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TRUST AND PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL
DECISION MAKING AS PREDICTORS OF SATISFACTION

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TRUST AND PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL
DECISION MAKING AS PREDICTORS OF SATISFACTION

This study assesses the usefulness of trust and participation in decision making in predicting satisfaction attitudes among a college faculty. Organizational trust, a political assessment of hierarchical decision makers, best predicts overall satisfaction. The congruence between desired and perceived participation best predicts satisfaction with participation in decision making.

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If an organization is a decision-making system

then the nature of organizational decision making should help determine the satisfaction attitudes of its members. Indeed, past research indicates that the extent of participation in organizational decision making shows a slight association with satisfaction (Stogdill, 1974). Yet Gamson (1968) theorizes that individuals evaluate all decision-making systems not in terms of participation, but based on the expected outcomes of decisions for the individual. Trust summarizes that self-interested assessment and explains for Gamson the operation of decision making systems. The purpose of the present study is to compare the usefulness of trust and participation in decision making as explanations of satisfaction attitudes.

DERIVATION OF HYPOTHESES

Although participation in decision making predicts satisfaction with an organization, this relationship is neither inevitable nor well understood. Ritchie (1974), for example, summarizes several conditions facilitating the effects of participation: when individuals have relevant skills and information, perceive that their involvement will affect their outcomes, feel their participation is legitimate, experience little status or expertise differential, and benefit from the trust and support of their superiors. On the other hand, Strauss (1963), Lowin (1968), Wood (1973), and Ritchie (1974) all describe a wide range of potential explanations of the theoretical links between participation and satisfaction.

This study examines two of these explanations that rest on behavioral definitions of participation rather than a feeling of involvement. First, to the extent that participation in organizational decision making

satisfies important psychological needs for responsibility and autonomy at work, then increased levels of participation should predict greater satisfaction with the organization (Hypothesis 1). Among others, Wood (1972) and Vroom (1960) support this explanation. Licheron and Wall (1975), however, question this relationship. Second, as Ritchie (1974) and Alutto and Belasco (1972) argue, individuals differ in their desire or expectation for participation in decision making. So another link between participation and satisfaction lies in the difference between levels of participation desired and perceived. It is thus hypothesized that the greater the congruence between desired and perceived participation, the greater the satisfaction (Hypothesis 2). Alutto and Acito (1974) supported this argument. Moreover, this latter argument also implies that the congruence between desired and perceived levels of participation should be a better predictor of satisfaction than the level of perceived participation alone (Hypothesis 3).

While participation refers to making inputs to organizational decision making, Gamson (1968) develops an analysis of decision-making systems that focuses exclusively on the anticipated outcomes of decisions. Gamson defines trust as the probability that the decision-making system will produce preferred outcomes for an individual or group even if the system is left untended. Trust should predict both individual acceptance of the decision-making system and the means used to influence decision-makers. For example, Gamson expects confident or high-trust groups to accept existing authorities and rely only on persuasion to influence them. Neutral groups with a lower (approximately fifty/fifty chance) of getting their preferred results still accept the authorities, but will rely on positive inducements

to sway the actions of decision makers. In contrast, alienated groups see no chance of getting their way under the present system and view the decision makers as incompetent and biased; the alienated will thus resort to threat or use of negative sanctions to pressure the authorities. Applying Gamson's logic to the problem of organizational satisfaction suggests that individuals with more trust in the current decision makers are more satisfied with the organization (Hypothesis 4). Trust is thus viewed as an alternative means for the decision-making system to affect satisfaction attitudes.

Trust, however, may arise either from an assessment of the current situation or from a personality predisposition or trait. Gamson's discussion of trust neglects the role of individual differences, but Rosenberg (1956) and Rotter (1971) both demonstrate the importance of trust in other people as a global tendency cutting across situations. Extending Gamson's argument to include trust as an individual-difference variable suggests that individuals with greater trust as a global tendency also show more satisfaction with the organization (Hypothesis 5). While this effect may occur, Mischel (1968) summarizes an extensive literature demonstrating the greater influence of situational differences relative to personality traits in affecting behavior. Moreover, Citrin (1974) demonstrates the relative independence of trust in specific institutions from trust as a personality trait. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that organizational trust as defined in Gamson's situational analysis is more strongly related to satisfaction attitudes than global trust as an individual difference (Hypothesis 6).

