

Organizational change is essential for short-term competitiveness and long-term survival, but it poses daunting managerial challenges. Advanced technologies, global markets, and mobile capital intensify pressures to constantly cut costs while enhancing flexibility (Leana & Barry, 2000). According to Kanter, Stein, and Jick (1992), managing change has become the ultimate managerial responsibility as firms continuously engage in some form of change—from shifting organizational boundaries, to altering firm structure, to revising decision-making processes. Yet major change projects rarely claim “substantial success” (Taylor-Bianco & Schermerhorn, 2006).

Labianca, Gray, and Brass (2000) stressed the managers’ roles as models. They found that employees watch their supervisors intently, skeptical of management’s commitment to change. Although executives design such projects, middle managers serve as critical change agents. Middle managers operationalize change initiatives, thereby aligning their units to executive mandates (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Huy (2002) described “middles” as the lynchpins of organizational change, acting as intermediaries between top management and the front line. His study depicts middle managers’ need to implement change while managing subordinates’ emotions, for change can spur debilitating anxiety and defensiveness.

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## 2.1 Employee Engagement Leading Towards Sensemaking and Thus a Successful Organizational Change

Consequently, “sensemaking” becomes very important for management to achieve in order to manage change successfully, which in turn makes employee engagement in the change effort vital as it can lead towards the necessary sensemaking.

### 2.1.1 Sensemaking and Change

According to Weick (1995), sensemaking denotes efforts to interpret and create an order for occurrences. Managers, however, must also communicate their understandings, particularly in the midst of organizational change, in a way that provides their subordinates with a workable certainty. Such “sensegiving” seeks to influence subordinates’ interpretations (Maitlis, 2005). Yet change may foster intense cognitive disorder for middle managers (McKinley & Scherer, 2000).

Such conditions spur confusion, anxiety, and stress that impede, or even paralyze, decision making. Indeed, Huy (2002) blamed unsuccessful change projects on managers’ inability to cope with shifting organizational expectations—shifts that dramatically alter their cognitive and behavioral interactions with the world around them. Balogun and Johnson (2004) further explained that managers “have the challenge of grasping a change they did not design and negotiating the details with others equally removed from the strategic decision making”. Unfortunately, studies of managerial sensemaking and change are rare (Maitlis, 2005).

Organizational change poses a particularly critical and difficult setting for sensemaking. As Weick (1995) explained, sensemaking is an effort to create orderly and coherent understandings that enable change. Yet dynamic contexts intensify experiences of complexity, ambiguity, and equivocality. Complexity rises as work demands shift, multiply, and potentially conflict (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993).

Ambiguity renders new demands uncertain and frequently misunderstood (Warglien & Masuch, 1996), and equivocality fosters confusion as demands become open to varied, even contradictory, interpretations (Putnam, 1986). As a result, actors often struggle with changing roles, processes, and relationships. Without clear understandings, anxiety may paralyze decision making and action (Davis, Maranville, & Obloj, 1997; Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

Organizational change spurs reframing, as actors seek to make sense of disparities between their expectations and new experiences (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). According to Bartunek (1984), frames provide a structure of assumptions, rules, and boundaries that guide sensemaking and over time become embedded and taken-for-granted. Shocks and surprises signal that existing frames may no longer apply. Reframing, therefore, enables actors to alter meanings attributed to changing situations (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974).

Argyris’s (1993) distinction between “single-loop” and “double-loop learning” offers illustration. Single-loop signifies incremental variations within an existing frame, and double-loop denotes reframing, substantially altering an actor’s view and thus enabling dramatic changes in understanding and action.

Striving to fulfill “boundary-spanning” and sensegiving responsibilities, managers face further sensemaking challenges. During change efforts, managers link executives to employees (Kanter et al., 1992). Yet Balogun and Johnson (2004) found that as firms become more geographically dispersed and leaner, managers’ sensemaking is inhibited.

Through restructuring, top managers have less contact with lower levels, relying on middle managers to span boundaries. Simultaneously, managers have fewer interactions with executives, limiting opportunities to seek clarification. So while employees look to their managers to give sense to change mandates, managers themselves struggle for understanding (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Too often, a result is anxiety that debilitates decision making and implementation.

Despite the importance of managerial sensemaking during organizational change, related studies are rare (Luscher & Lewis, 2008). First, frames fluctuate as managers struggle for meaning through social interactions and experimentation (Maitlis, 2005). Therefore, examining their sensemaking requires a highly interactive method (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Second, managers may be unwilling or unable to articulate their understandings. Argyris (1993) explained that in changing times, managers often grapple with conflicting emotions tied to “undiscussable” facets of organizational life.

### 2.1.2 Paradox and Sensemaking

Consequently, paradox becomes central to the process of managerial sensemaking. In hindsight, this is not surprising. When environments are complex and changing, conditions are ripe for the experience of contradiction, incongruity, and incoherence and the recognition of paradox and ambiguity within organizations (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993). According to Lewis (2000) change surfaces “contradictory yet interrelated elements—elements that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously”. In turn, such awareness spurs sensemaking, as actors seek a more orderly understanding.

In their study De Cock and Rickards (1996) identified paradoxical themes through interviews and then presented those themes to managers in group feedback sessions. Westenholz’s (1993) study showed that paradox energized reflection, offering a “counterweight to the unreflective discourse surrounding the management of change”.

Luscher, Lewis, and Ingram (2006) complement these findings, focusing on the social construction of paradoxes. That work examines communicative patterns, noting that “Identifying links between paradoxes and communication suggests discursive processes through which actors seek to make sense of change, but that often foster anxiety and paralysis”.

The significance of collaboration in paradoxical inquiry extends research that depicts managerial frames as shifting through social interaction (Isabella, 1990; Maitlis, 2005). For example, Hatch and Ehrlich (1993) examined how a management team juxtaposed contradictory and equivocal messages in meetings. Using irony and humor helped managers work together to make sense of their paradoxical changing roles. Similarly, Balogun and Johnson (2004) stressed the importance of middle managers’ interactions to reframing. They explained that as firms move toward more decentralized structures, the actions, language, and shared experiences of peers have a direct effect on managerial sensemaking.

