



## Levels of Decision Making in the Workplace

By Jane Weddle

Every day at work we are faced with decisions to be made. Leaders are faced with many issues when making decisions and employee perception plays a big role in the outcome of those decisions.

How are your decisions made in your workplace? Workplace experts say that taking time to gather employee input can be worth the effort. Evidence has shown that productivity increases with decisions that are made with employee input. It has been my experience over the years that one key issue with decision making is that others are often not aware of the level of decision making the leader chose to use or that the leader isn't aware of what level of decision making they are gravitating towards when needing to make a decision. I have been approached by workers at all levels with statements like:

"My manager asked me what I thought and then went a totally different direction"

"Leadership asked us to make the decision and instead of going with our recommendation they chose a different alternative"

"My team always seems to show little or not buy in to my decisions"

"I empowered them to make the decision and then couldn't do it - so I decided"

I am sure you have heard similar statements in your workplace. It has been my experience in working with teams that many times the leader has not clearly defined what level of decision making they are using or have taken the time to share what level they are about to use for a particular decision and communicate it to the team. It has also been my experience that leaders often don't take time to evaluate decisions to get an idea what % of decisions are being made and at what level. Another key factor is making sure you and your team have the skills and knowledge to contribute to effective decision making efforts.

### **The Five Levels of Decision Making**

You will see that with each level the amount of time and the level of involvement increases.

#### **Level One: Leader makes the decision alone & announces.**

This level takes little time and no involvement. This is used especially in emergency situations where immediate action is critical. Input is not helpful, quick action and immediate compliance is what counts. Unfortunately, some leaders use this level when there isn't an emergency and more time could be taken to involve others and to use another Decision Making Level.

**Level Two: Leader gathers input from individuals and decides.**

The leader seeks input, usually to cover blind spots and enhance their depth of understanding around the issue to be decided. Key individuals hold important information and not consulting them would be foolish.

**Level Three: Leader gathers input from team and decides.**

Leader holds a team meeting and solicits input from the team listens to the team's ideas and then takes that information and decides.

**Level Four: Consensus building.**

At this level the leader is part of the team and he/she is just one vote/voice among many. The group processes all the decisions involved, compromises positions until everyone is in agreement. Consensus is reached when everyone feels at least 70% comfortable with the decision, feels like their thoughts and opinions have been heard and everyone agrees to stand behind the decision 100%.

**Level Five: Consensus and delegates with criteria/constraints.**

Leader fully delegates the decision to the team and is not a part of the decision making discussions. This level requires the leader to be very clear with the team as to what are the criteria/constraints that must be met for their decision to be able to move forward! Failure to meet that criteria could result in the team being sent back to the drawing board or the leader choosing a fall back option" and utilize another level for moving the decision forward.

**What is fall back option": Within the levels of decision making the "fall back option" is used by the leader when the team can't reach consensus and they need to get involved for certain reasons. I recommend to leaders that they make the team aware of the "fall back option" prior the process. Leaders also need to make sure they don't use it too quickly!**