdrawn by management placing the employee in a position of dependence of the goodwill of their employer in a whole range of areas affecting job and career (Daniel and McIntosh, 1972). Such an imbalance of power between the employer and employee according to Daniel and McIntosh (1972:111) is unlikely to be conducive to an environment in which employees can freely express their voice and challenge their superiors. Freeman and Medoff (1984) argued that trade unions are the only credible source of employee voice as they represent voice that is independent of employer control. These arguments point to the important role of trade union representation in creating opportunities for employees, through the union representative, to collectively and more freely

express their voice without fear of management reprisals (Greenfield and Pleasure, 1993).

Indeed, representative voice has achieved its most concrete expression through collective bargaining (Gunnigle, 2001). At its simplest collective bargaining is a means for unions to jointly regulate with management the employment conditions of their members (Flanders, 1975). Collective bargaining is a key union mechanism to facilitate the 'redistribution of decision making power away from management and towards employees' (Gunnigle 2001:4). Representative voice at enterprise level seeks to reduce the extent of managerial prerogative and effect greater employee influence' on organisational decision making (Gunnigle 2001). As a consequence, representative voice at the workplace is a continually contested terrain between employers and labour that is reflected in the tensions inherent in the employment relationship (Bowles and Gintis, 1990).

3.4.1 Union voice and the employment relationship

The employment relationship is at its most basic level an economic exchange (wages for labour effort) marked by attempts by both employers and labour to influence the terms of that exchange (Edwards, 1986; Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; D'Art and Turner, 2006). Underlying the nature of this exchange relationship is the potential for conflict and cooperation as an ever present and central feature of the employment relationship. Edwards (1986) argues that a basic antagonism is built into the day to day employment relationship because the relationship between reward and labour effort is an indeterminate exchange that is subject to continuous negotiation of competing interests and its eventual compromise. D'Art and Turner (2002:170) emphasised a number of recurring elements identified as the wage bargain, reward bargain, the commodity status of labour and the asymmetry of power 'as enduring and permanent features of any employment relationship rooted in a market system'.

The wage bargain refers to the economic relationship or the value that employers and labour attach to particular jobs and occupations. However, the value or price of labour becomes a source of conflict (D'Art and Turner, 2002). The overriding concern of the employer to accumulate profit is impaired by the cost of using labour in the provision of goods or services (Hyman, 1978). An essential feature of cooperation in the employment relationship centres on concluding a satisfactory economic bargain, where wages represents an acceptable value of labour. Any pragmatic acceptance of the price of labour is influenced by existing labour market and the relative power balance between the employer and employees (D'Art, 2002).

The effort bargain refers to the level of employee productivity or the labour effort the employer receives for the payment of wages. According to this perspective, conflict arises around the question of what a fair day's work is (D'Art, 2002). The expectation of what is a fair level of effort is ultimately vague and subjective construct in the context of constantly changing market conditions. Competition in a market economy compels employers as purchasers of labour to maximise the productivity of labour effort (D'Art, 2002). An inherent conflict arises as workers have a strong interest in controlling the use or abuse of their labour effort (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004:40). However, the economic dependency on a firms' competitiveness ensures that cooperation is directed towards reaching the notion of a mutually acceptable level of labour effort (D'Art and Turner, 2002).

The concept of labour as a commodity underlines a notion that labour is a commodity like any other as the employer purchases labour for use in the making of a product or delivering a service (Hyman, 1978). Blyton and Turnbull (2004) refine the commodity argument by separating labour from labour power where they point out that the employer is not interested in the employee as such, but only in the talents and skills of the employee in so far as they are useful in contributing to the product or service. Conflict in the employment relationship arises between the use of labour as an inanimate commodity and its human essence (D'Art and Turner, 2002). Budd (2004) extends this view suggesting that employment is not just a system of economic exchange providing employees with extrinsic monetary

rewards, but also fulfils a complex of psychological and social needs such as fulfilment, respect, personal dignity and self-actualisation. As such, shop stewards as the union voice intermediary at the workplace, play an important role in challenging management and minimising the extent to which workers are treated as a commodity or a factor of production by employers.

The asymmetry of power refers to the inherent power imbalance between employer and employee (D'Art and Turner, 2002). McBride (2006) contends that there is no precise, comprehensive definition of power but refers to power general terms as the ability to impose one's will on others. In the context of the employment relationship the ability to impose one's will, or the power to command labour according to Hyman (1978) derives primarily from the employer's position as owner or controller of capital and the common law employment contract. Employers and workers interact as unequals with significant power differentials in bargaining between them (Budd, 2004). Yet, an essential feature of employment relationship is the dependence of the employer on the consent or cooperation of labour. Shop stewards as voice intermediaries represent a collection of voices in the form of a collective organisation of workers in the workplace. Shop steward voice facilitates a countervailing source of power against management through the process of collective bargaining where the consent and cooperation of labour is codified within collective agreements (Edwards, 1995).

Framed within the characteristics of the employment relationship, shop steward voice as enabling workers to have meaningful say in managerial decisions is a contested and conflictual exchange at the workplace because of the inherent conflict of interest between workers and employers. Yet, representative voice facilitates workplace stability by providing the employer with information and the opportunity to identify and resolve the effects of their conduct on employees (Gollan & Wilkinson, 2007). Consequently, any emphasis on the significance of trade union voice highlights the relevance of the shop steward's representative voice function in the regulation of the wage – effort bargain at workplace level.

3.5 Chapter summary and research question 2

In sum, this chapter explicitly addressed shop steward actions and tasks associated with substantive representation. As such, this aspect of the shop steward's role focuses on the behaviour of shop stewards as they act on behalf of and in the interest of those they represent (Pitkin 1967, Mansbridge, 2003). Table 3.2 summarises the key shop steward tasks associated with substantive representation relevant to this study.

Table 3.2: Summary of shop steward tasks associated with substantive representation in the workplace

Substantive tasks of the shop steward	Key features
Union leadership	Managing the relationship and responding with the membership as follower or leader union representatives
Union communicator	Enabling a network of member involvement in the union
Union voice	Facilitating workers to have a say in the wage – effort bargain

While there is no universal acceptance of the exact composition of the shop steward's duties as a workplace union representative, leadership, communication and voice have some relevance in highlighting the unique undertakings that are associated specifically with the shop steward's role in acting on behalf of and in the interests of their members. Given the dual nature of the shop stewards role as a voluntary part-time union representative and a fulltime employee, the question of what key tasks shop stewards perform as they manage, organise and communicate employee interests at the workplace is the second crucial question addressed in this study.

Chapter Four

Towards an integrated framework of shop steward representation

4.0 Introduction

This chapter integrates the literature reviewed to formulate a framework for examining the shop steward's role. Previous research examining shop stewards have identified a number of salient characteristics associated with the role. The research to date is fragmented in nature and previous research has not brought together in one study the many aspects of the shop steward's role as it is enacted in the workplace. Moreover, the research to date on the role of the shop steward in the Irish context is limited (Flood and Turner, 1996). As such there is a need to build a more comprehensive picture of the contemporary role of the shop steward in the Irish context.


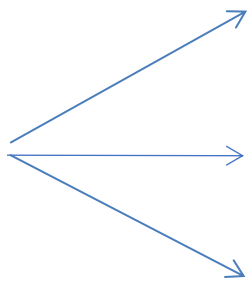
The concept of representation as standing for and acting on behalf of others (Mansbridge, 2003) is central to this study as it encompasses multiple responsibilities associated with the shop steward's role as fundamental in providing union assistance and protection to union members in their place of work (Terry, 1995). Descriptive representation emphasises the importance of union members taking on and accepting the role in the first instance and relates directly to membership recruitment into the role as a volunteer union representative. Substantive representation emphasises the actions of shop stewards as they undertake representative tasks associated with their obligation to act on behalf of the interests and wishes of the membership at workplace level.

In this regard two questions are addressed from the literature regarding the role of shop stewards as workplace union representatives:

1. What influences a union member to become and continue as a shop steward?
2. What representative tasks do shop stewards perform as workplace union representatives?

The first research question encompasses a consideration of descriptive representation and focuses on a range of factors that influence the recruitment and continued presence of a union member in the role of a shop steward. The second question focuses on substantive representation and considers the tasks the shop steward undertakes in acting on behalf of the members (Pitkin, 1968; Castiglione and Warren, 2005). Consequently, the concept of shop steward representation is identified from four core responsibilities in the traditional shop steward literature (1: becoming /remaining a shop steward, 2: leadership, 3: communication and 4: voice) and enables us to develop an integrated framework through which to analyse the representative nature of the shop steward's role at workgroup level. This thesis suggests a multifaceted image of the shop steward's role and brings together in one study an examination of multiple features, complexities and challenges associated with shop steward representation. The chapter subsequently provides a brief synthesis of the key features of the role highlighted in table 4.1 below to identify the key variables under analysis and develop a set of more detailed supplementary questions to answer the two main research questions of this study.

Table 4.1: Summary of the key aspects of the research framework

Dimensions of representation	Research focus	Key responsibilities of the role.	Key characteristics	Examples from the literature
Descriptive representation (physical presence standing for others as the representative)	<p>What factors influence a union member to become and continue as a shop steward</p> 	<p>1. Becoming and remaining a shop steward</p>	<p>Influencing factors such as age, gender, socialisation, union orientation, method of recruitment, stress, support and ability to cope in the role.</p>	<p>Nicholson (1976); Nicholson et al, (1981); Winch (1981); Moore, (1980); McShane (1986); Flood and Turner (1996).</p>
Substantive representation (acting on behalf of others)	<p>What tasks stewards do perform as a workplace union representative</p> 	<p>2. Leadership</p>	<p>Shop stewards' relationship with the membership as follower or leader union representatives</p>	<p>Pedler (1973); Batstone et al (1977); Marchington and Armstrong (1983); Fosh (1993); Green et al (2000)</p>
		<p>3. Communication</p>	<p>Shop stewards as the focal union communicator and enabling union contact with the members.</p>	<p>Pedler (1973); Partridge (1977) Schuler and Robertson (1983); Jarley (2005).</p>
		<p>4. Voice</p>	<p>Enabling member influence to have a say on the wage effort bargain</p>	<p>Freeman and Medoff (1984); Terry (1995, 2003); Bryson et al (2006); Dundon et al (2004); Blyton and Turnbull (2004); D'Art and Turner (2006).</p>

4.1 Becoming a shop steward

Workplace union representation relies on union members to volunteer and assume the job as a shop steward. The shop stewards' position is the highest form of lay membership participation in the union (Barling et al, 1992). The role is undertaken voluntarily by a union member, it is an unpaid position and the role is undertaken to assist other members in their dealing with management. Such participation has important consequences for the effective functioning of the union (Sverke & Kuruvilla, 1995). How rank and file members are transformed into workplace union representatives and remain a shop steward is a significant aspect of union representation at the workplace. Moreover, there is an implicit assumption that few if any restrictions on becoming a shop steward exist and any rank and file member is eligible to take on the position (Moore, 1980). In essence, every union member is a potential candidate for the role, yet there is no great keenness on the part of union members to come forward and take on the position of shop steward (Nicholson, 1976; Moore, 1980; Flood and Turner, 2006). A key focus of this study is on the personal factors and externally influence social factors associated with a member devoting their time and effort to volunteer for an unpaid position in the union. Personal factors refer to the individual traits and characteristics that a shop steward possesses that may explain the decision to become a shop steward. Externally influence social factors refer to the different ways in which shop stewards were recruited into the position.

4.1.1 Union orientation and past activism

Nicholson et al. (1981) classify union member orientation (the extent to which members identify and internalise the goals of the union) into five-member behavioural categories: reluctant members, card carriers, selective activists, apolitical stalwarts, and ideological activists. Apolitical stalwarts and ideological activists are consistently active members of the union compared with reluctant members, card carriers and selective activists who have passive and occasional rates of union participation (Flood et al, 2000). Beynon (1973) and Roby (1995) highlighted that in general, members who became shop stewards had previously been involved in union tasks or assisted existing shop stewards in the position. Such active union members may be more likely to engage the position of shop steward to the extent that they have previous experience of active union involvement as a rank and file member. The

segmentation of membership participation allows a precise insight into the past participation / orientation of shop stewards as ordinary union members. Based on the assertion of Beynon (1973) and Roby (1995), shop stewards can be expected to have a previous history of activism as an ordinary union member.

4.1.2 Socialisation influences

Socialisation experiences such as the influence of pro-union family members and wider social networks like union active friends and political alliances have been found to be positively correlated with membership union participation in general (Anderson, 1979; Nicholson et al, 1981). In the wider context of volunteering in social movements, the premise is that active volunteers pass down the values of volunteering to other friends and family members and therefore increases the propensity of other members within the social network to volunteer (Nesbit, 2012). The basis of this proposition is reinforced by the union participation literature where union members with friends or family involved in the union are more inclined to participate in union tasks like the shop steward's role (Klandermans, 1984).

4.1.3 Demographic influences

Demographic factors like age, gender, length of tenure as a union member and education have been used as predictors of rank and file participation in the union (Nicholson et al, 198: McShane, 1986). These factors are used in distinguishing active from less active union members and can be expected to be associated with shop steward occupancy. The influence of age and length of tenure is based on the assumption that more senior union members on the basis of their experience are likely to be more invested in the workplace and more likely to be integrated and active in the union as a shop steward (Fosh, 1981; McShane; 1986, Flood and Turner, 2006). Furthermore in terms of gender, survey evidence regarding the personal characteristics of shop stewards suggest that women are less likely to hold the position of a shop steward (Upchurch et al, 2002; Charlwood and Forth, 2008). For this study, the inclusion of gender as a variable allows a consideration of the extent to which the PCMD

sector of SIPTU reflects historical patterns of male dominated involvement in the shop steward's role within manufacturing oriented unionised workplaces (Heery and Kelly, 1989).

4.1.4 Recruitment into the role

An important factor in becoming a shop steward concerns how shop stewards were recruited / elected into the position (Nicholson, 1976). A particularly salient feature is that member recruitment into the role is generally one of not actively seeking the role and relative reluctance and little initial motivation to become a shop steward (McCarthy and Parker, 1968; Nicholson, 1976; Moore, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996). This presents a scenario whereby voluntary entry into the position is a distinctive characteristic of the shop stewards' role, yet it is highly probable that the role will consist of willing and reluctant members. A central factor in explaining how reluctant members become voluntary shop stewards is Nicholson's (1976:18) 'external factors'. External factors refer to socially determined instances outside of the control of the individual member where the member was nominated, encouraged or propelled into the position by their group, (Nicholson, 1976). The occurrence of differences in shop stewards desire to volunteer for the position merit attention for the current cohort of shop stewards.

4.1.5 Intention to remain as a shop steward

A second focus of this thesis explores why members remain in the position of shop steward. A principal characteristic of the presence of workplace union representation is that occupancy and more specifically continued occupancy of the shop steward's position is optional. There is no monetary incentive attached this type of union participation and there are no explicit penalties attached to vacating the position (Olson, 1971; Moore, 1980). This creates a unique and uncertain situation in terms of shop steward representation in that rank and file members are free to leave the position at any time during their occupancy. The frequent turnover of shop stewards presents a problem for unions in hindering the development of experienced and knowledgeable shop stewards to represent member interests (Winch, 1980). As such, length of tenure and the intention to remain in the position is an essential factor in the

effective functioning of the union at workplace level. The existence of workplace union representation is therefore inextricably linked with the continued voluntary presence of a rank and file member in the shop steward's position (Winch, 1981; Flood and Turner, 1996).

A key feature of this aspect of the research highlights that continued occupancy is predicated on the shop stewards' tolerance of the pressures and demands associated with the position (Winch, 1980). Representative experiences of shop stewards once in the position are suggested as possible influences on the decision to remain as a shop steward (Winch, 1980; Martin & Berthiaume, 1993; Flood and Turner, 1996). The voluntary nature of the position requires the occupant to perform as a workplace representative while simultaneously working as an employee of the firm (Moore, 1980; Terry, 1995). The shop steward presides over a voluntary position that is subject to potentially demanding and conflictual situations and experience a variety of stressors including conflict, ambiguity and overload (Winch, 1981; Martin & Berthiaume, 1993; Flood and Turner, 1996). This suggests the intention to continue as a shop steward depends on the extent to which the shop steward can cope and manage the pressures and demands associated with the position (Winch, 1980).

4.1.6 Management attitudes and support

Flood and Turner (1996) reported that the organisational climate within the firm regarding management attitudes and the level of support from management was associated with higher levels of shop steward satisfaction in the position. It seems that favourable management attitudes and assistance towards workplace representation will have a positive influence on shop steward continuity in the position. Thus, shop stewards' experience of managerial attitudes towards them as workplace representatives and the facilities made available to shop stewards may be a factor in continuing as the shop steward.

4.1.7 Support from the union

Winch (1980) reported that longer tenure as a shop steward was associated with high levels of support from the union. Nicholson (1976) highlighted the haphazard way in which shop stewards typically acquire the skills and expertise necessary to deal with the demands of the position. Shop stewards have relied predominately on their own self tuition through trial and error in handling grievances, negotiating and interpreting the rules of plant level documents (Nicholson, 1976). Union support from which the shop steward can draw includes sources as the full-time union official and the union's training department (Beynon, 1973; Winch, 1980). Shop stewards depend on the full-time union officer for union support services such as assistance with negotiations, dealing with member grievances, interpretation of employment law and organising industrial action (Boraston et al, 1975; Darlington, 1994). Shop stewards experience a role characterised by a wide range of demands that often places them into conflictual situations (Winch, 1980). Access to and support from the union official is a valuable resource to shop stewards in developing the capability necessary to deal with the demands of the position. Therefore, where shop steward's experiences of support from the union hierarchy are positive then it is likely to influence intentions to stay in the position.

4.1.8 Stress and strain

Studies of shop steward's work experiences have found that they experience at least moderate amounts of stress (Martin and Berthiaume, 1993; Flood and Turner, 1996). Stress is referred to as emotional and behavioural reactions that occur to a role occupant as they react to changes in their environment (Hart and Cooper, 2001:94). Role ambiguity and role overload are as distinct sources of stress particular to the shop steward's position that can negatively impact on the shop steward causing physiological and psychological strain (Bluen and Barling, 1988; Martin and Berthiaume, 1993; Flood and Turner, 1996). Role ambiguity and overload may in turn contribute to shop stewards exiting the position (Flood and Turner, 1996). The size of the firm and the size of the member constituency places varying demands shop steward's time and workload (Nicholson, 1976; Winch, 1980). Shop stewards representing larger constituencies face additional role demands on their time due to a larger number of members dispersed over a larger number of locations, while still spending time on their own duties and an employee (Schuler and Robertson, 1983).

4.1.9 Length of tenure and perceptions of experiences

The voluntary nature of the shop stewards role presents a considerable challenge to the continued presence of union representation at the workplace. Shop stewards can vacate the position at any time if they cannot cope or are not satisfied in the position. Length of tenure as a shop steward may represent a shop steward's satisfaction with the job of representation and their intention to continue in the role (Flood and Turner 1996). Factors that make the job less difficult contribute to shop stewards' intention to remain or not in the position and assist in dealing with the stress that is inherent in representing the membership (Martin & Berthiaume, 1993). Where experiences of shop stewards are positive then there is a greater likelihood of remaining in the position. Flood and Turner (1996) suggested that more experienced shop stewards with longer periods of tenure in the position had higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of stress and strain in the role than inexperienced shop stewards with shorter tenure. Shop stewards learn on the job where the skills and knowledge required to meet the demands of the role are developed over a period of time (Nicholson, 1976; Winch, 1980). Longer serving shop stewards may be more likely to display more positive perceptions of their experiences than shop stewards with shorter lengths of tenure.

4.1.10 Research Questions

From a review of the literature becoming and remaining a shop steward is a core aspect of workplace union representation and the factors that influence a union member to become and remain as a shop steward is central to understanding union member involvement in the voluntary role of workplace union representation. A number of factors are likely to be associated with the likelihood of a union member taking on and continuing in the role. Personal characteristics including age, socialisation influences, tenure and prior union activism are key characteristics associated with becoming a shop steward. Recruitment/election into the position and the initial motivation of the member (willing-reluctant) are also likely influence members to take on the role. Personal characteristics and recruitment can be viewed as pre-entry measures influencing a union member to voluntarily take on the shop stewards' role. Shop steward perceptions of their role experiences are likely to be related to length of tenure and influence the intention to continue. Based on these associations the following questions are examined in the results section:

1. What personal factors are relevant to becoming a shop steward?
2. Are PCMD members reluctant recruits into the role of the shop steward?
3. What factors influences shop steward's intention to continue in the position?
4. Do shop steward perceptions of the role vary according to length of tenure in the position?

4.2 Leadership

The second research question; what tasks do shop stewards perform as workplace representatives, aims to understand the shop steward's role as a workplace union leader in shaping the democratic nature of union representation (Green et al, 2000). Leadership is a core activity of shop steward representation responding to the preferences, expectations and perceived injustices of union members in such a way that best protects the members' welfare (Green et al, 2000). This leadership function is an important component in building a strong workplace union that encourages membership participation in the workplace union (Green at al, 2000; Darlington, 2007). A central feature of studies of union leadership is the extent to which shop stewards influence membership decision making through leading or following the members wishes and preferences (Batstone et al, 1977; William, 1980; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). While union representation ostensibly shares the same aim to protect their members' interests, shop stewards may differ regarding how they realise this aim (Batstone et al, 1977).

Individual characteristics and factors related to shop steward's experiences in the role have also been found to account for differences in shop stewards leadership styles (Warren, 1971; Pedler,1973; Batstone et al,1977; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). Individual characteristics such as age, education, union orientation and political orientation affect shop steward leadership style (Pedler,1973; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). Moreover, Partridge (1977) and Marchington and Armstrong (1983) suggest that a dominant leadership style may shift over time and be linked with length of tenure as a shop steward gravitates from a spokesman (follower) towards a leader with experience over time in the position. 'Green' or less experienced stewards will likely be more reliant on and follow their member's wishes in

raising and shaping issues. Alternatively, longer tenured shop stewards tend to exhibit the characteristics of leaders (Marchington and Armstrong, 2007:46).

Shop steward leadership style may be influenced by their experiences in the role and how they develop over time (Marchington and Armstrong, 2007). Support from the union such as training may enable to shop stewards be more effective in leading and influencing their members. As shop stewards take time to learn the role they may not have the repertoire of knowledge and skills and will more likely display follower behaviours (Marchington and Armstrong, 2007:47). The suggestion is that training speeds up the development of shop stewards. A related factor is that shop stewards through inexperience or lack of confidence may place considerable stress upon themselves in taking up every member issue until they learnt which issue was important and which was a gripe that should be quashed (Marchington and Armstrong, 2007:46).

Management attitudes to the union may influence the leadership style of the shop steward (Pedler, 1973; Broad, 1983; Marchington and Armstrong, 2007). Shop steward perceptions of management hostility and resistance towards the union may influence shop stewards to adopt a leadership style to influence membership unity and in order to put pressure on management and protect member interests (Pedler, 1973; Marchington and Armstrong, 2007). Finally, shop stewards experience with their constituency may be important in shaping the leadership style of shop stewards (Warren, 1971; Batstone et al, 1977; Schuller and Robertson, 1983). Shop stewards are accountable to the members that elected them to the position (Warren, 1971). Shop stewards' freedom to 'lead' on their own initiative can be constrained by the group if they think that shop steward behaviour goes beyond what the membership finds acceptable (Schuller and Robertson, 1983:340). Pedler (1973:44-45) argued that union leaders are subject to limitation by their group where membership majority decides what is to be done by the shop steward. As such a larger constituency size may have a more influence and control over their steward's leadership style in defining the mandate to be followed by the shop steward.

Therefore, a range of variables may influence a dominant leadership style of a shop steward such as individual characteristics, length of tenure in the position and workplace experiences (Marchington and Armstrong 1983). A central influence on leadership style is the extent of shop steward experiences in their workplace that makes them more or less reliant on the membership in dealing with membership wishes and preferences. These individual and workplace factors have been already considered as factors that influence a union member to become and continue as a shop steward (see figure 4.1). Therefore, these factors have some merit in further examining and explaining the predominant leadership style of shop stewards. Overall, patterns of shop steward leader/ follower styles and the factors that influence them have remained unexplored in the Irish context.

4.3 Communication

A second theme within the shop steward literature has focused on leadership as composed of the daily interactions and communications between shop stewards and their members (Pedler, 1973; Partridge, 1977). Communication broadly refers to facilitating membership access to union information and decision making (Pedler, 1973; Partridge, 1977; Schuler and Robertson, 1983; Jarley, 2005). Union communication is a component of internal trade union democracy in which union decisions are subject to membership opportunity to accept, reject and influence decisions that potentially affect them (Salamon, 2000). In this sense, the basic strength of a trade union as a means of countervailing employer power according to Wallace et al (2004:125) lies in its ability to organise and unite workers. Creating internal processes and networks of membership communication through which union leaders can meet members and articulate membership interests at work is an essential union activity in this regard (Kelly, 1998). Given the proximity to the membership, the shop steward is a key union resource in creating a network of communications and close social interactions among the union members (Pedler, 1973; Partridge, 1977).

Despite the importance of communication, the organisational context in which shop stewards are deemed to be the main union communication channel has been largely overlooked in the literature. Relatively little research has explored how shop stewards actually create a network

of close connections to their members other than highlighting a range of communicative forums for meetings and grievances (Schuler and Robertson, 1986). Jarley (2005) suggests that social capital, offers considerable potential to explain how trade unions develop connections among their members. Social capital is defined in terms of structural social capital as frequency of contact with members and relational social capital as quality of relations with members (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The regularity of contact with the members is a central component of the shop steward's communication function and underlines the availability of shop stewards as an entry point for members to participate and communicate with their union (Schuler and Robertson, 1983). The closeness of the shop steward to the members in facilitating membership communication and decision making have been identified as an important influencer of membership support towards their union (Schuler and Robertson, 1983; Green et al, 2000). In this sense the activity of communication, particularly with regard to the frequency and quality of shop steward-member relations is a pivotal aspect of the shop stewards' role as a workplace union representative. To what extent do shop stewards facilitate membership access and connection to the union is an important question.

4.4 Union voice

A core traditional function of trade union representation is to improve the wages and conditions of their union members (D'Art and Turner, 2002; D'Art et al, 2013). This union function in particular characterises the shop steward as a pivotal union figure in exercising and expressing employee voice at workplace level (Terry, 1986). The contemporary meaning of employee voice has become increasingly blurred and generalised to mean 'any formal mechanism by which workers can communicate their views to management' (Bryson et al 2006:438). The wide connotation of 'any formal mechanism' is indicative of the emergent literature redefining voice to mean a variety of voice schemes created by the employer as a substitute to representative employee voice (Dundon et al, 2004; 2005). However representative voice through the mechanism of collective bargaining implies employee voice as more than just 'communicating' member interests to management, but rather is associated with imposing a check on management power and challenges to managerial prerogative over the rules governing the employment relationship (Edwards, 1986; D'Art and Turner, 2002).

The nature of employment relationship and the indeterminacy of the wage effort-bargain differentiate representative voice as expressing worker interests that are separate from and sometimes in conflict with, those of management (Boxall and Purcell, 2003). How the substantive aspects of the exchange relationship have been regulated, not only in terms of the price of labour and how labour is rewarded (pay, job security, pensions, hours of work) but also the conditions under which how work is performed (management discipline, the organisation of work), has been a major focus of attention in industrial relations literature (Edwards, 2003:2). In this context, shop stewards as the workers' own voice mechanism is a central and core function of the shop steward in the workplace to protect union member interests (Greenfield and Pleasure, 1993). Yet, the effectiveness of union voice at workplace level in the UK context has emphasised the combination of organisational, political and market conditions as continuing and key challenges to shop steward marginalisation by management at the workplace (Terry 1986; 2003). In the Irish context Roche et al (2013) reported union officials confronted with a changed relationship with employers as employers were willing to by-pass unions and drive through opportunistic workplace changes to terms and conditions due to the recession. Moreover, in the Irish context the significance and challenges to the shop steward's voice function in the private sector is reinforced owing to the decentralisation of collective bargaining entirely towards enterprise and workplace level since 2008. This necessarily leaves the shop steward with higher levels of responsibility to protect member's interest at workplace level. Consequently, the extent to which shop stewards as a voice mechanism influence the wage-effort bargain on behalf of their members is a particularly relevant question in understanding the shop stewards' role and responsibilities as a workplace union representative.

4.5 Research questions

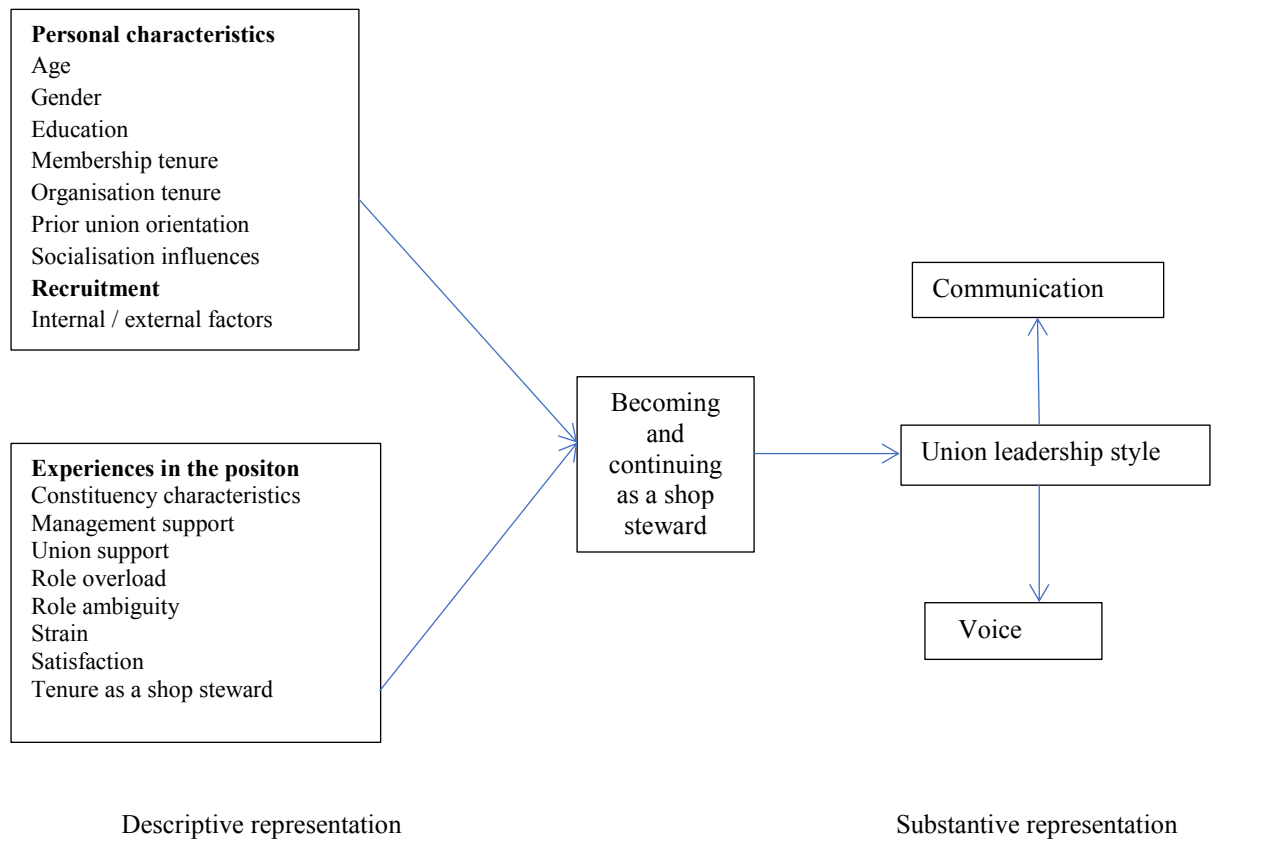
From the review of the literature, a core feature of the shop steward's role is to assist the involvement of members to express their preferences and wishes in influencing decisions regarding their treatment as employees. As such, this aspect of the shop steward's function focuses on the actions undertaken in responding to and protecting the wishes preferences and interests of the membership. The key questions that this section seeks to address from the literature reviewed are as follows;

5. Are PCMD sector shop stewards leaders or followers of their member's wishes?
6. What factors influence the leadership style of the shop steward?
7. To what extent do shop stewards facilitate membership access and connection to the union?
8. Do shop stewards facilitate member voice in protecting membership interests?
9. Does the leadership style influence the communication and voice function of shop stewards?

4.6 An integrated framework of shop steward representation

An integrated research framework elaborating on the concept of descriptive and substantive representation has been created (figure 4.1) to address the questions relating to the four key aspects of shop steward representation in this study. The framework begins with descriptive representation emphasising the factors that facilitate the presence of a volunteer union representative at the workplace. The framework identifies the likely influences of personal characteristics (question 1) including age, gender socialisation influences, tenure (organisation and union) and prior union activism in becoming a shop steward. The framework takes into account the method of recruitment/election into the position and the external (membership persuasion) and internal factors (initial motivation) to take on the role (question2). Personal characteristics and recruitment are likely to influence becoming a shop steward. These are viewed as pre-entry measures influencing a union member to voluntarily take on the shop stewards' role. The framework links shop steward experiences in the position with the intention to continue as a shop steward (question3). Shop steward perceptions of their role experiences are likely to be related to length of tenure and influence the intention to continue (question 4).

Figure 4.1: Integrated framework of shop steward representation



The framework treats substantive representation as a core component of the shop steward’s role and identifies a variety of ways that the shop steward may act on behalf of the members as the workplace union representative. The integrated framework accords a central role to the leadership function and the leadership style of the shop steward in responding to and representing the membership (question 5). The characteristics associated with voluntary entry into the role (personal characteristics) and the factors associated with voluntarily continuing in the role (experiences in the position) combine and may influence different styles of shop steward leadership in the workplace (question 6). The framework attributes communication and voice as key leadership tasks of the shop steward to assist the membership to shape the policies and practices that determine their employment conditions (questions 7 and 8). The framework also takes into account the possible influence of leadership style (leader-follower) on the way the shop steward acts as a communication and voice mechanism on behalf of the members. Based on a review of the literature, this study suggests that shop steward representation is composed of multiple aspects and tasks. As such an understanding of the

role of the shop steward as a workplace union representative requires an integrative approach involving descriptive representation; becoming and continuing as a voluntary shop steward and substantive representation; the tasks associated with managing the concerns of the membership.

Chapter Five

Research methodology and data

5.0 Introduction

This chapter considers the philosophical foundations of this study and describes the methodological choices made to answer the research questions outlined previously. The discussion outlines the appropriateness of using both quantitative and qualitative methods given the nature of the research subject in this study. The chapter then presents the research design chosen, the data collection methods, measurement items and data analysis methods are outlined.

5.1 Philosophical assumptions in social research

Expressing an overall perspective or ‘world view’ (Creswell, 2009) that guides the research approach for this study requires an understanding of alternative research paradigms towards social research (Holden and Lynch, 2004). Kuhn (1974) referred to the term paradigm as the underlying assumptions upon which research in a particular field of inquiry is based. Bogdan and Biklan (1982) refer to the term as a loose collection of logically held together assumptions that orientates thinking around the best means to answer a research question. The researchers’ paradigm or worldview is predicated on a number of interrelated dimensions in terms of how the researcher views reality as existing independent of the researcher or created by one’s own consciousness (ontology), how the researcher believes that knowledge is created and studied (epistemology) and how knowledge may be captured (methodology) (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Consequently, the same research phenomena can contain different facets of reality which determines how that reality will be examined by the researcher. Therefore, a diversity of approaches in how a research question could be investigated is a fundamental feature of social research (Saunders et al, 2009). Approaches to social research traditionally separate two dominant overarching research philosophies labelled as positivist and interpretivist (Creswell, 2009).

Distinct interrelationships exist between the paradigm adopted and the related method of investigation into a study. The positivist philosophy informs a methodological approach as deductive and theory driven by creating testable propositions that can be generalised to a wider population using quantitative methods of data collection (Creswell, 2009; Hussey and Hussey, 1997). The interpretivist philosophy is concerned with grasping and interpreting the personal experiences of those under investigation using participative methods of data gathering such as in-depth interviews, case studies or focus groups (Crotty, 1998). As such quantitative and qualitative research methods are based on mutually exclusive philosophical assumptions representing two extreme forms of scientific enquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 1995). A common debate between two competing methodological standpoints is the absolutist view that researchers should confine themselves exclusively to one or the other (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). However, the philosophical distance between these two dominant paradigms can be tolerated by a 'methodological pluralist' approach (Gill and Johnson, 1997:133) in which the assumptions underlying either paradigm do not mean that one is superior to the other (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Proponents of methodological pluralist approaches suggest that researchers do not necessarily need to be restricted to a single worldview but employ multiple methods of data collection and analysis (Mingers, 2001; Creswell et al, 2004; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Instead the paradigms can be regarded as somewhat complementary, where one approach can inform and guide the other in a single study (Sale et al, 2002; Creswell et al, 2004).

5.2 Research methodologies in shop steward research

The research to date regarding the role of shop stewards in workplace industrial relations advocates no distinct or explicit ontological or epistemological preference. In part this may reflect a certain multiplicity inherent the shop stewards' workplace function. This is evident in the differing methods within the existing shop steward research. The strands of research with positivist type approaches are underpinned by quantitative methods associated with self-report questionnaires. Several British based studies of shop stewards have provided descriptive survey evidence of the general strength of shop steward organisation and a description of the role in terms of the day to day tasks associated with shop stewards at the workplace (Clegg et al, 1961; McCarthy and Parker, 1968). Brown et al (1978) sought to

deduce from a survey questionnaire, the inter-relationship of variables such as constituency size, bargaining levels and management cooperation to identify common factors that shape the shop stewards' function at the workplace. Pedler (1974) attempted to understand the social dynamics of the shop stewards' leadership role but placed an emphasis on quantitative data in the form of a questionnaire as the appropriate method to determine the nature of the shop steward's relationship with their workgroup.

