There are many different ways to make decisions and equally as many ways to manage a project. What we are presenting here is a simplified decision making and project management process that is drawn from the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP), years of hands on experience in making decisions and running projects, and my experience in teaching this subject as part of the strategic planning process.

A decision-making process should be: intellectually rigorous, repeatable, and defendable. When you are making a decision, you need to be thoughtful in your approach and your process to ensure that all of the right inputs are considered, that the output makes sense, the decision is feasible, and it links and aligns to your larger objectives and overall mission.

The decision-making process should also be repeatable. It should be one that you can use as a ‘standard model’ for all decisions and project management requirements. This does not say that you cannot tailor the process to the specific environment, but having a repeatable process and recognizable format will greatly enhance your ability to convince others of the logic of your decisions and viability of the project management process.

Decisions change things. The decisions we make can lead to substantial changes for large numbers of people. Therefore, the process of making these decisions and then managing the change process needs to be defendable. Your customers and stakeholders need to understand and believe in the process and its validity.

**The Framework:**

The primary decision making framework has six (6) elements, which can be abbreviated as ‘SMEACC’

* **S**ituation
* **M**ission
* **E**xecution
* **A**dministration
* **C**oordination
* **C**ommunication

**Situation:** This is a description of what the issue is, why you are considering this decision, which is often referred to as the ‘problem statement’.

**Mission:** The mission is the objective of this process. What we want to achieve. The ‘desired end-state’. Stating the mission clearly and concisely is one of the most important parts of the process, because the mission statement tells us where we want to go with this process. Having a clear idea of the destination will make planning and executing the journey much easier.

**Execution:** This is how we are going to accomplish our mission. This is where we list the details of the process of managing the decision process and then implementing the decision. The execution step has imbedded in another layer of decision making which is referred to in its military format by its acronym: METT – Mission, Equipment, Time, Troops and Terrain

* + **Mission:** A restatement or validation of the mission of the process
  + **Equipment:** What equipment or resources will you need to execute the decisions process and then implement it?
  + **Time:** How much time will your decision process take and how much time will the implementation of your decision take?
  + **Troops:** How many people and what kind of people will you need to get this done?
  + **Terrain:** What does the lay of the land look like? In the military sense the actual topography is very important to the development of the decision and to its implementation. In other venues use the word ‘environment’ in place of ‘terrain’. A thorough analysis of the environment in which this decision process and the implementation will take place is a key determinant.

**Administration:** What are you going to need to administer this decision process and the follow-on implementation? What are the performance metrics that will help you measure your progress and success in the decision process and then the implementation?

**Coordination:** Who do you need to coordinate with to make your decision process and implementation work properly?

**Communication:** Who do you need to communicate with before and during the decision process to make the best possible decision? Who do you need to communicate with before and during the implementation of the decision to achieve your mission?

**The process at work**:

The need for decisions come from many places in our life: a superior at work, a group requirement, a family member, or your own thoughts to name a few. This framework will work in all cases.

When the problem first is presented, you use the **Situation** step to ensure you understand the background and the backdrop of the issue. Then you can determine what the mission is going to be.

Developing the **Mission** is of such importance that we recommend that you always write a formal ‘mission statement’. Writing out the mission statement is a way to ensure that you apply the necessary intellectual rigor to the development of the mission and makes it possible for your superiors and other customers and stakeholders to see exactly where you are heading. The writing of the mission statement can be a lengthy and often contentious process in a business or group setting. It is always a good idea to go back to that person or committee who gave you this problem and get their agreement on the mission statement before proceeding beyond this step. This will limit much disagreement later in the process.

One the mission is agreed upon we move to the **Execution** step where it is up to you to develop multiple Courses of Action (COAs). Use the analytical steps of METTT, as described above, to determine all the elements of the execution step. This will make sure you have agreement on the mission, how many and what kind of people you need, the time required, and the environment you will be working in.

While the ‘right’ solution may jump right out at you during your analysis, we have learned from experience that going back to your superior with at least three (3) COAs demonstrates not only that you have analyzed this issue from multiple angles and have given it rigorous thought, but it also provides your superior or the group an opportunity to inject his/her/their thoughts and possibly new information into the process. Gaining consensus greatly increases your probability of success.

Once you and your superior have chosen the best COA, you are can to move on to the development of the implementation plan – the details of how you are going to implement this decision.

Note: The development of the details of the implementation of the decision may bring to light new facts or decision points that may require revisiting the original decision. This framework is an iterative process and going back to your superiors or the group with new information that may change the original decision is a further demonstration of the validity of the process.

Once you have agreed on the necessary stops required in to execute this decision you can develop the administrative requirements. In this **Administration** step, you need to determine what will be required to manage the rest of the decision process and the implementation of the decision. This step includes the development of performance metrics that will indicate how you are doing in your progress toward accomplishment of the mission. Since the implementation of the decision is a ‘project’ by definition, there are standard project metrics that will almost always apply such as: Is the project on time? Is the project on budget? Is the return on investment (ROI) in line with expectations? Is the quality of the output in line with expectation? Some of these performance metrics may have been handed to you as requirements in the initial steps of the process, but you may have to modify them or develop addtional ones during this step.

By this point in the process you have most of the workings of the decision and implementation processes in place, but you need to determine who you **Coordinate** with to ensure success. Few decision or implementation processes take place in a vacuum. They take place in concert with other organizations, groups or individuals whose assistance or at least acquiescence is required. You need to determine who these entities are, what they will require of you and how you will accomplish the proper coordination.

The last step in this framework is the **Communications** step where you will determine who needs to be communicated with, what needs to be communicated, and how best to accomplish this. Communication ties closely to the Coordination step, but will go beyond the scope of entities that require actual coordination to include those who only need to be informed. Telling the right story to the right people at the right time is a key part of the successful accomplishment of the mission.

Once all the steps are completed it is time to once again return to the person or group that gave you this problem to begin with to make sure that your decision process and the plan for implementation meets everyone’s expectations.

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