



7 PRINCIPLES

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DEVELOPING YOUR INNER DECISION RESPONSE PLAN

A black and white photograph of a police officer in tactical gear, including a helmet with a visor and a vest with "POLICE" written on it. The officer is holding a rifle. The background is a light, hazy sky.

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Making easier and better choices will require you improving your decision making ability. That means providing yourself with the tools to do the job. Always making decisions 'on the fly' can be exhausting and will eventually wear you down. That's not to say those decisions are not good decisions but when it comes to complex choices, you want the best result.

The following principles are designed to work in unison to help you set the foundation to making less stressful and even better decisions when you have to.

In real-life business situations, decisions can often fail because the best alternatives are not clear at the outset, or key factors are not considered as part of the process. To stop this happening, you need to bring problem-solving and decision-making strategies together to clarify your understanding.

A logical and ordered process can help you to do this by making sure that you address all of the critical elements needed for a successful outcome. When you're making a decision that involves complex issues, you also need to engage your problem-solving, as well as decision-making skills. It pays to use an effective, robust process in these circumstances, to improve the quality of your decisions and to achieve consistently good results.

Working through this process systematically will reduce the likelihood of overlooking important factors.

INTRODUCTION



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When most of us are distracted, rushed, stressed and trying to do three things at once we perhaps don't perform at our best. If, in amongst that, you're wrestling with an epic decision, it's easy to see that you're behind the eight-ball to begin with.

Straight up – stress and anxiety restricts your ability to think clearly and that affects reasoning.

If you have to, schedule time to devote to the problem at hand. If the issue involves others then they too should devote some time for the necessary discussions.

Remove distractions such as phones, TV, internet and other people that are not directly involved in the discussion and decision. Yes, that may be the kids and even the dog!

Decisions can become complex when they involve or affect other people, so it helps to create a constructive environment in which to explore the situation and weigh up your options.

Often, when you are responsible for making a decision, you have to rely on others to implement it, so it pays to gain their support. If it's most appropriate to make the decision within a group, conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify who to include in the process. To build commitment from others, make sure that these stakeholders are well represented within your decision-making group (which will ideally comprise five to seven people).

PITFALL - Not Enough Information

If you do not have enough information, it can feel like you are making a decision without any basis. Take some time to gather the necessary data to inform your decision, even if the timescale is very tight. If necessary, prioritise your information-gathering by identifying which information will be most important to you.

1. SET THE SCENE



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Decision fatigue is a real phenomenon. After a long day or an extensive period of having to make choices or decide outcomes we all fall victim to overload.

There are times when it is okay to 'go with the flow' or not be bothered about the outcome. "I don't mind what's for dinner, you decide" Ever, found yourself uttering something like that to a partner or spouse?

However, if the decision is something that will affect your life more than one meal then abdicating responsibility for the decision is not ideal.

So too is how we are influenced by the media, our friends, popular opinion and advertising and so on. Rather than settling for a choice that appears popular or trendy, look at the problem from your own point of view and determine what's important to you. Remember you are going to be the beneficiary of the decisions you make.

PITFALL - Too Much Information or Too Many People

Having so much conflicting information that it is impossible to see the wood for the trees'.

This is sometimes called analysis paralysis, it delays organisational decision-making, with those involved demanding ever more information before they can decide. This problem can often be resolved by getting everyone together to decide what information is really important and why, and by setting a clear timescale for decision-making.

Making decisions by committee is difficult. Everyone has their own views, and their own values. While it's important to know what these views are, and why and how they are important, it may be essential for one person to take responsibility for making a decision. Sometimes, any decision is better than none.

2. INVESTIGATE



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The wider the options you explore, the better your final decision is likely to be.

Generating different options may seem to make your decision more complicated at first, but coming up with alternatives forces you to look at the problem from different angles.

It can be helpful to employ a variety of creative thinking techniques. Step outside your normal patterns of thinking and you may very well come up with some truly innovative solutions.

Brainstorming is probably the most popular method of generating ideas. When you're satisfied that you have a good selection of realistic alternatives, it's time to evaluate the feasibility, risks and implications of each option.

Almost every decision involves a degree of risk. Use risk analysis to consider your options objectively. Use a structured approach to assessing threats, and evaluating the probability of adverse events occurring – and what the implications may be.

Then, prioritise the risks so you can focus on the ones that are most likely to occur.

PITFALL - Vested Interests

Decision-making processes often flounder under the weight of vested interests. Vested interests are often not overtly expressed, but may be a crucial sticking point. Because they are not overtly expressed, it is hard to identify them clearly, and therefore address them.

It can also help to explore the rational/intuitive aspects with all stakeholders, usually with an external facilitator to support the process.

3. EXPLORE OPTIONS

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Once you've evaluated the alternatives, the next step is to make your decision. If one particular alternative is clearly better than the rest, your choice will be obvious. However, if you still have several competing options, there are plenty of techniques that will help you decide between them.

