

Team Building and Consensus Decisions

DFL Lesson– Faculty Guide

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PURPOSE

In this lesson we will look at the necessity for Senior Leaders to use outside sources to reach solutions to highly consequential problems. This can be an unnerving idea to a senior officer who here-to-fore has been in charge and control of all the assets he or she needs to make decisions. However, positional power alone will normally not suffice to reach solutions to problems in the interagency or coalition setting. The sheer complexity and serious consequences of decisions senior leaders face dictate the use of specialized teams and ad-hoc staffs. This class will introduce the student to the concepts of team building and the importance of reaching consensus in highly consequential decisions.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE COURSE

This class will build on previous lessons in the competencies block, especially Critical Thinking and Executive Decision Making. Critical decision skills and executive decision making skills are an important foundation to building teams and reaching consensus. This class will lead directly into the next two IPs where students will build on their knowledge to face the consequences of failing to reach consensus: having to conduct negotiations. They will learn in this IP that knowing how to pick the right people and solicit consensus to reach a favorable decision, up front, will preclude longer and more drawn out negotiations later.

DESIRED LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Determine when and how to establish and employ decision making teams to reach effective solutions.
2. Comprehend how executive teams can contribute to effective strategic issue formulation, and how strategic leaders can foster a climate conducive to teams reaching complex decisions.
3. Understand why effective senior leaders seek diversity and encourage disagreement.
4. Understand the essential elements of consensus decision making and develop a working model for high performing teams.

READINGS:

1. Managing Strategic Decision Making. (**Caution: this IP does contain an Owen Jacobs article...you just thought you were finished with him!**) This reading is chapter eight from Jacob's book, *Strategic Leadership: The Competitive Edge*. His premise is, strategic leaders in isolation rarely make highly consequential decisions. The issues filling the decision space are so complex that one individual alone rarely can encompass them all. The unanticipated second/third/fourth order effects (ripple effects) are so great that prudent decision-makers test and fine-tune their proposed solutions with advisors before implementing them. The quality of the decision will strongly depend on the quality of these advisors, their commitment and

relationship to the leader (decision maker) and their relationship with one another the extent to which they have formed into a real team with shared commitment to a common purpose. A hierarchy of decision processes describes Vrooms' five levels for decision making which tells the student how leaders "decide to decide" and is found on p. 197. The movie will show examples of this hierarchical process.

To achieve effective team decision making leadership, Jacobs describes a **Consensus Team Decision-Making (CTDM) model** which has **three key pillars**: maintain a high conceptual level, strive toward consensus and manage the decision making process. There are problems with this model and challenges to achieving consensus, such as highly politicized situations that create high levels of distrust, and if the decision sought would result in the elimination of an agency or department represented by one of the team members.

2. *World Class Teams: Working Across Borders*. Brawley, McDermott and Waite's article concerns shaping the raw material (talent) to make a team and considering the dynamics of team membership. How do you choose members? What roles do you intend for them to play? What competencies do they need at the outset, and which ones can be developed later? How do you keep them working together toward a common purpose, vice a personal one? The article gives a listing of basic team competencies (page 209), addresses team roles & processes, and discusses who should be involved in team selection. This is a good companion article for the movie, and I think you will see good examples used by President Kennedy; i.e., purposefully selecting an ad-hoc team to handle the Cuban missile crisis, wanting the most experience and diversity possible on his team (the EXCOM), and wanting (demanding) to hear all opinions.

3. *Decision Making: It's Not What You Think*. Mintzberg & Westley write that managers should supplement the rational "thinking first," model of decision making with two other models: "seeing first" and "doing first" There are advantages to combining all three approaches within an organization: namely, flexibility for the decision maker.

"Thinking first" is science and our most conventional way to make decisions. It works best when the issue is clear, the data reliable and the world structured; when thoughts can be pinned down and discipline applied, as in an established production process. It is verbal and depends on facts.

"Seeing first" is an art, necessary when many elements have to be combined into creative solutions and when commitment to those solutions is key, as in much new-product development. It is visual and deals with ideas.

"Doing first" is a craft, preferred when the situation is novel and confusing and things need to be worked out, as is often the case in a new industry. It is visceral and relies on experiences.

You should note this article directly relates back to the last lesson on Executive Decision Making (IP 6207). Seeing first (an art) and doing first (a craft) relate back to the Hayashi article "When to trust your Gut." "Thinking first" reinforces the Murray article, "Making Defense Decisions" and the scientific structured way of making decisions.

