Employees' Conceptions about the Organizational Arrangements Management Can Provide Them with to Achieve Their Involvement in a Media Organization

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Abstract: This is an inductive study of change in a media organization to understand how employees think about the way management can achieve their involvement, highlighting the importance of the recruitment process, employee creation, innovation and confidence that their involvement is true and valid.

Key words: employee involvement; employee support and motivation; empowerment practices; open door communication

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1. Introduction

According to Aristotle it is because we are a political-animal kind of being that the opportunity for exercising a natural capacity for practicing democracy, defined in a minimal sense as "association in public decision", is for us a good-in-itself that is both inherently happiness-producing and necessary to our full happiness (Ober, 2007). Thus, association in decision ought to be promoted and in a form that is as robust as is practically feasible, because it is a happiness-producing exercise of natural capacities that are necessary for true and complete human happiness and thereby constitutive of the human kind of being (Ober, 2007).

Some 2,500 years ago, the city state of ancient Athens rose to unprecedented political and economic power by giving its citizens a direct voice and an active role in civic governance, bringing individual initiative and common cause in harmony. The Athenian democracy encompassed participatory structures for making decisions, resolving disputes, and managing activities; a set of communal values that defined people's relationships with one another, and an array of practices of engagement that ensured the broad participation of the entire citizenry (Manville & Ober, 2003).

In this Athenian form of democracy, participatory democracy, the demos was composed of a socially diverse body of individuals, each capable of choosing freely in his own interests and its members were not unified in their desires by an "all the way down" ideology. Many of them required some sort of subsidy if they were to participate on an equal basis (Ober, 2008). This meant that a well-structured participatory democracy needed to educate citizens in cooperation, encourage their prudence by making the advantages of collective action self evident, and

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have institutions offering appropriate incentives and sanctions (Ober, 2007).

This did not mean that appropriate institutions would emerge without effort. Indeed, it pointed out to the need for more work on the design of optimally effective participatory institutions (Ober, 2007).

2. Problem Statement—Research Objectives

Based on the above, the idea of moving towards a more democratic structure in an organization requires a genuine organizational and managerial change. Despite long-standing recognition on the importance of gaining employee involvement for implementing change successfully, we know little about how employees think about the way management can work to gain employee involvement. The purpose of this research is to eliminate this lacuna.

From a theoretical perspective, there has been a great deal of literature on the importance of gaining employee involvement in order to implement change. Academics have looked at organizational arrangements provided by management when aiming to achieve and manage an organizational change and as a result provide employees with more influence. These theories suggest that management needs to gain the support of both employees and managers (Delaney & Sockell, 1990), use empowerment practices (Conger & Kanungo, 1988), motivate employees, and finally ensure that any problems likely to arise are solved without delay (McHugh, 1997).

Even though these theoretical views are helpful, outstanding issues remain. Although there is a great deal of literature about the importance of gaining employee involvement in order to implement change, the existing theoretical views have not dealt adequately with how the employees think about the way management can work to achieve employee involvement. Also, there is little empirically grounded theoretical account of how employees think about how management can operationalize employee involvement.

3. Research Question

What are the employees' conceptions about the organizational arrangements management can provide them with to achieve their involvement?

4. Literature Review

Various experiments and empirical studies have suggested that increased worker involvement in decision making increases organizational effectiveness, while positively affecting satisfaction, trust, participation and other work related attitudes (Vroom, 1959; Porter & Lawler, 1968; Argyris, 1973; Hrebiniak, 1974; Morgan & Zeffane, 2003; Lewis, Schmisseur, Stephen & Weir, 2006; George, 2007; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Focusing on the case when tasks are non-repetitive several authors stressed that involvement in the decision making process has a positive effect on job satisfaction and performance regardless of the subordinate's predisposition towards independence or autonomy (French, Israel & As 1958; Maurer, 1967; Abdel-Halim & Rowland, 1976; Ahmed Abdel Halim, 1983; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004; Lewis et al., 2006; Detert & Burris, 2007; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008).

Prior research also offers a general perspective into the concept of employee involvement, highlighting group support and acceptance.

Vroom and Yetton's famous participation model (Vroom, 1973) suggests how much decision-making power managers should share with subordinates under certain conditions, noting that one of the major factors influencing this

decision should be the acceptance and commitment on the part of subordinates to execute the decision effectively.

