**Adoption of Employee Involvement
Practices: Organizational Change Issues
and Insights**

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Employee involvement (EI) as part of a set of high performance work system (HPWS) has successfully transformed a large number of organizations and become standard practice many new organizations today. Despite the proven benefits of EI, however, it is still not as common as it could be even when accounting for industry and organization differences. We suggest that EI implementation is limited in part by challenges of change management. We review the recent research on EI and HPWS and suggest way in which change research and theory can inform our understanding of why EI practices have fallen short of their potential.

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High involvement work practices have been one of the great success stories in management over the last fifty years. In many workplaces self-managed teams, cross-training, shared information, participative decision-making and incentive rewards are no longer seen as "innovative" or "high performance" but just a way of doing business. Large numbers of manufacturing and service employees today are organized into teams, quality circles, or a "factory within a factory" that provides some degree of decision-making authority. In the early 1970's only a handful of companies had experimented with participative management and industrial democracy. By the 1990's some form of high involvement was found in some 2/3's of the Fortune 1000 (Lawler, Mohrman & Ledford, 1998). There is also substantial research to show that employee involvement management practices are related to positive employee work experiences and high levels of organizational performance (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen 2006).

Employee involvement (EI) is an approach to designing work systems that emphasizes high levels of employee decision-making authority. Over the last 30 years, EI has been examined as part of larger set of "high-performance", and "high-commitment" practices. Research on the relationship between high performance work systems (HPWS) and performance draws heavily on the theory and research dealing with employee involvement (Lawler, 2003; O'Toole & Lawler, 2006). This research has demonstrated the benefits of employee involvement for individuals, teams, and organizations in industries as diverse as textiles, steel, call centers, and high technology (e.g. Bailey, 1993; Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1991; Ichniowski, Shaw and Prennushi, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995).

While there are numerous success stories for employee involvement, the practices have yet to reach their full potential (Benson & Lawler, 2010). The principles of EI were first implemented in the 1960s and 1970s, in Europe and the United States in large manufacturing

plants and gained wider acceptance in the 1980s (Boxall and Macky, 2009; Cappelli and Neumark, 2001). At that time many organizations began to adopt work teams, flat organization structures, cross-training, skill-based pay, and cooperative union management relationships (Lawler, 1986; O'Toole & Lawler, 2006). Still, data collected from 1980 to 2000 suggests that practices associated with employee involvement were found in only around half of firms in the U.S. and some two-thirds of the Fortune 1000 (Osterman, 1994; Gittleman, Horrigan & Joyce, 1998; Lawler, Mohrman & Benson, 2001; Freeman, Kleiner & Ostroff, 2000). Although there have been no large-scale studies over the last 10-15 years in the U.S., the available research suggests that adoption of EI practices has slowed or begun to decline (O'Toole & Lawler, 2006). Surveys in the UK indicate that between 2004 and 2011 adoption of different types of involvement practices remained stable or decreased slightly (WERS, 2011).

This decline in interest and implementation of EI has happened at the same time as more and more evidence for the benefits of EI practices has accumulated. In 2006, a meta-analysis of 92 studies found that HPWS, including employee participation, were significantly related to firm financial and operational performance (Combs et al., 2006). EI and HPWS have proven effective in start-ups and Fortune 1000 firms, in union and nonunion environments, and in service and manufacturing (Lawler and O'Toole, 2006). This raises an important question: If this system of management yields better performance, why is it not more widely adopted? Critics of this research might suggest that the benefits of the practices have been oversold and the effects on employees are not universally positive (e.g. Godard, 2004; Kaufman, 2011). Much of the early research in EI and HPWS was based on a universalistic or "more is better" theory of the impact of practices on performance (Delery & Doty, 1996; Boxall & Mackey, 2009; Kaufman, 2010). The last twenty years of research on EI and HPWS, however, demonstrates that employee

involvement is better suited to some organizations than others. The most commonly identified determinants of HPWS impact on performance are industry conditions, social environment, organizational strategy, and the nature of the tasks performed by workers.

First, HPWS are less prevalent in industry environments that are growing slowly, or have low competitive rivalry (Datta, Guthrie & Wright, 2005; Batt, 2002).   Environments that are growing slowly, have low rates of change, or have low competitive rivalry, create fewer incentives to install HPW systems. Datta, Guthrie and Wright (2005) tested a sample of non-diversified manufacturing firms and found that HPWS produced greater returns for firms in industries with low capital intensity, high differentiation, and high demand growth. They concluded that manufacturing firms competing in industries with high differentiation or high demand growth tend to face more changes in their output and processes. Consequently, motivating employees to learn, apply and share a broader range of knowledge and skills is more important.