As McKinley and Scherer (2000) explained, the cognitive disorder created by change can debilitate, frustrate, and even paralyze middle managers. Working through paradox could help managers enact a more workable certainty—a negotiated understanding, sometimes even more complex than the former understanding, but eventually more meaningful and actionable (Luscher & Lewis, 2008).

In her work on communicative patterns of paradox, Putnam (1986) posited a linear, upward flow from mixed messages sent at the individual level toward systemic contradictions entrenched within a firm. In essence, tensions bubble up. Mixed messages often become stable patterns, fostering recursive cycles within groups as they become undiscussable and emotionladen elements of daily life (Argyris, 1993). Eventually such communicative patterns become independent of actors, embedded within the system.

For instance, the organizing paradox of needing both stability and change is reflected in conflicting mandates for managers to increase productivity and build their teams. In this case, performing paradoxes may mirror systemic contradictions as managers communicate mixed messages of needing to resolve team conflicts but also use team time efficiently. Likewise, systemic contradictions may spur recursive cycles. For example, conflicting organizational demands for top-down and bottom-up management may challenge managers to engage and disengage in their teams' efforts (Luscher & Lewis, 2008).

Luscher and Lewis (2008) explained that interwoven communication patterns, in turn, imply the potential for coping strategies to reinforce each other. Paradoxes of performing, for example, are related to actors' self-understanding. Splitting may enable reframing by reducing cognitive conflict between seemingly competing roles, expectations, and demands. Likewise, emotional tensions that pervade paradoxes of belonging may benefit from more social confrontation through collective reflection and modeling.

In turn, according to the authors, viewing paradox as a natural feature of intricate and dynamic systems suggests that paradoxes of organizing benefit from acceptance. Yet ongoing paradox management may require all of the above, as coping with one paradox may enable coping with related paradoxes. Splitting exposes alternative perspectives that may aid confrontation, while acceptance reduces defensiveness to facilitate splitting, and social confrontation may fuel exploration of undiscussable issues and foster more collaborative and productive sensemaking.

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## **2.2 Employee Engagement Leading Towards Creativeness**

The interrelationship between employee engagement and sensemaking can also lead towards employee creativeness.

### 2.2.1 Creativity in Organizations

Early research on creativity centered, to a large extent, on discovering and describing the nature of creative people (Barron, 1955; MacKinnon, 1965). While noteworthy in its own right, its nearly exclusive focus on the individual level of analysis eclipsed more macro explanations of creativity (Slappendel, 1996). Amabile, working with her colleagues (Amabile, 1983, 1996; Amabile, Goldfarb, & Brockfield, 1990), enlarged the scope of creativity research from its origins at the individual level to the group or social-psychological level and, eventually, to the organizational level (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996). In general, scholars in the field have followed this approach, and multilevel models of creativity in organizations are now emerging.

Later studies on creativity concluded that it was dynamic, defining creativity as the process of engagement in creative acts, regardless of whether the resultant outcomes are novel, useful, or creative (Amabile, 1988, 1996; Ford, 1996).

By defining creativity as a process (Mohr, 1982) and Amabile (1988) have modeled creativity as an individual-level cognitive process consisting of multiple stages. To Torrance (1988), individual creativity is a process of sensing problems, making guesses, formulating hypotheses, communicating ideas to others, and contradicting conformity or “what is expected.”

At the individual level, creativity can be defined as the engagement of an individual in a creative act (Torrance, 1988; Ford, 1996). Creative engagement is a process in which an individual behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally attempts to produce creative outcomes (Kahn, 1990). For example, engineers working on a project may attempt to design an apparatus that is creative; they may collect data, consult past solutions, contemplate alternatives, propose inventive ideas, and become emotionally invested in their work.

This process orientation focuses on how individuals attempt to orient themselves to, and take creative action in, situations or events that are complex, ambiguous, and ill defined. In other words, this is an issue of how individuals engage in sensemaking in organizations (Greenberg, 1995; Weick, 1995; Volkema, Farquhar, & Bergmann, 1996).

### 2.2.2 Employee Creativity via Sensemaking

A sensemaking approach to creativity affords a fresh perspective. Traditionally, creativity research has depicted the key levels of analysis as being individual, group, and organizational, with creativity at higher levels typically being an aggregation of creative output at lower levels (Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993; Glynn, 1996).

A sensemaking perspective enriches this perspective by pointing to cross-level, systemic, and embedded effects that may arise from idiosyncratic and/or communal interpretations of what it means to be creative. This implies that conflict, political influence, and negotiated order may operate at more macro-organizational levels

(Walsh & Fahey, 1986; Weick, 1995) and over time in organizations to influence creative processes.

Creativity is a choice made by an individual to engage in producing novel ideas; the level of creative engagement can vary from person to person and from situation to situation. An individual may choose minimal engagement, proposing simple solutions that may not be novel or useful—a behavior Ford (1996) refers to as “habitual action.” Alternatively, an individual may choose to engage in a full manner, using all of his or her abilities in an effort to produce creative outcomes. To Kahn (1990), such processes of engagement (and disengagement) vary over time, ebbing and flowing from moment to moment and from day to day.

The goal of theory building in the interpretive or sensemaking perspective is to describe organizational life. The focus is less on understanding how to manipulate a system (so as to increase the level of creativity) than it is on understanding the processes through which individuals and organizations develop systems of meaning about creative action. With its focus on the development of meanings and how they motivate engagement and action, a sensemaking perspective is well suited to the focus on creativity as a process.

Although functionalist perspectives dominate organizational research (Gioia & Pitre, 1990) a sensemaking perspective has made significant headway (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). A sensemaking approach has been invoked to explain a diversity of topics, including issue and agenda formation (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), strategy formation in top management teams (Porac, Thomas, & Baden-Fuller, 1989), change management (Poole, Gioia, & Gray, 1989; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), and technology diffusion (Barley, 1986). Researchers have studied the general innovation process using a sensemaking framework (Ring & Rands, 1989; Dougherty, 1992; Hill & Levenhagen, 1995), but we know of only limited work that applies an interpretive framework specifically to the study of creativity (Ford & Gioia, 1995; Ford, 1996).

