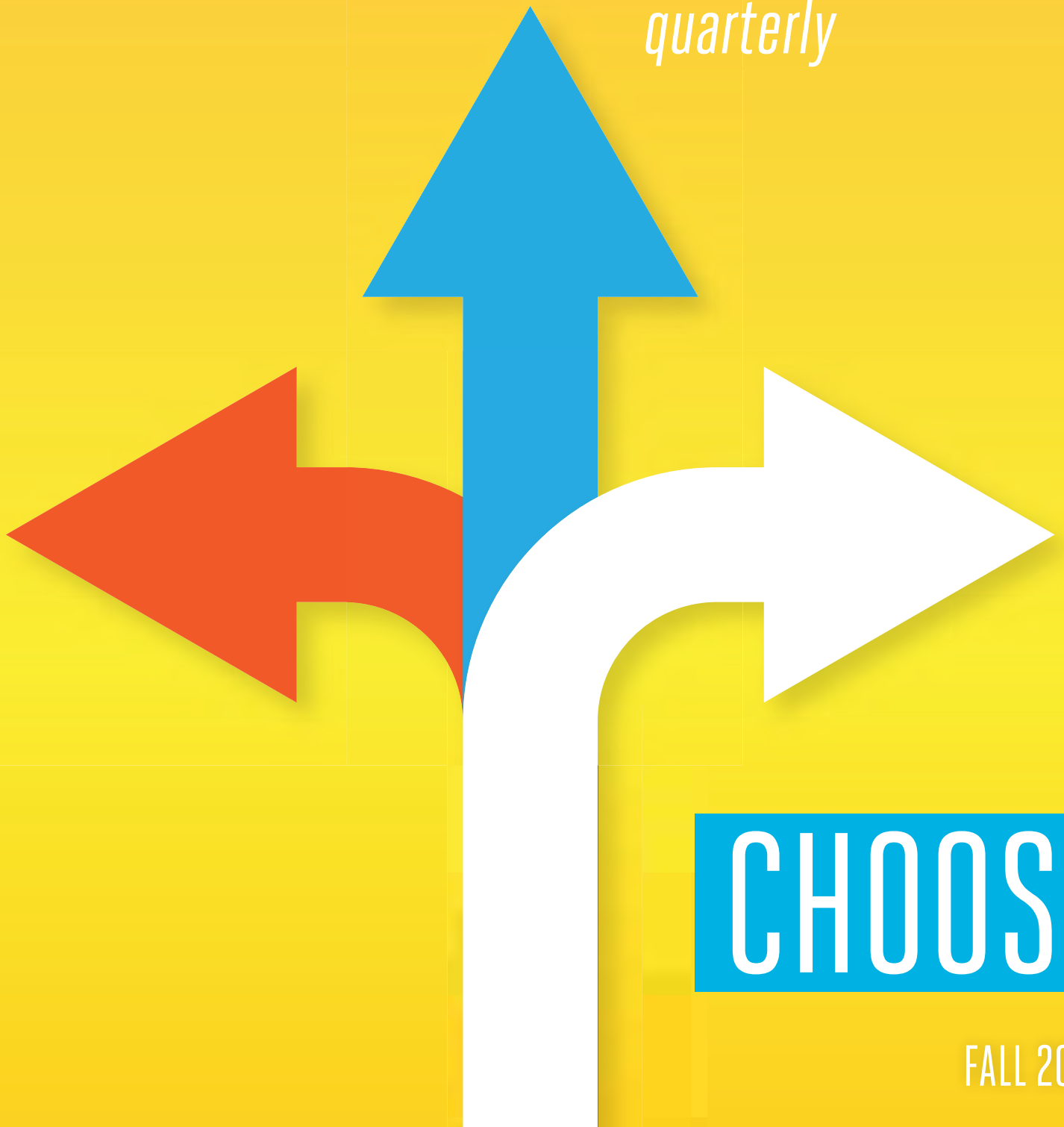


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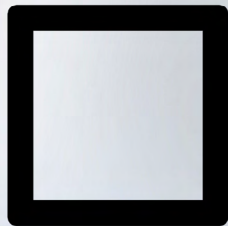
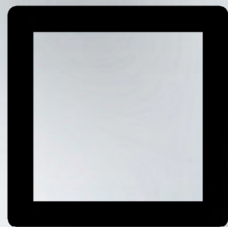
FALL 2018

Trusting: *Me, the team,
or the vision*

Direction: *Setting or
executing it*

Battles: *How and when
to choose them*

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NQ16: CHOOSE

By Jarrod Shappell



Have you ever entered a Target store on a mission to buy one item, purchased a cart full of things you didn't know you needed, and left feeling like you needed a giant latté and a nap?

You are not alone. Research shows again and again that large, department-style stores, with lots of options, are cognitively exhausting. But it's not the bright lights, screaming children, or long lines that are tiresome. The exhaustion comes in the micro buying decisions that we are bombarded with having to make. Having to evaluate whether or not you need that new iron on the aisle end cap (you don't) or whether you will go through two cases of La Croix (you can) may seem insignificant (it is), but these mentally taxing, low-level decisions are sapping the energy you need for higher-stakes decisions. This is called decision fatigue.

The work of sociologist Dr. Roy Baumeister is now being confirmed in neuroscience. Each of us has limited decision-making energy. The more decisions you have to make throughout your day (or in a store), the more likely you are to look for shortcuts. The most obvious shortcut? Not to make a decision at all. Passing on a decision may seem like an easy way to conserve mental energy, but the postponement in itself is a decision. Forgoing the iron has minimal consequences (unless you habitually show up to work in wrinkled clothes because your last iron broke years ago). But deferring some decisions may bring on significant consequences later. Even deciding if and when to decide can be depleting.

