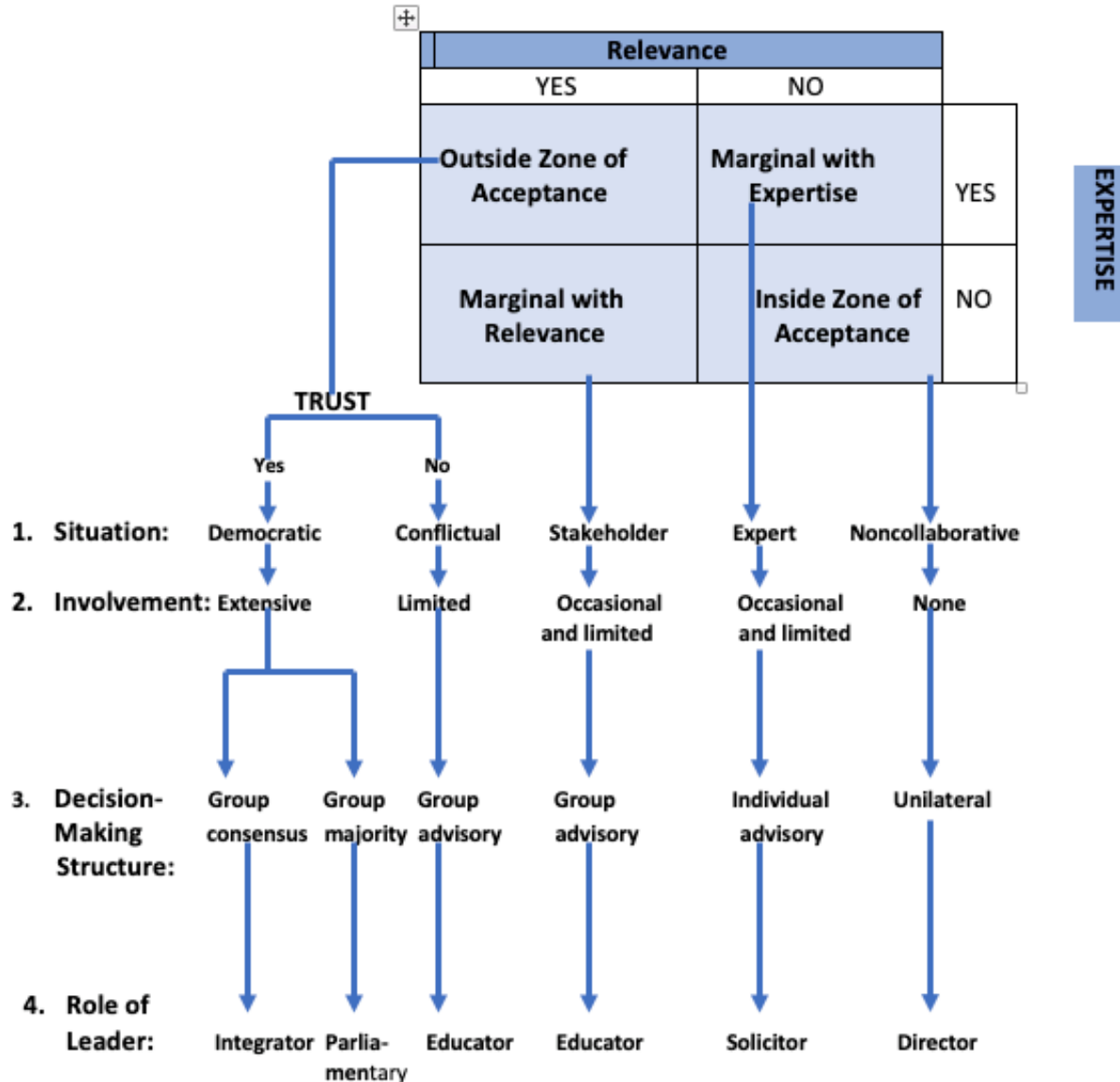


## A Simplified Model for Shared Decision Making



**A Normative Model for Participative Decision Making**

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When should principals involve teachers in decision making and how? The following description is a simplified normative model that answers these questions and is pictured in the Figure above. The **zone of acceptance** is the key concept in the model and is drawn from Chester Barnard (1938) and Herbert Simon (1947). There are some decisions that teachers simply accept because it is in their zone of acceptance; "it's their job." or they don't care, but in either case, they willingly comply to the directives of their superiors. Thus, it is foolish to try to involve them in such decisions. The zone of acceptance is pictured above in the blue portion of the model with two dimensions: *relevance* and *expertise*. Follow the Figure as you read the description below.

