Building an Effective Workforce

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Introduction

The overall approach to the human component of organizations has altered dramatically since the 1980s. Although many “innovative” concepts and techniques have existed for several decades, their applications usually seemed premature or unnecessary. Such applications did not occur until a series of concurrent changes enabled an environment to evolve that ushered in a new era of human resources.

Two of the most highly publicized changes include the necessity of multiple-person decision making and the higher expectation levels of employees. These factors, among others, have contributed to a general organizational strategy of participative management. The concept itself is often misunderstood or confused during both its inception and its application. When understood correctly, however, this strategy can be used to develop employees and to refine and improve the overall management and decision making of an organization.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to explain and clarify the current options surrounding this most intriguing and challenging approach to building an effective workforce.

Expectations

Whenever, wherever, and however humans communicate, expectations are at the center of their interaction. Furthermore, shared expectations are essential for any type of successful communication. Individuals, groups, and organizations must understand and act on commonly held expectations. Without these, there are, at best, misunderstandings and confusion. At worst, there are multiple directions, animosity, and countless lost resources.

How individuals see themselves interact with their coworkers and serve their customers is learned primarily from the organizational culture in which they work. The culture both communicates and represents the expectations of all those involved. Current approaches to organizations and the individuals who create them directly question existing organizational cultures. There is perhaps, then, a no more critical time for the proper alignment of expectations than during a change or shift in organizational culture.
**Basics**

First, building an effective workforce means that an individual or a group of individuals is involved in the act of creation and development. This is of particular importance, because it implies a unique, organizationally specific application of concepts. In essence, a customized approach to current theories and practices in participative management and workforce development is the most viable strategy. There simply is no such thing as a "one-size-fits-all" formula, book, CD-ROM, or three-ring binder.

Which aspects of participative management will be chosen, when they will be communicated, and how individuals will be trained in them will all reflect the philosophy and underlying assumptions of the organization. Thus, the type, degree, and sophistication of any developmental theory or technique must be created or recreated hand in hand with the organization's culture.

Second, even the meaning of "effective" may not be shared by all. What does it mean to have an effective workforce? How is effectiveness measured? To some, the terms effective and efficient are completely synonymous. To others, efficiency may be sacrificed for effectiveness. To still others, the only acceptable workforce goal is to be both efficient and effective.

As individuals share their interpretations, expectations are in turn aligned and realigned. This clarification step is often omitted under the mistaken assumption that "we all know what we're talking about." To assume that all individuals interpret things the same way is to assume that all individuals think the same, process the same, and react in the same manner. This is, of course, not the case. On the contrary, organizations are rich with the diversity of individuals, and it is this diversity that gives organizations their strength. It is this same diversity, however, that requires people to double-check what may appear patently obvious. Many hours, monies, and working relationships could be saved each year if more individuals asked for such clarification.

**Leadership**

One of the key responsibilities of the leadership function is to clarify and ensure direction. The direction of an organization, a division, or a department is the cornerstone for its success and is based on a clear understanding of purpose. Without it, there can be little hope for influential motivation, consistent productivity, or longevity,
The role of leadership is also responsible for developing an "atlas" that identifies boundaries and describes parameters to be used when venturing into new waters. Such an atlas seeks to maintain a focused direction while continuously preparing others to best navigate through existing situations and circumstances. It makes certain that expectations are aligned to the best degree possible and that a mechanism is in place by which they will be continuously realigned.

Implicit within leadership is a commitment to development. This includes self-development, development of employees, and development of the organizational culture. At the core of true development is the assumption that there are untapped resources within every individual and that these resources, when released, can and will positively impact the overall organization.

More recently, there is the additional assumption that groups and teams are symbiotically and synergistically more than just the sum of their members. This assumption requires a further commitment to the development of group-based interaction and is the foundation for almost all participative management techniques.

