

Knowledge Management Forum



Henley KM Forum 10th anniversary conference

Knowledge enabled decision making:

Developing knowledgeable decision makers

A personal reflection and coaching guide



Developing Knowledgeable Decision Makers

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Introduction

Decision making is something we do every day of our lives. It is easy to take it for granted that people know how to do it well. In practice, expectations often exert a pressure for action which can take priority over making time to think through the different aspects of the decision process. Then communications are incomplete and decision makers encounter more resistance when action starts.

During 2009, member organisations of the Henley KM Forum carried out research into how knowledge management practices can be used to improve decision making in organisations. The research was carried out by interviewing 19 decision makers in 10 organisations (half public and half private sector). The results show how the effective **use of technology** to distribute information and explicit knowledge to decision makers, the **use of expert knowledge** and an integrated approach to **internal and external collaboration** contribute to supporting good decision making. Organisational decision making improves over time when individual decision makers have the capacity to **learn from their decisions** and the organisation has the collective capacity to **improve its decision making processes**. Report and guidance documents for knowledge managers were prepared (available separately) which detailed these findings and how to use them to support decision making capability.

The interviews generated considerable insights about how individuals can develop their personal capacity to become what we call here “knowledgeable decision makers”. The interviews were analysed using content analysis software and the findings were used to create a competency model that could help individuals and those responsible for developing them to think about their decision-making practice. Twenty skills and abilities in five clusters were identified as underpinning these competencies.

This document defines the competencies, outlines the skills and abilities required to develop the competencies, shows the relationship between them and identifies key questions that individuals can challenge themselves with, or coaches can use as a development activity.

How to use this document

Good decision makers tell us that investing in upfront thinking time about a decision saves a lot of time in the implementation stage; revisiting the process during decisions while they are evolving can defuse tension and reduce resistance. Skilful decision makers are aware of the potential pitfalls and take care to sensitise themselves to what is going on in different dimensions of a decision. Usually they achieve this either through systematic personal reflection, or discussion with a trusted coach or mentor to help them think around the issue. This document provides an overview of the key areas that could make a difference to the quality of your decision making. You will have thought of some of them, but following a structured process means you can comprehensively cover all the ones that matter. It's good to **make some valuable time in your busy schedule to stop, think and reflect to help you to clarify and speed up your judgement about effective decision making processes**.

The following pages explain the five competencies that will help you cover all the bases. **Knowing what** will make a sound decision means **knowing why** the decision matters, **knowing where** boundaries impose limits on what is possible, **knowing who** you need to influence to make things happen, **knowing when**

changes and communications have an impact and **knowing how** to weigh up the various factors and make a sound judgement (see pages 4–8 for more detail). These five competencies draw on the twenty overlapping skills and abilities, mapped on page 9 and specified in more detail on pages 10–13. Pages 14–16 provide a **structured process to help you think and reflect on important decisions alone or in conversations with a coach**. You may find this useful to plan how to tackle a big decision, or work out what to do differently when things don't seem to be going to plan, or learn from experience once the decision is done. Whenever you use the guide, the discipline of reflecting on your practice is what will help you improve your decision making process. The story on pages 17–21 tells how one senior executive used the various skills to make a successful decision.

Definitions used in this document:

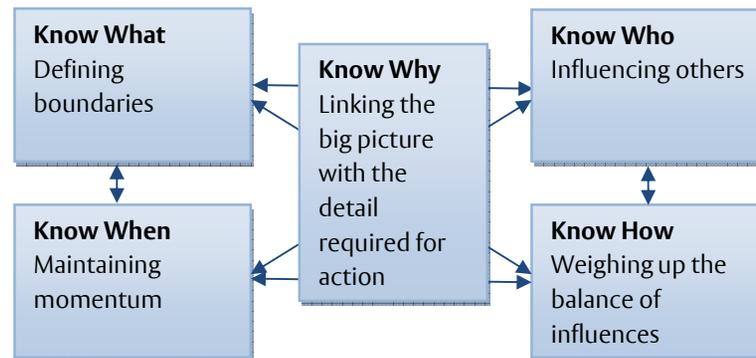
“A ‘decision’ is a commitment to a course of action that is intended to yield results that are satisfying for specified individuals”

Simple decisions: decisions that are not necessarily easy, but for which cause-and-effect linkages can readily be identified. In other words, an action will lead to a foreseeable outcome.

Complicated decisions: decisions for which cause-and-effect linkages can also be found, though not easily. Experts in the field need to be used to make sense of the situation and evaluate the options.

Complex decisions: decisions for which cause-and-effect linkages cannot be found. Multiple issues and influences interact and it is not possible to be sure what will happen as the result of an action. There are no right answers and patterns can only be seen in retrospect.

What a good decision requires: A competency model for knowledgeable decision making



The five competencies work as a suite, in no particular order. However, “knowing why” sits at the centre as a reference point. This is the basis

of meaningful decisions. Meaning releases energy because action makes sense. As Warren Bennis¹ pointed out, the art leadership is about the “*management of attention*” and leadership at any level is essentially the “*management of meaning*” for others, so that a decision is actionable because interested parties can see that it makes sense. Focusing on knowing why creates important conditions for buy-in:

- A sense of fit or belonging, where people know what they do matters; this is motivational and vital in values-driven organisations
- A clear “roadmap” that is the basis of autonomous decision making, then people know where their contribution makes a difference to achieving the outcome
- Confidence that the decision is appropriate
- A baseline for challenging new developments and assessing risks

