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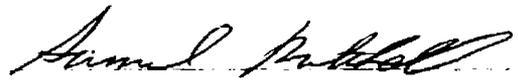
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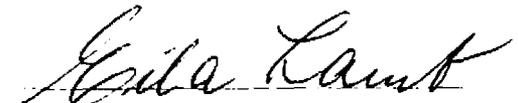
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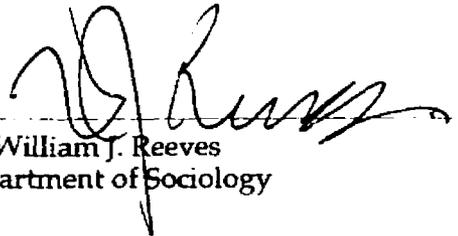
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Experience of Shared Decision Making at Two Calgary High Schools" submitted by James E. Robertson, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



Supervisor, Professor Samuel H. Mitchell  
Graduate Division of Educational Research



Dr. Ella Lamb  
Graduate Division of Educational Research



Dr. William J. Reeves  
Department of Sociology

## ABSTRACT

This case study investigates how shared decision making has affected the work and attitudes of teachers and administrators at two Calgary high schools. Twelve participants were interviewed. Because many features of the two schools contrasted significantly, the study was able to readily distinguish between issues that could be attributed to the innovation and those that may be anomalous to each site.

Referring to organizational theory, the author suggests that public education's turbulent environment has encouraged the innovation to emerge. Governance at both schools appears to be structured along the lines of matrix organization. The work finds that shared decision making has affected the jobs of teachers and administrators, interactions among colleagues, and internal politics. However, learning and teaching remain relatively unchanged. The author concludes that, unlike in management-oriented issues, authority over instructional decisions belongs to teachers who seem unwilling to share it at the cost of classroom autonomy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Assistant Principal
CBE	Calgary Board of Education
CL	Curriculum Leader
CTS	Career and Technology Studies
DH	Department Head
DMG	Decision Making Group
OD	Organizational Development
PD	Professional Development
TA	Teacher Advisor (Program)

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### AREA

There appears to be a long standing debate in organizational theory as to whether organizations should centralize or decentralize their decision making. Traditionally, complex organizations have been built upon the premise that centralized, top-down management would bring about rational structures and efficient performance (Morgan, 1986, pp 27-29). However, according to Bolman and Deal, policies associated with reducing the hegemonic characteristics of the traditional hierarchy had reached fad proportions by the mid-1980s (1984, p. 88). The trend was based upon the belief that those who are closest to production, the customer, or product design would be the best equipped to make productivity decisions for those areas. In their highly celebrated work *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-run Companies* (1982), Peters and Waterman observed that excellent companies had successfully balanced decentralizing policies with those that promote centralization: "For the most part, as we have said, they have pushed autonomy down to the shop floor or product development team. On the other hand, they are fanatic centralists around the few core values they hold dear" (ibid. p. 15). To the present, the debate continues. Mintzberg criticizes that efforts to delay and decentralize companies have resulted in measurement-oriented hierarchies as opposed to work-oriented ones (1996b, pp 62-64). He argues that even though departments and divisions may be empowered to accomplish their particular tasks, the preoccupation with accountability through measurable results tends to reinforce the hierarchy.

The debate persists in public education as well. Particularly over the past ten years, more and more attention has been given to efforts to decentralize schools and school systems. In a handbook designed to aid educators confronting this trend, it is claimed that the set of initiatives that have emerged "may well be the single most significant educational reform effort of this century" (Phillips, 1993, p. vii). In the United States, at least five state governments have mandated some sort of system decentralization (Bradley and Olson, 1993, p. 44). At the same time, observers question whether or not decision making should be decentralized in an era of shrinking school budgets (Lindquist and Mauriel, 1989, p. 406). Michael Strembitsky, who gained recognition across North America for the site-based management policies that resulted from his tenure as superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools, suggests: "The issue is not *whether* you centralize or decentralize, but *what* should be decentralized and *what* should be centralized" [original emphasis] (O'Neil, 1996, p. 69). As the debate continues, schools and districts reexamine themselves to assess how they will organize.

Certainly, the notion of decentralization broadly suggests a whole host of reform efforts in school governance. Unfortunately, the academic and policy discussions that result can confuse the various forms that decentralization has taken (Brown, 1995, p. 335; David, 1996, p. 4; Lindquist and Mauriel, 1989, p. 404). Site-based management and shared decision making in particular have fallen victim to this circumstance. Site-based management, also referred to as school-based management and school-based decision making, is an arrangement where decision-making power is transferred from the district to individual schools. Often schools are empowered to make more budget-related decisions, but they may also have more say in matters pertaining to curriculum (Brown, 1995, p. 339; Lindquist and Mauriel, 1989, p. 404). Site-based management is often, but not always, utilized in conjunction with shared decision making.

Shared decision making, which may also be called participatory management or broad-based decision making, generally entails principals sharing their authority to make school decisions with teachers, parents, the community, and even students. Although stakeholders may be empowered by this arrangement, the school may not become more autonomous because additional decision-making power is not necessarily transferred from the district to the principal. Nonetheless, shared decision making has attracted much attention in recent years. For this reason it draws the focus of the present investigation.

## FOCUS

As it has elsewhere, shared decision making has gained considerable momentum in the Calgary Board of Education. Not only has there been a trend of reform at the system level to be more inclusive with decisions, the innovation\* have also made remarkable progress at many high schools. Indeed, according to the CBE's computer bulletin board, more than 80 percent of the job postings for junior-leadership designations at high schools between September and June of the 1996-97 school year cited participation in shared decision making as an expectation.

Although some schools in the system do conduct in-house assessments of the innovation, through staff surveys and small-group discussions, little critical inquiry has been formally pursued. The staff at a school, for example, may take the time to record teachers' impressions of shared decision making. However, the results from such investigations tend to be reported as an inventory of perceptions, with little consideration to what the results mean and how they compare to research that has been conducted elsewhere. That is what the present investigation intends to do.

---

\*The term *innovation* is used with some latitude in this investigation. It is not suggested here that shared decision making is purely a grass-roots initiative. As it will be shown, shared decision making has certainly been encouraged by large-scale initiatives and reforms.

In general terms, the goal of this project is to investigate and report on the progress and experience of shared decision making at two Calgary high schools. Having worked at one of the sites since the inception of the innovation as a teacher and also as a curriculum leader, I have come to realize that it can have a tremendous impact on the entire organization of a school. For this reason I have pursued the present research. An earnest attempt is made here to sew a common thread through the many diverse impressions of affected individuals to quilt together a collective understanding of this innovation.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

Three lines of communication are initiated by this study. Firstly, an attempt is made to facilitate communication, within each of the participant schools, to address and reflect upon the many perspectives of individuals on the innovation. High schools are big places, and it is easy to trivialize or simply remain unaware of the circumstances and concerns of others. It is hoped that by retelling the stories of teachers and administrators at each of the schools that successful aspects of shared decision making may be celebrated and maintained while problems may be identified and assessed.

Secondly, this research is intended to communicate experiences between the two participant schools and with other educators who may find the discussion to be relevant to their own circumstances. It was evident from the field work that many teachers and administrators are not aware of what is occurring at other locations. Particularly when it comes to the internal dynamics of human interactions and relationships, a great deal of privacy is afforded to schools. Many frank discussions occurred during this study that revealed a great deal about how each of the sites has coped with the innovation. It is hoped that by highlighting these experiences, practitioners can learn from each other.

Finally, this investigation seeks to address the education community at large. There appears to be a shortage of research that penetrates the surface of school organization to describe how shared decision making alters the work environment of teachers and administrators. S. Conley calls upon researchers to investigate specific cases of shared decision making within the context of conceptual models of organization and decision-making processes: "Research should address itself to applying these conceptual frameworks to examining particular decision-making structures and altered roles for teachers and administrators in group decision making" (1991, p. 259). She also points out that "we know little about how teachers and administrators interpret, protect, and negotiate these [shared] decisions in daily school management"(ibid.). In addition, Ingersoll observes that little has been done to assess how alternative arrangements of decision-making power affect different aspects of

schools:

The debate over power in schools has, in general, suffered from a shortage of theoretical and empirical work devoted to specifying and examining which kinds and aspects of power have what effects on which outcomes in schools, and why (1996, p. 161).

The present research is intended to address these issues.

## **METHOD OF INQUIRY AND PROCEDURES**

This project required careful planning in order to yield the desired results. Participant and site selection were carried out in a way that would access a variety of perspectives on the innovation. Data gathering involved open-ended interviews and a consideration of school and system documentation. With the aid of a database software package, data were analyzed until findings emerged. Care was taken to ensure that this case study was conducted in compliance with accepted qualitative methods of research (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1988).

### **Site and Participant Selection**

In terms of constructing this study, a diverse set of perspectives were sought so that a broad understanding of shared decision making could be ascertained. The two schools from which this investigation was derived, called City High and Suburban High to maintain their anonymity, were excellent participant sites because their governance models are quite similar. As Brown observed, this is often not the case with shared decision making, as it has taken many different forms (1995, p. 336). However, the schools greatly contrast in many of their other features such as historical background, physical design, size of enrollment, clientele, and approach to learning and teaching. As a result, it was possible to compare the sites and to identify common experiences that could be attributed to governance, rather than their other unique characteristics. Furthermore, this arrangement also encouraged speculation about the cause of anomalies when experiences at the two schools differed.

Concerns over *observer effects*, where the presence of the researcher influences participants' behaviour and responses, also prompted the inclusion of two distinct research sites. At one school I was an insider who had previously built work relationships with the participants. I was their colleague and for some I had acted as a department leader. At the other school, I was stranger and an outsider who was relatively detached from the innovation. This provision allowed me a great deal of insight into how my presence may have affected the participants in this study.

I was particularly impressed by the willingness of the principals to allow this study to be conducted in their schools. They gave a sincere impression that their

schools are open and honest places where frank discussions on critical issues are encouraged. In many ways, such an atmosphere seems to embody the very essence of shared decision making.

Participant selection was also aimed at deriving a diversity of perspectives. The entire staff at each school was invited to contribute to the research and to indicate their willingness to become involved by filling out a brief questionnaire. Candidates were requested to indicate their gender, age, teaching experience, and the number of years that they had worked at their schools. In addition, they were asked to provide a brief summary of their attitudes towards and experiences with shared decision making. Since many candidates volunteered, it was possible to select a balanced and diverse group of participants.

Of the twelve participants in this study, five teachers and one administrator were involved at each of the two schools. Participants ranged in age from being under thirty years old to being over fifty. They had as little as six and as many as thirty years of teaching experience and had been at their schools for between one and nineteen years. Although both of the administrators were men, gender was split relatively evenly among the teachers at each site. In addition, the guidance department and each of the subject-area departments were represented at one or both of the schools.

A diversity of participant attitudes on shared decision making were also sought. From the questionnaire responses, it was possible to select an equivalent number of participants who appeared to be supportive of the innovation compared to those who appeared to oppose it. In addition, participants were also sought who would be indifferent towards shared decision making. This study was sensitive to the likelihood that individuals might be motivated to participate because of their support for or opposition to the innovation. Since there was a strong possibility that people who are indifferent towards shared decision making might not have volunteered to participate in this research, some individuals who had not responded to the initial invitation were asked a second time to become involved. Those who expressed apprehension due to their indifference were encouraged to represent that perspective. In the end, two individuals agreed to participate upon the second request.

### **Data Gathering**

Much of the school and system documents utilized in this project were acquired during the year prior to the field work. However, field work was conducted intensively over a three month period. In that time, participants were interviewed, transcripts were produced and reviewed, and member checks were conducted.

The design of this study allowed each participant to be interviewed discreetly in a private setting. Interviews tended to vary in length between twenty-five and fifty-five

minutes, with most of them lasting approximately thirty-five to forty minutes. Six open-ended questions were provided to participants prior to our meeting. The questions were:

1. What is the process for decision making in your school?
2. How has shared decision making affected you and your work?
3. How has shared decision making affected learning and teaching for your students? In your department? In your school?
4. What do you consider to be outcomes of shared decision making?
  - a. Positive?
  - b. Negative?
  - c. Other?
5. What advice would you give to colleagues in a school that is interested in undertaking shared decision making? What works well? What doesn't work well?
6. What other issues surround your experience with shared decision making?

These questions were meant to facilitate an open and comfortable discussion; they were not intended to narrow or isolate certain topics. Indeed, the goal was for participants to consider the wide impact that shared decision making has had on their schools. As a result, they were encouraged to topic jump and to raise issues that were beyond what was asked. In fact, most of the interviews seemed to take on a life of their own.

All participants agreed to have their interviews recorded on audio cassette and transcribed. They were encouraged to view the transcripts to ensure that the text accurately reflected their thoughts. An additional benefit of this measure was that it allowed participants to reflect upon what had been discussed and to record any additional thoughts and ideas that they had had since their interviews. Given that discussions may have covered issues that participants had not previously considered, this strategy proved to be invaluable in capturing their thoughtful impressions, rather than simply their initial reactions to the questions. Although none of the participants asked to have comments removed from their transcripts, several of them provided clarification on ambiguous text and supplementary considerations that occurred to them after their formal interviews.

To complement the member checks that were conducted through the review of transcripts, participants were also asked additional questions informally and through electronic mail to further probe the issues and to strengthen research findings. E-mail proved to be beneficial because it reduced the time and energy needed to track participants down and ask them questions. Also, their responses were received as text

documents which allowed them to be easily integrated directly into a database for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the data, transcripts and field notes were reviewed repeatedly until common themes, trends, and patterns became evident. Next, the transcripts were dissected, encoded, and placed into a database that was built using *ClarisWorks 3.0*. The database was further reviewed and encoding was adjusted to present an accurate interpretation of the findings. The use of computer software greatly aided the process of data analysis and the eventual write-up.

Official school and system documentation was utilized, where possible, to confirm the perceptions of participants. This measure further broadened the scope of this investigation, providing for the triangulation of findings. Where it is used, the official documentation is clearly indicated throughout the text of this work.

### **LIMITATIONS**

While this project has certain strengths that are inherent to its design, it also has some limitations that warrant recognition. Of paramount concern in case studies is whether or not observations and conclusions accurately depict the reality of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988, pp 166-170). Indeed, as is evident in the design of this project, several measures have been taken to address internal validity. Despite these efforts, there are certain cautions that should be acknowledged about the findings. Certainly, participants may have knowingly or unknowingly withheld or distorted information relevant to this study. Also, do to the size of the participant group relative to all of the potential candidates, some significant information may have been missed that could have affected the findings.

In terms of the generalizability of the findings, this study also has its limits. While it certainly is hoped that practitioners at other schools may find that they can learn from the experiences described in this work, it is not suggested that findings are valid beyond the participant schools. The intention of this project is to describe experiences with shared decision making at the two research sites.

### **ORGANIZATION OF THIS WORK**

It is little wonder, given that shared decision making can thoroughly affect schools, that the findings of this research would unfold in a complex fashion. As Bolman and Deal suggest, the activities of one part of an organization are likely to have an impact on the experience in other parts (1984, p. 288). Acknowledging this point, this work has been organized in a way so that it virtually dissects the subject along the

various planes of issues that became significant as the research progressed. Although these planes are distinct, they are not independent. Their common ties are woven throughout the collective experience of shared decision making. The planes are presented here by chapter.

Chapter 2 of this work investigates the pertinent literature on shared decision making. Along with an historical account of its emergence, educational literature is presented that ponders the merits and limits of the innovation. In Chapter 3, we visit the participant schools. A description is provided of the immediate environment of the two sites. Also, the climate of public education in the province is reflected upon within the context of organizational theory. The consideration of organizational theory continues into Chapter 4, where it is demonstrated how shared decision making has been integrated into the governance structures at the two schools. Chapter 5 explores how the innovation has affected the job of the teacher. There are also strategies identified to alleviate some of the tensions that can result from implementation. Perhaps the essence of shared decision making is presented in Chapter 6, where the impact on communication and collegial interactions are examined. Power relationships are examined in Chapter 7, with particular attention given to the dynamics of authority and influence. Chapter 8 explores what some regard as the acid test for shared decision making, its impact on student achievement and instructional innovation. Finally, Chapter 9 reflects upon the findings of this work and suggests future directions for research.

## CHAPTER 2

### A CONSIDERATION OF THE LITERATURE

#### INTRODUCTION

Organizational, management, and educational sources illustrate the emergence of shared decision making, particularly over the last fifty years. While inclusive management practices appear to have been more of a matter of personal style in the first half of this century, the latter half has been characterized by a variety of large-scale initiatives and movements. Nevertheless, whether or not the outcomes of shared decision making are desirable continues to be debated.

Much of the literature claims that shared decision making facilitates the conditions where wise decisions can be ascertained and implemented through the commitment of the people involved. Unfortunately, with regard to schools, the literature is not all positive. There are concerns that administrators may utilize the innovation to co-opt staff members. Some observers have also expressed the worry that schools will decline into chaos with the decentralization of power that it implies. Furthermore, there are questions about whether or not shared decision making is complementary to the primary function of schools: learning and teaching. There seems to be good reason for schools to approach shared decision making cautiously.

#### THE EMERGENCE OF PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT

Generally, the history of organizational decision making, over the past fifty years, is characterized by increased employee participation. According to Bolman and Deal, managers have historically been resistant to the notion of "*organizational democracy*, where the rights of worker to participate in decisions are built into the formal decision-making process and are not subject to managerial discretion" (1984, pp 88-89). Consequently, other than through the process of collective bargaining, the level of employee inclusion in managerial decisions had been viewed as dependent on management style, for a large part of this century (Bolman and Deal, 1984, pp 88-89; Nightingale, 1982, pp 35-47 and 140-154).

A formalized initiative of participative management emerged in Yugoslavia, in the early 1950s. Apparently, the Yugoslavian government experienced a significant ideological shift resulting from friction with the Soviet Union. When Stalin cut relations with Yugoslavia in 1948, the latter reexamined its interpretation of Marxism. "Yugoslavia made a subtle change in the official definition of who owns the workplace: It was owned not by the state but by the entire society" (Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 89). In the 1950s, the concept of *self-management* emerged in Yugoslavia, as every "work organization was required to have a workers' council elected by the employees, with

essentially the formal power that is usually held by the board of directors in a corporation. The workers' council [could] set basic policy, hire and fire management, and set wages and salaries" (ibid.). While the system certainly had its limitations, as conflicts between formal authority and real power emerged (Nightingale, 1982, p. 91), it apparently still had a significant impact on the process by which decisions were made (Estrin and Bartlett, 1982, pp 83-109). Furthermore, in the system's first twenty years, "Yugoslavia's increase in industrial production was second only to Japan's" (Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 90).

Elsewhere, in the early 1960s, management theorists praised the merits of the innovation. In the United States, Douglas McGregor, through his book *The Human Side of Enterprise* (1960, p. 128), suggested that the innovation would provide an opportunity "to encourage the growth of subordinates and their ability to accept responsibility." Renis Likert (1961) differentiated between organizations that are "job-centered" and "employee-centered" (cited in Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 97). He claimed that the latter grouping is associated with higher production and democratic supervision. It should be noted, however, that although he was a proponent of shared decision making, participation "was to be 'informal,' that is it was to be practiced by the enlightened supervisor, but was not a formal component of the decision-making structure of the organization" (Nightingale, 1982, p. 49). These authors, and others that followed, began an emphasis on *human resources* and the sharing of authority to meet individual and organizational needs (ibid. pp 47-48). While their views fell into disrepute among business executives for the first part of the 1970s, emphasis on the workplace as a social environment would continue into the 1980s (Peters and Waterman, 1982, pp 95-118).

Organizational Development (OD) emerged from relative obscurity in 1965 to become prominent among managers by 1975 (Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 98). Researchers in OD undertake a consultative role for the improvement of complex organizations (Morgan, 1985, pp 61-62). The job of the OD consultant is to recommend organizational reforms that will create a *fit* between organizations and the environment (ibid.). Although OD has not focused purely on shared decision making as a strategy for organizational improvement, there has been a substantial emphasis on the human and cultural needs of organizations (Bolman and Deal, 1984, pp 96-100). This emphasis has ushered support for shared decision making in recent years.

By the 1980s, employee participation again had emerged in western management theory. In blending American and Japanese approaches to management, William Ouchi's *Theory Z* (1981, cited in Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 101) supported the notion of decision making as a collective process. The innovation of *quality circles*, which is a group process of problem solving borrowed from the Japanese, became increasingly

popular during this period. Interestingly enough, quality circles actually has its roots in the United States. It was initiated by a team of American efficiency experts, sent to improve the economic base of war-torn Japan in 1945. Ironically, their theories were largely ignored in the United States at that time (Hawley, 1985, pp 41-42). However, Bolman and Deal reckon that related innovations had reached fad proportions in business by the mid-1980s (1984, p. 88). A 1982 report on the 500 largest corporations in the US claimed that one-third had successfully implemented some form of participatory management (cited in Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 133). It is not surprising that into the 1990s, shared decision making has become established in the field of education.

### **SUPPORT FOR SHARED DECISION MAKING**

Shared decision making is promoted by much of the educational literature of the 1990s. There is considerable support for the innovation as a means of improving organizational management and climate in the current environment of change. By examining the innovation through Gorton and Snowden's "Major Steps in Decision Making", it becomes evident that it apparently carries with it both cognitive and affective features. It is suggested by the literature that the innovation can improve the quality of decision making and stimulate the commitment of school personnel to effectively implement resolutions.

Keith and Girling argue that participatory management provides both cognitive and affective benefits to the process of decision making (ibid. p. 28). In the cognitive sense, higher productivity is the result of "higher-quality information from different areas and levels of the organization to bear on strategic decisions" (ibid.). Supported by many (Blase and Roberts, 1994, pp 81-89; Epp, 1993, pp 31-32; Gorton and Snowden, 1993, p. 8; Hackman and Lawler, 1971, pp 282-284; Lawler, 1986, pp 28-32; Schlechty, 1990, p. 50; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, pp 60, 136-137; and Tranter, 1994, p. 22 ), Keith and Girling also contend that through the affective domain, "productivity gains are the result of worker satisfaction and its relationship to motivation" (1991, p. 32). Using Gorton and Snowden's insightful illustration of the fundamental process of decision making (1993, p. 8), the cognitive and affective dimensions of shared decision making are explored below.

*Step 1 Define the situation.* This cognitive process involves determining if there is a problem and what the circumstances are. That is, decision makers identify the source for concern, the scope, and the interested parties. Participants in a model of shared decision making identify problems as they arise because they are stakeholders. Furthermore, as stakeholders they are able to engage in critical discussions on issues that may be overlooked in a traditional hierarchical model where decision making is centralized (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 60; Tranter, 1994, p. 22). According to

Shedd and Bacharach, "Participation strategies shift responsibility for identifying and volunteering information with system-wide implications to those with direct access to that information, without burying them under piles of report forms" (1991, p. 137). Shared decision making, it is suggested, allows for a more thoughtful consideration of problems.

*Step 2 Identify the alternatives.* This step involves the cognitive process of recognizing the choices that exist in a decision. To avoid the problematic assumption that only two solutions exist (Gorton and Snowden, 1993, p. 9), it may require that the decision makers creatively define new alternatives for maximum gain and minimum loss. In quality circles, for example, participants are trained in brainstorming techniques to encourage creativity (Hawley, 1985, p. 42).

As in the first step, shared decision making may facilitate greater access to information about a situation being considered. Participants are welcomed to develop many creative alternatives, that address the diverse needs across the organization. Schlechty summarizes that, "participatory leadership creates conditions in which ideas in their most compelling form can flow up and down the organization" (1990, p. 50).

*Step 3 Assess the alternatives.* Since participants are stakeholders, in shared decision making, the ramifications of the alternatives may be effectively explored before decisions are made. Communication is key here. In addition to building trust among participants (Epp, 1993, p. 31; Glickman, 1993, pp 22-23), which is an affective outcome, it is argued that the process also provides the cognitive benefit of reducing isolation by giving individual teachers "the opportunity to learn from each other . . . [and] the opportunity to cultivate a continuously expanding body of professional knowledge . . ." (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 138).

*Step 4 Select the Best Possible Alternative.* Shared decision making relies upon democratic principles that may nurture both affective and cognitive benefits. Affectively, the innovation is intended to motivate people to make decisions that all stakeholders can accept. A recent study that utilized school data from across the United States found that as teachers' influence on decisions increases, conflicts within schools decrease (Ingersoll, 1996, pp 159-176). The process is not, however, intended to merely reduce conflicts in schools. Rather, it is intended to have the cognitive benefit of improving the quality of decisions (Epp, 1993, p. 6). A 1989 study of group decision making found that 97 percent of groups were able to outperform their best members (R. Black, Michaelsen and Watson, 1989, p. 836). This study was significant because it involved more than 1300 participants arranged in 222 groups, undertaking problem-solving activities that were relevant to the individuals beyond the research.

