The Effects of Information to Gain Employee Involvement and Achieve Organizational Convergence in a Media Setting

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1   Introduction and Problem Discussion

The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of how the way managers seeking to achieve organizational convergence think about gaining employee involvement by closing a gap in the current literature. Specifically, we believe that scholars have failed to adequately study how managers view employee involvement. This lacuna is noteworthy given an apparent consensus about the value of employee involvement to successfully achieve organizational convergence.

There is consensus among academics that to achieve organizational convergence via employee involvement successfully, managers often need to gain the support of employees (Cobb, Folger, & Wooten, 1995; Delaney & Sockell, 1990; Morgan & Zeffane, 2003; Tesluk, Vance, & Mathieu, 1999). To do so, they are advised to use practices that empower employees via both the provision of employee development (Block, 1987; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Detert & Burris, 2007; Rusaw, 2000; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008) and operational freedom (Bandura, 1986; Conger, 1986; Nord, Rosenblatt, & Rogers, 1993; Tierney, 1999; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Also they should use several motivational methods (Black & Margulies, 1989; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004; Neubert & Cady, 2001; Schwochau & Delaney, 1997) to ensure employees are motivated to deal with problems that arise without delay (Clayton & Gregory, 2000; Gill, 1996; Lewis, Schmisseur, Stephens, & Weir, 2006; McHugh, 1997).

Despite Lewin's (1943) pronouncement about the practicality of a good theory, if managers and academics think about employee involvement to achieve organizational convergence differently, even if an underlying theory is correct, then managers might not use it. To see how wide the gap might be, we begin with a

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brief overview of significant portions of related academic work. Then, we present the results of an empirical study designed to learn how at least some media managers think about introducing employee involvement to achieve organizational convergence. One caveat before we begin—we are academics, consequently our understanding of how media managers think about employee involvement was developed from the perspective of prior academic research.

2 Literature Review

Research stressing the importance of gaining employee involvement to achieve organizational convergence has a long history. Existent research on involvement has appeared under a variety of labels, including participation and empowerment.

2.1 History of Academic Interest

Much of the interest in topics such as participative management is grounded in the 1947 work of Kurt Lewin (Maynard, Mathieu, Gilson, O'Boyle, & Cigularov, 2012). Some of Lewin's most well-known inquiry dealt with the use of participation to reduce resistance to change at the Harwood Manufacturing Corporation, where participation entailed involving workers in small discussion groups. The results were published in the now-famous paper by Coch and French (1948). This lineage apparently led many academics to view group discussions as the major step in implementing participative management and achieve organizational convergence. Even though one of the co-authors, Coch, was a personnel manager, this study gave us little insight about how the managers in general conceptualized employee involvement.

The emphasis on groups was evident in a second early stream of research, the contingency theory of leadership advanced by Vroom (1973). Vroom and Yetton proposed a normative theory to guide leaders choices concerning the degree to which groups should be involved in decisions. As with the Lewin and Coch & French works, this research did not investigate how the managers viewed the involvement process.

Since this early research that was the foundation for interest in employee involvement, more recent work has increased our understanding of employee involvement in efforts to achieve organizational convergence. Much of this work concerned communication.

2.2 Importance of Communication in Involvement and Convergence

The way communication can help gain employee involvement to achieve organizational convergence has been widely recognized. Lundberg's (1990) theoretical

work explained how different types of communication can aid employee involvement. Further, Klein (1996) provided evidence concerning the way the communication process can help employees. He found that: (1) feedback and adjustments, (2) strategies that encourage disclosure of problems, and (3) discussion of solutions, was helpful.

In a similar vein, Gill (1996) observed that recent company history, trust factors, and communication methods could introduce barriers when aiming to achieve employee involvement. Introduction of a communication exercise prior to implementing involvement contributed to success in its implementation. Similarly, Tierney (1999) found that the quality of supervisor/employee relationships affected the degree to which an organization's climate was conducive to employee involvement leading towards organizational convergence.

