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Resources Available To Managers To Manage Employees Through Mergers

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ABSTRACT:*The purpose of this phenomenological, descriptive study was to explore resources managers perceive to have available to assist with managing employees through a merger. Researchers have documented that managers are burdened with extra responsibilities that result in poor people management during a merger process. Greenleaf's servant leadership and Herzberg's two factor theories were used to explore managers' perceptions of the range of resources available to assist with managing employees during a merger. The key findings were that while managers perceived they were not provided resources, managers' personal experiences along with resources such as human resource personnel and other managers' expertise were used as great resources. Open communication and information exchange were critical between the manager and the employees during the merger. The findings indicate that managers should focus on their soft skills to manage employees through the merger process.*
KEY WORDS*: Mergers, Managing employees, Merger resources*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Business mergers and acquisitions have been happening for many decades and because of advanced technology, corporatemergers and acquisitions are now taking place in the global market (Tavor, 2013). A manager's responsibility is to manage many aspects of the business including the management of their employees. With an announcement of a merger, managers are given extra tasks of working the merger details, resulting in them having less time to engage with their employees.

Employee welfare is affected in many ways once a merger is announced (Komornicka, 2015). Hinescu (2014) noted that there are both legal and psychological impacts of mergers on employees. Employees' losses may include heath, medical and pension benefits, personal freedom, access to their manager, and communications within the company (Komornicka, 2015). This causes extra stress on the employees and creates the fear of job loss (Hinescu, 2014; Giessner, Ullrich, & van Dick, 2011; van Dick, Ullrich, &Tissington, 2006).Employees look to their managers to help them through the process.

The failure rate of mergers is between 30-80% (Kelly, Cook, & Spitzer, 1999; Marks &Mirvis, 2001), with the greatest effects being felt by the employees because the people integration is poorly managed (Podgorski, & Sherwood, 2015).According to Rafferty (2007), mid-managers feel caught between the expectations of their managers and the employees reporting to them. Zhang et al. (2015) noted managing employee talent is one of the core issues during a merger process. According to Kelly, Cook, and Spitzer (1999), failure rates of mergers are high, and successful mergers include active manager involvement. It is also important to ensure managers have soft skills in resolving cultural issues, ensure effective communication, and look after the people.

It is understood that managers are responsible for the management of their employees.During mergers, managers are not only responsible for ensuring that business performance, motivation, and job satisfaction go on as usual, but also that the well-being of their employees does not go unnoticed, which is often an area of less concern for upper management (Giessner, Ullrich, & van Dick, 2011). Herzberg's (1968) two factor theory and Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership theory become more important in times of change. Herzberg's two factor theory supports the importance of the role of a manager and their management style during a merger. Greenleaf's theory, servant leadership supports employee's response to people in authority; rather, they respond to the leaders or managers who have earned their trust.However, there is a limited study on the resources available to assist managers with managing employees through mergers.

The lack of understanding of resources available to managers provides limitations to managers when trying to effectively manage their employees through the merger process. Mergers are taking place on a regular basis; therefore, it is important for managers to have an understanding what resources are available to help them successfully manage employees through a merger. Insights on this topic could help future managers approaching a merger with information how to work with employees so employees can stay committed, motivated, and

continue to maintain job performance through the merger process. The intention of this study is to increase managers' awareness of available resources and increase the rate of employee retention through a merger process.

II. PRIOR RESEARCH

Many researchers have used servant leadership to compare leadership roles and the effects they have within organizations. Kirsch and Peters (2017) recently studied servant leadership as their basis for developing student leadership, and Akram, UI Haq, and Karin (2016) used servant leadership to understand organizational commitment in high school principals. Güçel and Begeç (2012) conducted similar research on a private university to compare servant leadership and its effects on organizational citizenship behavior. All of these researchers found developing and practicing servant leadership skills had a positive impact on organizational commitment.

Herzberg (1968) spent years as a professor studying motivation. He conducted the first investigative study with engineers and accountants; he then went on to investigate multiple populations (Herzberg, 1968). All investigations resulted in findings that the factors involved in an employee's job satisfaction are different than the factors that contribute to job dissatisfaction. He classified motivators as contributors to job satisfaction and hygiene factors as contributors to job dissatisfaction. Herzberg (1968) mentioned that managers play a significant role in helping employees achieve job satisfaction.

