An Exploratory Study of Millennials' Perceptions of Trade Unions in Ireland.

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Abstract

"An Exploratory Study of Millennials' Perceptions of Trade Unions in Ireland"
by Aoife Davin.

This study aims to look at Irish millennials' perceptions of trade unions and involves participants from both the public and private sectors. The literature indicates that in Ireland, and internationally, union density and membership is decreasing and that globally, millennials are not members of unions. The research aims to look at this from an Irish perspective and see whether Irish millennials shared the same views.

The research uses a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews with six participants. The interviews were transcribed using thematic analysis with numerous themes and secondary themes extracted. These findings were then be discussed in relation to the literature and previous studies.

The research shows that Irish millennials do indeed replicate the feelings of their international counterparts when it comes to the unions and have wholly negative views of the unions. The factors helping to shape these perceptions and choice of non-membership emerged under the main themes of word of mouth, media, legislation and rights, union behaviour, loyalty and preference for internal resolution. Additionally, the limitations of the research are discussed as well as both practical and research implications.

Key Words: Trade Unions, Millennials

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Trade unions have been around for years, in Ireland their presence dates back to the eighteenth century (ICTU, 2020). Historically, people have joined for numerous reasons but the principal ones are in relation to the perceived benefits union membership offers, including general support, improved pay and working conditions and legal advice (Waddington and Whitson, 1997). Recently however, there has been a common trend emerging in union membership worldwide which could pose as a threat to the existence of unions.

Overall, the literature indicates that internationally there has been a decline in union popularity (Nor et al., 2018; Culpepper and Regan, 2014; Sarkar and Charlwood, 2014; Tomlinson, 2005; Allvin and Sverke, 2000). In the recent past there has also been a significant decline in trade union membership amongst the Irish population, a decrease from thirty-three per cent in 2005 to just twenty-five per cent in 2019 (CSO, 2019). So why exactly is the level of union density declining at such a rate or why are people simply choosing not to become members? Numerous studies have been done on the membership decline in Ireland and various reasons have been given for the decline (Culpepper and Regan, 2014; D'Art and Turner, 2011; Walsh, 2015). D'Art and Turner (2011) acknowledge that questions are being raised over Irish unions' abilities to remain as key actors while Culpepper and Regan (2014) have concluded that in Ireland unions have lost their power and Walsh (2015) summarises the reasons into three categories of changes – structural, competitive and institutional.

Simultaneously, the number of Generation Y, or Millennial, workers in Ireland is increasing and it is estimated that by the year 2025 they will make up seventy-five per cent of the workforce (ThinkBusiness, 2016). As they are about to be a very large portion of the Irish workforce the author believes that millennial attitudes and perceptions of trade unions are worthy of research as their generation is set to have a huge impact on the working world (Bannon, Ford and Meltzer, 2011).

The Research Question and Objectives

The title of this research is 'An exploratory study of millennials' perceptions of trade unions in Ireland' and will aim to gain a deeper understanding of millennial's

perceptions of trade unions. It will focus on millennials and will gather data from both private and public sector workers. Harrison et al., (2017) emphasise how millennial's crave flexibility in their job and is a huge factor in making a company an employer of choice. This is reiterated in Deloitte's 2018 Millennial Survey (Deloitte, 2018) which found that financial benefits and reward coupled with flexibility was what millennials wanted from a company, while PWC (2013) found that transparent and equal pay was a big driver. There is also the fact that legislation protecting employees and preventing exploitation or wrongdoing, has been greatly improved and developed in recent times (Furaker and Bengtsson, 2013) and also the increased emphasis on managerial training, as well as how emotional intelligence is now a 'must have' instead of a 'nice to have' (Goleman, 2004), resulting in better managerial social and communication skills.

The research, while exploratory in nature, focuses on the relationship between Irish millennials and trade unions and will look at the following; Is it simply a case now whereby millennial work demands and preferences are just instilled within the generation and they see no need for a union? Overall, do millennials have a positive or negative view of the unions or are their thoughts similar to the conclusion of Culpepper and Regan (2014) in that the unions in Ireland have simply just lost their power? Or are they simply unaware of, or ignorant to, unions and what they could offer?

These questions provide the basis of this research. In addition to focusing on the above questions, an interesting aspect of the research was that it also enabled the researcher to explore if there was any comparison to be seen between millennials working in both the public and private sectors. Overall, the aim of this research is to study the millennial perception of trade unions from an Irish perspective and explore whether Irish millennials replicate the thoughts of their international counterparts with regard to negative views of unions or non-membership of them (Nor et al., 2018; Sarkar and Charlwood, 2014; Allvin and Sverke, 2000).

Methodology and Analysis
The research project is exploratory in nature. Therefore, a qualitative approach of semi structured interviews was deemed the most appropriate research method due to its flexibility and openness (Lenger, 2019) and it allowed the researcher the

opportunity to discover new relationships and variables (Shah and Corley, 2006). Six interviews were conducted and the author then conducted a thematic analysis using Braun and Clarkes' (2006) six step procedure which formed the basis of the findings. The author used a non-probability purposive sampling technique and the participants were chosen as a result of certain qualities they possess (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). Six members of the millennial workforce were interviewed, three working in the public sector and three from the private sector. Coincidentally, all private sector participants were employed in the financial sector however they all had different roles within different companies. The fact they were all employed in the same sector is a mere coincidence.

Brief Overview of Findings

The findings of the study indicate that Irish millennial's have a wholly negative perception of trade unions and are not members of them. All of the public sector workers were aware of the relevant unions while amongst the private sector workers only thirty-three per cent of interviewees were aware of the relevant unions they could join. Factors contributing to the lack of membership and negative perception include union behaviour, word-of-mouth communication as well as increased protection for employees through legislation and media presence. Additionally, traits associated with millennials such as preference for in house resolution and lack of loyalty to jobs were also contributing factors.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In order to shape the research topic and delve deeper into why Irish millennial perceptions of trade unions is worthy of research it is important to discuss relevant research and literature that helped formulate the current topic. The literature review below aims to do that by discussing trade unions, benefits of union memberships, why existing members choose to leave or why people do not join at all, current international membership, trade unions in Ireland, millennials and their attitudes towards work and a look at existing research on the relationship between millennial's and trade unions.

Trade Unions

2.2 Introduction to Trade Unions

Trade unions fall into the category of Industrial Relations, or Employee Relations, as is the more modern term used. It is said that Alan Fox's *Frames of Reference* theory was the pioneering literature in this area and lots of further research has been done on it, and specifically on Fox's take on views of trade unions. Siebert et al., (2015) summarises the unitarist view as viewing unions in a negative light while Kaufman (2008) likens a unitarist view on unions to their view of conflict, emphasising the need for unions to be minimised. The contrasting pluralist views unions positively (Siebert et al., 2015) and accepts them as a legitimate method of expressing employee interests (Cullinane and Dundon, 2014). The third frame, the radical perspective, emphasises the need for army-like militant unions due to the conflict between labour and capital (Budd and Bhave, 2008). Three very different views on trade unions - one siding with extreme side of the employer, one in the middle ground and one on the extreme side of the employee but all of which can still be seen in modern workplaces, highlighting the different forms unions can take and the different things they can be used for.

2.3 Trade Union Membership – The Benefits and Why People Join

Historically, trade unions have provided valuable services at both enterprise, where they strived to protect members and police fairness measures, and at national level (D'Art and Turner, 2008). Waddington and Whitson's (1997) research shows that

the main reasons people join unions are for the support, improved pay and working conditions, free legal advice, industrial benefits and access to education and training programmes. Additionally, it is fair to say workers can be more successful in their efforts if they have the backing of a collective organisation rather than going it alone (Furaker and Bengtsson, 2013).

The issue of class comes into play when it comes to trade unions, with manual workers having a much greater need for the unions than white-collar workers as the working class are seen to be collectivist while white collar are viewed as individualist, with unions playing a crucial role in negotiating on behalf of the working class (Furaker and Berglund, 2003). Or in the public sector or roles where pay is set across the board and collective bargaining is more effective as everyone wants the same thing. The unions have also proven popular for those who are dissatisfied at work, or with a certain aspect of their work, as found by Sarkar and Charlwood (2014) who state that workers who have a positive attitude or viewpoint towards the unions are more likely to be dissatisfied at work. Additionally, D'Art and Turner (2008) conducted a study which concluded that employees who are not satisfied with their income are more likely to voice a higher need for unions. This reiterates the point made by Waddington and Whitson (1997) regarding people joining unions to access improved pay and it has also been found that in comparison to non-union members, members of unions experience a much lower dispersion in pay (Metcalf, Hansen and Charlwood, 2001).

In addition to pay there are other benefits associated with union membership. O'Sullivan (2019) says unions also play a crucial role in defending members in disciplinary or grievance issues or going up against unsatisfactory decisions made by management, similar to Waddington and Whitson's (1997) mention of legal advice being a motivator to join.