4. *Leadership on the Line: John F. Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis* is a short paper that condenses the facts of the crisis and will give you more background to understand the movie. Notable nuggets include: JFK deliberately used an ad-hoc team, assembled the best he could find and wanted different inputs & views (sounds just like Colon Powell, doesn't it?); he managed the team process well; he maintained control over the situation; he got past parochialism and acted for the good of the nation; he allowed the opposition (Khrushchev & the Soviets) the opportunity to "save face". This last nugget, saving face, is a negotiating strategy you should remember to carry over to the next IP.
5. The last reading is a chart borrowed from ICAF that may be a quick and useful guide for assessing teams.

TEACHING STRATEGY

The movie "Thirteen Days" concerning the Cuban missile crisis will be shown in Jones auditorium. This movie was well received by the students last year, and while we would like to have shown it in seminar, recent technical difficulties between AU and the AWC preclude it. While we want to focus on the movies' excellent examples of team building dynamics and reaching consensus in highly consequential decisions (we were on the brink of Nuclear war), you will see effective negotiation examples and strategies used that can carry over into our next IP, "Negotiating." I will make reference to them here. You may want to make note of these and use them during the later negotiating class to reinforce the guest speaker and readings.

Tom Hall will do the introductory remarks for the movie from the stage in Jones during the first five minutes of class. At this time, I expect he will stress to the students not to get sidelined and critique the movie and to ignore some obvious historical inaccuracies and "theatrics." For example, nobody from the White House would ever call a U2 pilot or ship Commander directly, and the presidents' advisor (Kevin Costner) would never address the president with such poor deportment. Concentrate on the decision-making processes used by President Kennedy and his crisis management team, the "EXCOM" (Executive Committee) and the negotiation techniques involved, especially during the UN debates. The movie will give excellent examples of team building and consensus decision making, with the added value of negotiation vignettes (see below scene descriptions...these are but a few). These same concepts can be seen today with the Bush administrations' handling of the 9-11 terrorist attack on the US. For example, conducting "shadow negotiations" and implementing the "strategic levers" and "power" and "process" moves described in Kolb and Williams' articles, especially with Pakistan and against the Taliban. There will be a ten-minute break programmed into the movie at roughly the half way point.

Some excellent teaching points from the movie include, in chronological order:

Scene. Bobby Kennedy chosen by the President to be the Team Leader of the "Executive Committee" (EXCOM). The President maintains final decision authority. President Kennedy's crisis team discusses possible options. Strong opinions from the team (SECSTATE, Dean Rusk; former SECSTATE, Dean Atchison; SECDEF Robert McNamara; CJCS Maxwell Taylor; and Gen Curtis Lemay) push for immediate decisive military attack before the Cuban missiles

become operational (Mintzberg & Westley – “doing first” concept). US Ambassador to the UN Adali Stevenson suggests an alternative: give up Guantanamo Naval Base and our (US) missiles in Turkey (Mintzberg & Westley – “seeing first”). **Teachable Points:** Senior Leader staying in control of the team decision making process, giving consideration to all sides, striving for (demanding) consensus in highly consequential decision making, handling team conflict, recognition of powerful sub-elements/agendas in team members that can disrupt the group goal. These are Level IV - V decisions on the hierarchy of decision processes discussed in the Jacobs’ article.

Scene. Another meeting of the crisis team prior to the President addressing the nation for the first time. As the ultimate decision maker (and decision ratifier in negotiating terms) of the team, his body language continues to reflect calm even while under enormous stress. **Teachable Point:** Maintain outward composure to ensure confidence within the team (and the country). While teams give you options, the senior leader must make the final decision (a level IV decision).

Scene. President Kennedy leaves a crisis meeting and gives instructions to his Special Assistant for Political Affairs, Kenny O’Donnell (Kevin Costner). The President uses him as his “Trusted Agent” to report directly to him on the process of EXCOM’s negotiating and consensus decision efforts. **Teachable Points:** This is more a negotiation technique, but is valuable on obtaining feedback on how team members are performing. This scene shows the use of a trusted agent to keep watch on the process of negotiations and advise the chairman/decision maker when the “game plan” is not staying on track or in need of reevaluation in light of the opposition’s moves. The “Trusted Agent” is a process observer that operates independently from the negotiation team leader (the Attorney General, Bobby Kennedy) and is a “second set of eyes” during negotiations and team deliberations, reporting directly to the team leader and decision maker (the President).

