

NORMATIVE AND INSTRUMENTAL PERSPECTIVES ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION Citizen Summits in Washington, D.C.

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A normative literature in political science and public administration calls for enhanced citizen participation in public decisions. However, this approach overlooks the environment that shapes administrative behavior, an oversight likely to hamper reform efforts targeted at achieving the normative goals of participation. The administrative perspective is important because public managers shape participation forums and determine whether public input has an impact on decisions. In organizing participation, administrators are likely to be guided by an instrumental view of relative costs and benefits. Washington, D.C.'s Citizen Summit illustrates the primacy of the instrumental perspective but demonstrates conditions of compatibility with normative goals. In this case, public managers perceived administrative costs to be low relative to instrumental benefits, such as the quality of public input and a need to increase governmental legitimacy. They also applied innovative participation technologies to reduce administrative costs and raise instrumental benefits, reinvigorating the frequently criticized public hearing.

Keywords: *public management; participation; strategic planning; Washington D.C., budget*

Those wishing to reform government have consistently targeted public managers. Increasingly, managers have been called on to make government more open to direct citizen involvement. Advocates see participation as a means of improving both the performance and accountability of a bureaucracy portrayed as outdated, unrepresentative, and underperforming (Barber, 1986; King, Feltey, & O'Neill Susel, 1998). However, even as participation advocates decry bureaucracy in general and current bureaucratic modes of participation in particular, public managers remain a necessary part of the governing framework and ultimately bear

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responsibility for structuring public participation and channeling public input into public decisions.

Calls for public managers to overturn exclusionary bureaucratic conventions rely largely on what has been termed a “normative” perspective, resting on democratic ideals of freedom and responsibility (Olivo, 1998). The democratic ideals celebrated in the normative approach are often vague or implicit, creating what M. G. Kweit and Kweit (1981) see as “mandates that do not always specify what the participation is intended to achieve” (p. 8). Such ambiguity prevents the creation of clear standards by which to judge participation efforts and careful reform prescriptions. This article, therefore, seeks to add some clarity to the normative perspective by first presenting a typology of participation goals based on normative values that allow categorization of participation efforts and then introducing a series of instrumental considerations that reforms must address for normative goals to be achieved.

Olivo (1998) criticizes the normative literature within political science as failing to acknowledge the practical aspects of participation, overlooking the importance of administrators in implementing participation. Public administration discourse theorists take up the cause of participation in similarly normative terms but explicitly recognize the role of administrators in facilitating change (Scott, 2000). However, both literatures fail to take into account the factors that are likely to drive administrative attitudes toward participation and subsequently the efficacy of implementation. The normative approach argues for increased participation and changing existing structures and incentives in the public sector to foster such change, for example, by “reeducating” public administrators or by adopting new modes of participation. This article proposes that efforts to explain existing participation outcomes and subsequently foster increased public participation need to understand the instrumental factors that shape administrative attitudes toward participation. The administrative perspective is crucial because the degree to which managers either create barriers or promote access to participation forums and public decisions will, in turn, shape the costs and benefits that citizens consider when deciding whether or not to participate.

An examination of the administrative viewpoint proposes that managers are less attuned to normative goals of representative and meaningful citizen involvement than to concerns with perceived instrumental costs and benefits. Marking the differences between the normative and instrumental perspectives and arguing that successful achievement of normative goals rests on developing reforms that demonstrate an understanding of the instrumental perspective enhances the current dialogue about participation in the public sector. Such an instrumental perspective has been criticized as leading administrators to view participation as an onerous requirement with little clear benefit (Kettering Foundation, 1989). However, Washington D.C.’s revolutionary approach to the public hearing, the Citizen Summit, provides an example of instrumentally driven action overlapping with normative goals of participation. The summits brought together thousands of citizens, employing technological innovations to facilitate discourse. The case underlines

both that public managers are critical to participation and that the quality of public management has a profound effect on the outcomes of participation.

FROM DISILLUSIONMENT TO THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL: THE LURE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

An emerging literature in both public administration (Cooper, 1984; Crosby, Kelly, & Schafer, 1986; Fox & Miller, 1996; Frederickson, 1982; Stivers, 1994) and political science (Habermas, 1989; Putnam, 1993) catalogues the virtues of civil society and public deliberation of issues. The result is an increased call for direct citizen participation in public decision making (King et al., 1998). In this context, citizen participation refers to citizens or citizen representatives (who are not elected officials) interacting with and providing feedback to government at some part of the policy process (either policy formulation or implementation).¹ Three closely inter-related theoretical arguments support the rise of public participation: postmodern discourse theory, disillusionment with bureaucracy, and the search for a democratic ideal.²

The Postmodern Argument

Citizen participation is frequently characterized as an inevitable outcome of a logical movement from insulated and bureaucratic modes of governance to more open, transparent, and participatory approaches. Democratic theorists propose that current societal conditions, and the associated understanding of individuals in relation to their government in liberal democracies, make it ever more likely that citizens will seek to involve themselves in public decisions (Fox & Miller, 1996; Maier, 1994; Wamsley & Wolf, 1996). The use of public discourse as a means of answering questions, rather than rational analysis associated with bureaucratic structures, provides the key unifying factor behind postmodernists who consider themselves discourse theorists (King, Patterson, & Scott, 2000).³

One broad rationale underlying such a movement is a shift in citizen values in a "postmodern" age. Cross-time and cross-national surveys provide evidence of a worldwide shift to "postmodern values" that include a distrust of formal institutions such as government and political parties and a desire for more participatory democracies (Inglehart, 1980, 1997). Proposed reasons for the value shift include the increased mobility of individuals and the weakening of the traditional family structure and the values that structure produced, including a benevolent view of authority (M. G. Kweit & Kweit, 1981). Societal changes, particularly increased education, lead to a greater demand for involvement and access to information (Thomas, 1995). Access to information is facilitated by new technologies. Citizens therefore enjoy both the will and the means to break the monopoly and centralized control on public information enjoyed by the government (Cleveland, 1985). Given these

changes, the isolated hierarchical structures of the traditional bureaucratic form appear increasingly out of step with the societies they serve.

