Computerizing an Organization:

Zesto's Ice Cream

I303 Organizational Informatics

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A. Two Changed Aspects

Two changed aspects of the dynamics of organizing that I believe, in the future, will be correlated with mediation by digital technologies are organizing labor and community building. I believe that these two aspects of the dynamics of organizing will be correlated with mediation by digital technologies, because digital technologies are enabling people to communicate and interact in new ways. To take advantage of digital technologies and remain competitive with other organizations as well as to maintain a happy, productive workforce companies will need to adopt a dynamic of organizing that will enable the organization to utilize these resources.

The changed aspect of organizing labor is base on Frederick Winslow Taylor's theory around the idea that information needs to go to the upper level of management because they have the most power and authority and are best suited to deal with this information. Digital technologies will disrupt this and allow those at lower levels in the organization to use and interact with the information, and create new information, allowing the lower level employees to have access to this information will help them feel more involved in the organization and in theory increase their happiness (Herzberg 1967). In this way, the mediation of digital technologies will help build a more productive, engaged and happy community.

B. The Organization

I used to work at Zesto's, a local chain of ice cream shops, when I was in high school. Zesto's has been operating for over 50 years and for 35 of those years was a family business. It has expanded and currently has ten locations. The area I have chosen to focus on are its scheduling and culture.

Currently, the scheduling system is more complicated than it has to be. Every other week schedules are made for the upcoming two weeks. Prior to the new scheduling coming out, employees' mark on a calendar located in the store what days they are unavailable to work. The majority of workers are high school students so in addition to school, they are also involved in other extracurricular activities. Some of these activities (clubs, sports practice, volunteer work) are reoccurring, but some of them have altering schedules. Although ideally an employee would mark on the calendar that they are unavailable to work prior to the new schedule being released, there are times when employees have forgotten to mark off for a certain day or something has come up that makes them unavailable to work. When this occurs the employees have to call around to other employees and see if they can cover their shift. This process becomes more complicated because the workers are not all interchangeable due to their varying amounts of experience.

The primary issue with the organization is that they handle their scheduling without the aid of technology.   The main problem this creates is that the managers have to spend more time than is necessary setting up the schedule and the employees have less control over when they will be working, leaving them feeling "dehumanized." By adding

technology into the organization scheduling will be easier for the managers and the employees will be able to have a schedule that is more suited to their needs.

C. New Digital Mediation

The new digital mediation, which Zesto's would greatly benefit from, would be an online scheduling system where employees could preference their days they want to work and the system would automatically schedule them.

On the new scheduling website employees would be able to input the days they need off. Not only would this be more convenient for the employees, it would also be more convenient for the manager. A spreadsheet would pull in the employee submitted data and formulas could be used to generate the schedule.

Another advantage of this system over the previously used man made system would be the ability for employees to give more input on when they would be scheduled. In the past, employees were only offered the ability to list when they couldn't work. This was mainly due to the fact that other special request such as "I can work that day, but it wouldn't be ideal" were just one extra aspect the manager had to take into consideration when making the schedule and so they were overlooked. By using a spreadsheet, formulas can be used to increase employee satisfaction without adding extra work for the manager. Employees could rank from 1-5 what days they can't work (5) to what days they would like to work (1), with the numbers in between showing preference.

The scheduling would also be improved with this technological mediation is by creating a process for employee to swap shifts with one-another. The current method of doing this requires the employee who wants to find someone to work his/her shift to get

in communication with the other employees individually and ask them if they can switch. This can be a long and painful process. Managers also find issue with this because sometimes all employees aren't equal when it comes to their performance. To solve the issue of employees switching or taking each other's work shifts, one part of the site would allow employees to post which day they are trying to find coverage for and which days they would be willing to give up. Managers could also authorize who can switch with whom so that each shift has the required amount of experience.

This system also makes it easier for manager to keep track of how many hours each employee is working. They can easily see how the hours are distributed and who is willing to work more than they currently they are. Manager could also have a backend view where they could make notes about each employees and their performance.

