

MODUL: ABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS (FURTHER VET)

Statistics	
No. of participants	2 per practice
Module length	3 x 30 minutes

Definition and description of a module	
	<p>Decision-making is a cognitive process resulting in the selection of a course of action among several alternative scenarios. Every decision-making process produces a final choice. The output can be an action or an opinion of choice.</p> <p>Numerous research has been done on decision-making in vocational training from the perspective of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *the relationships among different aspects of decision-making (e.g. career decision-making self-efficiency, vocational identity and career exploration behaviour etc.) *the efficiency of vocational education in different regions and countries and by the social factors (Greece, Spain etc.) *returns to educational choices (e.g. economic and social returns) *type of decision makers (e.g. indecisive students, African-Americans, beaten women etc.) *etc. <p>The ability to make career decisions is a very difficult and complex process, which includes integration of large amounts of information, involving the self and the vocational world (Gati et al., 1996). Recent sociological rational choice theories argue that educational decisions are made with the objective of maximizing both economic and social returns to education. Economic returns are, for example, earnings, while social returns include the preservation of existing peer groups and social networks. In particular, this new sociological rational choice (SRC) literature embraces the notion that students are rational decision makers whose educational choices are aimed at maximizing expected returns to education (Jæger, 2011).</p> <p>But we don't live in ideal world where we could choose further vocational education just by the expectations for maximizing the return. Neither can we say that all people choose their education just by logic – many grown-ups decide for a vocational training of their inner choice, to enrich their lives with pleasure and enjoyment on their work-place. Therefore we shall take in account the position of decision theorists who take the holistic approach, using both intuitive and analytical styles for decision-making. They claim that <i>good decisions</i> don't always produce desired results. Conversely, some <i>poor decisions</i> get good results. Therefore one cannot judge the decision only by the physical results (money) as it can short-circuit the decision-making process. Experts on decision-making define a <i>good decision</i> as one that holds up in retrospect (WEC - MAS 105).</p>
Aims	
	Through this module participants will learn:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *to combine intuition and analytical skills with decision-making *how to make good decision through qualitative decision-making *good practices for decision-making *practices to avoid in decision-making
Content	
	<p>The module contains 3-step practical role-play:</p> <p>STEP 1: Intuition vs. Analytical Skills</p> <p>STEP 2: Quantitative vs. qualitative decision-making</p> <p>STEP 3: Good practices for decision-making vs. Practices to avoid in decision-making</p>
Performed as:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Seminar <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Role-play in pairs (for practices) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plenum (for initial discussions on definitions) <input type="checkbox"/> Small groups <p>Practices are prepared for two levels of users where needed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *BASIC LEVEL for younger and less experienced users *ADVANCED LEVEL for experienced users <p>NOTE: Ability to make decision is most efficiently practiced in pairs to avoid the influence of a group decision-making.</p>
Materials and other supplies	
	<p>Paper</p> <p>Pencil</p> <p>Creativity</p>
Intensity of preparation	
	Low
Number of participants	
	2 persons per practice
Classroom	
	No special equipment is needed

References:

Gati, I., Kransz, M. & Osipow, S. H. (1996). A taxonomy of difficulties in career decision maing. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 43, 510-526.

Jæger, Mads Meier (2011). Economic and social returns to educational choices. Extending the utility functions. *Rationality and Society*, Vol. 19(4): 451–483

WEC – MAS-105 - Westinghouse Electric Corp. MAS105. Problem solving and decision-making. Internal documents, 18-24.