In conjunction with the numerous benefits listed above, workplace union density also plays a big role in membership levels as Toubøl and Jensen (2014) found that people are more likely to join a union if their colleagues are members and this was a primary factor while joining because a person agrees with the union ideals or beliefs was only a secondary one.

2.4 Trade Union Membership – Factors Influencing Why People Don't Join or Decide to Leave in General

As discussed above there are several benefits associated with union membership. However, it is also worth mentioning the reasons people may leave a union and discussing the counter arguments for union membership and why people may not join at all.

In terms of existing members choosing to leave Waddington's (2006) study found that changes to employment circumstances and members not being satisfied with union behaviours are contributing factors. He notes that such dissatisfactory union behaviour includes lack of contact and information regarding the union and ability to participate in union decision making, essentially there is no impact of membership evident. Additionally, in the public sector retirement was a big factor as many members appear to stay in their membership until they retire (Waddington, 2006). Allvin and Sverke (2000) note that the individualisation of working life also plays a role in union membership due to the fact that people are becoming more independent from their working lives and therefore their reasoning for joining unions is now more down to choice than as a symbol of identity.

There are also the factors contributing to people not joining at all. Many unions charge a fee, SIPTU for example charge based on your earnings but the max rate is five euro per week or twenty-one euro and sixty-seven cent per month for anyone earning five hundred euro or more a week (SIPTU, 2020). Human nature is to, of course, weigh up this cost against the perceived benefits and some may simply feel as though the costs associated are much higher than the benefits the person believes they could receive and therefore do not join (Furaker and Bengtsson, 2013).

Mentioned in the benefits discussion was the legal advice, (Waddington and Whitson, 1997) protection of members and encouragement of fairness (D'Art and Turner, 2008) that unions advocate for. It is worth noting that employment legislation has been greatly improved and developed in recent times internationally, offering greater protection to employees (Furaker and Bengtsson, 2013). In the Irish context such legislation includes the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977 as amended and the Employment Equality Acts 1998 as amended. Such improvements in legislation are now playing a much more dominant role in establishing working conditions and

pay and as workers exercise these rights and make use of legal enforcements, the role of the unions has been somewhat restricted (O'Sullivan et al., 2015). Therefore, it is fair to assume that some people may choose not to join simply because they feel they have adequate protection within their workplace without the unions.

A third factor to consider is the training of managers. As the saying goes 'people don't leave jobs, they leave managers' and line managers in particular play a key role in creating a work environment that encourages willing engagement from employees (Alfes et al., 2013). Heraty and Morely (1995) go so far as to say line managers are key stakeholders in the human resources function. Nowadays there is much more emphasis on continuous professional development and also, on the importance of leaders and managers possessing emotional intelligence, which comprises of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill (Goleman, 2004). Having managers with heightened emotional intelligence and training as well as having a role in the human resources side of things would hopefully minimise conflict and additionally, allow the opportunity for any potential conflict to be discussed in house. Improved communication between managers and employees may lead to a heightened employee voice, reducing intention to quit and helping to resolve conflicts at work (Van Gramberg et al., 2020). Again, this could provide a possible reason for people choosing not to join a union as they feel as though any potential issues they may have they can discuss with management themselves.

2.5 Trade Union Membership – Current International State

As mentioned above, there has been a stark decline in trade union membership in Ireland (CSO, 2019; Walsh, 2015; Culpepper and Regan, 2014; D'Art and Turner, 2011) but it is worth looking at the trends in union membership on an international scale. D'Art and Turner (2008) note that union density in European countries has declined significantly since the 1980's and attribute this partially to changes across social, political and economic platforms in the decade before that led to the functions previously performed by unions to be somewhat useless in the contemporary workplace.

Older literature highlights perhaps the beginning of the decline in union popularity with Allvin and Sverke (2000) speaking of the Swedish situation at the turn of the

century and stating that traditional labour movement and basic trade union tasks were beginning to deteriorate despite the fact they previously enjoyed a very high rate of union density in comparison to other countries.

Culpepper and Regan (2014) discuss the relationship between the government and unions in Italy as well as in Ireland, stating that unions are now viewed the same as any other standard interest group concluding they no longer pose any threat nor possess the ability to assist the government in solving problems, noting that previously in Italy the unions were always incorporated in any major reform but that is not the case anymore.

Sarkar and Charlwood's (2014) study on call centre workers in India and Britain found there was also a weakening of the unions and this was attributed to both the lack of legal supports and issues surrounding labour commodification. Sticking with the British context, the idea of 'never-membership' has become prominent with the number of people who had never been members of unions rising by over two thirds between the years 1983 and 2001 (Bryson and Gomez, 2005). This 'never-membership' has been attributed to be the main cause of the decline in overall union membership rather than current members just suddenly deciding to leave the unions (Bryson and Gomez, 2005). Tomlinson (2005) also notes in her study on full and part-time female workers that a considerable number of participants felt union representation was irrelevant and preferred to solve matters in house.

In Malaysia, currently, there is also a decline in unionism which is being blamed on employer attitudes in addition to the fact that many young workers in the generation X and Y categories are simply just not joining unions (Nor et al., 2018).

In contrast to all of the above, China, which has a huge working population and is a powerhouse of modern trading, has seen an increase in labour action and collective bargaining which has given way to trade union reform (Wang, 2016). However, overall, the literature indicates there is a considerable sway internationally towards a decline in union popularity and membership.

2.6 Trade Unions in Ireland

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) is the biggest civil society in Ireland, representing over three quarters of a million people through forty-four affiliate

unions, and they strive to achieve a fair society and also aim to play a role in policy formation on relevant topics such as employment law and taxation (ICTU, 2020). The largest union is the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU) with over one hundred and eighty thousand members from both the public and private sector across almost every industry (SIPTU, 2020).

From an Irish perspective trade unions have unofficially been around since the eighteenth century masquerading as local societies that represented craftsmen and then from 1889 to 1907 new, more structured unions were formed that then paved the way for modern trade unions to be used by organised labour in Ireland as a collective voice (ICTU, 2020). As previously noted there has been a stark decline in union membership in Ireland in recent years (CSO, 2019; Walsh, 2015; Culpepper and Regan, 2014; D'Art and Turner, 2011). However, in the past trade unions did have a significant degree of power in Ireland and they played a crucial role in social partnerships (D'Art and Turner, 2011) and had influence over administration and policy making at all levels (D'Art and Turner, 2005). At certain stages the relationship was seen to be very much political and minimising the level of strike action was a particular issue presented to the Irish governments of past (Murphy and Hogan, 2008).

In the Irish context work is split between public and private sector. The public sector typically comprising of companies under government control or involved in public administration and O'Sullivan (2019) notes that within the public sector a collective agreement is present which covers both pay and conditions. The rate of unionisation typically tends to be higher within the public sector and amongst older age groups (O'Sullivan, 2019). O'Sullivan (2017) also notes that unionisation is higher in the public sector, approximately two-thirds of public sector employees are said to be union members while the same could only be said for less than a quarter of private sector workers. And as the private sector employs more than the public sector, there are approximately three hundred thousand public servants in Ireland (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2017), the maths would indicate that overall, there are far fewer non-union members than union members. Union members are also found to be much less likely to leave their employment than non-union members (Walsh, 2015). This is somewhat similar to what Waddington (2006) found in his study of British unions whereby in the public sector many workers stayed in the

union until retirement. This brings into reference the term 'job-for-life' that can be associated with a career in the public service or at least has been in the past, whereby an employee remains in the same job or organisation throughout their entire working career.

In their 2005 paper D'Art and Turner conclude that it is within the private sector where the density decline can be seen most prominently and one reason given for this is that achieving union recognition in the private sector is very difficult. The absence of unions in many private sector organisations has led to employees having to venture down alternative avenues to deal with various issues (O'Sullivan, 2019). Interestingly, this is not exclusive to Ireland as there has been a decline in both manufacturing and public service jobs worldwide with employment shifting to smaller, private organisations where union presence is miniscule (Furaker and Bengtsson, 2013). This illustrates that Ireland appears to be following the same international trends regarding both decreasing union membership as well as industry changes in general.

Millennials

2.7 Various Definitions of Millennials

There is an ever-increasing amount of research and analysis being done on the millennial cohort and therefore millennials, or Generation Y as some literature refers to the group as, has some differing opinions on their years of inclusion. Zaharee et al., (2018) described the millennial cohort as those born between 1980-1994 while Harrison et al., (2017) uses the years 1981 and 1997. Arsenault (2004) allows a wider gap of 1980-2000 which is similar to ThinkBusiness (2016) who describe the grouping as those born in between the 1980's and the beginning of the 2000's. Maxwell and Broadbridge (2017) widen the defining range again to incorporate those born in 1977-2000. For this particular research the author will use the birthing years as described by Harrison et al., (2017) as criteria for inclusion.

2.8 Millennials at Work

According to Kilber, Barclay and Ohmer (2014) millennials have a completely different view of the world than the generations before them. It is expected they are going to be play a crucial role in the development of the economy in both an employee and consumer capacity, have a significant impact within their respective

workplaces and to date, they are the most diverse, educated and technology savvy than any other generation (Bannon et al., 2011). Companies also view millennials as potential leaders and rely on them for new, innovative ideas (Campione, 2014).

