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PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING;
RESEARCH, RESULTS AND HYPOTHESES

By

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ABSTRACT (within 250 words)

..... This report evaluates initial empirical studies on participation
as well as the cross-national experience of workers...
participation in decision making. Though the ^{more} empirical
studies show the effectiveness of ~~the~~ participation, the
cross national experience has not been all that
encouraging. It is suggested that experiments on
workers participation have, by and large, ignored
to control and/or eliminate intervening variables.
Several hypotheses that take into account some
of the intervening variables have been pointed
out.

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None

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PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING: RESEARCH, RESULTS AND HYPOTHESES

Although famous Hawthorne studies (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger, 1943) were conducted years ago, the passage of time and subsequent exploration of their themes has allowed them to take on the flavour of a classic. These studies are significant because they represent an honest and concerted effort to understand employees, instead of approaching the problem only from the managerial point of view of increasing efficiency on an economic level. These studies have specifically pointed out many dependent variables found in human experimentations, changes in method of supervision, attitude towards work and interpersonal relations were found to be generally more important than the wage incentive.

Subsequent to Hawthorne studies, several researches have been done both on the nature of man, his attitude and their effect on his working life. Several humanistic and empirical theories have been developed and tested. Under humanistic theories we have such deliberations as those by McMurray (1950), Argyris (1957) Maslow (1954), McGregor (1960) and Tennenbaum et. al. (1961). While under theories we come across with such names as Stogdill (1959), Bass (1960), Likert (1959a, 1959b), Fiedler (1964) and Blake and Mouton (1964).

As a result of these studies several measures have been suggested and opted for by organizations with a view to increase morale and efficiency. Work groups, decentralization, greater freedom on the job and participation in decision making etc. are some of the measures that have shown satisfactory results. Participation in decision making has been experimented under several titles. Industrial democracy, joint participation, workers council, codetermination and joint management council are some of the forms of the concept of participation.

Meaning of Participation:

The term participation is variously understood by the involved parties. For management it is a joint consultation prior to decision making; for workers it means codetermination while for Government it is an association of labour with management without the final authority or responsibility in decision making (Mhetras, 1966). A rather interesting description of participation is provided by Strauss (1963). According to him participation is generally conceived of a way of reducing power differences and therefore equality is stressed. Participation as a means to reduce power equality, however, seems difficult to accept because of the obvious difference in formal power positions between a labourer and the director.

The more precise conceptual properties of participation are hardly clear, although at least the following elements seems involved (Golembiewski, 1965).

1. The amount of verbal interaction between a supervisor and subordinate.
2. The degree to which a supervisor performs his role in a group centered way.
3. The degree to which a supervisor is active in making decisions and setting goals to his work units.

Despite the variations in the interpretations, there seems a consensus that participation means sharing in an appropriate manner the decision making power with the lower ranks of the organization. The general assumption being that by using such a process the workers would be able to contribute to the overall effectiveness of organization.

Mhetras (1966) has suggested five levels of participation which range on a scale from minimum to maximum participation in decision making. Since these levels of participation can give us an indication of the extent of condetermination in an organization, they deserve attention. We have tried briefly to highlight these levels below. They are ranked from minimum to maximum degree of participation:

- (a) Informative participation: Refers to only information sharing concerning balance sheet, production, economic condition of the plan etc. Here the workers have no right of close scrutiny of the information provided.
- (b) Consultative participation: Here the council is consulted on such matters as welfare programmes, and methods of work and safety. However, the final decision is always that of management, the council only works as an advisory body.
- (c) Associative participation: Here the council's role is not purely advisory unlike consultative participation. The management is under moral obligation to accept and implement the unanimous decision of the council.
- (d) Administrative participation: A decision already taken comes to the council for choosing an alternative to implement. Here the degree of sharing authority and responsibility is definitely more than the others.

- (e) Decisive participation: Decisions are taken jointly on matters relating to production, welfare etc.

The level upto which the company will allow council to participate will depend on the philosophy followed by the company on one hand, and the personality of the council on the other.

Participation has been called as one of the most prominent construct in the group dynamics literature (Schnieder, 1955). Several empirical findings, conducted in laboratory and otherwise show that significant changes in human behaviour can be brought about rapidly only if the persons who are expected to change participate in deciding what the change shall be and how it shall be made (Simon, 1955).