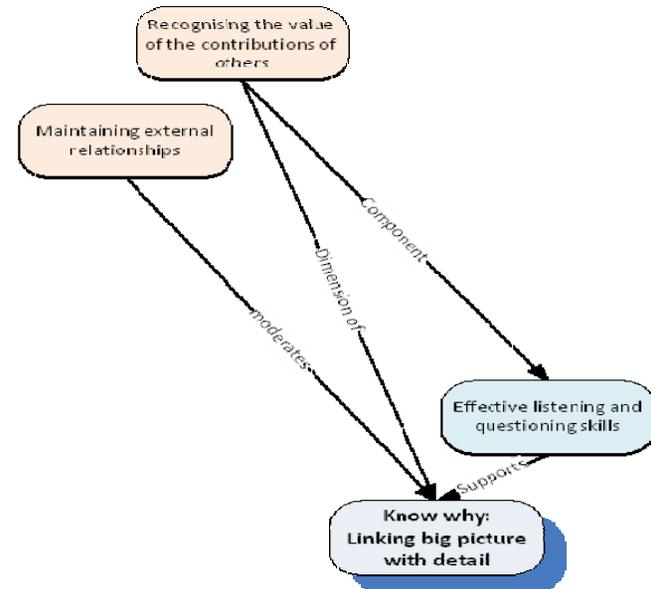
We will now look at each of the competencies in turn. The diagrams show how our interviews expressed the connection between the skills and abilities and the competencies in the decisions they were taking. There will be other connections, simply because in practice we use the skills as an integrated set, and the competencies work as a system. What matters is that in any decision an individual has the capacity to draw on the five competencies in all decisions.

¹ Bennis, W. (1989) *Why Leaders Can't Lead*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco.

Know why: Linking the big picture with the detail required for action

Clarity about the purpose of the decision helps those involved maintain a focus on the desired outcome. Good decision makers pay sufficient attention to the detail needed for action and effective implementation, whilst remaining clear about the big picture which shapes the decision direction and timescale. When those affected by the decision know why a decision is taken and why it matters to the business, they can engage with it more meaningfully in their context. Ultimately this makes it easier to communicate why the decision matters to those affected by the outcome.

Skills and abilities required: Maintaining external relationships, recognising the value of the contributions of others, effective listening and questioning skills.



Know what: Defining boundaries

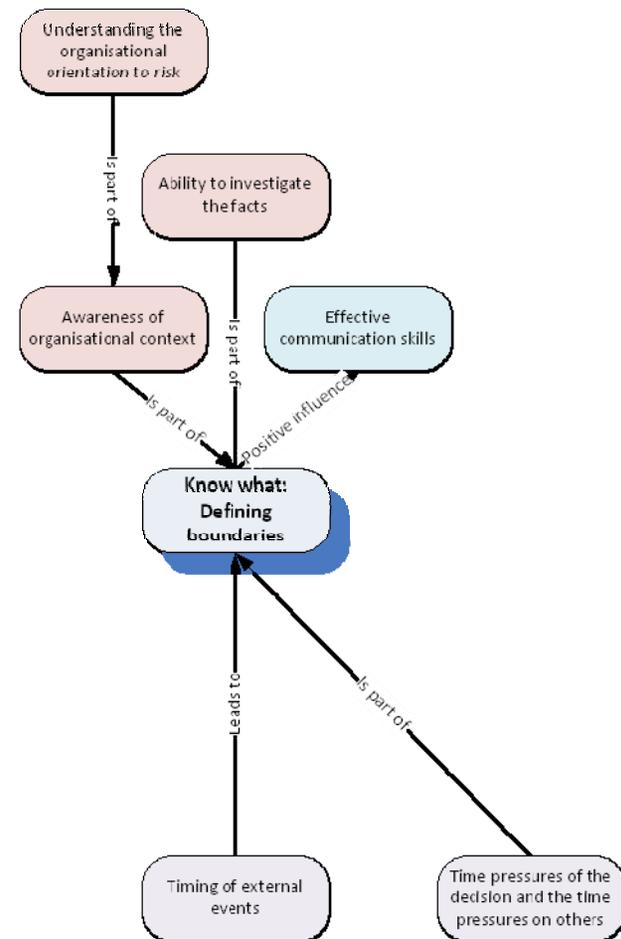
Boundaries are key principles and criteria defined at the outset to help those involved in making the decision to understand its scope and limits. They make clear where contributions can be valuable, as well as helping make choices between options.

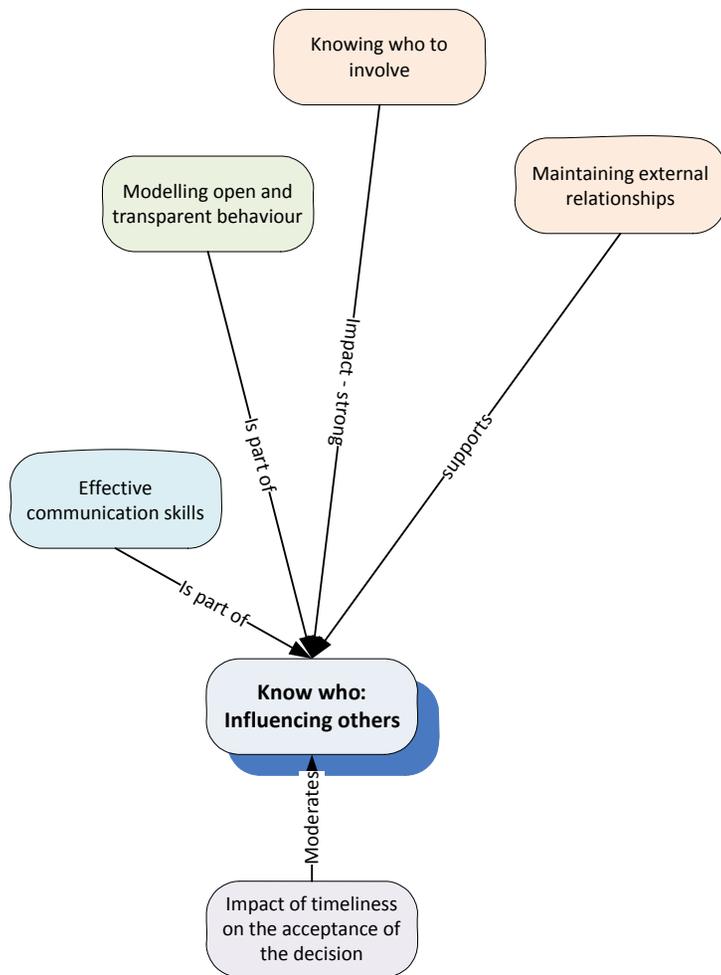
Boundaries come from a number of sources, for example:

