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**THE EFFECT OF PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT  
ON WORKPLACE BELONGING**

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**A Research Project  
Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graziadio Business School  
Pepperdine University**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
In  
Organization Development**

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**by  
Hannah Nichols  
July 2020**

This research project, completed by

HANNAH NICHOLS

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The Graziadio Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: July 2020

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to examine how participation affects employee perceptions of belonging within nonprofit organizations. A mixed-methods design was utilized that included a survey of 24 employees' perception of participation, belonging, and relationship with their supervisor, and 10 semi-structured interviews. A regression analysis showed that participation had a strong positive relationship to workplace belonging and that generally interviewees felt invested in and supported because of their participation. There was also a strong positive correlation between perceived participation and the quality of the supervisor-employee relationship. The main conclusions of the study were participative management affects workplace belonging and may be a signal of a belonging and that the perceived quality of the relationship between supervisor and employee matters to an employee's perception of their ability to participate and belong.

*Keywords:* belonging, perception, supervisor-employee relationship

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

"For far too many people, loneliness is the sad reality of modern life," said former U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May as she appointed Britain's first minister of loneliness in 2018. The new position was created in response to a survey of its citizens, which found that 14% of its population often felt lonely (John, 2018; Yeginsu, 2018). Loneliness has risen to an epidemic level in many countries; over the last 40 years, rates of loneliness in Americans has doubled (Murthy, 2017). In 2018, a survey ("Loneliness is pervasive and rising," 2018, para. 1) found that 22% of Americans reported always or often feeling lonely, lack of companionship, or isolated. Fewer Americans say they have someone to talk to about important matters, and there has been an overall decrease in the different types of social relationships individuals have compared to 20 years ago with the most prominent decrease being in neighborhoods or voluntary social groups (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006)

Humans are social beings and continually pursue their need for social connection and relationship with others as part of their survival (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Maslow, 1943). The effects of loneliness on mental and physical health conditions are staggering. Loneliness exceeds other mortality risk factors such as obesity and smoking 15 cigarettes a day. People suffering from loneliness or perceived social isolation are 50% less likely to survive than those individuals with social relationships (Holt-Lundstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). The rise of technology and social media in daily life, increased global mobility, more people living alone, and a larger isolated aging population have been attributed to the increase in loneliness over the last decades (Apt, 2013; Howe, 2019; "Loneliness is pervasive and rising," 2018; McPherson et al., 2006). However, the root causes of the loneliness epidemic remain a debate (Apt 2013; Thomson, 2005).



For the modern workplace, the implications of increased loneliness in society go beyond the health and wellbeing of employees. Lam and Lau (2012) found that that relationships with leaders and peers were the mediating factors between workplace loneliness, citizenship behavior, and performance. Loneliness is associated with burnout (Seppälä & King, 2017), lower performance, and decreases in organizational commitment (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018). According to a 2013 Gallup study, the loss of workforce productivity due to disengagement at work can cost a company \$450 billion to \$550 billion annually (Sorenson & Garman, 2013). Research conducted by Better Up (2019) found that belonging can increase employee performance by 56%, reduce absenteeism by 75%, and reduce turnover risks by 50%. While there is still much to learn about Generation Z (Gen Z), Calk and Patrick (2017) suggest that belonging is one of the top areas for companies to focus on to recruit and retain Millennial generation workers. As the Millennial generation continues to grow in the U.S. workforce and with the increasing presence of Gen Z, it will be critical for organizations to learn how to adapt or create business environments that will satisfy the needs of their workforce. Experts are now looking at ways that organizations and their management can lessen loneliness and strengthen belonging within their workforce. Approaches include increasing engagement where employees can see themselves in the bigger picture (Berens, 2013) and adding management tactics to increase interpersonal connection or social events (Baldoni, 2017; King, 2018).

The importance of human connection at work has a long tradition through the human relations movement. The human relations movement recognized the need for human connection and relationships as a vital piece of the productive workplace (Argyris, 1974;

Likert, 1961; McGregor, 1960). Management needed to make a critical shift to recognize the humanity of workers, their capacity of employees, their unique value, and the nature of groups and teams (Argyris, 1974; Likert, 1961; McGregor, 1960; Tannenbaum, 1959). The Hawthorne experiments (Mayo, 2014) and the various implementations of the Scanlon plan (Frost, Wakely, & Ruh, 1974) provide case studies demonstrating how participation within an organization improves productivity and commitment. McGregor's (1960) Theory Y calls to the necessity of management to facilitate the collaboration required to tap into the human potential of its workforce and its desire to fulfill its psychological and self-fulfillment needs, using the Scanlon plan as a demonstration of his theory in action.

Johnson and Ouchi's (1974) compared American and Japanese companies in industries in which Japanese companies were outproducing their American competitors. They found concern for employees and participation in decision-making as two of the differentiating components of Japanese management. Ouchi and Jaeger (1978) introduced the organizational Type Z, which combined American's value of individualism with the Japanese's collective relational environment. They conjectured that as the world and society become more dynamic, complex, and global, the weakening of ties in places outside of the workplace would make it advantageous for organizations to strengthen the social ties through taking on Type Z characteristics (Ouchi & Jaeger, 1978).

Ultimately, through creating an avenue for individuals to satisfy needs to belong while at work, organizations could supplement or reduce the increased isolation experienced outside of work as compared to organizations that kept traditional contracts.

Again, these practices are traced back to the underlying value of collectivity in their culture.

There may be transferrable learning from this study, which can be applied to diversity and inclusion work. Belonging is an essential part of the inclusive workforce (Randal et al., 2018; Shore et al., 2011). In 2017, companies in the United States spent \$8 billion on diversity and inclusion training to address unconscious bias (Kirkland & Bohnet, 2017). Such training is the least effective way to increase an organization's ability to include women, racial minorities, and other underrepresented groups (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). Kalev et al. (2006) found that activities like mentorship and networking, which address social isolation, are associated with "modest changes" (p. 590). This study could provide data for organization development practitioners to introduce additional programs related to management and support organizations in improving the organizational conditions and the lives of individuals.

The study will also delve into how organizations can begin to address the growing challenge of loneliness in society to maintain productivity, retain a growing Millennial generation workforce, and explore how to support and include the changing structures of a workforce. Over 10 years, 94% of net new U.S. employment was from alternative work arrangements, such as freelancers, gig economy workers, temporary help agency workers, or workers provided by contract firms (Katz & Krueger, 2016).

Remote work affords employers more competitive candidate pools for its positions as well as increased productivity, profitability, and performance from their remote employees (Farrer, 2020). Remote employees benefit from increased independence (Abrams, 2020; Farrer, 2020), time to focus (Abrams, 2019), and flexibility

(Abrams, 2020; Farrer, 2020). More recent world events have forced organizations to work remotely to remain in business. Before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, 16% of the American workforce worked from home at least part time (Abrams, 2019, para. 1). A CNBC survey (Burke, 2020, para. 2) showed that 42% of Americans were working from home as of April 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Large technology companies, like Microsoft, Facebook, and Google, are now considering extending their work from home into 2021. For Twitter, the move may be indefinite (Lerman & Greene, 2020). With most companies set up for in-person interaction and relationship development, the question of how organizations support a sense of belonging through the relationships in the workplace has become a critical one.

The previous studies of participative management (Cooper & Wood, 1974; Cotton et al., 1988; Kim, 2002; Leana, Locke, & Schweiger, 1990; Miller & Monge, 1986; Pacheco & Webber, 2016; Van Der Westhuizen, Pacheco, & Webber, 2012) have primarily focused on productivity and job satisfaction. An open question remains as to whether participative management approaches, in the proper context, can also act as a type of social support within the workplace to affect belonging. This study contributes to the existing body of work on the effects of participative management and considers whether it is another avenue to develop feelings of belonging within the workplace.

