

Managerial Problem Solving and Decision Making

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I will define the terms ‘problem solving’ and ‘decision making’, discuss the ways in which they are related, and their application individually and in groups. I will address creativity in the workplace and its utility in problem solving. Effort will be given to describe different decision-making styles, the application of a decision-making model, as well as techniques you can use to make better decisions.

Problem solving and decision making are inseparable concepts. Problem solving was first defined by psychologists in a study of how we think while decision making has its beginnings in economics and research into corporate operations (Decision Innovation, 2020). Both processes can be delineated in a five step process and bare remarkable similarities. The first step of either concept is to determine what situation is requiring a solution and to congeal this thought into its most basic elements. Subsequently, each model requires understanding and defining tangential issues and considering and assessing alternative solutions which can handle each, collectively or possibly individually. After the problem-to-be-solved or the decision-to-be-made is clearly articulated and solutions identified, the manager needs to choose that best course of action. As soon as that is identified, execute and act with resolve. Positive and negative consequences will unfold. Address each in a similar fashion. Lastly, both problem-solving and decision-making each require an evaluation of the effectiveness of the chosen solution and the methods of execution employed. As you can see, these models are inextricably tied.

A seasoned manager worth his or her weight in salt is no stranger to finding solutions to problems. Yet we all know the value of submitting a well phrased query to Google or in having a friend we can call on who is competent in the subject wherein we are tasked with solving a given problem. Here is a tip for improvement in problem solving, take everything you know about problem solving and divide it into two categories: Divergent thinking and convergent thinking. Divergent thoughts are new ways of approaching a given situation and convergent thoughts focus on evaluating your solutions. Next, you will need to be creative in defining your tangential issues. The second step in problem-solving and decision-making, covered previously, was to understand and define tangential issues and consider and assess alternative solutions which could handle each.

Collectively this is referred to as brainstorming (Mind Tools, 2020). This step can be a monstrous task. You will have to really analyze each secondary problem which may develop along the path of implementing a solution to your problem. Think creatively, abstractly, and conceptually in trying to come up with alternative solutions to your problem and try to avoid thinking in terms of the way you have always done things. Times change and so will your solutions to new and developing problems, so be creative.

A manager's decision making practices can generally be defined by one of three styles: Reflexive, reflective, or consistent management. Reflexive management requires time, grade, and experience. Managers following this style have a certain set of subconscious rules for reacting to situations, distinct habits, and standard responses that enable him or her to act deftly (Giulioni, 2019). Conversely, reflective management results in a significantly delayed decision-making process because he or she is purposefully choosing solutions in the instance when the problem arises. Given that these management styles are opposite ends of a continuum, consistent decision-making is a style which is a mix of the two, mitigating the negatives of each and seeking to retain the positives of both (Lussier, 2017). Consistent decision-making is superior in five distinct ways. It permits measurement of your successes and failures by eliminating variables through reliability. Consistency provides for a process of accountability in everything from setting goals for yourself to creating a schedule you can adhere to, and including setting realistic expectations and procedures for work-flow. When you are consistent as a manager, you begin to establish your reputation through a track-record of proven success. Consistency will keep you relevant and contemporary since you are always taking adequate time to consider solutions for problems which arise. Lastly, a consistent decision-making style will facilitate in setting a solid example for your subordinates to follow in your footsteps (Holtzclaw, 2012).

Decision-making can be further aided by the use of models. A decision-making model, also called a problem-solving model, is based on logical steps. They are used to rationally analyze a problem or situation. Models convey a step-by-step process which can be employed to make decisions. A model comes in all forms, from fairly straight-forward like the decision tree to sprawling and complex like the pareto analysis. In all forms of decision-making models they can speed up and expedite the listing of potential solutions. Some function best within specific

industries and others are more broad and general. Each gives a visual representation and can simplify the deciding process. There are many tools and techniques. I will analyze one, the flowchart, which is an invaluable tool in the information technology industry but has additional application to any problem which requires visualizing a process or something which has a distinct or predictable flow.

