ABSTRACT

Sustained participation in organizations is viewed as a function of member identification and sense of proprietorship growing out of the attainment of intangible rewards such as a personal feeling of affiliation, opportunities to develop one's professional capacities, opportunities to achieve status and others, as opposed to attaining tangible rewards such as newsletters and low-cost insurance.

A participation model based on the concept of organizational proprietorship has been developed and tested in one organization. This model separates out rewards that lead to sustained membership (tangible rewards) and those leading to sustained participation (intangible rewards).

The model has applicability in a number of organizational contexts utilizing volunteers, including local and regional organizations, organizational sub-groups such as Boards of Directors or committees, and staff complements within organizations.

Nine guidelines for enhancing participation in organizations are provided, together with illustrative comments on the implementation of the guidelines.

The concept of identification and proprietorship provides one explanation of the process that occurs when individuals who are affiliated with an organization elect to be actively involved in the life of the organization.

Organizational Proprietorship: A Participation Model

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The task of encouraging and enhancing participation on the part of many and diverse actors presents an organizational challenge of considerable proportions for organizations utilizing volunteers. Achieving loyalty, participation, and involvement on the part of staff, volunteers, or other organizational members is essentially a function of each person's sense of ownership or proprietorship of the organization. The idea that individual actors in an organization contribute most effectively to the life of the organization if they have a sense of possessiveness about the organization has long been understood by successful managers in business and the public sector. Indeed, the central theme of the Japanese Theory Z approach to management is one of individual commitment to the organization's goals, and the development of a sense of personal pride in the creation of an end product of excellent quality.

Building this sense of proprietorship among various actors in any given social welfare organization has been a matter of concern for administrators, staff position managers, and researchers for many years.[1] The work of Rothman and associates is of particular interest to practitioners because of its empirically-based models for fostering participation, and for promoting innovation.

This paper presents findings from a study conducted under the auspices of the Washington State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers to address the issue of fostering participation of chapter membership. The study, which was grounded in Rothman's concepts was expanded to include the proprietorship component and on the basis of that addition to create a theoretical model which was then field tested in one local unit of the Chapter.[2] The authors contend that the findings from this NASW study have relevance enhancing participation of volunteers at large, and might be used by program and administrative personnel in building a base of participatory support for agencies, or agency programs. This article therefore, describes the NASW study, presents the participation model, discusses some of the findings of the study, and offers some possible applications of the model and the findings. Im-

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plementation guidelines are included in order to assist practitioners to apply the findings most effectively.

THE NASW STUDY

The Washington State NASW study came about as a result of state chapter leaders recognizing that the organization's image among professional social workers and the larger community was one of ineffectiveness because of a lack of active participation by volunteer members in the work of the organization. This image seemed to discourage prospective members from joining and current members from taking pride in their organization. Despite the image problem, the organizational response to this dilemma has typically been one of launching a membership drive in order to increase chapter income thereby making it possible to develop programs that would excite and challenge the members. The defect in this process of logical analysis is apparent. Without involvement of current members, recruitment of new members is not likely to be highly successful, and the increased resources from a half-hearted response to a membership drive would not serve to enhance the existing program to any great degree. Thus the organizational participation project was proposed as one possible response to the Chapter's problems.

The first task of the project was one of developing a model that might identify relevant factors in the process of becoming a member and of participating in any organization.