Initial Research in Participation:

Of the earliest studies in this area, two (Lewin, 1947; Coch & French, 1947) need special mention. These studies have successfully shown that changes in attitude and behaviour can more effectively be brought about through participation rather than by lecture or individual instructions.

Lewin and his associates (1947) conducted several studies to see the effect of participation on change in food habits. These studies lasted for a period of four years. In the first study one group of housewives was given attractive and interesting lecture on the vitamin and mineral value of three meats, beef hearts, sweet breads and kidneys. With the help of charts, explanations were given, health and economic aspects were emphasized and mimeographed recipes were provided. The other group was induced to participate in a program of change without high pressure salesmanship. A follow up study showed that only 3% of the women who have gone through lecture method served one of the three meats. Whereas of those that went through group discussion, 32% served one or the other meats to their families. Subsequent follow up showed similar trend.

Coch & French's (1947) study was centered around women tailors working in Harwood Co. producing pajamas. The factory was facing problems of reduced production after transfer of its employees. An experiment was designed in which there were three degrees of participation: (a) No participation by employees in planning the changes though an explanation was provided, (b) Participation through representation of the worker in designing the changes to be made, (c) Total participation by all members of the group.

The results of the three conditions are summarized in a table form by Golembiewski (1965). The table is reproduced below:

Estimated changes in output vis-a-vis degree of participation

Conditions	Production Units per hour at five day interval after minor changes					
	5	10	15	20	25	30
Total participation	64	65	75	71	71	72
Representation participation	50	53	60	68	64	66
No participation	45	53	55	51	49	55

Without going into too much of details it can be fairly stated that the resistance to change could be overcome by getting the people involved in the process of change.

A subsequent and relatively recent study by Marrow, Bowers, & Seashore (1967) using same company as Coch & French (1947) showed some very revealing results. The study was carried out for two years 1962-64, whereby the Harwood's management model (Participative) was used to bring about changes in Weldon (a company Harwood bought) which was run on a dictative fashion. The results summarized by the authors (p.147) in a table are reproduced below.

Indication of Organizations
Efficiency in Production

Area of performance	Year	Weldon	Harwood
1. Return on capital invested	1962	-15%	+17%
	1964	+17%	+21%
2. Make up pay	1962	12%	2%
	1964	4%	2%
3. Production efficiency	1962	-11%	6%
	1964	+ 4%	16%
4. Earnings above minimum (Piece rate and other incentives, employees only)	1962	none	17%
	1964	16%	22%
5. Operator turnover rates (Monthly basis)	1962	10%	3-4%
	1964	4%	3-4%
6. Absence from work (daily rate production employee only)	1962	6%	3%
	1964	3%	3%

In addition the results of the attitude survey suggest stable but moderate changes, more positive view of the company, an awareness of the reduction in disruptive job changes, more satisfaction with compensation; more willingness to stay in Weldon and a general positive attitude.

Although there is ample evidence to suggest that participation does bring about a change in attitude and behaviour, the persistence of change does not seem to show the same promise. A longitudinal comparison by Sinha (1974) pointed out a reversal in the participative management over a three year period. The study showed definite increase in input (Physical, Personnel facility and Personnel competence) intervening (eg. supportive relationship goal setting, decision making motivation) and output (quality and satisfaction) enables in the employees of a hospital after the introduction of participative decision making. However, a subsequent measure on the same variables after a period of 3 years (1974) revealed significant reversal in intervening and output variables suggesting thereby a curvilinear relationship between participation and measures of it's effectiveness.

The studies discussed in some detail above and several other studies (see for example Radke & Klisurich, 1947; Morse & Reiner, 1956; Lawrence, 1969) suggest substantial degree of support to the general effectiveness of participation.

Multi-national Experience in Worker's Participation:

Despite such convincing evidence the application of participation hypothesis has run into some problems in the area of workers participation in management. It seems that in specific situation such as this, lot many intervening variables operate and thus inhibit a clear cut prediction on the effectiveness in participation. Such variables include both structural as well as personality variables. To fully comprehend this point we need to look at multinational experiences of worker's participation and it's effectiveness.