Making decisions is a primary aspect of a managers' duties. A manager is thus judged by his ability to analyze a given situation, comprehend tangential issues, derive possible solutions, select the best course of action, and execute all while handling positive and negative consequences. Decision-making is aided by models which help to visualize the situation and ulterior considerations. There are many models, including linear programming, queueing theory, probability decision theory, the payoff matrix, scatter diagrams, SWOT analysis, and cost/benefit analysis, to name a few. I'll briefly examine a handy model, the flowchart, which aids in visualizing complex processes. Flowcharts are composed of geometric shapes which define each step in a logical flow or process with connecting lines or arrows which demonstrate sequence (Lucidchart, 2020). A legend is used to define the geometric shapes used and the style of lines too. Flowcharts aid in decision-making by providing a visual representation of a complex problem or system. It can be used to understand and break-down any complicated system, algorithm, or process which would be otherwise difficult to comprehend when presented verbally or in writing. Lastly, flowcharts have the added benefit of documentation, a unique feature that provides a space to document information about each stop or step in the signal-flow. I personally have employed this visual decision-making model and regret when I've neglected to.

Decision-making is a critical skill which can make or break an organization. Decisions should be timely made; nevertheless, due consideration should be given to each. Herein I set out to delineate five tips and techniques than you can implement today to make better decisions. Firstly, adopt a task-oriented approach to your management. Working relationships with your team are important, but the primary duty of a manager is to get things accomplished leveraging the human-resources and other organization assets (Gavin, 2020). Focus needs to be on the tasks at-hand and attention must be given to the process. An effective manager will comprehend ulterior considerations and anything tangentially related to the decision which is under-contemplation. In

leveraging the human-resources, the manager should be able to pool from the collective knowledge and experience of the team and spend time in brainstorming sessions that put the whole team together to discuss and strategize. The old adage, two heads are better than one, applies as does the concept of synergy: The effect of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Third of all, an effective manager can make better decisions by promoting ad-hoc groups within the organization. An ad-hoc group is one composed of individual members communicating with each other directly. The ad-hoc nature of the group promotes the spontaneous and instantaneous sharing of information. Agents in bureaus of government will be familiar with proprietary information and the lack of sharing of information which would be beneficial. Caution should be exercised by any managers who desire to form competitive groups within an organization. The competition for rewards, perquisites, or bonuses could create a decentralization of information and ideas. This can bring the company backwards rather than leading it to seek the desired goal of synergy within the organization and among team members. Fourth, promote a mutual-respect amongst your team. Something as simple as a concept that there is no such thing as a dumb question can go a long way to ensuring members share opinions avidly. Be sure to provide equal consideration to all opinions which have been shared. Your members will feel valued and encouraged to contribute. Lastly, do not lose sight of the desired outcome and goals which were originally set forth (Gavin, 2020). It can be easy to get side-tracked and subsequently lost pursuing irrelevant tangents. Some tangential considerations are imperative, others can get the team off-focus. Good managers will be able to discern the difference.

Managers may prefer to leverage the collective consciousness of the group in arriving at binding corporate decisions. There are however a few considerations and precautions which must be given due consideration before proceeding. First, ensure that the team has a definite leader. Perhaps it is you, perhaps it is a designated expert on the subject which is the subject of contemplation. Either way, this should be clear. Additionally, group members should be individually accountable for their actions and in carrying out delegated tasks. The success or failure of the group should be able to be attributed where due to members individually. Each group member should contribute to the collective, but just as accountability should be held individually, so should the effectiveness of each member be individually measured. As the manager, you should

promote group discussions, shared input into decisions which are to be made, and delegate work to be performed by group members individually (Barnett, 2020). Lastly, employ the Delphi Method of convergence. This method consists of group members making predictions and suggestions and then being given anonymous feedback from other members of the group. This promotes an eventual convergence toward the solutions which are most approved by consensus while presenting members with constructive feedback. A case study on the success of the Delphi Method is Toastmasters International, an international organization which promotes public speaking and leadership training. Its administrative organizational structure is hierarchical with its formation of regions, districts, areas, and individual toastmaster clubs. They implement the Delphi Method with members who give speeches receiving feedback from members of the club on slips of paper after presenting.

Problem-solving and decision-making are harmonious. Effort has been expended to discuss their correlation and the irreplaceable role that creativity has in the decision-making process. In review of the different decision-making styles, reflective and reflexive, the combination of the two is termed the consistent decision-making style, which is preferred, and in-effect is a mixture of the two, mitigating the negatives of each and seeking to retain the positives of both. Decision-making models are tools and techniques which greatly aid in visualizing complex processes. Decision-making is an integral part of the manager's day to day operations and he would do well to hone his skills in this craft.

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