CHAPTER

2

Decision Making

APPLICABLE PSEL STANDARDS

- **STANDARD 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values**
  Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.
- **STANDARD 2: Ethics and Professional Norms**
  Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
- **STANDARD 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness**
  Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.
- **STANDARD 5: Community of Care and Support for Students**
  Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.
- **STANDARD 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community**
  Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

The ability to make effective decisions is vital to the successful performance of a school administrator. Herbert Simon has called it the "heart of executive activity," and Duncan considers it the one thing "generic" to the administrator's job.[1] In addition, reform proposals have called for numerous structural changes and strategic school governance revisions that further underscore

the need to improve the process of decision making and develop successful decision-making skills. The empowerment of teachers has also resulted in new decision-making situations for administrators, as teachers are given more responsibilities in such matters as hiring, curriculum adoption, staff development and evaluation, and school policies, and have themselves become decision makers.

Although intuition and experience can provide a useful basis for decision making, they are seldom sufficient. The effective decision maker must also employ an analytical thought process with greater focus on explaining and predicting the everyday realities that affect educational decision making.

This chapter introduces an expansive view of decision making.[2] A set of theoretical constructs that have emerged from the early 1900s to the present are provided. These constructs, if appropriately applied, can improve a school administrator's decision-making capability. Through careful study and application of the nature and process of decision making, the reader should be able to develop and improve the skills necessary for making better decisions in schools and school systems.

THE NATURE OF DECISION MAKING

Over more than a century, the various models and theories associated with the process of decision making have been reflected in the research literature on management and educational administration. The aim has been to improve performance by making decisions that are cumulatively and successively built on assumptions of choice.

Rational Model

In one model, generally referred to as *rational* or *normative prescriptive,* decision making is viewed as a process that begins with a problem or need that the administrator then logically addresses by engaging in a series of sequential steps, culminating in an effective solution or decision.[3]

The rational or normative prescriptive decision-making approach is concerned with what should be done and with prescribing actions designed to produce the best solution. This theory assumes that choices are made by administrators to maximize certain desirable values and objectives via rational analysis within a highly structured, bureaucratic system.

It was this theory that provided a "scientific" base for the development of modern school systems in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Industrial Revolution had posed new management questions for the world of business. The importance of efficiency in maximizing productivity began receiving much attention, and the growing influence of powerful urban business communities affected schools as well. School decision makers endeavored to apply levels of "scientific management" and Weber's ideal type bureaucracy.[4]

This rational view assumes that administrators function in a closed system, a bureaucracy, characterized by task specification, rigid adherence to written rules and regulations, and formal hierarchical control. Decision making in this structured context is seen through the lens of the decision maker, a supposedly rational administrator. The decision-making process emphasizes solutions to problems and an outcome that results from choice among alternatives in relation to clearly delineated objectives accomplished by following specific tasks and steps.[5]

Obviously, the school administrator's world does not operate in such a logical, sequential, and rational manner as the advocates of the rigidly bureaucratic decision-making tradition suggest. Various studies, both with school administrators and nonschool executives, have tended to confirm reservations about many aspects of this model of decision making. Such studies have revealed an organizational environment that is frequently more dynamic, complex, and uncertain for decision makers than the rational bureaucratic or normative prescriptive theory of decision making has recognized.[6] In addition, a number of these studies have raised severe doubts about how rational or sequential most administrators are in their thinking as they proceed to make a decision.[7] Nevertheless, to protect the image of the educational enterprise and of the school administrator from external interference, the appearance of rationality is frequently applied to the process of decision making. This, however, is wrought with ambiguities. Wise, for example, discusses the dangers of "hyperrationalization" in educational organizations as a result of attempts to impose rational standards on nonrational processes.[8]

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Rational Model Normative prescriptive theories have a number of advantages. They specify clearly what should be done in terms of goals, objectives, criteria, and outcomes. They provide the administrator with the challenge of deciding among knowable alternatives by placing highest priority on what is most effective and desirable. And they help to reach agreement on future plans of action. Normative tools, such as management by objectives (MBO), management information systems (MIS), and associated models for decision analysis, provide a structure for decision making that can assist the administrator in day-to-day managerial tasks. The use of staff time, organizational material, and financial resources can be efficiently and sensibly maximized by the decision maker using a rational decision-making process for budget development, personnel decisions, facility maintenance, scheduling, or plant management. Clearly, rational bureaucratic assumptions accurately reflect the context of many educational decisions.

On the other hand, in studies that critique the rational normative theory of decision making, researchers found that most administrators who participated in the studies did not spend much time seeking additional information about the nature of a problem to better understand its causes and consider possible alternative solutions. Instead, they ignored the need for a decision, apparently hoping the problem would go away, or they took quick action without carefully investigating the nature of the situation. In the latter instances, they typically considered only a narrow set of alternatives. In most cases, these alternatives were based primarily on experience rather than reason or analysis and were not carefully evaluated as to their advantages or disadvantages. The picture that emerges from these studies is that most administrators tend to "muddle through" when faced with a decision, and end up with an action that may have little relationship to the original situation that called for a decision.[9]

Shared Decision Making

A second model, *participatory, shared,* or *site-based decision making,* also builds on the assumption of choice. But whereas the rational bureaucratic theory suggests choices are made by the administrator to maximize attainment of objectives, the participatory model assumes choices are made to satisfy constraints. The theory reflects the democratic and nonhierarchical administrative norms dating to the work of Mary Parker Follett in the 1920s and constitutes a reaction to the impersonality and rigidity of scientific management.[10] After the *A Nation at Risk*

report in 1983, serious attention was given to the quality management philosophy of William Edwards Deming, which came to be known in the United States as *total quality management* (TQM). Deming's principles of management had been used primarily for business applications in Japan and were credited with the remarkable recovery of Japanese industry after the damage it had suffered during World War II. Deming suggested that TQM techniques applied to any organization would make it more successful, and school leaders saw in these techniques a possible path to school improvement. Thornton and Mattocks have pointed out that Deming's famous 14 points, as applied to education, may be summarized under five general statements: "Create a consistency of purpose, adopt a cooperative philosophy, provide training for all, improve constantly and forever, and implement effective leadership."[11]

Participatory theories seriously question the definition of decision making as rational choice made solely by an administrator at the apex of an educational hierarchy. Instead, the focus is on consensual decision making, rooted in the values and beliefs of the participants. Assumptions and organizational preconditions for shared decision making include shared goals or values, influence based on professional expertise, open communication, and equal status among participants. Because many of these assumptions (such as shared goals and professional expertise within an organizational structure) are similar to the assumptions governing the rational bureaucratic model, participatory decision making has been viewed as a subset of the bureaucratic approach.

Descriptions of the way administrators make decisions versus how they should make decisions have contributed to the development of participatory decision-making theory. Led by the pioneering work of Herbert Simon and James March and more recent critiques of the rational approach to decision making, these critics believe that the organizational context in which decisions need to be made reflects much more complexity and uncertainty than the rational theory of decision making seems to acknowledge.[12] These critics also tend to see the decision maker as possessing limited control over the educational enterprise and as being influenced by personality, values, and previous experience more than by reason or intellect. The participatory view of decision making has the administrator rely far less on management controls and more on bonding staff by developing norms that are derived from a shared vision of what is important. These administrators are more likely to view the problem of coordination as cultural rather than as managerial.[13] In the process of participatory and/or group decision making, a consideration of diversity is crucial. In his book *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* Scott Page argues that group decision making is best when the group reflects unique perspectives and ways of thinking. According to Page, the key lies in bringing together individuals with different backgrounds and life experiences; the result will be a messy process, but one that out-performs groups of like-minded individuals chosen on the basis of extensive experience or high IQ.[14]

The benefits of using a participatory decision-making approach in terms of decision outcomes are not conclusive in the research literature. It is not clear, for example, what the direct effect of different obstacles to teacher participation is on decision outcomes and in decision making.[15] According to research by Straus, however, student achievement in mathematics and teacher morale were significantly higher in the five schools in their study that were using TQM as compared with the five not using TQM.[16] Many educators concur with Linda Jean Holman's assessment of site-based decision making as being the educational initiative that has had "more potential for effecting enduring change in the structure and operation of our schools" than has been true of any other in recent years.[17]

Decision Making

According to a study by Margaret Neale of the Stanford Business School with regard to diversity and decision making, people tend to think of diversity as simply demographic, a matter of color, gender, or age. However, groups can be disparate in many ways. Diversity is also based on informational differences, reflecting a person's education and experience, as well as on values or goals that can influence what one perceives to be the mission of something as small as a single meeting or as large as a whole company. Furthermore, diversity among employees can create better performance when it comes to out-of-the-ordinary creative tasks such as product development or cracking new markets, and managers have been trying to increase diversity to achieve the benefits of innovation and fresh ideas. In the context of schooling and decision making, school leaders must also consider issues of diversity and ways in which they should respond. R. Roosevelt Thomas suggests that there are eight ways for leaders to respond to diversity:

1. *Exclude:* Aim to minimize diversity by keeping diverse elements out or by expelling them once they have been included.
2. *Deny:* Enable individuals to ignore diversity dimensions. They look at a green jelly bean and see only a jelly bean. This is viable only if the object of denial permits the practices: entities that celebrate being different are reluctant to allow denial.
3. *Suppress:* Encourage entities that are different to suppress their differences. For example, the treatment that "old timers" often give inquisitive newcomers who inquire, "Why do we do things this way?" A frequent response from the old timers is, "How long have you been here?"
4. *Segregate:* Practices such as clustering members of racial or ethnic groups in certain departments, isolating or piloting a change in a corner of the corporation, and so on.
5. *Assimilate:* Managers attempt to transform the element with differences into clones of the dominant group.
6. *Tolerate:* Adoption of the attitude, "We don't bother them, they don't bother us."
7. *Build relationships:* Assumption that a good relationship can overcome differences; happens when there are grounds for mutually beneficial relationships; focus on similarities.
8. *Foster mutual adaptation:* The parties involved accept and understand differences and diversity, recognizing full well that those realities may call for adaptation on the part of all components of the whole.