The literature on participation, though not extensive, provides a theoretical base for the Organizational Proprietorship Model that was developed and tested in the NASW study. This model, as portrayed in Figure 1, incorporates membership in the organization as either an employee or a voluntary actor; a sub-process of benefit attainment; and a sub-process of sustained participation growing out of a sense of proprietorship of the organization. Various aspects of the model require elaboration if the full time impact of the model is to be realized.
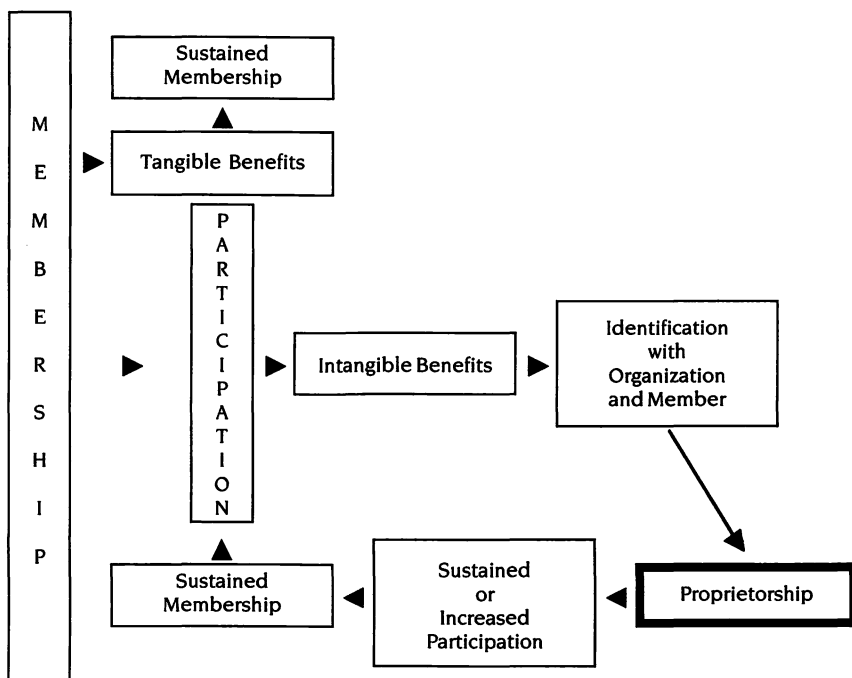

Figure 1
A PARTICIPATION MODEL

MOTIVATORS

Motivators that move people into affiliation with an organization must be considered separately from the benefits that derive after affiliation has occurred. Variables identified in the literature as having a relationship to both membership and participation include:

1) Psycho Social Needs - Wood suggests that the amount of satisfaction derived from participation may well be a function of differing levels of need for such things as power and/or affiliation.[3]

2) Personal Characteristics - Research suggests that participation is highest among people aged 35 to 55. Participation in organizations seems to correlate with higher socioeconomic status, white ethnic origin, and being male; married persons seem to have higher participation levels than singles, particularly if both partners are members of the organization.[4]

3) Professional and Skill Determinants - Participation in organizations is enhanced when it is encouraged by employers, when a person's orientation is cosmopolitan, and when a person has a high commitment to one's profession. Previous organizational experience also correlates with high participation levels.[5]

4) Organizational Supports and Constraints - The structure, process, programs, and policies of an organization appear to help determine levels of participation. Higher levels of participation are related to decentralized decision making, open communication between members and leaders, and programs and policies that enhance a member's inclination and ability to participate. Organizational size seems also to be a factor in participation, with smaller organizations being more facilitative of participation than are larger ones.[6]

Affiliation motivators include the individual's need for power, recognition, intimacy, etc., and are probably tempered by individual characteristics and professional determinants. The structure and processes of the organization serve to determine whether or not participation will be enhanced or suppressed. While these motivators influence the choice to affiliate with the organization (membership), they will nevertheless influence the nature of participation once the affiliation option has been made.

In addition to the foregoing variables, a cross-cutting set of variables having to do with real or perceived benefits derived from participation must be taken into account.

The NASW study further differentiated benefits by the nature of the perceived rewards. Rewards may be *Tangible* or *Intangible*. Tangible rewards include such concrete benefits as salary, fringe benefits, development of new skills or knowledge, and participating in social change activities.[7]

Intangible rewards comprise three subgroups of benefits.

1) Anticipatory Rewards - for example, interim benefits that derive from setting up a committee or working on legislative change.

