



## **Ethical and Responsible Decision-Making by Leaders in Professional Institutions**

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### **Abstract**

In today's complex and dynamic professional landscape, decision-making is a critical aspect that can significantly impact individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. Professional institutions, such as law firms, medical facilities, educational institutions, and corporate organizations, are expected to uphold the highest standards of ethics and responsibility in their decision-making processes. This paper explores the importance of ethical and responsible decision-making in professional institutions and highlights key principles and practices that can guide leaders in making informed, ethical choices.

Ethical decision-making is essential in professional institutions for several reasons. Firstly, it helps build trust and credibility with stakeholders, including clients, patients, students, and the broader community. When leaders make decisions that are guided by ethical principles, they demonstrate their commitment to integrity, fairness, and respect for others. Secondly, ethical decision-making can help mitigate risks and prevent harm to individuals and organizations. By considering the potential consequences of their actions, leaders can avoid decisions that might lead to legal, financial, or reputational damage. Leaders may face time pressures that can limit their ability to engage in thorough decision-making processes. The system in which the leader operates may lack the resources, including training and support, needed to make informed, ethical decisions.

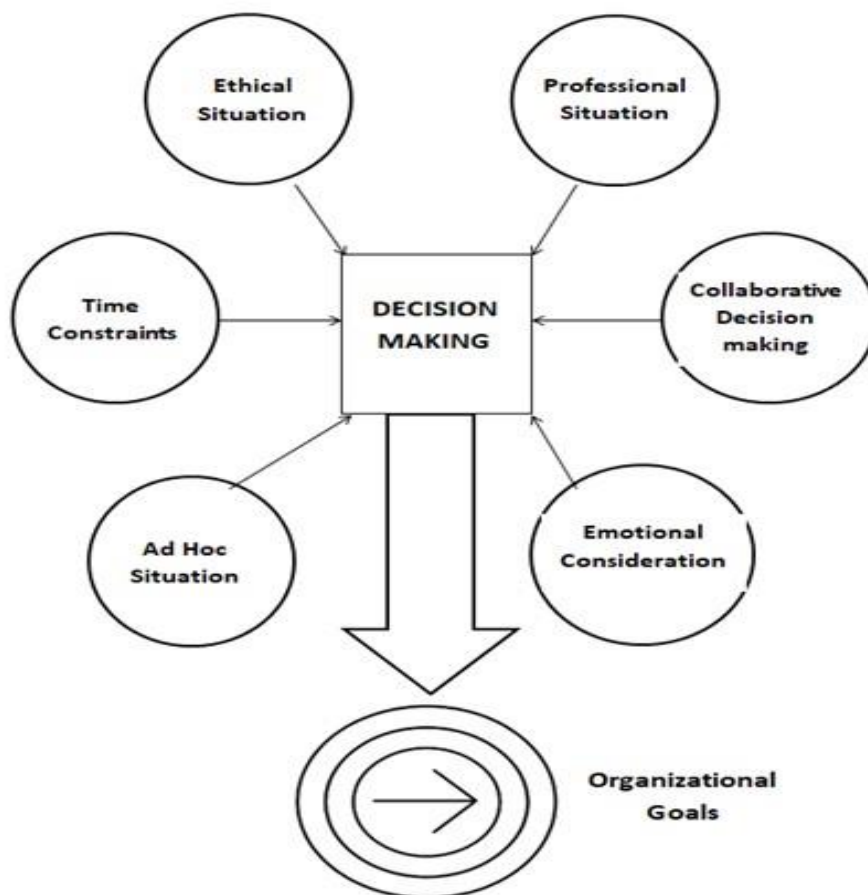
This paper discusses about a few principles that guide decision making in the real world like Respect and Autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, integrity, risk assessment, conflicting interests, collaboration and consultation etc. Reflecting on decisions and reviewing their outcomes can help leaders learn from their experiences and improve their decision-making processes over time. By upholding key principles, leaders can make informed, judicious ethical choices that promote the well-being of individuals and organizations

**Keywords:** *Ethics, Professionalism, Leadership, decision making.*

### **Introduction**

Decision-making in both ethical and professional contexts requires careful consideration of various factors. While ethical decision-making focuses on moral principles and values, professional decision-making emphasizes expertise, standards, and organizational goals. It has been said that attempting to define ethics is like "nailing jello to the wall" (Lewis 1985, p. 377)

Time constraints can significantly impact decision-making, influencing the quality, accuracy, and effectiveness of choices. Here are some key effects of time constraints on decision-making. Collaborative decision-making is also an intricate part of an organization's administrative process where multiple stakeholders work together to make decisions that benefit the organization. This approach can lead to more informed, well-rounded, and effective decisions. In decision-making, ethical and human considerations often intersect, requiring a delicate balance. A thin line separates the rules and policies and often embarks on the strong DNA of Human considerations in specific cases. Leaders are faced with situations where Ad hoc decisions are inevitable. Ad hoc decision-making refers to a flexible and spontaneous approach to decision-making, often in response to unexpected or unique situations. This approach can be effective in certain contexts, but it also has its limitations. If decision making was left to the regime of Artificial Intelligence, then emotions have no role in the organizations. AI decision making is best suited for and effectively used in decision making process in various context, leveraging data analysis, machine learning and automation. But, more than often Emotions play a significant role in ethical decision-making, influencing how individuals perceive, process, and respond to moral dilemmas.



