

Decision making at the top: the all-star sports catalog division essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Objective:

To decide the course of action to be taken for improving the cross functional communication and coordination between the top decision makers of All-Sport Catalog Division.

Case Facts:

Don Barrett, president of All- Star Sports Catalog Division, which dealt in catalog selling of sports goods, hired a consultant to study his staff's strategic decision making process. His objective was to improve his organization's ability to identify and exploit the strengths of the division's businesses and to get effective cross-functional communication and coordination out of his team.

The company had recently shifted to a functional organizational structure and the General Managers, the former owners of acquired firms were appointed as Vice Presidents for each division.

Don Barrett had a diverse team of 12 members, who had the expertise as well as the values and culture to drive the company successfully. It comprised of both senior as well as junior level members with varied backgrounds like entrepreneurs, financial and strategic planning, human resource etc. Don Barrett's team found him to be a good listener and willing to accept challenges.

Their decision making process consisted of two hour meetings on Mondays, where all the 13 members met and spent the first one hour discussing and

reviewing issues, updating each other on key projects and presentations about new plans. The second half was spent on in-depth discussion of a particular topic. The stages of decision making followed were framing the problem, identifying the alternatives, analyzing the alternatives, making the choice and finally ratifying the choice. For most decisions, a thorough analysis of the alternative was carried out.

Hindrances:

Apart from diverse backgrounds, the decision making techniques of the team were also varied; some relied on instinct and experience, while the others used analytical approach for decision making. Moreover, their speeds of decision making were also different. The team members could not connect to each other and apart from framing the problem, the rest of the steps of decision making was followed in subgroups consisting mostly of senior members with relevant experience to contribute. Finally, for the last stage, ratifying the choice, the subgroup would present their recommendations to the staff at one of the weekly meetings. The recommendation was then either accepted or change was suggested.

Apart from this, though Barrett was open to ideas from his team, all his team members did not participate actively in the discussions. Moreover, there was no policy to resolve conflicts and in such a case the issue was taken offline. Barrett was a non confrontational and in case of conflicts, encouraged to take the disagreement offline. To top it all, it was taking a long time to

overcome some of the team members' affiliations to the business units where they worked.

The members felt that Don Barrett's style and the size of the group was a hindrance in the Decision Process.

To improve their decision process, the consultant suggested three alternatives:

1. Engage the staff in more " team oriented" approach to decision making.
2. Formally establish a smaller " top management team", consisting of only three to four key staff members, to chart the division's strategic direction.
3. Fine tune the existing process by changing the group's rules and norms.

Evaluation of the alternatives given:

1. Engage the staff in more " team oriented" approach to decision making.

By following this approach, all sub-groups and offline meetings would be eliminated. The team would understand the rationale for a particular and hence conflicts would be minimized.

However, the problem of the group being too large will not be eliminated, and thus the problem of low participation will still persist.

2. Formally establish a smaller " top management team", consisting of only three to four key staff members, to chart the division's strategic direction.

Here the problem of large group is eliminated but a smaller top management team may inhibit the integration and commitment of the organization as key managers would be left out of the decision process.

3. Fine tune the existing process by changing the group's rules and norms.

This looks like a plausible alternative, but it still does not solve the problem of a large team which the members are not able to handle.

Recommendations:

To have a more efficient decision making process at the top level, All Star Sports Catalog Division (ASC), needs to handle both its problems, the size of the decision making team and the sub-grouping of the members, simultaneously.

Hence, for getting effective cross-functional communication and coordination among team members, the following suggestions are recommended:

1. Downsizing of the decision making team. Junior members who are already reporting to some senior team members should not be involved in the top decision process. (Exhibit 1)
2. A copy of the issues to be discussed at the meeting be made available to all the members well before the meeting is scheduled.
3. A formal team building workshop be arranged for the remaining top decision makers.

Pros:

1. The problem of forming subgroups is eliminated.
2. Active participation is encouraged as it's a smaller team now.
3. The top decision making team now has more number of senior members and they are the ones who prefer working in teams.
4. The time required to take a decision is reduced as with a pre delivered draft, the members can come prepared with their suggestions thus eliminating the step of framing the problem and reducing the time required for identifying alternatives.
5. The team size has not been considerably reduced thus there is still enough participation from all the spheres of the organization.
6. The team building exercises will help the members to get to know each other and be more comfortable around each other. This will not only increase active participation but also make them understand each other better.
7. The seniors' expectations don't change so frequently so the process is smoother.