From a generally interpretivist perspective the research by Batstone et al (1977) sought to develop a theoretical perspective on the shop steward leadership typologies. The research approach emphasised the usefulness of socially constructed meaning by adopting observation and interviews of shop stewards to highlight the differences in individual union orientation. These differences were used to uncover the relationship between shop stewards and their members. In a similar investigation into shop steward leadership styles, Broad (1983), emphasised the requirement for close contact with shop stewards by using in-depth interviews and a daily diary to uncover the emergence of a diversity of shop steward leadership styles in response to changing workplace circumstances. Studies looking at different aspects of the shop stewards' role have also sought to understand how shop stewards interpret their role. Nicholson (1981) in identifying the motivational forces that led to a rank and file member to accept the shop steward's role relied on interviews and focused on the psychological aspects of the individual. Partridge (1977) in looking at what shop stewards do once in the role conducted a diary study of 24 stewards over a ten-week period. Further investigations into the shop steward have been content to adopt a mixed methodology. In the Irish context, Flood and Turner (1996) deployed both questionnaire survey evidence and interview methods to explore the variables that explain the ideological differences between shop stewards and rank and file union members.

5.3 Philosophical assumptions underpinning this research

The aim of this study is to examine shop steward representation in the pharmaceutical, chemical and medical device sector of SIPTU. The literature review identified that shop steward representation comprises of a complex set of behaviours and actions that enable

worker inclusion in the governance of their working lives (Greenfield and Pleasure, 1993). Two specific research questions are examined regarding the characteristics of shop steward representation in the pharmaceutical chemical and medical devices sector of SIPTU;

- (1) What influences a union member to become and continue as a shop steward
- (2) What tasks do shop stewards perform as workplace union representatives

The methodological decisions for this study were subsequently informed by ontological and epistemological choices of the researcher, the methodological approaches taken by previous research and the nature of the research question (Saunders et al, 2003). This study adopts a methodological pluralist position in which both the positivist and interpretivist philosophies are intuitively appealing in addressing the research questions regarding the role of shop stewards as workplace union representatives. The starting point for this position is the researchers' acknowledgment of nature and context of the shop stewards' role in workplace industrial relations. In essence, the researcher's philosophical stance views the representative responsibilities of shop stewards as very much the same in all organisations in terms of protecting members from arbitrary management actions. Shop stewards belong to a unique group in which their behaviours and tasks are largely pre-determined by the requirements of the position itself. These universal properties influence a level of regularity and predictability in shop steward tasks that can be defined and measured, regardless of the organisation in which workplace representation is exercised. These indices of shop steward representation can be generalised to the wider population of shop stewards.

Conversely, representation as played out in everyday work life has a complexity and dynamism that is difficult to capture accurately with quantitative approaches alone. Therefore, account must be taken of the insular nature of the shop steward's position in individual workplaces. Shop stewards are situated in worksites that are essentially unique entities in which the operating environment of the shop steward is influenced by a range of factors. For example, contemporary developments in Irish workplace industrial relations such as the breakdown of social partnership in 2009, the repositioning of collective representation towards enterprise level and the type of organisational responses to unstable markets (Roche, 2011) are likely to have an impact on any up to date empirical patterns of shop steward behaviour and tasks. Consequently, shop stewards as union representatives in their individual

firms are unlikely to be exposed to exactly the same workplace circumstances. Accordingly, shop stewards are likely to interact with their members and workplace circumstances in slightly different ways as they respond to their own individual workplace situations.

5.4 Critical realism

The critical realist philosophy (Bhaskar, 1986) underpins this methodological pluralist view of the shop steward by accepting the use of both the positivist (facts) and interpretivist philosophies (meanings) (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). A distinctive feature of critical realism is the acceptance of an ontological reality that exists independently of human conscious while simultaneously recognising the existence of an interpretivist epistemology in which knowledge of that reality is socially constructed (Bhaskar, 1986; Sayer, 2000; Fleetwood, 2005). Within this perspective the philosophy emphasises that reality is multi-layered, representing differences in the nature of reality (Bhaskar, 1986). Consequently, reality consists of empirical patterns that can be observed and experienced by the observer as well as the events and actions that exist which may not be readily accessible to immediate observation (Sayer, 2000; Fleetwood, 2005). As such, the critical realist philosophy does not rely on a purely positivist view of law like versions of observed reality in which knowledge is captured and generalised in a context-free environment (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Consequently, the ‘critical’ element of critical realism contends that reality cannot be observed in isolation but must also take into account that social reality is context dependent and requires interpretative understanding (Sayer, 2000).

5.5 Determining an appropriate research design for this study

The research design adopted to answer the research questions for this study is therefore both quantitative and qualitative in nature and is consistent with the researcher’s philosophical stance. A quantitative approach allowed the researcher to measure quantitatively driven questions to examine relationships between variables based on existing shop steward literature. A self-administered questionnaire provided the means to reach the population under study and measure the constructs of interest. This data can lead to generalised

inferences about the representative characteristics of shop stewards. In addition, applying standard questions where possible allows a comparability of the findings across a number of studies over time (Babbie, 1990).

Relying solely on the positivist philosophy to catalogue observable empirical observations would represent a completely deterministic view (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) of the shop steward that disregards their autonomy within the function as workplace representatives. Consistent with the philosophical stance, the researcher is also sensitive to shop stewards as conscious participants and is concerned with capturing the personal interpretations and experiences of shop stewards in further explaining and understanding law-like generalisations of the role. In this regard focus groups were used to further understand the quantitative findings and sought to invite the participants to candidly share their experiences within the presence of other shop stewards, thereby allowing participants to expand on each other's responses (Beyea and Nicoll, 2000). The focus group questions were open ended and created on the basis of the quantitative findings.

On this basis, the use of a mixed-method research design is the most appropriate choice to answer the research questions in this study. Mixed-methods represents research where more than one methodological approach is used to combine qualitative and quantitative methods within the same piece of research (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Moreover, in determining the most appropriate research design for this study as the mixed-method approach, the degree of mix within the methods requires consideration as to whether the data is to be collected simultaneously or sequentially (Creswell, 2009). A simultaneous approach, sometimes referred to as concurrent or parallel design, refers to collection of quantitative and qualitative information at the same time in which both methods are of equal importance to the research (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). The aim is to achieve a convergence of the results or triangulation to reduce the uncertainty of interpretation of the data that might occur from using just one method (Bryman, 2006). A sequential approach refers to two separate but consecutive phases in which one data collection method are used to further explore or explain the findings of the other method (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

This study adopts an explanatory sequential approach in which a quantitative data collection phase is followed by a second phase of qualitative data collection (Creswell and Clarke, 2011). The available literature to investigate the shop steward's role as workplace union representatives uncovered a multi-faceted collection of technical and social characteristics associated with the position. Thus, adopting such a design recognises an underlying complexity inherent in the responsibility of voluntarily protecting workers where quantitative patterns explaining the role of shop stewards requires follow up explanations regarding the context within which shop stewards perform the role of representation. The data from this sequential approach was used in two ways. Firstly, the quantitative results were used to inform follow up questions in the qualitative phase and secondly, the data from both phases were blended in the discussion chapter to gain deeper understanding of the findings from both phases. Therefore, utilising a mixed-method approach in this study acknowledges that neither a qualitative nor quantitative approach alone was deemed to be able to adequately answer the research questions (Creswell and Clarke, 2011).

5.6 Research design

This section provides details of the research design and the stages involved in the collection of the data. The information required for the quantitative phase of this study was collected by means of a structured self-administered questionnaire survey. In linking the concept of representation with the role of the shop steward, the survey phase assesses and identifies the relationships between variables of interest identified from the literature review. A survey however will only scratch the surface in terms of the richness of data that respondents may provide compared to a more unstructured conversation (Batstone et al, 1977). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this research, the survey was an effective method of gathering the opinions of a large group of people from a geographically scattered population (Brunch and Holtom, 2008). The self-administered survey approach is widely accepted as a key instrument for conducting and applying social science research methodology (Rossi et al, 1983). One criticism of a self-administered survey is the lack of opportunity to interact and probe the complexity and dynamism of shop stewards function at the workplace.

The detached nature of the self-administered survey does not offer the respondent a means to express themselves outside the confines of the researchers' predetermined questions (Fowler, 1990). To overcome this shortcoming, the researcher incorporated a qualitative phase comprising of three focus groups. The focus group participants were shop stewards who participated in the quantitative phase and enabled the researcher to capture shop stewards' views and experiences on the issues raised in the questionnaire. Focus groups were preferred over individual interviews firstly due to the efficiency of attaining supplementary information from a number of participants than would be the case with in-depth interviews conducted with a similar number of individuals. But more importantly, according to Krueger (2009) is the potential for focus groups to produce more enriched information due to the social interactions that take place between group participants. In this sense, as social interactions reflect the shop stewards' real world of representation, the social nature of focus groups offered the opportunity for participants to interact with each other and consider their own experiences with other participants from different organisations (Kitzinger, 1995; Beyea & Nicoll, 2000). This potential for a more elaborate and considered discussion from the participants was not necessarily accessible in one to one interviews.

5.7 Population for the study

Shop stewards in SIPTU were the population of interest for the study. A number of justifications led to this populace as the preferred choice most relevant to the research question. SIPTU is the largest general union representing workers across a large spectrum of occupations. This union would therefore have a significant sample of shop stewards with workplace experiences that could be captured across a range of diverse industries. SIPTU has been a prominent driver and architect of contemporary Irish industrial relations. In this sense, workplace representatives in this union would present an appropriate sample to test the premise of what it means to be a shop steward in contemporary times. Finally, the researcher was a former member of SIPTU for many years in which the expectation arose that access to a sample from the population may be less problematic than in other unions.

There was some naïve optimism by the researcher in the population selection for the purposes of sampling. The original intention was to gain access and data across the entire spectrum of industries and occupations where SIPTU shop stewards represented worker interests. SIPTU had reorganised from localised branches into specific industrial sectors with an equivalent reorganisation of branch secretaries into sector organisers. The reorganisation provided a potential sampling frame that had been already stratified into convenient industrial sectors but individual worksites within the industrial sectors were geographically dispersed. Access to a nationwide database of shop stewards to produce a sampling frame was problematic. Databases of union activists in the sectoral divisions were inaccessible due to being incomplete, still under construction and eagerly safeguarded by sector organisers. Access to the information for sampling would therefore require building trust and support for the study with each sector organiser. Attempts were made to contact sector organisers by phone to explain the purposes of the research and gain permission to develop and distribute a questionnaire to shop stewards. The self-complacency of the researcher became evident as the general responses to the study were at best luke-warm with organisers being quite cautious and protective of their section from the potential intrusion of an unknown external investigator. Access to the population of SIPTU shop stewards would therefore take more relationship building with sector organisers than initially envisaged to attain permission to carry out the study.

For this study the sample frame consisted of shop stewards in the pharmaceutical, chemical and medical devices sector (PCMD). This sector is part of SIPTUs' wider manufacturing division. Access to this sector was initiated through preliminary discussions with a senior figure in SIPTU. Access to these shop stewards could be facilitated due to an up-to-date and organised electronic database. Initial support for the project was granted in principal by the sector organiser, or what Burgess (1984) refers to as the gatekeepers who have the power to grant or withhold access. This subsequently required the on-going building of trust and cooperation to attain permission to carry out the survey and subsequent focus groups. Consequently, due to the reluctance of other sectors, it was decided to limit the study to one sector of SIPTU.

According to SIPTU's manufacturing division (2015) the PCMD sector contains a combination of indigenous Irish companies along with a high proportion of foreign owned multi-national corporations (MNCs). The competitive nature of the sector has been accredited as a major contributor to the Irish economy with an estimated total workforce of circa fifty thousand employees, generating approximately sixty percent of Irish exports. SIPTU represents approximately 14,000 members with the number of shop stewards in the sector database totalling 350 (Sector organiser database records). In addition, the high density of MNCs within the manufacturing sector in general have been accredited with continually developing innovative employment relations practices associated with high performance work systems (Gunnigle et al, 2011). At the same time the manufacturing sector presents an underlying threat to union representation as there is evidence to suggest that union avoidance practices are especially prevalent among MNC greenfield sites, particularly those that operate within the hi-tech sector (Lamare et al, 2013). Furthermore, this sector poses a considerable threat to employment due to the ability of foreign direct investment companies to halt any future inward investment or quite easily transfer production to cheaper labour economies (Gunnigle et al, 2011). The PCMD sector then poses continuing challenges for contemporary shop stewards at workplace level and therefore provides an opportunity to test and evaluate present day shop stewards in their role as workplace union representatives in a highly competitive export led business environment.

The selection of shop stewards for this study has imposed limitations as to the extent to which the results may be generalised to the wider population of Irish shop stewards. The ways in which present-day shop stewards navigate through the demands of independent workplace representation in the pharmaceutical, chemical and medical devices sector will not be representative of all industries or sectors. The shop stewards under study will most likely be employed in a technological trading environment that is markedly different from conditions in other private or public sectors. The nature of the sector and the analysis of the sample of shop stewards under investigation is also limited to a sector that is largely based on medium and large factories. Thus, the findings may not be representative of shop steward behaviour in smaller organisational settings. These limitations place a restriction on the extent to which the findings can be used to understand the universal picture of what Irish shop stewards do. Nonetheless, the study does not necessarily prevent making broader generalisations about the

shop steward population, as the act of workplace representation possesses some common characteristics to merit some suggestion of generalisation to the wider population.

5.8 Developing and piloting the self-administered questionnaire

The literature informing the use of self-administered questionnaires emphasise the importance of questionnaire design for acceptable response rates (Roberson and Sundstrom, 1990). Therefore, a key and reoccurring consideration in the development and design of the questionnaire was the requirement of the respondent. Fullagar et al (1994) noted that in gathering information from union officials, the questionnaire should impose the lowest possible response burden on the target respondent. A common announcement in the questionnaire design literature corroborates the view that the questionnaire should be able to facilitate and motivate cooperation from the respondents (Lietz, 2009). This was further emphasised by Fullagar et al (1994) in highlighting that low reported response rates are characteristic of survey research on unions.

It was not envisaged therefore that shop stewards in general would be willing to write detailed answers to elaborate academic questions and be duly impressed with a complex and lengthy questionnaire (Dillman, 2007). In consideration of the burden placed on the targeted shop stewards, explicit attention was given to the literature in the construction of the questionnaire in a manner that might increase the likelihood of survey responses and reduce the incidence of acquiesce by respondents (Dillman, 2007). Acquiesce refers to respondents who may continually agree or disagree with an unceasing bank of survey questions regardless of question content and therefore reduce the usefulness of the data (Hinz et al, 2007). Attempts were made during survey design to incorporate recommendations that might reduce the incidence of these occurrences. Firstly, attention was paid to minimise the length of the survey. While there are no universal guidelines on the ideal length of a survey, the literature is unequivocal in announcing that shorter questionnaires normally attract higher response rates than longer questionnaires, while at the same time recognising the potential to reduce the validity and reliability of the questionnaire itself (Schriesheim and Hill,1981; Dillman,

2008). To overcome the potential for acquiesce, the questionnaire contained a mixture of fixed response, and Likert scale questions to tap into specific behaviours and tasks of shop stewards.

The generation of items during the development of questionnaire were sourced from an analysis of the shop steward literature, an examination of previous questionnaires of shop stewards and relevant scales to ensure the content of the questions represented the dimensions the questions were supposed to measure. Much of the validated measures of union membership activity relate to union membership participation in general or instruments to measure differences between union membership activism. The survey questionnaire entails a combination of measures not entirely specific to the shop steward. However, in many cases, items within existing scales were adapted or omitted to fit the context of the study and make the question as relevant as possible for the respondent. In this sense, early continuous development of the survey document sought face validity from informed judges such as the researcher's supervisor, a small sample of shop stewards and a union sector organiser. Face validity refers to a general and subjective evaluation that the questions look valid for the intended respondents (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004). Where appropriate and in discussion with the researcher's supervisor, question items were revisited, amended and omitted in the various drafts where they did not assist in the analysis of shop steward tasks and behaviours. The questionnaire required some refinement in terms of wording and content requiring four drafts before the final version was administered.

5.9 Explanation of questionnaire sections and measures

Table 5.1 below describes the variables for the study. The self-reported questionnaire was apportioned into four main sections relevant to the research questions in the study (Appendix C). Section one sought information regarding the factors associated with a union member taking on the position of shop steward. Personal characteristics of the current cohort of shop stewards were utilised as age, level of education, political background, strength of interest in politics, union family / friends and length of tenure as union member. These background factors were generated and replicated from the profile sections of previous studies (Nicholson et al, 1981; McShane, 1986; Flood and Turner, 1996). Replicating background questions

from previous established surveys assisted in gathering comparable evidence from shop stewards regarding the profile of shop stewards in the PCMD sector.

Previous literature has suggested that member entry into the shop stewards position is characterised by a low level of desire to become a shop steward (Nicholson, 1976; Moore, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996). Therefore, the attitudinal characteristics of members taking on the position were captured by two measures. Nicholson et al's (1981) five item union orientation measure was used to indicate prior activist behaviours as an ordinary member before becoming a shop steward. Union orientation has been used to determine differences between active and passive membership participation in the union. For this study the question was used to determine if the current cohort of acting shop stewards had a history of union activism prior to becoming a shop steward. The respondents were asked to indicate which statement best described their membership of the union starting with the statement, 'Before you became a shop steward', to establish a dominant union orientation prior to taking on the representative position. The wording of the original five items was changed to the highlight 'past tense'. For example, item (2); was changed from 'I don't mind being a member, but I have no interest in union tasks, to, 'I *did not* mind being a member, but I did not have any interest in union tasks. The item responses were not scaled but treated as dichotomous groups and recoded into 0= inactive and 1= active for subsequent analysis.

A second indicator identified the occupant's initial willingness to take on the position. Willingness to take on the role was measured by a single question, 'How much did you want the role of shop steward when you took on the role' Responses were recorded on five-point Likert scale from 'I wanted it very much' to 'I did not want it at all'. The responses were collapsed into a dichotomised response to yield a binary measure of willingness to become a shop steward and recoded; 0 = Reluctant and 1= willing. Finally, Nicholson's (1976) broad categories of popular, accidental and union nominated were used as question items to identify how shop stewards initially assumed the position. Shop stewards were asked to nominate the statement that most closely resembled their entry into the position such as, I was nominated to contest a formal election against other candidates (popular), I was persuaded to become the

shop steward because no one else wanted it (accidental) and I was nominated by union officials (nominated).

Section two of the questionnaire examined participants' intention to continue as a shop steward in their workplace. A number of concerns were raised in the literature regarding the problems and personal cost to the shop steward in presiding over a voluntary position that is demanding and subject to conflictual situations (Winch, 1980; Martin & Berthiaume, 1993; Flood and Turner, 1996). A key aspect of this literature suggests that shop steward tenure in the position may vary depending on shop steward attitudes towards factors associated with their workplace experiences in carrying out the representative duties (Winch, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996). Intention to continue is the dependent variable and as a reliable indicator of shop steward's satisfaction in the position. This was measured using a five-point Likert scale 1= strongly agree to 4= strongly disagree, asking if respondent shop stewards would be 'quite happy to continue for another term'. The responses were recoded into 1= yes and 0= no, to facilitate binary logistic regression analysis.

The independent variables were based on the literature and included management attitudes towards shop stewards, management support, trade union support, shop steward ability and stress. Management attitudes towards shop stewards were assessed using items from the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS, 2004) and measured in terms of the nature of management treatment towards shop stewards. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they experienced intimidating behaviours from management due to their shop tasks on a scale from 0= never, 1= at least once and 3= often. The response scales were recoded and reduced into a dichotomised response 0= rarely and 1=often to differentiate between those respondents that experience regular forms of management harassment and those shop stewards who have rarely if ever experienced negative management behaviour due to occupying the shop steward's position.

Trade union support included two items relating to the provision of union resources including training and the level of assistance from the sector organiser measured on a five-point Likert scale. The two items were devised from Nicholson (1976), Beynon (1973) and Winch (1981)

denoting the union specific resources available to shop stewards to assist them to develop and continue to offer representation at workplace level. An overall measure of union support was generated by summing across the items and recoding into a dichotomised response, 0= poor and 1= good. Shop steward ability was measured by asking respondents their perceptions of their skills and knowledge to handle and deal with day to day representative issues using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0= not at all to 3= definitely. The items were adapted from WERS (2004) which sought to establish the most important issues that shop stewards were spending time on including both non- pay issues at the workplace.

Stress embodied seven items related to quantitative overload, ambiguity and strain. The items were adapted from Rizzo et al's (1970) role ambiguity scale, Bacharach et al's (1990) three item role overload scale and psychological strain (House and Rizzo, 1972). The wordings of the items were modified similar to Martin and Berthiaume's (1993) approach to account specifically for the shop stewards' role, for example the item 'I sometimes feel uncertain about what is the correct thing to do in my job' was reworded to, "I sometimes feel uncertain about what is the correct thing to do in my role as shop steward". The responses were based on the degree of agreement with Likert scale responses, 1= strongly disagree and 4= disagree.

Section three and four of the questionnaire focused on the representative tasks associated with shop steward representation. The literature review captured tasks that have a distinctive social context which focuses on the relationship and connections between the shop steward and those they represent. These representative tasks included the shop steward as a leader, communicator and as a worker voice mechanism. However, the actual composition of these tasks is somewhat unspecified, ambiguously defined and has not been measured in a self-administered survey in terms of the shop steward's function. This necessitated the development of items from a broad spectrum of literature into items that would constitute valid and context appropriate questions, specific to shop stewards in this study.

Leadership style in terms of the shop steward as a leader or follower is the dependant variable. Four items were used to assess the leader / follower dichotomy in how shop

stewards interact with their members as a union representative. The question terminology was adapted from Batstone et al's (1977) observations and Marchington and Armstrong's (2001) interview style questions to suit a self-administered survey questionnaire approach. The items included; (a) Sometimes I tell my members their demands are not reasonable, (b) as a shop steward I often raise issues myself (c) as a shop steward I have often rejected issues raised by members, (d) shop stewards should only do what our members want. Questionnaire responses were based on a Likert scale from 1 =strongly disagree to 5= strongly disagree.

The measurement of the extent to which shop stewards espoused trade union principals followed William (1980) and Marchington and Armstrong's (2001) criticisms that the concept as defined by Batstone et al (1977) was somewhat vague and ambiguous. In the Batstone et al study, shop stewards were classified as pursuing union principles if their system of argument frequently referred to the norms of steward leadership than to their members' wishes (Marchington and Armstrong, 2001). This was operationalised by Batstone et al (1977) through observation of joint shop steward committee meetings and open type interview questions. Marchington and Armstrong (2001) operationalised their version of trade union principles with a number of interview statements such as 'you can't act according to trade union principles, they don't feed the family', 'what do you think are the main trade union principles 'it is often said that a steward should support JSSC resolutions even if they are against his own member interests'. Therefore, due to the diversity in the meaning and measurement of trade union principles, these items were deemed unsuitable as items in a self-administered questionnaire.

Union communication tapped into the day to day interactions shop stewards have with their members. However, no validated scales specific to shop stewards as a communication mechanism exist within the literature. Shop stewards as union communicators was assessed by identifying regularly used items from social capital scales based on frequency of interactions and the quality of relations (Uzzi, 1997; Cook and Wall,1980; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Bolino et al, 2002). This is in line with Jarley's (2005) assertion that few studies have explored how unions create a network of interactions and relationships with their members. The measurement of shop steward interactions with the members was informed by structural

social capital referring to the overall pattern of connectedness among members of a community, and relational social capital referring to the quality of these connections among through a history of social interactions (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Structural and relational measures were chosen due to its focus and use regarding internal organisational social capital in which the question items would be more suitable to adapt in the workplace union context (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The wording of the items was amended to fit the context and relevance of the shop steward's workplace relationships.

Structural social capital was assessed using six items to determine the frequency and diversity of shop stewards contact with their members. The items were framed specific to the shop steward interactions with their members gleaned from the literature review such as; called a union meeting, contacted members by phone, interact with members due to a grievance, used facebook to contact members (Schuler and Robertson, 1983). Likert scale response categories ranged from 1= daily, 2=couple of time a week, 3=every couple of months and 0= never. An item regarding the use of facebook was included to reflect the increasing use of online social networks as a mechanism to generate or maintain the frequency of relationships (Ellison et al 2007). However, the item assumed that the respondents have access to social media, thus some respondents may have answered this question based solely on non-accessibility rather than a personal choice. Relational social capital was tested by asking shop stewards' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their members that are developed due to repeated interactions with the membership (Johnson and Jarley, 2005). The relational scale was developed using frequently used measures of relational social capital and modified to suit the context of the present study consisting of five items 'I trust the members I represent', 'my members are willing to help me perform in my role as shop steward', 'my members are willing to take collective action against management', 'my members are united as a group'. Likert response scales ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5 =strongly agree (Cook and Wall, 1980; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Bolino et al, 2002).

Shop stewards as a union voice mechanism was measured by the extent of shop stewards influence over the wage-effort bargain. No discernible scales are available specific to the shop steward. However, the items selected were taken from previous surveys (Cully et al, 1998; Millard et al, 2000). Respondents were asked to rate their influence in terms of (1) job

security, (2) staffing levels (3) wage levels, (4) work intensification, (5) changing of work hours, (6) pension issues, (7) redeployment, (8) management treatment of workers. A five-point Likert scale ranging from very effective to very ineffective was used. There is the possibility respondents may overinflate their responses to make themselves ‘look good’. An alternative question was to ask shop stewards how their constituents would rate their effectiveness (Cully et al, 1999). However, this was rejected for this study as it may lead to inaccurate reflection of the actual outcomes achieved by shop stewards that may be contextual to each organisational circumstance. For example, avoiding a wage decrease in one organisation may be judged by the shop steward to be just as effective as increasing wage levels by a shop steward in another organisation. The respondent shop stewards are closest and more deeply involved in the details of these issues and are thus deemed to be in the best position to judge the peculiarities and scope for achievement of meaningful worker voice in their workplace. Table 5.1 shows the variables and measures used for this study.

Table 5. 1 Variable descriptions

Dependent Variable	Measures	Mean	Std Dev	Cronbach Alpha
Intention to continue	One item; (a) I would be quite happy to continue for another term, Scored ; (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree (3) not sure, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree.	4.11	.733	
Leader / follower	Four items from Batstone et al (1977) and Marchington and Armstrong (2001); (a) sometimes I tell my members their demands are not reasonable, (b) as a shop steward I often raise workplace issues myself, (c) as a shop steward I have often rejected issues raised by my members (d) shop stewards should only do what our members want. Scored; 1 =strongly disagree to 5= strongly disagree. The items were summed were summed to create a score range 4-20 and were dichotomised into a high or low category based on their score above or below the mean score	14.77	2.51	.68
Independent variables	Measures			
Prion union orientation;	Before you became a shop steward which of the following statements best describes your membership of the union; 5 items based on Nicholson et al (1981), Nominal scale. (1) I was a union member because I had to be, I would not be in the union otherwise (2) I did not mind being in the union, I did not have any interest in union tasks (3); Most of the time I did not get involved in union tasks but I was active on special issues (4); I was an active member of the union but I was not interested in the socialist aspects of the labour movement, (5); I was an active union member and my involvement in the union was an extension of my ideological beliefs .	3.36	1.02	
Political socialisation	Where would you place yourself on a political scale of 0 -10 where 0= left and 10 = right	5.07	1.98	
Membership of a political party	Are you a member of a political party; (1) I am not, (2) Labour, (3) Fianna Fail, (4) Fine Gael, (5) Sinn Fein.	1.13	.339	

Influence of family and friends	Have any of your close family members been actively involved in the union; Nominal scale ;(1) None, (2) Brother, (3) Sister, (4) Partner, (5) Parents	1.00	1.40	
Willingness to take on the role	How much did you want the role of a shop steward when you took on the role; Nominal scale ; (1) I did not want it at all, (2)I did not want it that much, (3) I did not mind one way or the other, (4) I wanted it quite a lot, (5) I wanted it very much	3.47	.958	
Recruitment into the position of shop steward	How did you become the shop steward at this firm; Nominal scale; (1) I contested a formal shop floor election, (2), unopposed election –persuade no one else wanted the role, (3) I was nominated by union officials to take on the role	2.1	.509	
Satisfaction	One item; Overall I enjoy being a shop steward, Scored (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree (3) not sure, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree	4.22	.725	
Union Support; training	Have you been offered formal shop steward training opportunities in the last 12 months, scored (0) no I have not, (1) yes but I have not taken them, (2) yes and I have taken them	3.37	.962	
Union support; Sector organiser	Overall how would you describe the support you get from your sector organiser in your role as shop steward, nominal scale; (1) vey poor, (2) rather poor, (3) adequate, (4) good, (5) extremely good	4.27	.882	
Management attitudes	In your role as a shop steward have you ever been treated by management in the following manner, (a) threatened with dismissal (b) loss of overtime, (c) moved to a more gruelling job, (d) told to spend less time on union duties, (e) told that my career would suffer, (f) subjected to excessive management scrutiny; nominal scale scored, (0) never, (1) at least once, (2) often. Items were summed to give a range score 6-18	8.08	1.22	.68
Management facilities at establishment level	In your role as shop steward do you have the use of any of the following workplace facilities (a) telephone, (b) office, (c) photocopier (d) computer (e) I have no facilities; scored 1= yes, 0= no.	2.24	1.36	
Role overload	Two items based on Bacharach et al (1990); (a) I often find that my workload as a shop steward is too much for one person, (b) I find the role takes up too much of my personal time. Scored on a Likert scale (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) not sure,(4) agree, (5) strongly agree.	6.64	1.77	.76
Role ambiguity	Two items based on Rizzo et al (1970); (a) I sometimes feel uncertain about what is the correct thing to do in my role as shop steward, (b) I often worry that I don't have enough knowledge to perform the role well. Scored on a Likert scale (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) not sure,(4) agree, (5) strongly agree.	6.18	2.09	.85
Psychological strain	Three items based on (House and Rizzo 1972); (1) I worry about union issues outside of my regular work hours, (2) dealing with union issues can sometimes affect my sleep at night, (3) dealing with union issues can sometimes leave me psychically or emotionally drained. The items were combined to measure the intensity of role related tensions and scored on a Likert scale (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) not sure,(4) agree, (5) strongly agree.	9.20	2.88	.78

Shop steward capability	In your role as shop steward would you say you have the necessary skills and knowledge to deal with the following areas, (1) pay and working conditions,(2) employment law, (3) financial information, (4) member grievances, (5) conflict among members (6) disciplinary hearings. The items were combined and scored (0) not at all, (1) to some extent, (3) definitely, (4) very definitely.	9.38	3.26	.85
Frequency of communication; union information	6 items based on from Uzzi (1997) Cook and Wall1980, Tsai and Ghoshal (1998), Bolino et al. (2002); In your role as a shop steward how often would you have carried out the following; (a) called a formal meeting with your members, (b) handed ut union literature to members, (c) used facebook to contact your members on workplace issues, (d)contacted union members by phone,	3.78	.804	.62
Frequency of communication; member grievances	(e) interact with small groups due to a grievance, (f) interact with individual members due to a grievance. Scored (0) never, (1) daily, (2) couple of times a week, (3) every couple of months	4.99	1.47	.88
Quality of relationships	5 items based on Cook and Wall1980, Tsai and Ghoshal 1998, Bolino <i>et al</i> 2002; In your role as shop steward how would you describe the relationship with your members; (a) I can trust most of the members I represent (b) Generally, the members I represent are willing to help me perform in my role of shop steward (c) there is always a large member turnout at union meetings, (d) for the most part my members are very united as a group, (e) my members are willing to take collective action against management when necessary. All items scored on a Likert scale (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) not sure,(4) agree, (5) strongly agree.	17.83	3.55	.84
Voice; terms and conditions	Eight items based on (Cully et al 1999, Millard et al 2000). Overall how effective do you consider your role as the shop steward has been in dealing with the following; (a) job security, (b) pension issues wage levels, (d) redeployment of workers, (e) management treatment of workers i.e., disciplinary / harassment	20.12	3.20	.78
Voice; work intensification	(e) work intensification, (f) changing hours of work, (g) staffing levels,. Scored on a 5 point Likert scale; (1) very ineffective, (2) fairly ineffective, (6) I don't know, (3) fairly effective, (4) very effective.	10.51	3.02	.89

Continued below

Personal / control variables		Measures	
Gender	Male = 1, Female = 2	.77	
Age	1= 21-25 years; 2= 26-30 years; 3=31-40 years; 4= 40+ years .	3.52	.651
Education	1= Junior/ inter cert; 2= leaving cert; 3= 3 rd level; 4= other.	2.44	.301
Length of tenure as a shop steward	1= less than one year; 2= 1-3 years; 3= 4-7 years; 4= 7+ years	3.36	.757
Length of tenure as a union member	1= less than one year; 2= 1-3 years; 3= 4-7 years; 4= 7+ years	3.82	.384
No. of workers represented	Raw figure	171	
Category of worker represented	1= general / semi-skilled, 2=skilled craft, 3= administrative,4 = supervisory	1.28	.930
Hours spent on union duties	Raw figure	6.28	
Tenure as an employee	1=less than two years; 2=2-5 years; 3=6-10 years 4=10+years	3.67	.579
No. of employees	Raw figure	420	
Sector of employment	1= PCMD; 2=engineering ; 3=food and drink; 4=other	/	

5.10 Pilot study

A draft questionnaire was pilot tested on a sample of local shop stewards outside of the PCMD sector. The participation of the respondents was achieved through the researcher's own local network of shop stewards. The respondents were asked to complete a hard copy version of the survey. Fourteen surveys were personally handed out and a total of nine were returned. From the nine returns six shop stewards agreed to attend a focus group after filling out the survey. The shop stewards were asked to comment on and suggest improvements in the survey in terms of the clarity and relevance of questions, the ease of completing the survey and the overall design of the survey to improve the chances of survey completion.

Their comments and suggestions were taken into account in the final version of the questionnaire. Among the specific insights, the overwhelming comment from the focus group was that the survey was 'too long' and they only stuck with it because of past relationship that the researcher had been built up with them. The pilot group recommended reducing the number of questions in general and reducing the number of questions in the multiple scale items, commenting that they appeared to be answering the same questions with slightly different wording. While the researcher had already taken cognisance of the advice in the literature to reduce the burden on respondents, the length of the survey appeared to be a source of annoyance to the group.

On probing further, the group commented that shop stewards deal with management on a 'daily basis trying to pull the wool over their eyes' by presenting the same arguments in different ways to 'try and catch them out'. In this sense the multi scale items were viewed with some suspicion and annoyance especially if the survey was just 'landed on their lap from a faceless academic'. The general tone of the comments indicated that parts of the questionnaire might result in high non-response rate. Scales were revisited in conjunction with the researchers' supervisor and the pilot group's comments. Some amendments were made to the original pilot questionnaire. For example, the scale for turnover intention contained 3 items adapted from Sjoberg and Sverke (2000), (1) I am actively looking to leave this position, (2) I feel I could leave this position,(3) if there was someone else interested I would choose to leave, this was reduced to one item based on the participants comments to 'I would be quite happy to continue for another term'. An overall job satisfaction scale was also used containing a six-item measure adapted from Agho et al (1993). Due to shop steward comments it was decided to reduce this to a single item question to; 'overall I enjoy being a shop steward.

Some rewording of questions was also undertaken due to ambiguous interpretations by the group. For example, the pilot survey asked the question 'how much formal training did you receive from the union in the past 12 months'. The response scale ranged from 1 day to 16 days or more. It became apparent from the focus group that the question automatically assumed the respondents were offered or took part in training sessions during this period. The question was reworded to discriminate for these instances, 'have you been offered formal

shop steward training opportunities in the last 12 months'. The response scale was amended to 3 responses, 'yes and I have taken them', 'yes but I have not taken' them and 'no I have not been offered'. On this basis consideration was given to fit the language of the questionnaire to the respondents to ensure that the questions were unambiguous and relevant to the respondent.

Finally, attention was given to survey design arguments that demographic type questions should be located at the end of the survey due to potentially boring the respondents and increasing the chances of non-completion of the survey (Dillman, 2007). However, the arguments presented appear to be opinion based rather than scientific. The decision to put the background section at the start of the questionnaire was based on a consideration of the respondents as acting shop stewards. The background questions were relatively easy to answer, in addition, asking volunteer activists questions about 'how many people they represent', 'how long they have been a shop steward' and 'how long they spend on union duties', gives the respondent an opportunity early in the survey to unveil the significance and legitimacy of their responsibilities in answering the subsequent sections.

5.11 Administering the survey and response rate

In total of 134 hard copy surveys were returned from a potential sample of 350. Eleven of the surveys were deemed to be unsuitable for use. Seven of the responses were rejected due to large parts of the survey not filled out and in four cases the responses were rejected due to the inclusion of shop stewards from other sectors within the sample (engineering and electronics). In total 123 surveys were deemed to be usable. This represents a response rate of 35%.

The hard version copy of the survey was the predominant version of collecting the information. This was due to the reluctance of the volunteers to respond to an email invitation to fill out a survey monkey questionnaire resulted in a significant non-response rate, despite repeated reminders by the sector organiser. An electronic version of the survey was emailed

to PCMD sector shop stewards through the sector organisers' database in December 2015. The response from the survey monkey version elicited four responses in total. It is difficult to account for the apathy towards the electronic version of the questionnaire given that shop stewards as an interest group for social research would have few if any academic requests to fill out survey questionnaires related to their role. In addition, there is limited literature to account for the non-response rates of potential online respondents. Where analysis of the topic does exist, conflicting evidence emerges. Kieran et al's (2005) experiment to determine if the response rates of web-based surveys were superior to mailed based surveys using teachers as their sample, found that web-based survey responses superior to the mailed version. Equally, according to Converse et al (2008) more recent studies have shown lower response rates for web-based or email surveys than paper version surveys (Converse et al, 2008).

Little guidance is given for the reasons of respondents preferring one method over the other. Therefore, the researcher can only speculate as to the factors that may have contributed to the low response rate of the electronic version of the questionnaire. Firstly, the emailed version was distributed during the second week of December (2015) and therefore the survey was sent out during a period when respondents were most likely to be distracted with festive diversions. Additionally, regardless of the claim by the pilot group regarding the length of the survey, the survey would take approximately twelve minutes to fill out. This may have been perceived as a burden that the respondents were not willing to undertake. Finally, despite declarations that IP addresses could not be traced and the assurance of anonymity, these assurances, declared by a faceless and unfamiliar outsider may have done little to reassure the respondents. Moreover, the low visibility of the researcher to the respondents and the general impersonal nature of emailed request may have contributed to the low response rate on the electronic version of the questionnaire.

