Concepts of employee suggestions in business management – an interpretative approach

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Abstract

This study presents the issue of employee suggestion systems as a tool supporting innovation and organizational improvements, presenting their approach in business management. The author points out that suggestion systems are not only a mechanism for collecting and implementing employee ideas, but also an expression of a specific management philosophy based on participation, shared responsibility, and building an organizational culture based on trust, using the unconventional thinking of employees. The perspective presented in the study provides a better understanding of the social and cultural functions of suggestion systems as a tool for strengthening organizational identity, employee engagement, and co-creation of organizational value. An effective suggestion system requires the integration of tool-based solutions with the appropriate shaping of an organizational culture that fosters knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Introduction

Contemporary enterprises operate in a dynamic environment that requires continuous improvement of processes, products/services, and operating models. One of the key sources of innovation and organizational improvements are the ideas of employees who, thanks to their knowledge and experience, notice problems, opportunities, and gaps that are not apparent to management. Employee suggestion systems provide a basis for collecting ideas in an organized manner.

The aim of this study is to interpret the concept of employee suggestions in business management. The analysis focuses not only on the procedural description of suggestion systems, but also on their organizational, social, and cultural significance. These systems can be considered as part of a broader paradigm of employee participation and building an organizational culture based on trust, shared responsibility, and continuous improvement.

This study focuses on the interpretation of these systems in the context of motivational factors, organizational barriers, and the possibility of shaping relations between employees and management. The article aims to understand the role of employee suggestion systems not only as an operational tool, but also as an expression of a specific philosophy of long-term organizational management.

The concept of employee suggestions

Organizations are interconnected systems. In order to grow, every organization must have various management concepts (e.g., hard management or soft management) incorporated into its organizational system. One of the management concepts is employee suggestions, which are formal procedures that allow employees to submit their ideas, suggestions, and proposals for improving processes, efficiency, or other aspects of the company's operations. Their purpose is to encourage employees to actively participate (engage) in improving work or introducing innovations, which benefits the company and its employees [Griffin, 2004, pp. 109-110]. The concept of employee suggestions is an area of soft management, as the suggestions come from employees, and employees are the basis for developing soft management.

Managing an organization through employee suggestions is soft management of the organization. It should be remembered that employees are the potential of the organization; you just need to know how to listen to employees, and the solution to the problem will come about on its own.

In the business environment, innovation and continuous improvement are constant features of business development. A company that does not develop and introduce innovative solutions may lose its competitiveness and customer interest [Przybytniowski, 2023, pp. 2-7]. The concept of employee suggestions is a response to changes taking place in the world. They open the door for employees to actively participate in the process of improving work, which can contribute to the development of the company and increase its efficiency [Robbins, Judge, 2012, pp. 241-243]. It should be emphasized that employee suggestions can be implemented in an organization provided that employees have their suggestions and supervisors (managers) use these suggestions in management and motivate their subordinates[[(Leśniewski, 2018, pp. 79-98].

The characteristics of employee suggestion schemes are openness to other employees and simplicity in practical application. These schemes are available to all employees, regardless of hierarchical dependence, position, or professional experience. Every employee has the opportunity to submit their suggestions to their supervisor, which allows for more effective use of the company's employee potential [Leśniewski, 2018, pp. 79-98].

The purpose of introducing the concept of employee suggestions is not only to utilize the potential of employees, but mainly to achieve the intended goals. The following are the goals that can be achieved by introducing this concept into an organization [Gołembska, 2013, p. 87]:
▪ 1. Increased productivity and efficiency.
▪ 2. Improving the quality of products and services.
▪ 3. Increasing employee engagement.
▪ 4. Increasing creativity and innovation.
▪ 5. Building a positive image of the company.

One of the primary goals of implementing the employee suggestion concept is to increase productivity and efficiency in the company. Streamlining business processes,

optimizing activities, and introducing new solutions are ways to achieve this goal. Employees who perform their tasks on a daily basis are often the best source of knowledge about what can be improved or changed. Thanks to the employee suggestion scheme, employees have the opportunity to share their insights (perception of the company), which can contribute to increasing productivity and efficiency in the company [Grudowski, 2014, pp. 371–381].