Disillusionment With Bureaucracy

The arguments for participatory democracy also draw on simple disillusionment with the traditional governance model of hierarchical bureaucracies and insulated public servants and a belief that participation checks administrative power. For many years, the Weberian hierarchical-bureaucratic model has been attacked from various sides as lacking responsiveness. Public organizations, owing to their collective ownership and goals, are called on to create an inclusive relationship with the public, but bureaucratic forms of organizations have been judged unsuccessful in this regard (Zajac & Bruhn, 1999). The values of bureaucracy are based on expertise and qualifications, which place it in conflict with democratic or representative values that underpin the idea of participation. The traditional model of democratic governmental accountability was based on the assumption that elected officials exerted political control of the bureaucracy, designing policy that was implemented by neutral administrators. However, the policy/administration dichotomy has been long demolished (Seidman & Gilmour, 1986; Waldo, 1947). Along with popular unease with the perceived growth in government, the death of the myth of the neutral bureaucrat gave rise to a search for alternative modes of democratic accountability and control of the bureaucracy, including increased citizen participation in public decision making. Peters (1996) identifies the participatory model as one of the main alternative models of future governance, describing it as involving the “search for more political, democratic and collective mechanisms for sending signals to government” (p. 47).

Public participation is considered an external check on a bureaucracy that grew in power in the 20th century (Spicer, 1995), and recent proposals for participation appear equally distrustful of bureaucrats and elected officials, inasmuch as both are part of the broader framework of so-called representative bureaucracy that the modern-day administration has become (Barber, 1986). Those calling for participation therefore do not see the solution to representative bureaucracy as the provision of greater power to elected officials in the name of political responsiveness or increased discretion for street-level bureaucrats acting with a sense of social equity, as favored by the New Public Administration (Frederickson, 1980; Marini, 1971).

Instead, participation advocates see the infusion of citizen participation into administrative processes as the antidote to disillusionment with existing forms of public administration and a closer realization of the democratic ideal discussed in the next section. Representative bureaucracy is accused of undermining individual responsibility for beliefs, values, and actions and is incompatible with freedom because it delegates and alienates political will. Instead of representative bureaucracy, we should strive for “strong democracy,” characterized by increased citizen participation (Barber, 1986). Local governments are particularly suited to this

model. Peters (1996) notes that “local governments, by their very size, make participation more meaningful. Moreover, local governments tend to use more mechanisms that permit direct citizen involvement than do national or regional governments . . . in ways that would probably be impractical for national governments” (p. 58).

The Search for the Democratic Ideal

The idealistic nature of the goals of participation, particularly in relation to the yearning for the democratic ideal, explains much of its appeal. Minimalist treatments of participation, from *The Federalist Papers* to systems analyses of political structure (e.g., Easton, 1990), emphasize the importance of participation in preventing a sense of popular alienation from government and maintaining the stability of the political system. A more active approach, typical of normative theory, shows greater concern for participation that produces benefits to citizens and offers citizens the chance to fulfill the “democratic wish” to exert real influence in the governing process (Morone, 1998).⁴ Morone (1998) suggests that the search for the democratic wish is one of the deep and continuing instincts of American political life, reflected in a yearning for a direct, communal democracy and a fear of public power as a threat to liberty. These ideals are closely associated with the fulfillment of citizen rights in a democratic society, a value deeply embedded in the U.S. political tradition and philosophy portrayed by Jefferson and de Toqueville. Support for democratic ideals appears to have grown with the rise of postmodern values. Such ideals are often considered in abstract terms and tend to evoke affective rather than cognitive response from individuals. Justifications for participation emphasize the value of participation to the citizen, and society as a whole, in normative terms. Any form of citizenship beyond simple legal status requires active citizen involvement in public matters and the community (Cooper, 1984). Participation serves to establish the worth of individual citizens, allowing them to feel a sense of ownership and take an active part in controlling their surroundings and developing their capacity to act as citizens (King & Stivers, 1998; M. G. Kweit & Kweit, 1981). The process of public deliberation is expected to generate benefits not only to individuals but also to society, in terms of democratic legitimacy and a deliberative political culture (Habermas, 1996).

The postmodern, antibureaucracy, and democratic ideal arguments overlap and complement each other to a great degree. Assumptions are shared, although the degree of emphasis on the underlying justification for more participation varies.⁵ Postmodernists see participation as a historical shift in societal patterns; the antibureaucrats seek an alternative to a powerful yet emasculating and ineffective mode of governance, and the pro-democracy advocates regard participation as a necessary part of a healthy civic community and democracy. Ultimately, however, each perspective comes to the same conclusion. Postmodernists and others critique standard modes of bureaucracy as failing to meet the democratic ideal, pointing to the need for public administration to reconsider its role and move toward a more

direct discourse with citizens (Fox & Miller, 1996). To do so, increased participation is required. Such participation serves goals broader than that of efficiency and effectiveness and ultimately seeks justification in normative terms, based on the idea that greater citizen involvement provides for healthier democracies, stronger public sector accountability, and a restructured and strengthened relationship between government and its citizens. Denhardt and Denhardt (2000) codify many of the normative principles that underpin calls for greater participation into a broader and explicitly normative theory for governing, called the New Public Service. This perspective argues that administrators develop a greater taste for participation and collaboration based on values of service and empowerment.

Toward Full and Representative Participation: A Typology

The goals of participation are often implicit and highly ambiguous, and this section offers a typology of goals based on normative values. Pro-participation arguments portray participation as a channel for direct democratic voice in decision making, calling for decisions that affect citizens to be made by direct and open involvement of those citizens. A primary goal of this approach to participation is therefore toward greater and direct representation of all citizens. All citizens should be able to provide input, not just those who are qualified by election, position, expertise, influence, or money. Habermas (1989) points to criteria for participation in the public sphere as both including all affected by a decision and disregarding social status of the participants. The first element of the typology, therefore, is the *range* of citizen involvement, indicating the extent of representative participation. The range of involvement is narrow when only a handful of citizens or a particular socioeconomic group dominate decision making. The range becomes broader with the involvement of interest groups and is most representative when a large number of citizens, representing different socioeconomic groups, are directly involved. The involvement of more citizens helps to reduce the goal uncertainty inherent in any effort to make decisions about the future (Hellström, 1997).