Based on a sensemaking perspective approach several issues become important. First, although researchers recognize that individuals are the center of organizational life, those individuals are accorded a different role: they create meanings about their social setting through interactions with others (Weick, 1979). But individuals also have agency and take actions that shape their environments (Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Giddens, 1994) thus, the interpretation process is inherently dynamic.

### **2.2.3 Employee Engagement, Sensemaking and Creativity**

From this individual level of inquiry, creativity researchers have extended their perspective to include contextual variables. They have found that settings that provide opportunities, absence of constraints (Amabile & Gyskiewicz, 1987; Amabile, 1988; Oldham & Cummings, 1996) and rewards (Mumford & Gustafson, 1988) foster creativity.

A number of multilevel studies have revealed that leader style, cohesiveness, group tenure, and degree of cooperation are antecedents to creativity (King & Anderson, 1990) and research team effectiveness (Payne, 1990). Further, Andrews (1979) has found that the composition of groups is a determinant of recognition and effectiveness, as well as of publications, for research and development teams.

Creativity also can be defined as a group-level process. The complex, creative projects taken on by large organizations require the concerted engagement of many individuals, rather than just one or a few.

Individuals and groups participate in creative processes in an iterative fashion. Individuals develop ideas, present them to the group, learn from the group, work out issues in solitude, and then return to the group to further modify and enhance their ideas. The iterative, interactive nature of group creativity requires that individuals first choose to engage in individual-level creativity (Klein, Dansereau, & Hall, 1994).

In these settings, communication and coordination are handled directly between communities of individuals assigned to project teams. Situations characterized by high levels of ambiguity and low levels of inclusiveness provide individuals little in the way of guidance concerning what is correct behavior.

According to House, Rousseau, and Thomas-Hunt (1995), such psychologically weak situations “stimulate groups to engage in collective sense making and construct their own version of reality”. Different communities come to a project team with different professional frames; in turn, these influence team members’ interpretations of events that occur during the process of project work. In the face of situational ambiguity, individuals within different communities will consult one another to develop an interpretation of events in lieu of crossing communal boundaries.

For example, Amabile (1988) assumes that “major corporations select individuals who exhibit relatively high levels of these personal qualities, [and that] the variance above this baseline may well be accounted for primarily by factors in the work environment” Amabile (1996) later affirms this view in her statement that “whatever an individual’s talents . . . the conditions under which he or she works . . . can significantly increase or decrease the level of creativity produced”.

Support for this notion can be found in Oldham and Cumming’s (1996) study. These authors hypothesized a person-by-situation interaction effect on creativity and found statistical support for an ordinal relationship. That is, individuals whose dispositions make them more likely to be affected by a favorable work environment are more creative, but the creativity of all individuals is raised by a supportive environment. Thus, one assumption in creativity research, made explicitly or implicitly, is the homogeneity of higher-level (or situational) effects on individuals.

The degree of inclusion of individuals in a hierarchy of levels is an important construct in cross-level research (Rousseau, 1985; House et al., 1995). Total inclusion implies that only the group in which an individual has formal membership is influential (e.g., a functional department or an assigned project team). Partial inclusion means that an individual occupies multiple organizational roles and is

influenced by membership in all of them; situational attributes can cue or make salient membership in a particular group to the exclusion of other groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1996). As Fine (1996) observes, “The assumption of a dominant [occupational] identity overly limits people’s choices in constructing their work relations”.

Thus, it is important we consider in detail how sensemaking in the case of an organizational change in the dynamic manner described above can be achieved as this will help deal with the paradox and ambiguity described earlier one. According to the literature sensemaking can be achieved via communication and participation leading towards a successful organizational change because this way managers can work through paradox and enact a more workable certainty. This will be the theme of the literature to follow.

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## **2.3 Importance of Communication Methods in Achieving Sensemaking Leading Towards a Successful Change**

The matter of communication is of prime significance in the organizational change literature because communication influences several fundamental change factors. This multidimensional role of communication is discussed and analysed.

### **2.3.1 Communication Process Aid to Change Factors**

Lundberg (1990) examined the role of communication in different cases of organizational change, suggesting that organizational changes were facilitated through communication processes. He explained that because organizations operated in different ways, and organizational changes differed between them, the role of communication, its process and focus differed in each particular case.

The author went on to classify organizations in four different types (rational, human resource, political, cultural) based on the organization’s perspective on different organizational phenomena. He then classified organization change in to three types (internal adjustments, environmental alignment, future anticipation) based on the fundamental tasks that organizations performed (Lundberg, 1990).

Using these classifications Lundberg built a framework identifying the focuses of organizational communication that emerged with respect to each combination of frame and task. By mapping the communication focuses of organization change, the author argued that change agents could identify those targets of organizational communication that were most relevant to a particular perspective and type of change, and thus help ensure that organizational change projects succeed.

Klein provided further evidence on the way the communication process could help employees in the case of organizational change. He suggested that the communication strategy in the case of organizational change was important because it could deal with the difficulties arising with changes. Based on his experiences of a system-wide organizational change in several manufacturing plants of the company in which he worked as corporate manager, he described how significant

organizational changes began slowly, were implemented incrementally and were subject to change as information was being gathered (Klein, 1996).

According to Klein, because many organizational participants were vaguely aware about the changes, the resulting rumours, anxiety and resistance could adversely affect the success of the change. If communications were poor and employees did not really know and understand the reasons for the new system they would not approve it. Moreover, if they felt they had no influence over how to do their job and at what pace, again they would reject the change. Only if they comprehended the necessity for change and how it affected them, would the change be implemented successfully.

Klein then identified organizational communication principles that help ensure management satisfy the needs of the employees mentioned above and explained and described the different communication needs of the employees and the way management could ensure they were met satisfactorily. He then concluded that strategic thinking about how and what to communicate to employees dealt with change difficulties and could rectify problems via (1) feedback and adjustments (2) developing communication strategies that encourage disclosure of problems and (3) discussion of solutions through intensive face to face communications between management and employees (Klein, 1996).

### **2.3.2 Difficulties with the Application of the Communication Process**

Gill's UK empirical work investigated how information could be misinterpreted by the employees within the organization, despite the good intentions of the communicator to ensure clear and explicit information was being conveyed. The barriers of understanding were found to be the recent company history, trust factors and the communication methods (Gill, 1996).

