PERSONNEL PSYCHOLOGY
1989, 42

THE ACCEPTANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE INNOVATION BY MULTIPLE CONSTITUENCIES

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This study evaluated the acceptance of six human resource (HR) management innovations by multiple constituencies in a large organization using questionnaire data. The programs studied included quality circles, flextime, flexible benefits, job posting, cash awards, and a fitness program. Significant differences in the acceptance of this company's HR innovations were found for the following background variables: program experience, hierarchical level, seniority, and organizational unit. Possible reasons for differences in constituencies' levels of acceptance and practical issues to be considered when implementing HR innovations are discussed.

Tsui and Milkovich (1987) have suggested that organizations adopt a multiple constituency approach to evaluate human resource effectiveness. Application of their framework to human resource (HR) innovations is particularly valuable today in light of the growing number of firms that are experimenting with progressive programs. Recent studies evaluating HR innovations (e.g., drug testing, quality circles) are typically conducted using the responses from one or two senior managers per firm who are selected from a roster of personnel executives of Fortune companies (cf Gorlin & Schein, 1984; Gomez-Meija & Balkin 1987). By focussing on the views of management, such an approach overlooks other important constituencies whose perceptions may systematically differ from those of management. For example, it is likely that executives' assessments may be influenced by their role in making HR policy decisions and their desire to project their firms' programs favorably. Thus, various constituencies may have different reasons for reacting favorably or unfavorably to innovations.

Given that organizations allocate considerable resources to the development of new personnel programs, it is argued that it would be useful to adopt a multiple constituency approach to the evaluation of a sample of HR

I wish to thank Victor H. Vroom for his contribution to this work by directing the author's dissertation, which is partially summarized in this paper, and Clay Alderfer, who also served on the committee. I also thank John Hollenbeck, Kevin Ford, school colleagues, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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innovations. Such an analysis would assist organizational decision making regarding the allocation of scarce resources and the facilitation of program success, and it also would provide insight into the nature of the varying levels of acceptance of new programs by diverse employee groups.

A human resource management innovation is defined as a program, policy, or practice that is both designed to influence employee attitudes and behaviors and perceived to be new by members of the organization (Kossek, 1987). Acceptance of HR innovation is the extent to which an employee possesses favorable attitudes toward an innovation. Assuming eligibility, an employee's choosing to use an optional program can also be viewed as an accepting reaction. Acceptance is viewed as a necessary but insufficient condition for effectiveness. As training evaluation research has found, positive reactions to a program precede behavior change and improvements in job-related outcomes (e.g., Noe & Schmitt, 1986). Some scholars have suggested that, as measures of effectiveness, acceptance and reactions to HR activities are equal to more "objective" measure, such as return on investment and productivity statistics (Gomez-Meija & Balkin, 1987; Tsui, 1987; Ungson & Steers, 1984).

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The current study systematically examines key constituencies' varying reactions to HR innovations in one company. The goal of the research was to investigate the factors related to acceptance of multiple innovations, as well as to highlight the many issues that should be considered when implementing programs. In addition, the study illustrates the type of data that an organization might want to collect to evaluate its own interventions.

Undoubtedly, the results of this study are inextricably linked to the firm's culture of HR innovation and the idiosyncratic way in which each innovation was implemented. Notwithstanding these limitations, previous research on the relationships between level, race, sex, seniority, organizational context, and workplace attitudes helps frame the hypotheses. These variables were selected because employee demographic and organizational variables were believed to be representative of key constituencies that may experience HR innovations differently.

Hierarchical Level

Hierarchical level is expected to be positively related to acceptance of HR innovation. Previous research consistently indicates a positive association between level and favorable workplace attitudes (Berger & Cummings, 1979). Such study has suggested that level is better as a predictor than other variables such as gender (Fagenson, 1984; Varca, Shaffer, & McCauley,

1983) or marital status (Daly & Hammond, 1984). A rationale for positing a relationship between level and acceptance is also suggested by Tsui and Milkovich's (1987) finding that the largest difference in preferences for personnel activities was between executives and hourly employees. Similarly, studies of level differences regarding specific programs, such as performance appraisals, have found that managers are consistently more favorable than subordinates (Lawler, Mohrman, & Resnick, 1984; Mount, 1983).

Gender and Race

Membership in employee groups protected by federal equal employment opportunity legislation (e.g., groups based on race or sex) is believed to be negatively related to acceptance of HR innovation. Women and minorities may face greater risks in actively embracing innovative programs than their white male counterparts, who may be more secure because they do not have the pressures of possibly encountering racism and sexism in the workplace (Fernandez, 1981; Kanter, 1977, 1983). Also, subtle discriminatory pressures may negatively shape the way in which members of minority groups experience the overall organizational climate, which is shaped by HR policies and programs (Martin & Pettigrew, 1984).