A second primary goal of participation is that government provides for genuine discourse with its citizens and takes their input seriously, which Pateman (1989) labels full participation. Participation should be authentic and have a genuine impact on public decisions (Fox & Miller, 1996). Under full participation, each member of a decision-making body has an equal say in the outcome of decisions. The second aspect of the typology is, therefore, the *level* of citizen involvement, measuring the extent to which full participation occurs (Arnstein, 1969; Pateman, 1989). The level of participation can be divided into three steps: pseudoparticipation suggests a token effort at fostering public involvement; partial participation suggests that citizens are consulted but with limited impact; full participation indicates that citizens have an authentic discourse with government, and their views are taken into account.

Table 1 represents the dual goals of representative and full participation. The typology considers the public in terms of its involvement and impact in setting

TABLE 1: A Typology of Citizen Participation

<i>Level</i>	<i>Representativeness</i>	
	<i>Narrow</i>	<i>Broad</i>
Pseudo	Decisions: lack transparency, made by public officials Participation: symbolic, using a handful of citizens	Decisions: made by public officials Participation: symbolic but involves large diverse group of citizens
Partial	Decisions: made by government elite with limited influence of chosen interest groups Participation: interest groups exert influence; most citizens lack opportunity to participate	Decisions: made by public officials, with limited influence of participation Participation: large diverse group of citizens engage in limited discourse with government
Full	Decisions: made by public officials and chosen interest groups Participation: interest groups exert substantive influence, most citizens lack opportunity to participate	Decisions: made by public officials with strong influence of participation Participation: large diverse group of citizens engage in meaningful discourse with government

public decisions. Moving left to right on Table 1 increases the range of participation, and moving top to bottom increases the level of participation. The top left-hand section portrays participation as symbolic and restricted to a handful of citizens. The bottom right-hand presents the fulfillment of the dual goals of participation.

Given the seemingly obvious logic and appeal of full and broad participation, why do we not see it occur more frequently? And how can we foster more of it? The next section explains how the typology and the normative literature that underpins it overlook the costs and benefits of participation from the perspective of the administrators that structure public involvement, thereby failing to come up with an adequate answer to these questions.

NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES AND THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC MANAGER

The normative approach to considering deliberative democracy, particularly in political science, fails to consider the practical dilemmas in implementing public participation, with Olivo (1998) commenting that

while virtually all theorists of deliberative democracy and civil society call for connections and influences between the formal state sphere and citizen participation in the informal public spheres of civil society, there is a glaring lack of attention to the practical details involved in making these connections. (p. 250)

An implication of the failure to consider the practical dilemmas of deliberation is that normative theorists do not give due consideration to the role and interests of bureaucrats in supporting or subverting participatory forums. This is a critical oversight. Administrators, even when mandated to implement participation, have a great degree of control in how it is structured and the impact of the input collected from participation. As Thomas (1995) observes,

Even when they accept the imperative [of participation], public managers and policy planners must still choose when, how often, and to what extent to involve the public. Despite frequent managerial complaints about the constraining effects of requirements for public participation, these requirements have usually been limited to directing managers to involve the public, leaving the form and extent of that involvement to the discretion of the administrators. (p. 11)

Ironically, whereas pro-participation arguments reject and seek to constrain bureaucratic power, the implementation of participation provides another venue where administrators are provided with discretion and power—a familiar pattern to observers of bureaucratic reform (Nelson, 1982). Administrators have substantial power in shaping the participation forum in terms of how much influence to share—which relates to the level of participation—and what groups or individual citizens to involve—which relates to the range of participation. Understanding the administrative perspective on the benefits and costs of participation is, therefore, important. All parties in the participation process—citizens and public managers—are likely to make some judgments as to the relative costs and benefits of participation (M. G. Kweit & Kweit, 1981). Whereas the individual citizen can exercise a choice as to whether or not to participate, the decisions of public managers affect the opportunity and nature of participation for all citizens.

Many public administration discourse theorists have adopted the normative perspective but acknowledge the critical role of public managers in participation and expressing hope for public managers to actively lead meaningful citizen involvement (Fox & Miller, 1996; King et al., 1998). Scott (2000) comments that

the search for discursive normative grounding in the field of public administration shares a common understanding that there is a legitimate and important role for the public servant in both fostering and participation in authentic communication within the public sphere. (p. 268)

Administrators are called on to pursue participation given the public ownership and goals of public organizations (Zajac & Bruhn, 1999), creating an ethical obligation to facilitate the inclusion of fellow citizens in public decisions, through the creation of horizontal relationships with the public, educating the public, and creating opportunities for dialogue (Stivers, 1994). This “citizenship ethic” adopts a clearly normative tone in advising administrators as to what they should do. For example, Stivers (1994) advises administrators to “put consideration of the widest possible interpretation of the public interest ahead of all

other considerations, including efficiency, professionalism, or practical politics. . . . A citizenship ethic requires administrators to act *as citizens*” (p. 447).

The normative discourse theorists observe a low rate of effective participation, partly due to a negative predisposition of administrators toward reform. Administrators need to be reeducated to more broadly appreciate the role of participation (King et al., 1998). With such reeducation, the negative attitude of administrators toward participation will be reduced, and more and better citizen involvement will result.

The other main explanation normative theory offers for the failure of participation is unsuitable modes of participation. Subject to particular ire is the town hall meeting/public hearing mode of participation. King et al. (1998) say that “the most ineffective technique is the public hearing. Public hearings do not work” (p. 323). Such meetings can be poorly attended and dominated by elite nonrepresentative groups (Fox & Miller, 1996). Hearings are often timed late in the decision process, used to convince citizens of premade decisions rather than gain their input and provide no opportunity for an iterative dialogue (King et al., 1998). They have also been critiqued for fostering self-interested claims rather than concern with the general welfare of the citizenry and deemed unsuitable to foster choices between policy trade-offs. Citizens attending public hearings tend to have little background information on issues, often leading to poorly informed opinions about policy and the working of government (Ebdon, 2002).

The critique of the public hearing and other traditional participatory forums implies that achieving normative goals of full and broad participation rests to a great degree on moving away from such easily controlled modes of participation and adopting more suitable participation techniques. In a later section, this article details the Citizen Summits in Washington D.C., an updated variation of the traditional town hall meeting/public hearing. The basic concept—a public meeting of concerned citizens who offer their views to the community—is as old as the idea of government. Despite the use of this often criticized mode of participation, public managers succeeded in generating meaningful citizen involvement. This suggests that *how* participation is managed is at least as important as the mode of participation chosen. Additionally, public managers appeared motivated not by normative goals but by clear instrumental benefits arising from the summits.

