# What Drives Your Decision-Making Process?

Business leaders make decisions every day, all day long. Some decisions are made in split seconds; others are agonized over for weeks or months. The act of *decision-making is a cognitive process resulting in a selection of a belief or course of action among several alternative possibilities.* (*Thanks Wikipedia).*

Generally speaking, in making a decision you are trying to mitigate an issue or capitalize on an opportunity. It may be in response to what's happening within your company – an employee performance issue or a process breakdown; or you may be responding to a trigger outside of your company – a new RFP on the streets or a change in healthcare laws. For many, this time of year is when you plan next year's road map; making decisions on how you'll grow your business and what your priorities will be. Essentially you are problem-solving and strategizing.

**A Simple Decision-Making Process:**

1. **Identify the Issue or Opportunity.** What is the issue you are trying to resolve? Is it the root cause or just the symptom? Establish a framework for what it is you are trying to achieve. By visualizing and articulating what the ideal outcome would be, you gain clarity about what decision needs to be made.
2. **Gather & Analyze the Facts.** Capture the essence of the situation and determine what you need to know to make a decision. What's relevant? Who can be of assistance in the process because of their expertise, experience, familiarity or objectivity?
3. **Develop & Evaluate Alternatives.** Take off the blinders of habitual responses and open up some creative thinking. Practice "what if" scenarios to build out ideas and possibilities. Examine the potential benefits and pitfalls of your options – consider the reverberation of unintended consequences.
4. **Make Your Decision**.
5. **Act on it**. Decisions need to be communicated to all those impacted. The way in which you do this will impact the effectiveness of the implementation. Be clear on what was decided and why; as well as who is responsible for what. This provides clarity and direction. It also builds credibility.
6. **Mitigate Risks & Keep Learning.** Our work worlds are fast-paced, dynamic environments. We need to make the best decisions we can with the information we have. If we've appropriately analyzed the alternatives, we are in the best possible position of mitigating the anticipated risks. Not all things can be anticipated, for which we keep sharpening our skills; paying attention to what worked and what didn't.

**Independent or Group Decision-Making?**

Knowing when to make a decision unilaterally and when to include others in the process can be critical to its success. Not everything requires a group discussion! However, by involving other team members in the decision-making process, you increase their buy-in, sense of ownership and their connection and accountability for the results. It fuels the sense of team and camaraderie that is so vital to productivity. You also open up the discussion for new perspectives and potentially better thought-out solutions and consequences. People want to contribute and often have great ideas to share.

The potential downside of group decision-making is that it can be time consuming. In an attempt to please everyone, the solution may get watered down and be less effective or meaningful. There's also the danger of "group think" – where momentum is created in the wrong direction or individual responsibility and creativity is inadvertently discouraged. The desire for cohesiveness and a quick decision may lead to a less than ideal decision. Finally, group decision-making may create a perception of ineffective leadership.

**What gets in the way of making good, timely decisions?**

- Doubt. Uncertainty about one's capacity to make the decision.
- Fear of making the wrong decision; the belief that you have to make the perfect solution upfront.
- Too many choices. With the plethora of options in our world, it's easy to see how we can get overwhelmed by it and slip into the "analysis paralysis" trap.
- We overcomplicate things; making it harder than it needs to be.
- Accepting our assumptions as the "truth".
- Over-analyzing. Exceedingly long phases of planning, information gathering with little to no added value.
- Uncertainty about our authority to make decisions.
- Too much emphasis on consensus building.
- Over reliance on one's own perspective and resistance to contributions from others.
- Rigid, formal or bureaucratic organizational culture that is overly reliant on process and does not value risk-taking.
- Lack of preparation. While it is good to be able to be agile, lack of thoughtful planning can sabotage good decision-making.

I asked a client who I see as confident decision-maker on all things related to his business, *"What makes an effective decision-maker?"* His reply, *"Someone who is willing to take the risk and*

*make a decision. Once the decision is made, don't look back but immediately go into risk mitigation mode."*

Ultimately, you are making a decision that you deem is good for the health of your company. How does your decision impact profitability, long-term resiliency and employee engagement? Is it aligned with your core values? Does your decision reflect these considerations?

*Take the K Challenge:* What decision are you avoiding making? Walk through the decision-making process. The cost of not making a decision can be more expensive than making an imperfect one.

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