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Participation and Organizational Commitment during Change: From Utopist to Realist Perspectives

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14.1 Introduction

Employee commitment and participation in organizational decision-making and problem-solving are two of the more heavily-researched areas in organizational psychology and organizational behavior. Hence, a considerable research-based stock of knowledge has been accumulated over the past 70–80 years. This research has examined antecedents to commitment and participation, and explored different definitions of the two constructs. Based upon thse data, a comprehensive array of purported outcomes of the two constructs has been proposed, some of which has also been supported empirically. Theoretical and empirical contributions to the understanding of these two phenomena are summarized in several qualitative as well as quantitative review articles, meta-analyses, and books (Cotton et al., 1988; Glew et al., 1995; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Wagner & Gooding, 1987).

Less, however, is known about commitment and participation as they relate to organizational change. Although some of the research on commitment and participation has been done using data from organizations planning, undergoing, or digesting change, this body of knowledge is much narrower and thinner in terms of theories used for informing the research and empirical findings. Against this background, the purpose of the present chapter is to take stock of the research-based knowledge on participation and commitment prior to, during, and after organizational change. Based on this review, we identify gaps between the general literature on participation and commitment on the one hand, and the more applied organizational-change research on the other, and suggest areas for new research.

"Organizational change" is a somewhat ambiguous term (see Chapter 1), and it is often difficult to decide when an organization is in a change rather than an equilibrium stage.

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The ambiguous nature of much organizational change challenges the need for a specific literature on organizational change, especially when the focus is on human behavior during change. Partly for this reason, in Section 14.3 and 14.5 we review key themes and findings from the general literature on participation. These sections provide a foundation for assessing the more applied research on commitment and participation in change settings and for discussing relationships between participation and commitment during change. In Sections 14.4 and 14.6, research on participation and commitment in explicit-change settings is reviewed and discussed.

In Section 14.7, we present our views on important areas for future research in the intersection between commitment, participation, and change. This section is partly based on a selective highlighting of gaps between the general literatures on commitment and participation and the more applied literature on organizational change. However, we also try to point out the implications of some macro-level changes in the context surrounding these phenomena.

14.2 Participation and Organizational Commitment

Participation has been related to organizational commitment in several ways. Probably the most investigated issue is how different forms of participation influences levels of organizational commitment under varying contexts (see Section 14.1). Generally, the main-effect relationship has been hypothesized to be a positive one, a relationship that has been supported by the findings from a number of empirical studies. Similarly, studies have explored and found evidence of a positive relationship between organizational commitment and antecedents reflecting relatively higher levels of participation, including high-involvement work processes and organizational commitment (e.g. Butts et al., 2009); team empowerment (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999), employee participation in decision-making (Han et al., 2009), and profit-sharing plans (Bayo-Moriones & Larranza-Kintana, 2009).

The strength of the relationship between participation and organizational commitment is dependent on many contextual variables, such as the presence or absence of other participation-related features (Bayo-Moriones & Larranza-Kintana, 2009). From a longitudinal study of work practices in Spain, Bayo-Moriones & Larranza-Kintana (2009) found that the positive relationship between profit-sharing plans and affective commitment to the organization is negatively moderated by the use of participation in decision-making at the job level; that is, the effect of profit-sharing plans on commitment was weaker in cases where participation was used. This finding indicates that different types of participation can be seen as substitutes for influencing organizational commitment. In the same study, it was hypothesized and found that firm size negatively moderated the positive relationship between profit-sharing and affective commitment. The presumed reason for this is that as firm size increases, the contribution of each individual employee is reduced, leading to lower effects of social-exchange mechanisms.

Other moderators of the participation–commitment link that have been explored are depth and breadth of the participation (e.g. Cox et al., 2009), degree of conflict with supervisors (Janssen, 2004), organizational tenure, perceived organizational support (Butts et al., 2009) and organizational culture. For example, Smeenk et al. (2006) reported that academic employees in two faculties with different cultures (hegemonist versus separatist) responded differently to a given set of HR practices, including the level of autonomy. Huang et al. (2006) reported that the positive link between participative

leadership and organizational commitment was only present for short-tenure employees. Butts et al. (2009) found that the participation–organizational commitment link was strongest for employees who held higher levels of perceived organizational support.

In addition to the issues addressed above, some research has also explored the possibility that organizational commitment acts as a determinant of willingness to participate, as reflected in suggestions made for improvement, the likelihood of speaking up or remaining silent, silence during issues resulting in a decision, and active participation in decision processes, including organizational-change processes. For example, Malewicki (2005) found that employees' levels of normative commitment were positively related to participation.

