

all twenty sections by Wednesday, and only six of our rigs are working. Let me know if you guys can possibly get it done, how, and what extra expenses we'll have to incur."

Regardless of the approach, there are real-world practicalities for the manager to keep in mind. An overriding consideration is that he or she is responsible for the method's result.

It is important for subordinates to know what their role is in any given decision making process. Problems can arise from the boss' failing to communicate what is expected and how supervisory authority will be used. If a grower only wants to check out a decision that he or she will make, but workers get the idea that it will be delegated to them, confusion and resentment are likely to follow. When a foreman who knows from the outset exactly what he wants to hear and tries using a "democratic front" to get workers to think that the idea is theirs, the act will probably be smelled from "the back forty."

Even if they want to involve employees as much as possible, supervisors cannot delegate any more responsibility than they have been given. Employees ought to be told clearly about their discretionary limits when asked to take any role in decision making. And if no action results from the decision they help make, it should be no surprise when they lose their taste for involvement

The Right Approach

As usual in these matters, different approaches tend to be more practical under different circumstances. While there is no formula for determining precisely how to act, several factors bear on whether a given level of employee involvement makes sense. From instance to instance, the factors have varying weights, but the grower or supervisor who is sensitive to them can better decide on an appropriate mode of decision making in any given situation.

Attributes of the Manager

A grower's own beliefs and personality can usually predict more or less employee involvement.

- **Value system.** Some managers believe strongly that employees should participate in decisions that affect them, and others feel that involving workers in what managers get paid for is passing the buck. Such views would obviously influence the approach to decision making. Another personal key is the importance that the manager attaches to short-term organizational efficiency relative to long run employee development; the latter is usually served by more involvement.
- **Need for control and certainty.** When a manager releases some control over decision making, he reduces the predictability of the outcome.



Several factors bear on whether a given level of employee involvement makes sense.

Both mistrust and confidence can be self-fulfilling.

Growers and ranchers with more tolerance for ambiguity and surprise are better off delegating than their risk-averse counterparts.

- **Leadership inclinations and habits.** Some supervisors seem to function more naturally as highly directive leaders. Resolving problems and issuing orders come easily to them. Others are more comfortable sharing their options with subordinates. Most managers tend to perpetuate aspects of the styles by which they were led earlier in their careers.
- **Confidence in workers.** Generally, managers who have more trust in other people and specifically in their hired staff are better able to solicit and effectively utilize employee participation in decision making.

Attributes of Employees

A grower's confidence in workers may depend partly on his or her general inclinations but certainly also ought to be based upon employees' actual abilities and interests. People respond differently to decision making opportunities, and personal attributes are not fixed. Most employees are capable of significantly expanding their skill repertoires, and they can exhibit various levels of competence in the abilities they possess. How they develop and perform is affected by the structure within which they work, including what is expected of them and how they are treated.

A manager's mistrust can be self-fulfilling, especially in the long run. By a similar dynamic, the foreman with enough confidence in a worker to delegate part of an important decision (or a responsible assignment) is likely to be rewarded with both an immediate contribution and a more experienced, confident employee to whom he can delegate even more tomorrow. Many a "troublemaker" or "goof-off" from one ranch moves on to become a highly valued performer at another. Though personal circumstances often play a role in such turnabouts, so do management differences. To assume that either employee abilities or the manager-worker relationship is static is to undersell the potential of employee involvement in the decision making process.

A manager who is inclined to bring employees into a decision making process will find that involving certain individuals is more productive when they possess the following attributes:

- Knowledge and experience relevant to the issue at hand
- Interest in the issue and appreciation of its importance
- Understanding of and agreement with the goals of the business
- Desire for autonomy, responsibility, and growth to help meet the so-called "higher order" human needs
- Tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, as opposed to a need for firm structure
- Previous participation in decision making processes