

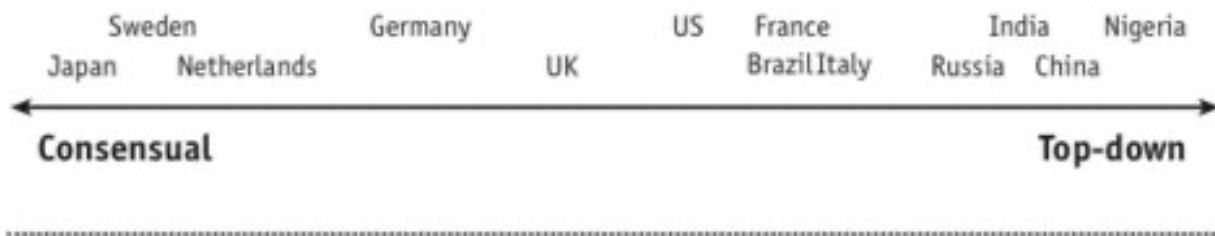
International Conversation Cafe

The Culture Map by Erin Meyer

Do cultural differences impact people and organizations that work globally? The answer is obviously, yes. From how we disagree to how we manage others, to how we communicate, our differences and misunderstandings can threaten to undo the cooperation we so desperately want. Enter Erin Meyer's, *The Culture Map*. Written in 2014, Meyer, a professor at INSEAD, a leading international business school, explains eight areas of friction between cultures. Each discussion guide focuses on one of the eight areas.

Who Decides?

FIGURE 5.3. DECIDING



One might think that the style of leadership determines how decisions are made for an organization. And largely, this is true, but not always. If the organization is hierarchal, then one would expect that the boss makes decisions and everyone under that person obeys. In contrast, if the organization is egalitarian, then one might assume that the boss makes a decision only after consulting everyone. Mostly, this might be true, but not always. In this discussion, we will look at the exceptions.

The United States tends to be egalitarian in some ways, but when it comes to decision making, the boss decides and the company follows. Germany tends to be hierarchal, but when it comes to decision making, Germans gather the opinions of people who work in the company and the decision made reflects the group consensus. The conflict arises when the two try to work together. The Americans would come to a decision they might change tomorrow which would frustrate the Germans who come to decisions that are meant to stick because the decision was carefully crafted by gathering consensus of the team.

In a consensual culture, the decision-making may take quite a long time, since everyone is consulted. But once the decision has been made, the implementation is quite rapid...and inflexible.

By contrast, in a top-down culture, the decision-making responsibility is invested in an individual...the decisions tend to be made quickly, by one person....But each decision is also

flexible...So plans are subject to continual revisions, which means implementation can take quite a long time. P 149

What has been your experience about decision-making in your own country and the one you are in currently?

What frustrations have you endured?

When working under a consensual decision-making process, here is what Meyer suggests you remember.

1. Expect the decision-making process to take longer with more meetings.
2. Demonstrate patience and commitment throughout the process.
3. Check-in with your counterparts to show commitment.
4. Cultivate informal contacts within the team to be aware of what is going on.
5. Resist the temptation to push for a quick decision (p.158-159).

Why would these suggestions be important?

When working for a more top-down approach to decision making, remember these tips.

1. Expect decisions to be made by the boss with less discussion or solicitation.
2. Be ready to follow the boss' directives.
3. When you are in charge, listen to differing viewpoints carefully but make decisions quickly.
4. When the group is divided and there is no obvious leader present, take a vote. Everyone will follow the majority.
5. Remain flexible. Most decisions can be adjusted or revisited later.

If you are working in a team with people that represent both viewpoints, clarify the method that will be used throughout the decision-making process. P 159-160

What is your experience under a top-down approach?

Do you feel more comfortable in a consensual decision-making process or a top-down approach?

What would be the advantages or disadvantages of each?

How groups or businesses make decisions often reflect the history of the country. For example, regarding Americans,

American pioneers spread west across the American plains depended on arriving first and working hard, regarding mistakes as an inevitable and ultimately insignificant side effect of speed... Americans developed a dislike for too much discussion, which would just slow them down, preferring to make decisions quickly, often based on scanty information, whether by the leader or by voting, p.148.

How do you think the history of your country contributes to the way decisions are typically made there?