14.3 Employee Participation in Organizational Processes

"Participation" is a technical term that is used in organizational research to capture arrangements whereby organizations try to involve a broader array of members in their decision-making and problem-solving processes. Hence, the need for and interest in participation is a byproduct of the traditional division of labor that is found in vertically- and horizontally-differentiated organizations. Most conceptualizations of participation are concerned with situations in which members higher in a hierarchy—typically managers—grant decision influence to those lower in the hierarchy. In this vein, participation has been defined as "a conscious and intended effort by individuals at a higher level in an organization to provide extra-role or role-expanding opportunities for individuals or groups at a lower level in the organization to have a greater voice in one or more areas of organizational performance" (Glew et al., 1995, p. 402). While this definition captures the top-down perspective used in much of the research on participation in organizations to date, it is important to stress that participation sometimes entails the involvement of members higher in the organizational hierarchy, initiated by members located at lower levels, in order to further the latter's agenda. One example of such behavior is issue-selling, where individuals at lower levels involve managers in order to build support for their agendas (e.g. Dutton et al., 2001). Increasingly, organizations are composed of semi-autonomous units at the same hierarchical level, whose decisions and activities are not easily controlled by managers at higher levels, due to knowledge asymmetries. This creates the need for a coordination and combination of specialized knowledge in decision-making and problem-solving among these units (e.g. Anand et al., 2007). One way to achieve this coordination and combination is through lateral collaboration, where initiative-takers in one unit actively involve persons from other units in order to optimize problem-solving and minimize unforeseen systemic effects that might create implementation problems.

The academic literature on participation is composed of two broad streams of writing: the industrial-relations literature, which focuses on collective bargaining and the macro-organization, functioning, and outcomes of unionized activity on the one hand (e.g. Ackers, 2010; Kaufman, 2008), and the more micro-oriented management, HR, and organizational behavior literatures on the other (e.g. Argyris, 1998; Glew et al., 1995). One key difference between the two is that the micro-literature is primarily concerned with employee participation in individual organizations or organizational subunits, such as work teams, while the macro-literature is more concerned with participation in populations of organizations or the economy as a whole. The core topics that are addressed in the two streams are interrelated in many important ways, but here we limit

our focus to the micro-literature, because it covers issues that are more relevant for understanding change at the levels of individual organizations and parts thereof.

The micro-oriented literature on participation in individual organizations can be divided into three substreams: (1) a utopist stream, stressing the often mutual benefits of participation to employees and organizations; (2) a critical—or dystopian—stream, concerned with the costs of participation to the two parties, and sometimes beyond; and (3) a more balanced, realist stream, attempting to establish under what circumstances and in what form participation is effective for employees and organizations (see Ackers, 2010, for a similar organization of the industrial-relations literature on employee participation). In reality, most contributors probably belong to the realist position, but from time to time take more-radical positions in order to explore certain facets of this complex phenomenon. This micro-stream of research on participation in organizations is theoretically highly eclectic and it is still hard to identify a small number of theoretical perspectives around which research converges. This is probably partly due to the complexity of the subject matter. The complexity is a reflection of the large and heterogeneous set of dependent variables that is explored in participation research, the dual focus on antecedents and consequences with limited conceptual and theoretical overlap (different theories are required to explain the presence versus the outcomes of participation), and the fact that participation is often part of larger organizational initiatives, simultaneously involving other elements such as new incentive systems, technologies, and changes in strategy or operating philosophy.

On average, participation is positively related to employee and organizational outcomes of interest, but the strength of this relationship—as expected—depends on many known moderating variables. It is likely that more moderators will be identified in the future, some of which will reflect broad local and global changes in organizations and their environments. Higher-order interactions are probably also present for many relevant phenomena, but these have not been explored extensively. It is also remarkable that very few contributions report negative consequences from the many forms of participation that have been implemented and evaluated in a wide variety of organizational and cultural settings.

14.3.1 Determinants of participation

Another important stream of participation research has examined determinants of participation. This research has focused on two main issues: the inclinations of leaders to adopt a participative style over more centralized, authoritarian leadership styles, and the willingness of employees to engage in participative processes and actually choose involvement when invited to by others in the organization (usually, but not exclusively, by higher-ranking managers). One oft-cited finding from this research, reported in Neuman (1989), indicates that roughly 67% of the workforce chooses not to participate when receiving such invitations, indicating that willingness to participate may best be regarded as a scarce and potentially valuable resource and that a considerable leadership challenge is to motivate employees to participate in order to achieve organizational or mutual gains. Earlier writings on the willingness-to-participate issue tended to focus on cognitive or knowledge-related explanations (e.g. Cotton et al., 1988). The general idea was that organizations need to prepare their employees to become more involved in a wider spectrum of organizational activities. Thinking has now shifted towards a focus on participation—including the right to voice opinions on issues—as a specific form of extra-role behavior, possibly associated with some degree of personal risk (e.g. Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

Recent research on voice in organizations adds important but only incomplete insights concerning the factors that may influence employees' willingness to provide thoughts and ideas about critical work processes and other issues pertinent to organizational functioning (e.g. Detert & Burris, 2007; Crant et al., 2011; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; Tangirala & Ramanumjam, 2008).