The literature emphasises that millennials expect a lot from a job. Bannon et al., (2011) note that millennials prefer a more open and flexible working environment, expect access to technology and for the technology within their working environment to be strong and up to date. They have a preference for turning away from traditional working hours in favour of a stronger work-life balance. Zaharee et al., (2018) also found that flexible work hours and work life balance was key for millennials, as well as development opportunity, decent compensation and reward and meaningful, important work. Their fondness for development and growth opportunities is made clear and Broadbridge, Maxwell and Ogden (2007) found that the preference was for a structured training and development programme. Millennials have also been described as being 'needy' in work, expecting constant feedback which some have attributed to helicopter parenting, however without feedback millennials' may suspect something is wrong (Thompson and Gregory, 2012).

There is also the question of millennial loyalty. They have earned this stereotype as a result of the frequent job changes and job hopping (Thompson and Gregory, 2012). As seen above flexible working and work-life balance appears paramount for millennials and they are willing to perform lateral career moves or exercise job portability in order to make it happen (Campione, 2014). One of the reasons attributed to this lack of loyalty is the fact that millennials' feel as though it is the onus of the company to continuously engage them and provide them with reasons to stay and that they also believe the psychological contract is in most ways, dead (Thompson and Gregory, 2012). Forty per cent of Irish millennials would consider working for the gig economy (Deloitte, 2018) instead of a full-time job, once again highlighting the millennial preference for flexible working, having a certain degree of control or say over their work and the fact they are not overly loyal.

Maxwell and Broadbridge's (2017) study concluded that millennials have three main criteria they expect from employment – progression, enjoyment, and similar to Zaharee et al., (2018), opportunities. Broadbridge et al., (2007) does acknowledge,

however, that millennial workers are aware they will need to be focused and also willing to deviate from their initial career path, indicating that they do not simply expect to be handed everything on a plate.

Kilber et al., (2014) set out seven different tips for managing millennials in the workplace and they are; creating a desirable environment for working, programmes for recognition and reward, change training methods to suit the learning styles of the new workplace generation, encourage collaboration, teamwork and listening, avoid micromanaging, provide them with work that makes a difference or has a purpose and lastly, practice savvy communication. All of these tips tie in to what has been discussed above regarding millennial work ethic and therefore reiterates they are a very unique group of employees.

2.9 The Relationship -Millennials and Trade Unions

As previously discussed trade union membership is decreasing while the number of millennials in the workforce is increasing. As highlighted in the literature, millennials have a lot of expectations when it comes to work and company culture and perhaps some of these expectations are unique to the millennial generation and therefore would not have been expected by the workers before them due to various social, economic and political reasons. Harrison et al., (2017) found millennials strive in providing feedback and change and therefore many organisations have successfully implemented internal advisory councils to discuss any issues, perhaps negating the need for trade unions at all. Additionally, Furaker and Berglund (2003) note that the younger generations are more likely to use an individual strategy and attempt to sort any problems with an employer on their own merit and the rate of unionisation amongst the youth is lower. One benefit of union membership that was discussed is the advantage of having a collective group for bargaining power (Furaker and Bengtsson, 2013). However, this millennial characteristic of individualism may mean that the younger generations may not see this as a benefit or motivator to join. Or perhaps heightened employee voice and managerial training has played a hand in this also.

Allvin and Sverke (2000) found that generation and age played a huge role in employee perceptions of unions, concluding that younger employees do not share the same commitment to union values as their older counterparts and even though many

unions are aware of this fact, they are unsure of what they should do about it. Sarkar and Charlwood (2014) also note the impact age has in union membership and note that in India traditional political unions popular with the older generation have failed to attract younger workers. Similarly, Nor et al., (2018) found in their Malaysian study that unions were of little concern to millennials and therefore they were largely unaware of the existence of any relevant unions they could perhaps join. In the Irish context it was noted that membership typically is higher amongst older age groups (O'Sullivan, 2019) and workers who have chosen to stay in the same career until retirement (Walsh, 2015). Again, perhaps the improvements in employment legislation which mean that employees have a far greater level of protection (Furaker and Bengtsson, 2013) and somewhat restricts the roles of the unions (O'Sullivan et al., 2015) as well as general managerial training improvements that these older generations did not have upon initial entrance to the working world may have an impact on these generational differences in views.

Additionally, unions are unable to offer significant value to members when they have little to no bargaining power with employers (Bryson and Gomez, 2005) and as previously established the private sector is the main employer in Ireland and it is therefore fair to assume a large employer of millennials, and achieving union recognition here is difficult (D'Art and Turner, 2005). Nor et al., (2018) also noted how fear of employer reaction was a factor in millennial union membership as well as millennials believing most union officials were much older and therefore could not understand what the younger generations wanted or needed, once again highlighting the impact that an age gap can make. It was also found that if a young employee chooses not to become a member of a union then there is a low probability of them changing their minds and joining a union as they get older (Toubøl and Jensen, 2014).

2.10 Conclusion

It is evident that union density and popularity is declining both here in Ireland and worldwide (CSO, 2019; Nor et al., 2018; Walsh, 2015; Culpepper and Regan, 2014; Sarkar and Charlwood, 2014; D'Art and Turner, 2011; Tomlinson, 2005; Allvin and Sverke, 2000). There are solid reasonings made for both sides of the argument, there are numerous benefits to membership but there are also increasing reasons why

people may leave or simply choose not to join the unions and as seen above, class, what sector people work in and age can play a role in this.

The literature discussed above indicates that internationally it appears as though younger generations are a lot less tolerant of or interested in unions. Seemingly the younger generation feel as though their interests are somewhat misaligned with that of the perceived older union beliefs as well as millennial's expectations of their employment. It is also acknowledged that millennials have different attitudes towards works than generations before them and that there has been significant progress in both employment legislation and managerial training.

The aim of this research is to study the millennial perception of trade unions from an Irish perspective and see whether it follows the same pattern of younger generation thoughts towards unions.

Chapter 3: Research Question

The research question is '*An Exploratory Study of Millennial's Perceptions of Trade Unions in Ireland*'.

The aim of the research is to gain a more in depth understanding of Irish millennial's perceptions of trade unions and what factors may be affecting their membership or lack of. It will aim to look at both the public and private sector. As evident in the literature review, there has been a decline in union membership internationally (Nor et al., 2018; Culpepper and Regan, 2014; Sarkar and Charlwood, 2014; Tomlinson, 2005; Allvin and Sverke, 2000). The research objective is to add knowledge to the existing literature surrounding generational differences in union membership, specifically focusing on millennials and in the Irish context.

The main research objectives are outlined as follows:

1.<u>Are Irish millennials members of trade unions?</u>
This objective is straightforward and essentially aims to discover firstly whether Irish millennials are members of trade unions or not.

2.<u>What are Irish millennials initial perceptions of trade unions, are they aware of the relevant ones specific to their own careers?</u>
This objective aims to discover what millennials think about trade unions or what attitudes or biases they may have towards them. It will also aim to discover whether millennials are aware of the trade unions operating within that sector and that they are eligible to join.

3.<u>Are there any differences between millennials who work in the public sector versus millennials in the private sector?</u>
This third objective will look at any potential differences between millennials working within the public and private sector.

4.<u>Is there an overall negative or positive perception of unions amongst the millennials?</u>
This objective aims to gauge an overall view of the millennial perception on unions.

5. <u>Are there specific factors influencing their membership, or lack of, and their perceptions of trade unions?</u>

This objective will look at specific factors that may be directly or indirectly affecting millennials' perceptions and membership of trade unions.

It will also look at whether the millennial work ethic has resulted in millennial specific factors influencing the membership levels and perceptions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will detail the methodology approach chosen by the researcher and, with reference to research philosophy, provide justification for why the chosen methodology was selected. It will also discuss the sampling technique, research instrument and the procedure for data collection and analysis while also highlighting any ethical considerations or potential limitations.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) explain research philosophy to be an umbrella term for the development and nature of knowledge and the research philosophy you adopt as a researcher communicates assumptions regarding how you view the world. There are four research philosophies – positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism (Saunders et al., 2009).

The interpretivist research philosophy has been argued as being the most suitable for business and management research, particularly in human resource management (Saunders et al., 2009). An interpretivist believes that reality is unique to each person and how an individual constructs, interprets and experiences the world around them as a result of their personal and unique circumstances and experiences (Quinlan, 2011). It is not concerned with the testing of theory nor replication but rather it focuses on the interpretations participants experiences with the particular phenomenon being studied (Shah and Corley, 2006). Therefore, this research will follow the interpretivism philosophy as it aims to explore individuals' different beliefs and thoughts, or perceptions, on trade unions.