5.12 Sample selection and representativeness

In March 2016 it was agreed with the sector organiser that to overcome the extremely poor response rate of the emailed version, the sector organiser would personally hand out hard copy versions of the survey during pre-arranged shop steward sector meetings and through

the network of contacts of shop stewards in the sector. This face to face approach became the primary sampling method. The sample chosen for the study was therefore a sample of convenience. Convenience sampling refers to sampling approach in which respondents are sampled simply because they are "convenient" sources of data for researcher (Rubin and Babbie, 2005). The term convenient sample is somewhat of a misnomer as access to the sample for the period of this study was rarely convenient. Rather a more accurate attribute that defines this sample as one of convenience was the absence of an underlying probability-based selection method in reducing bias in the selection process (Rubin and Babbie, 2005). The justification behind using the convenience sampling method was that over a period of time all PCMD sector shop stewards would have been offered an opportunity to participate. Furthermore, the sector organiser's concern to protect the confidentiality of the shop stewards was satisfied. This requirement for confidentiality prevented the researcher from personally acquiring the database of the shop steward's names, email addresses and contact numbers. Therefore, all correspondence with the sample respondents in terms of survey administration and focus group organisation went through the sector organiser.

A doubt then emerges as to the extent that those who participated in the survey display different characteristics and behaviours from those that did not choose to fill out the survey. Concerns over the representativeness and bias using the convenience sampling approach in organisational research emerge in the literature in general (Borg, Gall and Gall, 1993). Sample representativeness refers to the degree to which the sample respondents are typical of the population from which they are selected (Borg, Gall and Gall, 1993). The degree to which the sample differs from the wider sampling frame remains unknown beyond the fact that the all potential respondents had the opportunity to participate. However, despite any potential bias in this choice of sampling, it is conceivable that significant non-response rates from the electronic questionnaire approach would have a much more profound negative effect on the representativeness of the sample.

Moreover, convenience sampling in quantitative oriented shop steward research is not uncommon. More specifically, using convenient specific union events in which significant numbers of potential respondents may attend has frequently been used as a pragmatic method of generating questionnaire responses from shop stewards. Brown et al's (1978) questionnaire

survey of shop stewards used the unions' residential training course as the means to capture survey responses from shop stewards. Heshizer and Lund (1997) in investigating the relationship between union commitment and union participation collected questionnaire survey responses from shop stewards attending education classes at a local university. Martin and Berthiaume (1993) in examining stress associated with the shop stewards' role administered questionnaire surveys to shop stewards attending the annual steward's conference. Terry (1982) in investigating union organisation and behaviour adopted by shop stewards in local government sought survey responses from shop stewards attending their union's training college. Consequently, this sampling approach is considered to be within the normal practices of shop steward research.

This approach however meant that the survey responses came in in batches over a period of 9 months and required continuous communication between the researcher and the sector organiser. This communication was necessary firstly to ensure continued enthusiasm for the study and to ensure that respondents were not encouraged to fill out the survey on two separate occasions. However, given the luke-warm response to the survey in the first instance it was deemed that shop stewards would be unlikely to have unknowingly or willingly completed the survey instrument more than once. A cut off point was agreed with the sector organiser that the last sector meeting in December 2016 would be likely to have captured any respondents that were likely to complete the survey. The last batch of surveys were returned in December 2016 signalling the end of this data gathering phase.

5.13 Data preparation

The statistical analyses of the questionnaire data were performed using version 23.0 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The batches of the received questionnaires were coded and dated giving each response an identity number and the month in which the responses had been generated. Throughout this process, frequent checks were made to ensure that data was entered into SPSS accurately. When data entry was completed, the data file was cleaned by running frequencies, exploring distributions and checking for possible outliers arising as a result of entry errors. Data analysis tests carried out includes descriptive statistics,

t tests, chi-square analysis, regressions and Mann -Whitney test as appropriate, in order to determine statistical significance of the findings.

5.14 Questionnaire Validity and Reliability

Due to modifications and adaptations made on some original and non-specific shop steward measures, the constructs relating to role stress, social capital, voice union and leadership style were subjected to factor analysis to determine if the items on an instrument are identifying the same underlying construct (Kline 2000). Principal component analysis using varimax rotation was used as the method for rotating data (Hair et al, 1998). Rotating the factors allowed for each item to be accounted for by a single common factor. Kaiser (1974) recommend accepting a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) of 0.5 or more for factor analysis to yield distinct and reliable factors. According to Hair et al (1998) only variables with factor loadings greater than .50 on one factor should be used in defining that factor. Account also has to be taken regarding the sample size in which Bryman and Cramer (2011) referred to Gorsuch (1983) in recommending no less than one hundred respondents per analysis.

The sample size for this study was just above the recommended threshold (N=123). Cronbach's coefficient alpha is the most widely used measure of scale reliability (Peterson, 1994). The reliability for all the multi-item constructs was established through calculating a Cronbach's alpha and are reported in the subsequent sections of the analysis. A number of recommendations regarding the acceptable alpha level have been proposed within the literature. The minimum alpha level generally recommended is .7 (Kline, 2000). However, Hinton (2004) suggests that scores of between .5 and .7 can be considered as moderate. There have been occasions in trade union studies where the lower alpha values have been accepted in industrial relations journals. Heyes' (2012) study of trade union participation of members in UNISON accepted alpha scores on modified scales of union participation of less than .6 and referred to Nunnally (1978) that Cronbach's alpha scores below .7 can be acceptable, particularly where the number of items that form a scale is small or scales are

newly developed. In these cases, as Heyes (2012) advises the results must be treated with caution.

5.15 Factor analysis.

Role stress and strain determined the extent to which the items were related to stress and strain as shown in table 5.2. The items loaded onto three factors. Factor 1 contained three items that were consistent with role strain (dealing with union issues can sometimes leave me physically drained, dealing with union issues can sometimes affect my sleep at night, I worry about union issues outside of my work hours). The alpha coefficient for this factor is .780. Factor 2 contained two items related to ambiguity with an alpha score of .852. Factor 3 contained two items associated with role overload. The alpha coefficient is .757.

Table 5. 2 Factor analysis; role stress and strain

Items	Factor 1 Strain	Factor 2 Ambiguity	Factor 3 Overload
Physically drained	.805		
Affect sleep	.838		
Worry outside of work	.792		
Feel uncertain		.926	
Not enough knowledge		.928	
Workload too much			.884
Takes up too much time			.871
Cronbach's alpha coefficient	.780	.852	.757
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin.	.629		
Approx. Chi-Square	301.028		
d.f.	21		
Sig.	.000		

Table 5.3 below presents the factor analysis results for frequency of contact with members (structural social capital). Two of the items, ‘used facebook to contact members and ‘contact members by phone’ were removed due to a low factor loading. The four remaining items were factor analysed and loaded onto two factors suggesting two distinct underlying communication constructs. Factor one related to items measuring shop steward close face to face contact with members. Factor two related to general contact with members regarding union information.

Table 5. 3 Factor analysis; frequency of membership contact

Items	Factor 1 member grievances	Factor 2 union information
Interact with individual grievances	.934	
Interact with small group grievances	.933	
Formal union meeting		.828
Handed out union literature		.808
Cronbach’s alpha coefficient	.882	.624
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin.	.609	
Approx. Chi-Square	130.127	
d.f	6	
Sig.	.000	

Table 5.4 below shows the factor loadings for quality of membership relations. The quality of shop steward's relationship (relational social capital) with their members refers to the type of relationships that are developed due to repeated interactions with the membership. The five items loaded onto one factor with loadings of .66 or higher. The alpha coefficient for the relational scale is .84

Table 5. 4 Factor analysis; relations with members

Items	Factor Quality of member relationship
My members are united as a group	.857
I trust most of the members I represent	.854
My members are willing to take action against management if necessary	.819
My members are willing to help me as a shop steward	.734
There is always a large turnout at union meetings	.667
<hr/>	
Cronbach's alpha coefficient	.84
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin.	.813
Approx. Chi-Square	254.685
d.f.	10
Sig.	.000

The eight items regarding the influence of shop steward voice loaded onto two factors (Table 5.5). Five items loaded onto factor one were relabelled terms of work and resulted in an alpha coefficient of .776. Three items loaded onto factor two and are related to work practices and intensity of work. These have been relabelled organisation of work resulting in Cronbach's alpha of .880

Table 5. 5: Factor analysis; voice

Items	Factor 1 Terms of work	Factor 2 Organisation of Work
Job security	.779	
Management treatment of members	.760	
Pension	.728	
Wages	.692	
Redeployment	.663	
Work intensification		.920
Staffing levels		.866
Work hours		.845
Cronbach's alpha coefficient	.776	.880
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	.787	
Approx. Chi-Square	426.432	
df	28	
Sig.	.000	

Table 5.6 below shows the items measuring shop steward leadership approaches. The 4 items loaded onto one factor and are related to items measuring the extent to which shop stewards lead or follow their members.

Table 5.6 Factor analysis; leadership style

Items	Factor Leader
As a shop steward I often raise issues myself	.816
I tell my members their demands are not reasonable	.792
I have rejected issues raised by members	.739
Shop stewards should only do what members want (reverse coded)	.532
Cronbach's alpha coefficient	.681
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin.	.651
Approx. Chi-Square	175.621
d.f	10
Sig.	.000

5.16 Follow up focus groups

The survey findings were further explored by utilising focus groups from the sample of respondents that had participated in the self-administered questionnaire. The focus group allowed the researcher access to socially-constructed opinions, experiences, and attitudes of the participants that would enrich the meaning behind the survey data. The topics for discussion were developed from the results of the survey questionnaire and in conjunction with the researcher's supervisor. Key areas for further investigation were identified from the survey results. For example, the survey results revealed that a majority of PCMD sector shop stewards entered the position reluctantly. As such the survey lacked the flexibility to capture

more social contextual detail to enlighten the survey results (Wolff et al, 1991). The analysis of the survey results led to the key themes in the focus groups around participant's recalling their path into shop stewards position, their personal attitudes and opinions towards the position and how shop stewards have shaped the tasks associated with representing members on a day to day basis. Additional questions were asked regarding the challenges and changes associated with the position since they became shop stewards.

Participants for the focus groups were facilitated through the sector organiser and the sector president. In total three focus groups sessions, lasting between seventy-five to ninety minutes each took place between August and September 2017 involving a total of sixteen participants. Three of the participants were female and thirteen were male. The focus group responses were audio recorded. All the participants had previously filled out the survey questionnaire in phase one of the study and all had given their formal permission to take part in the focus group discussions. The first focus group was facilitated by the sector president in which volunteers were requested to attend Waterford Institute of Technology to participate in the focus group. This focus group took place in mid- August 2017 consisting of six respondents. Additional focus groups were organised in conjunction with a sector meeting for PCMD shop stewards that was held in Waterford Institute of Technology in mid-September 2017. This resulted in a potential pool of an additional eighteen volunteers who were available by attending the sector meeting.

In this regard, the second focus group, consisting of six participants, was undertaken on the evening before the meetings where participants had travelled down prior to the sector meeting. A third focus group was held after the sector meeting. However, for this focus group a number of participants dropped out or withdrew due to having to leave early and a number of potential volunteers identified that they had not filled out the questionnaire making them unsuitable for the focus group. This left only four participants available. It was decided to run the third focus group with these participants. This decision was based on Stake's (2006) recommendation that between 4 to 10 participants is an appropriate number for focus group participation. A summary of the focus group respondents is given in the tables below.

Table 5. 7 Focus group 1- August 2017

Respondent	Gender	Tenure	Members approx.
1	Male	10	80
2	Male	8	100
3	Male	10	Over 120
4	Male	7	Over 100
5	Male	7	30
6	Male	5	50

Table 5. 8 Focus group 2 - September 2017

Respondent	Gender	Tenure	Members approx.
1	Male	16	70
2	Female	12	40
3	Male	10	Over 200
4	Male	4	350
5	Male	14	230
6	Male	9	200

Table 5. 9 Focus group 3- September 2017

Respondent	Gender	Tenure	Members approx.
1	Male	16	110
2	Female	5	80
3	Female	7	170
4	Male	8	Over 100

5.17 Focus group preparation

Cognisance was taken from the literature regarding focus group methodology and the role of the moderator (Kitzinger, 2005; Stewart et al, 2007). The questions (appendix E) were formatted in an open-ended fashion to encourage participants to respond, interact and compare their experiences with each other to solicit the information needed from the group (Kitzinger, 2005). The number of questions was limited based on the recommendations of the literature suggesting that between eight and twelve questions is appropriate for focus group discussion (Kitzinger, 2005; Stewart et al, 2007).

The questions were piloted and tested on a small focus group of shop stewards not involved in the study to ensure the questions and the format of the proposed focus group was appropriate in terms of question ambiguity/language and the researchers' readiness to conduct a focus group. Based on the pilot group responses no changes were made to the questions. The study participants were subsequently sent the questions before the focus group discussions along with an introductory letter explaining the format of the focus groups, noting that the discussions will be recorded and assuring their confidentiality in the responses. The questions were sent out to the participants via the sector organiser to give respondents an opportunity to consider the topics for discussion rather than have the participants considering the questions cold or putting them on the spot (Stewart et al, 2007).

The role of the moderator and an atmosphere conducive to open discussion was also considered based on the advice of the literature (Kitzinger, 2005; Stewart et al. 2007; Krueger and Casey, 2009, Steward and Shamdasani, 2014). Welcomes, introductions, expectations, refreshments and seating arrangements were organised in an effort to assist the participants to feel comfortable enough to share their experiences in the presence of others in their group. A further important element in facilitating this environment is an emphasis on the researcher/moderator to fade into the background rather than take a centre-stage role in focus group discussions (Bloor et al 2001, Krueger and Casey, 2009). However, the researcher was mindful of a number of concerns raised in the literature concerning the social context of focus groups (Kitzinger, 2005, Steward and Shamdasani, 2014). A frequently raised issue centres on the possibility that some participants may be reluctant to disclose information in a group

situation (Kitzinger, 2005). A further critique lies in the possibility that some participants may conform to groupthink, where a participant follows or adjusts their own beliefs and opinions to correspond with dominant voice(s) in the group (Steward and Shamdasani, 2014). In either case therefore the potential existed that some focus group participants may not express their true beliefs and opinions (Bloor et al 2001). As such, the researcher was vigilant during the focus group sessions to intervene and ensure that all participants had the opportunity to express their opinions where more dominant voices may arise. Where necessary the researcher intervened to elicit additional perspectives and information with follow up questions while otherwise maintaining a background role (Bloor et al, 2002). At the end of each question, the researcher offered a summary of the discussion to ensure understanding of the key issues raised and to offer the participants an opportunity to expand or correct the researcher's interpretation.

5.18 Analysis and saturation

The focus group responses were transcribed from the audio recordings. The transcripts were not cleaned or edited in terms of grammar, idioms, incomplete thoughts or language used during the discussions. This was to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflected the atmosphere of the discussions (Stewart et al, 2007). The analysis of the transcripts required several readings to get an overall feel for the emerging issues during the discussions. The analysis was performed manually without the use of NVivo. The researcher deemed that the amount of data was manageable enough for the researcher to get close and familiar to the information in terms of seeking meaning and connections regarding the shop steward's subjective experiences.

The transcripts were analysed thematically on a question by question basis and the content was coded into themes emerging from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were identified by patterns of both frequency and extensiveness of responses related to phrases, sentences, or specific experiences identified by the participants (Krueger and Casey, 2009) For example in the exchanges between the participants regarding their path into the shop stewards position, particular emphasis was raised concerning their tendency to speak up or

speak out as an ordinary union member. An initial coding was assigned to this behaviour as 'protest' and 'reactions'. After initial coding, the codes and the transcribed texts were collated. During this analysis the codes were collapsed into a larger theme and coded 'injustices'. Relevant quotes were subsequently extracted from the transcripts to illustrate the typical responses attached to the theme in relation to the question asked. In this sense the themes identified were driven by the data rather than attempting to fit the data to the researchers' preconceptions derived from the survey analysis. This approach is consistent with a qualitative approach reflective of interpreting the meaning and experiences of the participants (Stewart et al, 2007).

Finally, the issue of saturation as a criterion for when to cease data collection and analysis is a recurring discussion regarding qualitative aspects of research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Data saturation is the term used to describe the point in the research where, on the basis of the information collected, further data collection /analysis is deemed to be unnecessary (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Yet no specific rules exist pertaining to how to reach data saturation (Bowen, 2008; Kerr et al, 2010). Sampling size regarding a sufficient number of interviews is closely associated to discussions of saturation in determining whether sufficient data has been collected. The guidelines range from five to twenty-five depending on the resourcing issues and the limitations of the sample under investigation (Kvale, 1996). The issue of saturation is further complicated regarding focus groups as there is a lack of guidance as to whether sample size should refer to the number of groups or the number of participants within the groups (Krueger and Casey, 2009).

Nevertheless, a common premise across deliberations is the notion that saturation is reached when the researcher finds no new categories, themes or codes emerging from the analysis of the data (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Onwuegbuzie et al (2009) argued that focus group data tends to be analysed one focus group at a time allowing the researcher to assess if the themes from one group emerge from other groups. The cumulative assessment of information across focus groups according to Onwuegbuzie et al (2009) allows the researcher to assess when data saturation is reached in terms of no new information or themes emerging between the groups. In the context of this study, the analysis of the third focus group started to confirm a high rate of duplication and similarity of responses across the three groups. On this basis and

having regard of the sequential mixed method research design, it was decided by the researcher that additional focus groups would be unlikely to yield any additional data that would generate substantially different information.

5.19 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the philosophical approach taken in this research has been outlined, together with justification for the methodology used to investigate the research questions. A mixed method design was chosen due to the benefits of this approach regarding the multifaceted nature of the topic under investigation. In designing the research approach the study advocates that shop stewards belong to a unique group and share a common occupation in terms of representing rank and file members in their organisations. Consequently, knowledge on what shop stewards do can be aligned with quantitative data to identify overall patterns of representative behaviours deduced from the available shop steward literature. However, investigating the experiences of shop stewards and how they interpret these experiences in their own individual workplaces would enrich the meaning behind the quantitative data that might otherwise be masked by predetermined response categories in a survey analysis. The following chapter will present the results of the analyses.

Chapter Six

Quantitative research findings;

Becoming and remaining as a shop steward

6.0 Introduction

Both quantitative and qualitative modes of data are utilised to examine the research framework presented earlier relating to the various tasks of shop steward representation to address the two main research questions regarding firstly, what influences a union member to become and remain as a shop steward and secondly what tasks do shop stewards perform as workplace union representatives. These broad research areas are disaggregated into a number of more fine grained discrete questions as detailed in table 6.1

Table 6.1: Summary of research questions

What influences a union member to become and continue as a shop steward?
1. What personal factors are associated with becoming a shop steward?
2. Are PCMD members reluctant recruits into the role of the shop steward?
3. What factors influences shop steward's intention to continue in the position?
4. Do shop steward perceptions of the role vary according to length of tenure in the position?

The findings of the quantitative phase of the study (N =123) are reported first. Where appropriate, comparisons will be made with other relevant studies regarding the shop steward role to highlight any differences or similarities from the more considerable UK research.

The analysis begins with the factors influencing a union member to become and continue as a shop steward summarised in the research framework in chapter 4 (Fig 4.1). The analysis begins with a summary of the descriptive characteristics of the respondent shop stewards (N = 123). To examine questions 1 to 4, frequency distributions, the two-sampled chi square test and colorations are used to identify the key relationships and variables related to union members becoming and remaining a shop steward.

6.1 Personal characteristics of respondent shop stewards

Table 6.2 presents a summary of the individual characteristics of respondent shop stewards. The majority of respondent shop stewards were male (78.9%). Consequently, in terms of gender, female shop stewards in this sector account for a much smaller proportion of the sample (21.1%) echoing previous survey results on the extent of female involvement in the union as a shop steward (Upchurch et al, 2002; Charlwood and Forth, 2008). However, the results of this study may be a product of the gender composition of the workforce accounting for a higher proportion of males in the manufacturing sector in general (Russell et al 2017).

Table 6.2: Characteristics of respondent shop stewards (N=123)

Background characteristics	%	Background characteristics	%
Gender		Political orientation	
Male	79	Left	59
Female	21	Centre	39
		Right	2
Age		Political party member	
21-25 years	2	No	87
26-30 years	7	Yes (labour party)	13
31- 40 years	30		
Over 40 years	61		
Highest education attained		Close friends are union activists	
Junior cert	15	Yes – at least one	69
Leaving cert	48	Yes – a lot	7
3 rd level	37	None	24
How long employed in your firm		Activist family members	
Less than 2 years	2	Yes	50
2-5 years	10	No	50
6-10 years	20		
More than 10 years	68		
		Prior activism as a union member	
		Stalwart / ideological	40
		Passive/ selective activists	60
How long a SIPTU member		How long a shop steward	
Less than 1 year	1	Less than 1 year	5
1-3 years	7	1-3 years	16
4-7 years	15	4-7 years	31
More than 7 years	77	More than 7 years	48

*percentages rounded to the nearest whole number

Table 6.1 also shows that sixty-one percent were over 40 years of age and nine percent of the sample is under 30 years of age. Almost half the sampled hold a minimum formal qualification of a leaving cert, while thirty-seven percent of the respondents continued their education beyond secondary education holding a third level qualification. Shop stewards in this sample are predominantly male, middle aged and well educated.

6.1.1 Length of tenure

The respondents have a considerable length of service with their employer and their union. Eighty-eight percent have a minimum of six years' service with their employer and sixty-seven percent have more than ten years' service. This indicates a relative stability of employment in this sector and the presence of shop stewards with a familiarity and knowledge of their workplace. These stewards also have considerable experience in their role as a workplace representative due to their length of tenure in the position as shop steward: Seventy-eight percent of the respondents have held the position for at least four years, while forty-eight percent of the sample indicated that they have more than seven years' experience in the position.

Table 6.3: Average age and length of tenure as a shop steward in the PCMD sector of SIPTU compared to UK studies.

Studies	Typical age	Typical tenure
Clegg, Killick and Adams (1961)	35 years	7 years
McCarthy and Parker (1967)	45 years	6 years
Pedler (1973)	37 years	3 years
Upchurch, Danford and Richardson (2002)	40 years	7 years
WERS 2004	46 years	8 years
WERS 2011	48 years	-
Present study	Over 40 years	7 years

Several UK based surveys undertaken over a period of some five decades indicate that the typical shop steward is middle aged and that the average age and length of time in the role shows some continuity over time. The age of a typical shop steward in Clegg et al's (1961) study averaged thirty-five years with an average duration in the role of seven years. Upchurch et al's (2002) study of union workplace representatives from a sample of three unions found that that seventy- two percent of their sample had an age of forty and above, while forty-two percent of the sample had held the role for seven years or more. The WERS (2004) survey revealed that senior shop stewards are on average forty-six years of age with an average duration in the role of eight years. The 2011 WERS revealed little has changed reporting that eighty-six per cent are forty years or older with the average age increasing to forty eight years. In the absence of comparative Irish studies, the results of this study indicate that shop stewards in the PCMD sector have similar age and tenure in the role.

6.1.2 Political orientation and family socialisation

Membership of a political party was relatively rare as eighty seven percent of respondents were not members of any political party. However, the thirteen percent that were members of a political party were members of the Labour party. There was an almost even split between the sample in terms of having (50.4%) or not having (49.6%) close family members (spouse, siblings, parents) active in the union. Just fewer than ten percent of respondents had parents that were active union members. A larger proportion of the sample (74%) has at the very least one or a few close friends that are union activists prior to becoming a shop steward themselves. On balance these results indicate that social influences from having like-minded active friends is a more influential group than family as a discernible personal characteristic of member participation as a shop steward.

6.1.3 Prior activism / orientation as an ordinary union member

Prior union activism as an ordinary member was assessed by the extent to which shop stewards identified with the union through their participation in union affairs before taking on the role (Nicholson, 1976). Table 6.4 shows the survey responses to the level of shop steward participation as an ordinary union member.

Table 6.4: Union participation as an ordinary member

Category	%
Reluctant activist	-
Card carrier	27
Selective activist	33
Stalwart	24
Ideological	16

Selective activists (33%) accounted for the biggest nominated category of activism as an ordinary union prior to becoming a shop steward. When this is combined with the second biggest category, card carriers who are passive members with no interest in union tasks (27%), much of the sample of current acting shop stewards (60%) had a minimal and somewhat instrumental involvement in union tasks as an ordinary union member prior to becoming a shop steward in their workplace. As such the majority of shop stewards did not enter the role with a history of high levels of activism or ideological commitment as an ordinary union member.

6.1.4 Summary

The descriptive profile of the 21st century shop steward in the PCMD sector of SIPTU bears some resemblance to the personal characteristics of shop stewards in past studies. The results indicate that most shop stewards have some level of seniority in terms of age, length of tenure in the company and occasional level of activism as a union member. In general, the survey responses suggest that members with accumulated life skills and longer workplace experience is a familiar defining characteristic of shop stewards in the PCMD sector of SIPTU (McShane, 1986). Longer organisational tenure is likely to increase knowledge about the workplace and may encourage more frequent occurrences of ‘occasional union activism’ (card carrier and selective activist) of union members. Consequently age, tenure and overall workplace occurrences may combine to create a seniority effect associated with appointment to the position of shop steward.

The ratio of shop stewards that have descended from a family background of union activism and membership of a political party is not as predominant and limited to small proportion of shop stewards. However, a majority of shop stewards had activist friends before becoming shop stewards suggesting that the social influence of activist friends rather than family members may reinforce union values and provide a pool of potential shop stewards (Flood and Turner, 1996:96). These descriptive results support previous research (Nicholson, 1976; McShane, 1986; Flood and Turner, 1996) related to the personal characteristics of members who take on the role of shop steward.

6.2 Recruitment into the position of shop steward

Table 6.5 shows the frequency responses to questions regarding how shop stewards initially became involved in the position and the extent to which they were willing or reluctant entrants into the role. Most respondents (70%) had taken up the position of shop steward unopposed and without any formal opposition from other rank and file members. In the main shop stewards entered the position by default or what Nicholson (1976) termed accidental occupancy and the common feature of role occupancy was that many current shop stewards were persuaded to take on the role because no one else wanted to go forward for the job. For this sample, lack of competition for the post of shop steward is contrary to the finding of Flood and Turner (1996) in which seventy-six percent of their sample were elected in contested elections. However, it is not known from the survey responses whether the uncontested nature of occupancy was due to the resignation of a former shop steward in which only one nominee (the current shop steward) went forward for the position.

Table 6.5: Recruitment into the position of shop steward

How elected	%
Unopposed	70
Contested election	30
Wanted the position	%
Willing	39
Indifferent	61

6.2.1 Willingness to take on the position

The position of shop steward is occupied by both willing and reluctant recruits. Thirty-nine percent of the sample indicated a positive desire to occupy the position of shop steward. This is somewhat higher than previous research on Irish shop stewards (18%) willing to take on the role (Flood and Turner, 1996). A majority of respondents (61 %) indicated varying degrees of indifference to the position. Yet despite this indifference they still found themselves as the shop steward. Indifference to the position is defined as those respondents who answered 'did not want the job' or 'did not mind one way or the other' to the question 'how much did you want the role of shop steward'. The indifferent attitude of the members into the shop stewards position points to a possible undermining of the basis of workplace representation as volunteer lay activists are an essential component for a strong union presence at the workplace (Darlington, 2010). The results from this sample indicate an apathetic membership view towards occupying the position of shop steward.

6.2.2 Factors associated with becoming a shop steward

Table 6.6 shows the inter-correlations among the shop steward personal characteristics and willingness to become a shop steward. The personal characteristics of shop stewards related to tenure (union and organisational) are significantly correlated with each other. Length of union membership is highly correlated with organisational tenure ($r_s = .783$, $p < 0.01$), and moderately but significantly correlated with past activism ($r_s = .310$, $p < 0.01$), political orientation ($r_s = .246$, $p < 0.01$) and age ($r_s = .521$, $p < 0.05$). These relationships suggest that a common characteristic of shop stewards is that they have considerable experience in the workplace and have a history of being active in the union. Willingness to take on the position shows a moderate but significant relationship with past activism ($r_s = .296$, $p < 0.01$), organisational tenure ($r_s = .352$, $p < 0.01$), duration of SIPTU membership ($r_s = .273$, $p < 0.01$) and to a lesser extent age ($r_s = .222$, $p < 0.05$). Despite clear differences in the actual willingness to initially take on the position, these relationships hint at the possibility that seniority in terms of years working in the labour force are key variables in contributing to union members gravitating towards the position of shop steward.

Table 6.6: Variables associated with becoming a shop steward

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.Willingness	1									
2.Political orientation	.084	1								
3.Political party	.130	-.226*	1							
4.Past activism	.296**	.006	.268**	1						
5.Age	.222*	.203*	.067	.371**	1					
6.Education	.086	-.158	.163	-.057	-.072	1				
7.Active friends	.131	-.013	.117	.045	-.071	.002	1			
8.Active family	.000	-.044	.170	.001	-.081	-.278**	.428**	1		
9.Organisation tenure	.352**	.223*	.070	.333**	.450**	.146	-.196	-.197*	1	
10.SIPTU tenure	.273**	.246**	-.002	.310**	.521*	.079	-.088	-.123	.738**	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (2 tailed)

6.2.3 Chi- Square tests; willingness to become a shop steward

To identify the factors that are associated with the recruitment of willing and reluctant shop stewards, the frequency responses of both groups were compared with the background variables to determine if the pattern of responses between the two groups is significantly different using Chi – Square tests of independence (table 6.7). To overcome the possibility that some cells within the test may have an expected count of less than five, the categorical variables were dichotomised. Age was grouped into less than 40 years and over 40 years. Organisational tenure was coded as less than 6 years and more than six years. Education was categorised into secondary and third level. Prior activism was recoded into occasional activist (passive and selective) and conscious activist (stalwart and ideological). Membership of SIPTU was omitted due to the high correlation with organisational tenure

Table 6.7: Chi squared tests; willingness to become a shop steward and background variables.

Background variable	category	Indifferent %	Willing %
Prior activism $X^2=14.34, df=1, p<.001^*$	Occasional activist	75	25
	Conscious activist	41	59
Age $X^2=9.330, df=1, p<.001^*$	Less than 40 years	77	23
	More than 40 years	49	51
Education $X^2=.1.231 df=1, p>.05$	Secondary	65	35
	Third level	54	46
Active family $X^2=.550 df=1, p>.05$	Yes	57	43
	No	46	36
Active Friends $X^2=.602, df=1, p>.05$	Yes	59	41
	No	67	33
Political orientation $X^2=.876, df=1, p>.05$	Left	64	36
	centre	55	47
Organisational Tenure $X^2=7.653, df=1, p<0.05^*$	Less than 6 years	93	7
	More than 6 years	56	44

The results indicate that no significant differences between those willing and those indifferent to shop steward occupancy for the variables political orientation, active family union members and active union friends. However, there are some significant differences between the groups in the domain of workplace seniority. The variables age, ($X^2=9.330, df=1, p<.001$) and organisational tenure ($X^2=7.653, df=1, p<0.05$) highlight significant differences related to the occupant's willingness to take on the position of shop steward. Prior activism emerges as the most significant variable in differentiating between those who are willing or indifferent occupants of the shop steward's position ($X^2=14.34, df=1, p<.001$).

6.2.4 Summary

The findings regarding how union members were recruited into the position of shop steward (question 2) are consistent with previous studies that a majority of members enter the role reluctantly, unopposed and were not actively seeking the position (Nicholson, 1976; Flood and Turner, 1996). There is little evidence in this study of an influx of highly eager or radicalised members into the representative position. The results here support the importance of influences in the workplace as the majority of shop stewards were asked/ persuaded to take on the position because no one else was willing to take on the job (Nicholson, 1976). The results confirm a noted perennial difficulty in attracting union members into the position (McCarthy and Parker 1968). In their sample of sixteen hundred acting shop stewards in the UK, forty per cent said they had to be persuaded to take on the role, while thirty-six per cent said that they actually wanted the role (McCarthy and Parker 1968). McCarthy and Parker (1968) also observed that competition for the role was not particularly intense as seventy-one per-cent of shop stewards obtained the position in uncontested workplace elections. In the main, not much has changed in the recruitment of members into the role and shop stewards in this study share similar recruitment experiences in their entry into the role. The notion of the ‘persuaded’ and ‘reluctant’ member taking on the role remains a notable feature of voluntary union workplace representation in this sector of SIPTU. A consistent explanation in the UK and Irish literature centres on the account that the shop steward faces a task that is often challenging and potentially stressful placing considerable demands on the occupants (Warren 1971, Nicholson 1976, Flood and Turner 1996).

6.3 Continuing as a shop steward

Given the centrality of shop stewards to the presence of union representation in the workplace, few studies have directly investigated the shop steward’s intention to remain as a workplace representative (Winch, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996). Retaining volunteer shop stewards is critical to the effective functioning of the union at workplace level (Winch, 1980). The research framework (fig 4.1) suggested that personal factors and role experiences such as constituency characteristics, satisfaction, stress, union support / management support are expected to be associated with shop stewards’ intention to continue in the position (Winch, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996).

A range of potential influences may encourage shop stewards to continue their tenure in the role. Length of tenure may be associated with shop steward attitudes towards their role experiences. More experienced shop stewards (length of tenure) are likely to report more positive attitudes towards the role (satisfaction, stress, union support, skills and knowledge / management support) than inexperienced stewards (Flood and Turner, 2006). As such a further aim of this study is to investigate; what factors influences shop steward’s intention to continue in the position (question 3) and do shop steward perceptions of the role vary according to length of tenure in the position (question 4).

Bivariate correlations are used to explore the relationship between the variables under investigation. Descriptive statistics are then presented to summarise the survey responses to the variables under consideration. To test the influence of the consistency characteristics, stress and strain, and management / union support, binary logistic regression is used to assess the likely impact of the various measures on shop steward intention to continue in the position. Personal characteristics are used as control variables in the regression analysis. Finally, one-way Anova with post hoc tests identify discernible differences in role experiences between experience and less experienced shop stewards based on their length of tenure in the role.

6.3.1 Intention to continue in the role

Table 6.8 shows that a substantial majority of shop stewards (84%) intend to remain on for another term. A corresponding question asked shop stewards whether they derived some level of enjoyment in the position in which ninety- five percent of respondents indicated they enjoyed being the workplace representative. The combined responses of these questions indicate that, once in the position a large majority of occupants are quite satisfied and content to continue as a shop steward in the PCMD sector of SIPTU.

Table 6.8: Intention to continue and role enjoyment (N=123)

Measures: Min =1 Max=5	Yes %	No %	Mean	Median	Std. Dev
Continue in role	84	16	4.11	4.000	.733
Role satisfaction	95	5	4.27	4.000	.725

6.4 Factors influencing the intention to continue

Table 6.9 shows Spearman's rho correlations for the key variables under analysis for this section. Role enjoyment and intention to continue as a shop steward are strongly correlated ($r_s = .662$, $p < 0.01$). Intention to continue is also moderately and positively correlated with firm size ($r_s = .240$, $p < 0.01$), tenure as a shop steward ($r_s = .340$, $p < 0.01$) and age ($r_s = .301$, $p < 0.01$). A number of the independent variables are strongly correlated with intention to continue including union support ($r_s = .325$, $p < 0.01$), use of company facilities ($r_s = .384$, $p < 0.01$) and prior activism as a rank and file member ($r_s = .324$, $p < 0.01$).

There is no significant relationship between intention to continue and the potential negative consequences associated with levels of strain, overload and ambiguity. Intention to carry on in the role has a negative correlation with role overload and role ambiguity but is positively associated with role strain. While these relationships are not statistically significant, they are suggestive of shop stewards being able to cope as a union workplace representative without any significant negative consequences to their wellbeing. Strain has a moderate and positive relationship with both role overload ($r_s = .395$, $p < 0.01$) and to a lesser extent role ambiguity ($r_s = .231$, $p < 0.05$).

Ambiguity and overload are both significantly correlated with skills and knowledge. Skills and knowledge refer to the extent to which shop stewards feel they have the expertise to perform in the position of shop steward. Shop steward skill and knowledge is positively correlated with perceptions of role overload ($r_s = .241$, $p < 0.01$) and is negatively correlated with role ambiguity ($r_s = -.392$, $p < 0.01$), but is not significantly associated with strain. These relationships suggest that more capable shop stewards find the position to be more demanding but experience less role ambiguity. Length of tenure as a shop steward is a key variable with a significant correlation with age ($r_s = .468$, $p < 0.01$), and moderate but significant correlations with prior activism as a union member ($r_s = .393$, $p < 0.01$), management harassment ($r_s = .280$, $p < 0.01$), skills and knowledge ($r_s = .349$, $p < 0.01$) and union support ($r_s = .335$, $p < 0.01$). Tenure has weaker but significant relationships with constituency size ($r_s = .185$, $p < 0.05$), hours spent as a shop steward ($r_s = .219$, $p < 0.05$), strain ($r_s = .216$,

$p < 0.05$) and use of company facilities ($r_s = .193$, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, there is negative but significant correlations with gender ($r_s = -.183$, $p < 0.05$) and ambiguity ($r_s = -.211$, $p < 0.05$). These correlations provide support for the proposed framework (figure 4.1) and the associations between shop steward experiences in the position and length of tenure as a shop steward.