A final way that this new system would be beneficial is because it would allow the owners of Zesto's to view the schedule and see how the manager is doing the scheduling. In the past they had little access to this information so if a new manager would take over the knowledge that the manager has wouldn't be available to the owners of the next manager.

D. Strategy

The underlying strategy of this approach to this problem of scheduling is Zuboff's concept of informating. The strategy behind incorporating more technology into Zesto's to make the scheduling process easier is an example of informating because the process is using information technology to collect and share as much information about scheduling as possible with employees and allowing them to use it with the other employees, the

managers, and the owners (Zuboff 1989). This would affect the managers by changing their role of directing the schedule to one of facilitating the schedule. Initially managers and employees would have to be trained how to use the system. Due to the demographic of employee I don't believe they would have a hard time adjusting. Initially the manager may push back on the idea, but once they realize what the system can do I believe they will embrace the change.

By using a website to manage the scheduling process, Zesto's will be able to provide their employees with an easier way to voice their schedule preferences and increase their satisfaction while also making it easier for the manager to schedule the employees. This in turn will lead to a happier company culture and increase the employee retention rate because employees realize that Zesto's makes it easy to work around a busy high-school students' schedule.

E. Possible Problems

There are possible problems that I foresee with implementing my solution for Zesto's. There could be some people that liked the simplicity of the scheduling that was used in the past. They might not want to get to know a new system. Also, some manager may get upset because they have less control over the schedule than in the past.

Employees may also abuse the system by taking advantage of how easy it is to find other people to cover their shift. Although this is something that the platform is able to do, it shouldn't be used excessively.

Another problem that could arise would be the system crashing. Errors do occur and systems do go down. This could cause data about scheduling preference to be lost and confusion about who is scheduled when may occur.

F. Preventing Possible Problems

I would attempt to prevent the problems that I anticipate and mentioned above by setting up training sessions, monitoring ability, and backup systems.

Training sessions would be helpful to help teach employees and managers how to use the system. Because the majority of the employees are younger, I don't think the training session would be too long or tedious. The management training may be bit longer because it would also include showing manager how to use the backend of the system, which has more administrative controls and would require initial setup. Managers would also be trained on how to fix small problems that could occur with the system.

Monitoring systems could also be used to prevent problems. An issue I mentioned above is that some employees may overuse the feature that allows them to switch shifts or have someone cover their shift. Employees that constantly are asking to have someone work for them could be detrimental to company culture.   A monitoring system would allow the manager and owners to have a dashboard view of the employees and could provide information such as how many times an employee has switched shifts with other employees. They could also see how many hours each employee works easily. The monitoring system and dashboard would also overcome the issue of managers feeling like they are losing control. When looking to decide who to give a raise

to and who to promote, information about how often the employee says he's available could play a role in the decision.

G. Monitoring the Organizing Correlates in "A"

I would also monitor to determine whether the organizing correlates I identify in "A" are indeed manifest. I would see if the mediation of digital technologies correlations to an increase of organizing labor and increase community building. In other words it would decrease Taylorism and increase "informating." I would do this by using survey, focus groups, and observing the employees, managers, and owners a number of times over a period of 1 year and compare the results. I would also perform these surveys, focus groups, and observations prior to implementing the system develop a base level. When surveying I would see if employees are showing symptom of the "blue collar blues" or if they feel dehumanized in this line of work(HEW 1972).

My theory is that employees will feel more humanized and be overall happier due to this scheduling system. That sounds like a grand claim for a scheduling system, but employees now have more control over their schedule and will be more likely working when they want to be working. This will also increase manager happiness because they will have to deal with disgruntled employees less often.

I will know if Taylorism is still alive and well if employees feel dehumanized and managers are being extremely controlling. Another indicator that I can roughly use will be the turnaround rate of employees. Ideally the system will increase employee satisfaction so much that less employees will decide to quit. This is based off the assumption that if employees have more control over when they can work, they will be

happier when they work. It is also based off my knowledge that employee will leave because they are busy high school students with other activities that they are involved in.

I believe that this system will be a success if surveys show that employees feel like they have more control over the schedule and show an increase in overall happiness at work as well as managers showing that the scheduling process is less stressful to them.

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