**We are focusing
this entire issue
on what it means
to choose.**


We often work with CEOs and GMs who are exhausted from the number of decisions that come their way – deals to be done, projects to approve or kill, customers to console, markets to enter. But even more consuming are the equally exhausting, but far less material decisions that sap mental energy – go to the employee luncheon or not, do the podcast interview with the local guru or delegate it, spend time reading those articles you filed, go to the gym, or just review the monthly financials. In their exhaustion, they often postpone their most strategic decisions in the face of the pressing, but less important choices. Through their postponing, they maintain the status quo or worse, fail to take advantage of an opportunity before a competitor. This is understandable given what we are learning about our brain’s ability to decide – mainly its limited capacity to process multiple choices simultaneously. However, it is no way for a leader to lead or an organization to thrive.

Our hope with the NQ16 is that we can be the double shot of espresso for your decision fatigue. We are focusing this entire issue on what it means to CHOOSE.

Choosing well begins with choosing how to choose. We need our own personal set of choice-making apparatus, lest we consign our most important choices to fate. What role will intuition and experience play? What role does information play, and what information do you trust or pursue? What role do others in your life play, and whom will you allow to help inform your choices? And beneath those apparatus, what is your orientation to risk? What makes choosing hard for you? Do you allow yourself to embrace desire? Are you driven by significant degrees of obligation and a need to please others? Are you counter-dependent, finding it difficult to compromise or accommodate? Your own story informs your choice-making apparatus more than you may realize. Choosing how to choose in the most important moments of life sets us up for greater success and satisfaction as professionals, family members, and citizens.

It should be noted that even with a choice-making methodology, choosing is hard. When we choose, each “yes” to one thing is an implied “no” to many others. Every choice has a list of painful trade-offs. Each time we choose to trust our gut, we bicker with our brain. Every time we seek more data to support our decision, we deny our intuition. And yet we must do the hard, painful work of choosing wisely because at the end of the day we all want to make more good decisions than bad ones.



Perhaps that is why Amazon’s (the virtual Target) leader, Jeff Bezos recently said “If I make, like, three good decisions a day, that’s enough. And they should be as high quality as I can make them.” For this quarter, let’s work together to make sure that our approaches to choosing are as high quality as they can be. 



When Making Decisions, Avoid these Extreme Binaries

By Ron Carucci

In the face of unforeseen hard choices, leaders commonly resort to binary choice making, limiting the options available to them to address complex challenges. This is because, as major research on decision-making shows, our brains are naturally wired to be more impulsive under stress. Spotting false patterns, we reach for premature conclusions rather than opening ourselves to more and better options.

One senior sales executive I worked with recently illustrated this in a moment of frustration. She'd been working on delegating more to her team, who had asked for more empowerment. To her dismay, many were struggling to take on the levels of freedom she'd offered. Exasperated, she vented to me, "I thought delegating was supposed to free me up to do more of my own job. But every time they drop a ball I hand off, it takes me twice as long to clean up the mess as it would have taken for me to just do it myself." Her complaint is not uncommon, because – like many leaders – she saw her only options as "delegate" or "control." Now exhausted from failing at one extreme, her natural impulse was to revert back to the other. What she needed to ask herself was, "What parts of this task are my people ready and confident to take on, and what role must I play for this to get done?"

To avoid the whiplashing effect of bounding between polarities, leaders must learn to increase their range of motion across an array of leadership challenges and increased pressures – because that gives them a more effective set of options from which to CHOOSE.

The two extremes leaders tend to bounce between here are being overly blunt and excessively politically correct.

Here are four common sets of extremes that leaders tend to default to when facing tough challenges.

1. Communicating tough news.

One of a leader's most stressful demands is delivering messages that disappoint people. The two extremes leaders tend to bounce between here are being overly blunt and excessively politically correct. I've watched leaders waste precious minutes in a long wind-up of couching and softening-the-blow as their teams braced for impact from an impending message of doom. I've also seen leaders convince themselves that "just ripping the band aid off" is the best way to deliver bad news. Neither option ever works. Worse, they only take into account the leader's discomfort delivering the news, failing to consider those receiving it. Leaders must learn to blend their degree of directness and their degree of diplomacy based on the impact of what they are saying on those hearing it. Leaders who don't have sufficient range of motion to appropriately deliver tough news have even less capacity when they need it most – dealing with the inevitable aftermath of what they've said. The key is preparation. If leaders spend time carefully crafting messages that blend the right degree of diplomacy and directness, tailored to those hearing it, they will be far better prepared to deal with what comes afterwards.

2. Facing high-risk decisions.

When faced with higher degrees of risk associated with a decision, leaders can revert to one of two extremes. The "trust your gut" leader makes highly intuitive decisions, and the "analyze everything" leader wants lots of data to back up his choice. For routine decisions with relatively predictable outcomes, a leader's strong preference for one of these poses minimal threat to the decision's quality. But when the decision has far reaching implications, such as long-range financial performance, a leader's angst can provoke them to their extreme preference with greater consequences. The highly intuitive leader becomes impulsive, missing critical facts. The highly analytical leader gets paralyzed in data, often failing to make any decision. The right blend of data and intuition applied to carefully constructing a choice leaves builds the organization's confidence for executing the decision once made. And it avoids wasting resources cleaning up after a decision goes bad or an opportunity is missed.

