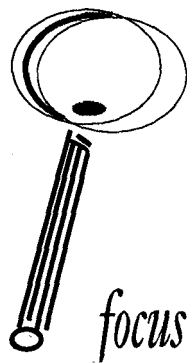


1

Decision Making and Problem Solving in Difficult Times



Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the nine steps in the basic decision-making model.
- Define four distinct situations where specific strategies are required for making appropriate decision.
- Identify the situations where each method can be used most effectively.
- List the circumstances under which others should be brought into the decision-making process.
- Outline the process of "consensus engineering" for group decision making.
- Specify why goal setting must come before problem solving and decision making.

INTRODUCTION

There was a time when a secretary (with her boss's input, if necessary) did not have to consider how her decisions might affect other departments or people outside her immediate area. In today's fast-paced business world, however, you cannot function with such a narrow point of view.

Superior problem-solving skills are one of the measures of an effective secretary. You must be able to gather and analyze facts and then systematically reason things out. Then you must select a strategy that does not create

friction with other areas. Moreover, your decisions are expected to produce good results.

Decision making is the process of problem solving through making a conscious choice or selecting one alternative from a group of two or more alternatives to achieve an objective. Good decision making and problem solving result in better, more productive use of resources. But decision making can also cause you a good deal of anxiety when:

- The actual problem situation is ambiguous in some way; the circumstances may be vague, the available information may be unclear, or the ramifications of the decision may be obscure at the time you must make the decision.
- The problem situation is new, an appropriate strategy has not yet been created for dealing with it, or there is no historical data on which you can base your thinking.
- You have to put your trust in the information and expertise of others.
- You may not see the outcome or results of your decision for a long time.
- The consequences resulting from your decision will be far-reaching.

In this chapter, we will first explore a basic method for decision making that will apply to most situations. Then we will look at four specific circumstances under which different strategies are necessary for making an appropriate decision. By the end of this chapter, therefore, you will have learned five techniques for decision making.

There is always the question of when to bring other individuals into your decision-making process and when to proceed on your own. This question is the final piece we will explore in this chapter.

A BASIC MODEL FOR DECISION MAKING

The traditional decision-making process has nine steps:

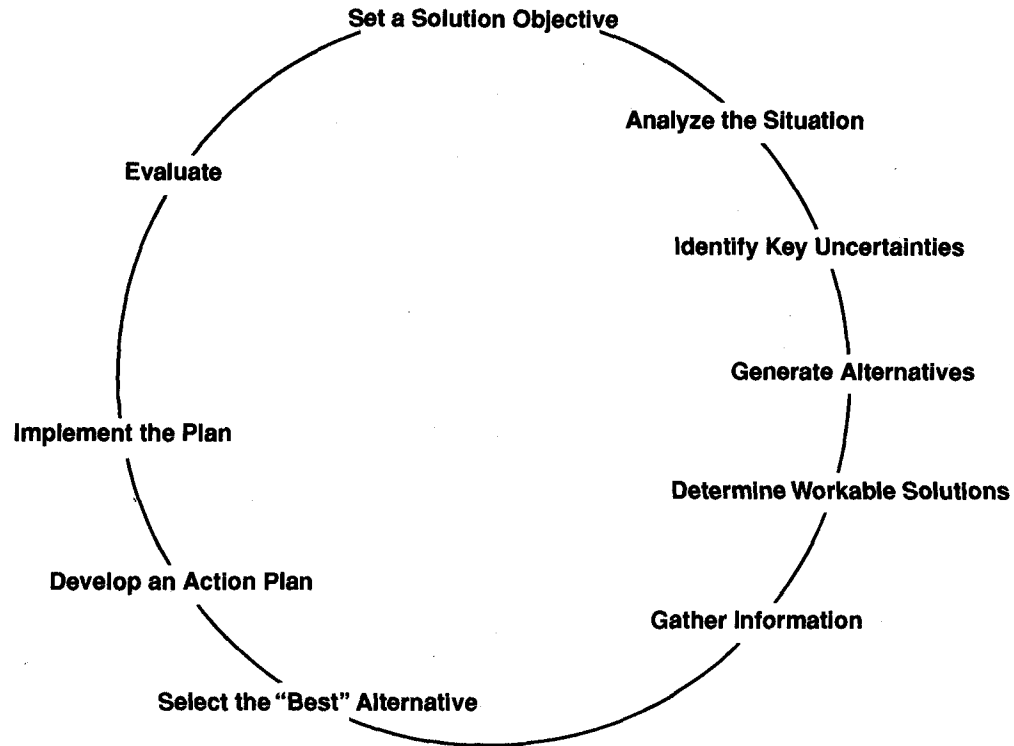
1. Recognize that a problem exists and set a solution objective.
2. Analyze the situation.
3. Identify key uncertainties.
4. Determine workable solutions and perhaps brainstorm for alternatives.
5. Gather data, perhaps using "expert" help; analyze which alternative might work best given the specific problem and your particular environment.
6. Select the "best" (most workable) alternative.
7. Develop a plan for implementation and action.
8. Implement the plan.
9. Follow up to see how the decision worked out and to evaluate its effectiveness in solving the problem.