THE INSTRUMENTAL PERSPECTIVE: COSTS AND BENEFITS AS SEEN BY ADMINISTRATORS

In contrast to the normative goals outlined in the participation typology, the instrumental perspective suggests that administrators are more likely to be concerned with the strain placed on the decision process and costs placed on the administrator arising from public participation.⁶ Governmental decision making is characterized by a series of limited opportunities to come to closure within a restricted time period, which is endangered by increased participation (Pressman &

TABLE 2: Administrative Costs and Instrumental Benefits

Direct administrative costs
Time and effort of administrators in coordinating participation
Opportunity costs of time and effort of administrators in coordinating participation
Costs of informing citizens about participation opportunities
Costs of educating citizens through provision of relevant information to participation discussion
Administrators must deal with "inevitable confrontation and conflict that citizen participation creates" (M. G. Kweit & Kweit, 1981, p. 40)
Decision process costs
Participation creates excessive administrative delays, slowing the process of making decisions and implementation
Reduces the ability to reach consensus and decision closure
Decision outcome costs
Decisions will be less timely
Citizens may lack knowledge to make good decisions based on the expert viewpoint of the administrator
Participation unsuited to dealing with complex and technical issues; technical and scientific information may be overlooked
Public involvement can deter innovation and new policies
Public may emphasize short-sighted goals
Decision may be more inequitable due to lack of representativeness of participants
If public is unwilling to make trade-offs, this restricts government's ability to inflict losses on groups. Unwillingness to make trade-offs can lead to pursuit of the many constituent interests rather than overall public interest and requires compromises that allow each group to gain, which will likely raise the absolute costs of decisions
Administrative self-interest costs
Possible loss of control of decision agenda, a source of power and prestige for the administrator
Loss of influence over policies that shape tasks for administrator
Reduced program stability, regularity, and routinization of decisions
Instrumental benefits
Programs, informed by citizen preferences, will be more targeted and effective
Additional and innovative ideas in how to deliver public services
Government accorded increased sense of democratic legitimacy in public perception
Greater acceptance of public decisions
Possibility of coproduction, leading to more effective program outcomes
Public may support administrator's position on a particular issue
Co-opting civil society in the provision of public services
Achievement of participation mandates (where appropriate)

Wildavsky, 1973). Participation forums will be limited by time and the amount of resources government and the community are willing to invest (Hentschel, 1996). If we assume that administrators are somewhat rational and self-interested but also care about the process and quality of public decisions, a wide range of potential participation costs and benefits emerge from these observations. Costs may be classified as direct administrative costs, self-interested administrative costs, and decision process and decision outcome costs (see Table 2).

Direct administrative costs are the direct costs placed on administrators when coordinating participation and include the actual and opportunity costs of time and

resources devoted to participation (M. G. Kweit & Kweit, 1981). Administrative self-interest costs arise from the public manager's potential loss of control of the decision agenda, which in turn reduces administrative power and autonomy over day-to-day activities. Managers who wish to maintain program stability (McNair, Caldwell, & Pollane, 1983) or are concerned with shaping bureaucratic activities and carving out an interesting policy-making role (Dunleavy, 1991) are likely to resist participatory processes that determine the policy agenda. Decision process costs are the variable costs involved in making the decision. Administrators view participation as slowing the process of making a decision and likely to reduce the potential for gaining consensus (Nelkin, 1984). Finally, administrators may profess that participation damages the quality of the decision outcome. Poor decisions may emerge due to a perceived lack of knowledge or expertise on the part of the public, who will offer criteria and values that may conflict with bureaucratic or expert-defined rational criteria for decision outcomes (Cleveland, 1985).

The instrumental perspective is not, however, solely limited to costs. Maintaining the assumption that administrators will be somewhat rational and care about their organization's policies and functions, participation benefits will be defined in instrumental terms rather than the normative values. Administrative views described in qualitative research on participation provide evidence of such an instrumental perspective (Ebdon, 2002; King et al., 1998). Public input can provide information that helps managers improve public efficiency—either allocative efficiency through better resource allocation choices or managerial efficiency through information that leads to improvement of the processes of public service provision. Additionally, public input may offer innovative solutions to public problems that would have not emerged from traditional modes of decision making (Koteen, 1989). Because many public programs require some level of cooperation from citizens, involvement of the public in setting goals is likely to provide more informed goals, raise acceptance of programs, and even possibly provide the possibility of citizen-administrative coproduction (Thomas, 1995). Another instrumental benefit is to generate support among members of the public for administrators and programs. Public agencies are particularly likely to seek public support in times of weakness or environmental instability, to counter negative political or public attitudes toward the public organization or the government as a whole (McNair et al., 1983; R. W. Kweit & Kweit, 1980). The creation of participatory forums may be therefore designed to increase the perception that public organizations are more consultative, lending an air of democratic legitimacy to the activities of the organization (Frederickson, 1982).

A focal concern with administrative costs will lead administrators to seek to reduce the representativeness and fullness of participation, inasmuch as both require greater administrative coordination and threaten loss of control over the process. Such a calculated approach to costs and benefits helps explain the rarity of genuine participation. As government increases the level of participation from pseudo to full, and the range of participation from narrow to representative, participation requires greater coordination, decisions may not be finalized and will be

perceived as requiring greater administrative effort and costs in relation to the perceived benefits (Kettering Foundation, 1989). Although administrators may recognize and understand normative values of participation, they will be motivated to use their discretion to shape participation in a way that reduces administrative costs while maximizing instrumental benefits given the particular environmental circumstances they face. The instrumental perspective, therefore, supports participation on the basis of (and only to the extent that it produces) net instrumental value to public managers, rather than the proposition of increased involvement based on democratic rights and norms.

THE INSTRUMENTAL PERSPECTIVE IN ACTION: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN WASHINGTON D.C.