The question remains whether trust in organizational decision makers adds to the understanding of satisfaction attitudes beyond the effects of

participation in decision making. Gamson argues that trust rather than efficacy (defined as feeling able to influence decisions) determines an individual's orientation towards the decision-making system, here the organization. Accordingly, as a final hypothesis for this study, trust is expected to be a useful predictor of satisfaction regardless of the level of participation (Hypothesis 7).

THE STUDY

In order to test these hypotheses, the results from a questionnaire survey among a population thought to be high in the value placed on participation in decision making are used, namely the faculty in a small liberal arts college in upstate New York. The questionnaire items reported here are part of a larger study of faculty attitudes. The mail questionnaires were distributed to the individual's homes with a cover letter describing the study's purpose and guaranteeing the anonymity of each respondent. One-hundred-nine faculty members (39%) responded to the survey. Those responding did not differ significantly from the population in terms of their sex or academic rank. Of the respondents, 49% were full or associate professors, 81% male, and 56% were less than 40 years old.

Dependent Variable

Two measures of satisfaction attitudes are used as the dependent variables. First, a measure is constructed for overall satisfaction by taking the average of six Likert-type items on satisfaction with chances for promotion, the job overall, job security, present coworkers, present salary, and the work done. If the faculty member is a full professor, and thus not eligible for promotion, the promotion item is not included. Table 1

presents the correlation among these items. Coefficient alpha for these items is .75.

The second measure focuses specifically on the attitude of satisfaction with participation in decision making in the organization. As with the other satisfaction measure, this measure is also based on a Likert-type item. From the value of that item is subtracted a predicted value for satisfaction with participation derived from a multiple regression analysis of the other six satisfaction items. Thus, the second satisfaction measure is the residual value of satisfaction with participation which is independent of the other satisfaction attitudes included in the study. The correlation between the multidimensional measure of overall satisfaction and this adjusted measure of satisfaction with participation in decision making is near zero ($r = -.03$).

Participation Measures

Perceived participation is each faculty member's average description of his or her activities in making a range of organizational decisions. The descriptions possible as responses include:

1. having no input to the decision;
2. being able to speak to someone who will represent my opinion in making the decision;
3. being consulted by the person responsible for making this decision;
4. making an input to group discussion before the decision is made;
5. participating in a group making this decision by a vote or consensus.

These descriptions were generated by the author from interviews with faculty members in another institution included in the larger study. The nature of that larger study also determines the decision issues examined here:

1. new faculty appointments;
2. faculty promotions;
3. faculty salary increases;

4. appointment of a new department head;
5. allocation of the College budget.

Table 2 shows the correlations among the descriptions of participation in these five decisions. Coefficient alpha for this index is .65.

The congruence between desired and perceived participation is measured using the same items as perceived participation. After completing their descriptions of perceived participation, the respondents went back over the same five items and indicated their desired level of participation in the five decisions. The congruence of participation is the average absolute difference between desired and perceived participation. Table 2 also presents the intercorrelations among these absolute differences as well as the desired levels of participation on the five decisions. Coefficient alpha for the average congruence measure is .63. The alpha for the desired levels is .65. The absolute differences are used in the following analyses because raw congruence scores, distinguishing between too much and too little participation, yielded a similar but weaker pattern than the absolute measures.

Trust Measures

Organizational trust is measured by averaging three Likert-type items describing the frequency with which the administrative decision makers at three hierarchical levels (Head of the Department, Dean of the School, President of the College) can be trusted to make decisions the respondent considers appropriate. This measure has a coefficient alpha of .37. Table 3 presents the correlation among these three items.

Global trust as a personality trait is measured by the average of two items referring to a general faith in the helpfulness of other people (Rosenberg, 1956). The alpha here is .86.

It might be noted that the average level of trust varies across these hierarchical levels on a seven point scale as follows: Department Head 5.2, Dean of a School 4.3, and President of the College 3.8.

