The Process of Engagement:

Examination of management values as a change strategy in Veterans Affairs Canada[1]

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ABSTRACT

One of the most difficult issues of change programs is how to get started. Motivating initial steps related to the change involves convincing those affected by the change that they should become actively involved in achieving the change goals. A frequent dilemma of change programs focused on increasing employee participation is that managers have been trained that it is their role to make the decisions and solve the problems. Employees, they believe, are not capable and, in many cases, not interested in participating in managerial tasks.

This research study examines a five-year change program carried out in the Department of Veterans Affairs Canada to shift the management culture in the direction of increased employee empowerment and participation. It examines the critical role that a four-day management values seminar played in convincing mangers that employees were interested and capable of participation in work-related decision-making. The study concludes that the structured examination of managers' personal beliefs and values related to employees, employee involvement, and change management processes was a critical element in motivating managers to implement change initiatives in support of the project goals.

Introduction

If only it weren't for the people, the God-damn people," said Finnerty, "always getting tangled up in the machinery. If it weren't for them, earth would be an engineer's paradise" (Vonnegut, 1952: 59).

Issues related to "the people" tend, for the most part, to absorb the highest percentage of management time and energy in the overall scheme of organization life. This is true mostly because, unlike dollars or other physical assets, people are not mere quantitative entities to be manipulated at will. They think, feel, judge, and act based on things they value – ideals, goals, outcomes, and processes – all of which are complex entities for the individual manager to track and take into consideration as he or she leads the organization. The conundrum remains, however, that it is through the successful management of people that managers succeed or fail in the achievement of organization goals. Shingen Takeda, a feudal lord and administrator from the province of Kai in Japan, felt so strongly about this that he maintained, when questioned about his lack of progress in building fortifications, that "the people are the moat, the people are the stonewalls, the people are the castle." (Imai, 1975:63)   With this conviction in mind, he never built a castle of his own, but instead focused on involvement of his people and responsiveness to their needs as a strategy to administrative success.

In modern organizations fortress building does not represent current official strategy, though some would say that informally it represents one of the prime goals of less effective managers. Even outside of the context of building castles, however, Takeda's principle still appears to apply. Regardless of the elegance of the organization design or the brilliance of the strategy, it is still the people (in this case the employees and managers considered together) who must accept and implement

it for success to evolve. Thus it is largely a factor of how effectively managers harness and engage the human component of the organization that determines how successful the organization becomes.

Literature on organization productivity points strongly to a positive correlation between employee involvement and empowerment and increases in multiple measures of organization effectiveness Applebaum et al., 2000; Belanger, 2000; Drucker, 1999; Pil & MacDuffie, 1996). Research undertaken by Peters and Waterman (1982) stressed that managerial efforts to influence the motivation, morale, and productivity of employees by listening to what they think or value and involving them directly in corporate decision-making represent one of the key differentiating factors between excellent and mediocre companies. The literature suggests that this very process itself – the involvement of the employees in organizational decision making – represents a critical practice differentiating merely effective and superbly productive organizations (Collins, 2001).

The difficulty with empowerment from the perspective of organizational power is at least two-fold. In a world framed by the assumption of limited power, empowerment of one party implies the disempowerment of another. The typical loser in the empowerment scenario is the first line and middle level management group, both of whom generally are divested of decision making authority in favor of increased rank and file decision-making in typical empowerment initiatives. For supervisors who have worked many years to reach the point of being able to make operational decisions see their hard-won authority – and associated status – eroded by the empowerment movement. Supervisory resistance to employee empowerment is understandably high. Given the supervisor's access to managerial decision-makers in the planning and early implementation stages or empowerment efforts, this resistance can quickly evolve into rear-guard actions designed to block or frustrate the success of empowerment initiatives.