The leader-member (manager-employee) relationship also affects the manager's, his group's, and the organization's performance according to Fiedler's contingency model (Fiedler, 1972) because group support, trust, respect and acceptance by subordinates affect the favorableness of the situation a manager has to face.

Kerr (2004) noted that the benefits of involvement will be greater where the work requires more innovative and creative input from employees. One way to achieve this, according to (Elsbach & Kramer, 2003), is for management to identify creative people based on several characteristics they possess. Management can also support open, collaborative, participative management processes, leading towards respect and trust in individual and nurturance of talent and creativity (Kerr, 2004; Shalley, Zhou & Oldham, 2004)

Several authors also considered the organizational climate and structure that would encourage employee involvement and as a result the emergence of creativity. They noted that the organization should focus on the idea generation function, open communication, a reward system of intrinsic character via self-selection of tasks, broadly defined constraints, increased freedom of work scheduling and autonomy concerning work methods and enhanced opportunities for professional growth (Cummings, 1965; Morgan & Zeffane, 2003; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004; Alge, Ballinger, Tangirala & Oakely, 2006; Lewis et al., 2006; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Previous researchers have looked at specific organizational arrangements provided by management when aiming to achieve and manage an organizational change, and have come up with several notions relating to the provision of influence to employees.

In the management literature is appears that management aims to gain the support of both employees and managers (Delaney & Sockell, 1990; Cobb, Folger, & Wooten 1995; Tesluk, Vance, & Mathieu 1999; Morgan & Zeffane, 2003), uses empowerment practices towards employees either by regularly expressing confidence in them (Bandura, 1986; Conger, 1986; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Detert & Burris, 2007) and/or via the provision of employee development (Strauss, 1977; Block, 1987; Rusaw, 2000; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008) and operational freedom (Nord, Rosenblatt, & Rogers, 1993; Tierney, 1999; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), ensures employees are motivated via the use of several motivational methods (Black & Margulies, 1989; Schwochau & Delaney, 1997; Neubert & Cady, 2001; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004) and that any problems likely to arise are solved without delay (Gill, 1996; McHugh, 1997; Clayton & Gregory, 2000; Lewis et al., 2006)

So, what do employees think about the way management can gain employee involvement? This question suggests that extant views need to be linked to employee involvement. This observation coupled with the limited research on employee involvement led to the inductive research described in this research.

5. Research Methods

The study used a multiple case design that allowed a replication logic, where a series of cases (interviews) is treated as a series of experiments, each case serving to confirm or disconfirm the inferences drawn from the others (Yin, 2003). The study also employed an embedded design, that is multiple levels of analysis, focusing at 2 levels: (1) employees (2) provision of organizational arrangements. Although an embedded design is complex, it permits induction of rich and reliable models (Yin, 2003).

The setting is a US online media organization whose mission is to help create and empower an artistic middle class through the use of innovative technology, ensuring that any band from any genre anywhere in the world can find and connect with any type of music promoter, licensor or broadcaster—easily, effectively, and quickly. Due to

the internet, this business has made it possible for just about any entrepreneurial artist to meaningfully connect with an audience and build a music career without the traditional backing of a major recording label.

6. Data Collection

To obtain multiple perspectives, 19 in-depth interviews were conducted over a period of six months with the founder/owner, and six employees of the organization from different areas. There were three data sources: (1) initial interview with the founder/owner of the organization (2) semi-structured interviews with the six employees (3) secondary sources.

Founder/Owner. An entry interview, using a semi-structured format was conducted with the founder of the organization who gave some general information about the organization and its mission, and more specifically its aim to achieve employee innovation and creativeness via employee involvement and contributions towards organizational decisions and operations.

Six Employee Interviews. After the initial interview with the founder of the firm, semi-structured interviews with the six employees were conducted. Initial interviews involved questions about the organization and the decision making process. The second and third set of interviews became more structured and questions during these interviews involved specific organizational arrangements provided by management including several issues on creativeness and innovation. 14 were discussed in total (Appendix). Following an approach to inductive research, these questions were supplemented with ones that seemed fruitful to pursue during the interview. The interviews were all taped.

Immediately after, the interview facts and impressions were cross-checked. Several rules were followed. The "24-hour rule" required that detailed interview notes be completed within one day of the interview. A second rule was to include all data, regardless of their apparent importance at the time of the interview.

The combination of multiple informants, "courtroom questioning" that focused on factual accounts of what informants did or observed others doing (Huber & Power, 1985) helped to avoid informant speculation, a tandem interviewing addressed some previous criticisms of research relying on employees' recollections (Schwenk, 1985).

