Organizational management styles, employee supervisory status, and employee responses[1]

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Employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors are compared in two automotive supply organizations that are similar in size, technology, industry, employee characteristics, and geographic location, but are different in formal management styles. The data are examined separately for supervisors and production workers to identify hierarchical differences. Overall, the results indicate that rank-and-file employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors are more favorable in the organization with the more democratic formal managerial style than in the more traditional organization, but there is very little difference in the responses of the supervisors between the two environments. Future research directions are suggested that would further enhance our understanding of the potential impact of managerial styles on employee responses at different hierarchical levels.

[1] Data for this study were collected under Grant No. 92-26-72-35 from the U.S. Department of Labor to the University of Michigan. Researchers undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express their own judgment. Interpretations or viewpoints stated in this paper do not necessarily represent the official position or policy of the Department of Labor. A previous version of this study was presented at the 1982 meeting of the Midwest Psychological Association in Minneapolis and is available through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC abstracting service). Some of he work on the manuscript was completed while the first author was Visiting Professor of Management at Oregon State University.

Introduction

Systemic properties of organizations can have an impact on many aspects of the work situation. Unfortunately, because of problems inherent in research in this area, we still know relatively little about the ways in which organizational properties such as the overall style of management affect employees at different hierarchical levels. Past research has shown organizational variables to affect employee responses, but there are many shortcomings in this research. For example, only a narrow range of employee responses have been considered, interactions among predictors are often ignored, and behavioral responses (as opposed to attitudes) have seldom been studied (Berger & Cummings, 1979). This study focuses on the extent to which organizational characteristics shape employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Operationalizations of organizational variables have usually relied on employees' perceptions only. Penley and Hawkins (1985) measured perceptions of organizational communication, Tannenbaum (1974) used graphs of perceived organizational control, and Drexler (1977), Joyce and Slocum (1984),

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and Newman (1975) used measures of perceived organizational climate, to name but a few. Operationalizations other than through employee perceptions are the exceptions rather than the rule. If we are to understand what factors in work organizations affect employees the use of measures of organizational properties obtained from sources other than employee perceptions is imperative.

The present study examines the relationship between organizations' managerial styles and employee responses in ways that partially sidestep some of these flaws. Managerial styles are defined as the prevailing managerial philosophies of the organization. The term does not refer to the managerial philosophies or actions of individual supervisors (which can be termed leadership styles more appropiately; Bass, 1981). Rather, the term refers to the overarching beliefs and values that guide the organization's design and functioning. Although individual managers may vary in their beliefs and behaviors, there is often relatively greater consistency in these variables within an organization than between organizations.

We expect managerial styles to have some impact on perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. Obviously, these variables are also affected by other macro-organizational properties (Berger & Cummings, 1979). Organizational size, technology, and industry type are three factors often mentioned in this regard (Talacchi, 1960; Ingham, 1970; Kimberly, 1976; Rousseau, 1977). In exploring the effects of managerial styles, it is important to control for these factors that might otherwise confound any observed relationships. The present study is designed to do this.

Many organization theorists (Argyris, 1970; Likert, 1961, 1967) have argued that participative management is almost a universal good. It has been noted (Starbuck, 1983), however, that other theorists have argued that the most effective type of management approach varies across settings and people, e.g., the contingency approach of Lawrence and Lorsch (1969). Consistent with this contingency approach, a natural selection view of organizations argues that organizations' management approaches are *determined by* the organizations' environment (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983; Bourgeois, 1984). We suggest that not only may the preferred management style depend upon situations such as the external environment, but that it may also depend upon where the employee is located within the organization. A particular managerial style may affect employees at different hierarchical levels in different ways. For example, it can be argued that democratic managerial styles shift decision making responsabilities from supervisors to subordinates. This shift could be viewed favorably by rank-and-file employees and unfavorably by supervisory employees, in that the former have greater say in matters affecting their work lives. Alternatively, rank-and-file employees could perceive this shift as increasing their "burden" without adequate compensation. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to decipher the relationship of managerial styles to employee attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions at different organizational levels.

Managerial styles are operationalized as "traditional" (where, for instance, authority relationships follow rigid hierarchical lines, employees have little or no say in the conduct of their work lives, and there is a union) and "democratic" (where these factors are not present). The type of management styles described here may lie on a continuum, on which variations of the former style have been labeled autocracy and totalitarianism, while variations of the latter have been labeled democracy and federalism (Scott, Mitchell, & Perry, 1981).

