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## Context to the conversation

Roopa speaks about how she made decisions given she had a high calibre team at Omidyar Network India. She also highlights the criticality of breaking down the “why” behind a decision so that the team members feel “heard”.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** I want to move to a different theme Rupa. In Omidyar Network you talk about a certain approach to decision making. You say 70 % agreement but 100 % commitment. Very often people use the term disagree yet commit but I like this sort of phrase. Talk to us a little bit about the nuance here.

**Roopa Kudva EP2 (RK):** So you know, particularly in investment firms where you're working with an exceptionally talented group of people and it is very important to have independent thinkers because it is core to the business model. So you will often find the partnerships, in any case there are no two people who see the world the same way and it becomes even more so in the case of a strong leadership team. And these are also very smart people. So how do you ensure that you're able to take all views on board? You're able to have a healthy debate and discussion and yet don't get into this analysis paralysis trap. It is so tempting to say, let's get more data, particularly in a world which is overflowing with data and information. Let's get some more information. Let's probe this question a little more. Let's run one more model or let's meet again next week to discuss further. These are very tempting, but beyond the point, they become counterproductive.

**DJ:** Especially when you're in an early stage, right?

**RK:** Especially when you're on an early stage and it could have to do with anything. may not have to do with making an investment. It could be basic decisions about the firm's philosophy, the way the firm is run, what kind of people to hire, strategy for the future. It could be about a diverse range of topics. And I think the worst time to make a decision on how to move forward is when you're actually faced with that situation. So what we did at ONI was we arrived at this decision-making framework saying that let's go by the rule of 70 % agreement, 100 % commitment, which means that we will leave enough time for discussion and debate. But once we reach a situation where 70 % of us around the table are agreed on a path forward, everyone will fall in line and everyone will commit to that decision. It takes a few things to work successfully. It needs clarity of direction. It needs everyone to be on the same page as far as the strategy is concerned. It needs trust amongst people. It also needs maturity that not everything will go my way, but there will be other times when things

will go my way. This time, the decision is not what I had originally subscribed to. But there'll be other times when somebody else's viewpoints don't get taken on board, don't get reflected in the final decision. So you win some, you lose some. But the whole idea is to build that spirit of commitment amongst the leadership team so that once a decision is made, everyone falls behind that decision, no matter what the original views on the top.

**DJ:** And maybe just staying with the 30 % that don't agree but still need to commit. Any nuance as a leader? How do you move the 30 % to commitment?

**RK:** Right. I think it comes over time, but I've found that as a leader, it is, you must expect that not everyone will like your decisions. And that is okay. You are not here to win a popularity contest. You are here to move the organization forward. As long as you are clear about why you made a decision and make the effort to explain to the person why you made the decision. The person may agree with your logic, may not agree with your logic, may not be happy, but they will respect the fact that you took the time to explain to them. Very often the dissonance or the heartburn comes from the fact that nobody bothers to close that. And very often, I think, friction is often a result of conversations that we don't have or we miss having.

**DJ:** Great point.

**RK:** And so I find that explaining the why, even though someone may not buy into it, is very powerful for taking people.

**DJ:** I think even in the coaching work I do sometimes how you trade off various things as a leader if you don't communicate enough then the sort of people attribute intent and they sort of it's just an opportunity lost in moving forward otherwise it sort of gets into another loop. Great point.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

**DJ:** I am reminded of the insight from Alan Eagle (AE), one of the Co-Authors of the book – Trillion Dollar Coach, which lays out the methods of Bill Campbell who had coached the Who's who of Silicon Valley ranging from Steve Jobs, Eric Schmidt, Sundar Pichai and many others.

**AE:** *"In the coaching I think Eric in particular learned a lot from Bill on this and they talked a lot about decision making but one of the most important things managers do is make decisions and like I said before you can't guarantee that you are going to make the right decision, you can never guarantee that but you can guarantee that you are on a good decision making process and that process entails making sure everybody is heard. Everyone needs to make sure that whatever side they are arguing they have a chance to really be heard. You know when sometimes in meetings there are the people who are the outspoken ones, who are always talking, they will always get heard but you need to look for the people who maybe aren't so outspoken, maybe not comfortable in arguing against a more powerful person in a meeting context. There are other ways to make sure that person gets heard, side meetings in the hallway, that sort of thing. So, when you are running a decision-making process, one, make sure you hear every possible perspective, you really stay open to it and then Marissa Mayer tells the story of how... but Marissa is such a smart person and she had a hard time doing this but Bill was coaching her that in your meetings when you are discussing decisions he made a rule for herself to follow: don't say a word other than maybe prompting other people speak. Don't opine until*

*everyone else has had a chance to speak because of course when the leader speaks up then people are going to maybe want to align with that or whatever and so Bill's advice to Marissa was kind of stay quiet until she heard all the perspectives. So, no. 1 hears all the perspectives but then sometimes you've got to make a call. We have all been in situations where people would just get an analysis paralysis and not make the call and so when the team is talking about something and everyone has had a chance to be heard lots of times the right decision would just come out of that discussion but if it doesn't the manager needs to make a call and then everybody needs to rally behind it and this is not consensus. Bill would talk about oh, I hate consensus, and I hate the concept of consensus because the concept of consensus is getting everyone to agree which will often lead to a watered-down decision which is not the right one. What it really is... my boss here at Google talks about is disagree and commit. Okay, I spoke up in the meeting, I had a chance to be heard, I don't agree with the decision we made, and I think it's the wrong decision, but I am on this team and I am in. I am going to play all in for this decision and not sabotage it in any way and that's the sort of behaviour Bill would expect. One of my favourite anecdotes in our book, it's just a little anecdote, it came from Rachel Whetstone. Rachel ran Policy and Communications here at Google for a long time and she was in Eric's staff meeting and there was something the company was doing or was planning on doing and she didn't want to do it; she thought it was a bad move and she argued passionately against this. She is a very passionate person and argued very passionately about it and she lost. After the meeting, Bill noted that she was disappointed in this so after the meeting he found her and he said, hey Rachel, that didn't go your way and as she was expecting kind of a pep talk and him telling her that maybe there is another way to get her decision made or something like that and instead he basically said that didn't go your way this time, suck it up, go with what the team decided, maybe you will get it next time and that was it. You didn't get it, you disagreed but they made a decision, you are on this team, you've got to be all in on it. That was his attitude."*

**DJ:** I guess, one of the elements of leadership is to listen widely but also to know when to move forward with conviction once you have a critical mass behind your decision. Not every one might fall in line but like Roopa says, the leader's job is to ensure that everyone is listened to and the rationale behind the decision is articulated for the people to understand the circumstances under which the decision was made.

## End of transcription

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Nugget from Alan Eagle that is referenced: [Enabling good decisions.](#)

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### About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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