

Week 12

Make decisions and solve problems

- The quality of the decisions we make coupled with our competence in solving problems largely determine the quality of our lives.
- Critical thinking enhances the rationality of our decisions by raising the pattern of decision-making to the level of conscious and deliberate choice.

### **Evaluating Patterns in Decision-Making**

Irrational or unethical decisions

- Deciding to behave in ways that undermine our welfare (X)
- Deciding not to engage in activities that contribute to our long-term welfare (X)
- Deciding to behave in ways that undermine another's welfare (x)
- Deciding to associate with people who encourage us to act against our own welfare or the welfare of others (X)

"Big" decision: those with long-term consequences, the most dangerous of which being unthought decisions

- Putting your long-term insights into action requires self-discipline and will power.

### **The logic of decision-making:**

Goal and question: "At this point in my life, faced with the alternatives (A or B or C or D), which one is most likely to enhance my welfare and the welfare of others?"

Four keys:

1. To that you face an important decision
2. To accurately identify the alternatives,
3. To logically evaluate the alternatives,
4. To have the self-discipline to act on the best alternative.

Practice

Identify an important decision that you will have to make in the future or that you need to make now. (For example: Should I major in a subject that will lead to a job immediately upon graduation or in a subject that will broadly prepare me to live life well in the long run?) Prethink this decision by completing the following thoughts:

My main purpose in making this decision is. . .

I am looking at this decision from the point of view of. . .

The precise question I am trying to answer is. . .

The information I need to answer this question well is . . .

I think I am safe in assuming. . .

The likely implication of my decision are. . .

- Write out or orally explain your answers.

### **Recognizing the need for an important decision**

Accurately recognizing the alternatives (A good general rule is that if you can think of only one or two options, you probably are thinking too narrowly.)

Rule One: There's always a way.

Rule Two: There's always another way.

### **Putting more time into decision-making**

#### **Being systematic**

#### **Dealing with one major decision at a time**

#### **Developing knowledge of your ignorance (we are intellectually arrogant)**

#### **Dimensions of decision-making**

1. Figure out, and regularly rearticulate, your most fundamental goals, purposes, and needs. Your decisions should help you remove obstacles and create opportunities to reach your goals, achieve your purposes, and satisfy your needs.
2. Whenever possible, take problems and decisions one by one. State the situation and formulate the alternatives as clearly and precisely as you can.
3. Study the circumstances surrounding the alternative possible decisions to make clear the kind of decision you are dealing with. Figure out what implications follow from the various possible alternatives before you. Differentiate decisions over which you have some control and decisions that seem forced on you. Concentrate your efforts on the most important decisions and those on which you can have the most impact.
4. Figure out the information you need and actively seek that information.
5. Carefully analyze and interpret the information you collect, drawing what reasonable inference you can.
6. Figure out your options for action. What can you do in the short term? In the long term? Recognize explicitly your limitations in money, time, and power.
7. Evaluate your options in the situation, taking into account their advantages and

disadvantages.

8. Adopt a strategic approach to the decision and follow through on that strategy. This may involve direct action or a carefully thought through wait-and-see strategy.
9. When you act, monitor the implications of your action as they begin to emerge. Be ready to revise your strategy at a moment's notice if the situation requires. Be prepared to shift your strategy or your analysis or statement of the kind of decision, or all three, as more information about the decision becomes available to you.

#### Practice

Poor decision-makings. Can you see why?

1. Staying in an abusive relationship "for the sake of the children"
2. Taking drugs to gain an immediate escape from the pain of facing unpleasant realities in your life
3. Overeating to deal with depression.
4. Establishing an escalating "get-tough" policy on crime, leading to larger and larger prison cultures that create more and more hardened criminals
5. Smoking to win approval in a group
6. Establishing an escalating "get-tough" policy on terrorists, leading to more and more resentment and hatred in the groups resorting to "terrorism," leading to even more violent responses.
7. Getting angry and acting out by hitting things or people, throwing things, and shouting.
8. Felling self-pity when frustrated

#### **The Early decisions (2-11 years of age)**

We are naturally dominated by the immediate, and our view of the world is highly egocentric.

