

Tips and Tricks for Effective Decision Making

School leaders are faced with a variety of decisions each and every day, some harder than others. Here, we unpack some of the key steps — and some tips and tricks — for how to tackle strategic decisions for your organization.

STEP 1

Articulate the question and identify the goal

STEP 2

Assign roles and responsibilities

STEP 3

Implement the decision-making process

STEP 1

Crisply **articulate the question** you are trying to answer and **identify the goal/outcome** you are striving toward, and document them in a shared place so you can refer to them as needed.

Articulate the question

This happens in parallel with identifying the goal or objective. Often, getting clear on the goal or objective helps strengthen the question.

Identify the goal/objective

Always return to your mission, vision, values, and reason for being. As you think about goals for the decision, be sure to connect them to your strategic plan and core values.

STEP 2

Define the decision-making process and **assign roles and responsibilities**, ideally using a tool that is familiar to your team and leverages a shared language and understanding of the process. The RAPID® decision tool is one of them. It outlines five key roles in the decision-making process:

Recommend: Single individual responsible for making a recommendation; gathers and assesses relevant information, drives analysis and conclusions

Agree: Single individual has a “veto” over the decision; used sparingly and often only for decisions affecting organization policy or compliance

Perform: Individual(s) who implement the decision once it is made

Input: Individual(s) or stakeholder groups who have knowledge, experience, or access to information that is relevant to the decision, with a particular emphasis on those who will be directly impacted by the decision

Decide: Single individual who makes a decision and commits to its implementation

Note: These roles do not happen in sequential order.

Assign roles and responsibilities

Always do this up front, as it will set expectations early in the process and save time down the road if/when different perspectives need to be heard, reconciled, or managed. Note that one individual may play more than one role in the decision-making process, and not all decisions require all roles.

Tips and Tricks for Effective Decision Making (continued)

STEP 3

Clear and efficient decision processes are necessary but not sufficient. Especially for complex issues with high degrees of uncertainty, the **implementation of the decision-making process** also matters. Several tips can help ensure you're supporting the best possible decision.

Implement the "I" Input

Exercise empathy and seek to understand the user perspective. Reflect on who will be impacted by the decision or for whom the decision will be made, whether you are considering what they need or what you *think* they need, and interrogate whether you have collected enough input from varying perspectives.

Implement the "R" Recommend

Analyze the situation. Evaluate the internal and external contexts that may affect your recommendation, including the capacities of your team, the priorities of the organization, and the practices of other organizations similar to your own.

Define and assess the possible options. Write down each of the potential recommendations you could make and how they are distinct from one another. Identify the pros, cons, assumptions, and risks behind each.

Synthesize your perspective. Ground your recommendation in the original question and goal, incorporating input and option analysis.

Implement the "D" Decide

Make a decision. Sometimes, it's enough to review the recommendation and make a decision based on the original question and goal. Sometimes, the person responsible for the decision may want to understand the thinking behind the recommendation, including the input collected and the options identified and assessed.

Reassess as you go. It is important to capture data to understand the effectiveness of your decision so you can learn from the decision, act on new data, and continue to improve.

Implement the "A" Agree

Check for dealbreakers. Ensure the decision does not expose the organization to undue risk or create compliance issues with internal policies or public rules and regulations.

Stay in your lane. It is important that the person with the responsibility to approve a decision exercises a "veto" over the decision and does not use approval as a way to reshape the decision itself.

Implement the "P" Perform

Clearly communicate the decision, rationale, and implementation expectation.

Once the decision is made, ensure the person/team who will be responsible for implementation understands the rationale, decision, and implementation expectations.

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