PRACTICES

STEP 1: Intuition vs. Analytical Skills	
Definitions	
Intuition	<p>Your intuition enables you to know or feel something without using logic or reason, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *with intuition you can create ideas that provide a starting point for fresh thoughts, *you can solve the „why“ or the „should I“ question, *you can break a deadlock in your mind among different strategies.
Analytical skills	<p>Your analytical skills help you use logic to examine and measure a problem, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *separate workable ideas from impractical ones, *solve „how to“ or „how many“ problems when choices can be assessed with facts.
Examples to understand the difference between intuition and analytical skills	
Intuition	<p>Write down some examples for decision-making by using your intuition. Than share it with your co-participant and leave him to share his examples. If some of them are not clear to you, ask for explanation.</p> <p>EXAMPLE: Write down the first idea that comes on your mind when you think of further vocational education. Now write down your second choice and third and more if there are more. Exchange the paper with your co-participant and try to answer why do you think you have selected these exact programmes and why in this specific order? Be sincere with your answers. Ask your co-participant the same.</p>
Analytical skills	<p>Spencer Johnson in <i>Yes or No, Guide to Better Decisions</i> states that making better decisions starts with how we make them to get better results.</p> <p>Take the list of choices from your previous practices and for each of them ask yourself questions below. For each question, proceed if you decide „yes“, or rethink if you decide „no“.</p> <p>EXAMPLE 1: <i>Is this what I want or need? What information do I need? Do I have options? If I pick this option, what will happen? Then what?</i></p> <p>According to the answers above, answer to the question below: Am I meeting the real need, informing myself of options, and thinking it through? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>EXAMPLE 2: <i>Have I told myself the truth? What would I decide if I would have no fears about the results? What would I do if I decide I deserve better results?</i></p> <p>According to the answers above, answer to the question below: Does my decision show that I am honest with myself, trust my intuition, and know that I deserve better results? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
Use both aspects of decision analysis – logic and intuition – to consistently make better decisions.	

STEP 2: Quantitative vs. qualitative decision-making	
Definitions	
Quantitative decision-making	Quantitative decision-making or multivariate analysis helps managers and supervisors rely on more than intuition, experience and luck in wrestling with real-life issues. Quantification can help analyzing complex issues and confirming hunches about the right choice. Yet for this kind of decision-making you need a broader audience so it's usually used in research or analyzes. For a single person decision-making process a qualitative approach is more suitable.
Qualitative decision-making	Qualitative decision-making requires flexibility, caution and the capacity to proceed sometimes with half the desired information when that's necessary. Sometimes we are overcome by opposing factors and are caught up in patterns that slow or halt good decision-making: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *defensive avoidance (delaying decisions unnecessarily), *overreaction (making decisions impulsively to escape the anxious state), *hyper vigilance (obsessively collecting data instead of making a decision).
Tricks for making really tough decisions with qualitative decision-making	
	<p>BASIC LEVEL: Imagine being in a situation which will change the course of your life: you have got a state, contract-biding subsidised further vocational training which will cover all your expenses but you will have to get a job in the field of your new expertise within a year after you finish the education. Which way to go? Use your newly gained intuition and analytical skills to choose vocational education. Put it down on a piece of paper. Now go through the points below and see which ones you've already incorporated into your decision. Try to answer yourself, what consequences would have those which were left out – would you choose a different vocational education?</p> <p>ADVANCED LEVEL: Imagine being in a situation which will change the course of your business life: due to the bankruptcy of your company you have to re-profile your career, starting with a totally new business. You have a year to make this re-direction through a state, contract-biding subsidised further vocational training. Which way to go? Use your newly gained intuition and analytical skills to choose vocational education. Put it down on a piece of paper. Now go through the points below and see which ones you've already incorporated into your decision. Try to answer yourself, what consequences would have those which were left out – would you choose a different vocational education?</p> <p>With really tough decisions, when there is just no room for error, have in mind: *identify needs and wants (jot them all down – even if some contradict. Don't get trapped by artificial boundaries – think outrageously! Imaginative reasoning is no more "outrageous" than stepping out of the paradigm)</p> <p>EXAMPLE: Draw two columns – one for "I want this training" and the other one for "I need this training". Try to put as many reasons as you can think of, why you have</p>

decided to choose this specific vocational training because you think you “want” it and why because you think you really “need” it. Observe, what is the difference between “want” and “need”.

*rank needs and wants (separate *needs = musts* from *wants = desirables*, then prioritize the wants)

EXAMPLE: Rethink if really all the “needs” are in the column of “needs” and “wants” are in the column of “wants”. If you think they are not in right columns, correct them. Now your identified “wants” and “needs” mark with numbers. No. 1 means that you think this is your most important reasons, no. 2 a bit less etc.

