PARTICIPATION: A CHALLENGE TO ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Artikel ini mereview dan mengevaluasi berbagai studi tentang partisipasi dan mengidentifikasi berbagai isu konseptual dan metodologis terkait. Ada tiga bidang masalah konseptual spesifik yang membatasi pemahaman tentang konstruk partisipasi: kebalauan definisional (definitional confusion), keragaman faktor kontekstual, dan hubungan antara partisipasi dan hasil. Berbagai tantangan disajikan dan disarankan sebagai cara alternatif pelaksanaan riset untuk memecahkan masalah.

INTRODUCTION

The study of participation has been an important part of the literature on management and organizational behavior for several decades. The topic has drawn the interest of many organizational scientists and practitioners especially because of its linkages to performance and satisfaction in organizations. However, the field of participation is presently still in a state of confusion. Participation has been defined in terms of influence sharing, delegation procedures, involvement in decision making, and empowerment. Indeed, participation can also be implemented in different forms in different organizations by different managers. Such diverse views and practices as interpretation of the scope and the domain of participation have resulted in definitional confusion of the concept.

Moreover, researchers have also raised questions about participation's ability to affect performance and satisfaction in the work place. It was Wagner (1994) who provided the first comprehensive attempt to resolve the issue of participation-outcome relationships by applying meta-analytic techniques to evaluate the eleven other reviews on participation literature. Wagner's particular interest was to reach a

basic, overarching conclusion regarding the effects of participation on performance and satisfaction. The result of his review suggests that participation can indeed have statistically significant effects on performance and satisfaction, but that the average size of these effects is so small as to undermine its practical significance. Ledford and Lawler (1994) have responded to the Wagner's (1994) review by equating the on-going participation debate to "beating a dead horse." Their basic position was that the narrow and specific conclusion reached by Wagner (1994) is mostly a correct one in that limited participation has limited effects. Given the careful, systematic, and rigorous methods used by Wagner, there can be little argument with the results of the review. However, it is more appropriate and productive to address the controversy over participation definitions.

The purpose of this article is to provide a review of the literature on the concept of participation and to examine the continuing debate over the definition and domain of participation, this article discusses a variety of issues related to participation, including definitional confusion, motives, conditions, organizational receptivity, and participation-outcome relationship. The focus is on identifying key challenges for future studies.

DEFINITIONAL CONFUSION

Despite the frequent attention given to the concept of participation in the literature on organizations, a well-developed and widely-accepted definition of participation has eluded researchers (Glew, Griffin, and Fleet, 1995). One of the issues has been the domain of participation. Although numerous researchers have attempted to clarify the term "participation," a variety of disparate definitions exist (Marshall and Stohl, 1993). Among the more commonly used are influence sharing (Mitchell, 1973), joint decision-making (Locke and Schweige, 1979), and degree of employee involvement in decision making process (Miller and Monge, 1986). However, new definitions continue to appear. For instance, Vandervelde (1979) states that "participation should be defined precisely as the who, what, where, and how aspects of involvement" (p. 75). While Neumann (1989) defines participative decision making as "structures and process for organizing individual autonomy in the context of group responsibility and linked to system-wide influence" (p. 184).

Unfortunately, this growing multiplicity of definitions has not clarified the meaning of participation.

Kanter (1983) specifically examines the pitfalls and complexities of participation and concludes that: participation is a way to involve and energize the rank-and-file; it is not a single mechanism or particular program. And it is certainly not the latest new appliance that can be purchased from a consultant or in a do-it-yourself kit, assembled, plugged in, and expected to run by itself. There are a large number of perils and problems, dilemmas, and decisions, that have to be addressed in managing participation so that it produces the best results for everyone (p.243).

Points of confusion. The first major point of confusion regarding the construct centers on whether participation is a technique or a philosophy, whether it is a unique or an overlapping concept, and what the appropriate level of analysis at which participation should be assessed. For example, some researchers equate participation with organizational practices, programs, or techniques, while others view participation as an over-arching philosophy of management (Kanter, 1983; Chisholm and Vansina, 1993). Still others view participation as a broader social issue with a variety of underlying implications, such as manipulation, oppression, and control (e.g., Aktouf, 1993; Alvesson and Willmot, 1992).

Secondly, the level of analysis at which participation is examined has been problematic (Yammarino and Naughton, 1992). Participation is often assessed at the individual level (Marshall and Stohl, 1993), but organizational programs interventions, and changes aimed at increasing participation almost invariably involve more that one person. In this regard, participation only takes place in a dyadic or group context. As such, interpersonal and group phenomena become relevant and must be considered (Tjosvold, 1987). However, it is important to note that participation theory and research have largely ignored these processes.