The study will focus on employees of nonprofit organizations in San Francisco and Oakland, California; Boston, Massachusetts; New York, New York; and Charlottesville, Virginia. The cooperating 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations vary in staff and budget size as well as sector and work both at local and national levels. The study subjects vary in background and experience level. There are just under 1.5 million 501(c)(3)

organizations in the US that employ 12.3 million people (National Council of Nonprofits, 2009). Nonprofits organizations have socially focused missions to transform communities and contribute to the greater good society. Nonprofits are a relevant sector for a focus on belonging because of the increased job demands and job stress as compared to their for-profit peers (Harmon & Foster, 2014).

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the research problem and the purpose of the research. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of literature related to the topics of belonging, participative management, and Leader-Member Exchange. Chapter 3 describes the research methods used, research sample and setting, measurement, data analysis, and the protection of human subjects. Chapter 4 reviews the results of the study, the survey analysis, interview analysis, and a comparison of the quantitative and qualitative data sets. Chapter 5 provides a summary of findings and draws conclusions. Recommendations to managers are made, as well as separately to Organization Development (OD) Practitioners. Limitations are cited and suggestions for further research are presented.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This research study focuses on examining how participative management affects employee perceptions of belonging within their organization. The review of literature looks at the concept of belonging, belonging in the workplace as a unique construct, participative and high involvement management practices and their effects, and the relationship between employees and supervisors via the leader-member exchange theory. The review also identifies gaps in knowledge related to participative management and belonging in the workplace.

### **Belonging**

Belonging is an essential human need and a fundamental aspect of human existence (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). "He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal" (Maslow, 1943 p. 381). Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belongingness hypothesis focuses on the universal need for humans to belong and as a powerful and the underlying motivation connected to cognitive processes, emotional patterns, behavioral responses, and health and wellbeing. Individuals "have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497); in other words, people are highly motivated to have relationships and be accepted by others and be a part of a group. A person must be able to develop an emotional relationship that has no foreseeable endpoint for his need for belonging to be fully satisfied (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The concept of belonging is psychological. According to the sociometer theory (Leary, 2005), as humans evolved, the internal mechanism to help them avoid rejection and exclusion from a group had fatal consequences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Cox, 2008). Belonging was once a necessity to survive and get the most basic physical needs met. In more modern times, the stable relationships and intimacy associated with belonging is an important factor to overall happiness and positive feelings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Cox, 2008). Humans evaluate their relative relational value, as an aspect of belonging, based on their perception of the behaviors and responses of others around them (Hagerty et al., 1992; Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2004; Leary, 2005). People vary in the strength of their motivation to belong and be accepted and the number of relationships they seek (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary et al., 2013). Lack of belonging is associated with depression (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cockshaw & Shocet, 2010; Hagerty & Patusky, 1995), stress, poor physical health, and lowered ability to manage one's behavior (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Definitions of belonging in social sciences have further broken the concept into elements of social connectedness, reliance on others, and feelings of acceptance, respect, inclusion, support, and how one feels they are part of or fits into the systems they participate in (Cockshaw & Shocet, 2010; Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Lee & Robbins, 1995). The need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) is distinct from the need for affiliation, or the traits of sociability and extraversion (Leary et al., 2013). There are differentiated group levels of social inclusion – communities or countries, instrumental coalitions, mating relationships, and family relationships – with different purposes, standards for acceptance, and benefits for belonging (Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2004). Leary

and Cox (2008) examined how there may be multiple motives related to belongingness applied to different types of relationships. They further added to the Kirkpatrick and Ellis (2004) model with the collective type of supportive friendships, examining that people may be motivated to accept both general and specific belongingness based on the type of relationship, such as workplace relationships. Researchers have only recently looked at workplace belongingness as a distinct concept.

### **Workplace Belonging**

Cockshaw, Shocet, and Obst (2013) identified workplace belonging as a factor distinct from other types of belonging by measuring both sense of belonging and a psychological sense of organizational membership. Through their study, Cockshaw et al. (2013) demonstrated that both general and context-specific constructs of belonging exist. Individuals may experience social acceptance and belonging in their family and friend context, but may not experience belonging in a work context. Although workplace belonging is a distinct concept, other belonging relationships outside of the workplace can support employees. A longitudinal study of Australian volunteer firefighters shows how support from friends and family can relieve the stress and tension between work and home, and that relationships outside of the workplace can support stronger organizational connectedness (Huynh, Xanthopoulou, & Winefield, 2013).

Cockshaw et al. (2013) demonstrated that workplace belonging affects mental health outcomes in ways distinct from general belonging. Other studies have since supported the finding that workplace belonging can provide positive outcomes for employee mental health (Armstrong, Shakespeare-Finch, & Sochet, 2016; Jena & Pradhan, 2018). Workplace belonging has also been found to be a strong predictor of



wellbeing associated with low levels of burnout and reduced stress levels (Armstrong et al., 2016; Shakespeare-Finch & Daley, 2017; Somoray, Shakespeare-Finch, & Daley, 2017). Workplace belongingness also fosters increased job satisfaction (Jena & Pradhan, 2018). At an organizational level, workplace belongingness leads to higher willingness in employees to partake in helping behavior (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2007; Stamper & Masterson, 2002).

Workplace belonging measures focus on the perception of supportive and caring relationships within an organization and find that perception is as impactful as actual supportive and caring relationships (Cockshaw & Sochet, 2010; Hagerty et al., 1992; Jena & Pradhan, 2018). One of the more prominent instruments to measure belonging in the workplace is Cockshaw and Sochet's (2010) Psychological Sense of Organizational Membership (PSOM) instrument.

Adapted from Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership instrument, the PSOM includes questions about perceived social acceptance, respect, inclusion, and social support by their superiors and their peers. Uses of the PSOM have primarily focused on the mental health of different workforces. The PSOM helped show the distinction between general belonging and workplace belonging, their individual contributions to depression (Cockshaw et al., 2013), and that a lack of general belonging could not be made up for by greater workplace belonging and vice versa. Armstrong et al. (2016) showed how organizational belongingness mediates stress and post-traumatic recovery in Australian firefighters by applying the PSOM. The study found that organizational belonging mediates the relationship between organizational stress and post-traumatic growth. Organizational belonging could predict whether a fire fighter

would experience positive individual change after a traumatic event. Somoray et al. (2016) applied the PSOM when examining predictors to the quality of the professional lives of US mental health workers. The study showed that belonging at work was the best predictor for healthcare workers feeling a sense of achievement in their work and lower levels of burnout.

### **Participative Management**

In the last century, there was a shift from scientific management strategies to a greater focus on human relations. Employees were no longer conceptualized as machines but as humans with individual motives and desires at work. The key ideas from the human relations movement relevant for this study are that work could be fulfilling, employee happiness and satisfaction are essential dimensions to productivity and performance, and people want to work. They can be positively motivated through increased responsibility. Likert (1961) observed managers of high-producing teams from his research at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research:

The leadership and other processes of the organization must be such as to ensure a maximum probability that in all interactions and all relationships within the organization each member will, in the light of his background, values, expectations, view the experience as supportive and one which builds and maintains his sense of personal worth and importance. (p. 103)

The main idea behind Likert's (1961) Principle of Supportive Relationships is for every individual to see its membership as genuinely important and that their work is meaningful to achieving organizational goals. Workers must perceive the behavior of their manager as supportive. Because employees perceive support differently based on their unique

backgrounds and values, taking a more socially involved approach like participative management is a strategy that managers can use to fully get to know the values, hopes, goals, and expectations of their employees.

