

Activities taken from Girl Guiding UK Peer Education pack: Decision Making. (2011)

Decision Making

- Objectives must first be established
- Objectives must be classified and placed in order of importance
- Alternative actions must be developed
- The alternative must be evaluated against all the objectives
- The alternative that is able to achieve all the objectives is the tentative decision
- The tentative decision is evaluated for more possible consequences
- The decisive actions are taken, and additional actions are taken to prevent any adverse consequences from becoming problems and starting both systems (problem analysis and decision making) all over again.

Everyday techniques

Some of the decision making techniques people use in everyday life includes:

- Pros and Cons: listing the advantages and disadvantages of each option, popularised by Plato and Benjamin Franklin
- Simple Prioritisation: choosing the alternative with the highest probability- weighted utility for each alternative (see Decision Analysis) or derivative Possibilianism: acting on choices so as not to preclude alternative understandings of equal probability, including active exploration of novel possibilities and emphasis on the necessity of holding multiple positions at once if there is no available data to privilege one over the others.
- Satisficing: accepting the first option that seems like it might achieve the desired result.
- Acquiesce to a person in authority or an "expert", just following orders.
- Flipism: flipping a coin, cutting a deck of playing cards, and other random or coincidence methods.
- Prayer, tarot cards, astrology, augurs, revelation, or other forms of divination.

Decision-Making Stages

Developed by B. Aubrey Fisher, there are four stages that should be involved in all group decision making. These stages, or sometimes called phases, are important for the decision making process to begin.

Orientation stage- This phase is where members meet for the first time and start to get to know each other.

Conflict stage- Once group members become familiar with each other, disputes, little fights and arguments occur. Group members eventually work it out.

Emergence stage- The group begins to clear up vague opinions by talking about them.

Reinforcement stage- Members finally make a decision, while justifying themselves that it was the right decision.

Decision making Steps

When in an organisation and faced with a difficult decision, there are several steps one can take to ensure the best possible solutions will be decided. These steps are put into seven effective ways to go about this decision making process.

The **first step** - outline your goal and outcome. This will enable decision makers to see exactly what they are trying to accomplish and keep them on a specific path.

The **second step** - gather data. This will help decision makers have actual evidence to help them come up with a solution.

The **third step** - brainstorm to develop alternatives. Coming up with more than one solution enables you to see which one can actually work.

The **fourth step** - list pros and cons of each alternative. With the list of pros and cons, you can eliminate the solutions that have more cons than pros, making your decision easier.

The **fifth step** - make the decision. Once you analyse each solution, you should pick the one that has many pros (or the pros that are most significant), and is a solution that everyone can agree with.

The **sixth step** - immediately take action. Once the decision is picked, you should implement it right away.

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The **seventh step** - learn from, and reflect on the decision making. This step allows you to see what you did right and wrong when coming up, and putting the decision to use.

Biases can creep into our decision making processes. Many different people have made a decision about the same question (eg "Should I have a doctor look at this troubling breast cancer symptom I've discovered?" "Why did I ignore the evidence that the project was going over budget?") and then craft potential cognitive interventions aimed at improving decision making outcomes.

- Selective search for evidence - we tend to be willing to gather facts that support certain conclusions but disregard other facts that support different conclusions. Individuals who are highly defensive in this manner show significantly greater left prefrontal cortex activity as measured by EEG than do less defensive individuals.
- Premature termination of search for evidence - we tend to accept the first alternative that looks like it might work.
- Inertia - unwillingness to change thought patterns that we have used in the past in the face of new circumstances.
- Selective perception - we actively screen-out information that we do not think is important. In one demonstration of this effect, discounting of arguments with which one disagrees (by judging them as untrue or irrelevant) was decreased by selective activation of right prefrontal cortex.
- Wishful thinking or optimism bias - we tend to want to see things in a positive light and this can distort our perception and thinking.

- Choice-supportive bias occurs when we distort our memories of chosen and rejected options to make the chosen options seem more attractive.
- Recency - We tend to place more attention on more recent information and either ignore or forget more distant information. (See semantic priming.) The opposite effect in the first set of data or other information is termed Primacy effect (Plous, 1993).
- Repetition bias - a willingness to believe what we have been told most often and by the greatest number of different sources.
- Anchoring and adjustment - decisions are unduly influenced by initial information that shapes our view of subsequent information.
- Group think- peer pressure to conform to the opinions held by the group.
- Source credibility bias - we reject something if we have a bias against the person, organisation, or group to which the person belongs: we are inclined to accept a statement by someone we like.
- Incremental decision making and escalating commitment - we look at a decision as a small step in a process and this tends to perpetuate a series of similar decisions.
- Attribution asymmetry - we tend to attribute our success to our abilities and talents, but we attribute our failures to bad luck and external factors. We attribute other's success to good luck, and their failures to their mistakes.
- Role fulfilment (Self Fulfilling Prophecy) - we conform to the decision making expectations that others have of someone in our position.
- Underestimating uncertainty and the illusion of control - we tend to underestimate future uncertainty because we tend to believe we have more control over events than we really do. We believe we have control to minimize potential problems in our decisions.

Reference class forecasting was developed to eliminate or reduce cognitive biases in decision making.

From the moment we wake up our days are filled with decisions. These can be routine and mundane such as deciding whether to snooze the alarm or get up, what to have for lunch or which film to watch in the evening. Decisions can affect our lives such as deciding where to move to or which jobs to apply for. They can even affect the lives of others such as decisions made in relationship.