The organization and Gill embarked on a communication exercise, prior to the implementation of a new employee scheme, to assist its implementation and create a sense of identity with the new element by providing employees with information and looking to them to provide input into how the new scheme would work. Their aim was to ensure employee involvement, commitment, satisfaction and as a result increased productivity, but it did not have any intention for involvement to go beyond consultation to co-determination. Participation was aimed to be kept to day-to-day operational issues and would involve no significant transfer of decision-making power from the management to employees.

The results showed that employees did not understand the objectives of the new scheme and believed that their opinions were not taken into account. Gill concluded that the communication exercise was only partly effective and successful. Although management provided information, employees interpreted it according to their experience and perception of recent company history, which for many had created suspicion and mistrust. The management methods of communication and the failure

of senior management to utilise a feedback system, effectively, did not help eliminate those feelings (Gill, 1996).

The process of communication was ineffective because the spirit and intent of it had not been fully acknowledged by the receivers. This was due to the fact that cooperation was based on sharing of elements of the language (Watson, 1994, as cited in Gill, 1996). In this case only some sharing of language occurred, but lessons had been learned about the communication process in general, the upward solving of problems and the need for feedback following a period of top down change. The importance of new language was established (Gill, 1996).

### **2.3.3 Effects of Working Relations on the Communication Process**

Tierney's empirical study analysed the impact of leadership and teams on the employee's psychological climate for change. Tierney wanted to test how and if supervisors and teams shaped the employee's climate perceptions because these perceptions played an integral role in the change process. Both types of work relationships employees shared might serve as potential mechanisms for transforming employees towards change (Tierney, 1999).

The results showed that the development of strong relationships between supervisors and employees and among employees and their team members was associated with employees perceiving that they worked in a context, characterised by risk-taking and departure from the status quo, open communication, trust, operational freedom and employee development, five of the necessary conditions for the emergence of individual and organizational change.

Quality relationships in the work setting might actually provide employees with work conditions conducive to change. Teams that perceived the climate as change-conducive, were more likely to have individual members who shared the same view. Employees had the strongest climate perceptions when they had the opportunity to experience a favourable relationship with a supervisor who viewed the organization as having a change-conducive climate (Tierney, 1999).

For this reason Tierney pointed out that organizations should support supervisors and teams in their attempts to develop high quality interactions so that they enhanced the potential for positive change. In addition, management should provide team members with conditions likely to cultivate good impressions of the work environment and thus result in greater positive discourse regarding change-centred factors. The study revealed that management should also be sensitive because any messages they conveyed regarding their views of the work context for change might have a substantial impact on employee's views. Management should thus ensure they did not expose employees to negative information.

### 2.3.4 Relationship Between Justice and Communication

Cobb, Folger and Wooten examined organizational change by focusing on the contributions justice might make to planned change and to the organizations that were constructed from those change efforts. The authors claimed that because organization change involved changes in policies, procedures and resource allocations, matters of fairness were inherent in change programmes. Justice research had shown that organizations and leaders perceived as fair command loyalty, commitment and trust and were better able to adjust to the kind of adversities often found in change efforts, even layoffs (Cobb, Folger, & Wooten, 1995).

Fundamental to change was a redistribution of resources as the organization shifted its missions, priorities and the means to achieve its goals. Thus the authors explained that such resource distributions would fundamentally affect perceptions of how fair the change effort was and as a consequence the outcomes that resulted from these perceptions such as organizational commitment, trust and the willingness to accept change.

The role of management became very important during an organizational change because fair treatment communicated higher standing in the organization, even when employees had to face disappointing results which appeared in the organizational change case. Explanations for actions that resulted in disappointing outcomes for the employees became important because they could reduce the moral outrage and retribution.

The authors also identified that management should communicate the need for change and reasoning behind this strategy, explain the basic normative principles of the change programme after integrating these with the core values of the employees. Also, articulate the experience of other organizations that had to change and succeeded, then, finally acknowledge the hardships of those affected by the change. The idea that while mistakes would be made, change efforts and emerging organizations were fundamentally fair and committed to the welfare of the employees had to be evoked (Cobb et al., 1995).

### 2.3.5 Stress Minimisation via Proper Communication

McHugh studied a change and found that ignoring the needs of employees and looking at the needs of the organization alone was a serious mistake. If employees were neglected in the planning and implementation of an organizational change, it was likely that the entire process would become stressful for employees, the adverse effects of which would be a cost to the organization. Management should thus include the matter of stress on the change management agenda (McHugh, 1997).

The study identified that a careful, well-planned approach to change management was required to ensure stressed staff were optimally placed to cope with additional pressures which inevitably accompanied a major change. As a result,

McHugh claimed that management should provide training programmes aiming to help employees control their own stress levels, identify causal factors and acquire the skills to cope efficiently.

McHugh argued that management should also ensure that those effecting and those affected by the change were engaged in adequate communication through dialogue in order to clarify pertinent issues, exchange views and alleviate any areas of uncertainty. The study also showed that organizational change was often imposed without dialogue taking place, consequently many employees were unsure of exactly how they would be affected and felt powerless to take any action to prevent the change from taking place.

The provision of information through dialogue was necessary but not sufficient. It was equally important, McHugh noted, to engage in adequate and realistic time planning for the process and to focus on the skills required by those who were at the core of the change process. These matters, according to the author, should also be addressed via the dialogue process.

The author added that in order to create an organization in which employees expressed their opinion, the communication structure should allow their suggestions to be heard, ensure they saw their suggestion's results and thus make them feel they influenced the decision-making. This would foster a climate of ownership over decisions and pride if their suggestions were accepted. The author also claimed that management should ensure employees were sensitised to the need for change and were provided with further training aiming to help them cope with change. This way change would be welcomed rather than viewed with fear and repudiation (McHugh, 1997).

### **2.3.6 Communication's Role in Employee Engagement**

Holman considered matters of communication and organizational culture together, in order to consider the issue of employee involvement. The author suggested that currently there was ample evidence that when high involvement and a system-wide approach to change were used, the potential for great results was high. Several characteristics for a successful approach to change were then mentioned by the author (Holman, 2000).

