



Stanford eCorner

How Do You Establish a Decision-Making Process?

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Though the Fluidigm executive staff was incredibly bright and talented, says Worthington, they initially were almost incapable at making decisions and constantly argued. Worthington decided that the only solution was to set up a decision making process. He set a timeline for the decision, organized the staff into teams, and gave them specific instructions to evaluate the options. Each team performed wonderfully and the process even spurred invention, he notes.



Transcript

The answer to this question is actually one of the more interesting times at Fluidigm. So I recruited an executive staff that I was really proud of, really smart people and we had all these different application ideas and we would sit in my staff meetings and just argue like crazy. I mean just for weeks, we just argued about this one and that one and all this other kind of stuff. I really thought when I finally got all these people who were way smarter than I was together in a room that we'd just talk it through that we'd come to an answer, and that wasn't happening, not at all. My wife and I actually went away to the Caribbean for New Year's and I spent almost the entire time waist deep in water just like this staring out of the horizon trying to figure out what in the hell am I going to do. On vacation, I'm the kind of person who likes to climb mountains and run around and do all this kind of stuff. My wife thought I had gone at the deep end. While I was out there, I had an idea. My idea was okay, if we can't decide then I'm going to set a deadline to make a decision. I'm going to create a process and the process is going to be we're going to pick our top five applications and we're going to do it in half an hour and then we're going to organize teams around each one.

And each team is going to do the same thing, they're going to try to prove feasibility of the product, they're going to write a business plan, they're going to write a manufacturing plan, they're going to identify intellectual property risks and issues and how to deal with them and any sort of partners and allies that we might need in order to be able to commercialize this. They're all going to have the same rules. They're all going to have the same formats. We said go on January 2nd, 2002 and I said we're going to decide on February 28 and that's it, go. Each team had an executive champion and each executive had their favorite application. It was wonderful. It was one of the more fun times in the company's history. There was all kinds of inventions, just unexpected things happened in protein crystallization for one. And people just did a phenomenal job. It's also part of this thing where we had waited just to the right point to decide and then when we started this process, everybody was into it and did their best to come up with the very best answer and we stuck to it.

We didn't have a complete answer at the end of it and we relied on collective judgment but we did have an unexpected result which was that our best shot was clearly protein crystallization. But I have to tell you we still made that decision without having all the answers. There are a bunch of unknowns still at that time, including actually whether or not protein crystallization would work repeatedly in the chips.