4.3 Methodology

There were two main options the researcher considered for this research, quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative analysis is more fact based and is typically made up of a series of 'what' questions while qualitative analysis is primary concerned with 'why' questions that allow for deeper levels to be reached (Barnham, 2015). Additionally, quantitative data is typically associated with numerical data while qualitative associated with non-numerical data (Saunders et al., 2009). As this research is not concerned with strict numerical date or with hard facts and looked at individual's perception, the researcher chose a qualitative method.

"Qualitative research resembles an archaeological excavation that requires careful and subtle delineation, consideration, exploration, interpretation, and meaning-making" (Kalman, 2019, p.343). It is a lot more flexible and open (Lenger, 2019), measures through words and examines participant's meaning and thoughts (Saunders et al., 2009) and produces information that is both in-depth and illustrative (Queiros, Faria and Almeida, 2017) which is exactly what this research aims to do. A qualitative approach can also enable a researcher to reveal and understand intricate processes and to perhaps discover new relationships and variables (Shah and Corley, 2006), which is relevant here as the researcher aims to discuss the relationship between millennials and trade unions.

A qualitative method does not come without criticisms, however. Lenger (2019) notes how time consuming and potentially cost-intensive, if employing professional interviewers and analysts, it can be as well as highlighting the generalisability of it as a method in the sense that it focuses on representational patterns rather than statements that are universally applicable. Kalman (2019) found in his study of novice researchers that the data analysis in qualitative analysis can be very difficult at times as it is very heavy on time and also involves steps or procedures that novice researchers may not be used to such as coding. However, for the purpose of this research the author believes these criticisms to be only minor and deems it a suitable and appropriate method.

4.4 Research Instrument

Saunders et al., (2009) mention the idea of either a mono method or multiple method of data collection. For this research a mono method approach was chosen. Saunders et al., (2009) list three main ways of conducting exploratory research – searching the literature, conducting interviews or conducting focus groups. The research instrument deemed most suitable and therefore the one used for this research was semi structured interviews.

It has been proven that interviews allow the interviewer to access deeper, more attitude-based data (Stokes and Bergin, 2006) and they are often used as a tool to collect various perspectives on the same topic (Shah and Corley, 2006), which the researcher thought applicable here as the goal is to discover individual's personal perception. Questions included participant's experiences with trade unions, i.e. what

their initial perceptions of unions are, whether they are members of any and what kind of factors have contributed to the membership or lack of (full questions can be seen in Appendix A). As semi-structured interviews were chosen it allowed the interviewer to veer from the set questions in order to gather more detail or information if needed. Previous research into perceptions on trade unions and union membership has been conducted through semi structured interviews as illustrated by Nor et al., (2018) and Tomlinson (2005).

4.5 Sample

When it comes to sample size for qualitative studies Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016) note that *information power,* that is how much relevant information is possessed by a sample will dictate how many participants are needed, is crucial. The intended sample for this study will be eight full-time millennial members of the Irish workforce working in a variety of sectors. As previously stated, the author will use Harrison et al'., (2017) birthing years of 1981 – 1997 as criteria for inclusion.

The approach to sampling for this research is non-probability sampling using the technique of purposive sampling. This occurs when participants are deliberately chosen due to certain qualities they have (Etikan et al., 2016) or recognising that a particular subset of people may have richer insight which therefore makes them more relevant than others to the research process (Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin, 2020). Johnson et al., (2020) note that this sampling technique is particularly suitable for a qualitative research method as the sampling design is done in an effort to find the most appropriate participants. Therefore, the author has chosen the above sample as they believe the chosen sample will provide a valid representation of millennial perceptions.

The intended sample for the research was eight participants. Of the eight potential participants who were contacted six agreed to take part. Therefore, the actual sample ended up as six millennial members of the Irish workforce and they are broken down below. While the three private sector employees who agreed to take part, all happen to work in the financial sector, they work in various roles from customer service to management consultancy. The fact they all work in the one sector is simply a coincidence.

Participant	Industry	Public/Private Sector
Participant 1	Healthcare	Public
Participant 2	Financial	Private
Participant 3	Trade Development	Public
Participant 4	Civil Servant	Public
Participant 5	Financial	Private
Participant 6	Financial	Private

4.6 Pilot Study

A pilot interview was conducted with another millennial member of the Irish workforce, separate from the main sample and this was done before the final draft of interview questions was completed. Pilot studies in qualitative research are very useful and can help identify possible issues in finding participants, allows the researcher to practice and perfect their approach and lead to the modification of questions (Kim, 2011). The primary reason the researcher chose to conduct this pilot study was in an effort to ensure all questions could be clearly understood and interpreted in the way the researcher meant them to be, allowing for the research sub-objectives to be met.

This pilot study illustrated that the questions were easy to understand and also gave the participant a flexibility to expand on answers. The only change that came about from the pilot study was a reorganising of what order the questions should be asked in. Upon completion the researcher also realised it had enabled her to practice her interview skills and technique.

4.7 Data Collection and Analysis

Six interviews were conducted over the last two weeks of May and the first week of June 2020 through online video calling and Zoom was the chosen instrument. In some cases video interviews using the likes of zoom or Skype can collect better data than a standard in person face-to-face interview would as the participant is typically in their own home or a familiar environment which makes them more comfortable while talking and therefore they are likely to speak for longer and develop points

further (Lo Lacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016). Video call interviews are also very time and cost efficient and typically produce the same amount of codes or topics as in-person interviews and are a particularly suitable choice when in-person interviews are not feasible (Krouwel, Jolly and Greenfield, 2019). The latter being very relevant to this study as due to unforeseen circumstances in-person interviews could not be conducted. As mentioned, semi structured interviews were used. The researcher used the set questions as a guide and then probed for more information or if something relevant came up within conversation this was also explored in an effort to gain as in depth an understanding as possible.

The researcher then used a voice recorder to audio record the interviews which were then transcribed. The audio files and the transcribed interviews were saved on an encrypted device to ensure the upmost levels of confidentiality and security.

The author then conducted a thematic analysis of qualitative recordings from the interviews using the six phases outlined by Braun and Clark (2006):
1. *Familiarising One's Self with the Data* – This first phase involves actively reading and re-reading the data and totally immersing yourself in it. It is also advisable to start making notes to be used for coding.

2. *Generating Initial Codes* – The second phase involves creating initial codes from the data and requires giving equal attention to all of the data items. It is advisable to code for as many possible themes as time permits. There are various ways to conduct this phase but for the purpose of this research the researcher chose to write notes beside the data being analysed as they went through it.

3. *Searching for Themes* – Phase three revolves around sorting through and analysing all of the codes made in step two and what themes they may form. This will create main themes and sub themes. It is important not to disregard any codes at this stage and therefore the creation of a miscellaneous theme is acceptable. For this research, the author used tables to organise the codes into potential themes.

4. *Reviewing Themes* – This involves refining the potential themes and may result in merging some themes together, breaking some down further or eliminating some themes that do not have sufficient data behind them. This refinement is done on two levels – the coded extracts (level one) and the entire data set (level two). This phase could also result in a complete rebuilding of potential themes. By the end of phase

four the researcher should have a very clear set of themes that tell the overall story of the data and that fit well together.

5. *Defining and Naming Themes* – Phase five involves the creation of a detailed analysis and breakdown identifying the essence of each theme as well as identifying how the themes relate with one another and any possible sub-themes within a theme. Naming the theme is also crucial as it needs to reiterate exactly what the theme is portraying.

6. *Producing the Report* – The sixth and final phase refers to the communication of the data, accurately relaying the data to the reader in a way that shows both the merit and validity of the analysis. The write-up should be concise, coherent, include vivid examples and make an argument that is relevant to the research question.

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that the advantages of thematic analysis include flexibility, accessible for less experienced researchers, allows for social and psychological interpretations of data as well its ability to highlight both similarities and differences across the data. However, thematic analysis is not without its flaws and it is important to note that its flexibility may lead to a very broad amount of data and that when used outside of an existing framework it has limited interpretative power (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

4.8 Ethical Considerations

As outlined above, the study is exploratory in nature with voluntary participation. The researcher believes that it centres around an in evasive topic such as trade unions and is primarily concerned with an individual's personal perception. Therefore, no ethical issues or risks of harm or distress are anticipated.

The researcher completed and submitted a signed NCI Ethics Form and received no hesitation or issues towards conducting the research. All participants were emailed consent forms (Appendix B) to complete and return prior to the commencement of the study. Additionally, when initially contacting participants inviting them to partake in the study a detailed information sheet (Appendix C) was sent alongside that email with an invitation to ask any questions or seek clarifications in an effort to provide full transparency.

As mentioned in the data collection section, all data collected was handled with the strictest confidence. Any details of an interview which could possibly have revealed a participant's identity or the identity of people they spoke about or made reference to was disguised. All identifiable data was stored securely using a seperate ID code. General data protection regulation was followed at all times.

Chapter Five: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will simply state the findings of the research in relation to the research objectives. The results will then be discussed in detail and in reference to the literature in the 'discussion' chapter following on from this one.

5.2 Findings by Research Objective (RO)

RO 1: Are Irish Millennials Members of Trade Unions?