RESULTS

The hypothesized effects of participation in organizational decision making are supported by the correlations presented in Table 4. Increasing levels of participation are associated with greater overall satisfaction with the organization as well as with satisfaction specifically with participation as an independent aspect of the organizational setting (Hypothesis 1). Similarly, the greater the congruence between desired and perceived participation, the greater the satisfaction both with the organization and with participation (Hypothesis 2). Moreover, as predicted in the third hypothesis, the association between the congruence of participation and the two satisfaction measures is stronger than for perceived participation alone. The Hotteling-Williams test (Darlington, 1974) for differences between two correlations involving a common variable, however, shows no significant differences between these two correlations ($p = .11$ for overall satisfaction; $p = .09$ for satisfaction with participation). Thus, while the results are in the predicted direction as overall measures congruence of participation does not predict satisfaction attitudes significantly more strongly than does participation in decision making alone.

If the individual correlations between satisfaction attitudes and the five decision issues averaged in the participation measures are analyzed separately, the same pattern of support for these hypotheses emerges (Table 5).

Increased levels of participation in specific decisions are associated with increased satisfaction with participation in decision making and to a lesser extent with increased overall satisfaction (Hypothesis 1). The congruence of participation in specific decisions also predicts satisfaction with participation and overall satisfaction (Hypothesis 2). Hypothesis 3 receives stronger support in this analysis of individual decisions. In eight of the ten possible comparisons, the congruence of participation is a better predictor of satisfaction than is the simple level of participation.

Trust in organizational decision making also emerges in this study as a predictor of satisfaction attitudes. As predicted by Hypothesis 4, organizational trust, a situationally-determined belief, is strongly associated with both overall satisfaction and with satisfaction with participation in decision making. Global trust as a personality trait, however, does not predict either of these attitudes. Hypothesis 5, therefore, is not supported. Moreover, as predicted by Hypothesis 6, organizational trust is a significantly better predictor of satisfaction attitudes than is global trust (The Hotteling-Williams test yields $p < .001$ for both overall satisfaction and for satisfaction with participation in decision making).

The importance of organizational trust, as predicted in Hypothesis 4, is consistent across hierarchical levels. Higher trust in each level is significantly associated with both overall satisfaction and satisfaction with participation (Table 6). The correlations, however, are somewhat stronger for overall satisfaction. Trust in the lowest hierarchical level (the Department Head) tends (non-significantly) to predict both satisfaction attitudes better than does trust in the College President.

What, then, can be said about the relative usefulness of participation and trust as predictors of satisfaction? The phrase "percentage of variance uniquely accounted for" has no single interpretation for inter-correlated predictors, such as these. Rather, solving several multiple regression equations allows an assessment of the decrease in overall prediction attributable to the presence of either a single variable or a set of variables. Darlington (1968) defines this decrease as the usefulness of correlated variables and Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1973) describe the appropriate significance tests.

The results of the "usefulness" analysis are presented in Table 7. Organizational trust is the only significantly useful predictor of overall satisfaction attitudes. Neither perceived participation nor the congruence of participation is a significantly useful predictor. Moreover, even when both these participation-related measures are considered as a set, they add nothing to the prediction of overall satisfaction. In contrast, however, when the trust-related predictors are removed and only the two participation measures are used to predict overall satisfaction, the percentage of variance accounted for by the equation drops from 28% to 6%.

When the dependent variable is satisfaction with participation in decision making, the congruence between perceived and desired participation performs much more successfully (Table 8). Congruence of participation is the most useful single predictor of such satisfaction. The other participation-related predictor, perceived participation, adds nothing to the prediction of this satisfaction facet. Again, however, organizational trust, as defined by Gamson, significantly adds to the prediction of satisfaction with participation in decision making. The relative usefulness of these two significant

predictors, congruence of participation and organizational trust determines the results for the variables considered as sets. When the participation-related predictors are dropped from the equation, only 14% of the variance is explained; whereas, 26% can be explained without the two trust variables.

In summary, then, Hypothesis 7 is strongly supported, organizational trust is most useful in predicting overall satisfaction attitudes and adds to the prediction of satisfaction with participation. The congruence between desired and perceived participation in decision making, however, is more useful than organizational trust in predicting satisfaction with participation. This pattern holds for the correlational results in Table 4 as well as for these multiple regression analyses in Tables 7 and 8.

DISCUSSION

The hypotheses in this study are all derived from the central assumption that the decision making process in an organization affects the satisfaction of its members. These results suggest the usefulness of that assumption. Two aspects of organizational decision making predict satisfaction: the individuals input or participation in decisions (especially the fit between desired and perceived participation) and the individuals' trust in organizational decision makers.

