# *DECISIVE INSIGHT (DI)*

Decisive Insight combines the ability to draw on one's own experience, knowledge and training and effectively problem-solve increasingly difficult and complex situations. It involves breaking down problems, tracing implications and recognizing patterns and connections that are not obviously related. It translates into identifying underlying issues and making the best decisions at the most appropriate time. At higher levels, the parameters upon which to base the decision become increasingly complex and ambiguous and call upon novel ways to think through issues.

| *This Means...* | *This Doesn't Mean...* |
|---|---|
| • using past experiences to quickly evaluate situations where information may be incomplete or unclear | • doing work as it comes without thinking through the longer term impact |
| • looking for the common factors in different situations and using/modifying previously successful approaches to meet the unique needs of the situation | • focusing on the peculiarities of each situation, without considering common sources of difficulty between situations |
| • prioritizing required information to help you determine when you can make a sufficiently informed decision | • waiting for all the information to be clear before evaluating options |
| • thinking ahead about the outcome of an action ("If I do A, then B and C will also happen.") | • solving the immediate problem without thinking about what other problems may follow, the longer term impact |
| • integrating and applying different ideas and approaches to accomplish a goal | • trying to force-fit standard approaches in order to maintain consistency |
| • identifying key factors in a complex problem, associating seemingly unrelated information in order to limit the risk in ambiguous situations where a decision need to be made | • pondering every complex detail of an issue until you are absolutely sure that the eventual decision is right |

**Developmental Activities**

### *Level 1-2 Activities*

## Keep an issues log.

- When an issue arises, record information in the following areas:
  - ⇒ Nature of issue (include a description);
  - ⇒ Person/department presenting issue;
  - ⇒ Perceived priority/importance;
  - ⇒ Time available to resolve issue;
  - ⇒ Cost/implications if unresolved.
- Be very inclusive when you begin.
- Using this information, look for similar issues recorded in your log. Review the actions you or others took to resolve the issue and which information you/they used in formulating the action plans.
- Compare this to the information you have recorded – have you included irrelevant information? Highlight the information that will be most relevant to the resolution of this issue.
- As you act to resolve the issue, make note of any information you require and do not have. Once you have responded to a number of similar issues, you may find there is a pattern in the types of information you need to successfully respond.

Reflection Tips:

* Sometimes, taking the time to write a description of the issue will help you do an initial analysis and define the relevant information.

* Remember that information that is irrelevant in one situation may be vital in another – use your past experience as a guide, but don't succumb to a cookie-cutter approach to issue resolution.

## Create an environment which is supportive of making good decisions.

- Think about times when you have made good decisions – what environmental factors were present? Some examples might include:
  - ⇒ Sufficient time and resources available;
  - ⇒ Peers who had similar issues and shared perspectives;
  - ⇒ Timing: the issue came up during a non-busy time;
  - ⇒ Implications of non-resolution were clearly defined.
- Contrast these factors to those in place when your resolutions have been less successful.
- Build your boundaries for dealing with issues. Which factors must be in place? Which ones are beneficial, but not necessary? Which ones can you control?

- When the next issue arises, evaluate the environment against your criteria. Involve others to help you maintain your boundaries (delegate other, less essential work to give yourself time and space to think, etc.).
- Evaluate the success of your resolution and efforts to maintain a positive decision-making environment.

Reflection Tips:

* Plan ahead for issues – think of it as your Emergency Response Plan. Make a list of people who can help you and places you can get further information.
* Evaluate your personal experience of the process – how did you feel? How did your stress levels compare to previous incidents?

## Have someone model his or her decision-making process for you.

- Be sure to explore and question the factors they consider in this type of a decision.
- For this particular type of decision, what particular areas of knowledge and resources do they generally use?

Reflection Tips:

* Ask others what they think about this person's decision-making. What are their weak areas? What are their strengths?
* How did they acquire this knowledge? Are there resources that you could draw on, also?

## Shadow a decision with someone whose Decisive Insight you value.

- After generally discussing the decision to be made, take some time on your own to consider the factors involved in the decision.
- Develop your own response to the decision, addressing all the factors you've just identified.
- Present your response to the individual. Be prepared to explain all elements of your response.
- Discuss what the differences are between your approach and the approach the individual took. What are the similarities?

Reflection Tips:

* It will help to prioritize the facts first. Discuss the factors with peers to gather information regarding their prioritization.
* Ask the model about the things you came up with he/she didn't. Ask why they would/wouldn't use these additional techniques.