Seniority

Seniority is hypothesized to be negatively related to acceptance. The longer an employee works for a company, the greater resistance he or she may have to changes in the status quo that implicitly alter the psychological contract (Kolb, Rubin, & McIntyre, 1984). Also, a recent study on attitudes toward one popular innovation, quality circles, found that senior employees had less favorable attitudes than junior ones, in part, because they had less of a stake in supporting changes that affected the organization's future (Bocialetti, 1987).

Program Experience

Organizations offer a multitude of personnel programs to a variety of constituencies, which vary in their level of program involvement. Some programs, such as quality circles and recognition programs, exclude certain employee groups (e.g., executives) by design. Others, such as fitness programs or flexible benefits, may be open to all employees, but their use is left up to employee discretion. Program experience is expected to be positively related to acceptance since it is assumed that either (1) using programs will be positively reinforcing or that (2) employees with accepting

attitudes will be more predisposed to use the programs in the first place. (The intent here is merely to indicate the existence of a relationship and not to signify causal direction.) Comparison of user and nonuser attitudes toward programs allows for investigation into whether there are HR programs that receive greater acceptance by exempt groups than by employees in targeted groups. Sometimes an excluded group's level of acceptance is an important factor in determining the long-term viability of an innovation: for example, supervisors' acceptance of quality circles (Cole, 1979).

Organizational Unit

Personnel programs are optimally administered to support the mission and goals of an organization (Walker, 1980). In a large corporation, there are likely to be interunit differences in mission and goals, as well as differences in constituent demographic background and the local employee relations climate. Additionally, there are likely to be differences in the extent to which local units "buy" into and develop appropriate implementation strategies for corporate-sponsored innovations. Consequently, it is expected that there will be significant interunit differences in acceptance, depending on the congruence between the innovations' features and the various units' missions and constituent backgrounds.

Method

Setting

The research was conducted in the marketing and data processing departments of the corporate offices of a large multi-divisional company in the financial services industry. The company was located in an urban area in the northeastern United States and employed nonunion white-collar workers. A total of 2,018 employees responded to a questionnaire for a 58% population response rate.

Of the respondents, 1,924 represented three main hierarchical groups based on salary-level category: (1) nonexempts ($N = 265$), the lowest group of employees, who mainly have clerical jobs involving insurance administration; (2) professionals ($N = 1,509$), the middle group of employees, who may have computer programming, actuarial, sales, customer service, or first-level supervisory jobs; and (3) officers and managers ($N = 150$), the highest group of employees, who are considered the executives of the firm. The remaining 94 participants did not report their salary-level group. Over half (57%) of the respondents had worked for the company six or more years. Ninety-three percent of the respondents were white. About half (53%) of the respondents were male.

The Human Resource Innovations

The six innovations represented a sample of programs adopted within the past 10 years. The organization had no prior experience with any of them. Under the job posting program, nonexempt and professional openings were listed on bulletin boards at 16 locations. All interested employees who had at least six months' job tenure could apply to the corporate HR department. Up to five candidates were selected for an interview slate for the hiring manager. The quality circle program trained nonexempt and lower-level professional employees in participative management and group problem-solving techniques. Under this program, small groups of employees from a work unit volunteered to meet regularly to identify, analyze, and solve problems related to their jobs and present their solutions to management. Flextime gave employees some control over their working hours. Employees could arrive at work during the band hours of 7–9 A.M., with the earliest arrivers eligible to depart at 3:30 P.M. The schedule included an hour lunch that was taken at employee discretion. The fitness program was designed to promote total health awareness. It involved (1) periodic home mailings of newsletters, (2) a fitness center, (3) lunchtime videos, and (4) peer group meetings to discuss fitness self-improvement. An outstanding achievement award program gave cash bonuses to all employees—except those on incentive plans (e.g., officers and managers, senior marketing professionals)—who were nominated by their supervisors. Those demonstrating outstanding achievement on the job received cash bonuses of up to 15% of their salary, attended an award reception, and had their pictures posted. Under flexible benefits, employees could elect to set aside pre-tax dollars in a reimbursement account for day care and special health expenses excluded from the company benefits package (e.g., eye care, plastic surgery). If employees did not use all the money set aside for a given year, they lost it.