The first such characteristic was that when people saw the possibility of contributing to something larger than themselves the emphasis shifted from focusing on why something could not be done to how we could make it happen. People felt alive and excited with possibility, and the belief was that people in the system knew best.

Another characteristic for a successful approach to change was that members collectively created a whole system of views and when this occurred members knew better how to participate and thus make intelligent, informed contributions to substantive decisions. The system was kept whole through a commitment to sharing information. When people were informed, they made more informed decisions about their own activities.

Based on these characteristics, Holman advised management to (1) be clear about their purpose of undertaking change, mobilise meaningful involvement and sustain the work, (2) know where the support was coming from and plan accordingly because different strategies depended on whether support was from the top middle or grassroots, (3) mean what they say and be prepared to be tested or do not start at all because people had the ability to read underlying intention, and if the motivation for high involvement change was not real they would know and behave accordingly, (4) determine their approach to change based not on the current culture but on the belief that they could move from where they were to the culture they wanted by focusing on how best to bring people into a future they desired, (5) communicate with everyone early and often, explaining that whilst it might start as one way communication about a decision to undertake change, when it would become an ongoing conversation among everyone involved, it would carry the momentum for success and finally (6) get the support they needed for success because high involvement change could look messy, and as a result, involving someone who saw high involvement change before could save much anxiety when they were not sure what was happening made sense (Holman, 2000).

### **2.3.7 Applying Open Book Management via Communication**

Maurer summarised the significance of justice, training and participation in the principles of open book management, claiming that the most important thing was to build support for these ideas and get an organization to recognise why a change was important. When a critical mass of people saw the importance of taking some action they would all be eager for the action to begin (Maurer, 2001).

The principles of open book management were an effective way to help get everyone to a shared recognition of why a change was important because this type of management literally opened the books. Often, the data that drove a business (industry trends, quality reports) were accessible to only a few in the organization. Consequently, when leaders announced a change, no one else saw why it was necessary.

Open book management provided access to critical business information, ensured that via training people could interpret the data, gave people enough time for all to make sense of the information and gave people a stake in the outcome by linking pay and bonuses to financial and other critical outcomes. In addition open book management gave employees the authority to act on information by trusting them with the information and with the power to do something differently, and finally made sure people received the data in a way that they could believe because when people did not trust the source of the data they did not trust the data itself (Maurer, 2001).

### **2.3.8 Communication and Employee Empowerment**

A major organizational change was considered a major factor that could lead to employees feeling powerless because existing organizational norms and patterns of action were likely to change. The organization's goals and rules might no longer be clearly defined, responsibilities and power might shift dramatically, uncertainty might prevail and the transition produce a period of disorientation, seriously challenging employees sense of control and competence as they dealt with the uncertainty of change and accepted new responsibilities, skills and guidelines for action and behaviour. Management should therefore ensure the provision of empowerment practices to its employees, in order to ensure the organizational change did not fail (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

According to Conger and Kanungo (1988) this could be achieved via the provision of training procedures to ensure that the requisite technical, linguistic and social influence skills were acquired, and that the company culture emphasised self-determination, collaboration, high performance standards and meritocracy. Organizations providing multiple sources of loosely committed resources at decentralised levels, and structuring open communication systems were more likely to be empowering.

Management should also express confidence in subordinates, foster opportunities for employees to participate in decision making and provide autonomy by setting inspirational and meaningful goals to ensure employees felt empowered. A reward system emphasising innovative performance and high incentive values also fostered a sense of self efficacy.

In order to be effective the empowerment practices outlined above had to directly provide information to employees about their personal efficacy. Management should therefore structure the organizational change programmes in a way that initial objectives were sufficiently attainable so that employees could execute them successfully.

Moreover, the authors claimed that because employees felt empowered when they observed similar colleagues performing their jobs successfully, supervisors should ensure their behaviour set an example for employees to believe in themselves. Words of encouragement and verbal feedback could help employees mobilise greater sustained effort. The authors concluded that it was the responsibility of management to ensure stress, fear or anxiety did not lower the self-efficacy expectations by clearly defining employee roles, reduce information overload and offer them technical assistance to accomplish their tasks (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

### **2.3.9 Communication via Training to Achieve Employee Participation**

Rusaw's (2000) empirical research considered training as a form of organizational change, since by giving employees skills and insights for identifying and defining

organizational problems, individuals would have greater capacity to change unproductive and unsatisfying organizational structures and processes. The author suggested training was a catalytic process that depended largely on the abilities of informed and skilled members to develop their own tools for change.

The case study considered a University Dean who decided to train all employees and managers in one department in skills that would address the issues identified by an employee- initiated study and related to trust, openness of communication and equity of treatment among different classes of employees (Rusaw, 2000).

Training however, according to Rusaw, might not guarantee that employees would make or could make the changes when they returned to their workplaces. This was because the training programme might be unable to transfer skills to the workplace, the employees had the skills but not the power to make changes, managers might fail to give the resources to employees to make changes because they could see the change as a risk, and finally because managers could look at highly skilled employees as a threat.

Rusaw added that Critical Theory suggested that resistance to change by managers could stem from a struggle between organizational domination and attempts to liberate employees. Training promoted autonomy, access to information, people who could meet and freely discuss with others their opinions, who could think critically, and did not allow ideologies to define personal responses. It finally aimed to liberate employees from oppressive organizational ideologies.

The case study revealed that management felt that training threatened its assumed authority and control and the maintenance of organizational hierarchy. Thus management tried to control the format of discussion in a training programme, imposed definitions of needs, approved training content and selected who attended training events. The end result was that the matters training aimed to address remained unresolved.

Consequently, Rusaw claimed that in order to succeed, management had to be able to change ideological assumptions and promote and write a new organizational ideology. They had to realise that their resistance affected not only present organizational productivity but also the capacity to meet future challenges and opportunities. Management should not view training as a threat to existing power but as a way to encourage maturity, creativity and satisfaction among them and their employees. They should value freedom and promote it in practice (Rusaw, 2000).

