

Title:

Gaining Commitment Or Compliance From Your Team? Some guidelines for team decision making

Word Count:

966

Summary:

Ever thought about the best way of gaining commitment from your team? Try changing the method of decision making to suit the situation. This article suggests some simple, yet effective steps to take.

Keywords:

Motivated employees and employee feedback, team meetings, decision making, group decision making

Article Body:

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Rob worked as a qualified, but junior physiotherapist in a busy hospital. He along with three of his colleagues were asked by their manager to discuss amongst themselves how they would like their rosters to be organised (i.e. who would do what shifts etc.) and put forward their proposal. Rob and his colleagues were very happy with their final choices as they had considered all of their personal and professional needs and felt that their decision was the best for all. A day before the new rosters were to start, Rob found out by rumour during his lunch break that their roster recommendations were not to be implemented. Worse still, the rosters decided on by their manager did not suit any of the four. This decision by their manager resulted in a severe lowering of morale within the team and created a culture of mistrust with management. In future, they would be very wary of any suggestion from management.

Ever been a member of a work team where the manager threw a difficult problem over to the team to solve only to see the manager implement a completely different decision to that of the team? If the implemented solution affected the ongoing congruence and cohesiveness of the team, how did this make you feel? Why does this happen and is it a legitimate management strategy for group decision making?

Often this occurs because the manager does not understand the importance and nature of group decision making within teams. It can also occur because of the

manager's feeling of comfort with one particular style of group decision making irrespective of the circumstances or context of the problem.

Decision making within groups ranges on a continuum from "by the leader with little or no discussion" through to "complete consensus". Here are the stages along that continuum:

- By the leader with little or no discussion
- By the leader following group consultation
- By an "expert" (either within the group or advice received by the group)
- Averaging (e.g. using a mathematical process to assess options, then averaging)
- By a minority (can be through personal or positional power)
- By majority vote
- Consensus

Surprisingly, each has its place and can be a very successful method. As a manager, the method of group decision making you decide on, depends on whether you want commitment or compliance from your team. Of the seven methods, only "consensus" is most likely to produce commitment to the team decision. Using the other six methods will bring compliance (because you are the manager). Commitment will then depend on:

- How well you are perceived as a leader
- How effective (for all concerned) is the final decision

Much has been written by managerial experts about the "appropriateness" for managers to use consensus decision making in order to build staff morale. This is also supported by the study of jury decision making where it has been found that juries required to make unanimous decisions consider the evidence more carefully and thoroughly and report higher levels of juror confidence in the ultimate decision, than juries operating a majority verdict system (American Judicature Society http://www.ajs.org/jc/juries/jc_decision_research.asp)

Managers should also consider that although it generally takes a lot longer, consensus more often comes up with a better result. Again in the legal system,

a recent study of the difference between judges' opinions of the outcome of 48 trials (ranging from a day to five weeks duration) and the ultimate outcome decided by the actual juries using the consensus method, resulted in only three differences. (Law Reform Commission of NSW

http://www.ajs.org/jc/juries/jc_decision_research.asp)

However, if you do not need commitment, but merely compliance, then it can be legitimate and effective to choose a method other than consensus. Sometimes this may be necessary because of time, context or other pressures. For example, it would be inappropriate (and quite hazardous) for an army officer to hold a group consensus meeting with the troops on how to hold back the imminent approach of the enemy!

Irrespective of which decision making approach you adopt, the most critical point for managers to remember is:

"Always inform your team beforehand how the decision will be made."

For example, if you decide that in a particular case, this is your decision to make but you would like the input of your team in order to make an informed decision (by the leader following group consultation), say so. You will find that if you do this on all occasions, then the team will become more involved (and ultimately committed) to both the decision making process and the decisions themselves.

You should also consider what your preferred style of group decision making is and most importantly, how appropriate is it for the current situation. Think for a moment about the last 5 or 6 meetings you have run with your team where there was a critical decision to make. What style of decision making as a leader did you adopt? What style do you feel most comfortable with? My suggestion is to read the list again prior to each team meeting and decide at the outset what method you will adopt for this decision. This will prevent you from becoming locked into your natural or preferred method.

Above all, having decided on a method for this decision, stick with it. In the case of Rob's manager (whom I mentioned at the start of this article), we can all probably see that she adopted consensus as the most appropriate and effective method, but then changed her mind after the event. Initial commitment was certainly lost, grudging compliance was gained and my bet is that staff morale would be very low for some time to come.