- Limited resources (time, effort, money etc)
- Cultural expectations for consistency with previous decisions
- The organisation's purpose and intent
- The creative desire to move beyond the current situation

The process of defining boundaries differs with the type of decision. In complex decisions where there are many interconnected issues involved, the boundaries that are set determine the decision that will be made. Defining what is included and what is outside the scope of the decision can reduce uncertainty and ambiguity, but care is needed not to cut things out prematurely.

Skills and abilities required: Awareness of the timing of external events, the time pressures of the decision and the time pressures on others; awareness of the organisational context, and the organisational orientation to risk; ability to investigate facts, effective communication skills.





Know who: Influencing others

Decision makers orchestrate a variety of contributions from people during the decision making process. Understanding the implications of different perspectives and contexts, as well as the relationships between the parties, helps ensure that contributions are productive and purposeful. Explaining and demonstrating why the decision is important involves using evidence, making links with other activities and highlighting risks. Facilitation, negotiation and conflict resolution training can be useful. Influencing can involve:

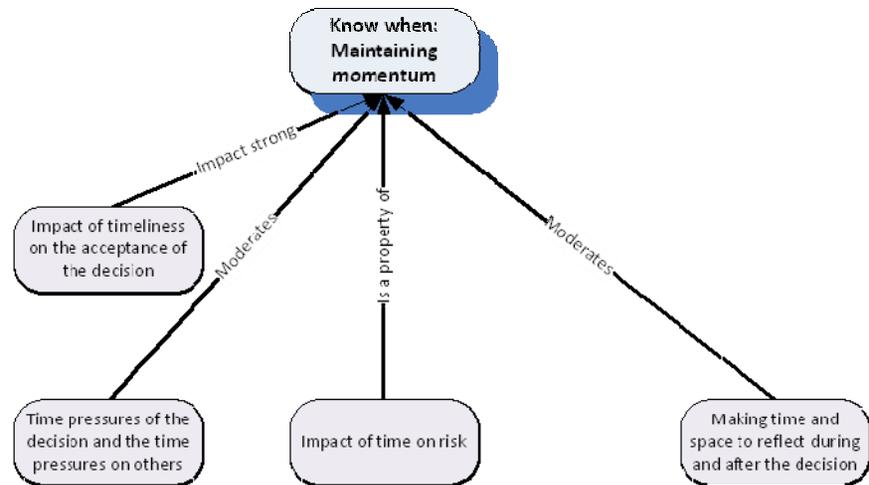
- Lobbying peers and more senior people
- Shaping the direction of effort by the team
- Phasing influencing effort to take people on the decision journey
- Using conversations and questions to “plant seeds” that develop thinking

Skills and abilities required: effective communication skills, modelling open and transparent behaviour, knowing who to involve, maintaining external relationships, and awareness of the impact of timeliness on the acceptance of the decision.

Know when: Maintaining momentum

As issues and challenges emerge during the decision-making process, the decision maker needs to maintain momentum towards the outcome. Sharing ambiguous information prematurely can create avoidable anxiety and concern, which may delay progress. The timing and timeliness of communication and action can have an effect on risk, resistance and results. However, it is important to allow time for disagreement and dissent and debate in all but the most simple of decisions because they can provide valuable new perspectives.