Table 6.9: Correlations; Intention to continue in the position of shop steward

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Continue as a shop steward	1																
2. Enjoy being a shop steward	.662**	1															
3. Firm size	.240**	.120	1														
4. Tenure as a shop steward	.340**	.212*	.178	1													
5. Constituency size	.124	.165	.444*	.185*	1												
6. Hours as a shop steward	.172	.060	.081	.219*	.001	1											
7. Gender	-.014	.202*	.107	-.183*	.276**	-.110	1										
8. Age	.301**	.176	.269**	.468**	.119	.006	-.210*	1									
9. Education	-.082	.004	-.114	.017	-.117	.096	.126	-.072	1								
10. Prior activism as a union member	.324**	.187*	.025	.393**	.050	.229*	-.059	.373**	-.042	1							
11. Strain	.169	-.065	-.065	.216*	.085	.075	-.240**	.110	.083	.060	1						
12. Overload	-.024	-.048	-.155	.166	.063	.039	-.083	.206*	.114	.101	.395**	1					
13. Ambiguity	-.106	-.029	.003	-.211*	.123	-.126	-.001	-.111	-.056	-.230*	.231*	.093	1				
14. Management harassment	.179	-.078	-.014	.280**	.195*	.157	-.065	.254**	-.034	.123	.139	.200*	-.008	1			
15. Use of company facilities	.384**	.157	.144	.193*	-.079	.202*	-.114	.087	.194*	.210*	.119	-.021	-.297**	.132	1		
16. Skills and Knowledge	.142	.035	.026	.349**	.104	.261**	-.120	.101	.079	.346	.154	.241**	-.392**	.099	.267**	1	
17. Union support	.325**	.362**	.056	.335**	.005	.221	-.121	.139	.247**	.247	.190	.062	-.051	-.043	.205*	.205*	1

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (2 tailed)

6.4.1 Constituency characteristics

The size of the firm, constituency size and hours spent on union duties are characteristics of local shop steward organisation regarding the scale of the demands facing shop stewards in their individual workplaces. Seventy-two percent of the respondents represent workers in a large organisation environment employing 250 employees or more. Seventy-five percent estimated that at least half of all the workers in their workplace were trade union members. The size of the shop stewards' constituency in terms of the number of union members directly represented by each respondent varied considerably from 10 members to a claimed 1400 members (Table 6.10). This gives a mean constituency size of 171 members. This figure is however prone to the outlier response of 1400 members from one respondent. When this outlier is taken out of the calculation, the mean constituency size is reduced to a still rather large 161 members. The midpoint in the range of constituency size is 108 constituents. Some shop stewards may have misinterpreted the question in terms of the number of members represented in the organisation rather than the number 'directly represented' by the respondent. A closer examination of the response revealed a common and relatively large constituency size, as fifty percent of the sample indicated directly representing a hundred members or more.

Table 6.10: Average constituency size and hours spent on union duties

Key studies	Average hours spent on shop steward duties	Average constituency size
Clegg et al (1961)	6 hours	50 members
McCarthy and Parker (1968)	6 hours	60 members
Pedler (1973)	6 hours	-
Partridge (1977)	10 hours	-
Schuller and Robertson (1983)	2.7 hours	20 members
Millard et al (2000)	6.3hours	32 members
This study	6 hours	161 members

The range in constituency size is also evident from UK studies. The average constituency size in McCarthy and Parker (1968) was sixty members. Brown et al (1978) reported a median constituency size of thirty-nine members. Schuller and Robertson (1983) reported variations from less than ten members to over a hundred with an average constituency size of thirty. The results of this study indicate considerably larger constituency sizes in this sector of SIPTU compared to UK results. The constituency size results here possibly point to a shop steward looking after more than one section or serving as a shop steward across more than one shift in the organisation. Moreover, the large constituency sizes suggest a general reluctance among union members to take up a position of shop steward and reduce the constituency size.

Differences in the number of work hours spent on shop steward duties ranged between 0 hours to 24 hours. Based on the responses, shop stewards contribute an average of 6 hours a week on representative duties in the workplace. While there is no Irish data to compare with, these results fall within the range of past UK studies (Table 6.8). Schuller and Robertson (1983) argued that shop stewards may overestimate how long they spend on union duties suggesting that based on a diary study of shop stewards, an average of 2.7 hours represents a more accurate account. The percentage of respondents indicating an intention to remain is quite stable across constituency size, time spent on union duties, and firm size (table 6.11). Respondents who spend the least amount of time on shop stewards' duties (up to 5 hours) are the largest category to indicate they would not continue in the position for another term.

Table 6.11: Percentages of respondents and intention to continue

Variables	Categories	Continue No unlikely	Continue Yes definitely
Constituency size	Up to 50	3 (12%)	22 (88%)
	51-100	7 (19%)	29 (81%)
	More than 100	8 (13%)	54 (87%)
Time spent on union duties	Up to 5 hours	12 (19%)	52 (81%)
	6-10 hours	6 (13%)	42 (87%)
	More than 10	0 (0%)	11 (100%)
Firm size	Up to 250	7 (21%)	26 (79%)
	250-500	8 (12%)	57 (88%)
	More than 500	3 (12%)	22 (88%)
Age	Less than 30	5 (45%)	6 (55%)
	31-40	7 (19%)	30 (81%)
	More than 40	6 (8%)	68 (92%)
Gender	Male	13 (13%)	84 (87%)
	Female	5 (19%)	21 (81%)
Education	Junior Cert	1 (6%)	17 (94%)
	Leaving Cert	10 (17%)	49 (83%)
	Third level	7 (15%)	39 (85%)
Tenure as a shop steward	Less than 3 years	7 (27%)	19 (73%)
	Between 4-7 years	6 (16%)	32 (84%)
	More than 7 years	5 (9%)	54 (91%)

The percentage of respondents indicating an intention to remain is also quite stable for gender and education. Proportionally more shop stewards in the under 30 years of age category are less inclined to continue as a shop steward for another term. Older shop stewards account for a higher percentage of respondents who are willing to remain in the position. Length of tenure has an upward relationship with the intention to continue as a shop steward. As shop steward tenure increases the proportion of respondents who indicate an intention to continue in the position increases. Proportionally more shop stewards in the more than 7 years category (91%) indicated a willingness to stay on as a shop steward compared to shop stewards in the under 3 years category.

6.4.2 Support from management

The results indicate evidence a general tolerance by management towards the presence of shop stewards in this sector. Few shop stewards reported any significant or sustained harassment by management in their position as a shop steward. The most frequently cited difficulty shop stewards encountered with management was being told to spend less time on union duties.

Table 6.12: Support from management

Number of company facilities available	None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Mean	Median	Std. Dev
N=123	4%	28%	20%	23%	17%	7%	2.42	2.00	1.36

Management support towards shop steward representation at the workplace was tangibly reflected in range of facilities made available to shop stewards in the performance of their role (table 6.12). The facilities referred to the use of a company phone, use of a specifically designated office, access to a multi-purpose office, use of company photocopier, access of a company computer. Just four percent of the respondents indicated being afforded no company facilities whatsoever in carrying out their duties.

6.4.3 Support from the union

Respondents reported positive experiences regarding the availability of resources and support from their union (table 6.13). Ninety-three percent of respondents described the relationship with their union organiser as generally good. Eighty-six percent of respondents indicated that within the past twelve months they were offered opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge and skills through union organised training events. The average number of training days taken over a twelve-month period was just under five days (4.74). A majority of the sample (95%) were satisfied that the training contributed to their ability to function as a shop steward. This was further reinforced when shop stewards indicated that they perceived themselves as having a high degree of mastery in terms of skills and knowledge in dealing with pay issues, disciplinary hearings, and member grievances and to a lesser extent

employment and financial issues. Based on these results, shop stewards in the PCMD sector of SIPTU appear to have a significant body of industrial relations expertise and experience at workplace level.

Table 6.13: Support from the union

Measures Min =1 Max=5	Good %	Poor %	Mean	Median	Std. Dev
Union support-training	95	5	3.73	4.00	.962
Union support sector organiser	93	7	4.27	4.00	.882

6.4.4 Stress and Strain

Table 6.14 indicates that the respondents perceive a marginal amount of overload and ambiguity but slightly higher levels of strain in their position as shop steward. While shop stewards experience some level of pressure in the position, there is no evidence from this sample that shop stewards perceive their position to be exceptionally stressful (Bluen and Barling 1988) or having any discernible negative effect on their wellbeing.

Table 6.14: Stress and strain as a shop steward

Measures Min =3 low Max=15 high	N	Mean	Median	Std. Dev
Overload	123	6.64	7.0	1.775
Ambiguity	123	6.18	7.00	2.096
Strain	123	9.20	10.00	2.877

6.4.5 What factors influences intention to continue

To test the factors (personal characteristics, constituency characteristics, stress, strain, union support / management support) expected to be associated with shop stewards' intention to continue (question3) a binary logistic regression was performed. This method is used when

the dependent variable has a binary value and to test whether the dependent variable can be predicted by the scores of an independent variable (Hinton, 2014). The dependent variable is intention to continue as a shop steward for another term and has been coded as a binary measure of 1= yes and 0=No. The explanatory variables were segmented into 3 groups; (1) control variables including personal characteristics (2) role demands including constituency characteristics, firm size, strain, ambiguity and overload and (3) union and management support.

The personal characteristics were recoded to generate fewer response categories. The education variable was reduced from four response categories to three (junior cert, leaving cert and 3rd level) as the category 'other' attracted only one response in the survey. Age was reduced to three categories, (less than 30, 31- 40 and more than 40). Prior union activism (occasional activist and conscious activist) were used as continuous variables. Strain, overload and ambiguity were constructed from a factor analysis and each construct was summed to produce continuous variables ranging from low to high. The variables union support, management treatment, was each used as continuous variables ranging from low support to high support.

Table 6.15 shows the impact of the various independent measures on the likelihood of shop stewards' intention to continue in the position. The parameter estimates are reported as odds ratios (OR) along with the standard errors (SE). The corresponding p-values are indicated by asterisks and are only shown where there is a significant relationship. Equation 1 includes personal characteristics, equation 2 adds the independent variables related to shop stewards' role demands and model 3 adds the support variables. Entering the demands and support variables increased the model fitness significantly ($X^2= 39.730$, $df 19$ $p=.004$). The regression model as a whole accounted for 52 per cent of the variance in the intention to continue as a shop steward and classified 87 per cent of the cases. The results indicate that three variables made a statistically significant contribution to the final equation 3.

Table 6.15: Binary logistic regression and intention to continue

Dependent Variable	Equation 1: Personal OR; (SE)	Equation 2; Role demands OR; (SE)	Equation 3; Support OR ; (SE)
Continue in position	O=No 1=yes	O=No 1=yes	O=No 1=yes
Explanatory variables			
Gender (ref male)	1.091 (.766)	1.440 (.826)	1.363 (1.08)
Age (ref cat) ;<30 years			
Age(1); 31-40 years	2.720 (.841)	2.265 (.885)	2.722 (1.30)
Age(2): > 40 years	6.891* (.893) p=.0.90	8.896*(.954) p=0.22	14.722 (1.54) p=0.82
Prior activist;(ref category, Occasional Activist)	2.383* (1.07) p=.034	4.236* (1.18) p=.034	15.335* (1.36) p=0.46
Education (ref cat; junior cert)			
Education (1); leaving cert	.497 (1.16)	.603 (1.30)	.476 (1.45)
Education (2); third level	.546 (1.19)	.479 (1.12)	.182 (1.70)
Firm size (ref cat; up to 250)			
Firm size (1) ; 250-500		1.779 (.725)	2.487 (.960)
Firm size (2) more than 500		1.160 (.960)	.555 (1.21)
Constituency (ref cat; up to 50)			
Constituency (1) up to 100		.558 (.420)	.125 (.129)
Constituency (2) more than 100		.515 (.897)	.100 (1.28)
Hours; shop steward duties (ref cat; up to 4 hours)			
Hours; shop steward duties (1) 5-8 hours		.715 (.717)	.163 (1.04)
Hours -shop steward duties (2) more than 8 hours		3.116 (.926)	1.648 (1.12)
Strain		1.503 (.136)	1.398 (.206)
Overload		.975 (.194)	.886 (.331)
Ambiguity		.936 (.162)	1.028 (.264)
Use of company facilities			2.673* (.415) p=.018
Management harassment			.857 (.309)
Shop steward skill and knowledge			.993 (.151)
Union support			2.141* (.361) p=.035
<hr/>			
% correct	85.6%	86.3%	86.6%
Nagelkerke R Square	.224	.322	.521
Chi square	17.223, df 6 p=.184	24.255 df 15 p=.183	39.730, df19 p=.004
	N=122	N=122	N=122

The type of past activism as a rank and file union member prior to taking on the position of a shop steward is a significant finding that points to the importance of union orientation in predicting the intention to continue as a union representative. In the final equation shop stewards who classified themselves as consciously active union members prior to becoming a shop steward (stalwart and ideological) are fifteen times more likely to indicate an intention to continue in the position when compared with shop stewards who were occasional activists (card carriers and selective activists) prior to taking on the position (15.335, $p < 0.05$). Previous research has consistently highlighted that the level of union membership activism and involvement is influenced by the extent to which members identify with the goals and beliefs of their union (Klandermans, 1986; Gallagher and Strauss, 1991; Newton and Shore, 1992; Flood and Turner, 1996). These results suggest that the prior strength of union commitment and related activism as an ordinary union member is associated with significantly stronger intentions to continue in the position of shop steward.

The results also suggest that the day to day experiences in the position may influence the intention to continue as a shop steward. The availability of resources including the use of company facilities and support from the union significantly increased the odds of shop stewards' intention to continue in the position. Respondents, who have access to a wider range of company facilities, are 2.6 times more likely to indicate an intention to continue for another term (2.673, $p < 0.05$). However, management support in terms of the extent of harassment towards shop stewards had no effect on the intention to continue as a shop steward.

Access to and satisfaction with union resources is a significant contributor to continued activism as a shop steward. Shop stewards are twice as likely to indicate an intention to continue for another term if they are satisfied with the support from the union hierarchy (2.141, $p < 0.05$). The importance of union support services such as training, assistance with negotiations or the interpretation of employment law is well-grounded in the literature (Nicholson, 1976; Boraston et al, 1975; Darlington, 1994). Strain was found to have no discernible predictive power on the intention to continue. The regression model was not able to distinguish between respondents who intend to continue and those who do not, based on their perceptions of the level of stressors associated with the position of shop steward.

With respect to the other variables in table 6.13, age had a statistically significant association. Shop stewards over 40 years of age are nine times more likely to continue in the position in comparison with shop stewards under 30 years of age (8.896, $p < 0.05$). Nicholson et al (1981) and Flood and Turner (1996) found that increased membership age and union tenure is associated with the probability of an increase in union orientation and higher levels of integration into the union. Equation 1 and equation 2 show that an increase in age is associated with the intention to continue as a shop steward. However, age lost its significance (14.772 $p > 0.05$) when the support variables were added to the model. Although the odds ratio for company facilities (2.6) and union support (2.1) are rather low. It may be the case that the influence of age on the intention to continue is weaker when a favourable supportive environment is experienced by the shop steward.

6.4.6 Summary

The results for this question underscore an overall willingness and intention of shop stewards in the PCMD sector to continue in the position of shop steward for another term, despite the initial reluctance to become a shop steward. Shop steward's experiences of the position are generally positive. Few respondents were extensively burdened with any considerable levels of stressors or deprived of the resources to assist them in their duties as a shop steward. Most shop stewards in this sample indicated satisfaction with union support, the development of their own competencies and in general, favourable management attitudes towards the shop stewards role. The respondents in the main did not endure a substantial level of harassment from management whilst in the position of shop steward. The largely positive perceptions of respondents have a positive outcome for unions in terms of an overwhelming willingness of shop stewards to continue as the workplace union representative. The results indicate that past activist behaviours associated with ideological union orientation prior to becoming a shop steward has a significant association with the intention to stay on as a shop steward. The extent to which shop stewards value support from the union was also significantly association with the intention to continue. The findings also identified management support through the provision of company facilities as a significantly associated with the intention to continue as a shop steward. The stressors typically associated with the position of shop steward (strain, overload and ambiguity) had no discernible impact on the intention to continue in the position.

6.5 Shop steward attitudes towards the position and length of tenure

The remaining analysis for this section explores differences in role experiences between experienced and less experienced shop stewards based on their length of tenure in the role (question 4). Tenure is associated with the development of skills and supportive resources as shop stewards become more integrated into the position over a period of time. Shop stewards essentially learn on the job, taking time to master the skills and cope with emotional adjustments associated with workplace representation (Winch, 1980). As such it is likely that longer tenure is associated with more favourable attitudes towards the position. The correlation matrix (table 6.9) supported tenure as a key variable. More direct evidence on the issue of tenure is provided in the descriptive table 6.2 above highlighting that as tenure increases the proportion of respondents intending to continue as a shop steward increase. This section tests for significant differences between shop stewards with less than three years, between four and seven years and over seven years tenure using a one-way factor analysis of variance (Anova) across shop steward perceptions of their day to day experiences. Some caution though is required in interpreting comparisons between groups due to the unequal sample sizes across groups. Where the data exhibited homogeneity of variance according to Levene's test, Tukey post hoc tests were used to compare shop steward experiences between groups. Where homogeneity of variance was not met, Welch's test of equality of means was used and Games-Howell post hoc tests were performed to assess any significant differences between groups.

The analysis of variance (Table 6.16) indicated that significant differences in mean scores were evident across the groups for the variables overall satisfaction [$F(2,120)=4.38, p<.05$], union support [$F(2,120) = 7.476, p<0.01$], shop steward ability [$F(2,120) = 8.664, p<0.001$] and strain [$F(2,120) = 6.025, p<0.01$]. The mean scores for overall satisfaction suggest that all three segregated groups are generally positive about their position as a shop steward. The post hoc tests reveal a discernible difference between shop stewards with less than three years' service and those with more than seven years' service ($p < 0.05$). Those with seven or more years of experience, ($M=8.71, SD= 1.218$) rate their satisfaction in the position more positively than their less experienced counterparts ($M=8.00, SD= 1.166$). This supports similar findings of Nicholson et al (1981) and Flood and Turner (1996) that shop stewards with the longest tenure reported higher levels of satisfaction in the position.

Table 6.16: Length of tenure and experiences as a shop steward

**Welch's adjusted F-ratio, asymptotically F distributed

Variables	Conditions	N	Mean	SD
Satisfaction as a shop steward F=4.38, p=.015	Less than 3 years	26	8.00	1.166
	Between 4and 7 years	38	8.11	1.269
	Over 7 years	59	8.71	1.218
Union support F=7.476, p=.001	Less than 3 years	23	6.95	1.3644
	Between 4and 7 years	37	7.97	1.7398
	Over 7 years	57	8.40	1.4124
Skills and Knowledge F=8.664, p=.000	Less than 3 years	26	9.38	3.522
	Between 4and 7 years	38	10.63	3.332
	Over 7 years	59	12.68	3.785
Strain F=6.025, p=.003	Less than 3 years	26	7.58	1.858
	Between 4and 7 years	38	9.92	2.685
	Over 7 years	59	9.46	3.120
Ambiguity** F=5.888 ,p=.004	Less than 3 years	28	6.35	1.496
	Between 4and 7 years	36	7.03	1.910
	Over 7 years	59	5.65	2.245
Management harassment** F=5.777, p=.009	Less than 3 years	26	6.50	.94868
	Between 4and 7 years	38	6.91	1.1396
	Over 7 years	59	7.52	1.7839
Use of company resources F=2.825, p=.063	Less than 3 years	26	1.92	1.262
	Between 4and 7 years	38	2.55	1.288
	Over 7 years	59	2.63	1.312
Overload** F=2.497, p=.089	Less than 3 years	26	6.12	.589
	Between 4and 7 years	38	6.68	.894
	Over 7 years	59	6.85	.977

The results suggest a difference in attitudes towards union support across the three groups of shop stewards was evident. The multiple comparison tests suggest that as length of tenure increases satisfaction with support from the union increases. A significant difference is reported between shop stewards with more than seven years' service and those with less than three years' service ($p < .001$). The most experienced respondents were significantly more positive about union support ($M=8.40$, $SD= 1.412$) than those with less than three years in the position ($M=6.95$, $SD=1.364$). Perceptions of respondents' ability to carry out the job as a

shop steward varied significantly between the groups according to length of tenure. Respondents in the longest tenure category (i.e. seven years or more) displayed a greater belief in their ability to deal with workplace industrial relations issues than respondents with four to seven years tenure ($p < .05$) and respondents with less than three years tenure ($p < .001$). There was no significant difference between respondents with tenure of less than three years and those with four to seven years in the position.

A significant difference is however reported between the groups regarding strain. The mean scores show that shop stewards with four to seven years in the position report the highest levels of strain effects compared with the other two groups of shop stewards. Tukey post-hoc comparisons indicated significant differences between the groups. Less experienced shop stewards (less than three years) reported lower personal strain ($M=7.58$, $SD= 1.858$) than their more experienced counterparts of four to seven years ($M=9.92$, $SD= 2.685$), $p < .01$ and those with more than seven years tenure in the position ($M=9.46$, $SD=3.120$), $p < .05$. This would suggest that relatively inexperienced shop stewards (less than three years' tenure) will encounter higher levels of personal strain as they gain more experience in the position. While experienced shop stewards endure more strain they are at the same time more satisfied with union and organisational support. The mean scores for use of company resources show that longer serving shop stewards have more access to company resources than respondents with less tenure, but the differences between the groups was not statistically significant, $F(2, 120) = 4.733$, $p > 0.05$.

For the measures ambiguity, overload and management harassment, the results of Levene's Test of Equality of Variances indicated significant violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption ($p < 0.05$). In this instance, potential contrasts were modelled using Welch's adjustment for Anova where the groups have unequal variances (Eckstein, 2008). Where these equal variances are not assumed, post hoc comparisons, using the Games-Howell post hoc procedure was conducted to determine multiple comparisons between groups. The Anova test with Welch's correction highlighted a significant difference between the groups regarding management harassment, Welch's $F(2,73)=5.78$ $p < 0.01$. The Games-Howell post hoc comparisons showed differences between the most experienced shop stewards with more than seven years ($M=7.52$, $SD=1.789$) and those with less than three years ($M=6.60$,

SD=.9486), $p < 0.01$, indicating that longer serving shop stewards reported higher incidences of management harassment. However, this increase in negative management behaviour must be put into the weaker end of harassment, as the most frequent response reported in the questionnaire was 'told to spend less time on union duties'.

Differences between groups was also detected regarding ambiguity in the role, Welch's $F(2,71) = 5.88$ $p < 0.01$. The means scores in table 6.14 highlight that shop stewards with between four to seven years' tenure report the highest levels of ambiguity amongst the three groups. The Games-Howell post hoc comparisons identified statistically significant differences between shop stewards with four to seven years' tenure ($M=7.03$, $SD=1.91$) and shop stewards with more than seven years tenure ($M=5.65$, $SD=2.24$) $p < 0.10$. The results suggest that overall shop stewards experience a relatively moderate amount of ambiguity throughout their tenure in the representative position. Higher levels of uncertainty develop as shop stewards progress from relatively inexperienced (less than three years) to relatively experienced (between four and seven years). However, ambiguity in the position reduces significantly as shop stewards become long term occupiers (more than seven years tenure) in the position. This supports Winch's (1980) suggestion that shop stewards learn the job over a period of time. No significant differences were found between the groups in terms of excessive workload due to holding the representative position, Welch's $F(2,72) = 2.49$ $p > 0.05$.

On the basis of these results, shop steward attitudes towards their experiences in the position will vary according to length of tenure. The results of the categories of tenure using the one-way analysis of variance test (Anova) indicate that longer serving shop stewards display more positive opinions about the support they receive from their union, are more confident in their ability to carry out their representative duties and experience reduced levels of strain in the position. The results further points towards a positive relationship between union tenure and intention to continue. As shop steward tenure increases the proportion of shop stewards that indicated an intention to continue in the position increases.

6.5.1 Summary

Some significant differences emerged across categories in terms of length of shop steward tenure. In general, longer tenured shop stewards displayed more positive opinions about the role than their less experienced counterparts. Less experienced shop stewards are proportionally more likely to indicate an intention to leave and appear to be most at risk in terms of shop steward turnover. Thus, longer serving shop stewards even though they reported higher levels of role overload, could be said to have more personal investment in the role and develop the resources and skills over an extended period of time. There is then a question regarding the extent to which these positive results may indicate a strengthened attachment to the union that develops over a period of time.

This section has analysed the survey responses based on the research framework and set out to answer the first research question; what influences a union member to become and continue as a shop steward. Trade union capacity to represent and protect their members' interests has been claimed as the central purpose of trade unions (D'art and Turner, 2002). Consequently, becoming and continuing in the position of volunteer workplace representative is a central feature of union representation at workplace level.

Chapter Seven

Quantitative findings;

Shop steward tasks as workplace union representatives

7.0 Introduction

This section analyses the second research question; what tasks shop stewards perform as workplace union representatives. Shop stewards as voluntary trade union representatives assume formal responsibility for union tasks associated with protecting the employment conditions of their members in their workplace (D'art and Turner, 2002; Terry, 1995; Darlington, 2010). This responsibility involves taking on the demands of a leadership level position in the union (Pedler, 1973; Green et al, 2000). The integrated framework relating to the various aspects of shop steward representation suggests shop stewards as workplace union leaders and their tasks as a union communication and voice mechanism is central to understanding the role of the shop steward. Leadership style is the dependent variable for this section and the extent to which there are discernible differences in shop steward leadership style is addressed. The analysis subsequently turns to whether leader/ follower differences influence the way in which shop stewards act on behalf of their members as a union communication and voice mechanism. The key questions for this section are summarised in table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Research questions shop steward tasks

What tasks do shop stewards perform as workplace union representatives?
1.Are shop stewards leaders or followers of their members wishes?
2.What factors influence the leadership style of shop stewards?
3.To what extent do shop stewards facilitate member access and connection to the union?
4.Do shop stewards facilitate member voice in protecting member wishes?
5.Does leadership style influence the communication and voice tasks of shops stewards?

To determine different leadership styles among the respondents (Question 1) the four question items relating to leadership style identified in the factor analysis in chapter 5 were summed to create a score range. Shop stewards were divided into a high or low category based on their score above or below the mean score. Question 2 sets out to determine the factors influencing the leadership style adopted by shop stewards. A range of variables related to individual characteristics as age, education, socialisation and shop steward experiences such as length of tenure, constituency size, union support, and management attitudes may influence a dominant approach that shop stewards take to the job of workplace union leader (Warren, 1971; Pedler, 1973; Batstone et al, 1977; Schuller and Robertson, 1983; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). A correlation matrix is used to identify the strength of relationships between the variables. This was followed by a hierarchical linear regression to assess the strength of the association between the independent variables and shop steward leadership style.

Questions 3 and 4 examine the impact of shop steward representation in terms of how they develop communication and voice mechanisms in the performance of their leadership function. Question 5 seeks to investigate the extent to which shop stewards' dominant leadership style is related to differences in the way shop stewards act as communication and voice mechanisms. The mean scores for communication and voice variables are presented to give a descriptive summary of shop steward involvement in these representative tasks. To determine differences in the communication and voice tasks according to leadership style (leader / follower) the mean scores were analysed by employing the independent group t-test analysis to make comparisons between two groups. Single item measures (relating to voice as contact with management) analysed the variance in the rank orders of responses using the Mann-Whitney U test. The results of the analysis are presented below.

7.1 Shop steward leadership styles; leader/follower

Shop stewards were divided into a follower or leader category based on their score above or below the mean score. In the absence of any particular benchmark in prior studies, the adoption of the mean is the most commonly used value as a cut point to dichotomise a group

with high or low values of a particular measurement, (MacCallum et al, 2002). Table 7.2 shows a breakdown of shop steward responses regarding their predominant leader /follower style.

Table 7.2: Leadership style

Leadership style	N 123	100 (%)
Follower	70	(57%)
Leader	53	(43%)

The results suggest the presence of both follower and leader type shop stewards in the sample. A small majority of respondents disclosed a preference for a broadly follower style of representative behaviour (57%). Shop stewards in this sample appear to see their representation function in passive and reactive terms. These respondents see their responsibility as primarily to follow and act on the instructions and preferences of their constituents rather than exercise their own independent judgment on how best to represent their constituency. The results are broadly consistent with Batstone et al's (1977) findings that the biggest proportion of shop stewards in their study adopted a delegate approach to representation by following the wishes of their members.

The results of this study are not wholly unexpected. Terry (1995) highlighted that an ingrained characteristic of shop steward representation is their accountability to those that elected them to the position. Precisely because shop steward representation originates directly from the workgroup, it is likely that the workgroup and their immediate interests are shop stewards' main democratic point of reference in their tasks (Terry, 1995). Thus, the voluntary and workgroup nature of the position is arguably more conducive to the adoption of a populist rather than leader style. Moreover, earlier results from this sample revealed that a majority of shop stewards took on the role in the first instance because no one else in the group wanted the role. Consequently, it is less likely that shop stewards will act as an

independent leader contrary to the interests of their own constituency from which they were elected.

7.1.1 Summary

The shop stewards' role as a workplace union leader is a process of influencing and organising their members towards the accomplishment of their goals (Clarke, 2009). This level of union leadership is voluntary, it is the lowest level of formal leadership in the union and it is without the formal powers associated with a business leadership position (Hyman, 2007). Union leadership in this study referred to the extent to which shop stewards were prepared to act independently of their members in initiating, quashing or amending issues (Batstone et al, 1977). The survey results in this study have identified differences between shop steward leadership styles in the way that they service the interests of their members. The follower style of leadership made up the greater proportion of shop stewards as they tended to conform and comply with the wishes and desires of the membership.

7.2 Factors influencing leader / follower style; correlations

Question 2 investigates to what extent demographic characteristics, length of tenure and workplace experiences as a shop steward are associated with variations in shop steward leadership style. The relationships are examined firstly by identifying the strength of relationship between the variables from a correlation matrix (table 7.3) and subsequently with multiple regressions to determine the magnitude of these relationships. For the regression analysis, leadership style (leader/ follower) was used as a continuous dependent variable. Dummy variables were created for the independent variables regarding personal characteristics. These variables included gender, age, education, political orientation and family socialisation influences. Shop steward tenure and experiences in the position were entered as continuous variables related to the nature of shop steward's local union environment once in the position.

Table 7.3 shows Spearman's rho correlations for the key variables under analysis. The bivariate correlations indicate moderately strong associations between the dependent variable (leadership behaviour) and many of the predictor variables. Gender shows a negative correlation with leadership behaviour ($r_s = -.255$, $p < 0.01$). The sample respondents are skewed towards a predominately male sample. Age ($r_s = .283$, $p < 0.01$), tenure as a shop steward ($r_s = .267$, $p < 0.01$), tenure as a union member ($r_s = .355$, $p < 0.01$) organisational tenure ($r_s = .338$, $p < 0.01$), and strain ($r_s = .337$, $p < 0.01$) showed moderate but significant relationships with leadership behaviour. Shop steward competencies was the weakest but still significant relationship ($r_s = .201$, $p < 0.05$). While some variables did not show a significant correlation, all the variables were used in the multiple regression analysis to take into account the possibility of a more complex interrelationship among the variables rather than just their individual effects.

To avoid the possibility of multicollinearity some individual background variables were omitted due to significant relationships in the correlation analysis. Multicollinearity occurs when two independent variables are correlated with one another to the point where one variable becomes redundant as it measures almost exactly the same thing as the other variable (Rogerson, 2001). Organisational tenure ($r_s = .603$, $p < 0.01$) and tenure of union membership ($r_s = .793$, $p < 0.01$) showed a high correlation with length of tenure as a shop steward. Therefore on the basis of this relationship and the similar nature of the questions on tenure in general, organisational tenure and union membership tenure were omitted from the analysis. Moreover, none of the variables in the regression models exceeded the variance inflation factor (VIF) above 5 as recommended by Rogerson (2001). These values imply that each predictor variable contributes a unique variance and multicollinearity is unlikely in interpreting the results in the models presented.

To perform the regression analysis, a hierarchical regression procedure was used where the predictor variables were entered in blocks. Therefore, a proportional increase in variation is shown by a change in the R^2 value based on the addition of variables into the regression equations (Cramer, 1994). The R^2 adjusted value is a measure of the predictive accuracy of the considered variables and compensates for the bias of the different number of predictor

variables in each model. In this sense the R^2 adjusted value allows for a comparison of the regression equations with a different number of variables (Cramer, 2003).

Table 7.3: Correlation matrix, factors influencing leadership style (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; 2 tailed)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. Follower / leader	1																	
2. Gender	-.255**	1																
3. Age	.283**	-.210*	1															
4. Education	-.144	.126	-.072	1														
5. Active family	-.044	.072	-.180	-.278**	1													
6. Active friends	-.090	-.073	-.071	.002	.428**	1												
7. Political orient	.000	.090	.203*	-.158	-.044	-.013	1											
8. Tenure as a SS	.267**	-.183*	.486**	.017	-.129	-.006	.129	1										
9. Tenure SIPTU	.355**	-.199*	.521**	.079	-.123	-.088	.246**	.793**	1									
10. Tenure organ.	.338**	-.119	.450**	.146	-.197*	-.196*	.223*	.603**	.738**	1								
11. Competencies	.216*	-.120	.101	.079	-.064	.108	-.056	.349**	.163	.203*	1							
12. Union support	.169	-.121	.139	.116	.030	.316**	.102	.355**	.212*	.203*	.205*	1						
13. Mgmt. treat	.079	-.065	.254**	-.034	-.021	.014	-.121	.208**	.212*	.306**	.099	-.043	1					
14. Strain	.337**	-.240**	.110	.083	-.120	-.005	-.074	.216*	.191*	.170	.154	.190*	.139	1				
15. Ambiguity	-.049	-.001	-.111	-.056	.186*	-.012	.053	-.211*	-.117	-.012	-.392**	-.051	-.008	.231*	1			
16. Overload	.140	-.083	.206*	.114	.029	-.092	-.149	.116	.129	.127	.241**	.062	.200*	.395**	.093	1		
17. Hours as a SS	.006	-.110	.066	.096	.038	.246**	-.077	.219*	.042	.105	.261**	.221*	.157	.075	-.126	.039	1	
18. Constit. size	-.013	.187*	.134	-.147	.107	-.016	.106	.161	.078	.158	.088	-.003	.207*	.142	.177	.032	.033	1

The regression analysis has three blocks of variables; 1: personal characteristics, 2: length of tenure, 3: experiences as a shop steward. The choice of the sequence of variables were guided by Marchington and Armstrong's (1983) suggestion that a dominant style of shop steward leadership may be influenced by tenure and by virtue of their personal experiences as a shop steward in their workplace environment. All these variables were previously developed in the research framework (figure 4.1).

The variables relating to personal characteristics of gender, age, education and socialisation were entered first. By entering these variables first, their effects on the dependent variable were removed before consideration of the other blocks of variables. Length of tenure was entered in the second block to test for the association between experience and leadership style (Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). The final block of variables related to the workplace circumstances and experiences as a shop steward such as union support, management attitudes, stress and constituency characteristics. This allowed the examination of one set of variables explaining the variance over and above another set of variables. In addition, the final block of the regression model produces the same model output as if the variables had all been entered simultaneously in a forced entry approach. The final regression equation represents the relationship of all the variables when acting in combination to determine their contribution. The results of the analysis are presented in the next section.

7.2.1 Hierarchal multiple regression; factors influencing shop steward leadership style.

The results of table 7.4 indicates that overall, the combined variables in the model explained twenty-three percent of the variance in respondent's leadership behaviour ($R^2_{Adjusted} = .230$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, there is some support to reject the null statement that there is no linear relationship between these variables and the approaches that shop stewards take in their role as workplace union leaders.

Table 7.4: Measures of independent variables on leadership style

Variables	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3
	Std. Beta (Std. error)	Std. Beta (Std. error)	Std. Beta (Std. error)
Controls			
Gender (male)	.176 (.655)	.143(.653)	.079 (.673)
Age 2 (>40)	.193 (.498)	.099(.542)	.214 (.536)*
Education (3 rd level)	-.049 (.519)	-.059(.512)	-.042(.498).
Family (active union)	-.092 (.522)	-.074 (.545)	.011 (.541)
Friends (union active)	-.014 (.626)	-.018 (.635)	-.103 (.645)
Political orientation (left)	.059 (.498)	.066 (.490)	.068 (.316)
Length of tenure			
Tenure as a shop steward		.221 (.302)*	.148 (.301)
Experiences as a shop steward			
Skills and Knowledge			.288 (.088)*
Management treatment			-.109 (.193)
Union support			-.053(.205)
Strain			.343 (.277)**
Ambiguity			.006 (.263)
Overload			-.124 (.306)
Hours as shop steward			-.236 (.064)*
Constituency size			-.136 (.002)
<hr/>			
R ²	.094	.131	.314
Adjusted R ²	.040	.070	.230
F	1.744	2.156	2.813
Sig.	.118	.045*	.001**
Durbin-Wat.	1.534		
N=116			

*p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001;

7.2.2 Equation 1; personal characteristics

Entering the control variables measuring demographic and socialisation factors in equation 1 did not make a statistically significant contribution in explaining variations in shop stewards leadership approach to workplace representation, $F(6,101) = 1.744, p > .05$. Variables such as age, gender, family socialisation and political orientation have been found to be predictive of higher levels of trade union participation such as taking on the position of shop steward (McShane 1986). Therefore, while some demographic / socialisation variables are associated with identifying the ‘typical’ union member that might become a shop steward, the regression

results for this sample suggest that there is no clear ‘demographic profile’ associated with the style of leadership the shop steward adopts. This suggests that demographic / socialisation variables are relatively insignificant in influencing the leadership approach adopted by shop stewards.

7.2.3 Equation 2; tenure as a shop steward

When tenure as a shop steward is entered into the equation in step 2, a moderate but statistically significant incremental increase in explaining the variance in shop steward leadership style is observed $F(7,107) = 2.156, P < .05$. When controlling for biographical variables, tenure accounts for an additional 4 percent of the variance in the model. The ΔR^2 change was significant $F(1,100) = 4.284, p < .05$. The results indicate that length of tenure is positively associated with the likelihood of shop stewards acting as leaders rather than followers ($\beta = .221, p < .05$). Therefore, when controlling for personal characteristics there is support for the notion that length of tenure as a shop steward influences the leadership style adopted. The finding from this sample is consistent with the assertion of Partridge (1977) and Marchington and Armstrong (1983) that more experienced shop stewards (in terms of tenure) are more likely to display leadership behaviours.