Administrative costs of participation are not insurmountable, however. Perceptions of participation will be shaped by potential benefits but also by knowledge of managerial technologies that can reduce costs and raise benefits. If the benefits of participation outweigh perceived costs, then it is more likely that participation will occur. A good illustration is the strategic planning process in Washington D.C. Hellström (1997) considers strategic planning as a type of public decision whereby public input is particularly valuable. In many decision areas, the citizen may lack knowledge and expertise to make informed decisions, so that in certain types of decisions bureaucratic expertise and means-end rationality may be justly given greater emphasis than public input. However, because setting goals is primarily an exercise in setting values, public involvement is important in adding legitimacy to the process. Strategic planning is therefore an area where the legitimacy derived from public involvement may be judged more important than other types of legitimacy derived from expertise.

If any government needed increased public legitimacy it was the city of Washington D.C. The District had a reputation for unresponsive, unaccountable, and sometimes corrupt government, which motivated newly elected Mayor Anthony Williams to make a public commitment to, and invest time and resources in, public participation and wider government reform (Williams, 2000a). The District had been branded the worst run city government in America (DeParle, 1989; Elliott, 1995) and nearly three quarters of D.C. residents viewed the local government as corrupt (Riley, 1989). Williams (2000b) saw “no culture of accountability. There was no culture of any sense of urgency.” The mayor’s policy agenda document explicitly juxtaposed problems of performance failure and public distrust of government with the need for citizen involvement to restore a sense of accountability and reverse the negative image The District had developed (Williams, 2001):

Upon taking office in 1999, the administration recognized three fundamental realities: the city’s service delivery systems were profoundly broken, citizens were distrustful of government leaders, and many had lost hope that it was possible to fix

the government of the District of Columbia. The administration determined that to rebuild, the District of Columbia not only needed to focus on the basics—better services, economic development, and neighborhood revitalization, among others—citizens should be fully involved in every aspect as a part of rebuilding faith in the District’s leadership managers and employees. (p. 3-1)

Revolutionizing the Public Hearing

Given the litany of well-documented criticisms against public hearings, is it possible to achieve meaningful discourse with this mode of participation? Washington D.C.’s Citizen Summit suggests so. The summit managed to overcome many of the documented shortcomings of the public hearing. The role of public managers was critical in actively searching for imaginative techniques to reinvent the rigid format associated with public hearings, while maintaining the essential characteristics of a group of citizens and representatives discussing public issues in a communal setting. District managers began by studying other community-wide planning initiatives that had been judged successful in linking public input to strategic plans and the budget. Organizing the summit was designated the responsibility of a specially convened Office of Neighborhood Action. The Office was aided by the expertise of AmericaSpeaks, a national nonprofit that uses technology to enhance citizen participation.⁷ The Office was given responsibility for not only organizing citizen participation but also building the links between citizen input and district strategic planning. The Office initiated the goal-setting process prior to the Citizen Summit, facilitating two cabinet retreats that generated broad goals. Following the retreats, cross-agency task forces led by the mayor’s office developed more detailed strategic plans around these broad goals. The Office of Neighborhood Action summarized the draft strategic plan into a four-page tabloid version presented to citizens both before and at the Citizen Summit.

The summit itself lasted over 7 hours and included the development of district and neighborhood vision statements, discussion of citywide priorities and the draft strategic plan, and identification of action items to be carried out in each neighborhood. Efforts were made to ensure that all elements of D.C.’s diverse citizenry were reached—the summit was open to all comers, and summit literature and translations of the proceedings were available in Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese. Demographic surveys of the summit were taken to establish the racial and class makeup of participants (see Tables 3 and 4).

The nearly 3,000 people who attended the summit were divided into tables of 10; trained facilitators sat with each group to promote meaningful dialogue. Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the process was The District’s use of technology in the information-gathering effort. Two kinds of technologies were used at the summit: networked laptop computers and wireless polling keypads. The computers recorded the messages developed at each table. Their use fostered discussion and consensus among the individuals in each group about the messages to be entered into the computer. The computers also allowed the mayor to receive and respond to

TABLE 3: Comparison of Racial Distribution for Summit Participants and Washington, D.C.

<i>Citizen Summit (%)</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Washington, DC^a (%)</i>
61	African American	60
5	Asian	2.7
22	Caucasian	27.8
3	Hispanic	7.9
2	Native American	0.3

a. Census 2000 data.

TABLE 4: Comparison of Income Distribution for Summit Participants and Washington, D.C.

<i>Citizen Summit Participants</i>		<i>Residents of Washington, D.C.^a</i>	
<i>Income Level (in dollars)</i>	<i>Percentage of Participants</i>	<i>Income Level (in dollars)</i>	<i>Percentage of Population</i>
0 to 25,000	22	0 to 24,999	31
25,001 to 40,000	19	25,000 to 34,999	12
40,001 to 60,000	20	35,000 to 49,999	15
60,001 to 100,000	21	50,000 to 74,999	17
Over 100,000	18	75,000 to 99,999	8
		Over 100,000	17

NOTE: Median household income for The District is \$41,162.

a. Census 2000 data.

the messages during the forum, thus providing greater interaction between the mayor and citizens. The polling keypads allowed the mayor to ask citizens to vote on any question during any point of the summit, providing instantaneous results on large screens at the front of the room. Citizens prioritized citywide goals, which were ranked according to level of support. The data collected through the keypads was cross-referenced with demographic data collected at the beginning of the program when participants completed a short survey.

Impact of Citizen Summits

The litmus test for the usefulness of any public forum is the extent to which citizen priorities will be reflected in government goals or decisions. At the summit, citizens had an opportunity to review and offer input on the first draft of the district strategic plan, resulting in a revision of the plan. The Citizen Summit and resulting plan was designed to be part of a wider strategic management cycle, with a clear understanding that the district strategic plan would set the stage for neighborhood-based versions, shape the budget, and inform performance management efforts such as performance scorecards for department heads.

There is substantial evidence that such linkages between citizen input and public decisions and processes did, in fact, occur. The next budget request to the city council (and overseen by the federal government) saw each department identify strategic issues raised at the summit and codified in the strategic plan, requesting resources to pursue these goals. The summit also pushed for suggestions of how to solve problems at the more local level, encouraging residents from different wards to register their opinion on neighborhood issues. The summit became the first step for more localized district/citizen planning and action efforts, through a series of Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans. These plans were designed to link to actual resource provision and operations at the neighborhood level. Management teams, consisting of a variety of agency officials, were appointed for each ward and tasked with addressing persistent neighborhood problems raised in these local plans. Goals from the district plan were also linked to performance standards for senior officials. Each department head has a performance contract and a public performance scorecard—a single-page list of the key performance targets and level of implementation of those targets—that incorporate summit goals relevant to the department.