3. Introducing radical ideas.

When faced with chronic challenges for which traditional problem solving approaches haven't worked, leaders must bring radical ideas to the table that haven't been considered. The notion of departing from conventional approaches can stress leaders, driving them to one of two comfort zones. On one end of the spectrum, a leader can hold a level of unyielding certainty about the efficacy of their idea and its likelihood to solve the problem. On the other end, leaders offer ideas very tentatively so as not to come across as overly domineering. The problem is that whatever the chronic issue is has already exhausted and discouraged the organization. If people feel the leader is being dogmatic about their views, leaving no room for anyone else's, they will likely disengage, regardless of the merits of the idea. Or if people feel the leader lacks confidence in their idea, they will struggle to muster conviction to try it, concluding, "Well, if she isn't all that convinced it will work, I'm not going to stick my neck out." The right blend of conviction and openness sets the stage for others to participate in surfacing an untested solution that builds on the leader's best thinking, but refines it with the inputs of others. This collectively energizes a leader and her team, preparing the organization for putting the idea into action.

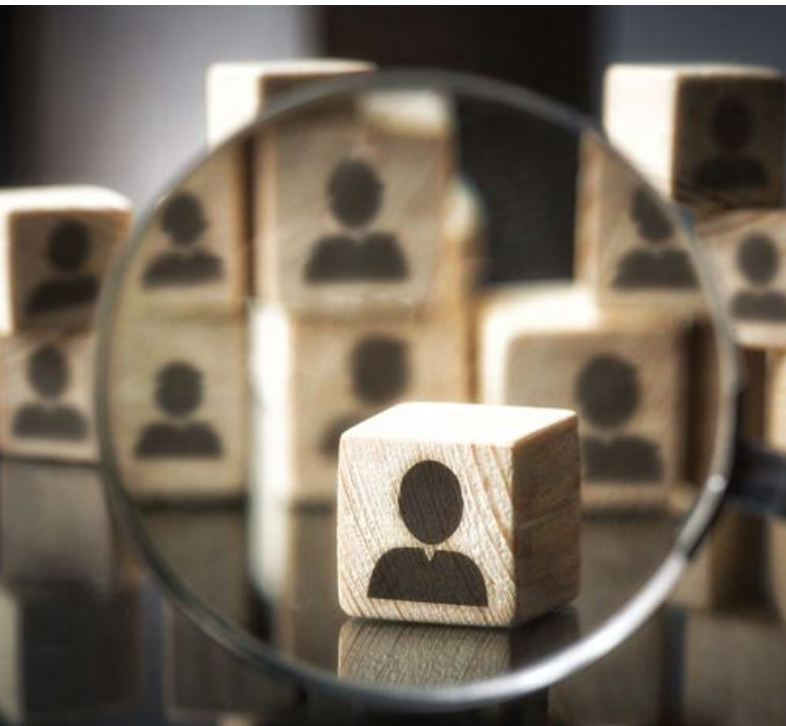
4. Delegating higher levels of authority.

Many leaders struggle to let go of decision rights to those they fear aren't ready. As was the case with the sales executive above, taking risks on untested followers can feel overwhelming. But in demanding situations, leaders are often forced to give people chances to step up to new challenges. Leaders obsess over letting go of their own authority because a follower's failure will make them look bad. Worse, they fear a follower's success will make them irrelevant. So they cling to their authority with exhausting levels of control. By contrast, some leaders throw caution to the winds. With unfettered optimism, they declare, "I trust you," and let direct-reports go off with limited perspective and experience. In challenging circumstances, that is not delegation: its abandonment. The balance of authority one retains and relinquishes is an artful blend that matches the person's skill and readiness with the situation at hand. Done well, this begins with a clear contracting session between the leader and follower clarifying expectations, honestly assessing what the follower is ready to take on, and how the leader will remain involved. Too often the stressful conditions causes leaders to skip such important preparation in a false sense of reflexive urgency. The more urgent a situation is, the more carefully planned delegated authority must be.

The more demanding circumstances are, the more a leader can benefit from a wide range of options to choose from. Reverting to extremes may create a false sense of comfort in the moment, but set up disaster in the end. There are no complex challenges in the world for which there are only two options to solve. The minute you find yourself torn between two extremes, assume that both are limited, step back, and build a broader menu of options. That's where you're likely to find your optimal choice.

The more demanding circumstances are, the more a leader can benefit from a wide range of options to choose from.





The Groups that Choose Together Win (or Lose) Together

By Eric Hansen

The warmth of the summer is gone. It has been swept away by the fresh, crisp evening air, cups of hot chocolate and the electrified buzz of high school football games! As I watched one such game from my perch on the cold, hard, aluminum benches last weekend, I jumped to my feet clapping and cheering! Surprisingly I was not roused by the athleticism of the players, but by the execution of the half-time show — two hundred amateur musicians following the mark of the drum majors. They played their instruments and marched in unison to create an ever-changing array of geometric patterns, accompanied by a beautiful wall of sound.

The band’s successful performance was clearly the result of a series of orchestrated choices executed, reviewed, and refined with discipline. “Wouldn’t it be equally amazing if business leaders could get their organizations to execute with similar commitment and precision?” I thought.