### **2.3.10 Employee Reactions to Changes in the Management Provision of Information**

According to Purdy employees had more input at work and could affect matters to the benefit of the organization when organizations operated in a democratic way in relation to the provision of accounting data to their employees (Purdy, 2003). In addition accounting data, and more specifically financial management accounting data, was important in current work contexts because it was used for both decision

making and evaluation of the performance of the decision-maker. Thus the appreciation and use of these data had significance for the actions of an individual at work. The ability to appreciate important data enabled an individual to utilise that data in their job (Purdy, 1996).

Two studies, Jackson-Cox, McQueeney, and Thirkell (1987) and Centre for Decision-Making Studies (1979), suggested that the type and form of information was determined by senior management. Evidence suggested that senior management were concerned to put across particular messages rather than provide data for use to affect engagement and company decisions.

The studies indicated that where information and financial information had been provided it did not seem to be appropriate for the requirements of the employees even in their existing conditions. The employees were unable to conceptualise situations, and where they did, were not in a position to requisition the information. They lacked the power to obtain information and even where it was obtained did not have the influence or power to utilise it.

According to the two studies, on other occasions where financial information had been provided gratuitously, the information did not seem to relate to the context of the employees. Irrespective of whether either the employees understood it or it had meaning for them, the employees were not in a position to use it. It appeared that during the period of the two studies the management did not expect employees to use this financial information, except to accept it.

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## **2.4 Employee Participation to Achieve Sensemaking Leading Towards a Successful Change**

### **2.4.1 Employee Participation via Empowerment**

There is consensus among academics that to introduce change successfully, managers often need to gain the support of employees. To do so, they are advised to use practices that empower employees (Delaney & Sockell, 1990; Cobb et al., 1995; Tesluk, Vance, & Mathieu, 1999; Morgan & Zeffane, 2003).

Empowerment was defined as the process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among employees through identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both organizational practice and informal techniques of providing efficacy information (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Initially, empowerment was introduced as an individual-level construct (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995, 1996) and grounded in work on employee involvement (Lewin, 1947). Early work on individual empowerment was closely linked to motivational frameworks such as the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980), and Bandura's work on self-efficacy (1977, 1977, 1982). As a result of these two foundational literatures, empowerment came to be conceptualized in two distinct ways: structural and psychological (Menon, 2001; Leach, Wall, & Jackson, 2003; Spreitzer, 1995, 2008).

### 2.4.1.1 Structural and Psychological Empowerment

Structural empowerment builds upon work centered on job design and job characteristics (Campion, Medsker, & Higgs, 1993; Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980) and, at its core, focuses on the transition of authority and responsibility from upper management to employees. Accordingly, structural empowerment is concerned with the actual transference of decision making and how this can best be done such that benefits from shifting authority and responsibility for certain tasks to employees are realized.

In comparison, psychological empowerment, which has ties to Bandura's (1977, 1982) work on self-efficacy, is less concerned about the actual transition of authority and responsibility, but instead focuses on employee's perceptions or cognitive states regarding empowerment. Here, the key is that individuals need to believe that they can perform their work on their own and as such, psychological empowerment can be defined in terms of motivational processes (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

### 2.4.1.2 Team Psychological Environment

With teams becoming more and more prevalent in organizations, it is hardly surprising that the empowerment construct has also been extended to, and examined, at the team level of analysis. Here, researchers argue that aggregation is appropriate given that empowerment appears to be both isomorphic and homologous (Kirkman & Rosen, 1997; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). In other words, empowerment retains its same basic meaning across individual and group levels of analysis (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000), and that similar relationships hold across levels of analysis (Chen, Bliese, & Mathieu, 2005). The recent work by Seibert, Wang and Courtright (2011) was the first to empirically show that these assertions hold for empowerment.

The most proximal antecedent to team psychological empowerment is structural empowerment. At its core, structural empowerment considers the effects resulting from managers handing over a number of activities such as scheduling, monitoring work, coordinating training, and conducting performance appraisals to the team (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 2000; Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000; Cook & Goff, 2002; Mills & Ungson, 2003). Lawler (1986, 1992) was one of the first to suggest that in order for employee involvement to be effective, organizational design elements needed to be transitioned to lower levels.

### 2.4.1.3 Relationship Between Structural and Psychological Empowerment

The argument for a relationship between structural and psychological empowerment is that the psychological empowerment state is likely to follow from organizational design features that facilitate this transference. This is in line with prior work by Menon (2001) who recommended that both perspectives of empowerment (i.e., psychological and structural) be integrated by considering structural empowerment as an antecedent to psychological empowerment.

The underlying thought being that when individuals or teams are given, through the structure of their work or task, increased participation in decision making and

overall responsibility, psychological empowerment should be enhanced (Susman, 1976; Hackman, 1987; Guzzo, Yost, Campbell, & Shea, 1993; Manz & Sims, 1993). While not numerous, there have been examinations of the relationship between structural and psychological empowerment. For example, Mathieu, Gilson & Ruddy (2006) obtained a significant correlation between empowering organizational structural features and team members' shared perceptions of authority and responsibility.

#### **2.4.1.4 Outcomes of Team Psychological Empowerment**

Psychological empowerment increases team performance because possessing a sense of ownership results in team members having greater levels of initiative (Spreitzer, Noble, Mishra, & Cooke, 1999). Spreitzer et al. (1999) provided evidence of a significant, positive relationship between psychological empowerment and team performance.

Additionally, empowered teams that possess the knowledge required for a given task should make better decisions hence have better performance (Latham, Winters, & Locke, 1994). Mathieu, Gilson, and Ruddy (2006) demonstrate a positive relationship between team psychological empowerment and two measures of performance in their study of empowered service technician teams. Finally, Kirkman and colleagues' (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Kirkman, Rosen, Tesluk, & Gibson, 2004) research suggests that psychological empowerment has a positive impact on team performance in both face-to-face and virtual contexts.

Essentially, empowered team members are better able to align their capabilities, interests, and availability with task demands thus reaping performance benefits through better leveraging of their human capital. Second, being empowered generates higher levels of employee motivation, which in turn, has long been seen as an essential ingredient for team success (Hackman & Morris, 1975).

#### **2.4.2 Participation's Ideological Background**

Considering employee participation from a theoretical point of view, Black and Margulies argued that the underlying basis which guided the implementation of participative methods had significant impacts on the nature and effectiveness of participation. They examined two basic ideological approaches to participation (organizational development and industrial democracy) and analysed potential learning from each in order to understand participation better and provide guidelines for more successful implementation (Black & Margulies, 1989).

