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# FEMALE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS' TEAM DECISION MAKING IN THE NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION GOAL SELECTION PROCESS

By

Rena Ellen Richtig

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration

1997

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# ABSTRACT

Female Elementary Principals' Team Decision Making
in the North Central Association
Goal Selection Process

By

Rena Ellen Richtig

Women elementary principals are steadily growing in number. Research has shown that they exhibit skills in collaborative and participative leadership; they place value on inclusion and connection, have a strong caring ethic, and value relationships. These qualities appear in most studies as highly effective in team decision making. However, women's voices are nonexistent in the theory and literature about their decision making thoughts and practices in school leadership.

In this qualitative study, the researcher explored the variations that emerged in six women elementary principals' talk about their thoughts and practices in decision making and team decision making in the goal selection process of NCA. The conceptual framework, designed from the five disciplines of systems thinking, shaped the methodology.

A model depicting each principal's decision-making/team decision-making plan was developed during the first interview. Further data from follow-up interviews of each principal, a focus group interview of each principal's staff, and

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interviews of each principal, a focus group interview of each principal's staff, and NCA artifacts, along with the models, emphasized the major themes and tensions that arose. Throughout the data collection, emphasis was placed on the variations in the women's talk about decision making and the tensions that enhanced or constrained the process of decision making.

Primary findings revealed variations, tensions, and themes in the ways the women talk about their thinking and practice of team decision making viewed through the lens of the five disciplines of systems thinking. Systems thinking had the most variation, there were slight variations in their talk about team learning and mental models, and little or no variation surfaced in the disciplines of personal mastery and shared vision.

Overall, these principals thought about team decision making often, and most attempted to embrace and use the process. Their models and stories demonstrated an attempt to practice team decision making within the confines of a slowly changing, but still hierarchical, bureaucratic school system. In the interviews, tensions were uncovered that affected team decision making. Time constraints and central office demands were major barriers to effective team decision making. Major themes that influence their thinking and practice also include the role parents played or did not play in the school's decision-making efforts, the importance of a shared vision and leadership, and the effect the school's overall environment had on decision making.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*She who plants a garden believes in the future.*

I am grateful to the following people for their intellectual and collegial support and encouragement in helping plant the seed of a Ph.D. and helping me believe it would come to fruition.

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Franklin, Dr. S

Gerry Whittem

Mary Anne Ho

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University faculty committee member Dr. Larry Smiley for his knowledge about North Central Association; Michigan State University faculty committee members Dr. William Rainey, Dr. Steve Kaagan, and Dr. Phil Cusick for their guidance and suggestions, which turned the proposal and final dissertation into an even better one, and advisor Dr.Maenette Benham, whose positive outlook and attitude inspired me to forge ahead, even though the revision stack grew taller by the foot as the months went by, and whose high energy level and even higher expectations rightfully but affectionately earned her the nickname of the General.

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LIST OF TAB

LIST OF FIGU

Chapter

I

II.

III.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES . . . . . xi

LIST OF FIGURES . . . . . xii

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW . . . . . 1

Introduction . . . . . 1
Purpose of the Study . . . . . 3
Significance of the Study . . . . . 4
Background . . . . . 5
The Michigan Landscape . . . . . 5
The Principal's Role in School Improvement . . . . . 8
The North Central Association . . . . . 9
Impact of NCA Accreditation on Principals' Decision Making . . . . . 14
Conceptual Framework . . . . . 16
Research Question . . . . . 21
Overview . . . . . 22

II. SHIFTS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP OVER TIME: A LITERATURE REVIEW . . . . . 24

Introduction . . . . . 24
Historical Perspectives of Leadership . . . . . 27
Leadership Prior to 1950 . . . . . 27
Leadership in the Mid-Twentieth Century . . . . . 28
Leadership in the Late Twentieth Century . . . . . 30
Decision Making . . . . . 65
Summary . . . . . 67

III. METHODOLOGY . . . . . 73

Introduction . . . . . 73
Design and Criteria . . . . . 74
Data Collection and Analysis . . . . . 75

Data Sources . . . . . 78
Data Analysis . . . . . 82
Ethical Considerations . . . . . 87
Written Presentation . . . . . 87
Limitations . . . . . 88

IV. WOMEN IN THE GARDEN . . . . . 92

Introduction . . . . . 92
The Garden: Blooming Where They Are Planted . . . . . 94
Ernestine : Madam Galem Trumpet Vine . . . . . 97
The Woman . . . . . 97
The School Setting . . . . . 98
Leadership . . . . . 100
Decision Making: Trimming the Vine With Research . . . . . 102
Team Decision Making . . . . . 105
The Extent to Which Ernestine Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making . . . . . 115
Bobbie: Granny Smith Apple Tree . . . . . 118
The Woman . . . . . 118
The School Setting . . . . . 119
Leadership: A Polished Apple . . . . . 121
Decision Making/Team Decision Making: Never the Twain Shall Separate . . . . . 122
The Extent to which Bobbie Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making . . . . . 134
Cindy: Siberian Iris . . . . . 135
The Woman . . . . . 135
The School Setting . . . . . 136
Leadership: A Supportive Backdrop . . . . . 137
Decision Making/Team Decision Making: Multi-Purposeful . . . . . 140
The Extent to Which Cindy Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making . . . . . 151
Debbie: Gaiety Ajuga (Bugleweed) . . . . . 153
The Woman . . . . . 153
The School Setting . . . . . 155
Leadership: No Weed Left Unturned . . . . . 157
Decision Making/Team Decision Making: Ground Cover . . . . . 159
The Extent to Which Debbie Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making . . . . . 170
Nancy: White Oak . . . . . 171
The Woman . . . . . 171
The School Setting . . . . . 172
Leadership Role: As Strong as the Oak . . . . . 174
Decision-Making Model: Stand Alone . . . . . 178

Team Decision-Making Model: Empowerment . . . . . 179
The Extent to Which Nancy Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making . . . . . 188
Rita: English Ivy . . . . . 190
The Woman . . . . . 190
The School Setting . . . . . 191
Leadership: Undying on the Vine . . . . . 193
Parents in School: Fungus on the Vine . . . . . 196
Decision Making: Site-Based, District Mandated . . . . . 198
Decision Making/Team Decision Making: Intertwined on on the Vine . . . . . 200
The Extent to Which Rita Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making . . . . . 204

V. A GARDENER . . . . . 207

Introduction . . . . . 207
Principals' Thoughts About Decision Making/Team Decision Making . 211
Models as Tools for Thinking About Decision Making . . . . . 211
Principals' Thoughts About Team Decision-Making . . . . . 213
Team Decision Makers: Change Agents in Practice . . . . . 217
Strategies of Systems Thinking in Decision Making/Team Decision-Making Practices . . . . . 217
Major Themes in Team Decision Making . . . . . 223
Themes That Enhance: Environment, Parents, Community, Parameters, Leadership . . . . . 226
Themes That Internally Constrain: Time, Environment, Community, Staff Changes, Parameters, Parents, School Day Structure, Budget . . . . . 227
Themes That Externally Constrain: Time, District Policies, Environment, Parents, Community, Leadership, Structure of Day, Budget . . . . . 229
How Principals Think About and Practice Team Decision Making . . . 231
Cloudy Systems-Thinking Lenses in Team Decision Making . . . . . 231
Changes in Practice . . . . . 232
Barriers to Change . . . . . 233
Implications . . . . . 235
Implications for NCA . . . . . 237
Implications for the Leadership Literature . . . . . 238
Conclusion . . . . . 239
The Five Disciplines . . . . . 240
External Support/Barriers . . . . . 241
Grapple With Power and Authority . . . . . 241
Reflection in Action . . . . . 243
Final Comment . . . . . 243

APPENDICE

A UCRI
Guide

B Princip
Letter

C NCA
Accre

LIST OF REF

APPENDICES

A. UCRIHS Approval Letter, Interview Guide, Focus Group Interview Guide, Focus Group Questions . . . . . 246

B. Principal Letter of Request, Principal Letter of Consent, Staff Member Letter of Request, Staff Member Letter of Consent . . . . . 255

C. NCA Annual Report Sample Form, NCA Report for Outcomes Accreditation Schools . . . . . 260

LIST OF REFERENCES . . . . . 277

1 Major
2 Charac
3 Princip
4 Systen
5 Major

LIST OF TABLES

1. Major Authors and Systems Thinking Disciplines . . . . . 69

2. Characteristics of Principals in This Study . . . . . 96

3. Principals' Thoughts About Team Decision Making and Systems Thinking . . . 212

4. Systems Strategies in Principals' Practice of Team Decision Making . . . . . 218

5. Major Themes in Principals' Decision/Team Decision Making . . . . . 224

1. System
2. System
3. Ernesti
4. Ernesti
5. Bobbie
6. Cindy's
7. Debbie
8. Nancy'
9. Nancy'
10. Rita's

## LIST OF FIGURES


1. Systems Thinking Conceptual Model . . . . . 19
2. Systems Thinking Conceptual Model With Identified Tensions . . . . . 20
3. Ernestine's Decision-Making Model . . . . . 103
4. Ernestine's Team Decision-Making Model . . . . . 104
5. Bobbie's Decision/Team Decision-Making Model . . . . . 123
6. Cindy's Decision/Team Decision-Making Model . . . . . 141
7. Debbie's Decision/Team Decision-Making Model . . . . . 160
8. Nancy's Decision-Making Model . . . . . 175
9. Nancy's Team Decision-Making Model . . . . . 176
10. Rita's Decision/Team Decision-Making Model . . . . . 195

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

## Introduction

This dissertation is a study of female elementary principals in Michigan who are involved in North Central Association (NCA) accreditation and who recently completed the goal selection process in their schools. My goal in conducting this study was to investigate to what extent principals think about their practice of team decision making and to what extent they conduct the decision-making process. As a practicing elementary principal with questions about the process of team decision making, I searched for resources and materials which might help guide a principal through the process of decision making with staff on goal selection under the constraints of state mandates and recommendations by the accrediting organization. Little was found. A manual prepared to describe the complete process of NCA outcomes accreditation includes one paragraph on the role of the principal. The Michigan Department of Education provides no resources or training for principals on team decision making, nor does the accrediting organization. This lack of guidance has become a serious concern for principals who want and need support in their leadership role in team decision making.

Conversations with elementary principals who had completed the goal selection process revealed an uncertainty with their roles. Principals, whether recently graduated

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with an education leadership degree or with years of experience, seem to have little grasp of what they should do in the decision-making process. Training for principals in team decision making is nonexistent.

In the recent past, principals had the power to make the decisions for their schools and carry out the policies of their districts, but social changes and school reform efforts have affected this authority. As teacher empowerment became more prevalent and decision making began to involve more of the stakeholders, the principal's responsibilities in this regard began to shift. Since this shift tends to be loosely defined at best, and no training is available, principals are often uncertain of what they should do and how they should do it when it comes to making decisions for the school.

In addition, the hierarchical, bureaucratic organization of most schools does not mesh well with participative management tenets. Bureaucracies as systems fail to value or provide for team decision making or consensus, yet this style of reaching decisions is recommended by state mandates. Within the context of all of this uncertainty and lack of articulation, three types of decision-making practices seem to have emerged: business as it has always been with the principal maintaining all of the power, complete removal of the principal from the decision-making process, or team decision making facilitated by the principal.

Some principals who make solo decisions justify the practice by claiming that they do it because the staff is too busy to be involved in all of the decision making on goals and outcomes for the school. Others simply do not want to change from the traditional roles they have held for years; they do not want to share their power with teachers (Conley & Bacharach, 1990). Other principals, because of the myriad duties a principal must handle,

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resistance to change, and/or lack of training, have abandoned the responsibility of team decision-making altogether and allow their school improvement teams to make all of the decisions. Still other principals recognize the value of having the staff and other stakeholders involved in the school improvement process and attempt to incorporate participative decision-making.

The question is, if principals use team decision making, how have they learned the appropriate techniques? The findings of this study indicate there are few similarities in this regard that elementary principals share, because no models have been presented to them either through graduate courses, through the Department of Education, or through the NCA staff development process. Any team decision-making methods that principals use seem to have been gleaned either from district inservice presentations or from professional research on the subject, then developed as the individual principal enacted team decision making through trial and error.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent principals think about team decision making and how they implement the team decision-making process, specifically, in the selection of goals for school improvement within the NCA accreditation process. Through this study I hoped to find a model that elementary principals could use to develop their leadership roles in team decision making. Such a model could be helpful to NCA and the Department of Education in providing the guidance needed to carry out mandates. School districts and central office administrators

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might also find a model of effective team decision making helpful in following the recommendations of the NCA and the guidelines of state mandates.

The research offered by noted authors in educational leadership (e.g., Sergiovanni, 1993; Leithwood, 1978; Bolman, 1991; Rost, 1991) describes what team decision making is but does not describe how to implement team decision making. In other words, theoretical frameworks are presented, but guidelines for application are not. Organizational theorists (e.g., Senge, 1990; Ogawa, 1993; O'Toole, 1995; Wheatley, 1992) contribute more in prescriptives which support what a principal needs to do to shift his or her decision-making practices successfully. The present study, based on case study research of female elementary principals to determine to what extent they think about and implement team decision making in connection with systems thinking. This is significant to the practicing principal who, recognizing the importance of team decision making, wants to learn how to develop the appropriate skills.

## Significance of the Study

The NCA may see this research as important in designing training programs to present to principals or for visiting team chairs to offer to principals who are struggling with the team decision-making process. Indeed, seminars, workshops, video presentations, or printed text outlining the process would be useful to all key players in school improvement planning and implementation. Many principals have not had formal training in teamwork, collaboration or facilitation skills. These findings offer a model of decision making that may assist both principals new to the profession and veteran principals. University undergraduate and graduate education courses may consider

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## Background

### The Michigan Landscape

Rapidly changing mandates have affected public schools in Michigan almost annually since 1990. These mandates, in the form of four separate public acts, cannot be ignored. This constant shifting of requirements by the state Department of Education has educators in a quandary because compliance is tied to the per pupil allotment that the State of Michigan awards to schools. In 1990, partly in response to new waves of school reform prompted by the Nation at Risk report (1983), Michigan legislators passed Public Act 25. This measure held schools accountable to prescribed indices to qualify for financial support from the state government. In 1993, Public Act 335 and Public Act 339 prescribed additional requirements, and in 1995, Public Act 289 created further adjustments.

One aspect of compliance with Public Act 25 is that schools must submit annual reports which include their accreditation status. Public schools in the State of Michigan are required to be accredited by the state Department of Education's Michigan Accreditation Program (MAP). To qualify for MAP accreditation, a school must respond to a list of questions and attain certain scores on state assessment tests for students, called the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP), over a three-year period. For schools involved in the NCA, a voluntary accreditation organization, responding to the

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In addition to meeting the requirements of these mandates, the public schools face a long list of challenges from both the public policy arena and the broader environment: schools of choice; the voucher system; teacher empowerment; waivers of contracts to allow diversity in school policy and implementation; public unease regarding the job public schools are doing to prepare students for tomorrow's world of work; changing demographics, family structures and values; programs and directives from central office because of tightened budgets; union pressures; the urgency to change which is accompanied by too many new approaches to education; and changes in economic forces affecting families and schools. With our macro economic system in transition, thrusting forward into the information age and competing in the global marketplace, the business world is discovering that traditional hierarchical leadership is no longer effective. Worker involvement and team efforts are but a few of the changes linked to a business's success. Likewise, educators have learned that the old "factory model" of educating students is outmoded and ineffective.

Not only are school structures changing in curriculum design and implementation (in part due to state mandates and accreditation guidelines), but the position of teachers is changing. Teachers need to learn how to become team players and understand their role in decision making. Administrators, unless they have been able to learn how to collaborate and have developed skills as facilitators, find it difficult to lead their schools through the maze of changed roles and requirements. Principals often do not have the knowledge base to understand the changes in the socioeconomic environment and how these changes

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affect the conditions necessary for success in our schools. The State of Michigan sees its role in school reform as regulatory. Mandates require buildings to have school improvement teams, with representatives from school, community and parent factions and that extensive minutes of all team meetings be kept. These mandates also recommend a consensual decision-making process at the building level. Unfortunately, however, the State of Michigan offers no training or staff development programs to assist principals and teachers in adapting effectively to this decision-making style. No research is available on how principals now view their roles as decision makers or on the changes, if any, which principals have made in their decision-making practices.

As mentioned above, public schools in the State of Michigan presently are required by the state Department of Education to be accredited by the state-sponsored program, MAP. This program requires schools to select goals and implement them, specifying who is involved in the process and how it is conducted. Further, the State of Michigan recommends that consensus be used as the model of decision making.

Because of this regulation and the corresponding fact that no staff development training or materials are offered by the state to the schools to assist in understanding and implementing the process, a number of schools have turned to accreditation by the NCA, a nonprofit organization. For the most part, MAP and the NCA require similar standards and processes for school improvement. There are, however, important differences. One major difference is that MAP is regulatory and commands compliance and NCA membership is voluntary. Another major difference is that staff development opportunities are offered to schools by the NCA; staff development from the State of Michigan is

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Whether a school is responding to the requirements of Public Acts 25, 335, 339, and 289 of Michigan or is abiding by the guidelines of another accreditation process, the school must select target area goals they believe will move their school forward in student achievement. Setting goals to move the school forward in its improvement efforts is a major step which creates a powerful impact on the school for at least the next three to five years. How this goal-selection process occurs and who is involved gives us a view of how principals define their decision-making roles and their level of involvement in the goal selection decision process.

The Principal's Role in School Improvement

The role of the principal as the decision maker in the school improvement arena began to change with the implementation of Public Acts 25, 335, 339 and 289. Principals found themselves working with groups of people, including parent and community representatives (and mandatory student representation at the secondary level) and attempting to create consensus on the selection of goals and strategies for improvement. Old habits die hard. For those who had acted for years in traditional leadership roles, the new process proved difficult. Without training other than a brief description of how to practice consensus, even the most willing found understanding the concepts and putting them into practice nearly impossible. Teachers were not accustomed to being part of the decision process, nor were parents and community members, who asked additional

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Articles touting the benefits of teamwork and collaboration with staff on school improvement began to appear occasionally in education periodicals. Principals began to question themselves and others on their role as principal. One way to determine how principals are redefining this process is to examine their involvement in decision-making situations in school improvement.

## The North Central Association

The NCA Commission on Schools, a voluntary nonprofit accreditation agency consisting of 19 states in the midwestern United States, the Navajo Nation and the Department of Defense Dependents Schools, has had several processes K-12 schools could utilize to achieve accreditation status. The most common one today is the Outcomes Accreditation (OA) process, which closely parallels the school improvement program required by Public Act 25 of the State of Michigan. Although the standards for school accreditation are specific, school improvement team development and goal selection and implementation vary considerably from school to school. The major differences between the NCA OA process and Public Act 25's school improvement process are peer evaluation and more stringent reporting of holistic target areas and goals, strategies and interventions.

Another process in the pilot stage in several NCA member states is called Transitions. Presently, 14 Michigan public schools, 8 of them elementary schools, have chosen to pilot this process. The process is based on individual credentialing of students

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and allows flexibility to address the needs of all students. The emphasis of the Transitions program is on meeting individual needs, just as the OA process focuses on student outcomes.

The NCA was born out of a group of educators who began meeting in 1895 to discuss ways to better articulate the transition from high school to college. It developed standards for high schools. In 1904, the accreditation function of the NCA Commission on Schools (NCA-COS) came into existence with 157 member schools and in 1905 the evaluation function became operational. In 1997, more than 8,000 schools are listed as members. The evaluation process includes 5 to 7 year cycles of activities comparing schools' programs with their success within the context of the philosophy and objectives of each school and its community (Shaw, 1990).

By most standards, K-12 accreditation is still very young--only about 70 years old. Still, outside of postsecondary education, accreditation has become the subject of serious national attention in just the past 15 years. Accreditation began because of a problem of definition and articulation between high schools and colleges. The NCA-COS established early on membership requirements for schools. These requirements generally set minimum standards defined in quantitative terms. In 1929 institutional accreditation made a major leap forward, with NCA leading the way. Standards were revised to focus on judging the facilities and activities of an institution in terms of the purposes it was designed to serve. Evaluation in terms of an institution's stated purpose, rather than by arbitrary standards, was adopted by the NCA and gradually by other associations. This step led to the establishment of the self-study process (Young, 1993).

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In the 1970s and 1980s, the focus in evaluation shifted from process to product (outcomes), reflecting the changing emphasis on school improvement (Young, 1993). Terms such as "effective schools," "exemplary schools," "successful schools," "mastery leaning," and "outcomes-based education" came out of responses to the criticism being directed at public schools during this period. Bloom and others studied outcomes as an educational phenomenon, and the effective schools research in the 1990s gave the concept renewed importance. Mastery learning and outcomes-based education further influenced and developed the outcomes concept (Shaw, 1990). Accreditation came to be viewed as focusing too exclusively on quantifiable resources and not paying sufficient attention to quality.

In response to the cry for school improvement in the 1970s, Dr. John Vaughn, executive secretary of NCA-COS, presented a 7-point plan which became the nucleus of the new OA evaluation process. Fundamental assumptions in the OA process are that every student has the potential for successful learning, and every student has the right to be taught in a manner that makes learning possible. The process focused attention on target goals and organizational process as concomitants rather than ends in themselves (Cohn, 1993). In 1985, the NCA-COS approved an outcomes-oriented accreditation process, which focuses on student success and quality-with-equity attention to the goals of the institution. This OA process is the most widely chosen form of evaluation in the NCA system today. Attention to goals as the primary norm has continued to the present (Crossen, 1987).

The new process offered a different approach to school improvement. The notion of episodic reviews was gone. Instead of one or more school staff responsible for

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ndertaking periodic self-studies, a school improvement steering committee was formed. 'sually, the committee consisted of teachers and other stakeholders. The entire faculty, )mmunity members, parents and students participated. A school mission was developed which everyone had a voice. The mission statement, along with school profile data, ·ovided an axis around which the target area, goals and strategies, and interventions were eated, then implemented and evaluated. Policy decisions became invested with this volvement by teachers, who held the knowledge and were expected to carry out the )licy (Cohn, 1993).

The OA process is said to be faculty-driven and data-driven. Its success is viewed possible only when faculty members own the process and make the decisions, based on lid assessment data. The continual monitoring of causal links assures that changes in ervention, instruction, curricula or organization are not accepted unless those changes ult in improvements in student performance and achievement (Armstrong, 1994). hough specific standards are required and the process is data-driven, participants' ues influence the process and product (Meadows, 1987). However, evaluation is ically objective in nature. Panels of reviewers from other NCA-affiliated states make l decisions on the status of a school's accreditation at the NCA's annual meeting of the mmission on Schools.

At the heart of the OA process is the assumption that bottom-up decision making ot only the most powerful means of achieving school improvement but that it may also he manner in which authentic and lasting improvement can be made. The willingness eachers to participate is a key factor. In this regard, a study of a K-8 district showed variable as statistically significant: the relationship between the teachers and their

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principal. If teachers perceived that their principal was open, collaborative, facilitating and supportive, they were more willing to participate in the decision-making process (Smylie, 1992).

Concepts like effective schools, curriculum alignment and site-based management, along with other school reform efforts, have moved to the forefront of education. Renewed attention is being paid to what schools are like and how well students learn. The NCA-COS maintains that school improvement can occur only when teachers, administrators, school board members, parents and citizens in local communities work together to make it happen (Cross, 1987). Recent research supports this belief (Little, 1993).

Armstrong (1993) urged the NCA to use its influence to encourage administrators to release some of their authority to other members of the school community. His research has demonstrated that most of the failures in the OA effort have been the result of top-down decisions. Thus, Armstrong concluded that top-down management styles must yield to a bottom-up method of addressing issues. To help prepare future school personnel for this change, he suggested that the NCA encourage graduate student internships or assistantships in NCA programs; work with university officials and professors to merge NCA programs into university missions and graduate education programs; and assist in expanding university principal preparation programs through field experience.

Overall, a partnership of the state NCA, the K-12 schools, the state Department of Education and the institutions of higher education would aid in developing improvements in the NCA and ensure more knowledgeable leadership in the school improvement

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rocess, which should lead to improved student achievement. Outcomes might include vell-designed graduate coursework that reflects changes in leadership requirements and ndergraduate coursework that prepares future teachers to be knowledgeable decision-akers. Departments of education and other accrediting agencies also need to develop olicies that reflect the best practices in school improvement, with staff development rograms for support.

## npact of NCA Accreditation on Principals' Decision Making

The NCA must take all stakeholders into consideration in the decision-making ocess for accreditation. Although the NCA is known for its wide array of staff velopment materials, workshops on the principal's role in leading a school in NCA creditation efforts are minimal. Informal observation and discussions have indicated that ncipals are uncertain of their role in the accreditation process, and they tend to make e of three choices. Some see collaborative decision making as a threat to their power l resist change. Others know they need to give teachers a voice in the process, so they d over all the decisions and sit back. Finally, some principals have developed skills in m building, collaboration and facilitation, and lead effective, participative decision king. Research shows little improvement in a school's goals without staff input and e improvement if the leader does not help guide the process. Giving principals the s to guide their staff in the decision-making process should increase the possibility of ess of school improvement plans.

As mentioned above, principals have little preparation in participative decision ng or for their role in the process. Schools of education sorely lack course offerings

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ich reflect the changing roles of leaders in today's society and what state mandates uire of school leaders. Principals who are used to being the power-wielding force in schools may find themselves struggling with the new decision-making requirements or h faculty demands for more voice in school improvement decisions. Principals who derstand the need for change may not be able to find the resources they need to develop necessary skills.

Some state policymakers recognize a direct connection between state mandates voluntary accreditation processes and allow reciprocity in most areas. Typically, new ndates are brought in by new governors. A year is needed to design a protocol to ect the mandate and another year to communicate and staff it. The mandate is lemented in the third year and adjustments and changes begin. In the fourth year, even new governor is not elected, other changes occur, creating instability and uncertainty oops, 1996). Cycles for accreditation by voluntary agencies are five to seven years, well-established procedures. However, those schools that choose not to become edited through a voluntary organization often do not have any way to become icient in the changes brought by staff empowerment and involvement in school sion making. Research-based evidence demonstrates that the change process has been glected area in policy implementation (Hord, 1992). Even when mandated policy is d to a change, little change actually finds its way into schools. Studies of successful unsuccessful change efforts show that the key factor is "the presence or absence ective of persons who assist others in the adoption and implementation of plans for ge" (Leithwood, 1994, p. 95). Specifically, Leithwood advocates these six actions to t in a change process:

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1. Create an atmosphere and culture for change.
2. Develop and communicate the vision plan.
3. Provide resources.
4. Provide training and development.
5. Monitor and check progress.
6. Continue to give assistance (p. 96).

Weiss (cited in Blase, 1994) reported:

> We now know that attempts to restructure schools such as site-based management, participative decision making and restructuring have for the most part resulted in only "partial" development of successful democratic structures and processes. In fact, the idea of school-level decision making has been constrained not only by bureaucracy, tradition and school context, but also by administrators' and teachers' own discomfort with radically different roles. (p. 154)

When one considers how drastically changes in the decision-making process have
nged the school principal's role, it is understandable that, to be successful,
nsformation this significant requires a specific plan.

## Conceptual Framework

This study explores the thinking of female elementary principals as it relates to
n decision making at the goal-setting stage of NCA accreditation. Before undertaking
task, an examination was made of the literature on leadership, which exposed the
owing disciplines and their definitions common to the theories of major thinkers:

1. Systems thinking (Senge, 1990; O'Toole, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1993;
wa, 1993; Patterson, 1993; Leithwood, 1978; Rost, 1991; Bolman, 1991). Systems
king is how learning organizations view the world. Thinking is not linear; circular and
leness are key words to describe systems thinking.

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2. Personal mastery (Senge,1990; O'Toole, 1995; Katzenbach & Smith, 93; Ogawa, 1993; Patterson, 1993; Leithwood, 1978; Rost, 1991; Bolman, 1991; rgiovanni, 1993). Personal mastery is a personal motivation which generates and ıtains creative tension. A person sees reality objectively, develops patience, deepens the ion and focuses the energy on the vision.

3. Mental models (Senge, 1990; O'Toole, 1995; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; gawa, 1993; Patterson, 1993; Leithwood, 1978; Rost, 1991; Bolman, 1991; giovanni, 1993). Forming mental models is how we understand and take action; it udes reflection and influence.

4. Shared vision (Senge, 1990; O'Toole, 1995; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; awa, 1993; Patterson, 1993; Bolman, 1991). Shared vision is the group commitment, "what" of the organization.

5. Team learning (Senge, 1990; O'Toole, 1995; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; awa, 1993; Patterson, 1993; Leithwood, 1978; Rost, 1991; Bolman, 1991). Team ning includes insightful thinking, coordination, action, dialogue, discussion; how flict is handled.

For the purpose of understanding how principals make team decisions in goal- ng, I examined principals' practice through the disciplines of systems thinking, and ugh their use of the 12 techniques Senge (1994) believes effective leaders use to bring ple together and enable them to mobilize their efforts. These team leadership niques are also discussed in research by Katzenbach and Smith (1993). The techniques

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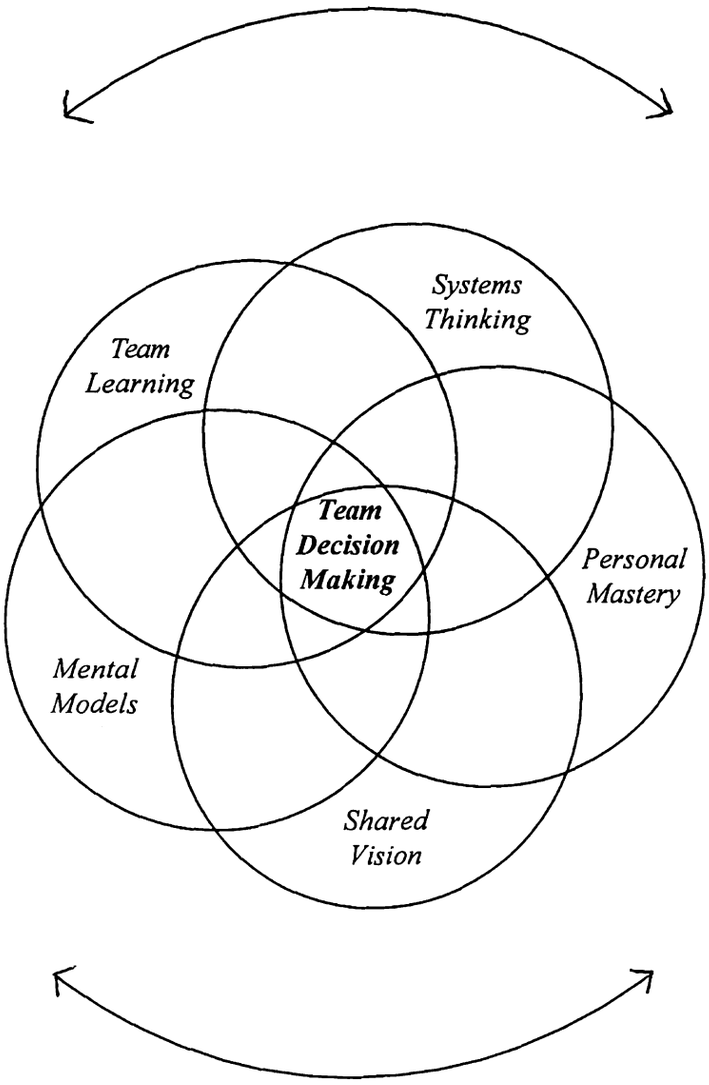
1. Focus on the real work.
2. Keep it simple.
3. Learn by doing.
4. Focus on the best.
5. Find out what brings the group together.
6. Timing is everything.
7. Design places where community can happen.
8. Find the people who share your passion.
9. Learn how to host good gatherings.
10. Acknowledge peoples' contributions.
11. Involve the whole person.
12. Celebrate.

A conceptual model in the form of five overlapping circles, representing the five isciplines of systems thinking, was developed to illustrate team decision making, how ıe disciplines articulate, and how they are incorporated into or are missing from principal ractices in team decision making. (See Figure 1.) This model helps reveal how principals ink about and practice team decision making. I also identified tensions that affect team ecision making in the elementary principalship.

A more detailed model (see Figure 2) evolved as interviews with the principals ogressed. It became evident that tensions arose which greatly affected the team decision aking process. As the talk continued, the various tensions became significant across ost of the principal interviews. Because of the roles they played, these tensions became portant to identify and consider in the conceptual model. Common tensions specific to w the principal viewed and responded with the various disciplines were noted as internal sions and external tensions are concerns outside the control or view of the principal. ıese tensions were almost universal in all six schools. They included the budget (money r staff development or off-site meetings), the structure of the school day (a common ınning time for teachers to meet), a sense of community (the school, parents, and others

Figure 1. Sy




gure 1. Systems Thinking Conceptual Model

School Day Structure

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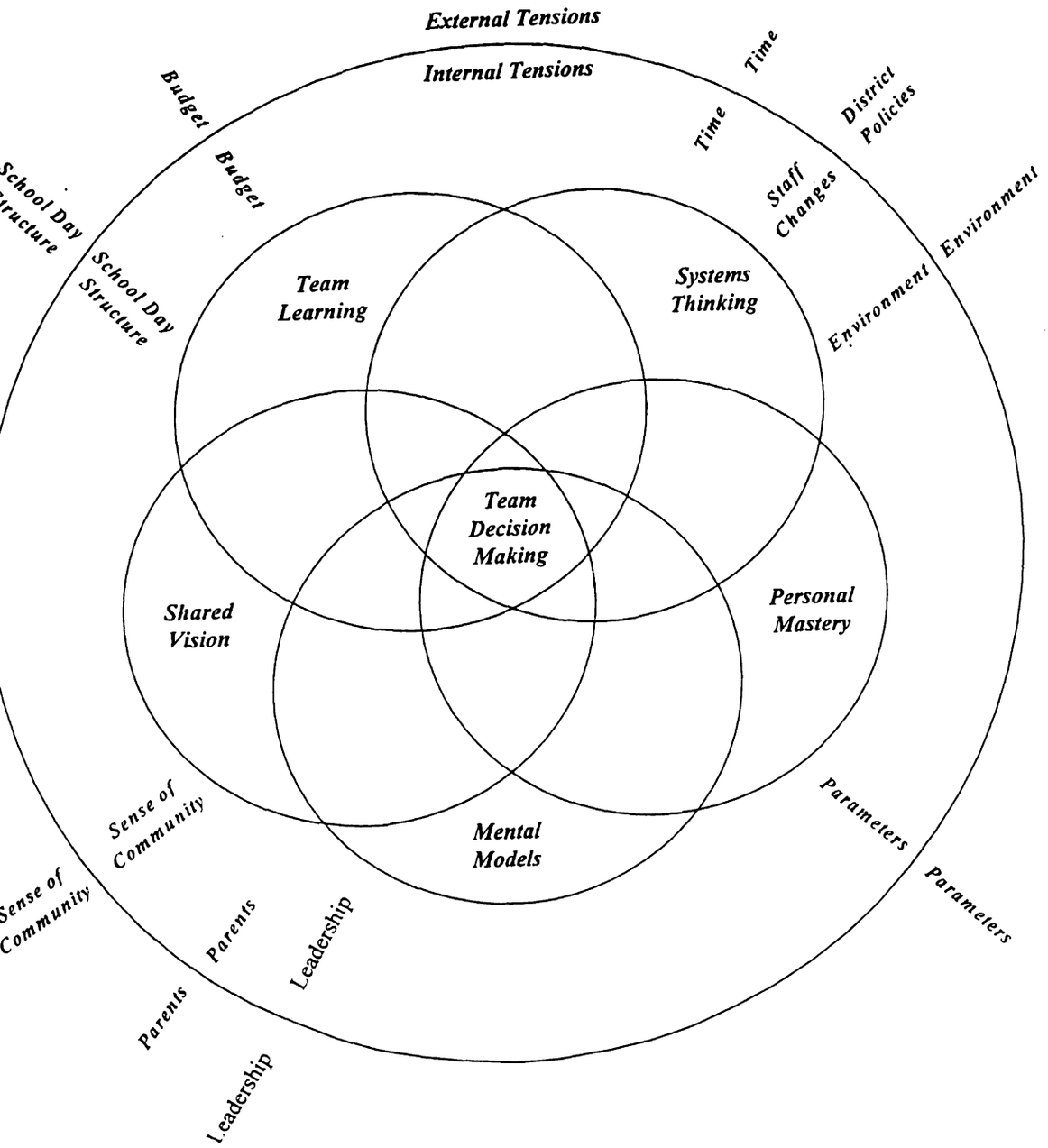


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together), parents (in the role of joint decision makers), leadership (supportive and
edgeable in team decision making), parameters (understanding and providing for
time (lack of it for effective team leadership), staff changes (input into changes,
g new members), and environment (space for meetings, a trusting atmosphere).

## Research Question

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which female elementary
als think about and implement team decision-making processes by examining the
ties and differences among six principals and to what extent their team decision
reflects the systems thinking concept of leadership in their thinking and practice.
dy is not an examination of goal selection, nor is it an examination of student
ement as a result of decision making. I am not interested in determining what
s were made, but to what extent team decision making is thought about and
ented, what model or process is used, and what similarities and differences, if any,
ong the six case studies.

This study addresses the research question: To what extent do particular female
ary school principals in the process of NCA accreditation goal-setting think about
lement team decision making within their school's environment?

. To what extent do female elementary principals think about decision making and team decision making?

   a. What do decision making and team decision making mean?

   b. What elements of systems thinking disciplines are missing?

c. What elements other than the identified qualities of the discipline model are being used?

2. To what extent do female elementary school principals enact team decision making?
   a. What factors enhance their practice?
   b. What factors constrain their practice?
   c. What changes have principals made in their practice at the goal-setting stage of NCA accreditation to accommodate team decision making?
   d. What changes have principals made in the team decision-making process from the first term of NCA-OA goal-setting to the second term of that process? What caused those changes?
3. What are the implications for NCA and school leadership literature?
   a. In what way will this study contribute to NCA and school leadership?
   b. Who will benefit from the contributions?
   c. How can these contributions reach its beneficiaries?

## Overview

This dissertation is organized into 5 chapters. Chapter 2 contains a review of ıre on leadership from early in the century to the present and on decision making as es to leaders in education, followed by a critique of the literature. Chapter 3 es the methodology used for the study. Next, Chapter 4 contains a summary of the s and results of the study, which explores the use of and models for decision that emerged from interviews with the principals and other sources. Conclusions

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implications of the study are discussed in Chapter 5, along with suggestions for her research. The appendix includes interview and focus group protocols, conceptual dels developed by the principals, and an example of the NCA report.

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# CHAPTER TWO

## SHIFTS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP OVER TIME: A LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This study focused on female elementary principals and the extent to which they ticed team decision making in the goal-setting process of school improvement. Three es of literature on leadership (leadership prior to the 1950s, leadership in mid-century, leadership in the late twentieth century) were examined to explore the history of ership in general, the changing definitions of leadership through the years, and current ership research, theories and discussion. This grouping by time period is artificial, yet ful in presenting information in a concise and organized fashion. In addition, ership was studied chronologically in order to determine whether or not a pattern s as to when leadership theories were introduced and when these theories began being iced. An obvious lag appears. Next, present-day concepts of leadership from the pectives of educational researchers and organizational researchers are reviewed and pared to determine similarities and differences. This part expands on the specific mptions of the characteristics of leadership. Then, because the nature of the study ves around team decision making, a particularly close look is taken at discussions in erature pertaining to this topic. A matrix showing the leading educational and

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ganizational theorists and the major precepts presented in their work is displayed to dicate key similarities and differences. The chapter ends with a summary which includes ationale supported by the literature for the need and purpose of this study.

Leadership proves to be a somewhat elusive term; there is no consensus as to the eaning of the word. Attempts to define leadership have been confusing, disorganized d muddled. Moreover, the leadership literature since about 1910 has not generated a nool of leadership, and there seems to be no common understanding of what leadership A definition of leadership still has not emerged that is clear, concise, understandable, earchable, practically relevant and persuasive.

It is clear, however, that the concept of leadership has changed radically over the rse of the century. Rost (1991) said that since about 1910, leadership scholars and ctitioners have tried to develop a reality-based understanding of leadership. He lists ee basic uses of the word: a description of someone who is "number one," a cription of collective learners who are in office, and a description of one person cting other people. These uses reflect the dominant characteristics of the industrial adigm of leadership for the past century. The concept of leadership within this adigm was straightforward: good leadership was deemed to be good management. value structure in which leadership was understood and practiced leaned toward c, objectivity, rationality, individuality and detachment. Because those who were sidered leaders were the managers, followers logically had to be the subordinate le in an organization. Indeed, starting in the 1930s, the leadership literature began to ribe leaders as managers who direct others and are active and followers as rdinates who are submissive and passive.

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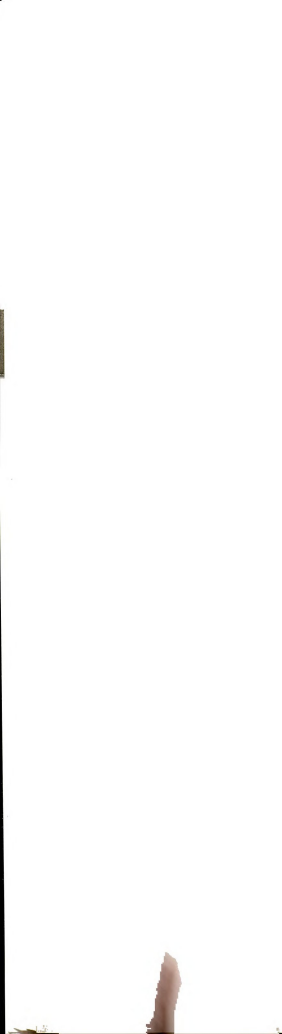

Postindustrially, however, leaders are not equated with managers, and followers are not equated with subordinates. Today, Rost (1991) says, "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purpose" (p. 102). Rost believes leadership entails four essential elements: the relationship is based on influence, leaders and followers are the people in the relationship, leaders and followers intend real changes, and leaders and followers develop mutual purposes. The ay conception of leadership offered by Bolman and Deal (1991) is somewhat similar: Leaders are able to get others to do what they want, leaders motivate people to get things done; leaders provide a vision, and leadership is really facilitation (p. 421). The value structure within leadership as practiced has changed as well, as this definition of eadership, by Tichy (1990), suggests, "Leaders are individuals out to create new pproaches and imagine new areas to explore, relate to people in more intuitive and mpathetic ways, seek risk where opportunity and reward are high, and project new ideas nto images to excite people " (p. vii).

In the push for educational reform, the leadership approaches and practices of dministrators are being increasingly scrutinized. Technical leadership, which most niversity programs in educational leadership espoused for the past 30 years, does not clude any of the moral, ethical and value dimensions of leadership which would more itably reflect the needs of today's schools (Murphy, 1993). Along the same line, ergiovanni (1992)) says that leadership has been viewed as behavior rather than action, sychological rather than spiritual, people rather than ideas. However, our attitudes and lues inform our leadership practices, visions frame our views and others' views,

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eadership belongs to everyone, and building learning communities is the appropriate goal
of leadership.

## Historical Perspectives of Leadership

The review of the literature explores leadership within its different contexts,
troduces the main contributors to the research of leadership, and describes the basic
rinciples of leadership and how these have been transferred into practice. This review is
resented according to Goodlad's (1978) division of the history of educational leadership
to three eras. Thus, it is woven through three broad timelines: leadership from the turn
f the century to the mid-1950s, the mid-century concept of leadership, and leadership in
e late twentieth century.

### eadership Prior to 1950

According to Goodlad (1978), the first era in the history of educational leadership
curred in the years prior to 1950 when educational administrators were characterized by
strong concern for instructional management. In the early 1900s the conceptual focus of
hool leadership began to move away from scholarship and educational philosophy
ward a management perspective. Starting in the 1930s, principals focused on managing
truction and curriculum, but this slowly changed. In earlier schools, principals were
olved in managing the peripheral areas of the curriculum such as music, home
nomics and vocational education, but as schools grew larger, management
ponsibility for these areas lessened. At the same time, management involvement in

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The second era of educational leadership began in 1950 and continued through the 970s (Goodlad, 1978). During this time, administrators were concerned with the anagement of non-instructional functions. However, following the launch of Sputnik I in 957, massive efforts were undertaken to improve mathematics and science education. ithin a short time, change became a primary objective for American schools and merous reforms were introduced. Indeed, Fullan (1993) identified the 1960s as a period adoption of reform. However, such adoption hinged on funding; without it, educational anges would not be initiated (Berman, Greenwood, McLaughlin, & Pincus, 1975). sinesses provided funding incentives to encourage innovative educational programs to tter prepare the students for the world of work, but the federal government was the mary funding source. Federal funding was the catalyst for many planned change efforts l with the funding came new laws and regulations. The Elementary and Secondary ucation Act of 1965 signals the beginning of the federal government's expanded role in schools.

Although this period was marked by new program development and adoption, ools unfortunately put new programs into effect with little planning and achieved few lts. Consequently, in the 1970s educators began to question the effects of many of the grams which had been adopted. The results of subsequent evaluation studies were not ouraging. Inconsistencies in results between school settings were evident as well.

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'What worked well at one time and place may not work at all at another time or in a different setting," concluded Berman, et al. (1975, p. 5).

In the meantime, criticism of the public schools increased. Because of little success in new program development and adoption due to poor design, planning or development, something significantly different was needed to pull American public education out from under severe scrutiny. The effective schools correlates became a driving force for change.