Secondary source and other data. Internal documents were examined as available.

7. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed as follows. The qualitative responses of each employee interviewed were first compared. There was some agreement among respondents around the critical issues of the organizational arrangements necessary for employees to be enabled and encouraged to get involved in the decision making process. The few, conflicting responses were preserved in the stories.

The search for propositions was assisted by combining the descriptions each employee had given and listing similarities and differences. From these lists and comparisons, tentative propositions were induced. After the development of these tentative propositions, each case (interview) was revisited to improve the understanding of the underlying dynamics. After many interactions between data and propositions existing literature was used to sharpen the insights yielded by the inductive process.

Once preliminary analyses had been developed from the respective data sets, the analyses and induced propositions were combined using methods for building theory from case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). What emerged were propositions linking organizational arrangements with employee involvement.

8. Contribution

8.1 Employee Support

First, the current study has insights relating to the issue of management gaining the support of employees in order to achieve their involvement. In this study the employees' opinion is that management must aim to gain employee support in relation to their involvement and subsequent contributions during the recruitment process. The employees interviewed believed that "management can do so by communicating to new employees the need to both create and innovate, leading to higher profits, and as a result find ways to generate extra value".

The employees added that management must also aim to gain employee understanding and subsequent support by explaining to new employees the reasons why their decisions are expected to follow the organization's formalized path (procedures) in order to be approved by management.

The employees stressed that "we are not fully entrusted to make decisions for major issues which will not follow the general organizational path (pay promoters' procedure). If we do our ideas and suggestions are not heard or even worse we are left out of the decision making process". According to the employees "when we make decisions that fall outside the formal organizational procedures management will ask why the decision was made and talk about it as a first warning".

The employees considered however that "this top-down approach with many priorities and requests from top level may sometimes have negative results, leading to lack of both execution on other projects and analysis of decisions that have been made, affecting negatively team morale and encouragement".

Proposition One: The employees' opinion is that management can encourage employees to get involved in the decision making process by gaining their support during the recruitment process

8.2 Empowerment Practices

8.2.1 Expressions of Confidence

The employees interviewed suggested that "there are cases when management expresses confidence but there are times when guidance turns into telling us what to do, right down to a detail like what an email should say, which makes us question management's confidence in us".

Consequently, it is the employees' view that management should aim to encourage and as a result gain their involvement via the way they are evaluated, and more specifically by tying their performance and compensation to revenues and profits generated as a result of creativity and innovation, and that this should also be communicated clearly during the recruitment process.

What managers should not do, according to the employees, is "to confuse us by not being happy when we try to innovate and as a result lose track of our individual jobs and criticize us for not trying enough new stuff when we try to focus on the task on hand".

8.2.2 Employee Development

In addition, the employees expressed their views relating to the importance of their development via training. The employees noted that "the business offers training focusing on the organization's mission, objectives, goals and operations, gives us the opportunity to attend related conferences and provides us with related books and training materials". In the past, according to some employees, management used to offer external training as well. However, the organization does not offer any specific training on how to be creative and innovative, something employees consider important.

Management aims to achieve creativeness and innovation on-the-job by giving employees tasks to solve and

coaching them along the way. In addition, management verbally expects and gives employees freedom to execute certain tasks and employees are asked to do so creatively, given guidance with the ideas they have and being challenged on these ideas. Employees are therefore encouraged to come up with solutions on their own and try things, not just asking for answers.

The employees interviewed also added that "training is essential to develop our skills and knowledge but initiative only goes as far as the priorities of the company let people take it. Conversations from a company strategy/management perspective for example are handled by leadership exclusively".

What is important to note is that employees believe that having to innovate and create and thus accomplish something new is what keeps them going. If they did not have the opportunity to use their talents they would leave their jobs. More specifically, several expressed the view that "media makes a meaningful impact on both our individual life and on a greater societal level and we thus work to improve other's lives. As a result we enjoy coming up with new ideas and executing them, because it enables us to live a life from a socially responsible perspective".

8.2.3 Operational Freedom

Employees also considered the idea of job autonomy and operational freedom. According to the employees interviewed, "management gives us the opportunity to provide value how and where we feel we are most impactful, as long as we remain focused on the company mission, objectives and strategies, and provides us with authority when it relates to our department and its objectives".