Procedure

The study was conducted in three phases over a seven-month period using diagnostic methodology. Alderfer (1980) defines this methodology as a process for publicly entering a system, collecting valid data about experiences with that system, and feeding that data back to promote increased understanding of the system by its members.

During the first phase, multiple entry meetings were held with executives to discuss and finalize the programs included in the study, interviews were held with program managers, data on program history were collected, and departmental employee liaison groups were formed. The liaison groups had seven to eight members and were designed to allow the researcher to

interact with a cross section of employees and to encourage organizational participation in the study. During the first group meeting, the study was introduced, a list of individuals to invite to group interviews was formed, and employee attitudes toward the programs were explored.

Phase II consisted of "empathic questionnaire" development, using data from interviews (Alderfer & Brown 1972) and input from executive and liaison group review of the instrument. The questionnaire had a separate page of about 20 items devoted to each program. Of these items, 10 were identical across the innovations and were used to form the acceptance scale that is described in the measures section below. The other 10 items on any given program were uniquely related to the acceptance of the specific innovation (sample items: "Flextime has helped people better integrate their working day with the demands of their private lives." and "Overall, the quality circle program has helped make employees more involved in their jobs."). While these empathic items could not be used in quantitative analyses for across-innovation comparisons, since they differed, they were used to enrich organizational feedback on the study and enhanced understanding of the results. Also, some employees indicated that interspersing the unique items with the comparable ones on each program's page made them motivated to complete the entire questionnaire, despite the repetition of items.

Phase III included questionnaire administration and written and oral feedback. All employees received a letter signed by the top local executive explaining the study's purpose and a survey with an internal envelope addressed to the researcher. About a week's time was given to return the survey. Oral feedback was given to executives, the liaison groups, and attendees at special departmental meetings. A one-page written feedback sheet was sent to all employees.

Measures

Attitude toward HRM innovation. For each program, participants completed ten items assessing their attitudes toward personnel innovation using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = "strongly agree"; 5 = "strongly disagree"). Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and scale intercorrelations by program. The scale assessed the following dimensions: (1) the extent to which an individual was familiar with a program, (2) the extent to which the program was important to an individual, (3) the extent to which an individual felt that the program was well run, (4) the extent to which an individual liked the way that the program was designed, (5) the extent to which an individual wanted to see the program continued, (6) the extent to which an individual believed the program had been effectively communicated, and (7) the extent to which an individual believed

TABLE 1

Attitudes Toward HRM Innovations: Scale Intercorrelations, Reliabilities, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Flextime	–					
2. Job posting	.30*	–				
3. Cash award	.05***	.18*	–			
4. Fitness program	.13*	.21*	.19*	–		
5. Flexible benefits	.03	.09**	.17*	.19*	–	
6. Quality circles	.12*	.22*	.30*	.24*	.15*	–
Reliability	.87	.81	.83	.88	.72	.88
Mean	1.88	2.56	3.05	2.57	3.30	2.86
Standard deviation	.58	.51	.57	.58	.44	.64

Note: Negatively worded items are reverse scored.
*$p<.0001$; **$p<.001$; ***$p<.05$

his or her immediate supervisor supported the program. The items were summed (reversing negatively worded ones) to measure acceptance.

The reliabilities for the innovation scales ranged from .88 (fitness program) to .72 (flexible benefits). The scales were not strongly correlated (mean $r = .19$). Due to the exploratory nature of the study and its main objectives, which were to examine variation in acceptance of innovation across employee groups and programs, the scales were collapsed to represent a general attitude toward personnel innovation.

Employee background variables. The questionnaire asked respondents to report their use of the programs and their backgrounds. These data were categorized in the following manner: hierarchical level (salary grade group = nonexempts, professionals, officers and managers); race (caucasian, noncaucasian); sex; years with the company (<1, 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, >16), program experience (user, nonuser), and organizational unit (marketing, data processing). Although efforts were made to conduct analyses by specific minority subgroups (e.g., black, Asian, Hispanic), it was necessary to form a dichotomous race variable because of the very small number of individuals in each subgroup. Similarly, program experience was analyzed using a dichotomous variable because of the theoretical difficulties in comparing multiple and different types of uses across innovations. For any analyses using the program experience variable, within- and between-subjects error terms were pooled in order to facilitate more accurate estimation (Green & Tukey, 1960).

