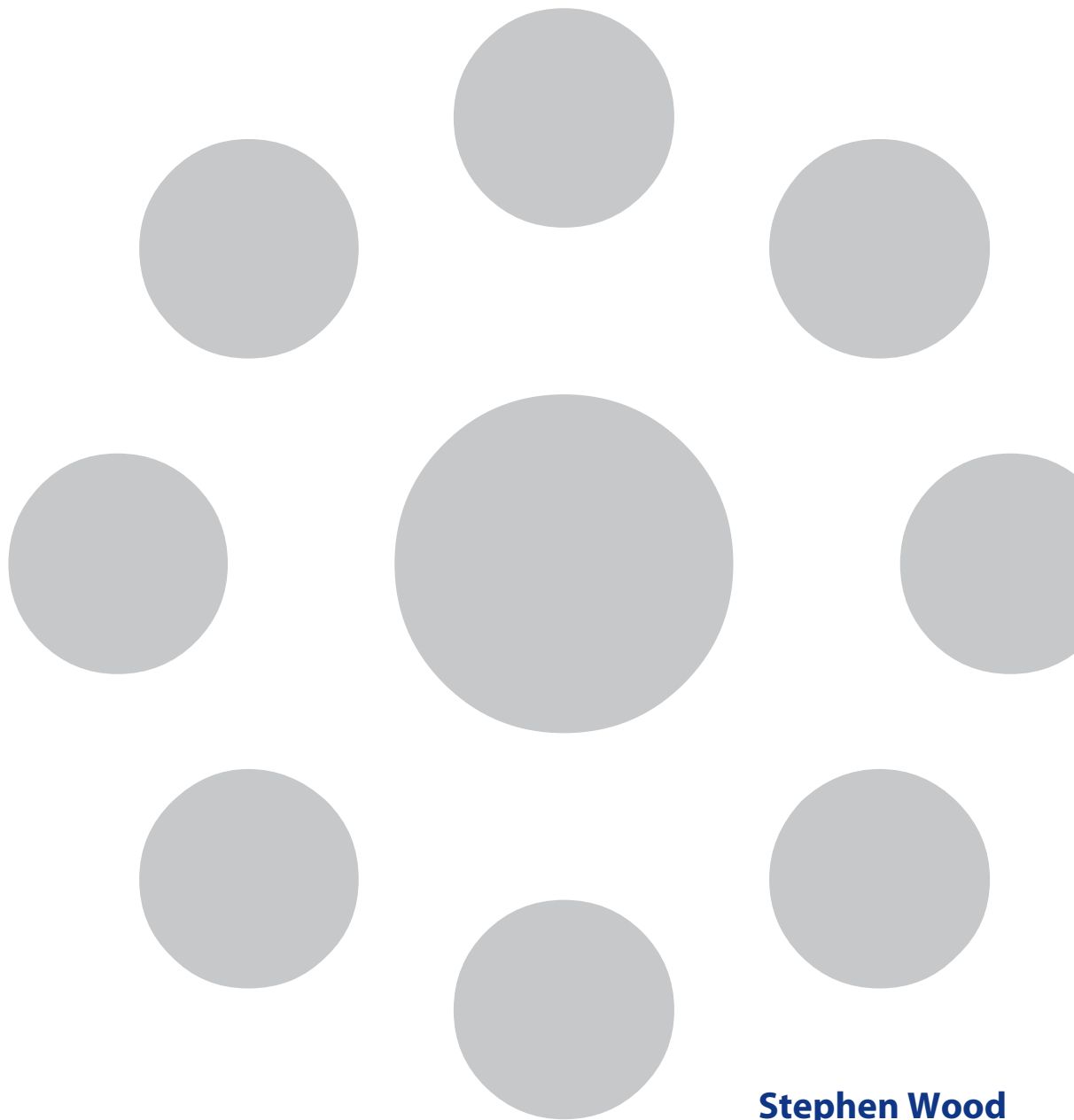


High-involvement design: The time has come



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About the author

Stephen Wood is Professor of Management, University of Leicester, and a Fellow of the British Academy of Social Science, an Academic Fellow of the CIPD and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Stephen's main research area is the nature and use of modern management methods and their effects on performance, innovation and employee well-being. His recent research has centred on how management practices, job characteristics, workplace abuse, and recessions affect well-being, and its effects on organisational performance, absenteeism and family-work conflict.

