

# An Analytical View of the Key Elements in Management/Union Relationships through the Introduction and Implementation of the Job Evaluation Programme

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## Abstract

*UNLESS the job evaluation programme gains employee acceptance and support management needs to be prepared to reconsider some aspects of the **principle of “management prerogative” and “employee rights”** without underestimating or exaggerating the right of either. A clear understanding mapping out the programme’s direction and objective must be translated or reflected in a joint management – union venture, with the programme’s strategy complimenting the organization’s mission and sense of purpose. This should include a desire to bring about harmony, improved team work and team spirit, thereby promoting cordial relations among all the parties concerned. This in turn will help strengthen both vertical and horizontal communication channels within the organization which must lead to an improved, seamless delivery of service where all parties understand a common purpose. By contrast, failure to go down this route will mean that the job evaluation programme risks becoming no more than a waste of time, effort and resources. As a consequence it can be anticipated that it will be reduced to simply creating a source of confusion and or chaos. At best the programme will turn out to be an academic exercise only. There may still be much thought, with thought – provoking assumptions and perhaps even some good ideas. But these will operate in a vacuum only with no direction forward. No matter how much carefully studied and soundly designed the job evaluation programme is, winning employee acceptance is an inevitable requirement. It is incompatible with conventional wisdom for management to have a programme that affect employees’ livelihood and yet is conducted and administrated by a single party’s mind (management only) without sharing that vision and gaining the support of the other interested parties. This paper identifies the need for the development of strong cooperative relations together with the necessity for a joint effort between the interested parties to exist before any job evaluation programme can be successfully taken forward. Furthermore, it considers that the twin opposites of over-emphasis upon “management prerogative” and the underestimation of the management’s role and responsibility are both common causes for why a job evaluation programme may fail. The topic of this paper, therefore, is to deal with and explore a problematic area with controversial views. For many employers it may feel that job evaluation programmes only serve to place a millstone round their respective necks. Nonetheless, the topic is not one that can or should be circumvented and this paper seeks to address the subject matter head-on.*

**Key words:** Job evaluation programme, Joint Management – Union programme, Participation, Management prerogative, Employees rights, Management attitudes, Union attitudes, Responsibly

## 1.0 Fundamentals

### 1.1 Introduction

Wherever the term ‘job evaluation programme’ is mentioned, it refers to a formal job evaluation programme unless stated otherwise.

A job evaluation program, if designed and conducted properly, is an organizational instrument for developing an effective pay system with a view to positively improving staff morale, co-operation and efficiency. The programme seeks to achieve this through creating job and pay satisfaction along with a general feel-good factor towards the organization. Simultaneously, the programme is affected by, amongst other things, the philosophy of senior management, capability, size of the organization, together with the level of both union and employee understanding and cooperation. Thus, it is a vehicle of performance reflecting an organization’s mission and strategy that has built on or emanated from its early vision and ideology – strictly in relation to job evaluation theory and philosophy for pricing the jobs of its employees. It is important to emphasize that **no single** pay programme or **pay scheme** meets all the employer’s objectives or all the workers’ demands, but through **it** an organization is brought closer to its overall objective of a fair and consistent wage and salary programme. However, **an appropriate job analysis and (consequently) a job description are essential** in setting up, on a firm footing, a wages and salaries scheme in any organization.

Getting the job description completed with the approval of all parties concerned is a vital procedure, paving the way from a clearly defined, positive starting point towards a planned job evaluation programme with the anticipated outcome of securing a satisfactory level of cooperation and coordination between those parties.

