3 Decision-Making Techniques to Suit Any Purpose, Project, or Need

~ By Adele Sommers

Is there a secret to making stellar decisions? I’m talking about a process that:

- Engages people in reaching satisfying, robust conclusions
- Guides thorny, complex problem-solving with relative ease
- Averts expensive project failures instead of causing them

Decisions made during problem-solving sessions are legacies businesses often have to live with for a long time! Not every decision requires special attention; many are simple and routine.

But the more risky, costly, or large-scale a problem or project is, the more attention it requires. In these instances, the after-effects can come back to haunt people who bypassed good decision-making procedures. This article explains three ways to get superior results from your decision-making processes.

Avoid "Mission Impossible…"

Remember the old saying: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail?" The quality of the decisions people make in group settings determines the long-term benefits of those decisions. Unfortunately, potent tools and techniques for making complex decisions and solving tricky problems don't seem to be widely understood.

Decision-making techniques are critical for managing projects, for example, where they should be visible in every aspect of project planning. Imagine an aerospace company that designs and builds highly complicated satellite equipment. The potential exists for large-scale fiascos if every facet of every phase doesn't come together perfectly!

Yet, for various reasons, decision-makers often feel pressured to arrive at expedient outcomes when working on urgent issues under tight deadlines. Sidestepping sound decision-making techniques often occurs in the planning stages "for the sake of the schedule." But rushing through a project can easily backfire, and actually cause it to go over-budget and end much later than the original schedule would have required.

You’ve probably noticed that the consequences of poor decisions - where people hurried to make a decision without weighing all of the important issues - can range from annoying to catastrophic.

...And Turn It into "Mission Possible!"

If you’ll recall in the "Mission Impossible" series, the characters invented ingenious manoeuvres and planned
every aspect of the project down to the most minute detail. Even though it wasn't always obvious to us - the viewers - the mission planners and implementers had to weigh the risks, alternatives, and "what if" scenarios of every potential outcome. All of these actions contribute to great decision making.

The best decisions for difficult problems can withstand future challenges because they use structured techniques.

These techniques help the participants generate breakthrough ideas, jointly analyse risk, and weigh alternatives. Intricate decisions made without them can quickly fall apart and may even cause harm. So to arrive at great group decisions, I rely on proven, highly adaptable methods such as these:

1. **A silent brainstorming process that leads to breakthrough thinking with exceptionally good results. It uses an affinity diagram.**

   Why is silent brainstorming useful? The process of generating brand, new ideas naturally excites our filtering mechanisms - the ones that protest that we've already "been there, done that," or that someone's new idea can't work "because..." Silent brainstorming, on the other hand, helps us get past those instinctive hurdles to expose new frontiers that we might not have explored.

2. **A handy problem-solving tool that helps people identify underlying causes of challenging problems. It uses a root cause diagram.**

   Why is getting at root causes necessary? Because too often, we fail to look deeply enough at what's responsible for a particular problem. There may be a whole series of nested or interconnected reasons for orders not being filled correctly, for example. The answer could be far simpler than anyone thought, such as a faulty printer ribbon that doesn't print orders clearly, rather than, say, a training issue. We'd never know without asking "why" from several angles and points of view.

3. **A tidy decision-making technique that enables a group to compare ideas and alternatives. It uses a prioritisation matrix.**

   Why is prioritising valuable? It's one of the ways we can best assess the relative merits of one idea over another, especially when each has several complex components. Using a tool with a built-in scoring system can coax the real winner to emerge, clearly separating it from the "runner ups."

In conclusion, structured decision-making produces sturdy, satisfying results, even for complex projects or problems, while boosting both morale and profit potential. For more information on these methods, you may want to explore the decision-making tools and guidebooks at GoalQPC.com

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