Effective Decision Making Basics

The decision-making process involves identifying alternatives, analyzing their consequences and the outcomes you want, and making the best choice. People make decisions for a lot of different reasons, both good and bad:

- To solve problems – If several alternative remedies are available, you have to choose the best.
- To move organizations forward – These decisions are frequently complex and difficult, so it's important you have effective decision-making skills.
- To cover up mistakes – This can have negative consequences because decisions aren't made for the good of other people or the organization.
- To improve one's standing – A desire to gain prestige or impress others isn't a good reason to make a decision.
- To facilitate fitting into a peer group – Sometimes people make popular or unpopular decisions because they think they will help them fit in or further their careers.

Given the variety of decisions people make every day, it's important to be good at decision making.

Effective decision making

Effective decision making is important for personal and professional success. People who don't think things through or who consistently make rash or bad decisions struggle to achieve their goals and find fulfillment.

Good decision making is also essential for career advancement. Any authoritative or responsible position requires good decision-making skills. Typically, managers need to be decisive and able to choose the right course of action. Alternatively, they need to know when it's appropriate to involve others in the decision-making process. Good decisions move teams and organizations forward, give them competitive advantage, and help them achieve their goals.

Finally, as an effective decision maker, you'll be more confident about the outcome of your decisions. This is because you will have carefully analyzed the potential consequences of your actions.

The decision-making process

You follow logical steps when you make a decision. It's useful to think of decision making as a conscious, established process so that you don't miss or compromise any steps. A basic decision-making model includes five sequential steps:

1. Establishing a context for success – The first step is to establish a context in which to address the problem effectively. To do this, you involve the right people, keep the decision group small, encourage participation, choose diverse settings for meetings, and avoid advocacy.
2. Framing the issue properly – Your experiences and expectations affect your perceptions. So when a complicated situation arises, you need to frame it properly to make sure you address the key issue. To avoid misframing, question initial perceptions. Try to pinpoint your and others' biases. Seek out the perspectives of other team members and try to approach the issue from several angles.

3. Generating alternatives – You need to be creative at this stage – try to come up with as many ways of understanding the situation as you can. You can brainstorm, which you do as a team by writing down as many possible alternatives as you can, without criticizing or judging them. You can also involve creative people; you should include people who tackle problems energetically and are original, thereby sparking healthy debate. Your list should include as many alternatives as possible, but it shouldn’t be overwhelming.

4. Evaluating alternatives – You now need to evaluate your alternatives. This involves determining how well each meets your objective. Several tools enable you to reach informed decisions, including a prioritization matrix, a trade-off table, a decision tree, and software programs.

5. Choosing the best alternative – Once you’ve considered the merits of each alternative, you need to choose the best. An important aspect of this is that you need to know when to end the deliberations. If you make a decision too quickly, you might miss a better alternative. If you take too long, you might miss valuable opportunities. You'll then need to turn the decision into action. First, communicate your team's finding to everyone who was and will be involved. Consider everybody that has given their input by stating why their suggestions were or were not taken up. To implement your decision, you'll need to delegate, set deadlines, and follow up. Ensure everyone is aware of their responsibilities and of how they may be affected by them.

**Influential Factors in Decision Making**

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<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>If you need to make a decision quickly, the most effective styles are the authority or expert, and the traditional majority or voting style.</td>
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<td>Importance</td>
<td>Where decisions are important or likely to have a significant impact on others, it's best to use either the consultative style or the consensus style.</td>
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| Knowledge | If your team is knowledgeable about an issue and has relevant expertise and information, you should use a consultative approach.  

If the team lacks relevant knowledge, it's better to use the authority or expert style; and then to explain your decision and its impact. |
| Buy-in    | When you need others to support a decision and its implementation, the traditional majority or voting style may work. However, it's generally better to use the consensus style. This ensures that everyone will support the final decision. |
| Experience| If your team has sufficient experience in making decisions as a group, you should use the consensus style. This style acknowledges your team members’ capabilities and involves them in the decision-making process.  

If your team is inexperienced in group decision making but has relevant knowledge about an issue, you should rather use the consultative style. |
### Complimentary Resources

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<tr>
<th>Activity Type</th>
<th>Learning Activity Title</th>
<th>Search Code or Web link</th>
<th>Est. Duration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Video</td>
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<td>25 mins.</td>
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<tr>
<td>eBook</td>
<td>Moving out of the Box: Tools for Team Decision Making</td>
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### Organizational and Talent Development

- Leadership Development
- Team Development
- Organizational Development
- Employee Development
- Learning Technology / Spark Learning

http://www.sanjac.edu/org-talent-development

- Register for **Leadership Discussion Groups** via SPARK Learning – Item # ODHR 5431
- Need information on how to navigate **SPARK**? Search **SPRK 1000** in the catalog to access the on-line training course: Spark LMS: Getting Started and General Navigation
  SPARK support available @ (281) 998-6399 (ext. 6399) or sparksupport@sjcd.edu

For additional Organizational and Talent Development support, email the OTD department at otd@sjcd.edu