



TOPIC 1

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Description: *In this topic, participants will explore the decision-making process and practice using a structured approach to making difficult or complex decisions.*

Instructor Script:

Slide 10; Workbook page 5

I hope the warm-up activity got you thinking about the decisions you are called upon daily to make as a charge nurse. Unlike the decisions you often make in your clinical role, leadership decisions frequently lack hard evidence and can be complicated by the biases and opinions of the different individuals involved. Let's talk now about the advantages of using a structured approach to decision making.



Presentation: Introduction to Decision Making

Time: 15 minutes

Description: *Present an overview of decision making concepts, particularly as related to complex situations, and review a structured process for improving the quality of decisions.*

Instructor Script:

Slide 11; Workbook page 5

As a charge nurse, you encounter many situations that can be solved with relatively quick or straightforward decisions. Examples of simple decisions include scheduling staff for lunch or dinner breaks, ordering unit supplies, and determining who should perform quality control procedures on hospital equipment. These situations do not typically require a formal process or approach to lead you to the best decision.

The decision-making process, however, can be an effective tool for determining solutions when faced with complex situations. Let's take a look at some types of situations that call for a structured approach to decision making.

- **Insufficient information.** *Are you ever faced with making a decision but you lack the information needed to make an "informed decision"?*

[Pause to hear from one or two participants.]

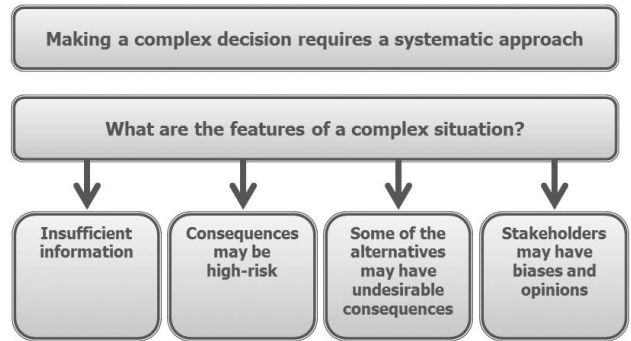
In the absence of crucial information, decisions may be arbitrary and difficult to defend. Applying the decision-making process can improve the quality of your decisions when more information is needed.

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Topic 1: The Decision-Making Process

**The Decision-Making Process:
Utility for Complex Situations**



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Scenario 3

You are the charge nurse in the emergency department. An ambulance has arrived with a patient who is experiencing an acute ST segment elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI). The medical and nursing staffs quickly descend upon the patient, starting an IV, completing a 12-lead ECG, drawing labs, obtaining a medical history, and administering aspirin. You call ahead to the heart catheterization laboratory (cath lab) to alert them of the situation. The nurse in the cath lab apologizes, telling you all three labs are being used.

To comply with the acute MI core measure, you have 90 minutes from door (the time the patient arrived) to balloon (the time the catheter is inflated in the occluded coronary artery). Fifteen minutes have passed since patient arrival. Consent has not been obtained. What do you do?

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THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

As a charge nurse, decision making is a major component of your work. Have you ever thought about how you make decisions when you are faced with complex situations? It's possible that you have made decisions on the basis of your intuition or a hunch. Or maybe you have followed the path of least resistance. To make the best decisions when faced with complex situations, effective leaders and charge nurses follow a decision-making process.

Purposeful decision making using a systematic approach will help you solve problems, improve performance, and manage the tempo of your unit.

The Best Decisions Are

- > Based on accurate information
- > Able to be implemented
- > Understood by others

Features of Complex Situations

- > Insufficient information is available – the facts may not be known
- > Consequences may be high-risk
- > Some of the alternatives may have undesirable consequences
- > Stakeholders may have biases and opinions

Think About It! In your role as a charge nurse, how often are you called upon to make complex decisions? Several times a day? By applying a systematic approach to decision making, you can feel confident that your decisions will be sound and defensible.



- **Consequences may be high-risk.** *Let's face it; we work in a high-risk environment where the consequences of our decisions may be life or death. Can you give me one or two examples of decisions you have made recently in your role as a charge nurse where the potential consequences were high-risk?*

[Pause to hear from one or two participants.]