### 1.2 What a job evaluation programme assumes:

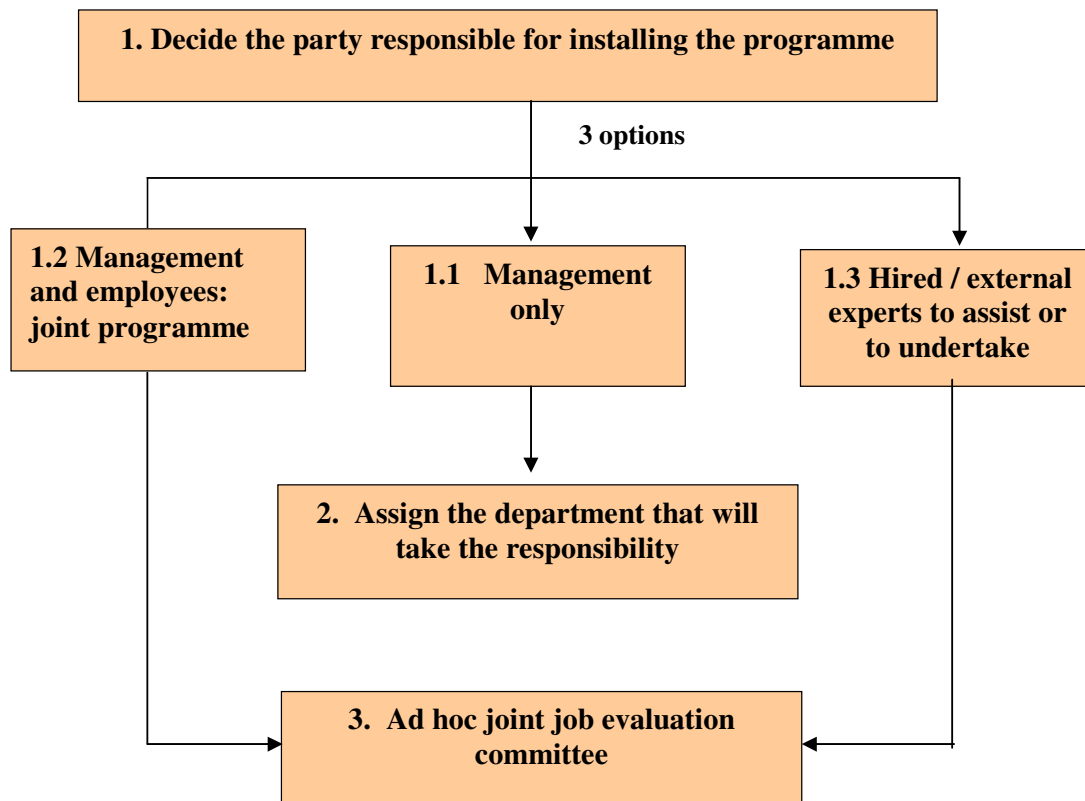
A job evaluation programme is based upon the following **assumptions**:

- (a) that it is logical to assign the highest pay to those jobs that maximise their contribution to obtaining pre-defined, organizational goals,
- (b) that people feel more fairly treated if wages are seen to be based upon the relative worth of the jobs they are employed to do,
- (c) that the goals of the organization are furthered by maintaining a job-structure based upon relative job worth (French, 1974: 315), and
- (d) that there is a degree of consistency between the structure of the wage rates of an organization to those in the broader community.

Ideally, **no** job evaluation **programme** will produce outcomes that **will result in** any of the existing workforce taking a **reduction in wages**. But if / when this to occur then, quite clearly, those that do take a drop in pay will be dissatisfied and resentful. Regrettably, however, there are times when the programme clearly demonstrates that some jobs have been arbitrarily priced in the past and should be down-graded. This creates a dilemma for which there is **no easy solution**. The existing workforce may be granted top-up allowances that means they do not lose out. Or, the organisation may guarantee protected pay schemes, again for the existing work-force. However, whatever scheme is introduced, it remains the case that until the existing workforce move on then new recruits will be doing the same job at a lesser rate which is the very thing that the job evaluation programme seeks to eliminate. Consequently, any adopted strategy must be identified before the job evaluation programme is proposed so that everyone is aware of the process. Furthermore, the programme may need to be phased in to cover the transition until everyone is on the new, lower rate.

**1.3 Assigning responsibility for implementing the programme:** One of the basic duties of an organization which has decided to undertake job evaluation is to assign exact responsibilities for installing the programme.

**Figure 1: Responsibility For Installing Job Evaluation Programme**



Does the management organization alone wish to run and undertake this responsibility? Should management and employees combine to achieve this goal? If the latter is true, then should they work together on their own or bring in hired consultants to assist them? Will the industrial relations department or will human relations management be involved? In the experience of Mondy, Noe Premeaux & Mondy, J. (2002: 324), the human resource department is typically responsible for administering job evaluation programmes. Yet, some look at the responsibility of the programme that should be in the hands of the line managers so that they could act and decide what is required without returning to the personnel/ HRM specialists (see Cushway, B., 1999: 152). **However, whichever party or corner undertakes programme responsibility**, they should keep in mind that it is important, at all levels and stages of their work, not to decide something based upon assumption alone. In short they should not exercise an amputation before diagnosis; for this will result have a debilitating effect upon the company, reducing its internal structure to chaos. The programme management or the committee must always remember that however competent the organization, their **policies and decisions** largely reflect the organization's personality regardless of its **real intentions**.