2.3   Overview of History

The longstanding interest in employee involvement has produced a rather strong consensus in the academic literature that employee participation, communication, empowerment, etc. can contribute to successful employee involvement and organizational convergence.

However, it appears to us that there is a significant omission in this stream of research. There has been little study of how practicing managers view employee involvement. This omission is particularly troublesome given the wide variety of labels academics have used to refer to employee involvement. Still, some of the more recent inquiry has provided some clues about the managers' views.

2.4   Some Clues Concerning Managers' Conceptualizations of Employee Involvement

Several scholars that have dealt directly with how managers view the role of employee involvement have provided some clues. First, practicing managers may not perceive terms that academics use to refer to employee involvement, particularly empowerment, as applicable to organizational convergence.

Second, managers consider the provision of information in achieving employee involvement and organizational convergence to be important.

2.5   Managers May Not Perceive Concept of Empowerment as Applicable to Convergence

Edwards and Collinson's (2002) work provided some more direct information about managers' conceptions of employee involvement efforts. They treated employee involvement under the heading of empowerment. Their findings supported Hales (2000) analysis that the empowerment concept was elastic.

Managers had difficulty defining the term, but whatever it was it was difficult to implement and the term was . . .not a word used at local level (p. 287). Managers viewed the idea of empowerment as inapplicable to organizational convergence because it meant giving workers a wide range of freedom. "Managers were much happier with terms such as involvement" (p. 288). They concluded that, in practice, managers "rarely attempt the far-reaching transformations that the langue of empowerment" (p. 293) suggests.

2.6   Information Provision in Employee Involvement and Convergence

The value of the type of information management provides employees with to achieve their involvement and attain organizational convergence has been widely recognized. According to this research stream the information provided needs to be (a) relevant, essential and specific to a particular operation/decision, (b) adequate, structured to separate all its components and accurate, (c) controllable and not imposed without the employees influence, (d) timely so that it can be of any use to employees, and (e) relate to the employees' area of operations (Jackson-Cox, McQueeney, & Thirkell, 1987; Lewis et al., 2006; Morgan & Zeffane, 2003; Purdy, 1993; Wall & Lisheron, 1977; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

In a similar vein, several studies emphasized the organizational arrangements that can be provided to achieve employee appreciation of the information. Academics have observed that regular expressions of confidence in employees, formal technical training, assistance provided to ensure employees can understand how the information has been prepared, management control over the amount of information provided, and methods to identify and rectify related employee problems can help employees appreciate and use the information provided by management (Clayton & Gregory, 2000; Conger, 1986; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Detert & Burris, 2007; Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004; Klein, 1996; Nord et al., 1993; Rusaw, 2000; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008).

2.7   Overview

Based on the literature, there is a good reason to believe that the provision of information and related organizational arrangements to employees by management can lead towards their involvement that can help achieve organizational convergence.

There has been little study of how media managers conceptualize employee involvement via the provision of information and related organizational arrangements, but the available clues suggest that inquiry is needed. The study reported below was motivated by our desire to satisfy this need. We conducted an inductive case study.

3   Methodology and Approach

3.1   Setting and the Change

The study was conducted in a Greek-speaking, medium-sized media organization that recently implemented a major change—the Personal Development Program (PDP). The program was introduced because due to the convergence of the European Union markets, this Greek-speaking organization had to operate in a very competitive media environment.

The PDP was intended to reduce costs and increase both the quantity and the quality of the programs produced. It was one of several programs the organization had introduced aimed at improving personnel quality to achieve organizational convergence.

The PDP included the introduction of new technologies, accompanied by special personnel educational programs aiming to improve employee skills and knowledge related to the new technologies. It also provided specific organizational arrangements that management hoped would achieve employee involvement through which employees could influence and contribute toward organizational decisions and operations in an effort to achieve organizational convergence.

Gaining employee involvement via the implementation of the PDP was intended to ensure that the opinions of the employees were taken into account and that they influenced both the organizational decisions and work level operations. However, management did not want to make joint decisions with employees. They only aimed for employees to have an input in the decisions the managers made.

