EPRA International Journal of Economic Growth and Environmental Issues- Peer Reviewed Journal
ISSN: 2321-6247
Volume: 11 | Issue: 3 | March 2023 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0713 | SJIF Impact Factor (2023): 8.322

CRITICALLY EXAMINE THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP AND IDENTIFY ANY NEXUS IT SHARES WITH ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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---**ABSTRACT**---
The inevitability of change in human affairs is undisputable. However, change in the business world is evidently a perpetual and unpredictable process that organizations need to respond promptly to if they are to survive and remain competitive. Also, the dynamic nature of the business world requires a change strategy that is eternal in order to minimize the operational inefficiencies inherent in organizations that use superficial change strategies. Similarly, the transformation of an organization's structure cannot be done every time the organization is in need of change. Therefore, a change strategy that incorporates employees into the ownership of an organization in need of change provides a sustainable approach. Consequently, this article critically examines the concept of employee ownership and identify, and any nexus it shares with organisational development. A qualitative approach was adapted for the study. Related and relevant studies in this area were assessed to ascertain the possible nexus between the variables. It was found that employee ownership strategies fosters employee organizational identification, which ultimately increases the chance of employees responding positively to organizational development and change efforts. To this end, it was employee ownership plans that are created to rescue an impaired organization are more likely to be linked to organizational development and change, because participants identify more with the organization and become more willing to change their standards of behaviour in favour of organizational development interventions. As such it was suggested that managers of organizations should adopt employee ownership strategies such as ESOPs to facilitate the employees to realize the need for change endow them with identification and internalization commitment that make them embrace change.
KEYWORDS: *Employee Ownership, Identification, Organizational Development, Organizational Commitment*---

INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades, many studies have been conducted that have been interested in organizational change and the mechanisms that promote that process smoothly (Benford & Snow, 2000; Bouckenooghe, 2010; Caldwell et al., 2009; Pettigrew et al., 2001). Despite that wide interest in the process of organizational change, these studies reported negative results, as most of those efforts ended with an unsuccessful implementation of the process of organizational change and ultimately failure (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Meaney & Pung, 2008; Hussain et al., 2018). This is because the focus was on many secondary variables and ignored the most important factor of individual and organizational reactions towards organizational development and change in those studies (Alnoor et al., 2021; Holten & Brenner, 2015; Penava & Sˇehic, 2014).

Over the past century, management – "the art of getting things done through people" (Mary Parker Follett, 1868-1933) – has evolved through the times. From Taylorism and Fordism to laissez-faire approaches, different methods of management have worked for different organisations. As the most countries have changed from being dominated by manufacturing industries to the service sector, management has changed to an approach that emphasises the people factor. In the 21st Century, employees are often irreplaceable as the nature of work has become knowledgeintensive, thereby creating a need to retain and attract the best employees (Rowley, 2014). This research study does not address management as a whole, but instead its focus lies on a variety of practices that can be used to help attract and enthuse employees. Such practices are also understood to have the capability to enhance management itself.

Organizational development as one of the methods of changes management is becoming more relevant, because of its impact on the company's activities and because it is a tool that, for the sake of development, maximizes human potential and uses modern managerial technologies (Doroshuk, 2019). The inevitability of change in human affairs is undisputable. However, change in the business world is evidently a perpetual and unpredictable process that organizations need to respond promptly to if they are to survive and remain competitive. Imperatively, the dynamic nature of the business world requires a change strategy that is eternal in order to minimize the operational inefficiencies inherent in organizations that use superficial change strategies. For instance, downsizing and retrenchment are very effective change strategies but are not repeatable every time an organization wants change. Similarly, the transformation of an organization's structure cannot be done every time the organization is in need of change. Therefore, a change strategy that incorporates employees into the ownership of an organization in need of change provides a sustainable approach (Talebi, 2015). However, many researchers have not explored the effectiveness of employee ownership and identity as a change strategy. In particular, the underlying factors that make the ownership bait a suitable motivator have not been sufficiently explored.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (SET) is understood to be important to the concept of employee ownership and identification because it attempts to provide a rationale for a two-way relationship. The work of Saks (2006) is particularly significant because he argues that there is a stronger theory behind the occurrence of employee ownership. SET is described as a relationship between one or more persons involving "a series of interactions that generate obligations" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005:874). SET relationships evolve over time and are mediated by trust, loyalty, and mutual commitments. Saks (2006) argued that when an organisation provides returns to an individual, the employee feels valued, sees the organization as their own, identifies with the organization and replicates this exchange with engagement and acceptance of change efforts. Therefore, depending on the level of exchange that the organisation presents, an individual will determine the perceived value of this and respond with a variable degree of acceptance or resistance to change.