### *Level 2-3 Activities*

## Identify obstacles.

- Look ahead over the next three months. Considering each of the projects you are working on or plan to work on, with which project do you anticipate encountering the most difficulties?
- Make a list of the major obstacles that you believe you will encounter that will deter you from achieving your goal.
- Analyze the root cause of each obstacle and identify what actions you can take to lessen or overcome the problem before you encounter it.
- Agree a way forward with stakeholders to remove obstacles.

Reflection Tips:

* Discuss with your peers how they identify obstacles. Remember to keep a proactive approach rather than a reactive role.

* Have you encountered any of these obstacles before? If so, review the methods you used before, and the resulting outcomes.

## Identify a persistent problem that has resisted solution.

- Set aside sufficient time so that you can really focus on the problem. If the problem is truly difficult, it will not be resolved in a couple of minutes between meetings.
- Work on a plan that goes to the root of the problem.
- Consider the background to the problem.
- Try breaking the problem down into pieces, and examining each separately.
- Consider similar problems from the past. Is any information that you've gathered previously relevant in this situation?
- Carefully think through the consequences of your plan. Why will it succeed when the others have failed?
- Fine tune your plan until you are confident that you have addressed the fundamental issues causing the problem.

Reflection Tips:

* Gather information about how your peers break down problems.

* Use diagrams to show the relationships of each of the pieces within the problem.

## When you are faced by new and difficult problems, think through the chain of events leading to the problem.

- The next time an important problem occurs, stop yourself from jumping to a conclusion as to what caused the problem.
- Write down the chain of events leading to the problem (e.g., “A” occurred because of “B”, “B” occurred because of “C”). It is important to actually write it down or draw a diagram. Most people cannot keep all the details of a complex situation in their heads.
- Identify any gaps in the information you have at hand. Use past experiences to make any assumptions you’ll need to come to a decision.
- Work together with your peers to implement the solution in a feasible manner.

Reflection Tips:

* Consider if you or your peers have come up against the problem before. If so, what aspects of it have changed?
* Consider each of the components, and think about what can be done to address them.

## Ask for feedback.

- Ask your peers to identify specific times where you either showed or did not show effective decision-making skills.
- Ask them to specify what it was about your behaviour, which made a particular impression on them.
- Ask them to talk through how he or she would have tackled the issue.
- Take note of these suggestions and try to apply them in future circumstances.

Reflection Tips:

* Is there a pattern to situations where you avoid using analytical skills?
* What factors consistently hinder your ability to make effective decisions quickly?

## Identify a recent business unit problem that was successfully resolved.

- Plan to meet with the people involved in the problem resolution.
- Find out how they dealt with the problem or situation. Ask the following:
  - ⇒ What difficulties did they encounter? How did they handle the difficulties? Is there anything they feel they could have done to prevent the difficulties from arising? Were there any issues that they “nipped in the bud”? What would they do differently next time?
  - ⇒ What resources did they use? Are these the typical resources that are used, or were additional ones brought in?


 

  ⇒ How did they measure the specific outcomes of their efforts? Were they satisfied with this method of measurement? How successful were the outcomes? How successful were the outcomes expected to be? What, if any, different methods of measurement would they use the next time?
- Use this information when you are confronted with similar problems or situations.

Reflection Tips:

* Consider meeting with managers of those people as well, to get their input.
* Your goal here is to continue to ask questions until you feel you have not only an understanding of the problems encountered, but also a feeling for how to address them efficiently and prevent these types of difficulties from arising in the first place.
* Have you ever called upon these resources? Under what circumstances could you use them?

### Take a longer-term project or assignment that you have become involved in and invest time to look ahead for potential problems.

- Break down the project or assignment into all the critical tasks and key milestones.
- Analyze each task and identify any potential areas of risk. Try to determine any areas where something could potentially go wrong such as an untried technology or a shortage of experienced employees.
- Sort the potential problems into high and low risk.
- Prepare possible alternatives if the potential problems you have identified should occur.
- Review your task breakdown, risk analysis and alternatives with your manager.
- Implement an action plan with appropriate time scales to address those risks.
- Identify obstacles.

Reflection Tips:

* Also consider the background of the project.
* Speak with others who have been involved in similar projects about the obstacles they experienced.