Second, research finds that the effects of EI and HPWS are moderated by organizational strategy (Guthrie, Spell & Nyamari, 2002; Lepak & Snell, 2002; Youndt & Snell, 2004; Michie & Sheehan, 2006; Camps & Luna-Arocas, 2009). HPWS are associated most strongly with performance for firms pursuing both differentiation and innovator strategies (Batt, 2002; Guthrie, 2002; Lepak et al. 2007; Wall, 1985; Bowen & Lawler, 1992). With the ongoing shift to professional work, services, and complex manufacturing, these strategies are becoming increasingly common, and this shift is often cited as an important factor driving HPWS adoption (e.g., Wall, 1985; Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Innovator and differentiation strategies emphasize creating competitive advantage through human capital and human processes (Boxall, 1996; den Hartog et al. 2012). On the other hand, Guthrie et al. (2002) found no relationship between

HPWS and performance for firms with a generic low cost strategy. Organizations that hold down wages and other investments in employees to control costs have little use for involvement or HPWS.

Finally, performance effects and EI implementation appear to vary according to how central human capital is to operations. In terms of the work that employees perform, EI practices are less effective, and in most cases impossible to implement, for repetitive, low value added tasks. This applies to low cost manufacturers producing a commodity and service providers in markets that demands low cost, no frills service. Batt (2002), for example, found the use of HPWS was lowest in call centers serving low value added markets. In a comparison of clerical and semi-professional employee groups across law firms, McClean & Collins (2011) showed that the HPWS-performance relationship was weaker for the employee group doing work considered to be less central to a firm's competitive advantage.

Overall while there are conditions that limit the effectiveness and implementation of high involvement, EI practices are still not as common as they could be even when accounting for industry, organization strategy and task characteristics (Benson & Lawler, 2010). We suggest that a significant reason for this is because implementation of employee involvement practices in existing organizations brings all of the well-documented difficulties that accompany major organizational change. In the following pages we review the recent research on HPWS and EI and suggest ways in which change management research can inform our understanding of why EI practices have fallen short of their potential.

Challenges of EI Implementation

Employee involvement scholars have long recognized implementation and change

management as significant obstacles for EI. Much of the early evidence for the success of employee involvement programs came in the 1960's and 1970's in new "greenfield" manufacturing plants. Twenty-five years ago, one of the highest profile employee involvement project in the U.S. was the NUMMI plant in Freemont, California that was restarted after being shuttered two years earlier for poor performance. In their studies of 70 steel finishing lines, Ichniowski, Shaw and colleagues (Ichniowski et al. 1997; Boning, Ichniowski & Shaw, 2001) noted that traditional management systems were more common in long-established sites and those with longer-tenured managers, whereas HPW practices were more prevalent in newer operations. The reasoning used to explain these differences revolves around the difficulty in overcoming both managerial and worker resistance to change, particularly when the workforce has deeply ingrained ideas about job roles and how work gets done (Ichniowski & Shaw, 2003; Chi, Freeman & Kleiner, 2007). An example of this can be found in a study of three shipbuilding firms by McBride (2008), who concluded that strongly established cultures and work practices limit the effectiveness of EI and HPWS practices.

The challenge of implementing EI is one of the major reasons not all high-involvement initiatives are successful. Eaton (1994) found that up to 20% of EI programs in unionized firms were ultimately abandoned. Chi, Freeman, and Kleiner (2007) used detailed interviews with 51 manufacturing firms to look at the adoption of employee involvement over 10 years and found that while EI practices increased significantly from 1986 to 1995, firms were dropping programs during this time much more frequently than expected. They concluded the primary reason for terminating programs was a lack of short-term financial returns, partly caused by the expense and disruption of implementation.

