

Developing Decision-Making Skills

You Should Know

You make many decisions quickly and automatically, relying on mental shortcuts your brain has developed to efficiently guide you. When you make decisions, you form opinions and make choices that are affected by your biases, reasoning ability, emotions, and memories – all of which influence future decision-making. But you might find some decisions difficult to make. You may find that you endlessly go back and forth about a decision without being able to make a plan and set a course of action.

Take a moment and answer these questions about your decision-making skills.

1. How well do you make decisions? _____
(Rate your answer from 0 = Not well at all, to 10 = very well)
2. How quickly do you make decisions? _____
(Rate your answer from 0 = very slowly, to 10 = impulsively/very quickly)
3. Do you often second guess your decisions? _____
(Rate your answer from 0 = always, to 10 = never)

Add up your score from the 3 lines above: _____

If your score falls between 0 – 15, you have a difficult time making decisions and you might want to develop your decision-making skills.

So how do you effectively make decisions? When you are faced with a decision, you probably rely on a mix of intuition (your “gut feelings”) and rational thinking. However personal biases and blind spots can make decision-making difficult. There are steps you can take to ensure you consistently make thoughtful, deliberate decisions. This process increases the chances that you will choose the best choices in an effective and efficient way. This worksheet will help you learn the process to make good decisions.

What to Do

Describe three problems are you facing.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What makes something a “problem” for you?

Now, choose one of the three problems you listed previously:

What decisions do you need to make to solve this problem? Clearly define the decision(s) you must make to solve this problem.

What information or resources can you use to make the decisions? Some information is internal (e.g., problem-solving strategies from the past, self-assessment, and so forth). Other information is external (e.g., found on the Internet, in books, or from other people).

Now, consider all possible alternatives. When you were collecting information, you probably identified several possible paths of action (alternatives). Use your imagination and the additional information you gathered to come up with alternatives. List all possible alternatives.

Now, review the information you have gathered and imagine what it will be like if you carry out each of the alternatives. Evaluate whether the problem you identified will be resolved through the use of *each* alternative. List the alternatives in priority order, based upon the likelihood of solving your problem.

What is the alternative that seems to be the best option to solve your problem?

What action(s) can you take?

Finally, describe the decision you made based on the above process.

Consider the consequences of your decision and evaluate whether or not it resolved your problem. If the decision did not solve the problem, repeat the steps of the process to make a new decision. For example, you might want to gather additional information or explore additional alternatives.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did the decision you made solve your problem? If not, what happened? If so, will you use this process again when you are faced with a decision? Explain.

What did you learn about yourself while completing this exercise?

Is there anything you could have done differently?

How helpful was this exercise? _____ (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)