Managers are responsible for seeing their employees through a merger. Mergers are challenging times and employees look to their managers for guidance and support during these times. Servant leadership theory holds that managers should practice being of better service to their employees. The managers' role has a direct impact on employee's job satisfaction or dissatisfaction and is supported through by the two-factor theory. Many scholars have used servant leadership and two factor theories to compare how leadership skills come naturally and can be enhanced.

Mergers

Mergers are a common occurrence in today's global market. A merger is defined as the act of two organizations combining to form one organization (Jewoo&Tianshu, 2014). Vazirani (2015) added to the definition by stating it is a circumstance whereas a company, including all assets, liabilities, and people merge with another company. Mergers have taken place in ways resulting on companies merging into a new organization. However, mergers can have both positive and negative impacts on companies. Employees have to change and adapt to the newly formed combined company.

Mergers Effects on Organizations and People

Mergers can be announced at any time, driving the managers and employees onto a new organizational path. The success of a merger depends on many factors. Success rates of mergers are poor and have been said to have a failure rate of 70-90 percent (Christensen, Alton, Rising, Waldeck, 2011). Francis, Hasan, Sun, and Waisman, (2014) noted lack of communication, broken alliances, and lack of information as leading causes of merger failure. While it is known that merger success rate is low, mergers still take place. Stakeholders entering into a merger agreement need to consider all possible risks associated with the merger, the effects the merger will have on the organization, and how the people will be affected throughout the merger process.

Mergers have many effects on people and organizational outcomes; therefore, is it important to understand the characteristics and events often witnessed once a merger is announced. While managers work through the motions of a merger, the managing of employees continues to be part of their responsibility. According to Haransky (1999), a manager can create an unhealthy environment for their employees. Managers face massive performance improvements to ensure the success of a merger (Sirower, 2000).

In a review of mergers and their effects on employees, there are many studies conducted on job responsibilities and managers' added responsibilities during a merger process. Kandžija, Filipović, and Kandžija, (2014) found that previous studies have focused on other aspects of the merger such as company culture, the effect management style has on the success of the merger, the structure of the organizations, and technology. There is a lack of research in understanding what resources are available to managers to help managers be successful in managing their new responsibilities as well as continuing to manage the employees through the merger.

Cording, Harrison, Hoskison, and Jonsen, (2013) found that the integration process is critical to the overall success of a merger. Unfortunately, the integration process also results in the elimination of redundancies and reduction of jobs throughout the organization (Schweiger, 2002). The integration of two companies will result in time required, by the management teams, to help manage the merger process. This time commitment puts extra responsibilities on the managers, causing them to give less attention to the day-to-day activities of their employees.

There are many different ways mergers can be managed to help the merger process be smoother on the employees, managers, and the stakeholders. Van Dyke (2015) discussed that guiding principles should be developed to manage the integration. Most organizations have a business strategy before entering into a merger with another company. Therefore, Gunkel, Rossteutscher, Schlaegel, and Wolff, (2014) found that all managers need to have an integration plan to help assist with the success of a merger.

Merger Effects on Employees

Employees can feel many effects during a merger. Marks and Mirvis (2011) found that most mergers fail and cause a huge effect on the people involved. Mergers cause employees to be unsure of their jobs and their futures. According to Choi, Chung, and Du (2014) and Weber and Tarba (2012), employees behave differently once a merger has been announced. There are many factors that make a difference in whether employees are willing to remain with a company throughout a merger. The employees want to be informed of the merger process as it is taking place.

Commitment. Employee commitment is important during a merger process. Continuous support and setting employee expectations throughout the merger can increase job satisfaction (Lim, 2014). Often job satisfaction and the productivity of employees are based on the environment within the organization(Ahmadvand, Heidari, Hosseini, &Majdzadeh, 2012). Too often, mergers have a negative effect on employee commitment to the company (Roundy, 2010). It is a manager's responsibility to assist employees to remain committed to the organization throughout the merger. Often management are unaware the employees are not feeling committed; therefore, managers need to work closely with their employees to ensure employees values are taken into consideration when going through a merger.

According to Mangundjaya (2015), change is not successful without the support and commitment of the employees. Employees help the managers with the change logistics, and other changes needed.When a merger is announced, employees understand change will happen. Employees have to be willing to commit to change, and therefore organizational trust needs to be established (Mangundjaya, 2015).

