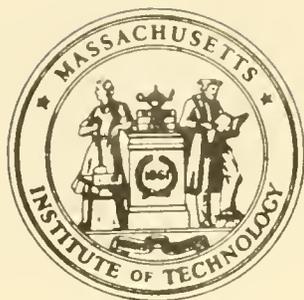


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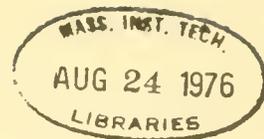
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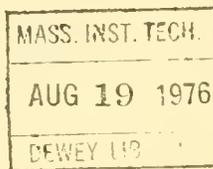




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WITH PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL  
DECISION MAKING\*

James W. Driscoll\*\*



WP 867-76

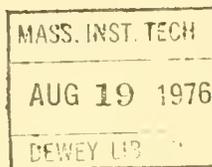
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\*\* Assistant Professor in the Alfred P. Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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Organizational Trust and Satisfaction with  
Participation in Organizational Decision Making

ABSTRACT

Among a college faculty, organizational trust predicted satisfaction with participation in decision making beyond the effects of perceived participation, the congruence between desired and perceived participation, or global trust as a personality dimension. Organizational trust emphasizes decision results and suggests a political perspective on decision making.



Deutsch (1955) defined social trust as an individual's willingness to rely on the actions of another where the potential costs of such dependence outweigh its benefits. Gamson (1968) extended the notion of trust to decision making in political systems. For Gamson, a political system consisted of competing groups with differing interests who seek to influence decision making. Trusting individuals and groups expected decisions within the system to favor their interests in the long run and thus had less need to exert their influence through participation. They were satisfied with the existing process.

To the extent that organizations are political systems composed of individuals and groups with different interests and goals (Baldrige, 1971; Tushman, 1976), trust should play a major role in determining attitudes of organizational members towards decision making. Nonetheless, in examining individual attitudes towards participation in decision making, most research focuses on the extent of participation or involvement in decision making, rather than on how the results of decisions affect participating individuals and groups. This perspective claims that increased participation is directly linked to satisfaction with participation. The political perspective suggests that trust, as defined by Deutsch and Gamson, may provide an alternative reason for satisfaction with participation: when positive decision results are anticipated, satisfaction with level of participation should be high regardless of the current level of involvement in decision making. The purpose of the current study is to assess satisfaction with participation in decision making from these two perspectives.



## HYPOTHESES

Although there have been some negative findings, e.g. Lischeron and Wall (1975b), a body of evidence has supported the conclusion that under appropriate conditions increased levels of participation in decision making are associated with increased satisfaction. After reviewing the leadership literature, for example, Stogdill (1974:392) concluded that in many different situations there was a "slight tendency for satisfaction to be related to participative leadership." Strauss (1963), Lowin (1968), and Wood (1973) reviewed a number of conditions under which participation should effect satisfaction. Ritchie (1974:65) recently summarized these conditions as follows. Participation in decision making by subordinates was more effective when: 1) they had relevant skills and information; 2) they perceived that their involvement will affect outcomes; 3) they were motivated to participate and thereby achieve outcomes; 4) they felt that participation was legitimate; 5) the status difference or expertise [difference] between participants was low; 6) the trust and support exhibited by their supervisor was high.

While Strauss (1963), Lowin (1968), Wood (1973), and Ritchie (1974) have each described a broad range of psychological mechanisms to explain the effects of participation, the present study focuses on two explanations that are commonly advanced to account for the relationship between levels of involvement and satisfaction with participation in decision making. These explanations rest on a behavioral definition of participation where the extent of subordinate involvement can range from



taking no part in the decision-making discussion of an issue to participating in all phases in the formal determination of organizational policy (Vroom and Yetton, 1974; Wood, 1973).

According to the first explanation, increased involvement in decision making provides satisfaction for a variety of needs including the need to control the environment at work (Lowin, 1968; Wood, 1972). This explanation leads to the hypothesis that increases in participation will be positively associated with satisfaction with participation (Hypothesis 1). A related explanation is that the fit between participation and an individual's role expectation or desire for participation may determine satisfaction with participation in decision making (Allutto and Belasco, 1972); that is, the congruence between desired and perceived participation is expected to be positively related to satisfaction with participation (Hypothesis 2). Previous research supports this view for teachers (Allutto and Belasco, 1972) and blue collar workers (Allutto and Acito, 1974; Lischeron and Wall, 1975a). This study tests the generalizability of this hypothesis to college faculty members, who place a high value on participation in collegial decision-making.