For such actions to link to citizen input assumes that the strategic plan is a genuine reflection of citizen input. Evidence suggests this was the case. Following the summit, a number of steps were taken to ensure that citizen input was incorporated into the strategic plan. The Office of Neighborhood Action collected and categorized citizen comments for the mayor, senior staff, and cabinet and organized a retreat where the district strategic plan would be revised as a result of citizen input. The revised plan was presented to citizens at a similar forum on January 29, 2000, where approximately 1,500 citizens (60% of whom had participated in the first summit) had the opportunity to hold the mayor accountable for the revisions made and offer final messages and thoughts before the plan was completed.

The final version of the strategic plan bears the clear imprint of summit input. The front section of each issue-driven chapter identifies specific citizen concerns or priorities raised at the Citizen Summit and strategic goals resulting from these concerns. Each goal is then broken down by a specific action item that describes what implementation steps are taking place to achieve the goal. A performance target accompanies each action item, and the plan identifies the agency responsible for the target and the date by which the target will be achieved.

In addition to these detailed citizen-driven goals and actions, one chapter of the strategic plan, *Unity of Purpose and Democracy*, is devoted to institutionalizing democratic input and action as part of the governing process in The District. The chapter also outlines how citizen requests for greater participation led to clear responses:

- Calls for increased provision of information to citizens are responded to by a variety of new programs including public information kiosks.
- Calls for increased capacity for Advisory Neighborhood Commissions has led to the city's committing resources and training to support the advocacy of these groups.

- An explicit strategic goal of the plan is to foster neighborhood involvement in the governance of the city, through actions such as citizen forums, the provision of quarterly reports, and neighborhood planning teams forums.
- In response to calls for greater opportunity for participation, the plan commits to more and regular citizen summits. On October 6, 2002, a second Citizen Summit took place, reviewing the implementation of previous goals and revising the strategic goals for the city. The second Citizen Summit also employed input from 39 Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans produced by neighborhood planning teams.

The Role of Management in Reducing Costs and Maximizing Benefits

The D.C. case offers an example of how management of the participation process overcame many of the seemingly inherent weaknesses of the public hearing mode. This was true not only for managers organizing the event but for citizens also. Achieving full and representative participation required convincing large numbers of citizens that it was worth their time and effort to become involved in the summit. Citizens employ their own cost-benefit calculus with regard to participation and are more likely to become engaged if, as was the case with Citizen Summits, participation opportunities are widely advertised and available, government is perceived as accessible and responsive to citizen input, and actual participation experiences reinforce these perceptions (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; M. G. Kweit & Kweit, 1981). The District managed the participation process in a way that limited administrative costs while maximizing benefits, using different managerial techniques. What did these management techniques consist of? Great efforts were taken to publicize the meeting to a wide variety of district residents, and organizers were prepared to facilitate the large and diverse citizenry that emerged. The iterative nature of the discussion and the quality of citizen feedback was improved in three ways. First, by providing citizens with early versions of the district strategic plan, citizens had the opportunity to communicate with government and each other on the basis of substantive information in the context of a common, yet broad, framework (and from an administrative point of view, the potential loss of agenda control was limited). Second, the use of polling keypads allowed citizens to rank preferences, which facilitated an iterative consideration and prioritization of specific policy trade-offs and preferences. Third, the follow-up summit and the public nature of the strategic plan placed pressure on the city government to use the input of citizens in the plan and continue to maintain a dialogue on strategic priorities.

By organizing attendees into small groups with a facilitator, planners tried to avoid overwhelming participants and ensure they had an equal capacity to present their message. When policy issues were discussed among the entire forum, each table had an equal ability to register an opinion by using the polling pads. Policy issues were presented in a way that encouraged citizens to consider goals in terms of citywide and neighborhood priorities and to make trade-offs between goals. Additionally, the practice of placing citizens in small groups with others was

intended to foster a sense of shared community rather than an individual perspective. Participants were asked to develop a vision for the District of Columbia, with subsequent surveys finding that 92% felt that they had “definitely” or “for the most part” shared a common vision with other citizens at their table.

Instrumental Benefits for The District

The management actions identified in the previous section were designed to enhance the quality and depth of feedback from a single-day meeting. Presumably, the quality of this information feeds into and raises many of the instrumental benefits expected to follow from public participation, such as more targeted and effective programs, allocation of resources, and innovative solutions informed by local knowledge. The District can point to evidence that such information is indeed used in a number of decision areas: the district strategic plan, neighborhood plans, the budget, and performance contracts and scorecards with senior managers. Another instrumental goal was in fostering partnerships in an effort to coproduce outcomes. Mayor Williams has commented that “the challenges facing the District were too great for government to overcome alone” (Williams, 2001, p. 3-1). Many groups—including local businesses, foundations, nonprofits, faith-based organizations and community groups—were co-opted around the goals set out in the district strategic plan.

Other benefits sought by The District appear more symbolic but were connected to real concerns about the need to restore public confidence in government and to increase acceptance of government decisions. The District emphasizes the use of public input in its public announcements, Web site, and documents such as the district strategic plan, budget proposal, and mayor’s policy agenda. The reform has also shown value in reversing the previous notoriety of the district government at a wider level, gaining national and international recognition.⁸ Restoring a sense of confidence and legitimacy in government is particularly important for The District, given its vulnerability to oversight and management by Congress. In an effort to create a sense of public legitimacy, the mayor’s budget proposal emphasizes links between requested allocations, The District’s strategic plan, and citizen participation summits.

WHEN INSTRUMENTAL AND NORMATIVE GOALS OVERLAP

Washington D.C.’s Citizen Summits provide an example of how participation motivated by instrumental benefits can also satisfy the normative goals of full and representative participation. We see evidence of representativeness from the large and diverse group of participants. Meaningful participation is judged by whether participation provided a genuine discourse and had a real impact on decisions. Despite the size of the summit, we see evidence of meaningful participation in the

impact on the citywide strategic plan, Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans, the budget, and agency accountability mechanisms such as senior staff performance contracts and scorecards. Another indicator of the fullness of participation comes from the views of participants themselves. Postsummit polls found high support for the summit, with 94% reporting that they felt they had a chance to “fully participate” and 91% rating the summit as “good” or “excellent.” The overall Neighborhood Action Initiative also afforded a measure of local control through Strategic Neighborhood Action Plans, increasing the potential for meaningful dialogue at the neighborhood level.