In the case of Organizational Development, participation was planned, system-wide and designed to make the organization better able to adapt to changes and future demands, whereas in the case of Industrial Democracy participation was workplace oriented and the overall goal referred to the employee's right to have an influence on decisions that affected their life. The result was that the differences in values concerning participation had a significant impact on the factors that guided

the implementation of participative approaches. However, the authors claimed that in order to improve the chances of success, the two approaches should be combined.

Black and Margulies stressed that in both approaches participation was difficult to implement successfully and it took commitment to make it work. Managers needed to realise that values and the communication of these guided the utilisation and implementation of participation. When employees believed that the organization did not value participation they either were not motivated to participate or when they participated the quality of decisions taken was poor. Likewise if they wanted to participate but perceived that participation would not be instrumental in achieving valued outcomes, participation was not likely to be successful. In addition, managers and employees needed to realise that participation took time and it was not a means to fix problems quickly.

Although managers might perceive participation as a threat to their authority and employees perceive as submitting to managerial pressures to increase productivity or performance, its implementation would be more successful when both managers and employees viewed participation as a right of all and as a means to benefit all members of the organization. The authors added that management should incorporate a more flexible and comprehensive view of participation for change to be successful (Black & Margulies, 1989).

### **2.4.3 Development of Participation Programmes**

Schochau and Delaney investigated the effect of participation, profit sharing and the participation programme structure on managerial assessments of employee support for policy changes, to consider how employee participation efforts could lead to employee support for organizational changes. Their analysis used data collected as part of a study of human resource policies and organizational outcomes in business units of US-based firms. Relationships between managerial assessments and participation, profit sharing and programme structure were studied (Schwochau & Delaney, 1997).

The work indicated formal participation programmes were positively related with assessments of employees support for policy changes and with the managers' willingness to make changes in organizational policies. Profit sharing was positively related to the extent to which employees showed support for policy changes, however there was no evidence to suggest that profit sharing was associated with benefits over and above those achieved through participation alone.

Schochau and Delaney identified several aspects of the programme structure were associated with perceptions of support for policy changes. First, the amount of authority given to participants to implement their recommendations was consistently related to greater perceived support for changes in policies. Second, the extent of employee engagement in participation efforts enhanced employee support for change as judged by management. As a result, the importance of meaningful voice in organizations was interrelated with participation.

When the two were combined, when more employees were given input to a larger number of issues and were also given more authority to implement their recommendations, the assessment of employees support for policy changes was enhanced. The authors also identified that participation efforts succeeded because they tapped into an unused reservoir of unused talent, skill and knowledge that existed amongst employees. However, they pointed out that the beneficial results depended on developing participation programmes that would provide employees with a meaningful voice (Schwochau & Delaney, 1997).

#### **2.4.4 Employee Involvement Programmes Contribution Towards Participation**

Delaney and Sockell considered employee involvement programmes and their contributions towards change taking into account unionisation. The authors studied the relationship, if any, between employee involvement, unionisation, and the support for change in businesses. They used data collected as part of a study of human resource policies and organizational outcomes in business units of US firms (Delaney & Sockell, 1990).

For firms to accommodate change it was believed management had to emphasise flexibility in the control and deployment of resources including employees. It was also widely perceived that unions resisted this effort of management and that nonunion firms were better able to innovate or manage resources flexibly. On the other hand, employee involvement plans were seen as contributing to the flexible management of resources because they reduced shirking behaviour on the job, increased employee willingness to change the terms of their work and helped them adapt to change.

The survey results showed that unionisation together with employee involvement programmes were positively related to perceived support for change. If unions did not restrict the management's ability to make changes, employee involvement might be particularly effective in unionised settings. The authors explained that participation plans in unionised work places might have a greater effect on workplace support for change than similar in nonunion settings, because workers trusted their union more than they trusted management. On the other hand, if unions restricted flexibility, participation might be more effective in nonunion settings.

The authors claimed that participation programmes might be more effective in unionised firms because they posed a threat to unions. An involvement plan could serve as an alternative representation scheme, unions might become actively involved in it, and this involvement in plans could cause workers support for change to increase. The structure of the employee involvement programmes was also found to affect perceived support for change. This was significant, according to the authors, because in all cases, perceived support for change was significantly higher when an employee involvement programme existed. Management of organizations should therefore pay particular attention to the structure of these programmes (Delaney & Sockell, 1990).

### **2.4.5 Employee Commitment Leading on to Participation**

Neubert and Cady (2001) considered employee commitment to change programmes and investigated its association with important organizational outcomes and a set of potential antecedents.

The authors explained that in order to respond to the frenetic pace of environmental change, organizations introduced programmes requiring the engagement of Human Resource Professionals as change agents. Their success in positively affecting change depended on gaining and retaining the commitment of employees to the programme. High level of commitment motivated employees to put forth the effort, initiative and cooperative behaviours that were required to successfully implement change. Also committed employees demonstrated enthusiasm, got engaged, persisted in the face of difficulties and took personal responsibility for a programme's successful implementation.

The practical implications of the study's conclusions were very important for management, revealing that change agents should focus on obtaining programme commitment before the introduction of the programme. This way, employees would be more inclined to participate in the programme and perform at a high level. Several preconditions like organizational commitment, change efficacy and team-work orientations were found to affect programme commitment, thus programme commitment could be increased by attending to those factors.

Management could actively foster organizational commitment by developing a work environment with clear rules, motivating jobs and positive leader and co-worker relations. Management should also find ways to develop employee confidence in their own capability to contribute to an ever changing work environment, to emphasise their engagement in learning change-related skills and training prior to the implementation of the programme.

After the programme started, management could use the power of positive role models within the organization by recognising those employees who were examples of high levels of programme-related performance. The authors claimed that it was also important for management to ensure the organization recruited employees who indicated a positive disposition towards these programmes (Neubert & Cady, 2001).

### **2.4.6 Participation in a Rule-Bound Organization**

Change in a rule-bound organization was examined by Clayton and Gregory who highlighted the difficulties of management achieving the necessary employee participation and communication in order for the change to succeed. The research was undertaken about a prison and the changes that had to be brought into several of its sectors. The main characteristic of this organization was that rules were everything and individuals could not influence the organization (Clayton & Gregory, 2000).