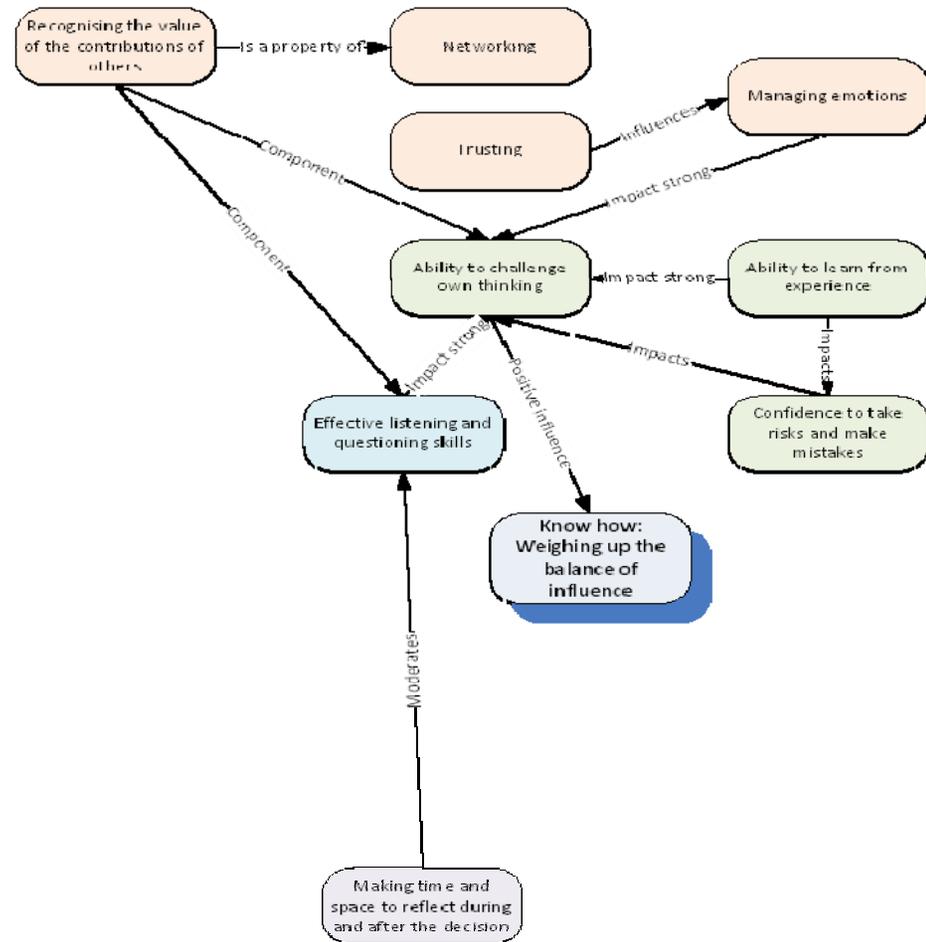
Skills and abilities required: awareness of the time pressures of the decision and the time pressures on others, the impact of timeliness on the acceptance of the decision, the impact of time on risk, and making time and space to think and reflect during and after the decision.



Know how: Weighing up the balance of influences

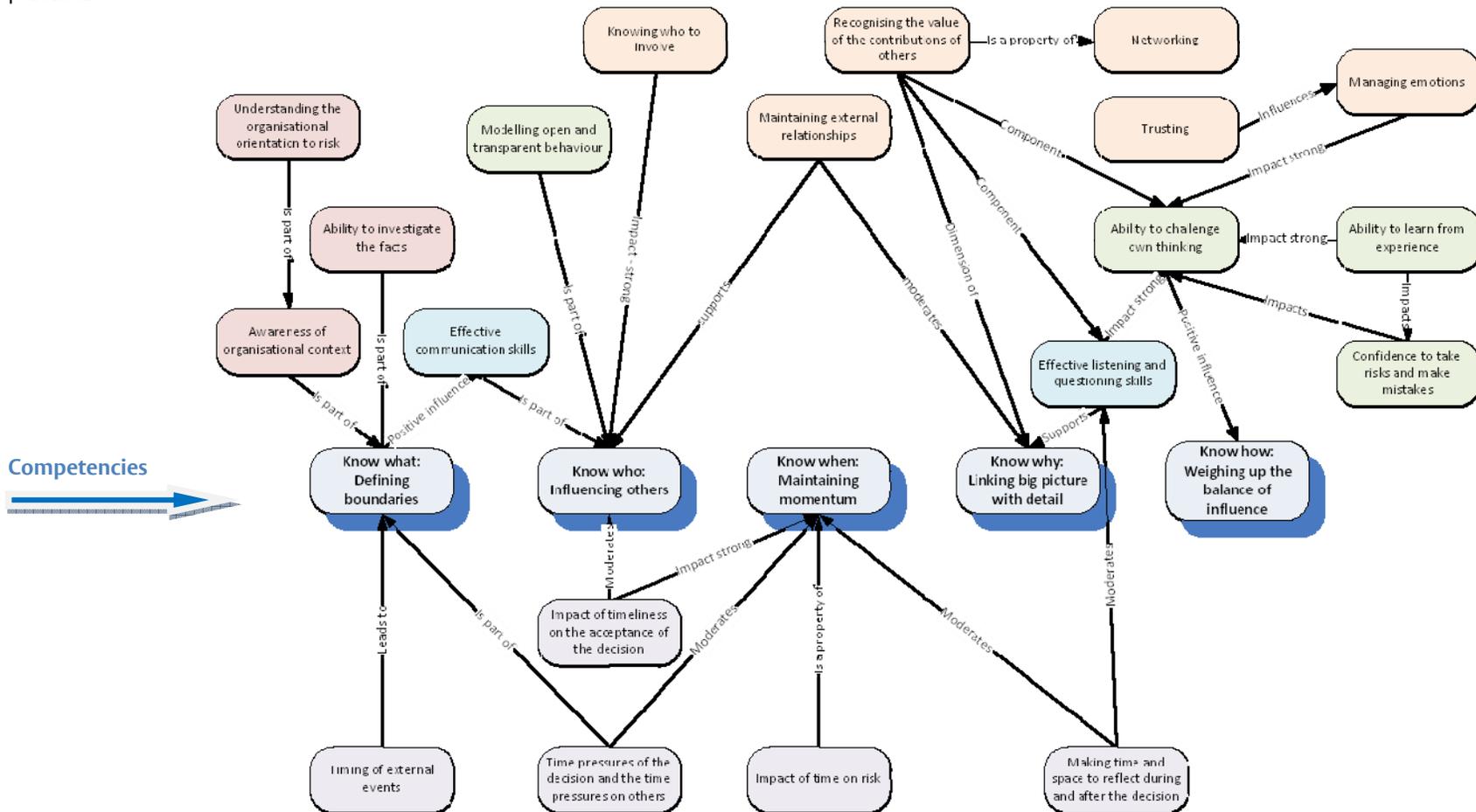
Having consulted widely, drawn on necessary evidence and expertise, and considered the timeliness and relationship requirements, decision makers need to weigh up these influences to shape a coherent perspective that satisfies as many priorities as possible, whilst achieving the decision purpose within the agreed boundaries.