The effective schools movement. The effective schools movement made many major contributions to school improvement (Murphy, 1992). Four correlates distinguished this movement: Educators emphasized equity, schools were viewed holistically, an emphasis was placed on teaching and learning, and the school became the unit of change. In the past, schools had sorted and selected students according to ability," which was, in general, thought to be represented by the Bell Curve for the overall student population, and education was not concerned with student outcomes. The effective schools movement's aphorism of "All Students Can Learn" pushed aside this psychological model of learning. Equity became a concern, and quality was judged by student outcomes, not socioeconomic status. Historically, instruction had been loosely unrelated (what was taught in one class may not relate to what was taught in another), effective schools were seen as tightly correlated in a structural, symbolic and cultural sense, operating more as a whole. As emphasis was placed on teaching and learning in the school, the school became the key unit of change.

The instructional leadership of the principal emerged as a pivotal factor in the ess of the effective schools movement. Ron Edmonds (1979), a major contributor to

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effective schools movement, studied schools that were successful in improving student evement and attempted to identify factors which had a direct influence on student evement. He found that the leadership of the principal was a major factor in bringing t change toward effective schools. In fact, Edmonds concluded that one of the most spensable and tangible characteristics of an effective school was a strong leader. ther researcher (Blase, 1989) explored the reasons for the importance of the principal ange efforts and concluded that differences in the principal's behavior caused teachers ehave differently. Consequently, the study suggested that principals reflect on their behavior and move toward a more open style of leadership, which, the study onstrated, would allow a significant, positive difference in teachers' interaction. This emphasis on the principal as a key factor in bringing about effective school change tually led to the term "instructional leader" to describe the principal.

lership in the Late Twentieth Century

Goodlad (1978) predicted that with the push for reform in public education, the era in American schools would also include a return to instructional management by rincipal. His prediction proved to be at least partly correct on both fronts. In the 1980s, more negative news about schools was in the public eye. The widely cized 1983 report, A Nation at Risk, seemed to force schools into a frenzy of reform was reminiscent of the 1950s. The effective schools movement had not generated gh positive change; according to the report, the world was changing around ation and education was not changing fast enough to keep up. Goals were not high gh, and graduation requirements were weak. This report to the nation drew a variety

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of reactions from parents, communities and educators. Administrators who behaved according to the management perspective did not vanish from American schools. As late as the mid-1980s, school leaders developed, implemented and evaluated educational programs according to the management by objective theory. However, research into effective principal behaviors did not support a management focus.

Research continued to show the critical role of the principal in the success of schools. Most of the findings, extending from the late 1970s into the 1980s, indicate that principals who were instructional leaders could bring about effective schools. In their review of the literature, Hall and Hord (1987) reported that many studies support the premise that if educational programs for students are to improve, principals must provide teachers with the instructional leadership they need and are entitled to as they strive to improve their practices. There is no mention of the principal as manager, but earlier, Fege (1980) stated that the success of the principal as instructional leader depended on the principal's ability to distinguish between the routines of management and the goals of instructional leadership and improvement. Citing Mitzel (1977), Cotton and Savard (1980) went a step further. Although some principals had questioned being able to conduct the myriad management duties of their positions and at the same time concentrate on being a key instructional leader, Cotton and Savard asserted that effective instructional leaders are also effective administrator/managers.

Principal behaviors and situational leadership. The literature on leadership centers on the analysis of traits, behaviors, or styles and the extent to which the situation influenced leadership behavior. In addition, the literature on change suggests there are different roles for the leader, and the literature on school principals explains how the

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effective principal behaves. One theme, however, is consistent in all three groups of literature: that leaders are the focal point from which action and effects emanate.

Despite these findings and the findings of other research showing that the instructional leadership of the principal is critical to the success of the school, studies of principal behaviors suggest that, in general, principals have neglected fulfilling this role. Although, by the early 1970s, principals had widely agreed that instructional leadership was their most important responsibility, McNally (1974) noted principals were not, in fact, exercising instructional leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992). In addition, Sergiovanni pointed out that several researchers (Wolcott, 1973; Sproull, 1977; Martin, 1980) had found that instructional leadership was not the central focus of real-life practices of the principal.

Regardless of whether instructional leadership was the central focus or not, the actual involvement in this area of a given principal might fall anywhere on the spectrum. Several studies reporting on specific behaviors identified in principals found that the level of instructional leadership varied from virtually no involvement to significant involvement. For instance, Rutherford (1984) cites the study of Leithwood, Ross, Montgomery, and Maynes (1978) of 27 principals on their influence on curriculum decisions made by teachers. Four types of principal behavior were discovered:

1. Administrative leaders (passive observers, only getting involved in case of an evident problem).

2. Interpersonal leaders (directly involved in curriculum decisions almost exclusively through interpersonal relationships with teachers, usually on a one-to-one basis).

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3. Formal leaders (relied on authority to influence teachers).

4. Eclectic leaders (influenced decisions by a variety of strategies for supporting and directing teacher choice, such as involving teachers in decision making, forming teacher planning groups, etc.).

About a decade later, Smith and Andrews (1989) found the instructional leadership of the principal described in four ways: communicator, resource provider, instructional resource and a visible presence. These findings appear to broaden the scope of the skills and behaviors which principals need to be effective. Other studies reflect vague handling of the principal's importance in promoting school effectiveness and innovation, and leave unanswered this important question: The question is to determine which administrator behaviors consistently are associated with what effects, how and why (Mitzel, 1977).

The answer to this question takes on additional significance within situational leadership theories. Some of these theories infer that leadership responsibilities can best be fulfilled by the leader changing his behavior or style to fit the situation. Indeed, the bulk of leadership theory developed in the past 20 to 30 years, reported by Hall and Hord (1987), is based on the belief that successful leadership is influenced by the situation (Fiedler, 1967; House, 1971; Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Bass, 1960; Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). Hall and Hord's findings led them to contend that successful leadership is a function of behaviors, not traits, and that the interaction between behaviors and the situation is the key (Weiss, Cambone & Wyeth, 1992). Earlier, Garland (1976) pointed out that Fiedler's research shows it is easier for leaders to change the situation than for them to change with the situation. However, there is considerable disagreement regarding the role and importance of the situation in determining leadership style. Blake and Mouton (1964,

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1976) propose that there is one way of behaving that is best for all situations: high task/high relationship behavior. Further studies indicate there is no way to specify and assess the phenomenon called "situation" so that it can be correlated with its influence on change facilitator behavior (Rutherford, 1984).

There is obvious disagreement over the meanings of the terms "style" and "behavior." Part of the confusion stems from the belief that behaviors and style are one and the same. Research by Rutherford (1984) has shown that leaders utilize a variety of behaviors while maintaining a constant style. Mitzel (1977) states that clear distinctions between style and behavior are lacking but that they are two very different concepts which have been confused. Further, Mitzel points to Hall and Hord (1987), whose research led them to the conclusion that style is not changed easily, but leaders can change their behaviors. Mitzel explains that if style is a gestalt of leaders' behavior, knowledge, concern and tone, then it probably cannot be changed that easily. Rutherford agrees that style and behavior are different, adding that a change in behavior does not necessarily represent a change in style. Bolman and Deal (1991) claim that Blake and Mouton's and Hersey-Blanchard's situational leadership models, as well as Fiedler's Contingency Theory, ignore many of the most critical challenges that leaders face, which includes seeing leadership as relational and contextual and not just power-wielding. Bolman and Deal assert that competent management and skilled human relationships have more to do with keeping schools from failing than with helping them to excel (Sergiovanni, 1992).

The Managerial Grid developed by Blake and Mouton indicates specific leadership styles, and, as reported above, they believe that the best style in all situations is high task/high-relationship-oriented. Hersey and Blanchard indicate that the style of the leader

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ıust change as the maturity of the followers in the organization changes. Fiedler's ontingency Theory is somewhere between these two theories. Fiedler believes it is easier or leaders to change the situation to fit their style than to change their style to match the tuation. However, these situational-style models of leadership do not indicate what akes one task or situation different from another or how different the task or situation eeds to be to require different leader behaviors.

Being able to change behavior may be far more important than being able to ange style. Much attention has been given in leadership research to the relationship etween style and leadership success or effectiveness, and findings have led to acceptance at there is little direct relationship between leadership style and leadership success. In ddition, a style successful in one school situation may not be so in another. Part of the planation for this may involve teachers. Attribution theory (Calder, cited in Rutherford, 84) suggests that leaders' successes and failures do not come solely from what they do ıt from what their followers (teachers) expect them to do and perceive they are doing. lso, teachers have a powerful influence on the effectiveness of school leadership. deed, according to the literature on change, teacher involvement plays a major role utherford, 1984).

Educational change, leadership, and empowerment. If our society as a changing vironment is discovering new meanings and purposes, different values and purposes, ange is bound to affect schools from all angles. Cambrian-McCabe (cited in Murphy, 93) claims shifting economic, social and political systems have brought urgent demands the reform of schools. These societal changes are both external and internal to the ıools. External challenges include a thrust to privatize education, voucher proposals,

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use of private contractors in public schools, and conservative citizen groups who challenge instructional programs and pedagogical approaches. Others are demographic trends such as an aging population, economic trends reflected in decreasing financial support for schools, racial diversity, racial tensions, safety of staff and students, environmental conditions, and the ever-widening gap between the very rich and the very poor. Internal challenges affecting school leadership are the bureaucracy in education, continued distancing between administrators and teachers, and lack of change in administrator preparation programs in educational institutions.

These pressures forcing change in leadership have created tensions in many arenas. Tensions include struggles between stability and change, between denial and acceptance of reality, between fear and hope, and between manager and leader. According to futurists, the transformation of leadership to a postindustrial framework has barely begun. There is a concern that schools of leadership are still in the industrial paradigm (Rost, 1991) although a few have already made the change.

Perhaps the best comparison between the industrial paradigm of leadership and the emerging paradigm is offered by Argyris and Schon (cited in Schon, 1991). He describes the two leadership theories in practice known as Model I and Model II. Model I reflects the technical leadership style which has been used for decades. It is one of unilateral control over others where the action is designed to sustain four underlying values: achievement, winning, suppressing the negative, and being rational. Strategies include unilateral advocacy, controlling inquiry, and protection of self and others. The consequences, Argyris and Schon say, are defensive interpersonal and group relationships with limited or decreased effectiveness. Model II is an alternative theory that must be

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inferred from actual behavior. It is described as fitting the needs of the postindustrial world by proposing that people hold theories of action which determine all deliberate behavior. Leadership according to this model creates learning systems and encourages joint control and inquiry, and holds underlying values of valid information, free and informed choice, and internal commitment. Strategies are to combine advocacy and inquiry, to make reasoning explicit and confrontable, and to encourage others to do the same. Positive consequences of Model II include increasing the capacity for learning and improving strategies for achieving existing goals and choosing among competing norms, goals, and values. Many readily espouse this model, yet cannot act consistently with it, possibly because it requires changes in underlying values and assumptions.

Other researchers also propose that the changes necessary for authentic reform require moving from administrative control to teacher empowerment and decision making. The hope of reform in education "rests in empowerment that generates action at the site of responsibility," Astuto (1994, p. 89) states. Further, he sees a shift from individual to institutional responsibility for achievement, from bureaucratic control to self-control, from bureaucracy to democracy, and from intervention to facilitation. He also states that generic solutions will not fit local needs, that those closest to the point of action usually have better and more effective solutions.

Summers (1995) disagrees, asserting that empowerment alone is not enough to carry out major reform, and decentralized decision-making programs seldom claim student achievement as their main objective. Further, Summers states that there is no significant support to the claim that site-based management has a positive effect on student achievement and that there are questions as to what goes on in schools when teachers are

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iven formal responsibility for participating in decision making. The link, he concludes, is either linear nor clear. In at least partial support of Summers's view, an earlier study Rutherford, 1984) identified 4 different management systems in 20 elementary schools nd found teachers use more effective strategies when decision making rests with a rincipal who acts as a leader. This, the researcher said, may lead to improved student chievement.

In truth, no one has clarified the series of assumptions that would lead from eacher involvement to student performance. Some elements in teacher participation ystems may even detract from student learning, such as time and energy diverted from the lassroom to decision-making councils. This diversion of energy and effort may be articularly acute in the transition phase; perhaps as shared decision-making processes ecome the norm, they would take less output of human capital (Weiss, Cambone, & Vyeth, 1992). However, even if the shift to shared decision making were expertly anaged, it is not clear that it would lead directly to better student achievement.

As noted earlier, one of the first generation correlates of effective schools research mphasized the crucial role in the school improvement process of the principal as structional leader, affirming the importance of the principal's role in shared decision-aking efforts. Weiss (1993) confirms the importance of principal participation in a shared cision-making process, one that allows a true sharing of ideas which can produce better cisions for students than either group could achieve separately. Recently, however, forts to minimize the impact of a competent school leader on that process have taken ace.

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There is conflict in the literature on how effective the principal can be in school improvement as well. Some noted authors have identified specific behaviors believed to indicate a relationship between effective school principals and effective schools. The tensions and studies in this area were examined in an effort to gain a clearer picture.

Addressing the relationship of leadership to school improvement, Rutherford (1984) referred to Thomas's study, which determined that although many factors affected implementation, the leadership of the principal appeared to be one of the most important factors. Liebermann and Miller (1981) agreed, stating, "The principal is the critical person in making change happen" (p. 783).

Several studies focus on goal-setting, communication, and implementation of projects as areas in which the principal's influence is important for a successful school. The principal's role in developing clear goals and communicating those goals to the school community "is related to school effectiveness" (Goldring & Pasternack, 1994, p. 248). The effectiveness of principals also depends on whether they contribute directly or indirectly to the realization of goals (Leithwood, 1989). Leithwood's observations, along with research studies, show that an effective principal is the glue holding the school together in some kind of framework and that his or her goals tend to be student-oriented. Reinhard, Amends, Kut, Lovell, and Wyant (cited in Rutherford, 1984) investigated the principal behavior that supported or hindered projects. They discovered that, first, the principal had to agree with the project and communicate support and enthusiasm to others. Second, the principal had to "sell" the project to teachers and the community and provide all necessary material and resources. Third, during the project's development and implementation, the principal needed to remain interested and ready to help solve

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As mentioned earlier, studies relay a mixed message about the realities of the principalship and the potential of principals to lead. The ability to manage the demands of the principalship is not the main attribute that distinguishes an effective educational leader from others; rather, Krug (1992) identified a distinctive set of beliefs about what is possible (Tucker-Ladd, Merchant, & Thurston 1992). Although there were earlier claims that leadership is the responsibility of the principal and could not be left to others, effective leadership alone does not necessarily lead to successful schools. In a recent study of 44 elementary schools, researchers found principals who demonstrate supportive leadership do not directly influence school effectiveness. This is because principals are limited in their degree of influence over school outcomes (Hoy, Tarter, & Witkoskie, 1992).

Change in educational practices requires a close look at educational leadership and its effect on school success, along with an exploration of new ways for teachers and principals to work together. Principals involved in restructuring see managerial functions of their job as staying the same but acknowledge the need to develop a collaborative

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Transactional to transformational leadership. For the past 40 years, the simple ıanagement rule of "expect and inspect" placed teachers in a subordinate role Sergiovanni, 1992). Today's changing society, however, demands that educational leaders ead with more than the authoritarian, power-wielding approach. Along with and perhaps artly because of changes in society, leadership is changing from a transactional emphasis o a transformational model. Alternative models are coming into view as well, such as eflective learning, systems thinking and team and organizational leadership.

Tucker-Ladd, et al. (1992) and Weiss, et al.(1992) describe transactional and ransformational leadership styles. Transactional (ordinary) leadership is based on an xchange relationship where followership compliance is exchanged for expected rewards. has its origins in the competent application of managerial and interpersonal skills as arious trades take place in order to reach some kind of compliance. Transformational adership is more difficult to describe, but it is, according to some, a key to creating ıccessful schools. Transformational leadership involves values, purposes, symbols and eaning as realities are negotiated and created. A conceptualization by Burns (cited in ichy, 1990) differentiating these two types of leadership reflects similar thinking.

A closer look at this new type of leadership offers a glimpse of the qualities, ırposes, and values of these leaders. Transformational leaders have these indicators:

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They identify themselves as change agents, are courageous individuals, are visionaries, believe in people, are value-driven, are lifelong learners, and have the ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty (Tichy, 1990).

Gender may play a role in the tendency to use either transactional or transformational leadership. At least one researcher contends that men tend to use transactional leadership, while women tend to use transformational leadership. In studying men and women in business, Rosener (1990) found that men, relying on their organizational position and formal authority, used transactional leadership, but women used transformational leadership. Those using transformational leadership shared power and information with workers and strived to enhance workers' self-worth. Transformational leaders further supported their people through enabling them to feel good about themselves and their jobs. This leadership style appeared to generate feelings of empowerment and commitment to the organization. Rosener says that as women have taken on more formal leadership roles, their more collaborative approaches have become acceptable and quite successful.

In his discussion of transformational leadership, Sergiovanni (1992) states that today's leadership practice relies heavily on bureaucracy, psychological knowledge or skill, and the technical rationality that emerges from theory and research, which can cause neglect of professional and moral authority. Attending to the moral dimension, he suggests, may cause a reinvention of the concept of leadership. Sergiovanni thinks the heart (beliefs, values, dreams, personal vision) and the head (a mental picture of how the world works--reflection, personal vision) of leadership need revisiting. Moreover, the head of leadership is shaped by the heart, Sergiovanni states, while reflection on decisions

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and actions reshapes both the heart and the head. In reviewing Sergiovanni's beliefs regarding transformational leaders, Rost (1992) emphasizes Sergiovanni's claim that leaders and followers develop mutual purposes, with mutuality being forced through influential relationships where interactions are vertical, horizontal, diagonal and circular. These are purposes, not goals; purposes are overarching and holistic, less oriented to quantification and less rigid than goals. Mutual purposes become common purposes because followers and leaders engage in leadership together, Rost suggests, while independent goals mutually held do not qualify as mutual purposes. Bolman and Deal (1991) believe transformational leaders bring out the best in their followers and move them to pursue higher and more universal needs and purposes.

Purposes play an important role in transformational leadership. Followership can be obtained by practicing purposing. Barnard (cited in Sergiovanni, 1992) says purposes serve as the basis of developing a cooperative system. Barnard further states that followership is built by developing people who can work by themselves without close supervision, self-assessing, committed, purposeful and with a vision of what the school is and can become.

Purposes, values, and vision are complementary transformational leadership concepts. Leadership purposes evolve into strategies, whereas values become linked to norms, and norms are linked to policies. Vision, on the other hand, is linked to forecasts, directions become objectives, and frameworks evolve into blueprints (Sergiovanni, 1992). The heart of the school as a moral community is its covenant of shared values, according to Sergiovanni. Purposes and values, he believes, can become the glue that binds people in a loosely connected world and can become the center from which the school begins

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development as a learning community. Frankena (1973) defines morality as " a code or a set of moral beliefs rather than to a pattern or quality of conduct as character to something a person or society has or subscribes to, rather than something he, she or it is or does" (p. 17), while Guy (1990) adds that everyone who makes a decision relies on a moral code. When shared values, purposing, professional socialization and collegiality are emphasized, Frankena continues, they become substitutes for leadership, which means direct leadership from administrators can be more informal (Sergiovanni, 1992).

These concepts of values and morality in the context of transformational leadership may help explain why women are more inclined to use this leadership approach than men. Women's identities have been defined in a context of relationships and judged by principles of responsibility and care (Gilligan, 1982). This type of moral reasoning is dissimilar to the male perspectives of justice and rights, Gilligan found. In other words, women see morality based on responsibility and relationship, while the men tend to espouse separation and competition. Women regard their personal lives woven into their professional lives. Helgesen (1990) described women's ability to integrate home and work without compartmentalizing these aspects of self.

Reflective leadership. Senge (1990) and Patterson (1993) talk about reflection as a changing value. Although today's world values firm decisions, followed by implementation without looking back, the two researchers believe people need to reflect on their own and others' thinking in order to achieve better organizational decisions. Patterson explains that valuing reflective time in reaching consensus means allowing time to talk things out until virtually all serious objections to a unified course of action have been resolved. Consensus requires suspending judgments and refraining from premature

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positioning; when positions are taken and defended the possibility is lost of reaching a group decision that includes the best of individual perspectives. In tomorrow's organizations, Patterson states, allowing reflective time for consensus-building would help achieve two fundamental goals of lasting decisions, a shared knowledge base and group ownership of decisions. Bolman and Deal (1991) and Schon (1991) also place a high value on reflection as a leadership characteristic.

Schon (1991), a colleague of Argyris, has shown that skills in reflection slow down thinking processes and increase awareness of how mental models are formed and how these models influence actions. He states that the practice of "reflection in action" distinguishes the truly outstanding professional. He suggests considering learning by doing and incorporating the techniques associated with good coaching. To enhance reflective practice, he recommends bringing together technical and moral considerations. Cambron-McCabe (cited in Murphy, 1993) presses the importance of administrative practice being informed by critical reflection which is situated in the moral, political and cultural context of schooling. She claims that if restructuring will create changes which ultimately mean results that are different, leaders will have to allow themselves to be reflective about schooling and critical about their work.

Several studies (Astin & Leland, 1991; Helgeson, 1990; Van Velsor & Hughes, 1990) found that women practice reflective thinking, not only about themselves but also about their relationship to their organizations. The studies show that women are learners regarding their work, themselves, and the process and practice of leadership, and that they learn and achieve significantly from other people's expertise and experiences. Helgesen

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also found that women leaders tended to design more breaks into their scheduling of time to handle unexpected demands and for personal reflection.

Other leadership concepts. Servant leadership, stewardship and ministering have also received considerable attention. These concepts redefine leadership by shifting the emphasis from behavior to the moral dimension of leadership. Servant leadership provides a sense of direction, establishes an overarching purpose and a trust of others. Steward leadership is the kind that touches people differently, taps their emotions, appeals to their values, responds to connections with other people and is morally based. However, the bond between servant leadership and moral authority is tight as well. When moral authority becomes the main effort in a school, Sergiovanni (1992) believes leadership will be advanced. In order to do this, however, he says that we need to direct our efforts to create learning communities in each school. Norms and values become substitutes for leadership. These can change the image of the school. The concepts of servanthood, stewardship and ministering redefine the routine and sense-making work of administration, allowing those aspects to become interdependent and indistinguishable.

The gains for the "new school" from such a change in orientation, Sergiovanni 1992) suggests, would include democracy, group authority and accountability, ariability, generality, interactivity in work assignments, self-discipline and control xercised individually and collectively, and group commitment to and consensus about rganizational goals and means. He claims that what gets rewarded gets done, is extrinsic, nd can be termed calculated involvement. What is good also gets done from a sense of uty or obligation and can be termed moral involvement. This is a new concept--that what

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Organizational perspectives. The concept of leadership as a quality of organizations has been mentioned in past research. Later work does not reflect on it and only very recently has begun to be expressed again by researchers such as Bolman and Deal in 1991. Ogawa (1993) and others wanted to see how leadership affected school organizations. Their hunch was that leadership is treated as a quality of organization--a systemic characteristic--and that leadership needed to be mapped throughout the organization to find it. Ogawa states:

> Leadership flows through the networks or roles that comprise organizations. The medium of leadership and the currency of leadership lie in the personal resources of people. And leadership shapes the systems that produce patterns of interaction and the meanings that other participants attach to organizational events. (p. 225)

Ogawa cites two other studies that support his findings, one by Barnard and one by Thompson. Barnard (1968) observed that the "authority of leadership" is not confined to those in executive positions, indicating that leadership may be practiced by anyone in an organization. Thompson (1967), although describing administration rather than leadership, asserted that leadership is something that flows throughout an organization, spanning levels and flowing both up and down hierarchies (Ogawa, 1993).

Ogawa (1993) lists four underlying assumptions which attend to the four dimensions of leadership: function, role, the individual, and culture. Leadership functions to influence organizational performance. Leadership is connected to organizational roles. Leaders are individuals with certain attributes, or who act in certain ways, or both. Most recently Ogawa reported that the literature shows leaders operate within organizational

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cultures, as reviewed by Daft and Weick, 1984; Pfeffer, 1981; and Schein, 1985. Sergiovanni's (1992) view of the concept of community and shared meaning and values emerges from the cultural perspective as well.

Two theories on organization are considered in Ogawa's work (1993), the technical-rational perspective and the institutional theory. Most theories of organizational leadership seem to be dominated by one perspective of organizations, which is the technical-rational system. Because the technical-rational system is familiar, the explanation here will focus only on the institutional theory.

The function of leadership from the institutional perspective is social legitimacy and organizational survival, which affects the minds and behaviors or external constituents (Ogawa, 1993). The organization seeks legitimacy rather than technical efficiency. Leadership is seen as a systemic quality of the organization, where leadership is meshed in the relationships that exist among members rather than in particular roles. Further, leaders possess certain attributes and take actions acquiring added significance. These attributes are resources on which individuals who draw on them attempt to exert influence; thereby, leadership can flow up and down as well as across levels in the organization.

The context of leadership from an institutional perspective is largely cultural. Culture is a pattern of development reflected in society's system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day ritual (Morgan, 1986). In recent educational literature, scholars argue that administrators lead by shaping school culture, affecting the meanings that others fix to events (Bolman & Deal, 1994; Deal & Peterson, 1990; Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1986). Even though this cultural context evokes a focus on symbolism and shaping of meaning, Ogawa (1993) sees this form of leadership as technical-rational.

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The four dimensions of leadership (function, role, the individual, and culture) as referred to by Ogawa (1993) lead to a depiction of organizational leadership as the influence that individuals in high-level offices exert through their attributes and actions on the culture and performance of organizations. Pounder, Ogawa, and Adams (1995) move beyond the emphasis on individual leaders to the concept of leadership as an organizational quality. The concept of leadership as an organizational quality suggests that the total amount of leadership found in schools will have a positive relationship to school performance, and it also suggests that all members of schools can lead, affecting the performance of their schools. Pounder et al. concluded that leadership affects performance by shaping the organization of work, developing solidarity among members, building member commitment to the schools, and managing schools' relations with their external environment.

Team leadership. Noted authors such as O'Toole (1995), DePree (1987), and Katzenbach and Smith (1993) agree that discussions of leadership in today's world should really be discussions of followership. Peter Drucker, a well-known writer on organizational leadership, notes O'Toole, observed only one characteristic common to all leaders: followers. O'Toole declares that leaders can no more be likened to shepherds than their followers can be thought of as sheep. Leadership has been likened more often to herding cats than to herding sheep, since in today's society, few people will allow others to paternalize them.

To explain leadership effectiveness, O'Toole (1995) reviews the leadership qualities of the presidents depicted on Mount Rushmore. He characterizes Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Roosevelt as "representatives of a school of values-

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based leadership dedicated to democratic change" (p. 21). He coined the term "the Rushmorean approach" to describe his philosophy, which is that leadership effectiveness has little relationship with matters of what to do or how to do it. Rather, leadership effectiveness has to do with appropriate morals, values, attitude and philosophy, such as trust, respect and inclusionary practices. O'Toole refers to the leadership of several fairly recent top executives in America such as Alfred P. Sloan to emphasize the importance of creating followers in an atmosphere of trust and respect. He draws from Drucker, Deming, DePree, Burns, Bennis and Nanus, among others. When leaders fail to bring about change, O'Toole says that the fault rarely is from reading the wrong how-to manuals. Rather, O'Toole says:

> Leaders fail when they have an inappropriate attitude and philosophy about the relationship between themselves and their followers. Those who do not respect and trust their followers cannot lead them. Those who succeed at bringing about effective and moral change believe in and act on the inherent dignity of those they lead--in particular, in their natural, human capacity to reason. (p. 37)

O'Toole (1995) also gives an instructional account of Robert Owen's leadership. Owen lived from 1771 to 1858 and, according to O'Toole, was a social inventor who devised or advocated a number of industrial relations and educational practices and social policies that are still considered progressive today. He became successful in Scotland as the owner and manager of a textile factory, practicing what is now called paternalism. However, he treated his workers with respect, providing clean housing and a disease- and crime-free community in which to live. Young children did not work; he founded a school, where he invented preschool and day care. Education was progressive; adult night school also started here. Even though he provided many innovative and important contributions, his career is a classic example not only of resistance to change but of an

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unproductive leadership style. No capitalist of the time followed his lead. As a visitor to other factories, he "spied," then reported the poor conditions he observed, therefore alienating himself from his peers. Owen also wanted to move too far, too fast, and did not want to accept slow changes. He would not listen to others and was sure that only he knew the truth. He never created followers.

As the Owen example illustrates, creating a followership is far from a simple task, nor is it simple to attempt to create unity without conformity. In addition, O'Toole (1995) points out, leadership requires listening to followers but not becoming imprisoned by their low expectations. He refers to Bennis' observation that there is a "paradox of values in which leaders must create a culture with strong strategic unity while at the same time fostering sufficient internal openness to encourage freedom of action and entrepreneurial initiative" (O'Toole, 1995, p. 47).

In their work in organizational leadership, Bolman and Deal (1991) describe four models of leadership that are essential to effective teams. These are:

1. Structural leaders, who exhibit a powerful approach. These leaders lead through analysis and design rather than charisma and inspiration;

2. Human resource leaders, who focus on interpersonal relationships between superiors and subordinates and on the values of openness, sensitivity and participation;

3. Political leaders, who are clear about their agenda and sensitive to political reality and who build alliances;

4. Symbolic leaders, who are artists, poets or prophets who use symbols and stories to communicate a vision that builds faith and loyalty among an organization's employees and others.

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These four approaches to leadership all have their individual strengths and weaknesses. Bolman and Deal (1991) claim that the weaknesses can be fatal if there is a singular leader. They believe singular leaders could be unable to see their own limits. All four approaches should be represented on teams to be effective.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) are considered giants in the field of team leadership. Their findings indicate that resistance to teams is caused by lack of conviction, personal discomfort and risk, and weak organizational performance ethics. Their definition of a team is a working one:

"A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable "( p. 45).

To make decisions, teams must be able to identify the problems and opportunities they face, evaluate the options they have, and then follow through with any trade-offs and decisions needed to move forward. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) argue that most teams need some members with these skills to begin with, although many will develop them best as they proceed. Six necessities of good team leadership, according to Katzenbach and Smith, are to:

1. Keep the purpose goals and approach relevant and meaningful
2. Build commitment and confidence
3. Strengthen the mix and level of skills
4. Manage relationships with outsiders, including removing obstacles
5. Create opportunities for others
6. Do real work (p. 44)

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It is interesting that Katzenbach and Smith contend that the most important determinant in team performance is not the team leader, but a specific performance challenge that is clear and compelling to all team members. They say this motivates the most.

In a later work with the RCL team, Katzenbach (1995) lists seven characteristics of real change leaders:

1. Commitment to a better way
2. Courage to challenge existing power bases and norms
3. Personal initiative to go beyond defined boundaries
4. Motivation of themselves and others
5. Caring about how people are treated and enabling them to perform
6. Staying undercover
7. A sense of humor about themselves and their situations .(p. 13)

Further, the authors ascribe to the principles of vision, courage, performance measurement, team performance and discipline which allow for successful change (Katzenbach & RCL Team). Their definition of real change leaders is: "Individuals who lead initiatives that influence dozens to hundreds of others to perform differently, and better, by applying multiple leadership and change approaches" (p. 16).

DePree (1987), the former CEO of a large office furniture company, drew the attention of other leaders with what he had to say, and practiced, about leadership. His six points, listed by O'Toole (1995), reflect his belief that the signs of leadership are among the followers. These points are:

1. The first responsibility of the leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant.
2. The signs of leadership are among the followers. Are they reaching their potential? Are they learning? Are they achieving the desired results? Are they serving? Do they manage change gracefully, and do they manage conflict?
3. Leaders don't inflict pain, they bear it.
4. Leaders respect people. Leadership is about relationships. Relationships count more than structure.

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5. Good communication means a respect for individuals. Good communication is an ethical question.
6. The best communication forces you to listen. Information is power, but it is pointless if hoarded. Power must be shared for an organization or a relationship to work. (p. 44-45)

DePree said that the art of leadership is liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible.

As the philosophy practiced by the Rushmoreans and other historical figures makes clear, values-based leadership espouses respect; and followership is what makes a leader a leader. Getting others to follow is complicated but not impossible. However, when people feel threatened in their beliefs, followership is resisted, " and nothing is more certain to stir up resistance to change than a challenge to the psychological comfort of the powerful" (O'Toole, 1995, p. 238).

Systems thinking. Research on how organizations view the world and the shifts that are taking place has been carried out by organizational theorists Senge (1990), Wheatley (1992) and others. The term "systems thinking" is becoming more well known and understood as leaders feel the push for change and seek ways to manage change. Systems thinking, Senge says, focuses on how to restructure assumptions to reveal causes of problems. The traditional view of leadership is based on lack of people's power, lack of personal vision and inability to master change (Senge, 1990). Thus, according to Kiefer and noted in Senge's work, the skills and behaviors which made a person an effective leader in the past could be counterproductive when people become open to new ideas and develop a sense of their own vision and commitment. Senge adds that in learning organizations, leaders are viewed as designers, stewards and teachers. Further, mastering

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a systemic language provides a new framework for thinking. Kiefer, Senge says, explains that when this thinking happens, people become system thinkers ever thereafter.

"Leadership has consistently been characterized by the central values of power and control," Patterson states (1993, p. 2). He believes these values do not describe the essence of leading at all; rather, they describe bossing. Patterson further defines leadership as the process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization. He lists five values needed to implement systems thinking: openness to participation, openness to diversity, openness to conflict, openness to reflection, and openness to mistakes. Senge (1990), Wheatley (1992), and Ogawa (1995) make assumptions that are similar to Patterson's values thinking. These five values, disciplines, or assumptions are discussed in detail below.

In his recent work, The Fifth Discipline, Senge (1990) names and explains five "disciplines" that he considers essential in systemic thinking. These five disciplines are systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. "Discipline" is defined as a developmental path for acquiring certain skills or competencies; to practice a discipline is to be a lifelong learner and is different from emulating a model. Senge has drawn heavily on the research of Chris Argyris, Donald Schon, Charles Kiefer, and David Bohm.

Senge describes systems thinking as the cornerstone of how learning organizations view their world. It is a discipline in which one contemplates the whole, rather than any individual part of the pattern, a conceptual framework that includes knowledge and tools developed over the past 50 years to make patterns clearer and help show how to change them effectively. Senge claims that systems thinking is truly a shift of mind (metanoia) in

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how we see ourselves connected to the world, in how our own actions create the problems we have, and in how we create reality and change it. More so, it is a shift from part to whole thinking, from helpless to active shaping of reality, from reacting to creating a future.

Systems thinking sees interrelationships rather than linear causes and effects; it sees processes of change rather than snapshots. More specifically, Senge (1990) states, "Reality is composed of multiple-simultaneous interdependent cause-effect-cause relationships. From this reality, normal verbal language extracts single, linear cause-effect chains" (p. 73). The result is a tendency to see the world in simple, obvious terms and to believe in simple, obvious solutions. Feedback in systems thinking is also a broader concept than it is in other contexts. Feedback means any reciprocal flow of influence; nothing is ever influenced in just one direction. People are influenced by and influence their realities.

According to Patterson (1993), a system is a collection of parts that interact to function purposefully as a whole. His guidelines for applying systems thinking are: Focus on the system, not the people; learn how the current system evolved and how it connects to related systems; expect the system to resist interventions meant to disrupt the stability of the current system; evaluate the system against the organization's core values; look beyond symptomatic problems and symptomatic solutions to fundamental systems issues; think whole-system, long-term solutions and allow time for the solutions to take effect; and anticipate new system problems arising from current system solutions. Senge (1994) summarizes Patterson's detailed guidelines in the first of two strategies he offers to

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accomplish systems thinking: peripheral vision. The second strategy is using the language of methods, tools and principles.

Wheatley (1992) weaves systems thinking and reflection together. She warns that information overload can result from the standard view of systems as requiring point-to-point connections that must be laboriously woven together. Rather, she suggests stepping back and refocusing attention on the whole. Giving up close attention to detail and standing back to observe the movement of the total system helps develop a new understanding of what is required to manage a complex system. In addition, she advises looking for patterns of movement over time and focusing on rhythm, flow, direction, and shape rather than seeking linear causes and effects or regarding people, events, goals, etc., as polarities. Instead, she recommends ignoring analysis and planning and concentrating on relationship facilitating by linking people.

Systems thinking is time consuming, requiring more dialogue, explanation, information, and practice. It is a completely different way of looking at and thinking about organizations, how they work, and the individual's role in them. It means understanding and developing the discipline of personal mastery, along with the other four disciplines. Personal mastery is a discipline which continually clarifies and deepens personal vision, focuses energies, develops patience, and aids in seeing reality objectively. Calling personal mastery the spiritual foundation of an organization, Senge (1990) says that it is a motivation to continually learn how personal actions affect the individual's world. Personal mastery, Senge (1994) says, is learning how to generate and sustain creative tension. Creative tension is generated by the gap between what is and what is desired; a force is created by the natural tendency of tension to seek resolution. He endorses holding

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a personal vision and keeping a clear picture of current reality as primary strategies for achieving personal mastery.

Robert Fritz, a colleague of Chris Argyris and referred to by Senge (1990), describes the effect personal mastery or vision has in a learning organization, stating, "It's not what the vision is, it's what the vision does" (p. 206). Fritz claims that people hold one of two contradictory beliefs that limit their ability to create what they want: Either they believe they are unworthy and undeserving of what they desire or that they are powerless to bring about what they really care about. These forces can result in structural conflict. Fritz identifies three generic "strategies" for coping with this conflict: letting vision erode, creating artificial conflict (fear of failure), or employing sheer willpower, such as a maniacal focus on goals. He claims that these strategies are not readily changed, since they are developed early in life, but that they eventually change as personal mastery is developed.

The third discipline in systems thinking is called mental models. These are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, images, or pictures that influence how an individual understands the world and how he or she takes action (Senge, 1990). Most mental models are systemically flawed, claims Senge, who believes people learn from experience, but never directly see the consequences of many of their most important decisions, which is a core learning dilemma for organizations. David Bohm, a leading quantum theorist referred to in Senge's work (1990), connected the systems perspective and mental models more explicitly when he said the purpose of science is not accumulating knowledge but creating mental maps which guide and shape perception and actions. Senge (1994) suggests two strategies for creating mental models which are appropriate to

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systems thinking: reflection, including attention to how mental models are formed, and inquiry, which involves sharing views openly and learning about the assumptions of others. Developing this discipline in organizations, Wheatley (1992) believes, will require building strong relationships through developing skills in listening, communicating, and facilitating groups.

Mental models, as some principals will contend, can slow the school improvement team down. Time is not allocated properly to explain thoughts to one another, for example. Team members do not know how to take the time nor do they take the time to express individual viewpoints.

The fourth discipline in systems thinking is shared visions. These bind people together through establishing a common identity and sense of destiny. Shared visions are a set of principles and guiding practices foster genuine commitment and "enrollment" rather than compliance. Senge (1990) refers to Kiefer's comment that enrollment is the process of becoming part of something by choice. Shared vision, a powerful force, emerges from the personal visions of a group and becomes the what; informed by the mission, which is the why; and the values, which determine how.

The openness necessary to create a shared vision, according to David Bohm (cited in Senge, 1990), emerges when two or more individuals become willing to suspend their certainty in each other's presence, and are willing to share thinking and be influenced. In this state, they gain access to depths of understanding not accessible otherwise. Senge quotes Fritz relative to shared vision: "In the presence of greatness, pettiness disappears. In the absence of a great dream, pettiness prevails. You cannot have a learning organization without shared vision" ( p. 209). Senge suggests five strategies central to

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creating a shared vision: knowing that every organization has a destiny, accepting that not all visions are equal, ensuring that members have a collective sense of purpose, designing ongoing processes where all can speak from the heart, and creating organizational creative tension.

An organization's culture may either enhance or reduce the likelihood of members developing a shared vision. Institutional theory suggests that organizations erect structures to reflect cultural rules in their internal environments, and indicates that organizations conduct activities around those structures to facilitate the development of shared meaning and value among the organizations' members. In this way, culture is developed. In fact, shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared sense-making are all ways of describing culture. Rather than a simple variable that societies or organizations possess, culture must be understood as an active, living phenomenon through which people create and recreate the worlds in which they live (Morgan, 1986). One of the characteristics of culture, according to Morgan, is that it creates a form of ethnocentrism. The formation of a group or the process of becoming a leader ultimately hinges on an ability to create a shared sense of reality. The challenge in understanding organizations as cultures is to understand how this system, in its mundane as well as its more dramatic aspects, is created and sustained.

The fifth discipline in systems thinking is team learning, a discipline that allows dialogue (assumptions are suspended and genuine thinking together occurs) and discussion (a heaving of ideas back and forth). Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire. It has three critical dimensions:

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1. The need to think insightfully about complex issues
2. The need for innovative, coordinated action
3. The role of team members on other teams (Senge, 1990, p. 236)

To develop team learning, teams must master the practices of dialogue and discussion, be able to balance advocacy with inquiry, bring assumptions to the surface, and "become aware of the assumptions and beliefs that link 'what we see' to 'what we conclude'" (Senge, 1994, p. 352-353). Argyris, who worked with mental models and organizational learning for over 30 years, said that when teams are confronted with complex issues which may be embarrassing or threatening, "teamness" vanishes (Senge, 1990). Senge supports Argyris's observation, saying collective inquiry tends to threaten team members. Argyris further claims that the difference between mediocre teams and effective teams is how they handle conflict and deal with the defensiveness which envelops conflict.

Bohm has contributed to the discipline of team learning through his study of the theory and practice of dialogue, and his work is drawn on by Senge (1990). His work represents a unique synthesis of the two major intellectual currents relating to the disciplines of the systems view. Two observations of Bohm's seem particularly significant in this context: that perception and action cannot be separated and that (productive) dialogue must be learned as a team and cannot be achieved individually.

The laws of the fifth discipline, according to Senge (1990), are:

1. We need to look at our own solutions to other problems in the past.
2. The harder you push the harder the system pushes back.
3. Behavior grows better before it grows worse.
4. The easy way out usually leads back in.
5. The cure can be worse than the disease.

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6. Faster is slower, cause and effect are not closely related in time and space.
7. Small changes can produce big results, but the areas of highest leverage are often the least obvious.
8. You can have your cake and eat it too, but not all at once.
9. Dividing an elephant in two does not produce two small elephants.
10. There is no blame. (p. 57-67)

Patterson (1993) states his belief in team learning strongly: "We are smarter than me" ( p. 11). Thinking as a group, governed by particular values, is today's value. Eventually, leaders will learn to create a safe environment for team members, learn to separate the person from the issue, and even develop the capacity to publicly challenge their own thinking.

It should be noted that educational researchers are silent on this fifth discipline. Numerous educational articles and workshops refer to team building, but not to team learning. Principals and team members can receive professional development training in consensus building and learn the tools to help select goals, but little has been offered on the need for teams to think insightfully, use innovative ways to coordinate actions, and learn the differences between dialogue and discussion.

According to Senge (1990), there are three distinct levels of the five learning disciplines (systems thinking, personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, and team learning): practices, in other words, what is done; principles, which can be described as guiding ideas and insights; and essences, the state of being of those with high levels of mastery in the discipline. Overall, the five disciplines provide a framework for focusing the effort to develop the capacity to lead (Senge, 1990). Those invested in school improvement need to be developed into knowledgeable decision makers by a capable

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leader who has the personal capacity to continually learn and grow. Although these brief guidelines cannot include every aspect of implementing systems thinking, they do provide a framework for moving from theory to practice. By using systems thinking to tackle the challenges of the future, an organization can learn to develop more effective practices and long-term solutions to problems.

There is, however, disagreement on the applicability, morality, and feasibility of participative management, including the systems concept. Wheatley (1992) tells us many critiques are offered regarding the current growing shift toward participative management. Because it is based on democratic principles it may be nontransferable to other cultures. It also may be a sophisticated way to manipulate workers. Further, relationship-based problems, such as how to get people to work well together, how to honor and benefit from diversity, how to get teams working together quickly and efficiently, and how to resolve conflicts, can be confusing and hard to manage. Leaders are being encouraged to include stakeholders, evoke followership, and empower others. Earlier, when the focus was on tasks, people were the annoying inconvenience. Leaders thought about situational leadership--how the situation could affect the choice of styles. The team learning approach has caused a different understanding of leadership to emerge. Despite criticisms, it seems clear that the era of the rugged individual has been replaced by the era of the team player.

Other organizational theories. Managers have been trained to focus on ethereal organizational qualities such as culture, values, vision, and ethics. Wheatley (1992) said that although these can be experienced they can be difficult to explain explicitly. The concept of field creation, filling space with the messages an organization cares about,

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produces a developed field with the capacity to shape and direct energy. These fields can change in content and shape through individual activity. This "field creation" is similar to Senge's belief that an organization's vision grows as a by-product of individual visions and a by-product of ongoing conversations. Wheatley adds: "We know that the best way to build ownership is to give over the creation process to those who will be charged with its implementation. We are never successful if we merely present a plan in finished form to employees" (p. 66).

The four organizational functions that Parsons (1960) claimed were necessary for organizational effectiveness and survival--goal achievement (an organization's ability to define its objectives and mobilize its resources toward their attainment), integration (the level of social solidarity that exists among an organization's members), adaptation (the organization's ability to control its relations with its environment), and latent (the cultural patterns, motivations, and commitment of an organization's members)--were recently examined by Pounder, et al. (1995). Their findings were consistent with the theoretical framework of leadership as an organizational quality. Leadership did vary across schools, but the variation was moderate.

Total leadership in schools is associated with school performance, according to Pounder, et al. (1995) and overall leadership in schools is related to the level of both goal achievement and latency in schools. Organizational leadership affects organizational performance by shaping the organization of work and building commitment among participants. Leadership that shapes the organization of work is predictive of student outcomes. The leadership of principals is positively related to social integration, but integration is negatively related to student achievement. This is contrary to the

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researchers' theoretical framework, which indicates that leadership enhances the social integration of school organizations, which, in turn, enhances performance. However, job satisfaction was used as the definition of social integration; the researchers suggest that a measure of group solidarity might more validly capture the integration construct.