Results and Discussion

Regression Models

Table 2 shows the results from both additive and interactive regression models, examining the effects of constituent background on acceptance

TABLE 2

Results of Additive and Interactive Regression
Dependent Variable: Acceptance

Source	*df*	Type III sum of squares	*F* value	*p* level
		Additive Model		
Innovation	5	901.18	629.41	<.0001
Program experience	1	313.58	1095.09	<.0001
Seniority	4	21.55	18.81	<.0001
Hierarchical level	2	11.76	20.54	<.0001
Gender	1	1.70	5.94	<.0148
Organizational unit	1	.063	.22	<.6378
Race	1	.017	.06	<.8042
Model F value = 603.39, $p<.0001$, $R^2=.45$				
		Interactive Model		
Program experience	1	152.80	556.82	<.0001
Innovation	5	88.91	64.80	<.0001
Innovation × Prog. Exper.	5	32.42	23.63	<.0001
Innovation × Level	10	24.30	8.86	<.0001
Innovation × Seniority	20	17.78	3.24	<.0001
Hierarchical level	2	10.55	19.24	<.0001
Seniority	4	9.66	8.80	<.0001
Innovation × Unit × Prog. Exper.	5	9.69	7.07	<.0001
Innovation × Seniority × Unit	20	7.14	1.08	<.3530
Innovation × Unit	5	7.14	5.21	<.0001
Innovation × Race	5	4.65	3.39	<.0046
Gender	1	1.64	6.01	<.0142
Unit × Prog. Exper.	1	1.44	5.24	<.0222
Innovation × Gender	5	1.14	.83	<.5287
Organizational Unit	1	.20	.74	<.3904
Race	1	.003	.01	<.9117
Model F value = 105.24, $p<.0001$, $R^2=.48$				

of the innovations. The additive model included the following variables: (1) innovation, (2) program experience, (3) hierarchical group, (4) organizational unit, (5) gender, (6) race, and (7) seniority group. The interactive model included these variables and interaction terms that were significant from separate analysis of variance results. Because all of the independent variables are noncontinuous, the F values for the Type III sums of squares are reported since they have more theoretical interest than the Beta values of categorical variables. Both models explain significant proportions of the variance (additive model: $R^2 = .45$, $F = 603.59$, $p < .0001$; interactive model: $R^2 = .48$, $F = 105.24$, $p < .0001$). In the additive model, the following main effect variables were significantly related to acceptance: innovation ($F = 629.41$, $p < .0001$); program experience ($F = 1095.09$, $p < .0001$); hierarchical group ($F = 20.54$, $p < .0001$); and seniority group ($F = 18.81$, $p < .0001$). (While gender was also significant, the Type III sums of squares were very small, and therefore these differences

will not be discussed.) The interaction variables with the highest significance in the interactive model are Innovation × Program Experience ($F = 23.63$, $p < .0001$); Innovation × Hierarchical Group ($F = 8.86$, $p < .0001$); Innovation × Unit ($F = 5.21$, $p < .0001$); Innovation × Seniority Group ($F = 3.24$, $p < .0001$); Unit × Program Experience ($F = 5.24$, $p < .02$); and Innovation × Unit × Program Experience ($F = 7.07$, $p < .0001$).

Means and standard deviations of acceptance by significant employee background variables are shown in Table 3 and will be discussed below in terms of the regression results. Two statistical tests were used to compare significant differences between groups. For comparisons between two groups, t tests were used. Whenever comparisons were made between more than two groups at the same time, the Student Newman-Keuls (SNK) statistic, a test of significant differences between all pairs of means was used (Winer, 1971).

Innovation Differences

Does acceptance differ between the innovations? Clearly, employees responded very differently to the programs. Flextime was by far the most preferred innovation (see Table 1). Job posting came next, followed by the fitness program and then quality circles. The least accepted innovations were cash awards and flexible benefits. (Fischer's least significant t statistic shows a significant difference between any two means of .01 ($p < .05$).

Employee Background Results

Program experience. Not surprisingly, users had much greater acceptance of all innovations (see Table 3). The significant interaction between program experience and innovation appearing in the interactive model suggests that users were more enthusiastic about some innovations than others. The t tests of significant differences between the means of users and nonusers showed variation in t value size. For example, the value for quality circles ($t = 18.96$, $p < .0001$) was a lot larger than the value for job posting ($t = 7.58$, $p < .0001$).

Interview data indicated that the difference between participating in a quality circle and only hearing about it is probably greater than the difference between using job posting and only hearing about it. Participating in a circle is likely to be a more intense experience than filling out a form to apply for a new position. Use of a quality circle involves the group experience of working with peers to solve an existing problem. In contrast, job posting is essentially an individual experience, and many employees who post do not ever get chosen for a job interview.