A second dilemma flows from the managerial culture associated with the basic assumptions underlying the concept of a managerial hierarchy. Most supervisors have only experienced an organizational system in which decisions were deferred to superiors at a higher level in the managerial hierarchy. Their deeper level assumptions hold that hierarch of decision authority is a natural and necessary condition for organizational effectiveness. Even when faced with valid and convincing research data supporting the position that decisions can be delegated effectively to lower levels of the organization with resulting increases in productivity, managers and supervisors who have not personally experienced the effectiveness of such a system fail to embrace empowerment. Their personal experience does not support the data and traditional managerial wisdom contradicts it.

The Change Agent's Question

Through what processes do men and women alter, replace, or transcend patterns of thinking, valuation, volition, and overt behavior by which they have managed and justified their lives into patterns of thinking, valuation, volition, and behavior which are better oriented to the realities and actualities of contemporary existence, personal and social, and which are at once more personally fulfilling and socially appropriate?"

Kurt Lewin

Allied with the managerial bias is the overwhelming experience base of employees whose typical day-to-day experience of work reinforce both Fayol and Taylor's fundamental managerial principle of the distinct division of responsibilities between management (including supervisors) and employee. Traditional employee experience – and accumulated expectation – is that managers will plan, organize, direct and control while employees implement. While the experience of more leading edge high performance organizations contradicts the necessity of this particular differentiated arrangement of work roles, the personal experience of employees reinforces both the "natural" nature of the division as well as the potential advantages to the employee of a relatively passive role in the job. Limited decision-making responsibilities easily equates to limited accountability for results determined by those same decisions.

Research carried by Auclaire and Archambault (1980) and reinforced by the literature of organizational effectiveness (Hackman and Oldham, 1980; Collins, 2001) supports the conclusion that

employees in general value the opportunity to use their cognitive abilities in the workplace--to actively participate in the analysis, planning, and decision making processes associated with their specific jobs. The Auclair and Archambault research further suggests that, to the extent that both managers and employees have opportunities to use these valued skills within the context of their work responsibilities – labeled "judgment at work" – organization performance will be above par and morale will be high.

The operating dilemma represented by the finding in the literature is one of implementation: how can an organization successfully engage supervisors in a shift from a more traditional hierarchical management approach to a more full involvement of all levels in the management of the enterprise? Literature on organizational change suggests a variety of meta-strategies useful in approaching this end (Benne and Chin, 1985; Miles et. al., 2002). Best practice analysis points in the direction of a combination of the use of information, power, and some form of personal experience that challenges the current values and beliefs of those involved in the change as the optimal strategy (Rokeach, 1970; Benne and Chin, 1985; Miles, 2002).

The research documented in this chapter examines the impact of a five-year effort by the Canadian Federal Government Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to broaden the participation of employees in decision-making and problem solving on the job. The declared goal of the initiative was to shift the overall management culture of the organization in the direction of increased joint participation of managers and employees in the daily management of work-related activities. The change process utilized a four-day Management Values Seminar (MVS) that confronted managers and supervisors with their own biases against this end. The content of the seminar itself challenged participants to reconsider empowerment-related alternatives. This chapter outlines the thinking behind the design of the seminar, summarizes the impact of attendance based on post-implementation evaluation, and suggests additional research considerations in relation to approaches to organizational change efforts focused on increasing employee involvement through empowerment in the workplace.

Method

In keeping with the overall strategy of the Department to bring about a shift in the management culture of the organization, the Management Values Seminar was envisioned as a first step in the movement of the Department of Veterans Affairs toward implementation of a philosophy of management consistent with maximum involvement of employees in the decision-making elements of their jobs. The overall Departmental change strategy outlined in Table 6.1 highlights a number of desired outcomes related to the seminar and follow-up activities in terms of immediate, intermediate, and long-term time frames.

The research approach adopted by this study was designed to measure the extent to which attendance by managers at the Management Values Seminar (MVS) had been instrumental in bringing about the two desired intermediate level impacts:

(1) managerial initiative to undertake projects to improve work environment and job design in individual work units; and
(2) increased employee participation in decision making related to their individual jobs.