## Overcome your "confidence killers".

- Think about a time when you had a good idea but were unsuccessful in countering the resistance you encountered. Review the steps you took in developing the idea and readying it for presentation.
  - ⇒ How did you come up with the idea?
  - ⇒ How much time did you have to develop the idea?
  - ⇒ Who else did you involve in the development and presentation?
  - ⇒ How did you prepare the idea for presentation (exhaustive analysis, feedback from others, conceptual description, etc.)?
  - ⇒ How did you prepare yourself for the presentation?
  - ⇒ To whom did you present?
  - ⇒ When/where was the decision made to not pursue your idea.
- Walk through each of the steps you took, remembering what you were thinking and feeling during each of them. What you are looking for is the point at which your confidence began to falter.
- This point serves as your "trigger event" and may be based on your own thoughts and feelings, or on your reaction to others and external events.
- Think about how you can recognize these trigger events in the future – what thoughts/feelings/situations do you need to be on the lookout for?
- Plan for the occurrence of these trigger events – you are likely to meet them again, so be ready for them. Actually write down the actions or statements you could use in those instances. These notes can form a type of "cheat sheet" should you get into a situation, which feels uncomfortable for you.
- Remember that ultimately, you are in control of your actions – once you have identified the people or situations which make you feel threatened, you can choose to react to them automatically or you can respond to them in a way which recognizes it is difficult for you, but does not work against your own progress or idea.

Reflection Tip:

* If the trigger event is based on information (not enough time to prepare, analyze, etc.), consider processes which will allow you to gather/clarify/work with the information more effectively. If the trigger event is based on the presence or reaction of another person, examine ways to counter this effect (take some supporters with you to the meeting, try to see the issue from the other individual's perspective before involving them, work in a supporting role on others' projects to gain some limited exposure to the individual in a "safe" environment, etc.).

## Build a cross-departmental innovation and solution team.

- When addressing an issue, gaining the input of individuals from diverse backgrounds will help you understand the broader implications of issues and actions.
- Identify all the groups who will be affected by the issue and invite a representative from each of the groups to join the team.
- Have each representative define the issue from his/her group's perspective and outline what success in dealing with the issue would look like. Your role in this discussion is to be a facilitator, not to have an opinion.
- As a group, decide which areas of the issue to tackle first and put action plans in place.
- Keep an on-going record of what you learned from each of the group representatives, for future reference.
- Refer to these notes the next time an issue arises which has implications for another group. Incorporate the perspectives or approaches into your own analysis of the situation and validate your views with members of that group.

Reflection Tips:

* Make note of the qualitative and quantitative differences that emerge as each representative is talking. Is it about customer service? Quality? Efficiency? Remember that the view of the issue doesn't have to be the same for an effective solution to be found – the team needs to find a solution that meets all the groups' needs.

* Consider how you can best use these learnings, even in situations that do not affect the group from whom you learned them. You are building a "big picture" view.

### *Level 4-5 Activities*

## Identify and plan for obstacles.

- Look ahead over the next three to six months. Considering each of the projects you are working on or plan to work on, with which project do you anticipate encountering the most difficulties?
- Write a two to three sentence summary of the project, which captures the objective, rather than the steps of the project. "Keeping your eye on the ball" in this way will help you distinguish high and low risk situations, and evaluate potential ways of dealing with difficulties.
- Make a list of the major obstacles that you believe you will encounter that will deter you from achieving your goal.
- Drawing on your knowledge of the issues involved and the context, consider the root cause of each obstacle.
- Identify what actions you can take to lessen or overcome the problem before you encounter it. Write out these actions in a plan, delegating responsibilities where appropriate and informing individuals of the potential risks involved.

- Provide targeted completion dates for each step.
- Develop a contingency plan to enable you to deal with unforeseen shifts in direction.
- Put the plan into action and keep a note of your progress.

Reflection Tips:

* Discuss your ideas with respected peers, and ask for their feedback.

* Ask yourself if the proposed actions will truly get you closer to your objective.

