



Decision Speed versus Decision Quality

by Cub Marion

The Apollo 13 scenario on April 13, 1970 is a classic case study for the balance of decision speed versus decision quality. Apollo 13 experienced an oxygen tank explosion during its flight to the moon, necessitating a comprehensive team effort to develop a plan to recover the dying spacecraft. Time was not on their side. Thus, the need for decision speed was essential, and so was decision quality in this situation. With that said, what takes priority, and how do you know you achieved the right balance? Truth is, there may not be an absolute right or wrong answer. From personal experience, I have observed and personally subscribe to the premise that individuals that process matters in this order are extremely effective and efficient decision makers:

1. Determine when the decision has to be made. This allows one to understand how much time is available to explore options and develop a solution
2. Gather the facts – get the relevant information
3. Develop multiple options if possible
4. Evaluate options and assess risk
5. Select option that yields highest probability of success
6. Make decision and communicate
7. Supervise, monitor, and adjust as needed

Notice that what drives the speed or pace of the decision is time.

In addition to the seven steps outlined above, there are human factors that have to be considered in decision making.

Some people procrastinate in decision making due to fear of failure, or simply making a mistake. Mistakes are acts of commission. The person thought it was right, but in the end they were wrong. Mistakes are not bad things; in fact they can serve as great instruments for learning. Keep in mind, there are situations when there is little or no tolerance for mistakes. The basis for this is risk. In high risk scenarios, detailed guidance, training, and supervision are required to reduce, if not eliminate the possibility of a mistake. That does not mean micromanage. Micromanagers are people that can't tell the difference between situations that necessitate zero tolerance and those that have some margin for error. Unfortunately, a consistent zero tolerance mentality fosters an environment that does not allow people to grow.

In contrast to a "mistake" described above, is a behavioral issue categorized as an act of omission. In this case, an individual knows what the right thing to do is, however, he or she chooses to do nothing or take an alternate path. This type of behavior is counterproductive. This behavior can be a by-product of an organization that is led by a micromanager with a consistent zero tolerance mindset. Individuals in the organization become so risk averse that

they would rather do nothing than to fail. This is not a good situation. However, individuals cannot divest themselves of their own responsibility to act and make decisions, regardless of their supervisor's conduct.

A summary of thoughts in very practical terms. Decision speed and decision quality represent the balance of efficiency and effectiveness. Time is the first element of consideration, as it dictates the pace of the decision making process. Limited time does not equate to random, hope for the best, decisions. Like the technical experts supporting the problem solving effort during the Apollo 13 mission, rapid and methodical investigation of the facts yielded a solution that became known as "The Successful Failure". Decisions should be timely, and based on the relevant facts. Refer to the seven bullet points above. In short, leaders make decisions, learn from them, and are accountable for them.