Ultimately, government led the way in providing broad and high-impact discourse because such participation aligned with the instrumental benefits the city sought to gain from public involvement. Thomas’s (1995) Effective Decision Model of Public already describes a set of contingencies that shape whether and to what degree public administrators will use public participation to foster effective organizational decisions.⁹ This article adds a series of instrumental benefits that shape participation efforts. Particularly important in the D.C. case was the use of participation to increase governmental legitimacy, move beyond a deep sense of governmental crisis, and reestablish an image of competent government responsive to citizens. Things had become bad enough that even city leaders were willing to admit fundamental flaws in the governing system. Williams (2000b) recounts “When I became mayor of Washington in January 1999, I took over a government that was famously unable to deliver even basic services . . . residents had lost faith that simple government services could be provided in a timely and courteous manner” (p. 55). In a city where government improvement had, according to Williams, become the “first priority,” participation provided major instrumental benefits in terms of communicating to citizens and public employees a restored sense of accountability, demonstrating that reform was occurring but that government could not solve all problems and needed the support of civil society. Whereas some discourse theorists criticize the conversion of participation forums into “pseudo” town meetings by image makers (King, 2000), the summits represent an example of where the use of participation forums for symbolic purposes can coexist with the achievement of other instrumental benefits, such as improved decisions and the normative goals of participation.

It is worth dwelling on how a sense of crisis made the instrumental benefit of increasing perceived democratic legitimacy appealing. The case suggests that it takes a deep sense of crisis or a lack of public legitimacy to prompt leaders to evaluate governmental failings and institute the kind of radical reforms that will satisfy the normative goals of participation.¹⁰ This aligns with the power-exchange perspective presented by McNair et al. (1983):

The agency provides to its participants information, prestige, and some access to decision making. In return, the participants offer political support, advice, information, and sometimes free or voluntary assistance in the work of the agency. . . . Mutuality tends to emerge when the agency is vulnerable and when it

has something to gain in exchange. It is minimized when the agency experiences no vulnerability or need. (p. 521)

CONCLUSION

A number of conclusions emerge from analyzing Citizen Summits from normative and instrumental perspectives.¹¹ I argue that the instrumental perspective more closely reflects the views of administrators than the normative perspective. This does not, and should not, lead to a rejection of the normative perspective. Because normative theory is based on philosophical goals rather than an account of the administrator's environment, it is not surprising if it offers little predictive power to explain the actions of administrators. This article is not, therefore, a criticism of the goals for participation pursued by normative theory. Such an argument would be better made on philosophical grounds. However, even if we accept the normative goals, the normative perspective has not paid enough attention to understanding the reasons behind existing participation outcomes, as the instrumental perspective attempts to do.

Successful prescriptive theories in the public sector need to make plausible arguments about why existing administrative outcomes occur and how structures and incentives can be adjusted to foster more desirable outcomes.¹² In public participation, this demands an instrumental perspective. However, current normative arguments about strategies to achieve normative goals fail to address the instrumental perspective, offering narrow reform suggestions, such as the reeducation of administrators or adoption of different modes of participation. Such reforms are unlikely to fundamentally affect participation outcomes. If normative goals are to be achieved, four critical issues arising from the disjunction between the normative approach and administrative realities must be addressed.

First, the organizational details of how managers organize participation, and how seriously managers take public input, matter profoundly about whether participation will be representative and full. The normative literature, by often overlooking the constructive role of public managers, does not explore this fact. It may seem ironic to argue that public management matters in public participation because some normative theorists begin by attacking bureaucracy, and real tensions between the normative goals and administrative costs do exist. However, as long as participation aims at having an impact on governmental decisions, public management does matter. In structuring participation, administrators shape citizen perspectives, either positively (as with the case discussed here) or, as normative theorists portray as more frequent, negatively. Additionally, administrators determine whether the results of participation feed into the goal-setting process or not, thereby shaping whether citizens were engaged in full or pseudoparticipation. These outcomes depend on political and administrative attitudes toward participation, rather than the particular mode of participation employed.

Given administrative creativity and the use of innovative technologies, many administrative costs can be at least partially overcome, such as time and other resources. Administrative costs that cannot be reduced by new technology can simply be exchanged for adequate instrumental benefits. For district managers, there were many clear benefits that made the partial loss of agenda control and other costs worthwhile. Citizen Summits not only provided advice on how to provide more effective and targeted programs, they also created a sense of increased legitimacy for a government famed for poor governance and increased coproduction efforts with nongovernmental organizations. Furthermore, the loss of agenda control was not so great as to make administrators feel threatened. This case demonstrates the possibility of structuring public participation in decision making as a win-win scenario for administrators and the public, rather than as a source of competition. Administrators gained benefits and largely retained control of the agenda by identifying the issues for discussion, but took seriously the feedback on these issues. Resulting participation was meaningful, but did not engender administrative hostility.

The second point is closely related to the first: The mode of participation is not wholly deterministic as to whether full and representative participation can occur. Normative theorists have criticized current techniques used in participation as “one of the most problematic administrative barriers” to allowing authentic participation to occur (King et al., 1998, p. 322; see also Crosby et al., 1986; Kathlene & Martin, 1991). They recommend seeking alternative structures of participation to replace traditional modes such as public hearings. This article presents a partially dissenting view. Although achievement of full and representative participation depends partly on the intrinsic advantages and disadvantages of the mode chosen (e.g., customer surveys will never deliver authentic discourse), the Washington D.C. case suggests that how a mode of participation is organized is also important. I do not suggest that the authors mentioned are incorrect in their criticism of traditional approaches to participation or the need to rethink existing modes of participation. Rather, I emphasize the centrality of public managers, rather than the mode of participation, in shaping outcomes.