TABLE 3

Means and Standard Deviations by Innovation and by Significant Background Variables

Innovation	Hierarchical Levels						Years With Company									
	Officers		Professionals		Nonexempt		<1		1–5		6–10		11–15		>16	
	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*
Flextime	1.98	.58	1.83	.55	2.05	.67	1.72	.46	1.72	.51	1.92	.60	2.01	.59	2.08	.64
Job posting	2.47	.46	2.53	.51	2.70	.56	2.57	.41	2.51	.49	2.53	.54	2.59	.53	2.63	.56
Cash award	2.58	.64	3.11	.55	2.96	.54	2.98	.50	3.08	.53	3.11	.56	2.97	.61	2.99	.67
Fitness program	2.58	.66	2.58	.58	2.48	.56	2.68	.62	2.57	.60	2.55	.55	2.56	.60	2.52	.58
Flexible benfits	3.30	.53	3.31	.46	3.21	.41	3.21	.42	3.30	.47	3.28	.46	3.26	.47	3.36	.44
Quality circles	2.61	.67	2.86	.64	2.94	.65	2.93	.57	2.84	.67	2.88	.66	2.85	.63	2.82	.63

	Program Experience				Organizational Unit			
	User		Nonuser		Marketing		Data processing	
	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	$\bar{x}$	*SD*
Flextime	1.79	.51	2.30	.72	1.96	.61	1.85	.57
Job posting	2.47	.55	2.65	.47	2.63	.52	2.54	.52
Cash award	2.62	.62	3.12	.54	3.01	.53	3.05	.60
Fitness program	2.49	.56	3.01	.56	2.46	.57	2.59	.59
Flexible benefits	2.60	.68	3.32	.43	3.22	.45	3.31	.46
Quality circles	2.34	.73	2.99	.55	2.87	.66	2.85	.64

Note: 5-point scale: 1 = "strongly agree" to 5 = "strongly disagree"

Similarly, nonusers of quality circles were much less enthusiastic than nonusers of job posting (see Table 3). Participants in group interviews stated that some nonparticipants thought that quality circle members thought they were "special" and superior to employees who weren't in circles. For job posting, there was little of this intergroup rivalry between users and nonusers. For example, officers and managers were the most enthusiastic about job posting, despite their exclusion from using it.

Hierarchical group. Officer and managers, the highest salary-level group, were the most accepting of quality circles, job posting, and cash awards (see Table 3), which are all programs that were specifically targeted at nonexempt and professional employees and excluded higher-level employees by design ($SNK_{.05}$, 1625 *df*, quality circles' critical value (c.v.) = .139; job posting c.v. = .111; cash awards' c.v. = .139). The significant interaction of Innovation × Level indicated that high-level employees were more favorable toward some innovations than others. Specifically, officers and managers were less accepting of flextime and flexible benefits, which were innovations designed for the entire population ($SNK_{.05}$, 1625 *df*, flextime, c.v. = .139; flexible benefits, $SNK_{.05}$, 1625 *df*, c.v. = .10).

Interview data indicates that while programs such as circles, posting, and awards sound good in theory; the employees targeted by the programs may be less accepting for a variety of unique reasons related to their own experience with implementation issues. For example, interviews with circle participants revealed that some members had lost enthusiasm for the innovation because some circles had gone through the entire problem-solving cycle and had had their suggestions officially accepted by management but never implemented. Another circle was dismayed to find out that "group suggestions" were ruled ineligible for remuneration under the company suggestion program, which rewarded only "individual suggestions." These perceptions were echoed by the survey results. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents disagreed with the empathic item, "In general, management has followed through on each (quality circle) recommendation." Only 25% of the respondents agreed with the item, "People who participate in quality circles receive enough recognition."

As for hierarchical differences in the acceptance of job posting, nonexempt employees were the least favorable, despite the fact that it was the main vehicle to help nonexempts move up the organization. It may be that these results stemmed from the system's lack of credibility, as many employees believed management was often just going through the motions of posting an opening. Nearly half of the respondents (44%) agreed with the empathic item, "Often jobs are posted that are already 'filled.'" However, it is important to point out that even nonexempt employees rated the program on the favorable side of neutral. For individual employees, job posting may have very favorable effects on careers for some, whereas

other, less qualified applicants may find themselves repeatedly out of the running for openings. Perhaps officers see a job posting system as leading to a larger pool of potential candidates for any given opening and the advancement of the best qualified interests.