Specific implementation challenges stem from the fact that the benefits of HPWS are

mediated by the attitudes and discretionary effort of employees (Cappelli and Rogovsky, 1998; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). In the 1990's the major studies of HPWS and performance tended to assume a positive effect on employee attitudes, abilities, and effort when examining organizational performance. This led to a proliferation in studies seeking to open the "black box" by examining how high-involvement practices affect employee attitudes and work climate (e.g. Takeuchi, Chen and Lepak, 2009). For example, many researchers have argued that high involvement practices promote performance through greater employee commitment and pro-social behavior (Arthur, 1994; Lam and White, 1998; Scholarios, Ramsay and Harley, 2000; Tsui, Pearce, Porter and Tripoli, 1997; Takeuchi, Chen and Lepak, 2009). Vandenberg, Richardson, and Eastman (1999) found that EI was directly related to the commitment and satisfaction of workers, which, in turn, were associated with higher individual performance and greater customer satisfaction. Similarly, Morrison (1996) and Koys (2001) found that employee attitudes and organizational citizenship behavior mediate the relationship between HPWS and organizational effectiveness.

Taken together this work suggests that social exchange is a key mechanism by which high involvement improves performance (Evans & Davis, 2005; Takeuchi et al. 2007; Kehoe & Wright, 2010). This means that the degree to which employees embrace participation is critical to the success or failure of EI implementation. The programs thrive only when employees interpret involvement systems as an indication that the organization values, appreciates and has confidence in front-line workers (Takeuchi et al. 2007; Chuang & Liao, 2010; Messersmith, Patel, Lepak & Gould-Williams, 2011). Repeated studies of social exchange and perceptions of fairness suggest that employees perceive these practices in a positive light, although some recent work implies this is not always the case (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Nishii, Lepak & Schneidger,

2008; Kuvaas, 2008; Searle et al. 2011). An increasing number of studies have examined the mediating social and psychological processes. It seems clear that realizing the performance benefits of HPWS depends a great deal on how they are implemented and how the change process is managed.

Researchers have offered a variety of reasons for failed EI implementation including lack of managerial support (Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998), lack of trust in management (Eaton, 1994), lack of job security (Preuss & Lautsch, 2002) and inconsistent implementation (Hunter et al 2002). Reviewing the EI research shows the challenges of implementing EI practices and the importance of employee attitudes towards them are key determinants of whether they take root to improve motivation and performance. We suggest that three areas of change management research can help explain what leads to successful implementation: (1) employee resistance to EI, (2) leader and managerial support for EI, and (3) the role of sensemaking and narratives in EI implementation.

Employee Resistance to EI

Much of the original motivation for developing high involvement management was to increase the quality of the work environment for manufacturing employees, and overall the research suggests that employees respond positively to high-involvement practices under most conditions (O'Toole & Lawler, 2006). Freeman and Rogers (1995), for example, reported that 79% of non-managerial participants in employee involvement programs report having "personally benefited from [their] involvement in the program by getting more influence on how [their] job is done". Researchers in the U.S., Canada and Europe have concluded that EI practices are often associated with feelings of belongingness and greater trust in management

(Freeman, Kleiner, & Ostroff, 2000; Goddard, 2004; Guest; 1999; Guest and Conway, 1999; Kalmi & Kauhanen, 2008).

However, there are many examples of employees and managers strongly resisting participative work practices (Hunter et al, 2002). A major critique of the research on "high-performance" practices is that most studies have focused on efficiency while overlooking the negative effects of these practices on employees (Wood and Wall, 2007). There is an alternative perspective that EI practices are sometimes implemented as a means to subvert unionism and increase workloads rather than to benefit employees (Barker, 1993; Bodah, McHugh and Kim, 2008; Godard, 2004). Organizations expand responsibility for front-line employees and increase job demands or production targets without increasing training, compensation, or decision-making power under the guise of high involvement. EI has also been implemented with other work system practices, including just in time inventory (JIT) systems, Total Quality Management (TQM), and performance-based pay in ways that increase assembly speed and pressure in manufacturing settings. Together, these have been labeled as "management by stress" (Mahony, 2007). The move to self-managed teams in which workers are encouraged to monitor each other can cause peer pressure, which can be more coercive and stressful than traditional supervision (Barker, 1993).There are studies which show increased stress and workload following EI implementation (Harley, 2005; Ramsay et al., 2000). In a study of healthcare workers, for example, Mackie, Holahan and Gottlieb (2001) found that moving to a participatory environment resulted in a decreased sense of coherence and control in the workplace, and was followed by increased stress and symptoms of depression.

Organization change is often associated with stressors when changing comfortable work and social relationships along with set routines for getting important work done (Shin et al. 2012).