This objective is one of the straightforward ones. Every single participant said they were not a member of any trade unions. The reasons for which are discussed later. One interesting unexpected finding however was that one participant had previously been a student member of the union.

- *"As a student you can join the union for free so I joined the union as a student only in my internship year ...so it was only when that strike was announced that I joined the trade union… you didn't have to but it was only because the union were striking and eh if you didn't, if you weren't a member of the union, you would have had to go to work... so I thought I better be a member of a union or else I'm going to owe back these hours!" (Participant 1)*

The participant's reasoning for joining was simply to avoid owing back hours and because it was free to do so, they did not re-join when they became fully qualified and would have to pay for membership.

- *"Yeah, so they were emailing me when I qualified saying your student membership will expire on this date, here's the link to join and you know, really bumping it up… and I was like okay, no thanks" (Participant 1)*

RO 2: What are Irish millennials initial perceptions of trade unions, are they aware of the relevant ones specific to their own careers?

The second part of this objective will be discussed first as it is the most straightforward. Of the six participants, four were aware of the relevant unions. All three public sector employees were aware of them while only one private sector

employee was. Interestingly, the private sector employee was only aware of the union through their own individual research.

- *"Like specifically for me any sort of jobs I've had just there's been no sort of, no reference to or no mention of a trade union. I had to actually look up myself what sort of trade union would be relevant to me. Companies don't really make you aware of it" (Participant 5)*

In terms of initial perceptions, two primary themes emerged here; *public sector* and *lack of relevance.* The theme of *public sector* was split further into three separate secondary themes as outlined below.

Theme 1: Public Sector

Five out of the six participants answers to what their initial perceptions of unions had something to do with the public sector, broken down into secondary themes of *industrial action, bureaucracy and rite of passage.*

Secondary theme of bureaucracy.

This emerged in the sense that millennials perceive that the unions are actually creating more work for people and make work more difficult than it needs to be through all of the layers and rigid procedures they enforce. It emerged that the participants associate these procedures and policies with the public sector and trade unions and view it in a negative light. The participants believe that in this sense, the unions are more of a hinderance than a help.

- ***"Right this is probably a bit controversial but I think like fusty public sector people like they don't want to do anything that is outside of the box from what their role states" (Participant 2)***

- *"I'm quite biased on that. Eh, I think it's just, sometimes it adds a lot of bureaucracy and makes things hard" (Participant 3)*

- *"It actually makes the job extremely difficult because the whole time the unions are trying to follow this sequence when it may not actually be the correct way of doing it… It's an extra element of work and stress and pressure" (Participant 4)*

- *"Like, sometime they're (the unions) arguing and bargaining for the sake of it rather than getting stuff done" (Participant 6)*

Secondary theme of industrial action.

Some participants associated the unions with industrial action or pay, and any of them who made reference to this used it in a public sector context or used public sector bodies as examples. This secondary theme did not come about in a negative way, however, and therefore did not necessarily result in the negative perceptions. Anything that was said re industrial action was simply more a stating of facts or a straightforward answer to what came to mind when they thought of the unions.

- *"I suppose pay is the first thing I think of when I think of a trade union. They kind of are supposed to strike, and pay increases" (Participant 1)*

- *"For me specifically a lot of what I hear is just strikes. So ehm teachers particularly, I think Irish Rail, bus drivers. That's a lot of what I hear" (Participant 5)*

- *"I know that they kind of claim that years ago when civil servants took a pay cut that they played a huge part in getting that money back for us" (Participant 4).*

Secondary theme of historical rite of passage

There was also mention of a previous 'rite of passage' like situation in the public service and how in the past people joined automatically and then just never really left the union after that. This ties in with the 'job-for-life' ideology that, in the past, was so heavily associated with the public sector in Ireland and these employees would join the unions upon entrance as it was what everyone did and then simply just not leave.

- *"I feel that in the nursing profession, the older members have always been in the union because at the time unions were all the rage and they're just afraid to not be in them now" (Participant 1)*

- *"And I suppose even like from my regard my dad is in the union… And he was like 'I got into it and I never really looked into how to get out of it, it was just something that I was part of and that was it'" (Participant 4)*

- *"I think in the public sector a trade union is like a rite of passage"*
  (Participant 2)

Theme 2: Lack of Relevance

Probably the more significant of the two themes, many participants felt that the unions are simply irrelevant and offer no real benefit or purpose to them or to any employees in the modern working world. The participants view the unions as unnecessary and put simply, powerless. These are very strong responses on initial perceptions of the unions and reiterates the negative reputation they appear to have amongst the millennials.

- *"I feel like they have no power and they just serve no real purpose in modern day. I mean maybe years ago they would have had more power than they do now"* *(Participant 4)*

- *"There is literally no advantage to joining. Like whether you're a member of the union or not, if the union strikes, you'll get the benefits anyway because they have to go board wide so … , I just think it's an unnecessary payment and I was like why would I bother paying three hundred euro when they're doing absolutely nothing for us"* *(Participant 1)*

- *"I don't really see how they (the unions) would benefit me"* *(Participant 5)*

RO 3: Are there any differences between millennials who work in the public sector versus millennials in the private sector?

An interesting side element of the research was to look at public and private side by side and see if the sectors had any difference regarding membership or perception as historically, the public sector in Ireland was more heavily associated with the unions. Three main themes emerged here - awareness, generational differences and the presence of unions. However, the most interesting finding in terms of these two ties back to the overall research goal in so fact that regardless of sector, millennials are not members of unions.

Theme 1: Awareness

This has previously been discussed in the first research objective regarding millennial's being aware of relevant unions but is still a noteworthy difference and why it is included here again. All of the public sector employees were aware of the

unions while only one private sector employee was and that was as a result of their own research and curiosity.

Theme 2: Generational Differences

All three public sector participants made reference to how the majority of the union members they know are a lot older and they acknowledge that the majority of people their age are also non-union members, suggesting that the unions are predominately made up of older workers. There was no reference to age or anything similar by the private sector workers.

- *"Going by the age group of members at the time that the strike went on, it was a lot of say 40+. And now, a lot of my group now that have just qualified are not members* and *even nurses that are two or three years qualified are not"* (Participant 1)

- *"A lot of the people that are in unions are retiring at the moment. I know a lot of the batch that I would have started with, any of them that I'm actually friendly with none of them joined the union, not one"* (Participant 4)

- *"a lot of members that I know are in trade unions in my company are people that are there for 20/30 years, they're like they're lifers, they're not going to move now"* (Participant 3)

Theme 3: Union Presence

This refers to union presence in the workplace with some public sector participants acknowledging presence of these in the workplace while the private sector workers made no reference whatsoever. This relates to both union materials such as flags and newsletters as well as mentions of meetings or just general chatter about the unions in the office. The private sector participants gave the illusion that the unions simply did not exist.

- *"I remember I seen an email and we have the newsletters in each kitchenette in the office. And some people with flags for whatever the trade union is"* (Participant 3)

- *"Just general conversation, saying things like I'm going to a union meeting or my manager is on the union board so just stuff like that like I know it exists through casual conversation"* (Participant 3)

- *"I've seen the odd person get it (union newsletter)" (Participant 4)*

RO 4: Is there an overall negative or positive perception of unions amongst the millennials?

Again, this is a very straightforward objective and the perceptions are wholly negative as illustrated by the non-membership in RO1 the sub theme of irrelevancy seen in RO 2 on initial perceptions. In addition, some of the themes discussed below in relation to contributing factors also play a role in creating the negative perception as the millennial participants illustrate why they do not feel the unions are relevant for them.

RO 5: Are there specific factors influencing their membership, or lack of, and their perceptions of trade unions?

This objective gathered the most amount of data and it also focused on some traits or factors heavily associated with millennials. Six primary themes emerged with three of them being split further into two secondary themes each.

<u>Theme 1: Word of Mouth</u>

It emerged that the participants had formed their perceptions based on what they had heard about unions from two particular groups – family and colleagues.

Secondary theme of family

Interestingly, two thirds of participants had at least one parent who had experience with unions and everything they had to say was negative and not overly encouraging of union membership. These words had resonated with the participants and heavily shaped a part in their perceptions.

- *"I do think they (my parents) often find them kind of useless as well. Also, bear in mind they have to pay into them so if they don't necessarily agree with them and the decisions, they're making you're paying for something you're not necessarily happy with" (Participant 6)*

- *"my dad is in the union and he was like to me 'do not join the union'" (Participant 4)*

- *"because mam works for a public sector organisation, like people in that organisation are like that (bureaucratic)" (Participant 2)*

Secondary theme of colleagues

What colleagues had to say regards the unions also had an impact on perception. Colleagues are the people you spend your working time with in similar roles and it would be fair to assume they may share some of the same values and if a colleague has a bad experience or something negative to say, it will have an impact. Again, all of this word-of-mouth was negative and all with a focus on how the unions have not done anything of benefit.