Source: M. Neale, "Diversity Can Improve Decision-Making," accessed online, http://www.retailgigs.com/articles/diversity-can-improve-decision-making-1156-article.html, December 28, 2010; and R. Roosevelt Thomas Jr., in *Beyond Race and Gender: Unleashing the Power of Your Total Work Force by Managing Diversity* (New York: AMACOM Books, 1991).

DECISION-MAKING ACTIVITY
WHO SHOULD BE HIRED?

Forrest Middle School is located in the Happy Valley School District (HVSD), and the total student enrollment is 1,500. Due to many years of ups and downs with regard to student enrollment, changing demographics, test scores, finances, and so on, the district has undergone many reforms in the past 15 years. The district has decided to try some major administrative reform, and it has chosen to try a distributed leadership model–the Alston Multi-leadership Model.

Taking on the role of the chief knowledge officer (CKO) in this school, and with school beginning in two weeks, you have the following situation:

> Seven teachers resigned two days ago and now you must hire seven replacements. Due to the many changes going on in HVSD, the chief operating officer (COO) and the chief financial officer (CFO) are unavailable to help you with this hiring, but they've agreed to sign off on your choices to fill the seven positions. Earlier in the year (between October and March–*note:* it is now August), the three of you conducted some interviews with 15 applicants. You only have the notes that all of you jotted down from those interviews along with applications and references to make your choice. Following is a summary of the information that you have about each applicant. Use this information to choose seven teachers to be hired on one-year contracts.

CASE DESCRIPTIONS

1. **Martha Atler:** 27, white, no religious affiliation. MS degree and four years of successful teaching experience (two years in middle-class predominantly White community and two years in a racially mixed community). She is reported to have ties to a military militia group.
2. **Robert Simpson:** 51, white, Protestant, a professed segregationist with a BA degree and 27 years teaching experience. Does not want to teach minority children. Married and father of two adult sons.
3. **Nannette Freeman:** 29, black, Muslim. Nannette has an MS degree with six years of fairly good experience. She is in good health and is an active member of several community activist organizations.
4. **Maxine Liberman:** 21, white, Jewish. BA from Vassar. Maxine has traveled extensively and is well versed in many areas. She has no prior teaching experience.
5. **James Crow:** 35, Native American, tribal religion. James has a BA degree and has worked for 11 years. He taught on several Indian reservations and for the Peace Corps. He is bitter about the conditions of his people.
6. **Mary Weaver:** 38, white, Pentecostal minister. Mary has a BA degree and has 15 years of experience. She has taught in church schools and in public schools. She feels strongly that a child's education should include a focus on morals as well as academics.
7. **Marie Vitale:** 32, Italian, Catholic. Marie has an MS degree and five years of teaching experience. She is reported to have lesbian tendencies.
8. **Bernice Johnson:** 22, black, Catholic. Bernice has a BA degree and one year of teaching experience in the middle-class community in which she was reared. She is a sports enthusiast.
9. **Julio Rodriguez:** 28, recently arrived from Mexico, Catholic. Received a chemical engineering degree from the University of Guadalajara. Originally certified through

the alternative certification program. Speaks limited English but feels able to communicate effectively with children.

10. **Herbert Brown:** 49, black, Baptist. He has an MS degree. Herbert was an active member of the Black Panthers of the 1980s and has taught for four years. His experience included Afrocentric freedom schools in the United States and Africa.
11. **Sister Robertann:** 40, white, nun. Sister Robertann is a strict disciplinarian who has taught in church schools for 19 years. She has a provisional certificate and permission from her order to teach in a public school system. She has been a religionist since she was 19 years old.
12. **Nguyen Nguyen:** 28, Vietnamese, Buddhist. BA degree with no teaching experience. Nguyen assisted in the literacy programs conducted in the factory where he was a part-time employee since age 16.
13. **Mary Jones:** 25, black, Methodist. Mary has a BS degree and one year of successful teaching experience. Single with one child. She was involved in a drug raid during her freshman year in college.
14. **Maria Garcia:** 39, Mexican American, Catholic. Maria is a former welfare recipient who received a BA degree by attending night school. She has worked for six years in a day care center. She is married and has 10 children, ranging in age from 9 to 21.
15. **Brian Nelson:** 25, white, no religious affiliation. Brian has a BA degree and has been asked to leave two schools in the two years that he has worked. He considers himself a liberal and feels that this contributed to his problems with his former principals.

Source: Adapted from Pamela M. Norwood and Deborah Carr Saldaña, "Who Should Be Hired?" in *Teaching about Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity,* T. M. Singelis (Ed.), pp. 73-79, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998 and J. A. Alston, *Multi-leadership in Urban Schools: Shifting Paradigms for Administration and Supervision in the New Millennium* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

Strategic Decision Making

The third model, the *strategic decision-making approach,* views decision choices as taking place in an environment made up of multiple interest groups, conflict, negotiation, limited resources, position authority, and informal power. This model incorporates structural elements found in the bureaucratic rational model (such as adherence to schedules and policies) with aspects of the participatory model (such as seeking consensus via the involvement of many people in the organization). The assumption governing this particular model is that choices the administrator makes are based on comprehensive knowledge and analysis of the internal and external environment.

For strategic decision making to be effective, constraints and obstacles, as well as opportunities and challenges that affect the decision choice, must be identified. Research studies dealing with strategic decision making go beyond the rational procedures prescribed in the bureaucratic model and the shared cooperative elements described in the participatory model. Instead, these studies view decision making in the context of multiple competing interests, problem situations, and influences of power and control.[18] The complexity of decision making is captured in this strategic decision model with many of the nonrational aspects of decision making reflected in the theoretical writings.

The strategic decision-making approach is utilized by the administrator interested in carrying out an educational vision and developing a long-range, overall plan that is flexible and subject to amendment. Decisions are governed by a shared philosophy and a shared purpose that ideally come from empathy and involvement with people committed to the same holistic purpose. The administrator may discover that, despite pure application of the strategic model, decision outcomes are influenced by unexpected events, behaviors, or value orientations. These realities of a world "thriving on chaos" or "organized anarchy" lead us to a description of the fourth model of decision making.[19] For lack of a more sophisticated term, we shall refer to this view as *differentiated decision making.*

Differentiated or Situational Decision Making

The differentiated model represents a shift from the traditional paradigm or way of thinking about decision making. This model takes into consideration various focal points or points of emphasis that require the administrator's attention and will affect the decision choice. The administrator can enter the decision-making process at different decision entry points, depending on the type of problem or situation. Hence, this model can also be referred to as "situational decision making." The process may begin with choosing among alternative solutions presented by groups of individuals, or the process may require the administrator to take a risk and decide against conventional mores in order to maximize a long-range educational goal. Many different situational variables influence the decision choices an administrator makes.

The new paradigm recognizes that some situations permit a linear, structured approach, and some may require group engagement or careful analysis of the external environment before the administrator takes that existential leap and decides. The decisions do not necessarily have to be goal based, but decision making can focus on the process itself, with the resulting actions having only a tenuous connection to the organizational outcome or the administrator's intention.[20] Ethical considerations, values, organizational culture, and climate are additional elements that influence decision making. The new paradigm of decision making recognizes the contextual ambiguity and uncertainty within organizations. It builds on the "garbage can model" of decision-making theory of the early 1970s, which describes a systematic, structured process, operating in an environment consisting of situations that severely limit decision-making capability and decision choices, thus affecting decision outcomes.[21] The new paradigm views effective and efficient performance by an administrator as the desired outcome of decision making.

There is limited research with practical implications for improved decision making in educational organizations faced with financial uncertainty, changing social patterns, technological advances, alternate delivery systems, and educational linkages. There are even fewer studies that provide empirical data and new theories with implications for practice on the symbolic nature of participatory decision making. This latter view of decision making is also incorporated in our new paradigm. The administrator intending to carry out a vision for the school must attempt not only to be performance conscious but also to determine the connectedness of individual and group participation, motivation, values, and goals to the decision choices. Even questions pertaining to the relationship between a particularly inspiring vision and the appropriate decision-making process must be considered in this paradigm for the twenty-first century. Empowering teachers, parents, or students, embarking on joint ventures with the community, and opening the educational system to change constantly demand reconceiving the paradigm of differentiated decision making.

