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Making Strategic Decisions

Quotes

- "Whenever you see a successful business, someone once made a courageous decision"— *Peter F. Drucker*

- I would not waste my time in friction, when it could be in momentum."
  — *Frances Willard*

Decision Making

- Decision-making is a part of planning and is generally performed during or following meetings that discuss important issues.

- Decision-making is familiar to engineers with respect to their research, development, and production activities and generally has the following approach:
  - Problem definition,
  - Identification of limitations or boundary conditions,
  - Identification of potential solutions/approaches,
  - Analysis of possibilities and selection of the most suitable,
  - Implementation of the solutions selected, and
  - Evaluation and perhaps modification of the decision.

The appropriate decision is made by analysis and evaluation of opposing viewpoints, and by seeking opinions of those closest and most familiar with the technology involved.

Making Strategic Decisions

1. Technical leadership and management decisions are made in the same manner that technical decisions are made.

2. However, unpredictability that exists in decision-making by leaders is the "people" aspect (you and your team) due to the emotions, biases (known and unknown), and egos that are often involved.

3. A leader must recognise and hold back their own biases and emotional reactions to situations, and may need to step in to supply a calming voice when other team members display this behaviour.

4. To be effective, the leader has to have patience and acknowledge the emotional responses from team members but facilitate the discussion into the logical and deliberate phase.

5. The decision-making process must be characterised by open discussion. Although this seems obvious, leaders (as well as followers) sometimes have already decided what the outcome could be prior to beginning the discussion.

Factors Affecting Decision Making

Making Strategic Decisions

6. Communication with the team is especially critical to describe clearly how the decision-making process will take place.

7. Leaders can encounter several problems when contemplating a decision, and have to weigh up the pros and cons of the decision

8. A wrong or poorly thought out decision affects the entire team, not only one individual or one part of the project.

9. Fear of making a wrong decision often delays or extends the time invested, because leaders and followers seek additional information, even when little to no useful additional information is available.

10. Decisions are required in a timely manner

11. As stated concisely by Sir George Adrian Cadbury:

"Shelving hard decisions is the least ethical choice"

Decision Making : An Example

- ✓ An engineer at a small company has been solely responsible for the software used in the primary (extremely profitable) product sold by the company for several decades.

- ✓ He originally wrote the code and continually maintained and further developed and updated this code.

- ✓ Since he is now nearing retirement, company management attempted to manage this upcoming change by adding a person in this technical area to learn the software and eventually take overall responsibility.

- ✓ However, the engineer is resistant to working with anyone and alienated the first person assigned to work with him, and then later the second person assigned to work with him; both individuals quit within a year.

- ✓ How should the team leader address this situation to ensure continuity of this important product?

Decision Making : Suggested Solution

- ✓ This is a very difficult situation if the engineer refuses to work with anyone.

- ✓ His supervisor or team leader should have a serious conversation with him asking why he does not want to work with anyone, and be mindful to take any emotion or insecurity from the engineer into account- acknowledge this.

- ✓ This could be a matter of wanting to feel needed (if so, there may be other ways to satisfy that need), or needing income. Perhaps the engineer does not like the idea of someone else working on this project, or feels no one else could do as good a job as him.

- ✓ Perhaps appropriate incentives could be put in place to facilitate cooperation in training a new person.

- ✓ Perhaps he has not been presented with an individual with whom he felt a connection due to personality differences, or feeling that the person(s) selected indicated clearly that they wanted to change a number of aspects of the software approach.

- ✓ If he has not been invited to participate in the search to find an appropriate person, then the leader could consider the option of including the engineer in the search process.

Decision Making : Suggested Solution

✓ The leader should stress to him the need for mentors to ensure the engineer's and the company's legacy in this technical area (i.e. help calm his ego).

✓ If his attitude will not change, and none of the attempts to appease his concerns have been successful, then the leader will either need to assign him to a different position, or consider another approach;

✓ You do not want to create a scenario that generates anger from the engineer or that his efforts over the last few decades are not valued.

✓ This type of problem brings up a larger issue:

✓ The major lesson is that no-one should ever be the only person who knows the details of a specific part of an organisation's critical components (e.g. processes, hardware, software). Teams are important, and sharing of knowledge is critical.

Multiple – Choice and Short Answer Questions

Decision making is typically described as which of the following (select one only):
1. Deciding what is correct
2. Putting preferences on paper
3. Choosing among alternatives
4. Processing information to completion
5. All of the above

Discussion Question

After two meetings and numerous individual discussions, your team has unanimously decided that an employment offer should be extended to a new graduate who has interviewed with your team. Although the applicant appears technically well-qualified, you are quite uneasy because you do not feel that the applicant will be a team player and you sense a lack of initiative. You finally decide that you will not make an offer.

How do you effectively present and justify this decision to your team, who are keen to have a graduate start as soon as possible and felt that this candidate interviewed really well and meets the criteria of the role?