14.4 Research on Participation in Explicit-Change Settings

It turns out that there is no clear way of delineating exactly which specific research articles belong to a "participation in organizational change" category versus those that should be classified into a more general "participation in organizations" category. The two categories are overlapping because most research on participation is to an important degree related to organizational change. Research on participation is concerned with the involvement of people in something and with the effects of involvement. That "something" is usually a decision process, broadly defined so as to include the implementation and control phases of the overall decision-related activities. For example, employees participate in suggesting new ways of working, with the intention that their suggestions will lead to change in the organization's work processes. Hence, intended change is part of the phenomenon that is subsumed under the "participation" heading. This raises again the important question of to what degree and in what respects contexts of change are different from contexts of relative stability, in terms that are important to our understanding of participation-related phenomena. Fundamentally, this is a question about generalizability; that is, to what extent can we expect theory and empirical findings from the general research on participation to carry over to organizations that are planning, executing, or evaluating and learning from change? As we showed in Section 14.2, organizational change is in itself a highly heterogeneous category, containing contexts that differ in terms of their comprehensiveness, compatibility with organizational culture, the location of initiation of the initiative, and so on. We'll come back to this issue in Section 14.6, where we discuss important avenues for new research on participation during organizational change. For the present, our take is to review research on participation during organizational change, although we acknowledge the arbitrariness of this approach.

The research on participation during organizational change partly mirrors the more general research on organizational change in terms of conceptualization of participation and its antecedents, consequences, and underlying theoretical perspectives. However, it is a narrower research stream as far as the number of publications and the breadth of issues under investigation are concerned. Nevertheless, some new topics have been investigated that are specific to the change context and that are derived from organizational-change theory. In this sense, it both draws on and contributes back to the more general literature on participation. These new topics are mostly derived from the research agenda found in the organizational-change field and typically relate to recurring problems experienced in organizations undergoing change. Among the most important issues that have been linked to participation in this research are resistance and cynicism towards change (e.g. Abraham, 2000; Piderit, 2001), commitment to change, and employee sense-making and its implications for change-related attitudes and behaviors.

Consistent with the general literature on participation, research in change settings has examined how different degrees and forms of participation impact attitudes and behaviors

towards the products of the change process to which influence opportunities for stakeholders were granted or withheld. In addition, some research has explored moderators of the participation–outcome links (Holman et al., 2009; Jimmieson et al.; 2008; Lines, 2004; Sagie & Koslowski, 1994; Sverke et al., 2008; Van Knippenberg et al., 2006). Research on change-specific outcomes has generally found that participation is associated with lower levels of resistance to change (e.g. Hideg et al., 2011; van Dam et al., 2008; Wanberg & Banas, 2000), cynicism towards change (e.g. Brown & Cregan, 2008), and higher levels of commitment to change (Neubert & Cady, 2001). Participation has also been shown to affect sense-making during change, for example by producing belief change and generally fostering a better understanding of change (Basinger & Peterson, 2008; Stensaker et al., 2008).

Our review of the literature on participation during change indicates that much more is known about the forms and consequences of participation than about its antecedents. One likely reason for this imbalance is that participation has traditionally been seen as a benefit that managers may or may not grant their employees. Hence, the possibility that employees may be indifferent to, reluctant about, or opposed to increased involvement in work processes—including change—has not received much attention. However, the research evidence shows that individual employees react differently to participation. For example, they seem to react more positively when involved in tactical decision processes than in strategic decision processes, and persons with an internal locus of control perform better under participation than persons with an external locus of control (Kren, 1992). Also, there is direct evidence that employees react differently to various efforts to increase participation, such as empowerment programs. In fact, Manyard et al. (2007) provide evidence that employees may actually resist organizations' efforts to implement more involvement-based processes.

Participation can partly be seen as voluntary behavior in organizations. Often, employees can decide whether or not to participate when invited to do so. If forced to participate, the level of effort put into a process can, to a certain degree, be regulated by the employees to match their levels of commitment and motivation (Neuman, 1989). Because participation requires effort from employees, researchers have wondered whether those more committed to the organization are more likely to volunteer in participative processes than those who are less committed. Some research has also examined this hypothesized relationship empirically. For example, Cohen & Lilach (2011) recently reported that more organizationally-committed Israeli teachers were more likely to participate in an optional change in their educational system than those who were less committed.

While theories of participation during change often posit that positive attitudes towards change and change-required behaviors result from employee participation in the change process, others have proposed that attitudes towards organizational change may form early in the change process based on rumors, observations of nonroutine behaviors among managers, visits from external consultants, and prior experiences of change initiatives. It has also been argued that social construction of a change and its consequences is mediated by peer discussions and social information-processing. Through these processes, assumptions and attitudes that are transferred among employees play important roles in the formation of attitudes towards change (Lines, 2005). Consistent with this view, Antoni (2004) found that employees' willingness to participate and their actual participation in a reengineering project were positively associated with their attitude towards change and their perception of supervisory support.

14.5 Employee Commitment in Organizational Processes

In an organizational context, commitment can be seen as an employee's attachment to the entire organization, an organizational subunit, a supervisor, or even a change program (Ford et al., 2003; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). There are many reasons why employee commitment to the entire organization in particular has been the scope of much ongoing research (Reichers, 1985; Wright & Bonnett, 2002). This kind of commitment has strong relationships with such important dimensions as job performance, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), willingness to share knowledge, absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover (e.g. Becker et al., 1996; Fedor et al., 2006; Maertz et al., 2002; Randall et al., 1990). More specifically, organizational commitment has been found to be negatively related to turnover (Cohen, 1993) and positively related to prosocial behavior (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), job satisfaction (Bateman & Stasser, 1984), motivation (Mowday et al., 1979), and attendance (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). In general, employee commitment has therefore been regarded as a positive factor for organizations. For this reason, there have been many attempts to gain a fuller understanding of the antecedents of commitment, as well as the consequences (Meyer et al., 2002).