To achieve the union's agreement and ensure all employees were thoroughly informed about the PDP, the Board held meetings with the employee trade union to explain the aims of the PDP and how it was expected to operate. Besides the information and explanations received by their union, employees could also communicate with the management staff of their department for any further clarifications or questions focusing on specific departmental matters.

The program also included training. During the second 3 months of the program all organizational staff went through some Internet training conducted by external specialists in order to ensure they understood and were able to utilize the new facilities at work. By the middle of the year all new facilities were in place and all staff members were trained to use them.

3.2   Research Design

Following Yin (2003), we employed a case-study design. The design permitted within study replication by treating a series of interviews as a series of experiments with each case serving to confirm or disconfirm the inferences drawn from the others. Data were collected primarily through 22 in-depth interviews conducted over a period of 5 months with the departmental manager (DM) of the technical department and the TM, the middle managers (MMS) and the working unit leaders

(WULS) of the three departmental areas of the radio and music department (Talk Area First Radio, Music Area First Radio, Third Radio).

Two sets of interviews were conducted: (1) an initial interview with the manager of the technical department, and (2) semi-structured interviews with the seven managers of the radio and music department. Immediately after the interview, facts and impressions were cross-checked. Several rules were followed. First, the 24-h rule required that detailed interview notes be completed within one day of the interview. Second, at the time of the interview, all data, regardless of apparent importance were included. In addition, secondary sources were consulted. Data were collected from internal documents, including the organization's annual summary and the annual published radio and music departmental review.

Initial interviews centered on departments' operations and structures and on the implementation of the PDP. The second and third set of interviews were more structured and concerned the provision of information and related organizational arrangements management provided employees with to achieve their involvement. 13 matters were discussed in total (See Appendix).

3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews of Seven Managers of the R&M Department

After the initial interview with the manager of the technical department, semi-structured interviews with all managers of the radio and music department were conducted.

In addition, questions were directed at obtaining factual accounts of what informants did or observed others doing.

3.3 Data Analysis

The search for consistent perspectives was assisted by selecting pairs of managers (MMS and WULS) within each of the three different departmental areas of the radio and music department, and listing similarities and differences between each pair.

Managers' thoughts about involvement were classified under three general headings: (1) Information Characteristics, (2) Empowerment Practices (3) Organizational Arrangements.

4 Results

4.1 Information Characteristics

While considering the information characteristics, the media managers thought that providing employees with information that relates to their area of operation, is relevant to a particular operation/decision (essential and specific), adequate (structured to separate all its components and accurate), controllable and timely, encourages and enables them to get involved.

4.1.1 Talk Area

The Talk Area Working Unit Leader (WUL) claimed that the information provided to employees had to relate to their area of operations for them to "become interested and able to understand and thus utilize it to get involved and to contribute". He added that "this way employees can influence matters of their area and consequently feel that they have the necessary job independence". According to the Talk Area Middle Manager (MM) employees had a limited amount of time available to appreciate the information provided by management because they were very busy working on many different jobs, and also spent a lot of time working out of office. Consequently "management needs to provide them with only the essential information".

According to the Talk Area WUL the information provided needed also to be structured to separate all its components so that management could ensure that employees were not overloaded with unnecessary information. The two Talk Area managers considered that the information provided should not be imposed without the employees influence, because otherwise "employees feel that they lose their job independence and consequently do not want to use the information to get involved and to contribute. Job independence is a particularly important matter because employees do not trust management to be completely independent".

Finally, the Talk Area MM explained that employees aimed to produce programs/activities of high quality, and this could be achieved when the information used in the programs/activities was prompt and continuously updated in order to be accurate. Consequently the issue of information timeliness was major.

4.1.2 Third Radio Station

The Third Radio station case also indicates the linkage between several information characteristics and the achievement of employee involvement.