Social Identification Theory (SIT)

This study was anchored on social identification theory (SIT). Social identification theory was advanced by Tajfel and Tuner in 1970's, and supposes that individuals assume universal tendency to maintain a positive identification through three key components namely loyalty, similarity and belongingness. The theory postulates that positive organizational perception lead to strong identification and vice versa making it a key theory that effectively predicts outcomes of the relationship between employees and their organizations. Literature has shown that social identification theory has been important in explaining why employees would either identify or disidentify with their organizations with the various resulting outcomes (Tajfel et al., 1979; Ashforth, 2008). Ashforth (2008) opined that employee organizational identification fosters employee loyalty, similarity of values and the feeling of belongingness to a group. Similarly, Tajfel et al. (1979) explained that employees' feeling of belongingness is determined by their degree of identification with the positive aspects of the firm. It is important to mention that social identification theory assumes that employees tend to identify with certain aspects of the organization that they perceive are similar to their values. Positive perceptions lead to strong organizational identification and vice versa (Tajfel et al., 1979; Ashforth, 2008).

Similarly, Tajfel et al. (1979) explained that employees' feeling of belongingness is determined by their degree of identification with the positive aspects of the firm. Scholars are in agreement that SIT opens up ground for debate regarding the structure of social identities, the motivations behind identification and how identification influence individual and group outcomes (Abraham & Gilat, 2007). SIT is projected to describe three mental processes that people go through when they join a group namely; social categorization, social identification and social comparisons (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Of the three mental processes, it is social identification that describes the process of identifying as a group member and the process of beginning to behave the way members of the group behaves. It has been shown that strong social identification can lead to people showing important prosocial behaviour towards an organization (Tak, et al., 2004). That is the debate this study projects to contribute to by analyzing if the theory supports the influence of EOI on employee performance.

Though social identification theory has positive postulations on employee identification, the theory has been criticized as a model that offers psychological foundations for employee discrimination, prejudice, and inter group conflicts through social categorization (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). The weakness of this theory is that, it is difficult to express the extent to which identification impacts empl oyee performance, for example, it is naturally recognized that employees would temporarily respond to favorable economic gains such as a pay rise, with high levels of work performance even if identification was not strong and positive (Riketta, 2005). This limits the predictive value of the theory. This study addressed the weakness by analyzing the extent to which organizational identification would influence employee performance. Despite the criticism, social identification theory remains a suitable theory for this study as it emphasizes the importance of identification in influencing employee behaviour.

Employee Ownership

At a basic level, being an employee-owner (EOC) is understood in the literature to represent an employee who has shares, directly or indirectly, in the organisation. Simple definitions suggest that employees own the majority share of the organization (Postlethwaite et al., 2005). To have ownership of something, it commonly dictates that one has a financial investment, authority to control, and a right to sale. However, ownership itself in EOCs is not that straightforward. As illustrated by Rosen et al. (1986:14), employee ownership is described as “a plan in which most of a company’s employees own at least some stock in the company, even if they cannot vote it, and even if they cannot sell it until they leave or retire”.

