

Title: "Decision Making in a Small School District: A Case Study Employing Principles of Systems Thinking and ithink®" (an unpublished doctoral dissertation at the University of Vermont, 1995)

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The Case:

A small New England community with one school (grades K-8)

- population: 1,400
- 1990 median income: \$36,894 (well above state average)
- 1990 per capita income: \$17,047 (well above state average)
- 1990 average home value: \$143,400 (well above state average)
- resort vacation community (summer visitors/residents inflate population five-fold)

Case Period: 1980-1994

Problem Statement:

Within a small, rural, demographically changing community:

- how can key school decision making process(es) be described?

- what factors impeded or facilitated school decision making process(es)?
- can an historical decision making model be developed for stake holders' future use in planning and decision making?

Purpose:

To advance knowledge on the topic of decision making at a local community-school level. Such knowledge can inform constituents when facing future decisions and change.

Relevant Foundational Literature:

- Power
- Community Power
- Rural
- Community
- Change
- Decision Theory
- Systems Thinking

Author's Previous Modeling Experience: None

Software Mentor: Rolfe S. Stanley, Ph.D.

Research Design: Case study, involving both organizational historical and responsive evaluation methodologies

Interviews: With +/- 5% of adults in community

Questions: cite important decisions; explain importance; name decision makers and influencers; factors aiding or hindering decisions; whether decisions

Findings: Six decisions were most commonly cited:

- Bond Issues (physical plant expansion or improvements)
- New American School Development Corporation Grant (three year, \$500,000 grant including training funds and ACOT computer hardware)
- Multi-Age groupings of students
- Math Computation (intervention with low math comp scores in some grades)
- New Principal Selection (community process informing board of needs and preference)
- Teachers' Association (less of a decision point than a political force)
- Also, two other decisions were pending: foreign language programs and technology links with neighboring school districts

Extension of the Study:

Three ithink® models were generated from the above data.

Figure 1. Model of leader and organizational stability.

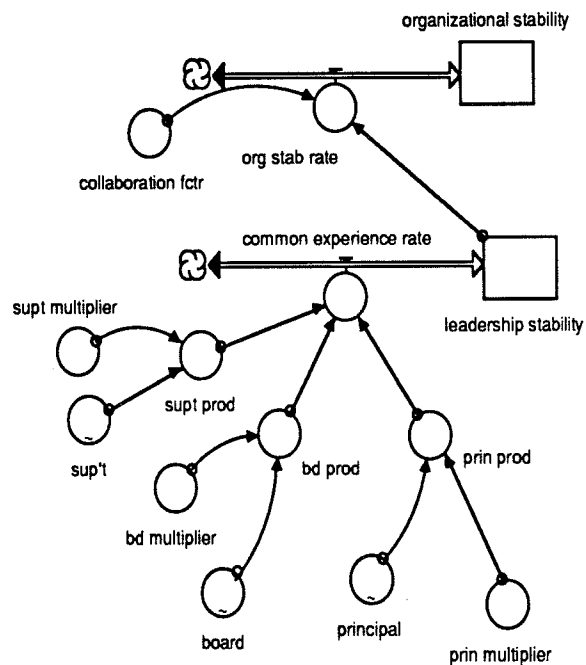


Figure 2. Model of teacher empowerment.

