The Role of the Solicitor Inside and Outside the Zone of Acceptance

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Modern leaders are often called upon to include subordinates in their decision-making processes, the assumption being that those closest to the problem will have the best solutions. In actual practice, most organizations are not democracies, nor should they be. Simon (1976) says of the member of an organization, “He [the subordinate] sets himself a general rule which permits the communicated decision of another to guide his own choices without deliberation on his own part on the expedience of the premises” (p. 125). The subordinate’s trust in his or her leaders to act in good faith and to exhibit the expertise to make correct choices in the interest of the organization is an integral part of every efficient workplace. There are times when shared decision-making is important and times when workplace democratization is inappropriate.

**Zone of Acceptance Theory**

The zone of acceptance is an area of trust in which subordinates accept decisions made on their behalf without question, either out of confidence in their leaders or out of indifference (Simon, 1976). When subordinates perceive that they have both a stake in the outcome of a decision and some type of expertise to contribute to the decision-making process, the decision is said to be outside the zone of acceptance, and those subordinates will not be comfortable with a unilateral decision on the administrator’s part (Hoy, 2003). When subordinates perceive that they have no stake in the decision or that they do not possess the expertise to contribute to the conversation, the decision is said to be inside the zone of acceptance, and those subordinates will be comfortable with allowing their leaders to make the decision for them (Hoy). Bridges (1967) applies Simon’s theory to school administration, arguing that a circumspect approach to shared decision-making is not only desirable but also more efficacious than a fully democratic system: “As the principal involves teachers in making decisions located in zone of indifference
Figure 1.1. Shared Decision Making in the Solicitor's Administrative Role

Most subordinates have a personal stake in the decision
Solicit relevant subordinate(s) for advice

Most subordinates have no personal stake in the decision

Most subordinates have expertise in the area of the decision
Solicit expert subordinate(s) for advice

Most subordinates have no expertise in the area of the decision

Most subordinates can be trusted to act in the interests of the organization
Solicit trusted subordinate(s) for advice

Most subordinates cannot be trusted to act in the interests of the organization

Figure 1.1. Model of the solicitor’s administrative role in relation to the zone of acceptance defined in Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization by H. A. Simon, 1976, The Free Press.

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participation will be less effective,” Bridges posits, but “as the principal involves teachers in making decisions clearly located outside their zone of indifference [acceptance], participation will be more effective” (p. 51).

The Role of Solicitor

Hoy (2003) defines the solicitor’s role in leadership as that of one who “seeks advice from subordinate-experts” (slide 11). As such, the solicitor’s deference to subordinates is simultaneously universal and limited. In cases in which subordinates have neither a personal stake in the decision nor expertise in the decision area, the solicitor will nonetheless seek out the most invested and the most expert subordinates for confirmation (See Figure 1.1). In all other cases – when subordinates are both invested and expert, whether subordinates can be trusted to act in the interests of the organization or not – the solicitor will judiciously choose subordinate advisors. The solicitor will share decisions made outside the zone of acceptance, but only with those subordinates he or she deems most capable of delivering relevant, expert, trustworthy advice (See Figure 1.1). The solicitor’s role is not to institute the democratization of the workplace, but to maintain the technocratization of the organizational structure . . .
References


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