## Decision Making

Research on decision making is sparsely described in the leadership literature. Senge (1990) claims that people are developed into knowledgeable decision makers by a leader who has the personal capacity to continually learn and grow. Another noted scholar in the field, Wheatley (1992), describes decision making as a participative process where management empowers others. Katz (1974), well known as a leadership author in the 1950s, claims leaders must develop intergroup skills in high levels of management and internal intragroup skills in lower to middle management, and utilize these skills with conceptual, human, and technical skills to make decisions.

As described above, team leadership authors Katzenbach and Smith (1993) describe the team decision-making process as a group making necessary trade-offs and decisions about how to proceed; after they have identified the problems and opportunities and evaluate the options, they have to move forward. Teams need some members with these skills to start the process, although the authors believe many develop them best on the job.

In his leadership research, Rost (1991) defines team decision making as noncoercive, not power-based, authoritarian, or dictatorial; yet leaders influence decisions. Sergiovanni (1992) is more descriptive but may be considered more elusive as well. He

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says trust and integrity must be built before allowing others to assume leadership roles. In addition, Sergiovanni remarks that democracy is an attribute, along with group authority, group commitment, consensus and accountability. Leithwood (1994) and Tichy (1990) both draw from Burns, and their concepts of decision making are somewhat complementary. Leithwood says collaboration is essential, and decision making is to be shared. Tichy indicates leaders must mobilize and get commitment from the entire organization. Bolman (l99l) uses terms such as facilitative and empowering, combining multiple frames, knowing the limits.

Although educational researchers are specific about the constructs of decision making, they are inconsistent. Very few translate decision-making theories into practice. On the other hand, organizational theorists provide a plan for decision making through the systems thinking disciplines. They describe the discipline of team learning as the method by which a leader can develop an effective, responsible means of decision making with the followers. Along with the other disciplines of the systems approach, team learning may govern how decisions will be made and carried out by the group. Organizational theorists stress a meshing of members, participative management, leadership meshed among members, and relationships as key to team learning.

This discipline of team learning is described by Senge (l990) as insightful thinking, coordination, action, dialogue, and discussion of issues. These guidelines help determine how conflict is handled. Team members are encouraged to network, to join other teams. From this team learning, the leader develops people into knowledgeable decision makers who have the personal capacity to continually learn and grow. Wheatley (l992) says team learning is carried out in a participative management mode, which is not situational.

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Relationships are key. From this discipline, decision making is carried out in a participative style by empowered people.

Team learning offers an approach for leaders to prepare followers to become effective decision makers. Yet successful team learning is inextricably linked to an understanding of the members' mental models, personal mastery, and systems thinking.

Just how principals can balance the decision-making process they are encouraged to use by new researchers with the hierarchical model of leadership still being utilized in schools has yet to be answered. Such balance appears to be an impossible task. One or the other may have to be chosen. If both are used, a question arises as to the conflict this may create in and of itself. Along with other increases in principals' duties, the time commitment necessary for shared decision making creates additional pressure on the principal. Yet the world is changing. Values are changing radically, including leadership. The transformation of leadership to a postindustrial teamwork has barely begun (Rost, 1991).

## Summary

Leadership has been the thrust of recent research by such organizational theorists as Wheatley (1992) and Senge (1990), whose work has influenced Ogawa (1995) and O'Toole (1995). Noted educational leadership researchers such as Sergiovanni (1992), Tichy (1990), Bolman (1991), Patterson (1993) and Leithwood (1994) have added their perspectives of what is happening in education administration.

A pattern of concepts emerges from the works of these well-known thinkers. The organizational theorist group coined the term "disciplines" to describe the major

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assumptions of a new way of looking at leadership. Educational theorists tend to describe four of the five elements of the same basic concept: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, and shared vision. (Shared vision is absent in the work of Bolman. Schon, and Leithwood.) Educational researchers do not describe a parallel to the discipline of team learning, nor is it addressed as significant to leadership in education; however, as the matrix at the end of this chapter shows, they do include indices of attributes that may contribute to team learning.

Although noted educational researchers seem to recognize and agree to a participative form of decision making, a model has not been proposed for developing a decision-making process in schools. Despite the parallels, it is clear that the school environment would require a significant change to adopt the five disciplines included in Senge's systems thinking model. A matrix of educational researchers' and organizational theorists' thinking as it relates to the five disciplines is included at the end of this chapter, which helps identify the similarities and differences in systems thinking in their contributions. (See Table 1.)

Women leaders hold characteristics Regan and Brooks (1995) call collaborative and participatory styles of leadership. Further, women place value on inclusion and connection, have a strong caring ethic and value relationships. Because these qualities, described by the authors as feminist attributes of leadership, appear in most studies as highly effective in team decision making, females were selected as the gender to study. This also helps limit the variables and increases the possibility of finding effective team decision making taking place in their schools.

*Table 1. Major Authors and Systems Thinking Disciplines*

| *Author* | *Systems Thinking* | *Personal Mastery* | *Mental Models* | *Shared Vision* | *Team Learning* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| *Author* | *Systems Thinking* | *Personal Mastery* | *Mental Models* | *Shared Vision* | *Team Learning* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Senge** | - How learning organizations think think about the world<br>- Wholeness<br>- Circular | - Focus energy<br>- Deepen vision<br>- Develop patience<br>- See reality objectively<br>- Personal objectively motivation<br>- Generate/sustain creative tension | - How we understand and take action<br>- Reflection<br>- Assumptions<br>- Influence | - It's the "what"<br>- Group commitment | - Thinking insightfully about complex issues<br>- Innovative<br>- Coordinated action<br>- Team members on other teams |
| **Wheatley** | - Fluid<br>- Nonlinear<br>- Wholeness<br>- Participative | - Stay creative<br>- Focus<br>- Meaning | - Purpose<br>- Strong capacity | - The vision of the organization from all individuals | - Participative management<br>- Followership<br>- Relationships are key<br>- Not situational |
| **Ogawa** | - Leadership shapes systems<br>- Leadership is systemic<br>- Flows throughout<br>- It shapes the organization of work | - Meshed among members<br>- Shared reality<br>- Ethnocentric<br>- The reality of the situation evolves from definition from colleagues | - Culture shaped by leader<br>- Relation to culture is something organization is<br>- External environment<br>- We choose domains through our conceptions<br>- Commitment<br>- Develop solidarity | - Meshed leadership across and within organization | - All members can lead<br>- All can affect performance |

*Table 1. (continued)*

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Table 1. (continued)

| *Author* | *Systems Thinking* | *Personal Mastery* | *Mental Models* | *Shared Vision* | *Team Learning* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tichy** | - Change agents<br>- Lifelong learning<br>- Elastic strategies | Visionaries | Cultural value (value driven) | Not power wielding | Technical design |
| **Bolman** | - All 4 kinds<br>- Multiple integrational | Also political (human resource) | - Values<br>- Rights<br>- Rituals<br>- Symbolic<br>- Reflective | | - Interactive<br>- Structural<br>- Rational approach |
| **Schon** | Creates learning systems | Internal commitment | Changes in values | | - Joint control and inquiry<br>- Contingent reward |
| **Leithwood** | Restructure of systems for good accomplishment | Identify and articulate a vision | Cultural (fosters acceptance of group goals) | | - Structure<br>- Shares decisions |
| **Katzenbach & Smith** | Discussion within and across organizations | Complementary skills, problem-solving and decision making skills | Differ, but each image needs to produce consistent meanings | Committed to a common purpose, goals, approach | Work together interchangeably on continuous improvement |

*Table 1. (continued)*

| Author | Systems Thinking | Personal Mastery | Mental Models | Shared Vision | Team Learning |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Table 1. (continued)

| *Author* | *Systems Thinking* | *Personal Mastery* | *Mental Models* | *Shared Vision* | *Team Learning* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Patterson** | - Wholeness-systems/thinking<br>- Focus on systems, not people<br>- Learn evolvement and connection to related systems | - Reality<br>- Deeper understanding<br>- Diversity | Reflection on ownself and others | Group think | - Participative<br>- Group think |
| **O'Toole** | Design | Tension | Composition | Balance | - Harmony<br>- Leaders must decide how to make decision (respect for people)<br>- Participatory |
| **Rost** | - Intend real change<br>- Multidirectional | Develop mutual purposes | - Relationships built on influence<br>- Reflection | Leaders and followers are in a relationship | |
| **Sergiovanni** | Building a learning community is new kind of leadership talk | Vision frames our views and others views | Attitudes and values inform our leaders | Leadership belongs to everyone | Moral commitment |
| **Katz** | - Conceptual skill<br>- Way of thinking (innate) | -Visualization<br>-Relationship of business to industry | Human skill | Conceptual skill | Technical skill |

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Literature on systems thinking and recent educational research provided a framework for the attempt to determine to what extent women elementary school principals, who are involved in the NCA accreditation process, think about and implement team decision making in an environment historically not supportive of participative processes. Several matrices linked the various behaviors of six elementary principals involved in the NCA goal selection step to the five disciplines of systems thinking. One matrix also helped identify behaviors not directly connected to any of the five disciplines.

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# CHAPTER THREE

# METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

The general purpose of this study was to determine to what extent female elementary principals think about and implement team decision making in NCA goal-setting. A qualitative research design was selected. This design was used to address the major research question as I believed it would be effective in carrying out the study, based on the findings of research design authors such as Yin (1989) and Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Upon choosing a case study design, which is descriptive in nature, three data sources were developed: NCA artifacts, focus group interviews and principal interviews. The Michigan NCA State Committee office offered information to guide me in principal selection according to specific criteria and provided artifacts such as the visiting team reports and annual reports. Focus groups of teachers took place in each principal's school as a form of data source. Two to three in-depth interviews were held with each principal as another means of data collection.

During the process of data collection, data analysis occurred which helped formulate questions for further clarification or expansion. Further analysis allowed for interpretations of the principals' team decision-making efforts and for conclusions and

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implications to be drawn from the themes as they emerged from the analysis across the cases. Further description of the design, data sources, collection, and analysis follows.

## Design and Criteria

Yin (1989) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that " investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple courses of evidence are used" (p. 23). Principals' perceptions of the process they use and to what extent they use it to make decisions is the phenomenon of interest described in this paper. Since organizational contexts and individual perceptions and meanings related to decision making in goal setting are not easily separable, it was important to examine each case within its unique school context as well as to make comparisons across cases. In order to meet the criteria for valid case study research according to Yin, multiple sources of evidence are necessary. Three primary data sources were used: interview data from principals; focus group interviews of three to five of each principal's staff members regarding their perceptions of the building's team decision making; and artifacts from the Michigan NCA state office, specifically, annual reports and visiting team reports.

Identifying sites in which team decision making occurred was important. Schools which had completed one cycle of outcomes accreditation had involved staff and school community members in the process of decision making. Equally necessary was the selection of female school principals according to specific criteria. Women principals, although fewer in number, are perceived to be more effective leaders than their male administrative counterparts (Sergiovanni, 1992). The NCA state office personnel

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identified 11 female elementary principals located in the southeast quadrant of lower Michigan whose public schools had undergone at least 1 cycle of Outcomes Accreditation and who met the other criteria. Ultimately, 6 women were able to participate in the study.

## Data Collection and Analysis

For this qualitative study three primary sources of data were used to study 6 women principals: interviews, focus groups and documents. These 3 sources of data are described in more detail below.

The following characteristics were used to identify candidates for inclusion in the study:

* principal of a southeastern Michigan public elementary school
* NCA member school for at least 5 years
* completed 1 cycle of NCA Outcomes Accreditation
* school had only 1 administrator
* female

The southeastern Michigan geographic area offered the highest concentration of NCA member public schools from which to select principals with the specific criteria and assisted in minimizing travel and time constraints. Principals were selected from a list recommended by the state office personnel of NCA, who identified them as meeting the above criteria. The principals listed were also considered successful building principals. The requirement that a candidate have completed 1 cycle of the NCA outcomes accreditation process in an elementary school ensured that the principal had been in practice for more than 5 years and had experience in team decision making. Selection of

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principals who practiced in one-administrator buildings ensured that team leadership practices reported by staff members were indeed practices of the principal and not of another administrator.

Characteristics of female leaders are referred to by Regan and Brooks (1995) as feminist attributes of leadership. These include collaborative and participatory leadership styles, placing value on inclusion and connection, a strong caring ethic, and valuing relationship. Other research by Gilligan (1982) found women's development leading to a morality based on relationship and responsibility rather than a focus on masculine values of separation and competition. Helgesen (1990) identified the values of inclusion and connection as valuable leadership qualities for organization in the next century. Further, Hurty (1995) defined women's leadership as "connective, persuasive, and collaborative" (p. 400). Because these attributes appeared in most studies as effective in team decision making, and limiting the variables would benefit the study, female candidates were selected.

Research conducted by Dunlap and Schmuck (1995) points out that women enter administration after a longer career in teaching than men have and use their leadership skills to bring about significant change and growth in the schools. This finding reinforces the need to better understand the experiences women have and how they affect their leadership in schools.

Using additional variables, such as the location of the school (urban, suburban, rural) and socio-economic status of the student population, was not possible because of the small pool of candidates. The original list of 25 qualified schools was non-gender specific. Only 11 candidates were female; of those 11, two principals moved to other

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districts, and 1 moved mid-year to another position in another district. Of the remaining 8, one principal's mother was quite ill, and the principal was not sure of her availability for interviewing. Another principal claimed she was too pressured by other demands and felt she could not devote any time to the project. The 6 remaining principals were agreeable and eager to start the interview process.

"Bobbie" quickly decided to be involved in this study; she saw it as a chance to learn more about herself. Her school is considered metropolitan and is southwest of Detroit; she has been principal there for 8 years. The school population requires only 1 administrator. "Cindy" also did not hesitate to agree to become part of this study. Her school, in northeastern metropolitan Detroit, has more than 600 students, but she is the lone administrator, although she has a full-time counselor assigned to her building to help with some nonadministrative duties. Her experience as a principal in this district spans 6 years. "Ernestine's" school is located near Cindy's, and has about 400 students. She has been in administration for 11 years, the past 6 as a principal. "Debbie" is principal of a building with fewer than 400 students in a community which could be classified as suburban, near Flint. She is in her sixth year as principal as well. "Nancy" has been principal the longest of the six; she has 11 years of experience in her school of about 350 students, located in southwestern metropolitan Detroit. "Rita's" school is situated in a university town and has about 400 students. She is in her 6th year of administration. Although all of the schools had been accepted into the NCA accreditation program for at least 5 years, Nancy's and Bobbie's schools had been members of NCA for well over 10 years.

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Data Sources

The three sources of data used were interviews of the principals, focus groups and artifacts. The interviews, consisting of 2 to 3 sessions each planned to last about 45 minutes, began in each principal's office. Questions were designed to be open-ended, and transcripts were reviewed and returned to the principal after each session for clarity and revision if necessary. The focus groups were conducted with 3 to 5 teachers from the NCA team of the school. These took place either before or after school, and consisted of a 45 minute, 10 question session, focusing on team decision making in the process of goal selection. Artifacts from the state committee's NCA office consisted of annual reports prepared by the school, and the visiting team report, which was prepared by the external peer group of teachers and chair, whose purpose it was to validate the school's progress. All 3 sources addressed the phenomenon of triangulation (Denzin, 1978) and provided the means by which data could be compared. Using different modes of inquiry offered a way to question conflicting data as well as show confirming data. Yin (1989) stated that using multiple sources of evidence in a case study allows the researcher to review and analyze the data together so that the case study's findings are based on the convergence of information from different sources, not on quantitative or qualitative data alone ( p. 96).

Interviews of principals. Two to 3 semi-structured interviews, each lasting at least 45 minutes, were conducted with each principal. The 1st interview concentrated on what principals thought about in their practice as it related to decision making. The 2nd interview was designed to be conducted about two weeks later and concentrated on how principals saw their decision-making practice in metaphors and how they applied the practice, including any enhancements, constraints, and missing or additional factors. The

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2nd interview and 3rd, if necessary, allowed more open-ended responses to team decision-making queries. Most of the interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed into computer text files. (See Appendix A.)

Although basic questions were used in the interviews, opportunities arose to probe further by asking for clarification, requesting details, and asking for examples of experiences through report or story format. Linkages seemed to appear among the principals' stories as the interviews were held, so further exploration took place by requesting an expansion of their responses to some of the questions in the protocol.

Wolcott (1994) indicated that in order to satisfy the challenge of validity in qualitative research, the interviewer had to listen more than talk during the interviews. In addition, taping the interview and returning the interview transcript to the interviewee for review and revision are methods to increase validity. When two to three interviews take place, one interview may inform the next, especially if linkages are sought. Therefore, when the information I gathered showed impressions, hypotheses, facts, and ideas on which there should be a follow-up, I did so in the next interview.

The design of the interview protocol provided a structure to guide the interview process and gain a clear picture of what principals think and do in team decision making. However, responses that were not part of the original protocol were pursued when I deemed it necessary, thinking that they could contribute to the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). This reasoning supported the necessity to analyze the interviews as they occurred, rather than conduct the analysis after the interviews were completed. Consequently, I reserved the right to modify aspects of the interview protocol as the

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interview evolved by encouraging further information on specific responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

In order to test the quality of the interview protocol, I piloted the questions and explorations with two elementary principals who fit the selection criteria. This step allowed me to adjust interview questions as appropriate to the research questions of the study (Seidman, 1991). Piloting may also decrease bias by testing question development, the order in which questions are asked, and presentation to the interviewees. It should be noted that the principals who helped pilot the interview protocol were not included in the case studies on which this research is based.

Focus group interviews. The purpose of the focus group is to collect qualitative data, obtain general background information, and learn how responders talk about the phenomenon of interest (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). These basic premises supported the purpose of this study. In addition, the characteristics and benefits of the focus group technique fit the needs of this study. Although interviews provided the central data collection method, focus groups allowed pursuing a broader research agenda through the type of information sought, the specificity required, and the way the information was used. Focus groups have specific characteristics:

1. Focus groups involve homogeneous people in a social interaction in a series of discussions.

2. The purpose of focus groups is to collect qualitative data from a focused discussion.

3. Focus groups are a qualitative approach to gathering information (Krueger & Morgan, 1994, p. 37).

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Multiple benefits can accrue from the use of focus groups. Data are gathered in a social environment, the cost is usually low, the process can be flexible, results are quick, and the size of a qualitative study can be increased (Krueger et al., 1994).

A focus group interview of 3 to 5 school improvement steering committee staff members took place soon after the 2nd set of principal interviews had been completed. Staff were selected on the basis of their specific roles in the NCA school improvement process. I asked each principal to request that at least 3 teachers who were on the steering committee join me in a focus group interview. Steering committee members either co-chair the schoolwide NCA accreditation process or serve as a goal committee chair. Although each focus group interview represented a single observation (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), a group setting often creates a situation in which ideas are generated serendipitously. The spontaneity and synergism generated through group discussion creates stimulations can add significantly to the collection of qualitative data. This occurred several times. To encourage this to happen, looser scrutiny was allowed in the focus groups, another benefit of the technique. However, by design the structure of the focus group interview was tighter than that of the individual interviews.

Basic questions focused on team decision making drew out the collective efforts of the group. This focus group information was documented with the use of charts that were formed as the process unfolded (see Appendix C). The charts, consisting of the 10 basic questions with group members' responses listed underneath, were posted on the walls for review and reflection and provided a means of documenting participants' comments and critiques as they talked about team decision making in their building.

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Artifacts. Documents from the state NCA office consisting of each school's annual report, OA annual report, and the visiting team chair reports were available for research purposes. The annual report and team report provided contextual data relevant to the school setting and the backgrounds of the principal and the staff. The OA annual report and visiting team chair report indicated the progress of the school improvement team with their goals. This information was approved for confidential release for research purposes by the NCA state director. Samples of these two artifacts are included in Appendix C.

## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis across cases. Examination of the literature showed that a great number of the aspects of systems thinking were repeated in a variety of contemporary leadership theories: in transformational leadership, reflective leadership, organizational leadership, team leadership, and systems thinking leadership. Therefore, the themes of systems thinking were used as a lens through which to view the team decision-making process of principals. The conceptual framework was designed to identify these themes in the interviews and focus group experiences. A compilation of the 5 disciplines as it related to each principal's team decision-making process revealed similarities, additions, differences and omissions among the 6 principals.

The real value of qualitative research is in the process of using data rather than the process of gathering data (Wolcott, 1990). The conceptual framework, supported by the literature review, served as a guideline to identify data that seemed relevant to the study. The data then were organized and interpreted. This process brought meaning to the raw

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data in the interview transcripts (Wolcott, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Wolcott recommends qualitative data be presented in the final document as description, analysis, and interpretation. These suggestions are followed in Chapters 4 and 5.

As each interview and focus group was completed, the discussion was transcribed. I searched for general statements about the relationships among the disciplines of systems thinking and the strategies that link to this theory, along with effective team leadership techniques that emerged from the conversations. Once this step was completed, I organized and interpreted the data, comparing and contrasting data from all three sources: artifacts, principal interviews, and focus groups. This step helped further develop the categories and themes and cued me to look for other possible explanations. Finally, I outlined the findings.

Multiple case studies follow a "replication logic" (Yin, 1989, p. 53). Similar results may be obtained from the cases; therefore, replication will have taken place. Each interviewee is considered a single experiment, and the analysis constitutes a cross-case design.

It must be noted, however, that the context with which an experience is seen can be interpreted and perceived differently. Not only the writer but the reader "will bring a context of meaning and interpretation to an account or text, and will interpret it accordingly" (Altheide & Johnson, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 496). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that nothing is neutral, not our mental processes, our instruments, or our disciplines; therefore, objectivity is an illusion, but subjectivity in the usual sense is not the only alternative. She suggests we consider perspective as a more useful concept. From where we look affects what we see. Any particular focus gives only a partial result, and

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no single discipline ever gives us a complete picture. "A whole picture is an image created morphogenetically from multiple perspective" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 15).

Patton (1990) claims that the selection, design, and implementation of evaluation methods should be based flexibly and on need and responsiveness in situations, advocating a paradigm of choices. These choices favor methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality. Therefore, objectivist and subjectivist methods can be used together without problem (Greene, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As the interviews progressed and notes were reviewed after being transcribed, certain patterns or themes began to emerge. Follow-up interviews allowed for further questions to tease out more information on these themes. This flexibility was helpful in enhancing responses to certain issues or tensions across the cases as they emerged. In addition, an attempt was made to use my own experience as an elementary principal to help interpret and understand the principals in their talk.

This awareness of the position of the principal plays a significant role as pointed out in a study by Manning (1987) of police call codes. Although he analyzed codes by indexing them, only his extensive knowledge of the police organization and culture provided the knowledge for the meaning of these codes. "He knows the work, the language, and the situations, typical, routine, and unique. As he clearly acknowledges, he could not have rendered a valid sociological account without this awareness" (Altheide & Johnson, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 497).

With this in mind, subjective notes that I made before and after the interview were included with the taped interviews and transcribed onto computer file. Then the printouts were analyzed by searching for key terms and descriptive words that indicated a

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knowledge and practice of the disciplines of systems thinking as they relate to team decision making. For instance, when principals were asked about techniques in team leadership, this part of the conversation revealed further findings on their practices in decision making. As this information was placed in a matrix design, similarities and differences appeared.

Taking into consideration what the teachers had to share in the focus groups allowed for a more objective viewpoint to be created and a more critical view to evolve. Lincoln (1985) claims, "Multiple perspectives are needed so that we aren't blinded by our own biases" (p. 15). She further cautions that "we need to recognize that objectivity in its pure form is an unattainable state" (p. 108). Lincoln offers a description of objectivity and subjectivity by Scriven (1971), to help explain further, "Subjective refers to what concerns or occurs to the individual subject and his experiences, qualities and dispositions, while objective refers to what a number of subjects or judges experience, in short, to the public domain" (p. 95). That objectivity, in expanding the conversation, can be threatened by relying exclusively on one single observer.

According to Creswell (1994), scholars contend that qualitative research is different from quantitative methodology in 10 identified characteristics inherent in the qualitative design. One of the assumptions indicates that the researcher seeks believability based on coherence, insight and utility (Eisner, 1991), along with trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), through a process of verification rather than through traditional validity and reliability measures. In-depth interviewing, if done in a manner of trust established between the interviewer and the subject, can lead to realistic and intuitive interpretation of the participants' perceptions and experiences. Van Maanen's (1979) standpoint is that

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qualitative strategies emphasize an interpretive approach where data are worked with and on, to pose and resolve research questions. Therefore, he claims, "There is nothing hard or soft, objective or subjective, about a qualitative orientation; within its reach are found a broad range of craft-like approaches to particular research problems" (p. 253). This broad-based view reflects the need for objectivity and truthfulness, which is critical to both research traditions but allows for judging a qualitative study to be different.

When analyzing focus group data, the data are developed mechanically, which is basically "cutting and pasting" the material into categories and concepts. The interpretive aspect lies in determining criteria and coding the data (Knodel, 1993). The conceptual model, with the circles depicting systems-thinking disciplines, provided the tool for identifying and categorizing the data.

Focus group information had been charted onto large sheets of paper as the conversations evolved, so that their contributions were visible and could be reviewed as the questions were asked. The sheets of paper were taped on a wall or window in the room as the interview progressed; the complete set of questions and responses was reviewed with the group toward the end of the interview to clarify and finalize the data.

According to Knodel (1993), accuracy of the analysis is enhanced if the analyst(s) is intimately involved with data collection by being present at the focus group sessions and possibly serving as moderator. Further, Knodel says, "This eliminates considerably the distance between the analyst and subject being studied that so often marks quantitative social science research in which only interviewers and not the eventual analysts have contact with respondents" (p. 50). Because I was the moderator and facilitator of the

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focus groups, I had the opportunity to make field notes after the process, allowing me a desirable level of intimacy with data collection, and thereby enhancing the data.

Artifacts from the NCA state office consisted of annual reports, OA annual reports, and visiting team reports. The annual reports, due every year from each NCA member school, are completed by the school (often the principal) and signed by the co-chairs and superintendent before being sent to the state accreditation office. The annual report requests data regarding the context of the school (i.e., changes in school faculty, enrollment) and the OA annual report asks for specific information from the school regarding its accreditation progress in the past year, including the level of progress the school has made.

## Ethical Considerations

A letter was secured from each principal indicating her agreement to participate in the study. The principals' names were changed, along with details about their school settings, to enhance confidentiality. To further ensure confidentiality, I was the sole interviewer, transcriber and data decoder. The same method of data decoding and reporting was followed with focus group interviews as with principal interviews. All data were secured in locked files. Each interview, once transcribed, was sent to the participant for review and clarification purposes, if needed. Principals were asked to make comments or changes where necessary and return them to me for revision.

## Written Presentation

In Chapter 4, each woman in the study is identified by the name of a plant or tree, which I use as a metaphor to describe her strengths and/or limitations as a school leader in

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the team decision-making process. I then present the reasons for each metaphor and describe the setting of the particular school, the principal's leadership role, and the principal's discussion of decision making and team decision making. Each principal's decision/team decision-making models are included at the end of each narrative.

## Limitations

Several limitations occur in this study. First, the interviews reflect the self-reported perspectives, beliefs, and values of each participant and are, of course, subject to self-report bias. This limitation was minimized by the data collected in the focus groups, from which I analyzed the actual behavior as viewed by subordinates versus the reported beliefs, values and perspectives of the principals. My experience as an elementary principal cannot be discounted or considered a limitation with the self-reporting style either. Qualitative evaluators "acknowledge if not celebrate the influential presence of their own selves in the inquiry process, and seek in their work primarily to augment practical program understanding," thereby emphasizing context but not generalizations, rather relying heavily on qualitative methods to construct meaning" (Greene, 1994, p. 537). This study was concerned solely with principals' thinking and behavior in team decision-making situations. "Even though espoused theories may not accurately represent what these leaders actually do, they are likely to influence the expectations these leaders have of themselves as leaders as well as their behavior" (Bensimon, 1989, p. 109). In other words, the responses to questions asked of the principals about their decision making may not accurately reflect what is taking place but may, in turn, bias their actions.

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Second, a small number of participants from a finite geographic area was included in this study, thereby limiting its generalizability. However, as noted earlier, generalization is not one of the characteristics of qualitative research. "Qualitative work aims to disclose and reveal, not merely to order and predict" (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 256). Creswell (1994) further explains qualitative research as "an emerging design, not a static design, wherein the categories develop during the study, rather than are predetermined before the study begins" (p. 44). The schools selected were of varying socio-economic circumstances, ethnic and racial mixes, sizes and locations, and were headed by female principals who varied in their ethnicity as well as their length of experience. These variations allow for some application of the findings to other schools.

Third, interview bias can enter when utilizing qualitative techniques through nonverbal cues by the interviewer and through question presentation and development (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To minimize this bias, pilot interviews were conducted, which provided healthy feedback on the questions and the interviewer's style. According to Van Maanen (1979), "qualitative work is, by design, open-ended" (p. 253). Open-ended questions decreased bias as well, since they allow interviewees to expand on their own responses. Presenting transcribed documents to the interviewees to review for revisions and accuracy further decreased bias.

Fourth, an experience bias may limit the study. In other words, a wide range of years of experience may create a notable impact. Of the six principals, one had significantly more experience as an administrator than the others. Although all the other principals had practiced for at least 5 years, one who had entered the principalship most recently indicated she felt she had more prior knowledge in team decision making to help

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guide her in this process than did the more experienced principals. However, data compilation and analysis showed that the more experienced principals had been able to figure out on their own, through research and trial and error, methods of team decision making similar to the ones practiced by the principals who were newer to their position.

Another limitation in the study is the participants being of one gender and the school context being dissimilar. Although a focus on both genders in team decision making is possible, the effort to only consider females was the emphasis of the study. Other potential limitations in interviewing include but are not limited to the difficulty of remembering what is said and accurately reconstructing events and experiences, and the possibility of miscomprehending responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). To minimize bias of this nature, I endeavored to establish a trusting relationship with the principals, encouraged frank discussion, and returned each transcribed interview to the principals for clarification or changes.

The use of focus groups brought potential limitations as well (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Again, the small number of participants limits generalization to a larger population. Responses of members of the group were not independent of one another; results therefore can be affected by a dominant or opinionated member. This phenomenon, however, did not seem to occur with any significance. Also, the open-ended nature of responses often makes summarization and interpretation difficult, and the moderator can send cues to participants which could bias the results. Caution was taken to minimize these possibilities by a careful phrasing of responses as they were written down and a review of responses near the end of each focus group session. Charted

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responses were posted as each question was completed, for visual reminders and further clarification of the discussion as the meeting was reviewed at the end.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## WOMEN IN THE GARDEN

Mary, Mary, quite contrary
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells and cockle shells
And pretty maids all in a row.

### Introduction

Gardening presents an apt metaphor for the process of creating and developing a vision for a school, then leading a staff in making decisions on the goals, strategies and interventions that are needed to produce a good crop of student outcomes. Despite Mary's facile reply in the nursery rhyme quoted above, having a successful garden is not simple; it depends on many factors, including the weather, the quality of the seed and soil, fertilizing, pest control, and the knowledge and care of the gardener. So, too, do many variables affect the results of participative decision making: the suitability of the vision; the willingness, interest, and knowledge of the staff; the support of other stakeholders; and especially the team leadership and facilitating skills of the master gardener, the principal. The data gathered and analyzed for this study show to what extent female elementary principals think about, plant and grow a vision for their schools and work with staff as they think about and implement team decision making within the framework of systems thinking.

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Because of my interest in decision making as it relates to the goal-setting process in NCA accreditation programs, female principals from NCA-accredited schools were selected. I interviewed each principal two to three times, employing a protocol that probed for stories or examples of practice that would explain, in detail, the leadership role of each woman and the decision-making strategies that she used. At the beginning of the first interview, each woman was asked to review, and draw on paper, the decision-making model or process she used. The interview continued with additional questions about decision making and team leadership concepts. Questions were open-ended and encouraged story telling, allowing the principals to give examples of their leadership and decision-making processes. Each interview lasted at least 45 minutes and was tape recorded with the principal's permission, then later transcribed into computer files. In the second interview, and the third interview if necessary, we reviewed the previous interview for clarification and made any changes before continuing with open-ended questions.

In the focus groups, comprising three or more steering committee members, 10 related questions were asked about the goal-setting process of NCA. Responses during the focus group sessions, which lasted about 45 minutes, were charted, and similarly tape recorded and transcribed. Data were used from NCA annual reports, NCA-OA annual reports and visiting team reports provided by the Michigan NCA office to support or negate information received in both individual and focus group interviews. (See Appendix A for samples of annual report forms from NCA.) These 3 data sources were rich bases of information for the study.

This chapter begins with an introduction of the principals who participated in this study. Then the unique stories of each principal's decision making are recounted. These

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principals, dubbed Ernestine, Bobbie, Cindy, Debbie, Nancy, and Rita, describe their schools, leadership, metaphors for team decision making, views of systems thinking, and decision making/team decision making conversations. Their accounts illustrate how they think about and practice decision making. Extending the gardening metaphor used at the beginning of this chapter, each woman is given the name of a plant that represents her leadership and practice. As part of each section, subsections are included to amplify the major themes in the accounts. Some principals responded to the interview request for a model by describing decision making with one model and team decision making with a separate model. Others described their models for decision making and team decision making as one and the same.

## The Garden: Blooming Where They Are Planted

*Look at my arm! I have (plowed) and planted*
*and gathered into barns...and aren't I a woman?*
--Sojourner Truth

The 6 women who participated in this research discussed their team decision making experiences and how they think about, learn about, and practice team decision making. As they did so, they described their models of decision making and team decision making and told stories that framed their team leadership experiences. As they talked, one example of decision making led into another, exposing rich detail and adding to the pool of data that supports their thinking and action as leaders in the decision-making process.

An avid flower gardener, I liken gardens to the position of principal. Like principals, gardeners must work with many variables. Each planting, growing and

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harvesting season teaches us how to be even better gardeners the next season. We learn and grow. Plants are all unique, like people, and are affected by environmental conditions, among others. I saw a resemblance in each principal to the characteristics of a specific plant, as it related to her qualities of leadership, so I christened each one with the name of the plant that reflected these likenesses. Like the plants they were metaphorically linked to, the women have unique, yet similar, characteristics and have given meaning and value to decision making in both unique and similar ways. Each woman "bloomed where she was planted," depending on her own skills, experiences, abilities and beliefs. Table 2 gives the pseudonym of each principal, her plant metaphor, ethnic background, age category, the characteristics of the school setting, her level of education, her tenure in education leadership, and the current NCA process the school has chosen.

During the interviews with these women, it was apparent that all but one appreciated being able to share their thoughts and beliefs. All interviews lasted longer than the time originally planned; all but one woman were quite willing to continue talking even when I brought up the fact that we had gone past the time frame to which we had agreed. The principals seemed to be aware that they were thinking out loud as they responded to interview questions, and as they verbalized their thoughts, they also made adjustments. All of the women found developing a decision-making model a most useful exercise to them; a few shared their models with staff to obtain feedback from them and further validate that this is what they actually do.

As the interviews began to sprout the seeds of how principals go about the task of decision making, commonalities began to appear, including ones indicating struggles the principals have with schools as systems. Differences in how they learned about and

*Table 2. Characteristics of Principals in this Study*

Table 2. Characteristics of Principals in this Study

| Principal Pseudonym & Metaphor | Heritage | Age | School Characteristics | | | Education Beyond Bachelor Degree | Principal Tenure | Present NCA Process |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | School Population | Level | Socio-economic | | | |
| **Ernestine** Madam Galem Trumpet Vine | Black | Early 50s | 500 | 3-5 | Lower middle to middle income | M.A., Special Ed. Ph.D., Ed. Admin. | 11 yrs. assistant principal 6 yrs. principal | Transitions |
| **Bobbie** Granny Smith Apple Tree | German/ English | Early 50s | 300 | K-5 | Lower middle to middle income | Ph.D., Ed. Admin. | 11 yrs. principal | Transitions |
| **Cindy** Siberian Iris | Black | Mid 40s | 600 | K-2 | Lower middle to middle income | M.A., Ed. Guidance Ed. Spec., Ed. Admin. | 6 yrs. | Transitions |
| **Debbie** Gaeity Ajuga (Bugleweed) | German/ Swiss/ Ukranian | Late 40s | 300 | K-3 | Lower middle | Ed. Spec., Ed. Admin. | 2 yrs. assistant principal 6 yrs. principal | Outcomes Accreditation |
| **Nancy** White Oak | Ukranian | Late 50s | 350 | K-5 | Lower middle to middle income | M.A.+ 18 hours supervision | 11 yrs. | Transitions |
| **Rita** English Ivy | Black | Late 40s | 400 | K-5 | Middle to upper middle income | Ed. Spec., Ed. Admin. | 6 yrs. | Outcomes Accreditation |

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approached the changing responsibilities of decision making with staff also became evident. As I listened to each woman and her staff, wrote notes and transcribed the data, I found myself examining my own experiences in decision making.

The following individual compositions portray each of the elementary principals in this study and are drawn from a combination of interviews, notes, focus group responses, and drawings developed to describe their thinking and behavior in decision making in their roles as principals. Patterns and variations are drawn from the conceptual framework of systems thinking and the techniques identified as significant in developing effective teams. The relationship between what the principals espouse as beliefs in their decision-making models (what the seed package directions are) and what they practice as interpreted from their stories (what the mature plant looks like), metaphors and focus group perceptions are described in the final chapter. Conclusions, implications of the study, and suggestions for future research are also described in Chapter 5. To ensure confidentiality, fictitious names are used for the principals, and no school names are mentioned. Conceptual drawings of decision-making models and team decision making models are identified as such and are included at the end of each woman's story.

## Ernestine: Madam Galem Trumpet Vine

### The Woman

The trumpet vine Madam Galem is fast-growing, hosting showy, trumpet-shaped flowers of orange or red from midsummer into fall. It must be cut back hard to control its growth. A clinger, it needs support such as a trellis. This sun-loving vine will continue to rebloom lightly until frost. The multiple blossoms that grow on this 20- to 30- foot plant

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attract hummingbirds. Madam Galem is an appropriate symbol of the presence of this woman.

Ernestine is a stately, well-dressed black woman in her forties who emits an elegance and elan that seem to support the calming effect she has created in her office environment. In her leadership role, she appears to play a significant part in team decision making. Her staff has the impression that central office is the entity that calls the shots and could be viewed as the trellis, directing which way the vine will grow. The stateliness and presence of the woman Ernestine, who wears flowing, impressive clothes, resembles the vivid trumpet vine blossoms, which cannot be ignored in a garden.

The School Setting

Directly off a busy highway near middle-income homes in a northeastern metropolitan area near Detroit, the school is a sprawling, one-story brick building with wide hallways and large, spacious classrooms. The school was built in the 1950s with superior materials, and is well maintained. The school is on a street that angles onto a busy four-lane highway leading to the downtown area. It is near businesses and light industry. Houses nearby seem to belong to people in the middle-to low-middle-income bracket, although the school draws from the whole community as a grade 3 through 5 school.

I parked in a nearly empty lot, because school had been out for about an hour. I tried the main door, knocked on some windows, then went to the side entrance where I repeated my efforts in vain. I returned to the front and knocked again, and this time, I saw the principal walking around the corner of the hallway. She came to the door. She had

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expected me later, so she was not watching for me. The main office area is large, spacious and uncluttered, with numerous desks. A conference area and principal's office, plus several other small offices, branch off this main area. The vestibule is wide and airy; bulletin boards are posted with student work.

The principal's office is off the main office. Its atmosphere creates a haven from the bustle and noise of an elementary school. Blinds on the window control light and interference from the nearby street; fluorescent lighting is not used. The principal has purposely installed indirect lighting and a lamp for softer light in the room. Quiet meditational music plays from a multi-disk unit on a shelf. Sculpture and fine pottery are on display on a shelf, along with books on educational topics. Posters and certificates, tastefully arranged, partially fill one wall. Although the office space could not be called large, furniture is appropriately placed, with comfortable conference chairs near the desk. The principal's desk is neat, but indicators such as file folders and papers show that work is done here. The atmosphere encourages thoughtful conversation and a sense of calm.

Ernestine says she purposely designed her office to elicit that kind of feeling in her visitors. She says it makes a difference to her and to students, parents, and other visitors. Expounding further on her space, Ernestine claims she spends a lot of time in the office and wants it to be as pleasant as possible.

Her experience includes 11 years as an assistant principal and almost 6 years as a principal. Her district reconfigured the elementary schools recently; now the school holds about 500 students in grades 3 to 5. Ernestine earned a Ph.D. in Educational Administration several years ago. The elementary schools in this district are all in the second cycle of NCA. A previous attempt was made to encompass all 3 elementary

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schools with 1 set of goals, but that was unsuccessful because the individual schools could not reach consensus on goal selection.

Leadership

Ernestine describes her style of leadership as being organized, consistent, supportive, practical, the person who lays out the parameters. She says ideas are shared and discussed with respectful exchanges.

> I mean listening does not mean agreement--that other people could voice opinions. You wouldn't see eye rolling, or arms across chests. As adults, we need to talk about it and reinforce it. I say that to them because I have to hear it for myself. I would not ask my staff to work on anything I would not ask myself to do. That is something I have struggled with myself. I am opinionated. I can intellectualize, but in actuality, I forget. Listen, this person may have something to say. I do a fairly good job of that, but it has to be a continual reminder of that, particularly when most of my ideas are fairly good, so why should I have to listen to the team? A successful leader does that. She lays out the parameters, and reminds them of the rules.

Hoping to compare the image of leadership the focus group has of their principal with Ernestine's perceptions of herself, I gave them the opportunity to talk about specific principal leadership roles, but nothing was shared. Their opinions on leadership mainly focused on the directives that central office issued to the buildings, rather than the buildings having control over their decisions. I was given the impression that the teachers saw the process of team decision making as a farce, one over which Ernestine had no control, and that the recently chosen Transitions Accreditation process narrowed their involvement even more. "They [central office] asked for input, but it was already decided that we were going to take on the OA process. There was a central office view of where we were going, unbeknownst to us at the elementary and middle schools."

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No mention was made of the principal or the principal's role in the process of goal selection. The feeling seemed to be that the principal had no control over what central office did. She was only the messenger.

Ernestine recognized a similar constraint with central office:

> I guess when the decision needs to be made from the outside and you can't get an effective team going with the amount of time given, or the subject is not conducive to allow enough information, such as central office requests. It is an artificial setting; it is not real team making.

A recent situation supported what she was trying to say:

> A good example would be central ad telling me recently that we will be doing more testing on 3rd graders. This is not going to go over big, as the 3rd grade teachers are already overloaded with piloting their new program of improvement. Had we known sooner, we could have paced our grumbles. Now there will be a big roar. I have no control. If you know, you do things differently.

As the focus group discussion of the central office issue deepened, however, one teacher added:

> But then it depended on the schools. When we got into the smaller groups, strategies and interventions, then it was more of a team. Yet that is where we bogged down. But we could start to see some things happen, and that was helpful. One school had more gains than the others. Then when we made progress it was different.

Ernestine believes a successful, strong leader has other characteristics as well, and she described what she meant by that: "I allow them to grow and have the opportunity to do that. They are doing more things themselves. A successful, strong leader is one whose staff can run the building; the school can survive without the principal there." She gave an example of what she meant:

> We planned a fairly complicated procedure of dismissal for the first day of school. Well, guess what. I got a flat tire the first day of school, and didn't get here until about an hour and a half after it started. The whole routine went off without a

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Decision Making: Trimming the Vine With Research

In our discussion of decision making, Ernestine drew 2 models; 1 of which she uses for decision making, and 1 of which she uses for team decision making (see Figures 3 and 4). When asked to describe how she makes decisions, Ernestine said:

> I always begin with the end in mind. Parameters play a heavy part. The 1st thing I am concerned about is the deadline. I don't involve anyone for input until I weigh the pros and cons in a plus/delta chart. Only when I completed this step and had something to offer, do I start to gather input, unless I haven't a clue about the issue at hand. After this step, I filter it through my own thought screen. [Once through her filter] I revisit the input again if needed, then implement a final decision, assess the outcome, and make changes if needed. It can be never ending.

Ernestine learned her decision-making style through experience, trial and error, and practice, she said, although in our talk, I learned that Ernestine teaches education administration courses at her alma mater, and she finds that teaching these courses is an exercise in staying abreast of new concepts and research by doing a lot of reading. "I teach graduate classes in administration leadership, and I explain directly to students what good leaders do. I have to capsulize what I do and what I believe makes good leaders in education."

Teaching keeps her thinking about her practices as a principal and helps her to better understand team dynamics in her school. She said, "I refine my beliefs constantly." She teaches team decision making and finds that to her benefit as a practicing principal, because understanding how it works is an important part of the process.