Personal schedules are generally flexible, making employees feel more accountable. However, there are cases when success and reaching preset goals feels out of their hands and thus they do not get a sense of accomplishment and accountability. In addition, there are cases where initiatives for improving their work are not treated like a priority by management and even cases where a decision or a process employees made a million times comes into question by management, making them feel like they are not trusted.

Consequently, according to the employees, "there is operational freedom and authority provided it lies within the predetermined organizational path". This can explain the employees' opinion that when they look to build something new they can make a contribution by throwing out a lot of ideas which will be trimmed down via a fairly structured process that will satisfy management if it is practical, sellable and creative.

Proposition Two: The employees' opinion is that management can encourage employees to get involved in the decision making process via the use of both evaluation and empowerment practices (expressions of confidence, training, job autonomy) that are directly related to employee innovation and creativeness.

8.3 Employee Motivation

The employees also expressed their thoughts on the way management can motivate them and thus encourage them to get involved. According to the employees "management motivates us to be creative in our involvement and contributions towards organizational decisions and operations by checking return on investment on pre-set goals for team members that require both innovation and creativity, therefore expecting the decisions to line-up with the organizational and departmental goals.

In addition, employees receive the final management decision made together with feedback on how management has come to that decision which is reflected in the final result.

Most employees however expressed the view that "in order to motivate us to innovate and create management needs to use both monetary and non-monetary methods. Personal development, growth potential, a prize for the best idea, being called out in a meeting, added accountability and recognition are all non-monetary methods that would motivate us to get involved".

In terms of monetary motivation the employees added that "management first shows us the profit from our creation and innovation and explains to us how our innovation achieved the specific profit, which is also educational for us. Management then ties salary increases to profits from innovation, offers stock options, revenue-based goals and quarterly bonuses where achieving goals is tied to innovation".

It is the employees' opinion that as a result they feel motivated and encouraged to innovate and create new products that can achieve their department's revenue goals. Showing and explaining these tangible results to employees helps them understand the importance of creation and innovation, gives a real indicator of what innovations paid off and why, and enables employees to do more of the things that were successful.

The employees finally pointed out that some of them are self-motivated and their incentive comes from knowing they are making someone's life better and working towards a cause.

Proposition Three: The employees' opinion is that management can motivate employees to get involved in the decision making process using both monetary and non monetary methods.

8.4 Trust and Open Door Communication

Finally, the study has insights on the process behind the implementation of employee involvement. The employees interviewed considered that "what is important in relation to the process behind our involvement is the employee-manager relationship because it always affects the manager's willingness to include us in the decision-making process". The employees explained that "an employee must be trusted for a manager to include in a meaningful way. Managers who trust their employees are also affected when they prioritize employee thoughts and ideas. It takes a good deal of pro-activity, innovation and proving yourself to be in a position where your feedback is heard".

Another major issue mentioned is that of management encouraging open-door communication, collaboration and team work. According to the employees "an open-door environment that fosters this kind of initiative results on the employees' willingness to try and contribute. In addition, open-door communication leads to no major inter-office politicking or backbiting which also encourages employees to get involved". Some employees stressed however that although an open-door environment is important for management to achieve it is usually hard to get time from the managers to collaborate on everything.

The employees explained the importance of this initiative by expressing the view that "it has been tough to get the lines open. When we feel things are moving forward we definitely want to be involved. However, when we are told that things are moving forward but do not see much movement, or when we are told to sit tight on things that need movement its disheartening. Also when we feel we are communicating, collaborating and working together but are not able to get the priority from the rest of the company its also disheartening".

Finally, the employees noted that "this kind of approach helps individuals who are new or not necessarily visible to leadership to be engaged immediately, gives them an opportunity to prove themselves and gain visibility and puts them in a great position to be heard and included in decision making".

Proposition Four: The employees' opinion is that management can encourage and enable employees to get involved in the decision making process by creating an environment of trust and open-door communication

9. Limitations

It is important to recognize some limitations of this study. In interpreting these results, it must be recognized that the study dealt with one particular type of change in one setting and enclosed included only a few managers.

Thus while the finding suggest the need for future research, they must be interpreted cautiously.

10. Conclusions

Based on the employees' thoughts, this study contributes into a richer theory on the process behind the implementation of employee involvement.

10.1 Recruitment Method

Several of the propositions focus on how the recruitment method can be used by management aiming to achieve employee involvement.