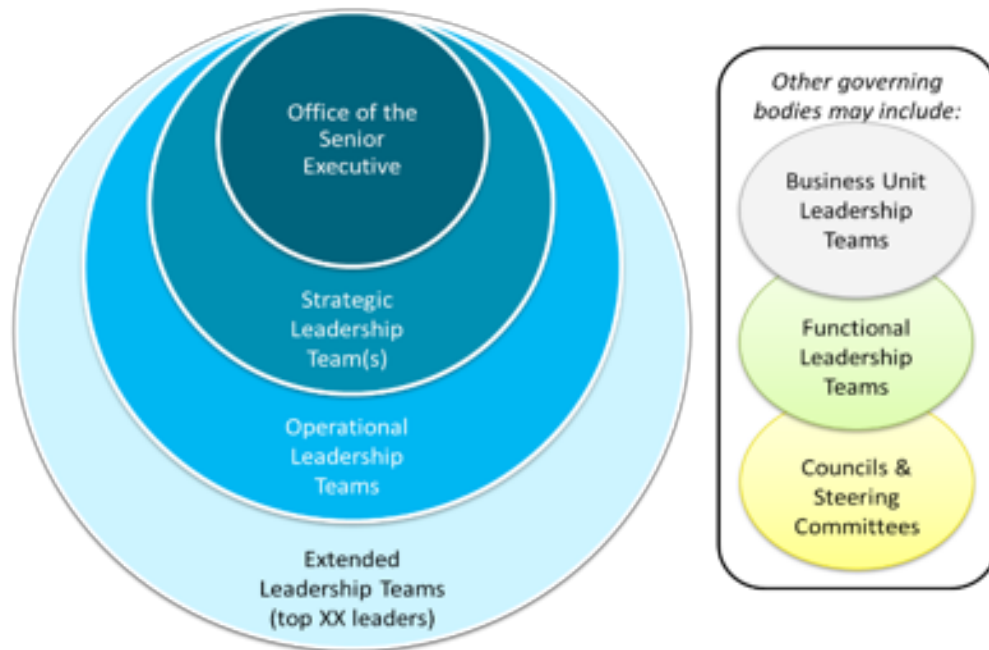
Making decisions is a personal challenge for many leaders, but it takes a set of clear choices to unify their teams and marshal their resources. The task only increases in complexity and difficulty when leaders must include and align the expectations and priorities of an entire organization. But, that IS the role of senior leaders — to consciously create focus by eliminating other possibilities.

It’s not just individual leaders who struggle to decide, but entire leadership groups are also victims to indecision.

To decide literally means “to cut off from.” And for many leaders, the very act of deciding is painful. But without clearly communicated definitive choices, leaders set in motion too many, often competing initiatives that create confusion and conflict. Everyone involved becomes overwhelmed and exhausted and receives little payback.

It’s not just individual leaders who struggle to decide, but entire leadership groups are also victims to indecision. Many organizations believe they have effective governance but have never defined how it should work or assessed how it actually works. However, a clearly established system of governance and decision-making is foundational to every well-run and successful organization. Small- and mid-sized organizations often think that governance is not applicable to them, and pride themselves as operating more “organically” or as an “informal company.” We disagree. The need for governance exists whenever individuals come together to achieve a common purpose.

Like a drum major's baton, governance is a relatively small but powerful tool to set priorities and mark time in directing and coordinating resources across the business. To elevate the impact of their leadership, senior executives and their teams should establish and work within a governance system suited to their business.



Well defined governance:

- Explains and reinforces a minimum critical set of governing bodies, their relationship to each other, and how they should work together for the benefit of the whole
- Defines the charter for each body including expected deliverables, minimum critical membership, parameters of their autonomy and authority, expected standards of performance, and their relationship to key stakeholders
- Outlines decision rights and how other key stakeholders can access the group to provide input and influence choices, and ultimately determine which tradeoffs are necessary for the greater good
- Establishes the rhythm of the organization by laying out the annual schedule for and the input/output relationship among the governing bodies
- States how business-level and broader enterprise performance is evaluated and regulated
- Embodies and reinforces the values and desired behaviors of the organization, and works to eliminate counter-productive influences and distractions

Sample Charter


Purpose / Mission		Critical Decision Rights		Critical Linkages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set corporate strategy, priorities, and financial targets for the business Identify, prioritize and maintain oversight on key enterprise initiatives (e.g. Category Management); identify and develop long term plans to deliver organization capability needs Allocate capital and other corporate assets to support strategic objectives; financial management Enterprise AOP development and oversight; set annual targets and priorities Monitor progress on long term innovation agenda Provide resource/direction for key businesses and organization initiatives; Direct business units on individual unit positioning and growth targets Identify and recommend strategic synergy opportunities across the enterprise (e.g. brand, integration, content leverage opportunities) Establish corporate policies and procedures; monitor organization's health Manage employment brand; establish talent management principles to guide Human Resource practices across the enterprise Manage key leadership talent and key roles; manage leadership pipeline 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic planning process and AOP Approve business unit plans Decide on acquisition or divestiture proposals Set corporate brand strategy; establish, evolve, and enforce brand usage guidelines Set, fund, and execute development objectives for key talent Set direct for Diversity initiatives 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO and Board (when applicable) Operational/BU leadership team Extended leadership team
Membership	Agenda	Cadence (Frequency, Timing)	Roles	Procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO/ President Executive team BU/Functional SME representation as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploration, review and adjustment of 1-3/3-5 year strategy for products and markets as a whole Annual business processes and how those map to the Strat Plan, AOP, Talent Management, Growth plans Develop/monitor org engagement Focused development for talent/leadership to improve effectiveness Develop greater connectivity across the enterprise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First month of each quarter 1.5-2 days <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Q1 – Celebrate results and kick off the year Q2 – Build momentum for the FY Q3 – How we will win long term Q4 – What it will take to win in the next FY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agenda Developers: member names – joint contribution Discussion Facilitator or Leader: member name Timekeeper: member name (rotated?) Minute Taker: member name (rotated?) Special roles (e.g. for Talent Reviews): member name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance requirements (face to face vs. phone; subs versus mandatory attendance) How and when the meeting agenda will be published and distributed (including pre-read materials and timing) What the meeting minutes and action items will be and who will track them What the owners of the meeting agenda or agenda items are expected to do (and not do)

Ultimately, disciplined governance facilitates unity for leaders and key influencers to work together toward a virtuous cycle of organizational choice and accountability. This is achieved through interconnected and mutually reinforcing discussions and decisions.