Skills and abilities required: the ability to challenge own thinking, forming trusting relationships, managing emotions, ability to learn from experience, confidence to take risks and make mistakes, effective listening and questioning skills, recognising the value of the contributions of others, networking, and making time and space to think and reflect during and after the decision.



Personal skills and abilities required to develop these competencies

From the experience of the 19 people we interviewed, we saw twenty skills/abilities supporting the five broad competencies. Depending on the nature of the decision they will be used to different degrees; reflection helps to develop them appropriately in different contexts. They are used as an interconnected and integrated suite. The map below shows the connections our interviewees made. There may well be others, which they did not describe, but which your experience tells you are important. For example, trust may be important for good networking. A description of each box is provided in the subsequent tables clustered according to different practices.



The skills and abilities underpinning the competencies: definitions and descriptions

Understanding and awareness

Awareness of the organisational context	Pre-existing boundaries exist in terms of how developed authority is, how tribal or collaborative people are, the historical orientation to change, what cultural tendencies shape their responses (for example, to avoiding loss of face, affiliation with corporate values or professional influences), and the level of recognition of a current or impending crisis. Understanding these factors affects how the decision maker can approach the decision and what needs to be done to manage, involve and influence other people.
Understanding the organisational orientation to risk	Some organisations have a highly risk-averse culture, meaning that managers are unwilling to sanction action without a supporting evidence base. Decisions that create uncertainty are problematic and can slow things down by leading to prolonged debate without action. Exploring and addressing the potential for risk management approaches can be used to build confidence and open up consideration of more options.
Ability to investigate the facts	Different kinds of decisions are supported by evidence in different ways. Evidence needs to be gathered in relation to complex decisions, but it is difficult to judge when there has been enough analysis. Complicated decisions may require considerable expert analysis, and simple decisions need to be founded on a sound and defensible evidence base. The decision maker needs to recognise the kind of decision, the role of evidence and analysis in that decision, and have the skills to manage or carry out the investigation.

Reflective practice

Modelling open and transparent behaviour	Openness minimises politics and rumour, and encourages others to practise the same behaviours. Good decision makers try to stay open-minded as long as possible, but then are clear about the rationale and consequences once the decision has been made, even if it doesn't please everyone. Openness carries through to transparency about the lessons learnt from the decision review process.
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Ability to challenge own thinking	The critical evaluation of real evidence leads to a defensible rationale for decisions, particularly simple and complicated ones. This means being open to all sources of evidence, not just preferred ones, involving people with different perspectives and seeking to verify the evidence through different sources. Challenging one's own thinking and potential biases is achieved through dialogue with others, consultation with a wide range of people and role-playing different viewpoints.
Ability to learn from experience	This comes from reflection on past experience, both personal decisions and observation of the decisions of others. Consciously looking back on difficult situations can be challenging. However, it provides a range of alternative strategies to handle situations in the future. Deliberately seeking experiences that provide new decision situations can build confidence in one's own ability.
Confidence to take risks and make mistakes	This is based on clarity of thinking and supports speedy decision making. Some people have this as a natural skill. Others believe that any decision is better than no decision and act accordingly. This can be productive when it is accompanied by a willingness to listen to feedback and change direction when the evidence suggests this is needed. Speed can be a deliberate ploy used to gain momentum, or to trigger debate and generate feedback. A supportive context is needed where one does not fear being blamed for mistakes.

Communication

Effective communication skills	Clarity, consistency and repetition all support effective communication. Tact and diplomacy are essential in some cultures. Hopefulness, inspiration and a forward orientation in all communications is key. Identifying and involving passionate advocates also builds awareness and interest.
Effective listening and questioning skills	Listening and asking good questions helps to ensure that the real problem is identified, an essential requirement of complex decisions in particular. For all types of decisions though, it helps build commitment to the decision and supports effective implementation.

Relating to others

<p>Recognising the value of the contributions of others</p>	<p>Recognising, accepting and managing contributions from a diverse range of people supports good decision making. It helps test the logic of one's own thinking and helps ensure that the decision is defensible. It also helps ensure that learning from previous decisions is considered. Understanding the perspectives of those contributing is important, including when competing interests are being protected. Good decision makers identify opportunities for others to contribute and encourage these with integrity.</p>
<p>Knowing who to involve</p>	<p>This depends on an understanding of the type of decision that is being made. Complicated decisions require experts to be involved, including external advisers. Many decisions, including complex ones in particular, require a variety of different stakeholder perspectives to be considered. Knowing who to involve means identifying those who are passionate advocates, those who need to be involved so they don't block the decision, those who will help build momentum, those who will offer unbiased advice, and those who will support effective communication of the final decision.</p>
<p>Maintaining external relationships</p>	<p>External relationships help provide a "big picture" perspective in terms of trends in the outside world, provide a fresh perspective and be a creative stimulus. They can be used to challenge thinking and help overcome internal blockages to change. Maintaining external relationships can be time-consuming and needs to be considered purposefully.</p>
<p>Networking</p>	<p>This is both an internal and external activity. The relationships provide access to different viewpoints and knowledge, speeding decision making, challenging thinking and stimulating creativity. Managing the time spent on networking is important. In some organisational contexts, using one's personal network can be more effective than using formal systems and processes.</p>
<p>Trusting</p>	<p>Decision makers need to be trusted if they are to sustain credibility and their decisions are to be effectively implemented. The contributions of experts need to be trusted. The greater the trust in others and in the decision maker, the faster decisions can be made because excessive control processes are not needed.</p>
<p>Managing emotions</p>	<p>Decision makers need to be conscious of their own emotions and how these shape their judgement and actions. They also need to be conscious of the emotions and sensibilities of others and how these influence their contributions and responses. Understanding emotions affects the timing of aspects of decision making, the maintenance of relationships with those involved, and the acceptance of the decision by those affected by it.</p>

