Why participation works
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INTRODUCTION

The upcoming section will explain the current research background, followed by the research scope, the research objective, the research question and the research model. Towards the end of this chapter, the outline of this dissertation will be presented. Altogether, the contents of this chapter form the introduction of this dissertation on the role of employee participation in customer relationship management organizational change.

1.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The research underlying this dissertation combines insights in two research areas: human resource management (HRM) and customer relationship management (CRM). The foundation of the current research will be presented hereafter, followed by the justification why those two research areas are combined.

Research foundation: human resource management (HRM)

Viewed from the human resource management (HRM) perspective every organization needs a founder to start, a worker to develop and a change agent to adapt (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Those founders, workers and change agents are often indicated by the term employees. Without (an) employee(s), no organization can start, live, grow, nor survive. Stated more positively: organizations are employees pursuing their interests by being formally assigned to a common purpose (Pusic, 1998, page 65). Employees are so crucial for reaching a common purpose, because they bring not only their hands to work; they also bring their heads. With the use of hands and heads, employees drive organizations. Following this view, organizational behavior usually results from the behavior of (many)

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1 The ability of using of hands and heads, respectively doing and thinking, is what makes the difference between employees and for example technology. The underlying philosophy goes back to the Human Relations vision of for example McGregor (1960, 1966), who stated what an employee could do more than a machine. Still today, despite many findings and insights, technology is created by employees and therefore will follow their orders. The foregoing considers employees as the drivers within organizations, while all other organizational elements –like technology, structure, procedures– are considered followers to those drivers.
individual employees within an organization. Such individual employee behavior can make the difference between organizational (change) success or failure (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Blake, Mouton & McCanse, 1989; Piderit, 2000, Schneider, Brief & Guzzo, 1996). Employees influencing organizational or organizational change behavior are often referred to under the label participation. The term participation refers to the following definitions:

- Participation was first defined as group involvement or group decision making, equalization of influence or power sharing, worker involvement and delegation, while nowadays scholars seem to have focused on the decision-making aspect and defined participation as involvement in organizational decision making (Cooper, 2002).

Participation is popular in many organizations. Research from Lawler, Mohrman & Benson (2001) on the Fortune 1000 firms between 1996 and 1999 showed that 66 to 75 per cent of these organizations used some form of participation. Like the popularity of participation among managers, so is its popularity among scholars. Literature describing (employee) participation is extensive: hundreds of publications can be found. Interestingly, scholars seem not to agree whether participation is positively related to organizational development and organizational change, or negatively. They described opposing views:

- In the positive view, participation is recommended as an instrument to make organizational change successful. Armenakis & Bedeian (1999) examined the theoretical and empirical organizational change literature over nine years starting from 1990. They concluded that participation is an important prerequisite in achieving organizational change success. Unfortunately, they did not make a distinction between the individual employees’ aggregation level and the organizational aggregation level. This distinction was described in Dachler & Wilpert (1978) and translated into a framework in Glew, O’Leary-Kelly, Griffin & Van Fleet (1995). These scholars wrote that participation leads to outcomes on the individual employee and on the organizational level. Furthermore, Wilpert (1998) stated that participation of individual employees implies an improved attitude of self-determination, which is a critical condition of intrinsic motivation to master one’s environment. This environment may be an organization, a country, etcetera. Wilpert added, that in industrial countries the level of education of the population is rising. A consequence of this trend is a general change in expectations regarding increased autonomy and self-realization in one’s work and as a consequence, demand for participation is rising. Inspiration for this positive view on participation can be found in several studies, like Coch & French (1948), where participation in the production department of a pajamas factory had led to successful changes. Today, this positive view is often associated with the Dutch term ‘poldermodel’, which implies that when everyone is involved, something arises that improves relations between individual participants while they bond.
together, which in turn leads to more successful outcomes of a change. Hence, Roberts (2003) calls participation a technique that works.

