

# TOTAL PARTICIPATION IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT – FRIEND OR FOE

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## Abstract

*The aim of this study was to examine how one's preferred management style (participative or autocratic), influences project-group effectiveness and his or her job satisfaction. The group experiment simulating a project management task has shown that people's preferred management style did not reflect their actual behavior. As predicted, members of participative project groups were more satisfied with the task they performed, and reported a more positive mood after the experiment. Members of autocratic groups were less satisfied and reported a more negative mood after the experiment. Contrary to the hypothesis, no significant effects on effectiveness were observed.*

**Keywords:** total participation, project management, leadership

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## Introduction

Although Total Participation Management (TPM) and other participative management styles are currently becoming more and more popular (Stocki, Prokopowicz, & Żmuda, 2008), there are still no clear empirical findings regarding its impact on effectiveness (Glew, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van Fleet, 1995; Wagner, 1994) or satisfaction (Miles, 1965; Heller, 1971; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Kim, 2002). Despite the fact that research on participation can be found in almost every field of contemporary psychology (see: Cheney et al., 1998; authors present other scientific disciplines where studies on participation also include other disciplines such as sociology, political science, economy etc.), it is hard not only to find conclusive results on what the conditions or effects of participation are but also what participation is. The need for adequate and conclusive studies on participation grows even faster when we take into account that many different companies around the world (e.g. Semco, SAIC, Harley Davidson, SRC Holdings Corp. and many others) achieve extraordinary results implementing total participation management (the term was used first by Graham and Titus (1979)).

There is a whole spectrum of different approaches to organizational participation that array from different assumptions, use different measures and postulate different outcomes of participation. Participation is not always even labeled as 'participation', sometimes scientists use the term employee involvement, work democracy, empowerment or self-directed work teams (Cooper, 2002). The most popular approach uses participative decision-making as a synonym of participation (Locke & Schweiger, 1979). Defining participation as participating in the decision-making process would be incomplete (for more anthropological assumptions that we make here see Żmuda, Prokopowicz, Stocki, submitted). The autonomy should be broadened by reflection and thus we propose to define participation not only as a power sharing but also knowledge sharing process.

Opposite to the participative management style, autocratic management or leadership can be found in the literature (Lewin, Lipitt, & White, 1939; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958;

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Vroom & Jago, 1988; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). This leadership style puts the manager on top of all decisions not necessarily demanding employees' involvement other than doing what one is told. Almost all Project Management methodologies (PRINCE2, PMBOK, PCM) require strict hierarchy of power. The project manager makes all the decisions. Group leaders are responsible for employees' work and report strictly to their immediate supervisor – Project Manager. The employees at the bottom of the hierarchy are only supposed to contact the Group leader, never the Project Manager. The roles are fixed, the information is dosed out if needed but mainly the tasks are given to the individuals without asking. This approach is typical for project management partially because of the nature of projects itself. Project is a management environment that is created for the purpose of delivering one or more business products according to a specified business case (Association of Project Management Group Ltd.). The vital factors in every project are: fixed time, resources and goals. The nature of those requirements mainly results in highly hierarchical, autocratic management style.

When it comes to the effectiveness of participation, as we stated before, the results are not consistent. As proven in some studies (Miles, 1965; Heller, 1971; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Magjuka, 1989; Mitchell, 1996; Kim, 2002; Stocki, Prokopowicz & Żmuda, 2008) those employees who had the possibility to make decisions about their tasks were more satisfied with their work. Participation has been shown to have positive influence on general well-being (Stocki & Bielecki, 2007), motivation (Mulder, 1977; Deci & Ryan, 1985), different aspects of personal development or fulfilling the high-level needs (Mendel, 2001). But, according to Summers and Hyman (2005) there is plenty of research that found no association or even a negative association between the company performance and participatory management (Kelly & Kelly, 1991; Ben-Ner & Jones, 1995; Vaughan-Whitehead, 1995; Summers & Hyman, 2005). The causal direction of the relationship remains to be discovered (Cooper, 2002). Similarly, the discussion on motivational vs. cognitive explanation for participation effectiveness is still in progress (Wagner et al., 1997). We believe that there is more credible data supporting the notion that participative management results in more positive mood together with higher work satisfaction when compared with autocratic management. Based on previous research mentioned in this section we assume that participants managed in a participatory way will be more satisfied with the work on the project as opposed to participants managed in an authoritarian manner (Hypothesis 1). Some research on leadership states that the outcomes of different management styles depend on employees' maturity (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977) or situational factors (Fiedler, 1964, 1978). In the situations similar to the experimental task presented in this study, namely: new, high time pressure, clear and difficult goals and changing environment - autocratic style seems to be more beneficial (Fiedler, 1964, 1978). Others (Magjuka, 1989) argue that satisfaction is partially responsible for effectiveness as a satisfied employee works better than an unhappy one. Heller et al. (1998) summarize research on participation with the claim that it has been shown to have neutral or slightly positive impact on individuals, groups and organizations. In this research, accordingly to the data mentioned above, we try to support the assumption that autocratic management in project management setting will be more effective than participative management style (Hypothesis 2).