In regard to cash awards, professionals were significantly less favorable than all other groups. Professionals may be less enthusiastic because this group includes most of the first-level supervisors, who have to deal with some of the negative day-to-day realities of administering awards, such as handling disgruntled nonrecipients and convincing management to allocate awards to their subordinates. For example, only 24% of respondents agreed with the empathic item, "Deserving employees have received this award." However, only 7% of respondents disagreed with the item, "Getting a cash award largely depends on your boss's sales ability."

As for flextime, officers and nonexempts were less favorable than professionals. Data from interviews indicated that some officers were less favorable because they believed that the innovation had resulted in a loss of productivity. It also may be that flextime had little impact on officers' and managers' working lives—which supports the findings of a recent study showing that flextime had the least impact on high-level employees (Narayanan & Nath, 1982). The lowered rating by nonexempts may be attributed to the perception that many low-level employees have less opportunity to actually use the innovation because of job constraints. Some work units, for example, had unofficially implemented a modified flextime that required clerical employees to sign a schedule indicating their flex days in advance in order to ensure phone coverage.

Flexible benefits was the only innovation that was significantly favored by nonexempts. Interview data and company records indicated that the vast majority of nonexempt positions were held by women, who were interested in the innovation's day care advantages, the innovation's main feature. For example, 54% of respondents agreed with the empathic item, "This program is good for employees with child care needs."

Seniority. Employees with either very short tenure (less than 1 year) or long tenure (over 16 years) were the most extreme in their reactions to specific innovations. Long-term employees were significantly less accepting of flextime and flexible benefits (flextime: $SNK_{.05}$, 1551 *df*, c.v. = .092; flexible benefits ($SNK_{.05}$, 1419 *df*, c.v. = .090). New employees were the second least favorable group toward job posting, the least favorable toward the fitness program ($SNK_{.05}$, 1521 *df*, c.v. = .087), and the most favorable toward flexible benefits and flextime.

Data from group interviews indicated that while flextime may have been useful in attracting employees to join the firm, it was not as attractive to employees with more tenure, who may have been concerned about the possible negative impact of flextime on productivity. As for flexible

benefits, interview data suggested that the program may have been better communicated to new employees, who had attended orientation sessions during the past year, than to existing ones, who had simply been mailed pamphlets. New employees were less accepting of job posting because of the rule that an employee must have at least six months' tenure before he or she can post for a job. Likewise, interview data indicated that new employees' lower ratings for the fitness program stemmed from the rule that employees must have at least a year's service to be eligible to use the fitness center, the innovation's hallmark.

Organizational unit. Although there was no main effect for organizational unit, the interactions (Innovation × Unit) and (Innovation × Unit × User) indicated that there were significant interunit differences in acceptance for four of the six innovations. Data processing (DP) employees had significantly greater acceptance of flextime ($t = 3.59$, $p < .0003$) and job posting ($t = 3.35$, $p < .0008$), while marketing employees were more favorable toward the fitness program ($t = 4.37$, $p < .0001$) and flexible benefits ($t = 3.76$, $p < .0002$). To a large extent, these differences may be attributed to interunit differences in implementing these "corporate programs" and the degree to which the innovation's features were perceived to meet the needs of department members.

For example, data processing's greater acceptance of flextime may partly be attributed to the unit's greater experimentation with forms of the innovation, compared with marketing. Interview data indicated that unofficial flextime was being followed by some data processing managers to accommodate computer programmers' preferences for unconventional working hours. Data processing had also piloted a related innovation allowing greater employee control over not only when they worked, but where they worked—work-at-home arrangements for new mothers. In contrast, when the top executive of marketing reviewed the questionnaire prior to its distribution, he added the item, "Flextime has hurt the service level provided by my unit," as some senior managers had felt that flextime hurt productivity.

Data processing's (DP) greater acceptance of job posting was also due to interunit differences in implementation. Unlike marketing, the local personnel department in DP initiated a career counseling program in tandem with job posting, thereby tailoring a corporate-initiated innovation to its constituency's needs. Interview data suggested that marketing employees' greater acceptance of the fitness program can be explained by the fact that the innovation was going to be marketed to customers as an additional service to help cut health insurance costs, a feature that was of immediate interest to marketing employees. The greater acceptance of flexible benefits by marketing was a level effect, as most of the nonexempt jobs were located

in marketing, and these workers were the most enthusiastic regarding the innovation.