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For EI in particular, the changes involve considerable uncertainty if the organization seeks to move from a traditional top-down power structure to distributed decision-making. Moving to high involvement workplace brings uncertainty and requires significant adaptation to a new approach to organizing work. Recent work on coping with change (e.g. Fugate, Kinicki & Prussia, 2008) and resources for change (e.g. Brown & Cregan, 2008; Shin, Taylor & Seo, 2012) might be used to better understand the psychology of EI implementation. There are a number of change management studies that focus on how employees cope with change and how to overcome resistance (Armenakis et al. 1993; Huy, 1999; George & Jones, 2001; Bouckenooghe & Devos, 2008; Fugate et al., 2008). Next, we discuss the following issues from this literature relevant to implementing EI: the extent of impact of change, evaluation of the favorableness of change, resources for change, and communication during organization change.

  Extent of the change. Individual reactions to new work practices are determined in part by the perceived amount of impact the change will have on individual jobs and the work unit as a whole (Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Fedor, Caldwell Herold, 2006). In general, the greater amount of perceived change the stronger employee reactions will be (Jaros, 2010). In terms of EI implementation, the extent of change for both individuals and their work units may be substantial, especially if many elements of HPWS were not previously in place. For example, work units may suddenly find themselves responsible for their own quality control where they were not before; members may be cross-training in new areas, understanding new incentive systems, and so on. Employees may be participating in new offline groups such as quality circles, interacting with unfamiliar employees from other departments, possibly even pitching improvement ideas to executives (Lawler, 1986).

  The essence of employee involvement is empowering workers, and this is difficult if the

organization has ever operated this way in the past. Labianca, Gray & Brass (2000) detail the case of a university health center undergoing significant change in how it provided services that required empowering workers to make decisions where none had existed before. Interviews with both employees and managers revealed that management had previously made every decision of any importance, and employees greeted their proposed empowerment with extreme skepticism. One department was so suspicious of the participatory change committee that they initially declined to participate, while others who did join considered resigning from the committee once they were told what they were expected to do. Having grown accustomed to not making decisions or even providing input on decisions, workers felt certain that their input on the change effort would not be heard (Labianca et al. 2000). Being suddenly empowered was perceived by these employees as too large a change to be possible, and empowerment is only one of the major elements of a high involvement work system.

Favorableness of change. As employees take in information about proposed organization changes, they develop either positive or negative opinions. There are many stressors associated with the early stages of change, and more stressors are likely to be experienced as the extent of the change grows. This leads to a negative evaluation of organization change (Huy, 1999; Scheck & Kinicki, 2000; Fugate et al. 2008). However, as noted by Fedor, Caldwell & Herold (2006), some changes may be perceived as worth it, and while creating short-term anxiety, they are still evaluated as a net positive because they are viewed as leading to a better work situation. Managing perceptions has long been a feature of change management research. During change, employees make an evaluation of their ability to deal with the harm, threat, or challenge of change, assuming it is not initially appraised as benign-positive. This evaluation is an important determinant of the attitudinal and behavioral reactions to change. It is human nature

to avoid what we do not believe we are capable of doing, while focusing on what we can (Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

Resources for change. The concept of resources for change has been employed in organization change research as a way to conceptualize how employees evaluate impending change (Huy, 1999; Shin, Taylor & Seo, 2012). Resources for change have been defined broadly as things which help individuals cope with stress in their environment, such as psychological traits, social support, training and salary (Shin et al 2012). Employees will evaluate change more favorably if they perceive that they have access to adequate resources to deal with the circumstances it creates. Research has linked employee perceptions of organizational inducements (e.g. support for career development, employee benefits) to resilience and commitment to change (Shin et al. 2012).

A related resource is is efficacy for change, or the belief that an individual personally will be able to adapt to change. Armenakis et al. (1993) discussed the importance of building feelings of efficacy into the process of creating readiness for change. Empirical evidence has linked efficacy for change with commitment to change (Herold, Fedor & Caldwell, 2007; Neubert & Cady, 2001) and openness to change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Similarly, personal resilience has been shown to be related to greater acceptance of change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Finally, job control can also be seen as a resource that can be used to cope with stressful organization change (Spector, 2002; Jensen et al. 2011).