There are some inconsistencies in the literature as to what is to be described as employee ownership. The Baxendale Partnership, an organisation which helps organisations to pursue employee ownership, is clear that there is just not one model of EOCs. It is understood that different elements characterise EOCs and this is not solely limited to having employee shareholders. They acknowledge that in many organisations, employee share options exist, but this is not always necessarily what is meant by employee ownership. Baxendale Ownership (2013) describe on their website that; “for an organisation to be considered employee owned in a meaningful way by the UK’s Employee Ownership Association, it must cross a threshold which is based on an informed calculation that measures the percentage of employees benefiting from ownership and the percentage of the business owned by those employees”.
Oliver (1990) describes four key types of EOCs as; one where all or the majority of the shares are owned by employees, wholly share owned by employees, worker cooperatives, and ESOPs (Employee Stock Ownership Plans). Pendleton (2009) alternatively proposes that there are just three types of worker ownership. These are described as worker co-operatives, minority share plans, and employee ownership/co-ownership. Different to Oliver (1990), Pendleton (2009) groups together employee ownership to include wholly-owned employee organisations and majority share ownership. Pendleton (2009) further claims the difference between the models of ownership resides in the percentage of the organisation being employee-owned, the rationale for ownership, the governance frameworks that operate within the organisation, and how ownership is distributed between employees.

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Table 2.1:Employee Ownership Outcomes (Individual Level)

Outcome	Authors
Satisfaction	Greenberg, 1980 Hammer, Stern and Gurdon, 1982 Long 1978a. 1978b, 1980, 1982 Kruse, 1984 Tucker, Nock and Toscano, 1989 Buchko, 1993 French and Rosenstein, 1984 Russell, Hochner, and Perry, 1979
Would Take the Same Job Again	Russell, Hochner, and Perry, 1979
Organizational Commitment / Identification	Hammer, Stern and & Gurdon, 1982 Keef 1994 Long 1978a. 1978b, 1980 Oliver, 1984 Rhodes and Steers, 1981 Russell, Hochner, and Perry, 1979 Long, 1982 Tucker, Nock and Toscano, 1989 French and Rosenstein, 1984 Oliver, 1990
Motivation, ESOP Satisfaction	Goldstein, 1978 Kruse, 1984 Long 1978a. 1978b, 1980 Rhodes and Steers, 1981 Russell, Hochner, and Perry, 1979 Long, 1982 Buchko, 1992, 1993 Klein and Hall, 1988 Rosen, Klein, and Young, 1986
Perceived and Desired Influence Under Employee Ownership	Goldstein, 1978 Hammer, Stern and & Gurdon, 1982 Kruse, 1984 Long, 1979, 1981, 1982 Rhodes and Steers, 1981 Russell, Hochner, and Perry, 1979 Sockell, 1985 Hammer and Stern, 1980

Source: Adapted from Thompson, P. B., Shanley, M., & McWilliams, A. (2013).

Table 2.2: Employee Ownership Outcomes (Firm Level)

Turnover, Absenteeism, Tardiness, Injuries	Buchko, 1992, 1993 Hammer, Landau, and Stern 1981 Kruse, 1984 Rooney, 1992
Sales, and Sales per Employee	Bell and Kruse, 1995 Bloom, 1985 Dunbar and Kumbhakar, 1992 Kumbhakr and Dunbar, 1993 Kruse, 1988, 1992, 1993
Return on Assets, Market Return	Bell and Kruse, 1995 Conte, Blasi, Kruse, and Jampani, 1996 Park and Song, 1995 U. S. Gov't Accounting Office, 1986
Tobin's Q, Value Added	Bell and Kruse, 1995 Kruse, 1993
Profitability	Mitchell, Lewin, and Lawler, 1990 U. S. Gov't Accounting Office, 1986

Source:Adapted from Thompson, P. B., Shanley, M., & McWilliams, A. (2013).