Simply put, although the actual or prime responsibility for administering a job evaluation programme lays with the personnel department / HRM, in some cases, a wage and salary division has been established within the department. It is assumed that this division has a good knowledge and understanding of job evaluation and its requirements. But where the organization is complex and big enough, the salary administration department has its own entity among other organization's departments and then the salary department will take control of the programme. Otherwise, the overall responsibility of introducing the job evaluation programme should be left to a senior executive, accountable to either senior management or to the board, to which he reports on-going progress and whatever is needed to secure the programme's success.

## **2.0 Job Evaluation Programme and employee acceptance:**

### **2.1 Difficulties in Gaining Employee Acceptance**

**Gaining employee acceptance for many employers is inevitably difficult.**

What is the industry's biggest headache in installing a job evaluation programme? Is it writing a job description, classifying the jobs, rating the jobs, computing wages, lack of required technical knowhow, financial factor **or** is it helping employees to understand the programme **and** to accept it? This last problem (gaining employee acceptance), is undoubtedly the biggest difficulty for it represents the organization's biggest challenge in setting up a job evaluation programme that will be successful in reducing wage grievances, providing rewards for the job's value, and furnishing a basis for fair and equitable pay rates. Daniels (1953: 30) states that, in practice, many job evaluation programmes are neither understood nor accepted by the very people for whose benefit they were installed. Although a half-century has passed since this statement was made, the general illustration and discussion throughout this section indicates that it may still be largely valid. Despite this, most management teams would agree that an invitation to participate does not increase conflict; instead, it reduces the likelihood of it, since steps are being taken to correct problems. At the same time, more important, non-participatory job evaluation installations do not solve the manifold problems of gaining employee and supervisory understanding and acceptance.

### **2.2 People are hardly identical in their aims, yet they must work together and in harmony for the organization they work for.**

In this context, management should think strategically and be fully aware that its decisions will interact with the union's decisions, actions and/or reactions. Both sides must firmly believe the point made by John McMillan, that "*rarely are different people's aims identical*". That is to say there are two faces in this context; one shows the area of conflict while the other reveals the scope for cooperation (McMillan, 1992: 4, 21). **Management should not believe that union weakness inevitably adds strength to management's position.** This is "*sheer self delusion*" and in reality results in management frustration (Drucker, 1974: 166). Therefore, the position of either is neither a matter of dominance to win a case, nor a power struggle. Neither is helpful in a work environment where people meet face-to-face daily. Thus, both parties have to look ahead for 'a win-win solution' or 'a win-win result', which is an agreement mutually satisfying everyone (Whitehead, 1992: 83). The more a business or industry lives in a competitive market or environment, the more there is a need for better synergistic or complementary relationships through employee participation in order to improve business performance (Morton, 1998: 142). One of the best ways, therefore, to ensure the success of a job evaluation programme is for the management to invite the union to take part in the programme.

### 2.3 Union attitudes towards the job evaluation programme

The result of inviting union participation (provided the union representatives can be satisfied and have consensus of fairness and desirability of the programme) is that the union will then go a long way towards convincing the employees. If the union cannot be convinced then highly doubtful results of the programme can be expected. Sometimes unions will take a different approach to the programme. For instance, some unions may feel that their participation in the programme and its policies would weaken their ability to challenge these policies. It may not wish to become involved in the manner in which results are obtained, since it is not concerned with the scheme used, but instead it is concerned only with the final results, which it considers at the negotiating table. To this end, such unions may prefer to remain aloof with a freedom to express disagreement and challenge management if necessary. That is to say, the union's position is that it accepts job evaluation only as an initial decision technique and yet retains the right to dispute the final result of the job pricing or evaluation decision through grievance procedures.

