Participant Materials
Decision-Making in Complex Times: Questions You Can Use Today
September 29, 2020
University of Virginia

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What is a decision you (or your team) must make, have made or will make in the future? (State it as a question.)

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Activity on your own: Which sub-questions (pp. 2 and 3) would you consider asking in each of the 5 stages (or stepping stones) of decision-making? (Use a highlighter or colored pen to select.)

Five Questions for Decision-Making in Complex Times

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Sequence	The Big Questions
I. Identifying the Issue/Question	What is the issue/question/challenge?
II. Generating Solutions	*What are all the creative possibilities for addressing the issue/question/challenge?*
III. Evaluating and Selecting Solutions	*What actions will we select to address the issue/question/challenge?*
IV. Implementing	*How will we get this done?*
V. Checking Back and Regrouping	*What has happened and what's next?*

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Questions for Decision-Making in Complex Times

I. Identifying the Issue/Question (What is the issue/question/challenge?)

    a) What are our hopes, worries, concerns, needs, around this problem or issue?
    b) Who are the stakeholders (those who will be affected by what we decide)?
    c) What is the history of this problem or issue?
    d) How can the problem/issue/decision be stated as a brief question?
    e) What is the underlying problem vs. the presenting symptoms?
    f) What are our assumptions about the issues and the underlying causes?
    g) What persistent patterns can we see?
    h) Why has it persisted till now?
    i) What are all the variables at play here?
    j) What factors are contributing?
    k) To what other problems/issues might this be connected?
    l) What data do we have?
    m) What data do we still need?
    n) Why do we think this problem is occurring?
    o) What will happen if we do nothing?
    p) What elephants in the room should we discuss?
    q) How will the final decision be made?
    r) Do we have the right people in the room to address this?
    s) _____

Tools to help you: Fishbone diagram, 5 Whys, Double loop learning, Dialogue, Timeline of Events, World Café, Systems Archetypes Diagrams

II. Generating Solutions (*What are all the possibilities for addressing the issue/question/challenge?*)

    a) What are the priority needs, concerns, hopes of the stakeholders?
    b) What is working well now that we don't want to lose?
    c) How have other institutions/organizations addressed similar problems?
    d) How might we be contributing inadvertently to this problem with our policies or structures?
    e) What could we do that is entirely different from anything we have tried before?
    f) What are all the options that might work to address this problem?
    g) What actions would we take if we were sure of success?
    h) What actions would we take if we were 10 times bolder?
    i) If we could go back to the beginning and redesign from scratch, what would things look like?
    j) What could we stop doing or do very differently to redirect our resources?
    k) What opportunities for partnering or collaboration exist?
    l) _____

Tools to help you: Appreciative Inquiry, Benchmarking, World Café, ICA Consensus Workshop, Brainstorming (done correctly), TRIZ, Crowdsourcing

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III. Evaluating and Selecting Solutions (*What actions will we select to address the issue/question/challenge?*)

a) How will each solution affect stakeholders?

b) What criteria or principles will we use to select our actions?

c) Which solutions align best with stakeholder interests (their hopes, worries, needs, concerns)?

d) What are the risks associated with our preferred solutions?

e) How do our top solutions align with our organization's values?

f) What are the constraints that will eliminate some possible solutions?

g) What are possible unintended consequences of our top choices for solutions and how can we avoid or lessen the impact of these consequences?

h) Which solutions will have the most leverage? (e.g. most effect for least effort)

i) If a strategy was unsuccessful in the past, do we know why it failed? What is different now?

j) What data do we have that either supports or does not support our top choices for solutions?

k) What are the possibilities for pilots or small-scale test projects?

l) With whom do we need to communicate now to avoid problems later?

m) _____

Tools to help you: Decision Matrix, Multi Voting, DeBono's Six Thinking Hats, Nominal Group Process, Force Field Analysis

IV. Implementing (*How will we get this done?*)

a) Who will do what by when?

b) What are the major milestones in this effort that we can celebrate?

c) How will we know we have successfully solved the problem/issue? (metrics)

d) When and how will we check on progress?

e) To whom do we need to communicate the progress?

f) What will be the most effective communication strategy(ies)?

g) Does the solution require retraining of employees or those we serve? If so, how will this be done?

h) What change management activities will help people implement the solution?

i) What potential roadblocks for users can we reduce now?

j) When and how are we going to check back on impacts of this solution?

k) _____

Tools to Help You: SMART Goals, Gantt Charts, Swim Lanes, Flow Charts

V. Checking Back and Regrouping (*What has happened and what's next?*)

a) Has the presenting problem/issue shown signs of improvement?

b) Do our initial assumptions about the problem/issue hold up?

c) What unanticipated results to do we see?

d) Do our assumptions need to change?

e) Have we involved the right people/players?

f) What are any sticking points and how can we remove the barriers to progress?

g) Have we been able to change the system(s) that contribute to the problem/issue?

h) What do we need to do now?

i)_____

Tools to Help You: Check Meetings, Double loop learning, PDCA cycle

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Breakout Room Discussion Questions

1. *What was your issue/question/decision?*
2. *What "aha's and insights" did you have as you selected the questions?*
3. *How could you use these questions in your work?*
4. *What are some additional questions to add to the collection (add to Chat)?*

Personal Reflections

1. **What stands out most in your mind from today's workshop?**

2. **Next Steps: How will you use powerful and exploratory questions <u>for decision-making?</u>**

Links

[Dancing with Systems,](#) Donella Meadows
[The Fifth Discipline,](#) Peter Senge
[Liberating Structures,](#) Keith McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz
[A Leader's Framework for Decision Making,](#) David Snowden & Mary E. Boone
[Journey of Facilitation and Collaboration Learning Opportunities](#)
[The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,](#) Thomas S. Kuhn