

BETTER DECISION- MAKING THROUGH MAPs

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Decision Making

We make hundreds, if not thousands, of decisions daily. Many of those run on auto-pilot, based on heuristics we have developed over years and nurtured through constant action/feedback loops. Decisions which are novel and/or have the potential for further reaching consequences and impact require a more deliberate approach. Our inherent bias can shape our views and influence our decisions. In order to make the best possible decision, we must gather more diverse inputs and be conscious of our potential blindspots. In our work with leaders and their teams globally, we have found a common desire for a simple and robust framework to ensure decisions are not only taken swiftly, but yield the best possible results.

be radical's MAP (Multiple Alternative Perspective) Decision Making Field Guide is based on decades of experience working at and with some of the largest and most impactful organizations in the world. We are delighted to share what we think is one of the best and most inclusive approaches.

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What Are You Trying to Decide and By When?

[Step 1]

Good decision making starts with clearly defining the decision to be taken. It seems like an obvious part of the process, but frequently decisions are not fully articulated nor are they documented.

For complex and far-reaching decisions, poorly defined decision statements (and therefore their scope and decision-making criteria) can often lead to a decision never being made at all. Furthermore, timeframes are often not taken into consideration and defined as a key component of the process. One should establish a decision deadline and consider any other key milestones and time constraints.

Having clearly articulated the decision, the decision making criteria, and timeline, it makes good sense to actually document everything. All of these things often do not happen and cause a tremendous amount of back and forth – as people are unclear who takes the decision in the end, what the exact decision point is, and how the decision will be made.

- ❓ What is the objective of the decision being made?**
- ❓ What criteria will you use to determine the decision being made?**
- ❓ What's the decision deadline? Are there any key milestones, important dates, or time constraints?**

Note: Steps 1 and 2 should happen at a parallel time. Both are critical to establish, and each will inform the other.

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Decisions Making Requires Clearly Defined Roles

[Step 2]

Another place where decision making is likely to falter is when the decision maker has not been agreed, and / or defined, and furthermore, communicated. It is important to assign a **single** decision maker. For complex decisions, there will be several stakeholders however, decisions still require a single approver. It sounds obvious, but over and over again we have found situations where the person seemingly making the decision could be (and regularly was) overruled by someone higher up in the chain of command.

This is not just unhealthy for team morale and culture but also creates enormous inefficiencies in the process as decisions are being seen as temporary, waiting for the blessing of some higher force. Note that while a single decision maker will not make that decision in a vacuum, one person does need to ultimately own a decision and be accountable for the outcome.

The **RACI** model offers a simple yet robust framework to ensure role clarity is established is. RACI defines four distinct roles:

R (Responsible) — The person(s) being responsible for doing the work to complete the task.

A (Approver) — The single person making the decision and being the ultimate responsible person for the task.

C (Consultant) — The person(s) whose insights and opinions will be sought out in the process.

I (Informed) — The person(s) who need to be kept up-to-date on progress and deliverables.

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Defining and documenting roles for the decision making process (and updating throughout) creates clear expectations, transparency and accountability. To stress this point one more time: You can have multiple Rs, Cs and Is but **there can only be one A.**

? Who are the stakeholders involved?

? Have you documented the RACI chart?

? Is every person aware of their role and responsibilities so they know how to contribute to the decision's success?

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Inclusive Decision Making: MAP

[Step 3]

As previously mentioned, bias takes many forms and can prevent us from seeing the whole picture. Therefore, when embarking on a large-scale and critical decision, it's important to include a diverse group of stakeholders in the decision making process. Be that in terms of different backgrounds, roles, expertise, functional areas and so on, having a greater range of perspectives and experiences will prevent decision makers from being blindsided while also ensuring maximum feedback and creative ideas. Whilst this may sound like a cumbersome process, taking time to include more voices in the process maximizes the likelihood of success for the decision being made.

Several years ago Mozilla developed a simple inclusive decision making system called 'MAP', which stands for Multiple Alternative Perspectives. This really gets to the core of an inclusive 'rounding out' process where a decision is stress tested and validated.

Here is the four part MAP flow to build into your decision making process —

[a] After researching and readying a potential decision of which you feel approximately 60% certain, reach out to a group of 3-5 stakeholders, present the problem statement / opportunity and the decision to be made. In a one-on-one setting with each individual, encourage them to pull apart your findings, ask challenging questions and welcome their feedback. Each session is an opportunity to refine and reshare.