Stephen has provided policy advice to a range of organisations, public and private, and contributed to public life in a number of ways. He was Chair of the Health and Safety Commission's Workers Safety Adviser Challenge Fund (2004–7) and a member of the Employment Task Group for the 2004 Health White Paper, commissioned to do an evaluation of the Employment Relations Legislation for the DTI in 2005, a member of the Methods and Infrastructure Committee of the Economic and Social Research Council (2008–11), and a member of both the steering committee and the research team of the Workplace Employment Relations Survey of 2011.

His editorial board memberships include, the *Journal of Management*, *Industrial Relations Journal*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, and *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, he was Chief Editor of the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1999–2003, and is currently a member of its International Advisory Board.

Recent books include S.Lewis, D. Anderson, C. Lyonette, N. Payne and S. Wood (Eds), *Work-Life Balance in Times of Austerity and Beyond*, New York and London: Taylor Francis, 2017, and B. van Wanrooy, H. Bewley, A. Bryson, J. Forth, S. Freeth, L. Stokes and S. Wood, *Employment Relations in the Shadow of the Recession*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

His paper, with Shaun Pichler and Gerard Beenen (California State University Fullerton), on appraisal systems and the importance of frequent feedback won the Ian Beardwell Prize for the best paper at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) Applied Research Conference of 2017.



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Foreword

The IPA has always believed that management is more effective when employees are properly involved in the decision-making that affects them at work. Many of the most successful companies in the UK over the past few decades, such as John Lewis Partnership and Standard Life Aberdeen, have been those which have focused on high-involvement management, ensuring their workforce are fully participating in making the wider organisation a success.

This paper rightly identifies the key value of employee involvement at both the level of day-to-day tasks and at the strategic, organisational level. This report also points out, however, that employee involvement does not simply arise naturally in organisations, but relies on strategic leadership and the right structures and processes being put in place to support and nurture it.

To be properly involved workers also need to be informed, and have a fuller understanding of the context of their jobs – this helps make their voice at work more constructive but also helps intrinsically to give meaning to their working lives. More broadly, being both informed and involved can help ensure that workers enjoy autonomy, satisfaction and well-being at work; key components of a good job. With a renewed national focus on ‘good work’ following the Matthew Taylor Review in 2017, this is an increasing priority for many employers.

Looking at the wider economy, over 10 years on from the great recession, productivity in the UK remains low and flat. Part of the explanation for this productivity puzzle, as argued by the Chartered

Management Institute and others, is a deficiency in the quality of management in this country.

Despite the lessons of history that high-involvement management works much better than a top-down management approach, there are far too many firms in the UK today that still need to move away from a command-and-control style of management.

A new focus on high-involvement design could do wonders to boost an organisation’s productivity.

A more involved workforce, with an informed voice and meaningful opportunities for participation would boost motivation, innovation, product quality, safety and employee wellbeing, as well as reducing industrial disputes and at the same time increasing organisational resilience to weather coming storms such as Brexit. Given all the challenges ahead, a revolution in UK management practice is needed now more than ever.

High-involvement design is indeed an idea whose time has come.



Nita Clarke OBE
IPA Director

Executive Summary

Increasing attention is being given to better management as part of the solution to Britain's productivity problem. But there still remains a danger of insufficient attention being paid to the human factor. While successive governments have targeted skills acquisition and employment relations legislation has weakened trade union power beyond all recognition, there remains a problem which must lie elsewhere: presumably in work organisation and management. The question though is which management practices or approach are required. Is it a strengthening of the recent emphasis on performance management, with its focus on targets, monitoring, and individualized performance-related pay? Or an approach centred more on employee involvement and enhancing coordination and intra-organisational relationships? Drawing on a rich body of knowledge – much of which is British and based on a national survey which is the envy of the world, the Government-led Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS) – that shows employee involvement is good for productivity and other related measures such as product and service quality this report argues for the adoption of the high involvement route.