On the topic of participation, this study supports one of Ritchie's conditions on the effectiveness of participation, namely that people must desire participation for it to have major effects. Even in this population of college faculty members, the congruence of participation rather than greater participation itself usefully predicts satisfaction with participation. This finding cautions that programs to increase participation through

group decision or group discussion may have limited effects on satisfaction. Indeed, if the target is an increase in overall satisfaction attitudes, organizational trust, rather than participation, should be the lever for change.

On the topic of trust, this study also assesses the importance of situation and personality-based measures of trust in predicting organizational satisfaction. Organizational trust reflects the member's assessment of the particular decision-making system rather than the personality trait of trusting other people in general. The former situational concept is the most useful predictor of overall satisfaction included in this study. In contrast, trust as a personality trait fails to predict either overall satisfaction or satisfaction with participation in decision making. This pattern is consistent with Mischel's (1968) conclusion on the compelling nature of situational differences.

The usefulness of organizational trust in this study supports Gamson's political analysis of decision-making systems. Continued analysis of work organizations from a political perspective is clearly required. While this correlational study cannot establish the causes of satisfaction attitudes, it suggests that an individual makes a political assessment of how well the decision-making system in an organization represents his or her interests. That political assessment appears to color both overall satisfaction with the organization and satisfaction with participation.

This study supports Dahrendorf's (1959) assertion that two perspectives are required to understand organizational phenomena--an integrative view based on the assumption that organizational members share common goals and a coercive view rooted in the assumption of conflict over goals. In

analyzing the effects of organizational decision making on individual satisfaction, a focus on participation reflects integrative assumptions. If organizational members agree on goals then the analysis of decision making shifts to other issues such as the satisfaction of higher order psychological needs. In contrast, Gamson's focus on trust is a coercive view. It directs attention to the conflict in goals among groups in the organization which makes the distribution of resources problematical. Some organizational members trust the existing decision makers; other members do not.

An adequate understanding of satisfaction attitudes in this college requires the insights of both perspectives. Participation, specifically the congruence between desired and perceived participation, strongly predicts the specific attitude, satisfaction with participation. To predict overall satisfaction, however, organizational trust is more useful than the congruence of participation. In addition, organizational trust adds to the prediction of satisfaction with participation. Thus, each of the two perspectives usefully predict some satisfaction attitudes, but both perspectives are required to understand both satisfaction with participation in decision making and overall satisfaction with the organization.

TABLE 1

Correlations Among Individual Satisfaction Items ($80 \leq N \leq 109$)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Chances for promotion						
2. Job overall	.35 ^{***}					
3. Job security	.44 ^{***}	.52 ^{***}				
4. Participation in decision making	.34 ^{***}	.31 ^{***}	.37 ^{***}			
5. Present coworkers	.22 [*]	.46 ^{***}	.31 ^{***}	.22 ^{**}		
6. Present salary	.40 ^{***}	.41 ^{***}	.26 ^{**}	.44 ^{***}	.32 ^{***}	
7. Work you do	.18 [*]	.68 ^{***}	.33 ^{***}	.18 [*]	.29 ^{**}	.24 ^{**}

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

TABLE 2

Pearson Correlation Matrix for Measures of Participation
(N ≥ 98)

<u>Perceived Participation</u>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. New faculty appointments					
2. Faculty promotions	.59 ^{***}				
3. Faculty salary increases	.26 ^{**}	.34 ^{***}			
4. Appointment of a new department head	.54 ^{***}	.45 ^{***}	.24 ^{**}		
5. Allocation of the College budget	.35 ^{***}	.39 ^{***}	.48 ^{***}	.19 [*]	
<u>Desired Participation</u>					
1. New faculty appointments					
2. Faculty promotions	.70 ^{***}				
3. Faculty salary increases	.15	.24 ^{**}			
4. Appointment of a new department head	.69 ^{***}	.52 ^{***}	.25 ^{**}		
5. Allocation of the College budget	.06	.07	.44 ^{***}	.06	
<u>Congruence Between Desired and Perceived Participation</u> (Absolute Value)					
1. New faculty appointments					
2. Faculty promotions	.55 ^{***}				
3. Faculty salary increases	.38 ^{***}	.30 ^{***}			
4. Appointment of a new department head	.30 ^{***}	.31 ^{***}	.25 ^{**}		
5. Allocation of the College budget	.38 ^{***}	.38 ^{***}	.14	.47 ^{***}	

