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As the IJV Grows: Lessons and Progress at Davidson-Marley BV

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The international joint venture of Davidson-Marley BV is located in Born, The Netherlands. It is in its second year of full-time operation with approximately 200 employees. The two parents of this IJV are Davidson-Textron of the US and Marley Automotive of the UK. The two parents came together to form this joint venture for several reasons. The reasons and the characteristics of each parent are detailed in earlier articles. Characteristics of the IJV itself, Davidson-Marley BV, are also described in an earlier article in this journal (December 1992). At the time of writing the last article (Spring 1992), Davidson-Marley was erecting its plant and installing its equipment. Preparations were being made to run prototypes for its main customer, the Ford Motor plant in Genk, Belgium that produces the Mondeo. Staffing procedures had been put in place with the majority of hiring yet to

be done. Full-time production and just-in-time deliveries to Ford were to begin 4 January 1993. Although the impression was left that the IJV was 'all but done' and the rest of what needed to be done was just perfunctory, this article attempts to describe the reality of it all. In so doing, there are several insights that might be of interest for followers of international joint ventures. There are also several suggestions, particularly regarding human resource management issues, for professionals involved in setting up international joint ventures.

Introduction

Strategic alliances, particularly the international joint venture, appear to be a major way firms are globalizing their operations (Main, 1990). As stated in earlier

articles, IJVs can make it easier and increase the chances of a firm being successful abroad. They can capitalize on the strengths of each parent and minimize the weaknesses of either. Working together, two firms can spread the risk and gain a greater understanding about doing business in the global environment. Thus, IJVs can be seen as ways to grow, learn and become profitable, ways that are more attractive than almost any other alternative (Harrigan, 1987a, b; Shenkar and Zeira, 1987a, b; 1990).

But, like any other business venture, nothing is a sure thing. In IJVs partners might not get along, markets may disappear (or in some cases, they may never appear), the relationship between the parents and the IJV itself may produce friction and failure, and/or the staffing of the IJV may result in an unsuccessful business under any conditions (Gomes-Casseres, 1987; Datta, 1989). Helping to reduce these downsides, potential partners are implored to get to know each other, to investigate each others' styles and philosophies of doing as much as possible. In many respects, potential partners are urged to treat the process of identifying an IJV partner as a marriage (Tichy, 1988; Brown, 1990).

As described in the preceding articles, Davidson-Textron and Marley Automotive almost followed the textbook on IJVs line-by-line, (Schuler, *et al*, 1991; Schuler, *et al*, 1992; Schuler and van Sluijs, 1992). If there were a marriage of IJV partners made in heaven, DavidsonMarley BV is it. If the market, financial conditions, complementary skill sets of the partners and management philosophies were ever to be more appropriate for the establishment and predicted success of an IJV, they would be harder to find than the Davidson-Marley BV itself (Schuler and van Sluijs, 1992).

In this article we pick up on the progress of the IJV itself, to see if the prediction of success has come true and to see if there are any lessons to be learned from this joint venture. In doing so, the marriage metaphor is extended. Not surprisingly, however, the focus shifts more to looking at IJV issues from the viewpoint of the IJV itself.

The Child Grows

Because this child, Davidson-Marley BV, has a customer that consumes almost the entire capacity of the firm, it is like a child with a vitamin-enriched diet; it grows fast! For an IJV, growing fast means encountering problems of joint venture development faster than under normal, less enriched conditions! Full *scale* production is the *first* order of business. Slow market growth and deliberate organizational development are luxuries. The child, the IJV, has to get on its feet and mature as fast as possible. As a consequence, the state of being a total and willing dependent child lasts a much shorter-time period. The child begins searching for its own identity and autonomy: The joint venture managers begin to want to make all of their own decisions without being second-

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guessed by their parents. Their major focus of attention rapidly becomes the customer rather than the parents.

In some respects this is where Davidson-Marley BV is today. Huub Cilissen, the general manager, and Jean Theuns, the human resource manager, both seek autonomy in running the business. This is not particularly surprising, given that they were both experienced and successful managers at the time they were hired. Yet, understandably, the parents are the ones who have given birth to the joint venture and thus they expect to have some right to direct and manage the operation. In addition, they did establish the market and provide the means of satisfying customers' demands (i.e., they provided the capital, technology and knowledge to serve the market). Thus the parents and the child have to understand each others' positions and be patient with each other.