## **Decision-Making In Ethical and Professional Situations**

Often, the leaders are faced with a dilemma of whether to go in for an Ethical decision or a Professional decision. Both have a process and the outcomes are varied.

### **Ethical Decision-Making**

Ethical decision making tend to uphold legal and professional standards and show respect to the stakeholders ( DuBois, 2008). Respect for autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice are the pillars of ethical decision making. Moral implications, potential consequences, and impact on stakeholders have little influence on the process. The outcomes of an ethical decision are independent of the decision taken- be it good or bad. In this process, identifying ethical issues, gathering information, evaluating options, and choosing a course of action that aligns with ethical principles is strictly followed. Example: A medical doctor deciding NOT to disclose a patient's confidential information to the family members or friends irrespective of the outcome. In this case the ethical tool is Confidentiality. Ethical decision making is an automatic process based on people's "gut instinct" or intuition in response to situational cues. ( Haidt, 2001)

### **Professional Decision-Making**

In a professional decision-making process, expertise, standards, and organizational goals are important. The key considerations like technical feasibility, resource constraints, and potential impact on the organization dictate the decision-making process that follow the steps as given below:

#### **Define the problem on hand**

Gather relevant information in terms of statistics and subjective nature,

Know about all the alternative options, and

Select a course of action that meets professional standards and organizational objectives

Example: An administrator allocates work to a team or a person based on the above information to ensure attaining the organizational objectives.

Both ethical and professional decision-making require careful consideration of potential consequences and impact on stakeholders and the outcome of the decision. Ethical decision-making focuses on moral principles and values, while professional decision-making emphasizes expertise and organizational goals.

The decision-making process does not end with the choice of decision, that is, after the choice of the best alternative there is the monitoring of the decision, which refers to the analysis and monitoring of the results obtained, both positive and negative, of the implanted choice ( Stoner and Freeman (1992). Situations may not be favorable to take a specific type of decision. Many times integrated ethically professional considerations are required. Consider the ethical implications of professional decisions and ensure that they align with organizational values. Apply professional standards where needed. Adhere to industry standards, guidelines, and codes of conduct when making decisions. It is best to clearly communicate decisions and their rationale to relevant stakeholders. In this

way, individuals can develop a more comprehensive approach to decision-making that balances moral principles with professional standards and organizational goals.

### **Time Constraints /Pressure on Decision-Making**

In a pragmatic situation, decision making may not be a cake walk. Highly dynamic situations and critical nature of a situation may call for quick decision making. Critical analysis of a decision may not be feasible since it is time consuming. The premises is based on the best wit and wisdom of the decision maker that come through experience and sometimes gut feeling. Generally the objectives of such decisions making is either a positive outcome, or an outcome that minimizes the loss. It is just like the Games theory in Operations Research where the decision is taken to maximize the profit and minimize the losses.

For more systematic research on time pressure, the terms “time constraint” and “time pressure” are used interchangeably (Svenson and Maule (1993) and Payne, Bettman, and Luce (1996) . Time constraints can help decision makers prioritize tasks and focus on essential decisions. Limited time can lead to more efficient decision-making, as individuals are forced to weigh options quickly, but it can boomerang as well. Time pressure can stimulate creative thinking and problem-solving and gives space for quick deliberations within teams if discussions are well structured. The Six thinking Hats of Edward De’Bono can be efficiently employed in such cases. Choosing from among a large set of options with time constraints leads to perceived

decision difficulty, frustration, dissatisfaction, and regret (Haynes, 2009). Rushed decisions may lead to errors, oversights, or incomplete analysis thus impacting the outcome of the decisions. Time constraints can cause stress, anxiety, decreased confidence in decision-making and sometimes decisions are not made at all. Time pressure may lead to only a few options being considered, potentially overlooking better solutions. Time constraints can result in impulsive, rather than thoughtful, decision-making. Moberg (2000) noted that writings on business ethics often overlook the role of time pressure on ethical decision making. The limited research that is conducted in this area often shows that time constraints increase unethical behavior (Moberg, 2000; Murnighan, Cantelton, & Elyashiv, 2001)

### **Strategies for Effective Decision-Making under Time Constraints**

Focus on critical decisions that severely impact the objectives than on those situations that are less important ones, and these can be delegated to a responsible individual when possible. Apply established frameworks and decision-making tools, such as cost-benefit analysis, fish bone diagram, Pareto analysis, SWOT analysis, decision matrix, decision trees and even mind mapping to streamline the decision-making process.

