In this chapter we present a second decision-making area in the school principalship. The area includes schoolwide decisions which principals make while interacting with teachers. Such conditions are commonly labeled as participative decision making. The area is also the second of three that pertain to instructional dimensions of the relationship between the principal and the teachers. It involves organizing, stimulating, structuring, and implementing decisions. When principals make such ongoing choices about ongoing school issues, they, in effect, determine many of the instruction-related personnel process decisions in the school.

We begin this chapter with a report on a recently completed study of some elementary school principals in four California school districts. In the study, observations were made of actual interactions between principals and their teachers. The study also sought the views of the principals about these interactions. The focus of the study was on those interactions dealing with schoolwide issues. Later in the chapter we introduce some exemplary evaluation considerations which we believe have the potential of improving decision making in the making of schoolwide decisions while interacting with teachers.
The Decisions

The literature on the school principalship stresses the importance of participative decision making (e.g., Bridges, 1952, 1967; Belasco and Allutto, 1972; Allutto and Belasco, 1973; Conway, 1976, 1984; Mohrman and Cooke, 1976; Moon, 1983; Hoy and Sousa, 1984). Effective principals are said to be those individuals using staff input to shape the learning environment of the school according to their own sense of mission and agenda for the school. It is further suggested that the opportunity to share in formulating schoolwide policies is an important factor in the morale of teachers and in their enthusiasm for the school as a place of work. Also, participation in decision making has been found to be positively related to the satisfaction of individual teachers with the profession of teaching.

Hoy and Miskel (1987) have summarized other generalizations that appear in the literature of participative decision making in schools. Teachers prefer principals who involve them in schoolwide decision making, even though they (the teachers) neither expect nor want to be involved in every decision. The specific nature of participative decision making is associated with the issue at hand. The roles and functions of both principals and teachers in participative decision making vary according to the nature of the issue. Factors both internal and external to the school affect the degree of participation in schoolwide decision making by teachers.

Several models for participative decision making in schools have been proposed. Bridges' (1967) model is based on the concept of zone of acceptance of teachers. This zone is determined by a test of relevance and a test of expertise. If an issue is of low relevance and participants are not at all experts on the topic, then the issue falls inside the zone of acceptance, and teacher participation in the decision-making process is neither desirable nor effective. If the issue is highly relevant and participants are highly expert, then the issue falls outside the zone of acceptance and teachers should frequently be involved in the decision-making process—as early as possible in order to maximize participation. Limited involvement of teachers is recommended when teachers have a high personal stake in the decision but a low potential for contributing significantly or when they have no personal stake but have a high potential for contributing important knowledge.

Vroom and Yetton (1973) suggest several conditions under which participative decision making is appropriate and necessary. One is when the superior does not possess sufficient information and expertise to solve the problem alone. Another is when the superior lacks information or expertise and the problem is unstructured. In this case the method chosen to solve the problem should include sufficient procedures for collecting information. These two conditions are designed to enhance the quality of the decision.