Three types of employee responses are investigated: employee perceptions of job characteristics designated as stressors (which have been hypothesized to be affected by macro-organizational attributes; Beehr & Newman, 1978; Kahn, Wolfe Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), and employee attitudes, e.g., job satisfaction, and behaviors, e.g., absenteeism, which are also hypothesized to be relevant in this context (Berger & Cummings, 1979; Porter & Lawler, 1965; Steers & Rhodes, 1978; Talacchi, 1960).

Method

Data were collected in 1972 from two organizations that manufacture automotive accessories in

small towns of a midwestern American state. These data are a subsample of a larger set of data and were selected for study because they have the unique characteristics necessary to answer the questions in the present study. Organization A employed about 400 people, used a participative or democratic management approach and had implemented a modified Scanlon-type plan (the modifications centered on tailoring the Scanlon plan to the particular dictates of organization A). Work groups in organization A participated in decisions concerning work methods and policies that affected their own work lives, and there was a profit-sharing bonus plan. The Scanlon plan had been implemented in this organization in 1952. Wrinkles in the installation of a profit-sharing plan had been smoothed out long before the inception of this study. Organization B had a traditional managerial style. It employed about 600 people and was unionized. This organization emphasized hierarchical authority, and employees had little direct input on matters affecting their work. The two organizations were similar in technology (mass production assembly lines), size (several hundred employees), industry (automotive supply), and geographic region (midwestern United States), but they were different in managerial styles.

It is assumed that the macro "management style" concept should be related to the nature of individual jobs, consistent with the assumptions of what Oldham and Hackman (1981) called the "job modification framework." The researchers' judgment that the two companies differed in managerial style was developed during a 2-year period of contact with the companies while doing research there. The observation that organization A was more participative in its managerial style than organization B was also confirmed by reports of independent observers trained to rate the jobs in the two organizations (see Jenkins, Nadler, Lawler, & Cammann, 1975 for the training and observation procedures). Thus, both the researchers' subjective impression gained from more long-term qualitative observations and trained observers' ratings based on short-term quantitative observations led to the same conclusion. The observers' ratings on scales related to participative management styles are shown in Table I.

Table I. Observers' Ratings of Job Characteristics Related to the Degree of Participation in Organizations A and B

Observation item	A mean	B mean	F[a](df–1, 197)
How much autonomy is there in the job?[b]	4.15	2.61	42.50
Check the column out for each person or object indicated how much control each has over the face of the employee's work: The worker himself or herself.[c]	3.11	2.50	31.83
The job allows an individual to make a lot of decisions on his/her own.[d]	3.79	2.49	48.62
The job denies the individual any chance to use his/her personal initiative or descretion at work.[d]	3.11	4.45	55.86
He/she is given enough freedom to decide how to do his own work.[d]	4.03	2.74	58.19

[a] For all Ps, $p < .01$.

[b] Seven-point response scale with points 1, 3, and 7 having labels that are parallel to a similar (but self-report) item in Hackman and Oldham (1980).

[c] Four-point response scale labeled "no control," "a little control," "moderate control," and "great control." The other people or objects rated on the scale were "his or her supervisor," "his or her work group," "machinery or equipment," "customers, clients, patients," and "flow of work from other groups or departments."

[d] Six-point response scale labeled "very untrue," "mostly untrue," "slightly untrue," "slightly true," "mostly true," and "very true."

Sample

All supervisors and a sampling of nonsupervisors from both organizations were asked to participate in the study. A response rate of 71.4% in organization A yielded an analysis sample of 120, including 29 supervisors. A response rate of 63.6% in organization B yielded an analysis sample of 124, including ten supervisors.

An examination of demographic characteristics of the samples from the two organization shows them to be quite similar: the average age of respondents was 36 years in organization A and 33 years in organization B, the average years of education was 11.8 and 10.7 in organizations A and B, respectively, 72% of employees from organization A and 67% from organization B were males, and 98% of employees from organization A and 90% from organization B were white. Thus, any observed difference between the two organization is not likely to be attributable to major differences in the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Measures

Data on three types of variables, perceptual, attitudinal, and behavioral, were obtained. Perceptual and attitudinal data were obtained through structured interviews conducted in the respondents' homes. Behavioral data were obtained through a search of the companies' personnel records. Data collection strategies are described in detail in Survey Research Center (1977).