> At first, when a group gets together, productivity is low and morale is high. As they begin to get into the problem solving, the morale goes down before it levels off with productivity. If you don't understand how that works, then you think, oh,

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Figure 3

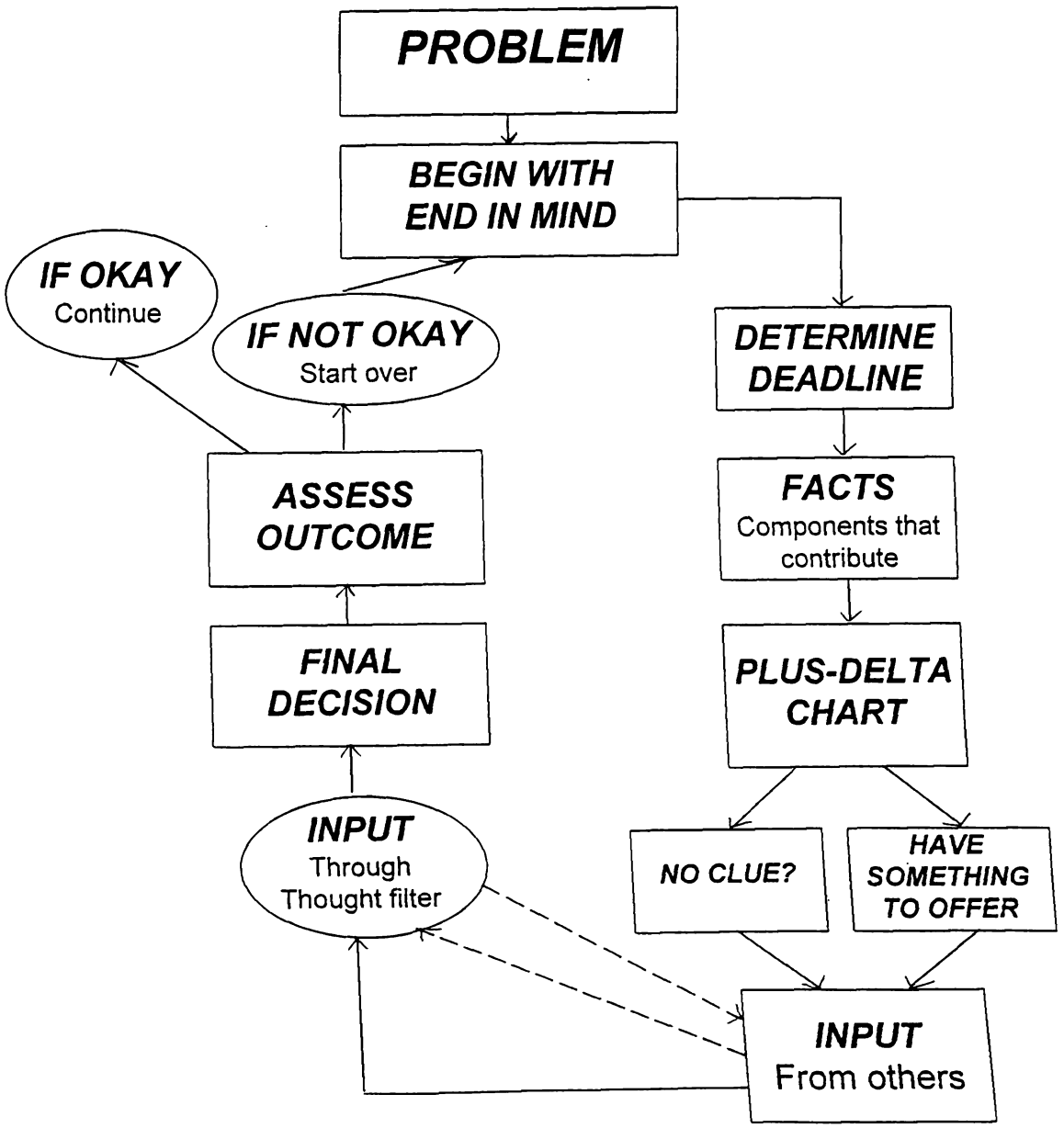


Figure 3. Ernestine's Decision-Making Model

Figure 4

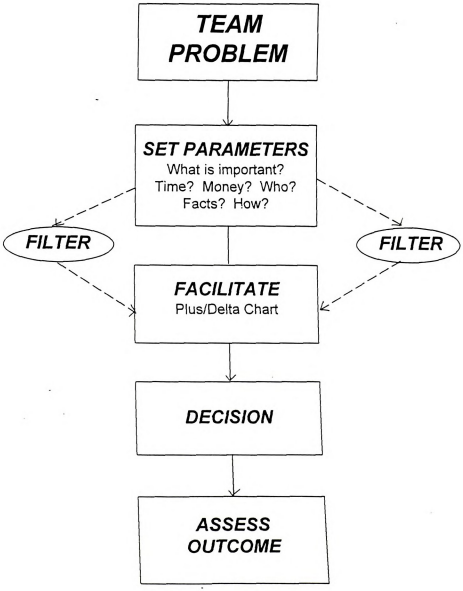


Figure 4. Ernestine's Team Decision-Making Model

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> my God, what is happening here with these people? If you do understand, when the morale goes down, you say, oh good, and you are there to help them through that spot.

Team Decision Making

When Ernestine was asked to draw how she sees herself in a team decision process, she regarded herself more as a facilitator. The entire team considers the problem, sets parameters, and, as facilitator, she processes information in the parameters through her filters in a circular fashion. A decision is then made, and an assessment of the outcome follows. She warns, however, that the process can be never ending.

To Ernestine, parameters play a heavy role in decision making and team decision making. She lists parameters specifically as facts, deadlines, components that contribute to the process. In team decision making, after a problem is identified as a team problem, Ernestine sets parameters, such as what input is needed, timeline, budget, who, what the facts are, and how the decision will be made. Her staff sees the parameters set by the central office and NCA. "If assessment shows it is not working, change it. You don't expect perfection on the first go round."

Further into the interview, Ernestine elaborated more on team decision making: "The more the people, the wider the opinions. In team decision making, I give parameters, for example, the timeline, budget, already certain goals or guidelines or whatever flexibility we might have." However, in reviewing her team decision making model, she described the team as setting the parameters in the team decision making process.

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As team decision making is implemented, Ernestine said changes occur: "We are assessing as we go. It looks good on paper, but when it involves people it is a different story. Factors that never occurred can emerge. There are different dynamics. It is a continual assessment."

When she reflected on how she had made adjustments in her thinking about team decision making, Ernestine described what she tried to do when she first came to this school. The district had completed a reconfiguration, and a portion of her staff was from the other school.

> When I was new, I was trying to pull people together to make decisions, and you just don't know the people. Two years ago, all of the elementary schools got reconfigured. When you are new, you are trying to pull people together to make a decision, and you don't know all the people. If you had enough familiarity with staff, then it is easy. But team decision making is really group dynamics. You have to know them and how to approach it at my school. It has a life of its own. It is a living entity.

Ernestine referred to the team needing to know each other and the benefits of it to team decision making:

> I don't have to work as hard. The staff knows and understands the process. They have worked in groups, set priorities and come to consensus. They understand the term. People are working better in groups. Teachers, by nature of the job, work alone, and at first they didn't know how to work together. That all takes time. They have a good working relationship with the process now and understand what needs to be done.

Metaphors from the vine: Highway, stoplight/freeway sign, and the wind. The highway is a metaphor that represents decision making for Ernestine. She views the process as a highway, with exit and entrance ramps, some going straight off, and some looping around, and with rest stops along the way.

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Originally, Ernestine said a metaphor for her decision-making process would be a stop light, explaining that its job was to indicate "OK, go ahead, caution, or stop. It still provides direction." Then, after a short pause, Ernestine said:

> Or better yet, those new signs you see now on freeways at various spots. They are electrical display signs with directions or warnings. It is a changing sign. The message changes, it is not permanent, as a highway with entrance and exit ramps, and rest stops along the way.

In our interview, Ernestine shared a story of an event that took place this past year to help show how she works with her staff on decisions.

> Two 3rd grade teachers came to me concerned with the achievement levels in their rooms. We discussed it, and agreed to go to the other five 3rd grade teachers. We all met, and as a result, have a commitment and with help from the assistant superintendent to meet for a four-and-one-half-day release time workshop to develop the plan.

Ernestine met with central office to discuss the problem, and central office arranged for the staff to meet off-site to develop changes in the curriculum, and helped with other resources as well. Ernestine said: "My job was to let the rest of the staff know what was happening, be the spokesperson, following up, supporting. I needed to deal with the parent component as well; all need explaining."

As a team leader she sees herself as the wind beneath their sails. A review of the focus group interview showed little that expanded their perceptions of their principal's involvement, other than that the principal and central office were involved in the process of decision making.

Systems thinking from the trumpet vine perspective. Ernestine is familiar with systems thinking concepts. Her view of systems thinking is one of connection and interaction: "It flows back and forth among the disciplines. You can't be very effective if

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you pulled any of them out. I couldn't even rank them. Depending on who you are with or where you are, then you go back and forth among the disciplines." Ernestine believes that all staff bring their own gifts to the group. She continues: "Other people have merit, ideas, talents, abilities. Individual thought helps you to learn and grow. Listen, this person has something to say. A successful leader lays out parameters and reminds them of the rules."

She makes a conscious effort to focus on the task at hand and give the staff choices supported by information from the best research and best practices. Letting the staff know what she sees as the link that pulls them together, she indicated, is important to share with them.

> It is important for me to find that common thread, when the staff are there, or finding the common link that unites this group. It is important for me to do it and also let the group know what that bond is, letting them do things so that they can discover it for themselves.

Ernestine believes that, for teams to be effective, "People have to assume different roles and you have to look at them in a different light." Ernestine also points out to staff when someone does something worthwhile. One evening while the teachers were in an after-school meeting, it began to snow heavily. The custodian went out and brushed all the snow off the teachers' cars before they left school. Ernestine recognized the custodian's kindness to the team, and suggested to them that they give him a pat on the back.

Communication is an important aspect of Ernestine's position. Although she indicates that staff can discover links for themselves, she agrees that she needs to let them know what she sees as well. Talking to individuals about specific situations and getting

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their input helps guide Ernestine in her decision making, but she sees it also as involving them with feedback. Not categorizing people helps her involve the whole person. Her story about the helpful custodian who brushed the snow off all the teachers' cars illustrates what she means.

> I am not just looking at what their job has to be, but who is he, such as the example of the custodian, but doing that when working with people in a group, it helps you pull out some other things. You don't categorize them by what they do. You come up with a shallow pool when there is much more available.

The focus group presses for more diverse leadership when they are in a team decision-making process. When they were asked to expand on what they meant, a teacher said, "The same people tend to be asked, or volunteer. Others just don't want to take on all that headache."

Team learning: Something to toot about. At some time in this process, Ernestine claims the team needs to learn about each other and understand where each person is coming from. This step takes time, and often the timeline is extremely tight. She gets around this step in an interesting way: "I just pull out those who are excellent representatives of the group and select those that will zero in and give good feedback. They have learned to let go of a personal hold."

Listening: Twining around mental models. Communication is the key to Ernestine's perceptions of mental models. "You need to hear the mental models, hear them," she emphasized. She shared this story to make her point:

> Even kids. I had a kid who was told to come to the office, and he disappeared. He said, "The teacher said for me to go to the end of the hall; she didn't say to the office." Was he stretching his logic? Perhaps that is how he saw it. If I don't listen, I can't help him rethink.

Expanding on this theme, Ernestine includes teachers in this discipline. "It is important to

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do that with staff; how they arrive at conclusions. I am fascinated by it, how they arrive at a conclusion and understanding how they got there."

The focus group believed that it should be suggested that central office stay out of the process of decision making and allow teachers the freedom to decide. They thought there was too much control. "I still think this was a central office thing. We may have come up with the same goals, but people didn't want to look beyond because they set the stage. We were told."

Tendrils: A shared vision. Just as tendrils twine around a trellis or arbor to hold the vines in place, Ernestine sees a shared vision as the glue that holds the school together. She states that giving people credit for their contributions is necessary, as is letting others know what their contributions are. In this regard, the NCA visitation team suggested more acknowledgement of the good work the school is accomplishing. According to Ernestine, "Celebration marks an event and brings a closure, then you move on. It should be part of the process." She adds, "Festivities do something for the spirit. Progress should be acknowledged in a team."

Ernestine sees her staff coming together as a group and individually, but notes that in a team situation the dynamics are always different. "The team has to learn about each other because we have to learn how to work together," she said. She believes the team learns by doing, because they will be the ones who will have to implement the decision. The more a team works together, the easier they find it to narrow down choices and arrive at something they agree upon.

What holds Ernestine back from good team decision making, she insists, is lack of time and information. Interestingly enough, because the focus group seems to want to

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view the process as a district directive, they see the agenda as driven from the top down, from central office. The group recommends that leadership be diversified, with a clear model and direction. The time issue arose for them as well. Ernestine says one must consider the time frame in a team decision process. Twice in her conversations she talked about brainstorming being a waste of time and more. "Sometimes brainstorming can be a waste of time, energy and trust. You need to make the most use of time."

She concurs that, although schools usually have no control over the surroundings for meetings, good gatherings can still take place if one plans and creates an atmosphere, and the time element arises once again. "The better presented, worked on, you will be more successful, depending on the time."

Ernestine may want to have her team consider joining other school improvement teams for group meetings, as suggested by the NCA team. They recommended that her school work with other elementary schools in the district, to share and learn from their experiences. The chairperson stated: "Try to find a way to meet more regularly as a committee. My perception is that you have a need to share your ideas with each other" (Visiting Team Chair Report, 1992).

The stakeholders: Who does what? Participation in the team decision making goal selection process is driven by district mandates, according to the focus group. When asked to describe the decision-making process that first time, they said: "We brainstormed the things we thought should be goals, because we looked at the possibility of doing all the same goals for all our [elementary] schools. All the schools got together to agree to the same goals, and it just didn't work. We were too big. That was another top-down thing that didn't work."

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No parents were present during the goal selection process, but Ernestine elicits parental input by informal contacts in the building with volunteers whom she knows. She agrees with other female principal participants that parent participation is difficult to develop in her school because of so many working parents. She asks teachers to identify parents who may volunteer because they knew the parents best. Parents are not on the goal selection team, but she communicates ideas to them and gets their input on building decisions if they are affected by the decision.

Ernestine described how her school had scheduled an art fair in the gym in the evening, then discovered that it was at the same time as a high school concert. She then talked to a parent who was active in the school. The parent suggested an earlier time for the fair so that parents could attend both. She described parents' view regarding school matters as peripheral, though, suggesting that they do not have all the information needed to make an informed decision.

Team decision making is seen by Ernestine as needing input; however, it needs to be kept simple, parameters should not be changed, and parents' input is important if they will be affected by the decision. She mentions simplicity and consistency more than once in regard to team decisions. She claims, "Teams are sometimes like kids with A.D.D. [attention deficit disorder]. They are all over the place unless you just put in front of them what they need to know at the moment."

The focus group offered paradoxical comments about the goal selection process, however: "It made you think about where your building was at; it made you focused." In the next breath, they stated that they believed the process was still a "central office thing."

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In our interviews, no mention was made of Ernestine's personal vision. Ernestine's viewpoint of how the staff sees her as a leader in a team decision making process echoes how she designed her decision making process. She said:

> I would hope they would say I ask their opinion. I listen to what they are saying to me. I use that information in making my decision. I would hope they would say I try to make fair decisions. The more the staff can participate and think, the stronger leader I am.

Language trumpets direction and meaning. Ernestine's experiences as a graduate instructor give her the opportunity to think about how she uses language. On 1 occasion, a graduate student of hers asked if she uses a different vocabulary in the elementary building where she talks with children, than the one she uses in the evening class with adults. She responded: "There are a few degrees of change. I make sure that I am presenting this at a level that my students will understand. I keep it simple. There is a better understanding."

Words also play an important role in how Ernestine perceives situations and in how she interprets others' views. When she first arrived at the school, she was aware that teachers spoke about and perceived each other in terms of their particular discipline. She sees power in terms of teachers' disciplines, regardless of what they teach. The Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP} is not just a classroom responsibility. She says it took classroom teachers awhile to accept her message. Special area teachers are appreciative of this. Ernestine also says there is power in words; students don't go to "gym." That is an area, not a discipline. This emphasis gives the teachers authority; teachers have their parameters.

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However, the teachers in the focus group still see power, roles, and authority as something that central office controls. They also recall their process of goal selection as one in which they struggled with language; the wording of the goals and the definition of consensus held them up. "Every time we did this, we would struggle with the language. It was like lawyers arguing. The language would hold up our consensus." They continued to say that once they arrived at a definition of consensus, they accepted it and went on. The two main conflicts they tussled with were the definition and use of consensus, and hidden agendas. One teacher added, "I think central office had the hidden agendas. It wasn't in-house." They worked in small groups, brainstormed and prioritized, then came to consensus after some time.

Consensus was an important element of the report from the target area chair for this school after the second team visit of 1994. He had been given no written report from this particular committee at the school, but from a discussion with committee members, he gathered that "long and difficult discussions concerning what the staff would agree upon as a research-based program which will address the needs of their students" had occurred, shedding light on the problem of defining consensus. He recommended:

> The first thing I would like to suggest is to have the committee and principal agree on what they will accept as consensus and then convey that definition to the staff. Once the hurdle of consensus can be overcome, the rest seems to all fit together. I would strongly encourage this committee work closely with the other two elementaries and use their experiences to benefit from one another.

Not surprisingly, the visiting team chair came to the same conclusion from his overall observations of their process:

> One of the biggest issues that came out in each committee is the extent to which "everyone" has to agree before consensus is achieved. Some committees had let this issue slow them down. Give everyone an opportunity for input. Research and

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> data are the key. Then make a decision as a group and move on. If you wait for every single person to get his/her way you will be pulling against each other in all directions, going nowhere. Achieving consensus is hard work, but important work. (Visiting Chairperson's Reflections, 1994)

The trellis supports the trumpet vine. If the trellis is used to symbolize central office, it is clear that the direction in which the trumpet vine heads is a direct result of the shape of the trellis. The focus group's view of the stranglehold central office seems to have on their school improvement process, along with the beliefs on decision making that Ernestine espouses, reflects the differences between the two entities, neither of which seems to understand the other's perspectives. Ernestine's leadership did not enter the conversation at all; the staff believes that central office is the guiding force for the school improvement plan. Ernestine just follows their path, gracing its way with lovely, bright, majestic flowers.

### The Extent to Which Ernestine Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making

The focus group's fixation on central office as the controller over all decisions and the NCA reports, which reflect struggles, along with the description of how Ernestine sees herself as a team decision maker, are far from alike. Minimal comments from Ernestine of central office do not support the teachers' views. Central office seems to be the driving force that works through Ernestine through no fault of her own, according to teachers' perceptions.

Ernestine's decision making and team decision-making processes are thought of and described as separate models. She was one of two out of the six principals who described them as such. Although her language includes words such as sharing and

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consensus, she involves staff members and other stakeholders in the process of decision making only by having them give input. Her language leans toward participativeness and a knowledge of systems thinking and team efforts, but her staff see her almost as a nonentity in decision making. In the focus group, although they had opportunities to talk about Ernestine and her leadership, the entire conversation focused instead on a negative view of central office as the controlling force that made all the decisions before the questions ever filtered to the building level.

Enacting team decision making was described by Ernestine in several stories that she offered; however, the focus group had none to share. Teachers believed they had input, but did not have any decision-making responsibility. One teacher described her view succinctly: "The top never released the authority for the site to make the decision." Teachers saw their goal selection experience as a mandate, where directives were sent from central office to use MEAP scores, and the process as full of hidden agendas. They did agree, however, that everyone had a chance to talk, some more in the small groups.

NCA team members were aware of the struggle that occurred in the goal selection process, as the report identified the problem with language as to what the term "consensus" meant to all the stakeholders, and encouraged them to agree on a definition. Further statements from the team encouraged them to work with each other and other schools, which seems to indicate an awareness of communication and working together.

How Ernestine thinks about team decision making through the lens of systems thinking disciplines is evidenced by her language. As noted, she describes systems thinking concepts well, so she does have a grasp of what it is about. Her comments about

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team learning were verbose, but her thinking denotes a framework that is devoid of specific strategies for carrying out the team decision-making process.

The five systems thinking disciplines strategies that arose in Ernestine's conversation may imply their use, but in Ernestine's case, knowing the language did not indicate that she has internalized the concepts. She knows her personal vision and articulated it, but the staff did not speak to this vision. She is aware of and spoke about others' merit and ability, but only as input. Reflection, another strategy along with inquiry of mental models, was not discussed, nor did it surface in any discussion with Ernestine or the staff. Although she said the team must learn about each other, neither Ernestine nor the staff indicated that any situation was created where this could be or was accomplished. A shared vision was seen only in a collective sense, and none was articulated, either through Ernestine or her teachers.

Overall, Ernestine knows the terminology and seems to think in those terms, but her actions and examples do not reflect an internalizing of the process of team decision making. Her staff did not indicate that any team decision making process was in place nor was it utilized; to them, central office made the decisions which seemed to flow right past the principal to the teachers. The constraints Ernestine mentioned were central office-based and had garnered minimal emphasis. Implementation of team decision making is not alive and well, except in Ernestine's eyes.

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## Bobbie: Granny Smith Apple Tree

### The Woman

Although this woman is the oldest of the six female participants in the study and is a grandmother, these are not the primary reasons that the Granny Smith apple tree is my metaphor for Bobbie. Her sense of family pervades her role as leader of her building. From the new hires who have become part of her staff in the last five years, to the huge parties she throws for more than 300 people, her ability to create a sense of family at her school is strong. She is all-encompassing, much like an apple tree can be. In the spring, there are fragrant blossoms; in summer it provides shade. In the fall, the tree bears fruit, but the Granny Smith apple is not ready for eating until November; it is one of the slowest to ripen.

Another interesting fact is that the Granny Smith apple tree is not self-fruiting; it requires two varieties for pollination. To Bobbie, the importance of family is not matriarchal; she is an encourager and nurturer who attempts to create unity to serve the purpose of the school. Although one or more of the other women in the study might be grandmothers, Bobbie is the only one who spoke of her grandchild, and her staff is the only group who spoke of their leader's grandchild or any other family member. Bobbie also spoke of her parents, and in particular, her father's influence on her leadership approach. Bobbie's need to be fruitful in her leadership role is supported by the symbol of education in America, the apple. A Granny Smith apple, when ripe, is a light green color and is the last species of apple to ripen. The color green identifies the new, almost unique process of team decision making. Most of the time, team decision making takes longer, as does the ripening of the Granny Smith.

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The School Setting

Situated on a rolling hill in a middle-to lower-middle-class setting in southwestern metropolitan Detroit, the one-story brick elementary school building houses about 300 students. The school was built in the early l960s and is well preserved. Some of the nearby streets are unpaved. Most students are bused to the building because the school is two blocks from a major freeway and is bordered on two other sides by highly traveled roads that lead to the suburbs. There is a scattering of factories and businesses near the community.

The school appears to be a focal point for activities and happenings and has a history of ice cream socials and picnics that goes back for many years. Bobbie tells of former parents, students, and neighborhood members who attend these functions as part of the community culture:

> I learned a lot from this community. It has such a sense of family. The ice cream social has been at this school for 35 years. Not only families with their kids, but middle and high school kids will come too; some people come every year. They have taught me the important things. After-school activities are also apparent. A number of classrooms are used for a variety of scouting classes and enrichment classes for students.

On my first trip to the school, a group of students was milling around the main entrance waiting for alternate transportation. They seemed to belong to some kind of organized group that met after school. The path to the main entrance has a covered walkway, which is inviting and most likely appreciated in inclement weather. It lends a feeling of entering a fine restaurant or theater. The office, although not as spacious as the oversized foyer, is equipped with a security television and various pieces of office equipment situated behind a service counter. The principal noted at one point in our

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conversation that space was at a premium in her building, and often she was forced to hold meetings in the foyer.

> That has been a real problem. We don't have hardly any space. It has all been given to kids. Meetings in classrooms can be interesting, but the reason we don't is Scouts and enrichment classes scramble to see which room is empty. Often we meet in the lobby; as we sit and meet in our committee meeting, kids go around us to get to the gym or other areas of the school.

The pervading attitude in this building is that kids come first, and if a space is needed for a program for students, it will be used. Adults' needs are not top priority.

Three years after starting her career as an administrator on the western side of the state, Bobbie moved to this building and is now in her eighth year as the principal. Of mostly German and English heritage, she is in her early fifties. She took some time off from school administration to complete her Ph.D. Her separate office, with a window that faces the front of the school, has a desk with a new computer, monitor, work area, and a large bookshelf that is jammed with curriculum books and folders. A few pieces of children's art work are visible near her desk. These were gifts from an enrichment class teacher who donated projects to be framed and given to Bobbie. The wall opposite the visitors' chairs displays two beautiful pieces of art work that she said she recently hung. They are watercolors with foil, each about 24 by 36 inches and framed in modern style. Soft pastels and gold foil create a somewhat impressionistic look. People have commented on what they "see" in the paintings. When asked why she chose these paintings, she says she had always surrounded her space with children's work, but read somewhere recently that people don't get a sense of who she is and what her tastes are if nothing in her office speaks of her essence. She recently brought the two framed watercolors into her office area and placed them so that when her visitors sat down

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opposite her desk, they would notice them easily. She is finding, in the short time they have hung, that people are responding warmly to them and they are good conversation starters. It was a conversation starter at the beginning of our first interview as well.

Leadership: A Polished Apple

Bobbie sees her leadership as evolving into one of influence, spreading shade, sharing her fruit, rather than accomplishing things based on the position itself, although it started out positional. Now she views herself as an instructional leader, democratic, participatory, influential; a cheerleader; a moral and spiritual leader; but also a manager and an organizer. Specifically, she states:

> As a leader, I see myself as democratic and participatory. But also a lot of leadership is from influence rather than power, and I have seen that change in my principalship. In the beginning, I had to use my position sometimes to accomplish even little things. I was democratic and participatory. But there were occasions then when I needed to do that, but almost never now. Now I have established integrity and respect. It is legitimate leadership, because of the person I am, the role model. I am the beliefs I have and what I live. They make me believable and respected.

Bobbie talked about two life experiences, missionary work and going through a divorce, which helped her appreciate and understand other people and their views, important qualities for team leadership. Immediately after college, Bobbie spent six years in Africa doing missionary work. This experience taught her to be a good judge of character and to be intuitive in knowing other people's feelings and what baggage they were carrying. Most important, it helped her develop interpersonal skills and appreciate differences.

> I am sensitive to that and quick to help others to get to that. I lived in Africa for six years, and grew up assuming right meant being on time, having one wife, how close you stand to each other. I never thought to question it at age 23, but then to

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> be put in a different culture; I had students whose dad had more than one wife. To try to change that would have been disastrous. Others' perspective and ways of thinking took me past my Protestant, parochial, narrow set of glasses and gave many points of view, that helped me.

Bobbie's other major life experience offered her keen insight into families and family dynamics. She said being divorced after 16 years of marriage helped her to also understand pain. She has told people, "I don't know how your pain feels, but I know what it feels like to have pain, to hurt." She is sympathetic to single-parent families. An experienced, knowledgeable educator who cares about people, she is a mature source of strength to many. "Those around me have that empathy now and see it through other points of view," she explains.

Decision Making/Team Decision Making:
Never the Twain Shall Separate

Bobbie discussed making decisions as a building principal and described her process, and her sketch of decision making and team decision making became one and the same (see Figure 5). The first item she considers is to define who is be involved; then she researches to find out what is known, consults with peers, considers her own experiences, considers the time element, then puts all this information through what she calls one of three screens, a screen of personal values and beliefs, or of community values and beliefs, or a combination of the two screens. Next she meets with those affected and comes to agreement on a solution. From there she draws the action plan developed by the group and her own plan of action, then both are implemented. The final step is to monitor and adjust. Her staff agrees that her decision-making process is participative:

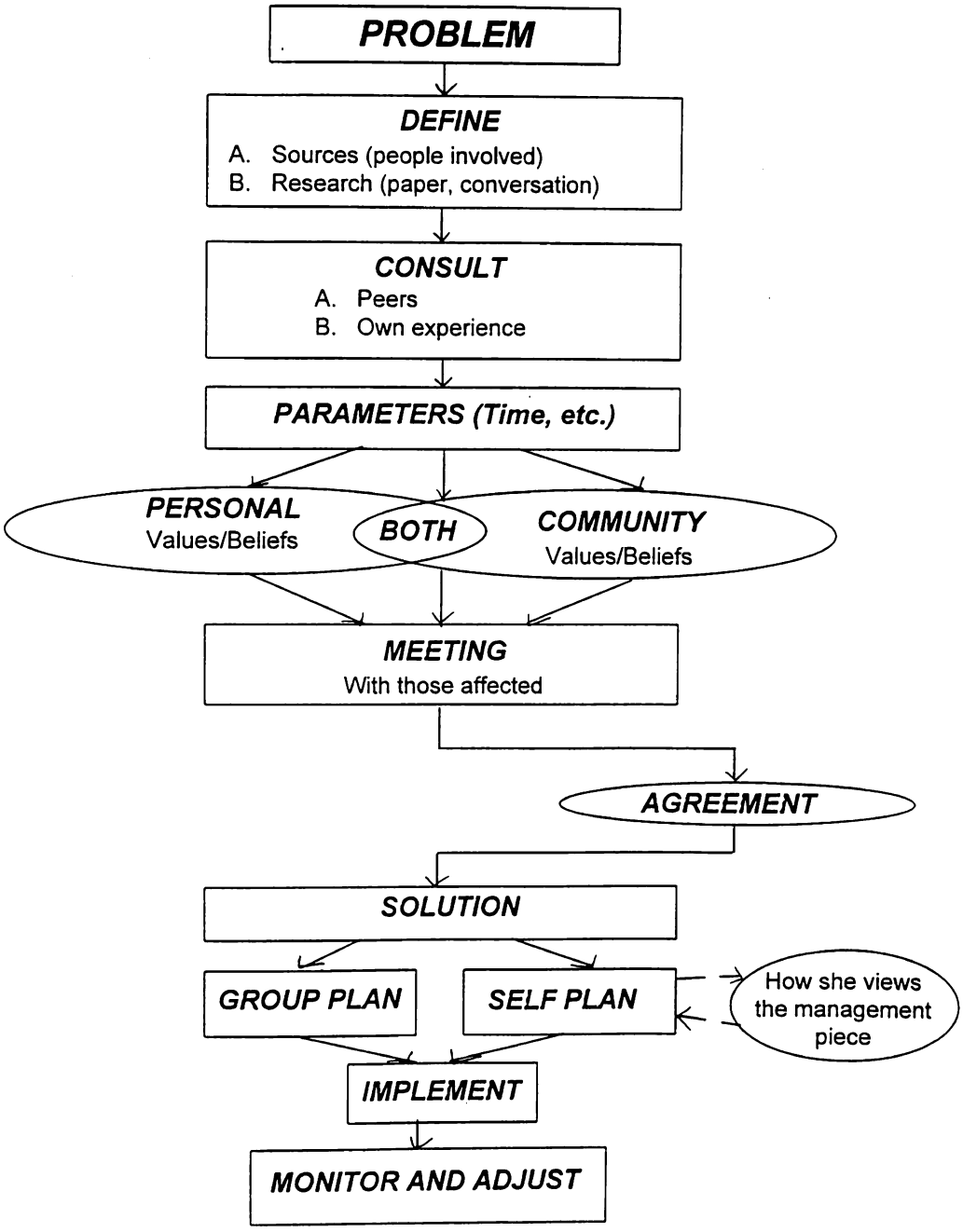


Figure 5. Bobbie's Decision/Team Decision-Making Model

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> We did a lot of discussing. We wanted to know where people were coming from with their ideas, and where they were seeing support for that goal. We felt people out. We talked an awful lot. We didn't stop discussing until everyone was happy. And it was pretty much by consensus.

Bobbie learned team decision-making skills by studying literature on decision making in education leadership classes, her experience as a principal, her upbringing and observing other administrators in practice.

> I have been fortunate to have a good education, a wonderful array of experiences, a good upbringing. I have had wonderful role models; my parents, women in education about 10 years older than me that I admired; they impacted me. There were a few at the university, too. The director of elementary education when I first started my career as a principal.

She claims her father and her mother are still major influences in her life. She adds, "My dad has been very influential. He has taught me win/win strategies. He is very compassionate."

Now that she has been a practicing administrator for 11 years, Bobbie has discovered that her role is shifting. "At this stage in life, I find I have fewer and fewer role models, and that I am one in some instances. Some people are sounding boards for me."

In the second interview, Bobbie talked more about being a role model.

> Now I have established integrity and respect. It is legitimate leadership. Because of the person I am, I am the role model. I am the beliefs I have and what I live. They make me believable and respected. Sometimes it is frightening how much of a leader I am sometimes, not so much to the staff and my children, but the leadership and respect I hold in the community, not only parents whose kids are there now, but previous ones, and ones that will be coming to my school. They see me as someone who they can seek advice from. It makes me feel as if this is a worthy job.

<u>Family and community values: Roots of the granny apple tree.</u> In discussing family values and how they play heavily into how she thinks and makes decisions, Bobbie has

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discovered that the more she sees family values and beliefs affecting her relationships with others, the bolder she gets and the more she expects. She talked about comments she hears from others regarding her expectations.

> Not only do I expect the best from teachers and kids, but from the parents. I expect this from them, being part of the global village, not only caring for one child but the rest of the village. I certainly expect that of myself, the kids, everyone who comes in contact with our school. People feel that from me strongly. For instance, at a board meeting a month ago, 18 parents made a presentation about what is happening in our school. Parents say, "If you ask her what is there to do, she will expect you to do your best." The Accelerated Reader is up and going. I say, "Are you still willing to do this?" to a parent. This parent said I can't wait to start a new project.

The metaphors: Florist, farmer, tree. When Bobbie was asked to describe herself metaphorically as a decision maker, team leader, and team leader in a team decision-making process, her response was not immediate. She asked if she could have some time to think about it and get back to me. She said she found her involvement in this study to be a time for her to reflect on her feelings about education and wanted to put some effort into her responses to make it worthwhile for herself as well as for the study. I contacted her two weeks later, and she stated:

> I appreciated having the time to think about this some more. As you know, I mentioned to you that I wanted to have the time to reflect on these questions, and it was for a reason. I have applied for some superintendent positions, and I find these questions valuable for me to consider as I may have the opportunity to weave them into my interview, if I am fortunate to get one.

Bobbie had spoken earlier about her belief in a shared vision, and she had reflected on that as well.

> It is important. Recently I have been examining my own ability to articulate a vision and clearly know what my vision is, clearly articulate, and I am feeling a need to extend myself in that. The staff I have are ones I hired, picked out, and even the ones I didn't, they hold the same shared vision. Yet cooperative learning

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> is valued by all the staff; it is cooperation instead of competition. There is a strong belief, even with the physical education teacher, we promote cooperation.

Bobbie slipped off her shoes, propped her feet on the rung of a nearby chair, and settled back. She asked if I was ready to hear her metaphors. I nodded and she began to talk.

> As a decision maker, I see myself as a florist. I gather the flowers, arrange them to make meaning to the collection, to create beauty. A florist cares for the flowers, waters them, then sends them out, to bring happiness to someone. In other words, making children happy and successful.

As a team leader, Bobbie described herself as a farmer. "A farmer sows seeds, cares for the crops, nurtures, grows the crops, then sends off the products to nourish other people." To Bobbie, a team leader in a team decision-making process, metaphorically speaking, is a tree.

> I see myself as the trunk. My values and beliefs that we have created in the family and community are the roots. The teachers, kids, parents, grandparents and community are the branches, leaves, buds, flowers. The tree provides shade, enjoyment. The seeds that fall sprout and grow more trees; eventually there is a forest.

I agree with Bobbie's metaphor for herself as a team leader in a decision-making process. However, I believe that Bobbie offered more in her leadership than a generic tree. A maple tree, or a pine tree, for instance, drops its seed pods or cones. Bobbie is such a family-oriented person and so strong in nurturing and giving ways, that it seemed natural to connect her with a healthy fruit tree, such as the apple.

Her staff perceived her as participative, a person who cares. They saw the team decision-making process as a team effort: "Yes, the principal played more of a participative role than leader. Everyone got involved, everyone shared."

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Values are important to Bobbie in her role as decision maker. One example she offered was a response she gave when her administrative group was invited to attend a function that involved travel to a warm climate in the middle of the winter. She described what she did and why. "It did not fit in with my values. I felt uncomfortable about it, and I believe that the community, if they learned about it, would not approve as well. So both my value system and the community values "filters" helped me with that decision." She declined to accompany the other administrators, of course, and had no problem letting them know why she had decided not to go. Ultimately, the trip was canceled. In another situation, some Scouts set off firecrackers outside the building one evening, and a parent, who also was a Daisy leader, became upset and wanted the Scouts permanently removed from the building. She could not see why these kids should be allowed to use the building anyway. Even though they lived in the area, they attended a different school. Again, Bobbie reflected on values before responding to the situation.

> The Webelo leader who told the Boy Scout leader and the Scouts' parents that those kids had to go find somewhere else to meet, later called me. I heard about the problem from the scoutmaster also. But I also talked to the parent club president whose group sponsors these Scouts, and the custodian. I needed to collect as much information as possible. And I gave it some time. I reflected on the community values, and my own values, and was sure to give the Webelo leader a sense that I was listening to her.

Consensus: The nutrients for team decision making. Like other schools in this study, Bobbie's school was involved in training, funded by a state grant, in team decision-making techniques. Trainers encouraged voting, but Bobbie's team practiced consensus instead. Bobbie explains it with few details.

> We are presently using a process designed by them for decision making as a team. It starts with a needs assessment, profile, surveys, but they ask us to use a vote

process with a certain percentage agreeing before we move forward on a decision. I always use consensus rather than voting.

She described how the team worked through this process.

> There was a vagueness at first. As they got closer to the end, it got to look more like a research project. They had to work together and work better because they learned how to work with people. They had lots of practice with consensus decision making. Making the involvement voluntary gave them the energy to do what they wanted to do. We broke up into two separate teams or committees and adapted the process to our building.

Bobbie's team also described how they made decisions in a group.

> You see, we had this district wide committee that came up with these goals for all the schools. The people on that committee were from all over the area, parents, people from the community, Rotary Club, and other organizations. They had lots of meetings, and came up with this plan for our school district. So we tried to see if we could fit it in with those district goals, which seemed to make sense. We debated back and forth and then the staff narrowed it down, but I think we did brainstorming to start with. Then we got into small groups and talked some more, we prioritized the goals, grouped common ones together, found common overlaps, then agreed in the large group by consensus.

According to the teachers, they received training other than that from the NCA training and from the principal sharing information with the staff. Bobbie and the focus group both listed discussion, brainstorming and consensus as part of the group process. Keeping a project or task simple is not a priority to her; she says, "If complex gets it done, then it is OK."

Bobbie believes the school mission provides a focus in decision making and for the school overall. She explains: "It means help us in decision making, to come back to the mission of the school, in classrooms, field trips, do not let projects get away from the real mission of the school." She finds herself not searching for special ways to bring a group together. She says she is too busy focusing on the real issues. "I don't do this well, and I

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get guilt over this. I see other schools with refreshments, sweatshirts, and I am too busy focusing on the real work. I just assume they want to be together."

Bobbie does not give involving the whole person a high rating as a team leadership technique. However, she believes that finding people's passion is an absolute necessity as a team leadership technique, and she describes how she does this.

> I do it by talking about things I feel passionate about. My enthusiasm is contagious, then those people are interested in what I want to do. I am looking for those people in my school community, and sometime outside my school community. I share what I am learning, and what I am interested in. I casually talk with people about an interest of mine, parents, and teachers, and those that become excited, they let me know. I share my excitement and it spreads. I solicit their help, and look for those with certain enthusiasms.

Bobbie's caring seems contagious. The staff describes how this fits into the goal-setting process this way:

> You see, everyone here is pretty agreeable. Even though there are differences of opinion, we listen to each other and respect other people's opinions. We really value each other as individuals with individual differences and gifts that we bring to the school. Our principal is wonderful at drawing that out in people. She is very caring, and has developed a wonderful feeling of family in this school. We care about each other.

When the staff began to discuss possibilities of goals to embrace, Bobbie told them she had a specific goal she wanted the staff to support and develop. Someone had recommended that Bobbie read a particular book about gifted children. She spent the summer reading and rereading the book, considered it a profound piece of educational research, and became convinced that this was a topic that had to be expressed and explained to her staff. This book about gifted children supported a view that others in her school community had been encouraging over a long time; the students who were gifted and talented were not treated fairly in the school.

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Bobbie knew that she could influence her staff if she gave them the information and did a lot of talking. She had not "pushed" for any goals before; she allowed them to bubble up from the profile and staff discussion. However, she was willing to do what she could to convince the staff to look at the gifted/talented population as a group that needed attention.

> The goal possibilities were generated by staff first. I added the gifted/talented goal. As they discarded ideas, they did not toss out that goal. We decided that our goals would be technology-related, to tie into our district's bond issue that had passed. We wanted to integrate language arts, math, and science. My priority was gifted/talented students. I presented it to the teachers as my idea. We shared ideas, and I told them about Ellen Winters's book I had read over the summer.

Bobbie has a keen sense of how to influence her staff; she refers to this sense as intuition. She described what she did when school resumed after the summer break.

> In order to raise their interest, I started talking to them about their curriculum, which reaches 80% of the students, not the top or the bottom 10%. I am interested in the top 10%, and I know you are interested in both sides. Let's consider concentrating on gifted and talented students this time, then next time let's concentrate on the at risk student. The process evolved by talking about it and giving them the chance to feel my enthusiasm, develop their own, and work out compromises. It helped soothe the ones who felt strongly about the students at risk. They know their time will come.

Even though Bobbie was so vocal about including a goal she felt strongly about, the staff believes they set the goals as a team and were more focused.

> The second time we went through this process, it was much smoother. Our staff is much more cohesive now. Our principal has replaced those who retired with people she has interviewed and hired for the positions. So she has been able to get staff she believes will work well in our building. Half left our staff in the last five years. I would say there wasn't a lot of ownership in the goals that first time. The second time we had more staff to discuss which goals we should select. The meetings were more positive, and I think that is because those new teachers were "hand picked" by our principal. She selected great teachers. The meetings were much more positive. We were more experienced in what we needed to do, we needed few directions, and we were much more focused. It makes such a difference when the staff is all together.

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The focus group was asked about roles people played in the process of goal selection. The conversation centered on the additional staff members other than grade-level faculty members and on the principal's role.

> The principal played more of a participative role than leader. Everyone got involved, everyone shared. Even though there were more of us involved the second time around, we were still small enough to allow everyone to feel comfortable to talk about whatever they wanted to talk about.

During the second NCA team visit, the team observed "Increased achievement in listening skills has been attained and no longer appears to be a critical issue. Continue using your strategies but shift your focus toward your [affective] goals " (Visiting Team Report, 1994).

Mental models. Bobbie reminds teachers and parents that there are different stages in people's lives. "A single parent may be going through horrible times, but 10 years from now their lives may be very different." Bobbie says if that is what mental models are, she does it often. Those around her also have empathy, she says, and see things through other's eyes. Bobbie went on to explain how she talks to teachers when they seem concerned about a family situation or do not understand the situation fully. The focus group saw her as encouraging them to look at people as individuals.

In turn, the understanding her staff has about other people helps them develop a shared vision. She said, "There is so much of that here, and we move in sync with it. It is so strong." The staff supported Bobbie's conviction, adding that almost half of the staff had retired and the principal replaced them with teachers who "fit the family." Bobbie believes she has become better at acknowledging people's contributions and is aware that it is a good technique. She likes celebrating when it is appropriate. The NCA goals were

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celebrated through newsletters, at parent club, and in presentations, which seemed more genuine to Bobbie than gathering for punch and cookies. She stated, "When we had a party to celebrate the completion of our NCA visitation, it didn't seem a natural feeling to us."

Casting shadows and offering fruit. Just as a mature tree can meet needs by providing shade for the weary traveler and food for the hungry, Bobbie knows what she needs to do to get people on the bandwagon; she builds on what people are excited about. The process is participatory. Learning by doing keeps everyone actively involved. In this school, it is difficult to provide places where community can happen because all of the available space is devoted to kids. Even after school there are many activities in which classrooms are used. Bobbie sees timing as important but not everything. Building a sense of family is her key to hosting good gatherings. She hosts several large gatherings yearly at her home for groups of people connected to her profession because she strongly believes in their value in keeping that sense of family. At holiday time, Bobbie holds an open house, inviting board members and spouses, parent club, staff and spouses; the attendance at these open houses, she says, has risen to more than 300 people. The staff spoke of Bobbie's gatherings at her home, and what was significant to them during one was that they had the opportunity to meet her grandchild.

When Bobbie and her focus group were asked what they see as constraints to team decision making, their responses skirted the issue. I sensed in both interview situations that these women did not want to say anything negative or contrary about anyone or anything. It seemed as if they may view it as airing dirty laundry, which families are taught

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not to do. Comments were focused on recommendations. Bobbie says she will have parents involved in goal-setting this time around.

Bobbie says the one complaint I might hear from teachers about her leadership is that she sometimes listens to parents too much and gives them too much power. This complaint did not surface in the focus group discussion. Bobbie firmly believes that parents must be listened to and be involved. She believes that the staff is more family focused in approaching the current goal-setting process than they were in the earlier one. When the focus group was asked what would they do differently, they responded:

> We need to do to each other what our principal does to us, and that is she listens. She asks how we are feeling, and no one is threatened. You can say what you feel. She has such a warm way with staff. Having her select the new staff is great; it has made a big difference in how we operate in our building.

The values that drive her model of team decision making are two-fold, big and broad, she explains. "Each day, be a better person, be kinder, more loving, more thoughtful. The other, I need to make a difference, make it a better place because I was there."

Bobbie's view is one that her staff has seemed to embrace. Recently, she accepted a superintendency near Traverse City, Michigan. It will be interesting to see what happens in the next few years at this school. If the values they have adopted from her are embraced and embedded in the staff's vision and mission, they may survive and move forward, continuing to provide shade, offer fruit, and perhaps even create an orchard like the one growing well in her former metropolitan Detroit elementary school community.

The Extent to Which Bobbie Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making

Bobbie's concept and involvement of herself in the team decision-making role is reflected accurately in the voices of the teachers. There were no comments in the NCA report either way on the aspect of decision making. However, there was a brief comment that noted parents were involved in the strategies, indicating the school's intention to involve stakeholders.