**Accountability and Responsibility**

Accountability and responsibility are the backbone of both profit and not-for-profit organizational operations. Nevertheless, like other fundamental concepts, the meaning of these two terms is more often assumed than interactively communicated. As a result, the understanding of these vital roles may be sporadic or confused. From individual job descriptions to mission statements, a lack of clarity concerning accountability and responsibility affects the fabric of decision making.

An analogy might be to think of the fundamental concepts and beliefs of an organization as an intertwined wire mesh that forms a network through the organizational structure. When there is agreement and shared understanding, this mesh is held firmly in place and provides the infrastructure to build continuously improved human and technical systems. When there is little or no agreement or shared understanding, however, the mesh will appear incomplete and vulnerable. Any attempt to apply human or technical systems to this latter infrastructure can result in inconsistency, spotty successes, and overall frustration. There may be so many starts and stops that entire projects or programs are eliminated altogether. This may eventually perpetuate a "cynicism" that becomes more and more difficult to displace, thereby decreasing odds for any future developmental successes.
In addition to accountability and responsibility, the traditional organization must be certain to assign or delegate the necessary authority for these roles. Simply stated, authority is how resources are obtained. Having no authority to accomplish the task is analogous to preparing a gourmet meal without any form of currency with which to buy ingredients.

A series of sample questions (figure 1) will help begin the dialogue process. The clarity of responses and the alignment of individual and organizational meanings of accountability and responsibility are essential for a solid infrastructure for development.

**Figure 1. Sample Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is our current organizational culture always clear concerning the roles of accountability and responsibility?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. In our organization, can a manager delegate responsibilities to his or her team?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Do I share responsibility on any issue?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. In our organization, can accountability be delegated?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Do I ever share accountability?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Is the ultimate accountability for our team equally shared among its members?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Do individuals acquire new responsibilities as team leaders?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Are team members responsible for any part of team functioning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. As the team develops and matures, will it acquire new responsibilities?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. If a customer files a complaint, is the entire team responsible? Accountable?</td>
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**Decision Making**

There is no more critical application of the roles of accountability and responsibility than the act of decision making. A decision (consensual or not) is so often muddled by issues of involvement, obligation, and responsibility that the entire process becomes questionable. As a result, it is sometimes viewed as a manipulative exercise in futility, rather than a legitimate organizational effort.

Regardless of the issue, if any part of decision making involves more than one individual, clarification should be the rule. Once again, proper alignment of expectations is the most proactive approach. There is a
simple tool to help individuals understand and communicate their roles in the decision-making process. The Involvement Continuum can be inserted easily into virtually any existing meeting agenda. Its consistent and accurate use avoids unnecessary effort, frustration, and confusion in the realm of responsibility and accountability. Figure 2 shows the three basic participant roles, as follows:

1. **Inform**: In this role, the participant's responsibility is to understand what is being presented and connect any implications to his or her own and the team's sphere of influence. Initially, this could be seen as a strictly passive role. In reality, however, the responsibility requires an information exchange for clarification.

2. **Input**: This role requires greater involvement than that of Inform. Participants are responsible for and must be actively engaged in understanding and contributing to the issue at hand. The key point here is that individuals in this role are not involved in making the decision. Rather, their role is to provide input to the person who will be deciding. (A recommendation is simply a more formal and systematic means of providing input.)

3. **Decide**: This role requires decision making by the group. Group decision making generally takes one of two forms: voting or consensus. Voting is commonly used and normally requires only a majority. Unfortunately, it is often an overused and sometimes inappropriate decision-making method, for two reasons. First, voting closes discussion to reach a conclusion. Dialogue is cut short, and input is limited. This can prematurely affect decisions, making them incomplete. A further consequence is that this practice often results in the same issue reappearing over time for weeks or even months. Second, participants in a voting process are generally perceived as "winners" and "losers." Although it is hoped that minority voters will support the final decision, this does not always happen. Consensus is a method by which the group wholly makes and "owns" the decision. All members are equally responsible for understanding the issue, proposing solutions, and weighing the consequences. They share a
responsibility for ensuring that each member understands and endorses the group's decision. There are two major types of consensus: true and modified. True consensus can probably best be thought of as the decision that is everyone's first (ideal) choice. With the exception of obvious moral or factual decisions, this type of consensus is unusual in most group work. Most participants do not select one identical answer as their first choice. The subsequent persuasion and negotiations used to reach a modified consensus represent much of the power behind group decision making. Discussion and dialogue are essential, and a conclusion is reached only when everyone, regardless of their first choice, can accept and fully support the final decision.