Information on three *perceptual* variables was obtained: job ambiguity (the degree to which the respondent perceived his/her job expectations to be unclear), job overload (the degree to which the respondent perceived his/her job expectations to exceed time or skills available to him/her), and underutilization of skills (the degree to which the respondent perceived himself/herself to have valued skills and abilities that were not used in the job). Information on the construction and the psychometric properties of these three measures is provided in Gupta and Beehr (1979). The three perceptual variables are often considered measures of job stress (Beehr & Newman, 1978).

Three *attitudinal* variables were also measured in the study: job involvement, a one-item measure taken from Patchen (1965), a five-item facet-free job satisfaction measure taken from Quinn and Shepard (1974), and job search intent, a one-item measure of the intention to look for a new job in the next year (Quinn & Shepard, 1974).

Finally, three *behavioral* measures were also used. Prior absences referred to the frequency of absences during the month preceding the interview. Subsequent absences referred to the average frequency of absences per month for the 6 months subsequent to the interview. Voluntary turnover referred to whether or not the respondent terminated voluntarily from the organization during the 18 months following the interview. These behavioral measures were obtained from personnel records, and are described in greater detail in Gupta and Beehr (1979).

Analyses

The effects of managerial styles and supervisor status on employee perceptions and attitudes were analyzed with 2 x 2 analyses of variance. Inspection of the data revealed that there was very little variance among supervisors' absenteeism and voluntary turnover levels. Analyses of absenteeism and turnover were therefore restricted to *t*-test of differences between the two organizations for nonsupervisors only.

Results

Perceptions

Results of the two-way analyses of variance on employee perceptions are shown in Table II. Managerial style had main effects on two perceptions, job overload and underutilization of skills. For both variables, the organization with the more traditional managerial style (organization B) was perceived as having a greater level of these perceived stressors. Supervisory status had a main effect on underutilization of skills, with nonsupervisors reporting more of this characteristic in their own work. Managerial style and supervisory status interacted in predicting

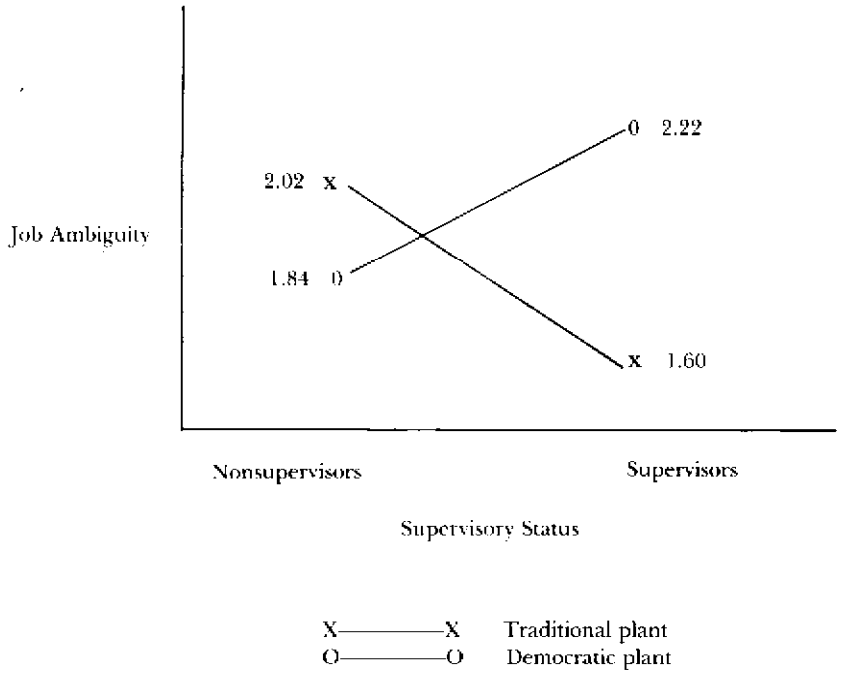


Fig. 1. Interaction between managerial style and supervisory status to predict job ambiguity.

job ambiguity and job overload. Figures 1 and 2 show that for both interactions, nonsupervisors' perceptions were more negative, the there was greater ambiguity and overload, than supervisors' perceptions in the traditional organization (organization B), but the reverse was true in the democratic organization (organization A).

Attitudes

Results of the two-way analyses of variance on employee attitudes are also shown in Table II. Managerial style had main effects on all three job related attitudes job satisfaction, job involvement, and job search intent. In each case, the democratic style of organization A was related to more positive attitudes, i.e., greater satisfaction, greater involvement, and lower job search intent. Supervisory status had a main effect on employees' job involvement, with supervisors reporting more involvement in their work than nonsupervisors. None of the interaction terms reached significance.