*Step 5 Secure Acceptance of the Decision.* This step involves strategizing for the success of the decision. An affective benefit of shared decision making seems to be that

stakeholders are able to take ownership for the decisions that are made. Blase and Roberts observed that, in a study of 836 teachers who had considered their principals to be effective, "Only one influence strategy — involvement in decision making — was linked to the development of teacher empowerment" (1994, p. 89). Teacher empowerment is correlated to increased teacher ownership. It also may contribute to their sense of dignity. It is evident in the study that when traditional formal authority was employed, at best the result was compliance (*ibid.*, p. 81). The process of bringing stakeholders together to participate in decision making is certainly appealing if it will engender employee commitment.

*Step 6 Implement the Decision.* Shared decision making may motivate the implementation of resolutions (Epp, 1993, p. 32; Tranter, 1994, p. 22). It is argued that when decisions are mandated top-down, along hierarchical lines, they are less likely to be successfully implemented: "It is, it seems, a condition of bureaucratic life that leaders need to delude themselves regarding the impact of their decisions, and subordinates have an interest in maintaining this delusion" (Schlechty, 1990, p. 50). Conversely, "The people involved in a shared decision should assume the responsibility and the accountability for the decision[s]" (Mitchell, 1992, p. 172). The innovation seems to encourage participants to be knowledgeable and accepting of decisions and active in their implementation (Lawler, 1986, p. 37). While increased teacher commitment to the implementation of decisions is an affective benefit of shared decision making, a cognitive advantage is that stakeholders may be more knowledgeable and capable of implementing and coordinating complex initiatives.

*Step 7 Evaluate the Decision.* This final step seems to cause the process to start once again. While the outcome of wise and effective decisions is certainly an attractive feature of the innovation, it seems that it is the process itself which draws in many educators. The innovation may encourage participants to contribute to the ongoing renewal of schools (Epp, 1993, pp 31-32). Furthermore, it is argued that shared decision making allows organizations to respond quickly to the changing needs of the environment (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, pp 134 -138; Tranter, 1994, p. 22).

Given the features that seem to result from the application of shared decision making, it is little wonder that it has drawn the praise of so many educators and educational researchers. A large proportion of the literature suggests that teachers are mobilized to support school decisions because of their increased participation in formulating and implementing resolutions. In addition, there is a considerable argument that the broader base of input, inherent in the model, encourages a greater appreciation of the diverse circumstances that are present in schools. The successful implementation of shared decision making, it is argued, produces wise decisions and rallies the support of empowered stakeholders.

## BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

While there appear to be many compelling reasons for schools to adopt shared decision making, there are clear barriers that can prevent the innovation from being successful. Certainly a predictable barrier is that stakeholders, particularly those who would be participants, may be resistant to the process. There may also be organizational limitations that block implementation. It is apparent that schools which undertake the innovation need to consider the time and training that it requires.

### Participant resistance

A potential barrier to the successful implementation of shared decision making is fear on the part of participants. Teachers may view participation as an undertaking that increases one's workload, resulting in minimal personal benefit (Keith and Girling, 1991, p. 44). Furthermore, they may fear that they will have little real impact on decisions (Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 88; Duke, Showers, and Imber, 1980, pp 101-102; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 132; Tranter, 1994, p. 26). McGregor warns that some leaders may regard the innovation as a "manipulative device for getting people to do what they want, under conditions which delude the *participants* into thinking they have had a voice in decision making (1960, p. 125). Similar warnings are voiced by Mintzberg, who claims that our cultural emphasis on strong leadership actually undermines the contribution of employees. He says, "In the name of empowering the workers, we actually reinforce the hierarchy. So called empowerment becomes the empty gift of the bosses, who remain firmly in charge" (1996a, p. 80). Finally, Glickman argues that in some places administrators are no longer seen as principal teachers. The notion of *principal as management* and *teacher as labour* may inhibit collegial relations (1993, p, 36). He recommends, however, that a collegial environment should prevail if shared decision making is to be successful (1993, pp 22-23).

Conversely, leaders may be fearful of losing control of their organizations (Blase and Blase, 1994, p. 10; Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 88; Flanigan and Gray, 1995 p. 9; Keith and Girling, 1991, p. 44). According to Glickman, shared decision making can only truly be successful if "those in status positions will have the same rights and responsibilities to influence decisions but, in the end, can win or lose as easily as anyone else" (1993, p. 42). However, given that principals may be held solely accountable for the decisions that come from their schools and that they are out numbered when compared to their staffs, it is reasonable that administrators would be apprehensive about shared decision making. Such sentiments are echoed in two case studies that are summarized by Conway and Calzi (1995). Here, they examine issues that arose when teachers were afforded enough power to defy the wishes of their school systems. In the

first case, teachers successfully blocked a board and central administrative initiative to restructure a gifted and talented program. In the second instance, a panel of teachers selected a new principal for their school who would be highly sympathetic to their interests, from a short list provided by the system. Although in neither situation did teachers appear to take actions that were beyond the power afforded to them, the authors demonstrate that teachers, guided by their own self-interests, will not necessarily make the same decisions as administrators. They suggest that the innovation can lead to "questionable, if not deleterious, outcomes" (ibid. p. 46). Their message is clear: administrators have much at stake with shared decision making.

Furthermore, principals may also feel uncomfortable with subordinates challenging their views (Keith and Girling, 1991, p. 43). Organizational theorists Adler and Borys claim that managers who fear opportunism within their employees tend to rely upon the coercive procedures that are characteristic of traditional management to maintain stability (1996, pp 71). Principals may also doubt that teachers have the commitment that is required to make school decisions. McGregor's *Theory X and Theory Y* illustrate the assumptions that leaders may make, when considering the potential of their employees:

#### Theory X

1. "The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can."
2. "Because of this human characteristic of dislike of work, most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort toward achievement of organizational objectives."
3. "The average human being prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition and wants security above all."

#### Theory Y

1. "External control and the threat of punishment are not the only means for bringing about effort toward organizational objectives. Man will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which he is committed."
2. "The average human being learns, under proper conditions, not only to accept but seek responsibility. Avoidance of responsibility, lack of ambition and emphasis on security are generally consequences of experience, not inherent human characteristics."
3. "The capacity to exercise a relatively high degree of imagination, ingenuity and creativity in the solution of organizational problems is widely, not narrowly, distributed" (cited in Gorton and Snowden. 1993, pp 17-18).

It should be noted that McGregor asserts that both Theory X and Theory Y have settings

in which they are appropriate. However, it seems unlikely that principals who subscribe to *Theory X* will be able to successfully provide a nurturing environment for shared decision making. Epp recommends to principals that they not undertake the innovation unless they are truly committed to it (1993, p. 34).

### **Systemic Barriers**

A systemic barrier barrier to shared decision making may be the high demand for time that it entails. As noted previously, organizations that are engaged in shared decision making may be able to respond swiftly to changes in the environment. However, much of the literature states that it demands more time from participants (S. Black, 1996, p. 26; Bradley and Olson, 1993, pp 52-53; Epp, 1993, p. 31; Flanigan and Gray, 1995, p. 6; Keith and Girling, 1991, pp 43-44; Tranter, 1994. p. 25). These authors argue that some sort of strategy must be developed to allow participants to commit the necessary time to the process.

An additional barrier, identified often in the literature, is the provision for sufficient participant training (Gorton and Snowden, 1993, p. 19; Flanigan and Gray, 1995, pp 7-10; Keith and Girling, 1991, pp 44 - 45; Tranter, 1994, p. 23). The innovation requires teachers to learn to constructively contribute to debates on issues of management, and principals must acquire skills to facilitate an environment that is task oriented and where opinions are freely expressed. Clearly, the innovation demands a lot from its participants. However, for many educators, the demands are affordable if the innovation will improve the performance of schools.

### **THE IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

Although there have been mixed responses to shared decision making in the private sector, generally the measured outcomes have been positive. Summarized research indicates that businesses experience more positive outcomes than negative and generally equal or higher productivity after the implementation of shared decision making (Bolman and Deal, 1984, pp 90-92; H. Levin, 1982, p. 45; Nightingale, 1982, pp 183-185). It is likely, as the field of OD suggests, that it is important to find an appropriate fit between a governance model and the environment in which an organization lives. While for business it is quite feasible to measure the impact of shared decision making on organizational effectiveness, through the use of financial productivity indicators, its impact on schools is less clear.

Several authors comment on the shortage of studies that examine the effect that the innovation has had on student achievement (S. Conley, 1991, pp 230; Conway and Calzi, 1996, p. 46; Ingersoll, 1996, p. 160). The quantitative research examined here is certainly inconclusive. Keith and Girling argue that shared decision making does

positively affect educational outcomes (1991, pp 30-31). The authors cite a 1988 - 1989 study of 16 California elementary and secondary schools that found that those that employed methods of participatory governance significantly outperformed others "on the California Assessment Program (CAP), a set of standardized school achievement tests that correct for variation in the students' socioeconomic status, racial background, and language spoken in the home environment" (ibid. p. 32). Meanwhile, a three-year Virginia study of fourth graders in 35 elementary schools found that "[achievement] test scores were not influenced by the degree to which teachers were involved in administrative decision-making" (Lawton, 1996, p. 7). Rather, the researchers concluded that "the socio-economic status of the student body accounted for most of the variation among test scores . . ." (ibid.). The difficulty in quantifiably assessing the innovation seems to arise from our inability to define school effectiveness in measurable terms. McGill management professor Henry Mintzberg claims that it is typically problematic to accurately measure and assess the outcomes of public services, such as education. His view is that such functions "are in the public sector precisely because of measurement problems" (1996a, p. 79). Given the ambiguous nature of measuring school effectiveness, it is not surprising that commentators would observe that experiments with shared decision making have not "resulted in the kinds of dramatic gains in student achievement . . . that their advocates had hoped for" (Bradley and Olson, 1993, p. 44).

Unfortunately, empirical studies suggest that the impact of shared decision making on learning and teaching is minimal. Brown found, in an eighteen-month case study of the innovation in a Pennsylvania elementary school, that decision making tended not to focus on student needs and instructional innovation (1995, pp 345-346). Similarly, in their study of six American schools, Peterson and Solsrud discovered:

In some of these schools, new shared decision-making structures are providing a forum for discussion on new instructional arrangements and current issues about curriculum and change. In other schools, however, substantive improvements have not occurred (1996, p. 109).

The authors concluded that:

While changes in decision-making structures may be important to teachers' sense of empowerment and to increasing professional involvement in key decisions, having new structures does not guarantee schools will focus on improving instruction. To do this staff and administrators will have to make this a priority (ibid.).

The argument raised here is that the implementation shared decision making alone will not necessarily lead to improvements in learning and teaching.

Meanwhile, after comparing six schools with shared decision making to six schools without it from across the United States between 1988 and 1993, Weiss and Cambone recommend "uncoupling issues of governance and of classroom curriculum

and instruction" (1994, p. 288). These researchers found that shared decision making alone is demanding of participants and suggest that it should become well established before instructional reform efforts are put into place (ibid.). Furthermore, while the study suggested that schools with shared decision making were only "modestly more innovative, and in line with recent reform prescriptions such as interdisciplinary teaching and schools-within-the-school" (Weiss, 1995, p. 579), it was concluded that it is perhaps wise that "'empowered' teachers tend to use their power to slow the pace of change" (Weiss, 1993, p. 89). Weiss contends that many educational innovations have been little more than "fads and fashions" (ibid. p. 84). She remarks: "Some changes probably should be rethought and refashioned in order to fit the needs of students and of teachers in the building" (ibid. p. 89).

Finally, some literature suggests that increasing the teacher's role in school management can actually hinder learning and teaching. It seems that the new responsibilities associated with decentralization, such as participation in decision-making bodies, can consume a great deal of teachers' time, reducing their ability to focus on long-term educational goals (Richardson and Sistrunk, 1989). Furthermore, it is argued that the organizational restructuring and new roles associated with shared decision making may disrupt the activities of effectively-run schools (Conway and Calzi, 1996). There is also concern that empowered teachers may undermine system-wide decision making (ibid.). Clearly, these views sharply contrast the arguments put forward by advocates of decentralization.

It is evident that research which investigates the relationship between shared decision making and student achievement is limited. While businesses may very well be able to measure their productivity through the analysis of profit margins and other financial indicators, the measurement of school effectiveness is certainly problematic. Furthermore, the results of empirical studies also seem to produce conflicting assessments of the innovation's impact on learning and teaching. It is compelling to pursue this topic in the present research.

## **SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2**

The literature on shared decision making provides a fascinating account of the evolutionary history of the innovation. The trend towards more inclusive management has emerged from being merely a leadership style to becoming well established as a large-scale innovation in both private and public industries. In educational literature, shared decision making has been touted as an opportunity to increase staff commitment while producing wise decisions. However, the literature also identifies some formidable obstacles for the innovation. Furthermore, research which examines the impact of shared decision making on student achievement is both lacking and somewhat contradictory. It is evident that more research is needed in this area.

## CHAPTER 3 THE ENVIRONMENT

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research sites and their environment are described. The two schools are portrayed as distinct entities that share a common environment of turbulent change. Although these schools share many similar characteristics, given that they are both high schools within the same district, their contrasting features are regarded as being particularly significant for this investigation. Consistent with organizational theory, the schools demonstrate the attributes of organisms that are dependent upon and responsive to their environment. While the schools are quite different from each other, they are both compelled to adapt to their circumstances.

### THE PARTICIPANT SCHOOLS

The two schools that form the focus for this investigation, when compared to each other, provide a fortunate blend of similar and divergent characteristics. Their similarities in governance make it possible for this investigation to consider both sites together, allowing for a valid and meaningful comparison. However, their significant differences in historical background, physical design, size of enrollment, clientele, and approach to learning and teaching allow this study to more readily isolate reported experiences with shared decision making, from those that may be attributed to other factors. Thus, examining the two schools together provides a unique and valuable opportunity to gain significant knowledge and insight into the innovation of shared decision making.

Called Suburban High and City High for anonymity, the two schools contrast in many ways. Firstly, Suburban High has a much shorter history than City High. Over its approximately thirty years of operation, Suburban High has been involved in a variety of innovative projects that have given it a reputation of being nontraditional. For most of its history, this school has offered a multidisciplinary program that has attracted visitors worldwide. It has also drawn enrollment city-wide with a provincially-initiated program that allows students a great deal of control over their learning environment. As well, the school is engaged in a Teacher Advisor Program that has enabled small groups of students to connect with certificated staff members for scholastic, career, and personal counseling. Suburban High has also been a system leader in the implementation of computers into learning and teaching. During its short period of existence, Suburban High has enjoyed many successes.

City High has a much longer tradition. The oldest surviving component of the plant was built approximately seventy years ago. By the 1940s, City High was one of

three public high schools in Calgary. Vocational facilities were added in the 1960s and operated with a great deal of success. However, by the 1970s, demand for vocational programs decreased, and the school experienced a steady decline. Nevertheless, in the 1980s City High experienced a miraculous turnaround, with the introduction of some highly regarded academic programs. As one administrator described it, "In a city that tends to tear down buildings rather than preserve them, [City High] provides a vital link with our past." By wandering through City High, one gets a sense of its long and proud history.

Perhaps indicative of the eras from which they have emerged, the physical plants of the two schools also significantly differ. As is evident from its history, City High is an older building. Its impressive brick facade provides a barrier between inner-city development and its traditional, yet humble, interior. With wide halls, high ceilings, and beautifully maintained wood trim, City High echoes the grandeur of Calgary's older architecture. Many of its windows still have their original panes, which distort the images that penetrate them. Although teachers and students enjoy the natural light that they deliver — in some instances, classes are taught with the electric lights turned off — these windows provide little insulation on cold winter days. Restricted by space and the available furnishings, the organization of school furniture also provides little warmth to classrooms. Straight, traditional rows of desks are common. In many ways, City High resembles what many Albertans lament has been lost in public schooling.

Meanwhile, located in a suburban community of Calgary, Suburban High is a much more modern high school. Having emerged from a period of experimental school architecture, Suburban High is characterized by: various teaching-space sizes, minimal hallway space, few windows, and many areas that are carpeted. In addition, the school exhibits remnants of dated colours that have been popular over the last three decades. Suburban High also brags several newly renovated areas, which tend to be the highlight of walking tours. Classroom furniture consists of desks or trapezoidal tables, arranged in a variety of formations, that seem to soften the classroom environment. Although Suburban High has much to be proud of in terms of facility, it does not have the programming flexibility enjoyed by larger schools.

With approximately fifty teachers, Suburban High is a relatively small high school. An enrollment of around one thousand students and a limited number of teaching spaces has challenged the process of scheduling, by limiting the number of course sections that can be offered and by placing many spaces in high demand. Many teachers teach in several different classrooms, and early morning sections are offered for some courses to alleviate time-tabling difficulties. Suburban High has little in the way of vocational shops, but does offer a respectable complement of option courses. Ironically, the openness of the school — which causes many teachers a great deal of

frustration — and the limits of the small plant, seem to promote a sense of community within the school. Teachers in Suburban High know each other, and it is common for them to be friendly with colleagues in other departments.

Conversely, City High is a large school. Having approximately 1800 students and nearly ninety-five teachers, it seems to be acceptable for staff members to be strangers at City High. In addition, the bizarre design of its stairwells contributes to the isolation of departments. Not only are departments located in separate wings of the building, but often the only route to another wing on the same floor is down and up stairs. The school is departmentalized further by the arrangement of staff spaces. Although City High has a wonderful common staff room, many teachers retreat to their ample offices when they are not teaching classes. Furthermore, many of them occupy one classroom for an entire year, and sometimes for several. The facility seems to encourage teachers to carve out their own territory. Although City High is an entity with which staff members identify, there are clearly physical barriers to staff unity.

The clientele of students at Suburban High and City High is a relevant consideration for this study. The schools are similar in that both of their student bodies may be described as being ethnically diverse. At City High, I was told of a 1994 demographics survey that found that English was not the first language for 52 percent of the students. In total, 81 languages were represented. Comparable statistics were not available at Suburban High. However, one can easily appreciate its rich ethnic diversity by simply walking through the halls. Furthermore, in recognition of their large Chinese population, Suburban High celebrates Chinese New Year and prints the school's newsletter in both English and Chinese. Although the mission statements at both schools express the desire to embrace this diversity, staff members at both sites face a common challenge of working with many students whose first language is not English.

While there was little relevant statistical data available to accurately depict the socio-economic circumstances for the two schools, given that high schools tend to draw from many neighbourhoods, staff members were able to provide insightful impressions. It was suggested in both schools that family wealth varies greatly from one household to the next. However, City High seems to have a sizable proportion of students who are quite wealthy. An administrator at City High indicated that their academic programs have proven to be a magnet for some wealthier Calgary families. Although many of the students in Suburban High seem to come from families that live comfortably, there does not seem to be the level of affluence present at City High. Furthermore, there appears to be a marginally greater proportion of students at Suburban High whose families are needy, compared to City High. According to the CBE's Finance Department, 4.5 percent of the students at Suburban High received waivers on their school fees in 1996-

97, compared to 3.6 percent at City High. Although the gap is narrow, this statistic is curious given that City High is located close to the downtown core and Suburban High is in the suburbs. Nonetheless, a common descriptor for the student bodies at both schools is *diversity*.

In their approach to learning and teaching, there are significant differences between the two schools. Although both may be regarded as schools that specialize in academic challenge, as they are both affiliated with an internationally recognized academic program that was originally intended for the children of diplomats, there are marked differences in their performance on provincial exams. As reported in the *Calgary Herald*, City High placed near the top in overall average, compared to other Calgary high schools for 1995 and for 1996 (User Guide, 1996, p. A1). Meanwhile, Suburban High placed in the middle for both examination periods. A reasonable explanation for this gap might be that City High has a much more established academic program than does Suburban High. As indicated previously, City High draws a large proportion of students from outside of its feeder schools. At this point, however, Suburban High's academic program is still in its infancy.

Perhaps a second explanation for the gap in exam performance, at the two schools, is their different philosophical priorities in learning and teaching. An examination of its mission statement reveals that Suburban High places a high emphasis on human needs, student-centered learning, and instructional innovation. The document indicates that learning is enhanced when students are "secure and comfortable," "encouraged to interact with others," and are able to "learn at their own rate." At Suburban High, teachers have committed themselves to "create an open and diverse learning environment; one which is supportive, dynamic, and innovative." These priorities contrast greatly with those identified at City High. In its mission statement, City High has asserted the importance of student self-reliance. Teachers at this school are committed to the development of "strength," "courage" and "individual potential" within students, through "challenging programs" of "excellence." Certainly, there are common priorities for the two schools — such as nurturing tolerance for diversity and making connections with their communities — however, the contrasting elements are striking. While it is evident that these two schools differ greatly, they do share a common environment that has encouraged them to undertake shared decision making.

## **AN EMERGING ENVIRONMENT FOR SHARED DECISION MAKING**

Organizational theorists provide us with a framework through which to analyze the two schools and how their environment has encouraged the implementation of shared decision making. Theorists differentiate between organizations that resemble

machines and those that are similar to organisms. While the bureaucracy of many public institutions appears to be almost machine-like, in that the focus on internal design seems to make them unresponsive to their surroundings, the two schools examined here have become more like organisms that are dependent upon their environment to thrive. According to Morgan, "This exchange is crucial for sustaining the life and form of the system, since environmental interaction is the basis of self-maintenance" (1986, p. 46). While organisms rely upon nature for energy, required nutrients, and other nurturing elements of an inhabitable environment, schools are dependent upon economic resources in an environment of politics. Consistent with contingency theory, changes in the environment have encouraged the schools to evolve. At the forefront of their evolution, Suburban High and City High have adopted shared decision making in order to accommodate their new surroundings.

### **The Emerging Political Environment**

Although some may wish that schools could exist outside of politics, it is apparent that they rely upon a favourable political climate. The political environment for schools is a complex one. Apart from addressing the interests of the students, staff, and volunteers that are direct participants, schools also face demands from external stakeholders. It is apparent that schools must be accountable to parents, the school system, and the provincial government. Indeed, a school's existence is the product of political decisions made by these groups. In addition, they must maintain relationships with the community, business, the media, unions, and a variety of public services. While a supportive political environment encourages healthy development, turbulence can cause schools distress.

Educational commentators Maude Barlow and Heather-jane Robertson express alarm over the emerging political environment in Canadian education. Through an examination of the debate on public school effectiveness, they highlight several political issues that have emerged and have damaged the public's trust in schools. The offending claims, which the authors regard as unfounded myths that constitute an assault on public schools, are summarized below:

- At least 25 % of Canadians are illiterate.
- Our drop-out rate is at least 30 %.
- We spend more on education than [virtually] any country in the world, and we have less to show for it.
- When our students results are compared with those of our international competitors, we are beaten by nearly everybody (1994, pp 25 - 44).

Although the authors argue against the claims, they concede that "It is naive to believe that anything as emotionally charged as education can be freed from the shadows cast

by myths" (ibid., p. 44). Whether the issues are contrived or real, they do affect the political environment in education.

The Calgary Board of Education has also acknowledged significant issues that have affected the political environment in public education. In a 1991 strategic plan scanning report, the Board identified a variety of challenges that had affected its whole organizational structure. The Board perceived that:

The structures which have provided security and stability for public institutions are in transition and are being questioned in this time of rapid change. The scope and speed of change is causing a fundamental reshaping of Canadian institutions.

- The changing family unit seems certain to pose new challenges.
- In telecommunications, technologies provide immediate global access.
- The passage of the Canadian Charter of Rights and freedoms is reflected in a significant shift in legal jurisdiction.
- Dissatisfaction with public education is emerging and centering around accountability, standardization, and "product." Challenges to the "traditional" classroom will continue.
- The "normal" classroom is comprised of expanding numbers of students currently regarded as exceptional.
- Political structures are being questioned.
- Technology will continue to provide an alternative to management and staffing (Calgary Board of Education, 1991b).

The report further detailed emergent trends in the system's political environment:

Individuals are recognizing that their individual rights may override group rights and there is an attitude of challenge within society.