In the opposite view, negative effects of participation on change outcomes were mentioned by many critics. Collins (1998) called participation ‘over socialized’, to express that it is naive to assume that individual employees would be even willing to change, let alone to participate in change without being pressured to do so. Buchanan & Boddy (1992) stated that real organizational change implies a lot more than folding pajamas at the case study mentioned before. An overview book on organizational change entitled by Beer & Nohria (2000) added interesting insights. The first chapter by Conger (2000) showed negative side effects of participation, like lack of direction. Such negative effects from participation and from non-participation were considered contra productive for organizational change success (Heller, 1998).

In the next chapter the foregoing aspects on participation will be clarified, including further specification of the positive and the negative view.

Research justification: why participation of employees?

The foregoing controversy makes the rather old participation research field –with publications starting from 1948 (Coch & French, 1948) – still particularly interesting today (Cheney & Cloud, 2006; Church, 2008; Elias, 2009; Kimberly, Eddleston, Otundo, Kellermanns, 2008; Wall, 2007). In order to raise the subject above the level of contradicting standpoints by either the positive or the negative vision, the positive or negative effects of participation on organizational change success need further research. This dissertation aims to take away at least some of the controversy regarding participation in organizational change.

Unfortunately, empirical findings were not taken into consideration in the discussions in Beer & Nohria’s overview (2000). One reason for this was caused by the fact that there is not much empirical data available, while in those cases it was found it did not consistently point out a strong relationship between participation and organizational change success. Ives & Olsen (1984) concluded the same in their overview of IT related organizational changes. They relate this to methodological weaknesses in most empirical studies. The limited number of studies on other forms of organizational change, like Total Quality Management (Coyle-Shapiro, 1999) and Quality of Working Life Programs (Nurick, 1982) provided the reader with the same methodological weaknesses and lack of consistent empirical findings.
With on one hand the positive view and on the other hand the critics, the (dis-)advantages of participation in organizational change seem almost a matter of taste. In the previously mentioned overview book on participation, Strauss (1998, page 10) wrote: “for every advantage, participation has a disadvantage”, while in the chapter entitled ‘playing the devil’s advocate’ Heller (1998, page 145) responded with: “where there is shadow, there must also be light”. Miller & Monge (1986) did also highlight contradicitive viewpoints on participation and concluded that when scholars draw conclusions they invariably state that it depends, while unfortunately the question on what it depends on had not adequately been answered. The existence of a direct relationship between participation and organizational change success remained questionable.

Even with no direct relationship, an indirect relationship between participation and organizational change success could still exist. The latter could simultaneously support the positive view and the negative view. Participation may lead to intermediary effects, that sometimes lead to positive, sometimes to negative, and sometimes to a net result of zero organizational change success. Mediating entities that form part of the causal chain between participation and organizational change success may then well cause the difference between positive and negative contributions.

Despite the fact that even today there is hardly any literature found to support this indirect relationship between participation and organizational change success, some literature in adjacent research fields indicates such kind of relationship. Ostroff & Schmitt (1993) researched successes of schools. They found that students who participated in class activities, showed improved attitudes and those improved attitudes aided to improve the effectiveness of the schools. Furthermore, Conger & Kanugo (1998) suggested that participative efforts result in an increase in their own performance and their own performance will produce more success for an organization. None of the foregoing scholars associated participation with organizational change success, but they did indicate that participation was positively related to success in other fields through mediating entities.

Those findings in other fields could supposedly be applicable to the field of organizational change success. The upcoming supposedly mediating entities were suggested by several scholars:

- Ostroff & Schmitt (1993) wrote that participation can affect *intrapersonal attitudes* of employees, that can affect organizational change outcomes. Strauss & Wilpert (1998) explained the foregoing as follows: anyone who participates makes decisions and consequently develops attitudes of attachment to those decisions, that motivate him or her to make those decisions become more effective. Piderit (2000) and Burke (1987) suggested that participation makes involved employees understand the situation, background and goal of organizational change better than those who are not involved, indicating more positive intrapersonal attitudes towards the change decisions and outcomes. Consequently, participation is
supposed to improve individual employees’ change related attitudes, which in turn are supposed to improve organizational change success.