At this point there are different views in the literature on job evaluation. For instance, Mike Burns, (1978: 40-1) states that without employee involvement the result of evaluation will probably look good and logical to members of management. But the workers will see this as a management decision that is arbitrary and at times irrational. Merrie (1968: 22) goes further and states that experience in Britain and America has shown that, provided the unions are kept fully informed of results and how the scheme operates, it is better for unions to leave evaluation to management whilst retaining the right to criticize at a later stage if necessary. Conversely, Gary Dessler, 2000: 405) mentions that the presence of management on a job evaluation programme committee may be viewed with a degree of both discomfort and/or suspicion by the employees. He maintains that a human resources manager (as specialist, expert and proven facilitator in the field) would probably be the more appropriate person to sit on the committee than would a line-manager. In granting this, management could still reserve the right to serve on such a committee.

### 2.4 Management attitudes towards the union/employees participating in the programme:

At the other extreme, some employers may see the whole job evaluation process as a 'management prerogative' that needs no employee involvement at all (Armstrong, 1999: 134). This means a tendency to introduce a unilateral (rather than a joint) approach to the job evaluation programme. This approach may save management some effort, time and money and provides management with a high level of satisfaction. In effect it is an endorsement of a management's right to manage and make decisions. From the management's point of view (or at least in the case of some management teams) the decision about employee influence in the decision-making process is an extremely sensitive issue. Some managers want little or no compromise over this issue. They feel that the union has no part to play. They believe that the role of driving an organization towards its goal is a management prerogative matter. Therefore, they consider that management knows best when it comes to determining to what extent or degree employees should become involved in decision-making processes. Any tendency or thinking outside this framework may be seen as stereotypical thinking. However, this attitude will be at the expense of ignoring the influence of the other party, or parties, in the work place and will likely cause deterioration in employee-employer relations. Consequently, Pritchard and Murlis (1992: 191) in recognising such risks, introduces the "non – employee panel based approach to evaluation". Essentially, the role is handed to a *management (specialists) evaluation panel* which, by design, includes neither an employee nor a union presence.

**Accordingly**, we may find the following organization's attitudes to be among the most popular: -

- (1) An organization with a job evaluation scheme prefers to disclose job description and job grading to its employees.
- (2) An organization would like to go further by making all documents and details concerned with job evaluation available to its employees.
- (3) An organization would approach and keep the union / employees informed first about the job evaluation scheme.
- (4) An organization invites the union to take part directly from the early stages in the evaluation scheme.
- (5) An organization would only get involved in serious discussions with the union at the time of the results of the evaluation scheme.
- (6) An organization believes in, and is committed to, the 'management prerogative' principle.

### 2.5 Cordial relations rather than focusing on 'management prerogative'

If this is achieved then both management and employee participation in any joint effort required for the success of job evaluation programme is guaranteed for as long as the cordial relations can be maintained. This, in fact, would reduce the problems of administration, in number and in size – especially at the implementation level. Similarly, it would help smooth procedural problems, if or when they arise.

Henry Ford (1863–1947) supports this position and has a canny saying in this context: “*Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success*” (in Clemmer and McNeil, 1990: 176). A good organization policy includes “*consultation in all matters affecting the workforce*” (Carter, 1986: 165).

## 2.6 Type of strategy needed:

**Thus, we need a programme with a strategy that** induces employees to be committed to it. This strategy should show employees the reason and importance of their involvement in the programme, make employees realize that there is something in it for them, and employees should have to know that their involvement is valued and appreciated by management. Otherwise, there will be an informational vacuum (on the part of the employees) which most likely will be filled with discrepant confidence; where statements, opinions, suppositions or assumptions, predictions, expectations, beliefs and convictions may negatively serve in place of truth and factual knowledge of the programme. **Furthermore**, the programme’s strategy recognizes the usefulness and importance of having an **ICE (In Case of Emergency)** unit or sub-committee to deal with any contingency or uncertainty issue - particularly for the big organizations where the job evaluation programme covers a very large number of jobs and various types of professions to be evaluated, and probably with more than one single evaluation method applied. This unit may have a coordinative relationship with the maintaining and monitoring unit in addition to the direct relationship with the job evaluation committee and management.

## 2.7 The importance and need for empathy, rather than sympathy, towards the employees’ feelings, values, demands and attitudes

One of the most effective characteristics of management is the possession of empathy (see Koontz and Weihrich, 1998: 235). Here, management enjoys the ability and awareness skills of understanding and sharing in the feelings and related aspects (communication) of others (see also Sutherland. and Canwell, 2004: 106). This kind of management’s attribute can have a vital role to play in winning employee cooperation and acceptance of the job evaluation programme. Management can come to know or realize that its programme and its related course of action are on the right path when it receives the support, advice or consultation, and participation of the employees and their union. Hence, employee involvement is often seen as an essential feature for the organization and for maintenance of the job evaluation scheme.