- The aging population are growing in number and have the political power and voice to influence decision-making.
- The majority of taxpayers do not have children in school and this trend will continue.
- A greater demand by aboriginal people for recognition and rights is occurring.
- Growing ethnic diversity is reflected in greater demands for cultural recognition.
- Individuals are challenging institutional policies.
- Business and community are demanding more input into the educational policy and decision-making, and are questioning the educational "product."
- Community and educational agencies are increasingly being required to act as advocates for children in the absence of stable family structures.
- There is an expanding demand for educational response to special needs.
- There are more women holding positions of decision-making and power (ibid.).

It is evident that increased political instability has challenged the CBE and its schools. It is not surprising that the provincial government responded to this apparent political strife through the institution of school councils.

### **School Councils**

According to Ingersoll, the trend towards the decentralization of school decision making has taken two distinct forms. One approach, which is the focus of this study, allows teachers to have more input into school decisions to increase their "authority, autonomy, and professionalism" (1994, p. 152). The second strategy allows parents and community members to have a greater role in the decision-making process of their local schools (*ibid.*). In Alberta, the latter strategy has brought about the institution of parent-dominated school councils.

By design, school councils bring together parents, members of a school's community, school personnel, and sometimes students, through a democratic process, to make decisions about how a school should be run. Furthermore, the innovation may be part of a site-based-management initiative where a transfer of authority occurs, from central administration to local schools, over decisions "about instructional programs and services and how they are funded" (Russel, 1995, p. 3). In Alberta, the innovation is intended to affect learning and teaching positively. Alberta Education defines school councils as:

collective associations of parents, teachers, principals, staff, students and community representatives who seek to work together to promote the well-being and effectiveness of the entire school community and thereby to enhance student learning. A school council is a means to facilitate cooperation among all the concerned participants in the local school (Alberta Education, 1995a, p. 1).

Ironically, however, Ingersoll argues that this approach is predicated on the notion that schools are currently managed too loosely. To increase accountability, the strategy would be to disempower teachers by "shifting substantial control from school staffs to parents and communities" (1994, p. 152). It is evident, then, that the inclusion of teachers and the community in school decision making has the potential to produce friction between the two groups.

Although initially there was distress, on the part of both parents and educators, about the amount of power that school councils would wield (Jenkinson, 1995a, p. 34), that concern was ameliorated with clarifications presented in the *School Council Resource Manual* (Alberta Education, 1995b). This document clearly indicates that, "Final decision-making responsibility rests with the school principal. School councils exist to advise and consult the principal . . ." (p. A8). Unfortunately, one year after they were legislated, a *Calgary Herald* article indicates that, "many parents say the only role these

councils can deal with is fund-raising to ensure their children will have the necessary tools in school to learn, following cutbacks in education in recent years" (Dempster, 1997, p. A10). While it is apparent that council members may have become aware of the current financial realities of schooling in Alberta, it is unlikely that they are playing the significant role that was initially envisioned.

Nonetheless, it is evident that school councils are viewed as an opportunity for stakeholders to make personal, significant contributions to the improvement of schools and student learning. While, it is possible that the implementation of such an innovation will cause considerable stress within local schools, the initiative does reinforce the notion of stakeholder inclusion in school decisions. This emphasis has been shown to be well supported by current educational literature and is evident in the governance models of the schools that participated in this study. Unfortunately, as indicated by the *Calgary Herald* report, the environment of the political arena is interdependent with economic circumstances.

### **The Scarcity of Resources**

The political environment has a tremendous impact on the availability and distribution of economic resources in public education. School funding is largely determined by governmental decision making. In 1995, for instance, 94 percent of the CBE's operations revenue came from the Alberta Government. Other sources of funding included federal grants, the municipalities, and user fees (Calgary Board of Education, 1996b). In addition to the provincial government's decision-making process, which determines the system's funding, the school board in turn decides upon the actual budget allocation for individual schools. As with organisms in nature, schools exist in an environment that is characterized by a scarcity of resources.

In its 1991 strategic plan, the CBE identified a trend in declining funding for public education. It claimed that, "Declining financial support for education has threatened and complicated the task of providing equity of access for all learners to Calgary Board of Education programs and services" (Calgary Board of Education, 1991a). The funding situation worsened in the spring of 1993 with the election of a new Progressive Conservative government. When the government received its mandate, the electorate of Alberta had agreed to engage in a massive restructuring of the public service to eliminate an annual deficit of \$3.2 billion in four years (Bergman, 1993, p. 17). Health care and Education, constituting large components of the provincial budget, were among the most heavily hit with funding cutbacks. The dramatic restructuring of education has rocked the environment of public schools.

Apart from reducing the number of boards by nearly two-thirds (Jenkinson, 1995b, p. 34) and eliminating their ability to tax directly (Barlow and Robertson, 1994,

p. 229), the province has also placed limits on the proportion of board budgets that can be spent on centralized administration to “have the effect of increasing the amount of money available at the school level, without increasing the overall expenditures” (*Canadian Principal*, 1995, p. 4). These initiatives have had a significant impact on school boards. For the CBE, these reforms have resulted in a net loss of \$ 34 106 531 to its operations budget between 1993 and 1995, or 9 percent of the funding per student enrolled before inflation (Calgary Board of Education, 1996a; Calgary Board of Education, 1996b). During the 1997 provincial election, the Alberta School Board Association informed the public that, even after government reinvestment, per student expenditures throughout Alberta had fallen by 11 percent over the previous four years (Dawson, 1997, A8). Compounded inflation largely accounted for this drop. Clearly, the CBE has recently faced tremendous upheaval. The system and its schools would need to undertake significant restructuring to navigate political and economic turbulence.

### **Environmental Instability and Change**

It is apparent, within organizational theory, that when the environment in which an organization exists endures significant changes, the organization itself is likely to experience pressure to adjust to its new surroundings. Confronted by its new environment, an organization may experience internal resistance that produces tension. Bolman and Deal attribute this result to a misalignment of structural frames. They identify four frames inherent in complex organizations:

- *Structural frame* — goal direction, structural clarity, and task accomplishment.
- *Human resource frame* — effective response to human needs and use of human resources.
- *Political frame* — coalitions, conflicts, and problems of resource allocation.
- *Symbolic frame* — shared values, symbols, and cohesion (1984. p. 288).

As the authors suggest, change in the environment causes some of the frames to shift. Members of an organization may be reluctant or find it difficult to adjust to the new environment and misalignment results, causing internal tension within the organization. Tension is not alleviated until the frames are realigned (ibid., pp 288-292).

According to research associated with contingency theory, when change occurs in an environment, organizations can adapt more readily when an open and flexible internal structure is developed (Burns and Stalker in Morgan, 1986, p. 50; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967, pp 185-210). The resulting organic form is in stark contrast to the mechanistic one, which emphasizes hierarchy, accountability, and routinized operation (Mintzberg, 1996a, p. 80). While the mechanistic model is rigid and unresponsive

because of its dependence on environmental stability, an organic form is flexible and more readily adjusts to change. As the metaphor suggests, organic organizations are affected by instability in environment, and they evolve in order to maintain themselves.

As part of their evolution, organic organizations may attempt to increase employee participation in decision making (Rowan, 1995, p. 24). The work of Adler and Borys indicates that organizations which are dependent upon mechanistic principles tend to deny employees the opportunity to develop and exercise skills associated with organizational development and improvement by limiting planning and the formulation of ideas to management (1996, pp 70-76). While this approach does entrench standardization and managerial control throughout an organization, it reduces the potential contribution of individual employees and the adaptability of the entire organization. Borys and Adler recommend that organizational policies be implemented that enable employees to maximize their contribution to the workplace, especially when the environment is characterized by change (ibid.). This objective has been evident within the CBE and at the schools examined here.

The CBE's 1991 strategic plan scanning report described shared decision making as an organizational goal for the school system:

As educational resources decline, the quality of decisions becomes critical. The CBE will broaden its leadership base to take full advantage of the rich background and abilities of staff and implement leadership processes to increase collaboration and consensus building to improve the quality decision making (Calgary Board of Education, 1991b).

Furthermore, among the initiatives that it cited to accomplish this goal, the CBE called for a new "emphasis on leadership as a function and not a position" (ibid.). This emergent direction, although consistent with much of the current literature on school and system governance, was a departure from the approach that had been articulated in previous years. A 1989 position paper, released by CBE senior administrator Bill Dixon, had emphasized the importance of a strong traditional line of authority:

Authority permits the decision to be made; responsibility requires that it be made; and accountability requires accounting to one's supervisor for the decision process and the outcomes thereof: student to teacher, teacher to principal, principal to superintendent, and ultimately Chief Superintendent to the Board of Trustees (p. 16).

Although the essay does articulate support for the popular notion of staff empowerment, the notion of a "consultative decision making process" (ibid., p. 17) is in stark contrast to the emphasis on "collaboration and consensus building" that is part of the system's 1991 strategic plan. The system's 1993 learning and teaching scanning report recognized that, within the system, "There is a trend towards increased democratization of the people. Democratization refers to the treatment of others as one's equals" (p. 2). More recently, the Board of Trustees has further validated this

shift by articulating in its statement of purpose that: "The Board's governance exhibits wisdom, courage, foresight and shared leadership so that time, talent and resources are used in the best possible way" (*CBE News*, 1996, p. 1). Into 1996-97, the CBE is producing a policy on decision making that, in its draft form, calls for decisions to be made with the involvement of "those closest to, affected by and responsible for their implementation" (Calgary Board of Education, 1996c). It further highlights the systems preference for decisions based on "cooperation and collaboration" (*ibid.*). It is evident that the CBE is committed to the concept of inclusion in school and system decisions. This direction has been paramount in the emergence of shared decision making at the two schools considered here.

### **SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3**

Although the two schools that provide the setting for this study share characteristics that are common to many Calgary high schools, they also possess contrasting features which show that they are organizations that are quite different from each other. Their historical origins have marked them with experiences that are specific to the eras from which they have emerged. Their different styles of architecture highlight the transformation of educational philosophy over the past century. Furthermore, their dissimilarity in design and size have affected communication and their levels of staff interaction. In terms of meeting the needs of their diverse students, these schools seem to have adopted contrasting approaches. While both of them are affiliated with an internationally recognized academic program, their philosophical priorities in learning and teaching have been shown to be vastly different. It has also been argued that although these schools contrast greatly, they are both living organizations that are dependent upon their environment.

The environment of education has been portrayed as being politically turbulent and economically strained. A perceived trend of declining public trust and increasing demands upon schools was traced from CBE documentation and literary sources. This instability has further been aggravated by a mounting public debt, resulting in substantial funding reductions. In response to a perceived crisis, and with the encouragement of provincial legislation, the CBE has supported increased participation in decision making. For the two schools examined here, the result has been the innovation of shared decision making.

## CHAPTER 4 THE EXPERIENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION

### INTRODUCTION

To this point, the focus of this study has been largely on the greater systemic and environmental elements that have encouraged shared decision making at the two research sites. It has been argued that the emerging popularity of this innovation in organizational, business, and educational literature, combined with a ripe political environment for change, has motivated schools to become more inclusive in their governance.

The goal of this chapter is to shift the focus to the small picture. In support of the intent of this study to examine participant experiences with shared decision making, this chapter will consider the formation of the innovation at the two research sites. It is hoped that by retelling the history of the innovation's implementation and by examining the form that it has taken, the reader will develop a greater understanding of the context of participant experiences.

### THE TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

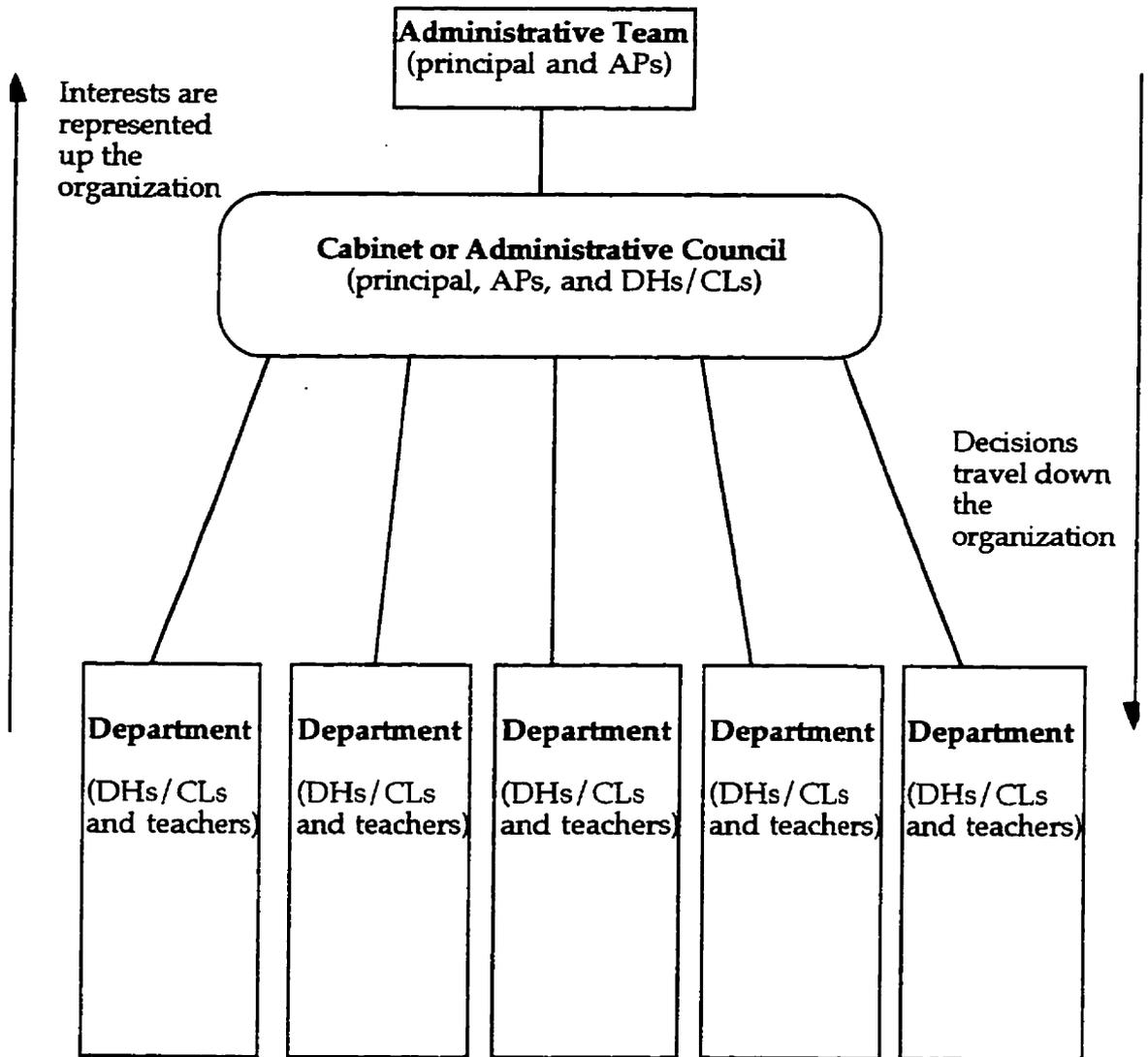
To fully appreciate the breadth of change that the schools have experienced, it is valuable to consider the traditional model of school governance, which was in place prior to implementation of shared decision making. The model described here, while likely moderated in practice, illustrates the hierarchical predisposition present in many traditional institutions. By the account of teachers and administrators alike, the model applied the philosophy of top-down administration.

#### Reflections on the Old Model

On occasion, in the interview process, participants of this study reflected upon their experiences with the *old model* of decision making. In terms of school-wide decisions, teachers and administrators commented on the level of discretion that had been previously enjoyed in particular by the principal but also by the administrative council. Figure 1 illustrates the model through which Calgary High Schools have traditionally made decisions. Essentially, as the model suggests, decision making was centralized at the top.

According to some participants, the administrative council was a significant organ for making school decisions. It was there that department heads represented and defended the interests of their departments. The principal and assistant principals articulated their positions, and through a process of voting, some decisions were made.

Figure 1  
Traditional Governance Structure for Calgary High Schools



Key

APs - Assistant Principals  
DHs/CLs - Department  
Heads/Curriculum Leaders

However, despite the gesture of inclusion suggested by the role of the administrative council, the principal wielded considerable power in this model. Typically, teachers and administrators alike recalled that school decisions had been “made in the cabinet or made in the principal’s office. And there were no bones made about it. It was no big secret. I mean if you said that to the principal he would not be surprised or upset. It’s just the way things were.” In fact, in some instances, principals even overruled the decisions of the administrative council. As one curriculum leader recalled, even if a clear majority had been reached by a council in the old model, “the principal might say, ‘Yes okay, well I think that you’re right. I think that you’ve got more here that’s right.’ And then he would overturn the decision anyway.” It is not my observation that principals generally were manipulative and overbearing. Rather, as participants at both schools have indicated, the governance model was one of consultation, not collaboration.

The minutes of the administrative councils’ meetings at both schools, dating back as far as 1988, support this observation. For the most part, they illustrate a discourse where department heads asked questions of clarification and expressed concerns over existing policies. Where decisions were made in the administrative council, they tended to be the sort that Glickman refers to as *minimal-impact* decisions (1993, p. 32). Typical decisions made by the administrative council were regarding temporary modifications to the school timetable for special events, the format for parent-teacher interviews, strategies for keeping the cafeteria clean, whether or not a warning bell would be implemented after a morning break, and that the morning announcements should be read slower so that they may be better understood. In fact, the more significant school decisions were made by the administration, outside of the administrative council completely. For instance, the allocation of funds from the school budget, the introduction of a Teacher Advisor Program, school goals, and the redeployment of junior leadership designations were all decisions that were made exclusively by administrators. Certainly, in each of these cases, the administration consulted with the administrative council. However, ultimately the decisions were reported to that group; they were not made by it. At one site, even a school motto was developed, utilizing the input of teachers and students, by a select group headed by the principal. Although department heads were invited to comment on the motto, their input was sought after a decision had already been reached. No modifications were made.

The role of teachers, in school-wide decision making, is consistent with the findings of Ingersoll (1994). In his analysis of survey results received from across the United States, he found that “typically, teachers are delegated responsibility for implementation, execution and enforcement, but do not exercise actual control over the conception and determination of larger policies and decisions” (p. 160). To facilitate

this result, the administrative council did act as a hub of communication. Typically, department heads were asked to inform *their people* about managerial issues such as: policies pertaining to student tardiness and early dismissal, significant dates for report cards, the time line for teacher evaluation, and the process for making photocopy duplications.

### A Page from Classical Management Theory

The model portrayed in Figure 1 is consistent with the organizational charts that are characteristic of *classical management theory*. Classical theorists, such as Henri Fayol, F.W. Mooney, and Col. Lyndall Urwick, advocated for organizations to adopt machine-like, rational systems which employed top-down control for optimum efficiency in the early part of this century (Morgan, 1986, pp 25-29). Sergiovanni acknowledges the coercive nature of traditional school governance:

In order for schools to get teachers to do what needs to be done, rewards and punishments must be traded for compliance. Teachers who teach the way they are supposed to get good evaluations. Good evaluations lead to better assignments and improved prospects for promotion (1994b, p. 216).

He further suggests that the nature of classical management theory

encourages us to assume that hierarchy equals moral superiority. As teachers, for example, move up the ranks not only is it presumed that they know more about teaching and learning and other matters of schooling, but that they care more as well" (ibid.).

It is apparent that the hierarchy employed by classical management theory likely does affect how employees regard themselves and the rest of their organizations.

As has been suggested previously, the lines of communication in the old model followed along the lines of command. Adler and Borys liken the coercive organization employed in classical management theory to the layout of many prisons: Prisoners are held in cells that surround a central tower, where the warden's office is located. Corridors radiate out from the tower to the cells, in a spoke-and-wheel fashion. This design provides the warden with "full visibility into each cell but simultaneously shielding the warden from the prisoners' sight and isolating the prisoners from each other" (1996, p. 73). According to these authors, this structure affects the way that employees contribute to organizational policies. For example, "an employee who submits a suggestion has no clear idea who will evaluate it, according to what criteria, where in the evaluation cycle the suggestion is on a given date, or why it was ultimately approved or rejected" (ibid.). It is not surprising that teachers felt isolated in the old model of decision making.

The arguments raised by opponents to classical management suggest that traditional organizational models, like the machines that they emulate, are harsh, cold,

and impersonal. However, several participants in this study did indicate that they appreciated the decisive structure that the old model provided within the school. Furthermore, teachers frequently commented that they were comfortable with the old model when they trusted their principal and other significant leaders.

In addition, it should be noted that the school is only one level of a much larger organizational chart. When schools implemented shared decision making, it was an in-house transformation only. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, this incongruity with system-wide organization has affected the experience of shared decision making.

## SETTING THE FOUNDATION

Certainly the process of implementing an innovation as substantial as shared decision making can be daunting. Apart from gaining acceptance from stakeholders, a workable model must be devised that will produce desired results and that minimizes frustration. At the same time, a school must carry on with its primary duties associated with learning and teaching. If the innovation is to carry on into the future, at least resembling what was intended at the onset, a willingness to be flexible and accommodating seems to be essential.

At both of the schools, the first step in implementing shared decision making was to produce a mission statement or what Glickman calls a *covenant* (1993, p. 24). A covenant is a statement of core beliefs and values about learning and teaching, agreed upon by all stakeholders. It is democratically derived and becomes "a guide for future decisions about school priorities" (ibid.). According to Sergiovanni, an important step to becoming a purposeful community is to establish *core values*: "The core values which a group selects as its own should be so significant that they permeate every aspect of the school organization" (1994a, p. 72). He further argues that shared ideas and a commitment to virtuous practice, engender professional and moral authority:

Professional and moral authority are substitutes for leadership that cast principals and teachers together into roles as followers of shared values, commitments, and ideals. This shared followership binds them into a community of mind (1994b, p. 223).

The covenant initiates communication and becomes a cornerstone for shared decision making.

According to participants, the building of a mission statement was largely a staff driven endeavour at each school. That is to say, each staff actively collaborated on the design, and the product reflects their views. This level of staff involvement contrasts greatly with the development of the school motto, mentioned earlier. Furthermore, participants indicated that the process was a satisfying experience. Both schools have their mission statements proudly and visibly displayed. However, at Suburban High the mission statement had been created four years earlier, and there was

some question if it remains to be a meaningful document to staff members. As one teacher commented, "Is that a living document any longer? Only in times of conflict, I think." There was no indication that the mission statement at either school, once completed, had had any effect on the work of school personnel. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the completed documents articulate the established traditions and values of the schools, rather than new goals and directions. Nonetheless, the creation of a mission statements was cited as an important step in the progression towards shared decision making.

### SHAPE AND FORM

As part of the process of implementing shared decision making, both schools have articulated the form of the innovation in what Glickman refers to as the *charter* (1993, p. 29). Although many educators will associate this term with *charter schools*, which have gained considerable attention throughout North America in the last several years, Glickman uses the term in a broader sense. The charter becomes a constitution for decision making, within the school. It details who will participate in decisions, what the level of involvement will be, and how decisions will be made. An examination of their charters provides much insight into the form of shared decision making at the participant schools.

### Decision Making Groups

As Brown has observed, there is tremendous diversity in the form that shared decision making has taken (1995, p. 336). However, it is fortunate for this study that the two models examined here, although certainly tailored to meet the specific needs of each school, are remarkably similar. Essentially, both schools have a committee structure, consisting of decision making groups (DMGs) with specific mandates. DMGs that are common to both sites include Technology, Budget, Extracurricular Activities, and Learning and Teaching. Other DMGs that are not common to both schools include Staff Deployment, School Organization, Professional Development, and a group that oversees a Teacher Advisor Program. These groups activate and deactivate according to need. Each DMG has at least one administrator, presumably to represent the interests of administration. Other than the Learning and Teaching Group at City High, which will be discussed in Chapter 8, and the lead groups, all groups are open to staff participation and they appear to have clear and powerful mandates.

Similarly, both schools have made provisions for ad hoc DMGs to address emergent issues. At one school, for example, a task force was struck to examine the merits of streaming versus destreaming. At the other one, a group was established to further evaluate the decision-making model. Both cases demonstrate that temporary,

task-oriented groups are able to operate within this model, employing the norms associated with the more-permanent DMGs.

A significant component of the innovation, that contrasts it greatly from the occasional utilization of advisory committees in the old model, is that permanent and ad hoc DMGs actually have the ability to make decisions within their mandates. Participants from across this study acknowledged that DMGs are making the decisions in their prescribed areas. A review of available group minutes verified this point. However, it was also apparent that this decision-making power does not preclude the interests of the schools at large. An administrator articulated this point: "A decision making group should only reflect the total staff and the total student body in their decisions." DMGs, it seems, are charged with the stewardship of their mandates. Repeatedly, there was evidence — through full-staff meetings, surveys, and department-based discussions — that DMGs have based their decisions on consultation with the larger constituency.