Employee Ownership (EO) predates the formal study of management. Baptista (2018) reports that the Basque whalers of the 16th century practiced profit sharing based on expertise of the individual. For example, the harpooner in the whaling long-boat received more than a rower. Once the boat was launched from the ship, it operated like an autonomous team. The harpooner and person on the tiller had to share leadership. Blasi et al. (2018) details how in the 18th century, a form of EO, profit sharing, was practiced in the cod fishing industry of New England. Some of the founders of the United States favored profit and equity sharing because the ideals of some of them were based on broad-based property ownership by a lot of citizens who had a share in the capitalist system. By the late 19th century, the need for employees to work as a team was recognized by Jevons 1883. In addition, profit sharing was used in the United States and western Europe as documented by Gilman 1896. By the early part of the 20th century, a few business leaders were using various forms of EO with a high involvement culture (e.g. Cox 2010). This trend continued in the latter half of the 20th century (Iverson & Varian 1997; Mackey & Sisodia, 2013; Stack & Burlingham 2013).

Organizational Identification

Behavioural scholars have expressed employee organizational identification as an employee's perception of the company and the degree to which employees feel that they share similar values with their organization (Loi, 2014). Study by Terzioglu (2016) on factors affecting performance among other variables showed that organizational identification was an attitude that can induce employee perceptions of the organization leading to either an employee becoming loyal or develop a negative attitude toward the organization and that dichotomy impacts employee performance. Studies have predicted that positively identified employees' exhibits positive behavours (Ashforth & Mael, 2008).

Employees tend to identify with broad sets of qualitative entities in the organization, such as organizational leaders, symbols, products, quality, organizational knowledge and so on. Such entities need to be enhanced for organizational identification to be strong. When employees positively perceive one or all of these entities then organizational identification develops leading to better employee outcomes. Literature shows that strong organizational identification drives job fulfillment, good feelings about the organization and the desire to stay (Khoshlahn, 2016), in addition to defending their organizations against any negative criticism at all cost (Terzioglu, 2016).

Identification is a psychological state in which a person considers himself/herself as part of a whole and sees and shows his/her behavior and attitude in a sense of belonging. Individuals experiencing identification establish and maintain a meaningful relationship with other individuals or group/s. Individuals adopt the beliefs of the organization they employ, and after a while consciously or consciously they behave in this direction. The factors that define the institution start to define individuals within the organization. In other words, as a result of organizational identity, social identities are shaped (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

For an individual to identify with an organization in a meaningful way, he/she needs to be positioned in his/her minds in a more memorable and different way than other organizations. Identification occurs when members of the organization find the identity of the organization attractive. The higher the organization's image is felt by the members of the organization, the higher the level of identification occurs. It is important to have a common purpose, interaction, and a common story between the organization and the individual for the identification process. Organizational identification occurs when the identity of the organization and the values of the employees are compatible. When individuals identify themselves with the organization in organizations, the level of job satisfaction increases, motivation increases, and the rate of turnover decreases (Zhou et al., 2016).

Organizational Development

Organizational development can be considered as one of the directions of a company development. Depending on the object of development, the following point of views can be deduced concerning organizational development: (1) organization as a social formation – an open socio-technical system; organization as management function - spatial distribution and timing; (2) organization as a characteristic of management system – the improvement of the system order can bring the increase of the company performance; (3) organization as a process of streamlining the organization's activities or manifestation of joint activities, which is expressed in the creation of new and improved systems created and functioning of any kind; and (4) organization as a structure - a set of stable links between objects and management implemented in specific organizational forms that ensure the integrity of management and preservation of the main features despite various external and internal changes (Doroshuk, 2019).

Organization development analyzes formal and informal parts of the organization and internal and external environments of the organizations. The internal and external environment which organization analyses are strength, weakness, opportunity and threat. The formal parts of the organization that it analyzes include objectives, structure, policy, human resources, and compensation (Agosu, 2018). The informal ones include values, attitudes, social relationships, etc. Organization development focuses on performance and health of the entire organization, not on an individual. It is designed to achieve organizational goals that will lead to the satisfaction of people working in the organization.