A. Yugoslavia* provides the most classic examples of worker's participation in management. Traditionally known as self-government in industrial undertakings, it was formally instituted on Feb. 18, 1922 when the coalition government passed a legislation conferring on workers the right to participate in the management of enterprise. The movement however could not effectively take off because of political problems, major of them was Nazi occupation during Second World War. However, through the "Basic Law" of 1950 the Government recognized the principle of workers' management. This law stipulated two kinds of agencies for cooperation; the workers' council (whose job was to decide and define the general policy of the undertaking with regard to economic and social matters) and the management Council (which was required to ensure the application of policies thus generated). Members of the two councils were to be elected by a majority vote

Despite repeated government's acts and decrees, the Yugoslav experiment has not been all that successful. A comprehensive study by Kolarja (1965) supports this conclusion. He used, observations, semistructured interviews combined with the content analysis of personal files and merits of meetings and questionnaire responses on a sample of two factories in Yugoslavia. His findings suggest that the major function of workers' councils in both factories was informative and educational. The workers councils "participated actively when personnel questions were discussed, their participation fell short of the professed definition of workers' management when technological developments as well as financial and marketing issues were discussed" (p.77).

* For detailed discussion on cross national experiences, see I. L. O. series on Cooperation in Industry.

B. Sweden: Joint enterprise council, the Swedish name for workers' participation was formalized in the year 1938 under an agreement between the Employers' Federation and the Confederation of Swedish Labour Unions. This agreement is also known as Saltsjobaden Agreement. According to the terms the following were agreed: (a) to achieve the highest possible production; (b) to ensure that the technical and financial information is made available to workers, (c) to encourage technical training within the firm; (d) to maintain security and safe working conditions of employment and (e) to maintain good relations between the management and the employees (Vallstand, 1961).

Swedish experience to some extent has been a story of success largely because of the efforts of trade unions and comprehensive training schemes. On the other hand, equal credit should be given to employers who have shared company information with the workers. However the performance of joint enterprise councils has not been uniform across undertakings. Two reasons seem to have contributed to this setback, (a) the suspicion of the workers to the information provided by management and (b) the lack of dissemination of the results of participation across to all employees (Das, 1964).

C. Germany: Another well documented attempt in workers participation has been codetermined in Germany. The history of workers participation dates back to 1840's when modern industrialization lead/unemployment among handicrafts man. However, it was not until 1916 when Government enacted the Auxiliary Service Act and legally recognized worker's right to participate in making of man power and welfare policies. Four years later Works Council Act was formulated which later became "Codetermination Law". Under the act the workers councils were required (a) to cooperate with the employer in promoting efficiency of production, (b) to cooperate in the introduction of new labour saving methods, (c) to promote peace, (d) to defend the workers' right of association, and (e) to reconcile grievances received from the employees (Das, 1964).

Although both the trade unions and the government were able, despite resistance from employers to achieve the right of codetermination, in actual practice it ran into major difficulties. Appointment of labour directors on the board was looked with suspicion by workers. They were concerned that these directors may overlook workers' interest in order to safeguard the interest of the enterprise. This was further accentuated by the fact that these people drew large salaries. On the other hand, employers were not very favourable to the idea. Schuchman (1957) concludes that despite codetermination the ultimate responsibility and decision remained in the hands of management. There could be three reasons.

(1) the advantage of electing an eleventh man on the supervisory board - a decisive vote on an otherwise 50-50 representation by workers and employers; (2) the failure to apply the codetermination law to holding companies; and (3) day to day management resting in the hands of management board where labour had minority representation.

D. Norway: Industrial democracy in Norway took a formal shape as early as 1935 when TUC and Confederation of employers signed the main agreement. It clearly recognized that (a) the industrial democracy should be considered in the context of existing Norwegian industrial conditions, (b) to bring Norwegian industrial life into closer accord with the democratic social life, (c) create conditions to individual commitment leading to increased productivity and efficiency (Emery & Thorsrud, 1969).

Results of the interviews conducted by Thorsrud & Emery (1966) with 30 persons who had personal experiences of these mixed boards revealed the following: (a) little evidence of active communication and feedback between the electors and their representatives which in itself renders suspect the effectiveness of representation (b) some interviewees mentioned of their having to take a company's view particularly in matters of production (c) failures of representatives to exercise control over managers or push welfare demands in the face of either company requirements or they were ill equipped to judge.

On attitude level, however, a survey by Holters (1965) indicated that a majority of lower grade industrial workers felt that they could cope and want more responsibility in their daily work.

