PROBLEM SOLVING AND DECISION MAKING

competency

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DECISION MAKING

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CONCEPTUAL
COMPETENCIES

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Difficulty

Easy
Stroll

Tough
Climb

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Problem Solving and Decision Making

Effective performers are able to identify problems, solve them, act decisively and show good judgment. They isolate causes from symptoms, and compile information and alternatives to illuminate problems or issues. They involve others as appropriate and gather information from a variety of sources. They find a balance between studying the problem and solving it. They readily commit to action and make decisions that reflect sound judgment.

Level	Performance Indicators and Behavioral Examples
4 **Strategic**	• Is expert at anticipating and creatively solving the organization's strategic problems. • Maintains and taps an external executive network for in-depth analysis of strategic challenges. • Debriefs key strategic decisions (especially faulty ones) with senior team to learn from them. • Demonstrates ability to make decisions and rally necessary resources and stakeholders quickly in company-wide crisis situations. • Continually tracks strategic decisions and monitors impact in order to improve future decision-making.
3 **Advanced**	• Is recognized for cross-organization analytical skills; is sought out for high level problem solving sessions. • Mentors, trains, and empowers others to methodically analyze problems and make quality decisions for the organization. • Proactively considers cross-team impacts or integration opportunities when reviewing problem/solution. • Considers short- and long-term outcomes, strategic scenarios and overall impact for clients and for the organization when making decisions. • Facilitates functional and cross-team decision-making sessions; consistently applies creative problem solving techniques (e.g., brainstorming, consensus decision making process, etc.).
2 **Applied**	• Analyzes and anticipates unintended consequences when making recommendations or decisions. • Forms informal problem solving teams; regularly forms and leads problem solving groups. • Actively solicits opinions and input from others as part of the decision-making process; solicits ideas from the team; encourages team members to be part of the process when necessary; looks outside of immediate work group for input; takes advantage of experiences of others. • Coaches team in creative problem solving; treats problem solving as a learning opportunity for self and team (team members report multiple opportunities to grow their problem solving skills with valuable coaching from their manager). • Steps back from the issue to see the big picture; considers the broader picture; considers potential impact on stakeholders, customers and the organization when making decisions. • Surfaces and solves problems in a timely manner; clearly decides and then willingly commits to action.
1 **Elementary**	• Effectively uses appropriate decision-making techniques (e.g., properly identifies root problem, involves others, gathers data before deciding, generates more than one solution, withholds making decision until underlying issues are clear, etc.) • Escalates problems to appropriate authority as needed. • Is objective; is able to evaluate facts apart from personal bias. • Willingly collaborates to help solve problems. • Willingly provides useful input and feedback to more senior team members to aid in decision making. • Asks questions; is able to isolate problem and generate acceptable alternative solutions. • Identifies key decisions within area of responsibility.
0 **Inadequate**	• Fails to recognize and address problems; misses key problems; doesn't engage key problems quickly enough to prevent negative consequences. • Lacks knowledge of problem-solving methodology (e.g., gathering information, generating alternatives, screening criteria, etc.). • Is not open to collaborative discussion to assess problems and generate alternative solutions; does not involve others appropriately. • Has tunnel vision—only considers what's obvious, or one way to do it; fails to see patterns within the problem; does not consider alternatives when making decisions. • Makes decisions without necessary information; does not adequately research problems; jumps to conclusions without adequate analysis. • Is indecisive, unable to make decisions; gets stuck. • Over-analyzes; spends too much time on simple problems. • Gets personally involved, too attached, and loses objectivity. • Decisions reflect poor judgment; lacks the experience in key areas for needed insights.

Significance

The result of competence in Problem Solving & Decision Making is good judgment. The team's success is the result of the accumulated impact of the thousands of judgments made by members on a daily basis. Your ability to render good judgments is paramount.

Best Ways To Develop

First, participate in a reputable workshop that explores the fundamentals of good decision-making (use of a simulation is preferred), and then bring your learning back to school and practice in a coached environment. For example, ask your professor or team leader for feedback during, and after, the decision making process.

Improving Your Capacity

Analyze a real company case, good or poor. Ask what went right, or wrong, in the decision making process.

Keep in mind that every decision involves an element of risk. Balance analysis with timeliness.

Identify the key elements in decision-making and key concepts. For example, know that the longer you withhold judgment the better your judgment will be. Keep an open mind during the discovery phase of decision-making.

Do not make decisions in a vacuum. People, data, facts and models are some of the most important decision-making tools.

Read: *Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

Read: *How to Solve (just about) Any Problem* by Greg Z. Faiberg

Read: *Think Twice: Harnessing the Power of Counterintuition* by Michael J. Mauboussin

Read: *Thinking Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman

Read: *Don't Jump to Solutions: Thirteen Delusions That Undermine Strategic Thinking* by William B. Rouse.

Start Today

Arrange to take an in-basket simulation. This is an excellent tool for analyzing practical decision-making skills (contact Organization Systems International).

Reflect on your best decision. Why was it effective?
Think about a poor decision you have made. What went wrong?

Pick one of the problems you are facing today. Methodically outline the elements to consider, including pros, cons, barriers, opportunities, resources, etc. Review your work with a mentor or supervisor.

Tips

- Look at problems from all angles.
- Look for the problem behind the problem. Keep "peeling the onion" until you get to the root cause.
- Delay making a decision until you have ample information—the longer you withhold judgment, the better your judgment will be.
- Test assumptions! Paradigms are powerful inhibitors of creative problem solving.

Remember, the key to improving competency is not just learning about the skill but choosing a takeaway and developing an action plan to put new behaviors into practice until it becomes a natural response.

Development Action Planning Form

Step 1: Choose a competency area to develop.

    Target Competency: _____

Step 2: Describe a positive outcome in the target area of competence; include your vision of a preferred future state.

    Goal Statement:_____

    Vision Statement: _____

Step 3: List the benefits of achieving your desired end state.

    Benefits: _____

Step 4: Brainstorm the actions you might take to achieve your goal. For each, anticipate obstacles and options for overcoming them.

Action Steps	Obstacles	Options
1.		
2.		
3.		

Step 5: Finalize your action steps based on your brainstorming in Step 4. Now, list each action you must take to achieve your goal, including time frames and resources you will need.

Action Steps	Time Frames	Resources
1.		
2.		
3.		

Lipscomb's CORE Competency Development Program helps improve the competency areas that are critical to achieving your life and career goals. Through course materials, suggested practice opportunities and personalized coaching, competency-based education focuses on developing a new set of skills you can apply to daily life. Visit Lipscomb Online for more information on our Certificate, Undergraduate, and Graduate degree programs.