The clarity of these roles cannot be overstated. Misaligned expectations cause needless turmoil, with participants "owning" either too much or too little of the decision. Only by consciously untangling these role responsibilities can the group improve its decision-making ability.

To reinforce this point, groups often add a means of qualifying these roles directly into their meeting agendas. This is usually done by adding a column that indicates which of the three roles group members should assume with each agenda item. A sample meeting agenda is outlined in figure 3.

In this example, item 2 indicates that group members should assume a decision-making role concerning scheduling and location. This is different from item 3, where T. Smith requests members' opinions and perspectives on a draft but does not involve them in making the final decision.

What happens when clarity of roles is not present? A common example might be when an information systems manager loosely introduces a topic in the monthly group meeting. She announces, "We are considering purchasing computers from Vendor A." A lengthy discussion follows, during which one member shares his past troubles concerning Vendor A.

Figure 3. Meeting Agenda
The group seems to understand his point, and the discussion ceases. A month later, the same group member notices new computers arriving from Vendor A and confronts the manager by stating, "I thought we agreed not to buy computers from Vendor A." In reality, the manager had used the meeting to sample the group's opinions. In her mind, she had weighed his negative "Input" along with other factors in making her decision. The group member, on the other hand, had mistaken his role in the meeting to be one of deciding. In addition to an obvious disagreement, this type of confusion easily sparks suspicion and questions of mistrust.

The baseline is this: Clarification of roles will happen, either before or after the actual event. If it is left until afterward, there may be wasted hours in human and operational repairs. If done before, such a proactive approach can avoid misunderstandings, confusion, and bruised relationships and directly contribute to a more focused and productive workforce.

**Participative Management**

If shared expectations are the building blocks of organizational culture, then fundamental philosophies are the blueprint. They provide the rationale and consistency behind direction and contain the central criteria against which decisions should be measured. Expectations tell us "what."

philosophy tells us "why."? Added to these are management methods and techniques, which are the mortar that helps clarify and communicate?

Organizational culture. Essentially, methods and techniques show us "how" we are to work with one another?, although valuable tools, specific methods, and techniques often change with some regularity and may even become "trendy." It is far more important, therefore, for initial emphasis to rest with the "what"? and the "why."?
**Historical Background**

What do employees expect from organizations? Current expectations normally include, but certainly are not limited to, the following:

- An involvement in decision making
- A greater opportunity to share in organizational benefits and profits
- A greater degree of "fairness" applied to organizational decisions and actions
- A broader and more timely understanding of organizational direction
- Reasonable job security
- A greater voice in operations
- Increased utilization of each individual's knowledge and expertise
- A more accessible and wider resource base
- Appropriate support during and after decision making

Without placing any particular values on these expectations, it is apparent that a greater degree of direct involvement of some type has begun to permeate the thinking and, therefore, the expectations of employees.\(^2\)

What do employees believe is expected of them? As with the list above, current expectations are not the same as they were even a few years ago. Current expectations include the following:

- An increase in decision making
- A greater share of responsibility for decisions that are made
- A willingness to work in a group mode
- Preferable experience with quality concepts and techniques
- An ability to acknowledge and adapt to change
- Increased skill in human communication, constructive confrontation, and consensus decision making
- Increased skill in the use of computers
- A greater application of creativity and innovation to organizational goals
- A strong and obvious commitment to the organization’s mission

Again, without assigning value to any particular expectation, if these are even somewhat accurate, then organizations as well as employees have altered their view of involvement and what it means to be members of an organization.

