

PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

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It was hypothesized that students encouraged to provide information and decision-making efforts for classroom procedures of importance to them give more favorable ratings to various aspects of the instructor's teaching effectiveness and to their perceptions of what they learned than do students not given this encouragement and opportunity. Two graduate classes designed their course within the latitudes of administrative constraints. As controls, two graduate classes were presented the identical course design the following semester as dictated by the instructor. Results indicated reasonable support for the hypothesis.

Several studies have investigated the differences between student-centered versus instructor-centered teaching vis à vis learning and motivation (for an extensive review, see Anderson, 1959). In general, with objective examinations used as an indicator of learning, the two types of teaching do not indicate any consistent differences. However, for "critical thinking" (i.e., essay exams and problem analysis) and for motivational criteria, student-centered teaching seems more effective (McKeachie, 1969). A systematic understanding of *why* and *how* student-centered methods contribute to the goal of education that goes beyond acquisition of knowledge could lead to useful changes in classroom activities. This study assumes that the theories developed to improve managerial and organization effectiveness are relevant to this understanding of the classroom situation.

Research in industry has found that giving individuals greater influence in decision making increases the effectiveness of their performance and their levels of satisfaction (e.g., Bass & Leavitt, 1963). It seems reasonable to ask if the decision-making process in the classroom can be designed to increase the quality of learning and motivation of students.

Not all activities and circumstances of the classroom, as in any life area, are subject to group participation in decision making. For example, a school administration may expect

that the class will meet according to some time schedule, that formal grading will be performed by the instructor, and that there will be some distribution of grades. Even within such constraints, however, there is latitude in the ways the constraints are satisfied. Much of the day-to-day actual classroom activity is not specified by the administration.

The present study hypothesized that when students are encouraged to participate in decision making regarding classroom procedures, they give more favorable ratings to various aspects of the instructor's teaching effectiveness and to their perceptions of what they learned.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were graduate business students in four classes (each of about 25 students) of a required course. The same instructor taught all four classes. Two daytime classes, taught in the winter semester, were assigned to the experimental treatment; two night classes in the spring semester were used as controls. Consequently, it was unlikely that students in these two treatments would interact and, therefore, discover differences between the instructor's methods for each class.

Procedure

On the first day of class for the experimental groups, the instructor outlined the constraints on the course. Within broad limits, he stated that the students, if they so desired, could determine the basic design of the course. Basically, the instructor permitted the students a voice in classroom issues they felt important to them.

In the two control classes, the instructor dictated

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the course design that was identical to that developed by the students in the experimental groups.

One week before the end of the semester, each class was administered a teacher and course evaluation form (University of Pittsburgh's Student Opinion of Teaching Questionnaire) by a student representative. This form contains 22 items concerning the student's perception of what he learned, as well as his reactions to various aspects of the instruction.

For each item (e.g., "The instructor has given me new viewpoints") a rating is made on a 5-point scale (1 = instructor ranks below most of the teachers you have known, 2 = is only fair, 3 = is competent and compares well, 4 = is well above average, 5 = is one of the most outstanding).

RESULTS

Of the 22 variables tested, the experimental subjects ($n = 54$) rated all items higher than did the controls ($n = 45$), except for contribution to learning via lectures. According to the sign test (Siegel, 1956), this overall result is statistically significant well beyond the .001 level. In addition, for eight separate items the difference in favor of higher mean ratings for the experimental group were statistically significant by a two-tailed t test ($p < .05$). These items were the following: the instructor has increased my interest, presents worthwhile material, encourages initiative, has stimulated thinking, shows respect for opinions, and is sensitive to student difficulties; the class discussions contributed to learning, and would recommend the course as an elective.

DISCUSSION

The only variable which was not rated higher for the experimental condition con-

cerned the "contribution to learning" made by the lectures. Since both classes in the control condition were taught after those in the experimental condition, it is possible that the instructor's lecturing technique actually improved with practice for the control group.

A limitation in the design is that other differences between the day and night students may account for these results. However, in the graduate program in business at the University of Pittsburgh, the differences in class composition and motivation did not seem significant. Whether the experimental effect is informational (e.g., students may have a better understanding) or motivational is not possible to establish in the present study. Further, a limitation of the study is that only one instructor participated. Although this helped to control for instructor differences, the results may not be generalizable to the teaching styles of other instructors. The study does suggest that follow-up work on participative management in the classroom may be fruitful.

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