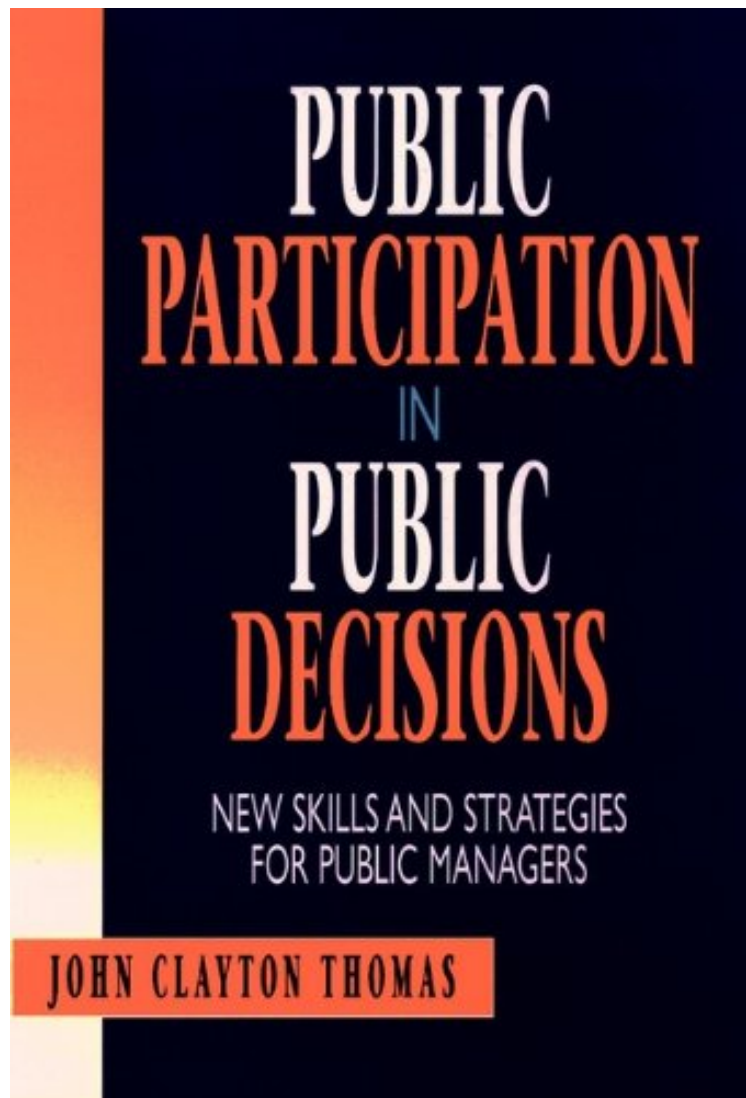


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## Public Participation in Public Decisions: New Skills and Strategies for Public Managers

*John Clayton Thomas*

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**John Clayton Thomas : Public Participation in Public Decisions: New Skills and Strategies for Public Managers** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Public Participation in Public Decisions: New Skills and Strategies for Public Managers:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great classic themes - needs new edition By KJ's mommy Very interesting book - bought it to learn how to get the public my job serves more involved in decision making. Great classic themes on how to get the nebulous public groups to speak up and help out! The info is laid out logically and

clearly. Fascinating case studies. Only problem - published 1995. Author alludes to the coming 'technological revolution' of electronic mail and fax. It would be wonderful to hear the author's current thoughts on how email and websites can be used to solicit public opinion.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Public Participation: A Contingency Framework