Communication during change. Armenakis et al. (1993) discuss the importance of communication in creating readiness for organizational change. These authors frame the issue in terms of the message employees receive from management, stressing the role of persuasive communication in influencing employee reactions. In particular, Armenakis et al. (1993)

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recommend creating a perceived discrepancy between the current state of the organization and a desired state. This can serve the purpose of instilling the belief that change is necessary and a sense of urgency. At the same time, in order to encourage a state of mobilization for change (Huy, 1999), such communication should also aim to assure employees of their ability to successfully adapt to the changes.

Coatsee (1999) developed a model of overcoming resistance to change based on Lawler's (1987) framework of high involvement, stressing the benefits of information sharing in order to increase commitment to change. Open communication of information is a way of easing uncertainty and the associated anxiety that surrounds organizational change, and has been shown to improve employee openness to change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000), as well as increasing trust in the organization (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). Conversely, a lack of communication increases speculation and has the potential to spread misinformation through attempts at group sensemaking and rumors, which is likely to hurt commitment to the change (Fedor et al. 2006; Conway & Monks, 2008) and increase cynicism towards change (Choi, 2011).

Taken together these findings suggest that EI researchers and practitioners seeking to implement high involvement programs needs to focus on managing perceptions of the extent of the change and make a strong case for the positive material and psychological benefits for employees. Specifically, firms seeking to implement EI need to prevent the practices from being framed in terms of such negatives for workers as job loss, increased performance demands, intensified peer pressure and mental strain (Barker, 1993; Godard & Delaney, 2000; Godard, 2004; Jensen et al. 2011). While high-involvement management is a means to improve productivity and quality, it has always been intended to also have the parallel goal of increasing the quality of work life. This must be emphasized in the design of high involvement systems and

consistently communicated as the programs are rolled out.

What does this mean for an organization seeking to implement high involvement? First is that while rolling out an involvement program as a wholesale transformation or necessary for organizational survival might get the attention of workers, larger scale changes are more likely to elicit resistance – particularly if the implementation is accompanied by new production targets or threats of layoffs. Second is that research suggests that providing resources to employees to help cope with change can ease some of the emotional reactions to proposed change. For example, calls for employees to have decision-making power should always be accompanied by incentives for them to take responsibility for their performance, information needed to make good decisions, ongoing skill development, and a long-term employment relationship and career development. Organizations need to provide examples of how participation can help employees increase their earnings or reach a higher position in the organization. Finally, this research shows that frequent open communication during the process is critical and is also a first step towards embracing the principles of employee participation.

Leader and managerial support for EI

The leadership behavior of managers at multiple organizational levels is a key determinant of the success of high involvement. Lack of managerial support undermines high involvement and plays a key role in failed initiatives (Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998). Changing organization structures to move information and autonomy to lower levels often entails supervisors giving up some authority, and resistance directly influences the nature of the new practices and their impact. Supervisors need to move past the stress and insecurity that can accompany EI implementation in order to support the new ways of work and allow the principles of high involvement to take hold in an organization (Mahoney, 2008; Batt, 2004). Often this is

not easy because at least some aspects of EI may appear to be counter to the interests of supervisors.

Batt's (2004) research on implementing self-managed teams shows that while the line workers reacted positively to increase decision-making power at work, supervisors often report lower perceived job security and satisfaction compared to supervisors in other work groups without EI. In a longitudinal study examining the implementation of a labor-management partnership, Mahony (2007) found that involvement lowered supervisor's perceptions of their advancement opportunities and increased their perceived workload. As a result, front-line managers may react to the uncertainty surrounding change by working to preserve their existing power and status (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). In such cases they may be unfamiliar with how to sell EI work changes to employees, and may not be convinced themselves of the benefits (Ichniowski & Shaw, 2003).

Yost et al. (2011) provide qualitative evidence of the importance of managerial action during the implementation of an ongoing change intervention. In particular, they suggest that the passion and persistence of the intervention leader can be a key success factor, as the change leader is responsible for overcoming many obstacles to change, such as ensuring the design fits with organization culture, securing resources and the commitment of top management, and communicating a clear plan to other various stakeholders. Other research has shown the importance of transformational leadership behavior, especially inspirational leadership (Bass, 1985; Oreg & Berson, 2011). Transformational leadership is associated with instilling a clear and powerful vision of future organization states in the minds of subordinates, and thus increase their identification with a goal such as organization change (Oreg & Berson, 2011). Communicating that vision to employees reduces their uncertainty about the change, and increases their coping

resources and change commitment. Transformational leadership is also associated with greater trust in management, the likelihood that workers will ascribe positive intentions to the change, and higher perceptions of leader competence to achieve organizational goals (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). This, in turn, decreases uncertainty (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003).