Ethical Decision Making

In their article "Thinking Ethically," Claire Andre and Manuel Velasquez note that making good ethical decisions requires a trained sensitivity to ethical issues and a practiced method for exploring the ethical aspects of a decision and weighing the considerations that should influence our choice of a course of action. Furthermore, having a method for ethical decision making is absolutely essential. Finally, when practiced regularly, the method becomes so familiar that we work through it automatically without consulting the specific steps.[22]

A FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

RECOGNIZE AN ETHICAL ISSUE

1. Is there something wrong personally, interpersonally, or socially? Could the conflict, the situation, or the decision be damaging to people or to the community?
2. Does the issue go beyond legal or institutional concerns? What does it do to people, who have dignity, rights, and hopes for a better life together?

GET THE FACTS

3. What are the relevant facts of the case? What facts are unknown?
4. What individuals and groups have an important stake in the outcome? Do some have a greater stake because they have a special need or because we have special obligations to them?
5. What are the options for acting? Have all the relevant persons and groups been consulted? If you showed your list of options to someone you respect, what would that person say?

EVALUATE ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS FROM VARIOUS ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

6. Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm?

UTILITARIAN APPROACH: The ethical action is the one that will produce the greatest balance of benefits over harms.

7. Even if not everyone gets all they want, will everyone's rights and dignity still be respected?

RIGHTS APPROACH: The ethical action is the one that most dutifully respects the rights of all affected.

8. Which option is fair to all stakeholders?

FAIRNESS OR JUSTICE APPROACH: The ethical action is the one that treats people equally, or if unequally, that treats people proportionately and fairly.

9. Which option would help all participate more fully in the life we share as a family, community, society?

COMMON GOOD APPROACH: The ethical action is the one that contributes most to the achievement of a quality common life together.

10. Would you want to become the sort of person who acts this way (e.g., a person of courage or compassion)?

VIRTUE APPROACH: The ethical action is the one that embodies the habits and values of humans at their best.

MAKE A DECISION AND TEST IT

11. Considering all these perspectives, which of the options is the right or best thing to do?
12. If you told someone you respect why you chose this option, what would that person say? If you had to explain your decision on television, would you be comfortable doing so?

ACT, THEN REFLECT ON THE DECISION LATER

13. Implement your decision. How did it turn out for all concerned? If you had it to do over again, what would you do differently?

Source: "A Framework for Thinking Ethically." Markula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, www.scu.edu/ethics.

THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING: IMPORTANT CONCEPTS AND STEPS

Decision making has been defined as "a process influenced by information and values, whereby a perceived problem is explicitly defined, alternative solutions are posed and weighted, and a choice made that subsequently is implemented and evaluated."[23] The process is usually viewed from the perspective of an individual administrator, but decision making also takes place in small committees and in large groups.

Site-Based Management

More recently, the philosophy of school-based management, designed to increase the autonomy of the local school staff, is gaining hold in school districts across the country.[24] Linda Jean Holman states, "If embraced in spirit as well as form, if genuinely supported by school boards, central office personnel, and campus-based administration, and if implemented at a pace neither too slow nor too abrupt, site-based decision making provides a vehicle whereby each school can adjust curriculum, scheduling, staffing, and budget to address its needs. Given time and sustained academic focus, the resulting empowerment and ownership should result in an improved instructional program and increased student achievement."[25] This approach gives greater flexibility to staff, offers increased participation opportunities, and has the ability to provide more immediate services to meet specific needs of students.

Some of the problems that arise in implementing school-based management are confusion of roles and responsibilities, along with difficulties in adapting to new roles. There could ensue a power struggle among administrators, teachers, and parents—especially if the administrator is unwilling to share decision-making authority. Some authorities argue that the individual administrator should not be making many decisions. Griffiths, for example, has asserted, "If the executive is personally making decisions, this means there exists malfunction in the decision process. It is not the function of the chief executive to make decisions; it is his [or her] function to monitor the decision-making process to make sure that it performs at the optimum level."[26]

Many school districts have successfully implemented a school-based management/shared decision-making (SBM/SDM) program that includes decentralizing decision making in order to enhance the leadership of school site administrators and to promote the empowerment of teachers at the work site. Evaluations of shared decision-making procedures are typically conducted by variously named groups of teachers, administrators, noninstructional personnel, parents, and students; supported by grade level or subject interest committees; and referred to a central decision-making body. Decisions are normally based on a majority vote with a great deal of opportunity for consultation and consensus resolution of issues, especially in cases where the principal has veto power.[27]

The Importance of Understanding Decision Making as a Process

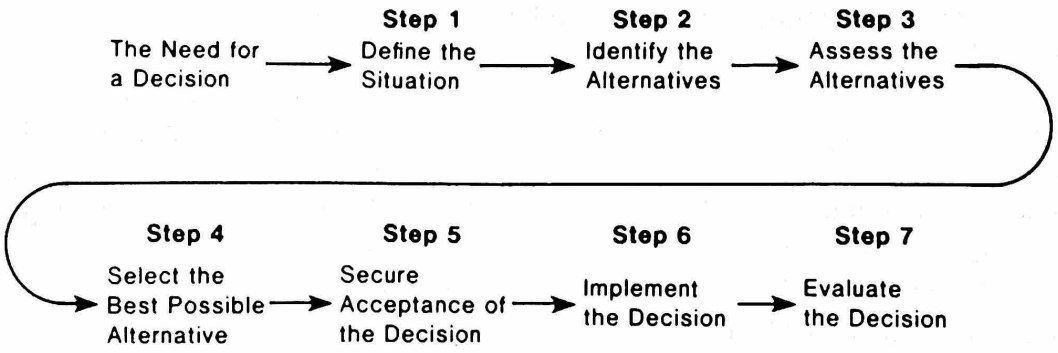
Regardless of whether the decision making occurs individually or in groups, or whether the administrator's role is that of monitor of the process; decision maker; or, more likely, both, an administrator must possess a good understanding of the decision-making process in order to be effective in any of these roles. Careful reading and reflection on the following concepts and guidelines should help accomplish that objective.

Figure 2.1 identifies the major steps in decision making, and the sections that follow describe the concepts involved at each stage. Although the process recommended is based on the rational theory of decision making, every effort will be made in the discussion to present the complexities–as well as the less rational aspects–of decision making. It is, of course, impossible to have a purely rational process since the administrator cannot enjoy perfect knowledge. Hence, nonrationality becomes a necessity, with aspects of "muddling through." It is only when what at times may be a necessity becomes a virtue, replacing the search for knowledge and information in decision making, that effective performance suffers.[28]

Defining the Situation

The first step an administrator should take when faced with a decision is to define the nature of the situation that seems to require a decision. The importance of this step is underscored by Barnard's observation: "The fine art of executive decision making consists of not deciding questions that are not pertinent, in not deciding prematurely, in not making decisions that cannot be made effectively, and in not making decisions that others should make."[29] If this sage advice were followed more often, more effective administrative decision making would undoubtedly result.

FIGURE 2.1
MAJOR STEPS IN DECISION MAKING



To make effective decisions, including the types of decisions referred to by Barnard, an administrator first needs to attempt to gain a better understanding of the question, problem, or set of circumstances that seems to require an administrative decision.

Except for routine situations, an administrator will not be in the position of possessing sufficient information or understanding at the time the need for a decision surfaces. Unfortunately, as research has shown, administrators often react too quickly on the basis of assumption, inadequate information, and/or someone else's perception of a situation and immediately begin looking for solutions before the situation has been sufficiently defined.[30]

Of course, in some situations the administrator will be forced to make an on-the-spot decision, and there will be circumstances when the press of time and a lack of available information influence the decision choice. In such instances, it will be important for an administrator to be decisive when the situation requires it and to avoid procrastinating in the hope that the perfect solution will at some point surface or that the problem will resolve itself.[31]

In most situations, however, particularly those involving important and long-range decisions, an administrator should take sufficient time to investigate and analyze the conditions necessitating a decision in order to reduce the possibility of an ineffective administrative decision.[32] This type of situational or problem analysis is most productively approached by the decision maker's seeking answers to questions such as the following:

1. What is known and unknown about the situation? What other factors must be clarified before a decision can be made?
2. Can anyone else provide additional information or a different perception of the situation? To what extent is the administrator's bias, or are the biases of others, influencing perception of the circumstances necessitating a decision?
3. Who will be affected by a decision?
4. How serious is the problem or question? How soon must a decision be made?

Effective situational and problem analysis is necessary in order to avoid making an incorrect decision based on an inadequate understanding of a situation or problem. Asking relevant questions is the key to effective situational and problem analysis. While there will be time constraints and possibly temptation to seek only the most accessible and interesting information about a situation,[33] the administrator should be trying to obtain the most relevant, accurate, and thorough information available on the situation or problem. A poorly understood problem or situation will almost guarantee an ineffective decision.