Commitment is to a large extent connected to a high level of focus and energy. If employees commit, orally or in writing, to an idea or a goal, they are more likely to achieve that idea or goal (Cialdini, 2001). The rationale for this relationship is that employees have established the idea or goal as being congruent with their self-image and, therefore, view the two as being cognitively consistent (Festinger, 1957). Even if the original incentive or motivation is removed after they have agreed, they will continue to honor the agreement. From this point of view, a focus on improving commitment by management can be regarded as a very powerful method for improving employee participation (Cialdini, 2001).

14.6 Research on Commitment in Explicit-Change Settings

A considerable number of studies have now hypothesized and found links between organizational commitment and employee responses to change. In their survey of full-time employees from four US companies undergoing change, Madsen et al. (2005) found that organizational commitment was positively related to employee readiness for change. In this study, the involvement dimension of commitment exhibited the strongest relationship with readiness for change. In her study of determinants of civic virtue and turnover intentions in a recently-acquired Greek restaurant change, Bellou (2008) found a positive relationship between employees' levels of organizational commitment and civic virtue and a negative relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intentions. She further reported that the strength of the relationship between organizational commitment and civic virtue was positively moderated by the employees' levels of coping with change. In a longitudinal study using data from 267 organizations undergoing downsizing processes, Trevor & Nyberg (2008) found a negative relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intentions. In this study, variations in levels of organizational commitment were explained by the perceived levels of procedural justice observed during the downsizing. Based on these and other studies (e.g. Eby et al., 2000; Iverson, 1996), it can be concluded that organizational commitment in general has a positive impact on how employees react to change. A relatively recent meta-analysis of the

relationship between organizational commitment and behaviors supporting one's job role also supports this conclusion (Harrison et al., 2006). The research evidence for this conclusion is, however, rather new, as indicated by a comment made by Herscovitch & Mayer (2002) less than 10 years ago: "Despite its presumed importance, however, little attention has been paid to the definition and measurement of commitment within a change context, and there is virtually no evidence to substantiate the claims made about its effects" (p. 474).

There are many definitions of commitment to change but perhaps the most well-known and well-established one was that presented by Herscovitch & Meyer (2002): "a mindset that binds an individual to a course of action deemed necessary for the successful implementation of a change initiative" (p. 475). Commitment to change is thus one of the most important factors involved in employee support for change initiatives, since it connects employees with organizational goals and change (Jaros, 2010). In order for organizations to not just survive but prosper, they must be knowledgeable about how to implement organizational changes that will be appreciated by their employees (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Research suggests that organizational commitment is the outcome of general attitudes towards change, change acceptance, and positive views about change (Judge et al., 1999; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). It has been suggested by Coatsee (1999) that the ability of commitment to promote and support change is related to: (1) employee abilities regarding change; (2) what is communicated about change; (3) employee decision-making authority; (4) rewards and recognition for participating in the change effort; and (5) employee understanding of the further future. In addition, motivational processes that underlie employee reactions to change initiatives seem to be important for the functioning of commitment to change (Armenakis & Harris, 2009).

According to Herscovitch & Meyer (2002), there are three areas of employee commitment that have been neglected in previous research: (1) affective commitment, which is a desire to provide support for the change based on its inherent benefits (identification); (2) normative commitment, which constitutes a sense of obligation to provide support for the change (reciprocity); and (3) continuance commitment, which manifests a recognition that there are costs associated with failure to provide support for the change (investment). Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) state that affective and normative commitment is associated with higher levels of support among employees than is continuance commitment. They also argue that commitment to a change is a better predictor for behavioral support among employees than organizational commitment. In a recent review, Jaros (2010) argues that current and future research must take into account and clarify this important dimensionality of change commitment.

In order to be able to understand the role of employee commitment to change, it would be wise to look at the behavior of managers in the change process. There are many reasons for this. Managers might be regarded as the primary change agents in most organizations. The decisions managers make and their role-modeling behaviors shape the organization's change culture. For instance, management decisions related to structural change, cultural factors, and human-resource policies have an impact on the innovation climate in organizations. Management decisions related to other policies and practices are imperative for organizational learning and for adaptation to changing environmental factors (Beer & Noria, 2000; Beer et al., 1990; Schein, 1992). Thus, the degree of management commitment to change is important to employees, in terms of how they experience their working lives, and to the organization, in terms of how it achieves desirable organizational outcomes and overcomes resistance to change (Jaros, 2010; Oreg, 2003).

For these reasons, those managers who are identified as the primary proponents and sponsors of a change initiative must provide the attention and endorsement that signal commitment in order to achieve a successful change outcome. However, organizational change initiatives often prove to be less than fully successful (Jaros, 2010). A fact of life is that the initial enthusiasm and support for a major change among employees deteriorate as problems and costs begin to become apparent. When this happens, employees look to their managers for signs of continued commitment to the change objectives. Demonstrating commitment involves more than just talking about the importance of the change. Managers must also participate in activities related to the change, such as attending special meetings or ceremonies relevant to the change effort. This has a clear symbolic meaning for the employees, indicating that the change must be important (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Podsakoff et al., 2000; Yukl, 2006).