High-involvement management is often equated with high performance work systems. This neglects its central point that primacy in Human Resource Management (HRM) should be given to employee involvement, job and organisational, not performance management systems. Job or role involvement management, often known as empowerment or enriched job design, is an approach to the design of high-quality jobs that allows employees an element of discretion and flexibility over the execution and management of their primary tasks. While organisational-involvement management entails workers participating in decision-making, beyond the narrow confines of the job, in the wider organisation or the business as a whole. Both have been increasingly neglected as the concept of high-performance work systems and performance management techniques have taken centre stage.

Recognizing this, the report argues that we need to move forward from the focus on high performance practices to a concept of high-involvement design. This is a principle that should extend to the whole organisation and the design of all elements of HRM. The value of high involvement design is partly that it increases employee well-being, but more significantly it changes, for the better, the way people connect what they do with what others do, develop shared understandings, and learn from each other. It enhances the relational coordination of the organisation.

The author makes suggestions for how the involvement principle could be applied to the design of all HRM activities. For example, recruitment processes should involve employers soliciting job previews from applicants and not just their giving their own realistic job previews. Training and development needs to be focused on supporting the requirements of involvement, team working, creativity, and diagnostic skills, and built into day-to-day activities. Appraisal processes should include frequent feedback and be focused on development and not ensuring obligations are fulfilled or pay increases. Individual performance pay systems could be forsaken in favour of collective ones. Idea-capturing through improvement or project teams must be clearly targeted at well-defined problems and these teams should include people from across hierarchical levels. Conventional engagement or employee attitude surveys need replacing with instruments that are themselves designed through employee involvement.

High involvement design also has implications for management education, as it implies it should be oriented towards deep learning and developing principles, dispositions and attributes and not simply a process of alerting management to best practices, as a literal interpretation of evidence-based management might suggest. The report concludes by highlighting that high-involvement management chimes with current concerns about work-life balance and workplace abuse: it is a "We too" concept concerned for all to "lean in".

Introduction

It is over thirty years since Lawler and Walton advocated a modernisation of human resource management centred on employee involvement, variously described as high-involvement management, high-commitment management, or simply human resource management (HRM)¹. Recognition of the economy-wide benefits of this approach was provided by a US Government report in 1993, which was titled, significantly, *High Performance Work Practices and Firm Performance*². The report says that such practices “provide workers with the information, skills, incentives and responsibility to make decisions essential for innovation, quality improvement, and rapid response to change”. This description mirrored the main dimensions of Lawler’s high-involvement management, which involves ensuring that employees have opportunities for participation and power to make decisions and the abilities and motivations to perform well. This subsequently became known as the AMO model of management – A for ability, M for motivation, and O for opportunity for participation. Formulated in this way, high-involvement management and high-performance work systems can be treated as synonymous, as indeed they generally have been.

However, to do this is to miss the central point of the high-involvement management prescription – the primacy given to involvement (the clue is in the title). The bedrock of high-involvement management is involvement at both the job level and the organisational level. Job involvement concentrates on the employee’s core role, and involves the design of high-quality jobs that allow employees an element of discretion and flexibility over how they execute and manage their primary tasks. Organisational involvement entails workers participating in decision-making beyond the narrow confines of the job, so that employees are involved in work organisation decisions, other immediate aspects of their environment and the management and strategy of their organisation.



From high-involvement management to high-involvement design

High-involvement management emerged from a concern to design high-quality jobs that, by giving greater autonomy, would increase employee job satisfaction and well-being. This contrasted with past methods based on a tight division of labour, narrow job descriptions, and over-reliance on pay as a motivational device – a command-and-control style of management. Experiments in job redesign had identified a need for changes beyond employees’ individual tasks. Successful job design requires people to be trained differently, as well as revised supervisory, appraisal, and selection systems. Moreover, involvement needs to go beyond the confines of the core role of employees: they need a greater awareness of the context of their jobs, both to use their discretion effectively and as an end in itself, to give meaning to their working lives and to their lives more generally. Moreover, giving employees autonomy does not guarantee innovation, and a quest for continuous improvement requires creativity from employees at all levels of the organisation. Organisational involvement through team work and idea-capturing schemes is a way of achieving this. The addition of organisational involvement is the distinctive feature of high-involvement management relative to job or work redesign.

