

The Decision Making Matrix Web and How Senior Management Can Untangle their Organizations

The Matrix.

No, not the popular movie and all its accompanying sequels.

The matrix is what participants who attend the leadership development classes I facilitate call how they commonly have to get work done, through a labyrinth of internal and external business partners. With the continued removal of layers of middle-management in many organizations, productivity today is achieved in large part by people working with many others with whom they have no direct reporting relationship.

Without the hierarchy that existed in many organizations just a few years ago, making things happen that drive the bottom line is more complex than it ever has been. Adding to this complexity is the mind-boggling refusal of most senior leaders (i.e. senior directors, vice presidents, general managers, on up) to relinquish control and allow people who work in the matrix and report to them to make key decisions that bring in revenue or contain costs.

You would think that fewer layers would mean more, not less, decision-making authority. The reverse, however, seems to be happening. Senior leaders disallow those who work in the matrix, and who are closest to the business, from making decisions that they have the talent, skill, and desire to make, not to mention, get paid to make!

Examine these very telling comments that form a common theme that I hear in consulting with companies in various industries:

- “The organization is suffocating it’s people”
- “I can’t be strategic”
- “My job has become tactical, and I make a lot of money”
- “So and so (i.e. senior leader) has to approve every decision we make”

Does it have to be this way? What can senior leaders do to untangle the matrix decision-making web? Here are some suggestions:

- ✓ Before, during and after re-organizations, senior management needs to have discussions with those reporting to them about a reprioritization of projects and work in general. People who remain after reorganizations are probably doing the

work of two or three people. There has to be functions and tasks that no longer have to or should be done, or no longer done in the same manner. Some things need to be emphasized, while others de-emphasized or eliminated all together. Senior leaders need to rely on their people more to help them decide what needs to be done, and how it gets done

- ✓ Delegate, Delegate, Delegate decision-making. Senior managers should think of the many benefits delegating has for them and the organization:
 - You provide opportunities for your direct reports to grow and develop in their positions, possibly grooming them for positions of higher authority
 - Greater exposure for direct reports to senior leaders, which not only boosts their confidence and self-esteem, it could move them closer to realizing their goals of seeking other opportunities. It also provides them the recognition they deserve
 - You are seen as a people developer, which is a great legacy to have that elevates your standing with your management. People will want to work for you if they know they will grow and develop under your leadership. You attract the best people, which should translate into greater business results for your functional area
 - Your people become more self-sufficient thinkers, better creative problem-solvers, and move closer to the corporate holy grail of being innovative. When they come to you with an issue, they are more likely to have thought through a solution, as opposed to “dumping” the issue in your lap and expecting you to solve it for them
 - To the last point, you spend more of your time on the highest-level strategic decisions and not consumed with those that your people have the ability to make

- ✓ LET GO! Trust your people, coach and guide them as they make decisions.

Working in the fast-paced, do-more-with-less, matrixed work environment today can be stressful enough. Senior leaders can remove some of the stress by following the suggestions above. Help untangle the matrix decision-making web before it strangles your organization!

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