

Actions to Encourage Worker Engagement in a Livestock Raising Company

Acciones para potenciar la participación obrera en una empresa pecuaria

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To propose encouraging actions of worker engagement in Venegas Livestock Company in the municipality of Yaguajay, Sancti Spíritus province, Cuba.

Methods: Semistructured interview to several different actors within the organization, review of documents issued by the entity, and scientific observation.

Results: The proposal of a group of actions to encourage worker engagement, and the development of potentialities that can contribute to strengthening the organization thoroughly.

Conclusions: The problems faced by this entity to develop the full potential of its workers are mainly determined by subjective factors linked to internal limitations that can be overcome. It was concluded that this entity has favorable conditions to broaden worker engagement.

Key words: local development, engagement, potentiality, workers.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Propuesta de acciones para potenciar la participación obrera en la Empresa Pecuaria Venegas, municipio Yaguajay, provincia Sancti Spíritus, Cuba.

Métodos: Entrevista semiestructurada a diferentes actores dentro de la vida de la organización, el análisis de documentos generados por la entidad y la observación científica.

Resultados: La propuesta de un grupo de acciones para incentivar la participación obrera y el despliegue de potencialidades, que pueden contribuir al fortalecimiento integral de esa organización.

Conclusiones: Los problemas que enfrenta esa entidad para desplegar la potencialidad de la participación de los trabajadores están determinados, en lo fundamental, por factores subjetivos, relacionados con limitaciones internas que pueden ser superadas. Se determinó que en la referida entidad existen condiciones favorables para incrementar la participación del personal.

Palabras clave: desarrollo local; participación; potencialidad; trabajadores; empresa.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society is characterized by cultural interference, based on the major role played by the media of powerful countries. The assumption of engagement as a social process has become a space for political and ideological struggle that adamantly denies the neutrality of social sciences. Engagement is not an exclusive category of bourgeois democracy, but a transversal axis of social and community processes, and an important element to improve socialist companies, a major actor in local development processes, which can and should become the ideal setting to strengthen social cohesion, and other very relevant values for the construction of socialism.

Venegas Livestock Raising Company (EPV) is located in the municipality of Yaguajay, province of Sancti Spiritus, Cuba. This entity can deploy all its potential in terms of

worker engagement in business actions, in order to achieve more integrated strengthening. The aim of this research is to identify such potential, and suggest actions to deploy it.

Yaguajay municipality is pioneering local developing actions in Cuba, due to the pressing conditions of the socio-economic dynamics created after the deactivation of the sugar-producing industry. It was the main economic activity since colonial times, and the pillar of identity values associated to the continuous impact of this practice in the local life.

This process has been studied by Lage (2006), Boffill (2010), and Reyes (2011). The outcome of such research showed the weaknesses and potentials of experiences assumed, and they contain concrete proposals made to local policy decision makers, and other actors involved in the process, who have helped introduce corrective actions to local development management.

In these works, several different approaches and concepts on local development have been studied. Accordingly, it is unnecessary to reiterate previous ideas explained and embraced by the Cuban academic scenario about a diverse issue that has reached consensus in relation to various key aspects, such as the leading role of government, the role of higher education, the determining action of knowledge and knowledge management, and local development, as a customized suit that fits the conditions of each territory, among other topics. (University Management of Knowledge and Innovation for Development [GUCID], 2006). It is also clear that in these studies, local development projects must lead to new strategies that articulate the endogenous potential with external opportunities to overcome obstacles, particularly today (Communist Party of Cuba [PCC], 2011).

DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical and methodological rationale

Local development is not only characterized by physical immediacy of concerted actions. It is a long-term process, where all the interacting social actors in a given surrounding that demands permanent, creative, and responsible engagement of citizens. Local development sustainability includes the promotion of economic growth, equity, social and cultural change, ecological sustainability, proper gender approach, quality, and spatial and territorial balance.

The engagement of involved actors is a fundamental premise, since close-knit ties among people are the ones legitimizing institutions, without contrasting them because of the social object they have or the kind of property they represent (Alonso, Riera, and Rivero, 2013; Garcés, 2013; Romero, 2013). This kind of engagement demands the following:

... active personal or collective engagement as the subject of activity, in keeping with what is known in the literature as actual engagement, as opposed to the one through which people intervene as the object of the activity of other subjects. (Alonso *et al.*, 2013, p.4)

Worker engagement in business scenarios has a growing interest in social sciences, including economic sciences, parallel to the fact that human resources today are assumed from positions farther than Ford or Taylor. In that sense, Senge (2012) expressed some doubts.