For example, the Third Radio Station WUL believed that the information provided had to relate to the employees' area of operations because via their involvement employees believed that they could assist management make decisions that could improve the quality of their area's operations and as a result benefit themselves via both job promotions and the provision of better working conditions. The two Third Radio Station managers also added that the information had to be relevant and specific towards a particular operation/decision in order for employees not to be overloaded with unnecessary information.

4.1.3 Music Area

Several different issues were also mentioned by the Music Area managers linking the information characteristics to the achievement of employee involvement.

More specifically, the two managers considered necessary that the information provided to employees be relevant, that is essential and specific to a particular decision/operation. They explained that because their area's operations had either changed or become more sophisticated after the internet implementation, when the information provided by management was not relevant to the particular operation/decision it was difficult for employees to appreciate and use it to get involved and to contribute.

Also, because most of the information was collected and transmitted online, management was tempted to provide employees with too much information. Management thus had to chose and transmit only the essential information because otherwise employees would not be able to focus on the specific operation/decision and their contributions would be vague as a result. Information according to the two managers needed also to be "relevant to the operations of more advanced organizations of the same industry so that employees are aware and comprehend the developments that are already taking place in the more advanced organizations, and as a result their contributions take these changes into account".

The MM also considered necessary the information provided was structured to separate all its components and accurate so that employees could appreciate and use during the decision making process, and that the manager's job was assisted by the fact that a lot of the information relating to the music area operations was produced, collected and stored online. The WUL noted that "the information provided to employees has to be under the employees control to also alleviate employee worries that they can be responsible for decisions which are out of their control".

The WUL considered necessary management provided employees with timely information "because the aim of the music area is to produce programs and activities of a current nature, for different groups of people whose tastes and needs change continuously".

4.2   Empowerment Practices

In relation to empowerment practices, the media managers thought that they can assist employees understand and appreciate the information provided by regularly expressing confidence to them, clearly defining their responsibilities, and involving them with its production.

4.2.1   Expressions of Confidence

The managers think that expressions of confidence do not always have a positive effect on the employee appreciation of the information provided.

According to the DM, expressing confidence to employees can assist them appreciate the information provided and that this can be done by "highlighting cases in which employees use the information to argue a particular matter or to draw their own conclusion and contribute". The Music Area WUL added that "expressing confidence to employees is necessary because the information provided has been more advanced and technical after the internet implementation and as a result more difficult for employees to understand and appreciate". In addition, the Music Area MM noted that "expressing confidence is crucial because employees are usually sentimental and easily affected and influenced based on other people's comments".

In contrast, the Third Radio Station MM considered that there is "no need to regularly express confidence because this will probably make them think that it is very difficult to appreciate the information provided by management. When

employees have problems they need the provision of specific management assistance that can help them overcome their problems without delay and not words of confidence".

4.2.2 Definition of Employee Responsibilities

The data collected illustrate a linkage between the definition of employee responsibilities in relation to the information provided and employee appreciation of that information. The managers in all three areas think that "management needs to clearly define employee responsibilities in relation to the information provided so that employees only have to deal with the specific information assigned to each one. The definition of responsibilities must be done in cooperation with employees because they are very close and thus familiar with each other's abilities, knowledge and expertise". The Talk Area WUL added that "as a result employees feel satisfied and comfortable with the information assigned to each one of them and consequently appreciate and utilize it to contribute".

4.2.3 Involvement with the Production of the Information

The managers of all areas pointed out that employees were also involved with the production of the assigned information. The DM noted that this "helps employees attain a good understanding and enables them to use the information to comprehend situations, get involved and contribute".

For example in the music area, according to the MM, "the continuous changes occurring in relation to its operations and activities mainly caused by the internet implementation, resulted in continuous changes in relation to the information used in the decision making process. Consequently, because employees need a lot of explanations and clarifications in order to reach a satisfactory level of understanding, it is also necessary to involve them with the production of the assigned information in order to obtain the necessary insights which will enable them to appreciate and utilize the information to contribute towards the management decisions".

Also, according to the MM of the Talk Area "by involving employees with the production of the information they have the necessary assurance about the independence of the information used to make decisions".