A diagrammatic illustration of this process is shown in Exhibit 1-1. The process is represented in a circle to stress two critical issues:



Exhibit 1-1 Decision Cycle

To know how good your decision has been requires measuring it against your objectives. Every decision serves a purpose; the good or successful decision is one that accomplishes its purpose. A decision that does not further and support your objectives is a detour.



1. All good decision making begins with a clearly stated solution objective. This way, the direction of your efforts are explicitly stated; you know where you are going. You have an answer to the question, "What are you trying to do, anyway?"
2. Decision making is a skill that can be learned, but, as with any skill, it requires you to have a logical, repeatable process by which you can incorporate what you have learned from previous situations. Thus, the more decision making you do, the better you will become at it.

Suppose your decision in a particular situation does not achieve its solution objective. The first thing you must look at is your analysis of the situation; perhaps it was not complete and accurate. Next you must look at the alternatives you generated; perhaps you did not generate enough choices. Thirdly you must examine your selection of workable solutions; perhaps you missed something important there.

In other words, go around the circle, examining each of the nine steps to see where you went off track. The circle gives you an effective, logical method for evaluating your decision process. When you are finished, go around the circle a second time, repeating the nine steps, and-this time-achieving your solution objective.

Example Demonstrating the Basic Model for Decision Making

Your boss is a hard-working, dedicated, and considerate person, but she does not read people well. Her peer in the next department, Chess Williamson, is a slippery character. When your boss is away from the office, Chess comes wandering by. After asking about your well-being with his usual insincere smile, he questions you about what's going on in your department, and especially about what your boss is doing. You have heard him make uncomplimentary comments about your boss to other managers ("too involved in details," "can't see the big picture," "never has a creative idea," etc.). You would like to tell your boss that Chess is not her friend, that she should be wary of him. She does not like you to speak negatively of others. Moreover, she likes Chess. Just the other day, she told you that Chess was "very personable and easy to work with."

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. Solution objective: | Make the boss aware of Chess's actions. |
| 2. Analysis of the situation: | Chess wants to make himself more promotable by making your boss seem less capable. |
| 3. Key uncertainties: | Maybe your boss is not capable of handling greater responsibilities; maybe Chess is correct? |
| 4. Three possible alternatives: | Do nothing; say nothing. Carefully prepare a little speech to tell your boss what you overheard and about Chess's visits when she is away. Write an anonymous note and send it by E-mail. |
| 5. Data-gathering efforts: | Ask a more senior secretary what to do. Ask personnel about any promotional opportunities coming up soon. |
| 6. Best alternative: | Prepare a speech and tell your boss about what you overheard and about Chess's visits. |
| 7. First action: | Write down what you want to say. |

Exercise 1-1: A Basic Model for Decision Making

INSTRUCTIONS: Below are five situations which require you to make a decision. With each situation, please work the problem around the decision cycle through step 7, using three possible alternatives for each situation. Since this is only a mental exercise, the last two steps of the cycle are not possible to accomplish.

SITUATION 1

While your boss was away on a business trip, you scheduled future appointments and noted them on her calendar. Upon her return, you learn that she has made a personal appointment that conflicts with an important business engagement you scheduled for her.

1. **Solution objective:** _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
2. **Analysis of the situation:** _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
3. **Key uncertainties:** _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
4. **Three possible alternatives:** _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
5. **Data-gathering efforts:** _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
6. **Best alternative:** _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
7. **First action:** _____ []
_____ []
_____ []

SITUATION 2

Your job responsibilities encompass many high-priority and important tasks. There is, however, one low-priority task that takes up a great deal of your time. Both you and the boss agree that the low-priority task is not critical to the department's success. Nevertheless, the boss wants you to do it. You

believe it is a waste of resources to have a person with your skill and other responsibilities commit so much time to this low-priority task.

1. Solution objective: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

2. Analysis of the situation: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

3. Key uncertainties: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

4. Three possible alternatives: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

5. Data-gathering efforts: _____

6. Best alternative: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []

7. First action: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []

SITUATION 3

About twice each week, your boss goes rummaging through the archives' hard-copy files to locate old pieces of correspondence. He usually leaves the files in such disarray that it is necessary for you to immediately stop whatever you are doing to rearrange them or assist him in locating some document.

1. Solution objective: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

2. Analysis of the situation: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []

3. Key uncertainties: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []

4. Three possible alternatives: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

5. Data-gathering efforts: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

6. Best alternative: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

7. First action: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

SITUATION 4

A valuable staff member in the department has been dissatisfied with his situation for some time. You know this because for the past several weeks he has been complaining about being treated unfairly. Today he tells you, "I have just accepted a fantastic job offer and I'll be leaving at the end of the month. Please don't tell the boss. I'll tell her myself when I think the time is right."