The study design was developed to enable inference to be made about the causal link between participation in the seminar and increased activity of departmental managers in relation to the above two outcome areas.

A variety of choices and dilemmas are encountered when planning any form of assessment program related to organization change. For this particular research study, the fact that DVA is a functioning organization responding in real time to both internal political realities and external environmental pressures strongly influenced the final choice of both the research design and questionnaire instrument used. It also resulted in a number of limitations to the final design itself,

factors impacting to some extent on the level of internal validity of the study and the ability to generalize results to other organizations. Key to these was the internal political processes related to implementation of the change across five regions of the country and under the direction of five strong and independent managers. Their personal styles and decisions related to the speed and breadth of participation in the MVS, and proved to be a critical factor in the penetration of the change within their individual geographic areas of responsibility. This in turn resulted in some regions being more represented in final questionnaire completion.

Table 1 Veterans Affairs Organization Renewal Strategy

Input	• Management Values Seminars (MVS) • Consultant follow-up and support
Intended Immediate Impacts	• Improved knowledge/skills of managers • Managerial values challenged (cognitive dissonance) • Managers motivated to attempt change initiatives within work groups
Intended Intermediate Impacts	• Projects Undertaken to improve Work Environment and Job Design • Increased Employee Participation in Decision Making
Intended Long Term Impacts	• Improved Work Group Effectiveness and Productivity • Increased Individual Productivity and Satisfaction • Departmental Philosophy of Management as a Prevailing condition in DVA

Design of Questionnaire Instruments

Measurement of the impact of the seminar was carried out through administration of two structured questionnaires, one designed for distribution to the management group members who had participated in (or were eligible for participation in) the seminars, and the other to a sample group of employees. Sample size of the management category was 408 respondents while that of the employee group was 300. This represented a 100 percent sample of manager participants of the values seminar and a 10 percent sample of employees selected from work unit groups spread throughout the Department. Sampling procedures for the employee group were designed so that work units and individual respondents were selected randomly within categories to ensure that all major constituent groups (geographical, language, gender, and organizational) would be represented. All members of the employee group of respondents worked for managers who were eligible for participation in the MVS. As such, the total sample of employee respondents was in a position to give direct feedback concerning changes introduced by their superiors subsequent to seminar attendance.

In their overview of instruments and procedures for measurement of organizational change initiatives, Lawler, Nadler and Mirvis (1983) indicate that there are eleven distinguishable types of instruments or procedures for the collection of information. Based on the goals of the current research as outlined above, the study carried out in relation to the MVS used a modified version of the "Change-Implementation and Goal-Attainment Questionnaire" approach outlined in the Lawler, Nadler, and Mirvis' typology. It is described as "a questionnaire employed to obtain employee views about the implementation of changes [in the workplace]. Questions are developed to determine the extent to which employees perceive improvements or other changes in their jobs." The particular form of questionnaire is focused on initiatives carried out in situations where multiple factors could be

perceived to influence outcome objectives. The intent of its design is to focus respondent attention on the potential for linkage between one or a subset of factors and a particular change initiative.

The final design resulted in manager and employee questionnaires highlighting content areas covered by the seminar itself. Respondents were requested to indicate, through the process of checking off listed categories of interventions, the variety of types of changes introduced or being implemented in their work areas (structured checklist approach). The questionnaire also allowed participants to specify an open number of additional change initiatives not specifically highlighted in the MVS itself but which modeled the spirit of the intended results in the direction of increased participation and empowerment of employees. Nominated choices were directly related to elements of job enrichment and work-group communication improvement strategies, on-the-job decision making, and intrinsic motivation techniques. All of these strategies had been mentioned in the seminar as core mechanisms to increase employee involvement and as mechanisms which competent managers frequently employed to achieve high levels of employee performance and satisfaction.