Admittedly, a degree of dysfunction and imperfection is always a factor because of the inherent complexities of people and organizations; but, when governance is properly designed and implemented, the synchronization and performance results are impressive.

Recently one of our new CEO clients, mired in substandard governance and inherited bureaucracy, insisted on an overhaul. He reformulated and streamlined the executive team and established a separate operating team with representatives from all four business units which he co-owned with the COO. He defined a common scorecard and mandated a singular strategic planning and resource allocation process. Charters were established, and decision rights with clearly defined expectations of information flow were allocated to the resulting six governing bodies. He further insisted on making resource tradeoffs at the enterprise — not the business — level. Importantly, dueling fact bases of individual BU's agendas was replaced by an open forum to debate strategic priorities from the new integrated data set. The change enabled the enterprise portfolio to be managed as one business rather than a loose confederation.

Moreover, the CEO could leverage the Supply Chain, HR, and IT functions that the old governance design prevented. The result was decreased costs and increased visibility of previously obscured emerging talent. Within the first year, the business launched a major product in one of the emerging BUs, integrated an acquisition into the largest BU, and increased their talent retention by nearly 40%. The transformation wasn't easy, but the alignment behind decisions and the potential for winning far outweighed the temporary disruptions of managing change.

Like the drum major's baton, orchestrated decision-making is a mighty force for achieving higher performance within your business. Establishing the discipline for how and when decisions are made, who makes them, how they are communicated, and how they are reinforced creates greater clarity and cohesion among your leadership team and enables your employees to execute with greater timeliness and precision. In turn, you too will have your customers and shareholders standing and cheering! 



Like a drum major's baton, governance is a relatively small but powerful tool to set priorities and mark time in directing and coordinating resources across the business.

Decision Compression

By Whitney Harper



Trigger warning! I am going to talk about a poor customer service experience with an airline. So buckle up, put on your oxygen mask, and take a deep breath.

An airline that shall remain unnamed mistakenly double charged me for three cross-country plane tickets. My request for a refund went to supervisors, was transferred to different departments, and one helpful soul gave me a fax number to call. The saga continued for 2+ months and involved multiple phone calls, emails, and letters but no one could solve my problem. I was on the phone with my seventh representative to solve the problem, when I began to hear their own frustration. They were upset because they could identify my problem, but weren't empowered to solve it. At each level, the employee had to call someone more senior. And that person would likely have to call another someone more senior.

Exasperation when someone is disempowered and unable to make appropriate level decisions is something that all organizations face. We call it decision compression and it impacts everyone.

Decision compression happens when a more senior person withdraws decision rights (either voluntarily or as a requirement) from a more junior person and assumes the role of the decision maker. When this happens there are three parties impacted. First, the junior person, who isn't being developed to deal with obstacles, becomes confused about their role and frustrated by the redundant work when their boss becomes involved. Second is the senior person who is working at the wrong level (WAWL). They are too far in the weeds and focusing on fighting fires, blinding them to the broader factors impacting their business. And the last person is the client, who suffers the consequences of delays in their service, increased costs, poor customer service, and a high degree of frustration.

Decision compression is a top down issue.

No matter where you sit in an organization or in relation to an organization, you are impacted by decision compression. The four kinds of decision compression, each with its own symptoms, are more easily addressed when they are identified.

	Symptoms	Consequences	Leader's Antidote
#1 Leadership Compression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role confusion • Rework • No development of team or succession plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are promoted to incompetence. (Ex: Strong tech skills, but poor or nonexistent executive skills) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify clear and distinct contributions as a leader (Delegate the rest) • Empower and develop your team
#2 Perspective Compression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siloed views • Short-term focus • Pattern blindness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions result in negative consequences for other departments or customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift to comprehensive systems view • Expand touchpoints (internally and externally) so you can see the patterns
#3 Information Compression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to data • Limited sources of intel • Limited utilization and leveraging of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information becomes a power currency • Poor decisions are made due to incomplete data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand access to data • Increase transparency • Utilize comprehensive dashboards
#4 Authority Compression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior leaders involvement in all decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constricts responsibility and accountability levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Push authority to the level with information and insight

Why decision compression occurs

- Unclear > Leaders aren't clear about what they are supposed to do
- Unskilled > Leaders lack the skills to do what they are supposed to do
- Unwilling > Leaders are simply unwilling to do what they're supposed to do

You will notice that all these reasons place the onus on leadership. Decision compression is a top down issue. Some leaders may claim that their team is too junior, which is why they must swoop in and make the decisions. There are lots of fun explanations as to why you can't develop your team, but none of them are as effective as simply developing your team.