However, a reference is to be made to the “Attribution Theory” under which managers are invited to analyze, interpret and understand the motives or causes of employees’ behavior in terms of action and reaction. In this context, it may also be useful for management to make use of “Games Theory”. To this, one may recall the work of William Ouchi (Japanese) and his theory Z, (see Bennett, R., 1995: 236) out of which: tasks are assigned to groups rather than individuals (group centered activities); open communications both with the group workers and between management and Labour; and workers participation in decision – making that may affect their work and / or their rights. Despite this, the above discussion on diversity in the attitude of unions demonstrates that, to an extent, these attitudes are a product of the very nature and system of the organization concerned. Consequently, this together with the perspective of management, who ultimately has the final word, will determine whether a unitary, pluralistic or Marxist approach is adopted.

## 3.0 Joint Management - Union Job Evaluation Programme:

### 3.1 One plus one can make more than two (metaphysically).

The above illustration shows that employees’ participation is an important part of the installation and development of the programme. Moreover, their participation increases their understanding and perception of it. One way of doing this is by dissemination of information to employees, as well as encouragement of joint deliberations with them. Quite often, in practice, some decisions may fail beyond the capability of single minds and/or single individuals, and thus with the joint management - workers job evaluation programme a collective operation through **a team work members can make one plus one equal three or even more rather than two**. Studies show that workers can offer more than just their Physical effort to perform their jobs should they be induced to get involved and participate in work issues that affect them [see David Dyer and Peter Stimpson , (2001: 174)]. It may be relevant, here, to mention the Article 1 of the European Union Treaty (Maastrich Treaty, Feb. 1992), which redrafted and strengthened Article 117 of the Rome Treaty (March 1957). Amongst its current European Union (EU) objectives, this Treaty reinforces the importance of maintaining a dialogue between management and workers (see McLlroy, 1995: 326). This, in turn, will help to avoid misunderstanding and unnecessary disputes. Otherwise it is clear that the collective workforce, both individually and through the unions, will become mistrustful of the true intentions of management and come to suspect that there is a hidden agenda at work which will ultimately be detrimental to themselves. In this way, management-union task forces perform a role of mutual problem solving (Milkovich and Boudreau, 1998: 728).

In this context, though Job evaluation is neither a collective bargaining process nor an alternative to it, management should be well aware of and conceive that it is **virtually** impossible, in economic terms, for an industrial society to look at wage determining factors without having some consideration to the role and influence of the trade unions (see Neil Fuller, 1990: 163).

### **3.2 A joint programme has a better chance to serve and succeed.**

Joint programmes are, by and large, more successful and desirable than unilateral ones, particularly in big organizations where many job evaluation programmes have been installed and maintained jointly by management and union. Note that the word 'jointly' here does not necessarily imply that both parties are on equal terms and enjoy equal weight, importance, effect or influence. Rather it implies that discussion and participation has actually taken place between the parties concerned. Thus, the word 'jointly' here does not mean formally sharing **final** responsibility for the programme if, for instance, it is subsequently seen to be unsuccessful in its application. The spirit of cohesion between management and union creates a sense of obligation or commitment to the required objectives of the programme. To achieve such a stage of cohesion one needs well-developed minds of professional and management staff, each with a strong and deep vision; this will "... enable them to see the big picture but act in response to local conditions." (Torrington, 1994: 227); in which case it is a reference **to** the interaction of the internal and external environments **and to** the kind of expertise needed.

### **3.3 Determine the level and size of employee participation in the programme**

However, in spite of the importance of employees or trade union participation in the job evaluation programme and whether the organization is unionized or non-unionized; a crucial point lies in determining who holds the responsibility for deciding the level and amount of employee participation as well as influencing the mechanisms and processes involved, particularly where there are many players involved in the field. Is it, for instance, left for the employees and their trade unions to decide? Or is it the employer represented by management? Or, again, does it come down to external, environmental and socio-cultural factors? Or, finally, do all of these play second fiddle to government legislation and policies? Meanwhile, an important thing needs to be remembered here. This is that the idea or principle of employee participation is a philosophy of organizational management without having **a particular / specified institutional form** for it. Alternatively, do all these parties and factors have significant roles to play on an interactive basis? It is difficult, generally, to see how any one element or party could act independently from any or all of the rest, but it should be recognized that in the final analysis, company management takes the lead role in deciding how much participation will be granted and how that participation will be interpreted and processed.

