

The role of employees in decision-making and strategy work - a multi-case study of participation in Finnish industrial production companies

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New organizational structures where employees have equal decision-making power have been introduced and the overall atmosphere in business has been shifting towards more inclusive organizations. It has been claimed that flat and democratic organizations represent the new generation of organizations in general. Also, in Finland the role and power to influence employees rise a lot of debate in the field of business and mass media at the moment. Giving power to the employees is seen as a tool to create commitment and agile ways to serve the customer. Finnish working life and companies are very inclusive compared to other parts of the world. We have a long history in involving employees via employee representatives, but there are also many young companies that see the role of employees in a completely new way. However, the majority of companies in Finland have a long history and can be perceived as traditional. What role employees currently have in these companies when it comes to decision-making?

This thesis work is to study the role employees have in strategy work and strategic decision-making in organizations that are perceived traditional. In this qualitative multi-case research, the research data was collected through semi-structured interviews with altogether 32 employees from three different-sized industrial production companies. The interviewees represent different levels of the organization from the production employees to top management. Data analysis was conducted as an iterative and explorative process, where data was transcribed, categorized and synthesized. Finally, the research findings were discussed with existing literature in order to improve the finding's validity.

According to the study findings, participation in strategy is seen very differently compared to participation in decision-making. There were also big differences between the different employee groups represented. The production employees (blue-collars) were largely satisfied with the possibilities to influence achieved by the use of Lean-methods and employee representatives. On the contrary, the middle management and white-collars often felt that they were lacking similar possibilities to participate in decision-making. In all three organizations, the strategy process was mostly perceived as a traditional top-down one. The white-collar employees and middle managers would like to participate more in strategy-making. However, the blue-collar employees often did not see the point in participating more. Also, the study shows how individual team leaders can create very inclusive and agile teams despite the overall bureaucracy and hierarchy that were evident in all of the three organizations.

Keywords strategy as practice, strategy, participation, employee involvement, decision-making, decision-making processes