However what is clearly missing in all mentioned research is taking into consideration managers' and employees' beliefs (convictions). The effectiveness of participative and authoritarian management styles may be mediated by the implicit theories about which style is the best one and should be used. In previous studies (Lewin, Lippitt & White, 1939) participants were assigned to certain managed groups without being asked about their own preferences. This might have affected the results. The positive relation between implicit

power theories and power sharing was found by Coleman (2004). In our study we want to examine satisfaction and effectiveness of participative and autocratic management styles taking into consideration the group members' and leaders' beliefs about the desired management style. We predict that participants will react during experiment accordingly to their preferred management style (Hypothesis 3).

## Research question

What are the outcomes of participatory and autocratic management styles in a project group, taking into consideration the participants' beliefs about their preferred management styles?

## Hypotheses

- Members of participative groups will be generally more satisfied with the job and will be in a better mood than members of autocratic groups.
- Autocratic groups will be generally more effective than participative groups.
- Participants will act according to their beliefs (preferred management style) – those who find participatory management most appropriate will act in a participatory way, those who find autocratic management style most appropriate will act in an authoritarian way.

## Methodology of research

The preferred management style scale was used to assess people's orientations towards participative and autocratic management and their preferences in this matter. Participants answered seven questions on their beliefs regarding management style (e.g.: "Best scores are achieved by the teams where the leader makes most of the decisions", "If you involve many group members in the decision making process it will always result in chaos and waste of time") using 4 points scale ("I definitely disagree", "I disagree", "I agree", "I definitely agree"). The maximum in this scale means that the person holds highly autocratic preferences when it comes to the management whereas participants with low results leaned towards participative management. The reliability of the scale was low, but acceptable ( $\alpha = .58$ ). According to the scores the participants achieved, they were assigned to be leaders or members of specific groups. Some groups were arranged in a way that guaranteed internal cohesion (e.g., all members had participative or autocratic attitude), while others were mixed. Groups took part in the project management simulation. Before as well as after the simulation, participants filled in the Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS) by Mayer and Gaschke (1988) which contains a list of several adjectives (for details see Appendix 1). Two subscales of mood were used – pleasant-unpleasant (adjectives: active, calm, caring, content, happy etc.) and negative-relaxed (adjectives: gloomy, fed up, nervous). High scores on the first subscale stand for unpleasant mood, while low scores indicate good mood. When it comes to the second subscale, high scores stand for relaxed state, while low ones for upset-nervous one.

The projects goal was to produce, using given resources (paper, scissors, glue etc.), and sell on the improvised market different types of goods (cubes, cones, circles etc.). The task was not very difficult to avoid influence of participants' earlier experience. We expect that the final score will result from the way group work was organized and how members were motivated. At the beginning of the project each group leader received detailed instructions on what the specific goals were: the number of goods to produce and the amount of money to earn. Leaders were told not to show directly the written instructions to the group

members, but that they could reveal any information they wanted to. Leaders were asked to organize the work of the group in the way they wished to do. The time for the task was fixed – 54 minutes divided into 8 rounds. In each round prices on the market were changing as well as special occurrences (price changes, new standards of products, new products etc.) were appearing. The role of the occurrences was to make the work environment more dynamic and less predictable. Each group was monitored by observers in order to check the behavioral aspects of project management. The observers received training before the experiment and during the group work were filling out the behavioral questionnaire – rating behavior of each member and leader to assess whether it was participative or autocratic. When it comes to the leaders, observers were noting down behaviors concerning: decision making, power distribution and knowledge distribution. Each behavior was later on assessed on the scale from 0 (low participation with group) to 8 (high participation with group). Each group was monitored by one observer. The scale had average reliability ( $\alpha = .66$ ). After completing the project, all participants were first asked to fill in the BMIS together with Satisfaction Scale (6 questions about general satisfaction, satisfaction with decision making process, atmosphere etc.;  $\alpha = .87$ ). The higher result on Satisfaction Scale, the more satisfied participants felt after completing the task. Later on, participants were asked to assess their scores. The project groups were to produce and sell a certain amount of geometric figures and obtain as much money for them as they could. At the end of the simulation, groups added up the money they collected and the value of the tools they bought during the work. In that way the final score was calculated.