Similarly, the interunit differences in acceptance that existed for all employees carried over for innovation users. Users of flextime and the fitness program were significantly more accepting in the marketing department, and quality circle users were significantly more accepting of the innovation in the data processing department. The largest interunit differences for users ($t = 6.34$, $p < .0001$) was for quality circles, as data processing users (2.18) had significantly greater acceptance than marketing users (2.67). Interview data indicated that the marketing quality circle program was on its demise, as the number of circles in operation was decreasing over time. In contrast, the DP program was still expanding. Also, most of marketing's circle users were nonexempt employees, who typically held clerical jobs. In contrast, DP's circles included college-educated technical professionals and even some middle-manager circles. While nearly half (47%) of marketing respondents agreed with the item, "It would be good if more officers and managers participated in [quality circles]," only a third (34%) of DP respondents agreed with the same item.

General Discussion

This study examined employee reactions to a sample of innovative programs adopted by a large organization. The specific effects that were found for constituencies are a consequence of the many idiosyncratic aspects of the way that the organization implemented each of the programs and cannot be assumed to be representative of effects found in any other firm. However, the results help illustrate the importance of attempting to understand innovations in their contexts and highlight many important issues related to their implementation.

While many companies can report that they have adopted an innovative program, the effectiveness of which is often ascertained by HR managers or top executives, the research hopes to encourage additional attempts to gather multiple perspectives to evaluate programs. Such research may also provide insight into a firm's culture and subcultures of innovation and an understanding of the factors influencing constituencies' diverse reactions to innovations. Using this approach might answer a host of questions ranging from "Does the personnel department value the same kinds of innovations that line managers do?" and "Do supervisors like the same programs as their subordinates?" to "Does the company do as good a job orienting long-term employees to new programs as it does new hires?" and "Are we generally adopting programs that are more effectively 'positioned' or 'marketed' to certain constituencies than to others?" This analysis would

also help companies assess whether they tend to have similar implementation problems related to the introduction of innovations and examine which innovations are more congruent with certain business units than with others.

Granted, a sound employee relations approach in an organization is based on the understanding that not every employee or group is going to respond well to every HR activity. The goal is to provide a range of programs to meet the different needs of the various constituencies, not an average need. The relatively low correlations in Table 1 show that individual employees value the programs differently. Despite these differences, however, this research has sought to demonstrate the value of analyzing whether, in general, an organization is adopting programs that more closely link the needs of employees with the needs of the corporation, in order to improve effectiveness and competitiveness. Development of meaningful avenues that allow for greater employee participation in the design and implementation of new programs could improve their effectiveness by providing rich information on constituencies' varying perceptions of HR initiatives and may encourage HR managers to be more market oriented when introducing innovations.

Although the results are specific to the firm, the findings that hierarchical level and seniority may be better predictors of acceptance than gender, business unit, or race merit replication across firms and raise a variety of interesting issues. Several hypotheses may explain the hierarchical finding that officers and managers accept innovations more than nonmanagers, particularly those that are designed for nonmanagers. Perhaps the intangible benefits executives derive from innovations are greater than the tangible benefits afforded subordinates. HR innovations may help give the impression that management leads a firm with competitive, state-of-the-art programs and may also help validate the legitimacy of the personnel system among management. By initiating HR programs and allocating considerable dollars to personnel activities, executives can ostensibly demonstrate their interest in the employee population to the chairman and board of directors, the community, competitors, and the workers themselves.

Perhaps human resource management programs serve a symbolic role: they provide evidence that top management acts as if it cares about its employees. Certainly this view is consistent with Smircich and Stubbart's (1985) contention that the primary role of management is the management of meaning. In order to serve this role, executives may develop a pro-innovation bias toward the latest fads, perhaps placing an overemphasis on the quantity of HRM innovation as opposed to quality. Despite managers' and officers' favorable ratings of programs designed for subordinates, the results suggest that lower-level employees may view these programs as having more fluff than substance. Nonexempt and professional employees' relatively lower ratings suggest that many of the supposed main constituents

of the programs don't necessarily want them or like them or, at best, are ambivalent toward them. Perhaps executives generally overstate program effectiveness because of their roles in promulgating organizational effectiveness and promoting the firms' reputation.

A second explanation for the positive attitudes senior employees hold toward HRM innovation is because there is a halo effect regarding their overall attitudes toward work (Inkeles & Smith, 1974). Because officers and managers have achieved relatively high stature in their jobs, they tend to rate all aspects of the workplace, including new personnel programs, more favorably than other employees. Higher-level employees' greater decision-making authority, better pay, status afforded by their positions, and other conditions related to their jobs may foster a general enthusiasm about HRM innovations.