The **zone of acceptance** has four aspects, which are mapped by asking two questions:

1. **Relevance question**: Do the subordinates have a personal stake in the outcome?
2. **Expertise question**: Can subordinates contribute expertise to the solution?

If the answer to both these questions is no, teachers do not want to be involved and it is foolish to do so because they have no personal stake and no expertise. The issue is clearly **Inside the Zone of Acceptance** and we have a **noncollaborative situation** with no involvement. The administrator decides and directs.

But if the answer to both questions is yes, then subordinates have both a personal stake in the outcome and the expertise to contribute and the issue is **Outside their Zone of Acceptance**. Teachers will want to be involved and their involvement should improve the decision. In this situation, however, one must next evaluate teachers' commitment to the organization by asking the following **trust question**: Can teachers be trusted to decide in the best interests of the school? That is, can they set aside personal needs for the benefit of the organization. If **yes**, then we have a **democratic situation** in which teachers have a personal stake, expertise, and are trustworthy. Teachers should be involved in the decision and their involvement should be extensive as the group tries to develop the "best" decision. In the process, the role of the administrator is to act either as an integrator (if consensus is essential) or as a parliamentarian (if a group majority is sufficient). If subordinates are not trustworthy (**conflictual situation**), their involvement should be limited. In this situation, the administrator acts as an educator, and the group serves to advise and identify pockets of resistance.

If, however, teachers have only a personal stake in the decision but no expertise (**stakeholder situation**), their involvement should be occasional and limited. Teachers are interested in the outcome, but they have little knowledge to bring to bear on the decision. The reason for occasional involvement in this situation is to educate participants and lower resistance. If the involvement is more than occasional, the danger is alienation as teachers feel manipulated because their wishes are not met. At the outset, all parties should know that the group is clearly advisory to the leader. Here the administrator's role is to educate and decide.

If teachers have expertise but no personal stake (**expert situation**), their involvement should also be occasional and limited as the administrator attempts to improve the decision by tapping the expertise of significant individuals who are not normally involved in this kind of action. At first blush, one might think that expertise should always be consulted in a decision, but if workers have no personal stake in the outcomes, their enthusiasm will quickly wane. They may well grumble, "This isn't my job." When involved, the experts provide the administrator with individual advice.

In **noncollaborative situations**, the teachers have neither the interest nor the expertise to contribute to the decision. Yet there is such a strong norm about involving teachers in all sorts of decisions that school administrators often feel constrained to involve teachers regardless of their knowledge or interest. Such ritual is dysfunctional and illogical. Why would you involve someone in a decision when that person doesn't care and can't help? The model suggests that administrators make direct unilateral decisions when the issue is within the zone of acceptance of subordinates.

This model for shared decision making is not a panacea. It is not a substitute for sensitive and reflective administrative thought and action; it simply provides some guidelines for determining when and how teachers and principals should be involved in joint decision making; it is a normative theory of participation in decision making. The effectiveness of decisions is determined by both the quality of the decision and the acceptance and commitment of subordinates to implement the decision.

Here are some guidelines for preparing teachers for shared decision making:

- Develop a school culture in which students come first.
- Develop a culture of authenticity; be honest and transparent.
- Develop a culture of trust; principals and teachers need to trust each other.
- Don't burden teachers with unimportant decisions.
- Don't try to give decisional authority when you don't have it.
- Don't engage teachers in shared decision making until they are ready.
- Ultimately, shared decision making requires that teachers have useful knowledge, are motivated to participate, and are willing to subordinate their personal agendas for the good of the school.

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For a fuller explication of this model, see Hoy, W, K. and Miskel, C. G. (2013). *Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: McGraw Hill.