1. Solution objective: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

2. Analysis of the situation: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

3. Key uncertainties: _____

4. Three possible alternatives: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

5. Data-gathering efforts: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

6. Best alternative: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []

7. First action: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []

SITUATION 5

Your boss has been away on business. He will return early this evening. On his first day back-tomorrow-he is to chair an important management meeting involving all the senior people in the company. You have been working on the handouts and the transparencies for that meeting for the past several days. Now you learn that the hard disk in the accounting department's computer has crashed, erasing all the compiled, processed financial data from the company's twelve sales locations. It will take two days for accounting to recover everything. Your boss will need this data for his meeting. You have a little of the data in hard copy. Each of the 12 sales locations has individual data available in hard copy.

1. Solution objective: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []

2. Analysis of the situation: _____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []
_____ []

3. Key uncertainties:

4. Three possible alternatives:

5. Data-gathering efforts:

6. Best alternative:

7. First action:

Answers to Exercise 1-1

SITUATION I

1. Solution objective: To eliminate the conflict in the appointment times
2. Analysis of the situation: The business appointment should take precedence over the personal one.
3. Key uncertainties: The boss may want her personal appointment to take priority.
4. Three possible alternatives: (1) Tell the boss about the conflict and let her advise you on what you should do; (2) find out how long each appointment will take and see if you can juggle things a little (by making one a little earlier and the other a little later) so that you boss can keep both appointments; (3) on your own, call the business appointment and reschedule that meeting for another time.
5. Data-gathering efforts: Find out which appointment is more important; how long each will take; how long it will take for your boss to get from one to the other; if there is another, mutually convenient time at which your boss and the business appointment can meet.
6. Best alternative: Consult the boss.

7. First action: Present the problem to the boss and show her the appointment book; ask her how she would like the problem resolved.

SITUATION 2

1. Solution objective: To convince the boss to reassign that low-priority task to someone else
2. Analysis of the situation: It will be easier for the boss to understand the situation if he sees something logical and convincing in writing that will show how having you tied up with this task is a waste of time, talent, and money.
3. Key uncertainties: There may be an underlying reason why the boss wants to you do that task.
4. Three possible alternatives: (1) Do not do that task for an extended period of time; let the work pile up until the boss says something about it, and then present your case again; (2) say nothing; make the best of the situation; (3) create a time study that illustrates your point and discuss the situation with your boss right now.
5. Data-gathering efforts: Keep an accurate record of the time spent each week on that task.
6. Best alternative: Do the time study and talk with the boss.
7. First action: Set up a form on which to record the time spent on that low-priority task.

SITUATION 3

1. Solution objective: To eliminate the necessity of straightening out the archive files
2. Analysis of the situation: Apparently the current files on the computer database do not give the boss sufficient information; what kinds of data are missing and can they be put into the current files so that the boss doesn't need to look in the archives?
3. Key uncertainties: Perhaps the boss does not know how to access the data he needs from the computer; perhaps he is more comfortable with information that is in hard copy.
4. Three possible alternatives: (1) Leave the archives alone; let them stay messed up; (2) tell the boss to ask you to locate and refile whatever he needs from the archives; (3) discuss the issue with the boss and see what can be done so that going to the archives is no longer necessary.
5. Data-gathering efforts: Speak to the boss and find out, specifically, what information he needs from the archives that is not available in the current computer files.
6. Best alternative: Ask the boss to let you locate and refile whatever documents he needs from the archives; that way there will be no need to straighten out those files.
7. First action: Look over the archive documents; perhaps they will indicate what kinds of data are missing from the current database; you will

then be better equipped to discuss with your boss incorporating those data into the current computer files.

SITUATION 4

1. Solution objective: To prevent the boss from being unpleasantly surprised about an employee's departure
2. Analysis of the situation: The boss may already know because this employee has been doing so much complaining.
3. Key uncertainties: The boss may be delighted that this employee is leaving; the boss may not appreciate your tattling.
4. Three possible alternatives: (1) Say nothing; (2) tell the boss; (3) depend on an intermediary—such as Personnel or department gossip—to carry the message.
5. Data-gathering efforts: Ask personnel if there are any anticipated changes in staff in your department; ask the boss the same thing; find out if you need to say anything.
6. Best alternative: Ask the boss if she is anticipating any staff changes.
7. First action: Talk to the boss.

SITUATION 5

1. Solution objective: To make sure the boss has everything he needs for tomorrow's meeting
2. Analysis of the situation: The data are not actually "lost"; you can obtain them in their uncompiled form from the other locations and put them together yourself.
3. Key uncertainties: Your boss and the senior staff prefer the accuracy of computer-generated information; after all the work you put into the task of compiling the data by hand, they may refuse to use them.
4. Three possible alternatives: (1) Contact the boss at home this evening and tell him what happened; perhaps he will decide to reschedule the meeting for another time when the data are available; (2) call all 12 sales locations and ask them to fax you the raw data; have them duplicated for your boss's meeting; (3) go to the accounting department, ask for their copies of the raw data and their help in compiling them by hand, and work until all the data are compiled, even though it may mean several hours of overtime.
5. Data-gathering efforts: Find out from accounting exactly how much effort will be required for you to produce those needed figures by hand; call the sales locations and find out how quickly they can fax their raw data to you; call the boss at home this evening and see what he wants to do.
6. Best alternative: A little bit of all three—call the boss at home and tell him what happened; have the sales offices fax you the information, and duplicate it for the meeting; ask accounting to give you enough information so you can make a decision about compiling the information yourself (it may be too complicated and require too much time).
7. First action: Contact accounting.