In similar vain, even though participation is almost always studied (and occasionally measured) at the individual level, the amount of individual contribution necessary to qualify as participation is unclear. For example, representation is sometimes described as participation (e.g., Cotton et al., 1988). However, one can easily imagine as a situation in which not all members of a reprented group initiate direct, "participatory" actions.

It is important to note that when programs, interventions, or changes are implemented across departments or divisions, participation can also be viewed at the organizational, structural issue in which specific individual or interpersonal processes are irrelevant. Such structural participation refers to formal rules and processes that allow individuals to contribute to an organizational level. Other authors have attempted to couple participation with an organization's work climate (e.g., Collins, Hatcher and Ross, 1993).

The literature suggests that perhaps the most common implication of the term of participation is its reference to intentional programs or practices developed by the organization to involve multiple employees. In this regard, there seems to be general agreement along four dimensions in which we can define participation. First, participation refers to extra-role or role-expanding behaviors. Ordinary and expected cooperative behaviors delineated within a specific job are generally not referred to as participation.

Second, participation requires conscious interactions between at least two individuals. Attitudes and behaviors of independent actors are not typically labeled as participation. Third, this interaction must be visible to both individuals. Extra-role behaviors aimed at, but hidden to, other individuals are not considered as participation. Fourth, participating actors typically occupy different level of positions in a hierarchical, as opposed to a horizontal, relationship (e.g., Mitchell, 1973). Beyond these four commonalties, another important element to be included in our definition is voice. In this context, voice refers to any vehicle through which an individual has increased impact on some element of the organization. Thus, it can be range from literal "voice" in making decisions to a greater opportunity to directly influence some measure of organizational effectiveness. The premise is that without voice, there can be no enactment of participation.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above discussion is that participation has to be defined in a broader sense. A more comprehensive definition of participation can be proposed here as follow: Participation is a conscious and intended effort by individuals at higher level in an organization to provide visible extra-role or role-expanding opportunities for individuals or groups at a lower level in

the organization to have a grater voice in one or more areas of organizational performance.

The strength of this definition is that it provides for a wide array of participation arrangements. For example, a manager who allows a subordinate to have a voice in making a single decision is facilitating participation, as is a manager who gives subordinates more control over how they perform their work on an ongoing basis. Moreover, it allows for the fact that the intent to participate may be initiated, or suggested, by lower-level participants, even though higher-level participants must approve or endorse that intent before it becomes a reality.

Another fundamental component of this definition is that purposeful behavior by management - managers take steps to bring about participation. Therefore, it is also important to thoroughly understand why organizations and managers might choose to use participation.

WHAT ARE THE LIKELY MOTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION?

The issue of organizational and managerial motives for participation has received insufficient attention in previous research. Kanter (1983) attempted to predict undertaking participation programs. Others, in turn, have predicted that superficial motives will lead to inauthentic programs with limed impact (Pasmore and Fagans, 1992). However, little research has actually considered the relationship between organizational motives for initiating employee participation programs and the success of these programs.

At the theoretical level, previous research has considered the types of philosophies that influence manager's decision to initiate employee participation programs. For example, Leana and Florkowski (1992) describe four theoretical models that are used to justify employee involvement programs. They are: (1) a human relations model, which assumes that both work and management interests might be served by employee involvement programs; (2) a human resources model, which promotes employee involvement as a tool for employee development; (3) a workplace democracy model, which champions employee involvement as a way of redistributing power within organizations; and (4) an instrumental management model, which views employee involvement as a vehicle for reaching management

goals. These authors suggest that differing types of programs might be associated with these different philosophies.

Although such philosophies might be the foundation for specific employee participation programs, it is unclear whether managers who guide the programs are aware of the corresponding objectives. Future research might address the extent to which employee participation programs are serving specific management objectives, and how these objectives influence outcomes. For example, do managers who actually direct employee participation programs typically know which objectives they are pursuing (e.g., employee development versus organizational performance)?

Management's goals may also influence the magnitude of employee participation In an organization. However, Sashkin (1984) suggests that organizations might apply participatory methods to four primary areas: goal setting, decision making, problem solving, and organizational change. The choice of area(s) in which participation program will be implemented is determined by the organization's philosophy regarding participation if it has one. For example, an organization with a human resources perspective might involve employees in each of the four areas described above. Similarly, an organization with a purely instrumental orientation might limit employee participation only to areas that lead to direct positive outcomes for the organization itself.

UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS IS PARTICIPATION NEEDED?

Organizational theorists have long emphasized the importance of considering the impact of contextual factors on participation outcomes. Locke and Schweiger (1979) outlines early research on contextual influences by distinguishing between individual and organizational factors.