The above explanations of satisfaction rest on the assumption that extent of participation is directly linked to satisfaction with participation regardless of the results of decision making. Yet, logically, decision outcomes would seem to influence satisfaction with participation. The notion of trust is helpful in this regard because trust reflects the expectancy that decisions will favor an individual's interest. Thus, whatever an individual's extent of involvement in decision making, individuals with high trust in organizational decision makers should report



satisfaction with their current participation level (Hypothesis 3).

Trust may derive from two sources, however; either from an assessment of the likely consequences of relying on others in a specific situation (Deutsch, 1958; Gamson, 1968) or as a global tendency to expect others to act in one's interest across situations (Rosenberg, 1956; Rotter, 1971). In the present context, organizational members may be satisfied with their current level of participation in decision making either because they expect decision makers in particular situations to consider their interests or because they generally expect others to behave in their behalf in making decisions. Studies of trust in government have indicated the relative independence of trust in specific institutions from trust as a global or personality variable (Citrin, 1974). This study, therefore, compares the usefulness of organizational and global definitions of trust in predicting satisfaction with participation in decision making. It is expected that trust based on the organizational situation, rather than trust as a global tendency, will be a better predictor of satisfaction because the former is more closely linked with decision outcomes (Hypothesis 4).

To test these alternative explanations of satisfaction with participation in decision making, a population where participation had a high value was chosen, specifically, the faculty of a four year college where the major goal was undergraduate education. Not only does the model of higher education as a self-governing collegium engender an expectation of involvement in decision making, but, as Strauss (1963) has pointed out, the average professor is more likely than the average citizen to desire participation.



## METHOD

### Sample

Questionnaires from 109 (39%) members of the faculty at a small liberal arts college in upstate New York were received in response to a mail survey done in 1975. 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. The results reported here refer to those respondents who provided information on all the variables of interest.

### Independent Variables

Perceived level of participation for each individual was measured by averaging the extent of opportunities for involvement in separate decisions--selecting faculty members, promoting faculty members, determining faculty salary increases, appointing a new department head, and allocating the college budget. Opportunities for involvement in each decision could range from: (1) making no input, (2) having the opportunity to speak to a participant in the decision, (3) being consulted by the final decision maker, (4) discussing the decision in a group, to (5) participating in a group making the final decision based on a vote or consensus. The median correlation among these five items was moderate ( $r=.37$ ,  $n \geq 98$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that participation was fairly consistent across these five decision issues.

The congruence between desired and perceived participation was measured by having each respondent indicate their desired level of participation for each of the above decisions. The absolute values of these



congruence measures also had a moderate median intercorrelation ( $r=.34$ ,  $n \geq 97$ ,  $p < .01$ ) while the median correlation among the desired levels of participation was somewhat lower ( $r=.24$ ,  $n \geq 97$ ,  $p < .02$ ).

Organizational trust was measured by averaging three Likert-type items describing the frequency with which the administrative decision makers at three hierarchical levels (chairperson of the department, dean of the school, and president of the college) could be trusted to make decisions the respondent considered appropriate. These items had a slightly stronger median intercorrelation ( $r=.41$ ,  $n \geq 92$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Trust as a global tendency was measured by the average of two items referring to a general faith in the helpfulness of other people (Rosenberg, 1956). These items correlated highly ( $r=.88$ ,  $n=94$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

#### Dependent Variable

Satisfaction with participation in decision making, the dependent variable, was a single Likert-type item with responses ranging from extremely dissatisfied to extremely satisfied on a 7 point scale. The hypotheses were tested using this item. In addition, to control for the effects of method variance arising from the measurement of these variables in the same questionnaire, a rotated criterion was constructed. This criterion used an item measuring overall job satisfaction to compute that component of satisfaction with participation which was independent of the overall satisfaction item. The hypotheses were then tested using that criterion and the results of these tests were identical in all major respects to those reported here which refer to the unadjusted measure of satisfaction with participation.



RESULTS

Table 1 shows the correlations of the various participation measures--perceived, desired, and the congruence between perceived and desired--with satisfaction with participation. Hypothesis 1 is supported by the significant positive correlation between perceived participation and satisfaction with participation. As perceived participation in decision making increase, satisfaction with participation increases. Hypothesis 2 is also supported by the significant positive correlation between the congruence measure of participation and the satisfaction measure. As the congruence between desired and perceived participation increases, satisfaction with participation increases.

Table 1 also shows the correlations of organizational and global trust with satisfaction with participation. Only organizational trust correlates significantly and positively with the satisfaction measure.