4.3 Organizational Arrangements

Media managers commented extensively, on how to assist employees appreciate the information provided and encourage them to use it to get involved by providing them with technical training, ensuring each employee receives all assigned information and by utilizing a system of feedback and adjustments.

4.3.1 Training

All three areas illustrate a linkage between the provision of training sessions and employee appreciation of the information provided. The Music Area MM noted that

"training sessions are necessary for the employees because some of the information has become very technical, and thus difficult for employees to understand and appreciate, due to the fact that some of the activities have become more sophisticated after the internet implementation".

The Third Radio station WUL pointed out that "the discussions with management after the end of the training sessions are considered very useful by employees because they have the opportunity to clarify all outstanding matters, including simple matters they would be embarrassed to mention in front of their area's staff".

According to the Talk Area MM "explanations in relation to the information provided are also available online for those employees who cannot take part in some of the training sessions because of their work duties".

4.3.2   Receipt of all Assigned Information

The managers also noted the importance of ensuring all employees receive all assigned information. According to the DM this should be done based on each employee's experience, knowledge and expertise.

The managers of the Talk Area pointed out that "it is very important for us to ensure that each employee receives and appreciates all information he/she is assigned to deal with. Employees can then get together, discuss and appreciate all the information and related matters concerning a particular operation or decision in total, then as a team be in a position to get involved during the discussions with management and contribute towards the final management decisions".

The MM of the Third Area and the Music Area WUL added that "management uses the internet to provide some of the assigned information and via regular face to face discussions ensures the correct information is received by all employees".

4.3.3   Feedback and Adjustments

Finally, the data illustrate the importance of utilizing a system of feedback and adjustments. For example, the Third Radio station MM noted that "we set up a mechanism to ensure all problems and misunderstandings the employees face, in relation to the information provided, reach management as soon as possible in order to be solved without delay. Otherwise they become an obstacle to employee understanding, because employees are influenced negatively and feel that they can not deal with the information, and thus get involved and contribute".

The WUL of the Talk Area added that "WULS are assigned to view employee problems daily, both online and via personal contact. If problems are not minor they can consider solutions together with the MM, and in case of a difference in opinion discuss also with the DM. Solutions are then presented and explained to employees".

Similarly, the Talk Area managers noted that "we inform employees during the provision of information that they must communicate all problems instantaneously to us in order to be tackled immediately".

5   Viewpoint on Convergence

A major purpose of this chapter was to learn how closely the way media managers seeking to achieve organizational convergence think about gaining employee involvement via the provision of information and related organizational arrangements, and compare them to the academic theories mentioned earlier on.

When the comments are viewed together, an interesting pattern can be seen.

First, the media managers shared the academic literature's emphasis on the importance of the provision of information to employees to achieve their involvement and attain organizational convergence, and that this information needs to have certain characteristics for employees to be encouraged and enabled to get involved in the decision making process. In addition, the media managers suggested that they need to provide employees with the necessary organizational arrangements in order to assist them comprehend, interpret and appreciate the information provided.

Importantly, adoption of the media managers' perspective helped us to see some interesting nuances in how managers thought about how to gain this involvement via the provision of information and related assistance, leading to organizational convergence. Two things were noteworthy and both related to employee trust. First, their idea on involvement via the provision of controllable information places emphasis on job independence which deals with the issue of employee trust towards management. The lack of employee trust in a media organization appears to be a major issue which can be considered further by future studies. Second, it was the proactive stance they felt they needed to take to ensure employees consider the information independent. In particular, they saw the involvement of employees with the production of the information provided as highly important. Also, they felt they needed to clearly define employee responsibilities in relation to the information provided in cooperation with employees so that they feel they can trust and can consequently use it to get involved.

In addition, there were a number of things the media managers believed they needed to do to achieve organizational convergence via employee involvement. Consistent with much of the academic literature many of these were quite pragmatic. The provision of a specific type of information was clearly the most salient. Other pragmatic-centered matters included: ensuring all employees receive all assigned information, providing training and the importance of immediately attending to problems.