... The question I can ask and share with you is what we have learned so far during the eight years following the first time I made this question. This is the strategic question: What if we start taking advantages of the self-reinforcement sources of growth? For instance, if we start building a shared vision, if we start making people commit further to what they do, if we really start paying attention to what people are thinking, apart from what they do, and they become partners in thinking about strategy development? If we start doing these sort of things, then we can release energy to make something new grow, then we start facing challenges, and balancing processes. (p.18)

Actually, in that reflection, Senge refers to unexploited organizational capacities, which are considered a potential of their members. These capacities remain there without practical application, since the methods used did not cause a situation of emergency.

The potential of engaging in business contexts has a relevant theoretical background, including authors like Schein (1996), who noted that in order to promote organizational culture, functional dynamics associated to managing and relational aspects inside the working group are relevant. Business activity cannot be uniquely limited to the perspective of an employee, and cannot be materialized according to the interest of a particular company. Therefore, they depend on hierarchical association and subordination, where employees play a critical role when they are regarded objectively in their condition.

Other authors like Robbins and Judge (2009), who studied topics associated to organizational behavior, such as the relation between personality and individual values and their work place; the effect of satisfied and unsatisfied workers on companies; worker engagement and their recognition; the fundamentals of group behavior; and their role in business management, among other relevant elements.

The contribution of Chiavenato (2004) is relevant in that the complexity of organizations was studied, along with their open and social character, and the role of individuals in them, from their respective roles. This paper considers that to mobilize and use the full capacity of people in their activities, organizations are changing concepts, and modifying managing practices. Instead of investing directly on products and services, they are investing in the people that know them, and know how to create, develop, produce, and enhance them.

The organization should adapt their strategies to make sure that people can fulfill their organizational mission appropriately (Chiavenato, 2004). This coincides with the criterion of Mayntz (1967, p.190), who claims that "Whereas an organization exists and functions, it has to accomplish three goals: make new members, achieve their permanence in them, and encourage them to perform their duties."

In the capitalist world, several authors from different perspectives of social and economic sciences perhaps began to observe business organizations in a more comprehensive way, providing arguments about the role of workers. One of them is

Senge (1992, p.12), who asserted, “The organizations that will gain relevance in the future will be those that discover how to make good use of enthusiasm, and the capacity of people to learn at all levels of the organization.” The same author was a critic of many of the current ideas in place, about human resources, and added, “In a smart organization, you have to merge every individual’s thought and action” (Senge, 1992, p.357).

The ideas of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1999) are very popular in the western academic world. Their engagement was based on the Japanese tradition, and they direct their efforts to creating a knowledge management model in business systems, which they named SECI. It is based on the traditional *Ba* Japanese tradition, which is regarded as shared context of emerging relations. This model promotes the creation of meeting spaces to encourage workers to be willing to demonstrate their basic knowledge at the service of the company they work for. This is based on symmetric conditions created in a work environment of commitment to the destiny of the organization.

Their contribution was made functionally to the interests of large capitalist corporations that financed, applied, and expanded the contribution of their research. Hence, it must be interpreted from a position favorable to assessing contributions, and also, point their limitations, which are determined by the need of capital to adjust their methods of exploitation to new historical conditions of postindustrial society, by unmasking the role of workers in companies, creating an image compatible with the politically sustained idea of democracy. However, many of their conclusions, based on scientific observation, may be useful as background.

In Cuba, several different research studies of engagement have been conducted, though few are dedicated to that analysis in business contexts. However, there are robust studies done on human capital theory, such as Odriozola (2007). The issue of engagement has been mainly studied from the social sciences, especially sociology and psychology, with the inclusion of several different concepts. Some of these studies have been conducted by the staff at the Center for Community Studies, Marta Abreu Central University of Las Villas (Alonso, Riera, and Rivero, 2013), and the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Camagüey (Caballero 2005), among others.

The need to restructure the academic approach of this topic is such that the new Constitution of the Republic of Cuba, Article 20 states, "Workers engage in planning, regulation, management, and economy control processes. ... The law regulates the participation of the staff in managing the state-owned business entities, and public administration's service units" (National Assembly of the People's Power 2019, p. 3).

Business activity in Cuba needs the development of scientific treatment of the issue of worker engagement, depending on different organizational conditions. The concept of collective owner, which is essential within a state-run socialist company, is visibly fading as vertical decisions and excessive sectorialization increase as the main method of work. This process must be reverted, since it is incompatible with the current updating of the Cuban socioeconomic model.

Actions to encourage worker engagement in managing of Venegas Livestock Raising Company

Local development depends on the actions of all the entities of the region. Among them, companies have a key role to play, though the traditional methods are not producing the currently demanded results. Clearly, though state companies share the economic space with other forms of property, it must gain broader space in Cuba as a guarantor of the ruling principle that says that the most important means of production are social property.