TABLE 1  
Pearson Correlation Matrix (N=96)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Satisfaction with participation in decision making	—				
2. Perceived participation	.48*	—			
3. Desired participation	-.06	.32*	—		
4. Congruence between desired and perceived participation	.64*	.76*	-.07	—	
5. Organizational trust	.64*	.31*	.07	.45*	—
6. Global trust	.13	-.03	.01	.03	.14

\*  $p < .01$



TABLE 2

Regression of Satisfaction with Participation on Measures of  
Participation and Trust (n=96)<sup>a</sup>

	Standardized regression	
	<u>coefficient</u>	<u>"F" statistic</u>
Perceived participation	.02	.03
Congruence between desired and perceived participation	.43	14.73*
Organizational trust	.43	29.88*
Global trust	.06	.78

a.  $R^2 = .57$ ,  $F = 30.04$ , d.f. = 4, 91,  $p < .01$ .

\* d.f. = 1, 94,  $p < .01$ .

When the two hypothesized measures of participation--perceived and the congruence between perceived and desired--are statistically controlled in a multiple regression analysis, the association between organizational trust and satisfaction remains significant ( $F = 29.88$ , d.f. = 1, 94,  $p < .01$ ) (Table 2). Hypothesis 3 was thus supported. Individuals with high trust in organizational decision makers are more satisfied with their participation regardless of the extent of perceived or desired participation. In both the Pearson and multiple regression analyses, moreover, organizational



trust is a better predictor of satisfaction than global trust. Using the Hotelling-Williams test to compare these Pearson correlations as described by Darlington (1974), organizational trust is a significantly better predictor of satisfaction than global trust ( $Z=3.22$ ,  $n=96$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Hypothesis 4 therefore is supported. Satisfaction is linked closer to organizational trust than to global trust, presumably because the attitude in question, namely satisfaction with participation in the organization's decisions, is situationally specific. Although no comparative hypotheses were advanced, Table 2 also clarifies the relative usefulness of the two hypothesized measures of participation. The congruence between desired and perceived participation predicts satisfaction with participation regardless of the level of participation, global or organizational trust ( $F=14.73$ ,  $d.f=1,94$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In contrast, the perceived level of participation fails to add to the prediction of satisfaction when these other factors are controlled ( $F=.03$ ,  $d.f=1.94$ ,  $n.s.$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The explanation of satisfaction with participation in decision making in this study includes two different perspectives on organizations as described by Dahrendorf (1958). Perceived participation in decision making and its congruence with desired levels reflect an integrative analysis of organizations. In that analysis, the primary variable in decision making is the extent of individual involvement in the process as a source of satisfaction for reasons of social needs, higher-order needs, or role expectations. The decisions resulting from the process receive little



emphasis since this analysis assumes basic agreement on goals among members of the organization. In contrast, a political analysis of organizations assumes conflict over the distribution of resources within the organization rather than coordination in the pursuit of common organizational goals. Gamson's (1968) concept of political trust applied here to organizations is congruent with this latter perspective.

The present results support Dahrendorf's assertion that understanding organizations requires both perspectives. Professors' attitudes towards their present participation in decision making reflect both their current level of participation in that process and their trust in its results.

Of the two integrative explanations of professors' attitudes towards their participation in decision making, the congruence between perceived and desired participation is a more useful predictor than the perceived levels of participation. Although participation predicts satisfaction directly, even among a population of college professors considering desired levels of participation improves the prediction of their attitudes. This finding supports one of the several conditions summarized by Ritchie (1974) and highlighted by Alutto and Belasco (1972) for the effectiveness of participation, namely that individuals are motivated to participate in decisions.

Of the two explanations suggested by a political perspective on organizations, trust as an assessment of the current decision-making system (organizational trust) rather than trust as an enduring personality characteristic (global trust) predicts satisfaction with participation. This relative importance of trust as a characteristic of the situation rather than of the personality supports Mischel's (1968) emphasis on the



psychological impact of differences among situations over the effects of personality.

Although this correlational study cannot identify the causes of satisfaction with participation, the usefulness of trust in this study suggests more attention should be given to political analyses of organizational decision making. Decision making not only provides a source of satisfaction for the social and higher-order needs of organizational members through participation in this process, but as a political system, organizational decision making also emphasizes the goals of certain members in its results. Decision outcomes determine the distribution of resources including money and the freedom to act within the organization. Therefore, analyses of attitudes towards organizational decision making should consider how decisions affect individual interests within a political system.



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