At the team level, managers play a critical role in individual employee reactions to organizational change, including commitment to change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Jaros, 2010; Van Knippenberg, Marting, & Tyler, 2006) and cynicism or ambivalence towards change (Choi, 2011; Oreg & Sverdilk, 2011; Reichers, Wanous & Austin, 1997; Brown & Cregan, 2008). EI practices are also actually operationalized through innovation networks in which managers and supervisors play a critical role. For example, Battilan and Casciaro (2012) examined how the networks of change agents impact the adoption of incremental and large-scale change. The role innovation networks can be directly applied to our understanding of the role that managers play in implementing EI in organizations (e.g. Gant, Ichniowski & Shaw, 2002).

One crucial way in which organizations can decrease resistance and promote support from supervisors is by illustrating the benefits for managers and providing them with a compelling explanation of a high involvement system. That means explaining the logic of the cause and effect between the involvement practices and organizational performance in a way that is relevant to their role and belief about the organization. Sonenshien and Dholba (2012) label this perception the strategic worldview. Using data from a Fortune 500 retailer they show that benefits and strategic worldview promote change implementation behavior. Once managers and supervisors understand and believe themselves in the benefits of high involvement other research suggest that the most important behavior of managers in EI implementation is employee consultation. High involvement begins by with managers and employees working together to

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design the new work practices... Using a broad sample of Australian employees Morgan and Zeffane (2003) show that employee trust in management and embrace of high involvement is strongly related to whether employees are consulted about changes by supervisors and higher level managers. Employees expressed greater trust in management and EI practices when they felt they had a say in decisions that affected them and were able to suggest their own ideas on how work was conducted.

Sensemaking and Narratives

Some of the more interesting recent work on HPWS deals with how the motivation behind the implementation of the practices is perceived by employees, which has been shown to be a key determinant of behavior change and the long-term success of high involvement management. For example, Bowen & Ostroff (2004), emphasize the benefits of a common interpretation of the meaning or intention behind practices. They argue that distinct, coherent practices create a strong HR climate, mitigating individual differences in perceptions of specific practices and giving priority to the shared climate in shaping employee behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Similarly, Nishii and colleagues have focused on the attributions employees make as to the "why" of HPWS (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Nishii, Lepak & Schneider, 2008). Based on cognitive-affective personality theory, they argue that differences in how individuals selectively attend to information from their environment can lead two people to different perceptions of the same situation. For example, an individual who perceives EI practices to be exploitative in nature is likely to manifest different attitudinal and behavioral reactions than one who views them as a win-win situation for themselves and the firm. Nishii et al. (2008) hypothesized that

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practices attributed to concern for employee well-being would be positively, and those attributed to getting "the most work out of employees" would be negatively, associated with performance. Data from a large supermarket chain supported this relationship, as mediated by department-level attitudes (Nishii et al. 2008).

The change management literature on schema and sensemaking are directly applicable to this research and can inform our understanding on how EI practices are interpreted and ultimately embraced by employees. Frameworks adopted for understanding employee reactions to a particular change generally focus on cognitive or emotional-cognitive processes (Lau & Woodman, 1995; Huy, 1999; Toby & Manning, 2009). Cognitive processes surrounding change have been understood in terms of mental models, or schemas, related to change (Lau & Woodman, 1995) and the formation of expectations from change-related information (Yuan & Woodman, 2007). Employees have developed schemas for work and employment practices, based on experience with them throughout their career, as well as socialization and ongoing experience with their present employers (Nishii & Wright, 2008).

Sensemaking. In addition to informing EI and HPWS research on the ways in which employees make attributions concerning the reasons behind the practice implementation, the sensemaking literature might also help us understand why high involvement practices are often implemented unevenly across organizations. Schemas are mental representations of a concept or process, and include an understanding of how different elements of the concept or process work together, such as in cause and effect relationships (Lau & Woodman, 1995; George & Jones, 2001). Schemas guide the meaning given to unfolding events, and it is acknowledged that multiple schemas may be relevant in determining employee reactions to a given object (Lau & Woodman 1995). Different schema are likely to lead to differences in the ways in which high

involvement is implemented and used in some work groups compared to others. Labianca (2000)

shows the persistence of schema in the face of organizational change and the importance of

consistency between leader communication and behavior in shifting decision-making schema in

the workplace. Sonenshein (2010) notes that leaders often use ambiguous narratives in

describing extent of change and organizational status. Using different narratives to communicate

change in different contexts opens the opportunity for managers and employees to interpret the

change process and the implementation of EI differently.