Major organizational changes cause stress among employees due to increased work targets, threats of job losses, changes in job holders' responsibilities/authorities, and shifts in the balance of power (McHugh & Brennan, 1994). These role stressors may affect employee commitment to change. Negative attitudes towards change have been observed to be related to lower job satisfaction and commitment (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). How can an organization and its managers expect commitment to a change initiative from employees when they are experiencing job insecurity and job stress? In order to overcome these obstacles, managers must provide change-related communication demonstrating their own commitment (Johnson et al., 1996). Such communication can be used to: (1) reduce resistance; (2) minimize uncertainty; and (3) gain involvement and commitment as the change progresses. It must be noted that role conflicts and role ambiguity also can be reduced by providing timely feedback to employees regarding changes.

In addition to providing a positive role model for employees, managers can demonstrate commitment by using an empowering leadership style. An empowering style includes behaviors that share power with employees and has been demonstrated to positively influence performance (Vecchio et al., 2010). This kind of leadership provides guidance on how to enhance effectiveness through practices such as providing increased autonomy and responsibility to employees (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). However, there is evidence that an empowering leadership style has limitations both in change settings characterized by urgency and crisis and for inexperienced employees (Sims et al., 2009). Thus, this kind of leadership depends on certain situational conditions. Furthermore, Vecchio et al. (2010) report that the mediating mechanisms are not well specified. Other research has reported partial rather than full mediation (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Srivastava et al., 2006).

14.7 Discussion and Directions for Further Research

14.7.1 From utopist to realist frameworks

Research on organizational change has been criticized for not adequately representing the context in which change takes place (e.g. Feldman, 1986; Howards-Grenville, 2005; Pettigrew, 1987). This critique seems relevant to the issue of participation during change. As we have shown, general theories of participation have identified a large number of contingencies that might moderate the strength of any positive relationship between participation and outcomes, including organizational commitment. In a similar vein, second-generation research on the outcomes of organizational commitment often focuses in on

contextual variables that might affect the direct relationship between commitment and outcomes of interest. At times these contingencies may create strong interactions; that is, situations where relationships actually shift from positive to negative.

From our review, it seems likely that the scale and scope of change—the extent to which change is affecting these core aspects of the organization—are likely to interact with both commitment and participation. From the research on commitment, it seems plausible to conclude that the effects of commitment are dependent on the size of change. This is because the requirements for cognitive and behavioral adjustment and the emotional strain experienced by employees are likely to co-vary with change size. Evolutionary change, also called fine-tuning, often takes place within a fixed set of organizational features and does not challenge organizational norms, values, or the prevailing power structure to any large degree. Hence the strain on employees and the need for high levels of commitment to match this strain are less than in times of more profound and comprehensive change. Also, it seems that the impact of change on organizational commitment might be affected by the magnitude of change. As we have shown, organizational commitment is often the result of a social-exchange process by which employees monitor how they are treated by the organization and its leaders, particularly regarding issues that are relevant to their personal values. There are some indications that the organizational commitment of low-tenure employees is particularly volatile and is affected by single episodes such as an organizational change. Consistent with this, research by Fedor et al. (2006) seems to indicate that organizational commitment is particularly likely to be affected when a change has impact in terms of favorableness, when the extent of the change is large, and when the change implies changes in recipients' work conditions. The authors also found evidence of interactions among these facets of change.

However, organizations undergoing radical change may find that their most-committed employees are those who react most negatively to the change. Organizational commitment partly explains the psychological attachment of an individual to an organization. One important driver of this attachment is the level of congruence between the organization's values and the personal values of the focal employee (Meyer et al., 1998). Personal values are much less malleable than is often assumed in the normative literature on organizational and cultural change. They seem to be established sometime in early adulthood, and often undergo only minor adjustments in the subsequent periods of an individual's life (e.g. Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004). Hence, when organizations attempt to change values and norms as part of a radical change, an incongruence with employee values occurs. This process can lead to identity problems and a corresponding reduction in commitment among those who felt a high level of identification prior to the change.

Radical change may also interact with employees' responses to participation during change. Participation is one important antecedent of perceptions of procedural justice in organizations. Issues related to justice, including the degree of fairness associated with processes used during change, have been consistently found to be a focus for sense-making during change and an important criterion for the formation of attitudes towards change. One reason why employees prefer "fair processes" is that such processes are associated with increased levels of decision control (Konovsky, 2000). According to this mechanism, employees respond positively to elements of fair processes (involvement, voice opportunities) because such elements are associated with higher levels of outcome control. When individuals have the right to voice their opinions concerning change or are involved in the change process, their perceptions of being able to control important outcomes of the process are higher than they are in top-down change processes flowing

from centralized decision-making. As change becomes more radical, the stakes involved for employees increase rapidly and their need to control the outcomes will likely be more strongly felt. Based on this, it is likely that employees' willingness to participate in change-related activities increases as change becomes more radical. Further, we believe that the positive emotions, cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors that are often associated with participative processes will be more pronounced during radical compared to evolutionary change.