ALTERNATE DECISION-MAKING STRATEGIES

Although most decision-making efforts can be concluded successfully by using the decision cycle, there are four special situations where different strategies are necessary. The four situations are the deviation problem, the matrix situation, the decision under risk, and the consensus problem. Each of these four special situations requires a different approach to the decision-making process.

The Deviation Problem

Decisions in this category require correcting a deviation from the norm. In this situation, there is a model, norm, or standard that is considered "the right way." There is presently a deviation or departure from the norm. To solve the problem is to bring the situation back to the norm. The strategy is first to measure the deviation (how big or small, when or how long it has been going on, whether it is getting larger or smaller) and second to discover what is causing it. Then you will be in a position to decide what to do to change the situation. This investigative process must be done in stages, where you look at one thing at a time.

Example

In the past, whenever the people in your department have sent projects to Word Processing to be typed, the work has been returned, completed, within two days. The past two weeks, however, it has taken anywhere from four to six days to get material back. Your boss says the staff is complaining, customer due dates are slipping, and she is concerned about the delay. She wants to know why this is happening so that she can make her own decisions about what to do.

Strategy

1. Determine the size of the deviation. The model is two days; since it is now taking four to six days, the deviation is two to four days.
2. Organize the search for reasons in the following stages:
 - Examine the work your department is sending to Word Processing; perhaps the recent projects have been more complex (technical, lengthy) than usual.
 - Survey the Word Processing area to determine if there have been any recent significant changes (new software, new equipment, increased workload, reduction in the number of employees) that might have altered this group's output.
 - Consider the effectiveness of the individual word processing operators. Perhaps several people are new and inexperienced; perhaps the decrease in output is being caused by one particular individual.

The Matrix Situation

Decisions that require evaluating a great deal of information fall into this category. In this situation, you have a mass of data to evaluate on a number of alternatives. The problem to be solved is to get the data into some kind of logical format so that they can be appropriately analyzed against some yardstick of needs/wants, pros/cons, or priorities. The strategy that best accomplishes this is to create a matrix with the needs/wants or priorities listed across the top from left to right and the alternatives being evaluated listed from top to bottom along the left-hand side. Then you can check off those alternatives that meet your criteria across the top. The alternative with the most checks is the alternative to choose.

Example

You are the secretary in the purchasing department. Your boss has been asked to evaluate 25 graphic software packages and then purchase the best product for the company's needs. Your boss has asked you to conduct telephone interviews of all the people who will be using this software package to discover what they want the software to accomplish for them. Then the boss wants you to display that information against the capability descriptions of each of the 25 software packages.

Strategy

1. Setup a matrix. List the names of the 25 software packages that your boss is considering for purchase along the left-hand side (see Exhibit 1-2).
2. Establish the evaluation criteria against which the packages will be measured. When you call those who will be using the software and ask them what they want the software to accomplish for them, they will give you a list of features. Record this in priority order with the most requested feature first, the second most requested feature second, and so on.
3. Rate each software package against the list of requested features, marking it with a simple check (x) if it has the feature, leaving it blank if it does not. Then your boss easily can see which of the 25 packages should be purchased.

The Decision Under Risk

Decisions that must be made without sufficient information fall into this category. These decisions cause the most anxiety because the ramifications of the decision are unclear at the time the decision is made. In this type of situation, whatever you decide to do is risky because your odds are fifty-fifty. This means you stand an equal chance of being right or being wrong. In other words, you know all the possible outcomes, but you do not know which outcome you will get. The problem to be solved is to obtain additional information so you can choose the right alternative. Sometimes people will illustrate all the possible outcomes on a "decision tree."



xhibit 1-2

Software Evaluation

<i>Software Package Name</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Most Requested Feature</i>	<i>Second Most Requested Feature</i>	<i>Third Most Requested Feature</i>	<i>Fourth Most Requested Feature</i>	<i>Fifth Most Requested Feature</i>
Central Point Eagle	\$695.00					
MicroSoft Falcon	\$450.00					
Novell Vulture	\$575.00					
Lotus Osprey	\$750.00					
Symantec Crow	\$650.00					
Corel Hawk	\$595.00					

Example

Your boss has given you a critical, confidential 30-page report which must be completed by Friday morning at 9:00 A.M. for her meeting with the company president. Today is Wednesday; your boss is en route flying back from Singapore. She expects to arrive just in time for the meeting on Friday. You have a question regarding how certain data should be presented in the report and she is the only one who can answer your question.

Strategy

1. Search for clues from past reports. Examine previous, similar reports to see how they were set up.
2. Reassess the purpose of the meeting. The data in the report should advance the purpose of the meeting.
3. Seek additional, outside information. What is the company president looking for in the meeting? Might his secretary know? Might she be able to tell you how he likes to see data represented?
4. Create a "decision tree" (see Exhibit 1-3).