- *"I was talking to one of the nurses about it, she paid it because she was a student and continued on when qualified but didn't pay it this year and that she's not going to join it again because she said what have they done for her in the last two years" (Participant 1)*

- *"I don't really know anyone who has good ideas about the unions, all they do is cause a bit of havoc" (Participant 4)*

Both of the above secondary themes also suggest there is perhaps a more negative perception of unions within the workplace as a whole as family members and some colleagues were of a different generation to the participants. However, this would require further research.

Theme 2: Media

The media also played a big factor in shaping people's opinions as well as offering up reasons as to why it is not necessary to join a union as media coverage provides plenty of protection from exploitation. Not only did articles regarding industrial actions and union demands play a role in cultivating a negative perception, but interestingly the media was seen as a protective measure as any wrongdoing by an employer would be portrayed in the media, rendering the union protection somewhat useless.

- *"probably more the media. Probably came in biased, I didn't learn this from working" (Participant 3)*

- *"I think with media, companies aren't going to treat their staff badly. They can't, they just wouldn't. It wouldn't end well for them" (Participant 5)*

<u>Theme 3: Legislation and Rights</u>

Improvements in legislation and the enforcement of such also emerged as a reason for not joining. The participants felt as though they had sufficient protection with Irish employment law and also felt that employees nowadays are more aware of their rights and are not afraid to exercise them, essentially minimising significantly the possibility of exploitation or mistreatment at the hands of an employer, similar to that said above regarding protection the media offers.

- *"I suppose with the legislation and all that's in now for employee rights I mean they just serve no purpose really" (Participant 4)*

- *"I think people are more aware of their rights and what they can and can't ask for" (Participant 5)*

<u>Theme 4: Union Behaviour</u>

Union behaviour also emerged as a strong deterrent as the participants noted that the behaviour they have seen and heard of is of no benefit to them and unsatisfactory for the large part, painting unions in a very negative light. The unions promising or saying they will do certain things and then failing to behave accordingly did not sit well. This theme emerged in the form of two secondary themes, detailed below;

Secondary theme of Communication

Lack of communication from the unions was mentioned by every participant, there was no one enticing them to join. This lack of communication meant that participants are firstly, not aware of the unions, and secondly makes them feel like they are not wanted nor valued by them. Again, this creates a negative association with the unions and something that will not just be forgotten.

- *"obviously the fact that they haven't marketed it towards me. The marketing is probably a big reason as to why I'm not a member" (Participant 5)*

- *"I've never been contacted by the reps" (Participant 3)*

- *"When I first started, I got a sheet of paper that basically said that you could join the union for this amount of money and that was it. And you either signed it or you didn't and that was the end of it… I've actually never met a union rep" (Participant 4)*

Secondary theme of no shows

Union presence, or lack of, left a distaste in some participant's mouths as essentially they were left thinking the unions do not care and do not show up when they are needed, again causing people not to join as they figure 'what's the point?'. Some of the examples given were for things in relation to court dates, which are by no means trivial, so raised the question that if the unions would not turn up for that then what would they show up for.

- *"somebody who ended up in court for some particular reason and the union didn't even come to their court date" (Participant 1)*

- "*the unions never turned up to one single meeting. They did absolutely nothing" (Participant 4).*

Theme 5: Loyalty

One aspect focused on in the literature on millennials is their perceived lack of loyalty to jobs or companies and this came across in some participant's answers regarding why they wouldn't join a union or their perceptions towards them. This was then divided into two secondary themes.

Secondary theme of leaving as a result of unhappiness

Some saw no need for the unions as if they were unhappy or being mistreated, they would simply leave and not fight it. As discussed in the literature benefits of union membership include their fighting for better pay and working conditions, however this theme contradicts this in so far as millennials would rather just leave the job and get a new one instead of fighting.

- "*If my company wasn't treating me well, I would have no problem leaving my job and moving somewhere else. Like I don't feel a huge tie to the company so, if I was unhappy, I would leave." (Participant 6)*

- *"In terms of how they would help you (the unions) it was specific sort of to your relationship with your company which specifically I don't really have any issues with… I mean it could come back and bite me one day but would much rather leave a job than stay there unhappy with a company" (Participant 5)*

- *"I have no ties. Like if something actually did happen in work I would probably just leave. It's this image where the unions are going to help you stay and fight for your job and that kind of stuff. I mean if something happened, I would probably just leave and look for something else"* (Participant 4)

Secondary theme of Growth and Development

It also emerged that some participants had used companies for development oppurtunities and had never intended to stay and therefore never felt the need to establish roots or consider a union. This suggests that non-membership could in fact have nothing to do with the unions at all but rather boils down to the millennial preference of working and seeking oppurtunities. This also illustrates that unions are definitely not a priority for millennials as they are not even considered.

- *"I was given training opportunities so I could do sort of side qualifications which sort of help me land the role where I am now, I wouldn't have gotten it without that qualification"* (Participant 5)

- *"At my age it's like wherever you can get a job, like where can you start. So, I might not necessarily even stay with the organisation, most probably don't"* (Participant 3)

Theme 6: Preference for internal resolution

This emerged in so fact that the participants did not see the need for collective bargaining and instead prefer to take matters into their own hands and make use of in-house facilities if they have an issue. It also brought to light the view on the manager-employee relationship and that the participants value this relationship a lot and would prefer to bring any issues to a manager instead of going around them or using an external force such as the union.

- *"I don't feel that I would need to have a trade union representative if anything went wrong... we have a HR lady on our site and then we also have a workplace relations commissioner like, negotiator"* (Participant 2)

- *"we call our managers team leaders, like I'd have a good relationship with her... if I had an issue, I would be confident that our HR department and manager would deal with it and they wouldn't be biased"* (Participant 2)

- *"I mean at the end of the day you would probably go to either the manager above that or a colleague and ask for advice" (Participant 4)*

- *"We have people advisors so if I have any questions, I can go to them" (Participant 6)*

5.3 Key Findings

As is evident, there was a lot of data gathered throughout this research. The author believes that while it is all relevant the key findings are centred around the fact that none of the participants are union members and the various factors affecting this lack of membership and respective perceptions of unions. It is noteworthy that the Irish millennials do in fact follow their international counterparts in their views towards the unions and reciprocate the pattern of non-membership. These findings will be discussed in detail in relation to the existing literature in the next section.

Table 5.1 – Summary of Themes that Emerged from Analysis

Research Objective	Primary Theme	Secondary Themes
Research Objective 2 – Initial Perceptions	Public Sector	-Bureaucracy -Industrial Action -Rite of passage
	Lack of Relevance	
Research Objective 3 - Are there any differences between of millennials who work in the public sector versus millennials in the private sector?	Awareness	
	Generational Differences	
	Union Presence	
Research Objective 5 - Are there specific factors influencing their membership, or lack of, and their perceptions of trade unions?	Word of Mouth	-Family -Colleagues
	Media	
	Legislation and Rights	
	Union Behaviour	-Communication -No shows
	Loyalty	-Leaving as a result of unhappiness -Growth and Development
	Preference for internal resolution	

Chapter Six: Analysis and Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will involve the discussion and analysis of the findings discussed in Chapter Five and will be done by research objective in relation to the literature. It will once again reiterate the key findings as well as highlighting the limitations of this study.

6.2 Discussion and Analysis of Findings

RO 1: Are Irish Millennials Members of Trade Unions?

All of the participants, regardless of what sector they work in, said they were not members of any unions. This somewhat contradicts what O'Sullivan (2019) and O'Sullivan (2017) say regarding unionisation levels in the public sector however it reiterates what they said regarding union membership being more prominent amongst older members. Probably the most significant result of this finding is that it highlights that Irish millennials are following the international trend of non-union membership as seen in other countries (Nor et al., 2018; Sarkar and Charlwood, 2014; Allvin and Sverke, 2000) and that there is no difference between the level of membership between public and private sector employees. Some of the factors found to attribute to this include the millennial relationship with workplace or job loyalty as well as the use of employment law and the media as protective measures for employees. This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

RO 2: What are Irish millennials initial perceptions of trade unions, are they aware of the relevant ones specific to their own careers?

In terms of awareness the findings of this study follow previous research. It shows that union presence within the private sector is virtually non-existent, the one private sector participant who knew of a relevant union did their own research, reiterating what D'Art and Turner (2005) said regarding the fact that achieving union recognition within private organisations is very difficult. This could also provide some reasoning as to why less than a quarter of private sector workers are union members (O'Sullivan, 2017) as they are simply just not aware of any unions due to sheer lack of presence. Again, the literature indicated that Ireland was not alone in this and again was following international trends ((Furaker and Bengtsson, 2013).