Behaviors

Table III shows the results of *t*-tests of the relationships between managerial styles and employee behaviors among nonsupervisors. Nonsupervisors had higher rates of prior absenteeism, subsequent absenteeism, and voluntary turnover under the hierarchical than under the participative managerial style.

Discussion

One consistent finding in the present study is that work-related attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions are more favorable among employees (especially the rank-and-file employees) in the organization using a more participative or democratic managerial style than among employees in the traditional, hierarchical organization. Although individual employees may react somewhat differently within the same organization, there are average dif-

Table II. Two-Way Analyses of Variance with Supervisory Status and Managerial Styles as Independent Variables and Employee Attitudes and Perceptions as Dependent Variables

	SS	DF	MS	F
Perceptions				
Job ambiguity				
Supervisory status (A)	.55	1	.55	1.40
Managerial style (B)	.29	1	.29	.79
A x B	4.06	1	4.06	10.26[b]
Error	91.79	232	.40	
Job overload				
Supervisory status (A)	.72	1	.72	1.59
Managerial style (B)	2.28	1	2.28	4.99[a]
A x B	2.16	1	2.16	4.72[c]
Error	105.89	232	.40	
Underutilization of skills				
Supervisory status (A)	26.93	1	26.93	7.11[b]
Managerial style (B)	17.11	1	17.11	4.52[a]
A x B	4.04	1	4.04	1.07
Error	879.02	232	3.79	
Attitudes				
Job satisfaction				
Supervisory status (A)	2.05	1	2.05	1.92
Managerial style (B)	7.72	1	7.72	7.23[b]
A x B	.10	1	.10	.09
Error	247.99	232	1.07	
Job involvement				
Supervisory status (A)	20.73	1	20.73	26.45[b]
Managerial style (B)	12.21	1	12.21	15.58[b]
A x B	1.68	1	1.68	2.14
Error	181.80	232	.78	
Job search intent				
Supervisory status (A)	2.26	1	2.26	1.51
Managerial style (B)	16.44	1	16.44	11.07[b]
A x B	2.14	1	2.14	1.44
Error	344.55	232	1.49	

[a] $p<.05$.
[b] $p<.01$.

ferences in these reactions that are predictable from the organization's management style. These results corroborate the view that a democratic managerial philosophy makes the workplace attractive to rank-and-file employees.

The significant interactions detected through the two-way analyses of variance lead to qualifications of this view. Two perceptions (job ambiguity and job overload), but none of the attitudes and behaviors, showed significant interactions between

Table III. Mean Differences in Withdrawal Bheaviors between Nonsupervisors in the Traditional and Democratic Organizations

	Democratic plant		Traditional plant		
Withdrawal behavior	Mean (n)	Variance	Mean (n)	Variance	t
Prior absenteeism	.45 (75)	.71	1.69 (105)	3.16	5.57[a]
Subsequent absenteeism	.36 (55)	.66	1.09 (82)	.72	6.49[b]
Voluntary turnover	1.09 (77)	.08	1.22 (54)	.18	2.12[c]

[a] $p < .05$.
[b] $p < .01$.

supervisory status and managerial styles. Perceptions by nonsupervisors were more negative than were perceptions by supervisors in the traditional organization; the opposite was true in the participative organization. It can be argued, at least in terms of employee perceptions, that the relative attractiveness of jobs at different hierarchical levels is reversed by the managerial style of the organization (and consequently by the nature of the relationship at the interface between management and labor). Lower-level employees react favorably to participation; higher-level employees see their jobs as more ambiguous and overloaded. A possible interpretation of this is that it may require much more skill (or at least a different kind of skill) to supervise in a "democratic" organization than in an organization where management and labor have a more clear-cut legal relationship with each other and domains of power and responsibility for each group are clearly specified. This argument is supported by the prob-