High involvement management (Lawler, 1992) emphasizes spreading power down the organizational hierarchy, and claims that the persons closest to the job duties or with the most information should have some influence over the decisions made (Lawler, 1992; Wood & de Menezes, 2011). Participative management practices emphasize sharing power, including involving employees in problem-solving and decision-making processes, thereby increasing their ability to influence decisions that impact their jobs and maximizing their contributions to their work (Weisbord, 1988). French, Israel, and Äs (1960) defined participation as a joint process in which an individual or group influences others in plans or decisions which have future effects on all those involved. The amount of participation is that which is accepted by another individual or group. Different types of participation can vary in form from highly structured and regulated decision-making to more informal and impromptu participation practices (Cotton et al., 1988).

Studies on participative management practices have primarily focused on their positive motivational effects and how employees' commitment to a decision increases when they can be a part of the decision-making process (Coch & French, 1948; Latham, Winters & Locke, 1994; Vroom & Jago, 1988). Job satisfaction has also been linked to participative practices (Cooper & Wood, 1974; Kim, 2002; Miller & Monge, 1986; Pacheco & Webber, 2016; Van Der Westhuizen, Pacheco, & Webber, 2012).

Participation acts as a motivator that enables employees to have greater independence and ownership of their work, building their satisfaction and motivation. However, there is an

overall lack of agreement regarding the level of impact participatory practices have on employees' job performance and productivity (Cotton et al., 1988; Leana, Locke & Schweiger, 1990; Wagner, 1994). Wagner's (1994) analysis of 16 participatory management studies concluded that participative practices have minimal impact on the performance of employees.

The inconsistent positive effects of participative practices for employees may also be due to their contingent or situational nature (Cotton et al., 1988; Locke, Schweiger & Latham, 1986; Vroom & Jago, 1978). Participative practice can be less efficient than autocratic methods at times (Locke et al., 1986; Vroom & Jago, 1998). Also, while there is support for participative management strategies, there are other aspects of work-life and jobs that are valued by employees (Locke et al., 1986; Pacheco & Webber, 2012), and there are numerous contingencies which impact participation (Leana et al., 1990).

Participation as a motivational method has limitations to its effectiveness if there is a misalignment between the organization's culture and the management practices and the individual preferences and values of employees (Lawler, 1992; Likert, 1961; Vroom, 1959). The benefits and effects of participative management are contingent on individual and situational factors (Abdel-Halim, 1983; Anderson & Fiedler, 1964; Benoliel & Somech, 2014; Fiedler, 2006; Herzberg, 1974; Lawler, 1992; Somech & Wenderow, 2006; Vroom & Jago, 1998). Vroom (1959) found that there is a more positive relationship between participative decision-making and job attitude for people with a high need for independence and low authoritarian values, and it has little effect on individuals with a low need for independence and high authoritarian values. Abdel-Halim (1983) supported Vroom's (1959) finding that participatory decision making is more

effective in achieving perceived power equalization for employees who have a strong desire or expectation for participation and those employees who valued equal rights.

Benoiel and Somech (2014) expanded the findings on the variable effects of participative leadership on job satisfaction and motivation to personality traits and preferences. Unlike belonging, the degree to which individuals desire to participate in organizational life is highly variable and situational.

Participation in the workplace is appealing to employees because it exposes them to more challenging opportunities and has the potential to bring more stimulating work and growth to the employee (Lawler, 1992). For instance, participative decision making can provide a degree of power equalization within hierarchy structures (Abdel-Halim, 1983; Mulder & Wilke, 1970). A criticism from Drucker (1954) of the human relations movement was the overemphasis on the employee feeling of responsibility or importance, while not necessarily connecting it back to their concrete work. This criticism suggests employees must feel that their involvement is legitimate (French, Israel, Äs, 1960; Likert, 1961; Quick & Feldman, 2011) and that they are equipped with the appropriate level of knowledge and expertise to exert influence (Mulder & Wilke, 1970).

However, the additional work created through participative management and high involvement practices can have negative impacts on employee wellbeing, like emotional exhaustion or stress (Oppenauer & Van De Voorde, 2018; Spreitzer & Kizilos, 1997; Topcic, Baum & Kabst, 2016; Wood & de Menezes, 2011). When high organizational participation increases employee workload, it leads to higher emotional exhaustion; however, involvement in practices like decision-making and sharing information, which often increases job responsibility, was found to have a negative relationship with

emotional exhaustion (Oppenauer & Van De Voorde, 2018). Employees who can influence their work experience less stress than those who are only given more to do by their supervisor.

### **Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

Participative management is an interaction or a set of signals between a supervisor and an employee. One of the primary relationships that an employee has within their organization is their direct supervisor. Supervisors are also often the primary 'gatekeeper' of resources within the workplace that contribute to the employee's success, and they are positioned to decide what types of resources will be available to different employees in exchange for their work and demonstrated a commitment to the leader and the organization (Graen & Cashman, 1975). Social Exchange theory supposes individuals participate in exchanges because they expect to receive some benefit (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga; 1975). In the workplace, Social Exchange theory translates to the idea that in exchange for employer support, employees are productive and display positive attitudes (Cropanzano, Dasborough, & Weiss, 2017).

The Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) is a relationship-based approach to leadership and focuses on the quality of the dyadic relationship between the supervisor (leader) and employee (member). Exchanges can be both transactional and transformational when the relationship is based on reciprocal respect, trust, and commitment (Dansereau et al., 1975; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Over time, the patterns of social interaction solidify, and members are categorized into the in-group (high-quality relationships) and the out-group (low-quality relationships). For members, high-quality relationships are characterized by more considerable influence in decision making, access to information, emotional and job support, and more control

within their jobs as compared to low-quality relationships (Graen & Cashman, 1975). High-quality relationships are associated with better actual performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Gerstner & Day, 1997). High-quality relationships benefit leaders and members at the individual level as well as workgroups and organizations (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Graen and Scandura (1987) identified six categories that leaders exchange with members: tasks, information, flexibility, support, attention, and influence. Griesinger (1990) further supported the idea of interpersonal resource exchange through his exploration of the concept of 'betterment.' Organizational stakeholders at a human level not only want to survive but also live better. Interpersonal resources and exchanges are necessary to fulfill the desire for fulfillment. Griesinger (1990) found material resources are necessary but not sufficient to satisfy human aspirations for betterment, and that the interpersonal exchange is just as valuable, a sentiment which echoes Likert's (1960) earlier theory of Supportive Management.

Following resource theory, leaders and members are most likely to exchange the same type of resource (Foa & Foa, 1974). Wilson, Sin, and Conlon (2010) identified typical acceptable exchange patterns between leaders and members across Foa and Foa's (1974) categories of resource exchange: affiliation, status, service, information, goods, and money. Additionally, the categories have two different dimensions, universal-particular and concrete-abstract (Wilson et al., 2010). Resources can be symbolic, like status, or tangible, like service, in nature. Exchange categories can also be more specific to the individual (like expressions of affiliation) or general to the population (like money or compensation) participating in the exchange. Members can exchange affiliation, a

similar concept to belonging, through expressing commitment to the leaders and including them in social events outside of work; a leader exchanges words of encouragement and socioemotional support (Wilson et al., 2010). Information, which is more associated with participative management, is a more universal and abstract resource. Particularistic resources, like affiliation, are more associated with high-quality LMX relationships. This leads to the question as to whether the information exchange, which takes place in participation, is enough to signal perception of belonging.