Trust. Employees want to feel that they can trust their manager to have their best interest at heart. Trust is an established agreement between the employee and the leaders of the organization (Rousseau, 1989). A merger can be perceived as a break in the agreement between the employees and their manager. Breaking the agreement can result in individuals losing trust in their leaders within an organization (Bansal, 2015; Jafri, 2012). It is important for leaders to continue to maintain an open and trusting relationship during a merger announcement. Trust is not transferable among employees or managers during a merger process (Bargeron, Lehn & Smith, 2015). Trust takes time to be established and therefore new managers assigned to new employees will have to spend the time to establish relationships. According to Buono and Bowditch (1990) and Shrivastava (1986), trust is essential to the integration process during a merger. When managers take into consideration the integration factors of employees' uncertainty, dealing with conflict, and feelings of insecurity, during a merger, it helps maintain trust for the employees (Thakur & Bansal, 2015).

There is also organizational trust. While organizations are now claiming transparency and contributory practices, all processes need to be integrated into the combined company, creating challenges (Bansal, 2016). The transition time for the integration of processes can also create an atmosphere of tension and mistrust. The integration processes can be viewed as unfair by some employees (Hopkins and Weathington, 2006) since changes may occur in both corporate programs. Employees are unaware of the intentions of the newly combined organization; therefore, often they will not trust the motives of the managers within the new organization. Open communication of the intended changes will help to develop employee trust (Bansal, 2016).

Communication.A manager's lack of communication can have negative effects on employees through a merger. Employees often create their interpretations of what is going to happen when a merger occurs (Bovey &Hede, 2001a). Management can help reduce uncertainties by communicating why the merger is necessary (Giessner, Ullrich, & van Dick, 2011). Employees may learn about the merger occurring, however, their main concern is how the merger will affect them. Open communication can help the relationship between the manager and the employees. According to Angwin, Mellahi, Gomes, and Peter (2014) and Muller (2006) communication is vital throughout any change process.

Too often managers do not communicate about the changes that come with a merger, and it causes stress among the employees. Employers who maintain open communication channels with the employees during a merger will increase trust, commitment, and innovation among the employee (Kim, 2011). Open communication and information exchange are critical during a merger (Bansal, 2015; Birkinshaw, Bresman, &Håkanson, 2000). Not communicating effectively will result in merger failure (Aguilera &Dencker, 2004).

Attitudes and stress. Managers sometimes think the integration of two organizations is an easy process; however, they often are wrong (Galpin & Whittington, 2010). The combination of employees from different companies' results in employees having to work together; however, trusting and working together is an issue (Yan, 2012). The lack of trust creates a difficult working environment, often increasing stress in the workplace. Leaders need to understand the impacts of a merger on employees and take measures to reduce the possibility of stress in the workplace (Hinescu, 2014).

Stress can lead to many things for both employees and managers during a merger process. The stress of not knowing what is happening may lead to insecurity. Insecurities can lead to employee competitiveness because employees are concerned about their jobs (Hinescu, 2014). Employees fear the financial impact on the organization when a merger fails (Wang & Wang, 2012). When stress levels rise within an organization, there is an increase in absenteeism. Absenteeism can also be because workplace reorganization can lead to employees having heath issues (Kjekshus, Bernstrøm, Dahl, &Lorentzen, 2014). Long-term illnesses also increase though a merger process (Kjekshus, Bernstrøm, Dahl, &Lorentzen, 2014). Managers who do not handle mergers correctly will see an increase in employee concerns (Muller, 2006).

There are many different phases to a merger process. During this process, managers need to help the employees move through each stage (Muller, 2006). Communication and awareness of each phase of the merger will also reduce the employees' stress level and keep them actively engaged in the process. According to Drzensky, Lupina-Wegener, Ullrich, and Van Dick (2013), employees experience high levels of stress and concern during a merger. The stress levels of employees can be managed by managers who lead through a servant leadership style.

Engagement/Motivation. Employee motivation can be affected when a merger is announced. Frick and Drucker (2011) defined motivation as the inner drive an employee has to do their work. According to Fowler (2015), managers are responsible for motivating their employees, however if the employees are disengaged, they will still leave the company. Motivation normally comes from within; however, a manager can help with the process of motivating the employees. Motivating employees is best done when a manager gives the employees a reason to be motivated (Fowler, 2015).