In addition, managers were asked to indicate the extent to which the Management Values Seminar was influential in their decision to implement change initiatives and to pinpoint other factors which were significant in helping or hindering the introduction of new ideas in their work groups. Employees were asked to indicate changes introduced by their managers by checking off a list of possible initiatives similar to that provided to managers and to confirm whether changes had been introduced before or after their managers had participated in the MVS. The research intent was to establish a temporal connection between the seminar and introduction of change activities. Statements by the managers concerning the impact of the study were matched with those of the employees concerning changes implemented. An assumption of the study, based on the Lawler, Nadler and Mirvis typology, was that if initiation occurred subsequent to the seminar and managers indicated positive impact of the seminar, attendance had been instrumental in motivating the new activity or behavior.

Results

Analysis of new initiatives implemented subsequent to attendance at the MVS

The first segment of the survey instrument focused on immediate follow-up discussions and agreements for activity between participants and their direct supervisors. Questionnaire responses indicated that of the 412 respondents, 247 had attended the seminar while 165 had not yet had an opportunity to do so. These figures confirm that, with the exception of a few newly promoted or transferred managers, all management staff down to the supervisory level in the Department had attended the seminar over the previous three-year period. The remaining supervisors were scheduled to attend the seminar in the upcoming year.

Of the sample of 247 managers who attended the seminar, 128 (52 %) indicated that they had taken the initial step of discussing the seminar with their immediate supervisors while the remaining 118 (approximately 48 percent) indicated that they had not undertaken this recommended initiative as of the date of the survey (see Table 6.2).

Given the existing hierarchical culture of DVA, the change initiative planning team recommended that most important initial action that participants could take would be to discuss their reactions and ideas concerning the MVS with their immediate supervisors. Responses to the questionnaire instrument indicated that approximately 50 percent of seminar participants undertook this initial follow-up activity. Results of these discussions generated a variety of potential options for action in keeping with the intent to increase employee participation. These are summarized in Table 6.1. Although a number of these initial ideas pointed in the direction of gathering more information and increasing supervisor and employee understanding of the significance of employee involvement, over 25% of follow-up activities identified focused on immediate implementation of work-group planning and work redesign initiatives directly. The topics discussed clearly reflect the content

covered by the seminar (as outlined by both the pre-prepared survey checklist and the unstructured "other" comments).

Table 2 MVS Seminar Attendance and Initial Management Follow-up

	Actual / Potential
Number of Managers Attending Seminar	247 / 412 = 60%
Attendees Holding Follow-up Discussion with Immediate Supervisor as suggested in MVS Seminar	128 / 247 = 52%
Follow-up Activities Discussed:	Frequency:
• Have additional staff attend seminar • Meet as management team to determine follow-up strategy • Undertake individual work-group planning sessions • Undertake work redesign activities • Gather data (using mini-surveys) on current issues related to employee involvement • No decision reached as a result of meeting • Other	104 80 55 57 26 25 17

Although immediate follow-up to the seminar through discussion with peers and supervisors was important, the goal of the seminar was to motivate actual ongoing change activity at the working level, initiated as a result of the participants' seminar experience. Data generated by the management participants in the MVS indicated that one hundred and ninety-seven participants (80%) initiated some form of change initiative subsequent to attendance at the seminar. Descriptions of the types of change introduced are summarized in Table 6.3. Analysis indicates that the activities initiated focus directly on broadening employee input to decision making through changes in the structure of planning and decision-making meetings, new division of work responsibilities / job redesign, creation of local "change committees" to capture employee ideas, restructuring of meeting agendas to facilitate idea discussion, development of change proposals for consideration by senior management, and a variety of additional initiatives generally designed to build employee involvement.

> I feel that I can't say enough positive things about the MVS. For me it opened many doors and gave me a new perspective on *me* and others. I have discussed the seminar with my staff. Trust and open feedback are more visible and continuing to develop. It is not all sunshine and roses. But at least I understand more easily now why my great ideas bombed out. Sometimes I have even caught myself being unfair and biased—OUCH.
> *Seminar Participant*

Among the miscellaneous items added in the "other" category were the following: having more study days with employees, leaving decisions that the manager does not have to make up to the discretion of the employees, including staff to a greater degree in goal-setting and work planning, and altering the format of staff meetings from information-dissemination sessions to team participation sessions.