Individual Factors

It is generally well accepted that employees' responses to organizational interventions are affected by individual differences (Staw, Bell and Clausen, 1986). Contingency models of participation imply that no one form of participation is right for all employees (Miller and Monge, 1986). Research on individual differences has typically taken one of the routes, either examining differences in subordinates'

responses to participation programs (based on personality, ability, demographics, or willingness to participate) or studying differences in managers' traits in relation to the decision of implementing participation programs.

Personality differences. Perhaps the largest amount of research on subordinate's responses to participation has focused on traditional individual differences. Early considerations of subordinate differences centered on personality traits (Abdel-Halim, 1983). For example, Veron (1959) examined the moderating effects of need for independence (or autonomy) and authoritarianism on participation outcomes. He found that there were significant differences among individuals based on these characteristics; individuals who displayed a strong need for independence and low authoritarianism demonstrated the largest gains in productivity and satisfaction from participation.

Other personality variables have also attracted research attention. Kren (1992) examined the moderating effect of locus of control on participation-performance relationship. She found that under conditions of participation, employees with an internal locus of control (i.e., internals) perform significantly better than those with an external locus of control (i.e., externals). However, externals did not perform significantly better than internals under conditions of no participation. These results suggest that an external locus of control limits participation's positive impact on performance.

Ability and demographic differences. Another area where subordinate differences have been examined is employees' ability to participate in a meaningful manner. Most frequently, employee knowledge has been emphasized as a factor that limits the effectiveness of participation, since employees with the most knowledge ought to increase performance to a greater degree than those with little knowledge (Locke and Schweiger, 1979). However, some researchers have failed to find support for this hypothesis (Steel and Mento, 1987). It should be noted, however, that individuals differ in their cognitive complexity. Individuals with higher levels of cognitive complexity are able to manage uncertainty more easily than those with lower levels through the use of judgment and reasoning. Accordingly, organizations should seek to match the individual to the cognitive requirements of the job; in

particular, more complex decisions should be handled by those with appropriate cognitive abilities.

Demographic differences may also influence participation outcomes. Denton and Zeytinoglu (1993) found that women were less likely than men to perceive themselves as participating in decision-making, even when controlling for other relevant variables, hi addition, they found that members of demographic (e.g., marital status, parenthood) or ethnic minority groups tended to view themselves as not participating in decision-making.

Differences in willingness to participate. The issue of subordinate willingness to participate presents another category of individual factors. Pasmore and Fagans (1992) claim that previous research has not measured employee's readiness to engage in participatory activities. They suggest that employee must be prepared both psychologically (e.g., ego development) and technically (e.g., knowledge and skill acquisition) to improve the effectiveness of organizational change efforts.

Values may influence employee's willingness to participate, especially if they do not value participation to the same extent as their supervisors (Hulin, 1971; Singer, 1974). Graham and Verma (1991) explored employee affective responses to participation programs and found that the extent to which employees liked the programs was positively related to their proximity to them and the length of time that they were involved in them. This finding was even clearer for employees who were discontented with the extent of worker participation in decision making or were low in their propensity to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors.

Differences among managers. Examining managers' preferences for involving subordinates, Vroom and Yetton (1973) have created a well-known decision-making model. Attention to differences among managers has also focused on personality and demographic variables. For instance, Steers (1977) found that, as a group, female managers provided opportunities for participation more frequently than did male managers. In addition, this sex difference affected the relationship between managers' personality variables and their tendency to offer participation (e.g., need for achievement was significantly associated with only male managers' decision to involve subordinates in decision making).

Organizational Factors

While individual differences provide one important perspective on the context of participation, organizational factors must also be considered. Indeed several authors have indicated that situational variables represent more important influences on participation than do individual differences (Steers, 1977). Similarly, Neumann (1989) argued that personality-centered explanations were inadequate to describe the complexity of participative behavior.

Organizational context factors. Some researchers have examined how the context of the organization affects participation within it. Vroom and Yetton's (1973) decision tree was one of the first systematic examinations of contextual variables in participation. In this model, the level of subordinate participation in decision making is determined based on the decision costs and desired level of decision quality, decision acceptance, and subordinate development.

Other context factors that have been investigated were size and organization purpose. For example, Conner (1992) found significant effects for organizational size, collective skill level, and profit-making orientation on the level of implemented participation. Denton and Zeytinoglu (1993) observed that rank was positively related to perceptions of participation. Moreover, some research suggests that once demographic, personality, and task variables are controlled for, the only significant variable is the company (Bruning and Liverpool, 1993). One of the common variables examined as a moderating variable in organizational research is the company's culture.