### **3.4 The efficacy of legislation over employee participation in the Programme.**

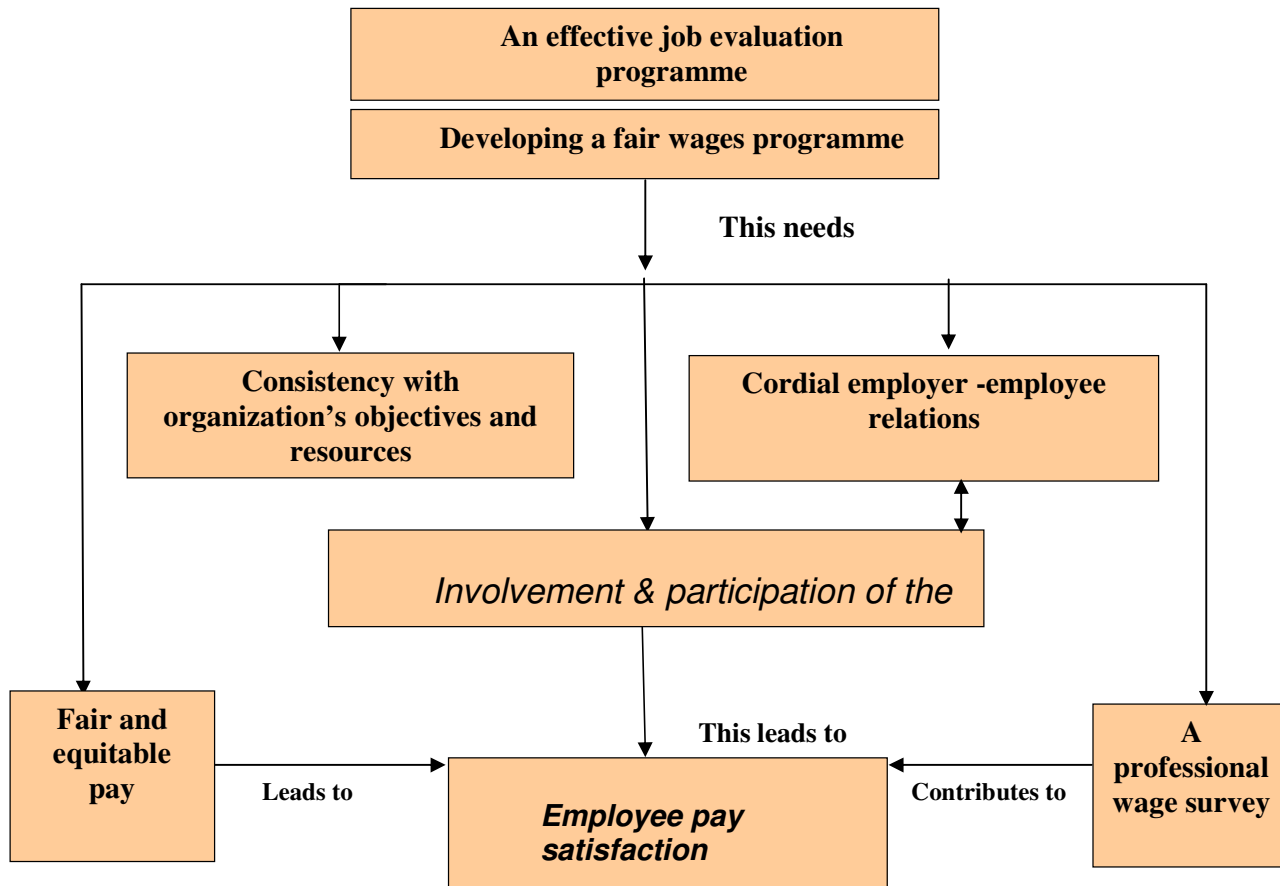
Management, in the main, influences the size, quality and mechanism of the job evaluation programme **unless** some or all of the other players or actors involved are willing to directly challenge it. **How, and by how much, employee participation is truly and actively involved in decision-making** remains largely down to the influence of management. In all cases, however, this neither changes the role nor reduces the degree of influence determined by government legislation and policies. Rather, this shows that the government's role and influence (likewise the role of the unions and other environmental forces) are partial, though vital. The managerial task here is to develop the organization's policy in relation to the amount of influence that employees may have regarding areas such as levels of pay and working conditions. Thus, employees' involvement **may** not bring about or give employees a 'real' or 'felt' influence in the decision-making process. Some studies show that the existence of legislative mechanisms, although important, do not necessarily increase the employees' feelings for the participation that exists. Nor does it guarantee that their voice will be heard and their influence felt. Consequently, despite what may actually be in place, workers may feel as distant from their representatives as they are from management of the organization (Beer et al., 1984: 8, 46). Once again, although employee participation generally can be seen as an indicator for their willingness, acceptance and understanding; **in practice, the principle of 'management prerogative' is the main factor in shaping employee participation and involvement** – where it is the management's influence that holds sway in this matter.