The Consensus Problem

In this type of situation, there are a number of individuals involved in the decision-making process because the decision made will affect all of them. Each person has his or her own different and strongly held opinion of what should be done, but all must agree on a single course of action. The problem to be solved is to find a resolution that everyone will accept and support.

Example

A part of the company's "total quality" effort, you joined the secretarial quality team, which meets once each week. This team of six people is supposed to discuss mutual concerns and identify problems that the team can work on solving together. At the first meeting, everyone came with one "burning issue" that each wanted the group to tackle first. No one compromised, and everyone argued for the entire hour.

All the issues are important but the team can only take on one issue at a time. The team needs a strategy that will help everyone to agree on one issue.

Strategy

1. Present the problem at the team meeting. Write the question, "Which problem should the group tackle first?" on a flip chart.
2. Record each member's preference. List everyone's pet alternative on the flip chart and ask each person to state his or her preference and why.
3. Take a weighted vote. Everyone prioritizes their choices and votes accordingly: 3 points for their most favored item, 2 points for their next favored item and 1 point for their least favored item. Add up the numerical ratings for each item. The item with the highest number is the group's consensus (see Exhibit 1-4).



xhibit 1 --3

Decision Tree: Report for the President Due 9:00 A.M. Friday

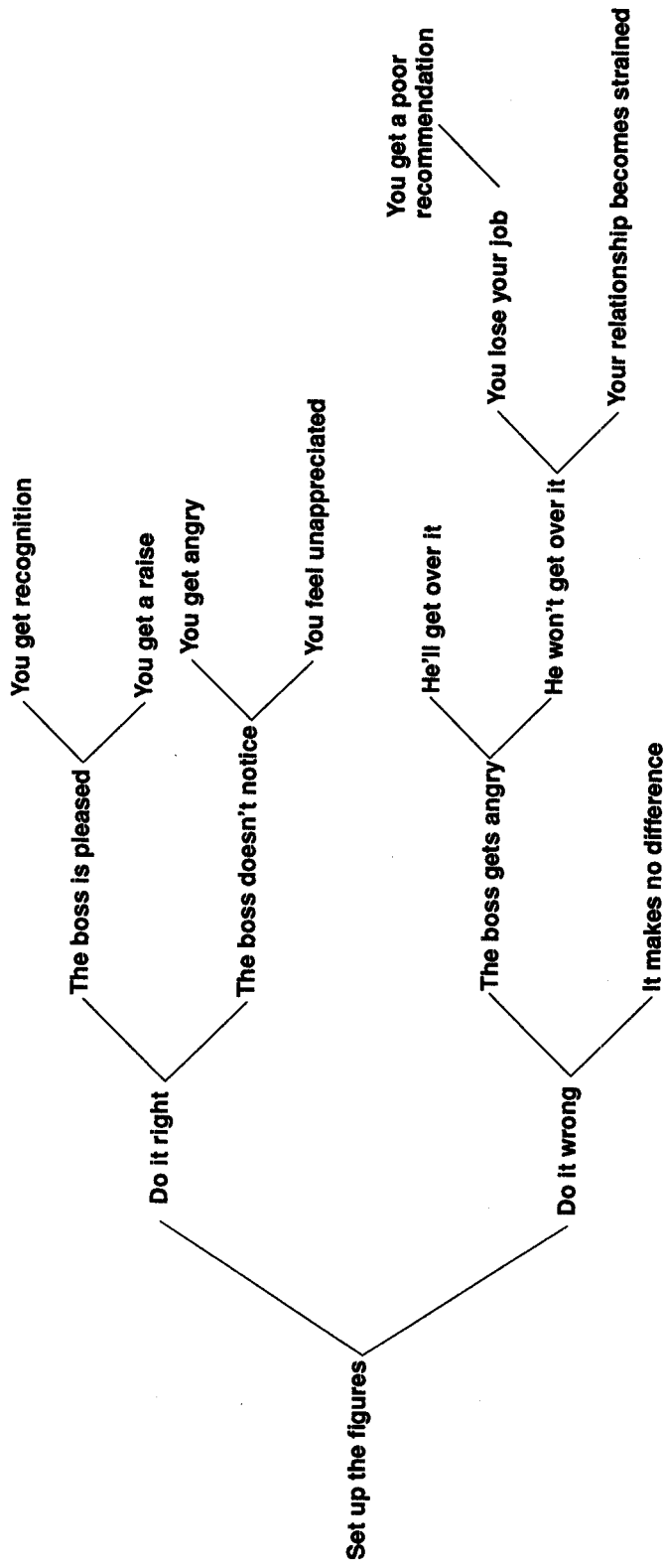




Exhibit 1–4

Which Problem Should This Group Tackle First?