### Participants

77 university students participated in the experiment (17 male and 59 female). The age average was 23,7 ( $SD = 4.4$ )<sup>29</sup>. The group consisted of students of the following faculties: sociology, psychology, international relations. Participants were chosen on the basis of their interest in project management. Most participants were students. The number of groups taking part in the experiment was 20. Detailed demographic information can be found in Table 1. The participants were assigned to the 20 groups (1 group of 5 people, 15 groups of 4, 4 groups of 3).

Table 1. Demographic structure of the sample.

Demographics	Category	Frequency
Gender	Female	59
	Male	17
	Missing	1
Age	<22	25
	22-25	24
	>25	9
	Missing	19
Education	Psychology	39
	Sociology	15
	Int. relations	23

<sup>29</sup> *As for the huge amount of age data missing there cannot be found any reasonable explanation why so many people decided not to reveal their age, however it is unlikely to have any influence on the research itself*

**Results**

The descriptive statistics of the main study measures before categorization are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of main study measures.

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Preferred Management Scale	65	10,00	22,00	14,98	3,94
Behavior Assessment	77	,67	8,00	3,93	1,78
Satisfaction Scale	75	8,00	24,00	18,26	3,83
Group Management Style	20	,67	7,67	3,47	1,81
Pleasant-Unpleasant Mood Scale	75	3,19	6,94	5,26	,86

**Hypothesis 1.**

The participants' satisfaction was measured by the Satisfaction scale (see the Appendix) and the mood was measured by the Brief Mood Introspection Scale (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988). To examine both participants' satisfaction and group effectiveness each group was categorized according to the observers' ratings as either participative, "in-between" or autocratic. Out of 20 groups, 7 were assessed as using a participative style (27 participants), 8 were using an "in-between" style (30 participants), and 5 were using an autocratic management style (20 participants). In our further analysis we will compare participative and autocratic groups only.

The means and standard deviations of the Satisfaction Scale of participative and autocratic groups were  $M = 20.33$  ( $SD = 3.05$ ) and  $M = 17.1$  ( $SD = 3.94$ ), respectively. A two tailed t-test showed that this difference was significant ( $t(44) = 3.13$ ,  $p < .005$ ). Detailed scores can be found in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Management style in the group and members satisfaction – means and standard deviations.

Management style in the group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Participative	26	20,33	3,05	,60
Autocratic	20	17,10	3,94	,88

Table 4. Management style in the group and members satisfaction – t-test.

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2,480	,122	3,134	44	,003	3,23077	1,03081	1,15330	5,30824
Equal variances not assumed			3,031	34,888	,005	3,23077	1,06604	1,06634	5,39520

Participants' mood was measured by two out of four BMIS scales: Pleasant-Unpleasant, and Negative-Relaxed. No differences in the mood were observed before the experiment. For the scale Pleasant-Unpleasant means and standard deviations of participative and autocratic groups were  $M = 5.16$  ( $SD = .75$ ) and  $M = 5.03$  ( $SD = 1.11$ ), ( $t(44) = .44$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and for the scale Negative-Relaxed  $M = 2.25$  ( $SD = .74$ ) and  $M = 2.13$  ( $SD = 1.00$ ), ( $t(44) = .47$ ,  $p > .05$ ). After the experiment the observed means and standard deviations of participative and autocratic groups were  $M = 5.50$  ( $SD = .76$ ) and  $M = 5.01$  ( $SD = 1.01$ ), ( $t(44) = 1.91$ ,  $p < .062$ ) and for the scale Negative-Relaxed  $M = 2.33$  ( $SD = .86$ ) and  $M = 2.67$  ( $SD = 1.01$ ), ( $t(44) = -1.22$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Although not significant and relatively small, the observed changes are interesting and suggest that members of participative groups were in better mood after the experiment than members of autocratic groups. To examine the changes within the groups Paired Samples T-test was used. The significant ( $t(24) = -2.33$ ,  $p \leq .03$ ) change was found towards more pleasant mood in Pleasant-Unpleasant Scale among participative groups, and negative change in Negative-Relaxed scale turned out to be not significant ( $t(24) = -2.33$ ,  $p = .74$ ). Detailed scores are presented in Table 5. Among autocratic groups, the negative change in Pleasant-Unpleasant Scale turned out to be insignificant ( $t(19) = .16$ ,  $p = .87$ ), and negative change in Negative-Relaxed scale turned out to be significant ( $t(19) = -2.83$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Detailed scores are displayed in Table 6.