Awareness of time in relation to the effectiveness of decision making

The timing of relevant external events	<p>Understanding factors outside the organisation and how these impact on the need to take a decision, contribute to the formulation of key constraints on the decision.</p>
The time pressures of the decision and the time pressures on others	<p>Communicating when the decision needs to be made, and why this is, helps others to contribute in a timely way. It may be a matter of undertaking the decision in phases to accommodate uncertainties and manage risk. Investing time at the outset in formulating the decision question and the decision boundaries helps in maintaining momentum later. The pressures others are under and how these impact the timeliness of the decision also need to be considered, as does an appreciation of how long the analysis of experts will take.</p>
The impact of timeliness on the acceptance of the decision	<p>Knowing when a decision might be acceptable involves developing an understanding of how long it takes to gain the trust of those involved, how to phase activities to maintain momentum, what opportunistic events could trigger acceptance, and an evaluation of the risks of delay relative to the risks of not having enough information. The decision maker needs to be willing to live with uncertainty, rather than closing the decision process at the wrong time.</p>
The impact of time on risk	<p>The decision maker needs to weigh up the risk implications of the timing of activities, for example, of communicating a partially formed idea to get feedback, formulating priorities for the decision process, or taking action before gathering more evidence. Implementation is more likely to run smoothly if issues have been resolved within the decision making process, but this can affect timeliness in other ways.</p>
Making time and space to think and reflect during and after the decision	<p>This is linked to reflective practices. Proactively creating time and space to think in one's day-to-day work helps decision makers, for example by thinking through the complexity of interrelated issues, identifying key concepts, and prioritising issues rationally rather than emotionally. Techniques include using thought experiments and identifying key questions. Time and space can be found at home, whilst driving, by role-playing different perspectives, or writing "the story" down. Some organisations use formal mechanisms to help people think together about significant decisions.</p>

Questions to ask yourself or for a coach to ask as prompts for personal reflection and learning

Practising these skills and abilities and thereby developing the five competencies of a knowledgeable decision maker, requires reflection time. When you are in the midst of a decision and when you want to review and learn from previous decisions it can be worth thinking through your response to some key questions in relation to each different type of decision. Then you will become more sensitive to the different needs of each situation, and be better able to transfer that learning to similar situations. Effective decision makers actively look for opportunities to analyse how they are making decisions and to think through how to improve their practice. The questions below are phrased for coaches to ask, but they could be applied to personal reflection too.

Awareness of the organisational context	What has determined how this kind of decision has been approached in the past? Does this still apply? To what extent is it important to manage current conditions to achieve an effective outcome? Who, and what might block progress?
Understanding the organisational orientation to risk	What risks are associated with this kind of decision? How are these risks viewed? Do these risks prevent the decision being made easily? Can the risks be managed differently this time?
Ability to investigate the facts	What evidence is needed to understand the situation within which this decision is being made, the options available, and how to choose between them? Who needs to help you collect and analyse the evidence? Will this sort of information be necessary again?
Modelling open and transparent behaviour	How can your thinking about the decision be shared with others? Are you communicating appropriately to convince others? Which other communication methods might be useful? Are you doing anything that might be misinterpreted as hiding something?
Ability to challenge own thinking	What are your preconceptions about this decision? Can they be put aside while you explore other perspectives and options? Who can you debate the issues and options with? What are the main perspectives that need to be considered – can you present the arguments from each in turn? How would someone you respect view this decision? How would you defend your reasoning to them?
Ability to learn from experience	How are decisions that you have made in the past relevant to this one? How can you use your observations of others making similar decisions? What learning opportunity does this decision offer you? What could have been done differently?

Confidence to take risks and make mistakes	What happens for you personally if this decision doesn't turn out well? What kinds of evidence or feedback can you use to help you learn and to improve the final outcome if you phase the implementation? Are others avoiding risk rather than managing it, and what can you do to change that? How big are the impacts of a mistake and what contingencies can you put in place to mitigate them?
Effective communication skills	What are the communication issues associated with this decision? Which enthusiasts can you engage to support you? How do you need to adapt your message to different stakeholder groups?
Effective listening and questioning skills	What are the different issues that this decision will address? What key questions need to be answered in order to know that you have addressed this issue? What underlying emotional sensitivities are implicit in people's feedback to your questions?
Recognising the value of the contributions of others	What opportunities are there for others to offer their perspectives on this issue? How can you define the best way for people to do this and the timescales that are needed? Who would you usually include, who would you ideally include, and who should you include even if you would prefer not to?
Knowing who to involve	What type of decision is this (simple, complicated or complex) and therefore who needs to be involved? Who will be a supporter and can help? Who do you need to involve so they don't cause problems later? Whose advice will you trust?
Maintaining external relationships	Who outside the organisation needs to be involved and why? How can you use your external contacts and network to add some fresh thinking?
Networking	How can you use your personal network in the organisation to best effect? How much time and effort should you expend to get the right outcome?
Trusting	What do you need to do to ensure that you are trusted after this decision has been made? Is there any impact on the trust others will have in this organisation? Who will you trust enough to be your eyes and ears in this process?