<i>Problems to Consider</i>	<i>First Choice (3 points)</i>	<i>Second Choice (2 points)</i>	<i>Third Choice (1 point)</i>	<i>Total Score</i>
<p>Secretarial levels and salaries should reflect difficulty of the work rather than the title of the manager to whom the secretary reports.</p> <p>Purchasing should consult with the secretarial team before committing any funds to new software packages that the secretaries will be expected to use.</p> <p>Allow the use of answering machines for the clerical staff.</p> <p>Establish an approved series of training workshops or seminars that secretaries may choose to attend and that their managers will support.</p> <p>Push for a written policy that overtime on weekends will be compensated at double time.</p> <p>The dress code should be relaxed on Fridays, allowing jeans to be worn.</p> <p>Change the vacation policy to give all employees, including the clerical staff, three weeks of vacation after five years.</p>				

Recognizing Types of Decision-Making Situations

We have explored four types of situations where you might be required to make a decision. In each type of situation, different information is needed and a different strategy is required to make a good decision.

Situation	Characteristics and Course of Action Required
Deviation Problem	<p>You need a model of the "correct" or desired situation.</p> <p>You need to know exactly how far off the mark the situation is now.</p> <p>You search in successive stages for causes of the deviation.</p>
Matrix Situation	<p>You create a matrix so you can evaluate all the alternatives.</p>

	<p>Your matrix can list alternatives by positives versus negatives.</p> <p>Your matrix can list alternatives and rate each against a prioritized list of requirements.</p>
Decision Under Risk	<p>You know all the possible outcomes but not which one will occur.</p> <p>You need information to tip the balance from fifty-fifty to sixty-forty.</p> <p>Assumptions based on previous, somewhat similar, situations are helpful.</p> <p>You can also make a "decision-tree," to illustrate possible outcomes so you can examine the worst-case scenarios.</p>
Consensus Problem	<p>Write the question or decision being discussed on a flip chart.</p> <p>Each person briefly explains his or her idea or alternative.</p> <p>The ideas or alternatives are listed on the flip chart.</p> <p>Everyone prioritizes their choices and makes a weighted vote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 points for their most favored item 2 points for their next favored item 1 point for their least favored item <p>Add up the numerical ratings for each item.</p> <p>The item with the highest number is the group's consensus.</p>

Exercise 1-2: Recognizing Types of Decision-Making Situations

INSTRUCTIONS: Each of the situations described below requires that you make a decision. Indicate which type of decision situation each appears to be by noting it in the space provided. Then indicate what strategy steps you would take to start the information-gathering process.

SITUATION 1

You have been given the task of setting up the vacation schedule for the department. There are 40 employees and three sections in your area. No more than two people from one section can be out at the same time.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

SITUATION 2

One of the women in the company is getting married. Eighteen of her coworkers have chipped in \$20 each to buy her one very nice wedding gift. The group has given you the money and asked you to purchase the gift. The problem is that everyone has a different idea as to what the gift should be.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

SITUATION 3

Your boss wants the department's requisitions for supplies filled and delivered within three days. He asks you to find out how that can be accomplished.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

SITUATION 4

There has been a severe downturn in your company's business. In order for the company to survive, salary expenses must be cut 20 percent. So that no one will lose his or her job, each department must select one of the following options:

1. Five months of no Friday work or pay
2. One month off with no pay (July)
3. Ten percent reduction in salary for one year
4. Elimination of vacation pay (two weeks) and all holiday pay for one year
5. Two and a half months (June 15 to August 31) of no Friday or Monday work or pay
6. Half days of work and pay for two months (July and August)

There are 22 people in your department; your boss wants you to find out which alternative people want.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

SITUATION 5

A meeting that you are supposed to attend has been rescheduled for a time when it is not really convenient for you to get away from your work.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

SITUATION 6

Your boss is writing a speech that she will deliver at a national conference. She asks not to be disturbed for any reason. Her husband calls and insists on speaking with her. There is a strong sense of urgency in his voice.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

SITUATION 7

Your boss is out of town. A situation comes up that requires an immediate decision. Since you always work closely with your boss, the vice president of operations wants you to make the decision in your boss's absence.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

SITUATION 8

Your boss wants you to arrange a meeting with six other department heads at a time that will be convenient for as many of the six as possible. His preference, however, is to have all six there. He gives you four dates and hours that are good for him.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

SITUATION 9

Your area is dependent upon the financial information from another department in order to do its work. Lately, the people in your area have been complaining that the data from the other department are coming over with a lot of careless and unnecessary mistakes. Your boss wants you to investigate the problem and find out just how bad it really is.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

SITUATION 10

You and your boss have been interviewing candidates for a new junior clerical position in the department. In all, both of you have spoken with 15 different candidates. Your boss wants you to recommend one of the candidates for the position.

Type of decision situation:

Your strategy:

Answers to Exercise 1-2

Situation	Type	Strategy Required
1	Matrix situation	(1) Ask people to submit to you their preferred vacation dates with one alternate choice; (2) set up one matrix for each section; (3) display each person's preferred selection in red and their alternate selection in blue; (4) should more than two people request the same dates, use a just method (perhaps giving the senior employee first choice) to sort out the conflict.
2	Consensus problem	(1) Call a meeting of all the donors; (2) write the question of what gift should be purchased on a flip chart; (3) ask each person to state his or her gift preference and why; (4) record the ideas on the flip chart; (5) take a weighted vote.
3	Deviation problem	(1) You already have the model-it is three days; (2) find out how long it is taking right now; (3) go to the supply department and determine what your department might do that would enable the supply department to speed things up and close the gap.
4	Consensus problem	(1) At staff meeting, have your boss present the problem; (2) write the question of which alternative the department should choose on a flip chart; (3) list the available alternatives on the flip chart; (4) ask each person to state his or her preference and why; (5) take a weighted vote.
5	Decision under risk	(1) Consider. the negative outcome if you do not attend the meeting; (2) try to get the information from someone else or ask someone else to attend for you; (3) consider the negative outcome if you do attend the meeting and your work suffers; (4) consider using overtime for completing your work.