Bobbie's decision making and team decision-making models are one and the same. Her language leans on "family," and the teachers reiterated the same views. Her caring about everyone, putting children first, valuing everyone, focusing on the best, and being a reflective participative leader are identical when listening to staff or principal voices. Her examples of team decision making correlated to the stories teachers told. An interesting dissimilar comment is the suggestion Bobbie offered that she thought the teachers might say about her; she said they would say she listens too much to parents. The teachers did not offer this viewpoint. They talked about the improvement in the team decision-making process through acquiring new staff in the past five years by Bobbie's selection that which gave them a more unified "family" of staff who are making good decisions for the school.

Bobbie is knowledgeable about leadership and seems to have worked long and hard at finding ways to incorporate stakeholders in the decision-making process at her school. It is evident that she spends a lot of time thinking about decision making, and finds it important to take the time to reflect on decisions before she implements them. Her values drive her beliefs on how to lead as a decision maker.

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The sense of family is key to creating the kind of environment that Bobbie wants in her building so that effective team decisions are made. Decisions are made involving as many stakeholders as possible, and she has developed the kind of family in her school that she thinks will make the right kinds of decisions. Her staff seems to be tightly knit in representing the family atmosphere she believes is important in creating the conditions for good decision making. Although the building environment helps her in decision making, the central office environment has caused her some concern because she has not been comfortable with some of their decisions which do not fit her beliefs.

## Cindy: Siberian Iris

### The Woman

The Siberian Iris stands apart from other members of the iris family because it adapts to partial shade and is one of the first in the iris family to bloom in the spring, yet it provides nice fall foliage to any flower border. Its varieties include plants with blue, purple, white, and yellow flowers, all of which bloom in June in this plant zone. The Siberian can bloom at a height of 24 inches, significantly shorter than the others, yet it can grow to 36 inches as a mature plant. This perennial is known to attract wildlife. The iris is a plant that often is found in old-fashioned gardens. Its purpose is two-fold: the blooms are lovely to look at in spring, but the foliage is an effective backdrop the rest of the season, particularly in fall.

Cindy has bloomed early in her role as principal. The recent reconfiguration of her school has forced change, and she has managed it well, helping the changes to be good and long-lasting. Cindy's belief in old-fashioned morals and character undergirding

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education parallels the longevity of the iris as a staple in the flower garden. She says these attributes are not new to education, but we have gotten away from teaching them to children.

Cindy is the only administrator in the school, even though it has more than 600 students, but she has a full-time counselor assigned to her building. A black female in her mid-forties, Cindy has been at this building since she began her principalship six years ago. Her manner is friendly, helpful, understanding and professional. She has earned both a Master of Arts degree in counseling and an Education Specialist degree in educational administration. Her office, conveniently located off the front entrance and main office area of the school, has a computer work area, conference table, desk, and bookshelf. The office is uncluttered but looks lived in. A sense of orderliness pervades the office which also comes through in her manner of responding in the interviews.

The School Setting

The school is a 2-story brick building set in a suburban neighborhood near a large hospital and next door to a parochial school. The school had K-5 students until the district was reconfigured a few years ago, splitting the elementary grades into 2 separate buildings. It presently has kindergarten through 2nd grade students.

Traffic is heavy. The street the school is on is 2 blocks from a high volume artery off an expressway. There is 1 parking lot, which is a considerable distance from the main entrance to the school. I entered a door close to the lot and found my way to the office by walking through the gymnasium. A latchkey program is located just inside this door. A community education basketball class for older students was in progress in the gym.

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The hallways I walked through were devoid of student art or displays, except for a few bulletin boards. It could have been the hallway of some nondescript institution. A comment made by a teacher during the focus group interview left me with the impression that the superintendent was highly sensitive to anything hung in the windows of any of the district's schools. I was warned of this when I hung a chart sheet on a window during our session. Perhaps there was a carryover to the hallways being left barren as well. In a follow-up discussion with Cindy, I asked her about the starkness. She explained that in the district emphasis was placed on "how it looks." Teachers are asked to use the cork strips placed in the halls for any student work.

Leadership: A Supportive Backdrop

In her leadership role, Cindy sees herself as a moral-spiritual-instructional leader and cheerleader who also manages and organizes facilities and resources. Her description of how she thinks as an administrator also explains her concept of herself as a leader: "People look at how you handle conflict, problems, difficult parents. My behavior, how I model what I do, how I handle tough situations, my staff will mirror what I do. I must set an example, and model how I want my staff to behave. " Setting examples for her staff and not asking them to do anything she would not do are some of her leadership qualities. She also talks about the moral aspect of leadership and how it ties in with conversations she has with teachers.

> I tell teachers, you don't just have kids memorize rules. That doesn't do it. You have to sit the child down and talk to him, and explain to him. Children need to see the connection. The older teachers or ones with a Catholic school background, they see this and teach this automatically. Our young teachers don't see this, they haven't been taught this at the universities. We have gotten away

> from teaching morals and character in recent years. Those teachers come in and talk about how mean kids are to each other and how badly they treat each other.

There are staff who do not see the connection between student behavior and what children have been taught or not taught elsewhere. She must explain to them, "You have to teach children this, they don't get it at home. They come from apartment buildings, single trailers, one parent, and a television, and we find they have no social skills." Some teachers balk at assuming this responsibility, and believe rote learning of the school rules should be adequate background for good behavior.

> When talking about morality, teachers say we shouldn't have to do that. We have our kids recite our school promise every day, which refers to the rules and expectations we have for the students as far as overall behavior. They think that is enough. With all they have to do, they shouldn't have to be involved. But teachers that do teach character and take time to talk to the kids rather than have them recite, realize that it is worth their time. The kids have internalized the rules that are not only good for the school but good for life.

Cindy recognizes that schools must be careful with lessons on morals and character, particularly in talking with parents. Cindy explains, "With parents, you can't use certain words when you talk to them about character. People react to labels. You have to measure your words." She has learned that if teachers stick to basics, phrase what they say carefully, and honor people's uniqueness, the responsibility can be carried out successfully.

> Parents and children come to us with different value sets. We need to honor their individuality, but it is all right to be exposed to the basics in morals and character. They should be taught, they are the foundations for learning. Character, responsibility, they undergird education.

Although the task may be sensitive for some teachers who have not grown up with character lessons woven into their instruction, Cindy encourages them to do their best. On the whole, she sees her staff attempting to carry out this important mission.

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"Responsibility, reliability, truth, community spirit, working hard to do our best, as educators we seem to need to stress morality and character more than people in other professions."

A charter school recently started in Cindy's nearby community. She has heard interesting comments from parents as to their interest in this alternative education.

> Parents are attracted to the character-building component in the charter schools. Parents want stricter rules, they want uniforms. I have been approached by parents to get uniforms in our school. Uniforms don't get at the underlying belief. We need to be more concerned with the inward instead of the outward. I like and encourage individuality and don't see how uniforms would make a big difference.

The charter school being established in her area has actually helped initiate conversations about morals and character with parents, and she appreciates the opportunity.

> Charter schools, what is interesting about them is they have a strong emphasis on morality and character-building. But that is not new. Responsibility, truth, respect was taught, but we got away from it. We were concerned about going into a "neutral zone" and not offending any religious group or teach any religious tenets. We went to the extreme and left out the basics. But it is really about being a decent, responsible person. Children have not been taught those basics. It has to be part of the educational process.

Although Cindy sees the necessity of these long upheld, basic beliefs in character and morals being embedded in the school day, she is cognizant of the need to embrace new concepts and encourages teachers to seize new thoughts and ideas and try them out. "Education is always changing; the curricula, the delivery systems, the materials, they are changing with the times. I encourage them to realize that they don't have to feel like they have to do as they have always done. Our clients have changed."

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Decision Making/Team Decision Making: Multi-Purposeful

As Cindy and I talked about how she made decisions as an elementary principal, I asked her to draw a model or picture that best explains her style of decision making (see Figure 6). My next basic question would have been to describe her model of team decision making; however, one of the first considerations she had in her model was whom to involve. With either a team or single decision, her model was one and the same. When she completed the process and we reviewed the drawing, the order of the process changed slightly. To Cindy, the framework of parameters is one of the most important components of the model. The framework includes who leads and how it will be worked through. This is something she learned to do; as a new administrator she did not practice this step. She believes in a democratic process but at first did not set parameters. As a result, she said she had people all over the board. "If you set parameters at the end, then people didn't have a handle on what was going on." More specifically, she describes how framing with parameters fits in with her style of team leadership.

> When you get a team together, you philosophize, then you get to specific tasks and assigning those tasks and timelines, and check-off points. You need to make sure you are not out in left field. It has to fit. Everything has to fit in the plan. This plugs in with framing the problem and the vision.

Cindy sets the framework first, determining who will lead and how it will be handled, then decides who will be involved. She explains:

> The first thing to consider when making a decision is who should make the decision. Is it one that requires the instructional leader or the building leader because that person is totally accountable, or is it a decision that involves other people? And in order for the decision to be successful, they need a certain amount of buy in, and if that is true, then a mechanism needs to be put in place.

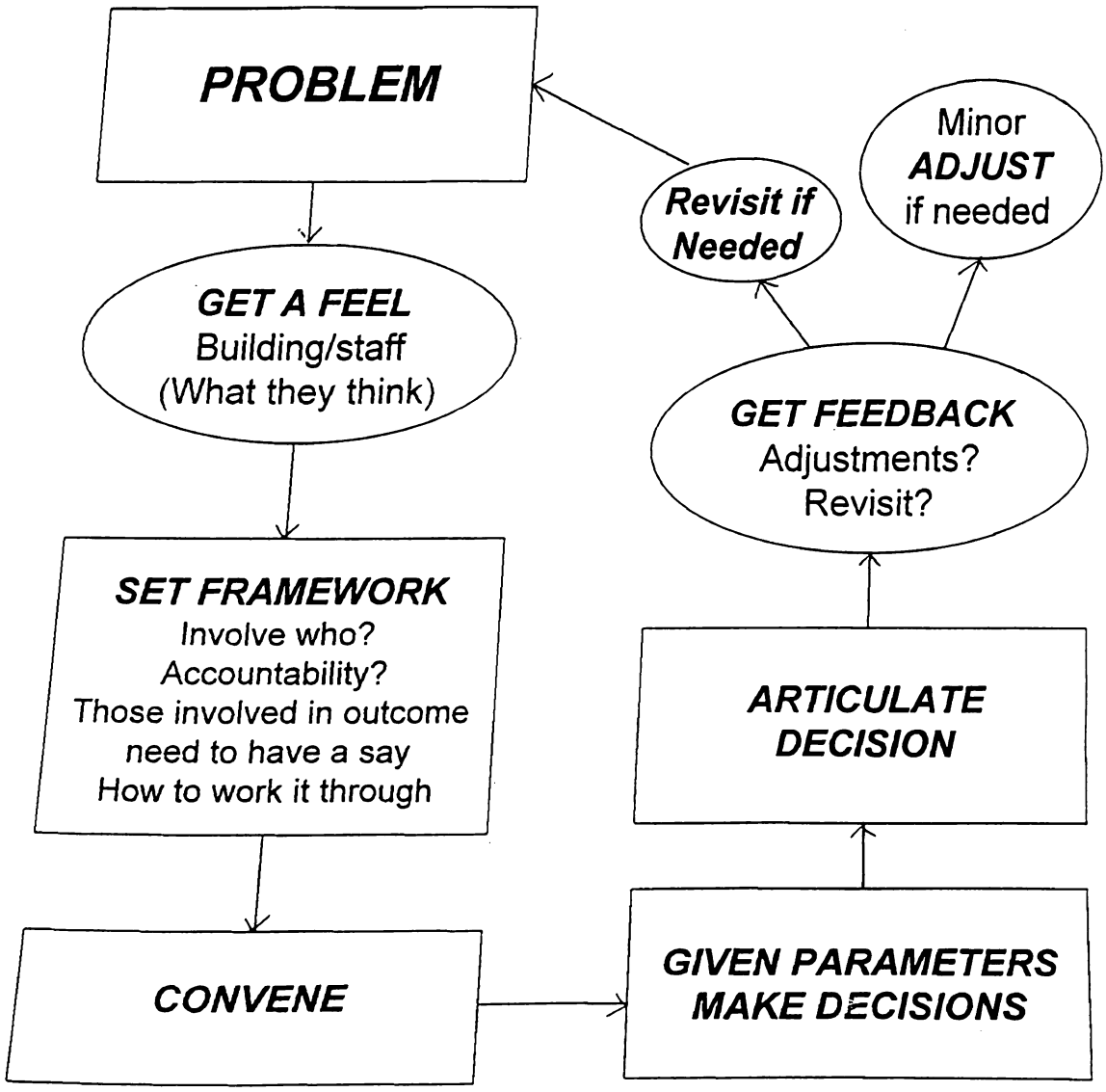


*Figure 6. Cindy's Decision/Team Decision-Making Model*

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Next, she finds out what the building staff thinks about the situation, then convenes the stakeholders, and given those parameters, the group makes the decision. Once the decision is articulated, she gets feedback on the decision and makes any adjustments needed. If it has not been successful, she revisits the problem from the beginning. Cindy is not afraid to revisit a problem. Her attitude is: "Some may want a time limit on it, or other concerns, then we adjust, any decision is up for review. If it doesn't work, or we may find downstream we need to make changes. Just because we try it doesn't mean we have to live with it forever."

Adaptability of the iris: Leadership role. Cindy views her role in the group process as facilitator, democratic, framing, painting the broad picture, a mixture of passion and the wooing of others. Cindy explains the passion and wooing further.

> I watched a lot of administrators over the years; some let the group go at it, and the people who are the most passionate get their way and that is not a model I particularly follow. Then there are others who act under the guise of team decision making, will have a preset agenda, and spend most of their time trying to woo people, but teachers are sophisticated nowadays, and I wanted to arrive at a mixture. You can't be totally loose. I don't think you can just throw everything out there.

Once Cindy finds this balance by employing wooing and a noncommittal attitude, she urges the process forward.

> What I try to do is paint a broad picture, make sure the staff understands our vision, where I think we might want to end up, understand how the staff wants to fill it in, fill in the blanks, and then the principal brings closure to it. We expect the team to pull together once the decision is made.

Her staff describes her as supportive, helpful, ready and knowledgeable, but not dictatorial.

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Metaphors: Visualizer, team member, conductor. Just as the iris plays a variety of roles in the garden depending on the season, Cindy sees the value in playing different roles at different times. When she needs to lead or conduct, she is there in colorful splendor. A visualizer, she is able to see the big picture and has the background information needed for good decisions. As a team member, she fits in with the cluster of greenery to make a nice setting any time of the season.

Cindy struggled with choosing a metaphor to define her decision-making style. She wasn't sure what word or words would be appropriate. She claimed, "This is really a hard one. I am not sure if there is a word to describe it. I don't know what to say." I offered some time for her to reflect on this request, and when she did respond, she began, "Well, I guess I could call it a visualizer." It was evident that responding to this query did not come easily to her. She continued, saying, "I visualize the final product and what it will look like before I mix some of the ingredients. I am just not certain of a good metaphor for this style."

Of the team concept, she says: "The team is greater and more powerful than any of the individual members, and yet the team is only as good as the individual commitment of the members." As a team leader in the decision-making process, she says, "I see myself as a conductor. I want all voices to be heard, but in the end, we make beautiful music together." However, she says her staff would be of two different camps if I were to ask them to describe decision making in their school.

> People who like making decisions would say, "I would like to do more. In fact, I would like to do the schedule for her!" Then there are others with tunnel vision, and they would say, "That's your job," so it would depend on the person. You have to develop a style you are comfortable with, then develop a framework; who should get involved, get a feeling, convene, make a decision, articulate it, get

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feedback, then decide whether or not to go back to the issue or framework or continue on.

Cindy learned about decision making from other administrators, from making lots of mistakes, and from trial and error. As she was learning, she would make mental notes of what worked and what did not, what approach was effective and what approach was not effective. She saw a pattern developing that she became comfortable with, and continued in that vein.

Her staff has learned about the NCA process from district meetings; outside people were invited to talk to them, and they watched Larry Lezotte films on school improvement. Although Cindy encouraged five staff members to attend an NCA conference about a year ago, the focus group members said they did not want to go. No one went. Cindy's style of decision making requires participation of those involved in the outcome.

> In order to be open and democratic, you need to ask teachers, "What do you think about it?" Of course their opinions are all over the place, but if you say, you know, one of our goals is to develop our students to be responsible and we don't want a whole bunch of rules to say this, if they know this is a goal, then they won't send home 30 rules for the children to follow.

Systems thinking: The panorama of the garden. Cindy interpreted systems thinking as partly circular in school systems. "It is partly circular. Some of the systems thinking has more emphasis than others. Individual grade teams have found when they made a decision it affects others; the ripple effect." As an example, she recalled a request that 1st grade teachers had. They wanted to change their entrance and exit procedures.

> A 1st grade teacher came to me with what she thought was a major problem. Normally, it is the small things that are most pressing for them. She came in with a good idea to dismiss the 1st grade. I told her to discuss it with the other 1st grade teachers. The teachers then went and talked to the 2nd grade team who said,

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> "Listen to us. First grade is only thinking about xyz." We listened to everyone, then we agreed that with a few changes, we agreed with the 1st grade teachers that their plan would work. After a few weeks, they thought it wasn't really working, and they wanted to go back to the old way, but they agreed to try it for six weeks, so I said, "We really need to stay with it for that time, then we can switch back."

This experience also pointed out the value of setting a timeline for piloting something new, and the willingness the team needs to allow enough flexibility, within parameters, to change.

"We don't want to confuse the children or parents by changing every month. I thought about it, even when people go through the process they think they want something, but they are not sure, so it is important to set a time to try it. " Cindy added, "Too much change too fast isn't good for anyone, either." The parameters she set included piloting the idea for a specific time.

Role of iris in the garden. Cindy spoke of decision making and people's roles. "The role of people in a decision-making process changes with the person. It shifts with the issues." Too often, she believes, people tend to talk only about the negatives, which is not helpful.

> We need to focus on the positive. Once we understand where each of us is coming from, it is easier to get the discussion going. Finding people who share your passion is all right if appropriate to the situation. We need to know each person's strengths and weaknesses. We are all different and we are important.

Cindy's teachers agreed, as a whole, that the principal encouraged them. When asked if their principal encouraged people to do things, they replied, "She worked with us, not telling us what we had to do. She encouraged us." Cindy seems aware of the importance of letting teachers share their ideas and comments, but she sees her role in the process as different.

> Some people are very vocal and others are very shy. Their opinions are personal, they don't want to criticize. When you remove that and give them an opportunity to think and share, they know they are not going to be attacked for adding their ideas to a list of ideas. There is no judgment here. People are freer to talk and add to the list.

She views individuals as advocates for their own areas, and she says that gives her a particular role in the process: "They will speak up. Sometimes the staff doesn't look beyond that. They need a person who stands away and sees how the pieces fit." She explains how she feels about staff members assuming new roles in the process of team decision making.

> This is important. I had to learn to think about this. Some become very good leaders. You have to encourage people to play different roles. The principal doesn't have to be leader all the time. You can be active, and sometimes not so active.

When Cindy holds staff meetings, there are times when she asks teachers to "forget what your position is. What would work?" She nudges them to think beyond their own initial reactions. People bring "crib baggage" with them, she believes, when they make decisions. This term helps her to understand where people are obtaining ideas. When teams work together, they get to know each other better, and they get stronger. Cindy's staff asserts that she does not force issues; people tend to make issues bigger than they need to be.

Team learning: As the stalk grows, so shall it bend. If a team is to learn and work together, Cindy thinks team members must have a common base of knowledge; this is also necessary before anyone can verbalize a shared vision. This area was seen as needing attention by the NCA visiting team in 1994. In its report, the visiting team suggested that all of the staff be informed of what is happening:

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> Please make sure all staff are aware of the plan and understand the important role they play toward reaching your success. The motivational speaker needs to be followed up with building sharing sessions so the successes of some can be shared by all. I would also encourage you to share beyond your building since the three elementaries are targeting the same area . (NCA Second Team Visit Target Area Report, May 1994)

As a team learning together, Cindy encourages people to try new things and not to be afraid to do so. She adds that timing is important. Cindy feels she has not done well in the area of designing places where community can happen, and she thinks hosting gatherings is all right if they are productive. As to letting people know of others' contributions, Cindy maintains it sets the tone for the school. However, as we saw in the preceding paragraph, the NCA team recommended that the school share successes within the building and with other schools in the district. More emphasis on this technique may help further develop the tone she would like to set for her school. The visiting team chair's final report to the school in May 1994 offered the following suggestion: "Celebrate your successes more. If we educators don't support each other and cheer each other on, you can bet that few others will" (Visiting Team Report, May 1994).

Shared vision: Beauty in the eye of the beholder. According to Cindy, a shared vision cannot be forced, but having one helps in team decision making.

> You don't waste a lot of time if the thoughts don't coincide with your vision. It is one of the correlates of an effective school. Someone has to set the vision for the organization. That creates the framework for which decisions are made, even if you go to the staff and develop that vision with them. But, staff looks to the principal to have some ideas as to how the team should move; you stop the confusion, looseness, openness. If they know how to look at a decision, you don't even have to articulate the framework, they know that, they use that framework.

Her staff said that during the process of goal selection, the goals were obvious. Therefore, there was very little discussion. They described the process this way. "We

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never had to push, or tell someone else what or what not to do. We never had to ask our principal to step in, nor did she. It just worked out." The staff found it easy to be focused on the real work, which plugged into the vision. But when this group started discussing strategies, it was a different story. The staff said there was: "difference in opinion, philosophies, personalities, attitudes. We said you don't have to love this, and we tried to practice consensus. Can you live with this? And, I guess they have. "

The steering committee was careful in their planning. They saw that the goal committees were heavy in one area and needed help in another area, so they did what one teacher described as "this volunteer thing." Some volunteered to go to other committees. "We didn't want to tell them we wanted them off, didn't want feelings hurt," the teacher explained.

Tending the garden: Team decision making in progress. The staff is more empowered now, Cindy said. The building has a different feeling. There is more respect for authority in the building--not necessarily a shift in authority, but a different way of looking at authority. She claims:

> When accountability is shared, they look at the authority figure as a person who is a colleague. One of the characteristics of a strong principal is to pull it all together within some framework and express it to those in school and out of school. You definitely need a person who has the big picture.

All is not rosy with team decision making, however. Cindy says questions arise as to why certain parameters exist and who decides on which groups will be involved.

> In teachers' minds, they see conflict in team decision making. It is difficult for them to understand sometimes who should be involved in what decisions and why. I ask them to think about their students' parents. Some decisions are made that are just the responsibility of the parent, some require teacher and parent, and some just the teacher. In an organization, not all decisions are group decisions. Some are joint, and some are not. If this is made clear, then people aren't upset. You get

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> hostility if this is not clear. You need to identify when and who. When site-based management came onto the scene, no one identified which decisions will be group and which ones will not be group decisions.

At times, some information cannot be shared with teachers, nor can they make decisions that they believe they should make, because of outside restrictions. In these cases, Cindy carefully words her explanation, understanding that this is one way she can keep their morale up.

> You have to keep to a minimum any decisions normally made by the group that for some reason they can't make. You have to be honest, to keep your credibility. What I do in this case, is I word it in a way that tells them I understand they would like the final say, but we are working with certain restrictions here. Then I talk about the one or two things they can decide on. If a teacher asks to be involved in a particular decision where it is not possible, I just tell them that it is not a decision that we can make in a group, but we can do such and such, and then I talk about what we can do. It is like the analogy of the flag. We can't make the decision to fly the flag. We know we have to fly it every day. But we can decide when to take it down.

There are times when her team reaches a point where they are not able to make a decision. Rather than arbitrarily making the decision for the team, Cindy considers other alternatives.

> When team decision making doesn't work, when you reach an impasse, or it is an emotional issue, I find we have some choices. We can try to construct a partial buy-in, table the problem, revisit, or I can make the decision myself. Often, the luxury of time to revisit an issue is just not there.

Lack of time to develop, review and reconsider decisions holds Cindy and her team back. A 50-minute planning period is not enough for the staff. Teachers and Cindy agree that they need more time. Cindy offers: "Teachers appreciate being involved but there is that lack of time; some aren't made by the team because of time. You know, let me know in an hour! "

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Another constraint comes from central office pressures and preferences, which Cindy believes tend to give too much direction as to which way they should go. Sometimes there is little room to fit in differing points of view when she considers board, central office, and other outside group expectations.

Neither Cindy nor her five staff members speak of or refer to parents in their conversations, except for the anecdote about changing the exit/entrance for students and how parents would view this change if it were dropped before the pilot was complete. One can assume that most parents work and are not readily able to participate in school-related activities or committees. The school's annual report of 1995 to the NCA shows the major findings of their student profile, which indicates possible reasons for the lack of strong parent involvement. "There is a great deal of mobility. A large percentage of children move in and out of our program. We have a multicultural, racially integrated population that ranges from the upper class to the lowest socio-economic levels" (NCA Annual Report, 1995).

In a follow-up discussion, Cindy talks about the transiency of the population and its effect on volunteerism. Students are particularly transient at the kindergarten level. Cindy says parents seem to have the attitude that it is all right for kindergartners to float in and out of this grade. "We always did have this problem, but we see it so much more, now that we are a K-2 building." Turnover is about 20% at the kindergarten level, and slightly less at the other two levels.

When the school had a K-5 configuration, there was a more homogeneous grouping of middle class students. Now they draw from all over their city, and they have a tremendous mix of socioeconomic levels. They have students who leave for weeks of

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vacation to exotic places, along with trailer park children and youngsters from the battered women's shelter. However, Cindy does not think that transiency has as much to do with volunteerism as other constraints such as jobs and distance from school. "Parents do volunteer. It is not strong, it is not a large group. It may be due to our recent reconfiguration, and for awhile we weren't sure if that was the reason."

Cindy suggests the lack of volunteers comes from the fact that more parents are working or have other responsibilities which keep them away from the school. Distance from the school also may play a role in lack of parent involvement. She says the parents seem interested but do not become involved.

Keeping the school moving forward amidst all the change and other dynamics which pound away on the doorstep is reflected in how Cindy sees her responsibility as the head of the team. She describes this responsibility:

> As a moral leader, when decisions are made that are out of our control, decisions that come from Lansing, the teachers feel they are not appreciated. They don't have any control. They work 8 to 10 hours a day. The leader of the building has a responsibility to be a cheerleader, a spiritual encourager, to tell them to continue to do their best, that somewhere down the road, someone will see the hard work they did.

The team's overall sense of who Cindy is and how she leads seems to indicate that they see her as an encourager and a team player. Her words of encouragement and positive attitude are qualities that offer fertile soil for ideas and decisions to blossom and flourish.

### The Extent to Which Cindy Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making

How Cindy sees herself in team decision making, and how the teachers view her in this process, support the model that she developed in our conversation. Teachers'

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language describes Cindy as an encourager who shares leadership, is a listener, supportive, not a dictator, and knows what to do. Although the language Cindy uses is not specifically reflective of systems thinking terminology, her decision-making model loops and links the disciplines together. The NCA reports had little to add, although they encouraged follow-up training and sharing successes with each other and other elementary schools. Both principal and teachers were curious about the role parents play in team decision making and indicated a genuine interest in how to involve them more as stakeholders in their school.

A fascinating point that cannot be ignored is that central office was mentioned only once by this focus group. They stated, "Our top administrators didn't know where we were at either." To review the numerous negative central office comments that Ernestine's teachers offered, and then to consider comments from Cindy's teachers, makes it difficult to believe that these two elementary schools are from the same district.

On the whole, through Cindy's talk, the awareness of what role team decision making plays in her leadership is strongly present. Her thinking about the process shows a knowledge of some of the terms, through her descriptive model. Further, the value she has placed on the process, as indicated by this self-described model, reflects a deep regard for staff involvement, although the parent component had not been a significant concern. The focus group talk did not place emphasis on parents either.

Cindy is conscious of team decision making and implements it across the myriad situations that arise to which decisions must be made in the school setting. Once again, time is a constraint both to her and the teachers, making team decision making difficult, although a sense of urgency or utter frustration did not come across in any interviews. The

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parent involvement component created some questions directed to me. I consider this lack of concern for parent voices to be a lack of awareness, which will most likely be addressed in the near future, now that it has been brought to their attention.

## Debbie: Gaiety Ajuga (Bugleweed)

### The Woman

A perennial ground cover, Ajuga is a low, fast spreading plant that grows best in soil that does not dry out and it grows in the sun as well as the shade. The plant is often selected for erosion control and is an excellent ground cover for borders and banks. In spring the plant makes an effective background, blooming with single stalks of blue blossoms. Multicolored with green and bronze leaves, the plant is not striking or showy, and blends so easily one does not realize its presence, yet it fulfills its purpose if treated properly and will give extensive coverage in a few short years. Normally growing to about four to six inches high, Gaiety Ajuga is drought resistant and attracts wildlife. Bugleweed mats so heavily that weeds will not grow through the ground cover.

As we shall see, Debbie and the ajuga go hand in hand. Known for staying in the background, she is effective in her knowledge and is all over the place doing a superb job of not standing out; rather, she is adept at encouraging others to take over the show. Not requiring a lot of care, she methodically works hard to develop her philosophy of early childhood, a place that is good for all kids, and where all stakeholders are accepted and valued. Her mission is to spread that philosophy so it will cover the school and continue to grow after she leaves.

Debbie is of German, Swiss, and Ukrainian heritage. She was sent to this building as principal almost 6 years ago, after completing a two-year stint as an assistant principal at another elementary school in the district. She earned her bachelor's degree, then took coursework in educational administration and earned an Education Specialist degree. Debbie did not apply for this position because being in a supervisory position was not her goal. However, she had been placed as an assistant elementary principal in another elementary school in the same district, dividing that responsibility with a federal programs director position, which had been a full-time position in years past. As building principal, she still maintains the federal programs title.

The school district reconfigured two K-6 schools into one with a K-3 student population and another with a grade 4-6 population. Debbie, having a strong background in implementation of the early childhood philosophy in her district, was given the school with the younger student enrollment. She found her first year difficult due to concerns about the recent reconfiguration, a major change for staff, students and school community. Debbie weathered the first year and began to learn more about her school, students, staff, parents and community, along with developing her own skills as a building leader.

Since then, Debbie and her staff have learned and grown together, strengthening relationships with parents and each other, and building trust. When they were going through the pangs of major change, they were awarded a grant called C-SIP (Collaborative School Improvement Plan), under the guidance of Eastern Michigan University. This grant offered training and other support to help move the process of school improvement forward. More than 2 years ago, they began a new cycle of NCA accreditation and have completed their goal selection process. This time, her team had a

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strong parent component, with 5 parents on the team. These parents started as room mothers and have been involved in various activities of the school for several years. The focus group said the parents were chosen because they had knowledge of the school and the school improvement process.

The School Setting

Nestled at the end of lower middle income homes off a main thoroughfare, the school is a one-story, well-constructed brick building that is about 40 years old. The area is close to small businesses and strip malls and at the edge of a large city. Some streets are unpaved; a trailer park is being built adjacent to the school building. Formerly housing kindergarten through 6th grade, the school was reconfigured about 4 years ago and now holds about 300 kindergarten through 3rd grade students. The classrooms are small; however, the lower elementary student furniture seems to be a comfortable fit. Hall walls and bulletin boards are filled with artwork; one bulletin board has all the staff of the building highlighted with a photo and some information about each one of them.

The school has a definite emphasis on little children. At the entrance, red wagons line one side of a cheery, spacious area. These are used for teachers to haul materials to the classroom and for parent use as well. Often, families who visit have little children in tow, and the wagons come in handy to transport them to wherever their parents are headed. In the middle of the school building is an atrium displaying rose arbors, benches, bird feeders, and a wide variety of plants and shrubs. A group of parents has taken on this space, transforming it into a place of beauty at any time of the year. Before school, a

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group of staff members meet early and power walk in the halls. Another group has organized an after-school aerobics class.

When I walked into the building at 10 a.m. on a school day, I had the feeling that it was a haven for children. Artwork and displays were placed at children's eye level. Bright colors were everywhere. The children in the hall were on their way somewhere, and whispered and giggled as they turned down a hallway from the office. An adult whom I met in the hall smiled and offered a pleasant "Good morning." Office personnel were friendly and helpful and knew where I was to meet the teachers. The rooms were full of activity as I passed by; a low hum emitted from most of them, giving the impression that it is all right to talk and learning seemed to be occurring in a friendly atmosphere.

Debbie's office is small, and loaded with boxes and books. Her desk is covered with papers and toys. She says she has the toys there for kids and adults who have attention deficit disorder (A.D.D.). She has a plastic open-winged bird that can balance easily. She said that, recently, a teacher took it and balanced it on her shoulder and then on her finger while they talked. A student balanced the bird on his nose. She has a squeeze ball that people manipulate as they sit and talk, a magnetic chip toy that gets used often, and a sand timer that just gets looked at. She said the toys on her desk are her A.D.D. test. She told about a preschooler who was in her office recently who asked her if she had anything there that she didn't want anymore. Debbie opened her desk and found a squirt gun, a puppet, and some Tic Tacs and gave them to the child. A moment later, the child's sister asked Debbie the same question, so she dug deeper in her desk drawers for some more little surprises. Debbie found the openness and honesty in these children touching yet humorous, because it points out how her office can seem a mess to adults but

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delightful to children. When she was out of the building for a few days, another principal came over to cover her lunch hour, and boxed up all the supposed junk to make the office neater. Debbie says the messiness does not bother her at all. She knows right where everything is and can put her hands on it in a second.

Leadership: No Weed Left Unturned

Ajuga will mat so thickly that no weeds can sprout. Debbie's style of leadership, given time, can create the same condition, allowing for her vision to continue to grow. Debbie explains her view as a building principal and leader of the school: "As a leader, you do have to set the tone for the building. If the tone is strong enough, then only strong people who believe in the vision will bid into positions in the building." Debbie finds it important to be willing to relinquish authority and trust others, peers, teachers, and parents, including her community education liaison person. "My liaison is so good at getting things ready, and I am terrible at it. She came in last night and worked getting the tables ready for a meeting today. It looked so nice. I was so glad she offered." Debbie says this liaison has come up with some good ideas, and she has encouraged her to move forward with them. Not surprisingly, the liaison's efforts have been well executed and appreciated. Debbie is now willing to have committee chairs run meetings and share authority. But she said, "They are not really there--the shared knowledge, sharing the vision, trusting the people; they know the focus and the vision." She explains that not everyone is at the same place. For instance, there is no support from the supervisors in carrying out the vision of the school.

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> It has fallen down with the noon-hour supervisors. These supervisors are paid little and are only in the building and playground during the noon hour for supervision. Their responsibilities are difficult but they are unwilling to make efforts to attempt making changes in their views and how they handle the children.

Debbie adds that they have a lot of substitutes for the noon hour supervisors, as they tend to call in "sick" often.

Debbie shares a story about a visitor in her building recently who asked enough questions to cause her to reflect, "How did I do it?" Her first responses seem to be a simple, "It just happened." This visitor, a new principal from a neighboring school district, came over to tour her school because the visitor's school was in the process of redesigning an early childhood center.

> She had so many questions for me. "How did you do this? How did you do that?" I don't know. I guess being there, supporting, being patient, a cheerleader, taking extra time and effort, encouraging them so they don't give up. Working alongside the team. Doing the unexpected. But, Rena, it is killing me.

Letting the staff take the leadership role has made a difference; she believes. They view her as a teacher, as one of them. She elaborates on how she accomplishes this.

> I do things to give them time to take the leadership role. I have become a model. I teach in the classroom to help out. Reflecting on it, I also wonder, is this worth it? I have my 30 years, but I know how hard they have worked; I could leave. They told me not to leave. They feel insecure yet, they need three or four more teachers for strength. I choose to stay to see the vision through.

She elaborates on how she supports and encourages those who are carrying out the vision, and how she handles those who do not. "They have bought into it. I let the 3 or 4 who have the vision and are carrying it through, to go on while I deal with the blockers. I work with them, do things for and with them, so they won't complain so much."

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Decision-Making/Team Decision-Making
Model: Ground Cover

As Debbie talks about her method of decision making, we discover in an elaborate drawing her perceptions of how she makes decisions, and create one decision model that incorporates both decision making and team decision making (see Figure 7). Once a problem comes to her attention that requires a decision, the first step she takes is to determine who needs to be involved. The parameters are set, then the process follows one of four avenues: teachers in a faculty advisory committee framework, a parent committee, support people or "other," or a decision that she can make on her own. This, however, is not done without input.

In making decisions involving the staff, Debbie and the teachers have an open discussion. If more information or research and discussion is needed, this occurs, then a decision is made as a group. In the process of goal selection, the teachers described what they did.

> We brainstormed, we broke up into groups, we put up sticky notes on what we thought was important, we prioritized, and we came up with three areas we needed to improve on. It was real clear, it came through loud and clear, it popped right out. We prioritized with complete staff and parents. Brainstorming took time. We had a lot of lunch meetings, and finally settled on our three cognitive goals.

In meeting with parent representatives from homerooms, Debbie says there are times they are able to make a decision, but other times they require input from elsewhere, and at times, they adjust their decisions after input. The same input-adjust technique is adopted for the "other" component. She says she needs feedback and closure in making decisions. Debbie talked a bit more about not making any decision totally on her own. "I am having a hard time recalling when I have made a decision without input from someone

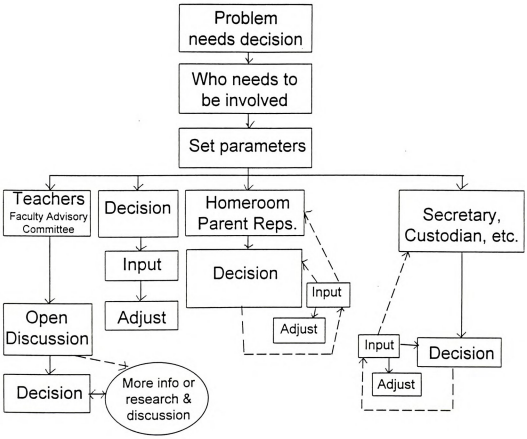


Figure 7. Debbie's Decision/Team Decision-Making Model

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else, and decisions impacting others aren't made without their involvement in the process. I just have always been that way."

> Debbie recalled a situation when the school had trouble with a parking situation. We had trouble with parents parking right where our buses load and unload, which created a dangerous condition. I knew if I wanted that situation to improve, I had to get input from parents, teachers and bus drivers. Well, we all got together and came up with a plan that all had input on and agreement.

In reflecting on it, though, she said people were starting to ignore the plan, and they would have to revisit it.

Another team decision was made on how to solve the problem of congestion when she sells goodies to kids at lunchtime to help supplement the school's slush fund. She met with the teachers and they developed a plan that would end the disruption that selling the treats had created in the hall and lunchroom.

Debbie also knew she needed to get more parents involved in the schools, so slowly and carefully, she incorporated room mothers, who have gradually become knowledgeable in the process of schooling, and who now are on the NCA team. She knew that all of the parents needed some idea of what the school was doing in school improvement, so she had her co-chairs attend the parent club meetings and give presentations. The focus group agreed that this was a good idea. They commented, "We went to parent meetings and kept them informed along the way."

Systems thinking: Essential to bugleweed's success. Metaphorically, Debbie describes her leadership as that of a coach, and in team decision making she sees herself as one of the members of a crewing race team. She sees herself as starting the process of decision making in a group setting, then she goes to the sidelines. A believer in modeling, she is willing to give power away.

Her firm convictions regarding the power of modeling are evident in an anecdote she told about a little boy who punched another child as he got on the bus to go home. The principal took the child off the bus. The mother had to be called to come and pick him up and was angry about the situation. When the mother arrived, Debbie modeled appropriate questions as she talked to the child about his behavior and the choices he could make. The mother called the principal the next day to say how much she appreciated how Debbie had talked to her son.

In telling this story, Debbie again talked about the plight that many of her parents are in, with little or no income, long hours of work with low pay, and precious little time to spend with their families. Many of these parents had had unpleasant experiences in school as children or their children had had difficulties in another school before coming to Debbie's school. Debbie says she works hard to turn those attitudes around. She sees this as one main way of helping kids to learn. Not only does she model with and for parents but also for teachers.

> I am shocked at how some of my teachers talk to parents. They seem to have no idea what these parents are going through, or what could help these parents. I model, model, model, and talk to the teachers. It has been quite an effort. I don't think I will ever reach some of the "old guard. "

Understanding people's perceptions is the top priority for Debbie. Schools must have tolerance for where the parents are and where the kids are. This belief is supported by Debbie's descriptions of her strong beliefs regarding the treatment she models towards parents and how she wants teachers to treat them. Debbie has spent a lot of time listening to parents and developing a comfort level with them. She says she has put tremendous effort into encouraging parents to become involved in the school. There have been times,

she says, when all the hard work she would put into developing a parent's trust would be lost by a staff member who would not be understanding.

Debbie has a strong belief in modeling. She said, "You have to believe it and really model it. Live the process, draw them in, model when you talk to students, parents, total staff, at all levels." She also is supportive when it comes to teachers going to training.

> I encourage training, any kind of training, and I tell them if they all go to the training, that I will go with them. How often have you heard a group of teachers at a conference or training session say, "You know, I wish our principal were here." I think this builds respect for what they are learning. Then you also have that common language.

She pitches in and works alongside or for the teachers when the situation calls for it. She will take over classes when possible.

> I think more horizontally than vertically. If a teacher has an appointment and needs to leave school early, I take their class. I do it all the time. I go into the classrooms and teach with them, too. It is not to show them how to teach well, but to give them time or to build a comfort level. It is not a reprimand situation. I would say I do this with about 80% of the rooms. I went into the art room recently, made a project right along with the kids, and when the class was over, I said to the art teacher, I just evaluated you!

Debbie understands that the comfort level is important in teachers allowing her in the room. She has found another creative way to get into the classroom and model teaching, as well as to share and model her beliefs of reality therapy/choice theory.

> With "bad kids" I offer to come and sit with them in the room rather than have them sent to the office. That way I see what is happening in the classrooms, and it The older teachers, they don't want to be the bad guy or take the time to talk to the kid who disrupts the class. They send the kids to the office. I can't give up MY principles to discipline the kids their way. The kids come out of the room, or I will go into the room with them, but I won't write discipline slips. The kids don't connect the behavior with the discipline slip. I am trying to teach them how to solve problems.

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Nutrients for success. Along with her belief in modeling to the staff, Debbie is convinced that decision making must be staff led; decision making and leadership must be shared. The staff views Debbie as supportive and encouraging; she truly counts on the co-chairs. Often, rather than asking Debbie what they should do or for permission to do something, they tell her what they plan to do. One focus group member said: "We don't ask Debbie if we can do something. We tell her. And sometimes, if she has an idea that she runs past us, we tell her if we don't think it will work. She listens to us and trusts us. We like it that way. "

Although Debbie attends most committee meetings, in the minds of the staff she does not need to be there. They are comfortable discussing issues without her input, but they also appreciate it when she is there. The staff has accepted this empowerment and describe how they began their process:

> We ran the whole group meeting; we would leave an hour so the small groups could meet after them. The principal was not involved in this at first. We tried to keep her out. We just wanted to talk about NCA. We didn't want to talk about state mandates, or annual reports. It was overwhelming. We siphoned things. What will help staff understand? They were getting too much information. We had to keep it simple. We wanted it to be a staff thing.

Keeping a group decision-making task simple is effective and something that Debbie agrees she needs to do more. She said she tends to start at the top with too much information, which perhaps is too complicated for some to understand. The focus group commented that her depth and breadth of knowledge sometimes hampered discussion because of too much information. The staff thinks that this seems to be changing, however. They find it helpful to get just bits of information at a time. Debbie agreed that the team should focus on the research that supports the issues at hand.

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> I attempt to focus on the real work, but not as much as I should have, or try to do, but I am easily sidetracked. Someone will usually say, this is important. Sometimes you have to deal with it then go on. If this is the vision, then you need to do it. Businesses do a better job of it. Schools are bad at it. Unless we teach what they are supposed to learn, other things are extraneous. But until we know what the teachers are supposed to teach, we won't know. That is a real eye opener.

The focus group comments cited above support this disclosure. Debbie says she believes she is truly an A.D.D. person.

Thinking further about her team decision-making model and how it has evolved, Debbie believes she has learned decision making through trial and error and reading in educational journals and articles. "Trust is important, you must know your people," she iterated. Debbie did not consider parameters at first, but found them to be more effective in getting the job done. Now defining parameters is part of her method, and she implements it early in the process. "When everyone knows up front what the parameters are, it is easier," says Debbie. Attending NCA meetings helped, according to the focus group, but they received conflicting information from different presenters, which was confusing to them. The information and guidance they received from an outside consultant who had come in to teach them how to make team decisions was somewhat more helpful. This consultant was provided through funding from a grant.

Bugleweed: Continuous growth. A firm believer in modeling, Debbie says with conviction, "We learn by doing, by modeling. If I don't try it, I won't know if it will really work." She relates this to involving the stakeholders in any decision that affects them. She says if she models this enough, some of her staff will eventually catch on and get others involved in decisions they have to make.

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One area that Debbie is not comfortable with is conflict. She attempts to smooth things out when it occurs. She sees the value of disagreement and tries to let it happen and thinks she is getting better at it. On the other hand, she finds it exciting to meet people who share her passion for education. When I asked her if she was willing to participate in this study, she did not hesitate. When she returned the transcribed notes from the second interview, which I had given her for review, she wrote:

> Rena,
> -looks good
> -I didn't recognize myself
> -I really enjoyed this
> -Let's do it again.

She finds education challenging and believes that a passion for it is an important component, one that her focus group reiterates. They think highly of Debbie's knowledge and intellect and depth of reading about educational issues. The staff also noted that Debbie has a keen way of discovering and developing their strengths.