### **Participation & LMX**

Scandura, Graen, and Novak (1986) looked at the importance of LMX quality and subordinate performance level as antecedents of decision influence and found that supervisors conveyed that high ability and high-quality LMX were necessary for subordinates to participate in decision-making. However, subordinates' perceptions of decision influence differed based on their LMX quality: those with high-quality LMX perceived high levels of decision influence, no matter what their supervisor had rated their performance. In contrast, those with low-quality LMX perceived high levels of decision influence only if they had positive performance ratings. Through performing well and demonstrating trust and respect, members can gain more access, which would satisfy one of the requirements in Baumeister and Leary's (1995) belonging hypothesis.

Following contingency theory, participative practices do not necessarily strengthen the relationship between leader and member any more than traditional management methods. The Anderson and Fiedler (1964) study involving Navy ROTC leaders found that student groups led by participatory methods led to better quantity product because of full group participation. Groups led by supervisory methods led to a better quality of the product because they played a guide. However, they found no



difference in group members' esteem for the leader, morale, or work satisfaction (Anderson & Fiedler, 1964). The experiment, however, is distinct from LMX, which looks at relationships over time and leaves open the question as to how regular participation in decision-making, problem-solving, and information sharing act as a psychological cue that a member's relationship being of value. Additionally, participative management is not a 'one-size fits all' for every situation and individual. It is unclear what effects participative management could have on a perception of belonging in instances where the participative approach is misused or overused by leaders.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) hypothesized that human culture was designed to meet the human need to belong versus purely for economic survival; LMX literature sheds light on the affective behavior, like praise or emotional support, which are adequate resources in an LMX (Wilson et al., 2010). Studies (Coch & French, 1948; Cooper & Wood, 1974; Kim, 2002; Latham et al., 1994; Miller & Monge, 1986; Pacheco & Webber, 2016; Van Der Westhuizen et al., 2012; Vroom & Jago, 1988) have focused on the effects of participative management on employee motivation and job satisfaction. However, little has been studied when it comes to how participative management affects employees' perception of belonging in the workplace through the nature of their relationships. Participating in activities like decision-making with groups can create a broader commitment to the group and its actions (Coch & French, 1948; Johnson & Johnson, 1991). Little speaks to the way that participative activities relate to belonging.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This research project examined how participative management affects employee perceptions of belonging within their organization. This chapter contains an outline of the research design, a description of the sample population and research setting, an explanation of the measures used, and an overview of the data analysis process.

The research study was a mixed-methods design. Perceptions of psychological participation, sense of organizational membership, and perception of leader-member exchange were collected using survey instruments. Participants submitted their responses online using Qualtrics. Qualitative data was gathered by semi-structured interviews with employees using a seven question interview protocol conducted in-person and via video conference. Interviews were audio-recorded for transcription. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently.

The quantitative data collected was used to identify any relationships between participation initiated by supervisors, an employee's sense of belonging in the workplace, and the employee's perception of their relationship with their direct supervisor. The qualitative data was gathered to gain more insight into employees' perceptions of their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of belonging within their organization as it related to their participation in work.

The research design was approved by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board, and all training required by the Institutional Review Board was completed before the research was conducted.

## **Research Sample and Setting**

The population of the study was made up of a convenience sample of supervisors and employees from five nonprofit organizations located in California, Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia. The organizations varied in age, size, and sector. The names of the organizations were omitted from the research to maintain confidentiality. Each organization was contacted through personal networks initially via email and an informational call conducted with each organization's point of contact. A formal letter of consent was requested if the organization agreed to participate in the research study. Employees within the organization were contacted directly to participate in the survey or the survey and interviews (Appendix A).

Participants were from all career stages. Participants in the survey were required to have been employed within their organization for at least 12 months so that they had adequate experience within their organization. 30 employees participated in the survey, and 10 employees participated in individual interviews.

## **Measurements**

The quantitative data collection attempted to understand perceptions of participation in the workplace, feelings of workplace belonging, and any influence their perceptions of their relationship with their leader may have on their feeling of belonging. This study used a variety of instruments to measure the three main variables: participative management, workplace belonging, and the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). The three instruments were combined into a single questionnaire, distributed to participants via Qualtrics, and broken into with labeled sections (Appendix B).

The definition of participative management used in this study is based on the definition from the French, Israel, and Äs (1960). Vroom (1958) used this definition to

create a four-question index of psychological participation used in this study. Each question is answered by selecting the best-fit answer on a five-point scale where 1 signifies low participation and 5 signifies high participation. Each participant receives a total score based on the sum of their answers. A higher score means a greater sense of influence and participation. This section is labeled 'Participation' in the questionnaire.

The present study uses Cockshaw and Shocet's (2010) definition of workplace belonging, which is how much an individual feels personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by other members in the workplace. Cockshaw and Sochet's (2010) Psychological Sense of Organizational Membership (PSOM) instrument was selected because it is a validated and widely used measure of workplace belonging. The PSOM is an 18-question instrument on a five-point scale where 1 represents responses of 'Not true at all' to 5, which represents responses of 'Completely true.' The workplace belonging score is calculated for each respondent by adding together ratings from each question after reverse scoring for questions 3, 6, 9, 12, and 16 (Appendix B). A higher score means a greater sense of workplace belonging. This section is labeled 'Organizational Membership' in the questionnaire.

LMX was included because participative management is a type of social exchange between supervisor and employee, and the quality of the relationship between the employee may affect any given employee's access to participation (Graen & Cashman, 1975). The LMX-7 questionnaire (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Scandura & Graen, 1987), based on Dansereau, Graen, and Haga's (1975) instrument measuring negotiating latitude, was used to measure the perceived relationship between supervisor and member and asks members to assess the level of individualized assistance provided

by their leader (Graen & Cashman, 1975). The LMX-7 is a seven question instrument that uses a 5-point Likert scale. The LMX score is calculated by adding all response ratings together. A higher score indicates a perceived higher-quality relationship. This section is labeled 'You and Your Supervisor' in the questionnaire.

The seven question interview guide collected data from employees. Interviews focused on employees' experiences of participation with their current supervisor and how participation affects their attitudes about their organization, specifically regarding belonging (Appendix C).

### **Data Analysis**

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between workplace belonging, perceived participation and workplace belonging, and LMX. A regression analysis was used to examine the impact of perceived participation on respondents' feeling of workplace belonging. Separately, a correlation analysis between the participation score and the LMX score to understand the relationship between the quality of the supervisor-employee relationship and the employee's perception of participation in the workplace was conducted.

Tesch's (1990) eight-step coding process was used to find common themes in the qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All recorded interviews were transcribed, read through, and key ideas were noted. After reading the interview transcripts, a list of the key topics and ideas was created and applied to the data to code it. The topics were used to create descriptive categories and reduce the topics to the most core themes. The categorized data were gathered, and the themes analyzed within and across the determined categories. Then, the quantitative and qualitative databases were integrated to

compare the results from the coding and the regression analysis to surface shared themes across the quantitative and qualitative trends.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

The research design was approved by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board before the research was conducted. Participating organizations were required to have a contact speak with me before signing a letter of consent. The names of the participating organizations were not included in the questionnaires or interview materials, and no identifying information was collected about interview participants. The Qualtrics database, where the online survey was housed, maintains firewalls and encryption to protect client data. Participants were provided a copy of the consent form (Appendix D), which appears at the beginning of the online questionnaire.

All interview schedules were arranged directly with participants. Individuals who were interviewed received a letter outlining the study and consent form, which they had to review and sign before the interview. Interviews were conducted in a private conference room or space. If interviews were conducted via web conference, the participant received a private invitation with a unique meeting link. The quantitative and qualitative data will be stored on a password-protected computer for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed. The audio-recordings were destroyed once they were transcribed. Participants were allowed to opt-out of audio-recording the interview if it was a barrier to participating. Any data shared was only be shared in aggregate form.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology to examine how participative management affects employee perceptions of belonging within their

organization. It included the research design, an overview of the sample population and setting, the measurements and instruments used to measure participation, workplace belonging and the leader-member exchange, the interview protocol, the data analysis procedure, and measures taken to protect human subjects. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the collected data.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this research was to examine how participative management affects employee's perceptions of belonging in nonprofit organizations. This chapter presents the findings of the study and describes the results of the survey instrument and one-on-one interviews.

The first section presents the quantitative results of the three-part survey using regression and correlation analyses. The second section presents the qualitative data gathered during individual interviews with members of participating organizations and the themes related to their perceptions of participation with their current supervisor and how participation affects their attitudes about their organization, specifically regarding workplace belonging.

### Survey Analysis

A total of 30 respondents from five nonprofit organizations started the survey; however, six surveys were left incomplete ( $N = 24$ ). All respondents had been at their organization for at least 12 months.

Perceived participation, workplace belonging, and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) scores were calculated for all respondents who completed all three sections of the survey. The distribution of the scores ( $M = 15.54$ ,  $SD = 3.18$ ) skewed towards a perception of high participation with their supervisor. Workplace belonging scores ranged from 49 to 85 ( $M = 70$ ,  $SD = 9.40$ ). The distribution of scores skewed towards strong feelings of workplace belonging. LMX scores range from 17, considered a low-quality relationship score, to 35, considered a very high-quality relationship score. The distribution of scores skewed towards stronger, higher-quality leader-member exchanges



( $M = 27.35$ ,  $SD = 5.01$ ). Based on the LMX scores, 71% of survey respondents consider themselves in-group members.

A correlation analysis was conducted to understand the relationships between perceived participation, workplace belonging, and LMX. The correlation between perceived participation and workplace belonging ( $r = 0.65$ ) indicates a relatively strong and positive relationship between perceived participation and workplace belonging. The correlation between LMX and workplace belonging ( $r = 0.78$ ) indicates a very strong and positive relationship between the perceived quality of relationship with a supervisor and workplace belonging. Results of the correlation analysis ( $N = 24$ ) can be found in Table 1 and descriptive statistics can be found in Table 2.

**Table 1**

*Belonging, Participation and LMX: Correlation*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Belonging</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>LMX Score</b>
<b>Belonging</b>	1	-	-
<b>Participation</b>	0.65	1	-
<b>LMX Score</b>	0.78	0.86	1

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Belonging</b>	<b>Participation</b>	<b>LMX Score</b>
<b>M</b>	70.70	15.54	27.35
<b>SD</b>	9.40	3.18	5.01
<b>Range</b>	49-85	12-20	17-35

A regression analysis was used to examine the impact of perceived participation on respondents' feelings of workplace belonging using the perceived participation and workplace belonging scores of each respondent. The regression analysis shows that the

variance explained between perceived participation and workplace belonging is significant ( $R^2 = 0.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

A correlation analysis was conducted using the perceived participation and LMX scores of each respondent to determine the association of the two variables. The correlation ( $r = 0.75$ ) points to a strong positive correlation between the supervisor-employee relationship and perceived participation.

### **Interview Analysis**

The 7-question interview guide collected data from employees about their experiences at work. Specifically, it surfaced views of their participation with their respective supervisor and how that participation affected attitudes about their feelings of belonging to the organization.

The 10 interviewees represented three of the five participating organizations. Interviewees were relatively established in their organizations (tenure in years,  $M = 3.4$ ,  $SD = 2.2$ ). There was an interesting divide among interviewees: 60% indicated that belonging at work was "very" important to them, while 40% thought that belonging at work was not something of personal importance. It should be noted that the 40% did think belonging was beneficial to productivity and professional effectiveness.

Interview question 3, "Describe how your current supervisor typically involves you in work," revealed a range of ways that respondents' supervisors involved them in work. 80% of interviewees shared regular instances of direct, participative management with their supervisor such as two-way dialogue to share ideas and inform decisions, soliciting the respondent's opinion about a work issue, and sharing information outside of the respondent's purview to enable them to be better informed in their work. These

methods facilitated opportunities to influence decisions and work activities, and interviewees expressed the value in holding bi-directional dialogue. For example,

Where there is more of a conversation is they might say 'Here's this opportunity, it seems like it would do well...or have a different direction or have a different perspective if you were on this project.' ...it's not 'are you interested?' but it does become more of a back and forth, mostly to figure out, are there trade-offs in terms of time and how much of a priority would it [be]... And I think one of the things that's really beneficial is that there is a sense of like information being presented, and then a conversation that is back and forth.

In comparison, the remaining two interviewees characterized their involvement in work by their supervisor as less participative. They described their involvement with their supervisor as primarily task delegation, like asking or directing respondents to execute specific activities, and team discussion. Table 3 (N = 10) shows the meaning of participation themes.

**Table 2**  
*Meaning of Participation Themes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>% (#) Interviews This Theme Appeared</b>
<b>Feeling Trusted and Valued</b>	80% (8)
<b>Experiencing Investment</b>	50% (5)
<b>Experiencing Uncertainty</b>	20% (2)

Interview question 5, "When your supervisor involves you in decisions, what does it indicate to you?" was analyzed for themes related to how respondents' attitudes and views on participation initiated by their supervisor. The three main themes were feeling trusted, experiencing support, and experiencing uncertainty. The most common theme identified by 80% of respondents was trust, defined in terms of perceived confidence in the respondents' competence in their roles. Respondents indicated that their skill level and expertise was recognized and respected by their supervisor as valuable contributors to

their organization or team. For instance, "That [participation] indicates that, for me, it feels like he trusts the work that I do and that what we're doing is heading in the right direction." Interviewees also expressed feeling trusted and valued for their unique points of view, lived experiences, or personal identities. For example, one participant said, "I think it means that she values and trusts me and my opinion and knowledge, whether that's historical knowledge or just lived experience or intricate things about how people on our teamwork... and that she cares about [it], so it means both that she values and respects me and will take that into consideration."

A second theme was investment, characterized by their supervisor's support of their development. Interviewees typically viewed their supervisors' initiation of participation as an opportunity to strengthen their leadership or decision-making skills and build self-confidence in their abilities. One interviewee said, "I think what that does is let me believe in myself and own that and step into that... I do think there is something there about it's not just uplifting in a general praise kind of way. It's literally stepping back, giving someone the space to occupy their own sense of self and decision-making capacity." Another respondent described, "...sometimes I don't have the right answers, but I'm also able to try on thinking through the process of being able to make those decisions which I think really helps me in my trajectory...I feel valued."

Two of the respondents did not attach a particular meaning to participation when initiated by a supervisor. They described participation as an organizational norm or a method to gain validation on a decision after it had already been decided. For example, "I don't know that it necessarily indicates anything to me because I think it's just like how we operate at [organization], that people sometimes to a point that is counterproductive, I

think are constantly seeking the opinions and advice and the validation of other people to do something." Another respondent spoke to a level of uncertainty related to their experiences with their supervisor: "If they pull me in at the beginning it tells me that they probably value my input and I say probably because I think there are sometimes when I think I'm being pulled in because of the sincerity of trying to involve me and at other times I feel it might be checking a box... It's hard to delineate, and so what I focus on is the fact that at least this time, I'm pulled in at the beginning, so that's a good thing."

Question 6, "How do you know when someone is accepted at your organization?" was analyzed for themes on how respondents related participation and belonging in their organization. Responses sometimes included multiple themes. The top themes included informal socialization, the hiring and selection process, demonstrated respect for expertise, personal disclosure/openness with others, and position within the organization. Others included recognition from senior staff, shared language from the organization, shared prior history, and tenure (Table 4).

**Table 3**  
*Themes of Acceptance*

Theme	Theme Details	Number of mentions in Interviews
<b>Informal Socialization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking someone to coffee, lunch</li> <li>• Socializing outside of work</li> <li>• Being friendly</li> </ul>	3
<b>Hiring and selection process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The selection process is rigorous</li> <li>• The hiring manager picked them</li> </ul>	3
<b>Demonstrated respect for expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invitations to join groups</li> <li>• Being asked for advice informally</li> </ul>	3
<b>Personal disclosure/openness with others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness to share personal details</li> <li>• Sharing challenges with others</li> </ul>	2
<b>Position within the organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job duties require lots of interaction</li> <li>• Status from departmental membership</li> </ul>	2
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition from senior staff</li> <li>• Using the organization's mission in planning/conversation</li> <li>• A shared history with the mission</li> <li>• Tenure</li> </ul>	

Note. N = 10

Participation initiated by a supervisor was not a prominent theme in responses regarding how interviewees knew someone belonged at work. However, participation emerged as an outcome of belonging, not specifically related to a direct supervisor. For example, being included via informal socialization and relationship development enabled inclusion and participation in information exchange activities and meetings. One participant said, "... there's always the meeting, and then there's the meeting before the

meeting or the meeting after the meeting. And I think people are accepted when they are able to be part of the meeting before the meeting. And I think those informal relationships are really, really important and that says a lot about acceptance into the org."

Respondents generally noted that investing time in informal socialization and relationship building allowed them to increase participation in projects and had benefits to their productivity, especially in fast-paced work environments.

Another example is the way demonstrated expertise enabled participation and inclusion in conversations. For example, one participant noted, "...a great way to say that someone is accepted is that we understand what body of knowledge they are bringing to the table and understand how their input will influence a decision and so they are invited to the table when decisions are being made that are relevant to that expertise needed...".

### **Quantitative & Qualitative Data Set Comparison**

A comparison of the quantitative and qualitative data sets showed converging themes (Table 5). Both demonstrated that perceived participation with a supervisor has a positive effect on an employee's perception of workplace belonging. The quantitative data set showed that 46% of the variance in workplace belonging could be explained by an employee's perception of participation. The quantitative data showed a similar pattern that other factors, including informal socialization and hiring and selection practice, also inform how employees perceive workplace belonging. Where the data sets primarily diverged was related to the level of detail in the qualitative data. The qualitative data set may provide some explanation or context to the regression analysis as well as situational nuances behind belonging, such as the variation in the importance placed on belonging by the interviewees as well as viewing participation as a signal that others belong.

**Table 4**

*Quantitative & Qualitative Data Set Comparison*

	<b>Quantitative Data Set (N=24)</b>	<b>Qualitative Data Set (N=10)</b>
<b>Relationship between perceived participation and workplace belonging</b>	The correlation between perceived participation and workplace belonging was strong and positive ( $r = 0.65$ ). The regression analysis of how perceived participation affects workplace belonging, $R^2=.46$ . The intercept value was 34.7, meaning that when an employee perceives that no participation occurs with their supervisor, their perception of workplace belonging would be relatively low.	<p>80% (8) of interviewees reported feeling valued and trusted by their supervisors as a result of their participation.</p> <p>50% (5) of interviewees reported feeling invested in and supported by their supervisors as a result of their participation.</p> <p>20% (2) of interviewees felt uncertain of the meaning of participation within their organization.</p> <p>Other factors listed by interviewees included informal socialization, selection &amp; hiring practices, and demonstrated respect for expertise.</p>
<b>Relationship between high-quality LMX and perceived participation</b>	The correlation between perceived participation and quality of supervisor-employee relationship (LMX) was strong and positive ( $r = 0.75$ ).	<p>80% (8) of interviewees reported patterns of regular participative management from their supervisor.</p> <p>Interviewees were not asked explicitly to rate their relationship with their supervisor. However, the theme of trust which was reported by 80% (8) of interviewees.</p> <p>Trust in a supervisor-employee relationship is a characteristic of a high-quality relationship (Dansereau et al., 1975; Gerstner &amp; Day, 1997; Graen &amp; Uhl-Bien, 1995)</p>



## **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis used to provide answers to how participative management affects employee perception of belonging in the workplace. The first section described the quantitative results of the three-part survey instrument measuring perceived participation, workplace belonging, and supervisor-employee relationship quality. A regression analysis on the data set found that perceived participation had a strong, positive effect on workplace belonging, explaining 46% of the variance. Through correlation analysis, perceived participation levels and supervisor-employee relationship quality were strongly and positively related. The second section described the data that emerged from one-on-one interviews. Overall, respondents identified three main themes of feeling trust, experiencing support, and experiencing uncertainty when participation was initiated by their supervisor, and that participation was an outcome of belonging but not a central theme to indicate belonging at work. Chapter 5 will discuss the conclusions, implications, and recommendations based on quantitative and qualitative results.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions & Recommendations**

The purpose of the study was to understand how participative management affects employee perception of workplace belonging in nonprofit organizations. This chapter presents a summary of findings, links them back to theory, and then draws conclusions. Implications of the study are offered. This chapter also provides recommendations to OD Practitioners and suggests possible further research.

The present study consisted of a mixed-methods approach to gain an understanding of employees' views on participative management and its effect on how they feel they belong at work. The quantitative results showed a strong, positive correlation between perceived participation and their perception of workplace belonging or how accepted, respected, included, and supported they feel at work (Cockshaw et al., 2013). The regression analysis showed a positive relationship between the effect of perceived participation on workplace belonging and that perceived participation predicts workplace belonging. The qualitative data showed that involvement in decision-making by their supervisor indicated that they were included and respected for their abilities and expertise and supported in their professional development. The employee's perception of their participation or influence on their supervisor and perceived relationship quality was also positively correlated, demonstrating that the higher perception of participation and higher-quality relationships between supervisor and employee are related. The results of the present study do not provide absolute answers to the role participative management can play in workplace belonging in nonprofit organizations. However, several conclusions can be drawn from the study results.

## Conclusions

A review of the quantitative and qualitative data led to six conclusions related to the effect of participative management in workplace belonging.

1. Participative management affects workplace belonging. Participative management is a method of influencing workplace belonging. The quantitative and qualitative data sets both supported this finding. The regression analysis of perceived participation and workplace belonging demonstrated that 46% of the variation in workplace belonging is associated with the employee's perception of participation with their supervisor. Further, the intercept value in the regression analysis was 34.7, meaning that when an employee perceives that little or no participation occurs with their supervisor, their perception of workplace belonging would be relatively low.

Interview participants viewed participation with their supervisor as a demonstration of support for their professional development as well as an indication of their supervisor's respect and trust in their professional skills and expertise. Participation provided the opportunity to influence through discussion and inclusion in information sharing. These findings align with the characteristics of workplace belonging defined by Cockshaw et al. (2013), where employees feel supported, respected, accepted, and included.

2. Multiple factors contribute to belonging. Participation facilitated by a supervisor is one of the multiple factors that affect workplace belonging. The survey and interview responses demonstrated that along with participative management, there are other activities that play a role in workplace belonging, such as a) informal socialization, b) experiences during the hiring and selection process, and c) people, such as their teammates and peers. The literature supports the finding that participative

- management approaches add value to the employee's experience (Locke et al., 1986; Pacheco & Webber, 2012) and that other factors, such as relationships with others outside of their manager in their work environment, contribute to belonging (Cockshaw et al., 2013; Goodenow, 1993).
3. Relationship quality matters. The quality of a supervisor-employee relationship impacts workplace belonging and any effect that participative management may have on workplace belonging. The study showed a strong, positive relationship between perception of participation and the quality of the supervisor-employee relationship and a strong, positive relationship between the quality of the supervisor-employee relationship and workplace belonging. A high-quality relationship for a subordinate was more powerful in shaping perceived decision-influence or power than actual performance (Scandura et al., 1986).
  4. Trust was associated as a key indicator of high-quality relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). When employees perceived they could influence and participate in decisions with their supervisor, they perceived a supportive relationship with their supervisor. Activities such as allowing their employees to influence decisions through bi-directional exchanges, as described in the interviews, can increase the employee's perception of a high-quality relationship.
  5. Individual preferences for belonging create variation. The level of importance placed on belonging at work varies based on personal preferences and situations. While 60% of the interviewees responded that workplace belonging was "very" important, 40% replied it was important professionally, however not personally. The literature review supports that there are different levels of belonging or social inclusion and different

purposes for relationships (Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2004; Leary & Cox; 2008; Leary et al., 2013).

6. Participation as a signal of belonging. The act of participation may be perceived as a signal to others of belonging in the workplace and inclusion, an aspect of Cockshaw and Sochet's (2013) PSOM for workplace belonging. Interviewees did not identify participation directly as an indicator of how they knew others were accepted in their workplace. However, they alluded to participation as an inclusive action that suggested someone belonged. The quantitative and qualitative results indicate that participative management positively affects how employees perceive they fit into an organization, but the qualitative data set also reveals how employees understand when others belonging within their organization. Participation, in this case, is perceived as an information exchange but also as a symbol of group fit and being a part of the greater system (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Wilson et al., 2010).

### **Recommendations**

Several recommendations for O.D. practitioners are suggested.

1. Integrate workplace belonging into organization design. OD practitioners can think about workplace belonging across the full system in organization design, not just along the lines of management styles or leave it to the HR department's wellness program. Similar to Lawler's (1992) High Involvement model of management, OD practitioners should work to identify opportunities throughout the organization's design where design components can support acceptance, respect, inclusion, and support (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2013). Practitioners should account for organizations' management processes, talent selection, performance management, and how the staff

is recognized and rewarded in order for workplace belonging to be fully realized in the way the organization operates.

2. **Supervisor development.** A possible application of the study findings is the direct application to coaching for supervisors in building high-quality relationships to promote workplace belonging. High-quality relationships are the gateway for active participation, better performance, and job satisfaction (Gerstner & Day, 1997). An employee's perception of a high-quality relationship is more potent than their perceived influence or actual performance (Scandura et al., 1986). Studies support the positive effects of workplace belonging on employees, such as lower burn out and stress levels (Armstrong et al., 2016; Shakespeare-Finch & Daley, 2017; Somoray, Shakespeare-Finch, & Daley, 2017). Supervisors play an essential role in an employee's day-to-day experience within an organization, and additional training on developing high-quality relationships, including participative management skills, could support increased workplace belonging. Coaching would also need to involve developing supervisors' understanding of the situational nature of participation and the individual preferences of their employees to engage them in a meaningful way as well as how strong a motivator belonging is for their employees (Leary et al., 2013).
3. **Inclusion in the workplace.** OD practitioners may be able to apply learning from this study to practices of inclusion in the workplace. The inclusion model provided by Shore et al. (2011) identifies belonging as a critical component to inclusion, along with feeling uniquely valued. A finding in the study is that others view that participation in meetings as a sign of acceptance and belonging at work. Leaders can find meaningful ways for employees of different backgrounds to participate in the

organizational activities and decisions that will contribute not only to workplace belonging but also to the overall experiences of inclusion.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study.

1. **Sample size.** The sample size for the survey and the interviews was small and limited to a few nonprofit organizations. Since only nonprofit organizations were included, it may impact the applicability of the findings to other types of companies. Staff from only three of five participating organizations volunteered to be interviewed. The lack of representation from the other organizations may impact the generalizability of the qualitative findings.
2. **Self-reported bias.** The survey responses and interview questions were self-reported and filtered through the respondent's view and perceptions and may not have answered truthfully. Also, the majority of survey participants (71%) perceived themselves as "in-group" members; this may have impacted the results.
3. **Limited perspective.** The study only considers the point of view of the employee and does not incorporate or corroborate practices with the survey and interview participants' supervisors.
4. **Single researcher.** Because I was the only individual coding the interview data, the interpretations were subjective. It would have been more credible if there had been multiple researchers coding and comparing themes.
5. **Individual preferences.** The study does not consider that respondents have individual workstyles and preferences for participation with their manager and the individual importance they place on participation in the workplace.

## **Suggestions for Future Research**

1. Variance across demographic groups. Future research related to participative management and workplace belonging could include examining preferences across demographic and geographic groups and potential variation in expectations about belonging at work across different groups. Baumeister and Leary's (1995) Belonging Hypothesis posits that belonging is a universal need and motivation; however, variation in the strength of the motivation amongst individuals is recognized (Leary et al., 2013). Racial, gender, and generational diversity and representation in the U.S. workforce continues to increase. Understanding any significant insights related to participative management and workplace belonging across demographic and geographic groups could provide a competitive edge to organizations as it relates to managing mental health and burnout as well as organizational commitment (Armstrong et al., 2016; Coch & French, 1948; Jena & Pradhan, 2018; Johnson & Johnson, 199; Shakespeare-Finch & Daley, 2017; Somoray, Shakespeare-Finch, & Daley, 2017).
2. Belonging and remote work. The second area of future research could also focus on employees who work remotely and management approaches to address belonging in a virtual or remote workplace. With the changing conditions of work due to global events such as the COVID-19 global pandemic, the nature of relationships and connection is changing, especially in organizations. The theme of remote work arose in several of the interviews during the study. The interviews highlighted how participation and an employee's ability to influence changes when working remotely and the associated challenges. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that telecommuting had no negative effects on relationships and there was a positive



association between telecommuting and the quality of employee-supervisor relationship. In the changing global environment, there would be added value to understanding the impacts of remote work on workplace belonging and the strategies for supervisors and organizations to cultivate participation, high-quality relationships, and belonging in their remote workforce.

### **Final Remarks**

The present research aimed to understand how participative management affects an employee's perception of workplace belonging in nonprofit organizations. The results of the quantitative and qualitative research methods indicate that participative management plays a part in workplace belonging along with other factors and that supervisors have a role in an employee's perception of belonging at work however are not the only organizational members who impact the employee experience. The world continues to become more digital, and remote work continues to rise. It is unclear how the trend of loneliness will accelerate in the future.

Supervisors will have an essential role in contributing to the connection employees have to their organization and enabling meaningful contributions. It is also important to note that workplace belonging is a unique context with distinct impacts on people's wellbeing and it will not serve as a substitute for deficits in belonging elsewhere in individuals' lives (Cockshaw et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the workplace and the people in it, whether virtual or physical, are a substantial in individuals' day-to-day. Participative management continues to be a valuable way to motivate and empower people in meaningful work. As the present study demonstrated, it is one factor that supervisors exercise of to affect employees' experiences of belonging and make work meaningful.