Clayton and Gregory conducted personal interviews during which it became clear that employees did not want to participate in this change as they believed that the means and ends were outside their sphere of influence. Moreover, some did not want a change because they could derive advantages from the existing system. Some other participants wanted change but were not prepared to contribute to the change, and others wanted to optimize their part of the system but did not want to consider how it would affect the other parts of the system. The process to move these people was difficult and time-consuming and needed to involve the establishment of some guidelines for participation.

People should be made to understand that it was important to speak up and listen to others, although it was not possible to force people to participate in a meaningful way. Changing attitudes and personal values and organization-wide commitment to change was necessary in order to endorse participation in the process.

The authors explained that this could be done via participant planning events, dialogues between viewpoints that conflicted and the creation of working situations in which employees at all levels felt empowered to participate in a meaningful way in a full range of organizational activities. They noted that rule-bound organization cases needed a different change approach which involved the recognition and valuing of change, even when this only amounted to opening up the channels communication (Clayton & Gregory, 2000).

#### **2.4.7 Multiple Levels of Participative Climates and Employee Engagement**

Tesluk, Vance and Mathieu examined how participation could influence the working climate and as a result ensure employee engagement. The authors examined the relationship between participative climates, as they existed at top and middle organization levels, and employee attitudes and behaviours (Tesluk et al., 1999).

Success in organizations required work systems that maximised the contributions of those individuals who were on the front line. As a result, the authors argued, these employees needed systems/mechanisms whereby they could work collaboratively to solve problems. It was also important to ensure employees were willing to contribute creatively and actively. Employee engagement, according to the authors, was designed to attain these objectives. The study therefore emphasised the complex interplay of managerial, structural and climate factors at several organizational levels as they influenced the success of employee engagement programmes.

Tesluk Vance and Mathieu considered their results could have several implications for organizations that try to implement programmes of employee engagement. It was important for organizations to ensure that managers at different levels were supportive and were communicating their support to those below them. Top management support would indicate to lower level managers that participation was the preferred method of decision making. Their support was also important to provide the resources and direction.

Support from middle level managers was also required for employee engagement practices to be implemented and translated into participative climates within small work units. Because middle managers often resisted employee participation, it was important that top level managers anticipated their concerns and designed a process that accommodated manager's roles and responsibilities to the changing roles and responsibilities of their employees.

The authors explained that ensuring that managers at all levels participated was also likely to promote greater understanding of the process necessary for taking steps at the work unit level to facilitate effective participation. They stressed that organizations should also consider how multiple climates operated and influenced employee attitudes and behaviours because, although the larger organizational climate might be supportive, smaller units might be less hospitable and therefore impede employee participation (Tesluk et al., 1999).

### **2.4.8 Participation's Role in Corporate Transformation**

Miles noted that we are in the age of corporate transformation and management had to learn how to focus the organization in such a way that employees could align quickly. Management should find new ways to engage employees, so that they could lead the organization in new directions at all levels. Also, the increasing speed of changing, and rapidly shrinking population of employees with the right capabilities were forcing the need to engage and align all employees rapidly. The author introduced the idea of the employee supercharger for leading corporate transformations that had to be introduced right after the corporate transformation planning effort was completed (Miles, 2001).

According to Miles (2001) management should involve all employees in high-engagement cascades that created understanding, dialogue, feedback and accountability. These cascades empowered people to creatively align their subunits, teams and individual jobs with the major transformation initiatives of the whole enterprise. As a result, they could refocus and re-energise managers and employees by creating an intensive initial experience that lasted for a few days.

Executive and business leaders set the transformation template, and managers and employees at all levels went through a circle of understanding, dialogue, feedback and goal alignment that enabled people to use their creativity and job knowledge, take prudent risks and drive the transformation challenge. The author stressed that managers exercised authority about direction but authority about the means by which the ends were accomplished rested with the team itself (Miles, 2001).

This combination was important for the success of the change process because, as Lewis claimed, people embraced changes they controlled and they disliked being controlled, which explained why when management led a change they needed an engagement plan. Lewis also noted that people embraced change that was good for them and resisted change that was bad for them. As a result and to the extent

possible, project teams would design all changes to benefit those affected by the change (Lewis, 2001).

Miles added that the high-engagement cascade event also served as a Trojan Horse for developing leaders at all levels in the organization because it empowered employees to take the initiative at their level, and enabled them to confront reality and develop a vision and success model, communicate these in a simple and compelling manner, engage in structured dialogue and establish personal accountability for the new performance expectations (Miles, 2001).

### **2.4.9 Effects of Participation on Employees**

A study conducted with male-blue-collar employees in a local authority's recreation department (Wall & Lisher, 1977), where employees' responses to an initial questionnaire showed a very strong desire for information about matters and decisions which were at a local level to their work, and a strong desire for information concerned with issues at medium and distant levels from their job task.

After this initial survey, Wall and Lisher and the local authority started an experiment which tried to implement the expressed preferences of employees and managers for a system of participation. The experiment included a series of meetings attended by employees and supervisors. The meeting topics were ones which concerned medium decisions and the information requested about these was provided to the employees. These meetings affected some of the distant decisions that were being made, whilst some earlier distant decisions were altered. The employees accepted these decisions more readily with the downward flow of information.

The study by Wall and Lisher (1977) combined participation with employee engagement and psychological growth and related growth to learning, knowledge and creativity. It also supported several notions and ideas that helped explain how participation could be used to promote organizational change.

First, since participation promoted democratic ideals and involvement, when the employees were engaged in any organizational change they accepted that change more willingly than if they had not been so engaged. A participative mode of working contributed to the positive ways in which employees felt about their work tasks, for example, more satisfaction at work.

Wall and Lisher also argued that the act of participating was frequently accompanied by some form of learning process and reported examples of managers providing information to employees who understood the information and consequently accepted the rationale of the managers' decisions. Wall and Lisher also cited examples of employees who felt that they had a lot of knowledge to contribute to the running of their work organization, where much more could be achieved if only the manager would listen and provide the information.

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