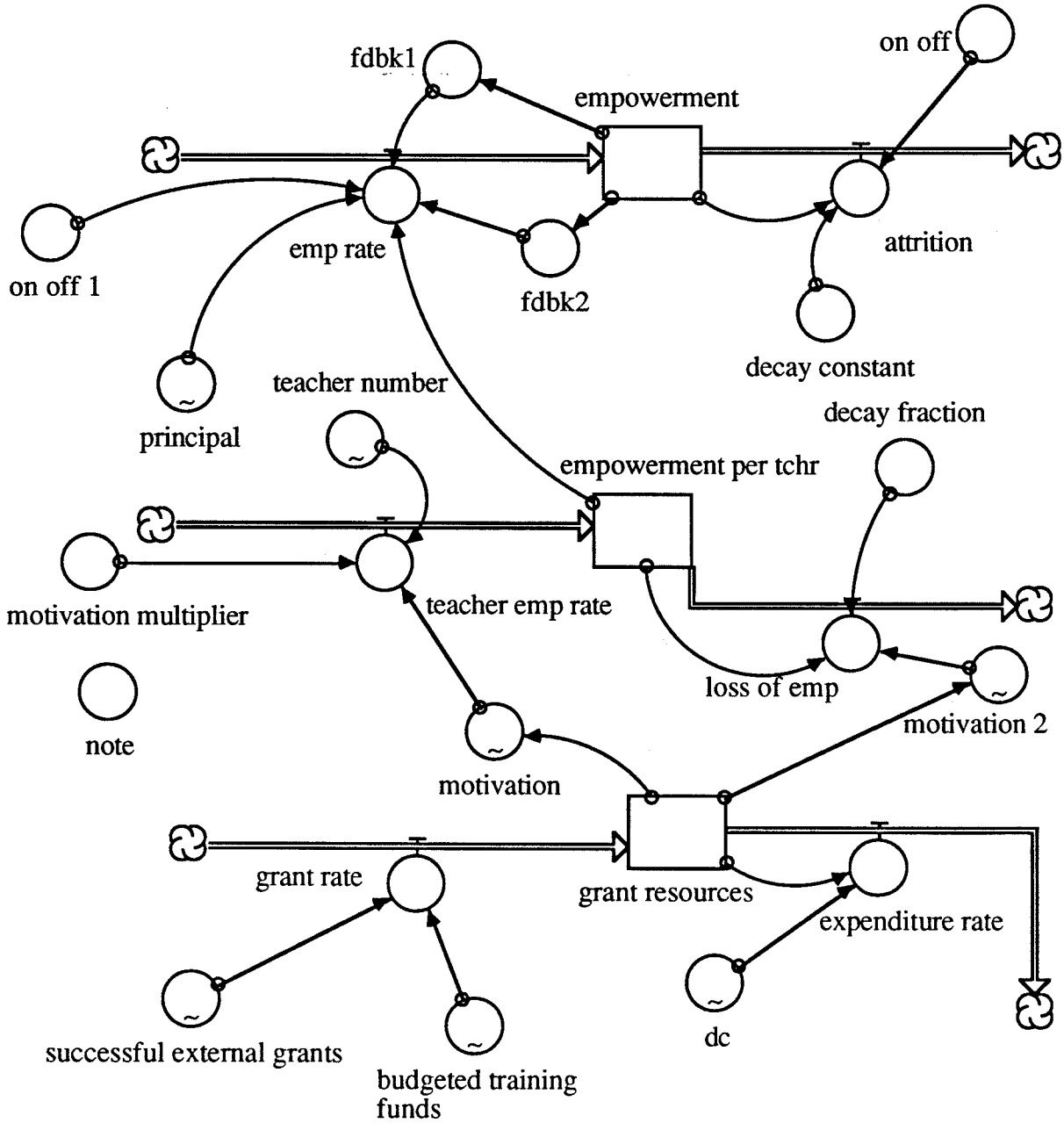


Figure 3. Model of Locus of Decisions: Composite.