If you have various criteria to consider, use decision matrix analysis to compare them reliably and rigorously. To make and use a decision matrix, you'll need to create a chart. The different decision alternatives are listed as the rows, and the relevant factors affecting the decisions, such as cost, ease and effectiveness, are listed as the columns. Then, establish a ratings scale to assess the value of each alternative/factor combination.

Decision Trees are also useful when choosing between different financial options. These help you to lay options out clearly, and bring the likelihood of your project succeeding or failing into the decision-making process.

If your decision is being made within a group, discussion, debate, negotiation and voting are ways to help you to reach a group decision.

When anonymity is important, decision-makers dislike one another, or there is a tendency for certain individuals to dominate the process, use the Delphi Technique to reach a fair and impartial decision. This uses cycles of anonymous, written discussion and argument, managed by a facilitator. Participants do not meet, and sometimes they don't even know who else is involved.

PITFALL - Emotional Attachments

People are often very attached to the status quo. Decisions tend to involve the prospect of change, which many people find difficult. Remember 'deciding not to decide' is also a decision.

4. CHOOSE THE BEST OPTION



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With all the effort and hard work you've already invested in evaluating and selecting alternatives, it can be tempting to forge ahead. But now, more than ever, is the time to "sense check" your decision. After all, hindsight is great for identifying why things have gone wrong, but it's far better to prevent mistakes from happening in the first place!

Before you start to implement your decision, take a long, dispassionate look at it to be sure that you have been thorough, and that common errors haven't crept into the process.

Your final decision is only as good as the facts and research you used to make it. Make sure your information is trustworthy, and that you've done your best not to "cherry pick" data. This will help you avoid confirmation bias, a common psychological bias in decision making.

Discuss your preliminary conclusions with important stakeholders to enable them to spot flaws, make recommendations, and support your conclusions. Listen to your own intuition and quietly and methodically test assumptions and decisions against your own experience. If you have any doubts, examine them thoroughly to work out what's troubling you.

PITFALL - No Emotional Attachment

Sometimes it's difficult to make a decision because you just don't care one way or the other. In this case, a structured decision-making process can often help by identifying the pros and cons of particular actions, that perhaps you hadn't thought about before.

Many of these issues can be overcome by using a structured decision-making process. This will help to reduce more complicated decisions down to simpler steps, see how any decisions are arrived at; and plan decision making to meet deadlines.

5. EVALUATE YOUR CHOICE



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Once you've made your decision, you need to communicate it to everyone affected in an engaging and inspiring way.

Get them involved in implementing the solution by discussing how and why you arrived at your decision. The more information you provide about risks and projected benefits, the more likely people will be to support your decision.

If people point out a flaw in your process as a result, have the humility to welcome their input and review your plans appropriately – it's much better to do this now, cheaply, than having to do it expensively (and embarrassingly) if your plans have failed.

PITFALL - Don't Make Simple, Complicated

Different techniques of decision making have been developed, ranging from simple rules of thumb, to extremely complex procedures. The method used depends on the nature of the decision to be made and how complex it is

6. TAKE ACTION



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Adjusting your decision depending upon all the variables that may affect that which you have decided upon is vital in ensuring that your decisions are appropriate. This may be by monitoring the outcome of your first actions derived from your initial decision or it may be that additional information has come to light, the circumstances have changed or you have consulted more widely.

Asking the right questions is one thing but listening, interpreting and understanding the answers is an important component in any feedback loop.

Making a decision quickly is a skill that will serve you well. However, having the ability to change your decision slowly, if the situation demands, is the icing on the cake.

PITFALL - Sticking to Your Guns

There are many tools and techniques that you can use as part of making a good decision. If you use them all, however, you could end up spending a long time making a small decision.

Pick and choose decision making techniques appropriately, depending on the nature and scale of the decision you want to take.

7. FEEDBACK LOOPS

COURSES & COACHING

MOVE THE BALL FORWARD

What's holding you back? Doing battle with procrastination? Are your staff or family getting impatient with you because you often have a 'wait and see' approach to things? This 'toe in the water' one-hour awareness training session looks to set out common barriers and pitfalls to decision-making.

DECISIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

For emerging leaders. Three half day workshops designed to give new staff or upcoming leaders the skills and insight in decision-making needed to lead. A three month program.

PROGRESSIVE MENTORING FOR EXECUTIVES

Exclusive mentoring for executives looking to progress new idea, change or restructure through uncertain or ambiguous times. By application only — Limited to five mentoring clients at any one time



LEADERSHIP UNDER ADVERSITY

Are those around you looking to you to 'steady the ship'? Whether you're a corporate or captain of your local sports team making the right decision when the situation is uncertain and time is of the essence is rough. This full-day course sets out the decision skills required in these circumstances and includes a range of exercises to test your learning.

KEYNOTES & WORKSHOPS

By interweaving emergency management stories with key decision-making, leadership and team concepts, I present keynotes that your Company or organisation can immediately apply. I am a seasoned speaker who engages audiences with captivating material that empowers leaders to break through indecision to help build high-performing, winning teams.

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DECISION MAKING

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