Title	**Participation Programs in Work Organizations Past, Present, and Scenarios for the Future**
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Brief Introduction	## Introduction This book is about employees' participation programs in work organizations. The theme is an old one in the social sciences, and its multidimensional and enigmatic character both attracts and frustrates researchers. Similar to some other fuzzy concepts in the social sciences, it lacks ontological and epistemological consensus on its definition, measurement, and application. This is evident in recurrent debates among researchers on the assessment and interpretation of research findings in the field. Despite extensive research in field, participation in work organizations still has ill-defined status as a subject of rigorous academic inquiry. This should not surprise any student of participation. Its interdisciplinary character; its ideological, political, and managerial biases; its being a subject of uneasy discourse among scientists and practitioners; its cultural diversity; its different historical contexts—all these distinctive factors hinder attempts at integration. Yet, is integration needed? The correct answer is Yes and No. *Yes*, because integrative and coherent sets of concepts, tools, and theories enable us to focus on specific problem areas and enhance the accumulation of valid, reliable, and useful information within the research community. To paraphrase Kuhn's terminology, it also better exhausts the knowledge paradigm, and the body knowledge is thus more systematic and comprehensive. *No*, because the cost of integrating a diversified and immature field might be too high in terms of oversimplification and reductionism. Also, ignoring too many specific aspects and unique cases may undermine the application utility of the field, and consequently violate the famous

dictum of Kurt Lewin—that nothing is more useful than a good theory. So, the attempt of integration in the case of participation is perhaps noble, but is not necessarily worthwhile and there are risks.

However, the four parts of this book are an attempt to navigate this intellectual stormy ocean. Part I surveys the intellectual and pragmatic roots of participation programs in work organizations and maps the main forms and practices of these programs. Part II, a historical dimension, divides the period after World War II into "two generations": The first generation is the first three decades after the war, in which the dominant and popular programs in many countries were of the "indirect workers' participation" type. The second generation belongs to the last decades, and is characterized by the "direct participation" type. The analytical tool in this part is a presentation of "major players" in each generation, as strong examples.

An attempt is made in Part III to construct a general model to explain the emergence, development (or degeneration), and performance of any participation program in work organizations. In the framework of this model, participation programs are perceived as open systems, which first, have to survive and second, have to contribute useful products to their context environment. Five components are identified as indispensable and necessary to any participation program, albeit with many possible options and configurations. These components are goals, support, participants, participatory practices, and contributions. The five components constitute a core program, which is practiced in four context areas: strategy, individual, organizational, and performance. With a small set of variables, the model enables us to better understand the rich world of participation programs that is described in the book. Nevertheless, two case studies are presented in detail as examples of the model's potential and as an invitation to further elaboration and refinement of studies of participation.

The conclusion in Part IV attempts to look at the future of participation programs as an organizational and social phenomenon.