One example that comes to mind is expediting the orientation of new graduate nurses. When staffing needs become dire, some hospitals consider shortening the orientation timeline of new graduates. Do you consider this a high-risk situation? By applying the decision-making process, decision makers may determine that the risk of curtailing orientation is greater than the gain of fulfilling staffing shortages.

- **Some of the alternatives may have undesirable consequences.** *When potential consequences of decisions are not explored, an unfavorable trickle-down effect can occur. During the decision-making process, the potential for undesirable consequences is considered and addressed. Can you think back to a decision you made (or a manager or team member made) that had undesirable consequences? Would taking the time to use a systematic approach to solving the problem have made a difference in the outcome?*

[Pause to hear from one or two participants.]

- *Stakeholders may have biases and opinions. Your stakeholders are individuals with a direct interest, involvement, or investment in the work that you do. Who are your stakeholders? [Brief pause. Sample responses are managers, hospital leadership, patients and their families, and team members.]*

How do the opinions of these people affect your decisions and the decisions of others? By allowing opinions and biases to guide our decisions, we can lose sight of our goals and make undesirable decisions.

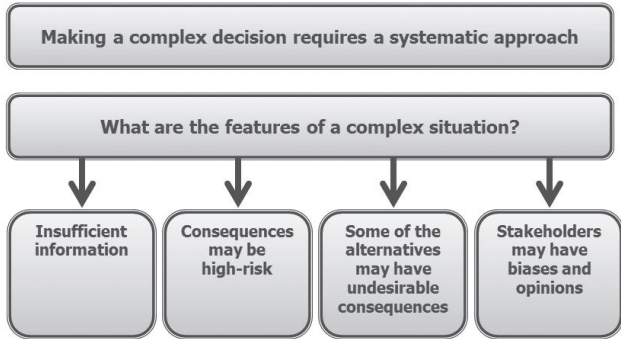
Slide 12; Workbook page 6

Now that we have established what we mean by "complex situations," let's set the stage for making a decision. These are some basic questions to ask yourself as you are preparing to make a decision related to a complex situation:

- **What is the goal of the decision?** *Be clear about your direction, not only for yourself, but so you can articulate it to your stakeholders.*
- **Will this be an individual or group-based decision?** *Would a group-approach provide you with more depth and better alternatives? Do you need to call upon the expertise of others?*
- **As we just discussed, who are the stakeholders and what are their opinions?** *Who will be affected by your decision or have a stake in the outcome? Do your stakeholders have existing biases? Do you know what they are? It is important to be aware of opinions and biases so you can control for the influence they may have on the final decision.*

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**The Decision-Making Process:
Utility for Complex Situations**



Setting the Stage for Making Decisions

What is the goal of the decision?
 Will this be an individual or group-based decision?
 Who are the stakeholders and what are their opinions?



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Setting the Stage for Making Decisions

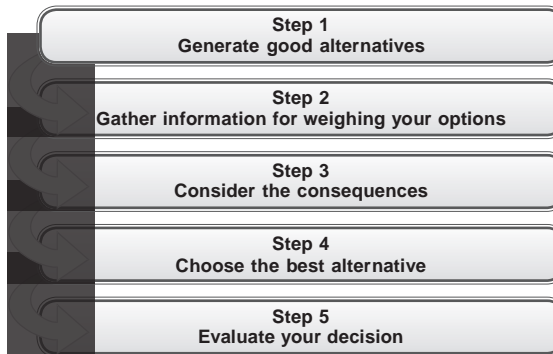
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A stakeholder is someone who has direct interest, involvement, or investment in the situation or issue at hand. In the context of the charge nurse, stakeholders may include patients and their families, teammates, supervisors, ancillary departments, and hospital administration. Can you identify additional stakeholders affected by the decisions you make as a charge nurse?

Decision-Making Process

Making good decisions takes practice. By consciously applying the decision-making process to solve difficult or complex situations, you improve the probability that your decisions will result in positive outcomes.



Source: Adapted from <http://www.corporatewellnessmagazine.com/issue-22/features-issue-22/5-steps-to-good-decision-making/>. Accessed April 1, 2014.