We also conclude that the interrelationships between participation and commitment have not been sufficiently explored up to this point. This seems to be particularly true for the specialized research on organizational change. A positive main effect of participation on commitment is rather well established as an average outcome across studies and organizational changes. In addition, there is strong theoretical support and indirect, but not direct, empirical evidence for a positive main effect of commitment on willingness to participate (see Section 14.8). But more-complex relationships between organizational commitment and participation during change are also likely to be present. First, it seems likely that levels of commitment interact positively with any relationship between participation and outcomes of change at the individual as well as the change level of analysis. More-committed individuals are by definition more emotionally attached to their organizations and more willing to exert a high level of effort in performing tasks (Mowday et al., 1979). Hence, it stands to reason that the contribution in terms of information-sharing, problem-solving, constructive talk, and other forms of support by a committed individual will be higher than for low-commitment individuals even in cases where both spend equal amounts of time participating in change-related work. In a similar vein, we expect participation to interact positively with the often-assumed relationship between organizational commitment and outcomes such as attitudes towards change, change-supportive behaviors, and change success.

14.7.2 Implications of a better-educated workforce and the continued transition towards knowledge industries

Among the broad global trends with implications for research and practice in participation and organizational commitment is the increased level of formal education that is observed throughout the world. Education transforms people in terms of both the knowledge they and their value systems, which in turn determine what they regard as important in their lives (Locke et al., 2001; Shapira & Griffith, 1990). Higher education seems to increase the importance of values such as the need for growth, autonomy, and democracy. These affect how people respond to organizational arrangements that allowi for more or less involvement in and influence on decision-making and problem-solving. Based on these relationships, it seems likely that the demand for higher levels of participation will continue to rise in the future.

This development is only partly matched by trends in organization structure and leadership. It is often observed that when organizations move towards centralization (and away from decentralization)—marked by increased control, standardization, and command-and-control leadership—employees experience a loss of a feeling of empowerment and therefore become less interested in participation (Jacobides & Croson, 2001). In the same vein, when organizational leaders are faced with the trade-offs between satisfying stockholders and satisfying (knowledge) workers, they tend to listen more closely to members of the former group.

Based on these two concerns, we predict that issues related to participation will become more, rather than less, important in coming years. There is already research to indicate that employees feel that levels of participation are too low (Bruhn et al., 2001). Ever more specialized, well-educated, and knowledgeable employees shift the balance of the power–dependence relationship from owners/managers to employees as the former become more dependent on the latter to achieve their goals. One consequence of this is that employee involvement is increasingly becoming a scarce performance-driving resource that should be allocated to uses in which its marginal productivity is maximized.

This implies that organizations must economize on the use of the time and energy of their highly-skilled personnel and that involvement has a high alternative cost. High-performers, who are often also important informal leaders, partake in many performance-driving processes in an organization. By involving such employees in change, important resources are drawn away from areas such as product development, sales, and other forms of innovation. This calls for selective involvement based on a set of criteria that define when the economic effect of involvement is at its highest. From both an employee and a managerial perspective, this is likely to be when organizational changes have the largest potential consequences for the attainment of professional values by knowledge workers. Due to self-allocation into educational and socialization programs, the members of a given profession hold strong professional values (Akerlof & Kranton, 2002). Such values tend to differ considerably between professions (e.g. Shapira & Griffith, 1990). When such professional values are furthered by a change, responses to the change are positive; when they are threatened, responses will be negative. It is possible that responses to participation will be at their most positive when involvement concerns decisions with a high impact on professional values, both because the issues are personally relevant and because participation is associated with outcome control. When changes do not have such an impact, it is likely that responses will be neutral or even negative. However, these interactions need to be explored empirically in future research.

The link between change and professional values is likely to be an important issue in organizational sense-making during change, but has up-to till now been subjected to little research. Across professions, there is some evidence that highly-educated employees differ from the less-educated in their focus on internal versus external work facets. Specifically, they seem to be less concerned with pay and job security, but put relatively more emphasis on intrinsic job facets such as interesting tasks, a sense of achievement, and chances for promotion (Warr, 2008). Hence, it seems that changes that have effects on job content are of particular importance to highly-educated personnel and that participation in such changes is likely to produce positive reactions in this demographic group.

To some extent, perceptions of such links can be influenced by managerial activities during change, including communication activities. In particular, highly-trusted change agents can probably influence how employees perceive such links as part of their activities, allowing them to develop justifications for change and to create perceived readiness for change early in the change process. The efficacy of managerial activities in creating or downplaying such links warrants further research, especially in organizations with highly-educated, self-confident employees. It also seems relevant to examine how the success of such attempts feeds back to post-change levels of trust and cynicism towards change, organizations, and individual managers.

14.7.3 Research on ability and motivation to participate

This review has shown that we presently know more about the forms and effects of participation than about its antecedents. This conclusion seems to hold for the general literature on participation in organizations, as well as for the more specialized literature on participation during change. We think that a better understanding of the determinants of participation is required from both an employee and a managerial/organizational perspective. From an employee perspective, it is crucial to know more about who is willing to be more involved, when, and in what processes, in order to improve the quality of work life through increased or decreased levels of participation. Increasing participation in situations where the present level is perceived as adequate might easily lead to a reduction in quality of (work) life because it will require levels of effort, competence, and job involvement that may not present in members of the organization. From an organizational perspective, the positive outcomes for knowledge-sharing, charge-taking, levels of effort, and financial performance are mostly mediated by positive employee responses to increased participation. Hence, from this perspective too, an intelligent use of participation must build on a thorough understanding of employees' ability and motivation to participate in organizational processes.