Second, Strauss (1998) theorized that participation can also affect *interpersonal relations* between employees, that can affect organizational change outcomes. Such mediation was theorized as follows: participants working together towards the same goal, tend to socialize and bond together, which leads to combined efforts towards the success of their common goal. Schneider, Brief & Guzzo (1996) stated, that when employees participate in decisions regarding a change, interpersonal relationships are supposed to be characterized by improved mutual trust, which would theoretically enhance the probability of actually having the change take root. Based upon the foregoing, participation is supposed to lead to more organizational change success through the mediating role of interpersonal relations.

Third, the already introduced negative view of participation implicitly indicated that participation may lead to negative outcomes. Among others, Heller (1998) pointed out that participation is not always better when there is more of it in an organization. Employees participating in extra activities next to their daily job, are confronted with additional *job pressures*. For example, they are pressured to show additional efforts on top of their regular work activities. Participants have participative meetings, negotiations, discussions and other time absorbing activities. Organizational change usually increases demands from those who participate, which can make it a burden (Conger & Kanugo, 1998; Karasek, Gardell & Lindell, 1987). A participative change strategy runs the risk of overloading employees with work which might even bring less performance and more negative aspects like stress, conflicts and burnouts (Elloy, Terpening & Kohls 2007). Grove (2004) added that especially during organizational change, collective stress can get dangerous, because most employees will be relatively inexperienced which causes events to occur unexpectedly, meanwhile jeopardizing organizational change success. In this view, participation in organizational change is supposed to lead to increased job pressures, which is supposed to lead to decreased organizational change success.

Finally, Strauss (1998) described two reasons to assume that the quality of the *job contents* of decisions is positively affected by participation. First, each individual is assumed to have specialized and in-depth knowledge about his or her own daily job. Consequently, the more individuals combine their knowledge, the better decisions can be made based on their combined knowledge. Second, changes in daily job routines can be addressed more quickly and more flexibly when not only managers but also employees are already involved in the process. The foregoing implies that participants contributing actively to organizational change, usually try to make the final change outcome fit their job contents (Newton & Jimmieson,
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In the foregoing view, participation is supposed to lead to a better fit of individual employees’ job contents with the organizational change, which in turn is supposed to lead to increased change success in an organization.

Among these supposedly mediating entities are on the one hand positive, success enhancing ones (intrapersonal attitudes, interpersonal relationships and job contents) and on the other hand negative, success reducing ones (job pressures). Thus, these supposedly mediating entities could possibly explain the already mentioned contradictory positive and negative views on participation. These mediating entities will be clarified in the next chapter and may influence the final outcome of organizational change effectiveness and. Such outcome may differ depending on the type of organizational change (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003; Schein, 2002; Schneider, Brief & Guzzo, 1996). To avoid different influences from participation caused by different organizational change types, the current research will focus on one type of organizational change, which will be introduced hereafter.

Research foundation: customer relationship management (CRM)

Plakoyiannaki, Tzokas, Dimitratos & Saren (2008) reported that participation of employees played an important role in a particular organizational change type: the implementation of customer relationship management (CRM). The acronym CRM refers to the following definition:

CRM is the engagement of individual customers in a meaningful dialogue with individual employees so that firms can customize their products and services to attract, develop and retain customers (Campbell, 2003).

Verhoeff (2001) wrote that CRM consists out of organizational processes that focus on the development and maintenance of relationships with individual customers. Such processes are for example the sales process, the call center process, the website content management process, the shop floor operations process and the customer complaints handling process. In all these processes, a dialogue between employees and customers takes place and relationships between employees and customers are established, built and terminated.

The foregoing is not a new business principle (Brown, 2000; Chen & Popovich, 2003). Over a century ago products were sold from local, small stores where the owner knew his customers well. Not only by name, but also by product needs. Because of the small scale it was possible build up a personal relationship with every customer. However, for reasons of economies of scale, nowadays organizations need to manage growing numbers of customers, which makes personal relationships increasingly difficult. Customer relations tend to diminish into account or policy numbers in mass correspondence. This jeopardizes the positions of large scale organizations (Brown, 2000). Information technology offers
opportunities to solve this (Winer, 2001), as intelligent software can assist a few employees to identify and monitor the behavior and purchase patterns of thousands of customers simultaneously (Jayachandran, Sharma, Kaufman & Raman, 2005). During any contact—for example a telephone call or an interaction via e-mail—the dialog between the employee and the customer can reveal interesting information regarding preferences and intended purchases. This information plays a key role in customer relationships (Jayachandran et al., 2005). Organizations that use this information well can not only manage relationships with customers, they can also sell them more products (Brown, 2000). This management process includes the initiation, maintenance and—if necessary—termination of customer relationships in order to maximize the value of a customer portfolio (Reinartz, Krafft & Hoyer, 2004). They reported that the more firms engage in this management process, the better their financial performance, based on a sample of 211 organizations selling consumer products in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