She believes training she has recently completed in William Glasser's Reality Therapy has helped her see and be more sensitive to the whole person. She considers the four basic needs that people must have met, and she applies this thinking to parents, students and staff.

Recognizing people's contributions must mean something and be personal, she says, but it is time consuming. Knowing that some staff rate this technique of team learning valuable as helpful to her.

> We can't treat people the same, you need to know their individual strengths, their physical needs; how long is the meeting, how much background knowledge do they have? I have become more knowledgeable to the staff; I am more sensitive to them. I find if you know the whole person and you know their limitations, and

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> support their strengths, know their needs, make them needs fulfilling, the Glasser needs; this is more so since I have had the training.

As to her team having a shared vision, Debbie surmises this is very important but states that they are not there yet.

> If everyone has the vision, they operate within the principles of that organization and they support the goals. When one doesn't, it takes time to go back. The quickest you advance is if everyone is on the same page. If you focus your energy on one or two teachers that aren't there, it doesn't get you toward the vision. Bring them in slow, model it, model it.

Accreditation: Bugleweed or weed. The team is upset because their plan got moved back due to an emphasis on the district rather than the building continuing to have their own visiting team. The 1995 annual report stated in July 1994 that a visiting team chair was assigned, but the school heard nothing from her, and the NCA office responded in March 1995 that the chair resigned because she did not have time. In August of 1995 another visiting chair and co-chair were assigned, but as district co-chairs. The school district's K-12 population are all in schools involved in the NCA accreditation process, and heavy emphasis was placed on individual buildings to consider and agree to a collaborative accreditation effort from a district standpoint. At this point, the school agreed to join most of the other schools in district accreditation. Because of the decision to work as a district in this process, some schools had to be brought up to where this school is, which meant a hiatus of a year to allow the other schools to catch up. It seemed like a hurry-up-and-wait process to the team at this school.

Ironically, though, both Debbie and the team see a need for more time, but time built in to the school year, to develop and implement their goals. A yearly planning calendar for teacher involvement in school improvement is not available, and total staff

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meetings are not arranged for NCA teamwork. However, Debbie has agreed to spend most of her required staff meeting hours on NCA-related work, according to the 1996 NCA annual report.

> Release time for committees to meet and be inserviced continues to present a problem. The requirement for staff to fulfill (6) hours of building inservice relating to building school improvement needs and the flexibility to use some of the required staff meeting time for NCA work has provided some assistance. A problem of the limited availability of substitutes who can cover for staff to provide release time for NCA committee work or attendance at training during the regular school day remains a problem. The majority of the work still occurs outside of the regular school day, during staff meetings, and from regular staff coverage within. (Annual Report, 1996)

The focus group spent considerable time on the logistics of meeting to discuss school improvement and to plan.

> Time was a struggle, but we did a lot of lunchtime meetings, and some were getting upset with us because we found it best to meet then, and others didn't. Time taken from class was real hard, too. We put so much time into this. We have family and after school is hard. Planning periods are different and that is so hard.

What holds this principal and her team back, she believes, is central office. "Among principals, there is support and help. Central ad, though, doesn't walk the talk. They say they want to, but when it gets down to the nitty gritty, no. One on one, yes. Got the foundation but haven't done much to build the house."

Central office claims to encourage and believe in school improvement and accreditation, but Debbie thinks they need to show support for and understanding of the process by meeting the building team's needs. They seem to have no grasp of the struggle to arrange for substitutes and the time needed for the process to work effectively. "I have so little control over this, and no one seems conscious of other things. Required deadline-

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-they want you now," says Debbie. Planning ahead is an effective way to deal with the time issue, Debbie surmises, "Then we can't use time as an excuse."

To improve the process, the focus group suggests more support and more consistency in what presenters share in staff development sessions. They also urge providing training for new staff in the process of NCA school improvement, so that it doesn't take years to get them up to speed with the rest of the staff. This school district has hired more than 40 new teachers in the past two years and expects to hire an additional 25 to 30 teachers for the next school year. It is doubtful that more than a few would have experience in or knowledge of the process of accreditation, school improvement, and team decision making.

Debbie spoke of seeing the school as a circular system. Her comment on systemic change reflects her views. "I like to think I go for systemic change, but it is so slow you don't think it is happening. If you wait, it will get there." She believes that one must take the time to learn, and learning has to carry over to everyone to be effective. She is the only principal who used the term "systemic change."

With Debbie's decision to stay on board as their principal for a while longer, spreading support and nurturing the shared vision, she and her staff may entice replacement teachers who believe in the school's philosophy and want to be part of that dream. Debbie says, "The most important lesson I have learned is patience." As any good gardener knows, time is essential to healthy growth.

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The Extent to Which Debbie Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making

The view Debbie has of herself in the decision-making/team decision-making process is supported by the teachers' stories. She thinks about team decision making as a valuable link to the community and the success of her students and staff. She works hard at getting everyone to understand what is necessary and getting them involved in the process. She is brutally honest in her disclosure of what she sees is her weaknesses, and the teachers refer to the same weaknesses as she does, but they indicate she has improved considerably. They kept her out of the process at first so that she wouldn't overwhelm them with too much information. Staff see her as excellent at finding people's talents. She is passionate about involving parents in their children's education. Debbie's talk of letting her staff run the meetings supports teacher voices; they said they see themselves as leaders of the team and the principal counts on them a lot. They admit, too, that they go to her when they need her help. The only frustration teachers talked about was how NCA was constantly shifting requirements and that consistency was lacking among NCA representatives on certain issues. Debbie is frustrated with the lack of support from central office, although the teachers did not broach the role of central office. Debbie's language and actions indicate a knowledge, understanding, and use of the concepts of systems thinking across most of the disciplines. Once again, the NCA reports were devoid of any evidence in this arena.

Debbie has spent considerable time and effort thinking of ways to involve the parents in the process of decision making, and she talked at length about the efforts she is making to get staff to understand and become part of the decision-making process.

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Constraints (leadership from central office, enough parents knowledgeable about team decision making for her school, and the structure of the school day) all are part of her discussion that she struggles with and attempts to overcome.

Other pressures cause Debbie to be frustrated not only in her thinking but also in her efforts to implement team decision making. The schedule allows for little time to meet with staff, and the same concerns she voiced in her thinking, hampers her following through as the kind of team decision maker she would like to be. Debbie demonstrates a genuine attempt through use of her model and desire to implement effective team decision making which comes through in her staff's talk about her leadership. Her decision to stay on as principal one more year so she can continue to develop a solid team of good decision makers indicates a wish to overcome obstacles in this arena.

## Nancy: White Oak

### The Woman

The white oak is different from other oaks in that it retains most of its leaves throughout the winter, making it easy to distinguish from other deciduous trees. Nancy bears a resemblance to this mighty tree because her style of leadership is an obvious presence at all times but not necessarily flashy or presidential. The white oak bears acorns, treats to herbivores who often store them for winter forage. Nancy plants seeds of information as she talks to her staff. This oak easily reproduces itself, with the help of the creatures who bury the acorns, but conditions have to be right. Nancy recognizes there are times when she needs to share information with staff overtly instead of covertly, and the information may not be taken into consideration. Sometimes seedlings come up in the

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wrong places, but these are easily pulled and discarded when they are little. She also is aware that mistakes happen, and she has learned by doing. Acorns and leaves can be a nuisance when cleaning a yard, yet the spreading adult tree provides shade in the summer. The white oak provides shade, beauty, and strength, and it is long lived. Nancy's purpose is to provide the support and the strength for staff to make good decisions in a team situation. Nancy is retiring this year after a long, stable career as a successful elementary principal; she has taught and administered in the same school district her entire career. In the fall, the white oak's leaves turn a rust color but are noticeable throughout winter because they remain on the tree. Nancy's influence on her staff is widespread; her style of leadership has affected the staff broadly. If it is up to the staff, her retirement will not be the end of team leadership in the building. Her vision and beliefs will hang on like the oak's leaves in the fall. The mighty oak is a symbol of wisdom, strength, and power, as is Nancy.

## The School Setting

The school, a one-story brick building housing about 350 elementary students, stands at the end of a narrow street about a half mile from a major thoroughfare in a middle-to lower-middle-class neighborhood of a metropolitan area. The exterior of the building is close to sidewalks and has a boulevard of mature trees lining 2 sides. Parking is not an effort; both the front office area near the street and the side entrance off a parking lot allow convenient access to the building. I entered a large, airy vestibule just inside the front doors. Two sofas flank a large fish tank built into 1 wall, and a fairly elaborate tiered planter occupies another corner. The plants and fish tank, upon closer

inspection, need some immediate care. The tank is ready for a cleaning, and some plants, in pots, have outgrown their containers and need repotting, trimming, and watering.

The office is located opposite the planter/aquarium area. Glass walls face the vestibule and the street. The secretary was helpful, friendly, and talkative, providing pleasant chatter during the short wait I had while the principal finished talking on the phone. The secretary said that her children are in middle school and she is still not able to trust them to get off to school without her guidance, which makes her late to school every morning.

The secretary's office is small; the copy room, closet area and bathroom are adjacent to the main office and are cluttered and cramped. Apparently, neither the secretary nor the principal is overly concerned with neatness. The principal apologized for the appearance of the bathroom. It was just off the secretary's office, with old fixtures, and was obviously used by students to wipe up bloody noses and wash off scrapes and cuts from outdoor recess or physical education classes. This room looked like it saw much use in an ordinary school day.

On my early morning return visit to meet with the focus group, I knew that the principal would not be there. The secretary arrived after 8 a.m. because she had to send her children off to school before she left for work. A teacher from across the hall came over to assist me. When I told him I was to meet with a small group of teachers, he said he was aware of the meeting and knew where I was to go. He guided me to a 4th grade classroom. The walls, constructed of high-quality tiles, were relatively clear of student work or other displays. Just as the focus group session ended, the bell rang for school to start. Children opened the classroom door and entered (in a rather noisily fashion). They

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appeared curious and open, and greeted their teacher warmly. As they filtered into the room, one student spied the picnic hamper, which held juice and snacks for the focus group and asked if I was taking the class on a picnic. The relationship between teacher and students seemed to be receptive and polite, and good natured-bantering began as their day started.

Nancy, of Ukrainian heritage, has been principal in this building for 11 years and has spent her entire career in education in this school district. She earned a master's degree in Growth and Development, and believes she has accumulated 15 to 20 hours past that in Supervision. Nancy plans to retire this year, but at this point has not made the announcement. Her office, directly accessible from the main office, is filled with shelves of books, a work table, and her desk, which is piled with stacks of books and files. A bulletin board hangs over the desk, covered with announcements, schedules, and other papers.

Leadership Role: As Strong as the Oak

Nancy has been in the profession longer than any of the other principals in this study. She has experienced her position as principal shift from "she who walks the halls, to facilitator, to discuss difficulties with." Most decisions are now team decisions, yet the staff knows the final decision rests with her (see Figures 8 and 9). As a leader, Nancy considers herself not the decision maker, but a facilitator, a team player. She hints that her perceptions may not be the same as the perceptions of others.

> I look at my people as professional and I expect them to be professional. I want a team atmosphere in the building. I always have. Everything I have done has been to that end. I don't think I am autocratic. I am not one who is the decision maker.

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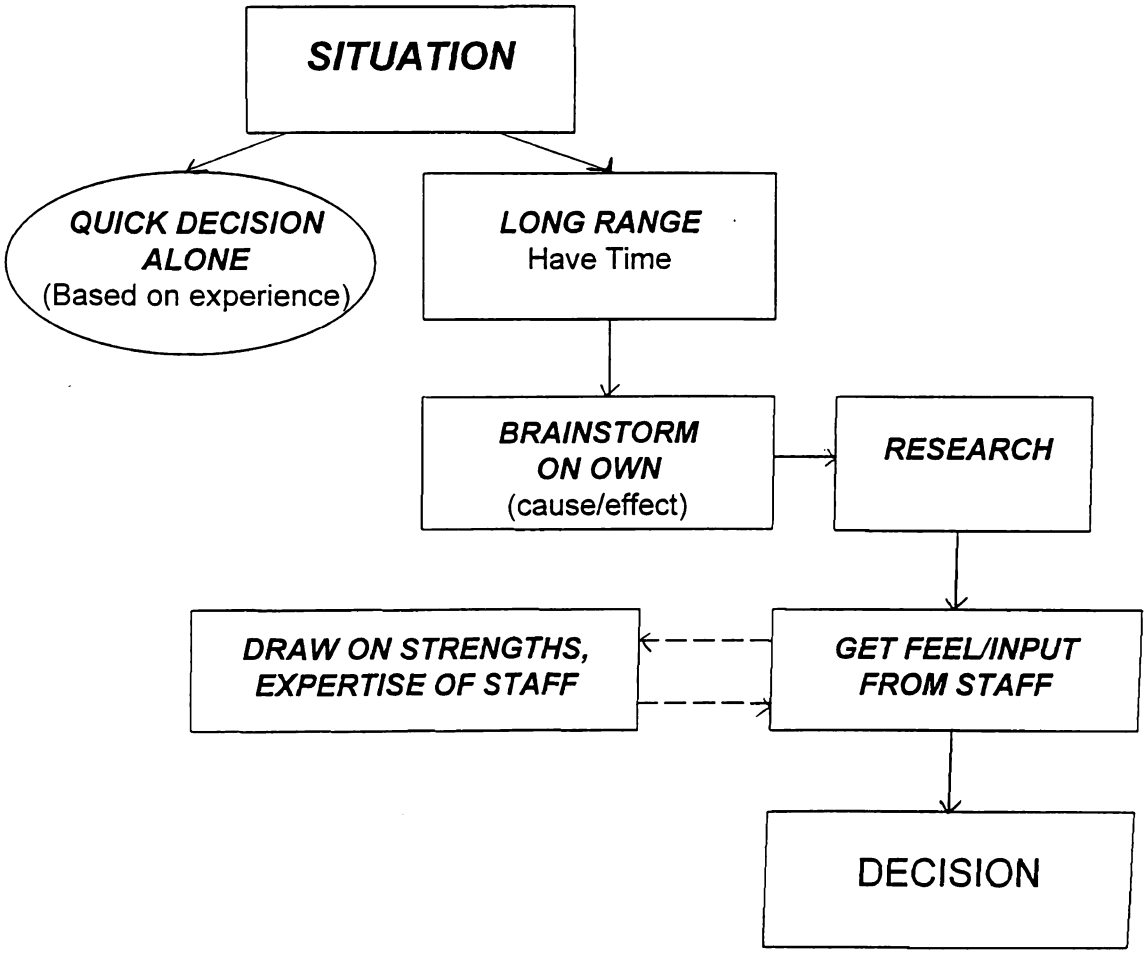


Figure 8. Nancy's Decision-Making Model

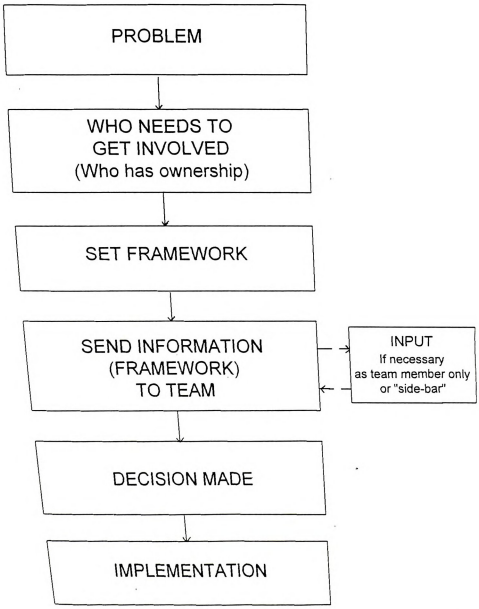


Figure 9. Nancy's Team Decision-Making Model

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I look at myself as a facilitator and as a team player with the staff. But that is my perception.

The focus group sees the goal-setting process and its implementation as staff driven. They support her perception of her relationship with the staff. "If we need help, if there are personality conflicts, that is where she is helpful. Her leadership style is that we are professional."

The visiting team chair evidenced the contributions of the principal in this report.

> Support for outcomes accreditation is evident at different levels of the administrative structure in this school district. The principal shows long standing knowledge of North Central and a commitment to the outcome accreditation process which she shares with her staff. (Visiting Team Report, 1992)

Nancy learned decision-making techniques by experience; she is an advocate of learning by doing and finds that she learns best if she practices something and adapts it to suit her needs. Her superintendent is one of her role models and has been for many years. Both administrators have been in the same district all of their careers. The visiting team chair also recognizes the commitment that her superintendent has for the process. "Superintendent support for the NCA-OA process was evidenced by his attendance at this school's luncheon and his interaction with various members of the Resource Team" (Visiting Team Report, 1992).

Nancy's team co-chairs had training at NCA conferences in Lansing and Chicago. Both Nancy and her staff seem to look at the group process of decision making similarly, mentioning consensus and brainstorming. The staff described their process thus:

> It was a group decision. Basically, what we are doing now, putting up chart paper, we took reading as an overall goal, looked at every aspect of reading, broke it out. We tried to get people's expertise. We brainstormed. At first, it was a

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> small group collecting data. Then we got more staff involved. If we are going to do it they are going to have a voice in it.

Nancy also spoke of brainstorming, but on her own. "An example of a parent council I needed to put together, I brainstormed, wrote down, then developed a framework for who could serve on the council." Earlier, when she talked about making decisions, she also used the term "brainstorm," again referring to it as a technique she practiced alone. "There are other times when the situation calls for long range planning and I have more time and can actually sit down and brainstorm on my own."

Decision-Making Model: Stand Alone

I asked Nancy to describe in a drawing how she makes decisions. She was not comfortable with the idea of drawing out her process, saying she was not good at that sort of thing, so I offered to sketch as she talked. Nancy is specific in describing her process for decision making, and a separate process for team decision making. In some situations, she makes a quick decision alone based on experience. If the decision will be long-reaching and she has the time, Nancy brainstorms on her own, looks at cause and effect, researches the problem, and then goes to the staff to get a feeling and input from them, drawing on their strengths and expertise. After she internalizes their input and feelings, she makes the decision. The process is linear to Nancy. "They acknowledge the final decision rests with me, and some are totally mine; I am not in the position of dictating everything that goes on, and that is most of what we do in a team decision. I want it that way, and that is my goal. "

Her process evolved through experience, and maturity.

> I have to be involved and do it and make mistakes, and develop my strategies and strengths, and that is how I developed as a teacher. I had a protective mother and I had tried several approaches with her. I went and talked it over with the 3rd grade teacher who helps me to see things in a different perspective. You know, the first few years teaching, parents never argued with staff, but the last few years, I saw a difference in parents. They want to know, do we have a right to make that choice? I would hear that. Then, as a principal, a parent would come in upset, and immediately, I would get defensive. You have to look at the whole picture. I am not the one who gets upset now. I began to change my responses, parroting to them, you are really angry. I got the input, tried it, and as I dealt with different parents, it works. All of a sudden I find that the parent is on my side and we are both working for the best of the child.

When one stands underneath a mature white oak, its size alone can be breathtaking. The tree can seem intimidating, all powerful. On closer inspection, however, we see that the oak offers us shade, a place to climb, bark to peel, acorns to pile up for happy squirrels to take away and bury for a winter meal, leaves to collect, and ultimately, branches to help start a fire, or wood to build furniture. As Nancy grew in her role as principal, she developed the tools to handle tough situations and used her skills to her advantage. She converted the intimidating position of principal into a helping relationship, much like the oak.

Team Decision-Making Model: Empowerment

When making a team decision, Nancy's first step is to determine who needs to get involved--what groups have ownership in the process. Then the framework is set, information including the framework is sent to the team, and Nancy's input is added only from her position as a team member. The decision comes from this group and is implemented. This is supported by her metaphor of a pyramid as a description of her decision-making style. "What I see is that if I develop a strong team atmosphere in terms

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of decision making, that becomes a strong foundation and everything in this building is built upon that--a pyramid."

For the most part, Nancy steps back in a team decision-making process, and she sees herself separate from the team in her drawing. Her purpose is to provide a different perspective. She says, "You have to look at the whole picture." If the team ends up in an impasse, then she tells them she will make the decision. "If we don't like it we can always change it," she adds, "but it is a rarity that I ever have to do that."

She uses terms such as data, assessment, consensus, and accountability. Nancy tells what happened when they first started out. "When we first started out we were drowning in data that we never used. We are now more selective. When we have a concern and collect data, we make sure it is specific and related to the goal or problem."

If someone were to observe at her school during the goal-selection process, this is what Nancy says the person would see the staff doing. "They probably would be getting out data, looking at and discussing results, classroom assessment, observation, come to a decision as to what area would need our focus most." Nancy made references to consensus throughout her discussions with me. She related how the staff learned to reach consensus as they developed their team decision-making skills.

> Initially, when we started school improvement, it was 2 steps forward and 3 steps back. As the staff matured and became more involved in decision making, and especially when they had to account for their results, you began to see more consensus building and more give and take.

She kept a low profile when the visiting team came to meet with her co-chairs and staff, just as she does in team meetings. "Each committee sat at the table with the team, I did

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not. When the team came, I sat at the back and co-chairs sat with the team and all the others were there, and it was theirs."

She purposely removed herself from the process. As the staff worked on their goals, there were times when she felt like adding something to the discussion or wanted to take over, but she did not think she should, so she would get up and leave the room.

Nancy had learned some lessons the hard way, particularly when it came to stepping in and making decisions for the group. Those lessons started 11 years ago.

> In this business, 11 ago when I became principal, I stepped right into the school improvement, the Larry Lezotte stuff, and it took us through the process. We learned all the steps, mission statement, goals, and I came back all fired up. We broke up into committees and got to work, and all of a sudden I found that I was doing all the work, all the writing, lots of talking, but down to the bottom, I did all the smoothing out, and we would try it and it wouldn't work, and I was taking all the responsibility and it got worse and worse. Then we went into accreditation -- not the traditional which we had done for 15 years, but the OA, and at first it was a nightmare. I stepped back and listened to some of the teachers and got to thinking about it. They have 2 co-chairs. "Here, you are in charge, go do it, tell me when you are having a meeting and I will drop in." And it got worse. The ultimate came when one of their strategies was to highlight every inferential question in a book. And I thought, this is not a strategy, but I thought, good, bad or indifferent, it is sink or swim, this is yours. When the team comes, I will just sit back. If I keep stepping in, it will become mine.

Since those early years, Nancy has grown and developed. She has now expanded team decision making into other aspects of school operation.

> I separate what decisions should be made in my office, or relinquish it to staff or to parents. I think I can separate those things more easily now, and I can make decisions without any hesitation. Some are easy to make, or I will do my stepping back and working it out with staff, and I feel comfortable.

Nancy describes how class lists are developed for the next school year as an example of team decision making. She gives the team overall criteria and then gives them release time, and they make up the lists. Only if she thinks there will be a clash between

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student and teacher because of a parent concern will she make a change. She does the same with the budget. She tells the teachers:

> Here is the money. If you use reams of copy paper, then don't complain if you come wanting a class selection of books; you made that decision. They monitor themselves, they bargain with me: "If I get the workbook and use blackline masters instead of individual books, then can I ...?"

Every once in awhile, she becomes autocratic. If there is a change in the curriculum, staff members must go along. "If you can't change with it, you need to leave." A teacher had agreed earlier in the year to take on a particular project, and at midyear, the teacher told Nancy she was going to drop the chair. Nancy told her: "Forget it. Sounds good but we are doing this. It could be done, should be done, will be done. You took this job on; you need to see it through."

The border collie metaphor. In a metaphorical sense as a team leader in the team decision-making process, Nancy envisions herself as a border collie.

> You guide them. You try to keep their direction and you keep your goal focused. If your team is going, if it is good they will spread out broad, you let them bring in their own views, their own passion, and they develop a wide spectrum and you keep moving toward that goal.

The oak tree is an impressive presence, not allowing other trees to grow nearby, just as the collie, with its herding instincts, has its own particular job, and its presence is known to the sheep or cattle. Neither tree nor dog is what one would call flashy or presidential, yet they accomplish their tasks.

Nancy perceives herself as a facilitator and professional. She strives for a team atmosphere in the building. Her staff believes she allows them to lead, prods if needed, is supportive, and treats them as professionals. Her participation in the goal-selection process, through their eyes, was thus:

> The principal would share perspectives of seeing things come full circle, and letting us know in no uncertain terms which way education was heading. She would expect us to be professionals, and gives us space. We came up with ideas she didn't agree to 100% and let us know her ideas, but still she would go along. She has done everything possible to get research for us so we don't go off running all over the place.

The morale in the corral. Paralleling team decision making, according to Nancy, is the environment, the morale of the building. The morale of the staff and atmosphere of the building, she believes, stem from a shared vision.

> A shared vision is absolutely important but you don't necessarily achieve it in the team decision making. It is in the morale and environment in the building. You want an environment where people enjoy and want to come and I think that lends itself to group commitments. It has to be built and developed well before you get into the team decision-making process. They go parallel; you don't ignore decisions and work on morale of the building.

Her staff claims they are not there yet, but believe a shared vision is important. There did not seem to be any feeling of lack of morale or strained relationships in the focus group. No discussion of celebration came up either, but Nancy talked about how the staff plans parties around specific milestones in teachers' lives. A tenure party was held recently, and a 50th birthday party was held for a fellow teacher; each person brought 50 of some item to give to the teacher. Nancy herself is not prone to celebration:

> ...even though school improvement tells us to celebrate. It seems contrived. The staff set their own ways to celebrate for various things, but it was not consistent with accomplishments in decisions. Better we celebrate for personal things that are meaningful to us.

There seems to be a more widespread team effort taking place beyond the walls of Nancy's school, according to her observation. The improvement teams in all of the district's elementary schools communicate with each other.

> What I see our school district doing among elementary schools is that feeling is becoming far-reaching. Our curriculum coordinating council and school

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> improvement teams meet and discuss. Not only teachers in the building communicate with each other but across the schools they are doing that.

Nancy has developed a relationship with her staff in the team decision-making process that she believes provides a level of comfort and support from all of them.

> The staff is accustomed to making key decisions and agreeing to reach consensus. I know as a principal there is often griping, but there is not an overt attempt to inhibit or sabotage a decision in any way. Over the lunch table, they may say this is stupid, and that kind of thing, but when the decision is made, everyone puts forth an effort.

Nancy finds some people struggle with issues in team decision making. "Each of us brings our own prejudices and viewpoints, and that is what is so difficult to give up in listening to another viewpoint." She offers these words of wisdom:

> I think whoever is the leader of the group needs to remember when you are dealing with people, that's what teachers bring to teaching--their personal motivation, their strong feelings, and if you discount it, it is like turning off the tap, the energy flow just isn't there anymore. For example, in setting up groups for school improvement, if you have someone with a drive for science, it makes no sense to say no, and put them in the reading section. Their drive and passion is in science, then they will serve as a model. You will need to know your people, and have them use it to their maximum.

Nancy explains how this is important to shared decision making: "That's why autocratic leadership doesn't work, autocratic doesn't see that." Knowing your people, Nancy indicates, allows you to understand what they have to offer to the team.

> When we look at people, we don't see all the gifts people bring. I think that goes along with learning about your people. The more you learn about them, the more aware you are of what those other compellates are. Then you can call on them, and that way, you can acknowledge them.

The staff takes more responsibility as a result of team decision making. She stopped making schedules for showcases and bulletin boards. She says, "Somehow it gets done; there is always stuff up, they do it themselves. Sometimes it is better than other

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times." A new principal in the district was not making schedules, and the teachers were upset. The principal before him had done all that. She said, "You are kidding, you want the principal to do all that?" She added, "Some things are very small, but it transfers over into big things. I see a big difference in the staff." This level of trust and agreement takes time and effort. Nancy sees accountability playing a role in the staff learning the process of team decision making.

Growing strong teams. It is apparent to Nancy that team decisions often have a better chance of being successful. She states, "When it is a team decision, it isn't just mine. It has a strong chance of being a good decision, and we have a better chance to see it through to fruition." Patience enters as an attribute that Nancy has to be conscious of when in the process of making team decisions. She is aware that time is an element that invades the process as well.

> Any time you are doing anything with a team, it is time consuming and you need everyone's voice, and sometimes I have a tendency to be impatient. Let's just do it my way. The constraints of time, sometimes more frustration, and you are forced to listen to the other person and hear their point of view.

Staff members are not the only ones in the school community to be affected by team decision-making practices in her school. Nancy said, "I saw a big difference in parents, too." She describes a hand-picked parent council that she developed for her school, selecting a variety of males and females, ethnic representation, and 3 vocal parents who were sometimes critical, to allay any concerns that this was a rubber-stamp committee. They were together for 3 years, tackled the homework policy and argued about it, conducted research and discussion, before finally leaving it the way it was. She said, "They learned a lot, they argued for 3 months on that one alone." These parents now

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have become knowledgeable about school issues; 5 of the parents from this group are now intimately involved in the NCA team process. It seems evident that the staff's view is that parents need to know how schools operate.

> For the past couple of years, we have had a parent advisory council. We made our selection for our school from those parents, that was a natural process, they were directly involved and knew the school improvement process. They were already knowledgeable.

The focus group wants to continue the parent component, keeping them involved in the process. "We don't see more parents involved...but we thought we would present our goals to a parent club group and let them know where we plan to go."

The NCA visiting team recognized the effort the school made to reach out to parents by noting a summer tutor program that included parents as necessary to the program. "This school sponsors a summer tutoring program for identified 'at risk' students. Students as well as parents are involved" (Visiting Team Report, 1993). A special evening program during the school year also targeted at-risk children and their parents.

Nancy is cognizant of the importance of parents but is sympathetic to the difficulty of getting them to attend functions in her school community because of work and other commitments during the day. She holds evening meetings to accommodate their schedules, and informs and involves them in school processes, such as bond money implementation in the school and parent advisory group sessions. The energy, the drive that all people bring to the group cannot be discounted, in Nancy's estimation. "If you are a good administrator, you need to know their vision, their style. With every new strategy or approach, there are some things that are excellent, and some that are not, and you need

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to take the best of those things." The staff seemed to feel the same commitment to the process when they discussed goal setting. Nancy believes that the NCA process helps get to the real focus. Her staff supports this belief, stating, "Without it, your building doesn't have a focus. You have a commitment on paper with your group. When I am on a committee I want everyone to be involved in the building." Keeping the process selective and simplifying is important to help members understand it. Nancy asks herself often if this is the best research, the best way to do something. One of the last things she worries about is what brings the group together. She searches for someone on the staff who has strong feelings about something, then looks for people who have similar passions, but other times she looks for a balance of people in a group to round it out, as in the makeup of the parent council she developed a few years ago.

The process of school improvement made the greatest growth, she insists. As a firm believer in learning by doing, Nancy says, "You have to try something to see if it works. One must trust the teachers to try something and put their own stamp on it." In regard to timing, Nancy believes it depends on the issue, but time constraints are always there. There is so little time to gather in meetings, and she tries to take the pressure of time constraints off the teachers. Having to rush gives her the feeling that she has not done things well, and she doesn't want the teachers to feel that kind of pressure. Teachers also indicated that having a calendar planned out for at least a half year, with due dates and more parameters, would help them.

Developing places where community can happen is also important to Nancy, as is demonstrated by her anecdotes about meeting with parents in the evening. A few years ago, the staff got together and traveled to Traverse City. Nancy was excited about the

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team building that took place on that outing. Time constraints just do not allow that kind of experience to occur often. She attempts to accomplish this somewhat in evaluations but assumes people know how much she cares about them and what they do.

To Nancy, as with almost all of the other principals, time is a major element that affects her team's work. Although she sees central office as a helper rather than a hinderer, the budget that is set by central office constrains them, as does the problem of there not being enough time built into the contract. The teachers also recommend that more time be scheduled in their school year to plan and to implement team learning; it is growth. Nancy believes the longer the team is together, the better the process of team decision making gets.

> Team learning builds coordinated action, the shared vision, allows for the personal mastery, it incorporates that, and the longer you do it, the more the staff grows and operates as a team without consciously thinking about it. It doesn't just happen. It comes through the team meetings, arguments, discussion, agreement. The more they do it, it almost becomes part and parcel to the teaching. All of a sudden, you see sharing of ideas...how did you get over this hump?

Nancy sums up her vision for the school. "That was my goal, to develop a community spirit, a team effort within the school. The OA process, the school improvement process, was the vehicle that helped me to do this." On the flip side, her role as a school principal is different from her school vision. The lone white oak says, "When you step into this office as principal, you really are alone."

## The Extent to Which Nancy Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making

As the most senior administrator in the study, Nancy describes decision making and team decision making as two separate models. In the stories that reflect her

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implementation of team decision making, it is evident that her knowledge of and understanding of systems thinking is minimal. The processes she describes are linear. She indicates she has made significant changes in leadership to accommodate stakeholders in the decision-making process.

The role parents play is something Nancy has spent considerable time and effort on, and one that teachers recognize as important. Teachers see Nancy as knowledgeable and focused, keeping things simple for them, helping with research, sharing her views but not forcing them, and practicing consensus. Further, Nancy's teachers viewed her as working at keeping the group together. They used the term "we" often to describe what they did, and the role they saw their principal in was one of knowledgeable helper who gave them space and time and was on the periphery. Central office did not come up in the teacher's voices, but the principal referred to her superiors as supportive and helpful. Although Nancy did not directly indicate that teachers were not in agreement on a shared vision, the teachers commented that they were "not there yet, but getting there." This seemed to be the only critical comment that surfaced from the teachers. The NCA report commended Nancy and her staff for the development of programs that were planned for the evening so that parents of at-risk students could attend.

Nancy thinks about team decision making as a force for change in her building, one in which the parents are an integral part, as are the teachers. She also described a different way of handling decisions alone and is not afraid to go ahead and make a decision if one has to be made, so her thinking still allows her to indulge in single decisions if and when she deems it necessary. Her staff does not describe her as a single driving force in decisions, however.

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For Nancy, team decision making seems to have evolved over a period of time in the last ten years, she says, and she finds it easier now than before. She fought off wanting to give the teachers the answers and let them learn the hard way. She does play a team-player role, however, as much as she can. The focus group painted her role the same way, although they indicated she helps them in a number of ways. The voices in this school are heard collectively, through Nancy's ears, and she includes her own voice among the choir.

## Rita: English Ivy

### The Woman

Often people associate the climbing ivy vine with college campuses, and the term "Ivy League" depicts a well-known group of colleges and universities. Rita's school is in a university town, creating an appropriate association, but the plant also has similarities to her leadership. It offers excellent wind protection, but it cannot tolerate full sun, growing better in shade or partial shade. As an evergreen, its presence remains constant; there are no blossoms.

Rita, in describing herself, shares her preference of remaining in the background. She allows discussions to follow their course, patiently offering time for all those who want to, to get in on the conversation. She stands up for her staff and takes the heat when necessary. She sees herself as consistent and always there for the staff, a stable but unassuming part of the structure. Rita, a gracefully tall, trim woman in her forties with fine features and some black ancestry, has been a principal for 6 years. At our first meeting she was still in tennis shoes from a walk she had taken earlier in the day. Ruth

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preferred that the conversation be scripted rather than audio taped. Her answers to questions were well thought out, and when verbalized were short, direct, and to the point.

The School Setting

Large elegant homes, some of them identified as fraternities and sororities, flank both sides of the streets in the area of Rita's school. One gets the sense that this is a stable community with historical pride and respect for itself. In the center of this upper middle class neighborhood in a university-based city juts this imposing, three-story school which has a longstanding tradition of excellence. A parking lot is adjacent to the side of the building, and has two speed bumps strategically placed, but they are hardly necessary because of its small size. An orange mesh fence, partially fallen, separates the sidewalk and parking lot from a play area that looks like it was designed for younger children. Outside is a large playground with mature trees and shrubs. The building itself is at least 60 years old, with narrow halls and solid wood doors and trim. Currently it holds about 400 students, about 100 of whom are bused to the school. One class of trainable mentally impaired students makes its home here, along with kindergarten through 5th grade students from the community. Signs leading to the main office are posted as difficult to spot because they have been lost in the mix of materials and pictures posted on the walls. A wood-floored auditorium with a raised, curtained stage is in the center of the main floor of the school. Originally, the school was built for middle elementary students, according to the secretary. The halls are filled with classroom projects and art projects. Painted murals line both sides of the hall in one lower wing, which leads to a kindergarten room with an old warped wooden floor.

The main office area is simply furnished and cluttered. I did not get a sense of creativity or any attention given to decor in this area. There are teacher mailboxes in plain view, and 3 desks are perched behind the low counter, separating the secretarial area from the public area. In spite of the lack of decor in the central office, there seems to be strong emphasis on the arts in this building. Two staff members whom I met in the hall were wearing matching vests. They were in a black and white print, with patterned musical notes. I asked one of the teachers whether the vest was a kind of uniform for the staff. The teacher replied that staff members who taught art and music wore the vests to indicate that they were part of the fine arts staff in the building. One of the fine arts teachers had made the vests for similar teachers in the school.

The principal's office, furnished with a desk and chair and two guest chairs opposite the desk, is flanked by a bookcase filled with spiral ring binders and educational books. Rita's office has a wooden glass-paneled door that opens out into the main office area as well as one that leads to the secretary's office. Rita's desk has a busy look, with paperwork and folders covering much of the space. Our first interview was held during the day, and because of the openness of the office and the visibility through the glass door, availability to the principal was easy to those in the main office area who needed to see her. She saw 6 people during the interview, which made data collection a bit difficult.

Four students were in the office when I arrived for the first interview; during the interview, a parent came in and asked for an explanation of some project. A teacher came in, fairly excited and in a rush to tell Rita about the phrasing of a question on the MEAP test. Rita spent time listening to the parent and the teacher, took care of whatever business she needed to, and they left. Shortly after the teacher left, the same 4 students

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who were in her office when I arrived returned to pick up letters of reprimand that had to go home to their parents. The students had written some improper notes earlier that day. The second interview took place after school, with only one interruption.

Leadership: Undying on the Vine

As a building principal, Rita regards herself as a leader who is collaborative, collegial, flexible, participatory and personable. She said, "My personality is one that I would rather blend in." She describes a good leader this way: "A person who likes to set the tone, be the example for others to follow, one where I am flexible and like to empower others, more of a person who is inclined to empower others to make a good decision. Participatory...not autocratic."

As the ivy plant winds its way, it covers its host well. The ivy, preferring shade, offers protection, beauty and its mission to cover as it grows. Rita's view of herself as a leader reflects the strengths of the English ivy. No showy flowers, but quiet strength, knowledgeable about what she perceives her role to be, she forges the path, leading others onward. Rita depicts her leadership style as constantly going around, gaining knowledge as she goes. She not only involves herself with staff for constant interaction, but she spoke early in the interview about parents' involvement at her school and their role. One of the parents on the site-based team said: "This has been a good year. No parent complaints, teachers are working hard. We are pleased with how you have arrived at these goals by looking at the data."

Rita enjoys honing in and picking up on what the real issues are and sees this ability as one of her strengths. One way she finds out what is going on, she says, is, "I am

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always inviting comments." (See Figure 10.) She sees herself as personable and attempts to create conditions in which teachers will talk to her.

> I try hard to get to know each teacher, their personalities. I am sure all building principals do that, but I really do try to develop a relationship of mutual respect so even the younger teachers aren't fearful to come and talk to me. I am a talker, I am out and about. In hallways, I get to know little small things about each person. I want to know their interests, who is going through the "change" like myself. We are human beings.

The focus group stated that Rita was supportive and gave them time to discuss issues among themselves. There was a brief discussion about conversations that needed some direction at times, in which Rita chooses not to be involved, and the staff wishes she would be. The teachers said they want focus and a "stick to the knitting" attitude when developing strategies and interventions. The focus group spoke specifically about a new member on their faculty who seems to be taking over discussions, which they do not appreciate.

> We have a new member on our staff now who is quite vocal, and she thinks she knows everything and I see where there are times when she speaks up in staff meetings but no one challenges her. Yet we talk later and disagree with what she has to say.

Staff have not talked to Rita about their awkward feeling when this new member takes over meetings. They have not told her that they talk later among themselves. Rita's perception is that staff are comfortable with her.

> When I first came here, it took the staff a while to know that. You can say anything you want, you can disagree, with what I said or how I said it, I might disagree with you, but that's OK, that is part of the learning mode. If we put our heads together we can come up with something. If you don't think something is right, let me know. I try to remain available.

When I asked the focus group whether they thought the co-chairs could talk to this new staff person and whether their principal is aware of what is going on, they said they

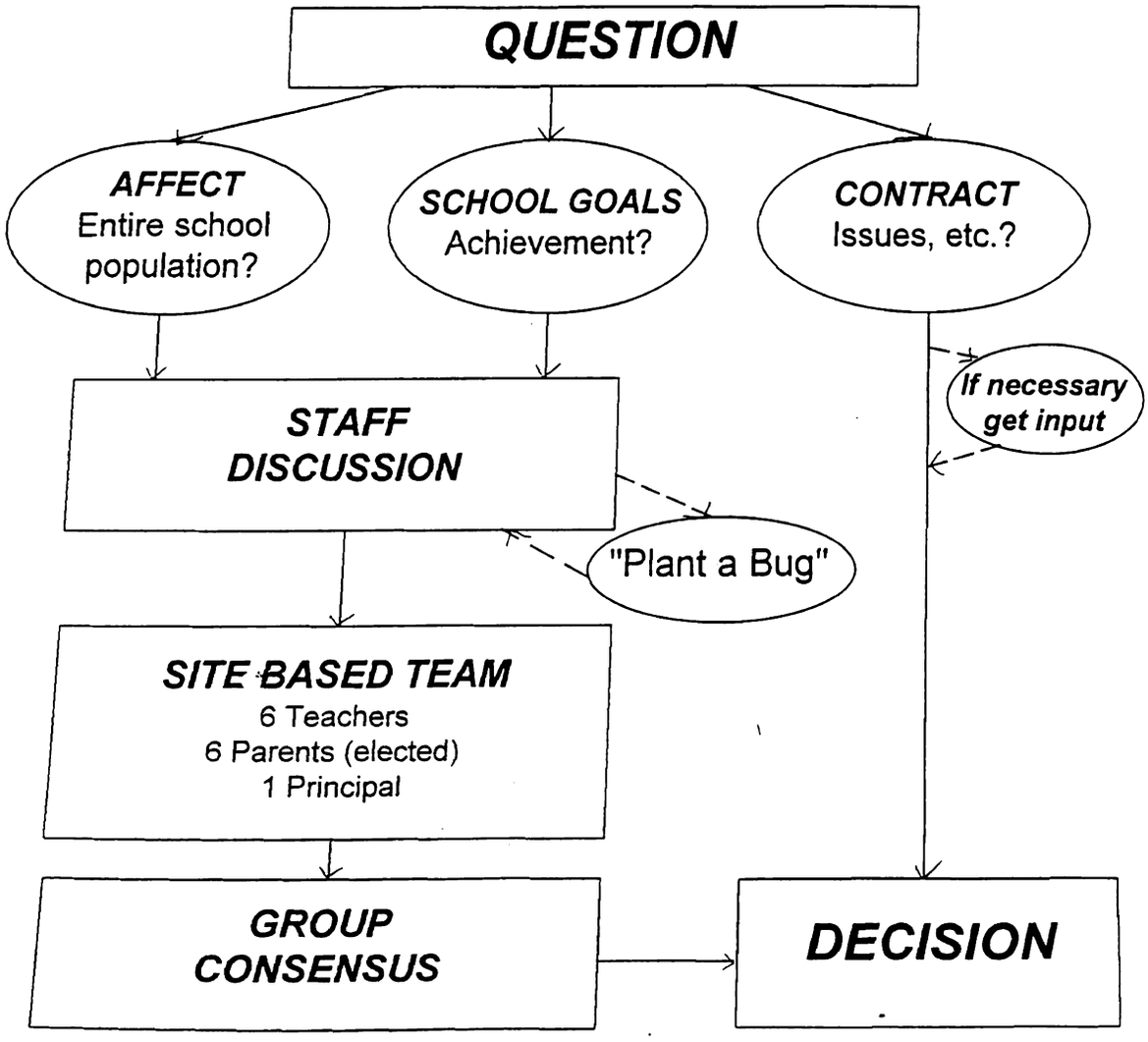


*Figure 10.* Rita's Decision/Team Decision-Making Model

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did not know. They couched their response this way: "We aren't sure about that. But we need to do something if we want it to be as good as it was before." Rita's low-key participative style might be keeping the staff from sharing their concern with her. I sensed that even though they may tell her about this woman's dominating behavior, Rita may choose to give it time to work itself out, letting the team take the responsibility for interaction with this new staff member.

Parents in School: Fungus on the Vine

Probably the most obvious difference between this school and the others is the parent component. Both principal and staff talked about the role parents play and the role many of them want to play. Rita's predecessor did not include parents in the NCA accreditation process. The first team visit report did not indicate a lack of a community study. During the second visit, however, this gap was identified in their findings.

> It was not apparent during the first OA team visit that the necessity for a study of the community as the context for school improvement had been communicated to the staff. The selected goals were presented apart from any particular comment as to their relevance to the _____ community, and no data were offered which indicated that a community study had been undertaken. (Visiting Team Report, 1994)

The NCA report recommended that the school consider its school community and their representation and connection to the school in their plan. This particular visiting team report points out interesting characteristics of the school.