Table 5. Results of members of participative groups in BMIS mood scales – paired samples t-test.

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower		Upper			
Pair 1	Pleasant-Unpleasant Before - Pleasant-Unpleasant After	-,37333	,80255	,16051	-,70461	-,04205	-2,326	24	,029
Pair 2	Negative-Relaxed Before - Negative-Relaxed After	-,06267	,95332	,19066	-,45618	,33085	-,329	24	,745

Table 6. Results of members of autocratic groups in BMIS mood scales – paired samples t-test.

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower		Upper			
Pair 1	Pleasant-Unpleasant Before - Pleasant-Unpleasant After	,03146	,86359	,19310	-,37271	,43563	,163	19	,872
Pair 2	Negative-Relaxed Before - Negative-Relaxed After	-,54333	,85847	,19196	-,94511	-,14156	-2,830	19	,011

**Hypothesis 2.**

The means and standard deviations of the effectiveness of participative and autocratic groups were  $M = 137.96$  ( $SD = 41.22$ ) and  $M = 121.04$  ( $SD = 48.68$ ). A two tailed t-test showed that this difference was not significant ( $t(10) = .65, p < 0.53$ ). Although the difference is not significant, it is worth mentioning that the direction of that difference was opposite to our hypothesis. Participative groups achieved a better score in effectiveness than autocratic ones. Detailed scores can be found in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7. Management style in the group and group effectiveness – means and standard deviations.

Management style in the group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Participative	7	137,96	41,22	15,58
Autocratic	5	121,03	48,68	21,77

Table 8. Management style in the group and group – t-test.

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	,194	,669	,652	10	,529	16,92762	25,97303	-40,94391	74,79914
Equal variances not assumed			,632	7,785	,545	16,92762	26,77212	-45,10667	78,96191

**Hypothesis 3.**

To examine the link between one’s preferred management style and one’s real behavior we had to categorize the scores on the scale of Preferred Management as well as the Behavior Assessment. Scores in each variable were ordered into three categories. The Chi-Square Test was used,  $\chi^2(4, N=65) = 4.11, p = .39$ . No significant relationship between preferred management style and behavior was found. For the details see Table 3 and 4. The data does not support hypothesis 3. Detailed data can be found in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. Preferred Management Style and Behavior Assessment – cross-table.

		Preferred Management Style			Total
		Participative	“In between”	Autocratic	
Behavior Assessment	Participative	10	11	5	26
	“In between”	10	6	7	23
	Autocratic	3	8	5	16
Total		23	25	17	65

Table 10. Preferred Management Style and Behavior Assessment – chi-square test.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4,113(a)	4	,391
Likelihood Ratio	4,440	4	,350
Linear-by-Linear Association	1,481	1	,224
N of Valid Cases	65		

a) 1 cell (11,1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4,18.

## Discussion and conclusions

Our pilot study suggests that, indeed, people are more satisfied when working in participative groups than when working in an autocratic environment. Members of participative groups (in our study) reported to be satisfied with the decision making process, atmosphere in the groups, proud of the results and would like to work with the same group again. Working in a participative environment changed people's mood into a better one, while working in the autocratic environment made people experience more negative mood. These results are coherent with most of the studies on participation (Miles, 1965; Heller, 1971; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Magjuka, 1989; Mitchell, 1996; Kim, 2002; Stocki, Prokopowicz, Żmuda, 2008) that suggest that when it comes to satisfaction, participatory environment, providing people with autonomy and a chance to execute their freedom, is more beneficial than an autocratic one. Participative groups were also more effective than autocratic ones, but this difference was not significant. It is however worth mentioning, because the characteristics of the situation – novelty of the task, time pressure etc – would rather favor autocratic management (Fiedler, 1964, 1978). It looks like working in good mood in participative groups allowed participants to achieve slightly better results. It is possible that the results could be more unequivocal if the team task lasted longer and allowed for the development and change of more advanced strategies etc. This should be a case in further investigations.