Nonetheless, it is not always easy to find the right balance between autonomy (empowerment) and guidance: Patience may be tested to the limit and not just by those running the operations. But this type of situation applies to any IJV, Davidson-Marley BV just gives us the opportunity to become more aware of it. For example, in an IJV the general manager reports to two individuals, one from each parent. Conflicts, differences and discussions thus occur among the three individuals. But for the others in the IJV the situation is a bit more complex. For example, the human resource manager reports to the general manager of the IJV itself and to the corresponding functional managers for the two parents. Thus, conflicts, differences and discussions take place among four individuals! Fortunately, both Davidson-Textron and Marley Automotive share philosophies of managing human resources. Both have participative systems and pursue total quality management in their own operations. But, even this can't guarantee some differences in how to best manage the work force. For example, it is not surprising to find two equally successful parents both thinking that their way may be the better way. The result of this is that child may no sooner get advice from one parent than it is receiving advice from the other one. And when this is done in the context where the manager of human resources and the general manager of the IJV may also believe that their way is the better way, everyone needs to draw upon as much patience as possible.

The Extended Family

The metaphor of the marriage and family needs to grow just a bit and encompass a few more family members to illustrate more events occurring in the IJV. When talking about the parents, it becomes simplistic when suggesting that each joint venture parent speaks with a single voice in unity. To say that because both parents practice an empowered philosophy of managing human resources, everyone in their respective firms interprets empowerment in the same way or can ignore exigencies of time pressure can be disingenuous. For example, the joint venture parents have representatives in the IJV

itself. The controller and the operations managers are from Davidson-Textron. The operations manager, largely due to the pressure to make the required day-to-day deliveries to Ford on a just-in-time basis, had to forego the use of participative teams and other forms of group, problem-solving activities that had been established *modus operandi* (Schuler and van Sluijs, 1992). While this is likely to moderate with time, this caused some disappointment with those in the IJV itself because they were expecting otherwise. The lesson here, however, is that the best laid plans can often go astray, particularly those that under other conditions might be seen as normal, but under time constraints might be rather time consuming. Thus if the maturation process of an IJV is accelerated, participative activities may require time that can be seen as a luxury, time that otherwise would be utilized as a normal part of managing human resources. Accelerated growth can also impact other plans intended for the IJV, particularly those focused around intending to support a total quality management environment.

Building the Strength of the Child

Davidson-Marley BV was to be built using participative management processes and using human resource management practices that supported employee development, teamwork and full skill utilization. Supportive human resource practices included extensive training, enriched jobs, employee empowerment and cooperative employee-manager relationships (Wickens, 1987). Based upon experience working with these practices in total quality manufacturing environments, Mr Theuns developed a rather extensive set of recruitment and selection practices to identify those most likely to work effectively under these conditions (See *EMJ*, December 1992, p. 434). Used as designed, these would build the strength of the child to achieve the objectives of the IJV. But the best laid plans ...

A Dual Workforce

While the first one hundred employees were hired between April 1992 and October 1992, the remaining employees were hired between December 1992 and April/May 1993. Although all employees were hired using the same selection procedures (described in our December 1992 article), there were differences in the desired profiles and characteristics. For selection of the first one hundred employees, the desired profiles and characteristics used were: (a) willingness to contribute to the building up of the firm in the pioneering phase; (b) ability to identify problems and develop solutions; and (c) having an international orientation (i.e. willingness to travel for training in either the UK or the US). By contrast, for the other employees hired, the selection criteria were different: (a) willingness to join an already on going process; and (b) willingness and ability to work in teams. Because the pioneering days are over, some of the initial group of employees have moved on, being replaced by employees using the second set of selection criteria. Regardless, there are two

groups of employees: those who were hired under the first set of criteria and those hired under the second set. Of the 200 or so production workers today about 75 are union members, mostly from the ranks of those hired after November 1992. To this situation was added the use of group activity descriptions, rather than specific *individual* job descriptions, that tend to produce ambiguity for the individual workers.

So today the workforce is composed of those hired between April 1992 and October 1992 and all those hired later. The slight variation in the time of hiring for what in all practical purposes are people doing the same jobs, has created many differences besides those already mentioned. Because all employees are initially hired under a one year temporary contract first, the first group is now under permanent contract while the second group is still under temporary contract. The first group has also been assigned to the more advanced job category. For the plant production workers there are three job categories: beginner, experienced and allrounders. The first group are all-rounders and are paid more than the second group who are still in the beginner and experienced categories.

