

In doing some consulting recently for a fairly large technology company, I was working with a department head and was questioning him as to why he had not killed a 3-year-old project that had gone nowhere. He indicated that he can't terminate the effort because some members of his management team don't agree. Clearly this guy is managing, not leading. The reality is that there are certain practices that managers take on that make it very difficult for them to provide leadership. Some of the more destructive are as follows:

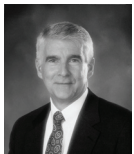
Consensus Decision Making - It is painful to be in an organization where the leader avoids making decisions until all relevant parties have their reviews reflected; i.e., consensus decision making. Significant improvement is all about change and creativity, and those things cause lots of folks to be threatened, so they don't agree or they ask for modifications. The result is the status quo or meaningless minor modifications.

Teams - If you are improving a process, teams work well; they bring together different kinds of expertise to help solve problems. If you are trying to innovate or drive change, teams drag things out and compromises get made since the team leader is often trying to keep everyone happy, which is not possible when driving change.

Committees or Task Forces - These groups are typically temporary in nature, and are formed by people contributing a small portion of their time while still doing their main job. This usually causes superficial, obvious solutions or assessments to emerge, since individual members won't be held responsible and people typically view such efforts as distractions. Weak leaders often use them to make a problem go away for a while.

Excess Layers - Having excess layers means excess bosses who are not very busy and hence, want to be part of any decision. The higher levels are often out of touch, but need to act smart, and are hence dangerous when you are trying to drive significant change or innovation. Too many layers also slow down decision-making.

The takeaway here is obvious: gutsy leaders avoid these practices and they avoid organizations where such approaches are used. Strong leaders seek out information from the folks who have valuable input on a decision, ask such people for reactions to possible options, and then make a decision. **BIG**



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