E. Great Britain: Joint consultation, the British name of workers' participation owes larger share of its gratitude to the Whitley Committee which provided a recognized means of consultation between the management and employees. The Committee in its recommendations suggested: (a) to give employees wide interest in and greater responsibility for, the conditions in which their work is performed, (b) prevent friction and misunderstanding, and (c) enforce the regulations contained in collective agreements drawn up by district and national authorities. Matters relating to wages and hours of work were excluded from its purview.

The joint consultation, though has contributed a sense of cooperation and mutual responsibility it cannot be called a success. Except in times of crisis the employees were generally uninterested in or apathetic to the joint consultative bodies. Apart from personal grievances, the individuals found it difficult to perceive how to use it. The set up was regarded as an important possession but its existence was taken largely as goodwill or a mechanism, in case things go wrong (Jaques, 1951). One important barrier to the success of joint consultation in production and efficiency has been the failure of the new conceptions at the center to permeate down to the shopfloor level (Kirkaldy, 1953).

F. India: Joint management council (JMC). Indian version of workers participation can be dated as far back as 1920 when the workers and employers in Ahmedabad Textile industry agreed to settle disputes by mutual discussion. However, it was not until 1947 when it achieved some acceptance. In this year, Government of India enacted the Industrial Dispute Act with the dual purpose of prevention and settlement of industrial disputes. Under the provision of the Act the works committees were appointed to "remove cause of friction between the employer and the workmen in the day-to-day working of the establishment and to promote measures of securing amity and good relations between them". Subsequently JMC was launched by Tripartite Indian Labour Conference in 1957 with the purpose of improving working conditions, productivity, communication, general administration of laws and collective agreement, encouraging suggestions from workers and creating among them a sense of participation" (Sheth, 1972).

Indian experiment in worker's participation has been far from satisfactory. In a study covering six industrial units; 3 private and 3 public sector undertakings, Sheth (1972) collected data through interviews with various cadres of management, labour and union. He concluded that the functioning of JMC had not been entirely satisfactory. Of the several reasons for failure Sheth (1972) highlighted the following:

- (a) If it is imposed from above or accepted after hard persuasion it may not be effective.
- (b) It has been found to be effective if it has been perceived to meet the needs of the concerned people at the level of organization.
- (c) It has not been clearly demarcated from other consultative committees like workers committee and production committee etc.

In an earlier study of five companies, Metras (1966) found management hesitant to share with workers their right to manage and workers reluctance to take the implied responsibility of participating in managerial action. He concluded that in addition to the attitude and outlook of concerned parties, lack of clear cut distinction from other consultative bodies endangered the effectiveness of JMC, a finding subsequently supported by Sheth (1972).

Though there is very little attempt in these studies to make a comparative evaluation of success or failure across nations, there is one study available that does just the same (Sturmthal, 1964). This comparative study of workers councils in four countries, France, Germany, Poland and Yugoslavia (two on each side of iron curtain) deals with the attempt to establish decentralized market economy on the basis of socialistic property arrangement and the status of unions. Sturmthal found that as far as countries behind iron curtain are concerned the political system makes real self government difficult. While in France and Germany the participation was limited only to the matters concerning personnel rather than production or finance. Sturmthal concludes that a sustained experiment in the system of workers self government does not yet exist (p.178).

Effectiveness of Workers' Participation

The following factors seem to account for the relative failure of industrial democracy across the world. The listing however does not exhaust all the possibilities:

1. Workers participation has suffered largely from the hands of employers. They have felt and probably still feel that such a move will take away from them their right to manage. To some extent, this is supported by a large scale Governments interference in using decrees, enacting acts, and formulating legislative bodies. Voluntary participation by employers has been a rare thing except may be in case of Sweden.
2. Because of this attitude of the employers, information sharing has not been liberal. Workers' representatives have often not been informed regarding manpower and production schedules. This has created an attitude of indifference and possibly hostility among the representatives.
3. Most studies have pointed out the role conflict that most of the representatives have faced in mixed boards and committees. The conflicts have arisen because very often representatives were forced to take company view on some matters that contrasted with the wider

interest of workers. This has not only created conflict of interest among these representatives but has very often generated a crisis of confidence among electors.

