



SOCIAL INNOVATIONS EDUBYTE 15, MANAGING YOUR TEAM

LEARNING FROM THEORY Z, AN APPROACH TO CONSENSUAL DECISION MAKING



About Theory Z

Theory Z is adapted from the style of management that emerged in Japan after the destruction of World War II. The consensual form of management that emerged is credit for contributing to Japan's recovery after the world, often cited as "the Japanese economic miracle."

This approach was later adapted by big American companies by introducing **quality circles** as a management tool. These are small groups of workers and management that meet on a regular basis to assess their own performance, think of solutions and so improve quality.

Basic Techniques of Theory Z

Theory Z suggests that the most effective decision-making is accomplished by the group rather than by an individual manager working alone. This **consensual decision-making** style assumes that the group decision-making process will result in better decisions because:

- The group has access to more data and personal experience about what works and what doesn't.
- Different people bring different perspectives and better-quality information to base decision making on.
- Members of the group will buy into the group decision if they have helped develop it.
- It builds stronger and more confident managers and team members.

Our managers of Social Innovations after-school centres manage small teams of teachers, and this approach works well – as it is easier to achieve consensus in smaller groups.

It makes the work of a manager easier as team members are agreeable to a decision taken and run with it.

This approach presents an opportunity for the manager to hear different views and for the team to discuss successes and challenges. Best practice can then be shared, and challenges solved during weekly meetings. This minimises the burden on the academy manager to think of solutions all the time.

Building stability and continuity in teams

After World War II, Theory Z was developed to help build the loyalty and commitment of Japanese workers as the nation worked to rebuild itself and its economy. It encouraged teams of people to work towards the common good over a long period of time.

This is a good lesson for managers of Social Innovations after-school academies. Consensual decision makes each team member feel valued and builds the stability of each centre by encouraging unity and team spirit. It ensures continuity if a manager resigns from the position or is posted to another school. Knowledge is then easily passed from person to person and team to team, so that intellectual property and learnings are not lost.

Here are some practical tips to help managers develop a more consensual management approach

- Hold weekly team meetings (what the Americans called Quality Circles) to share learnings, best practice and to discuss challenges and solutions.
- Prepare for the monthly meeting with your mentor or supervisor. Prepare a list of points where you are needing guidance or support beforehand. Consider for discussion: where does each of your team members need support? How can each of them be given opportunities to learn, grow, improve?
- Bear in mind that there are times when it is necessary for a manager to make decisions without getting inputs from team members, especially in emergency matters where there is no time to consult or in any situation that a manager must make a decision.

This is an open source educational resource drafted by Social Innovations mentor Sibongile Nkosi. This note draws from the book: Management, Patric J. Montana and Bruce H. Charnov, a prescribed textbook when she studied management at WITS. It is based on the section about Theory Z, The Techniques of Japanese Management. See more EduBytes on www.socialinnovations.co.za