As part of the research strategy, a parallel questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 300 employees in units whose managers had attended the seminar. Analysis of much of the data generated by this instrument resulted in conclusions of limited utility for a number of reasons. For example, in the question asking whether the immediate supervisor of the respondent had attended the MVS, 45 percent indicated that they did not know. Another questionnaire item asked respondents to indicate whether change activities had been initiated in their work units. Although 50 percent of the respondents indicated that activities had occurred, approximately 55 percent of this number failed to indicate whether such initiatives had begun before or after attendance at the seminar. As a result, the intent of the study to use employee data to confirm management responses was limited to some extent. Nevertheless, some of the descriptive data generated through the use of this instrument does prove

useful in confirming patterns established through the management survey results. This data is summarized in Table 6.2 along with the management statements of changes initiated. Review of the table confirms that employee experience of changes being introduced into their work group closely parallel the claims of management related to the types change initiatives implemented.

Table 3 Change Initiatives Undertaken Subsequent to MVS

Participants initiating change initiative Subsequent to Attendance at MVS	197 (80%)	
Follow-up Activities Discussed	Frequency Noted by: Employees	Noted by: Managers
introduction of more frequent idea-generation and decision-making staff meetings	157	97
new division of work responsibilities / job redesign	128	111
creation of local "change committees"	38	40
restructuring of meeting agendas to include employee idea discussions	46	35
preparation of change recommendations for transmission to senior management	39	17
other	24	14
Sample size	247	217

The sheer number of follow-up activities occurring subsequent to the MVS suggests a level of impact from attendance at the seminar. The MVS itself stressed the theme of opening up opportunities for employee use of judgment in either decision-making or problem-solving roles. Table 6.4 summarizes content areas addressed in the seminar and the perceived usefulness of each as judged by the participants.

Table 4 Perceived Usefulness of Topics Covered in the MVS

Topic	# of Participants Indicating Topic was Useful Total sample N = 247
• Extending "judgment" down the hierarchy	174 (71%)
• Involving work groups in generating ideas about better ways to do jobs	176 (71%)
• Sharing planning, organizing, and controlling aspects of jobs with employees	149 (60%)
• Respecting individual positions in the reporting structure	109 (44%)
• Developing "internal commitment" of employees to job	105 (43%)
• Creating jobs to allow "whole tasks"	80 (32%)
• Beginning change efforts with small issues and moving up to larger ones	62 (25%)
• Other	16 (7%)

Many of the follow-up activities attempted mirror the seminar content areas directly, especially the attempts to increase the frequency with which staff meetings became opportunities for employees to generate ideas and participate in decisions related to their jobs. Under the category of "other," respondents highlighted several additional content areas of particular usefulness. These included extending decision-making power to individuals in relation to their own jobs, understanding the impact of personal values on how individuals approach people and work situations, and the importance of being able to make mistakes without fear of disproportionate punishment.

Responses of participants in the seminar indicate that the vast majority (219 of the total sample of 247 participants) found the ideas and approaches covered in the seminar to be useful in a practical sense in their work environment. By far the most useful was the cluster of content areas dealing with the dynamics and mechanisms of participative management, with special focus on the seminar theme of extending the use of judgment to employees in their jobs. When questioned about the specific actions that participants took in the general areas outlined in Table 6.3, the most frequently cited new practices undertaken included the training of employees in new skill areas to accept broader responsibility, redesigning jobs to allow for individual responsibility for whole tasks, staff rotation across responsibility areas, and the creation of small teams of employees with responsibility for whole tasks. A large number of respondents (51%) attempted general change activities in broad area of job and work design. Specific initiatives undertaken are outlined in Table 6.5.