Another goal of introducing the concept of employee suggestions is to improve the quality of products and services, which in turn translates into competitiveness and competitive advantage [Dziekański, 2012, pp.387-403]. Employees who work on products or services on a daily basis are able to identify their flaws and weaknesses and suggest ways to improve them. In this way, employees have the opportunity to share their ideas on how to increase the quality of the products and services offered by the company [Dziekański, 2012, pp. 387-403].

Employee suggestion schemes are a tool that can help increase employee engagement in the company, which in turn reduces staff turnover. By giving employees the opportunity to share their suggestions and ideas, they feel more involved in the company's activities. They also receive feedback on their ideas, which can have a positive impact on their motivation to work [Arundel, 2006, pp. 211-212]. This concept is the basis for creating so-called employee participation in the management of the organization. It should be remembered that employees have potential that is not always recognized or appreciated.

Another goal of introducing the concept of employee suggestions is to increase creativity and innovation within the company. Employees have the opportunity to share their ideas, and companies have the chance to implement new and innovative solutions. Employee suggestion schemes allow companies to tap into the potential of their employees, who usually have different ideas and insights, and thanks to the introduction of such a scheme, they have the opportunity to present and discuss them [Arundel, 2006, p. 215].

The introduction of employee suggestion schemes can also contribute to building a positive image of the company. Such tools make employees feel more involved in their work and have an impact on business processes in the company. This can translate into positive opinions and recommendations about the company, which in turn affects its image among customers and on the market [Bombiak, 2010, pp. 65–79].

Employee suggestion schemes and organizational development

Employee suggestion schemes are tools that allow employees to submit suggestions for improving the functioning of an organization. Such systems are not only a means of gathering valuable information, but also a way of building positive relationships between employees and employers. These concepts have many advantages, such as increasing employee engagement, improving organizational efficiency, and contributing to employee development by involving them in decision-making. As a result, organizations begin to treat employees as partners, which affects their sense of belonging and motivation [Achanga, Shehab, et al., 2006, pp. 461-463].

Employee suggestion schemes enable organizations to gain access to valuable information that helps them develop strategies aimed at improving work efficiency and quality. In addition, the introduction of such a scheme can contribute to increasing employee engagement in the life of the company, which in turn affects their motivation and willingness to work [Krasiński, 2012, p. 51].

Employees who have the opportunity to influence the processes taking place in the company feel more emotionally connected to it. Aware that their opinions and suggestions are taken into account, they are more committed to their work and strive to achieve better results. In this way, employee suggestion schemes increase employee motivation and commitment to work [Krasiński, 2012, pp. 228-231].

Implementing the concept of employee suggestions can contribute to increasing employee engagement in the life of the organization and building a culture of participation. Building a culture of participation is a process that involves engaging employees in decision-making and giving them the opportunity to express their opinions on the processes taking place in the organization. Such a culture has a positive impact on the atmosphere in the workplace and increases employee engagement in the life of the organization [Oakland, 2014, p. 521].

Employee suggestion schemes in an organization can positively influence the company's image in the eyes of employees and the public. Because employees have the opportunity to influence the processes taking place in the organization, they feel more emotionally connected to it, which improves relations between employees and the employer. This shows that the organization values and respects the opinions of its employees and is open to their ideas and suggestions. In this way, the company builds a positive image as an employer that cares about good relations with employees and their involvement in the life of the organization [Grudowski, 2014, p. 390].

In addition, it introduces a new approach to the organization that promotes creativity and innovation. Employees who have the opportunity to influence the processes taking place in the company have many valuable ideas that can contribute to improving the efficiency and competitiveness of the organization. As a result, the organization can gain a positive image as an innovative employer that cares about the development of its employees and strives to achieve better results [Grudowski, 2014, p. 391].

Organizational capabilities in maintaining employee engagement in the employee suggestion concept – conceptual model

Maintaining employee engagement in the suggestion concept can be challenging, but it is also necessary to stay competitive in the market. If employees do not see the results of their suggestions or receive feedback on them, they may lose motivation to continue working for the organization. It is important for the organization to communicate regularly with employees, informing them of progress in implementing their suggestions and rewarding them for constructive proposals [Shook, 2010, p. 178].

If the suggestions submitted are ignored or do not receive sufficient attention from management, supervisors, etc., employees may feel discouraged and demotivated about the concept of employee suggestions. It is important for the organization to respond promptly to employee suggestions, acknowledging their value and emphasizing their contribution [Shook, 2010, p. 179].