¹ E. Lawler, “High-involvement management” (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986). R. Walton, “From “control” to “commitment” in the workplace,” Harvard Business Review 63 (March 1985): 77–84.

² U.S. Department of Labour, “High performance work systems and firm performance” (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

Job and organisational involvement are the fulcrum of high-involvement management, and skills and motivational practices – the other two elements of the AMO model – are subordinate to it. They are not given equal status as they are in high-performance work systems. Rather, the relevant skills and motivational practices are specifically aimed at supporting involvement. For example, training practices are concerned with developing involvement-related skills such as problem-solving and team-working skills, and reward systems are based on organisational and group performance, rather than being individualized. Non-monetary reward programmes may also be used.

More generally, high-involvement management is a philosophy or management approach that means *all* practices and behavioural expectations are designed on the basis of the involvement principle. The positive performance effects of involvement reflect the enactment of the underlying approach or managerial orientation – the organizing principles that guide people’s judgements and behaviours. This underlying orientation ensures an integrated approach to practices – they are tied together and made consistent by this principled management. Their precise nature is not, however, mandated by the philosophy, or defined by them. There is nothing inherent in, for example, appraisal that makes it an involvement practice. Rather, it depends on how the appraisal is designed. If the formal appraisal is focused on development and creativity rather than monitoring behaviours, goals are set meaningfully, and employees receive feedback on a regular basis, then its status can be transformed from a routine performance management exercise into a key part of a high-involvement approach.

High-involvement management has been distorted by being treated as synonymous with high-performance work systems. High-performance work systems have themselves morphed into a focus on performance management. Managers have been encouraged to prioritize targets, performance monitoring and individual performance pay. We need to rescue high-involvement management from this focus – not to look back, but to look forward using a concept of *high-involvement design*. Achieving high involvement is an organisational design principle that extends to the whole organisation which can fill a vital gap in the march to improve productivity.

Since the great recession of 2008, productivity growth has remained sluggish in many countries. A number of elements, including austerity programmes, lie behind this – but certainly in the United Kingdom, insufficient attention is paid to the human factor. Successive governments have targeted skills acquisition, and the Conservative governments’ employment relations legislation in the 1980s had weakened trade union power beyond all recognition. Nonetheless, a problem remains, which must lie elsewhere: presumably in work organisation and management. High-involvement design is the missing piece in the puzzle.

High-involvement design, well-being and relational coordination

It is generally accepted that the job-involvement element of high-involvement design increases employee well-being and job satisfaction, and this explains a large part of its beneficial performance effects. Enriched jobs have long been associated with increased autonomy, meaningfulness of work and skill utilisation, which are welcomed rewards for employees that enhance their well-being. Indeed, the relationship between job autonomy and well-being is one of the most robust relationships across research studies, in both the social and medical sciences. Other effects can include the way this autonomy allows employees to better organize their work and to be creative.

The effects of organisational involvement may also include enhancing the variety of work, skill utilisation and the meaningfulness of work, even if there is no concomitant increase in job discretion. Additional routes to increased well-being may include social satisfaction, because teamwork, functional flexibility, and group methods of capturing ideas increases social contact. The encouragement of involvement within high-involvement organisations may signal to employees that they are respected and acknowledged, which may increase their self-esteem, particularly as their rate of learning and trust in management increases. Insofar as high-involvement design produces positive outcomes or perceptions of organisational success, workers will perceive their jobs as more secure, or their career prospects as more promising. Being more involved in the organisation also enhances individuals' sense of coherence, which in turn improves their coping mechanisms and ability to withstand stress.

However, the strongest effects of organisational involvement are likely to be on the work orientations of employees and the coordination of activities in the organisation. The most decisive aspect of organisational involvement management is that it changes the way people connect what they do with what others do, develop shared understandings, help each other out, and learn from one another. Employees' ability to relate to each other as internal customers (implicitly or explicitly) is enhanced as their appreciation of each other's role increases. Employees' horizons and shared understandings expand alongside a strengthening of what Gittel³ at Brandeis University calls the *relational coordination* of the organisation. Organisational involvement is therefore opposed to performance-related pay, and to the piecework systems often associated with manufacturing, which have long been known to limit employees' focus, leading to tunnel vision and a lack of connection with the actions of colleagues.