Identifying the Alternatives

Upon defining a problem or situation, the administrator will usually begin to perceive alternative courses of action. A typical mistake made by the inexperienced decision maker is to assume that only two alternatives exist.[34] For example, a principal faced with making a decision on a parents' proposal for greater involvement in school affairs may assume there are only two choices: to reject the parents' proposal or to accept their recommendation. But if the administrator examines the situation further, additional courses of action may appear. For instance, the administrator could decide to postpone a decision on the parents' proposal until more facts became available or offer a counterproposal to the parents that would incorporate less involvement than they had requested but would improve their present circumstances. Or

the administrator could decide not to respond at all to the parents' proposal, hoping that the parents would take no further action.

What every administrator needs to avoid is the tendency to perceive alternatives in *either-or* terms. In most cases, an administrator will benefit from continuing to examine the problem, probing for that third or fourth alternative. This process requires careful analysis, imagination, and creativity, but it will usually result in an improved decision, one that may combine two previously identified alternatives or take a totally new approach.

Assessing the Alternatives

Administrators who fail to assess adequately the feasibility of the various alternatives under consideration may later encounter unanticipated consequences in the process of implementing their decisions.[35] This results, in part, from the ambiguity of information and uncertainty in estimating the consequences of selecting one alternative over another that is characteristic of much decision making.[36] But unanticipated consequences can also occur when an administrator makes certain assumptions about each of the alternatives that turn out to be unjustified. For example, a particular group may react differently than was anticipated, or a key individual may not possess the resources or competencies that are needed, or the extent of supplies required for implementation of the decision may exceed the original estimates. Usually the unanticipated consequences result from the administrator's failure to identify fully and to examine critically the assumptions inherent–although possibly unrecognized–in assessing the original alternatives. As noted previously, it is impossible to reach decisions or to take action without making certain basic assumptions. The real danger for an administrator, however, lies in making decisions without having examined the assumptions central to the feasibility of each alternative.

In attempting to assess the various alternatives, the administrator needs to anticipate their possible consequences, despite the uncertainty of the results. Such a process may be represented by the following sequence of thought: "If I choose alternative A, then result 1 will probably occur and result 2 will probably not. On the other hand, if I choose alternative B, then result 2 is likely to occur and result 1 is unlikely. If I choose alternative C, however, results 2 and 3 may come about while result 1 is unlikely."[37]

As the administrator evaluates each alternative, two important factors should be taken into consideration. The first concern is an assessment of one's own capability and that of the other individuals or groups who will participate in implementing a particular course of action. The second involves an assessment of the type of reception the decision will receive from those who will be most affected, for example, teachers, students, parents, and the general public.

The First Factor to Consider The initial question that an administrator must ask is, "To what extent do I possess the competency, resources, personal influence, or power necessary to implement this alternative?" For instance, an administrator may be interested in initiating a new program of individualized instruction. But before a decision is made to proceed with a plan, a personal inventory must be taken of the technical knowledge and skill for introducing the innovation, of the ability to obtain the necessary resources the new program will require, and of the extent to which personal influence or power is necessary for successfully implementing the decision. Although it may be difficult to evaluate one's own competency, personal influence, or resources objectively, these are the kinds of judgments required for an accurate feasibility assessment of a particular course of action.

A related question that the administrator should ask in assessing the feasibility of each alternative is, "To what extent do the other individuals or groups involved in implementing the decision possess the necessary competency or resources?" The effective implementation of most decisions depends on the capability or resources of people other than the administrator. Too frequently an administrator may assume that teachers, students, or other groups possess the skills, knowledge, or resources required for carrying out certain decisions. In the absence of these prerequisites, however, decisions are usually not implemented effectively, and the people involved may become quite frustrated. Therefore, it is essential that the administrator evaluate the degree to which coworkers possess the competency and resources necessary for successful implementation of a decision.

The Second Factor to Consider A second major factor to be considered by the administrator in assessing the feasibility of various alternatives is the type of reception the decision will be given by those most directly affected. Administrative decisions perceived as unsatisfactory may be resisted by those whose cooperation will be needed in the implementation stage.

The administrator should therefore determine how the affected individuals or groups regard the various alternatives. For example, with regard to each alternative, who can be counted upon for support? How solid would that support be? What would be the likelihood that a particular individual or group would reject or actively resist the course of action implied in each alternative? Which individuals or groups could exert sufficient influence or power to overturn a particular decision? Would it be possible for the administrator to change the attitudes of those who might reject or resist a decision? The answers to these questions should help the administrator ascertain the reception a particular decision will probably be given by those who will be most affected by it.

In trying to understand how various individuals or groups will react to each alternative, the administrator will frequently need to make judgments based on limited experience with those concerned. Although in a few circumstances it may be easy to predict the reactions of certain individuals or groups, it may be necessary in other instances to "float a trial balloon" to discover how a group would react to a particular decision.

Regardless of the specific circumstances, one cannot overemphasize the need for an administrator to assess objectively and thoroughly in advance the reactions that a particular decision may be given by others. In many situations these reactions may well determine the ultimate fate of any decision. Undoubtedly there will be circumstances when an administrator must or should make a particular kind of decision, regardless of the adverse reactions of those who will be affected by it. The administrator, however, should not ignore the attitudes and feelings of the people who will be affected by a decision. In most instances, such attitudes and feelings greatly influence the fate of any administrative decision and therefore need to be understood and considered carefully.

While the factors discussed thus far should play the major role in determining the feasibility of an alternative, an administrator needs to realize that other variables may unconsciously enter into the decision-making process. Each individual's decision making is affected by prior attitudes about the situation, group, or persons in question.[38] If the administrator's attitude is biased in some way, the administrator may distort the reality of a situation by not considering relevant facts, perceptions, or alternatives. As a result, a decision could be made about an individual or issue that might have been different had it been based on a more objective analysis of the circumstances. It will probably be impossible for an administrator to be completely

objective in any situation. It is important, however, to be aware of personal biases and to avoid letting them significantly affect the decision-making process.

Selecting a Desirable Alternative

If an administrator has followed the previously described guidelines, the best available alternative will usually become apparent.[39] If it does not, then the administrator's steps should be retraced and the assumptions reviewed, beginning with the question of whether the problem has been adequately defined. Of course, in most situations there is no ideal alternative, and in some circumstances it is a matter of selecting the least undesirable alternative. Through diagnosis, objective assessment of alternatives, and a little imagination—which never hurts—the best course of action will generally surface.

Implementing the Decision

Although some administrators seem to behave as though once they have made a decision, implementation will occur automatically and spontaneously, the process of implementation is more involved than has been frequently recognized.[40] The initial and perhaps most important step in implementing a decision is, as previously discussed, to secure its acceptance from those who will be most affected. Whether the administrator can gain acceptance of the decision depends on many factors, one of which is the perceived legitimacy of the administrator's position within the organization as a decision maker for the issue, question, or problem under consideration. (We discuss additional factors that determine whether an administrator's decision is accepted in Chapter 3, "Authority, Power, and Influence.") If the individuals or groups who will be affected by a decision perceive the administrator as having the right to make that decision, based on the administrator's position in the organization, the likelihood of having that decision accepted is greatly enhanced. If, on the other hand, those individuals or groups who will be affected by the decision do not perceive the administrator as possessing any more right than anyone else to make the decision in the situation, the possibility of securing acceptance of the administrator's judgment may be severely jeopardized.

The key factor in the acceptance of the principal's decisions is not self-perceived legitimacy but how others perceive the legitimacy of that administrator as a decision maker. If teachers, parents, students, and other reference groups do not believe the principal has the right to make certain decisions, his or her personal belief in that right is not enough to engender agreement.

However, even if those affected by the decision do not perceive the administrator as possessing a basic right to make a determination, they may accept the decision if they are persuaded that there is little or nothing they can do to change it or thwart its implementation. For example, although the faculty adviser to the student newspaper may feel that the principal has no right to censor the publication, the decision to screen the content of the newspaper before it is published may be reluctantly accepted if there is little that can be done to stop the principal. If the adviser thinks support can be obtained from the on-site representative of teachers' association, the city newspaper, or the civil liberties union, the adviser may resist the principal's original decision—or at least try to modify its implementation. Also, proponents of teacher and principal empowerment may argue that the administrator is resisting the teacher's expanded role as an inquiring, risk-taking, and contributing professional. The administrator could provide opportunities and the necessary assistance to maintain that teacher's self-esteem without

taking ownership of the issue or task, listen with empathy and compassion, and possibly ask for help to solve this problem. Of course, if negative attitudes continue to persist, the administrator will need to take additional steps in resolving the problem.[41]

Encountering Resistance The administrator encountering negative reactions to a decision can either modify or abandon the original decision, try to enforce the decision against the will of others, or try to change their attitudes. If there is a need to change the attitudes of those who will be affected by the decision, the administrator should recognize that negative attitudes can result from some of the following phenomena:

1. The individual's or group's feeling about the administrator as a person, or about the way in which the decision was made.
2. An incorrect understanding of the way in which the decision will affect the individual or group.
3. Inadequate skill or competency on the part of those who are to carry out the decision.
4. A perception by the individual or group that the decision will cause more personal disadvantages than advantages.
5. An honest disagreement about the merits of the decision, despite the fact that those involved may not feel they would be adversely affected.