#### Practice

Review in your mind

To what extent did your parents give you opportunities to make decisions?

To what extent did your parents restrain you from acting egocentrically and sociocentrically?

To what extent do you think you have learned, by having to bear the consequences of your own decisions, to be responsible for your own behavior?

#### **Adolescent decisions (12-17 Years of age)**

More independence (power struggles), thinking being more the result of the peer groups, love, sexuality, and a comprehensive view of the world (often understood superficially)

- In media-created romantic relationships, love is typically automatic, irrational, and at first sight and has no real relationship to the character of the person. →all of us are shaped, often for a lifetime, by decisions and habits we form during these important years. As soon as possible, conscious intervention is needed.

Practice:

Can you identify some ways in which you were influenced by the media as an adolescent? Elaborate.

To what extent did your decisions during adolescence reflect an attempt on your part to gain recognition and acceptance from other adolescents? What decisions can you specify?

To what extent were your decisions regarding romantic relationships based on influences from youth culture?

To what extent is your conception of love or friendship a reflection of the manner in which love or friendship is treated in movies or music lyrics?

### **Solving problems**

- Most decision-makings can be turned into problem-solving.

### **Becoming an activist problem-solver**

For every problem under the sun

There is a solution or there is none.

If there be one, seek till you find it

If there be none, then never mind it. (Mother Goose)

Practice

Make a list of 10 of the most important problems with which you have been confronted in the last 5 years of your life. Then comment briefly on each of the problems by answering the following questions:

1. To what extent did this problem arise as a result of a decision or behavior on your part? To what extent as a result of outside forces?
2. To what extent was this a problem that you had the power or capacity to solve? To what extent was it a problem beyond your control?

## Evaluating patterns in your problem-solving

- Pseudo-solution
  1. Pseudo-solutions seem to solve the problem but don't.
  2. Pseudo-solutions solve the problems at the expense of the rights and needs of others.

### **Distinguishing needs from wants**

- It is possible to want many things one doesn't actually need.
- You might want to be in a romantic relationship with a certain person, but you don't need to be.

#### Practice

Make a list of the various things that you, at one time or another, have talked about as a need when, at best, the thing so named was something you strongly or intensely wanted. You might begin with a romantic relationship. Consider also material desires—the various things you have thought were indispensable to you. Be prepared to explain how you would have acted and emotionally responded differently if you had been clearly aware of this important difference at the time.

### **Identifying irrational values and ends**

#### Practice

See whether you can identify some irrational values or ends that you have come to adopt subconsciously. Discuss briefly some of the problems that were generated, for you or others, as a result. Then discuss how you might begin to act to dissolve those problems by adopting more rational values and ends. We are not assuming that actually doing this will be easy.

### **“Big” problems**

#### Dimensions of problem-solving

1. Figure out and regularly rearticulate and reevaluate your goals, purposes, and needs.
2. Identify your problems explicitly and then analyze them.
3. Figure out the information you need and actively seek that information.
4. Carefully analyze, interpret, and evaluate the information you collect.
5. Figure out your options for action and evaluate them.
6. Adopt a strategic approach to the problem and follow through on that strategy.

7. When you act, monitor the implications of your action as they begin to emerge.

#### Practice

Make a list of as many problems as you can think of that you face in your day-to-day life. Notice how many of them you would classify as personal rather than academic. For each problem, ask yourself why you have not yet solved it. Write out the reason in each case. Then read the reasons and ask yourself what that tells you about yourself and your approach to problems.

Consider: Most people leave most of their problems unformulated and deal with them in a piece-meal, as-it-occurs-to-me-from-moment-to-moment way. Few people take the time to analyze their problems explicitly and systematically evaluate their options.

#### **Avoiding the pitfalls of problem-solving**

Figure out, and regularly rearticulate, your goals, purposes, and needs. Identify your problems explicitly and then analyze them.