> No one can live long in this town, or for that matter in much of southeastern Michigan, without having heard of this community and this school which serves it. There is a community culture here which is as rich and diverse and compelling as could be encountered anywhere. The values and expectations of this community have found expression in the school for decades and have contributed significantly to the education offered there. (Visiting Team Report, 1994)

This section of the report gives the reader a taste of the culture which the school exists, and the important roles that parents and community could play in school improvement. The visiting team member encouraged the school to gather data specific to the school community. She stated:

> Gathering together the data obtained will serve the building many times over. Most importantly, it will give the entire building staff, most of which presumably drive to the school each morning from other neighborhoods, a stronger sense of understanding and belonging to the community which entrusts them with the education of their children. (Visiting Team Report, 1994)

In her summary, this visiting team member offered some concluding remarks that focused on the necessity of including the school community in their accreditation process:

> We hope that you will not be unnecessarily uncomfortable about having neglected the School and Community study out of misunderstanding of its essential contributions to the total process. It is not too late. While "baseline" data about other factors such as student outcomes related to your specific goals are essential and can never be re-created if skipped, the truth is that community data are slow to change and are still out there waiting for you. However, the data you find have relevance to the goals you will set out to achieve. We recommend, therefore, that the data-gathering process begin now and that the findings be given thoughtful consideration as the context within which your fine school has defined itself in the past and will do so in the future. (Visiting Team Report, 1994)

The NCA annual report is usually written by the principal and/or co-chairs and is submitted to the NCA office yearly. In the annual report for the 1994-95 school year. The same year the visiting team report was written, a subcommittee report of the site-based management team, entitled "Parent Involvement," is explained. The report continues:

> The committee was developed and given the charge to look at the current range of intensity of parental involvement in the school, to develop categories of parental involvement, to develop a list of alternative volunteer opportunities (especially for parents who are working and are unable to come to the school) and to develop a philosophy and guidelines regarding parent volunteerism. This committee presented to the site based team a policy statement on parental involvement, a

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> range of volunteer activities and an activity proposal to be submitted by any parent who wishes to do a special activity in the classroom. All three were approved by this team. After approval, the subcommittee held a meeting with interested parents to apprise them of the new policy statement, guidelines and activity proposal. This meeting was videotaped for use by parents who were unable to attend. (NCA Annual Report, l994-95)

Neither the principal nor the focus group discussed any impact that the subcommittee may have had to that point, nor were any of these parent opportunities or activities brought up in conversation, even though this avenue for parent involvement was created 2 years ago. This may mean that the policy is not well known by the parents, or that timely notification of the policy in some form of communication does not exist.

Rita explained her concept of parent involvement in her school early in the interview. Her points seem well-rehearsed. "We need to move away from personal interests and make decisions that are best for kids; we need to determine what decisions are site-based, and which ones the building principal makes."

Decision Making: Site-Based, District Mandated

Site-based decision making, the format in which the previous subcommittee operated, was implemented in the district about 5 years ago when Rita first arrived. This site-based committee offered parents a voice in school operations. The staff and the principal see it as time consuming. The staff described how they feel about the site-based team.

> Our site-based team, we have to explain everything to the parents, because they don't understand the curriculum or how the internal process of the school works, and it just takes way too much time, and they want to get in there and make all kinds of changes.

Rita's comments run along the same path.

> With an informed parent population like ours, there is an assumption that site-based decision making will make all the decisions. We had to work through who makes what decisions. How much authority does a site-based team have over a school. There can be conflicting information; that is a lesson we learned over the past 5 years.

Rita complains that parents have no knowledge of how a school functions. Some want to come in and change the curriculum, not aware that the district develops and sets the curriculum and that teachers have the obligation to meet the criteria set in the curriculum. Approaches vary by teacher, but the curriculum cannot be changed without district agreement. Teachers agreed overall with Rita's view of the curriculum issue and parent involvement. One of them shared a situation that occurred a few years ago.

> One of our teachers really struggled with a professor and his committee who had this whole new plan all written out, and couldn't understand why we just couldn't adopt it for our school. They had no idea how involved our curriculum process is, and that it is developed through the district, not the school. They ask so many questions, and they really can't make decisions on things that they want to make decisions on, such as the curriculum or textbook adoption. It is amazing.

The parents in this school community are mostly educated, diverse, interested parents who want a voice in the school. Both principal and staff see parent involvement in school decisions as something that needs careful guidance. They see parents as wanting to have a say in everything, who find issues such as contracts and curriculum confusing. Their knowledge is limited. Even now, the principal plans to develop the goals only with the full staff, then take these goals to the site-based group as a "for your information" formality. It is as if the parents might force something that the teachers do not want.

Although the staff members talked about the training they received to understand and serve on the site-based team, there still is confusion as to who makes what decisions and what knowledge needs to be shared to help make good decisions.

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> If you put a group of parents and educators together, there is an attitude that it will automatically result in good decisions being made. With an informed parent population like ours, there is an assumption that the site-based decision team will make all the decisions. We had some work to do to get the parents up to speed and understand how the process works. For example, when we must assign a teacher to teach a certain grade, the contract dictates the procedure.

Decision Making/Team Decision Making:
Intertwined on the Vine

Rita has gained knowledge of decision making from classes she has taken, and has only operated as a principal only under the site-based decision-making process. She explains, "I grew up with it." Believing herself to be relatively new to the process of team decision making, and not having to break any of those "old habits" of autocracy, Rita has a sense of ease in practicing team decision making and thinking in those terms for many decisions. She says, "You need to spend time, to do trust building, be trained in consensus decisions." She believes that her teachers have a grasp of how the process works now.

> There are decisions that we need to make collaboratively and we all have accountability for those decisions. Teachers understand the process better. Overall, yes. It depends on the decision, though. For the most part, teachers feel good that I want them in the discussion before a decision is made.

Rita then goes on to describe what she does if they reach a stalemate, which happens often in staff meetings. "If we are at an impasse, I simply state that, then tell them I will make the decision. They seem comfortable with that. Teachers and parents want to be apprised of decisions and why. They have a better understanding then of how a school works."

As she describes how she makes decisions, it is evident that the first consideration Rita grapples with when there is a question to be answered is who should get involved. If

the question involves the entire school population or relates to school goals or achievement, it immediately goes into a staff discussion mode. Then, if she feels it is necessary, she will "plant a bug" to get more information out to them in a round-about way. A decision is made by the group, who come to consensus and make a decision. Then their recommendations go to the site-based team, which consists of 6 teachers, and 6 elected parents, and Rita. Rita determines that questions that must be answered is a contractual issue or something along those lines, she will get input if necessary, and then make the decision on her own.

As the tendrils turn: Metaphors. As we talked about how she would describe decision making metaphorically, Rita considered a number of possibilities before she was comfortable with the descriptors she chose. She sees the decision-making process as a spiral, going round and round, rechecking as it goes, moving up and gaining thickness, knowledge, as it goes. As a team leader she describes herself as a dynamo but in a laid back, quiet way, yet she can hit people with things that cause them to think. As a team leader in the decision-making process, she sees herself as knowing how to pick up on and hone in on what the real issues are and how to pull them out. Urging her to use a metaphor for this behavior, she guessed a word to describe that method would possibly be a surgeon.

A learning curve: Goal selection process. The focus group reviewed the goal setting process that took place 7 years ago and compared it to what is taking place today under Rita's leadership. They believe the training that accompanied the district

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directed, site-based management teams has increased their knowledge of team decision making. Rita also says,

> The teachers understand the process better. Teachers and parents want to be apprised of decisions and why. They have a better understanding then of how a school works. The previous principal was very knowledgeable in NCA and taught the staff the process.

Presently, this staff is in the middle of developing their goals for the second cycle of OA. They have been reviewing their data from the student profile and are narrowing their choices. However, their first cycle more than 7 years ago was with a different principal. They have worked with Rita for more than 5 years, however, completing the previous goals, and have developed a working relationship with her to this point in preparing for goal selection. The experiences they have had with her on the site-based team have given them practice in team decision making.

Considering that the site-based team comprises almost half the team and this process was where the staff learned how to make team decisions, I was curious to know what direct involvement parents will have. The focus group, when asked if parents are going to be involved in their goal selection process this time around, responded:

> No. Even now, our staff is working on our new goal selection, and we don't have any parents in our group. It is just staff. We will bring our goals to the site-based group which has parent representatives, but it will be a "for your information" type of thing. Parents here are very vocal. They want a say in everything we do, and they want to make decisions on what we teach and how we teach. So we have to handle this thing quite tightly.

Rita sees the school as a system that operates more like a wheel with cogs; some you have control over, some you do not. Some things are important, and some are not. Having a specific focus is important to Rita. As she travels to and from her school, which

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is a fairly long daily commute, these are the kinds of things she thinks about. She asks herself if the team is focusing on the best.

Rita agrees that a shared vision is part of the process. "We need to be totally immersed in the job, and give all our time and attention to it." She knows that understanding what motivates people and what makes others think are key aspects of team decision making. One of the last things she worries about is what brings the group together. She recognizes others' strengths and wants them to share what they know.

She responds in conversation in a no-nonsense fashion. An expression she often uses is, "Say what you mean and mean what you say." She feels that some of our best learning comes when we take risks. However, too many irons in the fire, however, can mean less control, so Rita says that limits must be set. Timing is important to Rita in a team leadership role. If time is treated as a high priority, then the team may want to prioritize how to spend it. She recognizes that mental models play a part here as well, and says, "It may not be high for me but for others it is, then I need to relook at it." Rita believes that what she espouses depends upon the audience. "We all have mental models, and sometimes it calls for a paradigm shift," she states. Hosting good gatherings is not something Rita is interested in; she prefers to blend in with the group and not stand out or run the show. Yet, designing places where community can happen is an important component of decision making, she revealed. She noted that schools celebrate kids' successes, but it is not done enough with staff.

Reflecting on the team process, Rita says that if she has to use team decision making, she finds that it takes longer but the benefits are worth it.

> You can't put blame on someone else in a group decision. It made a difference with parents. They get to see it from staff perspective, and staff get to see it from the parent perspective. You can put the 2 perspectives together. The parents help to get the information out to others. They get the message that good decisions are being made for their kids.

With problems come solutions. People hear the word "tension" and think negative, but it does not have the same connotation to Rita. Faced with a problem, she finds staff who have strong feelings about an issue and then they discuss it. Her view of her staff is:

> They are now more willing to bring up issues that are controversial. They are willing to risk to put it on the table. It is a combination of factors. I am open to constructive criticism. I am very direct. I tell it like it is. I want you to know that you have the right to tell me if you disagree and tell me your rationale. There is a freedom to disagree. They view me as pretty fair. I am not here to do someone in.

If staff and principal practice consensus, the dominating new member that the staff is concerned about will not have the opportunity to take over the meetings. Rita's convictions about the benefits of team decision making seem to outweigh their weaknesses, and she points out how it helps her in the long run with accountability.

> There is good healthy interchange with teams. There is nothing wrong with saying I have a problem with this. You have to get most people to a point where they are comfortable; also, getting everyone to a point where they understand the issue. The staff have concerns that it takes longer. Some days they say, "Rita, just tell us what to do." But then, they can blame Rita if it doesn't work.

The Extent to Which Rita Thinks About and Enacts Team Decision Making

Seeing herself as a collaborative leader who involves stakeholders in team decisions, and one who uses the language of systems thinking, Rita does not practice any looping or linking in her conjoined decision-making/team decision-making process. Rita is keenly aware of the strong parent component in her school community but does not include them in the actual process of team decision making in the goal selection process.

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Teachers are aware of and support this lack of involvement. The school has a site-based decision team designed for parent involvement, but their role in goal selection is seen strictly as "for your information" only. Rita prefers to stay in the background and act as a supporter but places responsibility on team decision making just with the staff and no other stakeholders. The teachers see the principal's role similarly to what the principal sees as what she thinks and does in team decision making. They see their role in the process as having ownership, being encouraged by the principal, and in agreement on many concerns, practicing consensus when needed.

There is a fear, however, that voiced in from the teachers' conversation about a particularly loquacious teacher. They worry that she may attempt to control the meetings, and the principal has not come forward to curb her conversation. This seems to be an indication that there may not be the freedom to talk and share that the principal thinks exists with the group. The NCA report had an extensive narrative regarding the lack of parent and school community involvement in the accreditation process, although they did recognize a sense of staff pulling together on shared goals.

Rita has implied that she has learned about team decision making through course work and has not learned any other way to make decisions in the school setting. She claims she "grew up with it." This implication would lead one to think, then, that little thought goes into the process of team decision making. Her own model incorporates both decision and team decision making, and gives the impression, though it is simplistic and is described that way, that things are cut and dried. Further talk, however, nudged her thinking more, and she gave the idea that she spends effort considering ways to go about

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carrying out the process, especially when it comes to how to involve or not involve the parents.

Obviously, Rita sees the parent component as a constraint in implementing passive team decision making. The process seems to have a different connotation to Rita than it does to the other principals. She does not enact this process with all the stakeholders in a total sense. She sees herself as only giving parents information and not involving them in a school decision such as goal selection. The school district mandated site-based teams t seem to wield little if any power. The power is maintained in the grasp of the staff and principal, even though she attempts to use team decision making in as many instances as possible, and stays in the background herself.

The stories of these 6 women and the roles they play in team decision making in their elementary schools have been shared through a series of interviews, and linked to metaphors that reflect their leadership as principals. The variations, similarities and tensions evolving from these stories and the focus group interviews, along with the NCA artifacts, provide data for the findings of this study.

# CHAPTER V

## A GARDENER

Did you ever see the devil
With his little spade and shovel
Digging taties in the garden
With his tail tucked up?
(Mother Goose Rhyme)

### Introduction

Gardens can be inundated with creatures, human and nonhuman, who wreak havoc on growing things. Rabbits and squirrels are great at nibbling off the tops of tender young shoots or digging up bulbs nestled just below the ground. Children can come along, and with pudgy little hands, yank anything out of the ground that looks interesting. Borers are feared by the iris lover, mold can consume garden phlox, and slugs make happy homes in the hostas. The elements of Mother Nature play a role in the life of any plant. Drought or constant moist soil is a killer to some, as too much or too little sun, and too hot or too cold temperatures can be. Each plant has its own special needs and particular environment required to survive; many intrusions are capable of stunting its growth. Successful decision making in an elementary school is similar to a successful garden. The conditions must be appropriate, the environment conducive, and the caretakers knowledgeable and capable. However, the landowners can pressure caretakers with time and budget

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constraints, allowing situations to occur similar to those of Mother Goose's devil, such as digging up, uprooting, and shoveling out good decisions nurtured by the caretakers. Barriers to good decision making exist in today's schools, much like the ones gardeners must face.

The research questions stated earlier were addressed by employing a conceptual framework to examine the extent to which female elementary principals thought about and implemented team decision making in the goal selection process of NCA accreditation. Their discussions of decision making were viewed through the lens of five disciplines of systems thinking and the techniques used in effective team leadership (Senge, 1990). This broad research question was further defined by the following specific questions:

1. To what extent do female elementary school principals think about decision making and team decision making?

    a. What do decision making and team decision making mean?

    b. What elements of systems thinking disciplines are missing?

    c. What elements other than the identified qualities of the discipline model are being used?

2. To what extent do female elementary school principals enact team decision making?

    a. In what ways do principals enact team decision making that are similar and dissimilar to systems thinking strategies?

    b. What shifts in practice have principals made to support team decision making?

3. What are the implications for NCA and school leadership literature?

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a. In what way will this study contribute to NCA and school leadership?

b. Who will benefit from these contributions?

c. How can these contributions reach beneficiaries?

The 6 women selected to participate in this study had completed at least 1 cycle of OA goal-setting in the NCA accreditation process. This process involved participative decision making, and each school had to meet specific criteria to be considered for accreditation, narrowing the variables.

I used a conceptual model framed around Senge's (1990) 5 disciplines of systems thinking to tease out how the women thought about and enacted team decision making. I then developed a matrix and organized the explanations of the principals' terms of systems thinking and examined the information systematically through the lens of the conceptual framework. Using strategies identified in Senge's (1994) work, I further identified examples of their practice from interviews with the participants and with the focus groups, as well as from artifacts from the NCA office. I organized this information in a matrix to gain a better understanding of principals' practices in team decision making. These matrices and a third one that identified the major themes emanating from the data, helped determine whether any of the disciplines were not used by the participants, what elements other than the identified qualities of the discipline model were being used in principals' team decision-making practices, what factors enhanced and constrained their practice, and what changes they had made in their practice to accommodate team decision making during the goal-setting stage of OA. These interpretations led to possible implications for NCA use and school leadership literature.

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The primary findings revealed several variations among the principals with regard to team decision making as it relates to the systems thinking disciplines. The overall concept of systems thinking had the most variation, followed by some variation in team learning and mental models. Little or no variation existed among the principals in the disciplines of personal mastery and shared vision. The basic conceptual model of systems thinking evolved as the interviews progressed; specific and unique tensions were uncovered that significantly affected the process of team decision making. Almost universally, time constraints and central office demands were indicated as barriers to team decision making. Other tensions also were identified across the 6 interviews. How principals thought about the practice of team decision making had little effect on how it was implemented. The focus group comments either supported or failed to support the principals' talk. The NCA documents, although not designed to provide specific details of decision making, did, in some cases, identify problem areas such as lack of parent support or the inclusion of parents in the process.

In this chapter I will explain the extent to which principals thought about and practiced decision making and team decision making. First, principals designed their own decision-making model, then they related it to strategies indicating the use of the 5 systems thinking disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery mental models, shared vision and team learning. This will be followed by a synthesis of how principals thought about and enacted team decision making and implications.

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Principals' Thoughts About Decision Making/Team Decision Making

I used the lens of systems thinking disciplines to help guide the interviews, Principals responded to open-ended questions, providing rich data with which to determine the extent to which they thought about decision making in their role. The data, collected in a series of three interviews that took place in about a month's time, included stories from the principals as they talked about the decision-making process. The stories helped to explain their practice of team decision making. The first interview began with the request for them to describe in detail the steps taken in decision making, which in turn was used to create a model. This model then became the catalyst for further talk.

Models as Tools for Thinking About Decision Making

As a group, the 6 principals are conscious of decision making in their practice and spend time thinking about it. This became an immediate awareness as a result of seeing their decision-making models, which were drawn at the beginning of the interview process. Systemically, their view of school is linear, which seems to reflect the current system these principals must operate in, which is a bureaucratic nature of public school organization and administration. Some principals think they have control over some issues, which reflect the thinking in their decision-making models. (See Table 3.)

Although the decision-making models were holistically linear in design, there were circular patterns in and among some components. The models were similar for 4 principals; 1 model fit all, whether the decision was a team effort or only a quick response to a question. They saw decisions as joint efforts involving the stakeholders whenever possible. The other 2 principals described decision-making models differently. These

*Table 3 Principals' Thoughts About Team Decision Making and Systems Thinking*

Table 3. Principals' Thoughts About Team Decision Making and Systems Thinking

| Discipline | Ernestine | Bobbie | Cindy | Debbie | Nancy | Rita |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Systems Thinking** | Sees school as flowing back and forth among the disciplines | See school as family and relationship dynamics, including activity, caring, helping, sharing | See school as partially circular system | Sees school as circular system | Sees school as linear system | Sees school more like a wheel with cogs; some you have control over, some you don't |
| **Personal Mastery** | Keeping picture simple provides a better understanding | Expects the best from parents, kids, self | Role changes with person and issue | See the value, let it happen | The energy the drive, the passion | Key piece; it makes others think |
| **Mental Models** | You need to hear them | Two life experiences helped find and appreciate this | When teams work together this gets stronger; know others' "crib baggage" | Puts this at top; tolerance of where parents and kids are | Prejudice and viewpoints are difficult to give up when listening | Causes paradigm shift |
| **Shared Vision** | It bonds the team | So much is here, we move in sync | Provides framework, takes time, need to agree on it, highly important | Very important , not there yet, you advance quickest if everyone is on same page | Parallels team decision making in morale, environment of building | This is part of the process |
| **Team Learning** | Coming together individually and as group; team has to learn about each other | We build on what people are excited about; participatory | Must learn together as a team to make good decisions | Common base of knowledge; need this before shared vision | Growth; this is the greatest advantage of school improvement process | Say what you mean, mean what you say |

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principals described how they think they made decisions, then a completely different model was described for team decision making. This task brought out how principals see their roles as decision makers; evidently, thoughts of team decision making are more prevalent than not.

All of the principals spoke about setting parameters as a key step in their decision making model. This was one of the lessons all but one said they had learned as they made improvements in their practice of team decision making. One principal described this step as one that is crucial to develop early in the procedure. All indicated that they learned how to make team decisions and develop their plan or model on the job while making decisions. All but one said the process was one of many mistakes and trial and error.

In the principals' talk of their models and what steps they believed they took to make decisions, all commented that the opening interview exercise of designing a model of the process they use to make decisions was most helpful. None of them had ever drawn out the process. After their models were sketched, all but one indicated that they found themselves looking at the model either before they had to make a decision or immediately after, to see whether this model they drew was what they really did.

Principals' Thoughts About Team Decision Making

Although she described it as circular, Debbie's decision making was only circular only in some segments of her model. One connection she mentioned was the relationship between team learning and shared vision; she stated that team learning had to take place before shared vision was possible. As a leader, Cindy saw her role as partly circular, and

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her model reflected that viewpoint. Bobbie alluded to the disciplines of systems thinking by using the family and its relationship qualities of caring, sharing, and helping as driving the process. Her decision-making model was linear but included looping, with much more emphasis on planning, defining, consulting, and thinking before setting parameters. Nancy's view was pyramidal, not circular, and her model of decision making indicated this conviction. Ernestine said she integrated all of the disciplines. Decision making by itself was sketched out as a circular process, which indicated that she thought in a circular fashion as an individual, but her team decision-making process was linear. Rita described her model as a constant going round and round, although the model we ended up with was a fairly simplistic and linear one. The linear view of decision making these principals took seemed to reflect the top-down structure emanating from the central office.

Major points that principals mentioned in their discussions of decision making, using the lens of systems thinking, were placed in table form. In the following paragraphs are detailed descriptions of the five disciplines of systems thinking and each principal's understanding of the concept.

The systems thinking lens. Systems thinking, according to Senge (1990), is a discipline in which one contemplates the whole, not any individual part, how we see ourselves connected to the world, a conceptual framework, a shift from part to whole thinking. Debbie seemed to understand Senge's concept, describing it more fully when she discussed systemic change. She described the school as a circular system, slow to change. Ernestine described systems thinking as a flowing process, back and forth among the disciplines. Rita explained systems thinking in terms of a wheel with cogs, some of which could be controlled by the school whereas others could not. Nancy viewed systems

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thinking as linear and pyramidal, with steps building up. Cindy saw the school system as partly circular, and understood that one grade-level decision could affect another grade level. Bobbie's idea of systems thinking was relational; she viewed it as a family, with goals, caring, helping, sharing, and activity with and among the members.

The personal mastery lens. Personal mastery, as described by Senge (1990), is a discipline that continually clarifies and deepens our personal vision, focuses our energies, and views reality objectively; it is a personal motivation to continually learn how our actions affect our world. To Ernestine, personal mastery meant making decisions that would not have to be changed. She carefully considered decisions so that this would not occur. Rita said personal mastery makes others think, but Nancy defined it as energy, drive, and passion, and emphasized that it could not be discounted. Debbie believed a leader must understand the value of personal mastery and allow it to occur. Cindy said evidence of personal mastery differed from person to person and issue to issue, whereas Bobbie was convinced that personal mastery occurred through expecting the best from self, parents, students, and staff.

The mental models lens. The third discipline in the systems thinking framework is mental models, which, in Senge's (1990) description, are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or pictures that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. Mental models affect what we see and help expose hidden assumptions. Mental models need to be heard, according to Ernestine. Two life experiences helped Bobbie appreciate mental models and realize their importance. Cindy said that mental models are strengthened by teams working together. She encouraged her staff to "forget what your position is. What would work?" Debbie considered this particular discipline the most

important. To her, it meant tolerance and understanding of where the parents and the kids are. To Nancy, it was difficult to give up prejudices and personal viewpoints when listening to others. Rita believed mental models caused paradigm shifts.

The shared vision lens. Shared vision binds people together around a common identity and sense of destiny; it fosters commitment rather than compliance (Senge, 1990). This discipline bonded the team for Ernestine. Bobbie believed this discipline was so strong in her school that they worked "in sync." To Cindy, shared vision provided a framework, took time to develop, required agreement, and was highly important. Debbie also rated this discipline as very important; she said the fastest progress could be made when everyone was "on the same page." Nancy saw shared vision paralleling team decision making and believed it was evidenced in the environment and morale of the building. Rita concluded that shared vision was part of the team process but did not elaborate on it.

The team learning lens. The fifth discipline is team learning, described by Senge (1990) as one that allows dialogue (suspension of assumptions and genuine thinking together) and discussion (a heaving back and forth of ideas). It is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results it wants. This happened individually and within the group, claimed Ernestine. She added that the team also had to learn about each other. Bobbie saw this discipline as building on what people were excited about; she thought it was participatory. Cindy described team learning as examining the issue, looking at it from all sides, and learning together as a team to make good decisions. To Debbie, team learning meant having a common base of knowledge. Debbie believed team learning as she defined it was a necessary condition to achieving

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shared vision. Nancy saw team learning as growth and considered accomplishing this step the greatest advancement in school improvement. Team learning to Rita was being straightforward in a team setting.

## Team Decision Makers: Change Agents in Practice

### Strategies of Systems Thinking in Decision Making/ Team Decision-Making Practices

It is one thing to ask principals how they think about team decision making, but it is another to ask what happens as they implement team decision making. In other words, how we think about something and what we end up doing may have little similarity. To determine the extent of these principals' practices in decision making and team decision making, I isolated indicators or strategies of systems thinking disciplines expressed in their interviews that would define their thinking and clarify their decision making models. I selected 2 strategies from each of the 5 disciplines of systems thinking listed by Senge (1994) that represented systems thinking disciplines put into practice. These strategies were linked to examples principals gave of how they practice team decision making. For ease of review, I developed a table to determine whether principals applied any of the strategies of systems thinking to team decision making (see Table 4). The strategies and their enhancement or constraint in the team decision-making process are described in the following paragraphs.

Strategies in systems thinking. To determine how principals employ the five disciplines in systems thinking (Senge, 1994), I reviewed the interview transcripts for strategies that indicated principals' understanding and possible use in team decision

Table 4. Systems Strategies in Principals' Practice of Team Decision Making

| Systems Discipline | Identify Strategy | Ernestine | Bobbie | Cindy | Debbie | Nancy | Rita |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Systems Thinking | Peripheral Vision | | Nonpositional intuitive, influencing (fg) Did not participate, let us do the talking | Stand back, see big picture | Prefers background | In background | Likes to blend in |
| | Uses the Language | Input; brain-storming sometimes not good, integrates all systems thinking disciplines | Brainstorm, discuss, prioritize, consensus, influences | Brainstorm, discuss, prioritize, consensus, chart, clarify | Systemic thinking circular, no force, listen, shared roles, tools, research | Research, consensus, brainstorm, input | Research, dialogue, discussion, consensus |
| Personal Mastery | Keep Personal Vision | Know it and clearly articulate it | Staff shares her vision | | Have to believe it, model it | Need to know others' vision | What is the vision |
| | Clear Picture of Current Reality | Others have merit, talent and ability | Focus on the real work at hand | Others with better knowledge to share | Ways to be tolerant (fg) Principal knew what to do, that made a difference | Staff takes more responsibility (fg) There is a positive conflict | Hone in, pick up on real issues |

(fg) = focus group

*Table 4. Continued*

Table 4. Continued

| Systems Discipline | Identify Strategy | Ernestine | Bobbie | Cindy | Debbie | Nancy | Rita |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mental Models | Reflection | | | Don't have same backgrounds | Patience is important | Talks about reflecting back (fg) Principal saw things come full circle | Calls for paradigm shift |
| | Inquiry | Team must learn about each other | Intuitive, good judge | Look at problem from different perspectives | Let everyone have their say | We bring own prejudices, views, that is what is so different | Some are nonparticipator y in large group |
| Shared Vision | Vision not Equal | | Many points of view from many people (fg) We respect others' opinion | Approach different but need to agree on vision | | (fg) There are different levels of enthusiasm | |
| | Collective Purpose | More team works together, easier to narrow down and agree | We move in sync; environment where everyone counts | As a team we are forced to look at an issue from all sides, be productive (fg) She worked with us | Quickest you advance is when everyone is on same page (fg) There was good energy. Brings us to common understanding | Don't necessarily achieve in team decision making; it is the morale, environment of building. | Become comfortable, move away from personal interest |

(fg) = focus group

Table 4. Continued

| Systems Discipline | Identify Strategy | Ernestine | Bobbie | Cindy | Debbie | Nancy | Rita |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Team Learning | Dialogue Discussion | The more people, wider the opinion (fg) We struggled with the language | Listen, learn and share information (fg) There is a comfort to talk about any thing | Freer discussion learn and share information (fg) The principal encourages | Staff initiates and asks for help (fg) Everyone had a voice | Need this before shared vision (fg) Ground rules are important so people don't lose focus | Freedom to disagree, time for dialogue (fg) We know each other |
| | Assumptions Surface | More staff participates and thinks, stronger leader I am (fg) Vision was there, but top never released authority for site to make decision | Involved if they feel they have a voice | Examine from all sides | More buy-in and risk taking | Patience and accountability | Risk, put it on the table (fg) Equal opportunities to speak |

(fg) = focus group

making. Systems thinking is evident when someone has a peripheral vision, "the ability to pay attention to the world as if through a wide angle, not a telephoto lens, so you can see how your actions interrelate with other areas of activity" and uses the language of methods, tools and principles, "speaking the systems language skillfully, when it becomes second nature" (Senge, 1994, p. 87-88). Three of the principals preferred to blend in the background rather than take over or run the decision making group. Two focus groups supported the roles these principals assumed. It was evident that all 6 principals used the language of systems thinking, but as I analyzed the interviews, I saw that the overall purpose or meaning of the common language was lacking or misunderstood.

Strategies in personal mastery. Two basic strategies suggested in developing personal mastery, according to Senge (1994), are to keep a personal vision and not lower it, and to keep a clear picture of current reality, seeing the world as it really is. Although no specific use of the word vision evolved in the conversation with Cindy, her sense of values pervaded much of her discussion on leadership. There was a sense of respect and support and willingness to belong to a cohesive group that came from her staff. The others felt strongly about their own vision and the importance of sharing it, as well as knowing the others' vision. The principals alluded to an understanding of knowing what others have to offer. Debbie's focus group recognized that their principal knew what to do, which they claimed made a difference.

Strategies in mental models. Skills to accomplish the discipline of mental models are reflection, "slowing down the thinking processes to become more aware of how we form our own thinking," and inquiry, "holding conversations where we openly share views and develop knowledge about each other's assumptions" (Senge, 1994, p. 237). The

strategy of reflection was little used in their language or in their practice. One focus group referred to their principal's technique of explaining to them how she had seen numerous educational reforms come full circle and shared that knowledge with them; the context within which this sharing was placed indicated that she gave some thought to what the group was talking about and offered her viewpoint. All principals spoke about inquiry but approached it from different angles, from seeing opinions mushroom according to the size of the group, to valuing a group's different perspectives. One woman recognized that some people choose not to participate in a large group setting, although a way to get around that issue was not discussed.

Strategies in shared vision. A shared vision has strategies and skills, such as, that visions are not all equal, there are different ways or thrusts of prioritizing information, and members have a collective sense of purpose, that we are all in this together (Senge, l994). One principal sees the shared vision as a way to have the team narrow down the choices, but another sees this as an opportunity to look at an issue from all sides. Debbie contends that if everyone has the vision, they operate within the principles of that organization. "The quickest you advance is when everyone is on the same page." She says there is more openness in bringing up problems. Yet another principal sees the collective purpose as being in the environment of the building. Although the concept was viewed more broadly, the principals and teachers placed high value on a shared vision from the staff feeling more responsible, comfortable, and respectful of each other and each other's' level of enthusiasm.

Strategies in team learning. Strategies and skills for the discipline of team learning list include dialogue, skillful discussion, balance advocacy with inequity, bring assumptions

to the surface, and "become aware of the assumptions and beliefs that link what we see to what we conclude" (Senge, 1994, pp. 352-353). As teams worked together, some learned to listen and share information and some principals encouraged freedom to disagree; one focus group agreed with their principal. It is obvious that a group must have time together to learn and grow as a team before they can reach a level of acceptance, understanding and freedom to share. Three principals whose talk indicated a strong sense of team leadership were conscious of the value in team learning and worked to get their staff to a point where their comments reflected a sense of encouragement, having a voice, and a comfort to talk about anything. One principal framed team learning as important to learn about each other and saw this as a way to strengthen her leadership as the team developed. This particular team still saw central office as the one pulling the strings. Cindy, whose teachers saw her as an encourager, talked about her team learning as they went. "When you bring people together to discuss tense concerns, you want it productive. There is an art to this. You learn as you go. People are freer here to talk and add to the list. As a team, we are forced to examine the issue and look at it from all sides."

## Major Themes in Team Decision Making

As the principals talked about their team decision-making experiences several themes emerged. The themes were time, parent participation, central office, shared vision, leadership and environment. These themes created both positive and negative tensions in defining the principals' practices of team decision making. Table 5 lists the six principals' comments and those of the focus groups along with language in NCA documents that

Table 5. Major themes in Principals' Decision Making and Team Decision Making

| Theme | Ernestine | Bobbie | Cindy | Debbie | Nancy | Rita |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Time** | Constrained by central office | | Need more (fg) Need more release time | Team building takes time (fg) Time for training, total staff meetings | District constraint on time (fg) Time needed to plan and implement | More time is needed to implement team decision making |
| **Parent Participation** | Informal for input | Strong parental involvement (NCA) Parents involved in strategies | Minimal; would like more | Heavy involvement on team, school | Parents on team; encourages support (NCA) Parents in summer, night program | Parents want control, do not understand schools (NCA) Parent feedback for goal |
| **Central Office** | Not enough time or information (fg)Top down agenda | Connected to vision but little respect for some in central office | Pressures from central office, time constraints, demands, expectations | Don't walk the talk; built foundation but didn't build house (fg) Moved time line | Supportive, great superintendent, however, time and budget are concerns | Time issue, can't share some information with staff |
| **Shared Vision** | Collective sense, easy to narrow down ideas | All in sync; strong supportive staff and parents | Is the framework, sees goals as obvious ones; close group (NCA)Share successes | Very strong with staff empowered, parents, almost all on the same page; not there yet | Is morale, environment, participative group (fg) Not there yet | Working at it (NCA)Sense of faculty pulling together on shared goals |

(fg) = focus group
(NCA) = NCA artifacts

Table 5. Continued

| Theme | Ernestine | Bobbie | Cindy | Debbie | Nancy | Rita |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Leadership** | (fg)Central office had hidden agendas- there is a central office vision and we are supposed to catch it | (fg)We listen, respect, value; principal is wonderful at drawing that out | (fg) Leadership is shared, she encourages, works with us, does not tell us what to do, never had to ask her to step in | (fg) You do need strong leadership, not just the principal; she counted on us a lot, supported us, we have freedom to lead | (fg) We are staff driven; she helps with personality issues; she gives us space, helps with research and is a team member | (fg) This is a team effort, we know each other, equal opportunity to speak, co-chairs run the meetings |
| **Environment** | Hostile toward central office; tension | Family focused staff; supportive | Sensitive and caring for others; still growing | Caring, family and child centered | Friendly, caring about kids, teamwork and respect | Staff still learning how to learn together |

(fg) = focus group
(NCA) = NCA artifacts

supported the major themes that arose from the study. A detailed discussion of how the themes enhanced and constrained the team decision-making process follows.

Themes That Enhance: Environment, Parents, Community, Parameters, Leadership

First, enhancements of team decision making are reviewed. Team decision making affected the internal environment of the school, parameters, parent involvement and sense of community in a positive manner. Teachers and principals both spoke of knowing each other better and understanding each other more through team decision making. Teachers appreciated knowing the parameters in a decision; all but one principal had learned to develop this technique and found it integral to the decision-making process. Teachers stated that parameters helped them to focus on the issue at hand. Knowing that parents can play a key role in the success of a school has encouraged principals to work hard to involve parents in the school, and the principals have found the results of these efforts to be positive. A sense of community inside and outside the school created a supportive environment for all stakeholders. Also, in an external sense, principals who actively encouraged and supported parent involvement spoke of their participation as key to school success. Leadership played a significant role in the enhancement of the team decision-making process. Staff who expressed support and empowerment from their principals saw this as integral to their team efforts. Some of these enhancements played an opposite role for particular principals, however, and became constraints. The enhancements and constraints are shown in Table 5.

Themes That Internally Constrain: Time, Environment, Community, Staff Changes, Parameters, Parents, School Day Structure, Budget

Constraints arose in myriad contexts, internal and external to the school, and most conversations reflected these struggles. Constraints affecting some principals internally were time, environment and sense of community, staff changes, parameters, parent involvement, the school day structure, and the budget. External constraints that some principals enumerated were time, district policies, the environment, parameters in goal setting, parents, sense of community, school day structure and budget. Time reared its ugly head in all but one conversation with principals and focus groups. There was not enough time to learn and develop together as a team. All of the principals but Rita described the decision-making process as being developed through trial and error and lots of practice. Learning how to balance all the duties a principal has, especially when roles are shifting, is difficult at best. There seemed to be no simple solution other than having had the luxury of time to spend with staff in a team learning environment. There was no time for the team to reflect on decisions or revisit and redo a decision. Any decision made in a team framework took longer, according to every one of the principals. This was not spoken of negatively, but the complaint about the lack of time signified that decision making with others involved could be difficult or troublesome because of the time issue.

One principal described the environment in the school as the morale; she also described it as their shared vision. She explained further that shared vision is not necessarily achieved in team decision making. The school that did not encourage parents into their environment seemed to feel constraints because of their attitude toward parents, which, in turn, appeared to affect their internal sense of community. Respondents from

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other schools gave the impression that the teachers worked together only because they were forced to by the central office forced them to do so. Their discussion gave no clues as to the quality of the teamwork or their enjoyment of team learning.

Staff changes affected the group because most new members had no idea how team decision making worked or what their role was, nor did they have experience in knowing and working with the others in a team setting. Parameters in the school setting could affect decision making negatively, as well. Along with finding the time to meet, setting a meeting place, working within the time lines, and learning what they need to know and do took a toll on the process, because often these parameters were narrow or ill-defined. Money to go off-site was not in any principal's budget. The leadership of the principal had a direct effect on the team's decision-making process. Principals whose views or knowledge of team decision making were minimal, often had not practiced it and had teachers who were not in the same frame of thinking as those from schools whose staff had been able to develop a team learning environment.

Parent participation was thought to be a major constraint in one principal's view; experiences with parents in the past had not been pleasant, and parents were viewed as problems in the building. The other principals found parent participation difficult only from the standpoint that few were able to attend meetings. Although evening meetings were more difficult for staff to attend, one principal held meetings at night so that more parents could attend. The structure of the school day, including when the teachers met for staff meetings, and whether or not they had common planning periods or lunch hours when they could meet, also affected team decision making. Building budget constraints affected team decision making in multiple ways, through lack of money for staff

development, off-site meetings, common planning time to meet, extra pay for committee work, and environmental limits affecting what teams were able to accomplish.

Themes That Externally Constrain: Time, District Policies, Environment, Parents, Community, Leadership, Structure of Day, Budget

Not only did the principals grapple with internal issues in a sense that affected team decision making, but external pressures created conflict as well. Problems with time for parents to attend meetings, time allotted for team decision making built into the school calendar by central office, time to reflect on decisions, and time to learn together were heard again and again from teachers and principals. It was evident in further discussion that most of these interviewees saw central office as holding the strings on the time issue.

One central office decision affected two schools significantly. The district reconfigured from a neighborhood school concept to a modified plan that relocated all kindergarten through 2nd graders into one building, and miles away, another building held 3rd through 5th graders. Parents often could not get to the schools because of transportation problems. The sense of community support suffered. This was noted in one conversation about parent availability and was evident in an annual report comment to another school that did not encourage parent involvement. This school had not followed through with a school profile that included valuable information about their community outside the school. Central office demands, which tended to be created and implemented in a hierarchical setting, filtered down to the slowly emerging, democratically structured team decision-making group in the changing school setting, which seemed to profoundly affect teachers and all but one principal.

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Leadership suffered directly from central office mandates and policies. Some principals experienced difficulty with their superiors regarding their evaluations. One principal perceived that her superintendent saw her as weak because she involved her staff in as many decisions as possible. She complained that there was a lack of understanding of what she was attempting to do by developing team learning. Principals spoke of central offices that wanted answers now, giving them little time to pull their staff together. There was also the perception among principals that central office still operates under the old system and treats schools accordingly but expects them to become knowledgeable about and adept at participative management and team building. It is like trying to place a square peg into a round hole. This pressure from central office directly affects the leadership of the principal, especially in the eyes of her constituents. One principal, when given a demand for an immediate answer, scrambled around and pulled out her "experts" for input before responding to central office with an answer, which they wanted right away.

The lack of an adequate building-level budget, set by central office, crept into the discussions as well, and was said to put up roadblocks to some well-laid plans. The flexibility to transfer funds or be given more autonomy with the budget, which could alleviate some of the budget pressure, was not commonplace for elementary principals. Parameters such as proximity of the school to parents' homes and holding meetings during the day affected the quality of the team decision, as well as who would be able to be involved in the decision.

How Principals Think About and Practice Team Decision Making

Cloudy Systems-Thinking Lenses in Team Decision Making

It was obvious that the principals saw the school as a system in different formats. The concept of systems thinking was not clear to these principals. They seemed to be grappling with what team decision making meant in terms of practice. A practical understanding of how to accomplish team decision making seemed to elude them; they had not reached the point where they could work with it comfortably in their practice. The context within which the principals worked was top-down decision making, with directives from central office, but they had to shift to the team decision-making process for goal-setting purposes and seemed to feel caught in the middle. They were attempting to practice team decision making in a rigid, hierarchical system. There had been little support or professional development to help them understand their roles and learn the appropriate techniques of leadership in a team decision making context. One of the principals was caught in both paradigms. She thought in the team decision-making mode, yet in practice she had not yet embraced the tenets of team decision making. The way most of the principals thought about team decision making, as illustrated by their decision-making models, tended to be quite linear, indicating a lack of control. Some of the principals were attempting to move the empowering process forward by being more fluid or circular within their linear models.

Disciplines understood. The shared vision discipline received strong support from the principals in their discussions and anecdotes. All of them highly valued team learning and seemed to give it the strongest support or level of importance. Several principals

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used compelling anecdotes about team learning. They had strong feelings and indicated a need to study learning together.

Disciplines defeated. Principals did not see the connection of mental models to the team decision-making process. They were unsure of how to use mental models to their advantage. They appeared to find that attempting to practice an empowerment process within a hierarchical framework was like trying to put a round peg into a square hole.

Language misunderstood. The principals also seemed to find it difficult to understand the language of team leadership and decision making. Current leadership literature discusses team building, shared vision, and systems thinking. However, the notion of personal mastery, which can be described as self-learning and reflection, allowing others to help in thinking, and learning about others, did not seem to be related to the principals' practice. Personal mastery is indicative of transformational leadership thinking. Principals seemingly were not taught to question or validate what exists. The practice of team decision making requires reflection, questioning, and revisiting personal mastery and mental models, which appeared to be relatively new concepts for these leaders.

## Changes in Practice

These principals recognized that their decision-making practices had changed during the time that they had been involved in the NCA process. They noted changes in their practice regarding how they managed time, their emphasis on parental involvement, their development of team leadership, their role as a team player, and the use of the techniques they saw as important in developing a working model of team decision

making. All of these seem to be significant changes with which the principals struggled. One woman saw herself as becoming more collaborative, but she did not seem to be so to the staff. A few knew the methods of making team decisions but chose not to practice these participative methods. A few others seemed to be truly moving toward team leadership.

Most of these principals learned how to be team leaders by "trial and error and lots of mistakes," according to Cindy. This took a lot of time and effort, one indicated. The principals also said they read research to find out what worked and made changes and tried different methods, while practicing and adjusting their changing roles. This meant that, for any of these principals to understand and practice team decision making, they had to be self-motivated enough to learn how to accomplish this process.

Barriers to Change

A number of barriers inhibited principals in moving forward in the team decision-making process. These were time, contracts, the structure of the day, and central office. The overarching problem with implementing systems thinking was the time required in a school setting to accomplish all of the disciplines effectively. Time constraints from central office and contract language hindered the process in a number of ways. In addition, researchers have suggested that effective team learning takes time.

Although some principals had made significant changes in their leadership roles in team decision making, no changes had been made at the central offices to accommodate these changes in the buildings. Changes that the principals and teachers advocated included modifying the structure of the school day, budgeting for school improvement

planning and implementation, and arranging the school day to allow adequate time for the stakeholders to meet and further develop their team learning skills. Two principals, in their models of decision making, reflected the thinking of the central office on how decisions were to be reached in their buildings. The principals complained about the time it took for their staffs to learn about each other and to learn together. Their structured day and contractual constraints did not allow time to be built into the day or the calendar year for teachers and principals to spend the amount of time all believe is necessary to meet the demands of implementing effective strategies and the skills of systems thinking.

The variation of viewpoints about how parents should participate in team decision making was interesting. Two principals saw parent involvement as integrally meshed with the school improvement plan and as valuable and essential to the success of the school. Two other principals, although they spoke about parents, did not give the impression that the parents were or could be a key link that must be included in the team decision-making process. Both of them asked about the role of parents in school improvement and how it was accomplished elsewhere. It was obvious that they did not know what parent participation was or what it looked like, but they were curious and wanted to know more about it. Cindy believed it would make a difference if parents were more involved, but she did not see this as possible because of a number of issues that kept parents from being involved in the school community. To Nancy, team learning included growth in parent participation.