In the daily lives of employees, involvement processes ought to reduce factors known by stress theorists as hindrance stressors, such as inadequate information and uncooperative colleagues. Meanwhile they should increase the challenges employees face through, for example, involvement in problem-solving, enhancing team working and growing employees' roles in a way that may have positive effects on their sense of achievement, further enhancing motivation and well-being.

The contrast with high-performance work systems

In contrast to the high-involvement perspective, high-performance work systems are conceived as a set of practices that complement each other and ostensibly cover all aspects of the AMO model. Each practice fills a gap left by the others. The implication is that the more practices are used, the higher the performance effects; it is practices *per se* that create performance. By contrast, in high-involvement design, it is the underlying principles or orientation, where the integrated design of practices is the critical ingredient. In the high-performance work systems perspective the practices define the system, and if managers follow it they have little discretion, whereas under high-involvement design, the practices reflect the approach. For example, involvement may entail idea-capturing, but this can be achieved through various methods, such as group-type quality circles, suggestion schemes, or surveys.

³ J. H. Gittel, R. Seidner and J. A. Wimbush, "A relational model of how high-performance work systems work," *Organisation Science* 21 (March–April 2010): 490–506.

High-performance management is a technocratic methodology, based on treating practices as technologies which can be applied selectively to different groups within the organisation. Investment in such practices is best targeted at what Becker and Huselid⁴, two pioneers of high-performance work systems, call “strategic jobs” – those jobs that are assumed to contribute most to the profits of the business, particularly through generating economic rent. Whereas the managerial philosophy of high involvement applies to the whole organisation, and to all employees. For example, not all employees are involved in a formal problem-solving group at any one time, but the principle that they may be involved at certain times extends to all, and may imply that such groups cross divides of discipline, race, gender, and status.

The policy prescriptions of the two perspectives differ. Following the high-performance work systems perspective means managers must implement a set of prescribed practices. Research testing this approach typically defines these practices in broad terms – sophisticated selection, appraisal, training, teamwork, communication, job design, participation, performance-related pay and promotion, and employment security. Under the perspective, the more of these practices that are used, the better. In contrast, under the high-involvement perspective, management adopts an orientation towards employees that encourages their involvement and proactivity, and the fulfilment of their potential. The precise practices used are not predetermined, and some may be substitutes for each other. This integrated design of practices and processes requires a more detailed specification than is involved in the broad-brush listing of high-performance work practices.

The broad categorisation of practices in the high-performance work systems perspective has led Professor of Management and Human Resources Barry Gerhart⁵, to question its bite. He asks “would we be content with saying, if doing medical research, that more surgery and more hospital stays should be implemented to achieve better health, without getting more detailed recommendations?”. Moreover, what makes the prescription less secure is that the body of research that has tested the effects of high-performance work systems has not measured the system with a consistent set of practices. The variety of practices across these studies is, in fact, immense⁶. A further reason for differentiating high-performance work systems from high-involvement design, at least when discussing academic research, is that involvement has been neglected in a good proportion of the studies⁷. Attention has focused on skills and motivational practices, often predominantly the latter, as monitoring and performance-related pay have been emphasized⁸.

However, what is particularly noticeable is that most studies, including those concentrated on high-involvement management, report HRM as having positive performance effects. The differentiation in practices may reflect the need for researchers to differentiate their study to meet the demands of academic journals, while the homogeneity of the results may reflect the bias of journals towards publishing positive results. It may be argued that the achievement of common results across studies using different measures is a strength. However, what are we to conclude? Do we end up saying that a whole range of HRM practices

⁴ B. E. Becker and M. A. Huselid, “Strategic human resource management: Where do we go from here?” *Journal of Management* 32 (December 2006): 898–925.

⁵ B. Gerhart, “Construct validity, causality, and policy recommendations: The case of high performance work practices systems,” *Human Resource Management Review* 22 (June 2012): 157–160.