The relevancy of comparing the above views is that these current assumptions and their corresponding beliefs have begun to coincide.

Expectations such as these, along with global economic shifts and
improved technology, have simultaneously drawn from and created the most popular and pervasive organizational philosophy to date.

Participative management has appeared in many forms in recent decades, each with its own name and unique set of terminology. Several sources place the official beginning of this movement in the United States in the early 1970s, when American manufacturers strongly felt the results of fierce global competition. Producers from other countries, particularly Japan, were manufacturing better products more efficiently and selling them at lower prices.

Quality advocates such as Deming and Shewhart had been speaking to American audiences for decades. Their message was not seriously recognized, however, until U.S. firms probed the Japanese phenomenon. An analysis of the development of their quality standards pointed to philosophies such as Deming's. From these observations and analyses emerged concepts such as quality circles (mimicking organizational structures often found in Japanese factories). Unfortunately, more technique (the "how"?) than philosophy (the "why"?) was transplanted. Essential differences between Japanese and American social and organizational cultures had largely been ignored, and thus the context of application was lost. As a result, customization was not attempted, and by the mid-1980s, most quality circles had disbanded. The concept behind quality circles, however, remained. The seed had been planted for widespread employee involvement.

The desire for participation drove organizations to find more applicable methods. In response to the needs of these organizations, a variety of programs have emerged since 1980. To understand these programs and their organizational impact, it is useful to review the organizational relationship among expectations, philosophies, and methods. Each one acts on, and is in turn acted upon, by the others. As a whole, it can be viewed as a continuous cycle.

**Improvement Cycle**

First, every organization contains at least two sets of interwoven philosophies and expectations (figure 4, diagram 1). One set represents the fundamental philosophy of improving the overall organization. This philosophy is internally focused and carries with it individual and organizational expectations of mutual behavior. The second set represents the philosophy of improving the organization's product or service. This is a more outwardly based philosophy and carries with it individual and
organizational expectations of cooperative action toward a tangible outcome.

Although it seems as though these sets should be locked automatically in a unified effort, they may not be. In fact, an organization can expend much of its resources on an improved product or service, to the internal detriment of employee well-being or development. On the other hand, an organization may so concentrate on its own internal development that it sacrifices customer satisfaction. Ideally, for the longevity and continued strength of the organization, the philosophies (and the expectations) of an improved organization and an improved product or service will be linked together. One will reinforce the other for a greater whole.

Organizational philosophies, however, do not exist in a vacuum. They occur within the ever-present context of an organizational environment, or culture. This could be envisioned as an outer circle surrounding the two sets of expectations and philosophies (figure 4, diagram 2). It is within this environment that methods and techniques of interaction and decision making are put to the test. Stated another way, it is within the daily practice of actions and responses that organizational expectations are confirmed or denied and that, ultimately, the organizational culture is supported or eroded. Correctly chosen and properly customized, specific methods will run ongoing checks and balances on organizational philosophies (figure 4, diagram 3). All employees will be able to see, hear, and feel symmetries or contradictions between what is said and what is done.
Starting a Participative Management Program

It is a difficult task to find one's way through the myriad books, terminology, videos, training sessions, software, and advertisements surrounding participative management. Even professionals in the field find it a challenge to sift through all the concepts and packages available. A common and viable question is, "Where do I begin?"

The easiest place to start is to mentally put them in context. Programs, labels, and titles such as "quality", "total quality", "total quality management", "continuous improvement", "continuous improvement process" and so on are all reflections of one or more parts of the cycle described above. They are not ends in themselves but are part of the overarching environmental and cultural context of organizational life.