It should be noted that some people at Suburban High would disagree that DMG members represent a larger constituency in their activities. Indeed, their charter indicates that DMG members should represent only themselves. However, there is evidence that teachers at Suburban High do not limit themselves in this way. As is the case at City High, all departments at Suburban High are encouraged to have representation on all DMGs. This characteristic implies that department representation should occur. In fact, it was common for participants at both schools to indicate that they belonged to DMGs to guarantee that their departments' concerns were addressed. With regard to this issue of representation, it is likely more accurate to suggest that individuals are not solely dependent upon representatives within the DMGs to influence decisions, as they have the opportunity to participate directly. However, there is a tendency for DMG members to represent the interests of their departments and other identifiable groups.

### **Lead Groups**

Although shared decision making has involved a decentralization of certain school decisions, both schools have maintained some sort of a centralized lead group. At Suburban High, the group, which is simply called the Leadership Group, includes curriculum leaders, assistant principals, and the principal. At City High, a Management Group exists which is comprised of one representative from each department, assistant principals, and the principal. It was, for the most part, the consensus of participants from City High that representatives to the Management Group are generally not department curriculum leaders. As one administrator indicated,

The three rules are: The curriculum leader cannot declare that he or she is the representative, [secondly] the curriculum leader can decide that no

they don't have time and they don't want to be on that, and the third rule is that it has to be the consensus of the department who the representative is. So nobody can declare themselves or anoint themselves to being the rep.

Both of the lead groups are charged with the responsibility of attending to the everyday tasks associated with the management of a school. As an administrator remarked, the lead group makes the kinds of decisions that "teachers don't really have the time [for] and, for the most part, don't want to be involved in." These groups typically have made decisions around school policy on smoking, the procedures associated with student registrations, and the process by which textbooks would be collected at the semester's end. Generally, the lead groups seem to deal with issues that do not fall within the mandate of any of the other DMGs. In addition, the charters at both schools suggest that these groups oversee the smooth operation of the entire decision-making model.

It is worth noting that the type of decisions made by these lead groups are similar to those that were previously made by the administrative councils of the old model. Furthermore, in the old model, administrative councils were often excluded from the types of decisions that now fall within the mandates of the DMGs. Therefore, it seems that decision-making authority, through shared decision making, has been decentralized from the principal to the DMGs.

### **Shared Decision Making as a Matrix**

It is compelling to compare these models of shared decision making with the notion of *matrix organization*, which has been employed by organizations as far back as 1959 (Kolodny, 1981, p. 17). Although history has shown it to be a delicate undertaking, likely because it forces employees to affiliate themselves with more than one function or task-oriented group, this organic structure can allow organizations to be flexible and efficient, especially within an environment of change. Furthermore, its emphasis on team-building can erode the traditional coercive relationships imposed by classical management theory.

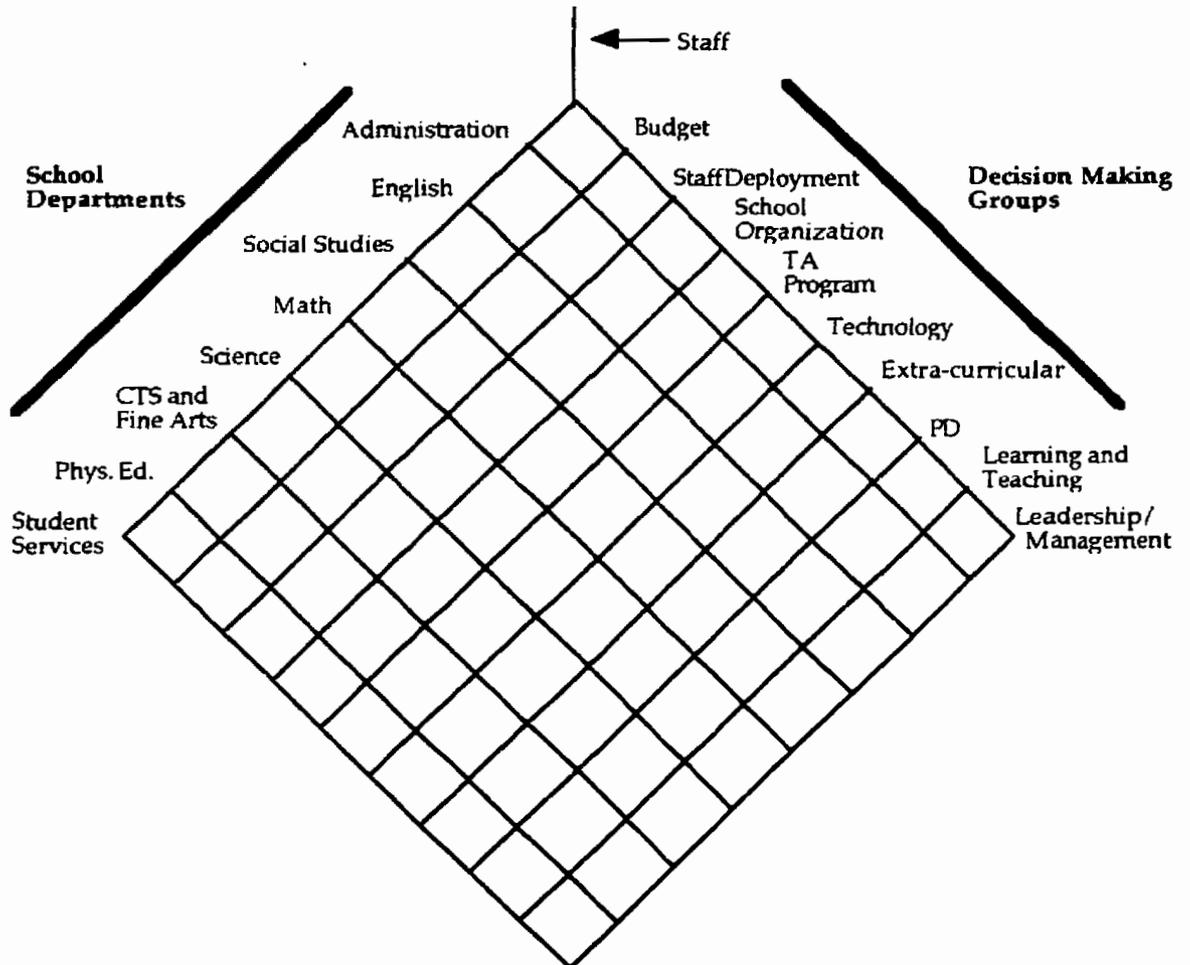
It was interesting to find, during the interview process of this study, that only two participants acknowledged, without prompting, that departments still have an important role in shared decision making. Even their charters fail to recognize that departments have an influence on decision-making processes. It is likely that the departments, being the major avenue of representation in the old model, are simply taken for granted as being a part of school governance. One participant, reflecting on her experience with shared decision making, quite aptly stated:

I would say that school policies and rules seem to me to come from two directions. One is from the committee structure and the other is from the department structure . . . . [I]t seems to me that the school seems to think

of people fitting into two places. One of them is a committee . . . . Then, also, everyone is a member of a department, and acts as a member of a shared decision making body, within that department.

When this point was drawn to their attention, most participants indicated that decisions surrounding learning and teaching, which are beyond the individual classroom, tend to be made at the department level. For example, departments have made decisions pertaining to the coordination of writing portfolios, the setting of subject-area goals, and how shared resources would be utilized. Furthermore, participants indicated that departments provide a major forum for discussing the activities of the DMGs. The DMGs, however, tend to focus on school-wide, management-oriented issues. This matrix organization of human resources is demonstrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2  
Matrix Organization for Shared Decision Making



Modified from *Business Horizons*, 24 (2). Copyright (1981) by the foundation for the School of Business at Indiana University. Used with permission.

As Figure 2 indicates, matrix organization allows individuals to identify with more than one interest group within an enterprise. According to Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), when the various activities performed within an organization are highly differentiated from each other in terms of how tasks are conducted and how the environment influences them, there is a need for the organization to employ appropriate measures of integration and conflict resolution for it to be effective (pp 212 -224). Matrix organization may be an appropriate measure in high schools because it integrates teachers from departments and the administration in small groups that facilitate horizontal communication. In shared decision making, this means that teachers not only identify with the interests of their departments, but they also develop ownership for the work of their DMGs by becoming active participants. As Figure 2 suggests, DMG membership is drawn from across the departments, providing for a broader perspective on school issues. Furthermore, provided that there is good communication within the DMGs and departments, individuals have the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the whole organization's activities (Kolodny, 1981, p. 19-21).

According to Kolodny, certain conditions encourage organizations to take on a matrix structure: Outside pressure to broaden the organization's focus, large quantities of information that need attention, and increased demands upon resources, particularly human resources (1981, pp 18-19). These conditions, consistent with the turbulence recently experienced by CBE schools (as described in Chapter 3), seem to encourage organizations to adopt the organic matrix structure. As Morgan argues:

Matrix organization typically increases the adaptability of organizations in dealing with their environments, improves coordination between functional specialisms, and makes good use of human resources. The approach also diffuses influence and control, allowing people at the middle and lower levels of an organization to make contributions that might otherwise be denied (1986, p. 59).

Clearly, matrix organization is consistent with shared decision making. Therefore, it seems wise to take note of the fragility that matrix organizations have historically experienced (Kolodny, 1981, p. 17-18).

Indeed, Peters and Waterman found that Boeing was the only excellent company that had been able to sustain a formal matrix organization at the time that they wrote *In Search of Excellence* (1982, pp 306-309). They attribute this finding to the complex reporting structure on which it is based. They suggest that organizations need to maintain a simple, single line of authority if employees are to understand their work environment. Certainly, these observations challenge the feasibility of shared decision making.

#### **SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 4**

In examining the emergence of shared decision making at the two participant schools, it is evident that the conceptualization and implementation of such a significant undertaking has been a difficult endeavour. Nonetheless, though not without conflict, both schools have been able to transform their organizations considerably.

Compared to the previous model of decision making, it is evident that the innovation clearly has the potential to incorporate a broad representation of competing interests. Having defined a clear set of core values, each school has laid a strong foundation upon which to build their decisions. By establishing decision making groups with real and meaningful authority, both schools have made an honest attempt to decentralize the decision-making process. Ironically, this decentralization has the potential to actually bring school personnel closer together. However, the new organization also threatens to pose new challenges. Certainly, there has been a dramatic shift in the roles associated with school governance.

## CHAPTER 5 NEW OPPORTUNITIES, NEW ROLES, AND NEW TENSIONS

### INTRODUCTION

It is not surprising, given the dramatic reorganization associated with shared decision making, that individuals would find the innovation to require personal adjustments. Even at Suburban High, where the innovation has been in place for four years, it is evident that teachers and administrators have needed to reflect on their jobs and where they fit into their organization. While the innovation has provided new opportunities for teachers, it has also involved personal tensions for many, as individual roles have evolved. Although these growing pains have been difficult for teachers and for those in leadership positions alike, it is fortunate that both schools have adopted measures for working through the new challenges that they face.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS

Shared decision making has provided teachers with opportunities for personal growth. Participants in this study noted that teachers have been encouraged to undertake new roles, exposing them to experiences previously afforded only to administrators. Consequently, many participants recognized the need for teachers to acquire new skills and knowledge to support them in these roles. They also recognized that the allowance for teachers to have a greater impact on school decisions has enhanced their professionalism, by increasing the influence of their judgment. For the most part, these opportunities weighed favourably in participants' assessment of the innovation.

#### Personal Development

Participants of this study spoke well of the new roles available to teachers through shared decision making. Their participation on the DMGs has allowed them to act as negotiators, facilitators, and department representatives, upon whom colleagues rely. It was the view of several interviewees, that shared decision making would provide important exposure to teachers who may be interested in pursuing careers in administration. And for those who are not interested in becoming administrators, it would allow them a chance to further appreciate school-wide issues. An administrator commented on this point:

One of the things that is really positive is that it [shared decision making] gives people, other than the people with leadership designations, an opportunity to be involved. We have some excellent people in our system, not only in our school but in our system, who don't hold a particular leadership designation. They may not be a curriculum leader or whatever. This is a chance for them to be involved in the

leadership of a school, and I think that's wonderful.

Conversely, consistent with the claims of Keith and Girling (1991), participants indicated that their schools benefit from the expertise of teachers in decision making.

As many authors have indicated, shared decision making can provide teachers with opportunities to develop valuable skills (Flanigan and Gray, 1995, pp 7-10; Gorton and Snowden, 1993, p. 19; Keith and Girling, 1991, pp 44 - 45; Tranter, 1994, p. 23). These authors warn educators that teachers must be provided with training in conflict resolution, negotiation, and meeting management, as well as the skills and knowledge associated with school-wide management duties such as budget development. While formal training has been lacking at both sites — in fact teachers and administrators both complained that this deficiency has hampered the process — many participants did indicate that the practice of shared decision making has itself encouraged skill development. Given that funding for staff development always seems to be in short supply, and that, as Lieberman has observed, the traditional model of school and system governance can in fact block good teachers from receiving formal inservicing (1988, pp 648-649), shared decision making may potentially become an important source of on-the-job training that is necessary for teachers to fulfill their professional aspirations.

### **Professionalism**

As some authors have observed (Etzioni, 1969, pp v-xvi [Ed's preface]; Griffiths, 1956, p. 113; Louis et al., 1995, p. 12), the vocation of teaching has found it difficult to be granted the same status that society bestows upon the traditional professions. In fact, an older source argues that teachers should be content that they belong to a *semi-profession* that ought not to have the level of discretion afforded to the *true* professions (Etzioni, 1969, p. vii [Ed's preface]). The rationale behind this argument is that, by the nature of their jobs, teachers have not attained the level of expertise nor the authority to make independent decisions within their practice, let alone within the larger organization, compared to doctors and lawyers (*ibid.*). Proponents of this position argue that accountability and control in teaching must be derived through the centralization of decision making through traditional administrative strategies (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 49). Likely, they would favour policies associated with strengthening the old model portrayed in Figure 1 of Chapter 4.

Advocates of teacher professionalism suggest that teachers must be empowered to affect decisions beyond their classrooms (Keith and Girling, 1991, p. 40; Louis et al., 1995, p. 25). The argument here is that teacher input is essential for decisions that will affect the classroom because they are the most capable of assessing the needs of learners. The potential for teacher professionalization through shared decision making

was widely acknowledged by interviewees. Many teachers suggested that they had been encouraged to be involved in school-wide decisions through the innovation, and administrators indicated that teachers now participate in issues that they have traditionally been excluded from, such as: the allocation of the school budget, staff deployment, and the organization of the work day. As one teacher remarked: "I find that that part is really kind of neat, because three years ago or four years ago I never would have been able to be a part of that, because I'm not a curriculum leader or a department head." In addition, teachers have had the opportunity to participate in the assessment of school performance, through the construction and review of school improvement plans. Furthermore, several teachers indicated that shared decision making has helped them to feel more professional. Although they sometimes complained about the lack of influence of their individual voices, teachers seemed satisfied that as a group they affect decisions.

While teachers were certainly supportive of shared decision making as an opportunity to increase their professionalism, there was a strong suggestion that this benefit has not been fully realized. This sentiment is consistent with findings presented by Louis et al. (1995, p. 13). Apart from concerns expressed over political manipulation in the process (discussed in Chapter 7), many teachers expressed frustration that the innovation has drawn their focus away from the professional activities associated with teaching their students. While many teachers are encouraged by the potential benefits of shared decision making, they are not willing to pursue them at the cost of their students' learning.

## **NEW TENSIONS**

Although many positive comments described the opportunities for teachers in shared decision making, they were often qualified with complaints of an increase in their work loads. While teachers were certainly interested in extending their influence over school decisions, in many instances they expressed concern over being distracted from their teaching responsibilities through the process of shared decision making. Certainly, both of the schools' models imply that teachers have control over their level of participation. However, there was much evidence suggesting that teachers find their choice to be somewhat limited. For many interviewees, this situation has resulted in increased levels of stress and frustration.

### **The Burden of Involvement**

Consistent with the findings of many authors (S. Black, 1996, p. 26; Bradley and Olson, 1993, pp 52-53; Epp, 1993, p. 31; Flanigan and Gray, 1995, p. 6; Keith and Girling, 1991, pp 43-44; Tranter, 1994. p. 25), it was evident in this study that shared

decision making has affected how teachers use their time. It seems that although the process is touted as being one that allows for flexibility and the efficient use of resources (Kolodny, 1981, pp 19-21; Tranter, 1994. p. 22), participants find that in many cases decision making is much more onerous than it was in the old model. Given that teachers experience systemic limitations on the utilization of their time, it is not surprising that shared decision making can potentially increase the level of stress in schools.

As one administrator pointed out, a reality for schools is that "time is the most valuable commodity that we have . . . , and it's also in the shortest supply." Although participants frequently expressed satisfaction with the decisions that have resulted from the process, they also spoke negatively of the amount of their time that it has absorbed. Reflecting upon his school's experience, the other administrator pondered "I guess the main thing that everybody talks about with shared decision making is time. That's the big question or the big bugaboo. It takes a long period of time to make a decision." In some instances, participants recalled that decisions around an attendance policy and the rotation of periods in the day involved eight or more participants for as many as twenty hours of deliberations. For teachers and administrators, the innovation has meant more meetings and more preparation.

As S. Conley observed in her literature review of the innovation, the fundamental organization of schools limits the flexibility that teachers have with their time: "Teaching loads, inflexible schedules, and reporting requirements virtually guarantee that every hour (or minute) of a teacher's day is prearranged" (1991, pp 246-247). For teachers and administrators, these limitations have meant that meeting early in the morning, at lunch, and after school has become a daily occurrence. Wherever groups have been able to squeeze in the time, meetings have occurred. Some participants suggested that their school has reached a "saturation point" for meetings and that staff members are experiencing "meeting fatigue." A teacher described how deliberations can even continue outside of formal meeting times:

Even the down time is more stressful, because you find yourself talking about the decisions. So it's like a continuous process when the door of the meeting shuts, it doesn't stop. You're still constantly talking about the issues. I think that in a lot of schools the staff room is *the staff room* where you can put up your feet and relax. And that is the exact opposite of what we have here. When we are in the staff room, we start talking about issues [spoken emphasis].

While the deliberations seem to be engaging, it is evident that shared decision making can become a burden for teachers.

### **Limitations on Involvement**

Glickman suggests that the schools that are most successful with shared decision

making do “not force people to be involved in decisions that they do not have the time, interest, or energy for. Instead, they ask people to commit themselves to a process of decision making in which they can choose a level of participation” (1993, pp 29-30). He recommends this tact because it is consistent with North American democracy (ibid.). While this principle has clearly been a goal at both schools, it is apparent that some teachers have experienced pressures that have shaped their level of involvement.

Administrators seem to have sincerely attempted to impress upon their staffs that the individual is free to determine his or her role in shared decision making. At City High, an administrator affirmed this point:

I have emphasized that there is nothing wrong with saying “I don’t want to get involved,” or “I’m too busy. My commitment is with my students,” or “I’m involved in the yearbook and I need to spend my time there.” That’s great, nobody is concerned about that.

This latitude is clearly spelled out in that school’s charter. The administration at Suburban High has also attempted to give teachers this right to self-determination. However, the message has been more subtle. There, the administration has “asked people, not expected but asked people, to sit on at least one committee.” A memo that outlines teacher involvement in the 1996-97 extracurricular program at Suburban High echoes this invitation.

Administrators have also attempted to impress upon teachers the consequences of nonparticipation:

I guess the other thing that is positive about shared decision making, and this is from my perspective, is that people have the opportunity to become involved. So nobody can ever say “Well I didn’t know,” or “I didn’t hear,” or “I wasn’t consulted.” In the whole decision-making process, everybody has that opportunity to get involved. Whether you choose that opportunity is entirely up to you. I’ve had several occasions where people have been a little vociferous about a decision that was made and chose not to be involved. And, I’ve had to remind them that they have had that opportunity and that they can take that opportunity. And, if they choose not to take that opportunity, then their role is not to sit back and bitch at people who will. That, to me, is a critical point.

These consequences are also consistent with Glickman’s views (ibid.). Choosing nonparticipation, however, does not mean that one’s interests are ignored. Repeatedly, participants suggested that DMGs make decisions with consideration for all of the school’s interests.

Despite the balance of this arrangement, teachers do not necessarily feel that they can control how they will contribute to shared decision making. At both schools, teachers said that they feel that administration expects them to be involved in the innovation. In some instances, nonparticipation was regarded as potentially damaging to one’s career. A teacher highlights this point: “I still think that there are pressures.

Although I wouldn't say that it's direct pressure to belong, but certainly I think that it's being evaluated who's on what committee and it's documented." Another indicated that, in one situation, an administrator told her that resignation from a DMG would negatively affect her career. Others recalled knowing teachers who worried about being placed on DMGs if they would not volunteer themselves.

It should be noted that a minimal number of teachers in this study suggested that they would prefer not to contribute to any DMG. Even those who expressed the most resistance to shared decision making contribute to at least one DMG. It was apparent that generally teachers want to be involved in their schools.

A second limitation for teachers in determining their involvement in shared decision making is the logistical problem of achieving department representation on each of the DMGs. Fearing that department interests will not be looked after at the table without the direct representation of their department members, curriculum leaders often attempt to orchestrate their personnel so that all of the DMGs are covered. Indeed, consistent with the design of matrix organization (discussed in Chapter 4), the administration at each school has requested that all departments be represented on all of the DMGs. Especially for small departments, but occasionally with the larger ones, this desire to spread representation has resulted in teachers sitting on committees that they would not otherwise have chosen. A physical education teacher described this point:

Our department wanted to spread their people out to all of the committees, because we wanted to know what was going on throughout the school. And if all five of us went to Budget then we would know nothing about Technology, Extracurricular, [and] Teaching and Learning. So when you look at the people in your department, sometimes you might not like an area, but you have to volunteer to take it because no one else will. I'm on the Technology Committee. I'm not really gaining any professional growth or anything out of this committee. I am absolutely in no way gaining anything out of it.

For the larger departments, it has been more likely to be the curriculum leaders who have had to join DMGs "because no one else would volunteer." Nonetheless, there are clear pressures that affect teacher participation on the DMGs.

On the other side of this situation, teachers may also find that there are a maximum number of DMGs on which they can participate. The most obvious barrier to their involvement is lack of time. Since there are as many as eight DMGs in a school, and each of them seems to meet regularly, it is unlikely that a teacher would be able to sit on all of them. In fact, according to the participants of this study, teachers are generally able to directly contribute to only three. Indeed, in instances where they carry heavy teaching loads, they may feel lucky to participate on just one group. It seems that teachers must weigh their priorities to determine where they will invest their

energies.

There are also organizational barriers that limit the maximum number of DMGs on which teachers can participate. Particularly when DMGs schedule meetings at the same time, teachers have found it difficult to belong to several groups. In some instances, groups are expected to regularly meet during the same block of time. There are also periods in the year when DMGs meet intensively. For instance, the Budget Group and the Extracurricular Group may meet more often in the spring, to make plans for the following year. Teachers belonging to both groups may find that they have to decide "where is my greatest priority? Do I attend this meeting or half of this meeting and half of that meeting?" Such logistical limitations may prove to be frustrating for teachers when unfavourable decisions result and it is assumed that they chose nonparticipation.

Finally, teachers may experience pressure from peers and administrators not to participate on multiple DMGs. For instance, one teacher referred to peers who heavily contribute to shared decision making as being "control freaks." Similar sentiments were implied by other participants. An administrator acknowledged a negative attitude among teachers who feel that some of their peers have contributed to DMGs as a means to further their career interests:

People who are involved in more than one area of decision making can be viewed as being upwardly mobile and doing all those kinds of things. Some how we should probably address that. You don't want to stifle those people's enthusiasm, but we've got some people who are involved in two or three different things. The perception of some of those people who are sitting back is that why are these people involved, and maybe they shouldn't be.

Although both comments are decidedly critical of teachers who vigorously participate in the innovation, they are probably accurate observations. Similar to much of the literature that was presented earlier in this chapter, participants of this study have praised shared decision making for encouraging teachers to take a greater role in school decisions and for the professional and career opportunities that it provides. Therefore, it seems counterproductive, and almost mean-spirited, for individuals to now criticize their peers for contributing to the process and for realizing the rewards. Nonetheless, these pressures likely do impact teachers as they determine their level of involvement in the innovation. Since there are factors that appear to set minimum and maximum limits on the level of teacher involvement in decision making, it is evident that participation can bring about new conflicts for teachers.

