

Decision Making: Art of Problem Solving

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All of us have heard of Swami Vivekananda, the wandering monk who lived from 1863 to 1902 was one of the finest minds that our country ever produced. Vivekananda's spirituality was a reflection of his understanding of life. He viewed life dispassionately and saw divinity in every being. This understanding of the broader meanings of life also made him a champion of women's rights. He wanted the women to be empowered so that they could deal with their lives themselves. His advice to men was, "our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are capable of doing it as any in the world."



Empowering women may sound simple but is not that easy to execute. It involves a series of interconnected aspects. The solution may differ from case to case depending on the context. It involves two main processes.

1. Creation of the right environment.
2. Women being able to act in such an environment.

While the task of creating the right environment is mostly external, something which has to be done by the society, the second one – viz women being able to act in such an environment – is an individual choice. A woman can choose to act or not to act in a particular situation. But this would require her to make an informed decision. It is this decision making process that we are going to focus in this lecture.

The dictionary meaning of "decision" is "a conclusion or resolution reached after consideration" and decision making is the step by step process through which one reaches such conclusion. What this basically tells us is that 'decision making' is a mental process but it depends on several external factors. Let me explain it with a story. There once lived a naughty child. While he was growing up, he happened to notice for the first time a fire burning and wanted to know what it was. His father told him that it produces a lot of heat and advised him to stay away from it lest it burn him. But the kid wasn't convinced and decided to try. He tried to touch the fire and got his hands burnt.

So the child made a decision to touch the fire though his father had told him not to and burnt his hands. This means that though he had someone advising him against doing it, his own mind was not mature enough to understand it. This means that the decision making capacity of a person is not only dependent on external factors, but also has to do with the mental maturity of each person.

Relevance

Women are roughly 50 percent of the world's population and have a key role to play in the day to day affairs. Womanhood is a gift of nature and women are blessed with some unique traits. We are called the weaker sex by the West but the truth is they are

mistaking our kindness as weakness. A woman has to play several roles in her personal and professional life. She is a daughter, a student, a professional, a mother, a wife, an aunt, a teacher, a cop, a minister, a lawyer, a grandmother and what not. The different roles require her to take different decisions depending on the facts and circumstances.

What should I study today, what should I eat today, what should I wear today, what should I say today, what job should I do, am I happy in my job and life, should I marry that particular person or should I marry at all, should I have kids, should I be bothered only about my rights or should I think about others too – these are questions all of us ask ourselves in some point in our lives.

The answer to each depends on our decision making capacity. And this capacity matures with time. Looking back at our teens, haven't we all wondered how silly we were then? What it actually means is that the decision that we made then appears to be immature to us now.

So those aiming for women empowerment should strive to create not only the tangible infrastructure in which women can take their own decisions, but also the intangible infrastructure to groom their minds to be mature enough to take those decisions. The intangible infrastructure begins right at home, with the kind of emotional support you are willing to give your child. Parents are the first teachers and only then comes school. The girls should also get the right support in school as it where they pick up the basics of social living.



These are days when cases of child sexual abuse are on the rise. Such disturbances can upset the emotional balance of the child and affect their growing up process and make their decision making process clouded.

This is what we say in Malayalam as,

മഞ്ഞപ്പിത്തം ഉള്ളവൻ എല്ലാ മഞ്ഞത്തെയും തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കും. "മനസ്സും മഞ്ഞി ചാൽകാഴ്ച പ്പാടും മഞ്ഞിക്കും.

Lack of decision making skills makes one indecisive and fills life with uncertainty which is a huge drain on our faculties. Thus making the right decision not only gives us peace, but also save time.

Let's for instance take the case of the fishing community. Men go out into sea and bring back the day's catch. This is either auctioned or sold in markets. But as we know, there are so many middle men and so the seller does not get the right market price. But what if there is a place where you can take your catch directly to and sell to the customers avoiding the middle-men. That will maximise your profit.

In life each action you do is based on the decision you take. You make a lots of decisions everyday. A decision is one when there are different you can do and you pick one of them. Some decisions are easy taken while some decision making is difficult. A decision varies according to the situation you are into. Taking the right decision at the right time is a very crucial activity.

A simple example for a taking a decision making: Ria really wants a new phone. Unfortunately, the one she wants costs Rs. 15000, and she has only Rs. 10000. She wonders how she will get the rest of money.

Step 1: Identify the problem Try to search out actual problem.

Step 2: Identify the problem. Ria does not have enough money to buy the phone.

Step 3: What are your choices?? Think of all the possible solutions.

Step 4: What are your choices?? Come up with list of possible solutions:-

- 1) Save her money until she's has got enough money.
- 2) Borrow money from her parents or friends.
- 3) Buy a cheaper phone.

Step 5: Consider the consequences of your solutions. List both the negative and positive consequences.

Step 6: Consider the consequences of your solutions.

- 1) Save her money until she's has got enough money.
 - +VE: She will feel proud about her accomplishments; she will get the phone she really wants
 - VE: She has to wait.

Consider the consequences of your solutions.