Situation	Type	Strategy Required
6	Decision under risk	(1) Consider the negative outcome if you do interrupt the boss; (2) estimate how quickly she will get over being upset with you; (3) consider the negative outcome if you do not interrupt the boss and the situation turns out to be really serious.
7	Decision under risk	(1) Consider the negative outcome if you refuse to make the decision; (2) imagine how it will affect you if the vice president and your boss are upset with you; (3) think about how your lack of action will affect the department; (4) consider the negative outcome if you do make the decision and it is wrong; (5) think about whether the situation is recoverable or whether you might lose your job.
8	Matrix situation	(1) Create a matrix by putting the four alternatives your boss gave you down the left-hand side and the names of the six department heads across the top; (2) call the six department heads and ask each to select their best alternative and one as a second choice.
9	Deviation problem	(1) Consider the desired level of accuracy; (2) determine the level of accuracy right now; (3) find out whether the errors are being made by everyone in that department or just certain individuals; (4) look for any recent significant changes (such as new procedures, increased workload, or new people who have not been properly trained) that might have created this problem.
10	Matrix situation	(1) Create a matrix that lists the 15 different candidates down the left-hand side; (2) across the top, from left to right, list by priority the skills, knowledge, experience, and personal qualities that you and the boss are looking for; (3) score each candidate against the list of priorities.

INVOLVING OTHERS IN MY DECISION MAKING

Involving others in your decision making can be inconvenient. It slows up the action, and, if those you involve do not agree with what you think ought to be done, there are additional problems. Nevertheless, is it sometimes very important to involve others because it may influence the results of the deci-

E**Exhibit 1–5**
Involving Others in My Decision Making

<i>Factors</i>	<i>I Decide Alone</i>	<i>I Consult with My Boss or One Other Employee</i>	<i>I Consult with the Staff in My Area</i>
Who owns the problem?	I do	Another person	Group's problem
How much time do I have?	None available	Have some available	Plenty available
Do I have the expertise?	Fully expert	Expert advice needed to fill gaps in my knowledge	
Do I have technical know-how?	Full know-how	Need to fill gaps in my technical know-how	
Can others add anything to the decision?	No	Yes	Yes
Will I accept suggestions?	No, not likely	Yes, from someone I respect	Yes, from an experienced group
Will it encourage others to support my decision if they are involved in the decision?	Not significant; I can carry out project myself	Yes, helpful and essential	Yes, necessary and essential
Is a coordination of effort necessary?	Not needed; I will handle it all	Yes, my boss or members of my department	Needed and necessary from the people in my area
What is the learning value, teaching application?	No value to anyone else	Value to one employee, maybe	Value to my whole group

sion. Exhibit 1- 5 lists some factors to consider when you are thinking about whether or not to bring others into your decision-making process.

Exercise 1-3: Involving Others in My Decision Making

INSTRUCTIONS: The following situations require that you make a decision. Please indicate whether you would make the decision alone, seek one other person's input, or ask the opinions of all the others in your area, and why you made the choice you did.

SITUATION 1

All through the week, people bring you their requests for supplies. Twice each week, you visit the purchasing department to drop off the requests and pick up the supplies. Because this process takes so much time, you want to cut it down to once every two weeks.

SITUATION 2

A manager from a neighboring department has a secretary with mediocre skills. Often, when she has been assigned something critical, she will bring it to you to do, explaining that "after all, we are all on the same team." Her work is not a priority for you and you already have your hands full.

SITUATION 3

You are the only secretary in the area. The copy machine is three floors away. All the people in your department ask you to go make copies numerous times a day. All these interruptions make it impossible for you to get anything done. You want to make it a policy that you make two trips to the copy machine each day-at 10:30A.M. and 2:30 P.M.

SITUATION 4

The boss has given you the OK to purchase a new, top-of-the-line, ergonomic chair in any color or style you want.

SITUATION 5

It is time for you to make an appointment for your yearly medical checkup. You know the boss prefers that such activities be planned so that they do not affect the work day. Your doctor, however, does not have evening hours.

SITUATION 6

You and one other secretary share the workload for the department. She is a smoker who, because of her habit, must take frequent breaks. The result is that-although she is a great secretary-because of all her breaks, you are doing most of the work. You want things equalized. You have been considering increasing the number of your breaks or asking her to limit hers.

SITUATION 7

Your boss and her assistant are going to Hawaii to take part in a national training conference on computer security software. It is the company's policy that, when employees travel for the company, they fly "economy coach." This will be a lengthy and brutal trip. Your boss has asked that you make the reservations.