### **Competing Demands**

It seems ironic that although shared decision making has been described as an opportunity to increase teacher professionalism (Keith and Girling, 1991; Louis et al.,

1995) and as a potential means to bring about significant school improvement (Glickman, 1993; Ingersoll, 1996; Keith and Girling, 1991; Peterson and Solrud, 1996; Shedd and Bacharach 1991; Tranter 1994), some teachers in this study complained that it actually distracts them from their teaching. This finding is consistent with claims made by Richardson and Sistrunk (1989). Unfortunately, as has been discussed, shared decision making is highly demanding and teachers have not always perceived that they are free to determine their own level of involvement. As a result, some have found themselves experiencing a professional conflict with the innovation. Although most teachers feel drawn into shared decision making, some are wary of its impact on their teaching.

It is evident that even though it may be desirable for teachers to expand their professional duties through shared decision making, the demands upon their time may be cost prohibitive. Duke et al. argue:

If teaching activities required only a fixed expenditure of time, it would be possible for teachers to choose to spend time on school decisions making in addition to other professional activities. But by its very nature, teaching is a job in which there is always more that can be done (1980, p. 95).

Furthermore, the demands of the innovation may be perceived by teachers as a threat to the performance of their primary duty of teaching students (Bradley and Olson, 1993, p. 53; Guskey and Peterson, 1996, p. 12). These sentiments certainly were evident in the present research. One teacher aptly described the conflict that he and some of his peers have experienced:

The best research suggests that the most active schools, the most successful schools, are schools where teachers are deeply committed to program, deeply involved in [it], [and] helped to create it — shared decision making. That's one of the anomalies because there is a tension that pulls you both ways. For you to get deeply involved in that, it pulls you away from teaching.

Typically, teachers demonstrated that they have experienced this conflict through remarks such as:

I think that as a classroom teacher, especially in this school because I'm teaching [honours] . . . , I'm just flying through stuff. And what I care about, day-to-day, is what I'm teaching in my classroom. Sometimes, I could even care less what's going on out there. I just want you to tell me, "Okay, we've all got to be at school tomorrow, and we've all go to do this and this." Just tell me, what the policies are, because I don't have time, I don't have the flexibility in my schedule. My dedication is to teaching.

Another indicated: "It's time . . . that I could use . . . preparing different ways of presenting materials to my class, instead of deciding on the budget committee which department gets x number of dollars." Both administrators expressed concern over this

conflict. One stated:

teaching is a full-time job, it's more than a full-time job. Working with kids and the time and energy you have to muster is more than a full-time job. So if we're going to tie people up, in what I would call unnecessary or needless kinds of meetings, then the other side of that is there is going to be less time and energy to be spent with kids, which is clearly our mandate.

Potentially, this conflict may reach crisis proportions for teachers already facing limited systemic support for their work.

Especially during times of rapid change, with little support from the system at large, teachers may find themselves scrambling to meet the many demands in their lives. While some teachers complained that their participation in shared decision making can negatively affect their teaching, others have found that it can encroach upon their lives outside of school. The remarks of one teacher describe how she coped with shared decision making, during the implementation of a new curriculum:

I just lengthened my day. Those kinds of things had to occur during the school day, because that is when people could meet. The number of times that I went home late last year was very high. I am not a person that can easily take work home. I do not have any technology at home. And, I have two children, and I'm a single mom. When I come home, my mother leaves, and I take over. Basically I am looking after my children. I am paying attention to them and helping them get their homework done, and getting them to bed. I do that from the moment that I get home. I could go home earlier, I guess, and do some of that, and do it after they go to bed, but I would be too short of sleep then.

It is little wonder that teachers are concerned that shared decision making may significantly transform their job description. Clearly, schools must make provisions to guard against the excessive demands upon personnel that can result from the innovation.

## **SUPPORTING THE INNOVATION**

It is apparent that by undertaking shared decision making, school personnel are committing themselves to a dramatic reorganization of roles and responsibilities. If the benefits of the innovation are going to be greater than the costs, strategies must be implemented that will accommodate the needs of participants. In this study, schools are finding ways to make it easier for individuals to participate. Perhaps consistent with the tenor of shared decision making, leaders are finding themselves supporting the efforts of teachers.

### **Finding Time for Meetings**

At both schools, the most obvious strategy for accommodating the demands

placed upon teachers, through this innovation, has been the establishment of a common meeting time for teachers and administrators in the timetable. According to Tranter (1994, p. 25), this provision is a must. It is evident that reserving blocks of time for meetings by lengthening periods and reorganizing the school week does not actually increase the quantity of time available to teachers. However, routinizing meeting time into the school's timetable does allow time to be set aside that is not subject to competing demands from other responsibilities. Especially for teachers who carry heavy extracurricular responsibilities, such as those who are involved in drama or who coach teams, it has enabled them to participate more effectively in the process. Although the allocation of common meeting time in the schedule may also place limitations upon the number of DMGs that teachers can belong to, because groups meet at the same time, this measure received tremendous praise from teachers and administrators alike. Furthermore, since the strategy was conceived and implemented through shared decision making, it seems to have provided participants with confidence in the innovation. The provision for a common meeting time has provided tremendous support to shared decision making.

### **Support from Leadership**

It was encouraging to hear the level of concern for teachers expressed by the administrators and other leaders interviewed in this research. Apart from their confidence in the professional capacity of their staffs, leaders' comments suggested a sincere interest in the personal well being of teachers. When confronted with the question of excessive demands upon teachers, resulting from shared decision making, they often indicated their awareness of the issues and described measures to combat the problems. The tone of these interviews suggested that school leaders truly wish to help teachers to make the innovation work. As one administrator remarked, "The last thing that you want to do is wear out good people. That's the absolute last thing."

Literature on shared decision making gives much advice to those who are in leadership positions. Leaders are advised to define and communicate a school vision, demonstrate democratic principles in visible ways, endeavour to build trust, coordinate personnel, and to provide opportunities for staff development (Keith and Girling, 1991, pp 67-80; Peterson and Solsrud, 1996, pp 110-111; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, pp 149-150; Tranter, 1994, pp 23-25). What is noticeably absent from these recommendations is simply that, other than providing a leading role, leaders need to take on a supportive role in their work with teachers. This consideration was clearly articulated by interviewees.

Several leaders made comments similar to the remarks of one curriculum leader who said: "If it's such that teachers are carrying a heavy teaching load, I see my role as

lightening their load as much as I can, or facilitating whatever it is that their doing, in any way that I can." Some may argue that the initiative to support teachers is not necessarily a sentiment that is unique to shared decision making. However, other leaders were much more precise in defining the form that their support should take in this innovation. One administrator clearly articulated the supportive role that some leaders are taking:

I also think that because teachers are so busy with their primary function of teaching and learning, that we need somebody on committee, not necessarily who chairs the committee, but brings forth information, that organizes, that is responsible for communication. I think that, as administrators, sometimes I see myself as a facilitator, not unlike facilitating in the classroom. I have time and I am paid to do administrative work.

It seems that teachers have experienced some of their greatest frustration with shared decision making when it has entailed them taking on administrative tasks, rather than just participating in decision making. One teacher highlighted this point:

What we were really stuck with was the, not the decisions, but the nitty-gritty running of things. I'll give you an example. I was part of the extracurricular committee . . . . What it meant was that anybody who had to take that on had to do a whole lot of tedious work, in terms of making sure that schedules were posted, making sure that teachers were signing up, minutes were recorded and they were documented, and meetings were arranged, and so there were an awful lot of time-consuming tasks to be done that had very little to do with actually making decisions. The meetings that we had, I guess we did iron out a policy that was satisfactory. I question that we needed to take the time that we took to get to that point. But again, I felt that really what we were doing was *other* work. It really had nothing to do with the decisions [spoken emphasis].

In the case of the teacher profiled above, she also recalled feeling discomfort when she had been expected to police other teachers to make sure that they were fulfilling their extracurricular duties.

The argument raised here is, although shared decision making entails school administrators sharing power with teachers through their inclusion in significant school decisions, it does not need to mean that teachers should also share in the duties and tasks associated with administration. The recommendation implied by the comments of many participants is that the role of the teacher in the innovation should be limited, as much as is possible, to the actual process of decision making. Teacher's, according to this position, should be freed from what participants called the *leg work*.

There are, perhaps, two qualifications that should be placed on this advice. First, schools should be careful not to limit the role of the teacher in the process so that he or she is unable to contribute in a meaningful and knowledgeable way. As is

discussed in Chapter 7, teachers can effectively be excluded from decisions if their role is reduced to that of simply ratifying decisions that are already made. Secondly, the intention behind this advice is not to suggest that teachers are exempt of responsibilities in the implementation of resolutions. The strategy is to free them from the supportive tasks that allow decisions to be executed. However, teachers would certainly need to implement decisions where it is within their regular duties and responsibilities. Teachers are expected to comply with the decisions of the DMGs in this innovation.

Clearly, there are measures that can be set in place to help to meet the challenges posed by shared decision making. In many instances, participants acknowledged the necessity to streamline their organization. There seems to be much to be gained by teachers and administrators working together as a caring community.

## **SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 5**

It is evident that the costs and benefits associated with shared decision making have meant that schools have had to adjust to new realities. The innovation has been positive, in that it has provided teachers with opportunities to become more knowledgeable of the organization of their schools and of the school system. This exposure may become invaluable for teachers who are interested in becoming involved in school administration. The innovation also may help to professionalize the field of teaching, by giving practitioners greater control over their environment.

In contrast, it has been argued that shared decision making can potentially interfere with the other responsibilities of teachers. It is ironic that an innovation which promises to increase professionalism can actually distract teachers from their duties associated with learning and teaching. Given this threat, and the potential of encroachment upon their personal lives, it is little wonder that some teachers have found themselves enduring a professional conflict over the potential costs and benefits associated with shared decision making. While both schools have attempted to give teachers control over their level of involvement, it is evident that perceived pressure from others and logistical limitations have interfered with this choice.

It was promising to see the willingness of teachers and administrators to work with one another to overcome the challenges involved in this innovation. Both schools are attempting to streamline their organization, to minimize frustration and maximize teacher effectiveness. In addition, many leaders are finding themselves in supportive roles that enable teachers to participate in decision making, free of excessive demands. The innovation has required teachers and administrators to forge new relationships with one another.

## CHAPTER 6 INTERACTION AND RELATIONSHIPS: THE HUMAN ELEMENT

### INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that the undertaking of shared decision making has marked a significant shift in the organization of two Calgary schools, and perhaps the entire Calgary Board of Education. Traditionally, school governance has been highly influenced by classical management theory. Characteristic of its Industrial Revolution roots, the bureaucratic organization of public education has been built upon the same sort of logic that is used in designing machines. Borrowing from the writings of Max Weber, Morgan contends that bureaucratic organization “emphasizes precision, speed, clarity, regularity, reliability, and efficiency achieved through the creation of a fixed division of tasks, hierarchical supervision, and detailed rules and regulations” (1986, pp 24-25). It is apparent that this type of organization would likely influence how school personnel interact with one another and the relationships that they form. Within the metaphor of organizations as machines, workers are regarded merely as standardized, mechanical parts (ibid. p. 20).

Schools that have adopted shared decision making, however, seem to value individual contributions. Although teachers may find that their interactions lack the simplicity and regularity characteristic of the traditional hierarchy, the innovation appears to promote an open environment for discourse, where individuals are encouraged to contribute through healthy and positive relationships. While their experiences have not been without problems, there seems to be real potential for the promotion of a collegial spirit among caring professionals.

### COMMUNICATION

At first glance, there seems to be a conflict around the perceived impact that shared decision making has had on communication within schools. Both sites have conducted their own reviews of the innovation, by taking an inventory of perceptions, and the results reveal that some participants believe that the innovation has enhanced communication while others feel that communication has been obstructed. Upon further consideration of these findings, and through the analysis of the interviews conducted for this study, three issues are apparent in this topic. First, participants generally feel that the innovation has reduced their isolation, allowing them to gain a greater appreciation for the circumstances of their colleagues. Secondly, teachers feel that they have a better understanding of decisions in which they have actively participated. Conversely, they seem less knowledgeable about decisions that have been made by others on their behalf. Thirdly, the implementation of matrix organization has

significantly altered the traditional lines of communication, which has resulted in some confusion for teachers who are not aware of the intricacies of the model. As a result, many teachers feel that they know a lot more about their colleagues and the concerns from around the building than they did in the old model. However, they do not always know how to navigate the new model to get information that they need. Therefore, it is perceived that shared decision making has helped communication at the same time that it has hurt it.

### **Reducing Isolation**

As Lortie notes, the physical configuration of schools and the relative freedom that teachers experience in their classrooms tends to promote isolation within teaching (1969, p. 9). In Chapter 4 it was suggested that the departmentalization of high schools is consistent with the coercive organization associated with classical management theory. In that tradition, workers are prevented from understanding the whole organization by the hierarchical reporting structure, as communication travels along the lines of authority (Adler and Borys, 1996, pp 72-74). Knowledge of the *big picture* is within the dominion of management, and workers are dependent upon their judgment (ibid.). The reorganization of shared decision making seems to reduce the isolation imposed by traditional management structures (Keith and Girling, 1991, pp 137-138; Schlechty, 1990, p. 50; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 60).

According to Adler and Borys, a characteristic of organizations that are designed to enable employees is *global transparency* (1996, pp 72-74). That is, employees are encouraged to gain insight into the activities of the organization, outside of their immediate work environment.

Workers' understanding of the entire process is considered a valuable resource both in their efforts to optimize the performance of the part for which they are directly responsible and in their contributions to identifying local and systemwide [sic.] opportunities for improvement (ibid.).

It has been the experience at both schools that shared decision making has reduced teacher isolation by providing global transparency through increased teacher interaction.

Particularly in departments where there is a diversity of subjects taught — such as Career and Technology Studies and Fine Arts — and also in departments where there does not appear to be a great deal of cohesion or identity, teachers indicated their appreciation for the adult contact that shared decision making has provided. As one teacher remarked, "I could easily spend a month and never see an adult in my day-to-day teaching." For these teachers, having the opportunity to speak with colleagues on school issues reminds them that they do have a network of support available to them.

For departments that do have a great deal of cohesion, teachers recognized that

they have a tendency to become preoccupied with their own interests, ignoring the larger issues that affect the entire school. One teacher observed that over-departmentalization may cause departments to “become really in-grown and it could really get kind of bitchy.” A second one speculated that in this type of department there is little desire to reduce isolation: “If I walked into a department, I would feel like a stranger. People look at you like, ‘Oh, what are you doing here?’ It’s not, ‘Oh, nice to see you,’ it’s ‘What are you doing here?’ It’s not an open spirit.” Shared decision making is perceived to be a means to improve this situation.

Throughout this investigation, participants appreciated that shared decision making had reduced isolation. The comments of one teacher were typical:

I would say that it has helped in a couple of ways in that I am more involved with the staff. They know me, they know who I am, they see me at a meeting. You’re not just talking about kids and problems. You’re talking about other issues, which I think is good in a lot of ways. You’re looking at things that are happening in the school, more so than just your own little circle. You get into your room, your own kids, your own whatever. I think that it’s good because this school needed that.

Furthermore, consistent with much of the literature on shared decision making (Epp, 1993; Lawler, 1986; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991), teachers feel that the innovation has allowed them to come to understand the different circumstances of their colleagues:

It’s very much made me feel more aware of what’s going on at this school. Like something may work very nicely down in the basement but it might be really inconvenient to the teachers that are upstairs. And I think that is really important because of the set-up of our school physically, like we really don’t meet in the staff room. And when you have shared decision making, you talk across the culture and across the school.

Shared decision making has evidently brought colleagues together.

From the perspective of school administration, the innovation has allowed principals and assistant principals to forge closer ties with teachers. Kolodny observes that matrix organization allows employees to have far more horizontal than vertical contact with management (1981, p. 19). For management, this means that the flow of “information is good because it comes through fewer levels of hierarchy, fewer filters to absorb and distort relevant information. . .” (ibid.). For school administrators, this structure means that they are able to gain an appreciation of the real circumstances around the school, directly from teachers (Schlechty, 1990). An administrator reflected upon the increased interaction that shared decision making has facilitated

I’ve always felt that it has allowed me to sit around a table with people and openly exchange ideas and talk about processes and talk about where people are at, listen to people. And I think that by doing that, by sitting back and having your ears open, it’s a really good forum to hear what people are saying about what is going on around the school, and

Unlike in the old model, where information was filtered through curriculum leaders or department heads, shared decision making seems to allow much of the communication to be face-to-face and personal.

### **Communicating Decisions**

Kolodny also observes that communication in matrix organization allows decisions to be made “in concert with those most in control of the relevant information, most capable of transmitting them with a minimum of distortion, and most responsible for making them happen” (1981, p. 21). In participative management, this means that comprehensive decisions can be coordinated effectively throughout an organization (Lawler, 1986, p. 37). For schools undertaking shared decision making, teachers are provided with insight into the actual balance of demands that produce decisions. Where teachers are highly involved in decision making, they understand the outcomes and gain an appreciation for the work of the decision makers. This result may reduce conflicts among personnel (Ingersoll, 1996).

Teachers in this study expressed that they had gained a great deal of knowledge about the many demands that affect school-wide decisions. Reflecting upon a decision regarding a change to the school timetable, one teacher recalled:

What we had to do was meet the needs of the Phys. Ed. Program. The Work Experience Program was the hardest one to work around because they needed afternoon blocks — the kids that are working, all the kid’s that are nineteen and have jobs. That was a major concern. And we didn’t just look at the teachers. We looked at all of the students and what they needed.

Furthermore, there was a sense that teachers are less likely to feel angry about decisions when they truly understand how they are formulated. An administrator commented on his experiences with the Budget Group:

Just knowing what is going on in the school is really a benefit. So people can sit back and say, “Well yes, the budget process is fair.” It is, everybody is getting what they wanted. It’s been spread out. It’s not as if it’s a bottomless pit there, and somebody is divvying it according to whether they like you or they dislike you.

Several teachers concurred with this assessment. One said:

I really like the fact that however many wish to be involved [in the Budget Group] can be involved, because I think that it gets rid of that idea that “I just got rooked somewhere. Somebody took my money and left.” And a real understanding of that process, which I think has always been mysterious to most people, especially now with the scarcity of money. But, I think that gives a sense of shared ownership over something that is happening. Which, I think is positive because it makes people feel better. They’re less angry.

While individuals may not necessarily be happy with all decisions, many participants

indicated that they are satisfied that their interests are represented.

Particularly in decisions where extensive measures have been taken to broaden the base of input, teachers seem to have a good understanding of decisions that have resulted from the model. When the timetable was changed at one of the schools, for instance, input from stakeholders was sought outside of the School Organization DMG through surveys to staff and students and consultation with the School Council. In interviews for this study, that decision was among the most celebrated products of shared decision making. Often teachers expressed their support for the decision. And those who do not support it, demonstrated that they thoroughly understand the outcome.

At the other school, a highly acknowledged product of shared decision making was the school's improvement plan. To develop that document, all teachers and administrators participated in large and small groups to determine goals and strategies for improvement. Although not everyone is in agreement with the product, they certainly are aware of it. For several participants, it has allowed them to see where they can contribute to broad organizational goals. One participant stated:

I know for myself, looking at individual plans and what I try to do on a year-to-year basis, looking at how I fit into the big picture, it's made me sit and reflect and organize some of my thinking around plans and initiatives and what I can do to make me a better person in the school.

The school has extended this initiative by having departments and individuals build plans that demonstrate congruency with school goals. Although teachers may not agree with this process, there seems to be a great deal of knowledge in the school about what their common goals are.

Unfortunately, teachers are not always knowledgeable about the decisions that have been made in shared decision making. The reader will recall from Chapter 4 that DMGs make decisions that are representative of the larger constituency. However, due to logistical limitations, the strategies that they employ to secure this representation can vary from group to group. Furthermore, teachers who are new to the model in particular may not thoroughly understand how it works. As a result, teachers are sometimes unaware of important decisions that are being made in their schools.

### **Navigating the Model**

Despite the apparent benefits to communication that shared decision making seems to facilitate, there are also new problems that have emerged from this structure. It has been noted that Peters and Waterman are critical of matrix organization because it complicates governance (1982). Given the dramatic reorganization of traditional communication lines that accompany shared decision making, it is not surprising that many teachers find it difficult to stay informed about decisions in their schools.

Furthermore, some seem to be relatively unaware of the intricacies of their school's decision-making model, particularly those who are new to it.

While teachers certainly feel that they are more informed about decisions in which they participate directly, either through their membership on DMGs or school-wide consultation, they complain that they are uninformed when DMGs make decisions on their behalf, with minimal dialogue. Where DMGs decide not to pursue exceptional measure to enter into discourse with the school at large, presumably because of logistical limitations, they rely upon their members to discuss group activities in department meetings. It seems that this strategy can result in teachers receiving a limited or distorted view of initiatives. A subject-area curriculum leader contemplated the difficulties that result from this representative process:

The success of the . . . shared decision making model is going to be based on communication. And that's communication, not only from the standpoint of members being able to attend the meetings, and then being able to carry that information back to the departments, but also being there and participating so that their understanding is of what was said and what the tenor of the meeting was, as opposed to what you can read in a set of minutes, which is somebody else's interpretation of what was important in that meeting. To me that makes the process really difficult when you have as many groups as you do.

As it has been discussed, teachers feel that they have increased their understanding of the circumstances of colleagues in other departments because of effective communication in the DMGs. However, the reverse does not always seem to occur. That is, communication about DMG activities are not always effectively communicated in the departments. It seems likely that teachers are more focused on the circumstances of their departments, than they are on the activities of their DMGs. Perhaps they are not aware of the critical role that they fulfill for their colleagues, acting as representatives to these groups.

Certainly, the reliance on representative participation in communication was a characteristic of the old model of decision making, as department heads represented the interests of their departments. However, there were well defined lines through which information flowed, as department heads were expected to communicate both up and down the hierarchy. As Figure 1 in Chapter 4 illustrates, information traveled along the lines of command. However, in the matrix organization of shared decision making, departments have many different representatives to the various DMGs, and there are many lines of communication. Consequently, some teachers who are consumed by their teaching responsibilities find it difficult to determine where to seek information. A second subject-area curriculum leader commented on his frustration:

I guess, one sort of negative thing, perhaps in the department, is that since I am no longer aware of everything that is happening in the school, not that I ever was, but I don't have access to be aware of everything in

the school because I have a smaller role. Because I am just supposed to be a curriculum leader instead of a department head, it makes things tough on me and other members of the department because they still expect me to be the department head.

As this curriculum leader describes, when teachers are uncertain about the new model, they seem to rely upon the traditional lines of communication. Unfortunately, these lines may no longer be active.

Indeed, some teachers complained that they do not understand what the new lines of communication are. In one instance, a representative to a DMG was asked to raise a question on behalf of her department. She recalled:

I go there, and I'm told that this is not the place to bring it. In the back of my mind I thought, okay, it's not the place to bring this. But on the other hand, it's not just me asking the question. I'm representing my department. And, they've asked me to ask it, and so of course I've asked it.

Clearly, there is a proportion of teachers who find shared decision making to be unmanageable.

It was interesting to hear from teachers the different, and often inaccurate, interpretations that they have of their decision making model. For instance, at each school there were many views on who ultimately makes decisions. Some said they must all go to a staff vote, others believe that the lead groups decide, and still others indicated that the final word rests with the school administration. While some observers may argue that these interpretations reflect perceptions about political power in the process (which is discussed in Chapter 7), it does seem reasonable to speculate that these teachers really do not understand the model. In fact, teachers often made blatant mistakes about the configuration, mandates, and membership of the DMGs, even ones of which they themselves are members. It was also common for teachers to simply admit that they do not know what groups exist and where specific decisions are made. Given the confusion that some teachers seem to experience, it is little wonder that the communication of DMG activities is hampered at the department level.

It should be noted, it was evident that this confusion was particularly prevalent among teachers who are new to the model. Therefore, it is not surprising that there seemed to be more of a problem at City High, where shared decision making was implemented just a year prior to this investigation. This issue suggest that the problem should subside somewhat with the passage of time. However, it was apparent that DMGs at both schools sometimes seem to have difficulty communicating with the larger constituency.