Whereas much of the academic literature also stresses the idea of communication via the provision of specific information, our results point to the need to recognize the somewhat obvious idea that not all calls for communication are necessarily calls for the same thing. Communication focused on ensuring employee job independence is not likely to be a call for the dialogue many academics seem to have in mind.

Of course, these specific thoughts may well be idiosyncratic to the media setting and thus can not be generalized, at least at this point.

On the other hand, what may be generalized and serve as a stimulus for future research is the findings that these managers thought of rather specific things that

they needed to do at least in this media context, to gain the desired employee involvement and achieve organizational convergence. Thus, the results are a first step in addressing the lacuna in the academic literature we pointed out at the start.

While transmitting specific information seemed to be a major issue, when the data were considered through an empowerment lens, some limited themes consistent with the emancipatory spirit appeared. For example, media managers emphasized the expressions of confidence, definition of employee responsibilities in relation to the information provided in cooperation with employees and the employee involvement with the production of the information.

Whereas much of the academic literature stresses expressions of confidence via words of encouragement, our results point to the need to recognize the different effects on different types of media employees. When employees seem to be sentimental, they can be positively affected. However, there are situations when employees are negatively affected, feeling that the reason why management regularly express confidence to them is because they do not consider them capable of dealing with the information provided.

This study also adds insights relating to the organizational arrangements provided by management towards employees like the provision of training, all assigned information and a system of feedback and adjustments. These arrangements point towards a very interesting direction that could be advanced by further studies, that of the importance of informal face to face interactions on a personal level.

5.1   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 included only a few managers. Thus while the findings suggest the need for future research, they must be interpreted cautiously.

6   Conclusions

This chapter addresses managers' conceptions of employee involvement in a rapidly-changing media environment. The results are derived from a single case and thus are, at best, suggestive. The study arose from concern that little was known about how media managers view employee involvement to attain organizational convergence. Although a case study of this sort cannot provide generalized results, it did yield some important insights into an underdeveloped topic. Specifically, the study of involvement (and the various headings related to it) can be advanced by study of how managers view it.

Matters of information provision and related assistance are likely to be central, leading towards some pragmatic matters apt to be salient. Interestingly, whereas the academic literature frequently suggests that the provision of a specific type of

information assists employees to appreciate and use it to get involved and achieve organizational convergence, the media managers in this study viewed the provision of this type of information as a means to achieve employee trust.

Moreover, consistent with some previous findings, it appears that media managers believe that the provision of several organizational arrangements can help gain employee involvement and achieve organizational convergence. However, the managers seem to highlight the importance of informal face to face interactions on a personal level with employees rather than formal organizational programs.

Of special note is that while both managers and academics emphasize the same word—communication—as a benefit of employee involvement to achieve organizational convergence, they are not necessarily discussing the same thing. Study of how media managers think about communication revealed what may be an important difference. Media managers may be focusing on ensuring employee job independence. Academics may be more apt to concentrate on dialogue. Future inquiry into this subtle dissimilarity that might make all the difference would seem to be a good direction.

Appendix

List of Matters discussed during the interviews
  Description of the Department

1. Operations and Structure
2. Implementation of the PDP

  Characteristics of the information provided
  In order to achieve employee appreciation the information provided by management to employees needs to

3. relate to the employees' area of operations
4. be relevant, essential and specific to a particular operation/decision
5. be adequate, structured to separate all its components and accurate
6. be controllable and not imposed without the employees influence
7. be timely so that it can be of any use to employees

  Organizational Arrangements in relation to the information provided
  In order to assist employees appreciate and use the information to get involved and contribute and thus achieve organizational convergence management needs to

8. provide employees with technical training
9. regularly express confidence in employees
10. clearly define employee responsibilities in relation to the information provided
11. promote and encourage feedback and adjustments

12. explain to employees the way the information each one is assigned to deal with is produced
13. ensure that each employee receives all the information assigned by management to deal with

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