7.2.4 Equation 3; workplace experiences

The addition of the variables related to shop steward experiences as a workplace representative in equation 3 made a significant contribution to the results. The results indicate that with personal and tenure variables held constant, the introduction of the measures of shop steward experiences explained a statistically significant ΔR^2 change of 18% in the variance in shop steward leadership style, $F(8, 92) = 3.076, p < .01$. The factors related to workplace experiences provide the strongest explanation of shop steward leadership behaviours relative to biographical and length of tenure variables. Overall the measures suggest that most of the shaping process regarding the influencers associated with leader style occurs after a union member becomes a shop steward. The results suggest that the emergence of a predominant leadership style is a response to different types of workplace environment and the possession

of supports and personal resources that the shop steward can draw upon in representing their members.

7.2.5 Combined equations

A closer inspection of the contribution of the individual variables in the final regression equation suggests a more complicated and nuanced interpretation of the influencers of shop steward leadership style. When all the variables are controlled for in the final step, shop steward tenure no longer makes a unique contribution to leadership style, while age becomes a more predominant and unique contributor in explaining the variance. The disappearance in the significance of tenure highlights the importance of considering predictors of leadership style in combination rather than isolation. The significant contribution of individual variables as age, ($\beta = .214$, $p < 0.05$), strain ($\beta = .344$, $p < 0.01$), work hours ($\beta = -.236$, $p < 0.05$) and skills and knowledge, ($\beta = .288$, $p < 0.05$) suggest that leader behaviours are associated with higher levels of strain and slightly more mature stewards in terms of age possessing more know-how in dealing with their constituents. This broadly supports Pedler (1973), Partridge (1977) and Marchington and Armstrong's (1983) suggestion that as shop stewards learn the job and gain a larger repertoire of skills and know-how they tend to assume leader type behaviours as a representative. Therefore, the final combined regression equation suggests that for shop stewards in the PCMD sector, it is not necessarily the length of experience that is significant, but the nature of the experience in the role that influences shop stewards to adopt a leader or follower style of union leadership.

7.2.6 Leadership style and union attitudes; Mann-Whitney test of difference

To further explore discernible differences between leader and follower shop stewards the groups were compared to determine if they diverged in terms of union attitudes and behaviours. Table 7.5 shows the extent to which there is a difference between the two groups regarding willingness to become a shop steward, prior membership activism, attachment to wider union and satisfaction as a shop steward using the Mann – Whitney U test of difference.

Table 7.5: Mann-Whitney; differences in leader / follower union attitudes

	Willingness to become a shop steward	Prior membership activism	Identification with the wider union	Satisfaction as a shop steward
Mean rank; Follower	58.61	53.20	55.68	62.03
Mean rank; Leader	65.38	76.67	68.30	61.96
Mann-Whitney U	1618.000	1239.000	1412.500	1853.000
Z	-1.134	-3.118	-2.154	-.012
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.257	.002	.031	.991

Significant differences between the leaders and followers are evident regarding prior union activism and wider union attachment. Prior union activism (conscious and passive members) was used as a variable in becoming a shop steward using Nicholson et al's (1981) measure of union member participation and attitudes towards the union (reluctant, card carrier, selective activist, stalwart and ideological activist). The mean rank scores suggest that leader shop stewards are likely to have been conscious activists (stalwarts and ideological) union members prior to becoming a shop steward, $U=1239$, $p<.01$. This result suggests shop stewards who were more intensely involved in the union as an ordinary union member are more likely to be predisposed to develop leadership type behaviours in dealing with the day to day union membership concerns.

Statistically significant differences between leadership style are reported in relation to shop steward identification to the wider union. Leader shop stewards in the PCMD sector are more likely to identify with the wider trade union movement than see themselves as just members of a local union workgroup than their 'follower' counterparts, $U=1412$, $p<.05$. Leader shop stewards are more disposed to interpreting the purpose and value of collective representation beyond the immediate workgroup level. This is consistent with Batstone et al's (1977) analysis that leader shop stewards tend to affirm the role of unions as a wider social organisation than their follower type counterparts. Follower type shop stewards were more concerned with the role of the union as representing the immediate workgroup (Batstone et al, 1977)

However, there were no discernible differences between the groups regarding initial willing occupancy or subsequent satisfaction in the position. Shop stewards who indicated a preference for a leader approach were just as likely to have been reluctant entrants into the position as follower type stewards. Both groups are just as likely to display similar levels of satisfaction towards the job of shop steward. Indeed, regardless of leadership style, both leader and follower shop stewards report their experiences as a union representative as generally satisfying.

7.2.7 Summary

Workplace experiences (union support, management attitudes, skills and knowledge, stress) in the role of shop steward relative to personal characteristics and length of tenure emerge as the strongest explanations for a particular leadership style in this study. As such, the way in which the shop steward develops and copes in the role in their place of work may be a factor in influencing the leadership style of the shop steward. However, the magnitude of the associations between specific experiences in the role and leadership style is modest at best and a large variation remains unexplained from these particular predictors. One explanation for the unexplained variance is that a set of variables may have not been considered which may make a significant contribution to the regression model. A second possible explanation may be the small sample size ($n=123$) and the disaggregation into smaller sub groups (leader / follower) may further limit the accuracy of the estimates and the associated standard errors (Maas and Hox, 2005).

Overall, the survey evidence indicates that a majority of PCMD sector shop stewards are followers rather than leaders and suggests that differences in the respondents' role experiences may influence the style of leadership adopted. The survey captures the leadership style of shop stewards at one point in time and does not test whether shop stewards adopt more than one style depending on the issues and circumstances they face on a daily basis (Pedler, 1973:56). Shop stewards may have a flexible approach to leadership acting as leaders on one issue and change to a follower style on another issue (Pedler, 1973). It may be the case that the survey does not adequately deal with the intricacies inherent in the shop

stewards role and does not capture the complex situations of everyday union leadership at the workplace.

7.3 Shop steward tasks; union communication and member voice.

To examine to what extent do shop stewards facilitate member access to the union (question 3) and the extent to which shop stewards facilitate member voice in protecting member wishes (question 4) the mean scores of the activity rates of sample respondents are first presented. The analysis subsequently addresses differences in the performance of leader and follower shop stewards. The mean differences in relation to these tasks are presented according to leadership style (leader/follower) using the independent group t-test and the Mann – Whitney U test where appropriate.

7.3.1 Facilitating member communication

The extent to which shop stewards actively facilitate and encourage union membership access to the union has been recognised by Jarley (2005) as structural social capital (frequency of contact with members). Structural social capital centres on tasks within a social network that facilitates contact and sharing of information among the network of members to promote their interests (Jarley, 2005). The mean scores for the variables indicate the pattern of tasks related to shop stewards' interaction with their members. The results suggest that shop stewards in general tend to interact and communicate more frequently with their members due to individual and small group grievances and are less active in organising informational type social interactions and keeping members informed via formal meetings and union information with the membership (table 7.6).

Table 7.6: Communication and voice tasks mean scores*

Measures	N	Mean	Median	Std. Dev	Score Range
Structural social capital					
Frequency of Grievances	120	4.99	4.50	1.470	(2-8)
Frequency of Union information	120	3.78	4.00	.804	
Relational social capital					
Quality of membership	121	17.83	19.00	3.551	(5-25)
Voice mechanism					
Terms and conditions	121	20.12	20.00	3.208	(5-25)
Organisation of work	121	10.51	11.00	3.022	(3-15)

*All the sub scales under analysis were identified through the results of a factor analysis. The means scores are based on the summed scores of the combined items under each factor and averaged to yield an overall composite score for each scale.

In terms of the distribution of responses to the question ‘how often do you have contact with your members’, forty percent of the respondents indicated that they interact with their members regularly on a ‘daily basis’ or ‘a couple of times a week’ due to individual or small group grievances. However, in terms of holding formal union meetings and disseminating union information, the frequency in which shop stewards actively encourage interaction with their members is comparatively lower. Twelve percent of respondents indicated that they have never held a formal union meeting with their members, while twenty-four percent of respondents have never presented their members with information in terms of union-based literature. The most frequent response to initiating union meetings with the membership was in the rather expansive category of ‘every couple of months’ (77% of respondents). The survey responses indicated that other alternative methods of membership contact such as the use of social media are rarely used as eighty-five per cent of sample respondents have never used facebook as a method to communicate with members. Grievance handling is the most common activity that the shop steward facilitates in terms of membership interaction with the union. These findings are consistent with previous studies of shop steward activity indicating that most of the shop stewards’ time is spent on dealing with and processing individual grievances (McCarthy, 1968; Schuller and Robertson, 1983).

This indicates that shop stewards are a focal point and communication channel for the rank and file when they have a problem at work (Warren, 1971; Pedler, 1973). Shop stewards appear to react to and handle isolated injustices/ grievances at workplace level rather than

coordinate a more strategic and collective approach to workplace problems (Schuller and Robertson, 1983). The descriptive analysis suggests that the extent to which shop stewards in the PCMD sector actively interact with and facilitate union social capital at the workplace may be relatively underdeveloped (Schuller and Robertson, 1983). It is likely that unless union members have a grievance, little communication or contact takes place between shop stewards and their members (Schuller and Robertson, 1983; Jarley and Johnson, 2003; Jarley 2005).

7.3.2 Quality of interaction with members

Relational social capital refers to the quality of relationships within a group network whereby the members feel part of a cohesive group (Jarley, 2005). In terms of the perceived quality of relations with their members, the mean scores suggest that shop stewards report relatively positive perceptions of the existence of a supportive and united union membership at their workplace. Sixty-nine percent of shop stewards indicated that their members were a cohesive and unified group of union members. Fifty-eight percent were confident that their members are willing to take collective action against management to protect their interests. In terms of more personalised reciprocal relationship between shop stewards and their constituents, sixty-seven percent of respondents indicated that their rank and file members would assist in the performance of their shop steward duties. Overall, the results indicate that shop stewards reported the existence of a cohesive union community among their constituents. The results are contrary to Schuller and Robertson's (1983) findings where shop stewards in their study encountered a more distant and apathetic relationship with the membership.

7.3.3 Summary

In summary, question 3 set out to examine shop steward communication tasks and the extent to which shop stewards facilitate the involvement of their members in the workplace. One aspect of the literature lays particular emphasis on the shop steward as well placed to directly facilitate a communication link between the members and the union (Partridge, 1977; Moore, 1980). The descriptive data suggests that the pattern of shop steward communication and interaction with their members lies predominantly around facilitating membership grievances.

Actively organising and mobilising other forms of rank and file contact and interaction with the union, such as formal meetings, was a more infrequent occurrence. However, it is possible that the nature of the question items in the survey may not have captured some of the subtleties of the day to day contact between shop stewards and their members. Thus, regular contact and meetings between stewards and union members may be difficult or impractical due to the nature of the work performed, the geographical location of the members at work and/ or the use or otherwise of company facilities to hold such encounters (Schuler and Robertson, 1983). Conversely, regular official meetings to share and garner information may be unnecessary as shop stewards are likely to encounter and communicate with their members regularly on an informal basis in the course of their workday (Upchurch et al, 2002).

Nevertheless, the results suggest that sporadic communication patterns seem to be conducive to supportive and positive social relationships between shop steward and their members (Jarley, 2005). Shop stewards in the PCMD sector perceive themselves to be successful in creating a strong and cohesive workplace union among their members. This finding is significant since as noted earlier shop stewards come from a membership cluster that are generally reluctant activists and do not want the job in the first instance. Thus, the capacity of the current sample of shop stewards to enable a close-knit union community is a notable aspect of representation in the context of the continuing decline in trade union density (D'Art and Turner, 2013). As such, a decline in union membership generally does not appear to have presaged a decline in collectivism at the workplace where shop stewards are present at firm level.

7.4 Facilitating membership voice

The mean scores associated with the shop steward as a worker voice mechanism (table 7.6 above) indicate that shop stewards in this study consider themselves to be relatively successful in defending membership interests regarding the terms and conditions of employment (pay, job security, pensions, management behaviour) and general issues of work organisation (work effort, staffing levels, hours of work). While these results are based on shop steward perceptions, they indicate a confidence regarding the effectiveness of union representation by those whom hold the position of shop steward.

Table 7.7 below shows the rank order of the individual voice items in which shop stewards consider themselves to be the most and least effective. The results indicate that shop stewards perceive themselves to be most effective as a union voice mechanism in defending job security and least effective regarding work effort / intensification levels. These results suggest the possibility that while shop stewards deem themselves to have considerable influence as a union voice mechanism in protecting their members' jobs, the existence of job security may be conditional on delivering changes to the organisation of work and higher levels of work effort.

Table 7.7: Rank order of shop steward success as a union voice mechanism

Measures; effective voice 1=ineffective; 5= very effective	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Job security	121	4.34	.80
Management behaviour	121	4.27	.65
Pay	121	4.22	.83
Redeployment	120	3.84	.97
Staffing levels	120	3.74	.99
Hours of work	118	3.50	1.12
Pensions	121	3.48	1.06
Work effort	119	3.45	1.10

7.4.1 Shop stewards and the raising of employee voice to management

Table 7.8 below shows the frequency responses regarding the degree to which shop stewards interact with management as a union voice on behalf of their members. The responses suggest that shop stewards are quite active in terms of their informal and formal contact with management. Eighty percent of shop stewards indicated that they communicate with management on an informal basis and thirty-nine percent of the sample interacts informally with management on a regular basis (daily or couple of times a week). Moreover, on formal interactions shop stewards appear to be active on a more regular basis (daily, weekly, monthly) with lower levels of management in comparison to higher levels of management.

This suggests that for the most part, worker voice through the shop steward is predominantly concentrated at lower levels of management closer to the shop floor. This result would be expected as shop stewards in their dual capacity as employees and representatives would have more frequent opportunities to converse with line managers regarding workplace issues. Overall the level and frequency of shop steward contact with management points to the central and distinctive position of the shop steward in representing union members' voice in the workplace.

Table 7.8: Shop steward interaction with management

Interaction with management N=121	Off the record meetings	Official Meetings lower level management	Official Meetings higher level management
Daily	11%	2%	-
Couple of time a week	28%	16%	7%
Couple of time a month	24%	45%	34%
Every couple of months	17%	31%	36%
Never	20%	4%	20%

7.4.2 Summary

Overall, the respondents considered themselves to be an effective union voice mechanism at workplace level regarding their capacity to defend the employment conditions of the members. Shop steward perceptions of their influence as a voice mechanism was strongest for job security, pay and management behaviour (discipline). Shop stewards perceived their influence as less favourable over work effort levels and pensions. The results indicate that shop steward voice facilitates membership influence over range of issues not only related to pay and conditions but also issues relating to the pace and control of work (Terry 2003). Indeed, it is for the protection over these issues that workers join unions (Waddington and Whitston,1997). Nevertheless, since the results are based on the respondent's own perceptions of their contribution they thus may be prone to at least some error.

7.5 Differences between leader and follower shop stewards; t-tests membership interactions and union voice.

Question 5 addresses the possible influence of leadership style on the communication and voice tasks of shop stewards. A series of t-tests were performed to determine whether the mean scores regarding the nature of shop stewards' contact with their membership and as a union voice is significantly different according to leadership style. The results of the t-tests (table 7.8) indicate no statistically significant differences between leader and follower shop stewards regarding the frequency of contact with members (meetings/ information) and the quality of member relations. The mean scores suggest that regardless of their predominant style, both leader and follower shop stewards maintain a similar but sporadic level of communication with their members in terms of membership information /meetings and enjoy reasonably good relations with their members. However significant differences between leader and follower shop stewards emerged regarding frequency of contact due to grievances, $t(118) = 2.636, p < .05$. Leader shop stewards have significantly more contact with their constituents due to membership grievances than follower shop stewards.

According to Batstone et al (1977) leader shop stewards tend to be more proactive in assuming responsibility in initiating grievances and less likely to leave the raising of workplace issues solely in the hands of the membership. Thus, leader shop stewards may be more inclined to initiate injustices that may not have been raised by the membership in the first instance as well as taking on, squashing and amending membership-initiated grievances (Batstone et al, 1977). However, it must be noted that in the present survey, reference to the frequency of contact due to grievances does not extend to identifying the number of grievances processed by shop stewards or how they were initiated, quashed or resolved. Thus, the differences regarding the frequency of contact suggests that leader shop stewards appear to be moderately more active in interacting with their members in managing conflictual issues and worker injustices than their follower counterparts.

The t-tests results suggest that the influence of both leader and follower shop stewards is relatively robust where voice is used to defend the terms and conditions of employment of the members (pay, job security, pensions, management behaviour). Shop stewards, regardless of

their predominant style, are confident that they positively impact on their members working lives. This is particularly salient as a principal objective of trade union representation is to protect union members from arbitrary management actions (Crouch, 1983; D'art and Turner, 2002). Yet leader shop stewards rated themselves as having significantly more success in defending their members regarding the organisation of work, $t(119) = 2.415, p < .05$. While the survey does not identify the magnitude of any success around such issues, the evidence suggests that leader shop stewards are more effective in influencing the outcome of any work practice changes that may occur and /or are more effective in defending workers from any management initiative to capture unilateral control over the intensification of work. In this sense, the results imply that leader shop stewards are moderately more productive in influencing a broader voice agenda than followers.

Table 7.9: t-tests differences between leader and follower shop stewards

Variables	Groups	N	Mean	SD	Levene equality of variances
Frequency of contact (group / individual grievances) $t(118) = 2.636, p = .010^*$	Leader	50	5.40	1.565	.105
	Follower	70	4.70	1.334	
Frequency of contact (meeting / information) $t(118) = -.172, p = .864$	Leader	50	3.76	.657	.061
	Follower	70	3.79	.899	
Quality of membership relations $t(119) = -.732, p = .466$	Leader	51	17.55	3.997	.043
	Follower	70	18.03	3.203	
Worker voice (terms and conditions) $t(119) = -.706, p = .482$	Leader	51	19.88	3.11	.690
	Follower	70	20.30	3.28	
Worker voice (work organisation) $t(119) = 2.415, p = .017^*$	Leader	51	11.27	2.75	.176
	Follower	70	9.95	3.10	

Voice was also considered in terms of shop stewards provision of voice regarding a variety of direct and indirect arrangements with various levels of management. The Mann-Whitney U test of difference (table 7.10) was used to determine if leader shop stewards are more active than follower shop stewards in terms of the frequency of their involvement with management

as a union representative. Significant differences emerged between leader and follower shop stewards in relation only to the frequency of official management meetings above line management level.

Table 7.10: Mann Whitney, contact with management

	Meetings with management off the record	Official meetings with management at line management level	Official meetings with higher level management
Mean rank			
Delegate	64.17	59.06	54.31
Representative	56.65	63.66	70.18
Mann-Whitney U	1563.000	1649.500	1317.000
Z	-1.196	-.762	-2.588
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.232	.446	.010

Leader type shop stewards reported significantly more contact with higher level management than follower shop stewards, $U=1317$, $p<.05$. However, the survey did not provide evidence as to the nature of this contact with more senior management in terms of negotiation or consultation. Nevertheless, the results suggest that leader shop stewards in addition to their informal and formal contacts at line management level are more likely to convey worker voice into higher levels of management decision making. This finding is consistent with Batstone et al's (1977) findings that leader shop stewards tended to cultivate stronger and more frequent contacts with senior management. It may be the case that leader shop stewards as a union voice at the workplace may be less likely to be marginalised by management.

7.5.1 Summary

The extent to which leadership style impacted on the shop steward's communication and voice tasks was also investigated. The t-test analysis found that leader shop stewards compared to their follower counterparts had more regular interactions with the membership in dealing with their grievances. Leader shop stewards also perceive themselves to be more successful as a voice in influencing management decisions around the effort bargain and have

more frequent contact with senior management in their capacity as the voice of the membership. As such, the evidence from the survey in this study reveals some statistically significant differences between leader and follower shop stewards. On other communication measures (frequency of membership contact, quality of relations with members) and voice measures (pay, lower level management contact) the differences were not significant. This is not unexpected as leader and follower shop stewards face the same conflicts of interest as an inherent part of the employment relationship regardless of their leadership style. There is no indication from this study that differences in the leadership style of shop stewards have a negative effect on the representation of the membership.

This section has analysed the survey responses based on the research framework illustrated in figure 4.1 to set out to answer the second research question; what tasks do shop stewards perform as a workplace union representative. The shop steward according to Pedler (1971) is the rank and file union leader with a key responsibility to protect the employment conditions of union members at the workplace. Consequently, acting as a leader, communicator and voice function on behalf of the membership to ensure their fair and equitable treatment at work is a central feature of the shop stewards' role.

Chapter Eight

Focus group findings

8.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the three focus groups undertaken after the quantitative phase of the research. The focus groups were arranged over the period August – September 2017. A total of sixteen shop stewards took part in the focus group discussions (chapter 5). The focus group discussions provided an opportunity to uncover any concealed influencers or contextual information from the respondent’s experiences that may further explain or have been overlooked from the survey data. The focus group discussions enabled a more in-depth consideration of the subtleties and complexities in the day to day tasks of shop stewards than can be gleaned from the fairly broad-brush patterns of the survey questionnaire. The findings here are presented in line with the survey analysis. The first section presents the focus group findings regarding the factors that influenced them to become and continue as a shop steward. The second section presents shop stewards experiences regarding how they perform the representative tasks of a shop steward. In each section a summary of the survey findings is reiterated before the focus group responses are presented. The focus group findings are organised into a number of themes that emerged relevant to the research questions.

8.1 Factors associated with becoming a shop steward

The survey findings revealed that a majority of respondents did not actively seek the position of the shop steward. Respondents who defined themselves as more committed and active members (stalwart and ideological) prior to taking on the position were more likely to want the position. However, the majority of respondents serving as shop steward had relatively long periods of tenure in the company and were 40 years of age or over. Longer service in the firm may reflect more knowledge about the nature of the workplace and involvement of ‘occasional union activism’ and workplace interactions. In this sense age, tenure and overall workplace experiences may combine to create a seniority effect associated with taking on the shop steward position.

The focus group participants were asked to recall their own experiences and influencing factors that led them to become a shop steward in their workplace. The responses highlighted a number of subtle but persistent factors. For the most part, there was evidence that it was not the intention of most of the participants to become shop stewards. Participants across the three groups confirmed that they had not actively sought the position with comments such as ‘it was not on my radar’, ‘I would have never thought about it’, ‘it was not something I thought about at the time to be honest’.

A number of factors emerged from the responses as indicative of a typical path into the role of workplace union representative. For the focus group participants, their behaviour as an ordinary union member and their reactions to workplace injustices over a period of time brought them to the attention of the membership as someone that was likely accept the position of shop steward. This was evident from the following experiences;

‘.....I used to be the one who would say something if someone was treated badly by management, at the time that happened fairly regular like.....I wasn’t afraid to say it as it was , when the shop steward thing came up on the shift the lads said I should go for it, so here I am 10 years later’.

Another shop steward (12 years) commented;

‘My father was a union official and there was always officials in my house when I was younger so I was used to that scene. I was always the one who would ask management the difficult questions, the others would say to me will you ask this or that. So a couple of girls came up to me and said would you go on the union as the shift rep and I said no way. Then we had an incident with a girl, she asked me would I go in with her and the management said, are you her union rep? and I said err yeah I am, and I became the shift rep’.

Shop steward (6years);

‘No one else would do it, we didn’t have a rep on the shift for a while, when there was some problems in the section I was the one who was a little more outspoken, well that’s not true there was a couple of hot heads but I think I was seen by the lads as a little more balanced shall we say, and when one of

them said they were going to go as the shop steward the lads wanted me to go for it instead. I ran against him and here I am’.

There were however some focus group participants with a more resolute desire to become a shop steward. One participant commented (14 years);

‘My father was involved in the Labour party he was also involved in the ITGWU back in the day so I always believed in proper wealth distribution. I was always active in the union bringing up issues to the union committee and making sure that we kept management accountable. I have always believed in the collective, it’s all about the collective for me and the collective getting what they deserve’. I went on the union committee and when it came up (shop steward position) I went for it and the lads were happy for me to do it.

According to one participant (6 years);

‘I worked in a non-union company in the States years ago – it was like a reign of terror and I nearly got the sack for bringing in union leaflets. Any job I am in I always made sure that the working class are treated fairly, that’s what any worker wants. When the last shop steward stepped down at the AGM I was put forward for election by a couple of the lads, I wanted it, they were happy for me to do it, I became a shop steward’.

‘Speaking up’ as a union member is a form of union participation. The inclination to speak up in the workplace emerged as a key factor that precedes some members’ entry into the shop stewards position. One factor that emerged among a small group of participants was their strong ideological association with the union. An explanation for most of the participants inclination to speak out as a union member emphasises a more gradual building of confidence, seniority and workplace experiences over a period of time leading the eventual crossover into the domain of the shop steward, as one participant (11 years) explained;

‘When I started in this job about 18 years ago I was younger and you would be nervous voicing your opinion, you would be just concentrating on doing your job and keeping out of trouble, but the longer you are there your confidence builds and you start to find your voice, all of a sudden you are being asked to be the shop steward’.

Another shop steward (8 years) emphasised a similar trait;

‘I was in the company a while and was a little older than most of the newer starts back then, they used to come to me for advice for all sorts of things. When the role (shop steward) was up for election, they asked me to go for it, they kept saying I would be perfect for it.’

8.1.1 Summary

The experiences described from the focus group participants support and inform the survey results regarding the influences involved in becoming a shop steward. The focus group responses confirmed that only a few participants were initially willing and motivated to become a union representative. Many participants across the focus groups indicated they were less inclined to actively seek out the position but were propelled into the position by what Nicholson (1976) termed external factors. In this sense, the focus group experiences support the survey finding of a reluctant shop steward that tends to have some level of seniority in terms of organisational and union membership tenure.

Moreover, a more nuanced consideration of the survey results that most members were only occasional activists before they became a shop steward can be gleaned from the focus group findings. While many of the participants were not particularly active or necessarily ideological activists before taking on the position, the explanation of an occasional activist suggests that they were however a little more willing than their workgroup members to participate in verbalising the existence of injustices and unfairness among the membership. This tendency to participate in union tasks according to the respondents was not enough in itself to motivate them to actively seek or take on the job of shop steward. It does however highlight that a self-assurance to speak up and an intolerance for workplace injustices is enough for such members to become shops stewards when circumstance arise with the encouragement of their members.

In order to recall the circumstances and influences that propelled them into the role, some of the participants had to go as far back as sixteen years ago. Even so, the focus group

participants could recall with some clarity, the circumstances that influenced them to become shop stewards. Becoming a shop steward and voluntarily representing their workgroup was a significant and important event for most in their working lives.

8.2 Factors influencing the intention to continue as a shop steward

The survey results indicated that shop stewards in the PCMD sector of SIPTU are content to continue in the position of shop steward for another term. Personal factors (age and prior activism as a union member) and experiences in the position (union support / management support) were found to influence shop steward's intention to remain in the role. Longer tenured shop stewards had higher levels of satisfaction regarding the resources (union assistance, management facilities and personal competences) to cope in the position and were proportionally more likely to indicate an intention to remain in the position than their less experienced counterparts. The views and experiences of the focus group participants tended to confirm the survey results.

In response to the question what keeps you in the position of shop steward, there was universal agreement across the groups that one of the basic reasons for continuing was due to the lack of interest among the members in replacing them. Several responses were offered to the effect that, 'no one else will do it'. One participant stated, 'the job is like a hot piece of coal, it is not for everyone'. Other comments reinforced this assertion, 'it takes a certain person to put up with the s**t, you need a thick skin.I have offered to let someone else do it, but they don't want it'. Another participant indicated, 'when it comes to the AGM, I have said several times I am prepared to step down if anybody is prepared to step up and no one steps up' (laughter from the group).

This consensus among the participants emerged only as a backdrop to the more notable role experiences that influenced a participant to continue in the role. Many participants referred to being content in the position indicating, 'liking the job' 'I am good at it', or, 'I have grown into it' and 'I enjoy it'. Participants also believed that the satisfaction attained by the acknowledgment from the members offering a simple 'thanks' every now and again has a

positive effect on them to keep going as shop stewards. This was acknowledged by one shop steward (16 years) who recalled an encounter echoing a sentiment expressed by many participants;

‘I met two of our lady members having a walk on their lunch break, I don’t know what type of lunch break they have but anyway, I was dealing with an individual grievance and it was one of their friends. I told them that I was over here defending the world again and they said to me, come here fair play to you, you are doing a great job keep it up. I find that very rewarding’.

There was during the discussions a feeling of elitism among the participants that the job is not for everyone. The perception was that only certain people would have the qualities necessary to be part of a distinctive group who could cope and endure the job of workplace representative. A number of themes emerged from this relating to union attitudes and the development of their own ability to manage the difficulties associated with the job as influencing factors for continuing in the role of shop steward.

Reflecting on their length of tenure as shop stewards, participants across the 3 focus groups were somewhat critical of other shop stewards that did not last as long compared to their own longevity in the position. A number of participants cited membership connection with the union as a contributory factor in the limited lifespan of some shop stewards. One comment from a participant (14 years);

‘You find with certain shop stewards the longevity is not in them, but when push comes to shove it is either in you or it isn’t, it is often the case that they don’t think of the collective when they are making a decision, it’s not just about them or what they can get out of it, you have to make a decision for the whole group, they aren’t there for the long term in my experience’.

A similar observation was highlighted by a shop steward in another focus group (9 years);

‘..... You do get people who get elected that don’t really believe in collectivism and you wonder where did they come out of, they are only pushing their own particular agenda. They get nowhere because they have not got the history, shall we say, of being a collective member, they are out for what they can get for themselves and they fizzle out after a year or two’.

In the same focus group another participant commented (6 years);

‘It is different being a member and being a shop steward, they are different beasts. It is easy to dip into the union every now and again and say that this should happen or that should happen, but it is different when you have the responsibility for it. You have to learn that hard lesson fairly fast and if your head is not in the union, you won’t last long’.

By this, the participant meant;

‘you have to have a belief in the union and create a fair workplace through collectivism, it is the only way, there is no point coming into this half-hearted, you inherit the legacy from someone else and you make it your own’.

The participants’ perceptions of union members who remained as a shop steward for only a brief period highlighted concerns that a perceived lack of collectivist attitudes in entering the position as a reason for these brief spells in the position. Union attachment and a belief in the difference that unions can make materialised as a key issue in contributing to the participants’ explanations for continuing in the position. This was evident in the consensus of the participants to continue in the position so as to build on the success of what they have achieved as a shop steward in their own workplaces.

One participant elaborated (6 years);

‘What keeps me going is making a difference in the terms and conditions we have built up over the years, that is the big drive for me. I can make sure there is no drop off there, once you are in it and you can see you are making a difference, you are prepared to keep going’.

This view permeated among many of the participants across the three focus groups as one shop steward (5 years) commented; ‘I stick at it to continue what we have fought for’.

Another participant (8 years) stated;

‘.....I know I made a difference, you would pull your hair out at times you know, but there is a moment when you go, yeah I made that happen and you just keep doing it’.

Further indications emerged of participants' union attachment as an influence on their continued presence in the position. Several participants described their developing commitment to the union during their time as a shop steward. One participant (12 years) articulated this sentiment as follows;

‘there is just something that builds your progression towards SIPTU mentally, the learning you get and the experiences as the steward does actually feed into your appetite for the union and your desire to keep doing it’.

Another participant (4 years) in the same focus group commented;

‘It’s a culture thing as well, I went to my first union conference last year and Jack O’ Connor spoke. It had the hairs standing on the back of my neck, I kicked some arse for the next two months after being at that conference’.

A follow up question was presented across the three focus groups asking the participants to rate on a scale of 1-10 their commitment to the union before and after becoming a shop steward. All sixteen of the participants rated their commitment to the union as higher since becoming a shop steward. The responses regarding the explanations for the difference reinforced the discussion comments above and highlighted that a developed sense of attachment to the union was a consequence of continuing as a union representative. One participant (6 years) commented on the somewhat obvious outcome and the relevance to continuing as a shop steward stating;

‘yeah I am more committed to the union now than before, sure that is only natural because otherwise you wouldn’t keep doing it’.

A second prominent theme emerged regarding the need to adapt quickly to the position highlighting the ability to develop the knowledge, skills and mentality to cope and continue in the role. Many participants referred to being exposed to many different situations, ‘getting it in the neck from the members’, being ‘verbally abused by an irate member’, ‘dealing with emotional people and issues’ and dealing with ‘difficult managers’. These were highlighted

as part and parcel of the job and the instances that tests shop stewards' resolution to continue in the position, especially at the start of their stint as a representative.

One shop steward (8 years) described his experience;

‘.....I was a bag of nerves at first and I had to lean on the union organiser big time, I did as many union courses as I could get my hands on. There were times at the start I felt like jacking it in but as time went on I grew into the role and I don't fear anything or anyone now cause now I know as much as anyone’.

Another participant (16 years) summarised the discussion in this focus group with the following;

‘There is a certain etiquette that you have to maintain when you are in the position (agreement from others), you need to have certain skills and political mind to deal with the issues in front of you’.

Participants in other focus groups commented on overcoming similar experiences and the effect it has on their continued presence in the position. One participant (6 years) commented;

‘The longer you do it the more confidence you get, you don't panic as much but you are still learning, that comes from the experience and the support is there when you need it. When you get asked for advice from management you know then that management know what you are talking about, there is some satisfaction in that’.

Participants in two separate focus groups brought up specific reference to the ‘table thumpers’ in their discussions of the character of shop stewards and their likely tenure. In one of the focus groups a shop steward (7 years) noted;

‘the one thing I noticed is that the table thumpers don't last in my experience it is the people who are steady and methodical are the ones who last’.

In response to this another shop steward (16 years) added;

‘I would have been a table thumper when I started, that's how things were done at the time but I realised that it does not get you anywhere, all you do is have an argument, you can shout and roar all day long but it won't get you anywhere. That was a big learning for me’.

Finally, the participants preference towards continuing in the position was identified as somewhat of a double-edged sword between their commitment to doing a good job and the intrusion on their spare time as one shop steward (10 years) noted;

‘Let me put it to you this way, if you told me 10 years ago that I would spend my weekends looking up law and legislation on my own time at home, I would have said you are off your chuck, whereas now I do it on a regular basis, especially if there is an issue. I need to be the best informed I can be and the best prepared I can be going into that issue. The members won’t know that nor probably do they even care that you are doing that. If you are not prepared to do that you won’t be a shop steward for long’ (agreement by the group).

8.2.1 Summary

The focus group responses support much of the survey findings regarding the factors that influence these participants to continue in the position as a union representative. None of the participants indicated that they intended to vacate the position in the immediate future. There was a certain feeling of prestige and kudos among the participants that they have ability and the qualities necessary to continue in the position. This sentiment was not necessarily evident from the survey results.

Shop stewards’ experiences in the role were positive. There was no discernible discussion of stress or strain as a significant factor among the participants. A general view emerged that the job was more frustrating than stressful, but at the same time also satisfying. This was underpinned by the skills and knowledge that the participants have developed over the years and their confidence in their own ability to represent their members. This reinforces the survey findings highlighting that a higher proportion of longer serving shop stewards are more satisfied in the position and as a consequence, intend to remain as a shop steward for another term.

A finding from the survey analysis identified that activist behaviours associated with ideological union orientation prior to becoming a shop steward is associated with significantly stronger intentions to continue in the role. This finding was not immediately obvious within the focus group discussions. However, focus group observations of those members who became but did not remain as shop stewards supports the basis of survey findings, that an absence of a collectivist orientation prior to entering the position has negative consequences for continuing in the position.

Finally, while there was a strong consensus among the focus group participants that their attachment to the union influenced their decision to continue as a shop steward, the focus group findings captured the underlying theme of this union attachment. The findings here suggest that the main motivation to remain in the position of shop steward is to ensure the union continues to make a difference at the workplace.

8.3 Shop steward representative tasks; Leadership style

The survey findings indicated that a small majority of respondent shop stewards were classified as predominantly followers rather than leaders. The questionnaire findings suggested that there are statistically significant but modest correlations between shop steward representative style and factors related to their length of experience and the nature of their experiences as a shop steward.

Participants were asked to review two statements regarding Batstone et al's (1977) leader / follower style of representation with their membership. The participants were then asked to consider which statement best describes their own predominate approach/ style as a shop steward. The participants across all the focus groups were somewhat hesitant to pin themselves firmly to one particular representative style. The general consensus among the focus group members was that representation was, 'much more complicated than that'. Their responses raised a complex and dynamic relationship with the membership that does not necessarily fall neatly into one category of leadership. There was little divergence from this view throughout the focus group discussions.

The consensus among the participants was that their overriding responsibility as a shop steward is to give primacy to fulfilling and conveying the wishes of their members. This, according to the participants is the very crux of workplace union democracy and central to their union representative function. Despite this ‘follower’ type mind-set, the focus group discussions revealed that the actual behaviours of many of the participants was closer to and more typical of a ‘leader’ type representative. The participants emphasised that their responsibility was to ensure that their members had an ‘informed’ wish. This was underscored by many participants reference to ‘redefining’ issues and ‘educating’ the membership. These themes and the factors that influence these behaviours received significant commentary from several contributors. One participant (16 years) expressed this as follows;

‘When you get in first you are there to represent the views of the members, I still’ hold the view that that is my primary role to represent their views, but after a while in the role I found for the want of a better word, I had to educate the members (agreement from the group) in a specific view. That’s because they didn’t always have the information or they had the wrong information’.

Another participant in the same focus group (7 years) responded;

‘You have to balance it. The express wishes of the membership should be an informed wish, that’s what they voted me in for, to fight for the wishes of the membership. You might get a fella saying ‘what we should do is’, but he does not have the right to dictate what we should do, because he is not the elected rep to act on behalf of we. He may be just thinking about me (himself). You have to correct that and redefine what the issue is, it has to be an informed wish because a group may have misunderstood the issue’.

Similar discussions and considerations arose in other focus groups regarding the dynamic relationship with their members, one shop steward (9 years) commented;

‘I think there is a fine line between the two (leader/follower) to be honest, you could have one fella at an AGM that could derail a whole process and you could spend the next hour trying to get fellas back into the right mind-set before you go to ballot’.

Another participant (16 years) offered a supporting declaration;

‘.....Whereas you are a member of a union, you are one of many, you are not a dictatorship (agreement from the group). There are times when you have to put lads back on the right track and you are doing it not because it’s what you want them to do, it’s because you have the information and you know that if we don’t make the right decision now then you have to point out what might happen down the line, we are not just making decisions for today, we are not dictating to them, we are giving them the basis for the reasons why you are making a particular decision’.