### **3.5 Experiences and surveys support shared visions through a joint management – union programme.**

Experience shows that internal industrial relations often improve when job evaluation is successfully introduced on a joint management-union basis (Craig, 1977: 36). A survey of the IPM by Thakur and Gill (1976: 34) found that 37 percent of the 213 organizations responsible for carrying out the job evaluation exercise lay with a joint management-union committee. This compares with 31.4 percent where the personnel manager/department was responsible. Therefore, the trend towards a participatory approach in joint management-union committee is a healthy one. It is a joint approach that takes place when the parties concerned are convinced of its benefits.

At this point where all related parties willingly join together, they establish “shared visions” which initially “emerge from personal vision” as stated by Bob De Wit and Ron Meyer (2005: 510). Despite its importance, **the case of sharing vision, poses the question of; what then are the reasons behind the discontinuity of job evaluation programmes in some big organizations?** There are some difficulties and obstacles, which may halt or preclude organizations continuing desirable job evaluation programmes. They are of various origins and backgrounds. Some relate to poor preparation, inadequate design, weak installation, administration, and mechanism of the programme. Some others are related to the psychological and behavioural attitudes of the union and management. However, the above illustrations mentioned in this article demonstrate that an effective job evaluation programme and its essential elements can be seen as follows:

**Figure 2: An Effective Job Evaluation Programme**



#### 4.0 Summary and conclusion:

In the light of different (sometimes even contradictory) points of view and attitudes, the questions that arise are, to determine if there is a pressing need to:-

- (1) Redefine the management's prerogative and employee rights over decision-making that affects both?
- (2) Introduce comprehensive, institutionalised management-employee relationships to be comprehensively institutionalised
- (3) Address the negativity of antagonistic management styles which **both** seek to retain the final responsibility for all managerial decisions **and** hold any vital influence over employee involvement in both job evaluation and the decision-making process (**This runs the risk of rendering the above-mentioned questions invalid**).

Regardless of what sort of philosophy or management school is followed, employee participation is inescapable although it may take different forms in terms of level, size and volume. To this, Management needs: -

- (1) A so-called 'second position' in which it needs to see the situation from the employee perspective and so understand their concerns.
- (2) To achieve a so-called 'third position' where it observes itself and others.

**The above illustrations and discussions also reveal that:**

(1) Should the programme of job evaluation be planned and designed professionally and performed appropriately, one can reasonably ascertain that the programme would also become a procedure for tightening the contacts and relations among the different layers of the organization throughout the hierarchy; i.e. it helps in strengthening communication channels vertically as well as horizontally. This is particularly so if all the related parties are incorporated into that process. Hence, the importance of the acceptance of the programme by the parties concerned cannot be over-stated. Failure to accommodate this fundamental principle will simply cause the programme to flounder. At best it will become little more than a vacuous set of assumptions unable to be translated into actions or achievements. At worst it will become a useless, redundant tool that nobody gives any due credence to. Either way, these will only serve to compound deterioration between management and its workforce, the latter of whom, can reasonably be expected to react negatively against the programme's outcomes once they are made known

(2) Accordingly, both management and union should, in advance, come to an agreement about the scope and the type of method to be used. That is to say, the number of jobs, sections and departments to be covered in the evaluation process and the type of the scheme to be adopted and whether to use the same scheme for all employees or different systems for different departments (see ACAS, 1982: 6).

(3) All of the above points need to be properly documented. These should include written clarification of all elements of those points, together with their constituent parts, in order to avoid or minimize any future disputes or misunderstanding among members of the various parties concerned.

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