An administrator should realize that the reasons people resist a decision or react negatively are complex in nature and need to be analyzed fully. Therefore, when faced with resistance, the administrator should try to diagnose the source of the resistance by thoroughly investigating the various and sometimes subtle reasons an individual or a group is not accepting the decision. Unfortunately, an administrator is sometimes thrown off balance by a negative reaction to the decision and responds directly to that reaction, rather than trying to explore and understand the reasons for it. The administrator is unlikely to be successful in counteracting resistance from others until the underlying causes of the resistance are dealt with.

Rowe and Mason suggest that hidden factors such as the administrator's decision style and that of the staff may affect overall performance. They found that where style is aligned with the requirements of the job, performance is often successful, and where it is not aligned, performance does not meet the person's potential. The authors contend that decision style reflects one's mental predisposition regarding personal objectives, what situations one avoids, what kinds of jobs one enjoys, what things one dislikes, how one communicates, and how one approaches problems and makes decisions. Patterns among these predispositions can be uncovered through the use of a decision style inventory developed by these authors.[42] The administrator attempting to deal with the underlying causes of resistance to a particular decision needs to better understand people's mental predispositions, perceptions, and consequent actions, as well as the differences in the way people approach their jobs through the use of such a decision style inventory.

Implementation Steps If the administrator can obtain acceptance of the decision from those who will be most affected, or if there is a need to proceed in spite of their adverse reactions, the administrator should then attempt to secure the resources and personnel necessary to initiate action. Depending on the nature of the decision, there may be the need only to instruct one individual about what must be done. On the other hand, there may be a need to

design and carry out a complicated plan involving many resources, a large number of people, retraining programs, and variables of time and role redefinition. Although the steps that must be taken have been designated by the various terms and have been applied in contexts other than the implementation of a decision, the basic activities include the following:

1. **Planning:** Working out in broad outline the things that need to be done and the methods for doing them to accomplish the purposes set for the enterprise.
2. **Organizing:** Establishing the formal structure of authority through which work subdivisions are arranged, defined, and coordinated for the specific objective.
3. **Staffing:** Selecting and training the staff and maintaining favorable conditions of work.
4. **Directing:** Making decisions and embodying them in orders and instructions; serving as the leaders of the enterprise.
5. **Coordinating:** Interrelating the various parts of the work.
6. **Reporting:** Keeping those to whom the executive is responsible informed as to what is taking place; keeping the executive and the subordinates informed through records, research, and inspection.
7. **Budgeting:** Fiscal planning, accounting, and control.
8. **Evaluating:** Formative and summative.[43]

CONSTRAINTS AND VALUES

The process of decision making described in the previous section is a logical, rational process that, if followed, should result in improved decision making. Several situational constraints and personal variables exist, however, that can affect the success of the decision maker's efforts. In addition to the technical expertise required in decision-making and decision-analysis procedures, personal values and ethical factors always will impact an administrator's decision choice. Decisions that are ethically unsound will not have a long commitment from the people required to implement the decision in the work setting. Organizational ethics include the development of the administrator as a moral person, the influence of a moral organizational environment, and a policy that reflects ethical performance goals.[44]

None of the constraints or personal variables diminishes the need for the administrator to follow the decision-making guidelines previously stated. Nevertheless, these constraints and personal factors must be considered if the administrator is to minimize negative effects. Nutt draws attention to a particular kind of decision made in and for organizations, which he calls a "tough decision" in his comprehensive book entitled *Making Tough Decisions.* This type of decision is characterized by situational constraints and personal variables that must be taken into account, including such related dilemmas as ambiguity, conflict, and uncertainty. The author recommends that administrators investigate future conditions and use sound procedures to gather and analyze information to inform the decision choice they ultimately make. Decision makers who simply focus on conflict management must make assumptions that negate ambiguity and uncertainty, treating tough decisions as if they were easy, frequently resulting in ineffective decision choices. One particular situational constraint, future projection, or the ability of

the administrator to anticipate future events and outcomes that may affect the final decision, requires the administrator to possess specific forecasting skills and techniques.[45]

Many of the difficult decisions an administrator must make deal with future conditions—whether to implement a new multicultural curriculum or install a preschool and after-school care program, for example. A strategic decision-making process requires the administrator to identify the obstacles or barriers as well as the opportunities or benefits associated with the decision.[46] In addition, thoughtful planning and technical expertise must be utilized by the administrator as a professional decision thinker. This implies expanding the strategic framework to include in the decision choice a concern for the personal values of the staff and community and acknowledging a responsibility to outside constituent groups and the greater society at large.

Situational Constraints

All administrators, even in the best of situations, operate under certain situational constraints. Although the types of constraints may vary from one situation to another, the most typical situational constraints under which administrators operate in a decision-making context are the following:[47]

1. Amount of time available to make a decision.
2. Availability of resources necessary to implement any particular alternative.
3. Amount of information available to make a decision.
4. Ambiguity of the situation, including the alternatives and potential consequences.
5. Degrees of organizational autonomy given for decision making.
6. Expectations of others regarding the nature of the decision-making process and the ultimate decision.
7. Amount of tension in the situation.

Each of the factors can act as an important situational constraint on the decision maker and can influence the effectiveness of the final decision on a matter or on its implementation. Whether or not the impact of these factors will be negative seems to depend as much on the type of person the administrator is as it does on the nature of the factors. For example, what is perceived as sufficient time, resources, information, and autonomy by one administrator in order to make a particular decision may not be deemed adequate by another administrator in the same situation. A situation characterized by one individual as possessing too much ambiguity, tension, and pressure by an external group for a quick decision may not bother or affect another administrator in the same set of circumstances. These differences reflect variations in personality and capabilities.[48]

Administrators can also differ in their perceptions of potential constraints. One administrator may perceive strong expectations by a certain reference group to make a quick decision the same week, whereas another administrator in the same situation may not sense the same degree of pressure and may plan to take a month or more to make the decision. In reality, both administrators may be misperceiving the expectations of the reference group, and the effectiveness of the decision may be impaired. Therefore, it is essential for an administrator to test initial perceptions about a potential constraint and to evaluate their validity to make sure they correspond reasonably with reality.

It also needs to be emphasized in discussing the role of situational constraints in decision making that, assuming the administrator is perceiving them accurately, they need to be analyzed critically to ascertain their potential for modification. There will, of course, be circumstances in which the amount of time available to make a decision may be a real and significant constraint. If an administrator is frequently experiencing this problem, however, and it is seriously affecting the decision making, then an analysis of overall time spent and an evaluation of the order of priorities need to be conducted. Effective decision making about matters that are out of the ordinary takes time, and although there will be situations in which the administrator must make a quick decision, the necessary time should be set aside for careful and thoughtful decisions on crucial matters.

Realistically, an administrator will not be able to eliminate or even modify every type of constraint; but if an administrator is to be effective as a decision maker, an effort must be made to analyze the causes and nature of the constraints and attempt to decrease their impact on decision making.

Personal Thoughts	*Type of Attitude or Value*
1. "I wonder about the risks involved in pursuing this particular alternative."	Risk orientation
2. "If Hank recommends it, I am sure that it would make a good decision."	Attitude toward people
3. "I question whether adopting a 'far-out' innovation like the open classroom is good education."	Educational philosophy
4. "This is the type of decision that an educational leader should make."	Concern about status
5. "It seems to me that if we choose that alternative, we can no longer 'call the shots' in that area."	Concern about authority and control

Personal Variables

In addition to situational constraints that can affect the decision-making process, numerous personal variables or value considerations can influence the decision maker and, ultimately, the final decision. These can perhaps be best illustrated by the thoughts expressed by several administrators, along with the attitude or value orientation each represents.

These five examples, of course, are only illustrative of a wide range of possible values and attitudes any administrator might possess and that could play a major role in influencing the type of decision made.

As Lipham and Hoeh have perceptively observed:

> Values serve as a perpetual screen for the decision maker, affecting both his [or her] awareness of the problematic state of a system and his [or her] screening of information relative to the problem. Second, values condition the screening serve as a perceptual screen for the decision maker, affecting both his [or her] awareness of the possible alternatives. . . . Finally, values serve as the criteria against which higher order goals are assessed and projected.[49]

Although an administrator probably cannot avoid the influence of values and attitudes in making decisions, the administrator should attempt to become more aware of the ethical nature of those values. In his study of chief school administrators, Dexheimer discovered that they were more inclined to engage in nonethical forms of accommodations in critical decision-making activities than in ethical forms.[50] Although it appears that the study has not been replicated with similar or other administrative positions, Dexheimer's discovery points up the need for every administrator to consider carefully whether the attitudes and values influencing a particular decision are morally and ethically defensible. This will be a challenging task for the decision maker because most individuals not only lack awareness of their values, attitudes, and how they are affected by them but also lack criteria and standards for evaluation.

The emphasis on organizational ethics is found predominantly in writings on business ethics and organizational culture. Studies and articles range in content, from business student attitudes before and after taking a course in ethical decision making, to identifying ethical business practices after students have completed a course on business ethics, to models for building ethical organizations.[51] The findings could have implications for an administrator in an educational setting who desires more information on value development and ethical conduct in general.

