Decision Making Guideline
Ursina Teuscher

Step 1:
Problem Structuring

Get the Right Perspective by
Asking an Open-Ended Question

What is the decision you're facing right now?

Decisions are often framed too narrowly: "Should I do this or that?"

Better to start your question with:
- ❏ "What…?"
- ❏ "How…?"

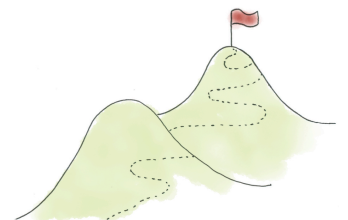This allows for more creative solutions.

For example:
"**What** should I do?"
"**How** can we do this best?"

Define your decision, using this type of open-ended question:

Step 2:
Criteria Clarification

Determine What Factors Matter
Most For Your Decision

Start with basic questions:
- ❑ What is important here?
- ❑ What are the things that matter?
- ❑ What am I looking for? What do I want?
- ❑ What am I afraid of? What are concerns?
- ❑ What makes this decision difficult?
- ❑ What are advantages and disadvantages of existing options?

Additional issues to consider:
- ❑ Stakeholder concerns
- ❑ Different time horizons
- ❑ Intangible consequences

Make a **long list** with all criteria that come to mind when you go through those questions above. Redundancy is ok at this stage!

Now, reduce your long list above to a **small set of criteria** that:

- ❑ Are most important
- ❑ Don't overlap

Make each of those criteria **quantifiable**.

Even subjective feelings can be quantifiable, e.g. with a scale: 1=worst, 10=best

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Criterion 1:

How will it be quantified?

Criterion 2:

How will it be quantified?

Criterion …:

How will it be quantified?

(list more criteria
as needed)

Are you willing to commit to this set of criteria?

Pre-commitment Test: Would you be willing to hand this set over to someone else (e.g., a genie? God? the Universe?), letting them pick an option for you, as long as it fulfilled all of your criteria?

- ❑ **Yes**
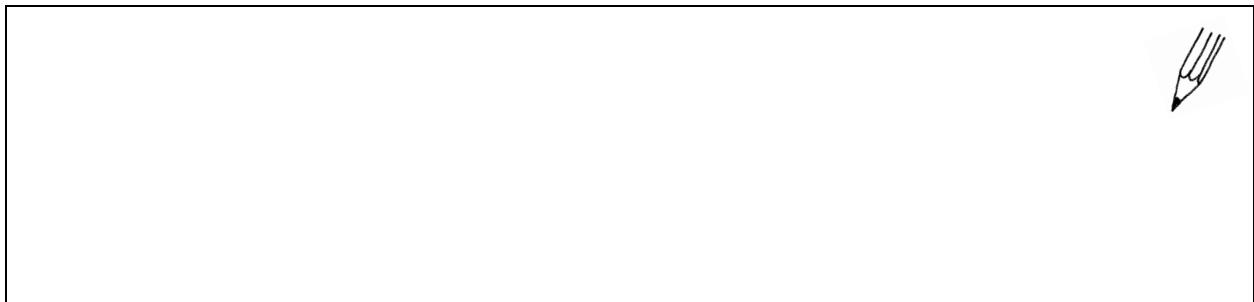- ❑ **No**

If you checked **No**: What's still missing?

Revise your set until it passes the pre-commitment test.

Step 3:
Exploring Options

Search For More and Better Solutions, Based on Your Criteria

List all possible solutions you can think of right now (a.k.a. options, alternatives, courses of action, strategies):
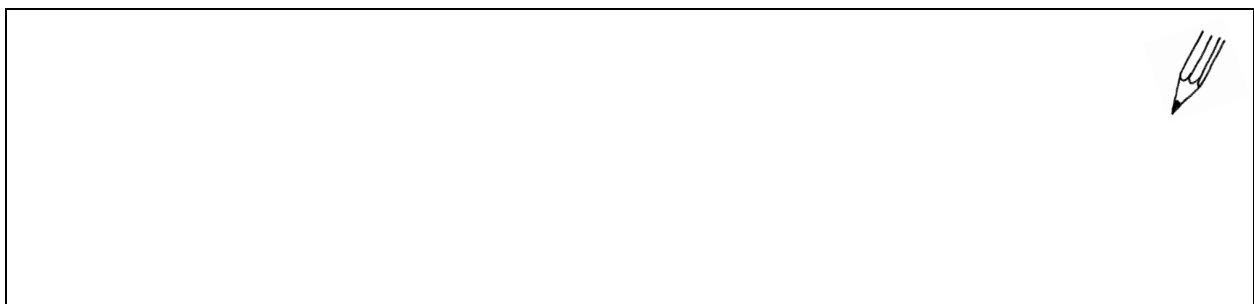
Then, look for more and better solutions with the following techniques.