You might find, through this process of rounding out your information set, that the decision to be made has changed. If so – the responsible decision maker should re-articulate the decision point and add the new framing to the earlier documentation (leaving the original decision point in the document so that people can later see how and from where the decision has changed).

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Depending on the decision to be made, one might also include people who are not currently part of your organization to offer their expert opinion and feedback to broaden the scope.

Time commitment: We recommend spending between 20 to 60 minutes per stakeholder session interview.

(b) Having gathered additional feedback, go back and research, reevaluate and be ready to share again to a larger group. Your comfort level with the decision should be around 75% now. Conduct 2-5 larger scale meetings with 4 to 10 people in each session. Ensure these people have some interest in the decision being made but represent a mix of people from different areas of the business and different levels of seniority. Also be attentive to include a wide range of ethnicities, gender identities and expressions, and geographic representation. Diversity of perspective and experience will continue to help you find pieces of missing information and bias. Once again, encourage feedback and challenges. With a larger group setting, you may need to call on people who have not yet shared their opinions. To prevent groupthink, you might also ask people to write their questions on a post-it note in silence, and then go around and share in the group. Remember: feedback is a gift, and, each feedback session is an opportunity to refine and reshare.

Note that at this MAP stage, these people are called upon as 'consultants' (see the RACI model above). They are not the ones making the decision, but their opinions and experiences will help validate and give new perspectives on the decision being made.

Time commitment: We recommend spending 60 minutes per group session interview.

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(c) After presenting, selling, explaining and arguing for your decision with between 10 and up to 40+ diverse people, you ought to have very robust feedback on and comfort with the decision you are about to take - likely around 90+%. Note – you need not and likely can not be 100% sure it's the right decision, but you should have a very high degree of confidence attained through this process. Not only will you have rounded out the decision, but you will also have a group of people who have been part of the process and are bought in and can be your champions in implementing the decision company wide.

(d) The last step, depending on the extent of your decision is to communicate it across the company. Here you might also encounter feedback and challenges, but most will already be known to you. During the inclusive MAP process you will have likely heard similar concerns and suggestions. You will be prepared to respond and have previously contemplated the implications. Once in a while, a new piece of information becomes available which might slightly alter the decision, but, if you have followed the MAP process, we are certain it will not change the decision at its core.

In our experience, most decisions meet resistance because people were not consulted and not informed. It's a good practice, where possible, to communicate that a decision making project is in process – and keep all of the stakeholders in your RACI model updated and included throughout.

? Has my decision changed since conducting MAP sessions?

? Who within my organization can provide a diverse perspective on the decision to be made? If I don't know, who can I ask to help me identify them?

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Document and Go

[Step 4]

Once the decision is made, don't forget to document the outcome, the criteria, the date, what was learned, who was involved, what was in and out of scope, and what comes next. The rigor which one needs to apply to documenting and thus completing a process means a thoughtful and thorough decision project was executed. It's also an artifact which can be viewed which creates transparency – and an artifact for scaling learning and institutional knowledge.

- ? What is the comfort level of the decision documentation being made accessible within your organization?**
- ? Where will the decision documentation live?**
- ? What parts of the process are most helpful to document in support of the decision being made and the subsequent impacts of the decision?**

Total MAP Time Commitment – following the MAP decision making process does require time investment. However, this additional time spent would be far outweighed by the time, energy and morale lost to decisions which have been poorly made, and communicated. A lightweight version of MAP might include only a few initial interview sessions at 20 minutes each, plus two larger group sessions - this would equate to only 3-4 hours extra time investment. For larger and more far reaching decisions, we would recommend a more extensive version of the process, but even at a minimum, MAP can be incredibly useful with minimal effort.

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Of course, not all decisions can be made in this way. There are sensitivities, people-related decisions, legal implications and so on. However, across the board from technology decisions, go to market strategies, and even hiring, using the MAP decision making process even in its most lightweight way will help you create buy-in, gather a much more complete set of inputs, root out bias and blindspots, and create transparency and accountability.

More Resources. Here at be radical, we focus on igniting and equipping leaders and their organizations with the knowledge and tools required to build the ‘future organization.’ Take a look at our other resources:

radical Briefing — a regular email digest that gives you brief and personal explanations of the future of business. Sign up at <https://beradicalgroup.com/briefing>

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Future FWD Program — a two-week live and online course designed to arm you with unique insights, frameworks and a practical toolbox for futures-thinking and leading in complex environments. Register at <https://beradicalgroup.com/futurefwd-you>