
Enriched Engagement Through Assistance to Systems' Change: A Proposal

GEORGE B. GRAEN

The University of Illinois, Champaign–Urbana

Top management teams (TMTs) of postmodern multinational corporations are increasingly confronted by new multiple context shifts defining our advancing global knowledge era (Grant, 2000). These include seven major context changes, not the least of which is knowledge becoming the new driver, not labor, machine, or money (Graen, in press). In addition, some complicating elements are the dysfunctions of human psychology under drastic changes in contexts (Snowden & Stanbridge, 2004). Clearly our 20th-century organizational designs and processing engineering systems are in need of continuous improvement to remain competitive. What TMTs seek are new practical ways to bring about needed changes in corporate structures and systems (Graen, 2007).

TMTs have a number of options for context challenges: (a) do nothing, (b) hire management consultants, (c) DIY, and (d) seek needed assistance from lower participants involved in the changes. Unfortunately,

TMTs have tried the first three with mixed success, and the fourth requires a good deal of interaction outside their class (Piderit, 2000; Tierney, 1999; Van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, in press). Our Illinois approach assumes that TMTs can admit that they need to develop their lower participants and earn their extra-job help in successfully implementing organizational changes needed to remain competitive.

TMTs of increasingly noncompetitive corporations may ideally like to have fully and authentically engaged lower participants, but they cannot afford not to develop their people to commit to continuous improvement to regain competitiveness in their markets. TMTs are searching for the means to survive and I think that new technology can be made practical if we focus our research energy on it. An example of the technology to which I refer is the University of Illinois approach (Graen & Graen 2003–2007; Hackman & Wageman, 2007). This approach asks for a deep-level description of what behavior is observed in and around the corporation when a system change is initiated by TMTs. When this event is resisted, assisted, or ignored by the lower participants affected, these become descriptive data and should be analyzed quickly using network analysis (Goldstein & Hazy, 2006). This network-centric method can identify competence networks that are the keys to successful program implementation (Graen, in press).

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to George B. Graen. E-mail: lmxlotus@aol.com
Address: Psychology, Labor and Industrial Relations, The University of Illinois, Champaign–Urbana, 10819 Gram B Circle, Lowell, Arkansas 72745.

George B. Graen, Psychology, Labor and Industrial Relations, The University of Illinois, Champaign–Urbana.

Dedicated in memory of my mentors: Marvin Dunnette, Mary Graen, Kelly Graen, Joseph McGrath, and Katsu Sano, and also in memory of my research partner, Mitsuru Wakabayashi.

According to the Illinois approach, TMTs perform their "due diligence" duties as "fully engaged" agents of needed changes in and of corporate systems. In addition, TMTs demand that their member managers mentor lower participants in their networks in such a way as to prepare them as emergent group leaders. This human asset development may provide the means to effectively implement needed changes initiated by TMTs. When TMTs knock the beehives into the fans, they had better have developed some competent bee handlers.

As TMTs initiate changes that may disturb their worker bees, groups of worker bees are expected to emerge to protect their interests. These emergent groups self-organize with plans and leaders. Research strongly suggests that workers who are viewed as the more influential in the local networks find themselves chosen as leaders frequently. These informal group leaders tend to be those who have developed strong network ties with their TMT superiors and with other influential members of their networks (Graen, Hui, & Taylor, 2006; Sparrowe & Liden, 2005). We have a choice: We can engage our worker bees or we can assist TMTs in more carefully protecting their beehives and queens.

A key component of this approach is advice-seeking interpersonal communications via networks. Research suggests that up to 85% of the time employees prefer to get their advice from other people than from relevant databases (Doz, Santos, & Williamson, 2001). These advice networks can be analyzed quickly and regularly. Another key component of the Illinois approach to organizational change is informal mentoring with lower participants in work networks. Such mentoring, when successful, demonstrates deep levels of mutual respect for capabilities, trust in motivation, and commitment to the team and the organization. In addition to the development of strong vertical network ties, this mentoring also strengthens nonvertical ties in networks (Graen & Graen, 2003–2007).

In conclusion, our new research suggests that industrial-organizational psychology may respond fruitfully to pleas from TMTs for new methods for successful change in their organizations (Goldstein & Hazy, 2006). Hopefully, this also will lead to improved engagement between lower participants and their contexts without a replay of another job enrichment fad.

References

- Doz, Y., Santos, J., & Williamson, P. (2001). *From global to metanational*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Goldstein, J. A. & Hazy, J. K. (Eds.). (2006). *Emergence Complexity & Organization*, 8(4), 1–112.
- Graen, G. B. (in press). When managership fails to avoid catastrophic consequences: A call for a new approach to the development of leadership for extreme contexts. *Academy of Management Perspectives*.
- Graen, G. B., & Graen, J. A. (Eds.), (2003–2007). *LMX leadership: The series* (Vol. I–V). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Graen, G. B., Hui, C., & Taylor, E. (2006). Experience-based learning about LMX leadership and fairness in project teams: A dyadic directional approach. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 5, 448–460.
- Graen, M. R. (2007). Creation of the Wal*Mart team of Procter & Gamble. In G. B. Graen & J. A. Graen (Eds.), *New multinational network sharing, LMX leadership: The series* (Vol. 5). Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 93–104.
- Grant, R. M. (2000). Shifts in the world economy. In C. Despres & D. Channel (Eds.), *Knowledge horizons* (pp. 27–54). New York: Butterworth-Hiemann.
- Hackman, J. R., & Wageman, R. (2007). Asking the right questions about leadership. *American Psychologist*, 62, 43–47.
- Piderit, S. K. (2000). Rethinking resistance and recognizing ambivalence. *Academy of Management Review*, 10, 783–794.
- Snowden, D., & Stanbridge, P. (2004). The landscape of management. *EICO Special Double Issue*, 6(1), 140–148.
- Sparrowe, R. T., & Liden, R. C. (2005). Two routes to influence: Integrating leader-member exchange and network perspectives. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50, 505–535.
- Tierney, P. (1999). Work relations as a precursor to a climate for change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 120–133.
- Van Dam, K., Oreg, S., & Schyns, B. (in press). Daily work contexts and resistance to organizational change: The role of leader-member exchange, development climate, and change process characteristics. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*.