Other research on reactions to change focuses on the close interplay between cognitions

and emotion. Upon receiving information related to organization change, employees first

undergo a kind of automatic primary appraisal of the information based on its relevance to their

well-being (Huy, 1999). Primary appraisal is based on the perceived congruence of the

information with salient personal goals, and are thought to take the form of benign-positive,

harmful, threatening or challenging (Scheck & Kinicki, 2000). Secondary appraisals involve a

determination of the certainty of outcomes related to one's goals. That is, if the information is

primarily appraised as obstructing personal goals (harmful, threatening or challenging),

secondary appraisal involves assessing the probability of overcoming the obstruction, and for

positively-assessed information it involves assessing the effects of the information on the

likelihood of attaining personal goals. It is through this two-stage appraisal process that

employees form emotional responses in reaction to change-related information, and thus form

attitudes and behavioral intention in support of or resistance to change

Implementation narratives. An important reason for EI failure identified by researchers

is the implementation of practices in an isolated or piecemeal fashion. Twenty years ago

Ichniowski, Shaw, and Prenushi (1995) examined steel finishing lines and found that individual

involvement practices such as work teams, flexible job design, pay for skills, and incentive pay had little to no effect on productivity when used in isolation. More recently Combs, Liu, Hall, and Ketchen (2006) confirmed in a meta-analysis of 92 firms that high-performance work "systems" were more strongly correlated with performance than individual practices, including teams and participation. Chi, Freeman, and Keliner (2007) found that practices implemented in isolation or with few other supporting practices were the most likely to be abandoned.

One of the reasons for inconsistent implementation of EI across organizations appears to be the lack of an internally consistent mental model of an involvement-oriented workplace across the organization. Adoption of HPW practices by a substantial segment of an organization has the potential to send a strong message regarding what behavior is expected and rewarded, and is thought to facilitate shared mental models, group sense-making and coordinated action (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Evans & Davis, 2005). Bowen & Ostroff (2004) emphasized the benefits of a common interpretation of the meaning behind practices and laid out some characteristics of human resource management systems that can be expected to increase the intended effects of HPW practices. They argue that distinct, coherent practices create a strong HR climate, mitigating individual differences in perceptions and giving priority to the shared climate in shaping employee behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). The importance of an overall climate for high involvement in which the principles and practices are implemented together has been illustrated in several studies including Riordan et al. (2005) found that higher aggregate scores on a scale measuring employee-perceived power, information, rewards and knowledge together were associated with higher financial performance across 92 insurance companies.

Jensen et al. (2011) tested the conditions under which employees are more likely to have negative experiences with HPWS. In particular, they found that employees simultaneously

perceiving high levels of HPWS and low job control experience greater anxiety and role overload. While high involvement practices with little job control may seem like a contradiction in terms, such a situation can occur as a result of poor implementation. This research reflects the fact that the same practices may not be perceived the same way by all employees given their existing schema and perceptions of control in the workplace (Nishii, Lepak & Schneider, 2008; Nishii & Wright, 2008).

What does this imply for organizations implementing high involvement? First is the importance of implementing all the elements of high involvement together and remember that the motives ascribed to the new practices will be critical to their eventual success. Increasing production targets and asking the employees for input on how to work faster or with fewer people is not enough. Employees need to believe there is a long-term commitment to invest in employees and relationships to embrace high involvement. Second managers need to be consistent in explaining the reasons for the changes and front-line workers need to be engaged from the very beginning to play a role in interpreting the ways in which high involvement principles are interpreted for their particular work processes. The recent work of Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) and Sonenshein (2010) on sensemaking and sensegiving in organizations shows the ways in which managers communicate EI implementation and the cues that employees pick up on in order to understand their new expanded roles. Employees look to leaders in organizations for sensemaking in highly uncertain situations such as implementing new work processes. Managers are more effective in sensegiving or meaning-making when they have stature and perceived expertise regarding the practices. Managers and supervisors need to be able to explain the rationale for the new practices and how they fit with the existing workforce, values and strategy of the organization.