Organization structure factors. Studies that address organizational factors and participation have also focused specifically on one or more aspects of structure. Miller and Monge (1986) found no support for differences in participation's effects based on job type (managers vs. lower-level employees) and organizational type (research, service, and manufacturing). Wagner and Gooding (1987b) identified few statistically significant effects for four situational moderators (group size, task interdependence, task complexity, and performance standards). In general, however, organizational factors appear to have a substantial influence on the participation process.

The type of task under consideration may also moderate the relationship between participation and outcomes. Vroom and Deci (1960) suggested that participation might be less appropriate at low levels of the organization where work is routine but more appropriate at high levels of the organization where work is complex. Indeed, path-goal theory (House and Mitchell, 1974) suggests that the task itself may override the effects of subordinate's personalities on their responses to participation. Abdel-Halim (1983) tested this hypothesis, but found only partial support. However, Sagie and Koslowsky (1994) found that subordinate participation in tactical decisions (those dealing with working methods), as opposed to strategic decisions (those dealing with the initiation of a new product or service), was a better predictor of an increase in change acceptance, work satisfaction, effectiveness, and time allotted to work.

Several organizational characteristics seem likely to act as barriers to effective participation. For example, bureaucratic organizations may embrace rules and regulations that limit autonomy and self-expression, thus blocking potentials for participation (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Neumann (1989) proposed three categories of explanations for why people don't participate in decision making: (1) structural (e.g. decision-making process is highly centralized); (2) rational (e.g., hierarchical arrangements promote competition and emphasize rank and status over mastery and competence), and (3) societal (e.g., employee socialization, ideology, or history may reinforce a separation between workers and managers).

Labor-management relation. Another potential barrier to participation may be the company's union status. Some forms of participation may be unlawful under different sections of the national labor-relation act. For example, some Western countries provide that forms of participation in which managers play significant roles could constitute a management-dominated labor organization and hence illegal. On the other hand, trade unions can force management to have organizational members have a strong voice in the participation process, especially in aspects that affect them directly.

National cultural factors. Similarly, the country in which a company resides is likely to have a substantial impact on participation and its outcomes. Strauss (1982) illustrated the diverse range and forms that employee participation programs take

across 13 countries. McFarlin, Sweeney and Cotton (1992) examined attitudes towards employee participation in a U.S. multinational company across four countries. They provided some evidence that U.S. managers viewed participation as a way to improve performance, while British managers saw it as a threat to management control. Dutch managers viewed employee participation as a societal obligation and had a difficult time understanding the need for separate programs to improve participation. However, views among Spanish managers were mixed. McFarlin and his associates also discovered significant differences among managers across countries regarding perceptions of the ideal level of subordinate participation, employees' moral right to participate, the effects on decision making and subordinates' desire to participate.

ORGANIZATIONAL RECEPTIVITY TO PARTICIPATION

Argyris (1964) viewed participation primarily as a means to an end. To him participation is a means of integrating individual and organizational needs. Argyris noted that the needs of normal, adult human beings and the arrangements in traditional organizations were opposed, at considerable costs in terms of motivation and satisfaction. The needs of normal, healthy adults are to develop from passive infants into active adults, to move from dependent to independent in relationships, to increase one's range of effective behaviors, to understand complex problems and opportunities and to see them as challenges, to develop a long time perspective, to move from a position of subordinate to equality, and to gain autonomy over one's behavior. This suggests that the leadership process in an organization must be such that it ensures a maximum probability that in all interactions and in all relationships within the organization, each member, in lights of his background, values, desires and expectations, will view the experience as supportive and one which builds and maintains the member's sense of personal worth and importance.

What most individuals encounter at work, however, is a situation that does not meet their needs. Argyris stresses the impact of dimensions of formal organization on the adult, including (1) task specialization that produces a lack of challenge, (2) unity of direction, which reduces ego involvement, and (3) span of control, which produces passivity.

It is posited that the conflict between adults in traditionally designed organizations will grow as individuals mature, resulting eventually in the avocation of defense mechanisms such as withdrawal, apathy, and disinterest. To avoid or overcome these consequences, Argyris advocates redesigning the organizational structure and increasing opportunities for meaningful participation. Therefore, Argyris views participation as a means of helping individuals to become more active, more independent, and more equal. Along with changes in job responsibilities and time orientations, these opportunities for participation would help to close the gap between individual needs and organizational experiences, leading to greater self-actualization and higher levels of performance.