A problem related to the influence of attitudes and values in decision making is the extent to which they can play a dominant role in compromising the objectivity of the decision maker and short-circuiting the decision-making process. For example, the administrator whose attitude is, "If Hank recommends it, I am sure that it would make a good decision," reveals a strong, positive attitude or bias toward the person Hank. Because of the administrator's attitude in this situation, it will probably be difficult to be objective about evaluating Hank's recommendation or any competing alternative. As a result, the administrator may not engage thoroughly in the various steps of the decision-making process—steps that should include identifying and evaluating objectively all possible alternatives.

Although the administrator's attitude in the previous example is a positive one, at least toward Hank, in another situation involving someone else it may be negative, with the same potential results of compromised objectivity and a superficial decision-making process. Of course, it is not axiomatic that such a decision will be a poor one, and it is recognized that the press of time on an administrator may require taking a shortcut through the decision-making process. Unfortunately it is because of the bias of the decision maker and such shortcuts that poor decision making frequently results. Therefore, an administrator should make every effort to become more aware of attitudes and values and their influence on the type of decision choices, attempting to reduce that influence when it could compromise objectivity or result in a less thorough and thoughtful decision-making process.

Involving Others

Involving people in the decision-making process—be they individuals, groups, or both—who will be either affected by the decision or in some way responsible for implementing a decision is not a new concept in the social science and school administration literature.[52] Frequently referred to as *participatory decision making* (PDM), this approach has generated considerable research revealing that PDM can be effective under certain conditions but is a

more complex process than typically has been recognized.[53] The process of shared decision making is the cornerstone of site-based management (SBM), school-site budgeting (SSB), and total quality management (TQM), which have been implemented in many school systems. The following sections will identify appropriate and inappropriate conditions for participatory decision making; the complexities associated with the process will be analyzed and discussed.

The rationale for involving persons other than just the administrator in the decision-making process consists of the following elements:

1. It increases the number of different viewpoints and ideas that might be relevant to the decision being made.
2. It makes for better utilization of the available expertise and problem-solving skills that exist within the school community.
3. It may improve school morale by showing the individuals involved that the administrator values their opinions, giving them greater feelings of professional pride and job satisfaction.
4. It can aid acceptance and implementation of a decision because the people who are involved are more likely to understand the decision and be more committed to its success.
5. It is consistent with a democratic principle of our society that holds that those who are affected by public institutions such as the school should have some voice in how they are run.[54]

Therefore, although frequently given the sole responsibility for making a particular decision, administrators may find it desirable to involve others in the process of arriving at the best determination. The old adage "two heads are better than one" can be applied to administrative decision making with appreciable advantage under certain conditions.

An administrator should not involve others in the decision-making process, however, if the administrator has already decided the outcome. It is certainly appropriate for an administrator to have some tentative ideas about a decision before involving others, but unless those ideas are tentative and there is a willingness to be flexible and open-minded in considering the ideas of others, it would be better not to involve others in the decision-making process. It can be a very frustrating and disillusioning experience for people to be involved with an administrator whose mind is already made up[55] and who is involving other people only because of trying to project a "democratic" image or to be able to say at a later date, "Well, they were involved, weren't they?" As Lammers has observed, encouraging and allowing participation by others in decisions over which they have little control may be just as damaging, if not more so, than no participation at all.[56]

Variables Influencing Extent of Involvement

Whether an administrator should involve others in decision making seems to depend on a number of factors. Perhaps the most important initial factor is the administrator's attitude toward the people who might be potentially involved in decision making. Unless the administrator's attitude toward other people is one of trust, confidence, and respect, it is unlikely that

involvement in administrative decision making will result. According to David, "Strong councils are usually led, though not always chaired, by strong principals (and sometimes teachers) who exercise leadership by mobilizing others. They encourage all parties to participate. And they model inquiry and reflection."[57]

A second major factor that initially seems to influence the administrator regarding whether to involve others in the decision-making process is the degree of organizational autonomy the administrator has been given by superiors for making decisions. Palmer discovered that the more autonomy administrators were given for making decisions, the more likely they were to consult and involve others in the decision-making process.[58] One implication of Palmer's study is that a certain degree of administrative autonomy and independence from superiors may be a necessary prerequisite for involving others in administrative decision making.

Involvement Considerations

Assuming that an administrator has reasonable autonomy within the organization, is open-minded, and believes that involving others may help in arriving at the best decision, three basic questions must be considered: (1) *When* should others be involved in decision making? (2) *Who* should be involved? (3) *How* should they be involved?

When Others Should Be Involved With regard to the first question, Bridges has proposed that other individuals or groups should be involved in those administrative decisions that they feel will significantly affect their lives.[59] He theorizes, based on earlier conceptual work by Barnard, that most people possess a zone of indifference. By implication, they also possess a "zone of concern." When a particular issue or problem falls within a group's zone of concern, the members will expect to be involved by the administrator in the decision-making process. If the members are permitted to be involved, they will be self-motivated in their participation because the final determination may affect them in some significant manner. If excluded from the decision-making process, they may feel deprived, and dissatisfaction with the administrator or the decision is likely to result.[60]

Deciding Who Will Be Decision Makers David writes that determining who will make what decisions is critical. Sound decisions are made by those who are both informed and concerned about the issue; in addition, an understanding of the circumstances in which the decision will be implemented is essential. Otherwise, there is no assurance that these decisions will be any better than those made by administrators many steps removed. School professionals are often the best group to make some decisions, whereas parents or students are the best to make others. In other situations, representatives of several constituencies or a formal schoolwide body would be the appropriate decision-making team.[61]

How Involvement Works Progress requires that a school faculty and staff redefine themselves as a community capable of setting and reaching its goals and managing its own resources. This redefinition requires establishing new working relationships among all participants. The principal must not control, monitor, or direct, but must respect the team as a responsible community of adults. Initially, these people must together set in place the framework within which

collective action can occur. David cites three operating principles that form the foundation of involvement in decision making:

1. Responsibility and authority go hand in hand.
2. Children and adults learn best in trusting communities in which every person is both a learner and a resource for learning.
3. All adult members of the school staff care for the institution and community as a whole as well as for their primary roles in it.[62]

The goal for the administrator should be to involve people in the process of decision making when their involvement could improve the quality, acceptance, or implementation of the decision, and when the involvement is based on people's desired level of involvement. Also, obviously, not everyone wants to be involved, and not all the decisions under the province of an administrator will be of concern to other individuals and groups.[63] On the other hand, it would be unwise for the administrator to assume that people want to have certain decisions made for them or that they are not concerned about particular issues or problems. Untested assumptions frequently result in unanticipated consequences. The administrator should not rely on assumptions but should actively seek feedback from appropriate others regarding the extent to which they are concerned about various issues and problems and the degree to which they feel their participation is desirable in making decisions.

Involvement Prerequisites

In many situations, the lack of feasibility will preclude participation in the decision-making process by everyone who may desire to do so. Consequently, the administrator will need to determine which individuals or groups should help make a decision in a particular area.

Objectivity would appear to be an important consideration. Individuals who are interested in being involved but who show a particular bias or an ax to grind are not likely to be helpful. Effective decision making requires an open mind and an unbiased examination of the facts and alternatives.

The most desirable criterion for selecting those who should be involved in decision making seems to be the extent to which they possess the expertise for contributing to an improved decision. Numerous individuals or groups may be interested in participating in decision making, but they may not all possess the expertise necessary to make a positive contribution. As Bridges has pointed out, the interested party should "not only [have] some stake in the outcome but also the capability of contributing to the decision affecting the outcome."[64] Interest and motivation are necessary but not always sufficient conditions for involvement in administrative decision making; the degree to which an individual or group possesses the relevant expertise should also be a consideration. Utilizing the latter criterion, the administrator should identify those students, teachers, parents, or other individuals or groups who can offer special insights, knowledge, or skills for improved decision making. They are the people who can be of considerable assistance to the administrator in arriving at effective decisions.

Levels of Involvement

Having determined that a certain group possesses the necessary motivation, objectivity, and expertise for participating in decision making, an administrator still faces the question of at what level to involve the group. Five alternative levels of involvement, each with its

underlying assumptions, are presented in Figure 2.2. As Figure 2.2 shows, the question of how an administrator might involve others in school decision making is a complex one. Several alternatives are usually available, each of which is based on certain assumptions. While there is no formula for easily determining the most appropriate level of involvement

FIGURE 2.2
ALTERNATIVE LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT

Level 1. The administrator makes a tentative decision and utilizes the reactions of other individuals or groups to assess the soundness of her [or his] decision. The administrator reserves for herself [or himself], however, the final determination on whether or not to proceed with her [or his] original decision.

Assumptions

a. The administrator has probably already reached the best decision for the situation.
b. It is unlikely that anyone else could offer a better alternative.
c. There is a possibility that the administrator might yet improve her [or his] decision by obtaining the reactions of others.
d. The administrator must make the final determination herself [or himself].

Level 2. The administrator describes the problem situation to other individuals or groups and ask them to investigate the various alternatives and to make a recommendation to her [or his] on several possible courses of action, listing the advantages and disadvantages of each. The procedures to be used by the individuals or groups investigating the alternatives are specified by the administrator. She [or he] will utilize their recommendations to help her [or his] make up her [or his] mind on the best course of action to follow.

