



May 2009

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What is the Decision Leader Review?

This monthly publication brings you current research and information in the area of business decision making. You'll find new concepts and ideas you can put to use immediately to impact the quality and speed of your strategic and tactical decision making activities.

Another document to read? Who has time? We carefully edit each issue for number of words. Our "must" limit is 930 words, or 3.5 minutes. So we hope you'll choose to spend 3.5 minutes with us, every month!

Decision Framing - *Getting off to the Right Start*

Last month we discussed the first element of Decision Quality - Accurate Assessment of the Decision Situation. If you missed this article, click [here](#) to access it. This month we address the second element of Decision Quality: *Appropriate framing of the decision, including involving the right people.*



This element of Decision Quality involves two critical factors:

- Framing the decision in a way that facilitates sound analytical focus.
- Involving the right people and achieving role clarity in the decision process

Framing the decision means declaring the objective(s) of the decision, selecting the right decision 'level', or scope of the decision to be addressed, and identifying viable alternatives as choice options. What can go wrong if these things are not aligned?

- The decision scope becomes too broad or too narrow.
- The wrong people become involved in the decision.
- The decision process suffers from lack of focus.
- Conflicts emerge over how to approach the decision.

Of these difficulties, the most damaging mistake is entering the decision analysis at too narrow of a scope. This is usually manifested by the decision being framed as a "binary" question.

Examples:

"Should we move all user publications to the web?"

"Decide whether or not to consolidate distribution centers."

"Should we reorganize the North American Operations Division?"

When a decision question is addressed as binary, we are limiting the decision to only two possible outcomes and force stakeholders to support one alternative strategy or the other. In addition, we may end up masking the true objectives of the decision. Perhaps most importantly, the opportunity to create higher quality solutions is missed, because of the narrow lens through which the decision is viewed.

There are three methods to select the proper frame for each decision. First, decisions should always be framed as statements, beginning with a verb like *choose* or *select*. This alone eliminates many of the potential problems with binary decision questions.

Examples:

"Choose the best method to distribute user publications."

"Select the best distribution strategy for the business unit."

"Choose best organizational strategy for the North American Operations Division."

Second, explore different decision levels by expanding and narrowing the scope of the decision statement. This helps zero in on the right scope for the analysis. Example:

- **Original Decision Statement:** *Choose best site to manufacture the new product (alternatives: USA, Germany, Puerto Rico, China).*
- **Broader scope:** *Choose best manufacturing strategy for new product (alternatives: internal, outsource, OEM partner).*
- **Narrower scope:** *Select the best USA site to manufacture the new product (alternatives: Texas, Iowa, Tennessee).*

This process helps the team to break free of its original perspective and view alternative starting points for the decision. In our experience, this is one of the most effective means to select the "right" decision level for any important decision.

Third, make sure there are viable alternatives and these alternatives are connected to the object of the decision statement.

Example #1:

- **Decision Statement:** Choose best communication method for user publications.
- **Alternatives:** Paper publications, CD's, public website, secure website.

In this example, the alternative choices of action match the object (communication method) of the decision statement.

Example #2:

- **Decision Statement:** Choose best communication method for user publications.
- **Alternatives:** Use outside supplier company, use in-house staff, use a single independent contractor.

In this example, the alternative choices do not match the object (communication method) of the decision statement. As a result, the decision analysis is at risk because of this incongruity.

The Idea in Practice

1. Think of a decision you are currently involved in.
2. What is the objective of the decision? How many alternatives are being considered?
3. Are two or less alternatives being evaluated in this decision? If so, re-assess your decision frame.
4. Re-state your decision using the guidelines above. You'll most likely discover new insights to help improve the outcomes of your decision analysis.

Next month we focus on the second half of this element of Decision Quality: *Involving the right people.*

News



We offer live web demos of the Focus performance solutions.

These contain an overview of selected Decision Focus, Creative Focus or Team Focus tools & techniques, and are hosted by a senior Focus Consultant. You can register for a pre-scheduled demo - click [here](#) or arrange an overview for yourself or your team. [Contact us](#) for arrangements.

Quote of the Month

"We have no simple problems or easy decisions after kindergarten."

-John W. Turk