Organisation, both public and private, are relatively permanent and structured group of people engaged in pursuit of common goals which are prone to change as any other natural phenomena. Formal organisations are made of people, structure, process, building, purpose, authority, responsibility, system, sub system, culture etc. Formal organization exists and operates within external and internal environments, the environment shapes the organization by exerting some forces on the organization, the forces exert on organization cause change and as such organization must be ready to cope with the necessary change brought by the environment (Agosu, 2018). One major tool to effectively cope with change is through organization development.

Employee Ownership, Identification and Organizational Development

A study by KPMG (2011) concluded that commitment based on identification and internalization spur effective changes in organizations because the receptiveness of the employees is embracing. Ownership entails the incorporation of employees into the shareholding and partial decision-making of an organization (Bartkus, 1997). Although compliance commitment facilitates change, the blind loyalty of the employees is fear driven. Consequently, most of the changes are not sustainable because the organization will have to formulate another need of change if the current strategies are outdated. For example, another study by Chreim (2006) on the experiences of employees who survived the job restructuring of their organization revealed that their acceptance of change was involuntary. Therefore, the employees do not have the motivation and job satisfaction that can lead to a positive working environment. This observation contrasts sharply with organizations where employees identified the need for change. However, the need of change is dependent in the things that appeal to the employees' motivations, job satisfaction, and values.

Though conceptualized in the 1970s, employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), a type of employee ownership strategy, have become the most reliable means of effecting meaningful changes in organizations that are sustainable (Guy & Beaman, 2005). The ESOPs are just one of the many approaches used by companies to incorporate lower level employees into the running and decision making of organizations. Imperatively, the incorporation of employees into the running of an organization's operation through initiatives such as ESOPs does not guarantee an automatic change. However, the inclusion of the employees is a catalyst since the employees own the change process. In this case, their commitment is driven by either identification or internalization.

Guy and Beaman (2005), postulate that including employees into an organization's management allows the employees to see the perspectives of the management team in calling for a change. Harung's (1996) study identified several factors of management that isolate lower level employees as stakeholders in an organization. These factors included lack of autonomy, poor communications, and inadequate or the absence of employee development. Consequently, the employees perceived themselves as inconsequential in the change process of a company because they are replaceable. Downsizing and forced retrenchments reinforced these false perceptions that led employees to adopting non-cooperative attitudes and behaviors towards organizational development and change initiatives (NextGen, 2011).

Employee ownership, on the other hand, results to a situation where shared values predicate the change process of an organization. Lower level employees are no longer replaceable outsiders, but valuable stakeholders in the organization's survival and ability to remain competitive. Consequently, the employees become active participants in identifying their weaknesses and taking remedial action in the change process because doing otherwise would harm their interests (Talebi, 2015). Notably, the incorporation of employees into an organization's decision making and running does not negate the role of middle and top management level teams. Al-Esmael (2014) claims that ESOPs are structured to passively participate without interfering with the discretion of an organization's top management. Instead, the lower-level employees are given the chance to be shareholders so that they can witness why the inability of embracing change eventually damages the interests of everyone associated with the organization. Organizations, just like individuals, cherish the opportunity to excel in all their endeavors. Therefore, the employees incorporated into an organization as owners will adopt the change strategies that organizations propose to secure their shareholding interests. In this case, the employees identify the need for change, which motivates them to embrace the change needed in their organization.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Change in an organization is inevitable. However, employees receive change according to the type of their commitment to an organization. Employees not committed to their organization will exhibit compliance commitment, which makes them to withdraw, resist or accept change. However, this type of change is not effective and sustainable. On the contrary, strategies such as ESOPs that facilitate the employees to realize the need for change endow them with identification and internalization commitment that make them embrace change. Consequently, employee ownership plans that are created to rescue an impaired organization are more likely to be linked to organizational development and change, because participants identify more with the organization and become more willing to change their standards of behaviour in favour of organizational development interventions.

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