These programs normally include further options of methods. Methods are the means by which organizational members interact and work with one another. Methods may include councils, autonomous teams, self-directed work teams, employee involvement teams, and so on. Each method usually suggests a selected array of techniques by which it is applied in the work setting (seven-step problem-solving process, fishbone diagram, bar charts, and so on).

The sheer number of options available at the program, method, or technique level may seem overwhelming. Most promise a solution to many, most, or all organizational ills. Like medicines, however, an inappropriate choice, used at the wrong time or applied incorrectly, may actually result in more harm than good.

The more important questions, and the ones that should be tackled first, are the "whys"? and the "whats."? Whether the organization is motivated toward participative management from a proactive or a reactive stance, the initial questions are the same: "Why are we doing this? Why do we believe it is important? In what way will this affect our expectations of one another? What impact will this have on our interaction and decision making? Exactly what do we expect to be accomplished? What organizational changes do we anticipate this will create?"

**Stages**

To know which questions to ask, it may help to understand the overall stages of development through a participative management process. Although there is great variance concerning specific steps, the following four stages of participative management can act as a general guide:
1. **Stage 1: Divergence.** The organization initiates participative management for a variety of reasons. There may be a true desire to create a culture of improvement. There may be mere curiosity about a new or untried developmental process. There may be a mandate to change or an organizational or departmental crisis. Whatever the catalyst, organizations typically enter this stage with many individuals "out of sync" with one another. Their beliefs, assumptions, and expectations may all be quite different. The key challenge is to converge these differences and develop some type of cohesive plan.

2. **Stage 2: Disillusionment.** The organization has had some type of participative management for a period of time. During this stage, there will appear to be a continuous sorting and sifting of perceptions. This is when realistic and unrealistic expectations are compared, contrasted, and analyzed. The key challenge is to realign these expectations and reestablish direction and hope for the overall process.

3. **Stage 3: Diligence.** The organization enters a stage where energies can collectively be focused on the process as a whole. With outcomes in sight and realistic expectations aligned, participative management can be set in motion. The key challenge is to accurately monitor the simultaneous progress of all those involved and prevent unending "loops" through previous stages.

4. **Stage 4: Discernment.** The organization is consistently learning from its individual and collective decision-making patterns and actions.²

5. **Stage 5: Mere avoidance of errors and mistakes gives way to a fully proactive approach.** The key challenge is to ensure that the changes realized through participative management are permanently integrated into the organizational culture and that proactivity becomes the cultural norm.

This is a given: Participative management (whatever the final form) will significantly alter the organization. If correctly fitted with the organizational blueprint, participative management will act as a positive catalyst for the organization to accomplish its true mission and its cycle of improvement philosophies. If incorrectly fit, participative management will highlight misaligned expectations and encourage questions of mistrust, insincerity, and inconsistency. If an organization is unprepared to answer such questions, it will have a difficult time making any program anything other than a sterile exercise. This issue can perhaps be better addressed by using the example of teams.

**Teams**
There are commonalities among existing participative management programs. One obvious thread is the use of teams, although the specifics of implementation may vary greatly. So widespread and popular is this method that many organizations adopt it with little or no preliminary scrutiny as to its "fit" within their overarching culture.

**Organizational Teams.** This use of teams begins with the existing organizational structure almost intact and converts functioning levels to teams (figure 5). The changes, of course, are far more systematic than instantaneous that is to say, not all teams will start at the same time, nor will they progress at the same speed. Figure 5 illustrates the eventual structure that emerges from this type of team application.

One potential disadvantage to this approach is that it can allow a mere cosmetic name change to impersonate a genuine cultural transformation. Some organizations attempt to arrive at this team "state" by continuously using the labels while ignoring or avoiding the fundamental implications.

**Specialty Teams.** This use of teams was popularized by quality circles and more recently has appeared within programs of total quality management. A specialty team crosses organizational boundaries to involve a diverse combination of individuals who then address a specific problem or issue (figure 6). The intent is that these teams will develop a highly productive synergy by uniting the members' multiple and varied talents.

