

The Involvement Process

The optimal amount of participation in a given situation depends on two factors: whether a superior solution is required and whether commitment is needed to implement the solution.

Need for a Superior Solution

A superior solution can also be described as the best or technically correct solution. A superior solution is consistent with organizational goals and based on the best possible information.

Many situations require a superior solution. Very few of the many available solutions will be superior. If you're hiring someone to work for you, you're probably not willing to accept just anyone who applies; you want the best candidate. If you have defects in a new product, you want to find the real cause of the problem and correct it. Only actions that eliminate the defects are acceptable.

Some situations don't require a superior solution because all possible solutions are acceptable. All potential suppliers may be able to supply quality parts on time. Each of your workers may be qualified for a particular assignment.

When you require a superior solution, you need to consider whether participation can help you find that solution. Do others have information you don't have? Can others help in analyzing the issue? Will others support the best interests of the organization or work unit?

Need for Commitment to Implement

Optimal participation depends not only on whether you require a superior solution but also on whether you need commitment to implement it.

When people are committed, they're willing to support the solution. When the going gets tough, committed individuals will defend the solution and put in extra effort to make it succeed.

In some situations commitment is needed for successful implementation. The members of a project team need to be committed to bring that project in on time, within budget and with the desired results.

Some situations may not require commitment; compliance is sufficient. Compliance means people follow orders or guidelines. Compliance may need to be enforced. Expense account guidelines usually only require compliance, not commitment. People will follow the rules because they want to be reimbursed.

When commitment is required for successful implementation, you need to consider whether participation will help generate that commitment. Sometimes people will commit without being involved. They may see the leader as an expert or as the person who's supposed to resolve the situation. In other situations people won't commit unless they have participated in some way. People tend to take ownership and be committed when they have been actively involved in resolving an issue.

Conflict can undermine commitment. When commitment is needed for implementation, it's important to discuss differences openly. Discussion of conflict may also uncover important information and lead to a superior solution.

Additional Questions to Help Assess the Variables

To accurately apply the involvement process, you must be able to assess each of the seven key variables. Your answers to the seven variable questions will allow you to determine which leader behaviors are likely to succeed in a particular situation. The response to the variable questions may not be obvious, however. Do you really know exactly what information is missing? Will people really commit without actively participating? Is there really goal agreement? We will look at some additional questions you can use in assessing the variables.

Superior Solution

Does it make a big difference which course of action is adopted?

These additional questions will help you determine whether you require a superior solution.

Is this situation a high-priority concern?

and

Are the possible solutions unequal?

Sometimes a superior solution is not required because the issue is low priority; the start time of a meeting, for example.

A superior solution is not required for a high-priority concern when all possible solutions are equal. If you have three similar offices available for three subordinates, you probably aren't concerned about who gets which office.

Information

Do you, the leader, now have adequate information to analyze this situation?

Information refers to all the data needed to analyze a situation.

This variable is usually relatively easy to assess. No additional questions are required.

Structure

Do you know exactly what information is missing and how to get it?

These questions will help you clarify your response:

Do you know exactly what information is missing?

and

Do you know where and how it can be obtained?

and

Do you know how to analyze it?

Suppose you need to fill a special order from a major client. To schedule production, you must know what work is in process and the shipping dates for current orders; the production supervisor has this information. Given the information, scheduling production of the special order is relatively simple.

In this situation you know what information is missing, where to get it and exactly what to do with it when you get it. The situation is structured. If you were unsure about where to get the information or how to use it, the situation would be unstructured.

Commitment

Is the commitment of others critical to effective implementation?

Commitment is critical when yes is the answer to any of these questions.

Is judgment, independent action or creativity required of those implementing the action?

or

Does effective implementation require more than compliance?

or

Are there serious negative side effects to forced compliance?

Conducting a research project requires judgment, independent action and creativity. On the other hand, following specific guidelines or using a specified format may not require these elements.

Compliance means following orders or directions. In some situations, we can specify exactly what we want people to do and supervise their work to ensure that they comply. Filling in time sheets and following travel guidelines are examples.

However, people may continue to do exactly what they have been told to do — even in situations where it's not appropriate. Forcing people to follow the rules can also lead to resentment that then has an impact on other aspects of the job.

Commitment without Participation

Will they commit to a conclusion made by you without their active participation?

Others will commit without active participation if any of these questions are answered yes.