Assumptions

a. The administrator has already adequately defined the nature of the problem.
b. Other people could provide help in identifying the available alternatives.
c. Because of the other participants' inexperience or need for direction, the administrator should specify the procedures they should follow in arriving at their recommendations.
d. The administrator must make the final decision herself [or himself].

Level 3. The administrator describes the problem situation to other individuals or groups and ask for help in better defining the nature of the problem, question or issue, and that she be presented with a recommendation on the best course of action to follow. The administrator specifies the procedures which must be used in arriving at the recommendation and reserves the right to veto the recommended alternative if she [or he] doesn't believe it to be in the best interests of the school.

Assumptions

a. Other people could help the administrator to better define the nature of the situation for which a decision is required.
b. Other people could provide help for the administrator in identifying the best available alternative.
c. Because of the other participants' inexperience or need for direction, the administrator should specify the procedures to be followed in arriving at their recommendation.
d. The administrator must make the final decision herself [or himself].

FIGURE 2.2 *Concluded*

Level 4. The administrator describes the problem situation to other individuals or groups and ask for their help in better defining the nature of the problem, question, or issue, and requests their recommendation on the best course of action to follow. At this level of involvement the administrator specifies no particular procedures to be used in arriving at a recommendation. However, she [or he] still reserves the right to reject any recommended which she [or he] believes to be incompatible with the best interests of the school.

Assumptions

a. Other people could help the administrator to better define the nature of the problem and to arrive at a recommendation for the best course of action.
b. The other participants possess sufficient experience and self-direction to determine for themselves the procedures to be used in reaching a recommendation.
c. The administrator must make the final decision herself [or himself].

Level 5. The administrator describes the problem situation to other individuals or groups and ask for their help in defining the nature of the problem, question, or issue, and requests them to determine the best alternative. At this level of involvement, the administrator delegates to the other participants the prerogative of determining the procedures to be used in arriving at the best decision and she [or he] indicates her [or his] willingness to accept whatever decision is finally made.

Assumptions

a. Other people could help the administrator to better define the nature of the problem and arrive at a decision on the best course of action.
b. The other participants are as competent as the administrator to make the final decision.
c. The administrator can be delegate the responsibility for making the final decision, and she [or he] can accept and support whatever decision is reached by the other participants.

by others, the administrator should try to be certain that the assumptions made in reaching this decision are tenable. Although it will be impossible to avoid making assumptions, the administrator should refrain from making those that could restrict valuable input from other people or provide more involvement than others could constructively handle. The initial conceptual work in this area was developed by Robert Tannenbaum and Warren H. Schmidt.[65] The authors have adapted and modified the original model for the purpose of administrative decision making and have added the basic assumptions that undergird each level of involvement.

There is research suggesting that an administrator's choice of the level at which to involve other people is typically based on the individual's attitude toward encouraging the involvement of others in school decision making, the perception of the administrator's immediate superior's attitude toward this question, and the perception of the expectations of others for a certain level of participation in school decision making.[66] The same research indicates that the administrator's own attitude about involving others and the perception of the immediate superior's attitude are the two most important factors influencing the administrator in deciding how to involve others.

In view of the research presented earlier in this book, however, showing that a growing number of students, teachers, and parents are dissatisfied with their current level of involvement in school decision making, it would seem important for every administrator to give greater consideration to these expectations for more meaningful participation. The challenge for the school administrator is to involve these groups in ways that will permit them to derive satisfaction from their participation and, at the same time, make a contribution to improved decision making in the schools.

Types of Involvement

The most typical approach is for an administrator to analyze a problem or situation calling for a decision with another person or persons in a conference or group setting. Such discussions can be helpful in clarifying the administrator's thinking and obtaining reactions from others.

The Quality Circle One systematic example of this approach is the *quality circle.*[67] A quality circle is a small group of employees such as teachers, secretaries, or any other group performing a common task. They meet weekly or biweekly to analyze problems that impair the effectiveness of the group or reduce the desired quality of a product or outcome of the group or, perhaps, to offer fresh ideas to improve some aspect of their work.[68] A group leader, perhaps an administrator, facilitates group discussion and helps the group identify and analyze problems, identify and assess alternative solutions, select the most desirable and feasible solution, and develop a decision implementation plan. The decision-making process followed in a quality circle is very similar to the process outlined in Figure 2.1.[69]

Although research on the effectiveness of the quality circle is limited, the approach is utilized in a number of schools apparently with some success.[70] The assumption that group decisions will be better than the decisions of the most knowledgeable group member is not always proved in the empirical research literature. It is traditionally believed that under most circumstances, the knowledge of the most competent group member represents the upper limit of what a group might reasonably be expected to achieve. However, findings from studies that focused more on contextually relevant and consequential problems to be solved by groups rather than on ad hoc groups using artificial problems and trivial rewards for solving problems demonstrated that groups outperformed their most proficient group member 97 percent of the time. This finding presents a strong argument for involving groups in problem-solving activities to improve the effectiveness of the decision choice.[71]

In addition, the keys to the success of the quality circle seem to be a strong commitment from the school board, the district administration, and members of the quality circle to this type of participatory decision making, as well as a committed group leader equipped with group leadership skills.[72] (These skills are discussed in Chapter 1.) Also, training in group interaction processes and problem-solving methods is essential for the members of the quality circle.[73]

Although the quality circle or other types of group interaction methods of decision making can, under the right conditions, improve the effectiveness of a decision, such conditions are not always present. For example, the people whom the administrator is trying to involve in a quality circle may not feel secure in responding to the administrator or to the other members of the group, and, when that occurs, such feelings and thoughts are frequently not revealed. Also, while it is true that in a quality circle or in other types of group decision-making situations

the people involved may stimulate each other's thinking, it is also true that often in a group discussion it is difficult to engage in the thorough, reflective thinking that is important for creative decision making. In addition, in group discussions certain individuals or personalities may dominate, and social relationships may become more important than solving a problem or making the best decision.[74] It should be noted that these problems are not inevitable with the quality circle or any other kind of group interaction approach, but their occurrence has led to the consideration of two alternative ways of involving people in the decision-making process.[75]

The Delphi Technique The first of these is known as the *Delphi technique.* It is basically a process for generating ideas, reactions, or judgments that could be helpful to the decision maker and includes the following major steps: (1) defining the problem, decision, or question to which reactions of others are sought; (2) identifying those individuals and/or groups whose opinions, judgments, or expert knowledge would be valuable to obtain in the process of making a decision; (3) asking for their responses, usually through the completion of a questionnaire; and (4) summarizing the results of the questionnaire, distributing the results back to the people surveyed, and asking them to review the results and to indicate any changes in their initial responses. This last step is repeated until there is a reasonable consensus on the problem or decision.

The advantage of the Delphi technique is that it is an excellent approach to involving a large number of people in the decision-making process. The step of writing responses to questions helps people think through the complexity of a problem and submit specific, high-quality ideas. The anonymity and isolation of the respondents tend to minimize the influence of status factors and conformity pressures.[76] One disadvantage of the Delphi technique is that the lack of opportunity for interaction among people asked for their input into the decision-making process can lead to a feeling of detachment and noninvolvement. Furthermore, the lack of opportunity for verbal clarification of responses can cause communication and interpretation problems, and summarizing responses does not address the problem of conflicting or incompatible ideas.

The Nominal Group Technique Another approach to involving people in the decision-making process, the *nominal group technique* (NGT), has been developed to avoid or to minimize the possible disadvantages of the Delphi technique. NGT is a good method to use to gain group consensus, for example, when various people (program staff, stakeholders, community residents, etc.) are involved in constructing a logic model and the list of outputs for a specific component is too long and therefore has to be prioritized.[77] The nominal group technique, developed by Andre L. Delbert and Andrew H. Van de Ven in 1968, has been employed in a variety of settings. Its main steps include the following: (1) presenting to a group, verbally or in writing, a question, problem, or task to be addressed by the members of the group; (2) requesting each member in the group to take a period of time, for example, 10 minutes, to jot down individual ideas (without talking to anyone else in response to the question, problem, or task); (3) asking each member of the group at the end of the time period to present one of the ideas, recording these ideas on a blackboard or flip chart (at this stage it is important that there be no evaluation of the ideas by anyone); (4) continuing the presentation of ideas in round-robin fashion until all the ideas are recorded; (5) discussing briefly each idea, in the sequence in which it is recorded, as to clarity or rationale; and (6) voting privately in writing by rank-ordering or rating the ideas, and then mathematically pooling the outcome of the individual votes.

