

Skills and abilities, personality styles, and conflict styles are, historically, things considered for career or team development. However, Project Managers and their teams should, from a pragmatic perspective, be measured by something more tangible than personality style and that is: decision making capacity. This article discusses the value of understanding decision making.

Decision Making Power is Project Management Power for Teams and Individuals

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Historically, when we have considered the idea of career development or team development in any employment environment we have attempted to identify such things as skills and abilities, personality styles, and conflict styles such as those that might be measured in tests like the Myers Briggs, DISC, and other self-report instruments.

Yet, when one examines the idea of development for Project Managers and their teams from a pragmatic perspective it becomes necessary to hone in on what is absolutely critical to both team development as well as individual career growth. We need to measure and develop something more tangible than personality style and that is: decision making capacity.

When we hire someone, or form a project team, we are buying their **decision power**. We aren't buying their childhood and whether or not it was happy. We aren't buying their preferences, or what they say or believe that they are like. We are buying their capacity to make decisions in the workplace in critical project environments: environments where they may be asked, at any moment, to lead, to take risks, or think on their feet - with little or no available information.

It may surprise you to learn that what under girds decision making potential is "thinking". "Thinking" also underpins all attitudes, behaviors, feelings and beliefs. This isn't a psychological opinion; we have empirical evidence of this fact. More interestingly and importantly, "thinking" is something we can measure scientifically, with laser precision, in order to identify decision making talent and leverage it.

The universally applicable science of Axiology, the study of thought, has determined that all people utilize the same dimensions of "thinking" or "valuing", but that they all combine or access those dimensions differently. It is these unique combinations of access that make us the diverse human family that we are. How people "value" is the basis for all decisions. As a consequence, measuring how people value gives us insight into their decision making potential.

Project Managers are hired to take ownership of a project, to move it along toward a conclusion that is valid to its context and goals as well as its stakeholders. When we want to support our project managers or ourselves as project managers, how do we do it? Until recently, we have had to guess at what we might need in terms of coaching, mentoring, or supporting talent from our team members. Historically, a highly pragmatic "get-it-done" project manager who sometimes steps on a few toes might be paired with a team member who is more in tune with people's feelings only after an unfortunate incident has occurred.

Now, through measurement of decision making talent, we can compensate for differences before any difficulty arises. For example, a highly conceptual "look before I leap" project manager who may tend to move less quickly because he/she needs to check it out and get more data before acting, is in fact, GREAT decision making talent. Project teams need this capability. This type of individual will look for ways to avoid re-work and will want to make sure the team is working on the right things and that the bigger picture is considered. But this individual may miss immediate opportunities or delay too long in acting. To compensate for this, we can pair this person with

someone like the “get-it-done” project manager who will be more focused on making things happen right away, and getting immediate results. Together they will compensate for the ways in which each of their decision making strengths might trip them up. The result is likely to be an efficient, well-thought out project outcome that is also timely and meets objectives.

What we now know is that we can structure project teams and develop individual project management talent based upon insight into team member’s differences in decision making potential. Through a short ranking exercise we can empirically measure how each person makes decisions and then thoughtfully combine our talent to compensate for differences and create powerful forward moving teams. We can also use this information to help autonomous project managers, those working alone, to better know themselves and self-manage to ensure that their decision making is balanced and appropriate for their projects.

Working with individuals and teams around decision making leaves all the guessing behind, and takes what has historically been intangible or “soft” and makes it very much hard science. Additionally, because decision making is an indisputable competency, we find that project managers and their teams are very interested in learning about it and are motivated to participate in team building and coaching.

What has been notably refreshing in our work with teams and individuals is that we can abandon all the traditional language around “weaknesses” and instead focus on “strengths” and how those great strengths may be deployed so they don’t trip up the team. The implications of this are powerful because now we have a language for many of the “hunches” or nonverbal factors that managers often consider when creating their teams. We can bring differences in decision making capacities into the foreground and openly capitalize on them as well as compensate for them.

Empirically measuring decision making potential helps project managers “cut to the chase” and address the “thinking” that drives their feelings, attitudes, behaviors and beliefs. Professional growth accelerates rapidly once we bypass “what you say you are like”- information that instruments like Myers Briggs captures really well- and instead focus on how you actually make decisions by measuring you performing a decision making task. One project manager stated it like this, “I always wondered what the value was behind knowing whether or not I was an introvert or an extrovert. So what? Knowing how I make decisions, the approach I use, helps me know what kind of team I need around me and what I need to watch out for as I execute my projects”.

In an environment where we often have to work with what we have, understanding, capitalizing on, and compensating for differences in decision making talent, allows us to leverage all of our resources with great precision and power. It also allows us to develop our teams and ourselves with tremendous velocity leading to expanded career potential for everyone.