A third main explanation for the hierarchical differences is that senior employees or a member of their group participated in the decision to adopt the programs. Many scholars have observed that participation in decision making can improve the acceptance of the decision (e.g., Vroom & Jago, 1978). Similarly, Lawler (1981) found that performance-based compensation systems were the most effective when employees participated in their design. He noted four reasons for the greater effectiveness of programs designed using participation: employees have more information about the system, they are committed to it, they have control over it, and they trust the program. For all of these reasons, officers and managers may have greater acceptance of human resource innovations than lower employees.

In large organizations, however, it is unlikely that all officers and managers participate in decisions regarding the adoption of a HRM innovation. Even if some upper managers do not directly participate in program decision making, perhaps they have greater acceptance simply because their managerial roles afford them the *opportunity* to have approval rights or input. Higher-level employees' possession of the decision-making authority to approve or influence the adoption of new HRM programs may facilitate acceptance for an additional reason. Perhaps some senior managers and executive groups engage in a quid pro quo game of politics. An executive may support one program currently touted by a colleague in exchange for support for a future program that the executive may introduce.

The findings that employees with the shortest and longest tenures were the most extreme in their reactions to innovations also deserve additional study. Given the fact that many organizations are attempting to transform traditional employee relations systems (Kochan, Katz, & McKersie, 1986), which may fundamentally alter the psychological contracts of long-term employees, HR managers need to consider how to best orient these constituents to the changing expectations and concomitant employee behaviors required by new programs. If these innovations are going to be effective,

long-term employees need to buy into and understand the rationales for HR initiatives that will undoubtedly alter existing HR systems.

The significant differences in acceptance of specific innovations between units points to the importance of obtaining local ownership for many corporate-initiated programs. While the corporate departments may serve as R&D units for the invention of HR innovation, the results of this study suggest a decentralized implementation approach may be appropriate. Also, the significant differences in acceptance for four of the six innovations suggests that future research might attempt to identify which types of innovations are more congruent with specific unit missions and workforce characteristics than others. This study suggests that the innovation flextime, for example, received greater acceptance in a computer programming work unit than in a customer service unit, which needs more standardized hours of operation. Turning to a discussion of overall differences in the acceptance of the innovations, it is important to note that the innovation with the greatest acceptance was the one that can be viewed least as a "program," but rather as an operating procedure involving the scheduling of when employees are permitted to enter and leave the work place. Flextime may have received high acceptance because it was more integral to the daily working environment than the other innovations studied. Like a car, there are some parts that are standard, and the car cannot operate without, and there are others that are optional and have little impact on the way the vehicle runs.

Unlike flextime, employees in this firm viewed innovations such as quality circles as somewhat peripheral to the work of the organization. In a recent review, Cummings and Mohrman (1985) distinguished between process and maintenance organizational innovations, a distinction that can aptly be applied to flextime and quality circles, which both involve the HRM policy area of employee influence (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1984). Once an organization adopts flextime, little maintenance or redesign work is needed to make the innovation operate smoothly. The nature and scope of employee participation in decision making is well defined and easily integrated into the existing authority structure.

In contrast, in order to ensure the long-term effectiveness of a quality circle program, constant attention and fine tuning is needed, and the perimeters defining the limits of employee participation in decision making are often unclear. It is unlikely that quality circles could be effective over the long run, unless their introduction were synchronized with some additional concomitant changes that affect the organization's authority structure (e.g., profit sharing, information sharing). Indeed, research has shown that quality circles have often failed because they didn't significantly change an organization's authority structure (Lawler, 1986). Over the long term,

integration into organizational systems is required for institutionalization (Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1987).

Because of the limitations of a case study, there are many areas ripe for future research. Further study needs to be done on constituent differences in acceptance of a wide diversity of HRM programs adopted in a large sample of U. S. firms. While the acceptance of innovation scale developed for this study offers a new instrument to measure acceptance of HRM programs, more work should be done to refine the scale and to determine whether there are any identifiable subcomponents of acceptance that are generalizable across innovations. Longitudinal research is needed to improve upon the study's cross-sectional design, particularly when viewed in light of the fact that acceptance of innovation will vary over both a typical organization's life span and program life cycle. Although statistical analysis found that innovation age was not correlated with acceptance, it is clear that analysis of variation in acceptance over time is needed, particularly for faddish innovations such as quality circles, which may fade over the long term. Last, future study should compare attitudes between different types of program users for a single innovation. In this way, the program experience variable need not be dichotomous, but a hierarchy of experience could be developed. Also, more research is needed exploring the attitudes of employees excluded by design from using innovations. Nonusers are often overlooked during evaluation but may have an important influence on long-term program viability.

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