

Are you a decisive or a divisive decision maker??

Every manager and leader has to make decisions – good ones make the right decisions most of the time. However, the way decisions are made and communicated can either lead to division and discord or to understanding and a commitment to making the decision ‘stick’.

Divisive Decision Makers

Divisive decision makers give the appearance of strength and speed. Every issue requiring a decision is quickly reviewed by the manager and a decision issued on the basis – ‘*I have decided we will do this*’, even if the manager does not need to be involved in the decision. Having made the decision, the manager then expects everyone to comply with his decision; dissent and alternatives are not tolerated (to do so would be a sign of weakness). This approach to decision making is loved by the media, they have an answer that slots into the 24x7 news cycle and from the media’s perspective it gets even better if the decision leads to controversy.



“My decisions are made after a complicated process of thought.”

The problems with divisive, leader centric, decision making include:

- The assumption the ‘leader knows best’
- The lack of any consensus – people are expected to do what they are told
- The lack of any commitment in the rest of the team to implementing the decision
- The likelihood the decision will stop being implemented the second the manager ‘looks away’ to focus on their next ‘important decision’

Unfortunately, in many situations being seen to be a ‘strong’, assertive decision maker is confused with being an effective decision maker. In many cases the divisive decision makers ego is intimately linked to being seen as a ‘strong decision maker’ and the decisions they make.

Decisive Decision Makers



A decisive decision maker looks to the outcome of the decision – they recognise making a decision is only one step along the road to a good outcome. They know they need others to collaborate if the decision is going to ‘stick’ and lead to the intended result. So rather than rushing into a divisive decision, the decisive decision maker takes a few seconds to think through the decision-making process, to determine the most effective way to reach a decision that is likely to be both the

best decision and one that ‘sticks’, the first things to consider are:

1. **How time urgent is the decision?** In an emergency the best option is for the decision maker to ‘issue an order’ and to use his/her authority to enforce the decision. However, the vast majority of decisions do not need an immediate answer (even if the media or a senior manager is asking for one ‘NOW!!!’). Where there is some time to decide, getting the best decision is a more valuable outcome. The difference between effective decision makers and divisive ones is the ‘divisive one’ will always put the appearance of decisiveness ahead of the need to make good decisions – PR ahead of performance.
2. **Who should make the decision?** The majority of decisions have some time available for the decision-making process, so the next key questions is: *Does the leader need to make the decision or does the leader need to facilitate a decision-making process?* Effective leaders know the best way to get their ‘teams’ buy-in to a decision is for the team to own the decision. The decisive decision maker is focused on getting the best decision possible by making use of the available time and the knowledge in their team. The leader’s role is to make sure the ‘right decision’ is reached within the ‘right timeframe’ by the ‘right people’ – this may, or may not, involve the leader in actually making the decision. A decisive decision maker is the person who makes sure the decision is made!
3. **How should the decision be made?** The final step is determining what is the best decision-making process to use in the current situation based on understand the type of decision required, ranging from resolving a simple problem¹, through to dilemmas and beyond².

Based on this quick analysis of the decision required the decisive leader is then in a position to direct the decision-making process towards arriving at a good, timely, and effective decision.

As with the divisive decision maker, they know that in almost every situation any decision is better than no decision and that a prompt decision is better than a delayed decision. But unlike the divisive decision maker the decisive decision maker does not need to be the ‘fountain of all decisions’, they let the right people make the decision and lets them take credit for their work. They use their authority to support an effective process, taking the actual decision-making role only when needed to get the best outcome.

The advantage of decisive decision-making is the leader uses the decision-making process to reinforce the team’s motivation and commitment to the overall project and to making the specific decision ‘stick’.

The decisive decision maker has one other key strength over most divisive decision makers. Because they focus on achieving the best outcomes, decisive decision makers are much better positioned to review and

¹ For more on **problem solving** see:
https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1013_Problem_Solving.pdf

² For more on **the types of decision** see:
https://www.mosaicprojects.com.au/WhitePapers/WP1053_Decision_Making.pdf



adapt any decision where later/better information shows an improvement or change is desirable. Decisive decision makers know the difference between 'dithering' and 'continually changing their mind' (the hallmarks of people who cannot make decisions) and making prudent changes to a decision based on changed circumstances, in fact the decision to change their decision is just another decision focused on achieving the best outcome. Unfortunately, divisive decision makers tend to see any change to a decision they have made as a threat to their credibility as a decision maker; with personal ego at stake, admitting there is now a better option is difficult.

Summary

All effective leaders must make decisions – good ones are decisive, not divisive. Decisive leaders do not make 'quick decisions' (unless they are needed) and don't seek unnecessary fanfares to announce their decisions. They work with their team to make sound decisions in an appropriate timeframe that are generally acknowledged as leading to a 'good outcome' that will 'stick'.

Divisive decisions made quickly by the leader and imposed on everyone, even if there is no time pressure, may make the manager look 'strong' and boost his ego, but can easily lead to suboptimal decisions that undermine team consensus and without the support of the team, many of the decisions will not 'stick'.

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