Research on issue-selling in organizations is relevant to understanding how individual competencies for effective participation develop over time through practice and reflection. Issue-selling is the process by which individuals or groups attempt to get their particular concerns included in the organizational agenda. It is related to the decision control path linking participation to positive outcomes. For example, Howard-Grenville (2007) shows how issue-sellers gradually develop knowledge about the key schemas of issue recipients and learn how to tie their own issues into them. This finding mirrors an issue that is often raised in comments on implementing participation: that participation has to be learned in some way, and that employees with work experience exclusively from organizations characterized by centralized decision-making are ill prepared for suddenly taking part in new areas of decision-making (e.g. Cotton et al., 1991).

Organizational voice—that is, employees' tendency to actually communicate their opinions when given the opportunity—is often included as a form of participation in organizations. Research on organizational voice has identified conditions under which employees choose to participate by raising their concerns over decision issues versus when they remain silent on such issues even when their views are solicited by change agents. Studying employees' responses to leadership behaviors in a restaurant chain, Detert & Burris (2007) provide evidence that managers who succeed at providing psychological safety to subordinates are rewarded with employees who exhibit a stronger tendency to contribute to the organization by voicing their opinions. Observed levels of psychological safety, in turn, are positively associated with a manager's degree of openness vis-à-vis their subordinates (see also Dutton et al., 1997; Edmondson, 2003). The willingness of members to provide thoughts and ideas about critical work processes is important to a firm's dynamic competitive position and characterizes successful learning (Edmondson, 1999).

We have argued that employee participation can fruitfully be seen as a form of voluntary behavior in organizations. Even in cases where employees are forced to participate, the effort put into this work is hard to observe. This may be because the requirement to participate is usually not included in formal work descriptions and is therefore largely a matter of the individual employee's discretion. Hence, a better understanding of employees' willingness to participate is crucial for efficient use of this approach to change.

Perhaps the most developed body of theoretical and empirical knowledge addressing voluntary behaviors in organizations comes from research on OCB. This research has identified a comprehensive set of antecedents, forms, and outcomes of different types of voluntary behavior, some of which overlap with behaviors normally subsumed under the concepts of participation, employee involvement, and empowerment. For example, organizational participation, defined as attending nonrequired meetings and sharing informed opinions and new ideas with others, is explicitly considered to be a reflection of organizational civic virtue (Graham, 1991). However, so far this body of knowledge is only integrated to a small degree with participation research and practice. Consistent with our view of evolutionary change, many of the findings from this research can probably be directly generalized to evolutionary-change settings; that is, predictors of OCB are also likely to predict willingness to participate during evolutionary change when employee stakes are relatively low. Several comprehensive reviews of this literature have been published (Chang et al., 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2000; Shweta & Jha, 2009). In this section we only illustrate how these findings can be used to inform researchers and practitioners concerned with employee willingness to participate during change.

One striking finding from this research is that different forms of OCB are strongly related to several important employee work attitudes, including organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and perception of fairness (e.g. Podsakoff et al., 2000, p. 527). These findings seem to predict that employees' willingness to participate in change is a reflection of their broader relationship with their organization. Employees who are satisfied with how they have experienced their work and the organization in the past are more likely to participate constructively during change than less-satisfied employees. Hence, it seems that willingness to participate and the resulting capacity to change are largely built up in the periods prior to any change episode and that organizations are more or less prepared for the successful involvement of their employees depending on their exchange history prior to change. As these attitudes vary within any organization, another implication seems to be that the willingness to participate is likely to vary. As job satisfaction and commitment may be more easily observable than willingness to participate, these relationships can be used to form work teams during change.

Another consistent finding is that leadership behaviors and trust in leadership seem to be important determinants of OCB (Podsakoff et al., 2000). In particular, positive relationships have been found between transformational leadership behaviors, the formulation of a vision, the provision of clear guidelines for what should be done and achieved, high performance expectations, and OCB. This implies that leadership and participation are much more interconnected than is reflected in the literature on participation during change, and that differences in leader–member histories are likely to affect willingness to participate and the outcomes of participation.

14.7.4 Leadership, trust in leadership, and participation during change

The degree and form of participation are often presented to leaders as choices that are disconnected from other aspects of leadership style and leader–member relationships. This is not likely to be true, as many facets of leadership potentially interact with participation in the production of outcomes, including organizational commitment. Many commentators on participation have pointed to the close connection between leadership and participation. In the leadership literature, participation is often portrayed as an important element of leadership style. For example, transformational leaders combine top-down

inspirational appeals with behaviors that involve their subordinates (Bass, 1985). Newer leadership concepts, such as authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) and servant leadership (Graham, 1991), increasingly reflect leadership styles in which decision authority is divided more equally between leaders and subordinates. Participation is sometimes presented as an influence tactic used by leaders that is tied to individual configurations of power bases. In the general literature on participation and organizational commitment, the interaction between leadership and participation has been explored to a certain degree, but little research from the field of organizational change has examined this. Specifically, we conclude that employee trust in leadership (Kramer, 1999) may operate as a substitute for participation and that this link may become more important as organizations are increasingly careful about how they deploy their highly-skilled workforce. Further, it is possible that highly-educated employees will react positively to reductions in participation in some processes, provided that they hold high levels of trust in those that make such centralized decisions.