Table 5 New Practices Reflecting MVS Content Introduced into Workplace

New Practice	Frequency (Total sample N = 247)
• Training of staff in new skill areas for broader responsibility	125 (51%)
• Staff rotation across responsibility areas	101 (41%)
• Work teams given overall responsibility for whole tasks	48 (19%)
• Redesigned individual jobs as whole tasks	83 (34%)
• Regular information gathering from staff about current issues	120 (49%)
• More frequent total staff meetings	113 (46%)
• Regular supervisor-employee meetings	62 (25%)
• Spending time with work groups to reinforce current effective practices	115 (47%)
• No new changes introduced	20 (8%)

Analysis of the relationship between attendance at the seminar and participant willingness to initiate change activity

Research data analyzed to this point has focused on the details of individual follow-up activities and new practices introduced subsequent to the seminar. A simple overview of activities, however compelling, is not sufficient evidence to lead to the conclusion that there is a causative relationship between attendance at the seminar and subsequent initiation of change activities. With this in mind, questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate directly by means of a seven-point scale the extent to which their participation in the MVS had been a motivating factor- in their individual decisions to introduce work group improvement activities. Results of the response to this question are outlined in Table 6.6.

Table 6 Participant Perception of Motivational Impact of MVS on Introduction of Change Initiatives

	Not at all a Related Factor						The Key Related Factor
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Responses (raw #'s)	9	13	29	22	65	60	27
Percent of Total	4.0	5.8	12.9	9.8	28.9	26.7	12.0

Note: Total sample size N = 247 (nil responses N = 22)

Statistical analyses of the responses received to this question indicate that the mean response to this item was 4.82 on the 7-point scale, with a standard deviation of 1.62. Given that the question was phrased such that any response above the base of 1.00 indicated some degree of connection between attendance at the seminar and motivation to introduce work group change activities related to the VS, the pattern of response indicated above suggests a strong relationship between the two variables. Analysis of cross-tabulation between participants' self-report on motivational impact of seminar and self-report on whether they did or did not attempt follow-up activities (Table 6.7) strongly supports this conclusion.

Table 7 Cross-Tabulation of Participant Self-Reports of Implementation of Change Initiative and Motivational Impact of Seminar

Participant Attempted Change Initiative ⟶			
Participant Self Reported Impact of Seminar As Motivating Willingness to Attempt Change Initiatives ⬇	Yes	No	Ratio Yes/No
Not at All Related (1)	4 (1.8%)	5 (2.3%)	1:1.25
(2)	9 (4.1%)	3 (1.4%)	3:1
(3)	23 (10.5%)	6 (2.7%)	3.75:1
(4)	16 (7.3%)	6 (2.7%)	2.66:1
(5)	56 (25.5%)	8 (3.6%)	6.25:1
(6)	54 (24.5%)	5 (2.3%)	10.8:1
The Key Factor (7)	23 (10.4%)	2 (0.9%)	11.5:1

Valid Cases N = 220   185   35   5.29:1
Probability of Chance = 0.011

Analysis of Table 6.7 indicates that as the degree of self-reported motivational impact of the MVS rises, so does the absolute number of managers who choose to implement follow-up activities. The comparison between the ratio of numbers of participants who indicated they did and did not undertake follow-up activity when viewed as a factor of their position on the seven-point scale is even more compelling in its suggestion of relationship between attendance at the seminar and the decision to implement change. For those who indicated that their attendance at the seminar was not at all related to their decision regarding implementation of work improvement activities, the number of managers who did initiate activities trailed those who did not (four respondents undertook activities compared to five who did not, representing a ratio of 1:1.25 for responses at this point on the seven-point scale). From this point on, however, as the self reporting of managers indicates that the seminar influenced their decision to change, the ratio of managers implementing activities compared to those who did not increase at all points on the scale except one. This is consistent with the degree to which participants indicate that the seminar represented a motivating force in their decision to proceed with follow-up. As indicated in Table 6.6, the probability of chance of such a relationship is 0.011. The described level of relationship between these two factors thus appears fairly strong.