*make choices among the contradictory options (certainly your needs and budgets provide you essential givens in the decision process, but keep an open mind to new approaches. Avoid do-it-by-the-book barriers with flexible thinking)

EXAMPLE: Take the list of options you have put down in Step 1. Now identify your “wants” and “needs” for each option according to what you have learned so far (think-rethink-rank). Try to see what the contradictions in your options are (is it realistic that you will finish the training in designated period? Will you be able to gather the money for it? Will you get job afterwards? Etc.), so what is what you realistically need and can do. Try to be creative when thinking, try to find more than one solution. Eliminate the choices which show to be most unrealistic and keep the good ones.

*gather all the information to make your decision (use your time wisely to gather pertinent information, without procrastinating – avoiding the decision-making. And remember that consultation in a group can be dangerous as groups are more receptive to information that most members share before the discussion than that which only a few individuals were aware of beforehand. This is called a “hidden profile”)

EXAMPLE: For the list of your choices sincerely answer yourself about how well informed you are about your choices, for example: did I go on the school and see what they can offer, what the curriculum is like and what kind of credentials teachers have? Did I surf the web for additional information and check the student’s opinions? Did I talk to anyone who goes to this school to receive information from first hand? Was I critical enough to evaluate which information is important to me and which should I avoid?

*look at all consequences, alternatives, pros and cons (take full advantage of your intuitive and analytical skills. Breakthrough ideas can pop into your head after hours of analyzing data and mulling over the range of possible solutions. The creative cycle enhances the possibility for arriving at higher quality solutions)

EXAMPLE: Try to predict for your list of choices what will happen when you decide for one training – how your life will look like afterwards. Try to see the alternatives – other trainings, what are their positive and negative aspects? Are positive sides of any of them stronger than your first choice?

*be objective throughout the process, don’t let your emotions take control (be confident in your ability to make the best decision possible with the available information and time allotted for the issue. Emotions such as distrust anger or

anxiety put the brakes on creative problem solving)

EXAMPLE: Go through your list of choices and see again the “needs” and “wants” from the perspective of your emotions. Try to answer yourself: Do I really need this training or is it just that I want it because my Dad/some_famous_person/other_significat is so successful doing this business? In what state of mind was I when I was making this choice (was I under pressure, was I anxious, angry)? Was my choice more rational or more emotional?

*determine the amount of risk you are willing to accept, than take these steps:

- 1) identify the safest alternative – ask yourself, which choices have less risk
- 2) pick the option with the best odds for success – ask yourself, which choices you think will bring you most benefits
- 3) select the choice with the most desirable outcome without considering the risk – ask yourself, which choice would be the best for you if there were no risks at all

*eliminate all options that present a loss you cannot live with – regardless of the odds for success

EXAMPLE: Ask yourself: what are the negative outcomes that can't be part of the risk of decision-making? From your list toss unacceptable options out.

*visualize how to cope with possible negative consequences (unavoidable lessons learned can be valuable information for future decisions. However, creative decision-making can help you avoid the pitfalls of hit-or-miss methods of generating solutions when the problem is too important to risk illogic)

EXAMPLE: Try to visualize some of your fears – what could go wrong after you make your decisions. Than search for solutions. Search wide and be innovative, try to surprise yourself.

*devise a plan-B - ask yourself what if plan-A falls through? Consider other alternatives if the best solution can't be implemented. The best solution is only as good as the implementation.

AND REMEMBER! You cannot control the outcome, only the decision process (don't judge your decisions on the basis of the results alone).

STEP 3: Good practices for decision-making vs. Practices to avoid in decision-making

Definitions

Good practices for decision-making

Experts on decision-making define a “good decision” as one that holds up in retrospect. With the resources and information available at the time the decision must be made, the good decision has the highest probability of producing the desired results.

Practices to avoid in decision-making

Contrary to good decision-making, one should avoid 8 practices which will lead to the lowest probability of producing the desired results. These are recognized as practices to avoid in decision-making.