These teams often have a single-task scope, and their existence is directly
tied to the problem resolution approach chosen by the team. It is common for large organizations to have several of these teams in place at once, each operating at a different stage in the problem resolution process. It is also common for specialty and organizational teams to coexist.

Support
Regardless of the type or extent of organizational change, it cannot occur without support. Much of this support will be found internally, and some will be found externally. Much will be focused on the human systems involved, and some will be technologically focused. In the 1990s, there began a steady and deliberate interfacing of human and technical support systems by both internal and external resources.

Professionals
Working through the human support maze can be just as challenging as working through the entire concept of participative management. Nevertheless, it is an important, and in most instances necessary, aspect of this form of development. Essentially, there are two types of professionals: internal and external.

Internal professionals are from within the given organization and, for participative management options, include individuals from human resources, personnel, and any other area that acknowledges and implements human systems. These individuals may be asked to clarify terms, assist in developing plans, obtain and interpret information, conduct training, and provide selected group facilitation. They can be a rich and accessible resource. External professionals may work as individuals, as part of a consulting firm, or even as temporary "loans" from a similar or specified industry. For participative management options, these individuals may be asked for the same types of support provided by internal professionals. They also can be a rich and accessible resource.
Initially, it might appear as though both types of professionals are basically the same and function in the same ways. Of course, they do not. Internal and external professionals may be either generalists or specialists. Within each of these distinctions, they will possess differing types and degrees of technical expertise and represent a wide range of experience. The task, then, is not just to "find" professional support, but to find and properly match the needs of the organization with the knowledge, wisdom, and abilities of these individuals.

First, managers should assess and determine the current stage of the organization. The descriptions for each stage are broad enough that a full analysis is unnecessary. A rough fit will probably be sufficient at this point and will be invaluable information when matching and acquiring professional support. One note of caution: Do not base stage assessment on the most advanced group, but on the organization's mode.

Second, managers should outline their own and anyone else's responsibilities that will affect the support selection process. Are managers expected to collect information concerning support options? Are managers also expected to make the final selection? Does anyone have the ability to veto the manager's decision? Who is responsible for designing and approving a plan? Is there or will there be an available budget for support? Will the manager be responsible for continuously interfacing with the professional(s)? Who is responsible for periodic assessments or for receiving assessment reports?

Third, managers should create the best possible match between organizational needs and available support. Although there is no fool-proof
method for determining such a fit, a common question is usually addressed at this point: What type of professional support does the organization really need? Normally, this question can be replaced with a more specific one: Does the organization need consulting, facilitating, or training?

**Consulting**

The label *consultant* is commercially used to describe anyone outside the immediate circle of influence. This often includes internal or external trainers, facilitators, analysts, statisticians, or problem solvers. In the strict sense of the term, however, consulting refers to outside expertise that is brought in to offer analysis, suggestions, and options.\(^6\)

It is common to use consultants for organizational change processes. An individual who is knowledgeable regarding the stages, aspects, and components of participative management can be invaluable in describing options, anticipating difficulties, and addressing roadblocks.

There are usually two initial issues to be addressed. First, the issue of bringing in an internal or external consultant will depend on the knowledge, experience, and perspective required. In addition, budget may be a contributing factor. Whatever the choice, be certain that the question of expertise has been resolved.

A second issue concerning consulting is whether the individual must have industry-specific experience. Although such experience may be an asset, it may not be a requirement. A medical example might help illustrate this point. If an athlete seriously injures his or her wrist, then any competent medical person trained in that type of injury should be able to diagnose and treat it. Finding a physician who works exclusively with athletes may provide communication shortcuts and create a more comfortable environment, but it may be more perception than necessity. There is also the possibility that particular specialists, although very experienced with that type of injury, might actually be excluded from the search because they lack contact with athletes.

