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## Moment of Truth

I once knew an agency whose top officer used a very effective method with his "governing" board. He placed every proposal he submitted on the agenda for three successive meetings. At the first meeting he would say: "Obviously we need not spend time at this meeting, debating this proposal; for today it is merely being recorded on our schedule for careful review at two later meetings." At the second, he would say: "I think it neither feasible nor necessary to devote any particular attention to this item at this meeting. It has been before you previously, and after all it does not come up for any definitive action until our next meeting." At the third and final meeting he would say: "Now gentlemen, this proposal has, as you all know, been before you for some time. The action requested today is the purely formal one of official approval, merely to complete the record on a proposal which has been before you twice previously, and which I am sure already has your carefully weighed consent. Do I hear a motion?"

I know another organization that prides itself on the many carefully scheduled steps which constitute the procedure for preliminary approval of any proposal for a new activity. By the time the proposal reaches the higher levels of responsibility, the number of examinations and successive interim approvals is so impressive that there is an almost overwhelming temptation to assume that the real decision has already been made.

I know another organization which approves "preliminary" studies of feasibility, of tentative design, of advance and small-scale laboratory testing of units to see whether they can be made to function—all of this aimed in the direction of some huge new venture. These beginning steps are taken in a rather carefree atmosphere of "Well, it won't cost too much to try out some ideas; and after all, we can decide later whether we really will undertake the huge venture." But presently the organization finds that, without ever facing the central decision, it has drifted into a position from which retreat is impossible.

I hope it will not be too abrupt and curious a change of scene to recall what happens under the warm afternoon sun within the Plaza de Toros in Madrid, or Mexico City, or Linares, or Bogotá, or in many other Latin cities.

At each running of the bulls, after the haunting and foreboding pageantry of the entry; after the mad rush out through the gates of fear; after the grotesque ceremony of the picadores and the stylized precision of the banderilleros; after the exquisite skill and the frenetic bravado of the matador—then comes that quiet instant when best and man face each other in motionless challenge. Then is the moment when the bull's head goes down and the bright blade is poised. Then is the moment when courage and beauty and death confront one another, not in sham play, but in terrifying and noble reality.

If this honest and clear focus of decision can be achieved in the bull ring, is it too much to hope that, in the infinitely more significant contests which decide the great issues of support for science, we can make the preliminary steps serve, but not conceal or dominate? Is it too much to hope that there can be a cleanly recognized, an honestly recognized, moment when courage and wisdom and accepted responsibility confront the act of decision? Is it too much to hope that, in the administrative management of science and in the determining of the major lines of strategy, there occurs, from time to time, a moment of truth?—WARREN WEAVER, *Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, New York*