

Idealism Versus Pragmatism in User Evaluations of Allocation Systems

Shelby, B., Whittaker, D., & Danley, M. (1989). Idealism versus pragmatism in user evaluations of allocation systems. *Leisure Sciences 11*(1), 61-70.

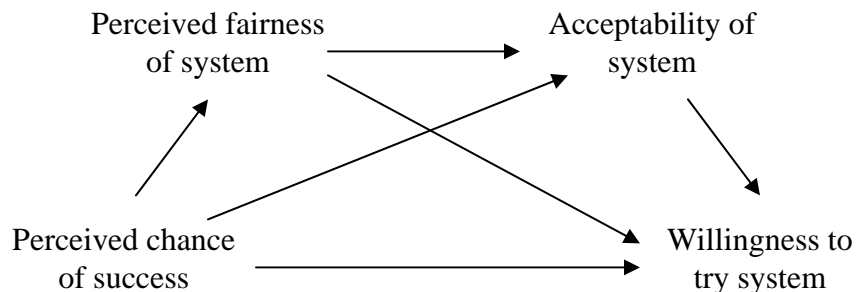
River(s): Snake River (Hells Canyon)
Research Topic(s): Permit/fee system, Use allocation
Type of Publication: Journal

1. Abstract

Researchers explored the relationships of idealistic and pragmatic variables leading to a user's willingness to try an allocation system. Three variables were hypothesized to be a function of a user's willingness to try: perceived chance of success of obtaining a permit, perceived fairness of the system, and acceptability of the system. A path model of these variables was developed and tested using five allocation systems: pricing, reservation, lottery, queuing, and merit. Researchers also tested consistency of user evaluations across the five allocation systems. Results indicate users view allocation systems similarly when evaluating their willingness to try the system. Results also suggest that chance of success is a large factor in a user's determination to try a system and their acceptability of a system. However, as the resource becomes scarcer, fairness plays a larger role.

2. Study Purpose

- "To explore whether individuals evaluate allocation alternatives based on pragmatic or idealistic concerns, and whether this perception-evaluation process is consistent across each of the allocation alternatives [pricing, reservation, lottery, queuing, and merit]." (p. 64)
- The following path model illustrates the hypothesized relationships tested in this study (Figure 1, p 65):



- ! A user's willingness to try an allocation system is hypothesized to be affected by the user's perceived chance of success, perceived fairness, and acceptability of the system

- Acceptability is affected by the user's perceptions of fairness and chance of success
- A user's perception of system fairness is affected by their perceived chance of success
- “Theory suggests that each of the six paths in the model will be significant” (p. 65)

3. Findings

Response rate: 83%.

3.1. Willingness to try

- “Most strongly determined by individuals' perceived chance of success” (p. 66-67)
- Perceived fairness is not as strongly linked to a user's willingness to try a system
- A user's evaluation of acceptability does not appear to play a role in determining their willingness to try the system

3.2. Acceptability

- “Strongly determined by whether the system is perceived as fair” (p. 67)
- A user's perception of success does not appear to affect their acceptability evaluation of the system

3.3. Perceived fairness

- “Strongly determined by perceived chances of success in obtaining a permit” (p. 67)

4. Key Discussion Points

- Users appear to evaluate and view allocation systems in the same way suggesting “the general relationships between perceptions and evaluations presented in this research may hold true regardless of the allocation alternative being considered” (p. 68)
- “When the perceived chances of success are equal, users will be more accepting of and more willing to try systems they perceive as fair” (p. 68)
- Users will tend to evaluate a system as acceptable if it is perceived as fair, but will more likely try a system that provides a good chance of success
- The idealistic notion of fairness is strongly linked to the pragmatic chance of success

5. Management Recommendations

- When attempting to implement a new allocation system, managers will need to convince users of their likelihood of success.
- Fairness and acceptability will play more of a role as the resource becomes scarcer
- Managers should “change allocation systems as supply/demand relationships and user perceptions change” (p. 68)

6. Research Design

Survey research, census

6.1. Study Area

Hells Canyon reach of the Snake River, Idaho and Oregon

6.2. Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaire handed out on-site and mailed back

6.3. Study Population

River runners at Heller Bar take-out during August 4-22, 1978

6.4. Sample Size

167 commercial boaters and 128 private boaters

6.5. List of Variables and Operational Definitions

In the questionnaire, users were given descriptions of five allocation alternatives (pricing, reservations, lottery, queuing, and merit) and were asked to consider each assuming all users would be required to get a permit for their respective area.

6.5.1. Perceived chance of success

- A closed-ended question asked, "How would this system affect *your* chances of obtaining a permit?" (p. 66)
- Response range (p. 66): "It wouldn't affect my chances at all; I could obtain a permit whenever I wished to float the Snake," to "I could never obtain a permit under this system", and included an "I don't know" option.

6.5.2. Perceived fairness

- A closed-ended question asked, "Do you think this is a fair method of distributing permits?" (p. 66)
- Yes/No response

6.5.3. Willingness to try

- A closed-ended question asked, "Would you try to obtain a float permit by [this method]?" (p. 66)
- Response range: "definitely yes" to "definitely no" (p. 66)

6.5.4. Acceptability

- A closed-ended question asked users to "indicate which system(s) you think are acceptable for issuing permits on the Snake River." (p. 66)
- Responses comprised: "acceptable" or "unacceptable" (p. 66)

7. Theories Used in Study

Theory of Planned Behavior – posits that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control combine to form an intention to act. The strength of the intention to act leads to a prediction of carrying out the action.

- Attitudes are comprised of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations “represented by acceptability and fairness” (p. 64) in this study’s model
- “Willingness to try a system is the behavioral intention” (p. 64)
- The authors use this theory to hypothesize the relationships between pragmatic and idealistic variables when recreationists are faced with evaluating an allocation system