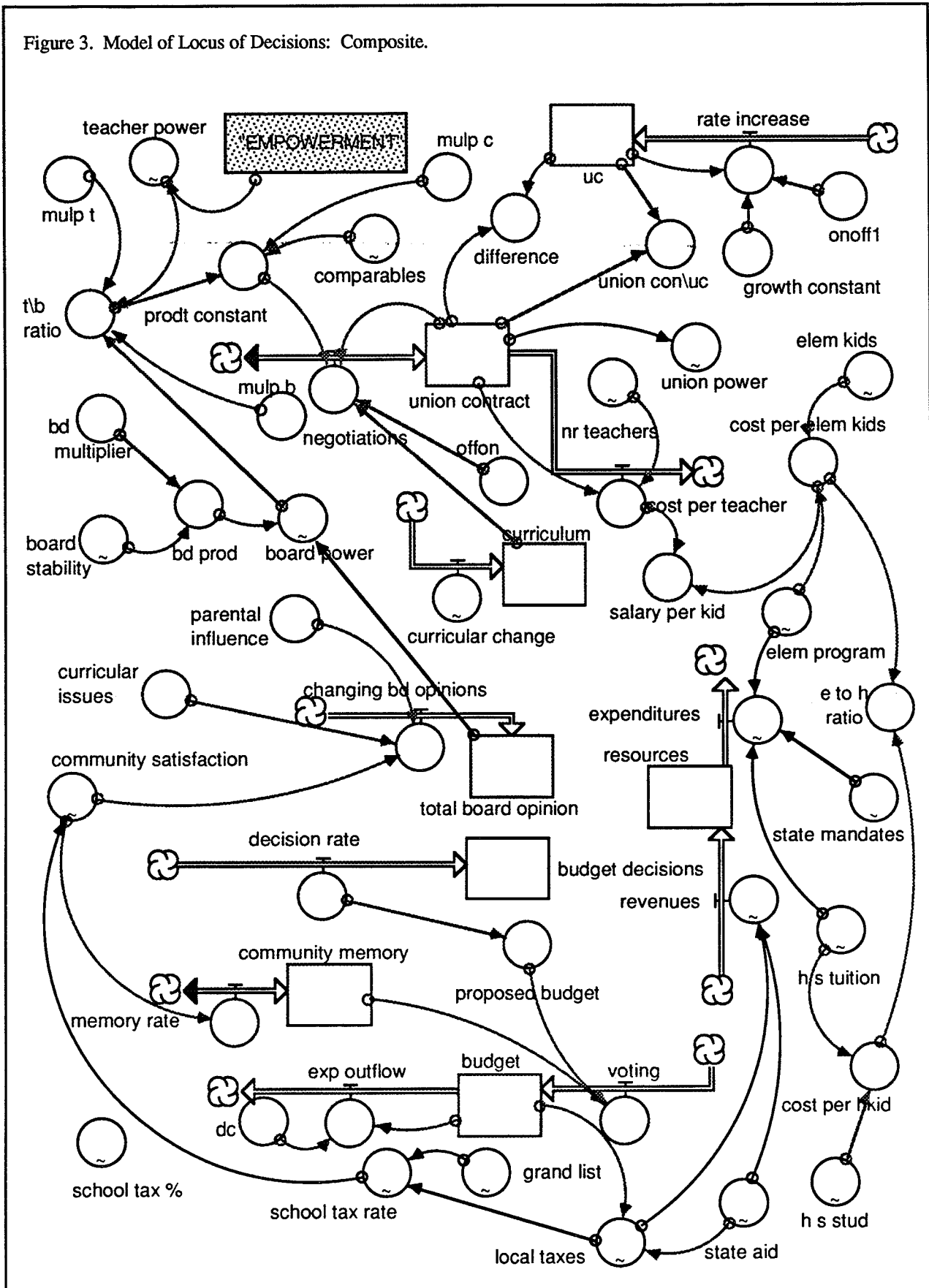


Figure 4. Teacher empowerment graph of empowerment, grant resources, and principal.

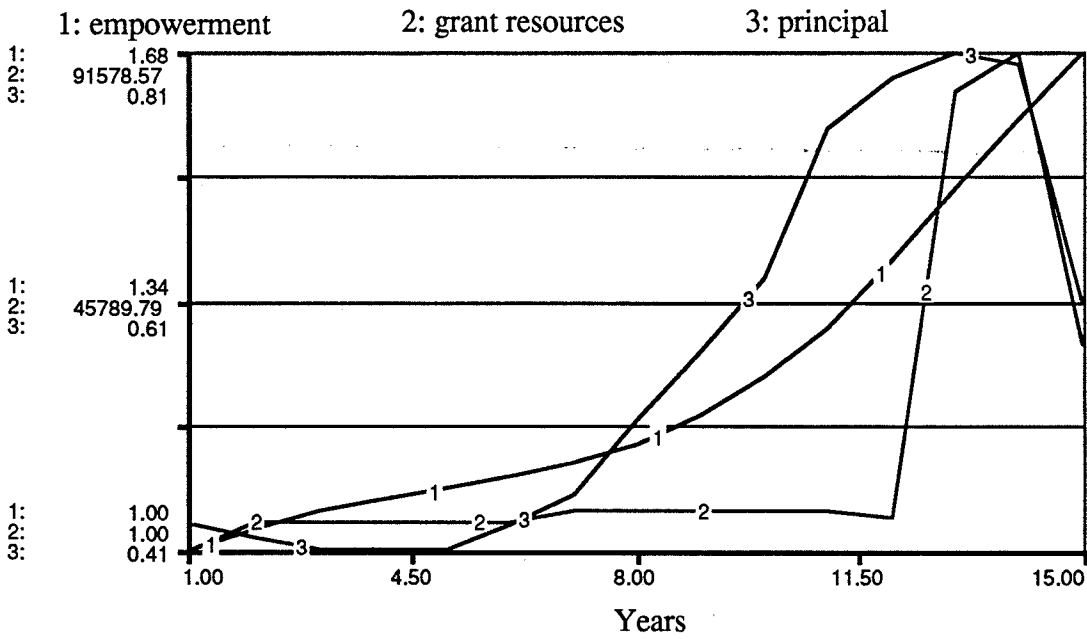


Figure 5. Graph of leader and organizational stability with board, principal, and superintendent products.

