

A Leadership Minute

ON MULTI-CULTURAL TEAMS

“Vote from the Rooftops”

Euphemism for an armed revolution if one's desires are not fulfilled.

...Urban Dictionary



“Hell, I never vote for anybody, I always vote against.”

...W.C. Fields

“Vote early and vote often.”

...Al Capone

Great minds who worried over the Tyranny of the Majority:

- ✦ **Plato**
- ✦ **Aristotle**
- ✦ **James Madison**
- ✦ **Alexis de Tocqueville**
- ✦ **John Stuart Mill**

One Man, One Vote: How Majority Rule Affects Decision Making

We Americans just love to vote.

The appeal of one-man; one vote is so powerful for Americans that executives often use it as a tool for making business decisions.

In the many workshops we have conducted for executives in global companies, invariably American teams use a simple show of hands to make decisions. Almost as invariably, other cultures do not.

American executive teams we have watched most often use a clean, simple process for collaborative decision-making. The process has just two steps. In the first, everyone who has a solution argues its merits. After a lot of give-and-take someone announces they should have a show of hands to decide. This concludes the first step. The second and final step of the American decision-making process is to count team member's solemnly raised hands. Majority rules.

Decision made.

The non-Americans use a different process. Like the Americans, they first offer solutions and argue them on the merits. But following a round or two of argument, the non-Americans begin a series of alignment deliberations. In the first step they find the similarities among the options. They agree on those, set them aside and regroup to tackle the differences. The deliberations on the differences are designed to reach compromise. Non-American executive teams spend considerable time hashing out what they can give in trade for what they wish to keep. When achieved, this is added back to the similarities. No show of hands; no majority rule. **Decision made.**

These two approaches yield very different results.

The non-American style results in an outcome that leaves almost everyone somewhat unhappy but all happy enough to be willing to support the decision. They have constructed a solution that was



rendered from some of this proposal and a bit of that one. Since the process did not set up a choice between two mutually exclusive options no one is entirely unhappy. **The decision sticks.**

In the American teams, the use of voting leaves a minority—and often a sizeable one—entirely unhappy with the outcome. The American process sets up a toggle switch for members to vote on—this solution **or** that one. As a result, the losing minority usually cannot bring themselves to implement what they completely disagree with. Their most common reaction to outcomes produced by majority rule is to plot ways to torpedo the decision. And while voicing public support for the decision – “we’re all on board” – they covertly assemble stockpiles of weapons to kill it. **The decision unsticks.**

Americans seem to strongly believe that voting makes the process **fair**. In turn, this obligates them to go along with the outcome. But they just can’t. They got little or nothing of what they wanted. As a result, they are left with few alternatives other than sabotage.

Even after watching other cultures handle decisions differently in these workshops, Americans remain convinced that voting is the best process for decision-making. They say that the voting process is good because it is fair. There are winners and losers. And that’s life.

But life is not fair and most decisions facing American executives are not simple. There are few mutually exclusive options, just difficult, complex choices with far-reaching implications. And most executives know that reaching a decision is just the start. Implementing one—**making it stick**—can be the real challenge.

The collaborative decision-making processes used by non-Americans yield compromised solutions. American executives often equate compromise with not standing on one’s principles. Where is the principle in solutions that result in 60% of the team 100% happy? And the other 40% off on a weapons search?

Good collaborative decision-making processes can yield 80% of what any one member wanted and keep 100% of the team behind the implementation. Decision made. Decision stuck. It’s a principled stand.

Hands down.



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