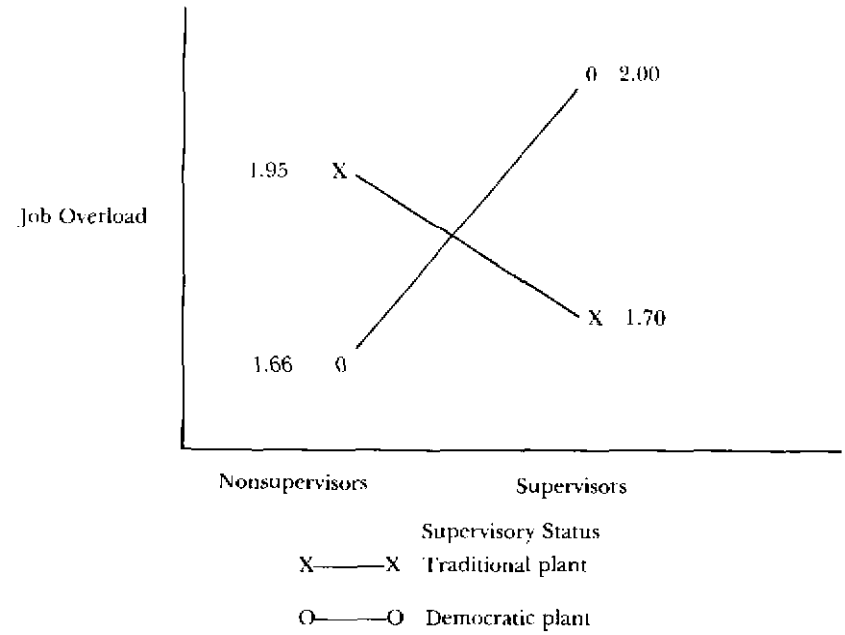


Fig. 2. Interaction between managerial style and supervisory status to predict job overload.

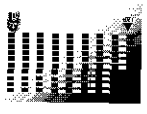
lems observed among firstline supervisors in "new design" participative organizations (Jenkins & Gupta, 1985; Lawler, 1978; Walton & Schlesinger, 1979).

Perceived job ambiguity and job overload were the only variables for which the managerial style/supervisory status interactions were significant and therefore warrant further comment. These perceptions have been related to job stress and strain in previous research (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Brief, Schuler, & Van Sell, 1981; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980). It is appropriate to surmise that traditional, hierarchical, unionized organization may produce a more stressful work environment for rank-and-file employees and the non-unionized, democratic management may produce a relatively more stressful work environment for managers. Since no measures of employee health were used in our study, however, these differential stress effects are presented here primarily as hypotheses for future research.

Of course, other explanations of our results are possible. For example, it may be that the specific location of the two plants created community/cultural differences in attitudes which, in turn, stimulated differences in employee responses observed in our study. In other words, cultural difference may intervene in the relationship between managerial styles and employee responses. Our data do not permit us to explore or to reject this explanation. But its applicability to our study is rendered doubtful for several reasons. Both organizations were in small towns in the same state, and the demographic constitution of the samples was similar, weakening the cultural differences argument. Similarities in size, technology, and industry type further render these variables less relevant as potential interveners. Moreover, reports of employees and independent observers confirmed our objective assessment of the relative level of participation in the two organizations. As noted above, organization A was seen as significantly more participative by both observers and employees. The consistency of the findings across employee responses (attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions) also increases confidence in the likelihood that differences in managerial styles, and not differences in cultural attitudes, are responsible for the observed differences.

Although the results suggest that managerial styles may affect employees, we still do not know precisely which factors within managerial styles are particularly salient in this regard. The design of the study precludes an unambiguous resolution of this issue, since the organizations differed from each other in more than one way. The participative managerial style consisted of somewhat autonomous work groups, a Scanlon-type profit-sharing plan, and lack of a union for rank-and-file employees. Even so, some logical inferences are possible. It is likely that managerial styles, as reflected in attitudes and behaviors toward rank-and-file employees, affect the way employees respond to their jobs and their employers. We could even argue that democratic managerial attitudes are more likely to *lead* to the adoption of profit-sharing plans for employees, and that a participative approach is likely to reduce the possibility of unionization. In other words, participative management, profit-sharing, and non-unionization in some ways may represent a "cluster" of managerial philosophies, a syndrome that, taken in *toto*, affects employee responses. In the real world, there may be a tendency for these characteristics to covary, making it difficult to disentangle their unique effects in field settings. In any case, future research should consider the possibility of the existence of such a syndrome of managerial philosophies.

In conclusion, the present study shows that the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of employees may be affected by managerial styles when organizational structure, size, and technology are held constant. The study shows further that managerial and nonmanagerial employees' perceptions of job stressors may be differentially influenced by traditional vs. democratic organizational styles. Future research steps that follow logically from these results include longitudinal investigations of the effects of changes in particular managerial/organizational styles, investigations that include measures of employee health to test our stress hypotheses, investigations of the effects of managerial styles across industry types, size, and technology, and investigations that determine the specific components of managerial styles that have the greatest effects on employees.



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