

DECISION MAKING AT FREE GEEK

Introduction and Background

On a management level, decisions at Free Geek have typically been made by consensus. While we recognize and embrace the consensus process as a valuable tool for thoroughly addressing concerns, we also see that, historically, there were times when the focus on reaching consensus as the only method of making decisions has:

- Hindered us from moving forward for unacceptable lengths of time,
- Caused decisions to be made at the management level that should have been made by the staff more closely affected by them, and/or
- Led to decisions having been made by an unnecessarily large group of people, making them time consuming and, at times, less relevant to those most directly affected.

The Principles

- Subsidiarity

Decisions should be made as close to the level most affected by the implications of the decision as possible.

(from Wikipedia) "...a matter ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest, or least centralized authority capable of addressing that matter effectively..."

- Capability

Effective decision-making authority should only be given to, or assumed by a person, group or level that has the capability, (I.E. the time, resources, authority, etc) to see it through to fruition.

(from businessdictionary.com) "...Measure of the ability of an entity (department, organization, person, system) to achieve its objectives..."

- Accountability

Effective decision-making authority means also having some outcome accountability. Decision-making authority should only be given to, or assumed by a person or level that can be accountable for the outcome.

The Process

To ensure that the above principles are respected, the decision-making process needs to pay attention to, and clarify how, the different people or groups involved should participate. Individuals or teams may be engaged to provide input, for deeper consultation and, as appropriate, to share or assume decision-making responsibility. Clarity about where the decision rests will require that leadership/teams clearly define who has what level of engagement in a decision.

At the department level:

1. Managers, supervisors and team leaders are expected to apply the principle of subsidiarity in their department and in their teams while taking into consideration the practical constraints of capability, and the implications of accepting accountability for the decisions.

2. Participants should be clear about their level of involvement in making decisions. The levels of involvement generally fall into one of four categories:

- Being informed of the decision
- Giving input on the decision
- Sharing in responsibility to make the decision, and
- Tasked to make the decision with clarity regarding how others are involved.

At the senior management team level:

1. Decisions that clearly affect only one department should be made under the authority of the senior manager of that department using the principles, as outlined above, to allow the decision to be made at the level where it makes the most sense.
2. Decisions affecting more than one department should be made by the department managers affected using the principles above, and in consultation with the non-affected managers in case of an impasse.
3. Decisions affecting all departments should be made by the senior management team. The team will use the exercise of consensus to work through questions and concerns and come to a decision grounded in a commitment to inclusive solutions that allow blocks and concerns to be more fully vetted. If consensus cannot be reached after a reasonable amount of processing the proposal, the decision will be made by a simple majority vote.
4. Should there be no clear majority, i.e. three very different choices, and coming to a decision is considered necessary by a majority of the senior management team, the group may choose to involve an additional party, such as the human resources partner, other staff, or volunteers closely affected by the decision, to give their opinion, perhaps shedding new light on the discussion, or perhaps to weigh in on the decision itself. This additional party may also be an outside consultant.
5. If such involvement does not produce an inclusive or majority solution, senior management will provide the Board of Directors with an executive summary of the issue and the proposed solutions, and ask them for direction or, if required, a decision.

In Sum

Free Geek has been both served and disrupted by reliance on consensus as its only means of decision making. Consensus is a valuable tool to vet concerns and add clarity to issues raised during the decision-making process. The capacity to move away from blocks in a timely manner is also critical, as is the ability to have decisions made by those most closely affected by them. We are committed to using the decision-making methods that are most appropriate to the situation, and to allow for a variety of decision-making strategies within the organization. Our goal is that decisions be made in a timely manner, with participation by those most affected by the decision, and with clarity about how individuals and groups will be engaged. We are committed to evaluating our processes to ensure that they are true to the above principles and effective in moving Free Geek forward.