Once you've made your decision, be prepared to explain it to those affected by it. Share the possible risks and anticipated benefits. The more information you share, the more likely your decision will be supported.

Slide 13; Workbook page 6

Once you have set the stage for making your decision, it's time to follow the steps of the decision-making process. In the absence of a process, your decisions may be disjointed and may cause confusion and unrest among your teammates.

The first step of the decision-making process involves **generating good alternatives to the problem**. If this is a decision that has been made previously, you may want to consider solutions that worked or alternatives that were not pursued. During this stage, it may be helpful to get perspectives from others. If you are using a team approach to decision-making, you might consider a free-range brainstorming exercise. This may reveal creative alternatives that may not otherwise be identified. At this stage, it's possible that you may identify too many alternatives, leading you to analysis paralysis. That's okay – the second step will help you manage this.

In the second step, decision makers **gather information for weighing their options**. The goal is to narrow the alternatives to those that are supported by the information that you have gathered. This is a phase of inquiry where questions are asked and research is completed. During this step, we collect all of the information that is available to us and begin to process those pieces of information that might be helpful in making our decision.

As a new charge nurse, you probably do this every day. You ask your peers and your managers for advice or validation. You review policies and procedures to be sure that you have the correct information to share with your team. You are informed about the hospital's quality goals. You review the literature. Having relevant information will assist you in making informed decisions.

The third step of the decision-making process is **considering the consequences of the alternatives**. While gathering information, we predict the potential outcomes of each of the alternatives. This information will allow us to choose the alternative that has the highest probability of solving our problem with the lowest probability of having unsatisfactory outcomes. How often do you consider the consequences of your alternatives when making decisions in your charge nurse role and personal life?

The next step of the decision-making process is **choosing the best alternative, or making your decision**. As we have identified from the previous steps, the final decision is only as good as the alternatives available to the decision maker and the validity of the information. Once you've made your decision, be prepared to explain it to those affected by it. Share the possible risks and anticipated benefits. The more information you share, the more likely it is that your decision will be supported.

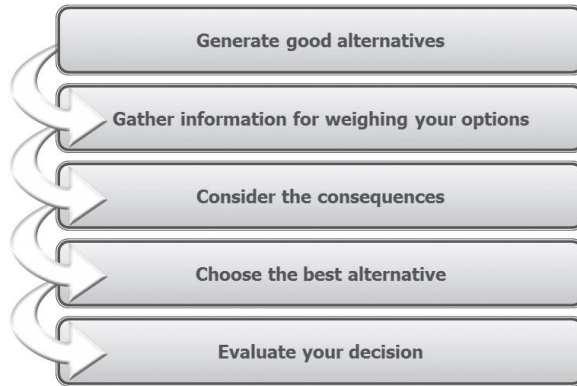
The **final step** of the decision-making process is **evaluation of the decision**.

An effective leader will regularly seek feedback from stakeholders as a way of evaluating decisions. Some decisions may be evaluated by reviewing data; e.g., you may evaluate the effect of a new process on the results of your unit's HCAHPS survey.

So let's summarize the key take-aways related to the decision-making process.

- It is a purposeful, systematic approach.
- It is helpful for solving complex issues.
- It reminds us to consider the consequences of the alternatives in order to avoid unsatisfactory outcomes.
- It is the process of choosing the **best** of the available alternatives.

The Decision-Making Process



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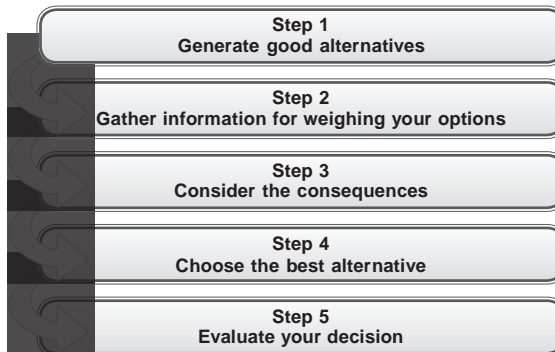
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