2) Symbolic Rewards - intrinsic benefits such as recognition, personal achievement, prestige, status, public approval and prominence.

3) Interpersonal Rewards - making new friends, enjoying social opportunities, developing interpersonal skills and helping others.[8]

As Figure 1 reveals, benefits accrue as a result of both membership and participation. Tangible rewards or benefits are, as we have noted, available to all members and do little to foster participation. They do, on the other hand, provide continuous motivation to maintain membership or affiliation with the organization.

Participation appears to be influenced mostly by the perceived presence of intangible rewards or benefits, rewards that appear to be available only to those who participate. These are usually of a symbolic or interpersonal nature, providing a source of primary group satisfaction for those who participate actively. Sustained participation over time is dependent

upon the individual actors' perception that these intangible rewards will continue only if participation continues.

IDENTIFICATION AND PROPRIETORSHIP

The concept of organizational proprietorship grows out of the idea that participation and intangible rewards are somehow interrelated. People who hold a proprietory view of an organization think of the organization as "my" organization rather than "that" organization, and they define members as "we" rather than "they." This feeling of proprietorship also gains expression in behaviors on the part of members that suggest that they are somehow responsible for the organization and its activities.

Proprietorship appears to be similar in many ways to Brown's concept of identification. Brown seeks it as a self-defining process that occurs "when an individual accepts influence because he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with another person or group."[9] This identification is dependent upon receiving satisfactions affecting one's own self-definition, and these satisfactions must be ego-involving and intrinsically motivating. It is the symbolic (intangible) motivations that are of primary importance to this process of identification, rather than pragmatic (tangible) motivations.

The feeling of proprietorship or ownership of an organization is the chief determinant of continued participation, and occurs after the identification process has taken place. Ownership carries with it a commitment to the purposes, policies, and programs of the organization, a commitment that only occurs when there is active participation over time.

TESTING THE THEORY

In order to test the idea of a co-relative relationship between participation and tangible or intangible benefits associated with membership in an organization, a stratified systematic sample of members of the Washington State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers was studied. While the purpose of the study was primarily one of analyzing how members perceived their own involvement in the Chapter, and which benefits were preceived to influence their participation in the Chapter, the findings of the study have relevance for leaders in other organizations.

A total of 511 questionnaires was mailed to the same with 381 or 74.6% responding. The profile of the respondents is that of a white female in her 30s, holding a Master of Social Work degree, and employed in the direct delivery of social services.

In the analysis of the data generated through the questionnaire, various parts of the model are examined in relation to the level of participation reported by the respondents. For example, if participation is a function of receipt of intangible rewards, then active members should receive more of these rewards than would inactive members. In order to test this hypothesis, the study used highly correlated multiple measures of participation, the levels of which were obtained through self-assessment questions. These levels were then used in analyzing the relationship of participation to perceived benefits.

Respondents in the NASW study saw themselves as moderately or very active, 6%; slightly active, 18%; and members only (inactive), 76%.

In this study, a list of 14 benefits that derived from membership in the organization was developed. Respondents were asked to indicate which, if any, of the benefits accrued to them through membership. Inactive members reported an average of 4.1 benefits, slightly active members, 5.6, and moderately or very active, 6.4. This direct linear relationship reveals that moderately or very active members received benefits at a higher rate than did the other two groups. Further, an examination of Table I reveals that the intangible benefits of meeting friends, association with other social workers, and leadership opportunities were correlated with participation, while the tangible benefits of receiving the journal or financial gain were unrelated to participation.

