Presenting and Assessing Recommendations

Purpose

To help the decision maker assess and approve the choice that best meets the criteria and has acceptable risks, and to improve your confidence in recommending that choice.

Introduction

Recommendations are a prime example of the use of decision making on the job. They require that a choice be made not only by the presenter (on what to recommend), but also by the assessor (on whether to approve the recommendation). Decision Analysis can be used by both parties to improve the effectiveness of the recommendation process.

Technique

Recommendations can be made in a number of formats, all reflecting the steps of Decision Analysis:

- Clarify Purpose
- Evaluate Alternatives
- Assess Risks
- Make Decision (Recommendation)

For a complex decision, or one with a major impact on the future of the organization, a fully documented Decision Analysis using whiteboards, flip charts, worksheets, spreadsheets, and groupware provides all the information in a visible format. For presentation to someone unfamiliar with the Decision Analysis process, or with a tendency to focus on individual pieces of information rather than a full analysis, a narrative format is recommended.

Consider the time you will have to present the recommendation and the amount of detail or justification the decision maker will need to become comfortable with your recommendation. The presentation will still follow the individual steps of Decision Analysis. In both cases, there is the option of either concluding the presentation with the choice or stating the recommendation first and then providing the detailed analysis to back the decision.

For the presenter of recommendations, some of the advantages of the visible Decision Analysis format are:

- The format is concise.
- A body of organized information supports the recommendation.

- The completeness of the analysis is apparent to the assessor.

- The examination of both benefits and risks is shown by considering the strengths of all alternatives and the adverse consequences of the most likely choices.

- The assessor's objectives and alternatives are shown within the analysis.

- The format helps focus the assessor on process rather than on content.

- If the assessor disagrees with the conclusion, the focus will tend to be specific: an objective missed or wrongly classified, an alternative overlooked, or erroneous or missing information.

For the assessor of recommendations, some of the advantages of the visible Decision Analysis format are:

- The format is concise.

- The information the presenter used to arrive at a conclusion is logically presented.

- The thoroughness of the analysis can be assessed.

- The presenter's biases and information weaknesses are visible.

- The presenter's objectives, weighing, and comparisons can be checked for consistency with the assessor's.

- The extent to which all the stakeholders affected by the decision have had their viewpoints reflected is clear in the analysis.

- The quality of the presenter's analysis can be assessed even when the content is unfamiliar.

Whether you are presenting or assessing a recommendation, the Decision Analysis process questions are very powerful tools. They give you insight into both the merit of the recommendation and the analysis done by the presenter. If you propose a course of action, you will be able to answer these questions:

- What is the reason for this decision?

- What key objectives are met by this recommendation?

- What are the other alternatives?

- What are the adverse consequences of this course of action?

Be prepared to explain how alternatives that may be particularly popular were handled. Avoid vague or imprecise information on any alternative. Make sure all risks are understood.

Instructions

1. Review your current work-related concerns. In the space below, list decisions that require you to present your recommended alternative for approval.

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    a. Prepare a recommendation for at least one decision. How would you incorporate the Decision Analysis concepts into your recommendation? What benefits will that provide? What risks might there be? How will you make your analysis visible?

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    b. How would you use Potential Problem Analysis or Potential Opportunity Analysis to improve your recommendation?

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2. Think through how you currently assess a recommendation. What questions will you now ask to check the depth and completeness of the analysis?

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3. How will you ensure that recommendations you are responsible for assessing incorporate all the steps of Decision Analysis?