In terms of initial perceptions, both primary themes that emerged were unsurprising. The first theme *public sector* again reiterates the literature on trade unions in Ireland and their typical association with the public sector (O'Sullivan 2019; O'Sullivan, 2017) particularly the secondary theme of *historical rite of passage* and people tending not to leave their employment (Walsh, 2015). In terms of *industrial action* this introduced the idea of the collective bargaining and as O'Sullivan (2019) notes there is a collective agreement within the public sector which covers both pay and conditions which perhaps explains the use of collective bargaining and action such as striking over pay. The last secondary theme, *bureaucracy,* interestingly did not make an appearance in the author's search of the literature regarding unions but came across in the interviews as very negative and could perhaps be tied into the literature on millennials preference for flexible and open working (Zarahee et al., 2018; Bannon et al., 2011) highlighting a disapproval for the perceived rigidness of some union policies and procedures and viewing it as a hinderance.

The second primary theme, *lack of relevance,* is the more significant of the two and ties back to the lack of millennial membership. The participants simply did not see any benefit in joining a union and felt that they offered them nothing. The issue of the fee arose also and it was explained that the amount was unjustified, concurring with Furaker and Bengtsson's (2013) conclusion that costs associated with joining are much higher than the benefits the person believes they could receive as a member. SIPTU, one of the largest unions, charge either a weekly or monthly fee (SIPTU, 2020) and additionally some participants of this study said that union membership could be up to three hundred euro. For someone on minimum wage or on an entry level or graduate salary that is a lot of money to be handing over, especially if they are not seeing any huge benefits to the membership. This also correlates with Sarkar and Charlwood's (2014) study which found that in India unions have failed to attract younger workers with their policies, and Nor et al (2018) who found that unions just were not something millennials were concerned with. Additionally, the notion of power, or rather lack of, was mentioned by participants and once again concurs with the literature, this time with Culpepper and Regan's (2014) diagnosis that unions in Ireland have lost their power.

RO 3: Are there any differences between millennials who work in the public sector versus millennials in the private sector?

As previously discussed regardless of sector Irish millennials are simply not members of trade unions although there is a much higher level of *awareness* amongst the public sector workers. While these are the core takeaways, the other themes are also interesting in their own rights.

The literature did heavily refer to *generational differences* when it comes to union membership with O'Sullivan (2019) noting that in Ireland, membership is higher with older workers and that internationally, younger workers do not value union commitments like older generations do and there is a difference in values (Sarkar and Charlwood, 2014; Allvin and Sverke, 2000). While it was expected that the idea of age would be mentioned it is noteworthy that it came across as a difference between public and private sector, however this could tie in with the level of *awareness.*

This could also be said regarding the third theme, *union presence.* It would make sense that the public sector would note a much higher level of union materials presence or casual references to them given what has already been learnt regarding *awareness* from this research and additionally from the literature regarding dwindling union presence in the private sector in Ireland (O'Sullivan, 2017; Walsh, 2015).

RO 4: Is there an overall negative or positive perception of unions amongst the millennials?

Again, the findings in relation to this, that being the perception was incredibly negative, were wholly unsurprising especially given what has been discussed above involving a combination of fresh findings from this study and the literature regarding the non-membership and the view of *lack of relevance*. This will be added to further in what is said below regarding the factors attributing to the perception.

RO 5: Are there specific factors influencing their membership, or lack of, and their perceptions of trade unions?

This is where the largest amount of data was collected and it is also the partial basis of the key findings of this study. For the purposes of discussion, the primary themes that emerged here have been divided into two groups; ones that reference were made to in the existing literature and ones that little to no reference of were found in the literature.

The themes that emerged from the research and that also had grounding in the literature are *legislation and rights, union behaviour, loyalty* and *preference for internal resolution. Legislation and rights* emerged in the study in the same way in which they emerged in the literature, as tool for protection shifting people away from joining unions and towards exercising their own rights. Employment legislation has improved greatly (Furaker and Bengtsson, 2013) and is now playing a much more dominant role in establishing working conditions and pay somewhat restricting the unions (O'Sullivan et al., 2015) or rendering them 'useless', as were the thoughts of some participants.

Union behaviour also came across as a very strong deterrent for joining as the participants felt that the lack of *communication* and union *no-shows* were very much a case of 'actions speak louder than words' and that the unions actions said it all. Waddington (2006) noted that such dissatisfactory like union behaviour such as lack of contact was a prime reason for people leaving unions and this research adds to this and offers it as a factor as to why people do not join at all and that they do not have to be a member themselves to witness this behaviour and for it to have an effect on them.

Loyalty, or a perceived lack of, is a trait very commonly used when discussing millennials in existing literature and predictably, it emerged as part of this research. The literature heavily indicates that millennials crave progression and opportunities (Zaharee et al, 2018; Maxwell and Broadbridge, 2017) and this shone through in this research also with participants admitting they had never intended to stay with certain companies and never felt the need to establish roots or look at the long term. This suggests that non-membership could in fact have nothing to do with the unions at all but rather boils down to the millennial preference of working and seeking oppurtunities while illustrating that unions are definitely not a priority for millennials as they are not even considered. Another secondary theme was lack of loyalty due to *unhappiness* which ties into Thompson and Gregory's (2012) research on how millennials expect the job to continuously keep them engaged and satisfied and that failure to do so will result in them leaving.

Preference for internal resolution again illustrated the fact that millennials see no need for the collective bargaining, highlighting their individualist attitudes and

reiterating Furaker and Berglund (2003) who note that the younger generations are more likely to use an individual strategy and attempt to sort any problems with an employer on their own merit. This theme also brought into light the role of the manager and how the employer-manager relationship means a lot to millennials, again tying back to the literature and their preference for feedback and internal advisory and resolution (Harrison et al., 2017). These preferences for individual strategies and internal resolution negate the need for the unions and again showcase where the preferences lie.

Unsurprisingly, there were less themes with little to no reference made to them in the literature but there were still two of them nonetheless and they are *word-of-mouth, particularly the secondary theme of family,* and *media.* Interestingly, the *word-of-mouth (family)* was a very popular one amongst the participants and what parents had to say in particular regarding the unions had made a big impact. The author was somewhat surprised at the level of impact it had given the fact it had not emerged in any of the reading. Perhaps a possible reason for this is that it could be down to a country-specific factor but there is not enough evidence to reach a conclusion on this and more research is needed. However, in terms of the *colleagues* there has been some research done on this and the findings of the study concur with Toubøl and Jensen (2014) who found that people are more likely to join a union if their colleagues are members.

Media was also a surprising one as it emerged in a way which was unexpected. The participants viewed the media as similar to the legislation and employee rights in terms of it providing protection and that employers simply cannot get away with things that in the past unions would have fought for on behalf of the employees.

6.3 Key Findings

The key findings of this study are that none of the millennial participants are union members, indicating that Irish millennials do in fact follow their international counterparts in their views towards the unions and reciprocate the pattern of non-membership. The various factors affecting perception and non-membership of unions are word of mouth, media, legislation and rights, union behaviour, loyalty and preference for internal resolution. The findings have also given light to some

practical implications and recommendations for how to address these are in the next chapter.

6.4 Limitations

This study is not without its limitations and these are listed below:

Methodology:

There are general limitations with studies of a qualitative nature such as being time-consuming, its generalisability as a method (Lenger, 2019) and the fact that novice researchers may not be familiar with all the procedures it entails (Kalman, 2019). The latter of which was particularly relevant for this study. The time-consuming element involved in the gathering, transcribing and coding of data also played a part in restricting the number of participants.

Sample Size:

Given the limited time frame and current global pandemic the researcher was only able to gather data from six participants, three from the public sector and three from the private sector. This only represents a very small cohort of the millennial workforce in Ireland. If more time was available a larger scale version of the research could use a larger sample to gather a larger representation of opinions. However, it is worth noting that within this sample group there was a saturation of data.

Biases:

There is a possibility that the researcher's own biases have come across during the interview as well as through the use of purposive sampling. The idea of reflexivity, whereby a researcher's actions throughout the qualitative research process can be influenced by their own preconceptions (Johnson et al., 2020), could also play into this limitation. Additionally, the researcher used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis and therefore was solely responsible for how the data was coded, as there were no other researchers involved, which may have resulted in a bias within the coding. This also meant, however, that some of the problems associated with full subjectivity were avoided.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate Irish millennials' perceptions of trade unions in Ireland and see whether they shared the same views as millennials internationally with the specific title being *"An exploratory study of millennials' perceptions of trade unions in Ireland'*. The study followed a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews being the research instrument of choice and these were conducted through video call. These interviews were then transcribed and themes derived using thematic analysis.

The key findings from the study are the fact that Irish millennials, regardless of sector, are not members of any trade unions and have an overwhelmingly negative view towards them, reiterating with what existing literature has said regarding this relationship (Nor et al., 2018; Sarkar and Charlwood, 2014; Allvin and Sverke, 2000). The various factors affecting this negative perception and non-membership are also fundamental findings. So why exactly is there such a lack of interest from Irish millennials when it comes to the unions? This research, along with the existing literature, indicate that improved employment legislation, increased awareness of employee rights and a media savvy workforce ready to publish any scandal make exploitation of employees next to impossible and negate the need for union's fighting for better pay and conditions. The millennial specific factors of loyalty and preference for internal resolution highlight millennial work preference and what the unions currently seem to offer just simply do not appear to match or appeal to these preferences. On top of all of that add dissatisfactory union behaviour and word-of-mouth negative communication from people millennials respect and it is clear to see exactly where these perceptions and lack of membership are coming from.