Table II shows the respondents' views of identification with the organization as related to their participation level. Active members more frequently referred to the

TABLE I

Comparison of Rewards Received by Participation Level

Intangible Rewards (rewards directly related to participation level)

	Percent Checking Yes		
	Moderately or Very Active	Slightly Active	Member Only
Opportunity to associate with other social workers	87.8%	68.3%	21.6%
Professional development	87.9%	68.3%	44.4%
Working to solve problems	75.8%	48.1%	30.3%
Opportunity to meet friends	45.5%	37.5%	8.0%
Leadership oppoortunities	36.4%	10.6%	5.7%

Tangible Rewards (rewards not directly related to participation levels)

	Percent Checking Yes
	Total Sample
Receiving the journal	63.9%
Agency expectations	11.5%
Financial gain	3.8%

TABLE II

Comparison of Identification with the Organization by Participation Level

	Percent Checking Yes		
	Moderately or Very Active	Slightly Active	Member Only
We	92.3%	48.9%	25.5%
They	7.7%	51.1%	75.5%

organization as "we" while inactive members more often viewed the organization as "they," suggesting a stronger sense of belonging on the part of active members, and a greater identification with the organization's goals, policies, and purposes.

Questions that probed the members' sense of responsibility for the organization and its activities revealed that moderately and very active members ranked these variables much higher than did the slightly active or inactive members. These findings add further weight to the argument that "proprietorship" is central to the choice of active participation. See Table III.

Given these findings about rewards, participation, and the interdependence of both in creating a condition of identification and proprietorship on the part of actors within the organization, it is helpful then to consider the implications of the participation model for other organizations.

TABLE III

Comparison of Feeling of Proprietorship by Participation Level

	Percent of members checking 4 or 5 indicating a moderate to high level of proprietorship feeling		
	Moderately or Very Active	Slightly Active	Member Only
Impact of organization due to you	14.3%	2.9%	.2%
Organization achieves goals due to you	21.9%	3.9%	.7%
Feel responsible for organization's activities	59.4%	5.8%	1.2%

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

While the work done in the NASW study was specific for that organization only, it did produce a model and some guidelines that might be generalized for other organizations and for other types of "organizational relationship." For instance, it seems reasonable to presume that identification and proprietorship would be desirable traits to foster among organizations relying on volunteers, among employees of social welfare agencies, among voluntary network group members, and among members of Boards of Directors and sub-committees of such policy making groups. To facilitate the adaptation of the model to other situations, several implementation guidelines are proposed.

Guideline 1: The goals of the organization's leaders need to be clear at the outset. Is the primary goal that of increasing membership or is it that of enhancing participation? If it is membership only, then one set of benefits should be stressed; if it is to be participation then a different set of benefits is indicated.

Guideline 2: The nature of benefits that have value to a given constituency must be determined in advance. In an organization that has a stable membership, a survey of active and inactive members can easily be conducted to determine which benefits lead to intensified identification and the ultimate sense of proprietorship espoused in the model. In a newly formed organization, or one that has a transient membership, it may be necessary to conduct time series probes about rewards to be sure that most members' values are taken into account as the organization grows or changes.

Guideline 3: If the goal of the organization's leadership is to increase membership, then tangible rewards should be considered over intangible rewards. The limitation to this is that participation as a result of membership may not occur or may be scattered and unpredictable.

Guideline 4: If the organization leadership's goal is that of enhancing participation, then intangible rewards will be more effective. This is not to say that tangible rewards should be ignored, but rather that the intangible ones need to be deliberately identified and openly made available to members.

Guideline 5: Personal contact is the method of choice in initiating the participation process. This is a logical application of the intangible reward concept. The organizational benefit of social interaction is modeled by this process, and the intangible benefits of professional affiliation or camaraderie are thus made apparent.

Guideline 6: Specificity in describing the nature of tasks to be performed is essential in enlisting individual participation, as is specificity in identifying individuals to be invited to participate. That is, identify the task clearly and personally solicit members to participate in the task.

Guideline 7: The importance of informal socializing before, during, and after meetings or task group activities cannot be stressed too strongly if participation is the goal. The findings of the NASW study and other work referenced in this paper all point to the fact that participation is most enhanced if people have a sense of closeness and personal affiliation with the other members of the organization or group.