Management aims to gain the support of employees (Proposition One) and the recruitment process can assist management in this effort. More specifically, management needs to explain to employees that they are expected to create and innovate according to the organizational path, leading towards an increase in the organization's profits. The recruitment method can also assist management when aiming to empower employees (Proposition Two). Employees must be encouraged to innovate and create, evaluated accordingly, and the method of evaluation should be clearly communicated to them during the recruitment process. Finally, management needs to ensure that employees are motivated to get involved and contribute (Proposition Three). Due to the fact that there are several employees who are self-motivated, and their incentives come from knowing that they make peoples' lives better by working towards a cause, management should aim to identify and thus recruit those self-motivated to get involved and contribute new employees. In this view interesting research questions could center on how management can identify and thus recruit self-motivated employees.

The emergent perspective thus considers the recruitment method used by the management of a media organization crucial in achieving employee involvement and contributions towards organizational decisions and operations. Others (French, Israel & Aas 1958; Vroom, 1959; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004; Detert & Burris, 2007) have argued that recruitment can help identify suitable candidates for an organization. The view here, in agreement with (Elsbach & Kramer, 2003), is that the recruitment process can also help management to both identify new recruits motivated to get involved and contribute and encourage them to create and innovate according to the organization's needs.

10.2 Employee Creation and Innovation

Second, several of the propositions describe how management aiming to achieve employee involvement needs also focus on employee creativeness and innovation.

The management's effort to promote employee creativeness and innovation can be assisted by the provision of empowerment practices like employee training (Proposition Two) which should specifically and directly relate to different ways employees can become creative and innovative in line with the company's mission, objectives, goals and operations. In addition, management can train employees on the job via coaching, challenging and encouragement, and not constrain them based on specific pre-determined organizational priorities. Management can also motivate employees to get involved and contribute (Proposition Three) by using several motivational methods aiming to promote employee creativeness and innovation. Management can check return on investment on pre-set goals for team members required to create and innovate and also offer opportunities for their development and growth by tying promotions, stock options and bonuses to profits resulting from their creativeness and innovation.

This emergent view thus emphasizes the importance of motivating employees to get involved and contribute

(Black & Margulies, 1989; Schwochau & Delaney, 1997; Neubert & Cady, 2001; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

The results of this research suggest that this view is limited when dealing with a media organization because in order to get involved and contribute media employees should first be able to create and innovate. This should thus be the initial aim of management.

10.3 Employee Involvement True and Valid

Several propositions also highlight the importance of demonstrating to employees that their involvement is true and valid.

One way of doing so is via the provision of empowerment practices like expressions of confidence, training, evaluation and job autonomy (Proposition Two). However, expressions of confidence should not turn into telling them what to do in detail because this lack of confidence will have a negative effect. Also, management must allow employees to set their own goals and treat their initiatives as priorities, rather than trim them down via a pre-determined management process.

Another way of showing employees that their involvement is true and valid is via the use of several motivational methods (Proposition Three). Management should communicate the final management decisions to employees and give them feedback on how they are made. In addition, management needs to show employees the profit from their creation/involvement, explain how it was achieved, and as a result indicate clearly the effect of their involvement.

A final way is via the creation of an environment of trust and open-door communication (Proposition Four). More specifically, management should promote open-door communication leading towards the involvement in the decision making process of all employees and not only those that have achieved the management's trust, ensure communication only relates to their involvement and not inter-office politics, and finally demonstrate to employees that their initiatives are given priority and any resulting concerns are solved without delay.

This emergent view thus highlights the importance of management commitment towards the process of employee involvement. The articles (Argyris, 1973; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Morgan & Zeffane, 2003; Lewis et al., 2006) indicate that employee confidence and trust are key factors affecting employee involvement in organizational decisions and operations. Similarly, this study suggests that to encourage and enable employees, management needs to both ensure and demonstrate to them that the process of employee involvement is true and valid.

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Appendix

List of matters discussed during the interviews

Description of the organization

(1) Operations

(2) Decision making process

Arrangement provided by management to encourage and enable you to get involved in the decision making process

(3) Expressions of confidence

(4) Training

(5) Operational freedom and job autonomy

(6) Job authority

(7) Communication and explanation of final management decisions made

(8) Effects of employee-manager and employee-employee relationships in your team/department

(9) Open-door communication, collaboration, team work

Creativeness and Innovation

(10) Expecting decisions to lead to innovation and creativeness

(11) Creativeness in media. Responding to social needs.

(12) Incentives to innovate and to create

(13) Showing profits from your creation and innovation and explain how and what you achieved in terms of profits

(14) Prefer to work in media because you want to create and innovate