CRM terminology emerged in the information technology community in the 1990’s. CRM software provides a common interpretation and shares customer files across all functions in an organization, so that every individual employee with sufficient access rights to the system can view and update customer (Chen & Popovich, 2003; Campbell, 2003). In the early days CRM was often described narrowly, as only technology-based solutions to build customer relationships (Payne & Frow, 2005). Later, it was reported that viewing CRM as a technology-only solution would likely fail (Chen & Popovich, 2003). Consequently, more aspects were added in a broader view that included a business orientation on improved revenues. For example Brown (2000, page xix) articulated this broader view: CRM aims to understand, anticipate and manage the needs of an organization’s current and potential customers, which is a journey of strategic, process, organizational and technological change whereby a company seeks to better manage its own enterprise around customer behaviors. Payne & Frow (2005) combined these elements in their conceptual framework for CRM. CRM is perceived as being widely influential throughout many internal and external aspects of an organization, in contrary to other programs that affect only one process, only one department, or only one technology (Haasnoot & Gianotten, 2003; Winer, 2001). CRM does not only change organizational structures, processes and technological systems, it is also affected by the job contents and behavior of individual employees (Brown, 2000; Chen & Popovich, 2003).

Research justification: why CRM organizational change?

Customer relationship management (CRM) provides organizations with the opportunity to improve their relationships with customers and to increase their sales revenues. However, organizational change of the customer relationship management type does not always lead to those desired improvements. Often, CRM organizational change was reported being not effective, nor successful (Bohling, Bowman, LaValle, Mittal, Narayandas, Ramani &
Varadarajan, 2006; Chen & Popovich, 2003; Corner & Rogers, 2005; Langerak & Verhoef, 2003). Rigby & Ledingham (2004) wrote that early adopters of CRM were often disappointed by high costs and elusive benefits. Bohling et al. (2006) reported that some managers claimed to have reached full success, while many others reported complete failure, indicating weaker relationships with customers and decreased revenues from customer spending. Customer relationship focused organizational change concepts have been implemented for several years, but many organizations were still struggling to fully align themselves with those concepts (Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin & Day, 2006; Verhoef & Langerak, 2002). Corner & Rogers (2005) even wrote that CRM had been described as having great potential, but with a poor track record on performance.

Clearly there is a need to understand which factors make CRM organizational change more or less a success (Bohling, Bowman, LaValle, Mittal, Narayandas, Ramani & Varadarajan, 2006; Rigby & Ledingham, 2004; Langerak & Verhoef, 2003). This dissertation aims to add insights in those factors.