⁶ B. E. Becker and B. Gerhart, “The impact of human resource management on organisational performance: Progress and prospects,” *Academy of Management Journal* 39 (August 1996): 779–801. T. D Wall and S. Wood, “The romance of human resource management and business performance and the case for big science,” *Human Relations* 58 (April 2005): 1–34.

⁷ S. J. Wood and T. D. Wall, “Human resource management and employee voice,” *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 18 (August 2007): 1335–1372.

⁸ Posthuma and his colleagues show that incentive compensation is the most popular practice included in the study of high-performance work systems, and single out the lack of attention to public recognition and other nonfinancial rewards in these studies, which I suggest corresponds with the neglect of involvement. See R. A. Posthuma, M. C. Campion, M. Musimova and M. A. Campion, “A high performance work practices taxonomy: Integrating the literature and directing future research,” *Journal of Management* 39 (March 2013): 1184–1220.

can operate as high-performance instruments? Or by questioning whether the differences between studies, or even between any underlying perspectives, matter? After all, the policy implications are the same – use sophisticated HRM practices, which should include employee involvement.

Simply, no, we don't have to end up treating all HRM practices as having an equal potential to yield high performance. High-involvement design does not entail just implementing, or selecting from, a set of practices. The precise details of the enacted practices are determined by managers in situ. Perhaps the biggest policy difference is the implications for management education and development. To ensure the high-involvement perspective is implemented effectively, a certain kind of management education, which is oriented towards deep learning and developing dispositions and attributes, is required. In contrast, under the high-performance system, the required management education is a process of knowledge exchange that alerts managers to best practices, as a literal interpretation of evidence-based management might imply.

Education for high-involvement design should include using evidence, understanding the nuances involved in following certain principles or enacting practices, and making judgements in applying such understanding in specific situations. It is only with such management development, coupled with accumulated experience, that managers can engage in the careful self-analysis that organisations need to undergo to create an involving environment and determine which involvement practices are best for them. In-house development can involve exercises and programmes that foster this self-analysis, and are constructed so that they bring together people from different occupations, departments, and locations within the organisation.



What high-involvement design entails

High-involvement management is often associated with initiatives to involve workers in the generation of ideas and solutions to specific problems, through quality circles or employee involvement programmes, and the implementation of organisational involvement management depends on targeted approaches such as these. However, the wider establishment and reframing of human resource policies, in conjunction with staff and trade unions (where recognized), is needed for the infrastructure to help support staff and generate involvement. The development of high involvement requires a rebalancing of human resource management, and CEOs can take – and indeed, are taking – a lead on this.

The focus of textbook HRM is still on processes – for example, whether appraisals are being done in a certain way, whether the information was disclosed to all people at the same time, or whether the training course went smoothly – and insufficiently on the content in the delivery – what actually happened in the appraisal, dissemination or training activities. Moreover, in stressing organisational involvement, we must not neglect job involvement; management must continually ask whether they are doing enough to provide people with autonomy and the support they need to do their core jobs.

CEOs should be saying that they want their human resources shaken, not stirred. There is a tendency, given the procedural emphasis of HR departments, for HR managers to stir rather than shake when looking for improvements. For example, they might ask how they can ensure appraisals are done on time, or that interview panels ask standardized questions. Shaking involves designing all elements of human resource management based on the involvement principle.

Let's start with selection processes which are conventionally based on the notion of a job. However, while employees will have core jobs, they are being recruited to grow their jobs and proactively extend their activities and horizons beyond its narrow confines. They are typically asked about their motivations for applying for the job, and their competencies are assessed, but we need to focus more on how they view the opportunity, their occupation, and the nature of involvement. It is tempting to give tests to discover proactive personalities, but rather, just as we need to give realistic previews for potential employees – at the organisational level as well as at the job level – we need to solicit realistic previews from the individuals of their expectations and approach to their profession.

Training and development need to be much more focused, and targeted at teamworking, creativity, and presentations, and built into day-to-day activities. Where retreat centres are used, activities should be based on current and potential future problems in the organisation and its environment. Simply educating employees in traditional brainstorming methods is not sufficient.