To combat this problem, both schools have pursued several common strategies. Certainly, directly addressing all staff members, through surveys and school-wide meetings, seems to have achieved some success. Both schools have also attempted to

coordinate the efforts of DMGs through their lead groups and the administration. While there is apparently concern among some individuals, as is discussed in Chapter 7, that access to and control of this information flow may place an important source of power into the hands of those with leadership designations, this measure does seem to have helped. As a third strategy, DMGs have endeavored to inform school personnel of their activities through memos and minutes. This measure has also experienced mixed success. While the information is available, and some participants said that they do access it, several indicated that they and their colleagues do not. An administrator complained about this issue:

We have gotten to the point of giving everybody a set of minutes for our meetings. And when you stand in the mail room and watch people throw them into the basket without having read them, you start to wonder if this is worthwhile. How many forests have we killed?

Clearly, staff communication with the DMGs continues to be a source of frustration for many individuals.

An additional strategy that was employed at Suburban High was an attempt to make the model more manageable by reducing the number of DMGs. When the communication problem became apparent to the school, through their self-evaluation in 1995, they reduced the number of official standing DMGs from eight to four, not counting the lead group and the Learning and Teaching DMG. At City High, there are currently eight DMGs. Unfortunately, this strategy also has experienced mixed success. While on the surface the model appears to have been simplified, many of the groups that were removed still operate and are considered to be legitimate DMGs. Even though they are not recognized in the school's charter, these groups continue to make important school decisions that require communication with the larger constituency. It is apparent that the communication problems that can emerge from matrix organization are not easily solved.

Shared decision making appears to have a paradoxical effect on communication. While it seems to reduce the isolation that many teachers experience and allows them to thoroughly understand decisions in which they have had high involvement, the decentralization of communication lines can confuse the flow of information between individuals and decision makers. Efforts to alleviate the challenges have achieved some success at each of the schools. However, communication still seems to frustrate those who are involved. Although the openness of the innovation potentially allows individuals to acquire a keener awareness of issues, it also seems to require them to expend their energy to become informed and to contribute as effective participants. In addition to the measures taken to improve communication, it seems apparent that much attention should be given to the internal dynamics of the DMGs if they are to operate in a way that is effective and fulfilling for all.

## **EFFECTIVE DMG QUALITIES**

In analyzing the interview transcripts, a number of themes emerge that provide insight into the inner workings of DMGs. They highlight the presence of certain qualities in groups associated with their effectiveness and participant satisfaction. Specifically, findings suggest that DMGs respond favourably when their activities are action oriented, teacher participation is meaningful, they nurture positive relationships, and when current research is consulted.

### **An Orientation for Action**

Consistent with the findings of Hackman and Lawler (1971) in their classic job enrichment study, in the present investigation participants often reported feeling greater satisfaction with DMG activities when there had been a clearly defined task to be accomplished and when discernible progress had been made. Reflecting upon his experiences in the Extracurricular Group, one teacher remarked:

It certainly had parameters set, certain definitions [were] thrust upon us. But, from there we pretty much made our own decisions. And it felt like I was building something, like I was a participant in building something there . . . . It was a real attempt to make decisions to solve a problem in our school. And, it was a real problem.

When participants were unable to see that their DMG was progressing, they typically expressed frustration: "I'm sure that's why people would get frustrated. They want to see action, they want to see things happen. If it's going to work, let's do it." Indeed, several teachers indicated that when progress is stifled, they are motivated to withdraw their participation from DMGs. An administrator recognized this issue: "I believe that there is a balance where somebody will invest a certain amount of time and then beyond that they will say 'Forget it, let somebody else make the decision.'" If teachers are going to invest their time in shared decision making, they expect to see discernible results.

### **Meaningful Involvement as a Motivator**

Several authors argue that shared decision making can have a positive impact on the motivation of participants (Duke et al., 1980, pp 98-99; Epp, 1993, p. 31; Lawler, 1986, pp 28-32). In the present study, it is evident that involvement in decisions must be meaningful for motivation benefits to be realized. When teachers perceived that they had had a real impact on decisions, they articulated a remarkable level of commitment. Even those participants who claimed to be reluctant about shared decision making, indicated that they felt passion about issues when they knew that the outcome of debates would be significant. Consistent with with the findings of Blase and Roberts

(1994, p. 85), participants indicated that they have decidedly negative feelings when they believe that the impact of their participation is trivial or that they have been manipulated.

### **Positive Relationships Built on Trust**

Perhaps the core element required to nurture productive, professional relationships within schools is collegial trust (Blase and Blase, 1994, pp 21-22). Indeed, many teachers commented that trust is essential to this innovation. They indicated that, for people to debate passionately and openly with colleagues and administrators, they must feel that the environment is safe and that others will be open to disagreement. Glickman recommends that an environment should prevail where participants are "willing to move beyond the social facade of communication to discuss conflicting ideas and issues with candour, sensitivity and respect" (1993, pp 22-23). Commenting on the necessity for trust and understanding, a teacher reflected on the value of dissenting voices: "The advantage of that type of person is that they make you stop and say 'do we need to do this?, why do we do this?'" In addition, participants suggested that an atmosphere of trust can facilitate the resolution of personal conflicts within DMGs. Several teachers recalled separate incidents, where individuals ended up shouting at each other, yet they regarded these moments as being positive:

When I first came here, I had two staff members who, when I joined the Extracurricular Committee, practically hit each other one day. On a Friday morning at eight o'clock in the morning I don't know how you could be that much awake. They were just out of their chairs. I went, "Holy smokes, guys split. Let's be calm here." Oh, it was close . . . it was like claws. And I thought, wow man. But that was good, because they never got that mad again. I thought, well you've said your piece and you've heard. But, some of that is useful because it gives you a place to be.

Some authors concur that such conflict can have a long-term, positive effect on an organization (Blase and Blase, 1994, p. 25; Bolman and Deal, 1994, p. 83; Weiss and Cambone, 1994, pp 294-295). "Indeed, conflict is not necessarily a negative force; it can be an opportunity for both growth and mutual support among professionals who most often work in isolation" (Blase and Blase, 1994, p. 25). Furthermore, Weiss and Cambone found that shared decision making provides a forum for disagreements to be discussed before they escalate into destructive problems (1994, pp 294-295).

In this study, it was apparent that shared decision making can actually improve the level of trust among teachers and administrators. Many participants commented that the innovation has allowed them to understand and appreciate their colleagues more. The comments of one teacher were typical:

It's also given me a great deal more awareness of where other people are at in their careers. . . . Even an understanding that someone who is the

same age as myself on the staff is at a different stage in their career. When we are in groups and you talk to those people you realize that you make assumptions about that person's life that they must have the same general feelings etcetera.

Administrators also indicated that the innovation has allowed them to improve their relationships with others. One remarked:

You know, working on the awards committee for the last four years or so, I mean as a group I think that we have really coalesced and bonded together and appreciated the work that each of us does in the school. I think that it has impacted me by relationships, building trust and relationships with staff and those kinds of people that I have been working with.

Clearly, an orientation towards building positive relationships among colleagues is beneficial in shared decision making.

### **The Utilization of Educational Research**

It has been argued that too often school decisions are made in ignorance of educational literature and are "reduced to what some people like versus what other people like" (Glickman, 1993, p. 59). According to Weiss, shared decision making "can be the place where good information — from research, national reports, journals, others' experience, their own experience, and sound reasoning — can be applied to issues at hand" (1993, p. 88, 1993). Unfortunately, her research indicates that the innovation rarely results in the increased utilization of educational literature (ibid. pp 88-89). In the investigation undertaken here, it was not possible to determine how often research is considered in the process of making decisions. However, the comments of several participants suggest that they feel that it is important to connect the activities that occur in schools to the knowledge that has been gained through research. Furthermore, they seemed confident that decisions were good ones when there had been consultation with educational literature. Examples of such decisions were: streaming versus destreaming, the use of portfolios, strategic planning, and a policy on student attendance. In addition, there was an expression of discomfort when participants perceived that consultation with research had been inadequate. One teacher argued:

There is literature abound, I would say, on these things. And often times, I would say, that it's a re-creation of everything. . . . I think that if we are going to make professional decisions, then we better make them with research and literature about, "This is how it's been done at other schools," and so on. I think that it lacks that expertise because they don't have the time, or they don't take the time.

There seemed little doubt among participants that decisions should be made with an awareness of current research. Along with the other points, this quality seems to enable group members to interact effectively to solve problems.

## **DMG STUMBLING BLOCKS**

Unfortunately, a number of qualities were also apparent that seem to hinder the operation of DMGs. While participants may enter into these groups with the best of intentions, circumstances can stifle progress and frustrate group members. The activities of DMGs are apparently hampered when group direction is unclear, there is a reliance on specialized knowledge, and when there is distrust and cynicism among group members.

### **Confused Direction**

In this investigation, many participants expressed frustration with the activities of DMGs where they felt that proceedings lacked direction. A typical comment was: "I think you sometimes tend to spin your wheels with some issues, where it's like . . . if some decisions need to be made, let's just make them without going through this great big process."

According to Kolodny, the restructuring associated with matrix organization requires a rethinking of leadership roles (1981, pp 21-23). It has been suggested of shared decision making that as new leaders step into their emerging roles, they must learn the skills necessary to facilitate decision making (Flanigan and Gray, 1995, pp 7-10; Gorton and Snowden, 1993, p. 19; Keith and Girling, 1991, pp 44 - 45; Tranter, 1994, p. 23). Conversely, those people who hold traditional leadership roles must learn to become supportive of the new decision making bodies (Kolodny, 1981). In the present study, participants sometimes complained that facilitators lacked the necessary skills to effectively guide DMG activities. One teacher's remarks were commonly expressed:

Because of the time factor, the effective use of meeting time is imperative. I'm giving up an hour of my time and I'm finding, more times than not, we digress from the topic. . . . [T]hat person needs a skill to be a facilitator. Some people are crass and abrasive, when you step in. And there is a skill there. It shouldn't be by accident that someone's good so it runs well, or someone doesn't perform this function very well and, therefore, it's chaos.

Indeed, a few participants indicated that some DMG meetings seem to have no clear leader. It is unfortunate that neither school has been able to offer formal training to facilitators.

On the other side of the issue, participants' comments suggest that sometimes there are too many leaders in the DMGs. Since there may be several curriculum leaders and administrators participating in each DMG, sometimes groups find themselves with two or more individuals attempting to facilitate their activities. As a result, as one teacher remarked, "Everybody is just floundering around, trying to get things done."

Indeed, since new leadership roles have emerged in the innovation, this scenario can also transpire in the traditional department setting. A subject-area curriculum leader complained of the problems he has encountered with individuals who occupy new leadership roles:

Last year there were three curriculum leaders in the . . . department. That was fun. The one who is still there, you can still see the need that if the person doesn't feel that I'm running the meeting quite as crisply as her, that person will take over. And there's also another one who does exactly the same thing. And I find the dynamics of that very interesting.

Clearly, a lack of unified direction can hamper DMG progress.

### **Reliance on Specialized Knowledge**

Some authors warn that teachers may not be capable of making a significant contribution to decision making where knowledge is required that is too far removed from their experience (Gorton and Snowden, 1993, p. 19; Keith and Girling, 1991, p. 45). According to Morgan, dependency relationships can result when individuals possess knowledge and information that others do not (1986, pp 167-169). In shared decision making, some participants may experience a tremendous disadvantage when they do not hold specialized knowledge. Certainly, this dysfunction may manifest in any of the DMGs. However, it was particularly evident in each school's Budget Group.

Although administrators maintained that teachers can have a significant impact on decision ("[G]et on the budget committee, come forth with that, bring forth the evidence, the information, and I think that you will be pleased with the results"), it was apparent that often teachers feel that they have little to offer in that area ("Budget, I don't know if any department gets a lot out of it, besides expressing needs"). The problem, it seems, is that teachers find it difficult to fully understand how the budget process works. They do not have access to information about system direction and are generally not privy to the record of internal accounts. Other than articulating what their departments' needs are, they rely heavily on the administrator in charge of the budget to initiate resolutions. An administrator's recollection of building the school budget illustrated this dependency:

Every department presented what they wanted. We added all that up and found out that the amount that was allocated was  $x$ , the amount that was desired was  $y$ . Then they gave me direction, "You go and meet with each of the departments to see what we can live with, to try and bring the  $y$  equal with the  $x$ ." So I did that by meeting with each of the individual departments. And, when I came back, I presented the budget as I thought, after those meetings. The choice was their's. They could have said "No, we feel that there's too much money being spent on technology, or not enough on technology. There needs to be more spent on Science or ESL or whatever." After they had seen all of the presentations, they could make that decision. As it turns out, everybody was happy.

Interestingly, a nearly identical process occurred at the other school. This administrator later commented on the difficulty he had experienced in the group's deliberations:

Nobody wants to make a decision without the proper information. I've been with this Board for 28 years, and I am still trying to figure out the budget process and all of the intricacies of budget. So, for the last 17 years, budgets have been a part of my day-to-day job description, and I'm still struggling with so many of the parts of it. So if I'm going to bring that kind of background to a table of eight people who have never dealt with a school board budget, it really becomes almost a ridiculous task to bring people up to the level where I am.

Especially since the membership of the DMGs turns over from year to year, it is little wonder that they would experience difficulty when decisions require specialized knowledge.

### **Cynicism and Distrust**

Although at both sites more than half of the interviewed teachers expressed distrust towards school leaders in this innovation, administrators should not feel personally betrayed. A similar proportion of teachers suggested that they do not trust their peers. In the latter situation, some teachers were concerned that their colleagues might make decisions that would ignore their interests:

I think that with this new model that there is a lot of mistrust. And I think that people get into, "Well if we allow the Science Department or the English Department to come to the conclusion, that will often disregard our concerns as a Social Studies Department." There's a lot of mistrust with this decision making process, if you don't have a representative at the table.

It is because of this distrust that departments have tried to have representation on all the DMGs, which has limited the ability of teachers to determine on which groups they will participate (see Chapter 5). Even after taking this measure, teachers have been suspicious of each other. One participant complained: "There are five people from the Business Ed. Department on the technology committee, each bringing in a vote. Well that's not fair."

Some teachers appeared to be cynical of shared decision making: "I think that maybe it's my insecurity with the system, that I don't believe that it's as democratic as one would want it to be. So I'm speaking not from personal experience with decisions. It's more intuitive." One teacher attributed this cynicism to distrust for school leaders: "I just think they feel lied to . . . mislead. 'People say that, but they don't mean it.' I think that there's a mind set that . . . there's an agenda. 'We may not know it, but it's out there.'"

In the worst cases, this distrust can degenerate into destructive conflict. One teacher retold a negative incident he had experienced on a DMG:

I had suggested in a particular committee meeting, that in fact I had not participated in a single decision that had been made all year. And I had a very angry human being in my face yelling and screaming at me, and telling me that I was wrong. And he was very upset by that as though it were a personal accusation, an assault, rather than an objective observation that I had had over the year.

In this situation, appeals made their way to the principal to intervene. Clearly, such interactions undermine the objectives of shared decision making.

It seems apparent that even the good intentions behind the interpersonal objectives of shared decision making are unable to completely counter negative interactions among individuals. It is fortunate that at both sites participants seemed to be aware of and willing to confront the dysfunctions that hamper the innovation. Furthermore, they seemed to be encouraged by the successes that they have experienced.

## **SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 6**

There is good reason to be hopeful that shared decision making can facilitate wise decisions and be fulfilling for personnel. While the innovation certainly can confuse the flow of information in schools, given the reorganization that it entails, there are also tremendous benefits to communication that may be realized. Apart from promoting collegial interaction through reduced teacher isolation, decisions can be more effectively communicated within schools, especially when there is consultation beyond the membership of the DMGs.

It is evident that the personal interactions that result from shared decision making can be demanding on individuals. Teachers and administrators must actively debate with one another for their concerns to be addressed in decision making. The interview transcripts that resulted from this study highlight a number of qualities that seem to contribute to DMG effectiveness. That is, DMGs seem to benefit when they are action oriented, teacher participation is meaningful, they foster positive relationships among participants, and research is consulted to formulate resolutions. In addition, DMGs are hindered when their direction is confused, their activities are reliant upon knowledge that only a few participants possess, and they are plagued with distrust and cynicism. It is evident that the success of DMGs is largely determined by their internal chemistry. Their dynamics are further complicated by divergent interests and clashes of political power.

## CHAPTER 7 SCHOOL POLITICS AND THE NEW BALANCE OF POWER

### INTRODUCTION

Certainly, the interactions among teachers and administrators that result from shared decision making are likely to be political. Since decisions are arrived at through the consensus of all DMG members, teachers are afforded considerable influence while administrators maintain their authority. Unfortunately, the innovation seems to have also allowed individuals to pursue alternative sources of power that are not formally recognized in either school's charter. Both teachers and administrators are capable of taking actions which allow them to gain an advantage over others in the process. While these strategies have proven on occasion to be quite effective, there is little doubt that they undermine the principles of openness and honesty on which the innovation was founded. Of the other stakeholders in public education, some have tremendous influence over decision making while others do not. Clearly, the political landscape at each school has had an impact on experiences with the innovation.

### POLITICS AND PARTICIPATION

While some interviewees feel that the innovation has caused the process of decision making to become political, it is probably more accurate to suggest that it has changed politics within schools. As S. Conley implies, the nature of school decision making has always been political (1991, pp 245-254). Certainly, before the innovation (as is discussed in Chapter 4), teachers were discouraged from participating in the process directly. Reflecting on his experiences with the old model, one administrator recalled:

The environment has been, in our system, where you don't ask questions. Or, if you ask questions, you were viewed as somebody who was meddling or that it was none of your business. It hasn't been an environment of openness to ask these questions.

As a result, politics in the old model was characterized by teachers discreetly lobbying those with authority in order to influence decisions. Indeed, several teachers recalled approaching department heads and the administration to influence school decisions, before the advent of shared decision making. Interviewees lauded the innovation for opening up internal politics and for inviting teachers to actively participate in the process of negotiations. One teacher's comments highlight this point:

You as a teacher can say, "Look, let's talk about this." You don't have to have the backing of an AP or the principal or your department head, or a petition signed by twenty teachers or something. You can just do it on your own. So often, these are the people who have really good suggestions to make. It doesn't have to be a movement. I really like that.

Shared decision making seems to have simply exposed the politics of influence by making it visible and accessible to the staff at large. Since teachers are able to engage in debate on their own behalf, DMGs have become the forum where divergent interests meet. To fully appreciate the politics that have emerged from the innovation one must consider the fundamental elements of that have enabled decisions to be shared.

## CONSENSUS

A critical component of shared decision making has been the requirement for decisions to be made by consensus. According to Mitchell, "*Pure* consensus is when all people working collaboratively agree to support a certain position even though it might not be their first choice" (1992, p. 172). At each of the schools in this study, consensus simply means that all DMG members can live with a resolution. However, in practice, the strategy is not so straight forward. Certainly, as its definition suggests, each individual seems to be guaranteed a voice in decisions. Unfortunately, the approach can be time consuming. Since group members are encouraged not to block deliberations, majority and minority divisions continue. To some participants, the minority has merely been squelched. Clearly, this component of shared decision making affects interactions within DMGs.

## Merits

In theory, the consensus approach works because participants come together as problem solvers, consider the variety of concerns, and choose a solution that best meets the needs of all stakeholders. Individuals identify themselves as part of a group and are willing support initiatives, even when they are not their first choice, because they want the group to succeed. According to this logic, voting is problematic because it encourages individuals to consider what is best for themselves and to make decisions based on what they prefer. Inevitably, participants are divided into the majority and minority where some people have lost. In a consensus approach, resolutions are agreed upon by all participants, and the group remains united.

It is not surprising that both schools utilize the consensus approach, rather than voting, in arriving at decisions. According to the literature presented in Chapter 2, there typically is mutual fear between teachers and administrators, as they approach shared decision making, which can threaten its feasibility. While teachers may believe that principals will ultimately retain predominance over decisions through some sort of veto (Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 88; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 132; Tranter, 1994, p. 26), principals may fear that shared decision making will lead them to lose control of their schools, since they are easily outnumbered when it comes to voting (Blase and Blase, 1994, p. 10; Bolman and Deal, 1984, p. 88; Flanigan and Gray, 1995 p. 9; Keith

and Girling, 1991, p. 44). In a consensus approach, however, everyone theoretically has substantial power because everyone has a veto. Not only would principals' interests be met, but so would the interests of all participants.

In general, the utilization of consensus as a means of determining support for decisions seems to have been quite successful at both schools. Teachers and administrators are content that they have been able to make many good decisions. Although teachers do not always feel that they have gotten what they wanted in the process, they usually acknowledge that formally they are afforded considerable power and that they have a real say in decisions: "Everyone has input, and we go with what everyone is comfortable with. If someone is adamantly against a solution than we look for another solution." Administrators also feel that their interests are adequately addressed. One administrator illustrated this point:

There hasn't been a decision made that has even come close to the point where I couldn't live with it. Nothing has come close. There have been some decisions that I may have preferred for them to be a little different, but certainly I don't think that I've lost. But I guess that's part of the challenge for me . . . that if I really believe strongly in something, and if I'm in a group with eight people, I have to be able to convince those other people that what I'm saying is meritorious. And, if those other people say forget it, then I have to accept that.

Clearly, the strategy of arriving at decisions through consensus has benefited the innovation.

### **Drawbacks**

While the consensus approach seems to have complemented shared decision making, there are unfortunately some negative outcomes as well. Undoubtedly, there is the threat that the difficulty in achieving consensus may hold up decision making. A teacher commented on this issue: "Let's face it, you're trying to get the best position from essentially everybody. You're essentially looking for the best position or one that I can live with, and that is very very hard." In an environment where time is scarce and decisions often have deadlines, stalls in the process simply cannot be afforded.

In addition to potentially slowing down decision making, it is ironic that the requirement for consensus has caused some individuals to perceive that they actually have a reduced voice in decisions. Since teachers recognize that decisions need to be made within a timely manner, it is little wonder that they sometimes feel that decisions are forced through the process, without due consideration of minority interests. Given that DMG membership seems to imply that one will contribute positively to group activities, and that one's support for a resolution merely means that one can live with it, individuals can feel pressured not to express views that are unpopular with the rest of the group. One teacher's remarks capsulized this concern:

If I'm in a committee, and say I'm vehemently opposed to a decision that a group has come to, I don't know if that dissenting voice will have enough credence to not have that decision go through. It concerns me. I think that in any democratic process, the minority has to be heard, not just listened to. That concerns me that in this model, you've got eight people sitting around a table. And what comes back is the majority opinion. If you want to oppose this, what leverage do you have?

Some participants expressed a preference for voting, because it at least allows them to formally register their views. That is, through voting, the individual shows his or her preference and support for a particular resolution by casting a vote in favour of it. To dissent, one needs simply to withhold one's vote. However, when a group must come to consensus to make decisions, unless one actively articulates his or her dissent for a resolution, it is assumed that he or she is supportive of it. Some participants indicated that within the consensus approach the expression of dissent requires considerable courage, sometimes more than they are able to muster.

It seems to be the intent, at both of the schools in this study, to formally provide a legitimate voice to all individuals through the consensus approach. Certainly, many participants feel that it has done just that. However, it is unfortunate that some believe that it has actually reduced their ability to express dissent. Nonetheless, the approach has proven to be critical within shared decision making, as it has enabled principals to share their authority in many school decisions.

## THE SHARING OF AUTHORITY

From her review of the literature on shared decision making, S. Conley identifies an important distinction between authority and influence within the innovation:

Unless research addresses the distinction between authority and influence in decisions making, it will offer minimal practical guidance in current participation debates about whether teachers should wield final decision-making power or whether their involvement should be limited to influence (1991, pp 255).

In the present research, the inclusion of teachers in decision making has indeed increased their influence over school management issues. However it should be noted that authority in such matters still ultimately appears to belong to principals. A consideration of the dynamic relationship between authority and influence in shared decision making is warranted.

*Authority* is a legitimized right to make decisions within an organization (Morgan, 1986, p. 159; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 142). In schools, it is the product of legal and bureaucratic delegation (S. Conley, 1991, 253). It is the finite factor that determines who will ultimately make the decision and who will be accountable for the consequences (Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, p. 142). *Influence*,

however, is the ability to affect decisions regardless of one's formal position (S. Conley, 1991 pp 253-255; Gorton and Snowden, 1993, p. 59; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, pp 142-143). Unlike authority, it does not need to be regarded as a finite quality that is conferred by the organization (S. Conley, 1991 p. 254; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, pp 142-143). That is, an increase in influence for one person does not necessarily mean a reduction for someone else. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any official accountability attached to it. However, both authority and influence are sources of power in decision making.