Managing emotions	How do you feel about what you need to do and where this decision might take you? How is that influencing your judgement? What do other key people feel about this issue? How is that influencing their contribution? What can you do to understand this better?
The timing of relevant external events	Is there anything happening outside the organisation that you need to be aware of? What does that mean for your timescales? How can you keep your “antennae” sharp for intelligence that might impact on the progress of your decision?
The time pressures of the decision and the time pressures on others	When does this decision need to be made by and why? Who needs to know this? How much time can be spent being clear about the decision question and the key issues and principles that will underpin an effective outcome? Are other people facing time pressures that you need to be aware of?
The impact of timeliness on the acceptance of the decision	Who needs to buy in to this decision? How long will it take for them to do so? How can you keep them involved and interested? How can you get feedback on the issues that might be raised? How can you collect more evidence? How can you bring in more points of view? What might be happening that would be useful for you to link this decision to?
The impact of time on risk	What risks are there in taking this decision sooner than you would like? Later than you would like? What can you do to manage the risks?
Making time and space to think and reflect	What are the difficult choices that you are facing? How can you find the time to think them through? What sort of activities help you think? Do you need to think alone or with a few others to think this through?

One decision maker's reflections on a strategic decision with “radical” organisational implications

The decision was how to move the whole organisation to a less centralised model. The decision maker described the situation as “a bit like the story of the six blind men and the elephant; everyone is touching a bit of it, and thinks they know what it is, but no-one is yet seeing the whole”. The aim was for the change process itself to build the capacity of those involved and develop their leadership skills.

<p>Awareness of the organisational context</p>	<p>It's important that I make a clear connection between how I made the decision, the decision itself and how that fits with the goals and the corporate mission of the organisation and, more importantly, how it fits with our core principles and values.</p> <p>Early on I went to my CEO and asked him to give me a sense of the appetite for change. I said just give me some parameters so I know how far we think we want to go. What he said was go as far as you can but stop short of restructuring the organisation. Although helpful that wasn't terribly specific. It was only when I started to feedback to my colleagues, it could be this, I think it is that, that I began to understand what he really wanted. I remember because I wanted to force my senior leadership team colleagues to show their hand, I wrote a paper for the senior leadership team, which was quite provocative. I deliberately termed it a discussion paper and said it was not the sort of paper I would normally write for them. I am pushing hard because I want us to know what we think. If you feel some of this is controversial and contentious that's great. The CEO expressed some concern with the paper. He said there are things I really don't agree with in it. I said that is what it is designed for. I want to know what you all agree with and what you don't. It was interesting because when you are trying to get into complex issues, the way the organisation generally works is that the senior leader writes a paper and asks for discussion then sign-off, but with something as complex as this you cannot do it that way. Looking back what I should have done more of is that very early contentious provocation of the scoping of the work. It would have helped me be clearer what we did not want as much as what we did want.</p>
<p>Understanding the organisational orientation to risk</p>	<p>We are quite a consultative organisation and we are always trying to get the balance right between consulting and possibly over consulting. In my own mind, I ask myself when is the cake cooked just enough to cut into it? Sometimes it's just matter of instinct.</p> <p>We have a bit of a habit of only making a decision when we are 100% sure. We find it quite hard to make it when we are only 80% sure. We have a lot of highly skilled people who tend to want to have covered all bases, and want to be really secure. We've also got a tendency of making a decision and then a group of people saying, hang on a minute can we not go back to first principles are we really clear about why we are doing this, and then we go round in a circle.</p>
<p>Ability to investigate the facts</p>	<p>We defined clear outcome measures up front against some core principles. This helped as benchmark evidence against the core purpose, to evaluate progress, to assess what to do about difficult problems and to test directions.</p>

Modelling open and transparent behaviour	<p>The first thing was to be clear with everyone about the platform for change. I gathered everything, warts and all, into a compelling story of what it is like out there and if we carry on and don't change what the consequences are.</p> <p>I was always very clear in the organisation that anyone could talk to anyone else about this. I wasn't holding the keys to the consultation. Giving people permission to be very open about what we were trying to do was important.</p>
Ability to challenge own thinking	<p>Decisions inside your own head are hardest. It's easier to make them in dialogue. I draw on whether I have had to make a similar decision before. I ask myself questions, "Am I deliberately avoiding something better but more difficult? Do I have to make the decision now, is there anyone I have to check this out with?". Wise counsel is really important. Being responsible for the future of the organisation means I can't afford to be cavalier. I imagine myself trying to justify a decision to the Chair of the Board or my Chief Exec and I can just hear them saying 'what do you think you are doing?' You can role-play it and know whether you feel you can justify it.</p>
Ability to learn from experience	<p>If I am asked to make a decision by someone, the first thing I will judge is whether this person is capable of making the decision themselves. If not, they are asking me to make the decisions and I will invariably say "this is why I have made that decision" so that they can see the transparency underneath the decision. Then I will ask "is that the decision you expected me to make?" If they say yes, the next question is "why did you not come to me with that decision made, why wait for me?" If the answer is no, then I ask them "what did you think I would say?" Then you get into a really good discussion. Sometimes they say "x" or "y" and you say "that's really good, I should have thought about that". I try to use decision points as coaching opportunities when someone asks me to make a decision.</p> <p>I have learned by watching three great leaders. I've worked with very honest leaders, and you can go back to them and ask them what was it that led them to a decision point. You can learn an awful lot from that, particularly when it is a decision that is going to be unpopular. That's where you go back to your core values and principles. I wouldn't stay in an organisation more than three or four years if the organisational values weren't aligned with mine.</p> <p>Another thing is to start off at the beginning of the process by having a broad table, to get as many perspectives into the room as possible. People will say, sometimes as a way of slowing down the process, have you consulted with x or y, but you've already done it and can show you have. That gives people more confidence in the process.</p>

