



GALE MOTE ASSOCIATES

Training People, Inspiring Growth

Making the Right Decisions, the Right Way!

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A critical responsibility of being a manager is making decisions. It's what you get paid to do! Frequently, it's a driving reason behind why employees want the promotion: at last, the opportunity to steer the ship not just row the boat! Being decisive is a competence that is included in most

leadership effectiveness assessments. Learning how to make the right decisions in the right way is a skill that will serve you well in all aspects of your professional career and personal life.

The formula for effective decision making is quite simple:

$$\text{Effective Decision} = \text{Quality} \times \text{Acceptance}$$

An effective decision is a function of its quality (a good decision that resulted in a positive outcome) and the acceptance for that decision (key stakeholders rallied around the decision and implemented it with minimal resistance and maximum efficiency.)

It is interesting that most people believe that effective decisions must be based on consensus where everyone has input and agrees to support the direction of the manager and their peers. While it is essential in a team for members to weigh-in on a decision, buy-in doesn't necessarily require 100% consensus. If team members believe they have been heard, valued, and understood, they are more likely to move forward with a collective decision and not hold on to individual agendas. (Patrick Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*) Chris Musselwhite, EdD, President and CEO of Discovery Learning identifies five different decision making styles that reflect different levels of inclusion, ranging from less to more: directing, fact-finding, investigating, collaborating, and teaming. The appropriate style depends primarily on the situation and assessing the following factors that influence an effective decision:

Problem Clarity: How well do I understand the problem or issue in front of me? If I am not clear about the nature of the situation or what is contributing to the problem, a more inclusive style is required.

Information: Do I have all the critical information I need to make a good decision? If not, soliciting input from key stakeholders is warranted.

Goal Alignment: Is the team in agreement on the direction we are moving and the goals we need to achieve? If not, a

more directive style of decision making is required. If you work for consensus, you will waste precious time laying out the vision. A leader's job is to set the direction. Just do it!

Commitment: When it comes to implementation, does this situation demand compliance or commitment? If compliance is all that is required, a more directive style of decision making will suffice. If commitment is needed, you will need to get the input from key stakeholders so there is more ownership of the solution.

Time: Is time a critical factor? How urgent is the situation? Collaboration and teaming require more time to make the decision. If time is short, you may need to use a less inclusive style.

Musselwhite's research of managers who have completed the Decision Style Assessment™, finds that time and commitment were the two factors most commonly overlooked by managers in determining the appropriate style to use in making a decision. This implies that we sometimes waste precious time making decisions that really do not require a high level of resource investment and at other times, we fail to gauge how important buy-in is for long-term success. For more information on the decision style assessment tool, please visit their website at www.discoverylearning.com.

Another important factor in decision making is to clarify people's role in the process. Is my role to simply provide input or to make recommendations? Will someone else make the decision or do I have full authority to call the shots? What about the people who have to implement the decision? How do we create a successful "hand-off?" When commitment is required, it is always best for the doers to also be the deciders or at least have a critical voice in the process. These roles should be clarified and communicated at the beginning of the decision making process to avoid ambiguity, unclear boundaries, and hard feelings! As a leader, be sure to hold people accountable for the decisions that are their responsibility to make. World class rescuers are world class losers!

Lastly, it is essential that leaders build trust. General Peter Pace said, "What I have learned is that if you're collaborative when you can be, it builds trust, so that when you have to decide right now, folks are more likely to trust your decision." Build trust so that your team members know that you are always looking out for them and the organization when you make decisions. When you can't involve people, be sure to explain how and why you made the decision that you did. And when the decision is wrong, admit the mistake, share what you learned from the process, how you will work to prevent future errors, and get back on your horse! You can't stop making decisions!

It's your job!

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