Tips for Leaders on Addressing Decision Compression

Tip #1: Tap into the "Quantified Self," using the data you have about yourself at your fingertips. For example, want to know how you spend your time? Look at your calendar. Where are you spending your time and with whom? What are the issues and outcomes? In a similar fashion, check your actions against the four kinds of decision compression in the chart above.

Tip #2: Give people space to do their jobs. In the words of Stephen Covey, “You can’t hold someone accountable for results if you supervise their methods.” Pick your battles; know when to get involved and more importantly when not to get involved. Be prepared to support your team members when they fail, which is a significant shift from preventing failure.

Tip #3: Replace compression with engagement. Share information with your team and ask them how they would approach an issue. Ask employees to identify ways to eliminate the bottle necks from decision compression. What processes slow you down? What customer complaints are we consistently seeing and how can we resolve them quicker? Reward your team members for identifying effective ways to battle decision compression and then implement them.

Tips for Junior Team Members on Addressing Decision Compression

This is a tougher battle.

Tip #1: Tap into the “Quantified Self.” Just like leaders, use the data about yourself. Look at your job description and identify the decision rights required to do your job. Track to see what is preventing you from making the critical decisions. Look at your calendar to see if you are spending your time flying at the right level. Analyze which meetings you are not attending and why. (Warning: Decision compression can be a tempting excuse for other issues you need to address.)

Tip #2: Engage in a conversation with your boss. Identify the decision rights you require and the consequences of not having those rights. Then have a conversation about what is needed to shift the process and enable you to make the critical decision.

Tip #3: Model the behavior you want to see changed. If you lead a team, empower them and engage them. Push decisions to the individuals on your team who have the most information and greatest insights.

In contrast to my experience with the airline, I had the pleasure of working for Ritz-Carlton where decisions were pushed down to the most junior level. Information was transparent, and employees could make decisions on any issue with a cost implication of less than \$2,000 without asking permission from anyone. That quantity and the overall empowerment granted was not lost on me, because \$2,000 was more than my monthly salary! New employees would test the policy by asking their new manager for permission, only to be told, “You can make that decision. Call me when you have an issue that you can’t resolve for \$2,000.” The managers were focused on doing their jobs, not their team members’. When explaining the policy to new hotel staff, I felt like Oprah giving away cars, except I was shouting “You! You! You get to decide!” May we all have the courage to create more Oprah moments and less airline travesties. 🚩





It's the Year of the Woman, Again

By Whitney Harper

Recently U.S. voters elected 35 additional women into the House of Representatives and pundits are declaring 2018 as the Year of the Woman...again.

In 1992, when American voters elected more new women to Congress than in any previous decade, it was also declared the Year of the Woman. “Calling 1992 the Year of the Woman makes it sound like the Year of the Caribou or the Year of the Asparagus,” said Senator Mikulski. “We’re not a fad, a fancy, or a year.” Twenty-six years have passed and her comment is as relevant as ever.

I agree that women are not a fad; however, the declaration in 2018 raises the question, what has changed in the years since this pundit declared the first Year of the Woman?

While a panacea has not been achieved for true equality, time has given us an opportunity to research and understand the challenges facing women in leadership. As more women step into senior roles, the challenges have been named and strategies defined to help them leap forward. There is more work to be done, especially as binary gender roles are shifting to a spectrum; however, there is wisdom to guide these 35 new congresswomen as they start another year as a woman.

I am both thrilled and anxious for these women as they set off as our elected representatives. And as such, I would like to highlight some of the challenges and solutions that both they and you can be mindful of this coming year.

Challenge #1: The Double Bind

A double bind is when you are faced with a choice between two undesirable options: 1) behaving in a typically female fashion and being thought of as not having leadership abilities, or 2) behaving in more masculine ways and being labeled as too aggressive and bossy and thought of as not having leadership abilities. Damned if you do and damned if you don't.

Challenge #2: Inner Critic / Imposter Syndrome

The inner critic is that inner voice that tells us that we aren't good enough, expressing criticism, disapproval, or frustrations about our actions. It is a stream of negative self-talk that can leave us paralyzed or retreating out of shame. The imposter syndrome is a cousin to the inner critic, but this voice tells us that we don't belong, are not qualified, or don't deserve the seat we are in. Women tend to have the volume turned up on their self-doubt when they cross over into areas of masculine leadership stereotypes, such as numbers, negotiations, and leadership. Women can also be sensitive to micro-aggressions that may occur when they exhibit "masculine" leadership traits, serving to reinforce and validate their inner critic.

Challenge #3: Impossible Selves

The impossible self is the "ideal" leadership version of ourselves; however, this ideal is impossible because the definition of the leader doesn't take into account the double bind and the mixed expectations of women leading in a man's world. Women can easily fall into the trap that they need to be perfect, 100% fair, and accessible 24/7, which sets up impossible expectations and guarantees feelings of failure.

PAUSE: Reflect and Check-In

Before we get into the solutions, let's recognize that the double bind is not your fault. The double bind is a symptom of unconscious bias around gender-based expectations. What you do need to recognize is that you may hold these unconscious biases near and dear. Check-in with yourself about the gendered-expectations you were raised with and recognize that you can bust through the invisible barriers you may be accepting as normal.

Reading about these challenges may cause you to feel rage, doubt, or peace. Recognize what you are feeling. With proper perspective on the challenges, and having checked in with yourself, it's time for ... **GAME ON!**

Solution #1: Be Versatile

The more styles of leadership that you can draw upon the more you can adjust to any situation. Being able to demonstrate empathy while also being decisive and assertive allows you to adapt to any situation. Don't worry about sticking to one note, play with all 88 keys on the piano. The more we can embrace the range and depth of leadership styles the more effective we will be at handling challenging situations with clear intent and impact.