Some researchers pointed at possible reasons for (not) reaching CRM success. Among others, Verhoef & Langerak (2002) theorized that creating successful customer relations does not automatically imply creating monetary value. Consequently, when suppliers invest heavily in CRM to improve customer relationships while neglecting sales related processes and employees, then they may not see any return on investment. Rigby & Ledingham (2004) studied five CRM implementations and concluded that certain firms had invested more heavily in CRM than they would probably earn back. Some of those CRM initiatives had grown into overly complicated systems that trapped sales employees in typing order reports instead of making sales calls to customers. Those organizations created unused technology capacity and unnecessary bureaucratic systems that kept their employees away from what matters most from a CRM perspective: gathering customer information and offering products while managing customer relationships (Rigby & Ledingham, 2004). Reinartz, Krafft & Hoyer (2004) wrote that successfully implementing CRM required more than just technology: in particular it required a strong people-related component. Verhoef & Langerak (2002) theorized something similar: CRM requires an organization with a customer-oriented culture in which employees from different departments jointly focus on creating customer relations. A single technology focus may work counter-productive, because despite CRM’s emphasis on building long-term relationships with customers, most CRM technology optimizes short-term relationships (Langerak & Verhoef, 2003). Applying such software without common sense from employees implies that only customers with the highest sales probability are repeatedly and bombarded with emails and direct mailings. As a result, these customers tend to become irritated and inclined to switch towards less aggressive suppliers. The foregoing technology focus jeopardizes customer relationships instead of improving them. Jayachandran et al. (2005) added that interviewees who mentioned CRM success in their organizations mostly also indicated that employees played important roles in the organizational change process, while interviewees who mentioned frustration with CRM had their implementation effort driven by technology and not by business nor employee
needs. Campbell (2003) studied five financial organizations that had implemented CRM three to five years earlier. She stated that a major obstacle for employees to manage customer information well was rooted in the fact that often multiple information technology systems existed that formed information barriers between employees from different departments (Campbell, 2003, page 378). For example, call center employees stored their customer information in a computer system that account managers could not access and vice versa. Such isolated customer information could cause misunderstandings among employees regarding customers. Employees from different departments did not always share the same customer information, which jeopardized CRM success (Campbell, 2003). Campbell found that more time was spent on generating customer information than on employees sharing customer information. Corner & Rogers (2005) added to the foregoing, that they saw a remarkable shortage of knowledge regarding individual employees implementing CRM, while they expected that the core difference between CRM success and failure could have been made by those individual employees. Similarly, Verhoef & Langerak (2003) wrote that the human factor is one of the most important determinants of CRM performance.

As a consequence, sufficient attention needs to be paid to employees participating in the CRM organizational change, otherwise it may fail (Payne & Frow, 2005, page 167; Plakoyiannaki et al., 2008).

Based on the foregoing, it seems logical that participation of employees plays a crucial role in the success or failure of CRM implementations. The current research will test this view.

1.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Next it will be described how the current research is designed. The research objective will be precisely formulated hereafter, followed by the research question and the supposed contribution to existing research literature. First of all, the scope that will set the boundaries of the research field will be presented.

Research scope: individual employees changing financial organizations towards CRM

In order to be able to research employee participation in CRM organizational change within limited time and budget, it is necessary to set some boundaries on the research scope. It is virtually impossible to include every possible participative effect regarding every organizational change throughout the world. For reasons of focus, the research scope will be limited to one aggregation level (perceptions from individual employees) that is
applied to one organizational change type (implementation of customer relationship management).

Furthermore, this study will disregard many of the variables that may exist across organization types (e.g., competition, technology use, or culture) by focusing on one single organization type. Winer (2001) suggested some organization types that would be potentially more or less successful in implementing CRM. He wrote that financial organizations (e.g., banks) get the chance to build up massive amounts of data about customer (payment) behavior and use this data for gaining customer understanding. Using customer understanding, financial organizations are able to target tailor-made messages to those individual customers that are receptive to those messages. Those messages form a delivery mechanism through which relationships between individual customers and individual employees can be built (Winer, 2001).

Thus, financial organizations are expected to be more ready for implementing CRM than most other types of organizations. For the foregoing reasons, the current research focus will be on individual employees implementing customer relationship management organizational change in Dutch financial organizations.

Other outcomes, success rates or the effectiveness of other organizational changes than CRM, in other industries than finance and in other geographical areas than the Netherlands will be considered out of scope of this research. The foregoing also implies that each individual employee is supposed to have his or her own subjective view on the level of success of a CRM organization change. In contrary, an objective view on the level of success of a CRM organizational change will not be presented in this dissertation. This scoped research approach will ensure focus on the key elements of this dissertation: the relation between individual employees participating in the implementation of CRM organizational change in the Dutch financial industry.

Research objective: understand how employee participation influences CRM change

The central objective of this dissertation is to add insights to the academic literature and to the professional practitioners’ knowledge regarding the role of employee participation and the supposedly mediating entities –intrapersonal attitudes, interpersonal relations, job pressures and job contents– in the customer relationship management (CRM) type of organizational change in Dutch financial organizations.
Research question: in which way does employee participation influence CRM change?