Employees need to remain motivated throughout the merger process to help continue to meet the organization's objectives and targets. Managers need to help employees remain motivated by engaging and communicating the activities of the merger. Effective manager and employee communication will help reduce potential resistance during the merger process (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012).

Performance and productivity. Mergers often lead toemployees feeling overstretched and overburdened (Muller, 2006). The employees are left in the unknown and are not sure what their future holds. Engaging the employees throughout the process will help them remain productive and continue to perform. According to Cowart (2014), to ensure productivity is up, employees need to be engaged. Human resources personnel can help with engaging employees to maintain their performance and productivity throughout the merger process. Resources are often available through the human resource department to help the management team with engagement.

Supporting Groups

Human resources personnel can play an important part in a merger process. A merger involves working with the employees from two different companies with two different cultures. According to Marks and Mirvis (2011), human resources personnel understand the importance of combining cultures with systems, employees, and service. They can help facilitate the culture change needed by focusing on the changes needed and not the merger details (Barratt-Pugh, Bahn, &Gakere, 2013). Managing cultures is a soft skill; leaders may not understand or have the resources to do so adequately.

Human resources personnel recently have been seen as providing soft skill resources to managers during a merger. Some soft skills are cultural differences, mismatch of leadership vision, communication, and structuring of human resources policies (Nagar, Masih, &Badugu, 2012). These skills are not necessary skills that all managers have; therefore, having access to these resources can help managers with having a merger go more smoothly.

Some of the resources to help managers with the merger process can be provided by the human resources department. The human resources personnel can help managers develop an integration plan with the resources and tools to work through the merger process (Podgorski & Sherwood, 2015). Human resources personnel can be a resource for the management team through all phases of the merger integration (Podgorski & Sherwood, 2015).

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological descriptive study was to understand the resources available to managers to manage employees during mergers. Englander (2016) noted that phenomenological research is best suited for understanding issues with human science. The study was conducted with a sample of 14mid-level managers who had direct management of employees during mergers of North American organizations. More specifically, understand the perceptions from a manager view of what resources they had available to them during the merger to manage the employees through the process.

The participants were required to have direct management of employees to ensure they share their experiences of resources available to help manage the employees. More importantly, to discover what resources were available to each manager, to help support the manager in managing the employees through the process.

Fourteen participants, two female and 12 male, took part in the study. The participants held a wide range of management positions. All managers were responsible for direct employees ranging from a minimum of two up to a maximum of 400 employees. The participants, while not directly asked, referred to at least one merger while a manager, but in several interviews, involvement in multiple mergers was mentioned.

Data was collected through one-on-one interviews with managers that fit the requirements of the study. The interviews were conducted to allow participants to share their personal experiences and perceptions on what resources they had available while managing employees through a merger.All interviews were held in a confidential semi structured interview using open ended questions.

All participants signed a consent form before completing the interviews. The participants responded to the three primary research questions with additional supportive interview questions. The main questions were: 1) What type of special resources or skills were you provided to help manage the employees through a merger? How did you utilize the resources?2) Explain any events or situations that might have occurred resulting in you utilizing the resources or skills to improve the situation? What effects did it have on the employees? And 3). What were the benefits for the employees when a manager was provided resources/skills to manage employees through a merger? What are the benefits for the managers? What are the benefits for the organization?

According to Sousa (2014), researchers conduct descriptive-based phenomenological studies to describe, understand, and clarify human experiences.Finlay (2009), Moustakas, 1994; Taylor & Bogdan, (1998) noted that the purpose of phenomenological studies is to describe the phenomenon of the lived experiences of the participants. The interview was held to allow the managers to discuss their firsthand experience of resource availability and its impacts on managing the employees.

Once the data were collected, it was entered in NVivo 11 software to organize the interview results, allowing for organization and analyzing for themes and trends. The data was also hand coded using an Excel spreadsheet to ensure validation of the data collected.Validation of data was also completed through participant verification. All interview notes, once transcribed by an external firm, were returned to the participants to be given the opportunity to review all recorded interview notes and verify the data collected during the interview. The participants confirmed and approved the accuracy of all data collected on their lived experiences.

IV. RESULTS

Through rigorous data analysis, seven qualitative themes emerged 1) the managers-employee relationships were maintained throughout the merger process, 2) managers were not provided any resources to manage employees during the merger, however there were resources or skills available within the organization and the management team, 3) notification of the merger was different for both managers and employees 4) employees reacted differently to the announcement of the merger, 5) situations that arose during the merger, was handled more efficiently with resources, 6) having resources available benefited employees, the managers and the organizations, and 7) majority of participants were willing to pass on advice to future managers of mergers. The seven themes that emerged were categorized into two groups: direct responses to the research questions and general themes that arose during the interviews.