Collect essential data and insights to inform decisions, while avoiding unnecessary analysis. Consider multiple scenarios. Brainstorm through potential outcomes and develop contingency plans to mitigate risks. Take short breaks to recharge and avoid fogging of the brain. Saturated brain creates obstacle to clearer thinking and effective decision-making. Anticipate situations that are time-sensitive and prepare accordingly.

Establish achievable deadlines and allocate sufficient time for decision-making if it is in your control. Nothing can be done if external situations demand quick decisions but follow the above strategies. Maintain organized records, documents, and information to facilitate quick access, easy retrievable records so that search time is reduced.

### **Collaborative Decision-Making in Organizations**

Collaborative decision-making brings together diverse perspectives, expertise, and experiences, leading to more informed and well-rounded decisions. When team members are involved in the

decision-making process, they feel a sense of ownership and are concerned about the outcomes. Collaborative decision-making can stimulate constructive feedback, creative thinking and problem-solving among teams

In Collaborative Decision-Making, understanding of the decision's purpose and objectives by the team is important. Involving the stakeholders with different backgrounds, expertise, and experiences expedites the decision-making process. Utilizing tools like brainstorming, mind mapping, or decision-making tools to facilitate collaboration can be of advantage. It is important to define the decision-making process, roles of individuals and their responsibilities. Encourage participation, open communication, trust, and respect among team members. It is also important to train the teams on collaborative decision-making techniques. Many times, a single individual dominates the process. Ensuring equal participation and use techniques like round-robin sharing to give everyone a voice their opinions. It is often seen that it is difficult to build a consensus, but a leader can do this by finding a solution that meets the organization's goals.

### **Human Considerations in Decision-Making**

Ethical considerations often prioritize universal principles over individual interests. Accounting for the emotional, social, and psychological impacts on individuals and communities is a challenge. A contextual understanding of relationships and circumstances surrounding a decision is important. The game of balancing the need to maintain confidentiality with the need to protect individuals or others from harm must be carefully strategized. Most disturbingly, in situations where the level of uncertainty is high, workers may become more reliant on personal biases and personal experiences—both developmental and professional—in their appraisals. Consequently, client characteristics related to identity and socioeconomic status may contribute to the appraisal of risk (Enosh, G.; Bayer-Topolski. 2015)

Weighing individual rights and freedoms is paramount as the potential short-term benefits against long-term consequences for individuals and communities can impact the organizations image. It is vital to reflect on the ethical and human implications of a decision considering the organization's objective. Engaging with stakeholders to understand their perspectives and concerns and being open to adjusting decisions based on new information or changing circumstances can simplify the decision-making process.

### **Emotions In Ethical Decision-Making**

Emotions like empathy, guilt, fear, pride, envy, nostalgia, gratitude and shame can serve as a honorable compass, guiding individuals toward certain decisions or actions. Leaders can motivate individuals to act in accordance with ethical principles. Emotions can also introduce bias, leading individuals to prioritize personal interests or emotional responses over objective ethical principles. Emotions like empathy and compassion can increase consideration for others' well-being in an organization. Strong emotions like love, happiness, sadness, anger or jealousy can also lead to impulsive decisions thus overriding rational consideration of ethical principles.

Recently, the effect of emotions on negotiation has received some attention (Martinovski, 2010). Recognizing, taking time to reflect on emotions and understanding one's emotions can help individuals make more informed and balanced decisions. It is necessary to recognize and acknowledge the role of emotions in decision-making. At the same time, we have to be aware of potential emotional biases and strive to consider objective ethical principles.

### **Ad Hoc Decision-Making**

Ad hoc decision-making involves making decisions on the spot, without planning or without using any extensive decision-making tools. This approach allows for flexibility and adaptability in response to changing circumstances or new information. Ad hoc decision-making builds upon informal discussions and consultations. Ad hoc decision-making enables rapid response to unexpected situations or opportunities with little consideration to the definite outcomes. For example : Army commandoes' decisions to neutralize terrorist attacks. It is best suited for changing circumstances. Ad hoc decision-making lacks structure and methodology, sometimes leading to inconsistent or poor decisions that can be risky.

Ad hoc decision-making can be influenced by personal biases or emotions, rather than objective analysis since thorough analysis or consideration of all relevant factors is not possible. Ad hoc decision-making can be effective in emergency situations, unique opportunities or unexpected events where rapid response is critical.

### **Conclusion**

Decision making is a complex event, or you may say a process. There cannot be one-size-all formula. Qualitative and quantitative techniques are both required for decision making and often in a blended mode. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence, decision making has become AI driven. It is widely used for predictive analytics and prescriptive analysis. However, AI works efficiently with quality and accurate data, but there is no accountability for AI driven decisions. Hence, human interventions are needed to understand situations, ethics, emotions and collaborations for a feasible decision-making process.

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