- 2) Borrow money from her parents or friends.
 - +VE: Ria will get the phone right away.
 - VE: She won't feel independent; friends or parents might say "NO" to her.

Step 7: Consider the consequences of your solutions.

- 3) Buy a cheaper phone.
 - +VE: Ria will get the phone right away.
 - VE: Ria won't get the phone the phone she really wants.

Step 8: What is important to you???

Step9:What is important for

Ria??....getting the phone she really wants???.Getting the phone right away???.not borrowing money???.After choosing what is important, cross out other solutions.

Step 10: Make the decision.

Step 11: Make the decision. Ria decided to wait in order to save some more money for phone.

Concept of decision making in detail: Approaches to the decision making

Three primary decision making approaches: Avoiding, Problem solving and Problem seeking.

Every decision-making process reaches a conclusion, which can be a choice to act or not to act, a decision on what course of action to take and how, or even an opinion or recommendation. Sometimes decision making leads to redefining the issue or challenge. Accordingly, three decision-making processes are known as avoiding, problem solving, and problem seeking.

Avoiding

One decision-making option is to make no choice at all. There are several reasons why the decision maker might do this:

1. There is insufficient information to make a reasoned choice between alternatives.

2. The potential negative consequences of selecting any alternative outweigh the benefits of selecting one.
3. No pressing need for a choice exists and the status quo can continue without harm.
4. The person considering the alternatives does not have the authority to make a decision.

One example of avoiding a decision occurs routinely at the Supreme Court of the United States (as well as other appellate courts). The Supreme Court will decline to hear a case because, in their judgment, the issues have not been sufficiently considered in lower courts.

Problem Solving

Most decisions consist of problem-solving activities that end when a satisfactory solution is reached. In psychology, *problem solving* refers to the desire to reach a definite goal from a present condition. Problem solving requires problem definition, information analysis and evaluation, and alternative selection.



Problem Seeking

On occasion, the process of problem solving brings the focus or scope of the problem itself into question. It may be found to be poorly defined, of too large or small a scope, or missing a key dimension. Decision makers must then step back and reconsider the information and analysis they have brought to bear so far. We can regard this activity as problem seeking because decision makers must return to the starting point and respectively the issue or problem they want to address.

Making Effective decisions

1. Perception
2. Priority
3. Acceptability
4. Resources
5. Goals
6. Demands
7. Judgments

Barriers to decision making:

Hasty: Making much decision without having much thought.

Narrow: Decision making is based on limited information.

Scattered: Our thoughts in making decisions are disconnected or disorganized.

Fuzzy: Sometimes the lack of clarify on important aspects of decisions causes us to overlook certain important concepts.

Decision making in family:

Making decisions in life can be a difficult task. Throughout your life you will make decisions that will affect your life. In fact, the decisions you make today will not only impact your future, but also other people at the world in which you live.

Decision making involves thinking talking and searching for information related to a problem. You gather that help you with the decisions you need to make. When families and individuals know their values, they use them as a guide for all aspects of life. Whether choosing a career, using money, or deciding what to wear, values are the basics for all decisions. Most decisions are not made all at once. Decisions take time to complete.



Types of family decisions:

1. Husband dominated decisions
2. Wife dominated decisions
3. Joint decision making
4. Child dominated decision making
5. Unilateral decision making

1. Husband dominated decisions:

- Husband takes the purchase decisions
- Traditionally in products like Automobiles, Alcohol and Insurance.

2. Wife dominated decisions:

- Wife takes the purchase decisions.
- Traditionally in products like household maintenance items, food and kitchen appliances.

3. Joint decision making:

- Both husband and wife make the decision.
- Traditionally in school choice, vacations and household matters.”

4. Child dominated decision making:

- Child makes the final product decision
- Traditionally on child related items.

5. Unilateral decision making:

- Taken by any member of the family.
- Traditionally on low priced goods and personal care items.



Career decision making:

Career decisions are a lifelong process. It is all about exploring and experiencing the world of work. It is all about understanding abilities, interests, skills, values and combining these to create a meaningful framework for life.

If someone has to join a career course, so many options might be in front of them. They should have the capability to take the right decision. For that they should have

self-awareness about the career and what are the different options for it. That finally leads to the decision on career path.

Activity Corner:

Making the crowd into different groups, giving them different topics to discuss:

- a) While going on a road, if you are seeing an accident what u will act first? Whether you will help that person or not??What decision you will take?
- b) If somebody has abused you with bad words on road? What u will do?
- c) While travelling in a bus, if somebody disturbs you what will you do?
- d) Ria really wants a new phone. Unfortunately, the one she wants costs Rs. 15000, and she has only Rs. 10000. She wonders how she will get the rest of money. How you will help Ria to get the phone?
- e) While on the road, how will you react if you happen to see an accident?
- f) Suppose you spot a thief in your house, how will you react?

Conclusion

The decisions we take today can make or break our future. It is all about making the right choice - knowing **what** to do, **when** and **how** to do it. It needs no emphasis that this requires a strong will. The strong will make destiny. Indecisiveness can be suicidal.