While the entire process may seem complicated, it is in fact fairly simple after one has acquired some experience with the various steps. Although NGT does have some disadvantages

in that it does not provide as much social interaction as some people may want and it requires the people involved to hold in abeyance their evaluation of the ideas being presented until later in the process, it nevertheless has tended to be very productive in producing higher-quality ideas than either the group discussion or Delphi technique approaches.[78]

Administrators must also consider their roles in regard to the participation of others in the decision-making process. For example, the administrators could be confined to presenting the initial circumstances calling for a decision and later receiving a group's final recommendation, *or* could attempt to play the role of a resource person for those who are helping reach a decision. The administrator might, alternatively, attempt to influence the final recommendation of the group by playing a dominant role in the group's deliberations. The question of *which* role the administrator should play while involving others in school decision making is an important one, and the three examples provided are only illustrative of the many possibilities. The administrator's final resolution of this question is sure to influence the nature of the participation by others in the decision-making process.[79]

PREREQUISITES FOR SUCCESS

Assuming that the administrator has selected appropriate participants and methods of involvement, several other factors determine whether their involvement will result in the mutual satisfaction of both the administrator and participants and whether they will reach a better decision than if the administrator had decided unilaterally. The administrator must recognize that involving others in decision making increases the complexity and difficulty of making a decision. It increases the number of situational variables with which the administrator will be working and requires a greater degree of competency than if the administrator alone made the decision. To be successful in involving others, an administrator must become competent in the group dynamics and interaction skills we discussed in more detail in Chapter 1. Strategic decision making is a popular approach that may be used for training administrators or top executives in business. Most of these training programs focus upon sensing opportunities and problems, diagnosing the situation and generating alternatives, and, of course, making that all-important choice. The popularity of various types of training programs at any given moment is reflected in the administration theory currently under discussion. Beginning with the decade of the 1990s and continuing to the present, the emphasis has been on training administrators in participatory and group decision making as a result of research on strategic decision making and teacher empowerment. The group process, collaboration, and teamwork produce better decisions if more people are helping to generate options.[80]

Furthermore, the administrator needs to be certain that the individuals or groups involved are given sufficient training for participation in decision making and adequate information to make a decision. Frequently administrators have attempted to involve students, parents, or teachers in decision making and have become discouraged and discontented because these individuals and groups did not participate fully or productively. When confronted by this type of behavior, the administrator should try to diagnose its cause or causes, which might include a lack of skills for participation or insufficient information about the problem.

The administrator also needs to make sure that those involved understand the reason they are being involved and the purpose, authority, and scope of their participation. Involvement of others tends to run into difficulty when there has not been agreement on the purpose, scope, and authority of that involvement.

The administrator may wish to embark on a strategic planning approach that measures the impact of the decision choices on organizational purposes and performance. This technique of decision analysis is frequently used by administrators and planners to determine the lowest practical level to which a class of decisions should be delegated. Various classes or types of decisions and factors determining the strategic value of the decision category and the impact in measurable, weighted criteria are the major elements of this technique.

Dougherty discusses some of the factors that may need to be considered when making a particular decision pertaining to a specific goal or method, such as involving others in decision making: (1) *Futurity* refers to the length of time after the decision is made before an evaluation of the decision outcome can be made; (2) *reversibility* is the ease with which a decision can be reversed; (3) *scope* means the extent of the organization affected by the decision; (4) *human impact* indicates the degree of the impact on the people affected by the decision; and (5) *frequency* refers to how often the decision would normally be made. The strategic value of each decision category is then numerically calculated. Decision analysis can also be utilized to determine the maximum level of involvement feasible. Any number of criteria can be used to make this determination, including "facts available," "competence," "advice available," and "present" or "proposed levels of decision making."[81]

Finally, if the administrator is involving others on a committee whose decision will be only advisory to the administrator, then this needs to be made clear to the committee at the outset. The administrator also needs to provide rewards to those involved throughout the decision-making process to keep their spirits up and to show appreciation for their efforts. The time, effort, and contributions of the participants in the decision-making process should not be taken for granted by the administrator if a high level of sustained performance is desired.

ASSESSING DECISION-MAKING EFFECTIVENESS

If school administrators are to improve as decision makers, they will need to devote time to assessing the effectiveness of the process they followed in making decisions and the quality of the outcomes of those decisions. Such assessment is a challenging task for a variety of reasons. Most school administrators are busy people, and unless a high priority is given to assessing the effectiveness of decision making, the assessment task is not likely to be accomplished. Also, it is difficult for most decision makers to remain objective about their decisions. After all, once an administrator makes a decision, there is naturally an inclination to have a vested interest in the appearance, if not the reality, of effectiveness. (Involving others in the assessment who do not have that vested interest could increase the objectivity of the evaluation.) An assessment of the decision's effectiveness may threaten to reflect negatively on the administrator. Perhaps the most serious obstacle to the school administrator's self-assessment of decision-making effectiveness is the fact that, unless a decision results in significantly negative consequences, there is seldom any pressure from superiors or anyone else for the administrator to evaluate a decision's effectiveness. Nor are there incentives or rewards for evaluating whether a better decision could have been made.

Despite these difficulties, it is important for the school administrator to assess periodically the effectiveness of decision making if improvement is to continue in this area. Experience in making decisions is not, in itself, a sufficient basis for improvement without reflection upon and assessment of that experience. The checklist presented in Figure 2.3 is proposed for assessing the effectiveness of the decision-making process.[82]

We realize that administrators will not have the time or the need to assess the effectiveness of every choice. If they are to continue to improve decision-making skills, however, periodic assessment of the process and quality of their decisions will be essential and–in the case of decisions with negative consequences–*imperative.*

FIGURE 2.3
CHECKLIST FOR ASSESSING DECISION-MAKING EFFECTIVENESS

	Check one response for each question		
	Yes	No	Uncertain
1. Did you sufficiently investigate the nature of the problem or situation (including causes) that required a decision?	____	____	____
a. Did certain facts later surface that you should have ascertained at the outset?	____	____	____
b. Could facts, if known earlier in the decision-making process, have improved the quality of the final decision?	____	____	____
c. Are there additional questions you could have or should have asked when the situation first presented itself that could have provided information leading to a better decision?	____	____	____
d. Do you have a good reason for not asking those questions?	____	____	____
2. Did you try to identify more than one or two alternative courses of action to resolving a situation?	____	____	____
a. Did you assume without much thought that only one or two alternatives existed and select the first one that "looked good"?	____	____	____
b. Reflecting upon the decision process you followed and thinking about the consequences of the decision you made, can you see that there may have been another alternative course of action that might have better resolved the situation or problem?	____	____	____
c. Do you know why the alternative course of action wasn't considered at the time?	____	____	____

FIGURE 2.3 *Continued*

	Check one response for each question		
	Yes	No	Uncertain
3. Did you adequately assess the advantages and disadvantages of the alternatives you considered before making a final decision?	____	____	____
a. Did certain unanticipated consequences develop that adversely affected the consequences of the final decision?	____	____	____
b. Were there problems that occurred that you did not adequately anticipate in choosing the course of action you did?	____	____	____
c. Do you understand now why you didn't sufficiently identify or anticipate those problems?	____	____	____
4. Did you involve to an appropriate extent those individuals and/or groups who could have contributed to an effective decision?	____	____	____
a. Were there people whom you should have involved and whom you would involve if you had to do it over again?	____	____	____
b. Were there people whom you did involve in the decision-making process whom you wouldn't involve if you had to do it over again?	____	____	____
c. Have you analyzed how you would have changed the ways in which you involved other people in the decision-making process?	____	____	____
5. Did the decision generate resistance?	____	____	____
a. Could that resistance have been anticipated, and steps taken to prevent or reduce it? (Resistance does not automatically mean that the decision was a poor one, but it does have implications for the implementation of the decision, and it may mean that there was room for improvement in the process you followed.)	____	____	____

Continued

FIGURE 2.3 *Concluded*

	Check one response for each question		
	Yes	No	Uncertain
b. Has the decision been fully implemented by the people who were supposed to implement it?	____	____	____
c. If the decision has not been fully implemented, do you understand why not?	____	____	____
d. Are there certain steps you could have taken (or still could take) to improve implementation?	____	____	____
6. Were the objectives that the decision was intended to achieve accomplished?	____	____	____

A FINAL NOTE

Having a process that allows you to habitualize decision making allows you to maximize your mental efforts when unexpectedly called upon.[83] Effective decision making is a complex process requiring considerable analysis and thought by the administrator. It does not occur in a vacuum but is influenced by situational constraints and the personal values and expertise of the individual making the decision. The process and product of decision making can frequently be improved by the involvement of others, although certain conditions must be met before that involvement will be helpful. Although decision making may be the most important administrative process, its effectiveness will depend to a large degree on the understanding and skill with which the administrator utilizes the other administrative practices presented in the following chapters.

Most of the case studies, suggested learning activities, and simulations presented in Part II of the text require the appropriate application of the ideas formed in this chapter on decision making. The following exercises, however, should provide the best opportunities for testing your understanding and effective use of decision-making concepts: Cases 19, 20, 21, 24, 34, 64, 66, 67, and the in-basket exercises.

NOTES

1. Herbert A. Simon, *The New Science of Management Decisions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960); and W. Jack Duncan, *Great Ideas in Management* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989), p. 69.
2. The major source of insight for the conceptual framework of decision making is found in an excellent article by Suzanne Estler, "Decision Making," in Norman J. Boyan (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration* (New York: Longman, 1988), pp. 305–319.
3. Richard Draft, *Organizational Theory and Design* (San Francisco: West, 1986), pp. 348–349. For classic treatment of rational decision making and problem solving, see Charles H. Kepner