Although Griffiths (1956, pp 229-230) contends that shared decision making is the delegation of authority to subordinates, it is much more compelling to consider that authority is merely shared and that teachers are actually given greater influence in decisions (S. Conley, 1991, pp 253-254). The delegation of authority, where authority is finite in quantity, suggests that final say in decision making is transferred to others. Moreover, it would consist of the transfer of accountability as well. Those who would receive authority would be held accountable for decisions, while their superiors would only be responsible for their decision to delegate. This arrangement has not been the experience at the two schools.

Several teachers and an administrator asserted that ultimately the principal retains authority in shared decision making. One teacher's comments were typical:

If you are holding a principal accountable to the runnings of the school, how much power can you expect that individual to relinquish? I think that's a problem and you have to have accountability somewhere. Somebody has to be accountable. And parents and the public often look to still the principal.

Furthermore, there was no indication that principals had actually reduced their impact on decisions through the innovation, as the delegation of authority would suggest. Indeed, the consensus approach has allowed principals, and theoretically everyone else involved, the ability to veto resolutions, thus guaranteeing them a final say over matters. Ultimately, principals seem to still own the authority but have been willing to engage in negotiations with DMGs to collectively make decisions. Teachers have been invited to share in the process to determine resolutions which greatly increases their influence. However, since decisions are made by consensus, the school administration is able to retain its authority.

The dynamic relationship between authority and influence is a complex one in shared decision making. Since much authority has been vested in the principalship by the community, the system, and by law, it has not been possible for principals to simply delegate it to others. Rather, they have engaged teachers in a process of decision making that has produced resolutions which have satisfied the responsibilities of the principalship. While teachers' influence has increased, it seems evident that principals

still retains their authority. This analysis summarizes the political power afforded to individuals through the innovation. However, it does not reflect the alternative sources of power, which are beyond the design of the innovation, that were evident in this investigation.

## ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF POLITICAL POWER

While it seems that most often teachers and administrators have opted to influence decisions by contributing to DMGs, the most emotionally charged stories told in this study were ones where individuals had accessed alternative sources of political power that were beyond the established parameters of the innovation. Whereas in some of these controversial situations it is probable that individuals have acted with malice, many times the seizure of power seems to have been due to ignorance or oversight. In each of these instances, however, the influence afforded to the staff at large through the established DMG structure has been reduced by the actions of individuals.

### Teachers and Power

Naturally, teachers can exercise power in decision making by simply attending DMG meetings. Not surprisingly, they seem to network themselves and increase their attendance when an issue being considered is of particular interest to them. Furthermore, some teachers are more influential because of their personal qualities. One teacher commented:

It could be by strength of personality. The human resource factor comes into any decision making. So if you've got a strong-willed individual, if you've got an articulate individual, if this individual has a position of status within the school, undeniably it will affect decision making at some point.

These avenues to power are in accordance with the two schools' charters. However, participants also described strategies that teachers have employed to exploit alternative sources of power, which seem to undermine the goals of shared decision making.

*Avoidance and Passive Resistance:* According to Morgan, this technique of *boundary management* enables one to assert his or her autonomy (1986, pp 169-170). In discussing his school's mission statement, one teacher commented:

Some staff chose not to own it because they saw that we had created a document that was potentially hazardous to their health. It was almost too idealistic. It created fear in people. "Well I'm glad I finished that, now I can go back to my classroom."

Another described how she copes with decisions that pertain to the school's Teacher Advisor Program:

Yet the TA structure has not changed after all of that input. We still are stuck with the same TA structure. And, quite frankly, with my grade elevens, I have given up on report [card related] interviews, because I just look like a fool with them, by insisting that they come.

Throughout the fieldwork it was evident that teachers can seize a great deal of autonomy in their schools.

*Misrepresentation:* Teacher can also gain power by misrepresenting to DMGs the circumstances of themselves and of their departments, through the distortion of information. According to Morgan, control over information allows individuals to act as “gatekeepers, opening and closing channels of communication and filtering, summarizing, analyzing and thus shaping knowledge in accordance with a view of the world that favours their interests” (ibid. p. 167). An administrator’s comments about the budget process reflect this potential:

If people are not prepared to be flexible, then people go away and come back with their own agendas. Budget is a good example of that, where they say “well you know so-and-so is not being really open with us. I don’t think so-and-so is being really open.” Or “I don’t like so-and-so’s figures because I think that they are trying to get one up on the committee or on the Budget Group.”

Clearly there are opportunities for teachers to gain an unfair advantage over others in shared decision making.

### **Administrators and Power**

The potential for teachers to access power that is beyond what is provided in each school’s charter seems to pale in comparison to the leverage that school leaders can exploit. As it was for teachers, it is not suggested here that all leaders have pursued these avenues of control. However, questionable instances have taken place that have affected participants’ experiences with shared decision making. Generally, these incidents of manipulation have occurred through maneuvers both internal and external to the DMG setting.

*Orchestrating the focus of DMGs:* Teachers’ claims echoed warnings in the literature that leaders may use participation as a means to co-opt subordinates to address their own concerns (McGregor, 1960; Mintzberg, 1996). That is, some leaders were accused of internally manipulating DMGs by directing their attention to select issues. One teacher stated:

I find that the administration seems to bring to the staff most of the issues for decision making. I can’t think of an exception off the top of my head. Agendas seem to be set and it’s brought before the staff that we need to make a decision about something. Then, we go through the process.

Although one may argue that leaders are in the best position to determine what issues

DMGs should consider because they have exclusive access to significant information, school leaders were just as likely to be accused of having dominated their groups where no such advantage seemed to exist. A second teacher commented on the development of his school's late policy:

I think that the administration saw that there was a problem, or a number of people brought up the problem to administration, but they respected that there was a problem. And they got everyone involved to try and get everyone on board to the problem. I think it was a politically correct way of bringing the importance they felt to this issue, to the entire staff, in a way that they didn't have to be the hammer.

While teachers did not suggest that the interests of their leaders are unimportant, they did question whether or not DMG activities address the concerns of all members.

On the other side of the issue, leaders were also accused of diverting DMG attention away from significant issues, towards more benign decisions. One teacher charged "The people that ask the questions are the ones that have the power. Some questions you don't get asked. 'Here's the decisions that you are allowed to make.'" In this instance, the participant complained about a leader who had informed him and his colleagues that the school would be undertaking an initiative that would significantly affect the entire school. The leader only allowed teachers to make decisions around implementation. Effectively, teachers were excluded from the debate on whether or not the initiative should be pursued. To Morgan,

much of the political activity within an organization hinges on the control of agendas and other decision premises that influence how a particular decision will be approached, perhaps in ways that prevent certain core issues from surfacing at all. By avoiding explicit discussion of an issue, one may be able to get precisely what one wants (1986, p. 166).

*Intimidation through position or status:* Commonly, teachers indicated that they find some leaders to be intimidating in the DMG setting because of their formal position and status:

The presence of an administrator there changes the dynamics. I don't think that you can move away from that. If . . . your mind is on promotion or moving or recommendations, there is, I think, an undercurrent to please the Administrative Team.

Morgan likens this sort of power relationship to the attraction of bees to honey (ibid. p. 184). That is, having something that others want or need can make one popular and powerful: "Power, like honey, is a perpetual source of sustenance and attraction among the worker bees" (ibid.). In the worst cases, leaders have been unsubtle in exploiting this relationship. One teacher commented on the pressure that he has perceived in debating DMG resolutions. "If you choose, and again in the words that it was articulated to me, if you don't like it, I think that you would feel yourself squeezed out of that particular school." Two more recalled an incident with an administrator who

had bullied members of a DMG to support his position. One of them said:

I belonged to a committee a few years back where we came to a consensus, but it wasn't the *right* consensus. We had to go over and over it again until we came to the *right* consensus. . . . When the decision was made I could not live with the process that consensus was achieved by, because consensus was not achieved through consensus, consensus was achieved through exhaustion.

The participant later commented that when she had tried to withdraw her membership from the DMG, the same administrator insinuated that such a move would unfavourably affect her career. When threats and intimidation manifest in DMG interactions, it is little wonder that some teachers withdraw their support for shared decision making.

*Design of the decision-making process:* Leaders also seem to have the power to affect the outcome of decisions from outside of the DMG setting. The source of this power is their ability to determine the processes by which decisions will be made (Morgan, 1986, p. 166). Morgan says that leaders are often afforded the ability to arrange: "How should a decision be made? Who should be involved? When will the decision be made?" (ibid.). According to many interviewees, administrators and the lead groups usually have held this responsibility. The use of this power is likely not as malicious as the incidents of intimidation appear to have been, as leaders probably are simply unaware that their choices have reduced the power of others.

Teachers indicated that some curriculum leaders and DMG facilitators make important decisions, on their own, outside of the group setting. In one instance, a teacher complained that a curriculum leader simply neglected to call meetings. Since decisions still have to be made, regardless of whether or not meetings are called, leaders sometimes make decisions on behalf of the DMG members, apologizing later that time limits prevented collaboration. A second teacher remarked that at meetings he is merely informed of decisions that have already been made outside of his DMG: "I go to the meetings and what not. Basically they are just disseminating information to me. . . . I think a lot of the decisions have already been made before they get to us." While it may be that such measures have been taken to cope with the demand for immediate decisions and the slow operation of DMGs, clearly they do disenfranchise group members. They also create the illusion to the school at large that a DMG's membership is supportive of the particular decisions. Furthermore, such instances can contribute to the communication problems described in Chapter 6.

Individuals are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from decisions when issues do not quite fit into the established DMG structure. A teacher commented: "When you have a shared decision making model and things don't fall into the preordained committees, . . . I would say that the decisions are made by those that have the power

to decide whether to share them or not.” A second one complained:

I had an experience where I saw a policy had been changed regarding field trips. When I questioned . . . why the policy had changed, I was told that “well this is just administrivia, we just wanted to change that, and we didn’t want to bother you with that.” And it turned out for me that it was a big change. It was something that affected me, and I didn’t really want to see that change. I would’ve liked to have been consulted. So it seems to me that the so-called model of shared decision making has strict parameters, and what is presented as possible decisions that we can make is limited.

Similar complaints were voiced at the same school about the development of a policy on student lates.

It is reasonable to acknowledge that in such instances leaders seem to be responding to the perceived unwieldiness of the entire innovation and the burden that it can place on teachers (discussed in Chapter 5). However, by denying access to these types of decisions, leaders greatly reduce the power of teachers. Furthermore, teachers become suspicious of their motives. The teacher in the above example could not understand why she had been given the opportunity to participate in an ad hoc DMG that made decisions about grouping students based on ability but was excluded from debates pertaining to policies on field trips and student lates:

I can’t imagine why you would discriminate one from the other. Unless there’s a process for deciding that certain decisions are to be made with this model and certain other decisions with that model. But, I don’t understand why there would be a discrepancy.

It is not clear why, in such instances, teachers have not been able to determine for themselves what decisions they would contribute to, as per the charters of both schools. As a result of their experiences, some teachers perceive that their “power is extremely limited.”

Fortunately, many participants shunned the use of power that falls outside of the established parameters of shared decision making. Teachers and administrators alike usually indicated a preference for fairness and honesty in their interactions with each other. One administrator advised: “If you’re not comfortable in that milieu, be up front and honest. Don’t say that you’re an open democratic kind of individual and then behave in other kinds of ways behind the scenes.” Furthermore, several teachers acknowledged that there are some decisions that cannot be shared. They appreciated their leaders when they were up front and honest in such cases. One teacher captured the feeling of most of the participants when he said: “I’ve been very fortunate at the schools that I have been at that I’ve had good experiences with the administration. So, my feelings are that they don’t always do things that I agree with, but for the most part they have been very frank.”

## THE IMPACT OF OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Most of the discussion thus far has focused on the interactions between and the experiences of teachers and administrators. However, there are other stakeholders who must be considered in examining shared decision making. While the school system and the province continue to have a tremendous impact on decisions, parents and students have held a limited role in the innovation.

Interviewees were very much aware that their schools comprise only a portion of a much larger system. They recognized that decisions made outside of the school were often not amendable nor even debatable within their DMGs. One teacher's comments were echoed by many participants and in each of the schools' self-evaluations:

there are certain policies that this system wants to see in place, they want to see these policies work. We don't seem to have control over whether these policies are to be had. There's no decision about the policy and whether or not to have it.

Similar comments were made regarding provincial regulations. Given that shared decision making amounts to an in-house initiative, there are clear boundaries to the decision making power of DMGs. Principals are only able to share the authority that has been delegated to them.

Parents, on the other hand, have had little influence in shared decision making. As per provincial regulations, parent-dominated school councils are ultimately only able to advise principals on school policy (Alberta Education, 1995b, p. A8). Furthermore, the councils at both sites have decided that they wish to only be consulted on and informed about school decisions. Perhaps this choice was a wise one, given the ratio of council members to the number of eligible parents: There are approximately thirty-five parents involved at City High and fifteen at Suburban High. Although parents in general are offered the opportunity for input into decisions, it is questionable whether or not the councils actually do reflect the wishes of the entire community. Indeed, Barlow and Robertson warn that that powerful councils can disenfranchise those who are unable to participate and may fall victim to special interest groups (1994, pp 233-235). Quoting Statistics Canada, they claim that "the average two-job, two-parent family with children puts in a seventy-five-hour workweek" (ibid., p. 233). Simply stated, many parents do not have time to put into the governance of their local schools. Nonetheless, although interviewees have not seen any real impact that their school councils have had on decision making, they indicate that council members have appreciated being consulted on decisions.

Students have also had minimal direct impact on decision making at each of the schools. Authors such as Glickman (1993, p. 37) and B. Levin (1994, pp 91-93) argue that at the high school level in particular students should be included in decision making: "If students are treated arbitrarily, are subject to rules they do not support or

understand, and have no opportunity to shape the nature of their work, then surely there is something educationally wrong" (B. Levin, 1994, p. 93). The charters at both schools indicate that students, and parents as well, shall compromise the membership of the DMGs where it is appropriate. Although the schools have used surveys to consult students, they both seem to have active students' councils, and there are spaces for two students on each of the school councils, there was no evidence in the interview transcripts nor in the minutes of DMG meetings that students have worked collaboratively to make school decisions. Indeed, only one teacher suggested that students should have more involvement:

I would like to see us welcome students into the process. . . . [T]hey have not, in my opinion, been aggressively pursued to join the process. And, I don't think that young people will join, unless the adults take control. . . . Now again people say, "Well what do kids know," and there's a lot of negativity.

It is evident that for decisions that are made within these schools it is the teachers and administrators who command most of the power.

#### **SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 7**

The intention of this chapter has been to explore the political landscape that has resulted from shared decision making. By considering the dynamic relationship between authority and influence, it is apparent that although principals have engaged their staffs in collaborative decision making, they have not relinquished authority. The strategy of requiring that decisions be made by consensus has provided teachers with increased influence, without reducing the impact of administrators in DMG negotiations. Beyond this legitimate power that is afforded to teachers and administrators through shared decision making, some participants have been able to exploit alternative sources of power to affect decisions. Finally, an examination of the relative influence of other stakeholders reveals that the school system and the province have considerable power because of the legal authority that they hold in many significant matters. However, parents and students have had little direct impact on decisions, despite the intentions articulated in each school's charter.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE HEART OF THE MATTER: LEARNING AND TEACHING

#### INTRODUCTION

It is apparent that shared decision making has had far-reaching effects on two Calgary high schools. It is compelling, therefore, to assess its impact on the most central aspect of schooling: learning and teaching. While both schools have focused a considerable proportion of their energies on instructional issues, through the innovation, it appears that the results have been less promising than has been experienced in other sorts of decisions. The problem, it seems, is that the innovation has tended to produce resolutions that require stakeholders to comply to prescriptive policies. This characteristic comes into conflict with teachers' autonomy over instructional decisions. Perhaps instructional issues need to be approached differently to how management-oriented ones are if shared decision making is to produce positive results in this area.

#### THE HOPE FOR IMPROVED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

It was noted in Chapter 2 that research which has attempted to measure the impact of shared decision making on learning and teaching is lacking and somewhat conflicting. Nonetheless, for many educators, the promise of improved student performance remains a significant motivation for undertaking this innovation. Unfortunately, the experience at two Calgary high schools suggests that learning and teaching to date has remained largely unaffected.

According to Weiss, much of the early educational literature on shared decision making claimed that the mere implementation of the innovation would in fact improve student achievement (1993, pp 69-70). Weiss says that this claim had been based on the following beliefs:

- Teachers are the best equipped to make school decisions that influence instruction.
- Because of their concern for and knowledge of their students, teachers will force schools to focus their resources on issues related to learning and teaching, rather than on the bureaucratic concerns that preoccupy administrators.
- Through the empowerment of teachers, schools will be liberated from their organizational limitations and ultimately learning and teaching may be revolutionized (ibid.).

Unfortunately, the data from her study prompted her to conclude "Over all, the evidence does not support either hypothesis, that SDM [shared decision making] focuses attention on curriculum and students or that SDM leads to innovation and

creative change" (ibid., p. 71). Acknowledging the more recent research, authors have begun to emphasize the necessity of consciously focusing the decentralization of decision making on the ultimate objective of enhanced student achievement (D. Conley, 1993; pp 228-232; Conway and Calzi, 1996 p. 49; David, 1996, p. 7).

In the present study, all but two of the participants indicated that shared decision making has had marginal or no noticeable impact on learning and teaching. One teacher's remarks were typical:

I think that there have been strides. I think that it would be false to say that there have been no strides. Primarily, what I think is the driving force of it right now for teaching and learning is the infiltration of technology into classes. So, yes, there has been that. But as far as an ongoing professional development, ongoing critique of the curriculum, it's nonexistent in the system, in our school.

Indeed, several participants complained that the innovation has forced them to become preoccupied with management issues. One administrator argued:

I guess to me . . . the most important function that goes on in this building every day is the function of what goes on in the classroom, not what goes on around budget. These are support areas around the kind of work that we do in classrooms. . . . I think that we spend too much, and this is my bias, we spend too much time discussing and worrying about governance issues and spending time on governance issues and not putting our energies into where they should be.

Similarly, a teacher commented: "One of the things that is really funny about that is that it doesn't feel like we are changing anything that we are doing in our classrooms. We have new carpet and new wall paper. Is that shared decision making?" Indeed, many participants reported being disappointed with the focus of the innovation in their schools.

Although there were two participants who indicated that they believe that effective school management indirectly supports student achievement, the vast majority said that learning and teaching has not benefited from the innovation. Indeed, some questioned whether or not the increased workload and attention that it seems to demand from teachers (discussed in Chapter 5) actually disadvantages students. Certainly, such perceptions warrant an investigation of how learning and teaching has been integrated into shared decision making at each of the schools.

## LEARNING AND TEACHING GROUPS

Perhaps in recognition that many of the DMGs only indirectly impact student achievement, both schools have attempted to redirect many of the resources invested in shared decision making towards learning and teaching. In comparing the innovation at the two sites, it is apparent that they differ most greatly in dealing with this objective. From its struggle to define the role of the curriculum leader, City High has sought to

make the Learning and Teaching Group the place where instructional leadership is coordinated. Meanwhile at Suburban High, the evolution of shared decision making has led to an attempt to make learning and teaching the most significant component of the innovation for all teachers. While both strategies seem to be based upon admirable intentions, neither one appears to have effectively accomplished its goal.

### **City High's Strategy**

Unlike many high schools, including Suburban High, City High has changed the role of the department-based leader. The change stems from a system-wide initiative to curb spending and flatten the hierarchy of school-based administration. In 1993 and 1994 the system reduced the amount of money available to schools for junior-leadership designations. In most cases, the result was that department-head designations were replaced by curriculum-leader positions. Since one-unit curriculum leaders receive half the allowance of two-unit department heads, the system was able to realize a savings with a minimal loss to the number of junior-leadership positions in schools.

In many high schools, curriculum leaders have simply continued to do the job that they did as department heads, for less pay. However, City High has attempted to change the role of the department-based leader. When department heads became curriculum leaders, City High decided to reduce their managerial responsibilities and focus their attention on instructional leadership. In recognition of the amended job description, a learning and teaching DMG was created where subject-area curriculum leaders and the administrative team would meet to make school-wide decisions pertaining to instruction.

Although the group has made decisions concerning a learning resource centre, course outlines, and some managerial issues around student assessment, several teachers indicated that little has filtered down to their classrooms. In some instances, they were unaware of the group's activities and in others they characterized the resulting decisions as being trivial. In addition, teachers complained in interviews and in the school's self-assessment of the innovation that they resent being excluded from this group. Apparently, the school will respond to these concerns in September of 1997 by opening this DMG to all who are interested. However, at the time of this investigation, no one suggested that the activities of the Learning and Teaching Group had improved instructional leadership. Furthermore, their comments suggest that the Professional Development DMG actually has had a more significant influence on learning and teaching in the school.

### **The Suburban High Approach**

Their self-assessment on shared decision making, which was conducted in March

of 1995, revealed that staff members at Suburban High were unhappy with the relative exclusion of learning and teaching in their model. Indeed, instruction is referred to nowhere on the organizational chart from that era. To counter this imbalance, the redesign that was enacted the following September sought to place learning and teaching at the centre of school decision making. While the Learning and Teaching Group did eventually become the cornerstone for professional development at the school, many teachers still complain that the group's activities are not relevant to course instruction.

In the redesign of shared decision making at Suburban High, creating a focus on learning and teaching issues was clearly a high priority. The new organizational chart reflects this attempt, as Learning and Teaching appears to be the dominant DMG. All certificated personnel are included in the group, which is subdivided into three smaller bodies for activities and discussions. Unlike many high schools, which have allotted one curriculum leader to the facilitation of learning and teaching, Suburban High has committed three.

Apart from investigating literature to support school improvement initiatives, the school's charter indicates that these learning leaders are charged with facilitating activities associated with "a) instructional strategies b) assessment and achievement [and] c) staff professional development." They are also expected to "assist in implementation and evaluation of new initiatives to ensure that we are 'walking the talk.'" It is apparent from this job description that the Learning and Teaching DMG is oriented towards professional-development activities. Through this organ, staff members have developed the school's strategic plan, which has prompted department and personal improvement plans. The DMG has also attempted to engage teachers, on a monthly basis, in activities that promote the development of computer literacy and professional reflection on assessment. Ultimately, it is the ongoing activities of the Learning and Teaching Group that determine how the school's three annual professional development days will be spent.

Nonetheless, many teachers still complain that the initiatives of this group do not enhance instruction in their classes. Several questioned whether or not the Learning and Teaching DMG's activities have been driven by the needs of the classroom. It seems ironic, but is certainly indicative of the varied responses to the redesign, that while some participants seemed to be sympathetic to the challenging set of expectations placed upon these learning leaders, others complained:

Behind the scenes, lots of things might have happened. But in front of the scenes, where most of us see, we don't see anything tangible being effective with these positions. I think that a lot of people saw these things as jump on the band wagon types of things.

Either way, it is likely that the job of the learning leader has been a difficult one.

It is curious that, despite the good intentions and considerable investment of

resources, neither school seems to have successfully focused shared decision making on student achievement. At City High, an attempt was made to have subject-area curriculum leaders facilitate instructional leadership through the innovation. In contrast, Suburban High has sought to make the Learning and Teaching Group the dominant DMG in their model, by requiring that all certificated personnel engage in professional development activities monthly. Nevertheless, most of the participants in this study indicated that these efforts have not affected instruction significantly at either school. Indeed, in discussing their experiences with shared decision making, participants were far more likely to laud the non-instructional accomplishments of the other DMGs than those of the Learning and Teaching Groups.

### **ANALYZING THE FOCUS ON LEARNING AND TEACHING**

Generally speaking, it seems reasonable to determine, based upon the interview transcripts and each school's self-assessment of shared decision making, that the governance and management-oriented DMGs have been more successful than the Learning and Teaching Groups. This is a particularly curious outcome, given that both schools have followed the advice of recent literature and have tried to focus considerable attention and resources on instructional issues. It is for this reason that an analysis of the Learning and Teaching Groups' activities, compared to those of other DMGs, is presented below.

#### **Authority and Autonomy**

It is interesting to consider the sharing of authority that has transpired within the Learning and Teaching Groups, compared to the other DMGs. In Chapter 7 it was argued that for nearly all of the groups shared decision making has actually amounted to the principal sharing his or her authority with other stakeholders. Furthermore, it was suggested that the principal is unable to share decisions in matters where he or she has not been delegated authority and does not own them in the first place. Thus, the impact of shared decision making has been limited to issues where authority resides in the principal and he or she has been willing to share it. This arrangement may also be an issue in decisions that surround student achievement. While the principal does appear to have the ability to share many decisions pertaining to school management, it is debatable whether or not he or she holds authority in matters associated with learning and teaching. Perhaps it is teachers who own these decisions.

