



Decision Making

Have you ever had to choose between two items for your organization and had trouble making a decision? If so, these steps may be useful to you and your organization.

TEAM DECISION MAKING STEPS

- Determine the problem.
- Generate possible solutions.
- Evaluate and test the solutions, plans or decisions.
- Decide on a mutually acceptable solution.
- Implement the solution.
- Evaluate the plan/solution/decision.

CONSENSUS DECISION MAKING

Hopefully, the above methods will lead a team to a decision based on consensus. Consensus-building is a process whereby the members of a team develop an alternative all the members can live with, although they may like another alternative better. It is sometimes tempting – and seemingly more effective – to resort to a vote when making a decision. A consensus usually results in a much better-implemented solution because if all of the members can live with a decision rather than vote against another alternative, the decision is more acceptable to the group and thus better-implemented.

Two methods of testing for consensus are the Thumbs Up and Stop Light models. As the leader goes around the room, the members signal “I can live with this decision” with a thumbs up sign in the Thumbs up model or a green index card in the Stop light model. A thumbs down or a red index card indicate non-acceptance. A horizontal thumb or yellow index card indicates neutrality, “not sure,” or “need more information.”

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

How can one decide what is the ethically correct thing to do? Here are four questions to help you determine if a decision or action is likely to be an ethical one.

1. Is it legal?
2. If someone else did “this” to you, would you think it was fair?
3. Would you be content if this were to appear on the front page of your hometown newspaper?
4. Would you like your mother to see you do this?

If you can answer “yes” to all four of these questions, then whatever you are about to do is probably ethical.

(From “Reaping Returns of Ethical Acts” by Norman Augustine, Executive Excellence, November 1998.)

PLAN-DO-CHECK-ACT PARADIGM

PLAN

- Select the problem/process, and describe the improvement opportunity.
- Describe the current process.
- Describe all possible causes of the problem, and agree on the root cause(s).
- Brainstorm workable solutions and an action plan, including deadlines for improvement.

Do

- Implement the solution or change on a small scale first.

CHECK

- Gather data, and evaluate the results to determine if solution is having the intended effect.

ACT

- Continue the improvement process by revising the approach and acting on results.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL DECISION MAKING FOR TEAMS

- Members must agree on the process of how they are making decisions
- The establishment of norms for the process of decision making
- The ability of members to be open-minded and to explore a topic
- The ability of members to listen to the points of view of others
- Member’s avoidance of statements that shut down group discussion
- Members thinking more in questions than in statements

FACTORS AFFECTING TEAM

DECISION MAKING

THE MOOD OF THE TEAM

Level of self-confidence, attitudes toward each other, etc.

FACTS OF LIFE

Recognizing those factors that may be influenced by the team

URGENCY

What factors are influencing the speed at which this decision needs to be made

GROUPTHINK

The group's ability to overcome the urge to agree and to instead bring up ideas and thoughts contrary to the consensus of the members for the good of the group

INHIBITIONS

How comfortable group members feel expressing their ideas

FEAR

Level of fear on the team about ridicule or the leadership's tolerance of mistakes

OUTSIDE CRITICISM

Pressure and attacks by outside critics who have a vested interest in the outcome

FACTS VS. VALUE JUDGMENTS

Uncertainty about how to integrate information and values when making a judgment

CLARITY OF BOUNDARIES/LIMITS OF AUTHORITY

The level of understanding among all those involved about whom should be making a decision and the parameters within which the members can make decisions

CLARITY OF PURPOSE AND EXPECTATIONS

The extent to which the purpose of the group and the decisions are clear in the minds of the members, as well as how well the expectations of the group are defined

SIX STEPS OF DECISION MAKING

1. DETERMINE THE PROBLEM IN TERMS OF NEEDS (NOT A COMPETING SITUATION).

Identify the problem or situation. The problem or need for a decision should be clear.

2. GENERATE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO EVALUATE.

The word "no" is not allowed in this step. Brainstorm a list of options for consideration.

(See SOAR sheet on Brainstorming.)

3. EVALUATE AND TEST THE VARIOUS SOLUTIONS, PLANS OR DECISIONS.

Consider what would occur if each alternative was selected. Be mindful of how the alternatives will impact your relationships with other organizations or groups. Identify the criteria to evaluate each solution. Resources like time, money, interests and skills may all be criteria.

4. DECIDE ON A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION.

The alternative that best meets the criteria is usually the solution to implement. Be sure to present this decision to those who may be affected by it or to a large group for feedback.

5. IMPLEMENT THE SOLUTION.

Choose and put into action the best plan, solution or decision you have come up with. The solution may be a modified version of an option from the brainstorming list or entirely different. Keep in mind the policies, steps or procedures to be followed.

6. EVALUATE THE PLAN, SOLUTION OR DECISION.

It is a good idea to periodically review the plan, solution or decision you are implementing in order to ensure future success.

Leaders need to explain to all why they made the decision they made, why they are pursuing a certain course. When you make a critical decision but never explain it, you lose the opportunity to take others into your confidence.

(From "Teaching Values" by Irving H. Buchen, Executive Excellence, November 1998.)

For more information on organization and personal development skills in the SOAR series, stop by or call UNL Student Involvement, 200 Nebraska Union, 472-2454; or 300 Nebraska East Union, 472-1780. Staff members will be happy to assist you and answer your questions.

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updated 6/2008