It has previously been found that organizational change constitutes an important event in which trust in leadership is built or destroyed. Specifically, Lines et al. (2007) empirically showed that post-change trust in leadership is related to how the change process is designed and to the consequences of change for change-recipient jobs. In this study, participation during change was positively related to post-change trust in leadership.

However, participation may not always lead to increased levels of trust. One important side effect of participative processes is the creation of organizational arenas in which trust-relevant behaviors can be observed and other trust-relevant information, such as cues for judging levels of competence and benevolence, can be transmitted to participants. When a leader collaborates with subordinates in a participative process, it is more difficult to hide the true motives behind change, and the leader's knowledge about the change becomes more visible than it would be in a centralized process. Hence, we believe that the link between participation and trust in leadership is contingent on a leader's level of competence and that only authentic leaders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) will observe a positive effect from participation.

14.7.5 Commitment to change and organizational creativity

In many ways, the essence of successful creative efforts might be regarded as synonymous with change (West et al., 2004). By definition, creativity requires that people deviate from conventional wisdom and adopt new ways of thinking and doing. It also implies that they enact new patterns and move away from the status quo so that they can develop novel and useful ideas (Shalley et al., 2009; Zhou & George, 2001). Moreover, creativity is connected with the willingness to generate wildly different ideas, which entails the possibility of real mistakes and failure (Miner et al., 2001; George & Zhou, 2001). However, for different reasons, it is difficult for employees to engage in change-related creative behavior (Shalley & Gilson, 2004; Shalley et al., 2009). Typically, they are found to resist it by clinging to routine and habitual behaviors (Ford et al., 2008; Oreg, 2003). The uncertainty, apparent riskiness, and potential for failure that accompany creative efforts are often feared by employees (Jermier et al., 1994; Jones, 2001). It is therefore argued that resistance to change is likely to be detrimental to their creative performance. This is because the resistance is assumed to prevent employees from taking appropriate risks, adopting new ways of thinking, and initiating change. All these behaviors are fundamental requirements of creative performance (Amabile et al., 1996; Ford et al., 2008). However, recent research

indicates that the work environment might help mitigate the detrimental effects of employees' resistance to change (George, 2007). For instance, contextual factors at the group level might moderate individual-level relationships between resistance to change and creative performance (Bliese, 2000; Hirst et al., 2009; Hofmann et al., 2000).

Although most employees tend to resist change to some extent, there are individual differences. Taking this fact into account, Oreg (2003) has developed a scale that measures dispositional resistance to change, and has found that higher levels are associated with resistance to innovation and voluntary change.

In order to improve the work environment so that it facilitates employee acceptance of change, leaders must focus on their communication. A knowledge-based vision requires a strong commitment and is communicated most effectively through social interaction. Such a vision generally includes new thoughts, ideas, phrasings, and actions. These provide a foundation for new forms of imagination in the organization. In addition, the vision often communicates to the employees what kinds of value and skill the organization requires (Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Selart & Schei, 2011).

Another way of improving the work environment is to apply empowerment-oriented leadership. Here, both rhetoric and economic resources are used to develop intellectual resources. In organizations where this kind of leadership is practiced, employees are characterized by qualities such as self-confidence, inner motivation, and skill. Such properties are synonymous with individual creativity in organizations. Whereas a shared vision requires an integrated understanding of the organization's goals, empowerment allows a lot of fragmentation with respect to how these goals will be achieved. In this form of leadership, it is the management's task to set goals, secure resources, and then leave the arena (Bennis & Townsend, 1997; Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Selart & Schei, 2011).

14.8 Conclusion

Our reading of the literature on participation and commitment during organizational change has revealed that a substantial body of theoretical and empirical knowledge has been accumulated so far. Large parts of the research evidence closely mirror findings from the more general literature on participation and commitment in organizations. However, research in change settings has expanded the field in terms of contextualizing general theory and showing how change affects and is affected by processes of participation and commitment. Moreover, a set of new, partly change-specific variables has been introduced to the broader field by researchers focusing on change. Some of the themes captured by these variables (e.g. cynicism towards change, resistance towards change) are of substantial importance to a better understanding of organizational functioning in settings with relative stability. Hence, this research indicates a potential for cross-fertilization and better integration of the two streams of research.

This reading has also indicated that our understanding of the roles played by participation and commitment during change may be promoted if a more realistic perspective is taken by researchers and practitioners alike. For example, increased levels of participation are associated with some costs, and these have to be compared to the benefits that vary from one change to the next. Also, employee responses to increased participation are more variable than is reflected in some of the most optimistic literature. We think that the greatest challenge in this field is to improve our understanding of when participation provides net benefits to organizations and employees.

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