4. Unlike the stated aims of the participation, in most cases joint boards, councils etc. have ended up dealing with personnel and welfare matters rather than production and efficiency. This, to a large extent, has been responsible for the dissatisfaction of the employers whose concerns rest relatively more with production and efficiency.
5. In some cases, studies have found very little evidence of active communication and feed back between the electors and their representation. Part of the blame can be put on the representatives themselves who have found themselves illequipped to judge as to how and what should be communicated. Partly multiplicity of union has caused such a problem. In Indian context this has done a considerable damage to JMC.
6. Finally, it has been found, at least in Scandinavian countries that ineffectiveness of participation has shown a positive correlation with the level of which it is utilized. As reported by Holter (1965) industrial experiments in U.S., U.K. and India (in engineering, coal mining and textile) have shown that the democratic sharing of power at lower grades of industrial workers can be stable and effective because it furthers the ends of both employees and government.

Participation: Intervening Variables

In our eagerness to apply any or all of the aforementioned factors, to judge the success or failure of the experiment in industrial democracy, let us not forget that each country and each organization may have a unique culture of its own (Jacques, 1951). For example, Whyte (1959) suggests that self determination so much valued by Americans is not shared by workers in South America. Same way Germans are groups only if they are led by a leader while informal group is a potentiality in U.S. (Weiss, 1956). Thus there seems no reason to expect that the consequences of participation will be universal. Although cross cultural work is scarce, evidence from more theoretical studies supports the point (Moier & Hoffman, 1962).

Vast amount of literature on participation is available; and numerous studies are underway. In fact, as Shaw (1961) notes "we are presently in the midst of something of a renaissance of research on the effect of participation". However most of the studies have tried to determine the influence of workers participation of performance in a one to one fashion. The significance of intervening conditions is not that thoroughly explored, though some studies have suggested the nature of necessary specification for participation.

Bennett (1955) found support for two hypotheses, i.e. (1) the process of decision to perform a specific action raises the probability that the decisions will be performed, and (2) the high degree of consensus on a decision raises the probability that the necessary action will be forthcoming. The results imply that they need not be due to the technique of group decision. Bennett explains, "the factions of decisions and perceived group agreement regarding the direction of such decisions alone have been shown to be as effective in increasing the probability of execution of an action as group decision itself" (p.271). In another study Hamblin, Miller and Wiggins (1961) found the perceived competence of the discussion leader in group decision-making, makes a difference in the morale of the group.

that
In a very extensive study of the entire Yugoslav experiment Broekmeyer (1968) found the following three elements necessary for the survival of workers self government. These are (1) expertness, (2) motivation for the problems handled by the council and (3) growth of a small sub-group of competent and responsible people. The expertness and knowledge hypotheses subsequently found significant support in Mulder (1971) and Mulder & Wilke (1970) studies which found expertness as necessary prerequisites for good participation. In a rather extensive survey of literature Lowin (1968) first proposed a model of participative decision making, and subsequently showed sufficient support for his model. Some of the parameters of the effectiveness of participative decision making that Lowin highlighted are:

- (1) The degree of effectiveness directly varies with the degree with which the participation meets the motives of the participants.
- (2) The greater the clarity of goal the higher the effectiveness provided conformity to goals is a stronger motive among the participants.
- (3) Settlement of relatively difficult issues leads to greater effectiveness.

- (4) The higher the visibility of the activity of participative decision making the more the effectiveness.
- (5) Effectiveness varies inversely with the urgency of the decisions.
- (6) Effectiveness varies directly with the number of administrative levels subsumed by the program.
- (7) Finally, the amount of useful information influences the effectiveness of the participative decision making. The more useful the information, the greater the effectiveness.

In a rather recent study on Indian sample Dadi (1974) provided support for two hypotheses. This results suggests that the level of economic development negatively correlates with work force participation rate, and age shows a curvilinear relationship with participation. These are just few examples of the specifics in participation. These studies do suggest one thing. They point out that without necessary preconditions for participation, there may exist the danger of false participation. Secondly people may engage in matters that are either completely unimportant or above their level of expertness. Both these dangers are extremely critical. The first may lead people to think that the fact that they are participating is sufficient to bring about satisfaction, commitment and so forth. The second may lead to the feeling that since they really are not contributing anything it may be demotivating and possibly lead to "destructive" activities. In order to avoid these danger the search for more and more intervening variables must go on.

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