Do others see you as:

Having the right to resolve the issue?

or

The expert for this issue?

or

The only person capable of resolving the issue?

or

Having a good track record on this kind of issue?

or

Are they indifferent as to which conclusion is implemented?

People usually regard senior management as having the right to make financial decisions.

Many of us implement decisions made for us by our doctors, lawyers and accountants because we consider them experts in certain areas.

When a group has tried to reach agreement and failed, or if they anticipate they will be unable to reach agreement, they may turn to a leader who can resolve the issue.

Leaders who have earned trust based on past actions may gain commitment without involving others. If you have always been perceived as being fair and considerate in assigning work, people may willingly accept your decisions.

Sometimes people don't care which conclusion is implemented. For example, they may be equally disposed to all possible suppliers or all available software packages.

Goal Agreement

Is there general agreement about goals between the group and the organization in this situation?

There is goal agreement if the answers to the following questions are yes.

Do they share common goals in this situation?

and

Are those goals compatible with the interests
of the organization or work unit?

People may have different goals in a particular situation. For example, one person may want to minimize salary costs, another may want to maintain employment and a third may want to increase wages. Minimizing costs might be the only goal that will ensure the long term survival of the organization.

Conflict about Alternatives

Is there likely to be conflict about alternatives within the group?

These questions will help determine whether a conflict about alternatives is likely:

Will the others have preferred alternative solutions?

and

Are these alternatives in conflict?

Suppose you are working on the layout for new office space. One of the offices is significantly larger and has windows; each employee would like to have this office. In other words, each person has a preferred solution and these solutions are conflicting.

Involvement Guidelines

The assessment of seven key variables allows you to use the Leadership Tree and determine which leader behaviors are likely to succeed. The tree is quick and simple to use. However, an understanding of the logic reflected in the tree will help you internalize the model and understand why the Leadership Tree recommends specific behaviors under certain conditions. We will now examine the guidelines reflected in the Leadership Tree.

Yes or No responses to the seven Situation Variables determine the preferred or correct leader behavior(s).

When you do not have Enough Information

A2, C1, C2, G2

Superior Solution	Yes	If you require a superior solution and lack information, do not decide alone. Use A2 (Question Individuals), C1 (Consult Individuals), C2 (Consult Group) or G2 (Resolve as Group). Using A1 runs the risk of missing a superior solution due to incomplete or inaccurate information.
Information	No	

When there is No Structure

C2, G2

Superior Solution	Yes	If you require a superior solution, lack information, and do not know what information is missing or where to get it, bring people together as a group. Use C2 (Consult Group) or G2 (Resolve as Group). The leader needs the group's interaction to identify and find the missing information.
Information	No	
Structure	No	

When there is No Goal Agreement

A1, A2, C1, C2

Superior Solution	Yes	If you require a superior solution and lack goal agreement, do not let the group decide. Use A1 (Resolve Alone), A2 (Question Individuals), C1 (Consult Individuals) or C2 (Consult Group). The leader cannot trust the group to develop a superior solution without goal agreement.
Goal Agreement	No	

If you cannot get Commitment without Participation

C1, C2, G2

Commitment	Yes	If you require commitment to implement and others will not commit without active participation, involve others. Use C1 (Consult Individuals), C2 (Consult Group) or G2 (Resolve as Group). Neither A1 nor A2 provides sufficient participation to build commitment.
Commitment without Participation	No	

When you Need to Address Conflict

C2, G2

Commitment	Yes	If you require commitment to implement, others will not commit without active participation, and you anticipate conflict about alternatives, deal with conflict as a group. Use C2 (Consult Group), or G2 (Resolve as Group). The group members need to hear all viewpoints to resolve the conflict and build commitment to the solution.
Commitment without Participation	No	
Conflict about Alternatives	Yes	

When there is No Need for a Superior Solution, and Commitment is Required

G2

Superior Solution	No	If there is no need for a superior solution, you need commitment to implement, and can not get commitment without participation, use G2 (Resolve as Group). This will maximize the commitment to implement.
Commitment	Yes	
Commitment without Participation	No	

When Commitment is a Priority

G2

Superior Solution	Yes	If you require a superior solution, commitment of others is critical, you can not get commitment without participation, and there is goal agreement, use G2 (Resolve as Group). This will maximize commitment, and the group is likely to reach a solution compatible with organizational goals.
Commitment	Yes	
Commitment without Participation	No	
Goal Agreement	Yes	