If the potential consultant is thoroughly knowledgeable with the change process and is also well acquainted with the particular industry (such as facilities), then it is, of course, an ideal situation. If, however, there is a choice to be made between expertise and industry-specific experience, then the selection criteria should be clarified and prioritized. If industry-specific experience is considered vital, then why and to what
degree is it a priority?

**Facilitating**

Facilitators can and should be used during organizational change. Cultural change in general, and participative management in particular, requires identification, analysis, and alignment of expectations. The facilitation process is well suited for much of the group interaction necessary to achieve alignment.

There are, however, initial issues to be addressed in selecting facilitators. First, what are the qualifications of the potential facilitator? People often have a better "sense" of the expertise required for consulting than for facilitating. One reason may be that the field of organizational facilitation is relatively new, and its base requirements are not usually well understood. For example, facilitating should be distinguished from moderating, arbitrating, or training. In addition, the skills of an expert facilitator are varied and complex and include such things as integrating, synthesizing, diffusing, structuring, clarifying, redirecting, and translating.

As in other fields, there are individuals who possess some training in facilitation, and there are professional facilitators. Although both are useful in an organizational setting, care should be taken when matching individual skill with task levels. Increased task difficulty, decreased participant group skill, increased emotional tension, and role complexity all indicate that greater expertise and experience are needed from the facilitator.

Second, there is also the issue of selecting an internal or external facilitator. Some organizations, although very few, have internal access to professional facilitators. Assuming skill and experience equivalency, there are remaining considerations. Internal facilitators are familiar with the environmental context and may be more familiar with the organization's history and its specific terminology. External facilitators bring greater objectivity (both real and perceived) and are farther, if not completely, removed from the more intense, sensitive, and political parameters.

**Training**

Training is perhaps the most commonly anticipated support mechanism for participative management programs, methods, and techniques. It is also the most visible and the most commercially available form of support. Given these characteristics, two issues should be addressed when selecting, creating, and implementing training.

First, ready access to training modules increases the likelihood that "package purchasing" will become the norm and overshadow any
systematic plan. This is particularly true in multivisional or multidepartmental organizations, where support selection is likely to be more diffused than centralized. For this reason, a consultant or facilitator, or both, can be of assistance when devising an overall approach to training during organizational change. Such a systematic plan for training will expose participants to key components of organizational change, improve the odds for a smooth transition, and help ensure a degree of consistency across training content. In addition, training courses and activities should fit the stages of participative management, encouraging continued and progressive development.

Second, because content consistency is an important aspect of the training plan, a strategy should be developed that balances essential organizational concepts with individually or group-identified interests. In other words, some training topics should be standard, and some should be optional. Many organizations address this concern by providing core topics (chosen centrally) and elective topics (chosen by individuals or groups). Although the actual topics vary from organization to organization, core topics include those concepts that require commonly shared meanings (e.g., decision making, empowerment, conflict management, and coaching). If there is no consistency among core concepts, there is certain to be further misalignment of expectations. One of the most important applications of proactive training is to provide shared understandings for the proper alignment of organizational and individual expectations.

**Groupware**

Work in teams, whether organizational or specialty, poses challenges to even the most experienced employees. To begin with, true teamwork has not been the historical norm in North American organizations. As a result, it is still a radical change for most workers. In addition, most employee development programs have not included targeted objectives for the areas of interpersonal communication, conflict management, decision making, or creative problem solving. For that matter, much supervisory and managerial training also lacks these vital subjects. Yet another compounding factor is that increasingly teams have members who are geographically dispersed (this is particularly true of specialty teams) or require teamwork from employees who have never met in person. These challenges converge and often hamper the progress of teams.

Since the early 1990s, however, information technology has come to the aid of these teams by providing new communication tools. Although the labels are diverse, the term *groupware* (software and hardware for groups) probably best describes this up-and-coming field. The simplest
applications are in voice communication, where technology allows multiple sites to simultaneously connect via telephone, often called teleconferencing. Much like an ordinary telephone call, this method limits participants to oral communication with less nonverbal accessibility than face-to-face interaction. Two-way video conferencing has become available and affordable, allowing for meetings over distant locations. This method combines the multiple-site voice link with a live image, thus providing more opportunity for nonverbal communication exchange. Unfortunately, because of current technical limitations, the quality of these images is still noticeably below that of traditional television.