The findings of the study correlate and agree with the existing literature on the topic and there were no findings that seemed to defy or seriously contradict what had already been researched or discovered. The research adds to the current literature regarding millennials and trade unions as it comes from the Irish perspective and highlights that Irish millennials are indeed following the international trends seen in union membership. It also introduces three possible future research areas which are identified below.

7.2 Recommendations

Outlined below are recommendations for future research based off of the findings. Additionally, the author has derived a list of practical recommendations based off the literature and findings from this study.

Research Recommendations

Based off the findings, the author has two main recommendations for further research.

1. Whole Organisation View of Unions

It emerged from the research that word-of-mouth played a role in millennial perception and level of membership and that was coming from both family members and colleagues. The family members were all parents or adults and therefore not millennials and they had many negative things to say about the unions, which somewhat contradicts what the literature had said regarding generational differences regarding unions. It would be interesting, therefore, to look at perceptions and views of unions from whole organisations and see whether this was perhaps a coincidental finding or if older workers perhaps do have negative views of the unions.

2.The Role of Media and Legislation

It also emerged from the findings that the media reporting of any wrongdoings by companies, improvements in employee rights and increased awareness of these rights had both contributed to a heightened sense of protection being felt by the participants. This sense of protection had therefore somewhat negated the need for the unions. Again, this could have been a coincidental finding and therefore the author would suggest research solely dedicated to the relationship between perceived levels of protection from media and employment legislation and views on the unions from an Irish perspective.

3. Role of Word-of-Mouth

It emerged from the research that a huge factor affecting perception and membership level was from word-of-mouth from colleagues, but primarily from family. Interestingly, this had not appeared in any of the literature and therefore the author proposes more research be done on the effect of word-of-mouth on union membership and perhaps determine if it could be down to country-specific factors.

Practical Recommendations

The author has also derived three practical recommendations for trade unions to consider based off of the literature and findings.

1. Communication

All participants mentioned a lack of communication from the unions and this is something that should be improved upon in an effort to increase awareness, show the millennials that they are valued and enable the unions to market themselves as worthy of joining. It is recommended this is done through union involvement in onboarding where possible, sending out of newsletters and leaflets and just general promotional material as well as following up with people who were unsure of joining.

Implications: This will require use of more resources as it is essentially focused on relationship building. It is more long-term focused and will require regular check ins and communication as the aim is to show the millennials that they are important to the unions. Additionally, printing of extra leaflets and newsletter and spending time and money on the presentation will require increased funding in those areas.

2. Presence in Private Sector

It is recommended that the unions drastically work on their presence in the private sector. There are private sector and mixed sector unions out there but the awareness amongst private sector employees just is not there. The unions should reach out to their existing members private sector members and encourage them to spread the word. They should also create a new business development role specifically for the private sector.

Implications: Again, this is a long-term focused recommendation but unions should look at ideally having this new role created and in place within three months. The cost required is substantial due to the funding of the new role and the money spent on development within the sector. However, this should be viewed as a positive investment in a unions' future.

3. Make Themselves More Appealing

The research has clearly indicated that millennials just simply are not members of unions. Recommendations one and two above will only go a certain way but what the unions should really focus on are making themselves appealing to join and

offering advantages and benefits for doing so. As is evident from the research fighting for work and conditions simply is not enough in modern society, not with the improvements in employment legislation. If the unions are to remain, they need to either drastically reduce their fees or focus on other areas such as helping members improve their employability, which would appeal to the millennial craving for progression and development through perhaps offering professional development courses or skills labs. They should also consider trying to eliminate some of the red tape procedures and look at a more collaborative relationship with employers in an effort to give themselves a more positive reputation.

Implications: Reducing fees or else maintaining fees and investing in providing courses will result in a greater expenditure initially but could lead to more members over time. This would be a long-term investment but one that should be started right way if the unions want to stay relevant with modern workers.

Personal Learning Statement – CIPD Requirement

Deciding to return to education after a year of working was daunting but seemed like the right thing to do and the best time for it. Personally, I found the block teaching format suited me very well as while the three-week module periods were intense, they allowed for total immersion and focus on one area at a time. My undergraduate degree was a very large course so going to a smaller, more intimate learning environment took some getting used to but it also allowed for much more student engagement, participation and discussion and meant we could learn from each other and not just from our lecturer.

Perhaps the part I was most anxious about was the dissertation as I did not have to complete one for my undergraduate, meaning the whole process was new to me and felt somewhat overwhelming. These feelings of uncertainty were magnified as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic with everything being switched to remote working and learning and the fact that who we had access to in order to gather data was now greatly limited. Luckily, my participants were more than happy to speak over video call.

I feel this whole process of writing the dissertation, along with the effects of Covid-19, have taught me the importance of self-motivation and drive and that sometimes things don't happen as expected but that you can't let that stop you and that there is always another way. I think I allowed myself adequate time to get everything done but if I was to do this research again, I would perhaps try and do it on a larger scale and get a bigger sample and also to start reading relevant articles as soon as my proposal was accepted. It has also taught me that making a plan at the start and sticking to it goes a long way in keeping everything on track.

Completing the MA in Human Resource Management is one of my biggest personal achievements to date has enabled me to learn new skills that I will take with me into the professional world.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Semi-structured Interview Questions

Q1. What industry and sector do you work in?

Q2. How long have you been working in this sector?

Q3. Are there certain things you expect from your job or that you expect from your employer to provide?

Q4. Do you feel as though employees nowadays have a significant degree of bargaining power in the employer/employee relationship?

Q5. What comes into your head when you first hear the term trade union?

Q6. Are you aware of any unions you could join relevant to the industry/sector you work in?

Q7. Are you a member of any trade unions?

Q8. If yes, at what stage of your career did you join?

Q9. What factors have influenced your membership/non-membership?

Q10. Can you see yourself potentially staying in, or joining a union in the future?

Q11. Do you think the sector you work in has certain opinions or affiliations with trade unions? If so, what are your thoughts on these?

And is there anything else you would like to say just on the sector you work in or any other thoughts on trade unions?

Appendix B – Consent Form

An Exploratory Study of Millennials' Perceptions of Trade Unions in Ireland

Consent to take part in research

☐ I……………………………………… voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

☐ I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

☐ I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

☐ I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

☐ I understand that participation involves taking part in a semi-structured interview answering questions based on my perceptions of trade unions.

☐ I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

☐ I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

☐ I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

☐ I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

☐ I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the researcher's dissertation.

☐ I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

☐ I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in an encrypted file on the researcher's password protected laptop that can be accessed by the researcher and their supervisor if needed, until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation.

☐ I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board.

☐ I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

☐ I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Contact Details

Aoife Davin (researcher)
Email:
Phone:

Signature of research participant

--------------------------------------- ---------------

Signature of participant   Date

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

--- ---------------------

Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix C – Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet

An Exploratory Study of Millennials' Perceptions of Trade Unions in Ireland

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT

My name is Aoife Davin and am currently studying a Masters in Human Resource Management in National College of Ireland. This research study is for my dissertation and upon completion will hopefully result in me being awarded my Masters.
The aim of this study is to gain an insight into millennials' perceptions of trade unions within the Irish context.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

Taking part will involve partaking in an audio recorded interview/video interview of approximately one hour in duration in a location that has yet to be confirmed but will be quiet and convenient for you, the participant.
The questions will revolve around your relationship with trade unions i.e. are you a member of one, are you aware of any trade unions you could join in your line of work and what sort of factors (work, family, personal views etc.) have impacted on your membership, or lack of, and general views of unions.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

You have been invited to take part as you were born between the selected years for inclusion and the researcher believes you have a valid insight on the topic (purposive sampling).

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate you are perfectly entitled to refuse to answer any question during the interview and may withdraw at any time without any consequence.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

As the nature of this research is exploratory there is no perceived risks associated with the study and the benefit is that you would be assisting in shedding more light on millennial views on trade unions as well as helping someone hopefully obtain their Masters degree.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

All identifiable data will be stored securely. Anything said or anyone mentioned by the participant that may give away their identity will be disguised or given any alternative name.

Please note that confidentiality may be broken if the researcher has a strong belief that there is a serious risk of harm or danger to either the participant or another individual (e.g. physical, emotional or sexual abuse, concerns for child protection, rape, self-harm, suicidal intent or criminal activity) or if a serious crime has been committed

Please also be aware that non-anonymised data in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings will be collected and retained as part of the research process.

 HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in an encrypted file on the researcher's password protected laptop that can be accessed by the researcher and their supervisor if needed, until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legalisation, you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

 WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The intention for this research is simply for it to be submitted as part of my dissertation. Submission date is 19th August 2020, however should that change you will be notified as and when your information or quotes are to be submitted with the project.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

Aoife Davin (researcher)
Email:
Phone:

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.