

High Involvement Management, Role Empowerment and Well-being

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High involvement management has been an enduring focus of human resource management thinking in the past two decades, with the emphasis being on its performance effects. Nonetheless from the outset of its inception there has been a concern for the impact of high involvement management on employee well-being. The argument is that high involvement management increases employee satisfaction and reduces stress and this is thought to be one of the main reasons why it is associated with performance.

High involvement management has equally been neglected in the research on well-being. Role empowerment, giving autonomy to employees to carry out the core elements of their job, has been the dominant element. But high involvement management extends beyond role empowerment. Its emphasis is on practices aimed at increasing flexibility, proactivity and integration of the individual, particularly to achieve continuous improvement.

The core of high involvement management is thus on organizational involvement, people being engaged and participating in matters beyond the narrow confines of their job description. This entails practices readily associated with high performance work systems (e.g. functional flexibility, cross-training, idea capturing schemes, team work), and those concerned with the involvement of workers or their representatives in decision-making within the wider enterprise, particularly about grievances and terms and conditions of employment. We will refer to the former as contextual involvement and the latter employee voice. These we assume along with role empowerment to constitute the high involvement approach.

In addition, motivational supports, which are assumed to be key for ensuring that employees use their creativity, enthusiasm, and knowledge of their particular job for the benefit of the organization, are often included in high involvement (or performance) work systems. Particularly salient are: job security guarantees, internal promotion and payment systems that link individual performance to collective performance outcomes.

Discussion of the three elements of the high involvement management has been fragmented and, despite being the bedrock of the high commitment or involvement management, increasingly role empowerment is being neglected in the high performance work systems literature.

Given this background, it is not surprising that we lack an integrated theoretical framework, which relates the three types of high involvement practices to well-being. In this presentation we will present some hypotheses on their effects on well-being and then test these. Our main hypotheses, derived from a range of background theories, involve the association between role empowerment, contextual empowerment, voice, and motivational supports on job satisfaction and anxiety-contentment. Secondary hypotheses involve interactions between some of these.

We use multi-level models (MLWin), to test our hypotheses; well-being and role involvement are measured at the individual level; proactive- involvement, voice and motivational supports are measured at the workplace level. We first use latent variable models (and particularly the latent trait model of Bartholomew and Knott, 1999), to (1) ascertain that the various types of high involvement management are empirically distinct and (2) develop measures of each dimension.

The results confirm the multi-dimensional nature of high involvement management and support some but not all of the hypotheses on the link with well-being and job satisfaction. WERS2004 unveils a picture of employee well-being in Britain that shows that job characteristics for much of the variation in contentment and job satisfaction. Of the other workplace-level variables only job security is significantly positively related to well-being and this being only for contentment not job satisfaction.

However there are some significant relationships that are not in the predicted direction. In particular contextual involvement management appears to be negatively related to contentment.