1. Criteria-Focused Search

❑ Focus on one criterion at a time:
   o Search for new options that would be ideal *for just that one value*
   o Regardless of how crazy they sound at first
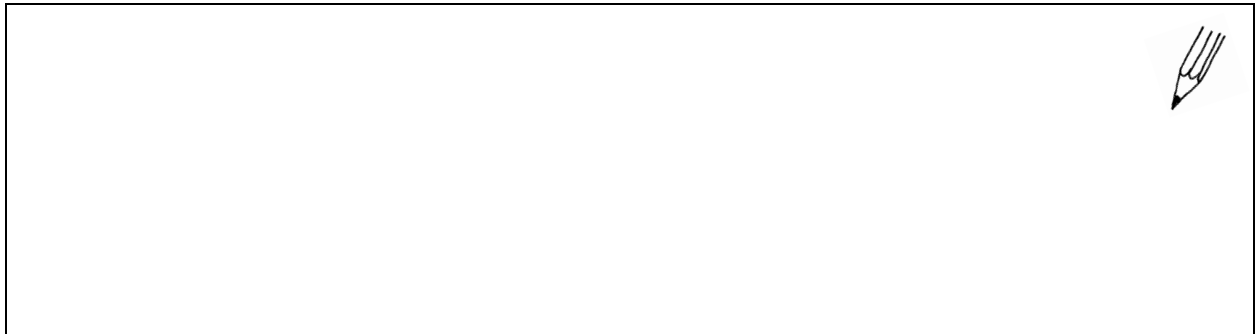❑ Then see if combinations are possible

Did new ideas result from this process? Write them down, even if they are only beginnings of new ideas:
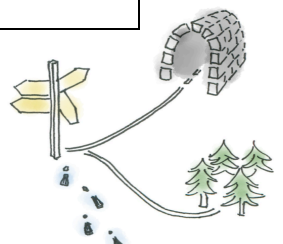
2. Improve and Combine Good Alternatives

- ❑ What's best about each alternative?
- ❑ Is there a way to combine those strengths?
- ❑ Is there a way to eliminate/improve the weaknesses?
- ❑ How else could you get what's best?

Did new ideas result from this process? Write them down, even if they are only beginnings of new ideas:

An 'impasse' is simply the place where we get tired of thinking.
- Sam Imperati

3. Take a Step Back and Consider Your Resources

- ❑ When you look at your current options, what would they cost you (in terms of time, money, intangible costs)?
- ❑ What else could you do with those resources?
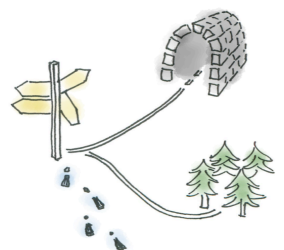
Step 4:
Evaluating Options

Draw a Grid: Use Your Criteria to Assess Your Options Systematically

Organize your information in the structure of a **decision table**.

This is the basic **matrix** structure:

	Criterion 1:	Criterion 2:	Criterion 3:	Criterion …
Option 1:				
Option 2:				
Option 3:				
Option …:				

Use the table above as a template to draw your own.

- ❑ Fill in your criteria as column headers (from most to least important)
- ❑ Fill in your options as row headers
- ❑ Fill the cells with your "data":
  What do you expect from each of your options, for each of your criteria?

This kind of table structure should forever replace "pros and cons" lists for your decisions! Can you see why?
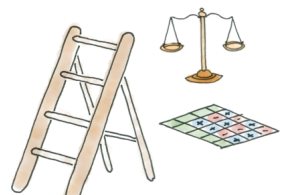
Why Decision Tables?

- The table structure allows for more than two options
- It forces you to think systematically, rather than focusing on the pros of your preferred option and the cons of all others
- It encourages you to think more creatively about how to improve or combine your options
- It holds a lot of information without overwhelming your working memory, and therefore creates clarity, even in very complex situation
- It is a great tool to search for information, showing you clearly where there may be gaps in your knowledge.

Selected Readings on Decision Tools

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