Worker engagement in this kind of company, regarded as an economic and social organization, is an essential condition of the construction of socialism. Hence, it is a major requisite for Venegas Livestock Raising Company (EPV) to surpass the current productive results, plays an outstanding role in the local socio-economic live, and contributes to the formation of a new type of workers that are engaged in building a striving and sustainable socialist society.

This reality, which limits the expansion of all its potential, is to change at EPV, by making better use of training and commitment of their workers with the organization. However, their engagement under the present conditions falls short from reaching possible transformation levels, even when the entire staff is stable, and makes higher personal achievements in terms of salary and social acknowledgement than other local entities.

This contradiction became the problematic situation to be studied, in order to learn the way of making good use of the engagement potential for comprehensive strengthening of the organization. This is assuming that the engagement potential _if acknowledged and spread by the actors involved in management, and other daily working conditions of the entity_ can contribute to integrated strengthening.

This company needs to identify worker engagement potential in their specific settings, but to achieve that, the analysis of theoretical analysis about this issue cannot be overlooked. It would be an element escaping from such possibilities, which turns into a demand met by the Municipal University Center in Yaguajay, in charge of all the study and result application process through several different activities, namely, training, advisory, and concerted work. This is the association where the link among the company, science, and higher education, as grounds for municipal development innovation, is materialized.

The next step is related to the characterization of worker engagement conditions in the entity, which contributes to the establishment of the relation between engagement potential and integrated strengthening. The real condition of this engagement is below its potential. Although workers were observed to discuss their plans, make proposals approved at different managing levels of the company, with the support of base union organizations, worker engagement is still mediated by an excess in vertical management methods, unidirectionality of communication strategies, voluntarism, and worker adjustment to the situation.

This reality limits the potential of knowledge, experience, discipline, and social cohesion existing within an organization. This result was analyzed by the demanding entity, as the basis on which the proposal for actions to orient worker engagement potential to comprehensive strengthening of EPV rests.

National and international trends of engagement potential in business activity were identified as part of a theoretical body containing the opinions to be discussed for application under the Cuban conditions. This document is a study material to support training actions within an organization, scientifically and methodologically.

The practical and methodological significance of this research lies in characterizing and establishing factors that may favor or hinder the deployment of engagement potential, in

order to strengthen the entity comprehensively. In a different moment, the possible extent of that potential was determined. This is hard to define data, since that potential _stemming from worker commitment, and the expression of individual and collective creativity turned into a social process at the company_ will have hardly predictable consequences in the very short run.

This element, more than the previous, may help the entity's management make decisions and set up stages and training programs that facilitate their pertinence, and to establish or improve strategies that contribute to successful accomplishment of their objectives. It can also work as a referent for studies done in similar entities of other municipalities in the country.

Documenting the research process and their written memoirs are one practical contribution corresponding to the knowledge management strategy at the Municipal University Center in Yaguajay, and the goals of GUCID Network Program, from the Ministry of Higher Education (GUCID, 2006).

The contribution of universities directly involved, such as Jose Marti University of Sancti Spiritus, and Marta Abreu Central University of Las Villas, provide them with accumulated experience that benefit their creative links with society and particular economic societies, with a more effective socio-cultural perspective adjusted to the present conditions of the country. The novelty lies in determination, based on a social science approach, of elements that confer relevance to all the components of engagement potential, as a way of strengthening socialist state-run companies comprehensively. It will depend on the particular conditions of a municipality, whose productive basis is being fully transformed, and requires stimulation of all local development processes to improve life quality, and meet their productive commitments to the province and the country, amid the Cuban socioeconomic model update in progress.

This study was divided into three stages: the first stage analyzed the theoretical and methodological background in relation to worker engagement potential in business activity, which permitted the establishment of common ground for research, according to the variables determined in the hypothesis, along with indicators, to provide a rationale for the empirical component. The second stage characterized the state of such

engagement in the target entity, and the third stage established the link between engagement potential and EPV comprehensive strengthening, suggesting actions in favor of orienting and making proper use of this potential for comprehensive strengthening of the company.