The design of reward systems must reflect a broad concept of employee motivation. The reward of intrinsic satisfaction that has underpinned much of the rationale for job involvement is one necessary element, while the enhanced opportunities for fulfilling needs for belonging, social satisfaction and public recognition is another. These are all too often neglected, and the high-performance work systems perspective exemplifies this perfectly, as the focus is on individual performance-related pay and financial rewards. Making the performance-related payment system the fulcrum of HRM, means it becomes a substitute for management, and discourages involvement. The problem is that it can work *too well*: it focuses employees' attention on their own reward with the risk of generating tunnel vision and individualistic outlooks. It also makes pay more salient within employees' motivations. The challenge of involvement is not to go in the other direction and neglect compensation or necessarily abandon incentives, but rather to develop collective schemes within a holistic reward system, aimed at high levels of cooperation, shared understandings, and organisational learning. If individualized systems work too well, why can collective systems not work equally well at producing beneficial outcomes?

The value of appraisals is widely questioned, as the feeling that they are not done well is widespread. Certainly, they are no guarantee of involvement or a voice for employees. It is often the case that the annual pay rise is the only time employees get a sense of how their work and contribution to the organisation is recognized. Appraisals offer a chance to provide recognition and feedback. However, the appraisal system needs to include frequent feedback and meaningful standard-setting processes, which is often not the case. Feedback should concentrate on employee development, as well as error correction, if it is to facilitate performance and well-being gains for workers. Performance standards should be linked to organisational goals, and designed in such a way that trade-offs between goals are acknowledged, and their achievement should not be at the expense of creativity. Standards make appraisal and feedback easier, so the appraisal does not need to focus on the person; and they can be defined as ideals rather than obligations, so the appraisal can focus on development and not on ensuring obligations have been fulfilled.

Idea-capturing is still widely associated with the suggestion box in the canteen and quality circles, both of which are out of vogue. Project teams, working parties and formal methods are vital however, but to be successful they need to be targeted at well-circumscribed problems. There needs to be strong support and feedback from senior management, and mechanisms to ensure changes follow from the group discussions. Membership should cross disciplines, hierarchical levels, and genders to reinforce the involvement culture. The teams need to be made to feel they are tackling something significant – it is instructive to recall that Ford's 5-dollar day was about giving a high wage to symbolize to the workforce that it was engaged in a historically transforming process, the beginnings of mass assembly.

Other forms of information gathering include attitudes surveys. Too often these are carried out in a ritualistic, perfunctory way. Insufficient feedback can be given to employees, and this can generate a feeling that little or nothing happens as a consequence of them, further engendering a feeling that management only hear what they want to, and managers are prone to dismiss any criticisms specifically about limited employee involvement with clichés like “you always get criticism that there is not enough communication, no matter how much you do”. The problem with surveys is more fundamental than simply ensuring feedback is given. They are usually targeted at assessing satisfaction levels, akin to market researchers asking about satisfaction with products, services, or customer service. The employee survey began in the 1930s, based on the theory that employee satisfaction would lead to good performance. They need to be underpinned with richer theories of performance, and directed at expected behaviours, and are a perfect example of an activity that needs shaking up. Where better to start than involving employees in establishing what they need to know about each other and how the organisation is viewed? This process could include asking the question: is a survey even the best or only way of obtaining this information?

Finally, there is the work–life balance agenda. Yahoo’s decision in 2013 to curtail home working appears to be based on seeing involvement and family-friendly arrangements as antithetical to involvement in the organisation; creativity depends on being together, and interactions are vital to allow it to happen. But high involvement and creativity require time away from core tasks, down time, and individual contributions. Formal practices such as flexitime and permitting home working can increase well-being and engender a sense that the organisation values and cares for its employees.⁹ However, while such practices allow individual accommodations for a particular problem group – typically women and more specifically mothers – as MIT’s Lotte Bailyn has argued they do not address the broader issue of the integration of work and personal lives¹⁰. Her recommendation of employee involvement in the design of collective flexible work arrangements is a perfect example of both what an involvement approach can achieve and how it is a requirement for this new-style human resource management.



