

White Paper

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Authors:

James S. Rowell, M.S.Ed.
Co-Founder &
Senior Consultant

Richard A. Pierce, Ph.D.
Co-Founder &
Senior Consultant

Solution Focus Areas:

Engagement / Morale
Leadership / Supervision

*For more information about Rising
Sun Consultants, contact Lynn
Lehman at:*
717-512-7531

or
Lynn@RisingSunConsultants.com

Visit our website at
www.RisingSunConsultants.com

The 5C's™: A Model for Group Decision Making

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Life itself can be seen as a continuous series of both large and small decisions. The ultimate quality or success of our lives, therefore, depends upon the cumulative effect of the individual decisions we make at each moment of our lives. It is essential, therefore, to be conscious of not only what decisions we make, but how and why we go about making those decisions.

For the purpose of this discourse, we will define decision making as:

The process of making active choices based on various past experiences, current needs and expectations, as well as thoughts and feelings about the future outcome of the choices we make.

Before going into more specific information regarding both strategies and recommended practices within any decision making model, it is important to first identify a list of guiding principles suggested by our working definition:

- Whenever we are faced with a decision in life, we always have freedom of choice in making that decision.
- When making a decision, the process (how we make the decision) is as important as the outcome (the decision we make).
- Decisions are influenced by both positive and negative internal (i.e. who we are as a person) and external factors (i.e. the effect on people around us).
- The need for control influences and/or limits the choices available.
- Due to the number of variables influencing a decision, decisions cannot be made in a vacuum. (Decision making is contextual in nature.)
- Every decision has an impact, result, or consequence.
- The impact or effect of a decision is multi-dimensional; it crosses over into many facets of one's life.
- The likelihood of a successful outcome of a decision is directly influenced by the level of ownership one has in the decision making process.
- When making a decision, we are answerable to both ourselves and others for the outcome of the decision.
- There are multiple strategies or techniques for making decisions.
- Decision making is a teachable process.

The goal of this discourse is to provide the reader with:

- an understanding that we really do have a choice about many important things in our lives,
- a repertoire of several different decision making techniques to be used in different situations,
- an understanding of why an agreed upon decision making process is important to the effectiveness of groups,
- the knowledge necessary to determine which decision making technique is most appropriate in which situation,
- an applied understanding of the value of decision making as a conflict resolution tool, and
- the opportunity to practice various decision making techniques and apply them to his/her personal and professional lives.

Every organization, group and individual makes numerous decisions each day. Unfortunately, not every organization or group agrees on how they will make decisions. This usually leads to confusion and people being hurt due to how some decisions are made. It is important for organizations and groups to come to agreement on a decision making model that include a process and techniques for making decisions. Here are a few rationales for agreeing upon a decision making model:

- Enables decision makers to set clear boundaries for the involvement of others.
- Clarifies accountability and decision making authority.
- Provides members with guidelines on whether and/or how to be involved in decisions.
- Lets people know what to expect and what is expected of them.
- Develops support, ownership and commitment of final decisions.
- Builds confidence, promotes a spirit of collaboration and supports leaders in sharing responsibility without experiencing a loss of control.

Based on both the above definition of decision making and our guiding principles, we will separate our discussion into three broad categories: process, influencers and outcomes. As such, “process” is used to refer to the steps an individual or group follows in coming to a particular decision. “Influencers” refers to the various related experiences, needs and expectations impacting both the number and quality of the choices available. Finally, “outcome” refers to the results or consequences of the decision.

Process

Several major researchers and theorists have suggested that an individual’s decision making style (process tendencies) may be dependent to a large degree on his/her relative position on one or more psychological dimensions (ex: introversion vs. extroversion). However, while we agree that decision making is likely to be influenced by one’s psychological makeup; we also believe that both individuals and groups can be taught to use a set of sequential steps in order to improve their decision making process.

As part of our overall approach to effective decision making, we recommend the following process:

1. Define the decision to be made.
2. Determine the desired future goal or outcome of the decision.
3. Clarify the variables influencing the decision.
4. Determine the best decision making method/technique for the situation (Rising Sun's 5C's).
5. Generate as many possible options/opportunities as possible.
6. Identify the pros and cons of each of the options/opportunities generated.
7. Determine the rationale for the decision.
8. Make the decision.
9. Communicate the decision and rationale to all involved and affected.
10. Evaluate the process used in making the decision
11. Evaluate the quality of the outcome of the decision made (follow-up).

Influencers

There are numerous variables or factors (both positive and negative) that have been shown to influence our decision making processes. For example, some experts point to such "barriers" as impatience, feelings of inadequacy, or the need to be in control as important influencers on effective decision making. Our findings have shown that the following seven factors appear to have the greatest influence on both individual and group decision making:

➤ **Context**

The specific situation/environment within which both the decision and implementation must take place.

➤ **Time**

Amount of time available to make the decision.

➤ **Resources**

Both quantity and quality of resources available to help make the decision and help implement the decision.

➤ **Involvement**

Level of involvement of those responsible for implementing the decision in making the decision.

➤ **Ownership**

Degree of ownership for making the decision by those responsible for implementing the decision.