Scene. United Nations debate. The Cubans and Russian Ambassador Zorin are lambasting the United States. Some members of President Kennedy’s decision making team (the Attorney General and the Political Advisor) are strongly urging the president to remove Adali Stevenson at the last moment in favor of someone seemingly more aggressive to carry on the Security Council debate. **Teachable Points:** Team building and negotiating psychology and how to select team members (remember the MBTI!). Know your team member’s strengths and weaknesses. Show trust and confidence in their abilities. Know more about the other side’s position than they know about yours. Keep an “ace in the hole” for bargaining (Stevenson “baits” Ambassador Zorin and then displays classified recon photos, instantly destroying his credibility). Don’t let your chief negotiator become rattled by personal attacks by the other side, and more importantly, don’t let him get blind-sided/surprised (i.e., by satellite photos).

Scene. A soviet spy, Alexander Poulin, approaches the US with an overture allegedly from Khrushchev: Russia removes missiles from Cuba, US pledges not to invade. The President ponders: Is this a trick? Is it actually from the KGB or Politburo? Why are they doing this? Ultimately, he goes with “my gut tells me this is a good offer.” **Teachable Points:** Advisors/teams give recommendations; the leader has to make (and ultimately be responsible for) the decision (a level IV decision). The value of “instinct” in decision making. This again relates directly back to the last lesson on Decision Making and the Hayashi article, “When to

Trust Your Gut.” It also displays the psychology of negotiations with the use of back-channel messages or couriers to break stalemates in talks (you will learn about this in the next lesson).

Scene. Finally, at the 11th hour, the president has his Team Chief (Bobby Kennedy) see Russian ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. At the last moment, Bobby Kennedy plays his last concession: giving up US missiles in Turkey. A deal is struck at last averting open hostilities. **Teachable points:** Most of these points will carry over into the next IP on Negotiation. Knowing the other teams’ members. The value of trust built between negotiators. Knowing your Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA) and Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BATNA) (we will learn about these concepts in the next lesson...in this case, no agreement would lead to war).

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why are strategic decision teams necessary for effective strategic decisions? Time constraints may overwhelm one person’s conceptual ability. At the strategic level, the issues filling the decision space are so complex that one individual alone rarely can encompass them all. A variety of disciplines and expertise will produce a richer variety of decision options. You get more diversity of opinion, which will lead to a better decision than one individual can achieve alone.
2. How does the strategic leader effectively build, employ, and control executive decision teams? Determine if the team is needed for part-time or full-time employment. Merge a variety of functions, specialties, competencies and cultures...the greater the diversity, the greater the potential for creative collaboration and a higher quality decision. Define team roles and responsibilities. Control the team with a defined charter and goals, then directly and/or indirectly observe the process.
3. How is conflict managed within decision making teams at the strategic level? By setting a common vision and agreed objectives and establishing roles and expectations. Build a strong sense of team identity. Work to integrate new members. Emphasize objectivity and establish buy-in for the greater good, vice parochial views of the separate organizations. By knowing when to get directly involved and when to stay away. Manage the tension tolerance of the group.
4. What are the fundamental concepts and issues to consider in achieving consensus? Consensus is problem solving that is open to creative new possibilities, with an atmosphere where all people and views are heard. Unanimity is desirable, but not required. The general principal of consensus is that the decision process should be shared with those who are going to be impacted by the decision, especially is the decisions are consequential and those who are going to be impacted must also be the implementers.
5. Why is reaching consensus necessary for a senior leader in the joint/interagency arena, and what barriers exist to achieving it? Highly consequential decisions always have second/third order effects (ripples) that impact others’ budgets, personnel, time or resources (opportunity costs) and will require acceptance and commitment to ever get implemented. Barriers exist the second you step outside your organization or that which you immediately control. Obtaining a shared commitment to a common purpose, especially when that purpose may not be in your

organizations best interest, is hard to obtain. Everyone has his or her own organizational bias and agenda...some decisions will be highly politicized, which will create distrust.

SUMMARY

Do not get sidetracked on discussions of the few historical inaccuracies in the video (forget Kevin Costner – nobody has that much personal power over a president except his wife! It wasn't Lemay that told the President "He was in a fix..." but Marine Corps Commandant General David Shoop).

The take-aways from this IP are:

The importance of using other resources to make high-level, highly consequential decisions. Highly consequential decisions are better made with multiple inputs;

Understanding the principals of team building and consensus decision making is critical to senior level leadership;

When personal persuasion fails to gain a favorable decision, then knowing how to establish a capable team is imperative to reaching consensus. When consensus is not gained, more painful and time-consuming negotiation follows!