Interesting findings were noticed when it comes to the relation between one's preferred management style and their behavior during experiment. We were not able to find any significant relation between those two. In other words, people say one thing and then do another one. We suggest a couple of different explanations for this phenomenon. First of all it is possible that when answering the questions in the Preferred Management Style questionnaire people do not answer according to what they really think or feel but according to what is dominant in their culture – present in media, thought in the business schools, etc. The second possible explanation is connected with the nature of participation. As Żmuda, Prokopowicz and Stocki (submitted) wrote, the participation is rooted deep in the human nature and it may be manifested in different situations, no matter what people say. Participation would not be a simple belief but rather an attitude or an even more complex mental structure. Alternative explanations may be formulated according to the sense-making process (Weick, 1995). According to the sense-making process people first act, then try to make sense of what and why they did. Another possible explanation of these findings is the context of the research and group dynamics – it is possible that people would act in a different manner in the occupational environment, as opposed to academic setting. Further research on a larger sample is required to examine which explanation is more relevant here. The absence of any relation between preferred style and behavior made it impossible to reasonably



examine the possible mediation of the preferred style and satisfaction (the situation resulted in small number of participants in important experimental conditions). Preliminary analysis shows that one's preferred management style may influence the satisfaction and effectiveness, but a larger sample is needed here before we can draw any conclusions.

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## Appendix 1

### Brief Mood Introspection Scale

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#### Instruction:

Circle the response on the scale below that indicates how well each adjective or phrase describes your present mood, where 1 stands for *I definitely do not feel this way* and 7 for *I definitely feel this way*.

In this moment I feel:

	<i>I definitely do not feel this way</i>						<i>I definitely feel this way</i>
Happy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Lively	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Tired	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gloomy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Drowsy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Caring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Content	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Jittery	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fed up	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Active	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Peppy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Calm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Loving	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Grouchy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Nervous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## Appendix 2

### Satisfaction scale

**Instruction:**

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements using the scale below where:

1 – I definitely disagree, 2 – I disagree, 3 – I agree, 4 – I definitely agree

Statement	I definitely disagree	I disagree	I agree	I definitely agree
Generally speaking I am satisfied with the cooperation in this group.	1	2	3	4
I am happy with the decision making system in this group.	1	2	3	4
I enjoyed the atmosphere during the group work.	1	2	3	4
As a team we accomplished as much as was possible.	1	2	3	4
If I were to do this task one more time, I wish I worked in exactly the same team of people.	1	2	3	4
I am personally proud of our team accomplishments.	1	2	3	4

## Appendix 3

Preferred Management Style

Statement	I definitely disagree	I disagree	I agree	I definitely agree
Best scores are achieved by the teams where leader makes most of the decisions	1	2	3	4
If you involve many group members in decision making process it will always result in chaos and waste of time	1	2	3	4
Revealing some of the information can be much worse than not meeting the deadline or failing to accomplish some tasks	1	2	3	4
When setting tasks and responsibilities you always have to take group members' personal situation into account*	1	2	3	4
Everybody in the team should have access to all information regardless of their position*	1	2	3	4
There are cases when you should put your own good over the group good	1	2	3	4
Good leader makes the analysis first, then makes the decision and after all convinces group members to follow it	1	2	3	4

\* reversed questions

## Appendix 4

## Observation check

- Leaders behavior

How often did he/she make the decisions without consulting the group members?								
0 Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Always

How often did he/she assign duties to the group members without asking about their opinion?								
0 Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Always

How often did he/she share his/her opinions with the group members ?								
0 Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Always

- Group members behavior

How often did he/she share opinions different than the rest of the group?								
0 Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Always

How often did he/she agree on decisions that he/she wasn't convinced to?								
0 Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Always

How often did he/she ask questions?								
0 Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Always

How often did he/she share his/her opinions with the group ?								
0 Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Always

## Abstrakt

Celem opisanego poniżej badania jest zbadanie relacji pomiędzy preferowanym stylem zarządzania danej osoby (na skali partycypacyjny-autorytarny) a efektywnością pracy w projekcie oraz zadowoleniem uczestników. Eksperyment grupowy, polegający na pracy w symulowanym projekcie, pokazał, że preferencje osób badanych nie przekładały się na ich rzeczywiste zachowania. Zgodnie z przewidywaniami członkowie grup zarządzanych partycypacyjnie byli bardziej zadowoleni z wykonywanych zadań a ich nastrój po eksperymencie był lepszy niż grup zarządzanych autorytarnie. Członkowie grup zarządzanych autorytarnie byli mniej zadowoleni oraz zanotowali obniżenie nastroju. Wbrew oczekiwaniom nie zanotowano istotnych różnic pomiędzy efektywnością obu stylów zarządzania.