



Decision Making

Decisions

Not all of the many thousands of decisions we make each day are conscious. The majority are subconscious, or unconscious - 'by instinct' - such as when we perform routine tasks, or analyse information when driving. We see this especially in an emergency, when there is no time to make a conscious decision. Experience counts; we may have faced a similar situation before and made a right or wrong decision, which we have mentally reviewed and stored until next time. In time, decisions made consciously become automatic.

Some of the decisions you will need to make are more major, especially if you are a manager deciding on a course of action that will affect your department or team. At this level, major decision-making borders on project management, and some project management techniques may be of use. You may also want to use some of the techniques for problem analysis and solving. The procedure below is for making major decisions, where the issues are not as straightforward or clear-cut as usual.

Making decisions

The process of making a conscious decision can be broken down as follows:

1. Define the issue

What exactly is the problem? At this point you may want to use one or more of the techniques for analysing the problem, to ensure that you are actually addressing the right cause, and not just a symptom or subsidiary problem. These include:

- Force Field Analysis
- Cause & Effect / Fishbone diagram
- SWOT Analysis

These are fully explained in the Top Tip on Problem analysis.

2. Clarify the aims

Be really clear on what you want to happen.

3. Identify any stakeholders

People who have an interest in the outcome include:

- Colleagues in your immediate team or other teams who work on site
- Other managers
- Departments at Basildon or Milton Keynes
- Customers

There may be others, depending on the issue, and you should take their opinions and thoughts into account at this stage.

4. Investigate the issue

Involve all relevant parties and sources of information.

5. Generate options

The more, the better - techniques to help here include:

- Brainstorming
- Mind Mapping

6. Evaluate the options

If appropriate using a cost v benefit analysis.

7. Select

Choose your preferred option and communicate it.

Communicating decisions

Tell it?

Not all the decisions you make will be popular. You will need to choose the best way to communicate your decision, and your management style will affect how you announce them to your team. For example, a manager with an autocratic style will announce the decision and expect the team to get on with it. If you feel comfortable with this, remember your team may not, and this can cause discontent that will lower team morale.

Sell it?

It may be better to 'sell' it in, perhaps at a team briefing, following the same steps and the logic that you used when making the decision yourself in the first place. Your decision does not change, but can become easier for your team to accept when they know the reasoning behind it. Alternatively, if your style is democratic and the group has made or helped to make the decision in the first place, peer pressure from those who made it will help to gain acceptance from the rest of the group.

Own it!

One thing to avoid is abdicating the responsibility. It is tempting and easy to blame an unpopular decision on someone else, but it will not help your credibility as manager. If it is not your decision, you may want to acknowledge this, but it is still your responsibility to implement it. In this case you should focus your team briefing on how you can effectively implement the decision, not on the wisdom or otherwise of making it in the first place.

Implementing decisions

Being an effective leader involves making things happen. Your decision is only good or correct if it leads to the desired outcome, and to do this needs an effective, well planned implementation procedure. Follow a checklist similar to this:

✓ **Identify clear SMART objectives**

✓ **List the critical activities**

- What do you need to achieve?
- Identify the measure/s of successful completion

✓ **List the sequence of actions**

Include dates by which they must be achieved – you may need to use a Critical Path or Gantt Chart to help with this – see the Top Tip on Project Management.

✓ **Identify the resources**

- What do you need?

✓ **Plan the implementation**

For each activity use a checklist such as:

- **What** – the specific objective
- **How** – the method
- **Who** – who will do this, who else is involved
- **When** – the completion date, any milestones or other critical dates

✓ **Communicate**

Convey this to all the relevant people, keep them informed throughout

✓ **Monitor, review, and evaluate**

Check what happens as a result; and plan and implement any corrective action necessary such as catching up with slippage on dates.

For related topics see Top Tips:

- **Analytical Thinking**
- **Creative Thinking**
- **Prioritising Tasks**
- **Problem Analysis**
- **Project Management**
- **Strategic Thinking**