Systematic initial hiring and job description are essential in an IJV

Resulting from the conditions described was some confusion and voicing of preference for certainty and direction, particularly among those hired without having experience of working in teams and conditions of worker empowerment. Now knowing this, Mr Theuns thinks the lesson here is to begin operations under more classical management procedures and *then* gradually move to conditions of teamwork and empowerment. The only exception to this might be if time can be taken to either hire everyone to fit the conditions and/or train those hired to fit before the pressure of full production begins. Conditions such as labour market availability, production pressure and operating costs might, in the final analysis, determine what is really feasible. Hindsight, however, might suggest that a modest increase in initial cost outlays might be more than compensated for over the longer term. To wit, bringing in all the employees at the same time might have avoided creating the two sets of employees described above. This would have enabled the plant to hire all individuals using the same selection criteria. This, in turn, could have precluded the need to now think of melding the groups together and moving from more traditional human resources practices to more teamoriented and empowered human resource practices.

Clearly, however, this scenario suggests the necessity of being systematic about the initial hiring and job description and direction preparation. It also indicates just how significant the realities of accelerated growth can be. But the impact of accelerated growth goes further.

Communicate, Communicate

Accelerated growth produces the need to attend to more events in a smaller period of time, make more decisions in a shorter space of time, and disseminate more information more quickly. Especially under the hiring and production conditions described above, the need for communications in the Davidson-Marley BV was considerable even though communications was not anticipated to be an issue because of the small size of the operation (Schuler and van Sluijs, 1992). Mr Theuns thus, found himself needing to perform two major jobs: one as human resource director and the other as communications director. And because of the demands of starting up the joint venture, Mr Theuns had to devote considerable time to his primary job of human resource director. Nevertheless, he did have to serve as a communications director as much as possible. Of course other members of the management team felt similar pressures.

Three potential lessons evolve from this situation. The first is consideration of hiring a full time communications director to work with the human resource director. In addition to helping convey the mission and philosophy of the business to all employees, a communications director might also develop systems of internal communications and train all employees in communication, listening and feedback skills. This, of course, depends on cost considerations, at least in the short run. The need for this additional person, however, may be attenuated with the initial use of classical management principles and the application of the second lesson.

The second lesson is locating the human resource department on the production floor, or at least adjacent to it. The human resource department is located on the first floor of the facility, thus making it practically impossible for workers and managers to see and utilize. This has made it difficult for the human resource department to communicate, subtly and not so subtly, its messages. One message that is communicated that is particularly important in the early stages of the IJV is that of *partnership*, the third lesson here.

The reality of the importance of partnership has been identified in many case examples of firms pursuing total quality management, such as Ford, Nissan, Komitsu, ICI, Shell and Unilever (e.g., see Starkey and McKinlay, 1993). The partnership is among workers, human resource professionals and the line managers (from the operations manager through to the floor supervisors). The partnership is about managing human resources.

In partnership literally everyone does something related to attracting, motivating and retaining employees. And because total quality management and operational success depends upon people, partnership is about everyone managing human resources. Mr Theuns thinks that locating the human resource department next to the production area can facilitate this partnership substantially in two ways.

First, it makes the department more user friendly to the workers. It removes the walls and floors between them and the human resource department professionals. Ease of interaction breeds interaction and interaction brings familiarity and understanding. Second, it makes the department more accessible to the line manager and vice-versa. This accessibility may act with line managers in the same way it does with the workers. Of course, it also has the potential to work the other way, i.e., for the line managers to dump the 'personnel matters' on the desks of the human resource professionals.

Predicting which direction it will take depends upon the philosophy and direction of the managers of the parents (and how committed they are to this theme of partnership); the philosophy of the line managers; pressure on the line managers for production that in turn focuses their time and attention on purely production-oriented activities; and the relationship between the human resource professionals and the line managers. To the extent they share the same philosophy and background, the greater extent to which partnership can become a reality.

But even with the same philosophy and background, it is still imperative that the issue of partnership be discussed by the management team. For example, at the Davidson-Marley BV it would be important for the eight person management team (Mr Cilissen and Mr Theuns are two members along with the managers of engineering, quality, sales, purchasing, operations and finance) to discuss and resolve their views on managing human resources. At the end of the day, it is important to decide and agree upon who is responsible for absenteeism, safety, grievances, shift change requests, workplace complaints, job conditions and training for group members. Variations in actual behaviour from what is agreed upon can cause substantial uncertainty and confusion, resulting in less than optimal operating conditions and employee morale. However, to the extent that agreement is reached and all behave accordingly, the greater the possibility of achieving optimal operating conditions early and of smoothly moving the joint venture from adolescence to adulthood.

From Adolescence to Adulthood

All within one year? Yes, a majority of the workers have been with the joint venture for only a year. But in the minds of some, Davidson-Marley BV began in 1989, so the joint venture can be viewed as celebrating its fifth birthday this year. In the minds of Mr Cilissen and Mr Theuns it is three years old. Remember, we are talking about an enriched joint venture, one growing at an accelerated rate. It is certainly mapping onto this path quite well in some respects. Despite the economic environment and demands for cost reductions that large customers are increasingly asking from their suppliers, the IJV is on track with its profitability goals.

