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DECISION MAKING IN A POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute

April 20, 2023

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Decision Making in a Political Environment

- ◆ Is it different than other settings in which we make decisions?
- ◆ Does it change the way we make decisions?
- ◆ What role do citizens play in the process?
- ◆ What role do staff members play in the process?

Factors Influencing Council Decisions

- ◆ Relationships
 - ◆ Values
 - ◆ District mentality
 - ◆ Few, vocal naysayers
 - ◆ “Run it like a business” mentality
 - ◆ Budget
 - ◆ Groupthink
 - ◆ Political philosophy
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Your Role in the Decision Making Process

- ◆ Provider of Neutral Information
- ◆ Influencer
- ◆ Devil's Advocate
- ◆ Minute Taker

Decisions Made by Your Jurisdiction

In the space provided below briefly describe one of the best decisions and worst decisions your town or city has made. What specifically made it the best or the worst?

Best Decision

Worst Decision

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Who's Responsible?

Instructions: Read the following short story. Individually answer the question that directly follows the story. Use line A for recording your individual answer and line B for your group's answer.

In a house is a young woman married to a man who works very hard. She feels neglected. When her husband goes off on still another trip, the young wife meets an attractive man who invites her to his house. She spends the night and at dawn she leaves, knowing her husband is coming back soon. The bridge is blocked by a madman who kills everyone who comes near him. The young wife follows the river and meets the ferryman, but he demands one-hundred francs to take her to the other side. The young wife has no money. She runs back to her lover and asks for one-hundred francs; he refuses to help. The woman remembers that a platonic friend lives close by. She runs to him and explains her plight. The friend refuses to help; she has disillusioned him by her conduct. Her only choice is to go by the bridge in spite of the danger and the madman kills her.

Question: In what order do you hold the principals (woman, husband, lover, madman, ferryman, and friend) responsible for the tragedy?

Line A: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____

As a group, arrive at a group consensus. All group members should agree to the final ordering of responsibility. Avoid communication-reduction techniques such as drawing from a hat or vote-taking. Record the group's answer on line B.

Line B: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____

Decision-Making Errors

There are several common errors individuals and organizations make when making decisions. We have all committed these errors at one time or another.

- Considering alternatives before knowing what we hope to achieve
- Focusing on a favored alternative or one that upholds the status quo
- Ignoring or being overly cautious to the possible consequences of an alternative
- Basing the decision on inadequate information
- Basing the decision on investments already made
- Failing to seek contradictory evidence or advice

What are the causes for making these errors?

Determine the Desired Outcome

Read the following statement:

Select a site for a new fire station in the growing western section of the city.

Is the statement written in terms of a desired outcome?

What assumption(s) do we need to make regarding this statement?

How are we going to know if the decision was a good one?

Review the following statements and answer the three questions above for each one:

1. Select a garbage truck for the new subdivision.
2. Select which fee to raise in order to increase the city's revenue stream.
3. Decide on whether to annex the tract of land along I-20.
4. Select a new maintenance contractor for city buildings.

A Tool to Generate Possible Alternatives – Affinity Diagrams

Purpose: To creatively generate a large number of ideas and then organize and summarize natural groupings among them.

How to Use:

1. Phrase the issue under discussion as a question. For example:

What are possible solutions for reducing the backlog of court cases?
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2. Brainstorm as many solutions as possible, recording each on a Post-it note. Be brief, four to seven words work well. Place the Post-it notes on a wall or board. For example:

Establish a specialized docket court.	Hire another judge.	Work with the solicitor to expand pre-trial intervention program.
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3. Sort the ideas into related groupings. For each grouping, create a heading or category name.
4. For each grouping, create a concise sentence that combines the central idea of all of the Post-it notes.
5. Divide large groupings into sub-groupings as needed.

Develop Evaluation Factors for the Decision

You may want to consider some of the following categories when developing evaluation factors:

- ◆ **Citizens** – What do they expect? How will the decision affect them?
- ◆ **Employees** – Will we need more? Less? Will they need training?
- ◆ **Policy makers** – Political “hot buttons”? Deal-breakers?
- ◆ **Your organization** – Is what you are deciding consistent with the strategic plan?
- ◆ **Other organizations** – Will other local governments be affected by the decision?
- ◆ **Money** – What is the true cost of implementing this decision? Of doing nothing?
- ◆ **Laws/ordinances/regulations** – Will we comply if we make this decision?
- ◆ **Time** – How quickly does the decision need to be implemented?
- ◆ **Material; Equipment; Facilities** – Will anything new be required?
- ◆ **Productivity** – Will the decision reduce or increase the workload of current staff?

Example: Reducing the backlog of court cases in the municipal or magistrate courts

What factors would you consider when deciding on the best way to reduce the backlog of court cases?

Possible Evaluation Factors for Reducing Court Cases

- ◆ What will be the cost to implement, including personnel and capital costs?
- ◆ How long will it take to implement?
- ◆ How quickly can the backlog be reduced?
- ◆ What effect will the solution(s) have on other agencies? Other courts? Detention center?
- ◆ Will the solution be acceptable to council?
- ◆ Will the solution be acceptable to stakeholders? Judges? Attorneys?
- ◆ What effect will the solution have on current court staff?