Technology can also assist teams by providing electronic "channels" and "places" that a team can call its own. By using a combination of electronic mail (e-mail), electronic bulletin boards (posting boards), and the World Wide Web, technology creates a virtual space. This space can be used to meet and conduct any team business. Once again, this is of particular value when team members are geographically dispersed (i.e., work at different sites) or chronologically separated (i.e., work at different hours or time zones). It also provides the added benefit of allowing working members to commit team actions and decisions to writing, which is then preserved as a written record. Much like hallway cork boards, these electronic bulletin boards allow people to browse for new items as well as research the past. Standard e-mail provides a more direct and private means of communication between two or more people.

None of these electronic tools, however, are without costs and potential pitfalls. First, they curtail one of our most efficient means of understanding messages from others: nonverbal communication. This type of communication encompasses not only gestures and body language, but also vocal intonations and emphasis. Researchers project that during face-to-face meetings, individuals receive at least 80 percent of the meaning of a message through nonverbal clues. This channel is particularly important when we communicate with strangers or anyone not close to us, as we depend on these clues to interpret what they are saying. During written communication such as e-mail, the nonverbal message is lost, leaving only punctuation, word choice, and writing style as guides. This situation often leads to different interpretations of messages between the recipient and the sender, not effective communication. Once again, the training that team members receive seldom addresses effective electronic communication techniques.

Electronic channels of communication can be ordered by how much information they permit to pass (referred to as their breadth). Such channels, from widest to narrowest breadth, are face-to-face, video
conferencing, voice conferencing, and text. Any subsequent channel with narrower breadth would further limit the nonverbal effectiveness of the message.

It is generally recommended that organizations define and enforce an electronic communications policy for their staff. One area that should be addressed by such a policy is which topics are suitable for each of the above four channels. Ideally, team members who do not know each other well should begin their interaction by using the most effective (widest) channel. As their comfort and trust build, they can use progressively narrower channels, ensuring greater odds of more accurate message exchange.

It is important to remember that these electronic tools exist to aid, not create, effective individual and group communication. They cannot make a dysfunctional group functional, nor should they be initiated before a firm foundation in group development and training has been established.

Summary
Participative management embodies a philosophy and an approach to organizational structure and functioning. It has altered organizational landscapes and continues to impact, shape, and reflect individual and group expectations.

In the future, the following are likely:

- Systematic group interaction and group decision making will continue.
- Tapping into the resources, skills, and experience of all employees is and will be vital to the sustainability and longevity of organizations.
- Effective human interaction will require refined understanding, skill, and constant application.
- Information and knowledge interdependence among organizational members will become an even greater influential force in decision making.

This chapter has focused on the central concepts, trends, and options involved in participative management. Collectively, they represent the pivotal issues faced by organizations in building an effective workforce.

NOTES


6. There are working definitions of training, consulting, and facilitating that may be useful in distinguishing these closely related fields. "Training provides information concerning skills and/or knowledge. . . . Consulting provides analysis, suggestions, options and/or alternatives. . . . Facilitating provides a method of adjusting and regulating interaction" (Zimmerman, A. L., and Carol J. Evans. *Facilitation . . . From Discussion to Decision*. East Brunswick, New Jersey: Nichols Publishing, 1993, p. 25).

7. Psychologist and researcher Albert Mehrabian (*Silent Messages*, Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1971, p. 44) devised a formula for explaining the impact of messages: 7 percent verbal, 38 percent vocal, and 55 percent facial. Vocal and facial are both considered to be nonverbal elements. Therefore, this formula suggests that 93 percent of the impact in a message can be derived from its nonverbal components.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**