It was evident that the process of team leadership caused principals to experience errors and trials as they slowly improved their skills. The principals indicated that their present relationship with their staff was different from their relationship with staff five

years ago, but that change was not automatic. They had to work at it and learn along the way. Bobbie said when she first became a principal she used the authority of her position to get what she wanted. Now, she said, she uses influence. She learned that this method was much more acceptable. Nancy saw her position change as well, from "she who walks the halls" to facilitator. All of the principals spoke of their role as that of learner. Although learning is included as an enhancement, it might be viewed in a general sense as a constraint, especially if the principal and staff do not have a good working relationship.

Three of the principals were specific in describing their role in team decision making as team players, not leaders. In numerous instances, the principals played the role of "teacher" and the teachers played the role of "leader." They thought that when their roles switched, much more learning took place. This switch, according to Nancy, also created more responsibility. Debbie experienced more openness with the staff because they say what they want to say, and there is more buy-in and risk taking. Rita agreed and indicated that teachers had the freedom to disagree. Bobbie believed a new environment had been created, one in which everyone counts. Ernestine said team decision making was easier in the long run; that it was refreshing to learn others' views and skills, and observe staff thinking and working as a team.

## Implications

As a member of the board of NCA Michigan Committee for 6 years and a practicing principal of an NCA member elementary school for 10 years, I have been acutely aware of issues surrounding the process of accreditation as it affects schools and changes in leadership. These issues have been noted from a principal's viewpoint and from

the vantage point of a state committee member, where major issues from NCA member schools in the state are brought to the committee for review, discussion, and approval or disapproval. I have experienced concerns with the language in the accreditation process along with its interpretation and use, the role of the principal in NCA accreditation, and what kind of framework would be best to carry out the responsibilities required by NCA. There is confusion among principals as to what the best practices are. The literature is lacking in these areas, and professional development programs to help principals answer these questions are nonexistent. This study has grounded these concerns in empirical data indicating that, in fact, there are dilemmas in carrying out the responsibilities for NCA accreditation that can and should be addressed.

This study in particular suggests that we seriously consider developing a framework of team decision making that is flexible enough for individual schools to adapt to their unique situations. A common language is commendable in implementing new projects or concepts, but it seems obvious that the principals neither understand the language nor know how to put the concepts into practice. A list of terms and simulations to interpret the meanings would be helpful for principals and other stakeholders to practice with, before developing the goal selection process. The next step in accreditation after goal selection becomes even more complicated because the school develops strategies, interventions, and time lines to carry the process through to fruition. This step entails more lengthy involvement than the goal selection process.

A variety of constituencies can benefit from these conclusions. These include:

1. Elementary principals
2. Education leadership literature

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3. North Central Association

4. School boards

5. Central office personnel

Implications for NCA

This study can benefit NCA by providing examples of effective methods of team decision making in elementary schools, supplying sample decision-making models for school principals to use to develop a framework unique to their needs, and drawing to their attention the necessity of defining the list of terms used in the language of NCA accreditation, so that schools can understand the language and build learning teams around that language. It is obvious that principals as well as teachers are grappling with team decision making; they have questions about what model is effective, how it works, what parameters should be set, and who are the stakeholders. These questions are answerable and need to be framed in a seminar or other method of communication and offered to principals who are in the process of NCA accreditation or who plan to be shortly.

Some considerations that could benefit NCA and its constituents are:

1. A workshop for principals on team decision making in goal selection and beyond (including a knowledge base of the five disciplines and a model of team decision making to be tailored to the individual).

2. An article in the NCA Quarterly offering suggestions for effective parent and community involvement in the goal selection and implementation process.

3. An article in the NCA Quarterly indicating what some elementary principals have done in the goal selection process as team decision makers.

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4. A section written in the NCA accreditation handbook written specifically for principals which deals with team decision making.

Principals involved in the NCA process will benefit by learning how to develop team decision making with an effective model. Having such a model will also enhance the way they look at setting parameters in the team decision-making process. Principals spoke of this concept as being the most valuable tool they had added to their decision making model; they learned it on their own through trial and error and much practice.

Implications for the Leadership Literature

The findings confirmed that some principals risk being collaborative in their decision making because this is in direct conflict with the bureaucratic nature of the school setting. The findings also confirmed what educational researchers such as Sergiovanni have determined--that collaborative leaders in schools are more effective than authoritative leaders. As indicated in the stories, reflective leadership supports a collaborative environment. This study indicated that principals have learned to become team decision makers through a trial-and-error method; they have not learned this in courses or workshops. Some principals are not aware of the importance of parent and school community involvement or how to go about creating an environment in which these stakeholders can be knowledgeable about and integral to the school decision-making process. The study also adds to the literature that the language of systems thinking, when understood and internalized, is enacted in team decision making.

# Conclusion

She who loves a garden
learns the lessons of the seasons
and how life itself
adheres to nature's plan.
Mary Engelbreit

Principals think about decision making a lot, as it is a significant part of their role and responsibility that is undergoing major restructuring. Overall, principals have not been taught how to make team decisions. It has been a trial-and-error process in a mistake-strewn path. Principals also have not been taught how to think reflectively about team decision making. The nature of the position historically has not encouraged nor fostered the importance of taking time to reflect on their practice.

The extent to which principals enact team decision making varies greatly, for a variety of reasons. The language of systems thinking as it relates to team decision making often is not understood and when it is not understood or internalized, it is not enacted. External and internal tensions affect the level and implementation of team decision making. The bureaucratic nature of school systems is not synchronous with team decision making at the building level. Struggles that principals deal with, such as their leadership skills, environment, beliefs, and other outside tensions such as parent involvement, central office demands, and the external environment, all come into play when these principals carry out team decision making.

The role of central office as a bureaucratic entity is in direct conflict with the collaborative efforts that team decision making entails. A certain amount of risk-taking is involved in making team decisions at the building level. One principal suffered a poor

evaluation because central office saw her team decision making as a weakness; it looked like she could not make decisions on her own. Cooper ( 1995) described how women in educational administration have responded to bureaucratic pressures by learning "to reflect on their organizational lives in order to survive and advance in the hierarchy. They carry their female views with them into the male bureaucratic realm and must consciously put some of them aside to 'succeed' in this world on its own terms" (p. 244). She further stated that women are claiming their place in their professions, moving from reflection to action and making a difference. As they proceed with this resistance to bureaucracy, they deliberately are transforming their own spaces. Although they are still part of that stifling bureaucracy and still use the rational, linear procedures, they are "moving from discourse to action and claiming their right to have their own part matter. These women can function as influential agents of change" (p. 245).

The Five Disciplines

The systems-thinking disciplines were understood and internalized by a few principals. Most but not all who did so grasped the concepts they enacted. Bobbie was effective in her explanation of the disciplines, although she did disagree that simple was not necessarily better. She believed whatever got the job done was all right, whether it was complex or simple. Nancy did not understand the terminology or its meaning; systems thinking was not part of her thinking or behavior in team decision making. The techniques identified by Senge (1990) and Katzenbach and Smith (1994) that affect team leadership were lacking in the stories shared by Nancy and her teachers in the focus group. Ernestine spoke the language, but in the teachers' eyes she was a transparent leader. They

saw her as someone who handed down central office edicts rather than practicing team leadership.

External Support/Barriers

Tensions affected team decision making to a significant degree and either helped or hindered the process. Parental involvement was integral to the school where Debbie was principal; her teachers recognized and valued parents as well. Rita and her teachers did not want parental participation whatsoever and did not see their value. As mentioned before, Debbie's evaluation was negative because central office viewed her team decision making as a weakness. A strong dominant central office affected the team decision making in Ernestine's school. Her teachers said that central office called all the shots.

Grapple With Power and Authority

The struggles that some of these principals are experiencing with power and domination from central office conflicting with their collaborative thinking are still evident in their practice. In an article about women principals and power, Hurty ( 1995) referred to other research describing a different kind of power encouraging a feminist ethic of risk. She detailed work by Dunlap and Goldman, who proposed that facilitative, interactive power is more useful in school reform than top-down vertical systems of authority. Hurty reviewed Judy Rosener's challenge that the "command and control" leadership style frequently associated with men then suggests that " women tend to use 'interactive' leadership which encourages participation, shares power and information, enhances self-worth, and gets others excited about their work" (p. 381).

There is little in the literature about the dimensions of power women hold as principals, Hurty (1995) explained. Further, she pointed out in a study of small-town schools by Schmuck and Schmuck the researchers found that women administrators were more skillful in interpersonal communication and most instances of collaboration. Further, involvement and shared influence occurred in schools with female principals, where the authors saw teamwork, excitement, and enthusiasm.

Hurty (1995) concluded that women principals use and talk about power in ways distinctly different from traditional ways. They saw power "with," not power "over." They referred to connectedness and coactivity, shared and expandable power, and empowerment. Connectedness was described by caring, interdependence, and commitment to community. This perspective was circular and paradoxical. They saw creating change not by commanding but nurturing growth over time, through a cycle of teaching, learning, and acting. Their world was less oppositional and more relational.

Others such as Sergiovanni (1992), Fullan (1992), Shakeshaft (1986), and Foster, (1989) have challenged the traditional organizational theory of schools, which is dominated by concepts of hierarchy, power, and authority and have endorsed the concepts of collaboration, community, and relationships. However, as we have heard through the voices of these principals and teachers, the time has not yet arrived. The flower has not yet bloomed. The struggle continues in public education; restructuring continues to move forward slowly, as a newly planted flower in a garden that needs care, nutrition, and time.

Reflection in Action

Those principals who did not talk about or refer to spending time thinking about an issue or revisiting an issue in their decision-making model were not rare. Only two principals, Bobbie and Debbie, talked about spending time thinking, or putting distance between the issue and when the decision needed to be made. Their models reflected this attribute. They saw value in reflection before and after action.

Senge (1990) talks about reflection as a changing value. He believes people need to reflect on their own and others' thinking in order to make better decisions. Bolman and Deal (1991) and Schon (1991) also support reflection as an important leadership characteristic. Schon further states that reflection in action distinguishes the truly outstanding professional. Women have been found to practice reflective thinking about themselves and their relationship to their organizations (Astin & Leland, 1991; Helgeson, 1990; VanVelsor & Hughes, 1990). They learn and achieve significantly from others' expertise and experiences. The two reflective principals seemed to be the most effective collaborative thinkers and decision makers in this study. Their actions support the literature on reflective leadership as we know it.

Final Comment

Research has shown that team decision making can affect school improvement. Pounder et al. (1995) claim: "Overall, current efforts to implement shared decision making have the potential to improve school performance. This study suggests that people in many different roles can lead and thereby affect the performance of their schools" (p. 564). Leithwood (cited in Pounder et al., 1995) warns principals if they

expect to have any influence on the school's improvement, they must give more emphasis to a shift in leadership to a transformational concept. Further, he states:

> Principals continue to have little influence on the emphasis given to instructional work and thus student achievement. It calls for the adoption of a more inclusive transformational conceptualization of leadership, considering that instructional leadership alone is insufficient to produce meaningful change and improved academic performance. (p. 567)

Just as a gardener has to learn the right times to reap, sow, and harvest, the principal must learn and practice effective team decision making to positively affect the results of goal implementation. The elementary principals in this study demonstrated a belief in their role as a model and facilitator, always learning and took considerable measures to develop their abilities as team leaders in a restructuring environment. It seems obvious that they consider their roles seriously and believe in what they do. Their team decision making, if enacted as such, can have far-reaching positive effects on student performance.

It seems that if the process of team decision making is about growth: growth of the team's knowledge about each other and is working as a team; growth of accountability and responsibility across the team with team decisions; growth in knowledge of the school; and growth in the effectiveness of the school through school improvement plans developed and implemented through this group process, making school a better place for children to grow and learn.

Keeping the devil out of the garden so that the plants can grow and flourish is no small task for the principal, but the team decision-making process, with its "enrollment" (Senge, 1990) of all the stakeholders and ensuing joint ownership of decisions, gives growth a chance. A favorite saying on a plaque hanging in my school's kindergarten

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classroom aptly phrases what may happen as principals and teachers practice and model team learning in the school environment:

> Kindergarten is, you know, a place where little people grow.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

UCRIHS Approval Letter, Interview Guide, Focus Group
Interview Guide, Focus Group Questions

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

February 13, 1997

TO: Maenette K. Benham
430 Erickson Hall

RE: IRB#: 97-085
TITLE: FEMALE ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL'S TEAM DECISION MAKING IN THE NCA GOAL SELECTION PROCESS
REVISION REQUESTED: N/A
CATEGORY: 1-C;D
APPROVAL DATE: 02/11/97

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects'(UCRIHS) review of this project is complete. I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS approved this project and any revisions listed above.

**RENEWAL:** UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Investigators planning to continue a project beyond one year must use the green renewal form (enclosed with the original approval letter or when a project is renewed) to seek updated certification. There is a maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for complete review.

**REVISIONS:** **UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change.** If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB # and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

**PROBLEMS/ CHANGES:** Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, investigators must notify UCRIHS promptly: (1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or (2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of any future help, please do not hesitate to contact us at (517)355-2180 or FAX (517)432-1171.

Sincerely,

David E. Wright, Ph.D.
UCRIHS Chair

DEW:bed

cc: Rena Richtig

OFFICE OF
RESEARCH
AND
GRADUATE
STUDIES

University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS)

Michigan State University
246 Administration Building
East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1046

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FAX 517/432-1171

The Michigan State University IDEA is Institutional Diversity Excellence in Action

MSU is an affirmative-action equal-opportunity institution

Interview Protocol

Purpose of Interview Protocol and Focused Group Interview:

To systematically collect and document information relevant to what principals do or do not do in the of NCA goal setting process. These tools were designed to respond to the research questions. Two to three separate interviews each lasting about an hour, will be conducted at the principal's building about three to four weeks apart. As soon as possible after the second (or third, if needed) interview, the interviewer will meet with three or four staff members for a focused group interview. The focused group interview will gather staff members' viewpoints of the team decision making process.

My Role:

To develop the interview and focus group guides and use them to ask questions and allow for further exploration to gather information about their thinking about and practice and promotion of team decision making. To move the interview forward by encouraging further response to questions which may give a better picture of team decision making.

Introduction for Participant:

I am interested in how principals have learned about, think about and practice team decision making. Two or three separate interviews have been devised to give me an idea of how you learned about and think about decision making, team decision making, and how you carry out decision making in your school setting. During the interview process, please feel free to expand on any idea or belief you feel will offer a good picture of how you think about and practice team decision making. I will audio tape record our

conversation during the interviews; however, at any time you may turn off the tape recorder. The transcribed interviews will be given to you for review and further clarification if you deem it necessary. All information will be kept confidential; changes in detail about specific location and other descriptives will help to maintain confidentiality.

Interview Guide

Interview Number One:

1. Would you please draw a picture or model that best explains how you make decisions?
   a. What does this model mean? Please explain. Describe your terms.
   b. How did you come to this process?
   c. How do you apply your model? Please give examples in your principal practice.

2. How is your decision making model the same or different from how team decisions are made in the NCA goal setting stage?
   a. Please give an example of each.
   b. Have you experienced any significant changes in decision making from the first experience of team goal setting in NCA? Are there specific groups that you relate with that are affected? Please explain.
   c. What do you see are the causes for any differences?

3. What do you believe has been most difficult for you in this process
   a. Are there any factors in the school setting that enhance or constrain your practice of team decision making? Please explain.
   b. Have you experienced any changes in relationships in the school setting as a result? Please explain.
   c. Can you describe how your own beliefs of leadership may have influenced your team decision making process? How did you arrive at these beliefs?
   d. How do you view the school as a system?
   e. How do you view "creative tensions" in decision making?
   f. How do you influence your staff in team decision making?
   g. What does team learning mean to you? How do you see it relating to team decision making?
   h. If I were to ask a teacher to describe how you involve him or her in the decision making process, what would I hear?

Purpose of Interview Number Two:

To gather more information from the participant on the model, review anything I didn't get to finish or need clarification on from the first interview, and narrow our discussion on team decision making to its relation to systems thinking and techniques.

My Role:

To probe further on questions and responses from the first interview that would benefit the study. I may respond to questions the participant may have from the first interview, as the time between interviews will allow for reflection. I will discuss the decision model the participant developed in the first interview. The questions will focus on more specific information on team decision making, and bring systems thinking and techniques into the conversation to learn what principals know about and do with team decision making.

Introduction for Participant:

In this interview I would like to briefly review our first interview, talk more about your decision model that was drawn and discussed in the first interview, focus on systems thinking, team decision making and how team decisions are made. If we believe that we need more time to answer all the questions, we will schedule a third interview to be held in the next few weeks.

Interview Number Two Guide:

1. Reflecting on our first interview, is there anything you would like to talk about or explain further? (At this point, I will ask for clarification or further explanation on any responses I believe are important or complete any portion of our first interview not yet addressed).

2. What does team decision making mean to you?

3. Can you describe a specific process that you utilize to help you with team decision making and how it relates to the decision making model or picture we discussed in our first interview?

4. How do you see team decision making impacting relationships with others in the school setting; outside the school setting; in the classroom?

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5. Have you experienced any changes in power; roles; authority?

6. Are there any factors of team decision making that enhance or constrain your efforts?

7 Research today tells us that five disciplines of systems thinking are an effective way to implement team leadership. I will talk about each discipline and list three descriptors of each discipline. As we look at each one, please tell me how you see these disciplines and descriptors fitting or not fitting in to your practice.

a. systems thinking (descriptors: circular; fluid; systemic)
b. personal mastery (descriptors: personal motivation; shared reality; creative tension)
c. mental models (descriptors: reflection; influence; assumptions)
d. shared vision (descriptors: group commitment; meshed; relationship)
e. team learning (descriptors: coordinated action; followership; participatory) What are others?

8. There are some techniques that are described as effective ways to bring people together to enable them to practice team decision making. I will mention each one and ask you to respond to the technique in two ways: l. what does the phrase mean to you? 2. how does this technique fit or not fit into your practice of team decision making? Give examples if possible:

a. focus on the real work
b. keep it simple
c. learn by doing
d. focus on the best
e. find out what brings the group together
f. timing is everything
g. design places where community can happen
h. find people who share your passion
I. learn how to host good gatherings
j. acknowledge people's contributions
k. involve the whole person
l. celebrate

9. If I asked an outsider to come to your school during its NCA goal setting process, what would the person see? How would it be described?

Focused Group Interview Guide

This process will document the conversations of staff members who were involved in the team decision making process of goal selection in NCA with the principals interviewed earlier. The group will be moderated by the interviewee, and facilitated by a professional focus group consultant offering this service in a volunteer capacity. The process will last about an hour and will be held in the school after school hours. The process will be charted and developed as it progresses. Up to five staff members who either served on the steering committee, held the chair of a selected NCA goal, or co-chair of the steering committee, will be invited to participate in the interview to respond to questions.

My Role:

To gather information from staff members relevant to their perceptions of the team decision making process in the NCA goal selection process. The primary questions will encourage further depth into the process.

Introduction for Participants:

I am interested to hear your perceptions of how team decision making is used, particularly in the NCA goal selection process. Your involvement in this process will help us to chart how your group saw decisions being made. I will ask about 10 basic questions and will expand on the questions if we need more information to clarify or understand the responses. Each of you is encouraged to share your comments and suggestions as we go through this process, which should take about an hour. The consultant is here to chart the responses as we go. If you see something you wish to clarify or question as our progress

is charted, please feel free to say so. The chart is an excellent visual tool to help us reflect, restate or change our comments.

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Focused Group Interview Questions

The following primary questions will be posed and expanded upon to help guide the process:

1. Who was involved in the NCA goal selection team decision process?
2. How were they selected?
3. How would you describe the team decision making process during the goal selection?
4. Elaborate on the role of all the participants.
5. What preparation took place before the steering committee began this process?
6. What were the conflicts during the process?
7. How were the conflicts negotiated?
8. What are your feelings about this process? Why?
9. Did you see this process as a team effort?
10. What would have improved the process?

APPENDIX B

Principal Letter of Request, Principal Letter of Consent, Staff Member Letter of Request, Staff Member Letter of Consent

(date)

Dear Principal:

You have been identified as a female principal whose school has completed one cycle of accreditation with North Central Association. Because of this accomplishment, I would like to invite you to participate in a study which will explore female elementary principals' decision making, specifically in the goal selection process of NCA. Six to ten female principals, identified as successfully completing one cycle of NCA accreditation, will be involved in the study, which will take place in the next few months. (A follow-up focus group consisting of three or four staff members who will reflect on team decision making will help round out the study). The study, entitled " Female Elementary Principals' Team Decision Making in the NCA Goal Selection Process", seeks to learn how principals learn about and think about decision making and how they apply their thinking when involved in the goal selection process.

My interest in this study grew from discussions with personnel and committee members from North Central Association in Michigan and other states, which pointed out the lack of understanding principals seemed to have in their role with NCA accreditation, specifically goal selection. Discussions with elementary principals in Michigan seemed to echo the same sentiments. A review of available information and staff development seminars and workshops showed very little was offered in the way of suggestions, models or guidelines. This study is important because it may present a model of team decision making that principals may find helpful.

The study will involve three or four separate visits to your school; two to three separate interviews each about an hour in length, will take place about a month apart, involving you and me. The interviews are semi-structured and will focus on how you think about decision making, a drawing or model of how you make decisions, and discussion on how the model is implemented. The last visit will be a focused group interview scheduled with three or four of your staff members who have agreed to participate and whom you have identified as being involved in NCA goal selection. All three visits will be held at your convenience. A tape recorder will audio record our meetings; however, at any time you can turn off the recorder and hand notes will be taken in its place. Background information regarding your school and your progress in goal selection can be gleaned from the NCA annual report and student profile.

At the end of each interview, I will transcribe the session and return it to you for review, comments, and clarification if needed. At the end of the study I will send you copies of the reports. Please be assured that I will treat all information with the strictest confidence. All transcriptions will be done by me alone; any recorded information in the observation will be coded. Any information in the study regarding you or your school will be altered or removed to maintain confidentiality. Charts developed in the focused group interview will be coded and kept in my locked file as well.

I will contact you in the next two weeks to discuss this study further and answer any questions you may have. If you wish to speak to me before that time, please do so. I will be happy to respond to any questions. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Respectfully,

Rena Richtig

(home)
3020 Curtis Drive
Flint, Mi 48507-1218
Phone 810-732-5691
email: rrichtig@admin.carman.k12.mi. us

(office)
Rankin Elementary School
3459 Mundy Avenue
Swartz Creek, MI 48473
Phone 810-655-4697
Fax 810-655-8440

## Letter of Consent

I agree to participate in the study on Female Elementary Principals' Decision Making in the NCA Goal Selection Process.

I have received and read the letter from Rena Richtig dated_____, which briefly describes the purposes and procedures of the research. The letter includes her name, address and methods of telecommunication in case I have any questions or concerns about the study.

I understand that my participation in this study requires me to participate in two or three separate interviews, each about an hour. I understand that one focused group interview of three or four of my staff members on the subject of team decision making setting will be conducted, and I also understand that documents about the school and its progress in NCA accreditation will be reviewed for information that may be relevant to the study.

I am aware of and understand that all interviews and data including the focused group interview will be held in the strictest confidence and that my identity will not be disclosed in any form during the preparation or completion of the study. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time, I may choose to not respond to any question, and that I may withdraw from the study at any time with no repercussions.

_____ _____

Signature Date

(date

Dear

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(date)

Dear Staff Member:

Your principal has agreed to participate in a study I am conducting on how principals implement team decision making in their buildings, specifically during the NCA goal selection process. An important aspect of this study hinges on the participation and viewpoints of staff members.
You have been identified as having been involved in the team decision making process in NCA goal selection in your school. Because of your knowledge in this area, I would like to invite you and a few other staff members to participate in a focused group interview to talk about team decision making in your school, as it relates to selecting goals for the NCA accreditation process.

A focused group interview, which consists of a small group of people who will be asked specific questions and the information charted as the discussion flows, is an excellent way to gain different perspectives. I plan to facilitate the group in this hour long session, and a trained focus group consultant will chart our progress. The information we gather will be coded by me to mask the identities of the participants and the school. The charts will remain in my locked files and kept confidential, and the consultant will maintain her professional status as treating all information confidentially.

The focused group interview will be scheduled after school sometime during the next month, and will be held at your building at a time convenient to you and your fellow staff members.

I will contact you in the next two weeks to discuss this study further and answer any questions you have. If you wish to speak to me before that time, please do so. I will be happy to respond to any questions. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Respectfully,

Rena Richtig

(home)
3020 Curtis Drive
Flint, MI 48507

phone 810-732-5691
email: rrichtig@admin.carman.k12.mi.us

(office)
Rankin Elementary School
3459 Mundy Avenue
Swartz Creek , MI 48473
phone 810-655-4697
fax . 810-655-8440

Letter of Consent

I agree to participate in the focused group interview which is part of the study on Female Elementary Principals Implementing Team Decision Making in the NCA Goal Selection Process.

I have received and read the letter from Rena Richtig dated_____, which briefly describes the purposes and procedures of the research. The letter includes her name, address, and methods of telecommunication in case I have any questions or concerns about the study.

I understand that my participation in this study requires me to participate in a focused group interview, which will last about an hour, and will consist of about three other staff members in my school, a professional focus group consultant, and Rena Richtig.

I am aware of and understand that all information will be held in the strict confidence and that my identity will not be disclosed in any form during the preparation or completion of the study. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that the charts developed during the focused group interview will be coded for the study, and kept in a locked file. I understand that I may choose not to respond to any question, and I may withdraw from the interview at any time.

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX C

NCA Annual Report Sample Form, NCA Report
for Outcomes Accreditation Schools

# NCA

**NCA Commission on Schools Annual Report** Form ESA
**Elementary Schools** **1996-1997**
A Compilation of Terms © 1996 North Central Association

School: _____
Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Principal: _____
School Phone: _____

District: _____
Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
County: _____
Superintendent: _____
District Phone: _____

Governance: ____ Public ____ Non-Public

1. Grades included in the school _____

2. Enrollment by grade: **FTE**

| | |
|---|---|
| Pre-K students in half-day sessions _____ ÷ 2: | _____ |
| Pre-K students in full-day sessions: | _____ |
| Kindergarten students in half-day sessions _____ ÷ 2: | _____ |
| Kindergarten students in full-day sessions: | _____ |
| Grade 1: | _____ |
| Grade 2: | _____ |
| Grade 3: | _____ |
| Grade 4: | _____ |
| Grade 5: | _____ |
| Grade 6: | _____ |
| Grade 7: | _____ |
| Grade 8: | _____ |
| **Total Enrollment** | _____ |

3. School year in which the school was first accredited: ____-____

4. School year of the most recent NCA team visit: ____-____

5. School year in which the next NCA team visit is planned: ____-____

6. Do all teachers have at least 200 minutes per week of planning time within the teacher's work day? [24.06] Yes ____ No ____

Form ESA
Page 2

7. **PROFESSIONAL STAFFING** Note on the chart below the number of persons (whole number) in each position, along with the full-time equivalencies for the positions. In calculating the full-time equivalencies for district office personnel, an estimate is to be made of the percentage of time those educators spend in providing service in this school.

| Certificated Staff | Number of Persons | Full-time Equivalency |
|---|---|---|
| Prekindergarten Teachers | | |
| Kindergarten Teachers | | |
| Grade Level Teachers | | |
| Special Subject Area Teachers | | |
| Principal [24.08] | | |
| Assistant Principal/Admin Assistant [24.12] | | |
| Guidance Counselor | | |
| Media Specialist/Librarian [26.02] | | |
| Pupil Personnel Specialists | | |
| Superintendent [2.02] | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| Total Certificated Staff | | |

Student/Professional Staff Ratio [24.02] _____ to one

8. Number of media aides _____
   Full-time equivalency of media aides [26.02] _____

9. Number of secretaries/clerks _____
   Full-time equivalency of secretaries/clerks [24.14] _____

10. Are there kindergarten sessions which exceed the 25 to 1 ratio? [24.04a] Yes ___ No ___

    If yes, is a full-time aide provided for the session(s) in which the ratio is exceeded? Yes ___ No ___

11. Does the prekindergarten program comply with standards 24.04b, c, and d relating to class size and presence of instructional aide? Yes ___ No ___

12. For grades above kindergarten, how many days were classes in session last school year? [22.06] _____

13. For grades above kindergarten, how many hours, exclusive of lunch, are included in the school day for grades? [22.02] _____

14. How many days were classes in session last school year for kindergarten students? [22.04a] _____

15. How many hours are included in a kindergarten session? [22.04a] ___ Hr ___ Min

16. If prekindergarten programs are provided, are standards for length of school day and duration of program consistent with standards 22.04b and 22.04c? Yes ___ No ___

17. How many volumes does the media program include, excluding dictionaries, encyclopedias, and texts? [26.20] _____

18. What was the total expenditure last school year for books, magazines, and audiovisual materials (excluding textbooks and equipment)? _____

19. What was the enrollment last school year? _____

What was the per pupil expenditure for the media program last year? [26.30] _____

**If the school is NOT in compliance with a standard, an explanation is to be provided in the comments section.**

20. Is instruction in the use of media materials and equipment provided to students and teachers? [6.36] Yes ___ No ___

21. Are media materials and equipment available to students and teachers throughout the school day and school year? [6.30; 6.32] Yes ___ No ___

22. Do policies and procedures exist which address the selection, evaluation, quantities, and distribution of media material? [6.02-6.18] Yes ___ No ___

23. Is the curriculum aligned with commonly accepted practices of human growth and development? [3.12] Yes ___ No ___

24. Does the faculty adapt the curriculum to the varying abilities, needs, and interests of the students? [3.10] Yes ___ No ___

25. Are evaluation data from a variety of sources used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program? [3.70E] Yes ___ No ___

26. Are parents and students significantly and appropriately involved in the school program? [3.18] Yes ___ No ___

27. Are pupil personnel services which maximize teaching and learning available? [5.02-5.04] Yes ___ No ___

28. Does the school emphasize the importance of the acts of teaching and learning through such means as inservice, an emphasis upon instructional leadership, and staff training and retraining? [2.04E; 4.28E; 4.30E] Yes ___ No ___

29. Are written guidance procedures available? [5.06] Yes ___ No ___

30. Are there written procedures for reporting child abuse and neglect? [3.88] Yes ___ No ___

31. Is a school action-budget plan available? [8.06] Yes ___ No ___

32. Are there written procedures for safety of students traveling to and from school? [9.30] Yes ___ No ___

33. Do governing board/staff relationships support the teaching/learning environment? [2.20] Yes ___ No ___

34.

35.

36.

37.

38.

39.

Form ESA
Page 4

34. Does the school have a new principal? Yes ___ No ___
If yes, has he/she had two years of elementary classroom teaching experience? [24.22] Yes ___ No ___

35. Does the school have a new assistant principal? Yes ___ No ___
If yes, has he/she had two years of elementary classroom teaching experience? [24.24] Yes ___ No ___

36. E Standards. Complete the enclosed E Standards Report; then transfer the responses for each of the 12 standards below. **Please return the completed worksheet with the annual report materials.**

| | | 1 Not Implemented | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 Well Implemented |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| [1.02E] | Statement of philosophy and goals | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [2.04E] | Instructional leadership of principal | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [3.02E] | Quality programs accessible for all | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [3.34E] | Students/parents informed of objectives | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [3.56E] | Productive use of classroom time | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [3.60E] | Teachers involved in assessing effectiveness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [3.62E] | Students receive frequent feedback | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [3.70E] | Assessment used to modify curriculum | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [3.76E] | School climate conducive to learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [3.96E] | Students involved in development of rules | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [4.28E] | Inservice programs developed via assessments | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| [4.30E] | Professional staff improvement program | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

37. Has your school been officially **accredited** by NCA under the Outcomes Accreditation model? Yes ___ No ___

38. Has your school been officially granted Outcomes Accreditation **candidacy status** by NCA? Yes ___ No ___

39. Comments (add additional pages if necessary):

[To Be Completed By the School]

## School Status Last Year

Status given this school by the North Central Central Association last year:

____ Initial Membership
____ Continuing Accreditation
____ Accreditation With First Warning
____ Accreditation With Second Warning
____ Candidacy Status
____ Dropped From Membership
____ Withdrew From Membership

## Disposition of Violations Cited Last Year

Use the following code to indicate actions taken on personnel:
1 = Has left this school.
2 = Has been reassigned to a field in which qualified.
3 = Has taken additional work to qualify. (Supporting documentation is to be included with this report.)
4 = Has taken additional work but is not as yet fully qualified.
5 = Remains on the staff and is still not qualified.

Describe the action taken to rectify other violations.

| Last Year's Violations [Record "None" if there were none.] | Steps Taken to Correct Last Year's Violations |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

We, the undersigned, have examined this report and hereby certify that it is complete and accurate.

_____
Building Administrator

_____
Superintendent

Elementary Schools E Standard Report 1996-1997

School _____

City, State _____

**The School and Certain Qualitative Standards**

The 12 statements below are the E Standards of the Commission. They refer to characteristics that appear to be especially pertinent to quality programs of education. The numbered statements accompanying each E Standard are some of the ways in which the meeting of the E Standard may be evidenced in the school. (The letter E means that evidence can be provided regarding the meeting of the standard.) After using this insert sheet to assess the school against the E Standards, the school's responses are then to be recorded in the space provided on the Annual Report form.

The insert sheet may be used to provide the school with direction regarding school improvement activities. The school's evaluation of itself in the areas of the E Standards could be a useful inservice activity for the school faculty and will reveal some aspects of the school which might be strengthened.

Using the following assessment scale, please indicate to what degree these standards are being implemented or addressed in your school.

1 2 3 4 5
Not Implemented Well Implemented

**1.02E There shall be a written statement of philosophy and goals which is the governing document for the school and its program.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. The school's program and operations are based upon the philosophy and goals. 1 2 3 4 5
2. The statement is regularly discussed by the total staff. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The statement is regularly included in a school publication. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The statement is regularly reviewed by the governing board. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Parents, community representatives, and staff members are involved in appropriate ways in the development and revision of the statement. 1 2 3 4 5

**2.04E Instructional leadership shall be the chief function of the school's administrator.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. The principal's daily, weekly, and monthly schedules indicate that a majority of the time is devoted to activities which are designed to enhance student learning and effective teaching. 1 2 3 4 5
2. The principal participates in courses, workshops, and seminars to enhance her/his leadership skills and to learn new understandings of the elements of effective teaching. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Individual and group conferences of the administrator with members of the staff focus primarily on aspects of good teaching, curriculum evaluation, and other facets of the teaching/learning process. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Provisions are made in the school to permit the principal to function effectively in discharging leadership responsibilities. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The relationship between the superintendent and the principal ensures effective administration of the school. 1 2 3 4 5
6. The relationship between the principal and the staff is such as to facilitate effective administration and operation of the educational program. 1 2 3 4 5
7. The school principal sets expectations for curriculum quality through use of standards and guidelines. 1 2 3 4 5

**3.02E Quality programs shall be accessible for all students.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. The curriculum is broad in scope and provides for a wide range of student, rate, readiness, and potential for learning. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Students are provided opportunities to develop skills in the affective, psychomotor, and interpersonal areas. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The faculty has high expectations for students. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Staff members are appropriately trained for their responsibilities. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Allocations of time and resources are sufficient. 1 2 3 4 5
6. The curriculum design emphasizes the inter-relationships among various areas of learning. 1 2 3 4 5
7. Procedures have been established to enhance horizontal and vertical articulation. 1 2 3 4 5

**3.34E Students and parents shall be informed of the objectives of each component of the student's program and about the activities to be undertaken to help the student achieve those objectives.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. Administrators have established standard procedures which encourage parent involvement. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Learning activities are derived from the curriculum objectives of the school. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The school communicates to students and parents the objectives of the student's current classwork. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The student has been introduced to and can describe the minimal learner outcomes for the age and grade level of the student. 1 2 3 4 5

**3.56E Teachers shall use classroom practices which make the most productive use of class time.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. Classroom interruptions are kept to a minimum. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Routine school activities are kept to a minimum. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The school's administrators enforce procedures and regulations which protect student learning time. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The master schedule is designed to eliminate, to the greatest extent possible, the need for students to leave their regular classes for other activities. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Activities within the classroom are related to curriculum objectives. 1 2 3 4 5
6. The vast majority of the day centers on opportunities for all students to learn. 1 2 3 4 5
7. Unassigned time and time spent on non-instructional activities are kept to a minimum. 1 2 3 4 5
8. Extra learning time is provided for students who need or want it. 1 2 3 4 5

**3.60E The principal and teachers shall be responsible for assessing the effectiveness of the program and for planning improvement of the program.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. The school calendar includes time reserved for individual teachers and the total staff to review the effectiveness of the school program. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Individual teachers, groups of teachers at the various grade levels, and the total staff establish improvement objectives each year and annually assess progress toward those objectives. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The school has specific, written procedures for curriculum revision. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The school conducts a planned and continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of its program. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The principal involves staff and others in planning implementation strategies. 1 2 3 4 5

**3.62E Students shall receive regular and frequent assessment of their progress.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. Student assessments are used by the teacher to alter teaching strategies as the need for that arises. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Teachers view assessment as a means of fostering student success. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Students are assessed in light of their individual characteristics. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Testing data are used by teachers as indicators of the effectiveness of instruction. 1 2 3 4 5
5. Measures such as an assessment of student attitudes, an evaluation of school climate, and delineations of parent expectations are used by the school to determine the effectiveness of instruction. 1 2 3 4 5
6. The school provides for the inventory and diagnosis of students who have physical, social, emotional, mental, and academic characteristics requiring specialized educational programs. 1 2 3 4 5
7. Services are available to students whose exceptional abilities, talents, or physical attributes present unique needs and opportunities. 1 2 3 4 5

**3.70E The results of the school's student assessment program shall be used to modify curriculum and instructional methodology.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. Individual test scores are used by teachers to identify students who need additional or different instruction. 1 2 3 4 5
2. The school uses test scores to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum design and to make appropriate modifications. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests are used to make judgments about curriculum modifications. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The purposes and mechanics of the testing program are described in school-to-home communications. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The school conducts periodic surveys of how well the program has served former students. 1 2 3 4 5

**3.76E The school climate shall be conducive to learning.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. Expectations regarding conduct are clearly stated. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Disruptive students are not permitted to interfere with the learning activities of others. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Student infractions of the conduct code are dealt with promptly and consistently by faculty and administrators. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The physical environment is clean, pleasant, and safe. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The school provides adequate health services. 1 2 3 4 5
6. The school facilities are adequate to accommodate an effective instructional program. 1 2 3 4 5

**3.96E Students shall be appropriately involved in the development and monitoring of the school's rules of conduct and scholarship standards.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. When sufficiently mature, students, through formal means, are involved in the development of rules of conduct. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Student organizations, such as a student council, have meaningful responsibilities and are part of the governance of the school. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The student handbook describes the various leadership opportunities available to students. 1 2 3 4 5

**4.28E Inservice programs shall be developed through needs assessments, faculty involvement, and faculty evaluations of each inservice program.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. A program of inservice education is maintained to stimulate the continued improvement of teaching and the curriculum. 1 2 3 4 5
2. The relationship between the inservice activity and the objectives of the school is determined prior to the activity. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Teachers are involved in the planning and evaluation of inservice programs. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The objectives for inservice activities are known by the participants. 1 2 3 4 5

**4.30E The professional staff development program shall provide diagnoses of performance strengths and limitations and shall specify processes and resources available to enhance performance.** 1 2 3 4 5

1. For each teacher there is on file a current record of performance evaluations, including plans designed to strengthen instructional skills. 1 2 3 4 5
2. The teacher evaluation process is described in an appropriate school publication. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The faculty indicates satisfaction with the evaluation plan and with options available to teachers who wish to strengthen performance. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Information about the preparation of professional staff members, as recorded on official transcripts, is used as a source of data for developing improvement programs for the staff as a whole and for individual teachers. 1 2 3 4 5

NCA Commission on Schools Annual Report Form
A Compilation of Terms © 1995 North Central Association

Form OA

School Year _____

## Report for Outcomes Accreditation Schools

This form is to be completed and returned to the NCA state office prior to January 15. Responses should be typewritten. **Please use only the space provided.** Thank you for your care in completing this report.

Name of School _____
Street Address _____
City, State, Zip _____
Principal _____
School Telephone _____ Fax _____

Governance _____ Public ____ Non-Public
Grades In the School _____
Total Enrollment (FTE) _____
Professional Staff (FTE) _____
Steering Committee Chair(s) _____

## How To Use The OA Report Materials

This OA annual report "cover" or "folder" is to be completed each year by the school so that the current year's materials can be appropriately prepared for review by the State Committee and the Commission on Schools.

The annual report questions are organized by the OA phases. Once you have completed a phase, that section of the report should be completed. The completed "phase" can be reproduced and reused each year in the reporting process. A computer program is available for completion of the phase reports. If you are interested in obtaining a copy, please contact your state office.

We, the undersigned, have examined this report and hereby certify that it is complete and accurate.

_____
Steering Committee Chairperson(s)

_____
Building Administrator

_____
Superintendent

**Criteria for OA Schools**

Among the criteria the NCA will use in developing accreditation recommendations for OA schools are these:

- Are the target areas selected for concentrated attention during the current cycle reflective of student outcomes important in all aspects of the school program?
- Are the target areas derived from the school's stated mission and performance outcomes?
- Is the student performance information and contextual information about the school and community adequate in quality and quantity to serve as a basis for conclusions regarding areas in need of improvement?
- Are the strategies identified for closing the gap between current levels of student performance and desired levels of student performance based upon research and likely to achieve the objectives?
- Has the school provided evidence of success (assessment techniques) to identify current levels of student performance and to trace changes in levels of student performance?
- Does the school staff view the OA activities as efforts having and deserving the highest priority for time and resources?
- Are the school's OA activities resulting in improved student performance?

## Report on the School's Progress Along the OA Timeline

### Phase I: Making the OA Commitment

1. Has the school gained the commitment of the faculty, building-level and central office administrators, and the governing board? ___ Yes ___ No

   Date Completed _____

   List issues which were addressed and resolved in gaining this commitment.

## Report on the School's Progress Along the OA Timeline

### Phase I: Making the OA Commitment

1. Has the school gained the commitment of the faculty, building-level and central office administrators, and the governing board? ____ Yes ____ No

   Date Completed _____

   List issues which were addressed and resolved in gaining this commitment.

2.

3.

4.

## Phase II: Getting Started

2. Has a visiting team chairperson been identified? ____ Yes ____ No

3. Date Completed _____

4. Name the visiting team chair, his/her professional affiliation, and address. Indicate how the visiting team chair has assisted the school in the OA process.

5.

6.

## Phase III: Developing the Student Profile

5. Has the school's student profile been developed and analyzed? ____ Yes ____ No

   Date Completed _____

6. What are the major findings, particularly as they relate to student performance?

## Phase IV: Developing the Mission Statement, Target Areas and Target Area Goals

7. Has the school completed the mission statement? ____ Yes ____ No

   Date Completed _____

   Does the mission statement focus on student outcomes? ____ Yes ____ No
   **(Please attach a copy of the mission statement.)**

8. Has the school identified the target areas and target area goals it will study during this OA cycle? ____ Yes ____ No

   Date Completed _____

   **List below** (and on the back of the page) the **TARGET AREAS AND ASSOCIATED TARGET AREA GOALS**. Include two sources of data to provide the rationale for the selection of each target area. **Note.** For those in a second or later OA cycle, please place an * by those target areas continued from the previous cycle.

   Please use the following format:
   *Target Area:*
   *Target Area Goal: (list one or more goals for each target area)*
   *Data Source #1*
   *Data Source #2*

9. Has the visiting team chair visited to affirm target areas and target area goals? ____ Yes ____ No

   Date Completed _____

**When Phases I - IV have been satisfactorily completed, the school may apply for OA candidacy**

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10.

11.

12

## Phase V: Assessing Student Performance and Establishing Expectations

10. Has the school selected subcommittees for each target area? ___ Yes ___ No

    Date Completed _____

11. Have baseline data for each target area been gathered and analyzed for development of the School Improvement Plan? ___ Yes ___ No

    Date Completed _____

    What assessments/instruments were used in securing the baseline data?

12. Has the school hosted its first visit by the visiting team (following selection of the target areas?) ___ Yes ___ No

    Date Completed _____

    What were the findings of the visit? Include a summary of the observations and suggestions made as a result of the visit.

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## Phase VI: Developing the School Improvement Plan

13. List examples of specific interventions the school will implement for each target area goal. Where appropriate, indicate the research upon which these interventions are based.

14. Has the school established desired levels of student performance for comparison with current levels of student performance for each target area goal? ___ Yes ___ No

    Date Completed _____

15. What are the areas of discrepancy? On what basis were decisions made regarding the expected levels of performance for each target area?

16. Describe how quality with equity as been addressed. On what basis did you disaggregate the data? What criteria were used in selecting student subpopulations?

17. Has the school hosted a visit by the resource team following the development of the school's improvement plans? ___ Yes ___ No

    Date Completed _____

    What were the findings of the visit? Include a summary of the observations and suggestions made by the visiting team.

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## Phase VII: Monitoring and Documenting Student Success

18. What modifications in program, time allocations, pedagogy, or other elements in the teaching/learning process are to be effected to reduce or eliminate the discrepancy between actual and desired student performance in the target area?

19. Has the school hosted a visit of the resource team where the school has documented improved student performance in the target areas? ____ Yes ____ No

    Date Completed _____

20. List the areas of improved student performance by showing a comparison of results with the baseline data.

**When Phases V-VII have been satisfactorily completed, the school may qualify for initial or continuing Outcomes Accreditation.**

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## Phase VIII: Continuing the Outcomes Accreditation Process

21. Date Outcomes Accreditation Candidacy was awarded: _____

22. Date Outcomes Accreditation was awarded: _____

23. List the target areas and goals currently addressed, interventions currently in place, and measurements being used for each intervention.

24. List each target area goal which has been accomplished and describe, briefly, the maintenance plan currently in place.

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