Research QuestionsThemes

Theme two and five emerged regarding possible resources or skills provided to the managers to help manage employees through the merger. Theme two uncovered that while participants were not provided any special resources or training to manage their employees during the merger, they had resources available through the organization along with their own experience. Forty-three percent of the participants stated they have some level of training related to management or other technical training. Seventy-nine percent of the participants stated there was a resource or multiple resources available. The resource stated was broken down among Human Resources department (36%), information provided to them (36%), access to information on a website (36%), external teams assistance (18%), access to their leadership or manager (27%) and access to the other merging company (9%).

Theme five and six emerged through exploration of possible events or situations that may have arisen while managing the employees, resulting in utilizing any resources or skills that they had access to. According to the participant responses, 43% had situations that occurred that were handled with resources available. The participants that had resources available to them responded positively in regard to having resources available to handle a situation when one occurred. When situations arose, the managers utilized the resources they had available to them to address the issues.

Question three explored the benefits to employees, managers and the organization when resources or skills are available during a merger process. According to the majority of the participant responses, there are benefits in all three areas. Theme five and six emerged showing seventy-nine percent of the participants responded with positive benefits to the employees when resources or skills are available to the managers. Eighty six percent of the participants expressed the benefits to managers and having resources available in relationship to beneficial to the organization.

General Themes

There were four general themes, outlined in the list of seven themes. The themes 1, 3, 4, and 7 that emerged from the study that is worth mentioning. The themes are 1) the managers-employee relationships were maintained throughout the merger process, 3) notification of the merger was different for both managers and employees, 4) employees reacted differently to the announcement of the merger, and 7) majority of participants were willing to pass on advice to future managers of mergers.

One hundred percent of the participants revealed that they had an excellent relationship with their employees before the merger announcement (theme one). Having an excellent relationship before the merger was announced helped the manager maintain the relationship during the merger process. Trust is an established agreement between the employee and the leaders of the organization (Rousseau, 1989). It is important for leaders to continue to maintain an open and trusting relationship during a merger announcement through open communication.

Theme three emerged regarding the variations of the notification of the merger among participants. The method used to notify the managers was not always the same as the employees. Thirty-six percent of the respondents stated they first heard of the merger through the public media. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents stated they found out in a face to face method, varying between individual face to face meetings with their supervisor, or a meeting where they brought a group together. Twenty-one percent were notified through an internal email or memo and seven percent responded that the manager called a group meeting with all the managers to inform them of the merger announcement.

The participants responded that the employees involved in mergers did not necessarily hear about the merger announcement in a similar manner as themselves. Thirty-six percent of the respondents stated the employees first heard of the merger through the public media, as they did themselves, twenty-nine percent of the respondents stated that they held meetings with the employees, through team meetings, public town halls, twenty-one percent were notified through an internal email, seven percent responded, with meetings with the direct line reports and then a global video conference. Employees were contacted but the method varied, depending on the merging company's method of choice.

Theme seven had the advice to pass onto future managers who manage employees in a merger. Fifty percent of the participants responded that communication is important for all managers to exercise when dealing with employees going through a merger. Twenty-nine percent encouraged engagement with the employees. Fourteen percent stated that the employees needed to be understood and checked in on. The remainder of the participants has individual suggestions to share from their personal experience.

V. CONCLUSION

Managers in this study reported positive results and benefits of having resources available to manage employees through a merger. The resources available were from within the organization and also amongst the experience of the management team. Open and honest regular communication between the employee and the manager was one of the major resources that benefited the employees. A manager's relationship with their employees was crucial in dealing with issues that were raised by the employees during the merger process.

Three research questions guided the data collecting for my study. The central question was: what is the scope of resources available from a manager's perception, to manage employees through a merger?The answer is that there is a multitude of resources available to the managers to assist when a merger is taking place. Managers have the perception that very little resources were available; however, my study revealed that managers themselves are a great resource, along with other organizational resources. Manager's personal skills are very important when handling employees through the unknown territory of a merger. Managers should focus on their soft skills when dealing with employees through change because in the end, the employees rely on their supervisor to have their best interest in mind.

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