

Delegation Poker

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One of the most important topics in all leadership development processes is to uncover the benefits of delegating. Many leaders and employees still struggle when trying to put it into practice.

by András Karácsonyi

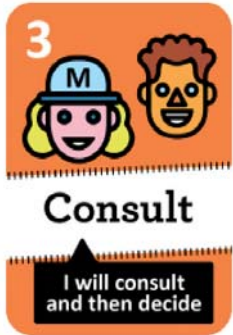
The struggle is noticeable on both sides. Questions for the leaders arise regarding what, how, to what extent and why they should delegate. Employees are mostly unsure about the framework, space and freedom of each action, the authority received, the nature of the task («is this something I will grow from or is it only dumping work on me?«), and the quality expectations.

For agile teams delegation has to be turned into participation. How do we use individual and collective intelligence to take good decisions in a fast way, while ensuring the commitment of the entire team?

Tackling mission impossible

You will find many valuable suggestions as to how to set up a better decision-making and delegation process. Once you start exploring, you will for sure discover some options for yourself. We have had very good experiences with »Delegation Poker,« a tool published on the Management 3.0 website. It allows individuals and teams to explore and discuss their options for taking decisions. The basic concept differentiates among seven ways of taking decisions. These options resemble the Leadership Continuum Model described by Tannenbaum and Schmidt in 1958 (see illustration):

- 1 **Tell** – the leader takes the decision and tells the team.
- 2 **Sell** – the leader decides and sells the decision.
- 3 **Consult** – the leader asks for opinions and then decides.
- 4 **Agree** – the leader and the team agree about the decision.



- 5 **Advise** – the leader advises and lets the team decide.
- 6 **Inquire** – the leader lets the team decide and inquires about the result.
- 7 **Delegate** – the leader fully delegates the decision.

Implementing the concept

One successful way of becoming familiar with the concept is to explore the options along some decisions you've made in the past. List some of the decisions the team and/or leader have had to take in the following grid:

Decision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Selecting a new trainee							
Vacation times							
Bonus distribution							
...							

Gather your team. Each member can express his or her preference along the seven options for every specific decision. Hand out different colored dots to place them in one of the columns. If voting happens at the same time, you will get a clear snapshot of individual and team preferences. In a subsequent step, discussing and understanding individual preferences and expecta-

tations is the next interesting part. Once there is a thorough understanding of team preferences, you can turn toward finding solutions for the eventual differences. One possibility is to start from the most far-flung opinions to find out if they can be brought closer together. Several rounds of voting may help to form some kind of consensus. Experience shows that focusing on past decisions turns the discussion more specific and tangible with good conclusions for the future. Using the tool and exploring it in an open discussion helps leaders and team members incorporate the most important guiding principles. This will help in selecting the right decision-making method for the future.

Practice makes perfect

The challenge of good decision making is about finding a balance between pace and involvement, speed and quality, participation and chaos. Not every decision can be delegated: content-related expertise is one of the most important factors for agile teams. Different people also have different preferences concerning how decisions should be taken. Therefore, teams should spend some time exploring these preferences and finding their own best-fit principles. Not everybody is willing to take accountability for certain decisions. Address the several reasons accordingly to find a suitable solution. A more participative process will take longer, but it will certainly generate more commitment. Is it worth it? For sure, yes! You and your team members will become much more aware of your own expectations and options for making jointly-accepted decisions. ●