The Relationship Between EI and Change

Finally, any discussion of the ways in which employee involvement can be better understood as a change process and benefit from the research in organization change must acknowledge the critical role that employee participation plays in effective organizational change. Giving employees a voice in changes that affect their work is perhaps the oldest and most often cited method of overcoming resistance to change. Coch & French (1948) demonstrated that worker effort following a change in production process was highest in groups asked to participate. Lawrence (1954) described the human element that is a necessary part of the concept of employee involvement; employees cannot simply be consulted as an afterthought when the organization has already decided on a change. Indeed the essence of involvement is respecting that employees have a real stake in the consequences of decisions involving the direction of their work unit and giving them a say in what happens.

The psychology behind the benefits of involving employees in the process of change is based on alleviating the sense of uncertainty and fear that is common in such situations (Devos et al. 2007). Further, participation can increase employee resources for coping with change by enhancing their sense of control over their work situation during a stressful transition (Bouckenooghe & Devos, 2008). In a very instrumental way, participating in the change process allows employees to acquire knowledge about the change that will speed their adaptation and engender psychological ownership (Dirks, Cummings & Pierce, 1996). Psychological ownership, in turn, discourages blaming management for change-related stress and possible change failure, and sets the stage for employees and organizations to embrace the high involvement management (Brown & Cregan, 2008; Choi, 2011).

As for the adoption of high involvement practices, there is somewhat of a paradox in that organization change research offers involvement as a critical factor to overcoming resistance, but organizations attempting to transform their workplaces to embrace involvement are those most likely to have deeply ingrained cultures that oppose high involvement. Organizations with a culture of employee participation will have the easiest time managing the change process to implement high involvement. This mirrors one of the great questions in the research on HPWS and organizational performance. Many studies find a positive correlation between HPWS and performance, but it is unclear whether the adoption of these practice leads to increased organizational performance or the organizations with above-average performance are the ones able to adopt the practices. Similarly, firms with high performance have the resources needed to make the investments in employees and a participation culture that make high-involvement practices effective. Firms with higher-quality managers and employees may be more likely to adapt to change and also to adopt high involvement practices. The ccumuled research on employee involvement suggests that the positive relationship between employee involvement and organizational performance is reciprocal and evolves over time. This is also likely true for the relationship between high involvement and the adaptability or capacity for change in organizations.

While high involvement management and HPWS have been tremendously influential and successful over the last fifty years we may have reached a point where there are few workplaces left to transform. Newer organizations today are more likely to incorporate the principles of high involvement management from the beginning. For example, all recent auto manufacturing plants in the U.S., particularly the foreign brands, have been built around teamwork, cross-training and incentive rewards. These practices are not seen as progressive or innovative, just productive and

efficient. In addition, the evolution of the economies of the U.S. and other developed nations towards knowledge and service work that naturally emphasize empowerment of line employees and working in teams means fewer organizations may need a set of initiatives to promote high involvement. High involvement evolved out of manufacturing settings which employ more technology and fewer employees today. Manufacturing employees accounted for 21% of the U.S. jobs in 1980 compared with just 8% in 2009 (Mishel, Bernstein, and Shierholz, 2009). Participative management was developed in response to Taylorism and Fordism which are less prevalent today than in previous decades. At the same time older organizations with the legacy of Taylorism and union-management antagonism are likely to be the most difficult to implement high involvement. When implementing high involvement practices, firms whose cultures do not fit may have a hard time changing, and it is probable that if the necessary cultural changes do not materialize, the system will be less effective, if not fail, regardless of whether the change management findings summarized in this work are applied or not.

Years of research across a number of disciplines has consistently demonstrated that employee involvement, high commitment, high performance work practices – regardless of the label – have consistent and positive impacts on organizational performance across industries and employee groups. At the same time, the most current surveys show that the adoption of these practices has slowed or even declined since the late 1990's. If the performance benefits of EI and HPWS are as real and robust as the research suggests the question is how firms that don't adopt these management practices survive? How could practices that provide such a competitive advantage not be universal? This work explores suggests that EI and HPWS are more than just HR practices. They require acceptance by individuals and managers working in highly complex social systems to depend a great deal on how they are perceived by those who operate with them.

Many questions remain concerning the future of employee involvement, but given the challenges of implementation, we hope this work helps to aid research on the continuing "transformation" of workplaces based on the principles of EI.

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