A number of respondents added supplementary comments related to the issue of the relationship between their implementation of change initiatives and participation in the seminar. Several indicated that they were already practicing the principles outlined in the MVS. For some such individuals, as noted in Table 6.7, there was little connection between the seminar and ongoing positive management practice at the work group level. More representative of this group, however, were comments similar to that which noted: "The seminar has reinforced a basic management style and has rounded off a few corners." In keeping with the positive overall reaction to the seminar, therefore, it appears that participation both motivated participants to introduce practices which were new to their work area and served to reinforce and further encourage the efforts of a number of participants who were already implementing management practices in keeping with the approach outlined by the seminar itself.

Discussion

Change interventions such as the MVS represent real-life experiments in approaches to management of employees. Such programs impact participants in a variety of ways, depending on their background, values base, experience, and working situation. Given the complexity of the multiple factors involved in change, the dilemma for the change manager is to motivate people – managers and employees alike – to change. The MVS was designed based on the assumption underlying much of the traditional and current literature of change (Benne & Chin, 1985; Lewin & Gold, 1998; Argyris, 1970; Kanter, 1983; Beckhard & Harris, 1980) that change is generally motivated by a need to resolve some experienced uncertainty or dissonance around current beliefs, concepts, expectations, or accepted behavior patterns. Lewin referred to this process as "unfreezing", Beckhard developed a formula in which he termed the initial change motivator "dissatisfaction", and Argyris referred to the disconfirming process as the "generation of valid data."

Underlying the three models of change noted above is an operating principle which maintains that change will not occur unless there is motivation to change. The MVS was the primary mechanism used in the Department's strategy to motivate the required shift in thinking among participants. The seminar focused on encouraging participants to openly and in depth consider their values, biases, pre-conceptions, and fears related to employee empowerment and participation. The process of this examination confronted participants with credible sets of information contradicting their own beliefs, experiences, and expectations. The seminar process was designed to raise questions in their minds concerning the accuracy or validity of their preconceptions related to employee empowerment. The intent was to raise a level of uncertainty – the suspicion that their current beliefs and associated managerial behavior – may have been inadequate. Once raised, this sense of "self-doubt" opens the door for the introduction of alternative frameworks of understanding and guiding participant experience through the process of resolution of the resultant cognitive dissonance. (Zimbardo and Ebbesen, 1970; Beckhard, 1997)

Theory associated with the concept of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999) supports the prediction that the magnitude of tension generated by the combination of credible data associated with managerial best practices supporting employee empowerment and the data, also presented in the seminar, that employees are highly interested in participation, would be sufficiently high to produce initial motivation to explore alternative managerial behavior options. Motivation for the initial steps in the change process would have been achieved, to be built upon by subsequent steps of the change program, including introduction of change initiatives in the work units.

Based on the research data, it would appear that participation in the MVS was indeed a significant factor in motivating change in the behavior of seminar participants concerning the involvement of employees in work group planning and decision-making activities. Data drawn from the study questionnaire clearly confirms in general the significance of the seminar in relation to manager motivation to undertake change activities focusing on increased employee involvement. Responses of seminar participants to a direct question in relation to this issue confirm that respondents overwhelmingly felt that the seminar was a least minimally influential in stimulating changes in their approaches to involving staff. As indicated in the results section of this paper, the mean response on the 7-point scoring scale related to the question on the motivational impact of the MVS was 4.84. On the basis of such a clear statement drawn from the total seminar participant group, the impact of the seminar in relation to motivation of follow-up change activities must be acknowledged. This conclusion is further reinforced by the sheer number of follow-up activities undertaken by respondents subsequent to their participation in the seminar itself. In addition, a very large number of questionnaire respondents (74%) indicated that their participation in the MVS was one of the key factors motivating and guiding the introduction of new ideas in their work area.