<p>Confidence to take risks and make mistakes</p>	<p>I am happy to make decisions that are not wholly right and I am happy to say that I am going to live by it. I'm happy to stand by other peoples' decisions that may have been marginal because sometimes it's the actions that make it right. A relatively weak decision can be strengthened by how you conduct yourself afterwards. This helped me to push this decision through quite hard. I had worked out a double act with the CEO acting as the voice of reason and testing it out to iron out the wrinkles.</p> <p>With this decision we are saying we will get to a degree of security that is good enough and we will go out and test it and learn from that experience. We may find that part of the decision we have made is wrong and we'll have no problem in going back and reversing it. I was very clear about the first base principles and I kept saying we're not unravelling what we have already agreed and we don't go back. Then you do the next stage about what are the core principles and test all your following decisions against those principles, to see that you are going in the right direction. If people have missed a meeting though, we are not unravelling. I had to be really clear about that.</p> <p>I did force a decision quite hard a few weeks ago. I actually said to colleagues if we got this 100% right it wouldn't be right, because it is so complex. We'd be deluding ourselves if we think we can get 100% certainty. I think I said we could all die trying. We've been talking about this for months, we could spend months more and not find any additional information, from the balance of all we know this is what we are going to do.</p>
<p>Effective communication skills</p>	<p>Because I am in a strategic position it is important that I am as transparent as I can be about the decision I have come to.</p>
<p>Effective listening and questioning skills</p>	<p>I had to create ways to create opportunities where conflict and dissent were healthy. We take things seriously, we are good at debating, but I don't think we are as good as we could be at being openly challenging with each other. We tend to try to get to consensus sometimes a bit too quickly. I said I was not here to defend anything in the paper. <i>I spent the time asking lots of questions</i>, which really helped to keep the debate alive.</p>
<p>Recognising the value of the contributions of others</p>	<p>Making sure I have spoken to as many people as possible who will give me as many diverse and divergent views as possible. It's really important that I don't appear in my role to be only consulting those people whose views I want to hear and who will re-enforce me in the decision I am making.</p>
<p>Knowing who to involve</p>	<p>It's really important that those who are going to have to implement the decision or whose work is going to be affected are included in the decision-making process. It's especially important to seek out those people who you know have views different to yours – it's too easy to listen to those voices who agree with you. I don't think that gets the best and most robust outcome.</p>
<p>Maintaining external relationships</p>	<p>Getting the Board involved early on was important.</p>

Networking	<i>(not mentioned by the interviewee)</i>
Trusting	People were only too happy to talk if you framed the opening to the conversation as “we need help”.
Managing emotions	There were a significant number of people with vested interests. I was struggling to get people to think about the corporate interests. All they wanted to talk about initially was their own work areas and how the decision would impact on them.
The timing of relevant external events	I can’t remember where the need for the decision came from. I guess it was one of the conversations I had with our Chief Exec. It probably stemmed from a small instance that was magnified across the country. There was a lot of testimony out there coming from our customers that we could do a much better job for them.
The time pressures of the decision and the time pressures on others	It’s important to keep an open mind for as long as possible, but not too long. There was an appetite for the decision to be much quicker and for it to be more of a transformational shift than we felt we could make. A number of voices of people whose judgement I really valued said we are not being bold enough, but I knew that if we did anything too radical too quickly we would be caught up in a reshaping and reframing of the organisation at a time when we could ill afford not to be doing our core business day in day out. So we have deliberately positioned this as an evolving strategy. I had to curb my natural desire to be bold and move fast, and I would have definitely been saying what these individuals were saying if I were standing where they were. I had to say I hear what you are saying, but here are the realities. Although people were disappointed, they understood it. It was quite hard for me not to be as innovative as people suggested I ought to be.
The impact of timeliness on the acceptance of the decision	<p>The decision to make a change happened six months ago. As a result of the number of interests out there the decision took longer. I put a proposal similar to where we are now on the table six months ago and it received a lot of criticism.</p> <p>Sometimes people fight against a decision early on, not because of the decision but because of what it might lead to and there are other issues that have not been surfaced. They will block it because they feel hurried along. When we were coming to the decision and I said hang on we were here five months ago and everyone said no, but I actually I knew that things had changed so I knew it was right to put it back on the table. I didn’t say that I was doing that, and somehow people saw it for the first time.</p>
The impact of time on risk	Moving too fast or too slow – you just have to judge this. The more strategic the decision the more I needed to be aware that until a decision was made, some teams could be paralysed by indecision. So even if you can’t give a decision quickly, giving an indication in broad terms of how things are likely to change is important so people can start to judge their own decisions against them. That way, when the decision is made there won’t be too much unravelling to do.

Making time and space to think and reflect

I've had really good leaders who I have learned from. They have been very professionally generous with me. The best advice I have had is to find time to think carefully about the issues you are wrestling with. When I try, I find it very difficult to slow down my mind enough to give the issue the thought it needs. My CEO has given me good advice: go for a walk, talk it through with a partner who does not have a vested interest, think through the pros and cons when driving. What he's really saying is I need some space.

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