Good practices for decision-making

Repeat good practices for decision-making, learned in step 1&2 on a new situation, this time a relaxed one. Imagine that you have got a lotto-winning ticket and you are well off for the rest of your life. So you can choose to do what you have wanted your whole life and never had the money and time to do it. You are prepared to start your new life properly – to learn the new hobby from the best. You will get the best teachers for your training yet you want to be sure you made a good decision for your time and money as with all the money you still cannot buy yourself immortality. Which steps will you take?

Try to make a list of options, taking in consider:

*define the problem before you try to solve it – ask yourself what is what you really want to do? Than search for best options.

*judiciously consider which decision process to follow - is it more important to you that you fill your “wants” or “needs”? Did you set your list according to your rational or emotional choices?

*choose among alternatives, rather than accepting or rejecting a single, most-available solution

ADVANCED LEVEL

You can help yourself with additional techniques:

*focused trial and error = widely used for adapting to partial information. Two steps include where to start the search and checking outcomes at intervals to adjust and modify. It assumes there is important information you must proceed without and helps you find an effective choice despite lack of essential information

*tentativeness = commitment to revise your course. View each intervention as tentative or experimental and declare that you fully expect to check and revise at intervals

*procrastination = purposeful delay that permits collection of new evidence, processing additional data, and presentation of new options. Sometimes the problem is resolved untreated. Rarely is delay deadly, particularly when you can rebound with a timely and persuasive solution

*decision staggering = taking action in increments helps you see the partial result of your fix, and determine if the action will be successful if fully implemented. Perhaps you are considering a series of changes to a process

	<p>*fractionalizing = instead of spreading an intervention over time, you treat important judgements as a series of sub-decisions, which can be staggered. This technique helps to relate to the changing circumstances and effects of your fix</p> <p>*hedging bets = the less certain you are about the outcome of a fix in a given situation, the better off you are to spread your risk. This is a decision-making version of avoiding the eggs-in-one-basket</p> <p>*maintaining strategic reserves = holding back resources to cover unexpected contingencies. This approach takes Murphy's Law into account</p> <p>*reversible decisions = avoids over-commitment when only partial information exists. Take the path of least resistance until you have all the facts. You can opt for a stronger route when you see initial results. Pilot a new system and work out the bugs before you convert entirely</p>
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Practices to avoid in decision-making

	<p>Even if you win the lottery, you shall avoid next 8 practices in decision-making. Consider why, trying to remember a bad practice from the past when one of these criteria was satisfied (talk about it with your co-participant):</p> <p>*groupthink = in a group a tension for consensus at the cost of realistic analyses and critical thoughts exists. Individuals suppress their ideas and normal scepticism to reach agreement and preserve human relations. Group thinking happens subconsciously – when we turn off our critical thinking in favour of reaching a decision. To avoid this phenomenon is best to avoid group decision-making and consult your decisions separately one-on-one. If this is not possible and you have to open a group discussion, make sure that you openly question ideas, thoroughly discuss options to be sure genuine agreement is reached, encourage lively discussion without personal attacks, recognize that the uncommon idea may be the best solution, keep the collective group open to unlikely sources for answers, lead by example and give your best effort without over-analysis. Avoiding group decision-making is better also due to a pattern, called “hidden profiles”. It happens if the majority of group members don't already know some information prior to a discussion, the chance of introducing new information is unlikely</p> <p>*awfulizing = the harried decision-maker faced with a variety of options and short deadlines can place too much emphasis on the negative possibilities associated with some alternatives. We tend to accentuate the negative when we are in a time crunch</p> <p>*snap decisions = take the logical steps, recommended in this module. If you are pressured for time, go through the process within the schedule you have and accept your best judgement</p> <p>*unnecessary actions = there are some events for which the best course of action is no response. Pick your battles!</p> <p>*focusing on the negative = when you face a deadline crunch, avoid oversimplification and accentuating only the risk of negative outcomes</p> <p>*avoiding decisions = you're just fooling yourself (or setting a poor example for your employees and peers) if you avoid making a necessary decision in a timely manner. Make the tough decisions; you'll be respected over the long-term for taking the responsibility</p>
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