Solution #2: Amplify


We have been fighting for the specific seats we sit in, but that doesn't mean others are ready to listen to what we have to say. Interruptions are frequent, and women tend to wait for a pause in the conversation or for their turn, which never come. When a woman does manage to share her idea, it might be ignored or commandeered by someone else at the table as their idea. This is where the sisterhood of the traveling megaphone comes in. When you hear a woman share a great idea, grab that megaphone and amplify it. If someone else tries to take credit, grab that megaphone and reiterate that you heard her say it first.

Solution #3: Love Negotiations

I would love to declare negotiation as the sixth love language. If you really love me, you will negotiate with me, for me, and against me. Negotiating is the art of navigating tradeoffs, a critical move for women to master as they realize the impossible self is a mirage. "In business, you don't get what you deserve; you get what you negotiate." (Chester Karrass) Strengthening your skills so that you don't approach negotiations with fear and trepidation and tackling them with strength and curiosity will serve you well in quieting the inner critic.

Solution #4: Think Strategically

The new glass ceiling is polished with praise for the doers. Research shows that women are not advancing into the most senior positions because they lack the experiences to develop strategic organizational leadership skills. They are seen as great executors and continue to be put in positions where they can be tactical doers. Don't settle because of the praise. Proactively ask for the stretch assignments, present your recommendations on how to navigate strategic opportunities, and identify a mentor who can help advocate for your career.

Each generation of women builds upon the legacy of those who came before. Thank you to the women elected to Congress and the Senate in 1992 and every year before and since. It is through your experience that we are gaining a better understanding of the challenges that lie ahead and the tactics that work. Let us hope that 2018 is the last year to be declared the Year of the Woman. May our collective efforts bring attention to the work ahead so that women are no longer considered a trend or a fad. 

I agree that women are not a fad; however, the declaration in 2018 raises the question, what has changed in the years since this pundit declared the first Year of the Woman?



Leading Through the Dissonance of Middle Management

By Josh Epperson

Who are the unhappiest workers in the US workforce? Assembly line workers? Public CEOs who are under analysts' microscopes? High stakes entrepreneurs? Research says that Middle Managers are the most unhappy population in the US workforce. But why?

It's because they are the lynchpin between two parts of the organization and in most organizations it feels like the wheels are about to fly right off.

Leaders' primary responsibilities fall into one of three organizational systems: 1) Strategic, 2) Coordinating, or 3) Operating. Leaders in the strategic system (those at the top of the house) must focus on external trends and set competitive, marketplace positioning. Leaders in the Coordinating system translate those longer-range bets into actionable objectives, applying and managing available resources to achieve those objectives. Leaders in the Operating system (the front line) execute tactical plans to produce products and services for their consumers and end-users. So then by definition, Middle Managers must lead through the inherent dissonance of their Coordinating responsibilities ...

Following superiors and leading subordinates;

Implementing requirements for change and dealing with lack of commitment to it;

Planning intended outcomes and translating that intent;

Identifying current state and forecasting future requirements;

Reviewing past successes and forging precedent-setting leadership;

Recognizing competing stakeholder needs and creating one, aligned way forward.

It is stressful and taxing to lead through such dissonance. It's hard to hold it all together and yet an organization's ability to realize its strategy rests squarely on middle management (a demographic that experiences high turnover and little development). They lead the Coordinating system and must constantly exhibit ambidextrous, Gumby-like leadership. You must be prepared to be pulled in numerous directions, by multiple (often competing) stakeholders while at the same time create a collective, coherent way forward.

Do you remember the game Telephone? One-person whispers a phrase in the ear of another person and little by little the message makes its way around the circle until it gets to the last person who blurts it out. Often the final message bears no resemblance to the original message. To work the metaphor, in a 10-person circle one Middle Manager is responsible for the message-passing of those 8-middle level employees! If only leadership in real life was as funny as the game.

I was recently coaching a Middle Manager perpetuating the game of telephone with his team. Senior leadership had pushed for a more transparent operating environment. This leader knew it was the right move, but also knew it required him to make significant changes. Suffice it to say, it required new levels of financial transparency and information sharing he had historically held close to the vest. He believed this "close to vest" approach increased his value, as well as that of his team. He acknowledged his superior's push and agreed to be more transparent. Yet not more than a week passed when he found himself with his team, praising a culture of transparency while at the same time encouraging them to, "Stay valuable, and not share more than you have to." It was a mistake. His internal dissonance got the best of him. The mandate started as, "Encourage transparency. If we're missing a piece of the plan, we need to know sooner rather than later." Which translated to, "When the numbers look bad, we look bad." He has since gone back to his team (and boss) and owned up to the dissonance he created. He's actively working to retranslate and model the original mandate. Unfortunately, that takes longer

than translating effectively the first time. Now his team, and boss, aren't just listening to what he says, they're watching how he behaves. They'll become believers when his actions and words align.

If you find yourself wrestling with Middle Management dissonance, take stock and make sure you do the following:

Increase the knowledge of those above and below you. The assumption is that you know your stakeholders really well. If not, that's the place to start. Know what makes them tick; what they care about and how they impact your success. Great translators know their context and have a range of options when translating. Get to know your superiors well enough that you're capable of effectively translating strategic choices in their absence. Get to know your subordinates well enough to translate those choices in ways that matter to them. Know your options and modulate your translation in genuine, meaningful ways.

Ensuring the buy-in of front-line leaders impacted by your organization's strategy is absolutely critical for ensuring they operationalize it.