➤ **Capability/Ability**

The actual ability or capability for making the decision at hand, as well as the actual ability or capability to implement the decision which has been made.

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➤ **Control**

Level or degree to which those making the decision have control over both those variables influencing the decision making process, as well as those variables influencing the implementation of the decision once it has been made.

Outcomes

As part of the decision making process, it is important that those responsible for making the decision consider the impact that the decision might have on those affected by the decision. This is particularly true in terms of the following four characteristics:

- Morale/Motivation
- Trust
- Relationships
- Ownership/Accountability

However, once a decision has been made, one of the most critical steps in helping to ensure the success of the decision is to provide a clear rationale or explanation for why the particular decision was made the way it was. As part of the decision making process, those responsible for making the decision should always consider the questions:

“Who needs to know which decision has been made?”

“Who needs to know how the decision was made?”

“Who needs to know why the decision was made the way it was?”

It is important that all those with a “need to know,” are provided with the relevant information in a clear, concise and timely manner.

Techniques: The 5C's of Decision Making™

There are a number of decision making “rules” or “forms” which can be used by a group in terms of how a final decision will be made. The following five decision forms are based on the level of participation and engagement desired by the members of the group in reaching the final decision:

- One of the most common forms of decision making in the United States and other “democratic” societies is that of “majority rules.” This form requires the support or affirmation of at least 51% or more of the members of the group in order for a decision to be reached.
- A second commonly used decision making form in both the United States and other democratic societies is the concept of “unanimity.” According to this form, all members of the group must agree in order for a decision to be reached.
- The third form of decision making is often referred to as “the power of one” and is commonly practiced in more “autocratic” forms of government. Simply stated, this is a process where decisions are made solely by one individual, typically the one with the greatest power or influence over the group.

- The fourth form of decision making is commonly referred to as a “consensus” style of decision making. The concept of consensus requires that the majority typically approves or agrees upon the decision, those who may have disagreed agree to go along with the implementation of the decision. This form of decision making is very similar to “majority rules”. The major difference is with “consensus”, the group agrees to implement the decision together even if it is not fully representative of their personal ideal.

Expanding upon these common practices, Rising Sun Consultants has identified five forms or styles of decision making (“Rising Sun’s 5C’s of Decision MakingTM”) which are designed to help groups determine how best to approach various types of decision making situations:

Style #1: Commissioned

- Description
 - Decisions are delegated to an individual or group after the leader clearly established the parameters within which the decision can be made.
- Rationale
 - To develop the highest level of member engagement and accountability.
 - To allow the leader to work on other items.
- Pros
 - Leader’s time can be spent focused on other important issues.
 - Team members are committed to the success of the decision.
 - Promotes decision making responsibility throughout the group.
- Cons
 - Time consuming and complex process.
 - Decision may not represent the leader’s vision or direction.

Style #2: Collaborative

- Description
 - Group members come together, brainstorm possible solutions and challenges to their own original thinking in order to create synergy in reaching a decision that everyone is excited to support, implement and advocate.
- Rational
 - To maximize the likelihood that a true “win-win” decision will be reached by the group.
 - To create a high degree of team engagement.
- Pros
 - Engages all members of the team.
 - High level of ownership for decision.
 - High level of creativity in decision.

- Cons
 - Relatively time consuming and complex process.
 - May be frustrating to some team members who prefer a quicker decision making process.

Style #3: Consensus

- Description
 - Group members come together to brainstorm possible solutions and negotiate a decision that everyone is willing to support and implement.
- Rationale
 - To increase the likelihood of a high level of input or involvement from all group members in order to ensure that everyone understands and is committed to the decision.
- Pros
 - Active participation by those involved.
 - High degree of support for decision.
 - Inclusion of various/minority opinions.
- Cons
 - Relatively time consuming and complex process.
 - Members may need to compromise which means that they may have a difficult time supporting the decision.

Style #4: Cooperative

- Description
 - Feedback is gathered from the group as a whole or from several individuals, then a decision is made and shared by the leader.
- Rationale
 - To provide the group leader with the opinions of other group members in order to make a more informed decision – particularly in cases where the outcome impacts all members of the group.
- Pros
 - Individual's interests are represented.
 - Provides groundwork for implementation.
 - Members have an opportunity to participate in decision.
- Cons
 - Group dynamics may be harmed.
 - Members may need to sacrifice their own ideas or desires, which may minimize support.

Style #5: Cloistered

- Description
 - The leader simply makes a decision and lets others know what decision was made.
- Rationale
 - To make a decision within a limited timeline in order to minimize the possibility of negative consequences.
- Pros
 - Decision is made quickly.
 - Control is vested in the leader.
- Cons
 - Decision may be made without critical information.
 - Limited ownership or buy-in of the decision by those other than the leader.
 - Control is vested in the leader.

It is important to understand that the five styles of decision making discussed above are not in a ranked order. Each style has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. All five styles have appropriate and inappropriate uses. It is not the specific style that is critical, but how the individual or group uses each style.

Ultimately, as an organization or group, the goal is to make the most effective and efficient decisions as possible. This needs to be done in a manner that involves as many stakeholders as possible to lead to the highest degree of ownership of each decision made. Ownership increases the likelihood that each decision made will be implemented successfully and will render the desired results.