To achieve the research objective as outlined above, the central research question is: in which way does employee participation and its supposedly mediating entities – intrapersonal attitudes, interpersonal relations, job pressures and job contents – influence the effectiveness of the customer relationship management (CRM) type of organizational change in Dutch financial organizations?

Research contribution: HRM and CRM academic research

When the foregoing research question will be answered, two research areas will be provided with further insights.

- In the human resource management (HRM) research area, the current research aims to contribute to the current understanding of employee participation, its consequences and their influence on organizational change effectiveness.
- In the customer relationship management (CRM) research area, the current research aims to contribute to the current understanding of CRM effectiveness and its potential predecessors like employee participation and several mediators.

1.3 RESEARCH CONCEPTS

In this section the main concepts of this chapter will be summarized shortly, followed by the representation of the research model.

Conceptual model i: employee participation, mediating entities, CRM effectiveness

All of the foregoing was combined into the conceptual research model of this dissertation, which is graphically represented in Figure i. It shows the assumed indirect relationship between employee participation – independent variable – and CRM effectiveness – dependent variable – via several mediating entities. Based on the insights from different groups of scholars, the following four entities are expected to mediate the relationship between employee participation and CRM effectiveness:

- Intrapersonal attitudes.
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- Interpersonal relations.
- Job pressures.
- Job contents.

These mediating entities are on one hand supposedly positive -CRM effectiveness enhancing-, such as intrapersonal attitudes, interpersonal relationships and job contents. On the other hand these are also supposedly negative -CRM effectiveness reducing- effects, such as job pressures.

The next chapters will reveal theories, methods, results and discussions regarding employee participation, intrapersonal attitudes, interpersonal relations, job pressures, job contents and CRM organizational change effectiveness.
Figure 1: Conceptual research model reflecting the relationship between employee participation and CRM effectiveness which is supposed to be mediated by intrapersonal attitudes, interpersonal relations, job pressures and job contents.
1.4 DISSERTATION OUTLINE

This section will describe the structure and outline of the following chapters, including a preview of the upcoming content of this dissertation.

Chapter 2: Theory

The upcoming chapter of this dissertation will reveal the theory and hypotheses regarding the relationship between employee participation and CRM effectiveness through the supposedly mediating entities: attitudes, relations, pressures and contents. Each of them will be defined and operationalized in subsequent sections of this chapter, together with the presentation of the hypotheses.

Chapter 3: Method

The third chapter of this dissertation will describe the method underlying the research. The research population, sample, data collection and constructs will be presented in this chapter, together with a description of employee participation in customer relationship management (CRM) organizational change in financial organizations.

Chapter 4: Results

The fourth chapter will describe the qualitative and quantitative results of the research. Each of the hypotheses will be tested and the results will be revealed in this fourth chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings regarding employee participation (independent variable), all mediating entities and CRM effectiveness (dependent variable) will be discussed in the last chapter of the dissertation, followed by the description of the implications for both practice and theory. Also the suggestions for future research will be made explicit in this final chapter.
2 THEORY

The goal of this chapter is to provide a theoretical overview of the concepts in this dissertation regarding (employee) participation, (CRM) effectiveness and the supposed mediating entities intrapersonal attitudes, interpersonal relations, job pressures and job contents. Each of the following sections will focus on one of these concepts.

2.1 THEORY ON EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION & CRM EFFECTIVENESS

In the upcoming section, an overview will be provided of different forms of (employee) participation that can be found throughout academic literature. For reasons of focus, it will be clarified which aspects of which forms will be used in the current research. Then, the (indirect) relationship between employee participation and customer relationship management (CRM) effectiveness will be clarified.

Employee participation in the current research

The phenomena of employees influencing organizations has been described in economic, psychological and sociological literature using a wide variety of definitions, labels, visions and sometimes even without explicit definitions (Dachler & Wilpert, 1978; Heller, Pusic, Strauss & Wilpert, 1998; Miller & Monge, 1986; Pasmore, 1986; Pusic, 1998; Siegel & Ruh, 1973). The following labels have been used for such phenomena: