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AN EXPERIENTIAL TEST OF BARGAINING DECISIONS AND REPRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Three models of political representation, relevant to business organizations, were compared in order to investigate the process through which elected representatives determine their political positions. Drawing from both the boundary-spanning and political science literature, two studies were designed which permitted a comparison among the trustee, delegate, and responsible parties models of representation. Each model is consistent with a different rationale for explaining the decisions of a congressional group. In both studies, predictions from each model were compared for similarity with decisions made by representatives meeting as a group (congressional level). The second study also considered the impact of two contextual factors, issue importance and degree of visibility to constituents, on the model of representation selected.

Six hundred and thirteen undergraduate and graduate students drawn from eighteen management classes at a southeastern university were requested to express their individual preferences for weighting of various grading criteria. They were then assigned to 124 primary groups and requested to make group decisions with reference to the weighting of the same grading criteria. From these primary groups, representatives were elected to attend a class-specific congressional meeting. Eighteen congressional groups were formed.

Decisions made in these congressional groups were compared to decisions from the primary groups (responsible parties model), the decisions from the representatives themselves when deciding as individuals (trustee model), and the decisions of the nonrepresentatives or constituents as individuals (delegate model).

The results indicated that representatives favored the responsible parties model. Neither the delegate model nor the trustee model was preferred over the other. Process visibility and issue importance significantly increased the degree of similarity between congressional decisions and decisions made at lower levels (primary groups and individual).