SITUATION 8

One of the people in the department likes to put RUSH in big red letters on every piece of work he gives you to do. There are 11 other people in the department and none of them ever put RUSH on anything. If they need it right away, they tell you. Perhaps you should ignore his RUSH and do your

work in the usual priority order. Perhaps you should just put his work at the bottom of the pile to teach him a lesson.

SITUATION 9

A coworker has a personal mannerism of which he is unaware. Others have noticed it and are making fun of him by imitating him. Now everyone in the area is laughing behind his back.

SITUATION 10

The mail is delivered to the department three times a day. Three times each day you distribute it along with any pertinent correspondence in file. The entire process takes about one hour. You have been thinking about cutting it down to once each day.

Answers to Exercise 1-3

- Situation 1** Everyone in the department needs to be a part of this decision. You will need everyone's support to make it work.
- Situation 2** Consult one other person: your boss. This is something your boss should handle.
- Situation 3** Everyone in the department needs to be a part of this decision. You will need everyone's support to make it a successful decision.
- Situation 4** You could make the decision yourself or seek the advice of an office-chair specialist. This decision will affect only you; you may not feel you have all the information necessary to make the best decision.

- Situation 5 Make the decision yourself but inform your boss. You have all the information necessary.
- Situation 6 Consult one other person: your coworker. See if you can work things out.
- Situation 7 Consult other department secretaries to learn if they have ever made exceptions to the rule and if so, under what circumstances. Find out whether this trip can be considered an exception to the rule.
- Situation 8 Consult one other person: that person. See if you can work things out.
- Situation 9 Consult one other person: your boss. This is something your boss should handle.
- Situation 10 Everyone in the department needs to be a part of this decision. You will need everyone's support to make your decision work.

SUMMARY

The secretary's role in an organization has evolved considerably over the past several years. Decisions made by secretaries often have far-reaching consequences for others within the department or throughout the organization. Therefore, a systematic approach to decision making is essential.

In most situations, the basic decision-making method is effective in arriving at a solution. Using this method, the solution is reached by first targeting the problem and then setting an objective for its resolution. Occasionally, however, an especially complex problem must be solved using one of the alternate decision-making strategies described in this chapter. Furthermore, a secretary must decide, based on the situation at hand, whether it is appropriate or necessary to bring others into the decision-making process. The situations illustrated in this chapter will help you learn how to choose the most effective alternative in resolving any problem.

Review Questions -

1. Define "decision making."

2. List three reasons why decision making can cause a good deal of anxiety.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

3. Describe the nine steps in the basic model for decision making.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

(7) _____

(8) _____

(9) _____

4. Explain why goal setting is the first step in decision making.

5. In addition to the basic model, there are four specific situations in which other decision-making methods are recommended. List those four situations.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

6. List the key decision strategy for each of the four situations.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

7. When should you consider bringing other people into your decision-making process?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

8. When would you not involve others in your decision-making process?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

Answers to Review Questions

1. Decision making is the process of problem solving through making a conscious choice, or selecting one alternative from a group of two or more alternatives, to achieve an objective.
2. Decision making can cause anxiety when (any three would answer the question):
 - (1) the actual problem situation is ambiguous in some way
 - (2) the problem situation is new and an appropriate strategy has not yet been created for dealing with it
 - (3) you have to rely on the information or expertise of others
 - (4) the outcome or result of your decision will not be known for a long time
 - (5) the consequences resulting from your decision will be far-reaching
3. The nine steps in the basic model for decision making are:
 - (1) recognizing that a problem exists and setting a solution objective
 - (2) analyzing the situation
 - (3) identifying key uncertainties
 - (4) determining workable solutions
 - (5) gathering data and seeking "expert" help
 - (6) selecting the "best" (most workable) alternative
 - (7) developing a plan for implementation and action
 - (8) implementing the plan
 - (9) following up; evaluating the effectiveness of your decision in solving the problem
4. Goal setting is the first step in decision making because it provides the direction and purpose of the decision-making effort.
5. The four special situations where different strategies are necessary are:
 - (1) the deviation problem
 - (2) the matrix situation
 - (3) the decision under risk
 - (4) the consensus problem
6. The key strategies for the four situations are:
 - (1) for the deviation problem-measuring the deviation and then looking in successive stages for its causes
 - (2) for the matrix situation-creating a matrix of factors to rate against a list of priorities
 - (3) for the decision under risk-making a decision tree
 - (4) for the consensus problem -taking a vote using a weighted scoring system

7. Consider bringing others into your decision-making process when:
 - (1) you need the support of others to make your decision a successful one
 - (2) you need others to assist in the coordination of a decision-making strategy
 - (3) you do not have the necessary expertise and knowledge to make the decision alone

8. Situations in which you would not involve others in your decision-making process are those in which (any three would answer the question):
 - (1) it is your problem
 - (2) you have the knowledge and expertise necessary to make the decision alone
 - (3) you can handle the coordination of a decision-making strategy yourself
 - (4) there is no time available