The vast majority of managers indicated that they were clearly influenced by the MVS to undertake change activities. In the sense that the intent of the seminar design was to motivate a rethinking of beliefs about employee empowerment and participation, the seminar succeeded – at least at the level of behavior – of achieving its intended goal. Although the same certainty of impact is not confirmed by data gathered from the non-management segment of the questionnaire sample, there is at least some recognition by this group that shifts in the direction of the changes proposed by the seminar did occur subsequent to their managers' attendance at the MVS. Management respondents confirmed this data, indicating that they had acted on the new information to which they were exposed in the seminar by attempting a variety of change initiatives related to seminar content upon return to their home work units.

Conclusion

The reality of change processes carried out within functioning organizations is such that many factors are usually significant in the successful implementation of a change program. Organizations exist as systems, resulting in the fact that changes in any one element of the system must be reflected in resultant changes in or support from other significant parts of the system. Data generated by the follow-up survey instrument completed by participants in the MVS highlighted a number of factors which respondents clearly felt were significant to the successful implementation of the DVA management change program. Although these do not detract from the results outlined above concerning the significance of the MVS in motivating change efforts, they broaden the scope of understanding concerning implications for future change programs or research efforts.

Most impassioned among the comments offered by respondents in addition to those directly related to the MVS itself were those concerning senior management's involvement in the development of the seminar process and overall change program. Although large numbers of seminar participants indicated an increased interest subsequent to attending the MVS in undertaking initiatives highlighted by the seminar content, feedback received through the research study questionnaire consistently stressed the importance of higher level management's support for such activities as a prerequisite for follow-up initiation. Fully 95 percent of DVA managers (both those who had attended the seminar

and those who had not) indicated that this was a key factor in facilitating the introduction of new ideas at the working level.

Indications of the significance of this factor represent an important planning element in change programs of the large- scale nature represented by the DVA values seminar project. Respondents' indication that higher level management's support of the change effort is a significant factor is important in an additional sense as well. Peters and Austin (1985:333) observed that higher managements' priorities – including what they will or will not support – are transparent regardless of what they say. The questionnaire follow-up of the MVS clearly demonstrates that this reality was alive and active in DVA. The public actions of more senior managers in relation to daily management activities became, for many seminar participants, influential in their decision as to whether they should attempt seminar follow-up activities.

Implications of the above data suggest the need for additional research into the role of senior management leadership of change initiatives. In particular, the impact of leader example as a critical factor in subordinate commitment to change represents potential fertile ground for further research activity. Additionally, the impact and significance of public involvement of senior leadership in the design and delivery of elements of the change process also represents an important area for future examination. DVA seminar participants commented specifically on the positive impact of the presence of top management at seminar sessions and noted this level of participation as a sign that "they were serious this time." Studies of the impact and strategy of senior level participation in elements of the change initiative could well result in some formative guiding principles related to this element of change leadership theory.

The change program reviewed in this study, especially the MVS element, assumed that managers resisted adoption of participative management not exclusively because they did not understand it at a rational level, but more significantly because they did not feel any personally relevant pressures to make the effort. The MVS provided an experience for participants which caused them to question their personal and professional beliefs concerning employee participation. In addition, the model which formed the base of the seminar reinforced that the most competent managers tended to operate on the basis of principles generally defined as "participative management." In a sense, the seminar operated on the assumption that the decision to become more participative as a manager is a decision of the heart, not of the head, although both components are involved. Results of the study tend to indicate that this assumption has some validity. It would appear that once managers are engaged at the level of values and convinced of the validity of an approach based on dialogue which either confirms or questions aspects of their personal values, their level of energy and creativity for implementing change activities rises dramatically, within the limitations of support from their organizational environment. The conclusion is that values and beliefs are at the heart of the decision to empower. As such, focused exploration of these human elements may be an underutilized strategy in the move toward increased employee involvement.

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