* p ≤ .05

** p ≤ .01

*** p ≤ .001

TABLE 3

Pearson Correlations Among Trust Items ($N \geq 97$)

	1.	2.
1. Trust in department head		
2. Trust in head of school	.46**	
3. Trust in College President	.23*	.41**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

TABLE 4

Pearson Correlations Among Satisfaction, Participation, and Trust Measures
(N = 109)

<u>Satisfaction</u>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Overall satisfaction						
2. Satisfaction with participation in decision making	-.03					
<u>Participation</u>						
3. Perceived participation	.16	.36 ^{***}				
4. Desired participation	-.09 ^{**}	-.04 ^{***}	.31 ^{***}			
5. Congruence of participation	.25	.51	.69 ^{***}	-.11		
<u>Trust</u>						
6. Organizational trust	.52 ^{***}	.35 ^{***}	.27 ^{**}	.05	.41 ^{***}	
7. Global trust	.12	-.08	-.08	.00	.01	.10

* $p \leq .05$

** $p \leq .01$

*** $p \leq .001$

TABLE 5

Pearson Correlations Between Participation Measures for Specific Decisions, Overall Satisfaction, and Satisfaction with Participation (in parentheses) ($N \geq 98$)

<u>Decision Topic</u>	<u>Perceived Participation</u>	<u>Congruence of Participation</u>
New faculty appointments	.07 (.33)***	.15 (.36)***
Faculty promotion	.06 (.26)**	.15 (.25)**
Faculty salary increases	.13 (.22)*	.14 (.38)***
Appointment of a new department head	.05 (.18)*	.22* (.27)**
Allocation of College budget	.25** (.36)***	.19* (.47)***

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

TABLE 6

Pearson Correlations Between Trust in Hierarchical Levels and
Satisfaction Measures ($N \geq 100$)

<u>Hierarchical Level</u>	<u>Overall Satisfaction</u>	<u>Satisfaction with Participation in Decision Making</u>
Department head	.42**	.31**
Head of School	.49**	.21*
College president	.29**	.23**

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

TABLE 7

Usefulness of Predictors of Overall Satisfaction

1. Focal Predictors	2. Remaining predictors in equation	3. Prediction from remaining predictors (R^2) ^b	4. Usefulness of focal predictor(s) (Overall R^2 - Column 3) ^b	d.f.	F
<u>All predictors</u>					
	PP+CP+OT+GT	-	.28	4, 104	9.87*
<u>Single predictors</u> ^a					
PP	CP+OT+GT	.28	0	1, 104	0
CP	PP+ OT+GT	.27	0	1, 104	.13
OT	PP+CP+ GT	.07	.20	1, 104	28.83*
GT	PP+CP+OT	.27	0	1, 104	.68
<u>Sets of Predictors</u>					
<u>Participation--</u>					
related (PP+CP)	OT+GT	.27	0	2, 104	.11
Trust--related (OT+GT)	PP+CP	.06	.22	2, 104	15.43*

a PP = Perceived participation

CP = Congruence between desired and perceived participation

OT = Organizational trust

GT = Global trust

b Columns 3 and 4 do not always add to .28 due to rounding

* $p < .001$

TABLE 8

Usefulness of Predictors of Satisfaction with Participation in Decision Making

	1. Focal predictor	2. Remaining predictors in equation	3. Prediction from remaining predictors (R ²) ^b	4. Usefulness ₂ (Overall R ² - Column 3) ^b	5. d.f.	6. F
<u>All predictors</u>		PP+CP+OT+GT	-	.29	4,104	10.84**
<u>Single predictors</u> ^a						
PP		CP+OT+GT	.29	0	1,104	0
CP		PP+ OT+GT	.20	.09	1,104	13.26**
OT		PP+CP+ GT	.27	.03	1,104	4.07*
GT		PP+CR+OT	.28	.01	1,104	1.57
<u>Sets of predictors</u>						
<u>Participation- related (PP,CP)</u>		OT+GT	.14	.16	2,104	11.60**
<u>Trust- related (OT,GT)</u>		PP+CP	.26	.04	2,104	2.57

a PP = Perceived participation

CP = Congruence between desired and perceived participation

OT = Organizational trust

GT = Global trust

b Entries in columns 3 and 4 do not add to .29 due to rounding

* p < .05

** p < .001

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