Misconceptions of high-involvement design

There are a number of arguments in circulation that might have contributed to the limited use so far of high-involvement design. One is that genuine involvement and coordinated activity cannot be induced, but can only arise through informal relationships, and formal practices may indeed be a constraint on developing innovation and creativity. However, the key point about high-involvement design, which perhaps the Japanese manufacturers taught us, is that employee involvement must be created and does not just arise from individuals being cooperative. It emerges through the design and implementation of practices and activities, including those for training employees in team working, creativity, and problem-solving, as well as conscious attempts to foster inter-departmental and inter-occupational networks and coordination.

It may also be thought hard to introduce involvement when organisations are having to respond to external pressures and make major changes, or that involvement activities can only really work if there is slack in the system to allow people to go off their jobs, a phrase that should perhaps be in inverted commas. Nonetheless,

⁹ S. Wood, K. Daniels and C. Ogbonnaya, “Work–Nonwork supports, job control, work–nonwork conflict, and well-being”, *International Journal of Human Resource Management* www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09585192.2017.1423102

¹⁰ L. Bailyn, “Breaking the mold: Redesigning work for productive and satisfying lives” (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). See also H. Kin, L. Bailyn and D. M. Klob, “Revisiting the dual agenda” in S. Lewis, D. Anderson, C. Lyonette, N. Payne and S. Wood, eds., “Work–life balance in times of austerity and beyond” (New York and London: Taylor Francis, 2017), 165–179.

my analysis of a national representative survey of British workplaces showed that organisational involvement management was no more or less likely in workplaces that were most hit by the post-2008 recession, or where employees experienced wage cuts or reorganisations and other actions designed to combat the recession.¹¹ To be more specific, again in Great Britain, there are several examples of involvement initiatives in the National Health Service, one of the largest employers in the world, despite intense pressures on resources and staff time.

But it may remain the case that involvement activities and the associated training and off-the-job activities are often seen as costs rather than investments. Employers need to find ways to support employees, so they have protected time for developing ideas, which is of course hard to do in a pressurized environment. However, if working methods and relationships are improved through involvement, then people may be less pressurized and not required to firefight so often. In this way, giving people time away from their core activities may mean sacrificing time in the short-term for long-term benefit.

High-involvement design: The time has come

As concerns continue over stagnant labour productivity, high-involvement design offers a means of increasing productivity directly – for example through increasing employee motivation and improving organisation – and indirectly through its effects on other outcomes, particularly quality and safety. It achieves the fundamental tenet of lean production, that quality and productivity are not in opposition to each other.

In putting forward employee involvement as an important principle, we can be confident that we are practising evidence-based management, as the research base linking it to productivity is strong. Moreover, there are good examples of best practice, from the longstanding innovations in Japanese transplants to more recent ones in NHS initiatives such as the Listening into Action programmes. These precedents are much more comprehensive than simply listening to employees, and involve creating an involvement culture and ensuring that management acts on the ideas generated.

High-involvement management chimes with current concerns over diversity, inclusivity, and workplace abuse. The recent reaction to growing unease about management bullying and other forms of abuse – the Me Too movement being the most salient example – has focused on speaking up or whistleblowing, which might be called corrective involvement. Important as this is (and my research has shown how abuse leads to absence¹²), there is a danger that it is framed in negative terms – involvement entailing freedom from – rather than in positive terms – involvement meaning freedom to. High-involvement design is a “We Too” concept, concerned for all to *lean in*, to extend Sheryl Sandberg’s¹³ phrase beyond the issue of gender. It is about more than simply removing constraints on people, but rather facilitating their development and improving cooperation and coordination across the whole organisation. Employee involvement is also more than simply enhancing people’s energy and motivational levels (the focus of the current vogue for staff engagement), but enables development of their cognitive and relational capabilities.

¹¹ S. Wood and C. Ogbonnaya, “High-involvement Management, Economic Recession, Well-being and Organisational Performance”, *Journal of Management*, 44 (November 2018): 3070–3098.

¹² S. Wood, K. Niven and J. Braeken, “Managerial Abuse and the process of absence amongst mental health staff”, *Work, Employment and Society*, 30 (October 2016): 783–801.

¹³ S. Sandberg, “Lean in: Women, work, and the will to lead” (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Sr, 2013).



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www.ipa-involve.com
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