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**Appendix A: Recruitment Letter Template**

Dear Research Participant,

As you may know, experiences of loneliness have risen to epidemic levels in the U.S., rates doubling in Americans over the last 40 years. Loneliness impacts mental and physical health and wellbeing and, within the workplace, negatively effects job performance and organizational commitment and leads to burnout. In nonprofits organizations especially, understanding ways an organization can help drive employee experiences of belonging is critical to retaining its mission-driven workforce and to fully realize its vision in a resource-constrained environment.

I am conducting a research study examining how participation at work affects how employees experience belonging in the workplace. You are invited to participate in the study if you have been employed by your organization for at least 12 months. If you agree, you are invited to participate in a survey and an optional interview.

The survey is anticipated to take no more than 20 minutes and interview is anticipated 45 minutes and will be audio recorded.

All responses will be kept confidential. Only aggregate data will be reported in the thesis or in any subsequent analysis beyond the thesis and possible future publication of the results. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Questionnaire and interview data will be stored securely in the researcher's locked file cabinet for three years, after which all of it will be destroyed. You may also leave any question on the survey blank. Interviews will be audio recorded to ensure the quality of the documentation of information shared. All audio recordings will be destroyed immediately after transcription.

To participate in the online survey, use this link: [secure Qualtrics survey link]. Please do not forward or share this link outside of your organization. The survey will close on Friday, December 20, 2019.

If you have questions or would like to participate in an interview, please contact me at [hannah.f.nichols@pepperdine.edu](mailto:hannah.f.nichols@pepperdine.edu) by XX date [date dependent on recruitment email date].

This study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Pepperdine University and meets all requirements regarding the university's procedures.

Thank you for your participation and support,

Hannah Nichols  
Pepperdine University  
Graziadio Business School  
Masters Student

## **Appendix B: Questionnaire Instrument**

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability regarding your current job with your current supervisor **Consent Form (See consent form attachment)**

- Yes, I consent
- No, I do not consent

*[If no consent, send to end of the survey.]*

**Eligibility**

Have you worked with your current organization for 12 months or longer?

- Yes
- No

*[If no is selected, send to the end of the survey]*

**Section 1: Participation**

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability regarding your current job with your current supervisor at your current organization.

1. In general, how much say or influence do you have on what goes on in your position?

1	2	3	4	5
No influence		Some influence		A great deal of influence

2. Do you feel you can influence the decisions of your immediate supervisor regarding things about which you are concerned?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all		Somewhat		Absolutely

3. Does your immediate supervisor ask your opinion when a problem comes up which involves your work?

1	2	3	4	5
Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Fairly often	Very often

4. If you have a suggestion for improving the job or changing the setup in some way, how easy is it for you to get your ideas across to your immediate supervisor?

1	2	3	4	5
Very difficult	Somewhat difficult	Neither difficult nor easy	Somewhat easy	Very easy

## Section 2: Organizational Membership

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability regarding your experience at your current organization.

1. I feel like a real part of this organization

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

2. People here notice when I am good at something.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

3. It's hard for people like me to be accepted here.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

4. Other people in this organization take my opinions seriously.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

5. Most supervisors in this organization are interested in me.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

6. Sometimes I don't feel as if I belong here.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

7. There's at least one supervisor in this organization that I can talk to if I have a problem.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

8. People in this organization are friendly to me.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

9. Supervisors here are not interested in people like me.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

10. I am included in lots of activities at this organization.

1	2	3	4	5
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Not true at all				Completely true
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11. I am treated with as much respect as other employees.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

12. I feel very different from most other employees here.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

13. I can really be myself in this organization.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

14. The supervisors here respect me.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

15. People here know I can do good work.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

16. I wish I were in a different organization.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

17. I feel proud to belong to this organization.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

18. Other employees here like me the way I am.

1	2	3	4	5
Not true at all				Completely true

### Section 3: You and Your Supervisor

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability regarding your current job with your current supervisor at your current organization.

1. Do you know where you stand with your supervisor and do you usually know how satisfied your supervisor is with what you do?

1	2	3	4	5
Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Fairly often	Very often



2. How well does your supervisor understand your job problems and needs?

1	2	3	4	5
Not a bit	A little	A fair amount	Quite a bit	A great deal

3. How well does your supervisor recognize your potential?

1	2	3	4	5
Not a all	A little	Moderately	Mostly	Fully

4. Regardless of how much formal authority your supervisor has built into their position, what are the chances that your supervisor would use their power to help you solve problems in your work?

1	2	3	4	5
None	Small	Moderate	High	Very high

5. Again, regardless of the amount of formal authority your supervisor has, what are the chances that he or she would "bail you out" at their expense?

1	2	3	4	5
None	Small	Moderate	High	Very high

6. I have enough confidence in my supervisor that I would defend and justify their decision if he or she were not present to do so.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

7. How would you characterize your working relationship with your supervisor?

1	2	3	4	5
Extremely ineffective	Worse than average	Average	Better than average	Extremely effective

*Thank you for your participation. Please remember to close this browser window when you've completed your survey.*

## **Appendix C: Employee Interview Questions**

1. Please state the length of your tenure with your present organization.

**Participation:**

3. Describe how your current supervisor typically involves you in work.

4. Tell me about situations when your current supervisor has involved you decision-making.

5. When your supervisor involves you in decisions, what does it indicate to you?

**Belonging:**

2. Help me understand how you get involved with projects at work.

6. How do you know when someone is accepted at your organization?

7. How important to you is it to feel connected to others at work? Why?

## **Appendix D: Participant Consent Form**

**PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY**

*Graziadio School of Business and Management*

**INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

**Study on the Effect of Participation on Workplace Belonging**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Hannah Nichols, MSOD candidate, and Dr. Miriam Lacey, PhD at Pepperdine University, because you are an employee employed by *Organization Name* for at least 12 months. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to understand how participation, specifically participation in decision-making with supervisors, affects employees' perceptions of belonging at work.

**STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a 30-question online survey. You will also have the option to participate in a one-on-one interview with the Principal Investigator. The survey will be administered using Qualtrics, an online survey platform and is expected to take 20 minutes. It will contain questions about your how often you participate in decision making at your workplace, how you experience support at your workplace and how you work with your supervisor. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to, click "next" or "N/A" in the survey to move to the next question.

Interviews will be conducted in-person, phone or via video conference in a confidential setting. Interviews will be approximately 45 minutes and will focus on your experience participating in decisions at your organization and connection to the organization. Interviews will be audio-recorded however you do not have to answer any questions you don't want to; if you don't want to be taped, handwritten notes will be taken.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this study however you may experience discomfort in answering certain questions that pertain to your work.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include an understanding of managerial methods to increase belonging and possible ways to address loneliness in the workplace.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The records collected for this study will be confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if required to do so by law, it may be necessary to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if disclosed any instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored on a password protected computer in the researcher's office for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed. All survey responses will be anonymous. Your interview responses will be coded with a unique I.D. code and transcript data will be maintained separately. The audio-recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

### **SUSPECTED NEGLECT OR ABUSE OF CHILDREN**

Under California law, the researcher(s) who may also be a mandated reporter will not maintain as confidential, information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, he or she is required to report this abuse to the proper authorities.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or only completing the items for which you feel comfortable. Your relationship with your employer will not be affected whether you participate or not in this study.

### **INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

You understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries you may have concerning the research herein described. You understand that you may contact Hannah Nichols, MSOD candidate, (hannah.f.nichols@pepperdine.edu) and Dr. Miriam Lacey, PhD (miriam.lacey@pepperdine.edu) if you have any other questions or concerns about this research.

### **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500

Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu).