Input and Recommendation: A Comparison

In a consultative decision, a leader asks people for input or for a recommendation. He then uses this information to guide and inform his decision-making process. When considering the input or recommendation information to guide his decision, he uses them in the same way.

- He gives all the input or all the recommendations careful thought, comparing and contrasting the information provided by the people or groups he has asked.
- Then he makes the decision based on a combination of his own thinking and the thinking represented by the input or the recommendation.

It is essential that leaders understand the differences between input and a recommendation. Input is an opinion. A recommendation is a proposed decision. What the leader must do after the decision is made is different depending on whether he has asked for input or he has asked for a recommendation.

If he has asked for input, he:
- Tells those who gave the input and those who will be impacted by the decision what he has decided,
- Thanks those who gave input in a general way,
- Gives a general reason for the decision,
- Establishes a plan for implementation of the decision and works the plan, or delegates that responsibility to someone in the organization.

Input is a suggestion.

If he has asked for a recommendation he:
- Meets with the people who gave the recommendation,
- Tells them what he has decided,
- Explains how he used their specific recommendation. There are three things a leader can do with a recommendation.
  - He can use all of it. The recommendation becomes his decision.
  - He can use part of it.
  - He can reject the recommendation.
  The leader explains which option he used and why.
- Answers their questions,
- Establishes a plan for implementation and works the plan, or delegates that responsibility to someone in the organization.

A recommendation is a proposed decision.

The difference in the process after making the decision is crucial. Asking for and using recommendations is more time consuming than input. Consequently, it should be done sparingly and for the higher impact and more complex decisions. The leader should ask for a recommendation from only one group.

In a consultative decision the leader should:
- Be clear in his own mind about whether he wants input or a recommendation.
- Make it very clear whether he is asking for input or a recommendation.
• Be sure those he is involving in the consultative decision understand the difference between the two concepts.

• If he is asking for input, remind people that when they are giving input, not all items of input will make it into the final decision, and that he will not be communicating with each person how their input impacted the decision.

• If he is asking for a recommendation, remind people about the three different ways he can use a recommendation.

When the leader is not clear, people tend to mentally default to thinking they are making a recommendation to the leader. If that is truly the case, and the leader really did want a recommendation, it is unlikely there will be a problem because the leader will be explaining what he did with the various recommendations to those who provided them.

On the other hand, if the leader wanted input and did not make it clear, people may be annoyed when the decision is reached and they hear nothing back about their input. They will be more annoyed if their input does not show up in the decision. Remember, if the leader does not designate input or recommendation, people tend to assume they are providing a recommendation.

Clarity about input versus recommendation will make it less likely that people will say, “Why did he ask for my input? He didn’t even use it!” When people understand the difference between input, which is opinion, and recommendation, which is a proposed decision, the efficiency and effectiveness of making consultative decisions will increase.

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