Classify Factors into Required and Desired

Which of the factors listed above would be “required”?

Of the “desired” factors, which is the most important?

Evaluating Alternatives

“10-4” Voting

Purpose: To help a group achieve consensus when making a decision; to help a group rank and prioritize items.

How to use:

1. Generate a list of solutions or alternatives using brainstorming, affinity diagrams, etc.
2. Put the list on a flip chart and number the items 1, 2,...
3. Each group member has a total of 10 points to assign to the items they feel are most important; no more than 4 points may be assigned to any one item.
4. On a separate sheet of paper, each member makes their point allocation for each item.
5. The facilitator records the allocations made by each member.
6. The facilitator adds the points assigned to each item.
7. The items with the most points are the “most important”.

Tools to Make Decisions – Factor Rating

Purpose: The factor rating method is a decision analysis tool that helps groups use objective criteria to make decisions. This method breaks the decision down into the most important **desired** factors to consider, and then uses ratings on these factors to help the group decide what to do. This method forces the group to focus on the factors rather than emotions or feelings about the issue.

How to Use:

1. Decide on the most important factors to consider in making the decision
2. Develop a three-point rating scale (e.g., high, medium, low) for each factor
3. Decide on a weight for each factor
4. Reach consensus on a rating for each alternative
5. The summed scores from the consensus of the group indicates the preference for a particular course of action

AN EXAMPLE: Reducing the backlog of court cases to provide citizens their right to a speedy trial

Three proposed alternatives (assume these satisfy the **required** evaluation factors)

1. Establish a “livability” court for codes enforcement issues
2. Hire another judge to hear cases at night
3. Work with the solicitor to expand the use of pre-trial intervention

STEP 1: DECIDE ON RATING FACTORS

The group identified five factors they felt would be important in deciding on which course of action to follow. These factors were:

- Factor 1: Cost to implement
- Factor 2: Cost to maintain
- Factor 3: Time to implement
- Factor 4: Effectiveness in reducing backlog
- Factor 5: Acceptable to stakeholders

STEP 2: DEVELOP A THREE-POINT RATING SCALE FOR EACH FACTOR

Factor 1: Cost to implement?

High	> \$100,000	=	1 point
Medium	\$50,000 - \$100,000	=	2 points
Low	< \$50,000	=	3 points

Factor 2: Cost to maintain (calculated on an annual basis)?

High	> \$100,000	=	1 point
Medium	\$50,000 - \$100,000	=	2 points
Low	< \$50,000	=	3 points

Factor 3: Time to implement?

High	Quickly (2 months or less)	=	3 points
Medium	(3 to 4 months)	=	2 points
Low	Slow (5 months or more)	=	1 point

Factor 4: Effectiveness in reducing backlog?

High	50% or more in one year	=	3 points
Medium	25% – 50% in one year	=	2 points
Low	Less than 25% in one year	=	1 point

Factor 5: Acceptable to stakeholders?

High	all stakeholders in favor	=	3 points
Medium	some concern from one group	=	2 points
Low	major stakeholder concerns	=	1 point

STEP 3: DECIDE ON A WEIGHT FOR EACH FACTOR

The group determined that some of the factors were more important than others. Using a 10-point scale, they weighted the factors as follows:

Factor 1	7 points
Factor 2	8 points
Factor 3	4 points
Factor 4	10 points
Factor 5	6 points

STEP 4: REACH CONSENSUS ON A RATING FOR EACH OPTION

Alternative: *Livability Court*

	Rating	Weight	Total
Factor 1	1	7	7
Factor 2	2	8	16
Factor 3	1	4	4
Factor 4	3	10	30
Factor 5	3	6	18

Total Points: 75

Alternative: *Another judge/night court*

	Rating	Weight	Total
Factor 1	2	7	14
Factor 2	2	8	16
Factor 3	3	4	12
Factor 4	2	10	20
Factor 5	2	6	12

Total Points: 74

Alternative: *Pre-trial intervention*

	Rating	Weight	Total
Factor 1	3	7	21
Factor 2	3	8	24
Factor 3	2	4	8
Factor 4	1	10	10
Factor 5	1	6	6

Total Points: 69

STEP 5: EVALUATE THE “BEST” ALTERNATIVE WITH POTENTIAL PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Tools to Make Decisions – Potential Problem Analysis

Purpose: To consider all possible threats and problems that could occur if an alternative was implemented.

How to Use:

1. For an alternative, list the potential problems or things that could go wrong if it were to be implemented.
2. For each potential problem, list the probability or likelihood that it will occur. You may want to use a simple three-point scale such as “Very Likely” or “Likely” or “Not Likely”.
3. For each potential problem, list the seriousness of the consequence if the problem did occur. Again, you may want to use a simple three-point scale.
4. For those problems that are likely or very likely to occur and have serious consequences, go through a problem-solving process to determine the causes and solutions for addressing the problem.

Example:

Potential problems for a livability court

Potential Problem	Probability	Seriousness
Current judge has a “penal” philosophy not consistent with livability courts	Very likely	Serious
Court will create more work than anticipated	Not likely	Not serious
Court will be more costly than anticipated	Not likely	Serious

Final Thoughts...

In which type of decisions do you think these decision making tools would be helpful?

Are there any of the specific tools you think would be most helpful?