Lead toward where you need to be, not just where things are. Coordinating leadership requires straddling current business needs and future opportunities. The strategic priorities of superiors often change. Subordinates just want to put their heads down and get to work. I've worked with organizations where the number of strategic priorities, or the speed with which priorities change, paralyzes the Coordinating system. When this is the case, you must carve out time to envision where the business is headed, create hypotheses about that future state, and then test them with your superiors. Manage up by pushing superiors to set and adhere to future priorities. Manage down by helping subordinates focus and significantly progress a consistent set of objectives.

Get your leaders around the table as early and often as possible. Ensuring the buy-in of front-line leaders impacted by your organization's strategy is absolutely critical for ensuring they operationalize it.

Strategic systems operate largely disconnected from the front line. Middle Managers must create commitment with subordinates who are likely far removed from top-level leaders and the decisions they make. Don't mistakenly pull superiors into your subordinates' orbit and thus consume their time with working in the business when they should be working on it. Instead opportunistically pull Operating leaders up by including them, when appropriate, in strategic conversations and discussions where resulting decisions will likely impact them.

Break through old mental models and create new versions of success. Promotions to middle management are often based on past accomplishments.

Which means you were likely promoted from a system where success was based on technical expertise and executing tactical objectives. However, the Coordinating system requires influencing in the absence of authority, managing interpersonal dynamics and team effectiveness, and unequally applying resources across diverse objectives and stakeholders. You'll naturally exhibit leadership that made you successful in the past and must actively work to redefine success for this new system. How would you define your top three leadership success metrics for the Coordinating system? How will you ensure you're not doing your team's work for them?

Leading in the Coordinating system can be both exhilarating and maddening. You're often undervalued and heavily relied on. Just remember – that's the point and value of your role. As odd as it sounds, you get the privilege of harmonizing the dissonance between the leaders who set direction and those who execute it.



CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES

By Ashley Morris



Sitting in the annual strategic planning meeting, the HR Director unexpectedly announced that several of the initiatives I was responsible for would be shifting to her oversight in the coming year. Not only was this the first time I was hearing this, but it was the first time I was hearing about something that specifically impacted my role, with no justification and in front of the entire senior leadership team!?

Throughout the meeting, I grew more frustrated as my thoughts raced; How could the HR Director do this and without any explanation or heads up? Did I do something wrong to warrant this? These initiatives belong with me! As my thoughts grew louder, I was ready to go toe-to-toe with my superior in that meeting; in hindsight, thankfully I didn't. I remember my colleague (and friend) caught my gaze from across the table, gently smiled and discreetly slid a handwritten note across the table. The note read; "choose your battles wisely."

While this old adage offered sound advice then (and now), it isn't so easy to heed all the time. There are plenty of times I have entered a battle when I shouldn't have. And perhaps times when I should have battled and did not. Why is it so difficult to decide when to charge into battle or when to hold the line?

What I've learned from my experience with the HR Director and over the following years and many battles that have followed, is that battles (with neighbors, partners, work peers, and most certainly superiors) are complex. Battles inevitably effect many people and often times have casualties. Battles drain resources. Battles can be personal and are sparked by efforts for justice and fairness. Battles are fought within organizations for power, territory and ownership of processes, projects, or people. Battles for relationships and partnerships. The list goes on...

Of all the decisions
we must make,
choosing when to go
into battle is perhaps
the most difficult.

Whatever the reason, if you're deciding to go into battle, I suggest reflecting on the following questions in the Pre-Battle Checklist before making any other decisions and taking any further action.

Pre-Battle Checklist:


- **Why...**why are you going into battle? Why does the battle need to be fought? Why are you the person that needs to have the battle?
- **What...**what are you fighting for? What is the objective? What are the goals? What are the potential risks? What are the rewards?
- **What Else...**what is my relationship like with those I am battling? How do I know if I've won the battle? What are the impacts of losing the battle? What other information do I need (to know) before proceeding into battle?

I've learned that choosing your battles is both an art and a science. The science is working through the proposed set of questions outlined above, which will help you to make a more informed decision about going into battle – whatever battle you're fighting! The art is then carefully considering each unique context, it's players and what you know about norms that guide behavior so that you can anticipate the tolerance for battle and plan accordingly.

So, if you complete the Pre-Battle Checklist and you decide to march into battle anyway, consider these Battle Tips...they may help avoid casualties along the way.

Battle Tips:

- There are no binary choices. Most battle begin between two distinct points of view. This is an illusion. There is always a third way.
- Remain calm, it increases your ability to not be offended or take it personally, which is a key to resolving organizational battles and avoiding potential conflicts.
- If there are others involved in the battle, make sure it's clear who can make decisions and commands; you don't have to command every single decision and action. This will help to avoid decision compression.\
- Instead of violently battling a decision or a territory, focus on setting some ground rules for battle. Label any kind of conflict unhelpful and adhere to the productive rules you have set for healthy conflict.
- Leave your ego at the door. Learn what makes you tick and ensure tapes and triggers aren't emotionally and unnecessarily leading you into battle.

Of all the decisions we must make, choosing when to go into battle is perhaps the most difficult. Because of the potential risks (and casualties), this is a decision that can have a huge impact. So, the note I am now sliding across the table to you reads "make sure you're not acting or reacting based on emotions, you have all the information you need to make a decision to march into battle (or hold the line) and you're aware of the potential impacts and have planned for casualties that come with the inherent choice to battle. Oh, and choose wisely." 



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