## Develop a new concept or transform an idea that would have a significant impact.

- Review current practices within your branch in order to identify an area or issue that needs revision, or that could benefit from some form of revitalization.
- Investigate and gather information from various sources (peers, trade journals, competitors, stakeholders, etc.) related to this issue.
- Discuss your findings with your peers. Gather their input on the relevance of the gathered information.
- Develop different approaches for dealing with the issue by integrating your learning, and discussions with your peers with what you already know about current practices within the business unit.
- Develop a business case that supports a change including such things as strategic repositioning and leveraging, resource utilization, cost/benefit impact, and so on.
- Examine the pros and cons from the perspective of each stakeholder group (e.g., sales, marketing, etc.).
- Create a draft implementation plan. Include a transition plan for migration or conversion to the new approach, or communication plan for positioning the project, and updates to stakeholder groups.
- Present your ideas and case to the appropriate group.

Reflection Tip:

* Consider their perspective while gathering this information. Don't discount any information immediately. Some of their ideas may be useful, but need to be formatted differently in order to be more suited to your branch.

## Keep current with trends and issues affecting government in general as well as your organization.

- Consider the factors that define success in your organization. Choose the two or three which you feel are most critical and research how your organization measures up against other organizations on these factors.
- Also consider the level at which you want to gather this information (e.g., local, regional, national).


 

- ⇒ Look at what other organizations are doing. What assumptions are they making? How are these assumptions driving their strategy?
- ⇒ Attend industry or economic conferences and seminars.
- ⇒ Collect information about best practices and key success factors in organizations that you believe could be transferable to your organization.
- ⇒ Monitor various information sources (e.g., newsletters, meeting minutes) to help you anticipate legislative or industry standard changes that you will need to accommodate.

- Once you have a solid base of information regarding these factors, you may want to identify and apply concepts which may improve your ability to tap into untried market areas.

Reflection Tip:

* Develop a cuttings file or a discussion list of ideas, which you feel are the most relevant to your future opportunities. Share this information, as well as your research process, with your colleagues to discuss how your organization can use this information efficiently to improve complex decision-making.

## Create and maintain an on-going monitoring system to capture how leaders in other industries are responding to their challenges.

- Think about what would be the most effective manner to gather this information. Share your ideas with your peers.
- Keep your records up to date. Keep these records in a centrally accessible location so that others may access and add to them.
- Build personal networks that will facilitate the gathering of additional information. Continue to update your records with new information.
- Once you have gathered some information, spend some time thinking about how it could be adapted for government purposes.
- Initiate discussions with peers about the information, and evaluate the merits of the various options.


 

## Develop alternate ways of looking at an issue:

- Select an issue that you are genuinely interested in understanding or resolving. The problem should be of reasonable scope and you should be familiar with its past history (i.e., what has led up to the problem and previous attempts, if any, at resolving it).
- Describe the problem in a brief statement.
  - ⇒ For example, you might state the problem as: "The staff turnover in my particular branch has steadily increased over the past two years".
- Identify the key factors in the problem from your perspective.
- Pretend you are going to tell someone a story about the problem. What are the three or four key characteristics or details you would want to convey?
- Identify the key factors in the problem from the perspective of others. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - ⇒ How would management in other areas view this problem? What factors would they see from their perspective?
  - ⇒ How would customers view this problem? What factors would they see?
- Prepare a summary of your findings. Identify any immediate steps you could take on your own to help resolve the problem. Take the first steps.

> Reflection Tip:
>
> * Check with others to ensure that you have identified all key factors. Which ones might you have missed? Why?

## Incorporate several perspectives into your problem-solving approach.

- Identify individuals who are most affected by a problem.
- Ask them for information about the nature of the problem and for suggestions about possible solutions.
- Imagine that you have no constraints to solve this issue or problem -- what would you do? Why would you do it? What prevents you from acting on the thoughts you have?
- Talk to people who are not familiar with the issue you are grappling with. This may include those from totally different areas of expertise or disciplines than you are used to -- what kinds of things do people come up with?
- Try to picture what you are trying to achieve. How does it look? Is there anything you would like to change? What one thing would you like to change in that picture? Will the courses of action that you have generated allow you to achieve your goals?

- Take the results of these approaches and try to come up with some novel solutions to your problem.
- Bounce your ideas off trusted colleagues and the individuals affected.
- Try to learn from and incorporate the comments you have collected. Make some notes to yourself regarding some of the things that have helped you to become more creative.

Reflection Tips:

* Be sure to gather information so that you understand the background to the problem.
* What sort of thought processes did those people use to break down or conceptualize the problem?
* Think about what situation this particular problem reminds you of. Are there any interesting similarities or differences between the current and past situations? What can you learn from them?
* Ask for specific feedback regarding the feasibility of the approaches you have defined.