Yes, it does have some facial symptoms of youth

remaining. It must improve working conditions, working hours and safety and health conditions. By the autumn of 1993 these conditions became an issue of concern to the workers. There were two showers, only a few toilets, a few wash basins, some workers were working 9.5 hours rather than the required limit of 8, emergency exits were difficult to reach and storage of toxic materials did not conform to requirements. An independent labour body in The Netherlands (the 'Arbeidsinspectie') issued a formal report enumerating these conditions to which the joint venture has responded. The joint venture responded by drawing up concrete plans for the improvement in working conditions. It also responded by creating two safety teams: one addresses general working conditions and safety and meets weekly with Mr Theuns; and the other is the ARBO-team (Dutch law requires such a team that addresses 'arbeidsomstandigheden' or 'working conditions'). Actually the plant had conformed to the law regarding toilets, wash basins and emergency exits, but this conformance was at the minimum. While having more of all was desired, the plant layout had already been established when this was noticed by the management team.

The rapid growth of the Davidson-Marley IJV gave rise to several problems

Again, these conditions largely resulted from the rapid growth of the joint venture and the issue, of building in some slack, enters. Perhaps these conditions and the report of the Arbeidsinspectie would have been unnecessary had the plant been built to standards above the minimum. Again, earlier involvement of the local managers could have raised the possibility of these conditions becoming an issue with the local workers and in so doing prevented them from becoming issues later. Precise forecasting of worker productivity is nearly impossible. This, combined with the desire not to overhire, resulted in working employees more hours than intended. The rapid start up also made it more difficult to get everyone attending to the importance of safety and health, even though this was one of the topics in the core training programmes. While largely the result of rapid growth and the lack of time necessary to balance workload with workers, the task forces have been addressing these issues and progress has been made.

Another aspect, which is related to the rapid growth of the IJV and also to the internal operations of the IJV, is the relationship between the technological layout of the plant and the working in teams. We already mentioned that due to the time, pressure on deliveries, the use of participative teams hasn't been operationalized to the extent planned. Apart from this time pressure, however, the layout of the production plant is also of importance here. The intrinsically flexible technology used within the IJV had been installed in such a way that teamwork and cooperation were made difficult to implement. In fact, many workers were

operating with their backs toward each other or were otherwise (i.e. because of the way the machinery had been organized) prevented from having contact with each other. During the summer of 1993, the layout of the production facilities was reorganized in such a way that it became easier for the production associates to interact with each other. And what we wrote earlier about the interaction between the personnel department and the workers applies here as well: The ease of interaction breeds interaction and in the case of the production associates, this interaction should enlarge the possibilities for establishing advanced forms of teamwork and participative problem-solving.

In relation to communications and internal operations, the joint venture is also seeking further development. The venture is still staffed with highly qualified individuals from the UK and the US as well as The Netherlands. While this is necessary in the early stages for reasons already identified, this management composition of three nationalities can slow down internal communications and operations (Harrigan, 1987a; Gomes-Casseres, 1987). This is particularly true in a participatory work environment where decisions require a great deal of discussion and information processing and when the majority of participants need to operate in a second language, discussions tend to become inefficient. As the expatriates from the two parents are repatriated during the year, this may ease the process of internal communications and facilitate internal operating efficiency. This will in turn speed the movement from adolescence to adulthood. Of course, this withdrawal of parental involvement in this joint venture is probably far earlier than many IJVs, but it is possible due to the rapid growth path this joint venture is on and the quality of the local nationals selected by the parents in the first place. As scheduled, the US controller is to be repatriated in September 1994 and the Canadian operations manager around July 1994. It is anticipated that they will be replaced with Dutch nationals.

Summary and Conclusions

Implied in the above discussion, there are many aspects of an IJVs' success that involve managing human resources and the HR department (Shenkar and Zeira, 1990). One of the big aspects is how many, when and what types of employees to hire. As suggested in the previous article, Mr Cilissen and Mr Theuns agree that bringing in local national managers as early as possible in the process of setting up the IJV can bring enormous savings and efficiencies over a very short period of time. In addition to bringing them in early, it is important to identify who to bring in. As suggested earlier, it is important to consider bringing in a local communications manager, particularly when pursuing a competitive strategy that depends upon a great deal of employee empowerment and participation. It also appears to be useful to bring in a logistics manager, a manager to assist in managing and organizing the material flow, especially within the firm and to a lesser extent the input and

output of 'raw' materials and parts through to finished products. Because this did not seem to be a particularly vital position to warrant early hiring of such a person, it became evident rather soon that this was not the case. This was due largely to the demands of just-in-time delivery of the suppliers to the customer. For others thinking about such a joint venture, the importance of this position should not be underestimated. And interestingly enough, the importance of this position appears to be most vital at the early stages, when the systems and procedures need to be set up. This position, however, remains vital, especially when the demand schedules of the major customer remain unpredictable. Because of the likelihood of such circumstances, it appears warranted to hire a logistics person early.