In the D.C. case, public managers showed a willingness to innovate that normative theorists would approve of. However, such innovation served to update a traditional mode of participation, the public hearing, rather than create a new mode of participation. The contrast between the dismal public hearing criticized in normative literature and the success of Citizen Summits also demonstrates how the same mode of participation can vary dramatically in terms of level and range of participation, depending on the manager’s willingness to structure the format to create representative and meaningful discourse. Sweeping categorizations of modes of participation in terms of their benefits should therefore be resisted.

The third issue is that if the normative approach leads to mandates for alternative participation forums, or “reeducation” of public managers, we are inviting the classic implementation dilemma. Bureaucrats will interpret reforms in line with how

the environment shapes perceived administrative costs and instrumental benefits (Lin, 2000). New modes of participation will, therefore, not necessarily result in more effective participation unless they are consistent with the existing values of administrators.

Finally, this article suggests that in situations of crisis and need for legitimacy, governments are more willing to employ meaningful public participation. Fruitful future research should further empirically investigate the administrative perspective, seeking other conditions where perceived instrumental benefits outweigh administrative costs. Another practical avenue for future research is to find innovations that reduce the administrative costs of participation while increasing benefits, similar to those employed in the Citizen Summits.

NOTES

1. Public participation is distinguished from more overarching ideas of civil society and civic engagement (Putnam, 1993) through its focus on citizen involvement in the setting of public decisions rather than other aspects of society. The idea of public participation is distinguished from the idea of stakeholder and interest group participation (Franklin, 2001) in that it seeks (but in practice may not succeed) to extend consideration of public decisions beyond both elected public representatives and group representatives to the public.

2. Zajac and Bruhn (1999) also present the moral context for participation, exploring different moral philosophies in relation to participation, including deontology, justice-based ethics, virtue-based participation, and utilitarianism. The authors conclude that none of the moral schemata examined offer a conclusive and realistic justification for participation, although each provides a useful lens from which to examine participation. Unsurprisingly, one can observe elements of the different philosophies in the arguments for participation offered here. For instance, the deontological emphasis on the autonomy and dignity of the individual mirrors both postmodern and democratic arguments.

3. Beyond the agreement on the need for discourse as a meaningful alternative to bureaucracy, there is considerable disagreement among discourse theorists as to the role of this discourse. Fox and Miller (1996) suggest that discourse improves the quality of decisions. Meanwhile, authors featured in a symposium of the *American Review of Public Administration* (King, 2000; Patterson, 2000; Scott, 2000) reject this view, suggesting that incorporating the idea of decision instrumentality reflects a continuing enthrallment with the idea of rational analysis. Any sorts of warrants by which to organize participation are viewed as exclusionary and cannot be justified on the basis of rational procedure, instrumental pursuits, and collective action. These discourse theorists place greater emphasis on the primacy of human relationships, mutual understanding, and solidarity as the source of moral impulse, rather than reason as presented in rational terms. There is therefore some ambiguity and disagreement about how postmodern discourse theorists understand the relationship between discourse and decisions.

4. The irony of the "democratic wish" is that the search for more direct democracy leads to redesign of political and administrative institutions in a way that ultimately builds up bureaucratic power.

5. Even where disagreement exists between discourse theorists (particularly on questions of rationality and instrumentality), they are united by the belief that discourse provides the most effective means of solving problems (King, 2000; McSwite, 1998).

6. Discussion of instrumental gains from participation are often cast in the abstract sense of providing better decisions but with little sense of the perspective of the beneficiaries. Instrumentality

can be interpreted from various competing perspectives that suggest different groups winning and losing, such as utilitarianism, justice-based ethics, and a rights-based approach. Given the potential ambiguity of instrumentality, this article seeks to be clear in the perspective from which participation is viewed (public managers) and the cost and benefits perceived by these actors (detailed in Table 2).

7. Neighborhood Action has an advisory board that includes local business leaders, community leaders, nonprofits, government officials, faith-based organizations, and city council members. It has succeeded in attracting funding and other forms of support from local businesses and universities.

8. The Citizen Summit/Neighborhood Action Initiative was recognized by the Government Performance Project as a notable city government innovation following a 1999 national survey of city governments (Moynihan, 2000); the Project of the Year from the International Association for Public Participation; and a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development award for best practices.

9. A simplified explanation of Thomas's (1995) model calls for some form of public participation to be adopted when there is little information about a decision, when there is a potential for adopting alternative solutions likely to be proposed by the public, when public acceptance is necessary for implementation, when there is not a single dominant public group that will capture the agency, and when there is a high likelihood of public agreement with agency goals (unless conflict is a solution that will benefit the agency). We see elements of some of these contingencies at play in the D.C. case, particularly the need for some form of public acceptance of district policies.

10. Another recent case supports this point. Christine Olivo's (1998) analysis of the roundtable forum in eastern Germany chronicled another participatory forum that also performs well according to the normative goals of participation and arose out of a search for governmental legitimacy. Active opposition groups organized the roundtables during a period of social unrest in the late 1980s in the former East Germany. Citizens created roundtables as a way of generating public discourse outside existing political institutions, which were increasingly perceived as out of touch, authoritarian, and illegitimate. To participants, the roundtables represented a means of active and equitable discourse (full participation) while seeking to be complete or inclusive by including every affected person or group (broad participation). As the Communist government teetered on collapse, members of the roundtable were invited first to consult with, and later become members of, the cabinet. The efforts of Communist leaders to invite this participatory forum into the realm of public decision signaled the search for the "moral legitimacy" (Olivo, 1998, p. 254) associated with the roundtables. The status of roundtables became uncertain in postunification West Germany, becoming less popular but still enduring. West German politicians object to roundtables as "extraordinary forums having no place in a legitimate, proven system of parliamentary democracy" (Olivo, 1998, p. 265).

11. The contrast serves a useful purpose. It highlights that the normative approach championed by the academic community is based on abstract ideals, whereas the instrumental perspective is reflective of the environment of the public manager. Furthermore, the contrast points out tensions but also areas of compatibility between two different and valid perspectives on participation. However, an important caveat is that at some level all actions are guided by norms and values. Instrumentality is not divorced from value judgment, because administrators' concern with benefits will be girded by underlying values, albeit values shaped by the workplace.

12. A good example of a failure of a prescriptive theory to adequately address the underlying causes of administrative outcomes and develop successful reforms as a result is pay for performance (Ingraham, 1993; Kellough & Lu, 1993).

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