TEAM THINK – HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP

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DEFINITION OF AN ORGANISATION

A group of people coming together to *make decisions* to act or not act in pursuit of purpose.

That's it. That is all. That is what an organisation is.

Therefore, your decisions and those of your people define you and your organisation's success.

THE PROBLEM

Just as most people think they are good drivers, most people think they are good decision makers and everyone else has a problem. This is nowhere more in evidence than when a joint decision is required. While it might be easy for a family to agree on Europe as the next destination for a holiday, things become more difficult when it comes to agreeing on which countries to visit and which regions or cities within those countries and how long to spend in each. Then you arrive and must agree on what to do each day! We have all experienced it.

The same kinds of problems arise with team decisions; even though a team leader may have a final say, a lot happens along the way that can influence the decision made.

Research shows that too much time is wasted on decision making and that the bigger and more complex the decision, the less often teams get it right. Which means it should come as no surprise that research shows the best organisations are good at decision making.

DECISION FLOW

The aim of decision making is to create value or protect it. Which means, you need to focus on good decision making throughout your organisation or, as I call it, *decision flow* or simply *flow*.

Flow is about both quality of decision making and speed of decision making to create an agile organisation. The core elements are required to create

Figure 1: Decision Flow
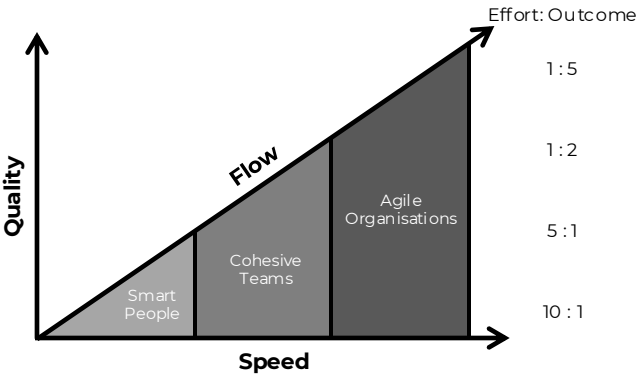
decision flow are smart people and cohesive teams **(see figure 1).**

Cohesive teams are clear on purpose, work creatively to achieve goals and communicate with a level of synchronicity that ensures good communication for decision making. The results are compelling decisions the team will support with verve **(see figure 2).** Great leaders build cohesive teams!

Figure 2: **Quality of Team Decisions**

| PURPOSE	TALENT	CONNECTION	DECISIONS
Clarity	Creators	Synchronous	Compelling
Clearing	Playmakers	Connected	Constructive
Cloudy	Toilers	Attached	Clunky
Blurry	Plodders	Siloed	Crippling

TEAM LEADERS DESIGN TEAM SUCCESS

My years of researching decision making, along with my experience as a chemical engineer of mapping complex chemical manufacturing processes as diagrams on a page, through to my work with clients developing decision support tools have led me to understand the key three things you need to focus on to create flow in your organisation **(see figure 3):**

1. a method to *categorise* decisions so they can be handled differently as appropriate

2. being diligent in the *design* of your optimum decision landscape to promote and support flow

3. ensuring the *veracity* of your decision support tools.

Figure 3: **Team Leaders Need to Design Their Team's Success**

CRITICALITY
+
DESIGN
+
VERACITY
=
FLOW
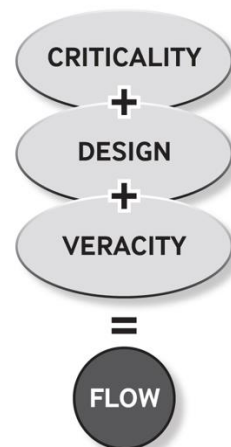
Categorisation

Long before me, business gurus like Bezos and Branson and consulting powerhouses like McKinsey and complexity guru David Snowden have all devised systems of decision categorisation. Allow me to introduce you to my four categories:

- *Empowered.* Staff are able to make decisions quickly, for themselves, and move on.
- *Controlled.* Staff are able to make decisions following clearly defined guidelines or more rigid controls.
- *Probed.* Information is uncertain and we need to dig further as time allows.
- *Analysed.* Decisions of higher risk with plenty of information to consider.

Design

Once decisions are categorised, they can be triaged and processed. However, cohesive teams are absolutely clear on who makes and how decisions in each category are made. Research shows that in the absence of an agreed methodology, team members develop their own mental models of the decision process and seldom are two people's models the same. As a team leader you will need to ensure everyone is on the same page and so you need to be diligent in the design of your decision landscapes.

Veracity

You and I know that our decision making is not perfect. While your brain is highly effective, it can always do with a little help when things get exceedingly complex. There is a range of decision support tools you can utilise from decision trees, to data models. You need to be proficient in determining which tools for which situation. Much is common sense, and the rest comes with experience and collaboration with others.

HIGH PERFORMANCE - LEADING YOUR TEAM

There are many sources of individual and team bias that can affect team decision making. Organisational bias is the way culture and organisational design can affect how decisions are made and how they are implemented. There is also the bias of individuals on teams and what is often called noise in decision making. Noise is the inconsistency in which you or your team members make decisions because of things as simple as swings in mood from one day to the next, social influences as well as more complex factors like *dichotomies* and d*iffering value scales*.

- *Dichotomies.* If conflicting opinions are not managed through a constructive conversation, people will tend to defend their position more and more strongly, to the point of extremism. Consider US politics in recent years.

- *Different scales.* We both believe a piece of information is significant, but one of us feels it overrides other factors while the other does not. Our scales of 'highly insignificant' to 'highly significant' are simply different. We establish risk criteria so when someone calls a risk 'high' it has to reflect the criteria.

How you deal with tackling these constraints on effective team decision making is in a very large part up to you. First, you are subject to the same potential affects of organisational and personal bias and noise. You must be attentive to decision hygiene.

First up, not all decisions should be made by you. Sometimes you need to let the team decide. This could be via majority view or team consensus (if you are lucky). Or it is smart to let a team member make the call as they have most to lose and the team has most to gain.

Second, are you or the team answering the right question. It's not always the case. Sometimes we let what drives us to block our sight of the real question to answer. You should also remember that team environment can adversely affect your drivers. They can put you and your team at risk of not living up to the values you set yourselves. Pressure is a good but sometimes damaging state to be under.

There are also a range of idiosyncrasies that affect your team's decision making. From the team being locked in on the first opinion, in particular when it is the team leaders. There is also the phenomenon of team members not sharing information because they don't think it is relevant or because they don't like where the decision is going. And the amplification pitfall when something is mis-represented in error or mis-understood and the error is built on.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

As you know and perhaps appreciate in a different way, team decision making is complex. High performing leaders need to be cognisant of it and lead their team through its complexities and the complex world we operate in. I encourage you to explore more on this topic. Perhaps you might grab a copy of my book *Team Think – How Teams Make Great Decisions* (Amazon Best Seller 2024). Perhaps you will get in touch to have a chat about building high-performance leaders in your organisation.

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