Bringing in the non-management staff at least six months prior to full scale production can also prove to be advantageous to the IJV. This relatively early time frame, however, is consistent with other greenfield sites set up with a total quality management commitment (Wickens, 1987). Workers need to be trained, both in the production process as well as in working with each other: teams take time to develop, there are no shortcuts. Systematic selection can help reduce the time needed, but it is also important to be consistent in the selection criteria used. In the situation of the DavidsonMarley BV, two sets of selection criteria were used, along with a single set of more traditional personnel practices. The initial intention was to use one set of general selection criteria accompanied by a set of specific criteria for the first one hundred or so team-oriented and empowered human resource practices. The Limburg region of The Netherlands had been selected in part for its high levels of unemployment (it was and still is more than 10 per cent). Again, however, cost considerations can revise the best intended plans. The result was bringing in one set of workers early and another set later. But these cost advantages may be lost in the longer run as the real impact of this type of deviation from plan becomes evident. This is particularly true of the impact on human resources. Both the parents and the joint venture are now addressing this situation and appear to be responding very successfully. Traditional personnel practices are being revised. In fact, one of the concerns of the joint venture is that when the European economic slowdown reverses, other employers may seek to hire away some of the Davidson-Marley BV workers because they have become so well trained and familiar with empowerment practices and total quality management procedures and processes. The joint venture is responding by revising career management, and salary and benefit plans to help prevent this from happening. A one day trip by all the IJV employees to Ford, for example, gave workers greater knowledge and insight into product-quality and just-in-time inventory issues.

Overall, it appears that many of the classic human resource management issues associated with IJV formation and development have surfaced in the DavidsonMarley BV, e.g., issues of career development for the

local managers; issues of conflict and control between the two parents vis-à-vis the IJV; and desire for the IJV to become an independent and self-sustaining business as soon as possible (Harrigan, 1987a, b; Schuler et al., 1991). And just as these issues have appeared so they have been addressed and managed fairly successfully. This has been in large measure due to the quality of the parents' relationship with each other; the quality of the local managers selected, and the fact that the major customer was already identified. But just as these factors have been critical in the success of the IJV thus far, they have also produced challenges. And these challenges have arisen primarily because the development of the IJV has been accelerated by having the large customer already arranged. These challenges, however, are typical of IJVs and thus are ones that would have had to be faced at some point. Having seen these challenges early has, therefore, made it possible for this IJV to get on with the evolution of the child to adulthood status earlier than other IJVs. Fortunately the management team recognized these challenges and responded accordingly. Fortunately, the management team has been supported by the Board (consisting of five members: two presidents and vice-presidents from each parent and Mr Cilissen). Certainly many of the changes and adjustments that have been made involved all the members of the management team, but particularly Mr Cilissen and Mr Theuns. Based on the experiences thus far, Mr Theuns recommends others thinking of joint ventures to not only systematically prepare for every aspect of the joint venture operation (from the earliest point onward), but also to systematically record events and processes as they unfold. He, in essence, recommends that the HR manager might be the one in charge of keeping a diary or journal for the joint venture. In turn, this journal can become a road map against which the management team can measure and evaluate and learn from its progress. This can be especially helpful in an IJV that is evolving from childhood to adulthood status earlier than most IJVs. Of course the parents might do something similar and then occasionally all could share their progress reports. IJVs could also expand their own learning by meeting with and exchanging ideas and experiences with other suppliers to Ford. In fact, several suppliers have been meeting to cooperate in such activities as joint recruitment and training (after realising that many of them were using similar human resource practices to deliver total quality products to their common customer).

For organizations interested in IJVs this profile of the Davidson-Marley BV has highlighted several significant human resource issues in IJV development and operation. Although there are many other issues in addition to human resource ones, read in conjunction with the previous three articles, this profile might still enhance the potential for a successful launch of an IJV between two hopeful joint venture parents (Cascio and Serapio, 1991; Slocum and Lei, 1993). At minimum it should help to flag some areas of human resource management that IJV parents need to discuss and

resolve as early as possible, particularly if major customers are ready for delivery.

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