Participative Leadership

Assumptions

Involvement in decision-making improves the understanding of the issues involved by those who must carry out the decisions.

- People are more committed to actions where they have involved in the relevant decision-making.
- People are less competitive and more collaborative when they are working on joint goals.
- When people make decisions together, the social commitment to one another is greater and thus increases their commitment to the decision.
- Several people deciding together make better decisions than one person alone.

Style

A Participative Leader, rather than taking autocratic decisions, seeks to involve other people in the process, possibly including subordinates, peers, superiors and other stakeholders. Often, however, as it is within the managers' whim to give or deny control to his or her subordinates, most participative activity is within the immediate team. The question of how much influence others are given thus may vary on the manager's preferences and beliefs, and a whole spectrum of participation is possible, as in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&lt; Not participative</th>
<th>Highly participative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autocratic decision by leader</td>
<td>Leader proposes decision, listens to feedback, then decides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team proposes decision, leader has final decision</td>
<td>Joint decision with team as equals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full delegation of decision to team</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

There are many varieties on this spectrum, including stages where the leader sells the idea to the team. Another variant is for the leader to describe the 'what' of objectives or goals and let the team or individuals decide the 'how' of the process by which the 'how' will be achieved (this is often called 'Management by Objectives').
The level of participation may also depend on the type of decision being made. Decisions on how to implement goals may be highly participative, whilst decisions during subordinate performance evaluations are more likely to be taken by the manager.

**Discussion**

There are many potential benefits of participative leadership, as indicated in the assumptions, above. This approach is also known as consultation, empowerment, joint decision-making, democratic leadership, Management By Objective (MBO) and power-sharing.

Participative Leadership can be a sham when managers ask for opinions and then ignore them. This is likely to lead to cynicism and feelings of betrayal.

**See also**

Michigan Leadership Studies, Theories about decision-making, Lewin's leadership styles, Vroom and Yetton's Normative Model