By TD

Public participation in public decisions has been an enduring theme promoted by both public administration scholars and practitioners, behind of which has been a fix belief in its positive impact on the quality and responsiveness of public decisions, implementation efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and its potential to unchain the power of public ideas and to develop a strong sense of civic engagement—a subsistence for broader and intense practice of democracy. Beginning with the Great Society legislations of the 1960s that required maximum feasible participation of communities in development projects, the sensibility in favor of a broader public participation has turned to be a mandate. Unorthodox public administration currents, including New Public Administration of the 1970s and 1980s, and New Public Management of the 1990s, have consistently called for broader and engaged public participation in the hope that broader public involvement would bring about wide-ranging benefits, some of which have been mentioned in the preceding lines. Though fed by a religious-like persuasion, most of the early scholars in the trench of public participation neglected or failed in developing a contingency model of public participation that would help public managers to analyze the context of public participation so that a productive, engaged and distortion-free dialogue process accompanied by public participation could be planned and achieved. Deprived of a fully understanding of a productive public participation process, first public participation initiatives taken by public managers proved to be frustrating for both undertaking public agencies and aspiring community participants. The book I am reviewing is really such one that comes up with a contingency framework for public participation that thoroughly inquires into "when and how" questions of public participation, with having a number of productive, well-crafted, and context-dependent strategies and recommendations. Public Participation in Public Decisions is organized around ten major chapters. In the first three chapters of the book, Thomas (1995) gets readers to three points. First, the author criticizes the orthodox public administration theory due to its lack of enthusiasm for public participation; second, justifies the necessity for public participation with numerous reasons; and finally, points to the importance of finding a "practical" approach to public involvement for making it really work rather than keeping it as "rhetoric". From the fourth to the eight chapters, Thomas (1995) explains the important parameters in public participation process. The parameters point out the critical decision points as to when and how public administrators should involve citizens in public decisions. In the ninth chapter, Thomas (1995) pays attention to the new forms of public involvement including ombudspersons and action centers, co-production and volunteerism. The tenth chapter includes a summary view and concludes with some recommendations to the public administrators for them to be effective in the age of public participation and involvement. The Effective Decision Model Thomas (1995) advances throughout the book rests on the organizational participation process developed by Vroom and Yetton (1973). Thomas (1995) proposes five options for decision making: (1) autocratic or autonomous decision-making, with no public involvement or influence; (2) modified autonomous public decision making in which the manager seeks information from segments of the public, but decides alone in a manner that may or may not reflect the group influence; (3) consultative decision making, with a limited but significant public role; (4) segmented public consultation in which the manager shares the problem separately with segments of the public, getting ideas and suggestions, then makes a decision that reflects group influence, and; (5) public decision making, with the extensive influence of a decision made jointly by the manager and the public (p. 39). To make the long shorter, two points are important. First, public participation does not suggest, all the time, direct and bodily involvement of public. Second, the influence of public increases as the public manager moves on from the first to the fifth option. For the question of which decision-making option public managers should opt, Thomas (1995) develops mainly two parameters: the need for quality and the need for acceptability of a decision. In cases when the technical standards and requirements (quality) outweigh the acceptability of public decision by community, Thomas (1995) recommends some degree of public participation, otherwise, an increasing degree of public participation. In cases where the need for decision quality and decision acceptability are equally important, the author recommends a number of decision options to be used in combination. In addition to the two main parameters, there are a number of other questions that would help public managers to analyze the context, for example, such as the structure of the problem, composition of the relevant public, and conflict or agreement within the relevant public. Thomas (1995) draws so meticulously a framework out of his assessments contingent on the combination of different contextual circumstances that appear in the book as configurations. I do not take all the "configurations" to the letter to presume the book as a cook-recipe, however, in the book's entirety, I sense them to be really helpful and thought provoking. I recommend patience before turning theoretical understandings into normative roadmaps. This book should encourage the reader to re-configure and re-interpret the parameters and contextual specifics in creative ways, and to add new ones. Robert Denhardt, in his praise for Public Participation in Public Decisions, remarks that this book "sets the stage for a revitalization of democracy at the local level", and I agree with him. I believe only lamenting for democracy is not enough for making it work. Democracy needs not just a set of normative propositions and institutions but also a number of well-crafted strategies that address the context (see, i.e., Barber, 1984; Forester, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 1998) that would push democracy along. From this angle, Thomas' book is surely a treasure, not only for it

demonstrates the challenges ahead but also for it comes with something that can be helpful for "helping" to decide what to do next. I would highly recommend.

This straightforward and practical guide outlines a strategic approach to public involvement in government decision making. Prepares public managers for the difficult task of involving citizens more fully in the affairs of government while maintaining effectiveness and efficiency. Written in easy-to-understand terms, *Public Participation in Public Decisions* presents the Effective Decision Model of Public Involvement that managers will find to be an invaluable asset when making decisions about when and how to involve the public.

From the Inside Flap More and more, citizens are demanding and are being given a voice in the decision-making process of such diverse public interests as community development, crime prevention, mass transportation, environmental planning, and hazardous waste disposal. This growing trend of citizen activism combined with new legislative requirements and changing professional values has legitimized the role of the citizen in myriad areas of public management. How can managers meet the challenge of increasing citizen involvement in public management? John Clayton Thomas has written a straightforward and practical guide for public managers in which he outlines a strategic approach to public involvement in government decision making. *Public Participation in Public Decisions* prepares public managers for the difficult task of involving citizens more fully in the affairs of government while maintaining effectiveness and efficiency. In easy-to-understand terms, he presents the "Effective Decision Model of Public Involvement" that managers will find to be an invaluable asset when making decisions about when and how to involve the public. The author explores the sensible steps managers can take to successfully enhance public support and acceptance. The book is filled with illustrative examples and includes such useful information as: How to build strong and lasting working relationships with the public. The do's and don'ts to keep in mind when contemplating public involvement. How to make decisions that call for extensive public involvement. Which mechanism to employ if only information is desired from the public. And much more. Written for government officials at all levels, students of public administration, public planners, and consultants and trainers to government, *Public Participation in Public Decisions* outlines a strategic plan for including citizens in public decisions—a plan that goes a long way in creating a stronger democracy for all. From the Back Cover A straightforward and practical guide for public managers in which he outlines a strategic approach to public involvement in government decision making. *Public Participation in Public Decisions* prepares public managers for the difficult task of involving citizens more fully in the affairs of government while maintaining effectiveness and efficiency. In easy-to-understand terms, he presents the "Effective Decision Model of Public Involvement" that managers will find to be an invaluable asset when making decisions about when and how to involve the public. About the Author JOHN CLAYTON THOMAS is professor and director of the School of Public Administration and Urban Studies at Georgia State University. He has held leadership posts in several urban affairs and public administration organizations: he served as president of the Urban Affairs Association from 1990–1992 and was program co-chair for the 1994 National Conference of the American Society for Public Administration. He is the author of *Between Citizen and City* (1986), and *Big City Politics in Transition* (1991).