Some shop stewards were much more definite in how they interpreted their representative function primarily as a leader. One shop steward (6 years) interpreted his role with the following comment;

‘If you look at the’ historical element of this job, it was built on strong leadership you know, look at Jim Larkin and a hundred odd years later it is still built on the same thing’.

Another participant (4 years) stated;

‘.....I see myself as providing good union leadership. I feel that I am educating people new to unionism about the union in my workplace. I have used the Bausch and Lomb story to educate our members about that, how things can flip on us, so in my workplace people look to me to drive it and provide leadership’.

This participant was referring to the announcement by Bausch and Lomb in May 2014 to lay off 200 employees coupled with a threat to close the facility with the loss of over a thousand jobs if remaining employees did not agree to a twenty percent pay cut (Higgins, 2014). When this participant was asked a follow up question to elaborate on how Bausch and Lomb was used educate his members, the response identified both using the event to highlight how vulnerable workers are in the PCMD sector, but also get members to stick together against the possibility of management using such occurrences to scaremonger among his members.

However, it did transpire during the discussions that a small number of participants were a little quieter in their opinion on this question. On probing the more muted participants there was a sense that these shop stewards were a little less active in influencing their members. As one participant (8 years) stated;

‘I was chosen by the members to fight for what they want and I am one of those members so -what they want I want, it’s the same thing. They might say to me we want 30% increase and I’ll say come lads they will laugh me out of it in there. I will try and put some reality on it, but if that is the mandate, I’ll go in and look for it’.

8.3.1 Factors influencing shop steward leadership style

Many participants referred to their experience and perceived expertise as factors that reinforces a leader /influencer responsibility towards their members, not only in terms of just ‘educating’ the members but also to ensure that a minority of members do not act contrary to the ‘informed’ preferences of the collective body of members. As one shop steward (9 years) commented;

‘At a (union) meeting, ‘I put the union point of view across and if we were having an argument from some of the members on the floor, I can lay out the consequences if we take this or that particular action. I have learnt over the years that you can bring most of the lads on in a certain way, and then get them to vote’.

Another participant (9 years) offered;

‘The lads don’t always know what is best for them – you to see the bigger picture and I can tell them what has happened in other places especially since we have moved away from the branch to the sector. I can use their experience on how to best deal with the situation. You can get most of the group to go with you but you can’t feed the expectations of the group if they are wrong’.

Other participants identified similar instances of leadership behaviours in which they could influence the outcome of a particular issue commenting that members would frequently ask

them for advice such as ‘what do you think’, or ‘what do you recommend before a ballot takes place’. One participant (8 years) noted,

‘..... the longer you are in the role the more comfortable you are telling them (members) what you think is the best way’.

A second underlying theme developed regarding the leader/ follower relationship relating to the importance of the issues under consideration. Some participants highlighted the limitations to their influence as a shop steward in which conformance with the membership on ‘big issue’ occasions was sometimes inevitable, whether they agreed with it or not. One shop steward (7 years) said;

‘.....you have to listen to them (members) that’s what were here for, I am not their personal assistant for every little quom they have. But some of the issues are very serious and you have to go with the majority, so you do what they want. You just make sure that they know what they are getting into before you go and do it’.

A participant (12 years) from another focus group highlighted a similar reflection;

‘I consult with the members especially on the life changing issues and if they tell you that they are going to reject a deal then you have to go down a different avenue, that’s democracy. But you couldn’t do that every week on the smaller issues, you would never get anything done (laughter from the group) as they will all have an opinion that suits them individually rather than what might be best for the group’.

Shop steward autonomy to initiate and decide what ‘smaller issues’ to deal with without membership involvement was evident in a number of instances recalled by the participants.

One participant (5 years) highlighted that;

‘..... there is a lot of behind the scenes conversations that happen – I might get a call from a supervisor asking me if I could clarify an agreement or can they ask a worker to do this or that – and I will put them straight on the agreement, they (members) don’t see that’.

Finally, there is a suggestion that SIPTU trainers encourage shop stewards to actively lead their members and decide on the issues that require attention. One participant (4 years) summarised a piece of advice he received from the trainer of a shop steward training course stating;

‘I’ll never forget the advice from Seamus, that 95% of the membership will go with you and that 5 % will break your balls, and that has been my experience. I was told don’t ever become a St Jude shop steward because you will end up on Jeremey Kyle’ (laughter from the group).

8.3.2 Summary

The focus group participants were consistent in their assertion that the leader / follower dichotomy was in their opinion an oversimplification of how shop stewards manage their members. The participant’s reflection of their own experiences is that they move between follower/conforming and leadership /influencing behaviours as they deal with the preferences of their members. It became clear during the discussions that many of the participants defined workplace union representation in ‘follower’ terminology, ‘to represent the wishes of their members’. However, when they described their actions there was an underlying emphasis on leadership type behaviours. In this sense the survey results highlighting follower shop stewards are only slightly more prevalent than leader shop stewards in the PCMD sector may suggest some conflict within the survey responses between their opinions and behaviours regarding their representative behaviour. It may also suggest that shop stewards have a more flexible approach to leadership than captured in the survey results (Pedler, 1973)

The participants revealed that they were willing when necessary to use their own judgment to inform direct and influence the membership towards collectivism, rather than simply acting to satisfy the immediate / short term wishes of their membership. There was a perception among the participants that their ability to influence their members was enhanced by their experiences as a shop steward and their knowledge of the issues. This reinforces the statistical findings that there is a positive association between shop steward experience, competence and leadership type behaviours. However, the focus group findings suggest that this capability did not necessarily mean shop stewards unilaterally determined the outcome of

the decisions, it did however highlight they attempt to lead/ influence their members while at times simultaneously conforming to their wishes. The participants interpreted this reality as democracy rather than a predominant leadership style. As such the focus group responses reaffirm the survey results suggesting that workplace experiences are strong explanation for a particular leadership style adopted by the shop steward.

8.4 Shop steward communication

The survey measured how shop stewards function as a union communication channel through structural social capital (frequency of contact with members) and relational social capital (quality of relations with members). The survey results found that shop stewards communicate more frequently with individual members and small groups and are less active in organising more strategic collective communication mechanisms to consult with and inform their rank and file members. However, the survey findings suggested that leader shop stewards have significantly more contact with their constituents' due to membership grievances than follower shop stewards. The majority of survey respondents indicated a relatively strong relationship with their members as a cohesive unified group.

The focus group participants were asked to describe how they normally go about facilitating union communication among their members. It was clear from the focus group discussions that there was a noticeable appreciation among the participants of the critical importance of their function as a direct union communication channel with the membership. Throughout the discussions subtle indicators related to their leadership function were offered such as, 'You can't let management control the union message'. Other participants referred to the necessity to 'tell the members what's going on' or the importance of being 'visible and available as a union rep to the members'.

In the main, most participants identified that they use several communication methods to facilitate contact with their members. In describing their approaches, the focus group participants confirmed the survey findings that shop stewards use a combination of well-known formal channels of membership contact / communications such as AGMS and notice boards. Reference was also made to the more individualised and informal day to day contacts

due to their proximity in working alongside their members on the shop floor. A small number of focus group participants highlighted the development of electronic communication media such as group emails to pass on important union information.

However, the focus group discussions captured how it was not uncommon for many participants to modify and adapt their membership interactions in response to overcoming problems with existing communications channels or problems associated with management accommodation. The union notice board was to a large extent well used but least favoured by the participants as a useful method of communication. One participant (9 years) in referring to putting an update on the notice board regarding a series of management / union meetings noted;

‘You’d be amazed how many different versions the members put on a written statement, some would have completely different interpretations of it than others and I would spend the day explaining it to them afterwards, I have to have a copy in my pocket and then say to them, where does it say that’.

Another participant (16 years) noted;

‘you could put up a notice of an issue before a meeting or something like that and half of them (members) wouldn’t read it. I developed it over the years where I went to IT and got the email address of everyone and they set me up with group email. Now I just upload a document or whatever and click send, so it can never be the case that a union member can say, oh I never got that’.

In terms of formal face to face contact with the membership, a common pattern emerged among the participants that in general, arranging meetings with individual shifts was the preferred method of interacting with their members and would only insist on a general ‘all shift’ meeting if there was a ‘hum dinger of an issue that required this’. These individual shift gatherings were used in both disseminating any relevant union information and informing members of any up to date developments on a developing workplace issue (many of the participants highlighted that there is not a rep on every shift). However with this preference, there was evidence of an underlying sensitivity from the participants towards facilitating membership involvement amongst all the members

As one participant (6 years) stated;

‘you could put up a notice and the agenda for a general meeting, you could get 500 or you could get 5, so we hold individual shift meetings where you get a better chance of getting the whole crew’.

Another focus group member (12 years) stated;

‘What I started doing early on as a shop steward is having shift meetings.....I have often been accused of fracturing the union by doing this but the people who are at the shift meeting don’t necessarily go to the AGMs. I might have 50 in total at a general meeting but I will have 50 at a shift meeting and if I do that across the four shifts I get in all the members. You tend to get at the general meetings, for want of a better word, the ‘militants’. Where whereas at a shift meeting you will have the saner people who are the silent majority who have an opinion, but might voice it in the safety of their shift.....’

Another theme emerged among the participant responses that their visibility and accessibility on the shop floor facilitated an almost limitless membership access to them as union representatives. As one participant stated; ‘sure I see them every day’ another stated; ‘I could be holding thousands of euro of product in my hands and a fella will come straight up to you and say hey what’s going on with this or that’.

Another shop steward (6 years) alluded;

‘I communicate with them every day, there is always some member issue or another that needs some piece of advice or sorting out’.

This was a concurrent theme through the participants as one shop steward pointed out the weariness of the always on call nature of their job as representative stating;

‘It can be draining at times, you could have a shitty couple of hours on a machine, you go on your break, and all I want to do is talk about the champions league game or something and someone will come up to you with a problem, you have to give them the time, you know’.

An additional but subtle theme emerged throughout focus group responses in having to overcome certain inconveniences as the workplace union communication channel. One participant referred to ‘still having to do my own job as well as looking after the floor’. Other participants brought up being ‘watched’ by supervisors or ‘warned not to be floating around’ or sometimes having to ‘play cat and mouse’ with certain supervisors. In most cases the tone

of their reflections was more a source of amusement rather than seen as a prohibitive dilemma. One participant (4 years) in listening to some other members of his focus group communication experiences, highlighted the presence of a more belligerent management and the effort he went to ensure that his members had a channel to the union;

‘My experience is from the paramilitary model (laughter from the group), basically I would position myself where I know there is going to be a common walkway and I would hold meetings with little groups or I would use the tea breaks. Sometimes I would do a shift swap to make sure I fill in a particular group but then they (management) stopped me from doing that’.

8.4.1 Relationship with members

A related focus group question asked the respondents to describe the nature of their relationship with the members. The participants were offered signposts as the extent of membership support for them as a shop steward and whether there was a sense of togetherness amongst the members. The general perception among the participants, that for the most part there was the existence of a mutually reinforcing relationship between themselves and their members. Varying degrees of explanation were offered at the initial response from, ‘yeah I find I have a good relationship with the lads’, or ‘most of the lads are ok’. Some participants offered a slightly more reflective assessment of their relationship commenting, ‘the lads respect me and in fairness they see the benefit of sticking together, I am the buffer for that’. Another stated, ‘I think I have a good relationship with the members, we have been through a lot together over the years’. The general positive tone of the initial responses supported the survey evidence. However, as the conversations developed throughout the three focus groups, there were indications that the nature of the relationship was slightly more fickle and complex than the original assertions. This was reflected by some of the comments. In response to some of the positive comments above, one participant (10 years) offered;

‘If you were to ask me, I would say that you get more respect from the union than the members, the members respect is based on your last win’.

Other comments from the participants put the survey findings in a slightly different context and suggest that the positive survey responses may have only captured the shop stewards’

relationship with the critical mass of the members. The difficulty in maintaining and building productive relationships with some of their members was evident as the participants compared membership characteristics. Two comments from participants in two different focus groups described their relationship with different segments of their membership and how they use this relationship to their advantage.

One participant (16 years) stated;

‘I find that the longer serving members, I have a more difficult relationship with them. They have longer memories of past fights and who stabbed them in the back years ago. The older crew are much more difficult to deal with, they are always in a bad mood, but you can use them when you want to get things going from a union point of view’.

Another participant (7years) commented;

I have a calmer relationship, shall we say, with the newer members, I think they are just reliant on you and tend to listen to you. The older members are more aggressive towards you and you have more arguments with them to the extent that management look on them as the usual suspects. When you go into management and tell them that quieter members are p****d off, they (management) tend to give you more attention’.

8.4.2 Summary

The focus groups responses support and reinforce the survey findings regarding the nature of shop steward communication exchanges with their members and the resulting positive relationship with their members. The participants confirmed the survey findings that they tend to interact and communicate more frequently with their members due to individual and small group grievances and are less active in organising formal collective interactions and meetings with the membership. However, the focus groups exposed an extra dimension to these survey results. The focus group findings suggest that the participants adopt a versatile and pragmatic approach to union member communication in response to the constraints at their individual workplaces, the nature of their work, or in some cases membership apathy. The focus groups findings suggest that shop stewards will develop and prioritise these smaller group communications and individual interactions to safeguard and encourage membership access to the union at workplace level. It was not immediately obvious from the

focus group responses supporting the survey findings that leader type shop stewards are more likely to have significantly more contact with their constituents than follower shop stewards.

However, actively creating opportunities for membership contact is comparable to leadership type behaviours. The focus group participants acted somewhat independently of the membership in initiating membership access to the union and ensuring the opportunity of membership involvement in collective organisation. In this sense, membership access to the union relies on the perseverance of these voluntary representatives to continue to seek opportunities to build a network of communication among the members.

There was also corroborating evidence from the focus groups of the existence of mutual supportive relationships between the shop stewards and the members. However, what became evident from the focus group experiences was that their relationship with longer serving members was more challenging than with newer members. In this sense the focus group responses suggest that building a cohesive union organisation at workplace level revolves around shop stewards managing a heterogeneous union membership within their groups. However, the nature of these differing membership relationships had the potential to be used by some participants to demonstrate a sense of collectiveness among all members when mobilising union voice in their dealings with management.

8.5 Shop steward voice

The survey findings revealed that shop stewards felt they had considerable influence as a union voice mechanism in protecting and improving their members' employment conditions. The survey evidence indicated that PCMD sector shop stewards, regardless of their predominant style are confident that they positively impact on their members working lives. However, when the extent of shop steward influence over employment conditions was considered in terms of two factors; work organisation/ intensification and wages / benefits, the survey results suggested that shop stewards considered themselves to be more successful in defending the wage bargain in comparison to work effort and intensification levels. Moreover, the survey results revealed that leader type shop stewards had higher perceived success regarding their influence over work intensification issues.

The focus group participants were asked to reflect on how effective they are as union representatives in protecting their members terms and conditions at the workplace. The deliberations of the focus group members are generally in line with the survey results findings. These findings suggested that a number of factors emerged throughout the participants experiences that complemented and further explained the survey evidence.

Many participants reported what they had achieved during the recession. It became obvious that these participants felt a sense of achievement in holding onto all or most of their terms and conditions during the recession. As one participant stated, 'we didn't take any reduction in our pay and conditions and I am very proud of that fact'. Where there were cuts in terms and conditions there was a sense among these participants that the effects of any cuts were significantly reduced due to their input as a shop steward at workplace level. Several of the focus groups participants were keen to point out their effectiveness and contribution in both pre-and post-recession.

The original 2% pay and stability pact strategy at sector level emerged as a predominate theme in their perceived effectiveness and success as a workplace union voice mechanism. Many of the participants recalled having to learn how to negotiate properly and that in the main, employers had been agreeing to the pay increases with little in the way of resistance to the increases. However, while some participants had a harder time than others achieving increased pay for their members, there was a consensus among the focus group participants that the wage bargain was the relatively easier aspect regarding the protection of their members. As one participant (5 years) reflected her experience in line with the survey findings stating;

'The big stuff, especially wages and such gets sorted pretty quickly because now you have a stronger hand when you have the entire floor behind you going into a pay negotiation. Management know that if they get it wrong they are in trouble so they deal with that stuff fairly sensibly'.

Moreover, in line with the survey results the focus group participants indicated that influencing work organisation/ intensification and flexibility issues was much more troublesome in representing their members' interests. This transpired in a number of

comments when the participants were prompted to identify where the difficulties in union voice was concentrated. One participant (8 years) commented without hesitation stating;

‘The hiring of temporary workers – pay parity and workload for the temps (temporary workers) is difficult to control. They would be union members we insist on it, but they are more easily manipulated by management, they would say if you want to stay on here, here is what you have to do’.

In the same focus group another participant (16 years) echoed the same issue;

‘We have the same situation, there is an increase in hiring temporary workers. You’re right, it is difficult to manage, we insist on everybody getting the same terms and conditions but like that management try to manipulate them to do more and then use them as a benchmark for the rest of us, it difficult to tell them not to because they are just trying to get a fulltime job’.

In a separate focus group, participants brought up the same issue highlighting a management intention to use temporary labour. One participant recalled how a timely intervention prevented the idea from taking hold commenting (12 years);

‘We completely stonewalled the idea of temporary workers in the company we insisted on full time workers on full time benefits. We told them (management) of the negative impact of letting temporary people hang in mid-air and the lowering of morale and pointed it out from a teamwork point of view to them, they are always harping on about the importance of teamwork’.

Another theme emerged among the participants as they revealed a sense of frustration or in some cases a sense that management were blatantly flouting the spirit of agreed industrial relations procedures, as one participant (6 years) commented;

‘I go in about the same problems over and over again. The same machines break down or we run out of materials mid run and we have to do an unplanned changeover. This causes delays and downtime and they (members) come to me to complain. And they complain because the next thing is management will say figures are down and we need to increase our efficiency, we have just given you a 2% wage increase. There is a big push from the supervisors on the floor for production and people are coming up to me and saying they have been put under pressure to run the machines faster or whatever’.

Another participant (7 years) noted;

‘The procedures are always being drawn out by management, we have a grievance at the minute and it is in the system for the last 5 weeks. Management are dragging their heels, this is a common thing, you could be dealing with a grievance and management know they won’t win it especially if it looks like it going to the WRC. Something else will surely pop up and all of a sudden that grievance is pushed to one side and you are dealing with another crisis. They use these delaying tactics the whole time’.

8.5.1 Summary

The focus group evidence supports the survey findings. There was a general consensus among the participants that they are more effective as a union voice in protecting the wage bargain and that they find it somewhat more difficult regarding the effort bargain. It is in the effort bargain according to the participants where the challenges lay for union voice at workplace level. There appeared to be a sense that shop stewards were reacting to a constant stream of unfolding work flexibility practices with underlying consequences for future work intensification. In this sense the general tone of the focus group discussion was that the participants found it difficult to react or form a convincing response to these management practices or opportunistic attempts to marginalise the participants. This broad consensus among the focus groups is supportive of the survey findings. Moreover, there was some evidence to support the survey findings that leadership behaviours are potentially more effective as a voice mechanism than follower shop stewards in defending the organisation of work. However, while this evidence may be isolated to one shop steward it still remains that one of the participants in leading and initiating an early intervention into the employment of temporary workers resulted in better working conditions for those particular members.

8.6 Changes to the role since the collapse of social partnership

Finally, the opportunity was taken to ask the participants two general questions regarding their personal experiences as shop stewards. Firstly, shop stewards were asked if the job of the shop steward has changed since the collapse of social partnership. Several of the participants could not answer as they indicated they were not shop stewards pre-social

partnership, or had just taken the position around the collapse. However, there was a sense from those that had the experience of both pre-and post-social partnership that the same basic issues and opportunist phases pop up over the years. One participant (14 years) stated; ‘sometimes you are defending and sometimes you are on the attack’.

However, a common theme emerged among several of the focus group participants pointing to the task of negotiation as the biggest noticeable change to their job as a representative. There was an undertone in these reflections that the return of local bargaining discloses a certain status with the job of workplace representation. This was evident by a number of comments across the three focus groups;

‘the job has become more of a traditional shop stewards’ role now because we have to go in and get the pay increases ourselves’

‘the role is busier since social partnership, pay was taken out of your hands and you were just making sure that we got the terms locally – now we are in the middle of it on the front line’.

‘I do much more negotiating now and that is a new learning experience in itself’.

‘Negotiation – but you also have to learn how to negotiate with your own members before you go in and negotiate with management’ (laughter from the group).

Another participant elaborated on the issue of negotiation with management and the members;

‘When we went in looking for the 2% increase over two years, they (management) gave it to us and did not really ask for anything in return. We had to sell it to the members that we were basically getting this for nothing - we had to point out to the nay-sayers that we did not have to give up anything – in my book that is good negotiating – if we went in looking for a silly amount we would probably have to give something up – it was a no brainer and we had to point that out to the members’.

8.7 Personal development in the role of shop steward

The participants were also asked if they have changed personally since taking on the position of shop steward. All the participants highlighted that the job had a significant effect on their own personal development indicating that it was transferable to general life skills. Some of the comments included;

‘Yes absolutely (agreement from the group). I am a better person because of it. I do calm much better now and you lose the gun-ho attitude. You are put into a position where you are thinking about thinking’.

‘I would always have looked on myself as a foot soldier. I never thought that I would be in this position. It has been of enormous benefit to me personally – just the confidence to deal with things, in here (the job) and generally’.

Another participant (12 years) gave a more reflective summary noting;

‘I would have many past friends that are now in management, but I would still be friends with them. My brother -in- law is a CEO of a company and since I got involved in the shop steward role, they have all said to me that since you know all that information you are an annoying so and so. I’ll take that as an indication that I have changed and made a difference’.

8.8 Focus groups overview and conclusions

The findings presented from the focus groups both confirm the survey results and adds deeper insights into how shop stewards navigate through the challenges and demands of workplace representation. The focus group results highlighted that a consideration of what shop stewards do is not simply a matter of determining patterns and relationships between variables. Rather the focus group results captured a more complex and nuanced information regarding how shop stewards interpret their role and subtly adapt their representative behaviours in the context of their own workplace experiences.

Chapter Nine

Discussion

9.0 Introduction

Trade unions as voluntary organisations provide workers with independent representation in the workplace (Greenfield and Pleasure, 1993). The concept representation is the central focus of this study of shop stewards occupying a key trade union position in shaping member's conditions of work at enterprise level. A framework of representation was presented earlier as the basis to consider two key dimensions of the shop steward's role as a workplace union representative. Independent workplace union representation ultimately rests firstly on member willingness to participate in the union as a shop steward and secondly to act on behalf of the interests of the members in the workplace. Consequently, shop stewards are independent by virtue of being chosen by their own workgroup to stand in the place of the members as their union representative. As an independent union representative, shop stewards perform tasks on behalf of the membership in raising their concerns and protecting their interests at enterprise level. This study argues that an understanding of shop stewards as workplace union representatives requires consideration of many aspects of their role. Consequently, workplace union representation is not a single activity but rather encompasses a range of responsibilities, tasks and challenges. This discussion chapter looks at the results of the quantitative and qualitative findings in combination and discusses the research findings in the context of two main research questions derived from the literature review. Firstly what influences a union member to become and remain a shop steward and second what tasks shop stewards perform as workplace union representatives.

9.1 Factors influencing a union member to become a shop steward.

The union participation literature identifies involvement as a shop steward as the highest form of voluntary union participation for rank and file members (Moore, 1980; Nicholson et al, 1980). Union members who voluntarily take on the shop steward's position look after the day to day affairs and preferences of union members in a specific setting such as a factory floor or office. As such, becoming a shop steward is an essential prerequisite to fulfilling

independent union representation at the workplace. The evidence from this study provides corroboration with previous studies that one of the challenges which confront voluntary workplace union representation is a lack of enthusiasm on the part of union members to accept the role of shop steward (Moore, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996). The findings of this study revealed that few shop stewards had to contest an election with other members for selection into the position. This underlines a consistent difficulty in attracting members into the role of workplace union representative as most members avoid participation in their union, particularly as a shop steward (Flood et al, 2000).

Nevertheless union members do come forward and take on the role in the PCMD sector and this study finds support for personal factors as an influence in becoming a shop steward. Survey responses indicate that most respondent shop stewards are relatively mature in terms of age with relatively long organisational and union tenure. These findings are consistent with Nicholson's (1976) and McShane's (1986) findings suggesting that organisational tenure is associated with higher levels of union participation such as holding union office (shop steward). Analysis from the focus group discussions indicated that organisational tenure and age may serve as a proxy for experience, wisdom, familiarity and awareness of the work environment. This in turn may be associated with a more assertive and opinionated rank and file member likely to 'more occasionally' participate in 'speaking up' and exhibit open displays of disapproval regarding perceived workplace injustices and mistreatment of fellow workers prior to becoming a shop steward.

Nicholson et al's (1981) union orientation scale was used as a measure of membership participation prior to becoming a shop steward. The survey results revealed that a majority of respondent shop stewards (60%) had a minimal and somewhat instrumental involvement (selective activists and card carriers) in union tasks as an ordinary union member prior to becoming a shop steward in their workplace. This is at odds with Nicholson's et al's (1981) orientation scale as such members would necessarily avoid participation in the union's governance structure (Flood et al, 2000). Thus, different member orientations and levels of participation as a union member prior to becoming a shop steward do not appear to influence the decision by many union members to take the position of shop steward. Moreover, sixty-

one per cent indicated that they had no real intention in taking on the position in the first instance and did not consciously choose to become a union representative. The findings indicate a relatively high level of apathy among the general body of rank and file members participating in tasks such as the shop stewards position (Nicholson et al, 1981; Moore, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996).

9.2 Recruitment into the role; willing and reluctant members

Consequently, other additional factors explain the union member's recruitment into the role. In the main, the survey findings suggest the factors that motivate a member to become a shop steward in the PCMD sector is broadly consistent with Nicholson's (1976) externally directed forces. The factors that pushed union members into the role of union representative were largely external to their own wishes in becoming a shop steward. Follow up focus group participants confirmed the survey findings that the decision to become a shop steward was not motivated by a desire to satisfy a strong ideological attachment to the union. The majority of the current cohort of shop stewards were persuaded or encouraged by their workgroup to take on the position despite having no real desire to do so. Indeed, the underlying narrative of focus group responses as defining themselves as being most likely to speak up in the workplace echoed Nicholson's (1976) observation that the typical path to becoming a shop steward is associated with a member displaying only slightly more interest in union issues than the rest of rank and file members. As such union members with a more established status such as age, work experience and occasional activism in the union may over a period of time distinguish themselves as 'that member' who voices their opinion and in doing so shows slightly more interest in union issues than the rest of the group. This union member becomes in the process, the popular choice and encouraged by the group members to assume the shop stewards position (Nicholson, 1976). Consequently, personal factors and workplace circumstances in combination play a role in not necessarily motivating a member to become a shop steward but as a background influence facilitating the likelihood of member acceptance to be recruited, albeit reluctantly when the position becomes vacant.

In this study of shop stewards, the notion of the reluctant incumbent remains a feature of the contemporary industrial relations scene in the PCMD sector (Flood and Turner, 2006). This finding is not surprising as little has changed regarding the basic characteristics of the shop steward's position. The role is associated with dealing in conflictual and hostile workplace issues (Warren, 1971; Nicholson, 1976). Shop stewards simultaneously undertake union representative duties along with their normal work duties (Moore, 1980). The position is still unpaid, voluntary and seen as somewhat of a thankless and time-consuming position (Wallace, 1982). In this context as Moore (1980:91) states, '..... the reluctance of workers to accept the position is easily understood', as becoming a shop steward holds few attractions for the ordinary rank and file member. These negative characteristics were acknowledged by the focus group participants where a typical response referred to the position 'as popular as a hot piece of coal'. These findings might suggest that workplace union representation in the PCMD sector rests on a fragile foundation. The union participation literature suggests that passive union members persuaded into the position will have little impact on union representation as they tend to have lower levels of ideological union attachment and tend to avoid higher levels of participation as a shop steward (Nicholson et al, 1981; Flood et al, 2000). Thus, a large distribution of passive and less than eager entrants to the position of shop steward may possibly reflect a problem for workplace representation as comprising of occupants with little internal motivation and potentially little attachment to solidaristic beliefs, values and goals of collective representation (Flood et al 2000).

Paradoxically, it is evident from this study that the notion of a reluctant shop steward does not necessarily indicate a lack of a belief in fairness and justice for employees at the workplace. This emerged as a clear theme in the focus groups. An inclination as an ordinary member to on occasion publicly and verbally display an intolerance and concern for perceived workplace injustices was a key factor in unwittingly 'stumbling' into the shop steward's position when prompted to do so by 'external' influences (Nicholson, 1976). The findings from this study suggest that the presence of a large contingent of reluctant volunteer shop stewards may reflect a realism about the difficult and demanding nature of the position itself rather than an absence of collectivist beliefs and attitudes regarding union representation. In short, the combined finding of the survey and focus groups suggest that there is likely to exist at least some pro union attitudes at the individual level before external

factors and workplace circumstances emerge to encourage or push ordinary union members to take on the role of a shop steward.

Moreover, the focus group respondents displayed a sharp clarity in the events leading to their occupancy despite on most cases having to recall these events from many years ago. Consequently, becoming a shop steward was perceived as a distinctive and important event in their own working lives. Even so, based on the findings in this study the path into the role by many of the respondents was relatively haphazard and as a result of chance and circumstances. Although the shop steward has a key role as a union representative in workplace industrial relations, the filling of the role is largely outside the control of the formal union hierarchy and in the main is left to the members in the workplace to organise (Terry, 2005). Based on these findings the role is likely to remain unattractive to union members as the trade union hierarchy has done little to attract and incentivise ordinary union members into a role that is purported to be an essential part of trade unions (Flood and Turner, 1996; Terry, 2005).

9.3 Factors influencing intention to continue as a shop steward

A remarkable transformation appears to occur once rank and file members agree to take on the position of shop steward. The survey responses in this study revealed that on becoming a shop steward most respondents indicated that they tend to remain in the position for a considerable period of time. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents had served four years or more, while nearly fifty percent had more than seven years' service at the time of the survey. Indeed most respondents were willing to continue as a shop steward for another term. These findings are consistent with previous studies regarding the average length of tenure as a shop steward (McCarthy and Parker, 1968; Millard et al, 2000). However, there is limited research other than Winch (1980) and Flood and Turner (1996) to explain the factors that influence union members to remain in the position of shop steward. In this study, the motivation of shop stewards to continue chiefly arises from the development of positive personal attitudes to the union over a period of time and their experiences in the role in terms of union support, competence to carry out and cope with the demands of the role.

9.3.1 Personal factors; evolving union orientation

Pro union attitudes as a rank and file member were positively associated with intention to continue as a shop steward. The binary logistic regression results suggested that union members who entered the position as a stalwart or ideological union member displayed statistically significant stronger intentions to continue as a shop steward relative to passive members. While not unexpected, the findings show that pre-existing positive union attitudes provide unions with a valuable source of sustained union representation at the workplace. Yet, even respondents who entered the position with a passive union background indicated a strong willingness to continue in the position. Thus for many reluctant entrants both ideologically committed and passive, attitudes and attachment to the union appears to have altered in a positive direction once time was spent in the position of shop steward.

In this context the survey findings are limited and may not accurately capture the underlying reasons behind the patterns of survey responses. Analysis of the focus group participants suggest the possibility of a reflexive relationship between the experience of being in the position and intention to continue as a shop steward. For example, focus group discussions revealed that stronger pro union attitudes tended to evolve because of participation as a shop steward, a process one focus group respondent referred to as a ‘gradual progression towards SIPTU mentally’. A general consensus among the focus group participants was that their personal involvement as a shop steward led to a greater appreciation of the contribution of union representation and this had intensified their attachment to the union during their time in the position. According to the participants, their growing union attachment underpinned their decision to continue as a shop steward. This finding supports union attachment as a distinguishing factor between shop stewards and the majority of ordinary rank and file members (Beynon, 1973; Nicholson et al, 1981; Flood and Turner, 1996). However, the evidence here suggests that such emotional attachment may not necessarily exist prior to taking on the job of shop steward, but rather develops over time by continued occupancy in the role.

A related finding emerged from the focus group discussions. Participants were influenced to continue by the desire to protect the legacy of their own personal contribution to workplace union representation. Focus groups participants stressed that a key driver in their willingness to continue was that in their estimation few other members would have the skills and ability to perform the role. The intention to continue was necessary to ensure that the union, through their own personal involvement and expertise would continue to make a difference at workplace level, thereby protecting the gains achieved by the current cohort of shop stewards. As such, once in the position shop stewards appear to become protective of the position and do not seem inclined to relinquish the job of union representation to someone else who may be less accomplished than themselves. Such explanations are consistent with Nicholson's (1976) internal factors. These internal factors refer to the influence of an inner belief system that is associated explicitly with the decision to become a shop steward. As such, taking on the shop stewards' role is motivated by a moral obligation or personal responsibility on the part of the rank and file member (Nicholson, 1976; Moore, 1980). However, this study suggests that internal factors are not initially relevant and apply more accurately to the factors that shape a members' decision to remain in the position of shop steward.

9.3.2 Positive experiences as a shop steward

Shop steward's experiences as a union representative were considered in this study as a factor in the decision to continue in the role. The results highlighted the influence of resource related factors such as union support, management support and levels of stress with the intention to continue or not as a shop steward. Previous research into shop steward tenure (Winch, 1981; Flood and Turner, 1996) indicates that such factors influence membership willingness to continue in the position of shop steward. When biographical and workplace variables such as age and constituency size were controlled for, the availability of resource related factors including support from the union (training and support from the sector organiser) and support from management (use of company facilities) were statistically associated with shop stewards' intention to continue in the position.

Employer support in terms of shop steward access to company resources may be seen as management acceptance of the legitimacy of the shop steward's function in the enterprise. At the very least the availability of a range of company facilities to the shop steward indicates a management tolerance towards the position of shop steward (Terry, 1995). However, at supervisor /line manger level there were limits to this support as many of the survey respondents reported being frequently told 'to spend less time on representative duties'. The focus group findings confirmed the line manager /supervisor level as less supportive in this regard. Shop stewards complained of being 'watched' by supervisors or 'warned not to be floating around'. These experiences were largely confined to instances where shop stewards might disrupt shop floor production by taking time out from their work duties to communicate with their members rather than seeking time off for official meetings with management.

This study also suggests that support from the trade union hierarchy remains an important issue for shop stewards in their intention to continue in the role (Beynon, 1973; Winch, 1981). This is not surprising as Nicholson (1976) and Winch (1981) have previously documented that for the most part, union members enter the position of shop steward with underdeveloped skillsets and expertise. Shop stewards largely acquire the craft of representation in a haphazard way by learning while doing the job (Nicholson, 1976). Focus group participants highlighted that the lack of advanced preparation required the occupant to 'adapt quickly' to have any chance of surviving in the position. Even so, the survey data indicated that the majority of shop stewards were satisfied with their access to union training and the support from the sector organiser after taking up the position. This support was more important to them on initial entry into the position according to the focus group members.

Moreover, the focus group participants pointed to the satisfaction from their own personal development in the role as a consequence of the learning derived from both union supported learning and workplace experiences as a union representative. This ranged from being 'a bag of nerves' at the beginning of their tenure to subsequently being 'good at it' as they developed 'a certain etiquette' and a 'political mind' with experience. This links strongly to focus group discussions of how being a shop steward changed them personally and positively in terms of personal development and transferable life skills. Thus, while the survey results

suggest that the likelihood of continuing as a shop steward is contingent on satisfaction with union support, a notable factor of the intention to continue most likely stems from an intrinsic feeling of personal fulfilment in making a difference to the working lives of the members.

The demands of the role in term of stress and strain were considered as a factor in influencing the intention to continue in the position (Martin and Berthiaume; 1993, Flood and Turner, 1996). Shop stewards in this study reported relatively low levels of stress in terms of role overload or ambiguity and only moderate levels of strain (worry, sleep disturbance, physical ailments) associated with the position. Previous research regarding the magnitude of shop steward stress found that shop stewards experience moderate amounts of stress in their role (Nicholson, 1976; Martin and Berthiaume; 1993, Flood and Turner, 1996). While the measures of stress are not exactly identical across studies, this study found that role overload, role ambiguity and role strain in terms of worry and undesirable physical ailments due to the demands of the role had no statistically significant impact on shop stewards' intention to continue or not in the position. Indeed, the focus group participants reported that they felt fairly comfortable in handling the often frustrating and challenging environment of workplace representation. For the most part the participants identified difficult members and difficult managers as the source of their frustration. However the focus group participants accepted this as just a normal part of the job and did not deem such things as impediments to continuing in the position. On the contrary, there was among the focus group members a sense of self acclaimed personal pride and prestige in being union members able to cope mentally with the demands of the position which according to the respondents 'was not for everyone'. This ability to cope was due to their personal resilience in handling the demands of the role to the extent that they no longer felt prone to 'panicking' or 'fearing' the responsibility of workplace representation.

There are a number of possible explanations that may account for such relatively low levels of stress compared to previous studies (Martin and Berthiaume, 1993). It may be the case that the Pharma sector is unique and a more comprehensive survey of shop stewards across other sectors of the economy would throw up a different result. Within this study there may have been reluctance from the participants in the follow up focus groups to publicly admit to personal difficulties in coping with the position. However, that two different data gathering

instruments in this study found similar evidence suggests that this evidence has at least some merit. It is important to note that the respondents did not imply that the job of representation was devoid of stress, but rather there was a suggestion that these respondents were able to cope with the stressors.

It is possible that some factors may have acted as a 'buffer' in this regard. One factor may be the specific nature and circumstances of companies associated with the PCMD sector. The survey responses indicated that management in this sector appear to have a relatively benign attitude and a tolerance towards shop stewards. This may be due to the nature of the general business environment as firms in this sector have been highly profitable and appeared to have weathered the recession quite well (Roche, 2013). This was supported by the focus group discussions as many shop stewards highlighted that their firms had a much softer landing than other sectors during the financial crisis. Such a favourable business environment may not necessarily directly reduce the ambiguity, overload and strain associated with workplace representation itself. But it may certainly reduce the prospect of management hostility thereby easing the exercise of union representation in such workplaces and in turn contribute to shop steward positive attitudes and intention to remain in the position of shop steward.

9.4 Length of tenure and positive attitudes towards the position

To explore if shop stewards' attitudes towards the position varies according to the length of tenure in the position, a one-way analysis of variance with Tukey post hoc tests were used. Longer periods of tenure may indicate more positive perceptions and satisfaction with the role and the intention to continue as a shop steward. The mean scores suggested that the three segregated groups in terms of length of tenure (less than 3 years, 3 to 7 years and over 7 years) were generally positive about their position as a shop steward. The results indicated that longer serving shop stewards displayed more positive opinions about the position in terms of union support, their skills and abilities to carry out the job and displayed reduced levels of strain in the position. This is consistent with Flood and Turners' (1996) findings that more experienced shop stewards reported higher levels of satisfaction in the position as a union representative. The focus group responses confirmed an ascending positive satisfaction in the role as their time in the role progressed. As such member satisfaction in the role

provides for the potential for future continuation in a voluntary role where the occupants are free to vacate at any time if they are not satisfied or cannot cope in the position (Moore, 1980). Indeed according to some focus group participants they considered 'jacking it in' at the start of their occupancy due to feeling vulnerable and overwhelmed in dealing with difficult managers, difficult members and difficult situations. The focus group discussions reported that dealing with these difficulties is a normal and persistent part of the role for both experienced and less experienced shop stewards. The only difference was that learnt experiences brought with it a greater self-assurance in their own ability to cope and continue to manage key aspects of the role that have a direct impact in protecting the working lives of the members.

9.5 Shop steward tasks as workplace union representatives

As such, a second key characteristic of the shop steward's role shop steward was considered in terms of the tasks undertaken by shop stewards as workplace union representatives. A recurring emphasis within the shop steward definitions implied that representation encompasses shop steward actions on behalf of their members to protect their employment conditions in the workplace. The definitions leave the concept of shop steward actions unspecified. Nevertheless, the literature points to the shop steward as an integral part of the governance of union members in terms of how the shop steward organises, collects and actualises the preferences of its members at the workplace (Terry, 2005). This thesis suggested that the actions of shop stewards encompass key tasks in acting on behalf of the membership including union leadership, communication and a worker voice mechanism.

9.6 Shop steward leadership style

Studies concerning shop stewards have been intimately associated with a union leadership function at workplace level (Clegg et al, 1968; Warren, 1971; Pedler, 1973; Batstone et al, 1977; Partridge, 1977; Greene et al, 2000). A central debate classifies the shop steward as a leader or a follower of their members (Batstone et al, 1977; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983; Broad, 1983). The focus of this debate is whether the shop steward predominately obeys and follows the mandate of their members (follower) or acts independently of their

members and takes the initiative to lead them (leader). This study suggests that differences exist between shop stewards concerning their predominant leadership style (Batstone et al, 1977). A small majority of survey respondents (57%) characterised themselves as followers rather than leaders (43%). Less emphasis was placed on the ‘trade union principles’ dimension in this study due to the widespread acknowledgment within the literature of the difficulty in defining and operationalising ‘union principles’ (Batstone et al, 1977; Willman, 1980; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). Nevertheless a Mann-Whitney U test tested the extent to which there might be a difference between the responses of follower and leader shop stewards regarding trade union principles based on a single ordinal type question in the survey. The question sought to identify the extent to which shop stewards emphasised their attachment to workgroup level unionism or the wider union movement. A similar question was used by Marchington and Armstrong (1983) as an interview question in their revised version of Batstone et al’s (1977) union principles. The results of this study suggest that where union principles were regarded in narrower workgroup terms, it was more salient among follower shop stewards.

The survey findings regarding shop steward leadership styles were not wholly unexpected. A majority of shop stewards follow and conform to the wishes of their members and see their union role in terms of looking after the interests of their immediate workgroup members. An explanation for these survey results may arise from the nature of the shop steward’s role in relation to their workgroup. Terry (1995) highlighted that an ingrained characteristic of shop steward representation is the accountability of the shop steward to those that elected/selected them to the position. The implication is that the interest and wishes of their workgroup is the main point of reference for shop steward leadership tasks (Darlington, 1991; Terry, 1995). Consequently, due to the voluntary and group nature of the position, it is likely that shop stewards will adopt a follower rather than leader approach as suggested by the survey responses in this study (Pedler, 1973; Batstone et al, 1977; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983).

Indeed a central aspect of the shop steward’s leadership role is explicitly democratic (Clarke, 2009). Trade union leadership emphasises the enabling of membership inclusiveness and participation in decisions that affect them at workplace level (Clarke, 2009). As such, the

relevance of shop steward leadership style in individual worksites assumes a greater importance since the shift to enterprise level bargaining in 2008. In this context an emphasis on shop steward leadership styles underscores a fundamental activity of shop stewards as more than just a title or position in the union but stresses a key responsibility in how shop stewards ensure that trade unions directly respond to workers' preferences and subsequently protect member interests in their workplace (Hyman, 1975; Terry, 2005).

9.6.1 Factors influencing shop steward leadership style

The extent to which shop stewards behave as a leaders or followers may depend on a number of factors such as personal characteristics, length of tenure in the role and the features of their experiences such as skills and knowledge, union support, management support, stressors (Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). These factors were tested using hierarchical linear regressions. The results of the regression equations indicated length of tenure and shop steward experiences (skills and knowledge, union support, management support, stressors, hours spent on union duties) accounted for a statistically significant 4 percent and 18 percent of the variance in leadership style respectively. Based on these results longer serving shop stewards will more likely influence and lead their members due to their protracted experience in the position (Marchington and Armstrong, 1983).

Yet, the results of the regression equations suggest that length of tenure itself does not necessarily mean that shop stewards are 'experienced' or have the confidence or ability to lead their members. This may explain why length of tenure as a variable lost its explanatory power in the final regression equation when items (skills and knowledge, union support, management support, stressors, hours spent on union duties) were added under the label of experiences. The addition of these factors significantly increased the explanatory power of the regression equations and suggests that how shop stewards develop and adapt during their tenure in the position has an influence on a predominant style of representation to emerge. This study corroborates Marchington and Armstrong's (1983) suggestion that the learning process both on the job and from union training can result in shop stewards gaining confidence to behave as leaders in their relationship with their membership.

However, the focus group findings suggested that the leader / follower categorisation is a less distinct and a more complex phenomenon as applied to the day to day representation of their members (Pedler, 1973; Broad, 1983; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). The focus group participants were quite specific in asserting that the wishes of their members were the core responsibility of shop steward representation and this was a fundamental benchmark for their actions as a union representative. These focus group responses reinforced the survey findings favouring a predominantly follower distribution of shop stewards. Yet a more nuanced and criss-crossing view from the focus group participants was that they also considered it their responsibility to educate, redefine and adjust their membership wishes where necessary. This leadership type behaviour seemed to arise when shop stewards felt the need to instruct or influence membership views with the intention of making these views more realistic, more informed and at times less damaging decisions regarding the longer-term benefit of the membership. These leader type interventions were enabled by the expertise, knowledge and confidence that shop stewards had built up over a period of time. This was apparent as shop stewards' felt they were in a position to 'see the bigger picture', be 'more informed' than the members and 'know what is best' for the members. In this context, shop steward legitimacy to act as a leader was underpinned by their learnt experiences of being a shop steward. Thus, there is a further suggestion from the focus group findings that tenure alone is less significant than the learning and development that shop stewards acquire during their tenure in the position for a particular leadership style to be adopted (Marchington and Armstrong, 1983).

The focus group findings indicated that shop stewards are acutely aware of the complexity and constraints of workplace representation in which the adoption of a particular ideal style is not a finite or absolute condition. The literature did offer clues that the complexities of the workplace environment may induce shop stewards to behave differently in response to different workplace circumstances (Pedler, 1973; Broad, 1983; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983). Evidence that aligned with variations between leadership styles was addressed by the focus group participant's day to day experiences. Shop stewards had much more autonomy to act in a leader capacity on smaller workplace issues such as defending the interpretation of a clause of the collective agreement with an un-informed supervisor or engaging in opportunities to win small concessions as getting time off for a major sporting event, or 'having a go' with a supervisor who has mistreated a member. On such 'smaller' issues, a pragmatic and speedy response is required from the shop steward independent of and without

a mandate from the members. These types of actions satisfy the definition of leader behaviours in these circumstances (Pedler, 1973; Marchington and Armstrong, 1983).

However, 'life changing' or 'hum dinger' issues such as redundancy, employment security or pay changes resulted in shop stewards shifting between the two styles. With such issues, a practice of shop stewards informing and influencing members was merged with having to argue with and pacify opinions from more rebellious and militant members. This resulted in either successfully 'bringing the majority of members along with them' (leading) or conforming to and acting on the members' wishes (following) as a result of a ballot (Pedler, 1973). These findings indicate that union democracy ultimately influences and determines whether shop stewards act as leaders or followers, or somewhere in between in terms of *implementing* the outcome of a democratic membership ballot on issues of higher priority. Indeed, focus group shop stewards were somewhat reluctant to portray themselves as leaders as defined by the literature and were more comfortable seeing themselves as facilitators of workgroup democracy. Yet despite this reluctance, the apparent willingness of focus group shop stewards to attempt to influence and direct their workgroup before a decision / ballot is made, implies a leader style is very much an underlying if not a recognised characteristic among shop stewards themselves in representing their members. Thus, the survey results regarding shop steward estimates of their own predominant representative style may be at variance with how they actually represent their members.

While the survey evidence in this study suggests the respondents may have a predominant leadership style, the focus group findings suggest that shop stewards at times vary their approach along a leader- follower continuum, depending on the attitude of the membership or the seriousness of issue at stake (Pedler, 1973, Marchington and Armstrong 1983). According to the focus group findings in this study, shop stewards in the PCMD sector are followers and they are leaders. This outcome is broadly consistent with Pedler (1973) and Broad's (1983) conclusions that a follower/leader classification may not be flexible enough to deal with variations in leadership style in response to changing workplace or workgroup circumstances. As such the focus group findings have gone some way to confirm Pedler's (1973:59) belief that measurement instruments such as the use of a questionnaire alone is not sufficient to study the dynamic workplace nature of shop steward leadership. Moreover, the final

regression equation only accounted for thirty-one per-cent of the variance in shop steward leadership style and there is a large variance unaccounted for in this study that requires further investigation.

9.7 Shop stewards as facilitators of union communication

A prominent task of the shop steward's role is the acclaimed importance of shop stewards as the main communication link between the union and the membership (Pedler, 1973; Partridge, 1977; Schuler and Robertson, 1983; Jarley 2005). The shop steward acts as a conduit to provide union information, facilitate membership decision making and provide a liaison for union members to highlight their collective and individual concerns, grievances and preferences regarding their treatment at the workplace (Pedler, 1973; Green et al, 2000; Metocchi, 2002).

Direct interactions with individual and collective groups have placed the shop steward communication function in a central position in building and maintaining workplace unionism (Schuler and Robertson, 1983; Terry, 1995; Jarley, 2005). For this study, the way in which shop stewards act to develop communicative interactions and connections with their members was measured in terms of structural (frequency of contact) and relational (quality of relations) social capital (Jarley, 2005). Social capital from a trade union perspective focuses on the importance of building strong relationships with the membership as essential to building a strong union presence (Jarley, 2005). The survey results indicated that the majority of shop stewards in this study have limited and infrequent contacts with their members (structural social capital). Forty percent of sampled shop stewards interact with their constituents on a daily or weekly basis. Moreover, it appears from the survey findings that most shop steward interactions are in the form of unplanned encounters. These revolve around individual member complaints and grievances as they arise at the workplace rather than shop stewards actively managing and coordinating formal interactions with the membership as a collective group.

The survey findings suggest that if union members do not have a grievance or an issue to be addressed, then shop stewards will experience little interaction or connection with their members (Schuller and Robertson, 1983). Consequently, these individual type communication patterns imply that other members in the shop stewards' constituency are not encouraged to get involved in the union for collective support and resolution of such individual issues (Jarley, 2005). Thus, infrequent and sporadic shop steward interactions that rely on individual or small group grievances can give rise to a fragmented and distant relationship between the union members and the union leadership at workplace level (Jarley, 2005; Jarley and Johnson, 2005). This was not supported by the survey findings in this study. Indeed, shop stewards' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their members were rated as relatively positive by the respondents (relational social capital). The majority of shop stewards indicated the presence of healthy connections with the membership in terms of trust, cohesion and support. This was reinforced when testing for differences between leader and follower shop stewards in their function as a union communication conduit. The t-tests results indicated that leader type shop stewards were associated with statistically more membership contact due to grievances, $t(118) = 2.636, p < .05$ than follower shop stewards. However, there were no statistically significant differences between leader and follower shop stewards regarding the perceived quality of member contact and interactions.

Overall, the survey findings suggest that in the main shop stewards pay little attention to their function as a union communicator other than performing as a one-way communication channel for members to present their grievances and problems to the shop steward (Jarley, 2005). This is similar to Darlington's (2009) finding that shop stewards in the UK are spending less time on collective issues and more time representing individual members. This represents a weakness according to Darlington (2009) as servicing individual union members may create apathy among shop stewards towards actively mobilising members to collective action as they are so used to dealing with individual issues. Even so, at the very least, this study suggests that individual forms of representation reinforce a central task of the shop steward as the union focal point for the rank and file when they have a problem at work (Warren, 1971; Pedler, 1973; Waddington and Whitston, 1997). Moreover, there is no unequivocal evidence in this study to suggest that a rather sporadic and individual level of membership communication has an adverse effect for shop steward representation in building and maintaining workplace unionism.

In this regard the focus group findings confirmed the survey findings but adds an extra dimension to them. Shop steward communication and interactions with the members change and evolve to suit the workplace environment. Shop stewards have adapted and modified their approaches as a union communication conduit due to the constraints and circumstances at their individual worksites. Indeed the predominantly individual patterns of shop steward / membership communication in this study may be a reflection of the limited amount of time shop stewards have to spend on union issues. Focus group shop stewards highlighting that they simultaneously 'have to do their own job as well as looking after the floor' is a pragmatic explanation as to the largely individual and sporadic manner in which shop stewards interact with and represent their members. Thus, there may be a tendency in the literature to overlook what can realistically be accomplished by volunteer shop stewards in terms of their workplace representative tasks (Schuller and Robertson, 1983). The challenges underlying the shop stewards' capacity to formally communicate with the members did not necessarily hamper informal contacts and connections between themselves and their members. Focus group shop stewards indicated there was a further implicit informal element to shop steward/membership interactions around their naturally occurring workgroups. The shop stewards' proximity to their members in terms of 'seeing them every day' allowed for regular informal opportunities to communicate and interact with their constituents (Schuller and Robertson, 1983). This would appear to mitigate the need for frequent formal collective communications and may explain the dominance of individual communication / interactions with the membership.

Consequently, the survey responses found that formal collective membership communication (formal union meetings) was much less frequent. Yet, the findings from the focus groups indicated that shop stewards were willing to evolve and adapt collective communications to overcome work pattern and membership obstacles to enable collective membership involvement in union matters. The twenty-four-hour split shift patterns that are a recurring feature of the PCMD shop stewards' workplace environment created a need among some focus group participants to assemble formal union meetings on a shift by shift basis rather than call all member meetings. Creating these communication methods was a response by shop stewards towards an enduring problem in relation to membership apathy in terms of low membership attendance at general meetings and the difficulty in communicating with a dispersed membership across different shifts at workplace level (Schuller and Robertson,

1983). Indeed, organising all shift-general meetings created a situation where a smaller number of more militant and hard-line members tended to dominate in terms of attendance and opinions. From a shop steward perspective, these findings indicate the largely passive and card-carrying nature of the majority of union members (Nicholson, 1981; Flood et al, 2000). Consequently, these challenges underline the difficult job shop stewards endure in building and maintaining a cohesive workplace union that provides for the inclusion of all members (Jarley 2005).

As such by adjusting their approach to facilitating workplace union communication for the membership, a leadership character is evident. Shop stewards where necessary develop practical solutions to encourage less active members the access to and involvement in the union in a more intimate and smaller group environment. This may explain the survey results in suggesting that leader shop stewards tend to have more contact with members due to individual/ small group grievances. It may be the case that these leader type behaviours provide a more conducive environment for members to air such grievances. Thus leadership style may indeed influence the ways in which shop stewards approach their communication function. Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest that all shop stewards through their daily and close presence among the members remain the focus of union workplace communication in its many formal and informal forms (Pedler, 1973). Indeed most of the surveyed shop stewards indicated a positive relationship with the members. This study suggests that membership communication dominated by individual grievances/small group issues, may not necessarily be disadvantageous to the building of strong relationships with the membership over time.

Nonetheless, the focus group participants reported that there were some tensions in the perceived quality of relations with some members. The focus group participants in general reported the existence of a lacklustre relationship with some factions of the membership in which shop stewards only felt appreciated by such members on 'winning' employment improvements for them. This coexisted with the presence of a more confrontational relationship that existed with a core of more militant members. These contrasting relations with the membership highlight the complications inherent in the shop steward's role in sustaining membership interactions, support and involvement with the union (Pedler, 1973;

Schuller and Robertson, 1983; Greene et al, 2000). This study underlines these challenges suggesting that shop stewards face a difficult balancing act with the membership. Consequently, communication as a core task of the shop steward's role is unavoidably bound up with accommodating a diverse community of indifferent, passive and militant members (Jarley, 2005; Jarley and Johnson, 2005). Accordingly, as a union communication conduit the shop steward manages and represents a diverse range of opinions and concerns that the membership wishes to see represented. In turn the shop steward provides the member(s) with a medium to confront management and have some say over managerial decisions regarding the quality of members' working lives at workplace level (Greenfield and Pleasure, 1993; Terry, 1995; Dundon et al, 2004).

9.8 Shop stewards as facilitators of union membership voice

In general terms, employee voice has been described as any mechanism in which employees have a say in influencing in management decisions that affect their workplace circumstances (Dundon et al, 2004; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2007; Boxall and Purcell, 2011). The literature suggests that contemporary interpretations of employee voice encompasses varying levels of employee influence ranging from informal meetings between managers and employees, employee suggestion schemes, team briefings and representative forms of trade union voice through collective bargaining (Dundon et al, 2004, Marchington and Wilkinson, 2007). As the independent voice of employees, shop stewards ensure that member preferences and interests are taken into account by management (D'Art et al, 2013). Worker interests are concerned with offsetting the greater power of the employer to influence terms on which workers are hired and how their labour will be utilised (Edwards, 1986; D'Art and Turner, 2006). The indeterminate nature of the employment relationship leaves scope for the independent voice function of the shop steward to bargain over an appropriate amount of labour effort in return for an appropriate level of reward at enterprise level (Edwards, 1986; D'Art and Turner, 2006; Blyton et al. 2011). Trade unions and collective voice are regarded as the most effective means through which workers can influence workplace decisions (Gunnigle, 1999). In practical terms, items as pay, employment security, pensions, working hours, discipline, and working arrangements are indicators of the extent to which the voice aspect of the shop stewards role provides a distinct and tangible impact on the welfare of the

union members (Cully et al, 1999; Terry, 2003). Shop steward voice at enterprise level is rigorously tested by employer claims concerning the economic circumstances of the firm, competitive market pressures and the need to remain competitive (Roche et al, 2011).

9.8.1 Shop steward voice efficacy

The survey results indicated that PCMD sector shop stewards believe themselves to have a positive effect in protecting the employment conditions of their members. The mean scores from the survey analysis suggest that shop stewards in this study are most successful in their efforts to protect job security and pay. The respondents also indicated that they have considerable expertise and success in restraining managerial prerogatives and injustices around the treatment of workers regarding issues of employee discipline and grievance handling. Shop stewards are a little weaker in influencing job controls regarding the organisation and intensification of work. Thus, the findings suggest that overall, PCMD shop stewards have adapted quite well to the return of enterprise level bargaining since the breakdown of social partnership in 2009. Indeed, local level bargaining has placed an increased emphasis on the voice function of the shop steward consistent with the classic account of the shop steward as an autonomous workplace bargainer (McCarthy and Parker 1968, Terry 1995). According to the focus group participants the voice aspect of the role is now associated with a ‘go in and get it yourself’ approach. This requires shop stewards to plan and negotiate on terms and conditions at enterprise level rather than just administering and policing national wage agreements negotiated at national level. The positive responses in this study suggest the shop steward is an effective union resource for exercising voice on behalf of the membership at the workplace.

Some caution is needed in this regard as asking shop stewards about their own efficacy may have produced biased responses towards a more favourable outcome in their eyes. However the voice aspect of the shop steward’ role is not exclusively controlled by the individual shop steward. Voicing member preferences regarding employment conditions often requires the acceptance by the membership through a majority vote. The communication function of the shop steward discussed previously indicated that shop stewards would attempt to influence and manage membership expectations or unrealistic expectations where they deemed it

necessary. Shop steward voice is in essence a conduit for collective voice that is strengthened by membership unity through a ballot over what is and is not acceptable to members in terms of their working conditions (Flanders, 1977; Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Greenfield and Pleasure, 1993). This was reported in the focus groups as the participants suggested the ‘big stuff’ (wages) that affected all members, tended to get sorted relatively quickly. The big issues according to the focus groups invited a more accommodating tone from management where there was the possibility that collective worker voice might lead to collective action in the event of an unacceptable agreement. As such workplace issues where the membership act in concert will likely influence the effectiveness of the shop stewards’ voice function.

Moreover there is also the possibility that ‘pragmatic union strategizing’ (Hickland and Dundon, 2016:10) has strengthened the influence of shop steward voice in this sector. It may be likely that the moderate two percent pay and stability strategy is a factor. This strategy originated and was targeted in the profitable PCMD sector, where companies in general had the ability to pay wage increases (Hickland and Dundon, 2016). It may be the case that this generic union strategy has facilitated a shop steward view that they are successful in providing an effective form of representative voice for their membership. Moreover, the continued and lengthy tenure of shop stewards in this study highlights a subtle signal of membership acceptance that in the main, the shop steward is successful as a voice mechanism in protecting membership preferences and interests. Indeed, the democratic nature of workplace trade union representation allows for the replacement of a shop steward where membership interests are not perceived to be voiced, protected or advanced (Clegg, 1976). These indicators offer at least indirect support legitimising shop stewards estimates of their own ability as an effective union voice mechanism.

Nevertheless, the findings revealed some difficulties and challenges regarding the effectiveness of shop steward voice. The survey results indicated lower aggregate measures regarding the ability to influence job regulation relative to job security and pay. One interpretation could be that shop stewards have a tendency to prioritise bargaining over pay and conditions rather than work organisation issues (Terry, 1995). Yet, the focus group findings suggested that this did not appear to be the case as shop stewards reported constantly attempting to influence work intensification initiatives by management. The focus group

participants suggested that work organisation issues were much harder to influence and challenge due to the opportunistic nature of management initiatives.

The issue of workplace flexibility and efficiency figured prominently in the focus group discussions in causing some constraints on shop steward voice. Where the issue of flexibility was mentioned, it was primarily related to the increasing use of flexible / temporary workers. Shop stewards were confronted with management engaged in an informal but targeted attempt in using temporary employees to change work effort and work practices. In other cases, production pressures were used as opportunities by management to target more compliant workers to intensify or change the level of work performed. The experiences of the focus group shop stewards are consistent with Geary's (2007) suggestion that employers are placing greater emphasis upon direct employee involvement approaches in introducing change on the basis of managerial prerogative. Moreover, in this study, shop stewards identified that they would have little if any knowledge of these issues, possibly exacerbated by the shift work nature of their employment, until such issues were raised by individual employees. As such, small and incremental changes in work practices may be underway before any shop steward involvement. In these circumstances shop stewards found it difficult to police, react and provide protection for members. This was due to the piecemeal, opportunist and informal changes that might occur in how work is performed with potential underlying consequences for future work intensification. Thus, there is some evidence in this study that shop steward voice has been constrained and marginalised regarding the effort bargain where managerial prerogative has been targeted towards more vulnerable or compliant workers.

9.9 Shop steward leadership style and shop steward voice

A key issue from the findings is that the exercise of union leadership is sensitive to the pressures and challenges at the workplace. As such the likelihood that leadership style might influence the voice role provided by shop stewards was tested in this study. The t-test analysis suggested that leadership style had no impact on the influence of shop steward voice over the terms and conditions of employment (pay, job security, pensions). The PCMD sector bargaining strategy in relation to pay may in fact serve to equalise the influence of shop

steward voice outcomes at workplace level, regardless of the leadership style of the shop steward. Nevertheless the t-test results suggest that there is some, if rather tentative evidence in this study that leader shop stewards are a little more effective in exercising influence over management initiatives to capture unilateral control over the pace and intensification of work effort. The focus group results depicted limited but supporting conclusions regarding how leader type stewards might accomplish such tangible outcomes at enterprise level. This may reflect the underlying difficulties for shop stewards in extending union voice and influence over the organisation and pace of work at workplace level (Terry, 2003). Nevertheless, there was some underlying evidence in the focus groups that where shop stewards did lead and take the initiative for early intervention it can at the very least curtail management authority. Some respondents recalled objecting to management regarding using temporary employees before the management practice started. This had the effect of unions and management negotiating some full-time positions in which the new entrants were protected and employed on the same terms and conditions as other operators in the organisation.

The findings identified that in general shop steward voice typically involved both informal and formal interactions with management in terms of talking to management ‘off the record’ such as clarifying the interpretation of a work rule with a line manager and through formal negotiations with management. Consequently, shop stewards’ informal and formal interactions with management provide an important and flexible channel for employee voice. A Mann-Whitney U test of difference was used to provide a further distinctive rationale to distinguish any discernible differences between leader and follower shop stewards regarding the frequency of their voice interactions with management. The findings suggested that leader shop stewards were associated with more frequent interactions with higher levels of management (dept. level and above). This may be of no particular significance in itself; it could merely suggest that the survey respondents had workplace issues and problems that increased the scope for more frequent and formal interactions with higher levels of management.

Nevertheless, the survey results suggest that those who consider themselves to be leader shop stewards are more likely to convey worker voice into higher levels of management decision making more regularly than follower shop stewards. When this is considered in conjunction

with leader shop stewards and their influence over the effort bargain in this study, these findings suggest that leader type shop stewards are less likely to be marginalised by management. This is consistent with Batstone et al's (1977) suggestion that leader shop stewards have more frequent contacts with senior management and secure better outcomes for their members. But in day to day practice, regardless of leadership style, the focus group discussions revealed that voicing membership injustices to various levels of management was at times frustrating and anything but effective. Despite the general acceptance of shop steward representation by employers, the effectiveness of shop steward voice was frequently tested by management. The findings highlighted that shop stewards were exposed to individual managers flouting procedures, disregarding agreements altogether or 'dragging their heels' in the operation regarding stewards' attempts to make management responsive to membership voice. The focus group discussions indicated that such delaying tactics had the effect of creating an accumulation of grievances going through procedure with shop stewards contemplating the referral of such cases to the WRC to assist the influence of union voice. Thus, behind the largely positive undertones of shop steward influence as a union voice, resides a more problematic and hostile environment in which management actively constrain the effectiveness of shop steward voice.

9.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the findings of this study bringing together the qualitative and quantitative results in the context of previous research of shop stewards. Based on the core aspects of the role identified in the integrated framework in this study, shop stewards are an integral part of trade union representation in directly protecting and shaping the working lives of union members at workplace level. Combining the various aspects associated with the shop stewards role reflects the complexities that shop stewards face in contemporary times in representing their members. The results provide some evidence that the factors influencing and shaping the nature of the shop stewards' role reveal an assortment of challenges, uncertainties and difficulties associated with the core aspects of union representation at workplace level.

The findings reaffirm the importance of the shop steward in their role as a workplace representative that relies on voluntary membership occupancy. Voluntarily occupancy is typically taken on with hesitancy, is demanding and frustrating but at times personally rewarding for the occupants of the role. Personal characteristics such as age/ maturity, work experience and a heightened attentiveness relative to other members of the injustices at work are linked to the likelihood of being asked or encouraged to take on the role. Positive workplace experiences in the role and growing favourable emotional attachment to the role is linked with the likelihood of continuing as a shop steward. Additional complex aspects of the role arise as members who become shop stewards take on a dual role of employee and workplace union leader. The study uncovers a complex network of leader-membership relations as shop stewards bear the responsibility of facilitating a direct communication channel to the members and translate their views, wishes and preferences into worker voice as they endeavour to protect members and curb the exercise of arbitrary employer power in the workplace (D'Art et al, 2013).

Chapter Ten

Conclusions

10.0 Introduction

The overall objective of the study was to provide a current understanding of shop steward representation focusing on the experiences, tasks and challenges associated with the shop steward's role in the PCMD sector of SIPTU. This final chapter provides an overview of the main conclusions from the empirical and discussion chapters of this study.

10.1 Key conclusions

The main conclusion that emerges from this study is that shop stewards play a key role in shaping the working lives of union members in their workplaces. This study concludes that facilitating worker access to the principle of representation is a particularly appropriate context to characterise the key role of the shop steward. The wider significance of this conclusion cannot be overstated in the current Irish industrial relations system. Opportunities for worker representation have been continually constrained by employer organisations rejecting the idea of independent union representation (D'Art et al, 2013).

Paradoxically employer opposition to the role of independent worker representation occurs while such firms simultaneously operate and trade in a free and modern democratic Irish society. In parallel to this, studies regarding the role of workplace union representation have suffered significant academic neglect in the Irish context (Flood and Turner, 2006). Consequently, a contemporary study of Irish shop stewards fills this gap and highlights the practice of representation in a business environment that views worker representation as incompatible with a society that endorses democratic principles for its Irish citizens.

Former studies of shop stewards relevant to this research offered a variety of ways to understand their role at the workplace. Collectively, these studies have emphasised the complex characteristics, tasks and the challenges inherent in making a difference to workers in their workplaces (McCarthy and Parker, 1968; Nicholson, 1976; Pedler, 1973; Batstone et al, 1977; Marchington, 1983; Winch, 1980; Terry, 1995; Flood and Turner, 1996). To date any attempt to consolidate the many aspects of the shop stewards role into one overarching framework has been notably lacking. This study has proposed the concept of representation as the central characteristic in understanding the role of the shop steward. An integrated framework of shop steward representation was developed as a means to incorporate and analyse two broad areas associated with shop steward representation. Firstly descriptive representation; becoming and continuing as a voluntary shop steward and substantive representation; the tasks associated with managing the concerns of the membership. These two broad aspects of the role identified in the framework suggest that shop steward representation is not a single activity but rather consists of a multiple of tasks that fall under the rubric of shop steward representation. As such two research questions guided this study in which the findings have yielded a number of insights informing the literature and the practice regarding the role of shop stewards as workplace union representatives. The main conclusions that can be drawn from this research are outlined below.

10.2 Research question 1

Research question 1 considered descriptive representation and sought to examine what influences a union member to become and continue as a shop steward. The physical presence of trade union representation at workplace level is reliant on a lay union member's voluntary enrolment and sustained presence in the position. Quite simply, workplace representation does not exist without these volunteers. In this regard a number of supplementary questions (questions 1-4) were specified and guided by the literature to address this particular research question and draw conclusions. While there are few if any restrictions on any union member volunteering for the position, this research suggests that individual characteristics, social influences and positive experiences as a shop steward are important influencers. The

evidence from this research concludes that the question of becoming and remaining a volunteer shop steward remains a concern for unions.

As such, supplementary question one sought to determine what personal factors are relevant to becoming a shop steward? There are many possible personal influencers and circumstances in this regard. This study concludes that a combination of individual characteristics such as maturity, work experience and an intolerance to workplace injustices play a part in becoming a shop steward. These individual characteristics create situations in the workplace where such members are presented with the prospect to become shop stewards by election or encouragement by their workgroup when the circumstances arise. The results reinforce the evidence against the simple interpretation of shop stewards as 'wild-eyed' radical union members (Barling et al, 1992:132). Indeed, it could be concluded that union members who take on the position are socially responsible union members (Moore, 1980). This can be evidenced by the consistency across studies that a critical mass of union members voluntarily but rather reluctantly take on the responsibility to protect working standards and contest injustices on behalf of their colleagues, because by and large no-one else will (Moore, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996).

A second supplementary question examined the extent to which PCMD members were reluctant or willing recruits into the role of shop steward. This study reinforces the assertion that few respondents are initially attracted to a role that is considered to be difficult and demanding by the members (Moore, 1980; Flood and Turner, 1996). In the main union members were persuaded to take on the role by their workgroup due to having some personal characteristic or a combination of characteristics (maturity, a level head, willingness to speak up) considered by the members as necessary for the role. Indeed, these findings indicate similar to Nicholson's (1980) suggestion, that a member's path into the role of shop steward is accidental, unintended and as a result of circumstances in the workplace.

A further challenge related to the role of shop steward is the preparedness of the member to continue as shop steward. As such, supplementary question three sought to establish what factors influences shop steward's intention to continue in the position? The voluntary nature of

the position necessitates the shop steward to simultaneously look after their members while continuing to work as an employee of the firm (Moore, 1980). This research found a number of factors influenced the willingness to continue in the role. Shop stewards are influenced by their experiences in the role. Positive role experiences such as union support, access to company facilities and competence to carry out the role were found to be prominent influencers in the intention to stay on in the position. Consequently, the propensity to continue may be weaker where shop steward experiences in the role are less favourable. This may be especially acute in regard to the vulnerability that is experienced by shop stewards in the early stages of their tenure as they take time to learn and adjust to the demands of the role (Nicholson, 1977). For the trade union hierarchy, awareness of shop steward needs that support their ability to initially cope and subsequently develop in the position may provide a useful insight into assisting shop stewards to settle in quickly and increase the probability that the occupants will continue in the role. Personal factors also accounted for the willingness to continue. Shop steward commitment to the union increased in a positive direction over time due to their own involvement in the role as a shop steward. The influence of personal factors and role experiences was found to have a positive influence on the intention to continue irrespective of whether the shop steward was a reluctant or willing entrant into the position. Occupancy in the shop stewards' role heightened the occupants' awareness and appreciation of the important function that trade unions and collective representation play in making a difference in the workplace. Moreover, a willingness to continue was associated with a belief that their own personal investment and achievements in the role was making an important contribution to the welfare of the members. This indicates that occupancy of the role fosters the development of more positive attitudes and a sense of duty towards the union over time

While the results suggest that the willingness to continue as a shop steward is influenced by a variety of factors, the final supplementary question (question 4) in this section set out to determine if shop stewards perceptions of the role vary according to length of tenure in the position. The results suggest that as tenure increases shop stewards tend to report higher levels of satisfaction in their current work situation as a shop steward. A key challenge for shop stewards was the feeling of vulnerability at the start of their tenure as they had to adapt and learn the nuances of the role quickly. Length of tenure may be an indication that shop stewards found ways to cope with aspects of the role that they initially found difficult. Yet the reported positive changes in role satisfaction with increasing tenure is associated with

enhanced knowledge, skill and ability developed over time to cope with the demands of the role. This suggests that positive perceptions of the role are an evolutionary process and the development and support of shop stewards at the early stages of a shop steward's tenure is an important consideration for the union hierarchy (Winch 1980).

10.3 Research question 2

Research question two examined substantive representation and considered what tasks shop stewards perform as workplace union representatives. To address research question two, a number of additional supplementary questions (questions 5-9) were developed from the literature. Consequently this section of the research sought to examine what shop stewards do in acting on behalf of the members in protecting them against the more powerful employer (D'Art et al, 2013). Consequently, leadership, communication and voice were identified as fundamental tasks of the shop steward's role. The results emphasised that workplace union representation was not confined to merely occupying the representative position of shop steward and assume union leadership responsibilities to respond to and enable union members to challenge management and influence workplace decisions that affect them (Pedler, 1973; Schuler and Robertson, 1983).

Accordingly, supplementary question five sought to determine whether PCMD sector shop stewards are leaders or followers of their member's wishes. Two main styles of shop steward leadership were identified (Batstone et al, 1977). Leader shop stewards lead and influence members while follower shop stewards comply with the wishes of the membership (Batstone et al, 1977). This study suggests that the leader-follower style may not be mutually exclusive alternatives. The responses to the survey statements describing follower and leader shop stewards were almost equally popular among the respondents. This study found that on a day to day basis shop stewards act on a continuum somewhere in-between the two alternatives due to the subtle complexities of workplace issues. This indicates that shop stewards 'lead' or represent their members in a manner that best suits membership interests at that particular point in time or due to particular circumstances. Consequently, the distinction between leader or follower shop stewards may be more analytical rather than practical.

In this regard question six set out to establish the factors that influence the leadership style of the shop steward. The literature indicated a range of factors as potentially influencing the shop steward leadership styles (Marchington and Armstrong 1983). This research highlighted factors relating to tenure and the experiences gained in the role were influential in shop stewards developing as leaders. Additional evidence was found in this study regarding the subtle ways in which the democratic nature of workplace trade unionism including the level of decision making and member/workgroup attitudes (member support or opposition to a particular issue) have the potential to influence shop steward behaviours as leaders or followers. Consequently, there is a complexity of influencers regarding the varying leadership approaches adopted by shop stewards in dealing with their workgroup members. This research substantiates the difficult and demanding job of shop stewards in responding to membership views and wishes as workplace union leaders. There has been sparse if any research regarding discernible differences in the Irish context and the limited research to date requires a further understanding of the differences in shop steward leadership style.

The importance of the communication aspect of the leadership role was examined through question seven to determine to what extent do shop stewards facilitate membership access and connection to the union? The question set out to determine the opportunities shop stewards provide for union members to interact and communicate with their union. The communication function provides a reassurance to members that their opinions and preferences can be expressed and heard by the union at the workplace. The results indicate that shop stewards facilitate both formal and informal communication via individual and collective communication mechanisms. The results highlighted the complexity of the shop stewards' role in managing and building a network of connections to the membership, while still performing as an employee of the firm. This study concludes that there is no single means of effective communication that shop stewards adopt to facilitate membership contact with the union. Shop stewards adapt and develop a variety of communicative mechanisms as a practical requirement of the role to facilitate information sharing, to receive information from members and to enable members to make informed decisions about their work situation. The shop steward's communication tasks emphasise a crucial aspect of their role in building a flexible network of social interactions and connections to facilitate individual and collective membership involvement in matters that affect them at work.