Neumann (1989), however, discards theories that hold that the major impediments to participation come from deficiencies in individual attributes and instead examines the situational factors that influence choices individuals make regarding their level of involvement. Neumann proposes three "clusters" or deterrents to participation: (1) structural, including organizational design, work design, and human resource management policies such as real decisions which are reserved for those at the top; (2) rational, including how participation is managed, the dynamics of hierarchy, and individual's stance toward the organization such as rank and status which continue to be more important than knowledge or competence; and, (3) societal, including primary and secondary socialization experiences, ideology, and politics with deeply held values of not demonstrating disloyalty.

Participation-Outcome Relationships

There are several dependent variables that have been empirically linked to participation programs in different organizations. Performance and satisfaction are the most examined outcomes of participation programs (Wagner, 1994; Miller and Monge, 1986; Wagner and Gooding, 1987; Spector, 1986). The results of these studies generally suggest that participation has statistically significant effects on performance and satisfaction. Its is noted here that although performance and satisfaction are clearly the most frequently studied outcomes, a long list of additional outcomes has also been hypothesized to result from participation programs. These

include some aspects such as absenteeism, intention to quite, turnover, quality of work life and injury rates.

Previous research has, however, examined the impact of participation programs on individual outcomes, including employee's commitment, involvement, perceptions of fairness, motivation, expectancies, role ambiguity, and role conflict (Macy and Peterson, 1983; Nurick, 1982; Spector, 1986; Witt and Meyers, 1992). Other research has considered the cognitive, rather than motivational, benefits of participation, focusing on outcome variables such as quality of task strategies (Latham et al. 1994) and clarity of decision making (Macy and Peterson, 1983; Nurick, 1982). Several studies have also been conducted to examine the relationship between participation programs and individual well-being, using physical symptoms and emotional distress as criterion variables (e.g., Spector, 1986).

Participation Measures

There are presently several measures that purport to assess one or more aspects of participation. However, none of these measures has been documented as an accepted standard measure that is accepted for assessing participation in organizations. In fact, many studies on participation do not actually include a measure of participation at all. For instance, Graham and Verna (1991) used a new, 16-item scale to measure interest in participation, and Evans and Fischer (1992) used measures of autonomy as surrogates for perceptions of participation. Yet, in other cases, especially in goal setting literature, participation is often manipulated as an independent variable while dependent variables such as satisfaction, motivation, and performance are subsequently measured.

Other studies attempted to measure one or more facets of participation. For example, early scales include Vroom's (1960) 4-item measure of psychological participation, Leifer and Huber's (1977) 4-item scale measuring participation in work decisions and 4-item scale measuring participation in strategic decision, and Sutton and Rousseau's (1979) 4-item measure of participation in decision making. These studies suggest that there is no single measure that can assess participation in general. Although these measures tap the assorted participation-related phenomena or were

created to measure such a construct, certain new measures that have the potential to provide a richer understanding of participation process are currently needed.

Researchers need to address the question as to why so many researchers continue to develop new measures. Is it because they may feel that the individual settings they are studying do not lend themselves to standardized measures? For example Denton and Zeytinoglu (1993) used new items to measure participative decision-making by faculty members in a university setting. Is it also that researchers may not be comfortable using existing measures because of the existing theoretical imprecision regarding the participation construct? We therefore believe that measurement is an important element of future research which requires careful and systematic attention. An area that can be pursued is the development of methods for assessing managerial motives and intentions and managerial perceptions of actual and desired participation.

CONCLUSION

The review shows that participation is a fundamental concept in organizational behavior research that has been defined in many different ways. Participation is not a single concept. Depending on the purpose of the investigation, the concept has been defined differently in different research settings. It seems that researchers have not actually established what the definitive construct should constitute when we discuss, manipulate or measure participation. It is expected that the review can serve as a meaningful "first" step toward a better understanding of the participation concept. Improving this construct calls for further studies. Researcher also needs to provide a practical framework of the participation process that can redirect us to look beyond simple participation-outcome relationships. Table 1 provides a summary of challenges that need to be resolved in future studies.

Table 1. Unresolved ChaUenges Facing Researchers on Participation

Challenges	Areas of disagreement
o Definitional confusion	o The who, what, where, when and how aspects of participation or involvement.
o Status for participation	o The who in the hierarchy actually is suitable
o Motive for participation	o The why of participation
o Level of analysis	o Individual, interpersonal or dyadic, group, or organizational
o Amount of individual contribution necessary to qualify as participation from both the participant and management	o The measure of the amount of individual contribution from the perceptions of both employee and employer
o Conditions for the success of partici-pation	o The question of interaction, time, ability, differences in managers, demographics, personal willingness, organizational context, size, and structure, type of task, labor-management relations, and even national cultural factors.

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