If employees do not trust the concept of employee suggestions, e.g., they fear reprisals or do not believe in the real possibility of influencing the organization, they may be less willing to engage in the process of implementing this concept. Building trust requires clear and honest communication, ensuring the confidentiality of submissions, and fair and objective consideration of proposals. Employees need motivation and rewards that will encourage them to actively participate in the suggestion system. If the organization does not offer appropriate rewards, such as bonuses, promotions, recognition, or career development opportunities, employees may lose interest in participating in the process. They may also need support and appropriate tools to effectively submit suggestions. If they lack knowledge about procedures, processes, or do not have access to the necessary resources, they may be discouraged from submitting suggestions. The organization should provide training, support, and access to tools that will facilitate employees' active participation in the employee suggestion concept [Wyrwicka, Zasada, 2008, p. 103].

In order to maintain employee engagement in employee suggestion schemes, the organization should continuously monitor and improve the process of submitting these suggestions. It is important to take employee opinions into account, respond to their proposals, and reward them for their contributions. In addition, promoting a culture of open communication and trust, and providing adequate support and tools, will help maintain employee engagement in the suggestion submission process. For the employee suggestion concept to function in an organization, an employee suggestion system must be created based on this concept, which consists of various factors (elements).

The employee suggestion system can take a formal or informal form as an organizational mechanism that facilitates and encourages employees to submit ideas, concepts for improvement, or innovations for solving various problems. The aim of the presented system is to use the knowledge, experience, and skills of employees to increase efficiency and build employee engagement in the life of the organization.

The above conceptual model divides the factors of the employee suggestion system into four basic groups and begins with the unconventional thinking of employees. This type of thinking is the starting point of the conceptual model, as it allows us to go beyond the established patterns of the organization's operation in the four basic areas of employee suggestions.

The first group consists of organizational factors, which integrate: organizational structure (centralization/decentralization, hierarchy, information flow), organizational culture (openness to change, trust, climate of innovation), organizational strategies and goals (consistency of the suggestion system with the mission and strategic goals), size and industry of the company – the impact of the specific nature of the business on the suggestion system.

The second group consists of procedural factors, which include: suggestion submission procedures (ease and accessibility of the mechanism), evaluation and selection of ideas (transparency of criteria, speed of decision-making [Leśniewski, 2021, pp. 155-168], implementation (planning, resources for implementation), feedback for employees (informing them about the status of suggestions), reward and motivation systems (financial and non-financial forms of recognition).

The third group consists of human factors related to: employee motivation (need for recognition, influence on the organization), communication and relationships (trust between employees and management), attitudes toward change (openness or resistance), employee competence and creativity (professional knowledge and ability to generate ideas [Przybytniowski, 2017, pp. 257-276].

The fourth group consists of technological factors that focus on: IT systems (platforms for submitting and tracking suggestions), access to knowledge and data (enabling better ideas), automation of evaluation (preliminary classification of ideas), and collaboration support (teamwork tools).

The employee suggestion system is the result of unconventional thinking on the part of employees in synergy with a group of factors, i.e., organizational, procedural, human, and technological. Weakness in any of these areas contributes to a decrease in the effectiveness of the system and limits its impact on the company's performance.

Summary

For decades, employee suggestion systems have been the subject of interest among management theorists and practitioners as one of the key mechanisms supporting broadly understood organizational improvement processes. However, from an interpretative perspective, they should not be viewed primarily as a set of technical procedures for collecting and selecting employee ideas. The analysis carried out in this study outlines that employee suggestion systems should be seen as a reflection of a management philosophy based on trust, participation, shared responsibility, and the formation of relationships based on mutual respect between employees and the organization.

Today's companies, operating in conditions of uncertainty, risk, and pressure to innovate continuously, need effective ways to leverage the knowledge and experience of their employees [Varese, Wojnarowska, et al., 2025]. Employee suggestion systems provide a framework for this process, but their effectiveness depends on many contextual factors. This study highlights the importance of organizational culture, leadership style, incentive systems, and the level of internal communication as key determinants of the success of such solutions.

Employee suggestion systems should encourage unconventional thinking that goes beyond any barriers or limitations and creates completely new solutions. Creative employees are those who should work in developmental organizations.

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