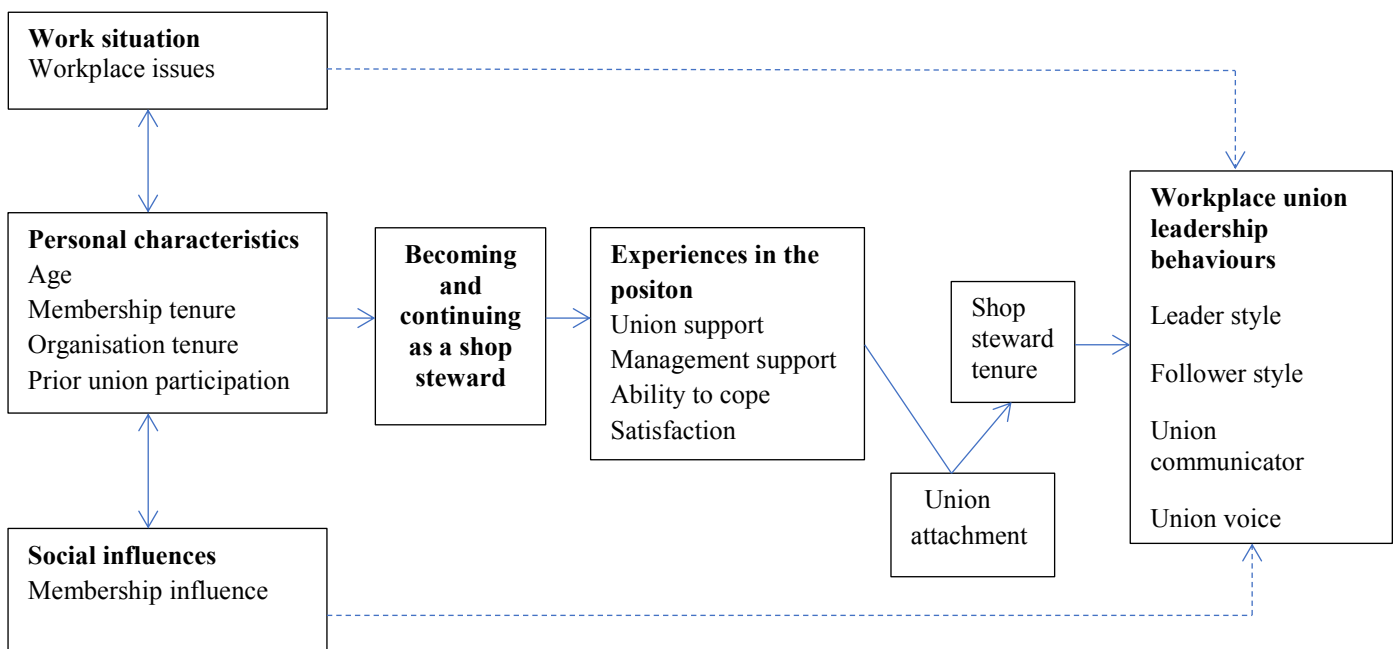
In this regard research question eight raised the question regarding how shop stewards facilitate member voice in protecting membership interests. The voice aspect of the shop steward's role attempts to stop the potential alienation of worker interests within the wage-effort bargain that might otherwise result due to the more powerful position of the employer. The findings highlighted the effectiveness of the shop stewards' voice role was apparent in the tangible protection of member's employment conditions as a result of challenging management in the areas of rewards and work effort. In particular the research question was prominent in highlighting that shop steward voice and the protection of member interests is vulnerable to management attempting to intensify labour utilisation with considerations of competitiveness and profitability. As such the question raised a considerable and ongoing challenge for shop steward voice in a market economy. The shop steward reconciles two countervailing voice demands. On the one hand to protect the welfare of their members and make management responsive to membership interests, while at the same time acknowledging that membership welfare is dependent on responding to the competitive interests of the organisation. Consequently this question underlines the importance and value of the shop steward's voice role. The findings suggest that in their union voice role shop stewards act as a mechanism for social stability in the workplace in resolving, or at least temporarily accommodating the competing tensions between employer and employee (Edwards, 1995; D'Art et al, 2013).

The final supplementary question (question 9) examined the extent to which leadership style influences the communication and voice function of shops stewards. The purpose of the question was to establish further evidence regarding discernible differences in actual role performance in terms of acting on behalf of the members as a workplace union representative (Marchington and Armstrong 1983). The evidence from the findings reveals little difference between leader and follower shop stewards in discharging their communication and voice functions. This may in part be due to the leadership findings above that shop stewards may vary their style depending on the circumstances, issues and member attitudes compelling shops stewards to be more or less reliant on their members (Pedler 1973, (Marchington and Armstrong 1983). In this regard the manner in which shop stewards discharge their communication and voice function is driven by the conflicts of interest inherent in the employment relationship that remain the same regardless of leadership style (D'Art and Turner 2013).

10.4 A revised framework of shop steward representation

Overall then, evidence from this research, based on a self-administered survey questionnaire and follow up focus groups confirms a greater complexity regarding the role of the shop steward than the traditional and somewhat fragmented shop steward literature anticipates. Accordingly, it is argued here that assessments of shop steward representation based on descriptive and substantive representation is inherently intertwined. As such, in reflecting the finding of this thesis figure 10.1 provides a more complete explanation regarding the integrated nature of shop steward representation at workplace level.

Figure 10.1: Revised framework of shop steward representation



10.5 Key conclusions and previous empirical work on shop stewards

The findings of this study are generally in line with previous research on shop stewards undertaken over different periods of time (Flood and Turner, 1996). As such the basic characteristics and actions involved in the shops stewards' role remain more or less the same despite the emergence of a new generation of shop steward representatives. In essence shop

stewards continue to be a fundamental part of the union (Pedler, 1975; Terry, 1995; Darlington, 2009). Despite this central role, this study concludes that in contemporary times, the current generation of shop stewards face the recurring and difficult and challenging process of building and sustaining workplace union organisation with a new generation of union members and a new generation of managers. The results also suggest that it may be a little naïve to assume that the role of the shop steward has a predetermined set of actions and effects. The conclusion from the qualitative findings suggests that each new member occupant of the shop stewards' position has the potential to put their own slant and interpretation upon the role. Indeed, the respondent shop stewards emphasised that the character of workplace representation develops in the context of the specific industrial relations history of their workplace and shaped by each new guardian of the role. As one shop steward stated, 'you inherit the legacy from someone else and you make it your own'.

10.6 A study of shop stewards in the Irish context

Nonetheless, in inheriting the role from previous occupants this current cohort of shop stewards inherit a role that appears to be in inexorable decline under a voluntary industrial relations system that progressively rejects the role of independent union representation among employees (D'art et al, 2013). Irish trade unions have recorded a sustained and continuous decline in trade union density since the 1980s (D'art et al, 2013; Walsh, 2015). Walsh's (2015) study on Irish trade union membership patterns highlight a steady decline in membership density over the past three decades to an estimated 28 percent. The longitudinal data is unequivocal in confirming that in the Irish system of voluntarist industrial relations only a minority of workers in Ireland have access to trade union representation. Union density and membership patterns are a widely accepted measure of trade union influence in terms of the ability / power of union unions to realise the interests of workers over employers (Turner and Lavelle unpublished).

Employer opposition to the presence of trade union representation in Irish workplaces has been offered as a key factor in the decline in union membership density (Geary, 2007). Several studies have highlighted a continuing pattern of union avoidance approaches as the

common currency especially among US owned multinational organisations establishing in Irish greenfield sites (Flood and Toner, 1996; Gunnigle et al, 2001; Geary and Roche, 2001). Indeed, diminishing union density levels displayed across English speaking countries (Ireland, UK, US and Australia) highlights a systematic opposition to trade union representation in Anglo-Saxon economies (Schnabel, 2012). This is underpinned by an employer ideology that has a negative image of trade unions as harmful to the interests of the organisation and its employees (Gunnigle et al, 2001).

Consequently, alternative forms of non-union representation have become the dominant orthodoxy generating some debate and rethinking of the direction of the study of industrial relations in Anglo-Saxon economies. This new orthodoxy is one in which collectivist forms of union worker representation appear to have little appeal in the actual practice of modern industrial relations (Cullinane and Dundon, 2014). A continuing decline in Irish trade union density and therefore the reduced visibility of union organisation across the economy is related to perceptions of a diminished union influence in protecting the working conditions of their members (Turner and Lavelle, unpublished). As such, the extent to which trade union density is reliant on employer sponsorship may weaken the importance of the role of workplace representation as trade union representation can be supported or obstructed by the policy and practice of a particular firm.

10.7 Shop steward influence

Nevertheless, there is evidence that the concept of independent union representation is a desirable principle among workers in a democratic society. D'Art and Turner's (2013) analysis of the 2002/2003 European Social Survey argued that in the Irish context there was little evidence of a decline in the demand for trade union representation. Rather they suggest a representation gap in the private sector was evident as a large contingent of non-union workers indicated the need for strong trade unions. The possibility exists that such non-unionised workers would join a trade union if one was recognised at their workplace (Geary, 2006). Consequently, an enduring employer rejection to trade union representation and the associated decline in Irish trade union density has not necessarily presaged the diminishing significance and relevance of independent union representation among workers themselves.

The protection offered by trade unions as voluntary civil organisations in shaping a socially just and democratic society for employees is therefore still an important and current theme in the study of Irish industrial relations (D'Art et al, 2013).

The findings of this study suggest that the continuing relevance of independent trade union representation is contingent on the role of shop stewards in building and maintaining that socially just society for workers in their own workplaces. The presence and actions of the shop steward is one indicator of the influence of workplace union representation. Despite the increasing employer hostility to trade union presence, the evidence of this study points to an enduring resilience among shop stewards in protecting members from unfair treatment, confronting management authority and on occasion winning gains for their members. A key indicator in this regard was the shop steward's positive perceptions of their own influence and effectiveness. The focus group respondents emphasised that a key factor in their willingness to remain as shop stewards was because they believed they 'made a difference' and wanted to 'protect the gains' they had made in their own workplaces. While this self-reported influence may be inherently subjective, the fact that respondent shop stewards feel such confidence in their role reinforces the relevance of union representation from respondents who are closest to dealing with the day to day interactions between workers and employers in the workplace.

Indeed, the collapse of social partnership and the shift towards establishment level industrial relations since 2009 can be considered as a crucial test regarding the extent to which shop stewards influence and protect worker interests at local level as firm's respond to competitive pressures. The initial shift towards local level bargaining heralded a serious challenge to the influence of union representation generally, as shop stewards experienced a radically changed and harsh economic environment (Roche et al, 2013). The results of this study suggest that enterprise bargaining has provided the impetus and opportunities for shop stewards to play a key role as union representatives in enterprise-level industrial relations. For example, focus group shop stewards stated that they were 'now in the middle of it on the front line' and 'going in getting the increases ourselves' rather than relying on nationally bargained agreements.

Furthermore, 'being in the middle of it' has also emphasised the central role of shop stewards in communicating and interacting with the membership to process their wishes and responses to establishment level employment conditions. This was evident in the widely acknowledged comment by shop stewards that they 'had to negotiate with the members first before they negotiated with management'. As such, a key conclusion can be drawn from this study. The prominence of the shop steward's role goes beyond protecting members' pay and conditions of employment but also emphasises trade union representation as a credible democratic organisation for workers to participate in forming their own independent perceptions of fairness and justice at work.

Yet stubborn continuities are detected regarding the position of the shop steward. An understated challenge for workplace union representation is that the shop steward remains an unpaid union volunteer with little in the way of any significant legal support for their existence as a union representative in the Irish workplace. While shop stewards occupy a prominent position within trade unions, it is at the same time a fragile one that is dependent on employer recognition to fulfil its purpose. Consequently, the particular nature of the shop steward's voluntary position inevitably places some limitation on what realistically can be achieved by these volunteer union representatives.

10.8 Contributions of the study

This study does not claim to lead to a fundamental paradigm shift in the study of shop stewards. However, a number of contributions to the existing knowledge of shop stewards can be discerned from this study. Firstly, this study has addressed the dated literature gap in the Irish context as to the tasks, challenges and nuances affiliate to the union workplace representative position. Current assumptions of the role of present day shop stewards have relied on research gathered over a generation ago (Flood and Turner, 1996). Indeed, the shop steward has been afforded little research consideration in Irish industrial relations enquiry. Thus, at the very least, this study has contributed some present-day explanations to the limited number of studies around shop stewards and what it means to be a workplace union representative in contemporary Irish industrial relations.

The study sought to appraise both the historical and more contemporary shop steward definitions in order to specify the core aspects of the role. As a result, representation is the central focus of this study of shop stewards. The concept of representation is based on the political view as ‘standing for’ and ‘acting for’ others (Mansbridge, 2003). As such this study tilts the perspective towards considering the function of the shop steward as an integral subsystem of a wider democratic society. The qualities of a democratic society rest on the universal principle of allowing citizens to have a say in matters that impact on the quality of their own society (Mansbridge, 2003). This is particularly relevant to the function of the shop steward as part of a voluntary organisation to assist workers to have some involvement regarding the quality of their working lives. While the shop steward definitions largely assume what representation is, this study contributes to the knowledge of shop stewards by identifying what representation attempts to accomplish in maintaining a socially just and democratic workplace for employees. This study suggests representation is a distinctive characteristic of the shop stewards’ role as they are the most visible union representative that is directly elected/ chosen by the members to look after their immediate workplace interests. This provides a further distinctive rationale for assertion that to the members the shop steward is the union (Terry, 1995).

This research also contributes to current knowledge in offering a holistic perspective on the study of shop stewards as workplace union representatives. One notable aspect of the literature is the apparent absence of a central focus of the study of shop stewards. Indeed, a review of the literature uncovers a wide range of tasks, characteristics and concepts regarding the role of the shop steward in the work environment. Few attempts have been made to organise and combine the diverse aspects associated with the shop steward’s role into an overarching framework of representation. This study proposed a framework of representation to bring together the core aspects of the role to address the fragmented nature of the shop steward literature. Moreover, the framework suggests that the essential and core nature of shop steward representation remains the same but that variations in shop steward representation may occur in response to the context of individual workplaces. As such, the basic components of this framework may have application across other sectors of SIPTU and other unions where voluntary workplace representation takes place.

This study makes a contribution to the practice and policy implications for trade unions in the context of the Irish system of shop steward union representation. The significance of this is in terms of the perceived value placed on the voluntary position of shop steward that according to the respondents is as desirable as a 'hot piece of coal' among members. Shop stewards are more prone to disruptive, hostile and difficult workplace experiences in their participation in the union relative to the members. Likewise, shop stewards indubitably weigh up whether time spent on representing others at work is worth the sacrifice of their time and effort. The findings presented in this study suggested that over time, shop stewards in the PCMD sector derive personal satisfaction from developing and using their skills 'to make a difference' at work. Moreover, the findings highlighted that shop stewards were very appreciative of the support from the union (opportunities for training and sector organiser input) as well as being appreciative of any acknowledgment by the membership that the work they do is socially valuable.

One immediate consequence is that the trade union hierarchy has some influence to reinforce the value of the shop steward's position within the union. This study suggests that greater consideration could be given to a formalised induction and mentoring policy in terms of structured support for new entrant shop stewards as well as some form of formal union reward for acknowledgment of their continued volunteer service. This is where the respondent shop stewards suggested they are most vulnerable and underappreciated. The current study does not necessarily recommend how this might be operationalised, but merely draws attention that some consideration is required towards the members' feeling of being appreciated in the position.

Moreover, shop stewards' experiences highlighted the complexity of the leadership role vested in the position in terms of the relationship with the members. Dealing with the membership has been identified as a commonly experienced challenge for shop stewards in this study. A key consequence of the findings is that PCMD sector shop stewards expose themselves to the dilemma of how best to manage membership wishes and preferences under the guise of an unpaid, voluntary position in the union. While SIPTU training courses are available for newly elected and advanced shop steward development, the SIPTU college website reveals that the training is largely targeted towards technical / procedural training in

terms of grievances, negotiations and dispute handling. If shop stewards are the key figure in the union (Terry, 1995), it follows then that more emphasis on membership interactions and leadership specific training as an additional accompaniment to the existing training may be beneficial to further facilitate the day to day work of shop stewards.

10.9 Limitations

There are a number of limitations acknowledged in this study that may impact on the results and conclusions. The greatest potential impact is related to the sample size (n=123) during the quantitative survey phase of this study. Furthermore, as survey participation was also based on a convenience sample, the findings cannot claim to be generalised to the wider population of shop stewards. The generalisability of the results and conclusions are further limited as the research was carried out in only one particular sector of SIPTU. This sector is characterised by predominantly medium and large manufacturing oriented MNC firms. As such the results and conclusions must therefore be viewed in this context. Yet, this does not render the findings invalid or prevent generalisation being made as the role of all voluntary shop stewards across the sectors of SIPTU is to represent the members in their workplaces.

A key question therefore is whether similar results would transpire in different sectoral contexts. A larger sample size from the PCMD sector or a probability sample taken from a cross section of sectors in SIPTU would have ensured a more representative distribution of the population of shop stewards and enhanced the generalisability of the results. The methodological choices were restricted by limited access to the different sectors of SIPTU and the required building of trusting relationships to overcome the 'trojan horse' potential of an outside investigator. Access to any future multi-sector research into this union by the researcher will be enabled by the relationships built within the PCMD sector due to this research.

A second limitation regarding the survey evidence concerns the measures used to determine the leadership style of the shop steward. These concerns and the key decisions taken to ensure appropriate scale items were addressed in the methodology chapter. The use of a simple

classification of 'follower /leader' leadership style used in this study may be too coarse grained to account for the differences across the sampled shop stewards. The 'lived experiences' of shop stewards suggest a much more complicated activity and process of workplace union leadership. It cannot be ruled out, that despite acceptable alpha scores from the factor analysis, the leadership behaviours of shop stewards were not adequately measured in the present research. This research would have benefited from incorporating more question items to further characterise differences among shop stewards due to workplace circumstances. Nevertheless, counter to the limitations of the quantitative phase of this study, the researcher ensured that the data collected from shop stewards came from more than one source. The qualitative phase of this research provided underlying explanations for the statistical associations tested in this phase. Indeed, the use of focus groups to explore in more detail shop steward experiences served to both confirm and enrich the survey responses. Consequently, the results gleaned from both data sets allowed for more confident conclusions and a more complete interpretation of the role of the contemporary shop steward in Irish industrial relations.

10.10 Further research

There is clearly room for more detailed and rigorous analysis of the role of shop steward representation in the Irish context. The distinctive shift to enterprise bargaining since 2008 requiring local union representatives to directly shape the policies and practices that determine the conditions of work is of central importance to current trade union representation. In this context it is equally important to understand what makes shop stewards effective in protecting their members at work.

One such consideration of shop steward effectiveness is union leadership and the extent to which shop stewards in a voluntary and unpaid position, influence and mobilise members to participate in union related matters (Batstone et al, 1977; Green et al, 2000). The limitations of this study acknowledged a coarse measure of shop stewards as follower or leader representatives. The day to day experiences of shop stewards highlighted a more complex relationship regarding the way in which shop stewards influence their members and the

extent to which they viewed themselves as union leaders. Therefore, the leadership function of the shop steward requires further investigation to determine how shop stewards develop as leaders and the effects of shop steward leadership on the strength of workplace unionism.

A related aspect of this relationship is that the strength and influence of workplace unionism is predicated on membership participation. Moreover, any measure of union effectiveness is determined by the extent to which the expectations of the membership have been achieved through their workplace union representatives (Kelly, 1998; Green et al 2000). Shop stewards in this study perceived themselves to have a positive impact in protecting their members. The extent to which shop steward representation is effective from a membership perspective would give a further insight into the contribution of shop stewards in contemporary times. There is a dearth of Irish research and literature regarding the impact of the shop steward in this context.

10.11 Concluding comments

This research set out to study shop stewards in contemporary Irish industrial relations, their experiences, tasks, responsibilities and challenges. Given that shop stewards have attracted little research attention in the Irish academic literature since Flood and Turner (1996) there was a need for an analysis regarding what it means to represent union members in a progressively antagonistic business environment. This research has attempted to address that gap by studying shop stewards in the PCMD sector of SIPTU to contribute some insights into the ways in which present day shop stewards navigate through the demands of independent workplace representation. One prominent feature of contemporary Irish industrial relations analysis emphasises the continuing decline in the pattern of collectivist Irish industrial relations alongside arguments stressing the continued relevance of trade union representation in a democratic society (D'Art et al, 2013). The evidence is weak regarding a decline in the demand and relevance for trade union representation among a majority of workers (Geary 2007; D'Art and Turner, 2013). In this context, a study of shop steward representation in contemporary Irish industrial relations was worth consideration.

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Appendix A – Invitation to Pilot Survey

Date; May 2015.

Dear Respondent, I am Mick Rock from Waterford Institute of Technology and I am asking for your assistance to participate in a pilot questionnaire survey in a study about shop stewards.

The survey is part of a doctoral thesis under the supervision of Dr. Tom Turner from the University of Limerick to examine some of the key issues concerning the role of voluntary union representatives in the workplace. Your participation will help to develop the final overall design of the questionnaire. The survey should take about 12-15 minutes to complete. There are 4 sections in the survey. These sections reflect the extensive and challenging role that you play in representing workers.

You will also be invited to a follow up focus group in WIT to get your overall impression of the survey and identify any problematic areas. In this sense you have an important impact in influencing how the role of the workplace representative will be investigated. All the information will be treated in the strictest of confidence and in line with research ethics protocol. You can withdraw from this pilot survey at any time.

Thank you for your time in considering this request. If you need any additional information, my contact details are below;

Yours sincerely,
Mick Rock
PhD candidate
Waterford Institute of Technology
Email xxxxx@xxxxx

Appendix B – Invitation to self-administered survey

Date: Dec 2015

Dear shop steward, I am Mick Rock from Waterford Institute of Technology and I am asking for your assistance to fill out questionnaire survey in a study about shop stewards. The survey is part of a doctoral thesis under the supervision of Dr. Tom Turner of the University of Limerick to examine the role of voluntary shop stewards in the workplace. The role of the shop steward is an area of research that has not attracted much attention to date.

Your participation will help to identify a more complete and accurate understanding of your current role. The survey should take about 12 minutes to complete. There are 4 sections in the survey. These sections reflect the extensive and challenging role that you play in representing workers. You will also be invited to participate in follow up focus groups at a later date to improve the researcher's understanding of your role.

Instructions for the survey:

The questions are answered by ticking the appropriate boxes or writing your answer in the space provided. For example; the question 'how long have you been a member of SIPTU'.

Less than 1 year	1-3 years	4-7 years	More than 7 years
		✓	

Please try to answer the questions as honestly and candidly as possible
There are no correct or incorrect answers.

Where you are uncertain about how to answer a question – you can make a best guess.
Please return the survey to sector organiser Alan O' Leary who has given permission to contact you.

The questionnaire is completely anonymous and will be treated in the strictest of confidence. There is no way of knowing your identity from this questionnaire. You can withdraw from this survey at any time. Thank you for your time in considering this request. If you need any additional information my contact details are below:

Yours sincerely,
Mick Rock
PhD candidate
Waterford Institute of Technology

Appendix C; Survey

Section 1

This section of the survey asks general questions about your background and obtains a general insight about you as a workplace representative. This information will not be used to identify individual respondents.

1 How long have you worked for your present employer

Less than 2 years	2-5 years	6-10 years	More than 10 years

2 How long have you been a member of SIPTU

Less than 1 year	1-3 years	4-7 years	More than 7 years

3 How long have you been a shop steward at your current employment

Less than 1 year	1-3 years	4-7 years	More than 7 years

4 Roughly, how many employees work for your current employer. (place your best estimate in the box)

5 Approximately what proportion (%) of all workers in your organisation are members of a trade union

6 About how many employees do you directly represent

7 How many hours a week on average you spend on your role as a shop steward (best estimate in hours)

During work hours	
During your own time	

8 **Are you**

Male	Female

9 **Please indicate your age group**

21- 25 years	26-30 years	31-40 years	More than 40 years

10 **Please indicate your highest formal educational attainment**

Junior / Inter Cert	Leaving Cert	3 rd level	Other (please state)

11 **In politics people sometimes talk of “left” and “right” Where would you place yourself on this scale?, 0 means the ‘left’ and 10 means the ‘right’**

00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Don't Know
Left										Right	

12 **Are you a member of a political party**

No I am not	
Labour party	
Fianna Fail	
Fine Gale	
Other (please state)	

Section 2

This section asks you questions about your entry into the role of shop steward. There are no correct or incorrect answers here. The questions from this point on asks about your opinions, beliefs and experiences about your involvement as a shop steward.

- 13** **Before you became a shop steward which of the following statements best describes your membership of the union – please tick one box only**

I was a union member because I had to be – I would not be in the union otherwise	
I did not mind being in the union – I did not have any interest in union tasks	
Most of the time I did not get involved in the union – but I was active on special issues (i.e. pay ballots)	
I was an active member of the union but I was not interested in the socialist aspects of the labour movement	
I was an active union member and my involvement in the union was an extension of my ideological beliefs	

- 14** **How did you become the shop steward at this firm**

I contested a formal shop floor election against other candidates	
Unopposed election – I was persuaded because no one else wanted to take on the role	
Unopposed election – I was nominated by the union official to take on the role	
Other - please explain;	

- 15** **How much did you want the role of a shop steward when you took on the role**

I wanted it very much	
I wanted it quite a lot	
I did not mind one way or the other	
I did not want it that much	
I did not want it at all	

- 18** **How many of your close friends are actively involved in the union when you took on the role**

None	Very few	Some	A lot

19 **Have any of your close family members been actively involved in the union**

None	Brother(s)	Sister(s)	Partner	Parents

Section 3

This section asks you questions about your personal opinions, experiences and reactions to your the role of shop steward there is no right or wrong answers just your opinions.

20 **Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements**

	strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
Overall I enjoy being a shop steward					
I would be quite happy to continue for another term					

21 **Please indicate the impact the following has had on YOU in your role as a shop steward**

	strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
Dealing with union issues has often left me feeling emotionally drained (loss of sleep, appetite, tense, headaches)					
As a shop steward I am regularly involved in workplace issues in which there are clashing requirements from my members					
I often find that my workload as a shop steward is too much for one person					
I find the role takes up too much of my personal time					
I sometimes feel uncertain about what is the correct thing to do in my role as shop steward					
I often worry that I don't have enough knowledge to perform the role well					

22 In your role as a shop steward have you ever been treated by management in the following manner

	Often	At least once since becoming a shop steward	Never
Threatened with dismissal			
Threatened with loss of earnings (i.e overtime)			
Threatened with being moved to a more gruelling job			
Told to spend less time on union tasks			
Told that my career in the firm would suffer			
Been the subject of excessive scrutiny (close monitoring of attendance / work performance)			

23 Do you have the use of the following workplace facilities in your role as a shop steward please tick the appropriate boxes

Use of a company telephone	
Use of a company office specifically for representative duties	
Use of an office that is also used for other company purposes	
Use of the company photocopier	
Use of a company computer	
I have none of the above facilities	

24 Since taking on the role of shop steward would you say you have the necessary skills and knowledge to deal with the following areas

		Very definitely	Definitely	To some extent	Not at all
1	Negotiations on pay and working conditions				
2	Dealing with issues on employment law				
3	Dealing with financial information				
4	Dealing with member grievances				
5	Handling conflict among members				
6	Representing members in disciplinary / grievance hearings				

25 From the above list, what area do you consider you causes you the most personal stress

None	1	2	3	4	5	6
------	---	---	---	---	---	---

26 Have you been offered formal shop steward training opportunities in the last 12 months

Yes and I have taken them	
Yes but I have not taken them	
No, I have not been offered	

27 If yes, please estimate how many training days per year

28 How well has any training undertaken prepared you to cope in your role as a shop steward

Very well	Quite well	Somewhat	Not very well	No difference

29 Overall how would you describe the support you get from your branch in your role as a shop steward

Very good	Good	Fair	Rather poor	Very poor

Section 4

This section of the survey asks questions regarding your day to day representative tasks and your relationship with the membership as a shop steward

31 In your role as a shop steward how often would you have carried out the following tasks?

	Daily	Couple of times a week	Every couple of months	Never
Called a Formal union meeting with your members				
Handed out union literature to members				
Used Facebook to contact your members on workplace outside of work				
Contacted union members by phone on workplace issues outside of work				
Interact with small groups due to a grievance				
Interact with individual members due to a grievance				

32 In your role as a shop steward how would you describe the relationship your members

	strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
There is always a large member turnout at union meetings					
My members are willing to help me perform in my role as a shop steward					
I can trust most of the members I represent					
For the most part my members are very united as a group					
My members are willing to take collective action against management when necessary					

33 In your role as a shop steward how often do you have contact with management (includes supervisors, department managers and senior managers)

	Daily	Couple of times a week	Couple of times a month	Every couple of months	Never
Speak to members of management about workplace issues off the record					
Attend official meetings with line management about workplace issues					
Attend official meetings with senior management					

Overall, how effective do you consider your role as the shop steward has been in dealing with the following areas

	Very Effective	Fairly Effective	I don't know	Fairly Ineffective	Very Ineffective
1. Job security					
2. Staffing levels					
3. Wage levels					
4. Work intensification					
5. Changing hours of work					
6. Pension issues					
7. Seniority / redeployment of workers					
8. Management treatment of workers i.e. Disciplinary / harassment					

35 From the list above, what do you consider to be the most crucial issue concerning your members currently

35 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

	strongly agree	agree	not sure	disagree	strongly disagree
I think of myself as belonging to the trade union movement rather than just a workplace union member					
Sometimes I tell my members their demands are not reasonable					
As a shop steward I often raise workplace issues myself					
As a shop steward I have often rejected issues raised by the members					
Shop stewards should only do what our members want					

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix D – Invitation to Focus Groups

Dear shop steward,

Further to your participation in the questionnaire survey on the role of shop stewards, this is an invitation to you to take part in follow up focus groups (group discussion) between the 21st and 31st August 2017 in Waterford Institute of Technology.

The purpose of the focus groups is to obtain more detailed information and clarification of responses to the survey questionnaire and to provide an opportunity for the researcher to explore your opinions and experiences as a shop steward. The information from the focus groups will be treated as confidential and used only for the purposes of the research. The discussion will last no longer than 90 mins. Refreshments will be provided during the discussion. A copy of the discussion questions is attached for your consideration. If you are interested in participating please contact your sector organiser Alan O' Leary or sector president Gemma Mackey, who have given permission to contact you.

If you would like more information or have any questions, please feel free to contact me through email or mobile below.

Yours Sincerely,

Mick Rock

PhD candidate

Waterford Institute of Technology

Email xxxxx@xxxxx

Mobile:

Appendix E – Focus Group Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this PhD research as a shop steward is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation at any point as I wish. I agree to participate in this focus group interview, which will be audio-taped and transcribed. I understand that the discussion is confidential and that when my responses are used to support research findings, they will be presented under a pseudonym so that the information I provide will not lead to the identification of any individual within the research findings.

I understand that I have the right to ask for a copy and check the transcript of the discussion I participated in for any inaccuracies of what I said and to make any clarifications or additional comments. If at that point I do not want certain or all sections of what I said to form part of the study, I can ask for my participation and contributing to be withdrawn.

I agree to be part of the focus group

I agree to be audio recorded as part of the focus group discussion

Signature

Date

Appendix F – Focus Group Discussion Questions

Focus Group Process;

Dear shop steward, each of the topics/ questions below will be the subject of an open discussion with the group in which I as the facilitator will pose questions, probe and clarify answers and test out views and opinions with the rest of the group. The questions for discussion are created from the findings / results of the survey questionnaire that you have previously filled out. As facilitator, I will summarise and clarify the key points from one discussion topic before moving to the next.

Participant No ; Researcher use only.	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10			
Age category	21- 25	26-30	31-40	Over 40
Years in the position				
How many members do you directly represent				

Question 1; Becoming a shop steward

The survey results identified 61% of the sample respondents were reluctant to initially take on the position of shop steward.

Which statement best describes your personal initial entry into the position

I was quite willing to take on the position	
I was fairly reluctant to take on the position	

Discussion;

What factors in particular influenced you to become a shop steward at your workplace?

Prompt if necessary;

Reasons for taking on the position

Are there any barriers to becoming a shop steward

Question 2: Continuing as a shop steward

The survey results identified that 84% respondents are willing to continue in the position of shop steward for another term.

Which statement best describes your intention

I am quite happy to continue for another term	
I would prefer to give up the position	

Discussion

What factors / reasons have contributed to your intention to continue or leave the position of shop steward?

Prompt if necessary;

What keeps you in the position?

What makes you want to leave the position?

What challenges as a shop steward

What supports available

Happy / not happy in the position

Question 3: Type of shop steward

The survey identified that shop stewards differed in how they see their function as a union representative at the workplace

Which statement best describes your view of a shop steward

A shop steward should be a spokesperson for the members acting in accordance with the expressed wishes of the membership	
A shop steward should take the lead in raising and defining issues on behalf of the membership	

Discussion

Is there any particular reason as to why you have adopted this approach to shop steward representation?

Prompts if necessary:

Explain what type of shop steward are you to your members

Follow up question:

Have you always held this approach since you became a shop steward?

Question 4: shop steward attachment to the role

The survey results identified that 60% of respondents were not that active as union members prior to becoming a shop steward in their workplace.

On a scale of 1 to 10 identify the strength of your attachment to the union
(1= low commitment, 10= high commitment)

Before becoming a shop steward	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Since becoming a shop steward	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Discussion;

How does the two scores compare: Can you explain the reasons for the difference / no difference in how you feel now.

Prompt if necessary:

Do you feel any differently about the union now than you did when you were an ordinary union member.

Follow up questions:

Can you give any specific examples that explains how you feel now

Question 5: shop steward and member communication / interactions

The survey identified that shop stewards are a direct communication link between the members and the union.

Discussion

Can you describe specific examples of how you have facilitated communications with the membership in your role as a shop steward?

Follow up question;

Have there been any barriers or difficulties in this regard?

How would you describe your relationship with your members;

Prompt if necessary:

Positive / strained / supportive

Question 6: shop steward and worker voice

The survey identified that shop stewards feel they are relatively successful as a union voice in protecting the employment conditions of their rank and file members.

Discussion

Do you have specific examples of where you have been successful and not so successful in protecting the employment conditions of your rank and file members?

Follow up question:

What particular challenges do you face as a shop steward as an effective voice in protecting the employment conditions of your rank and file members?

Question 7: the status of the shop steward

This research recognises that shop stewards hold a unique position in the union being simultaneously an employee and a volunteer union representative.

Discussion

Do you feel shop stewards are respected as an important contributor to workplace industrial relations by the; members / the union / the management

Follow up questions:

Has the role of the shop steward changed since the fall of social partnership agreements.

Have you changed since you became a shop steward.

Final comments

Are there any final comments you wish to raise

End

Appendix G – extract: focus group discussion coding and themes

Becoming a shop steward – extracts	Coded for	Themes extracted from coding
<p>Focus group 1 Participant (10 years) It was not something I thought about at the time to be honest – but I used to be the one who would say something if someone was treated unfairly by management at the time that happened fairly regular like – uh- I suppose I was always talking up if that is the case (laughter from group)</p> <p>Participant (8 years) we didn't have a shop steward for a while when the last lad left for another job – there was some problems in the section and I was the one who was a little more outspoken – well no that's not true there was a couple of hot heads but I think I was seen by the lads as a little more balanced shall we say.</p>	<p>Not looking (1)</p> <p>Protest Speak up (2)</p> <p>Protest Unfair (3)</p> <p>React to Problems (4) Protest Speak up (2)</p> <p>Responsible (5)</p>	<p>Injustice (2) (3) (4)</p> <p>Maturity (5) (7)</p> <p>Unintentional occupancy (1)</p>
<p>Focus group 2 Participant (16 years) In my case it was many years ago it was because of a specific` problem in the union in the plant- there was a row in the union committee I went on a as representative of the shift to fight a specific issue. The lads on the shift wanted me to stay on as shop steward</p> <p>Participant (12 years) I would have never thought about it – but I would be the first to speak up about something – if there was poor treatment of one of the girls on the floor I would be the one that they would come to for advice – it started off as a mammy thing looking after everybody and progressed from there I suppose when I was asked to go forward as a shop steward</p> <p>Participant (9 years) Same, I had no real ambition to do it at the time there was a specific issue that was going on (redundancy) and I just happened to know a bit about it as my wife had gone through it in</p>	<p>React to Problem (4)</p> <p>Not looking (1) Protest Speak up (2) Responsible (5)</p> <p>Not looking (1)</p> <p>React to issue (6)</p> <p>Protest Speak up (2) Protest Unfair (3)</p>	<p>Injustice (2) (3) (4)</p> <p>Maturity (5) (7)</p> <p>Unintentional occupancy (1)</p>

<p>another place – so I spoke up at a couple of meetings they (management were pulling the wool over our eyes) and made it look like I knew what I was talking about and I was asked to go on the union committee and I have been here since</p>		
<p>Focus Group 3 Participant (16 years) When we started in the job you would have been younger and you would have been nervous in voicing your opinion if you were treated shabbily by a manager -and I see it again now they are taking on again – they are young and don't put themselves forward for something like the shop stewards role they are on the radar if they did and might jeopardise their job the longer you are there the more wrong that you see, your confidence builds and you find your voicing your objections more and more and that is what happened to me</p> <p>Participant (8 years) That's what happened to me, I was in the company a while and was a little older than most of the newer starts back then, they used to come to me for advice for all sorts of things. When the role (shop steward) was up for election, they asked me to go for it, they kept saying I would be perfect for it.</p>	<p>Age (7)</p> <p>Protest Unfair (3)</p> <p>Protest Speak up (2)</p> <p>Responsible (5)</p> <p>Age (7)</p> <p>React Problems (4)</p> <p>Responsible (5)</p>	<p>Injustice (2) (3) (4)</p> <p>Maturity (5) (7)</p> <p>Unintentional occupancy (1)</p>