The results observed were useful to determine the following set of objectives for immediate work:

1. Evaluation of diagnostic results in engagement potential for comprehensive strengthening of the company, at the Board of Directors meeting.
2. Strengthening of capacities in terms of engagement managing methods at EPV:
 - a) Training of cadres, officials, and worker representatives in social engagement ways and techniques.
 - b) Training in the use of the power granted to basic company units (UEB) to promote social engagement.
 - c) Delivery of contextualized courses, as the fruit of constant diagnostic, including the vision and objectives laid out by the company, whose topics are focused on objective-based management, strategic planning, engagement, organizational responsibility, training systems, and others.
 - d) Creation of an effective communications system, including multidirectional circulation of communication: ascending, descending, horizontal, and transversal, at every EPV level.
 - e) Discussion of the objectives to achieve, business plans, and budget for all work areas, with higher engagement, and transparency.
 - f) Definition of a budget that backs the efficacy of such actions.
3. Strengthening of managing structure capacities at Venegas Livestock Raising Company, to promote comprehensive worker engagement.
4. Encouragement of worker engagement in the solution of problems, to present their initiatives and commitments, in reference to compliance and improvement of production quality, services, and managing:
 - a) Creation and operation of quality committees in every UEB, and the company.

- b) Organization of meetings at the National Association of Innovators and Rationalizers, and the Youth Technical Brigades, including the Science and Technology Forum.
 - c) Collective creation of the stock of problems at the company and UEB, and the generalization plans of innovation and rationalization.
 - d) Draft objective and control, according to the recommendations from higher levels, along with opinions from workers.
 - e) Strengthening of training and ranking in EPV work system, in meetings for economic efficiency, where workers can make suggestions that contribute to increases in production, productivity, continuous quality improvement, reduction of costs, etc.
 - f) Assurance of worker engagement in the Control Committee to tackle troubling areas, to provide solutions to problems.
 - g) Invitation to outstanding and reputed workers and specialists (used as a regular working method) to the Board of Directors and Technical Advisory Committee meetings, seeking more enriching opinions and experiences during discussions.
5. Higher comprehensive support to young workers at EPV.
 - a) Creation of a comprehensive attention system for young EPV workers.
 - b) Creation and utilization of spaces for exchanging and training young workers.
 6. Documentation of memoirs and life records of cadres and outstanding workers in the history of EPV. Actions: call for open contest participation about the history of livestock raising in Yaguajay.
 7. Publication in the media of monographs and essays in various formats, documenting the history, and work events of cadres and most outstanding workers in the history of livestock raising in Yaguajay.
 8. Strengthening of the ethical dimension, and social commitment in the everyday life of cadres and staff at EPV.
 - a) Development of a methodological workshop entitled “Cadre’s Code of Ethics, and human relations within a socialist company in Cuba”.
 9. Encouragement of vocational education in children and young people in the municipality to perform farming labor and become specialists in this area.

- a) Call for a contest to promote values and the role of farm workers in society, with the participation of children and the young population.
 - b) Organization of interest groups in primary and secondary schools about EPV activities.
10. Strengthening EPV in workers and families' knowledge about the local history and culture in Yaguajay.
- a) Design of a system of visits and discussions in historic and social interest sites, as well as setting ties with cultural personalities and institutions in the municipality and the province.
11. Increase of general culture of EPV workers and cadres, and their families.
- a) Development of talks on diverse topics, depending on the specific needs of every staff.
12. Increase in the level of appreciation of livestock aesthetics, by EPV cadres and workers, through the promotion of reading, and other local cultural manifestations.
- a) Implementation of socio-cultural project "livestock environment".

Methods like interview, document review, and participatory observation were used to perform a general evaluation of these actions. The evaluation actions were performed in the way of discussion spaces and social knowledge acquisition on the part of participants and people in charge, in terms of measuring the sustainability of results. This assessment can be qualitative and quantitative, according to the specifications of each action, which in both cases are combined to measure the transforming impact of the studied reality (evaluation of impact), and partial or full compliance of set objectives in intervention actions (evaluation of efficacy).

Therefore, it was deemed necessary to suggest a gradual evaluation, twice a year, in the Board of Directors meeting, as the one holding the right to determine how the different levels of implications in the EPV plan will be evaluated. The evaluation of actions is done in such a way that can it become another way of strengthening worker engagement, as they play a critical role in the process.

In the case of ground-level organizations of the Communist Party of Cuba and the Youth Communist League, the creation of commissions to politically support the

implementation of the results of this research, was considered necessary due to a marked political and ideological character of the actions suggested.

CONCLUSIONS

It was corroborated that during the investigation, engagement of all workers of this company, regardless of the role they play in the organizational chart, is essential to perfect this entity. To facilitate that, the conditions hindering the deployment of active engagement potential were determined to be mostly, of subjective nature.

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Conflicts of interest

The current paper has not been submitted to another journal, it is original, and the authors are the sole responsible for their comments.

Author contribution statement

Roberto Garcés González: Redaction of the theoretical rationale, and design of the manuscript. Review of the redaction.

Sinaí Boffill Vega: Redaction of results and abstract. Conclusions

Dianelys Plasencia Díaz: Search for empirical information, analysis of rresults.