

CRITICAL THINKING, DECISION-MAKING, & PROBLEM-SOLVING

GOALS:

- 1. To encourage the use of one or more problem-solving acronyms when attempting to solve a healthcare problem or make an important healthcare decision.**
- 2. To reinforce the need for critical thinking when making healthcare decisions.**
- 3. To present two acronyms used for decision-making and problem-solving, especially in healthcare situations.**

DEFINITIONS:

- 1. Decision: A conclusion reached after consideration**
- 2. Decision Making: Choosing the best option from the possible solutions.**
- 3. Problem: An unwanted matter or situation considered unwelcome, harmful, requiring to be dealt with and overcome.**
- 4. Problem Solving: A process used to find a way to fix a problem.**
- 5. Critical Thinking: The process of using information to make reasoned judgements and decisions.**

In the world of academic leadership theory, there are two dimensions of leadership skills—social skills and decision-making skills. Leadership social skills encourage attention and comradery. Process skills (decision-making/problem-solving) make for positive leadership/organizational outcomes and show evidence of understanding situations and leadership objectivity. The result is obvious leadership ability resulting in trust and respect. Like the Three Musketeers, these cumulative skills (social, process (decision-making/problem-

solving), and critical thinking are important and somewhat dependent on each other. All, together, these three skills help navigate a leader through everyday challenges!

When a health care provider or administrator attempts to solve a problem by determining the root of a specific problem, the decision is not always found to be easily determined. It is through critical thinking PATHWAYS that appropriate problem resolutions are found. Hence, an algorithm that encourages comprehensive critical thinking is encouraged.

The purpose of an acronym is to aid in the recall of the most suitable incremental steps that will most likely produce an appropriate, accurate, and final decision. Acronyms require consideration of different variables, such as time, impact, resources, cost, and the value in return—the natural active outcome of critical thinking. Either acronym (DECIDE or BRAIN) is useful in encouraging critical thinking which will, hopefully, lead to the most acceptable problem-solving decision. These techniques are used to encourage appropriate decision-making and to teach students in *any* field of study to make the most appropriate and effective decision(s).

PROCESS VERSUS A “FEELS GOOD” APPROACH:

Problem solving is the process of identifying problem(s) and evaluating a path or choice through critical thinking alternatives. What “feels good” is replaced with a planned problem-solving approach. It is through this intellectual critical thinking problem-solving process that alternatives are intellectually considered, and intervention(s) are determined.

THE FIVE STEPS OF PROBLEM-SOLVING:

There are at least two well-known acronyms known to encourage a step-by-step process of problem-solving. The two acronyms are known as DECIDE and BRAIN.

However, before making a drastic change due to the use of an acronym, it is always wise to first consider the current benefits and risks that already exist.

“DECIDE” ACRONYM: (activities requiring performance)

1. **“D” Define the problem.**
2. **“E” Establish the criteria.**
3. **“C” Consider all the alternatives.**
4. **“I” Identify the best alternative.**
5. **“D” Develop and implement a plan of action.**
6. **“E” Evaluate and monitor the plan of action.**

“BRAIN” ACRONYM: (Questions requiring answers)

1. **“B” Benefits of the possible options?**
2. **“R” Likely risks of the options available?**
3. **“A” What are the alternatives to the options being considered?**
4. **“I” What other information is needed to make The right decision?**
5. **“N” What would happen if you did nothing?**

A COMMON-SENSE APPROACH: (not an acronym)

1. Identify the goal and determine to what extent the situation does not meet the required or goal state/situation. Think out loud, as hearing yourself at times, helps solve problem(s).

2. Analyze the problem by seeking information. Seek information and learn as much as possible about the recognized problem.

- 3. Recognize the problem. Does the problem look, sound like, act like anything you have seen before, read about, and/or observed?**
- 4. Consider the possible and impossible causes. Be creative and flexible in your analysis!**
- 5. Name the known/observed problem. Take your time—let it gel in your mind to promote a perspective before making a final decision.**
- 6. Share the situation with other cohorts. Brainstorm with others. Sharing ideas helps increase perspective and accurate decisions.**
- 7. Determine possible solutions, their practicability, risk of negative outcomes, and chance of positive resolutions.**

IN CLOSING:

There are many thinking processes that encourage the best choice(s). You might use your own technique to promote objectivity and decision-making. The idea is to know and practice a system of successful decision-making—making sure it is defensible when asked to “explain yourself.”

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