There is an apparent disagreement over which parties should make instructional decisions within schools. Gorton and Snowden claim, "Teachers believe that they have authority and control over children and classrooms, while administrators believe that all the authority and control emanates from them" (1993, p. 50). It seems that teachers

regard themselves as professionals who must be trusted to make appropriate decisions to maximize the progress of their students (ibid. p. 49). However, administrators identify themselves as instructional leaders (S. Black, 1996, p. 25). This conflict can become further complicated when school board members regard themselves as representatives of the public's interests in schools. Although some authors suggest that legitimate authority over instructional issues is the province of school and system administrators (Griffiths, 1956, pp 229-231; Lortie, 1969, p. 41), it is evident that teachers command a great deal of autonomy in their classrooms (Lortie, 1969, p. 9; Pauly, 1991, pp 118-119; Ingersoll, 1994, pp 163-167).

Indeed, most of the participants in the present research indicated that shared decision making has not, for the most part, encroached upon classroom autonomy. Even with regard to the activities of the Learning and Teaching DMGs, teachers commonly reported: "We haven't really worked on anything that threatens the autonomy of the classroom." Furthermore, other than decisions pertaining to common final exams and student performance standards, they indicated that the resolutions of their subject-area departments do not interfere with their ability to make decisions around instruction: "I get the feeling that in my department, unless there's a reason to conform to a certain way of doing things, we're pretty much left to operate within a pretty loose framework."

Thus, it is apparent that at each of the schools, at least in practice, there is an acknowledgment that individual teachers have the authority to make decisions pertaining to instruction. Unlike most of the decisions that result from the management-oriented DMGs, it is not the principal who is at liberty to share the authority in instructional decisions; discretion belongs to teachers. Possibly then, as the findings of Weiss suggest (1995, pp 580-581), teachers are unwilling to engage in shared decision making if it will cost them autonomy in their classrooms.

### **Sharing Instructional Decisions**

If shared decision making is regarded as a coming together of stakeholders to define problems and to select and implement solutions, it is little wonder that the innovation seems to have been more successful in management-oriented decisions than in those associated with learning and teaching. This process appears to be well suited to organizational management. Indeed, most of the resolutions that have resulted from the innovation are characterized by decision makers finding common ground on big-picture issues, enabling problems to become manageable and solutions to become responsive to the needs of the larger organization. However, it seems curious that resolutions have generally not reduced classroom autonomy. Even management oriented decisions that are related to learning and teaching have not required teachers to

surrender a great deal of their discretion in instructional matters. There is a strong argument in educational literature that instructional decision making should not promote uniformity and compliance to predetermined policies and procedures, even if it is teachers who collectively make them. Perhaps it is for this reason that both schools seem to have avoided decisions that would encroach upon classroom autonomy. It may be an oversimplification to presume that instructional decisions can be similar to management-oriented ones.

It was evident from the interview transcripts and available minutes from DMG meetings that most of the decisions that have resulted from the innovation have required stakeholders to come together on resolutions. Decision making has tended to produce prescriptive policies that leave little room for diversity in their implementation. Teachers have had to comply with resolutions to enable the management of their schools. Some of the decisions that have resulted from DMG deliberations have pertained to: the allocation of the school budget, the purchase and maintenance of computer equipment, the selection of a new school timetable, recognition of student achievement, and prescribed levels of and guidelines for teacher involvement in extracurricular activities. In each of these instances, broad school issues have been decided upon for all stakeholders in order for the schools to be managed effectively. Even in those decisions that seem to have been targeted directly at classroom activities, management-oriented resolutions have resulted that have promoted uniformity and have required compliance from teachers. Such resolutions have pertained to: the creation of each schools' mission statement, strategic planning, grouping students by ability, a common assessment philosophy, common final exams, the appearance of interim report cards and course outlines, the design of a learning resource centre, and planning for professional development activities. Yet, none of these resolutions seem to have greatly affected decision making in the classroom.

It is not suggested here that any of these decisions were inconsequential. There is little doubt that they were necessary and invaluable, and required stakeholders to come together to implement them commonly. Furthermore, research indicates that it is these management-oriented decisions from which teachers have traditionally felt the most excluded (S. Conley, 1991, pp 235-237; Shedd and Bacharach, 1991, pp 138-139). Nonetheless, despite these initiatives, most participants still reported that shared decision making has focused almost completely on school management without improving upon learning and teaching.\* Clearly, by avoiding decisions that would

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\*It should be noted that there is a body of work in organizational theory which argues that when functional activities of an organization are not easily measured and appraised they are often decoupled from formal managerial structures because they may be difficult to defend when they contrast with societal beliefs and expectations (see Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Meyer, Scott, and Deal, 1981).

challenge classroom autonomy, and thereby essentially supporting its maintenance, neither school has been able to collectively make significant decisions regarding the actual instruction of students.

Some may suggest that the solution to the problem is simple: teachers should forfeit their autonomy to support the implementation of big-picture organizational goals. However, there is a powerful argument that instructional decisions should be made at the classroom level. After considerable research and commentary on shared decision making, Weiss speculates "What may be needed is not so much the big picture as a whole school of 'little pictures' grounded in classrooms" (1994, p. 299). She directs her readers to the work of Edward Pauly (1991).

Pauly contends that, despite our predisposition for seeking grand prescriptive policies for school reform, such initiatives have not consistently produced significant instructional improvements because it is "classrooms and the people in them [that] are at the core of successful schooling" (ibid. p. 35). He bases his conclusions on the findings of a number of quantitative studies, starting with the famous Coleman Report (1966, cited in Pauly, 1991).

James S. Coleman, a sociologist, was commissioned by the United States Congress to evaluate access to educational opportunities in the mid-1960s. While the study found that there were certainly consistent differences in achievement-test scores between schools, this disparity paled in comparison to the inequities that seemed to appear within individual schools (ibid. pp 20-23). Coleman and his colleagues theorized that if schools consistently showed a narrow range of test scores, then variations in school averages could be attributed to different policy choices. Conversely, if most schools experienced an equivalent wide range of scores then it could be concluded that school policies had little effect on achievement. After extensive analysis, the researchers found that "most of the variation in achievement could not possibly be accounted for by school differences, since most of it lies within the school" (Coleman et al., 1966, cited in Pauly, 1991, p. 21). Of the Coleman Report, Pauly remarks: "It suggested that the reason that thousands of education studies had failed to identify and agree on policies that would improve student achievement was the underlying futility of their mission"(1991, p. 24). Citing the findings of this research and three additional studies that followed, Pauly concludes that

when student test score gains are carefully examined, the important differences are between successful and unsuccessful classrooms, differences that cannot be traced to consistent school policies, characteristics or behaviours of teachers, curricula, teaching methods, or special programs (ibid. p. 33).

The author suggests that while reform efforts may have been successful if they had been carried out uniformly and precisely how they were prescribed, the social and academic

chemistry of individual classrooms forces teachers to modify the implementation of grand initiatives to cope within their specific circumstances. He cites the American eight-volume Change Agent Study (*Federal Program Supporting Educational Change, 1974-1978*) which found that:

each classroom, each school, and each school system, being somewhat different from others, implements the same innovations in different ways at different times or places. In short, even when tested and developed at other sites, an educational innovation, unlike a new drug or a new variety of wheat, undergoes *adaptation* during implementation [original emphasis] (cited in Pauly, 1991, pp 55-74, 116-117).

According to Pauly, standardized policies cannot reform instruction because the circumstances of the individual classroom are beyond standardization.

While this body of research may discourage some reform-minded educators, because of its nihilistic overtones towards efficacy, it does at least support the notion of classroom autonomy. If a large part of teaching is understanding and effectively dealing with the distinct chemistry of the classroom, clearly teachers need to be able to make instructional decisions. Blase and Blase summarize the principles behind teacher discretion:

1. *The primary control of pedagogical knowledge should be left to teachers.* This is the belief that professional teachers *create* pedagogical knowledge and that they continuously refine and adapt their knowledge.
2. *Teaching activities are nonroutine.* This is the belief that teaching activities are variable and constantly changing, thus *requiring* innovation and experimentation to counter meaningless standardization.
3. *The teachers's primary work activity is decision making.* This is the belief that teachers make decisions in highly *unpredictable and interactive* situations, requiring sophisticated and creative solutions [original emphasis] (1994, pp 6-7).

Evidently, much of the process of teaching is interactive and dependent upon the teacher's ability to utilize his or her judgment. Pauly's work suggests that we need to reexamine how we regard instructional policy making.

### **GETTING DOWN TO WORK: COLLABORATION ON INSTRUCTION**

Some may conclude from the discussion above that shared decision making cannot directly influence learning and teaching. If the individual classroom is indeed the pinnacle factor in student achievement, and if teachers rightfully own decisions regarding instruction, it would appear to be futile to pursue collective resolutions in learning and teaching. However, many participants in the present research did express a desire to collaborate on instructional preparation. Certainly, the form of such shared decisions would be considerably different to what has manifested in the management-

oriented DMGs. They would support the individual classroom and would allow for diversity in their implementation.

Several participants in this study suggested that they actually have little peer support when it comes to classroom instruction. As was discussed in Chapter 6, it seems that shared decision making has effectively reduced teacher isolation with regard to whole-school, management-oriented decisions. Nevertheless, teachers remain quite isolated when it comes to instructional decision making. Certainly, this result reflects the issue that classrooms have retained their autonomy. However, it also highlights that shared decision making really has not been successful in the area of learning and teaching. Commonly, teachers remarked:

Time wasted on management is not necessary. I would rather spend time learning about myself and how I can be a better teacher or how I can help the kids to become better learners. A lot of the time there is no time for that. It would be nice to get together with teachers from other departments . . . and see what's going on.

Shared decision making may be an opportunity to promote teacher collaboration.

Indeed, several teachers indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to work with peers on instructional issues. In most cases, they suggested that they would prefer to work in small, ad hoc, task-oriented groups. A physical education teacher commented:

If . . . the kids are studying Canadian identity, . . . I will give an assignment about basketball and how Canada has been involved in it. If I could see that there is that cross-over then I could give up having a written basketball test on rules, and that would be a really good assignment.

It seems that teachers do not mind sharing instructional decisions when they can see a practical benefit for their own students.

Generally, it appears that teachers would welcome the opportunity for ongoing ad hoc collaboration with colleagues for mutual gain. Pauly refers to this type of decision making as being *pluralistic*:

Pluralistic policies are those that provide support for a diversity of problem-solving responses tailored to the needs and strengths of those most affected by the problems at hand. . . . Pluralistic education policies influence classroom teaching and learning without creating new rules, required methods of instruction, or prescriptive programs. . . . Crucially, they use policy levers that are not prescriptions for specific methods of teaching and learning (1991, pp 126-128).

Pluralistic policies would support teachers as thinking professionals in their classrooms, rather than directing them through prescriptive resolutions or ignoring them for fear of infringement upon classroom autonomy. They would allow educators to come together, on the basis of need, to collaborate on real issues encountered in the classroom.

Certainly, instructional innovation would be small-scale. However, it would be sensitive to the needs of individual classrooms and the students and teachers within them. Such a strategy for making policies that pertain to learning and teaching is consistent with calls for new directions in professional development. According to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin:

Because teaching for understanding relies on teachers' abilities to see complex subject matter from the perspectives of diverse students, the know-how necessary to make this vision of practice a reality cannot be prepackaged or conveyed by means of traditional top-down "teacher training" strategies. The policy problem for professional development in this era of reform extends beyond mere support for teachers' acquisition of new skills or knowledge. Professional development today also means providing occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners (1995, p. 597).

Through pluralistic policies, teachers would be able to share the real instructional decisions without reducing their ability to exercise judgment in their own classes.

It is evident that at both of the schools in this study there has been support for the notion of classroom autonomy. This provision seems to be in conflict with the established policy-making process of shared decision making. However, there is hope that classroom autonomy need not impede the innovation. In fact, since teachers appear to be quite isolated when it comes to instructional decisions, it would seem that shared decision making should be vigorously pursued in this area. Teachers seem to welcome the opportunity to collaborate with others, provided that such interactions will be mutually beneficial and will not erode their ability to make important classroom decisions.

## **SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 8**

Likely the most frustrating aspect of this experience with shared decision making has resulted from efforts to place learning and teaching at the centre of the innovation. Despite their well-thought plans and best efforts, most participants of this study feel that learning and teaching has been largely unaffected by the innovation. There is a fundamental conflict, it seems, between how shared decision making has been conducted and the issue of classroom autonomy. While it may be pedagogically wise to provide teachers with the authority to make instructional decisions, this allowance has interfered with the established patterns of shared decision making. Perhaps it is necessary to require compliance to established resolutions in decisions that surround the management of schools. However, such an approach would reduce classroom autonomy if it were applied to instructional decision making. The result of this dilemma has been that both schools have simply avoided making significant shared

decisions around learning and teaching. Unfortunately, this strategy has left teachers isolated in fulfilling their most important duties. It is compelling to acknowledge that instructional decisions need to be treated differently to how management ones are. Perhaps instructional decisions should be made through the establishment of pluralistic policies, rather than prescriptive ones.

## CHAPTER 9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

### SUMMING UP

The central objective of this work has been to explore pertinent issues that have surrounded the experience of shared decision making at two Calgary high schools. By tapping into a variety of perspectives on the innovation, it has been possible to retell individual stories against a backdrop of the entire innovation. It is hoped that this work will enable educators to better understand shared decision making so that they may make good choices in their own practice.

This work has relied heavily on literature which has emerged from organizational theory because it is relevant to the assessment this subject. It appears that the two schools in this study and the entire Calgary Board of Education have been compelled to become more organic in their organization. Certainly, public institutions have demands placed upon them for consistency, equity in the delivery of services, and cost effectiveness – particularly in this era of reduced governmental spending. Historically, these demands have encouraged the public service to organize itself according to the mechanistic principles of classical management theory. Despite these pressures, however, the turbulent political and economic environment of public education has compelled some schools and school systems to become more organic in their organization. Given these conflicting demands, one may speculate that public schools will encounter difficult challenges in the future.

It is little wonder that such a significant undertaking would result in both positive and negative consequences throughout the two schools. While teachers have encountered some opportunities for personal and professional development through shared decision making, there have also been new tensions that have emerged. Participants in the innovation claim that it absorbs a great deal of their time. In addition to the many meetings that may be required for decision-makers to become knowledgeable about complex issues and to come to consensus on resolutions, there have been some instances where teachers have had to take on new responsibilities to support the process. While in many cases time seems to have been squeezed out of their private lives, some teachers fear that the innovation could have a negative effect on their teaching. Administrators also have new demands upon them. Apart from providing leadership for the innovation, they have found themselves fulfilling supportive roles to enable teachers to contribute to the process.

It was argued in this study that environmental pressures have encouraged these schools to take on a matrix organization. While the traditional governance structure allowed teachers to identify with just one interest group (usually their subject-area

departments), the matrix design of shared decision making encourages them to broaden their involvement in school issues. Teachers at the two schools contribute to decision making through their departments as well as through DMGs.

Shared decision making has had a paradoxical effect on communication at both schools. While the traditional model of governance tended to contribute to teacher isolation, as departments were linked to the rest of the school almost exclusively through department heads, matrix organization seems to have afforded teachers direct access to others within their schools. By participating on DMGs, teachers have had the opportunity to become familiar with the different circumstances that their colleagues face in other parts of the building. Administrators have been able to meet face-to-face with teachers to discuss important school issues. Neither group remains solely reliant upon department-based leaders to facilitate communication throughout their organizations.

On the other side of the issue, communication has also become less reliable. Since the lines of communication have become diversified, the flow of information, although much more robust than in the traditional structure, has become less routine. No longer is the responsibility for facilitating communication delegated to just a few key individuals. Virtually every participant in shared decision making is responsible for the flow of information.

It was concluded in this study that the communication paradox could be attributed to how well information flows within the various decision making bodies. Since participants in DMGs seem to be knowledgeable about the circumstances of the various departments and their members it is apparent that communication has been effective in these bodies. However, department members seem to find it difficult to attain important information about the activities of DMGs, especially when these groups have not pursued extensive measures to communicate with the larger constituency. Therefore, it appears that communication has been less effective within the department setting than in the DMGs. It was speculated that teachers are more likely to identify with and voice the interests of their subject-area departments than of their DMGs because their departments are more closely linked to their teaching responsibilities.

In addition, a number of variables were identified from teachers' and administrators' experiences that seem to influence the effectiveness of DMG deliberations. It was evident throughout this study that shared decision making encourages and works best in an environment of professional collegiality. DMG members respond favourably when groups are task-oriented, their deliberations will have a real impact on the outcome of decisions, participants develop positive relationships with each other, and their resolutions are based upon current research. In

contrast, participants find DMG activities to be frustrating when meetings seem to lack clear direction, decision making is reliant upon specialized knowledge that only a few group members possess, or when cynicism and distrust dominate attitudes. It is hoped that educators can benefit from these observations.

It is also apparent that the innovation has affected the politics of school decision making. It was argued in this work that the core of shared decision making is characterized by administrators sharing their vested authority with teachers. While teachers have an increased influence in decision making, it was evident that administrators still retain their authority. In addition, the innovation has not influenced decision making where the principal has not been vested with authority. Finally, it was clear that both teachers and administrators are capable of seizing political power that is beyond what they are formally afforded through shared decision making.

Perhaps the most significant component of this work was the consideration of the innovation's influence on learning and teaching. Since this area comprises the core activities of schools, it is not surprising that observers would look to instructional innovation and student achievement as productivity indicators for shared decision making. Unfortunately, to date, neither seems to be positively and directly influenced by the innovation. Unlike management-oriented decisions, which have been greatly affected by shared decision making, instructional decisions seem to belong to teachers, not administrators. Classroom autonomy appears to be supported at each school, as few decisions at either site have required teachers to comply to significant prescribed instructional policies. It was suggested that if the innovation is going to influence learning and teaching that policies may have to be adopted that are flexible and pluralistic in nature. There does seem to be a role for shared decision making in learning and teaching that could positively influence the entire experience for teachers and administrators.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

By design, this project was an exploratory study. Large topics were examined close to the subject matter to identify and draw attention to pertinent issues and, where possible, to attempt to explain what was seen. Through this process, however, a number of questions have been identified that remain unanswered. Some potential future research topics are described below.

### **Productivity Indicators**

It appears that attempts to evaluate the impact of shared decision making in the private sector have been more successful than has been the experience in public education. Businesses are able to rely upon profit margins and other quantifiable

productivity measurements as key indicators for their success. However, student achievement, which is ultimately the bottom line for schools, is more elusive. It has been demonstrated in this work that attempts to determine the impact of shared decision making on learning and teaching have produced results that are inconclusive and somewhat contradictory. Therefore, it is compelling for researchers to pursue other types of productivity indicators to measure the impact of the innovation. One such indicator may be the measurement of how teachers and administrators spend their time completing the various tasks of their jobs. Certainly, similar research has been conducted for schools in general (for example see Goodlad, 1984). However, little has been done to make comparisons between schools that employ shared decision making and ones that do not. The present study shows that shared decision making can affect how teachers and administrators spend their time. Meanwhile, Epp found suggestions in her research that participation had not required "extra effort" [from participants], but a redirection of energies which enabled the staff to get more done with less duplication of services" (1993, p. 35). Clearly, this is a topic that demands further attention.

### **The Value of Training**

Related to the issue of productivity is the impact that participant training has on the success of the innovation. Both teachers and administrators in this project indicated that shared decision making would have benefited if personnel had received formal training for the new roles that they occupy. However, much to their disappointment, resources have not been available to meet this need. Unfortunately, current research does not attempt to demonstrate how well the innovation proceeds when personnel are trained compared to when they are not. Given that participants of this study indicated that in some cases DMG deliberations can absorb an inordinate amount of time and energy in making minimal-impact decisions, it is conceivable that schools cannot afford to forgo participant training.

### **Serving Interests**

Some authors have suggested that teachers may benefit from their increased influence in decision making, at the expense of both students and administrators (Brown, 1995, pp 345-347; Conway and Calzi, 1996 p. 46). They observe that empowered teachers tend to focus the school decision making apparatus on their own interests, while administrators are left powerless to defend the concerns of students. However, the present study could not substantiate such conclusions. Firstly, it was not apparent that teachers are less caring about student interests than are administrators. While their opinions about pedagogy may differ, it seems unfair to suggest that when

they do not agree the reason is because teachers are self-serving. Secondly, the present research suggests that teachers do not choose to nor wish to focus a substantial proportion of their time and energy on management-oriented decisions, especially when it is at the expense of their students. In fact, teachers strongly indicated that they would prefer to direct their energies towards serving students. Finally, there was no evidence that showed that administrators experience reduced power in decision making because teachers have become more influential. Indeed, it was demonstrated that principals had retained their authority. Clearly, these authors' criticisms cannot be generalized to the entire innovation. Therefore, it seems fitting that future research should consider this matter more thoroughly.

### **System Support for the Innovation**

Finally, it is evident in the present study that even though there have been pressures from the external environment for the two schools to undertake shared decision making, the actual innovation is little more than an in-house initiative. Since it is principals who are sharing the authority that is delegated to them, it is clear that the larger system has little impact on the innovation. Weiss has observed that shared decision making is a delicate enterprise that can be easily upset, particularly when new principals step in with their own ideas about how it should work (1993, p. 86). While at the two schools efforts have been made to anchor the structure in writing by developing what has been referred to in this research as a charter, it has been evident that administrators have a fair level of latitude in interpreting their models. It seems reasonable, therefore, that research should investigate how shared decision making may be supported at the system level without divesting principals. Perhaps, school systems can establish operational norms that are sensitive to the unique needs of each school, but that maintain the integrity and consistency of shared decision making within individual schools.

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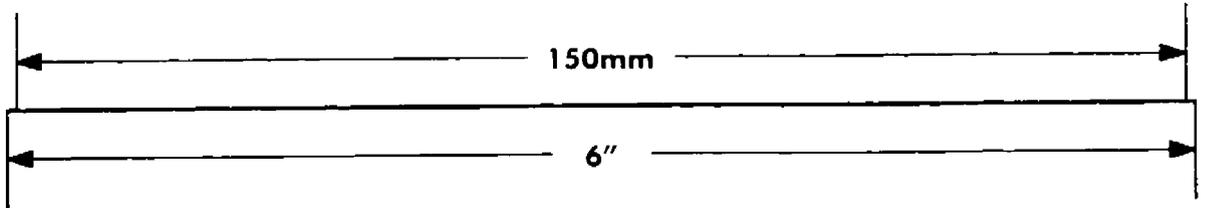
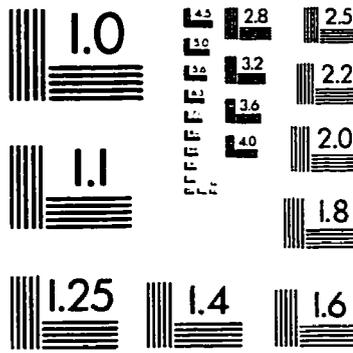
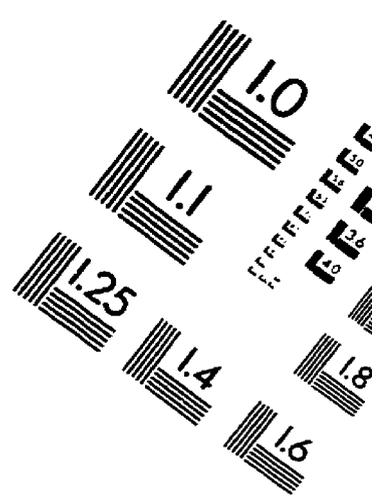
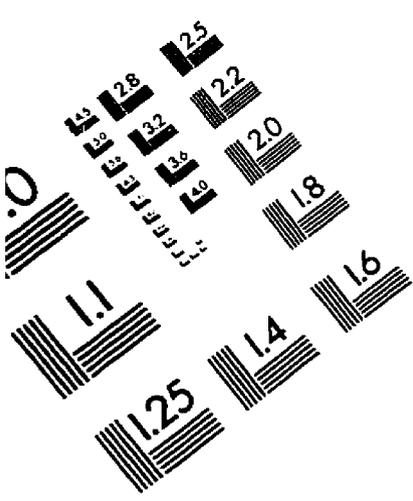
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