Guideline 8: The achievements of members should be recognized both publicly and within the organization. Such recognition provides both tangible and intangible rewards, through the use of such devices as media announcements about members' contributions, award ceremonies, letters of recognition, and in-house commendations at meetings or conferences. All of these serve to accord status within the organization, and to some extent outside the organization as well.

Guideline 9: The structures, process, programs, and policies of an organization each serve to enhance or inhibit participation. Participation is enhanced when decision making is broadly based in the organization, when communication flows easily from top to bottom and vice versa, and when the organization provides interpersonal supports. Further, participation is enhanced when the organization's policies and programs appear to participants to be relevant to the organization's and the members' goals and aspirations.

These guidelines provide a framework for thinking about how to encourage and enhance participation, but they do not provide a clear-cut model that can be applied to every organization or to every organizational situation. Fostering participation through encouraging identification and proprietorship is an individualized process that must take into account the nature of the organization, its goals and purposes, its environment, the nature of the potential and actual affiliates to be enlisted in the participation energy and time to the process. The process requires conscious planning and continous activity on the part of the leaders, and unless the process becomes institutionalized in the organization, it will quickly lose its impact.

SUMMARY

Sustained participation in organization is viewed as a function of member identification and sense of proprietorship growing out of the attainment of intangible rewards such as a personal feeling of affiliation, opportunities to develop one's professional capacities, opportunities to achieve status, etc., as opposed to attaining such tangible rewards as newsletters and low-cost insurance.

A participation model based on the concept of organizational proprietorship has been developed and tested in one organization. This model separates out rewards that lead to sustained membership (tangible rewards) and those leading to sustained participation (intangible rewards).

The model appears to have applicability in a number of organizational contexts including local and regional organizations, organizational sub-groups such as Boards of Directors or committees, and staff complements within organizations.

Nine guidelines for enhancing participation in organizations are provided, together with illustrative comments on the implementation of the guidelines.

The concept of identification and proprietorship provides one explanation of the process that occurs when individuals who are affiliated with an organization elect to be actively involved in the life of the organization. They identify with the organization and with other members, they exhibit a sense of responsibility for the organization, they derive intangible rewards which lead them to developing a feeling of shared ownership (proprietorship) of the organization, thus further participation ensues.

NOTES

¹See for example, Eugene C. Hagburg, Correlates of Organizational Participation: A Critical Evaluation, Pacific Sociological Review, 9 (Spring 1966), pp. 15-21; Robert W. Miller and Frederick A. Zeller, An Analysis of Participation in Contemporary Society (Morgantown, WV: Center for Appalachian Studies and Development, 1967); and Jack Rothman, John L. Erlich, and Joseph G. Teresa, Promoting Innovation and Change in Organizations and Communities: A Planning Manual (New York, NY: Wiley, 1978).

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⁷Stephen J. Cutler, Aging and Voluntary Association Participation; Eugene C. Hagburg, Correlates of Organizational Participation: A Critical Evaluation; Martin M. Perline and V.R. Lorenz, The Formally Participative Organization; and Jack Rothman et al., Promoting Innovation and Change in Organizations and Communities.

⁸Michael E. Brown, Identification and Some Conditions of Organizational Involvement, Administrative Science Quarterly, 14(3) (1969), pp. 346-353; Stephen J. Cutler, Aging and Voluntary Association Participation; Eugene C. Hagburg, Correlates of Organizational Participation: A Critical Evaluation; Michael Hanks and Bruce E. Eckland, Adult Voluntary Association and Adolescent Socialization; Jack Ross, Work and Formal Voluntary Organizations: A Neglected Research Area; Jack Rothman et al., Promoting Innovation and Change in Organizations and Communities; and Michael T. Wood, Some Determinant and Consequences of Power Distribution in Decision Making Groups.

⁹Michael E. Brown, Identification and Some Conditions of Organizational Involvement, p. 347.