

# Make Decisions Quicker And Easier

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The Lean methodology of process improvement defines at least 7 classical forms of waste. Going through notes, over and over again, as to the root cause of wastes we experience indicates that indecision often drives waste, even if it appears to be a circumstantial cause and not a regular or systemic cause of the system. I argue though, that indecision is not necessarily a special event, but frequently a cultural behavior and is, therefore, a very common occurrence, even if it strikes different processes at different times.

Let's look and see if my assertion makes sense. The seven classic wastes according to Lean are as follows:

- Overproduction – making too many things or extra output
- Waiting – people not contributing because they are waiting for work or information
- Motion – people doing more work than necessary to accomplish a task, especially moving between information or locations
- Transport – things moving from one step to the next
- Overprocessing – doing more work than necessary to get a specific task complete
- Inventory – incomplete or complete things that are not progressing/developing or selling
- Defects – output that is not correct and must be disposed of or reworked

Now, take a look at those wastes and see how many of them can be, or are, caused by indecision. Waiting is obvious; we often wait for decisions and a lack of decisiveness exacerbates the wait. When people wait, so does work or output generally, so we create inventory of work-in-progress that isn't getting done.

When we get tired of waiting or feel we can't afford it, we often gamble on guessing what the decision will be and work toward that assumption. Unfortunately, if we are wrong the work we did while we waited for a decision is wasted. It might be overprocessing, overproduction, or defective, or all of the above.

When the decision changes from the direction given to a new direction, work in progress becomes defective or work put on hold becomes inventory. The process of re-setting to adapt to the new direction might be motion or overprocessing or both.

When information gets passed around among several leaders or experts for their opinion or vote in an effort to come to a decision we create motion for people involved in the drawn out decision-making process and we create the waste of transport while that information is being passed, and waiting while we long for someone to put an end to the cycle. Likewise, meetings are generally not

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producing output, they are effort away from the output, so meetings can be called the waste of motion.

The bottom line is that indecision is a root cause for every one, and all, of the classic Lean wastes. If you don't like the Lean way of thinking, just examine your own sources of frustration and work pain and see if they too don't come from a source of indecision.

There are two things we can do to reduce this cause of waste that plagues us all. The first is to simplify the group of people necessary to make a decision. Endeavour to have one person ultimately responsible for those business elements that require important decisions.

For example, when one person is ultimately responsible for the pipeline of new product development projects, the task of determining what projects are in what order in that pipeline is more efficient than when a team of business leaders must come to consensus while each is travelling, dealing with other priorities, or in disagreement. Decision by consensus is rarely quick, unless the right thing to do is obvious, in which case we probably don't really need a consensus.

A wise decision-maker will gather information from experts and others who have information he or she needs. We do not need to create consensus to ensure that the right information is used. Consensus just lets everyone feel like they have a say. Eliminate consensus decisions to be more decisive.

The second thing we can do is to propagate a very simple decision-making habit. That habit is to reduce decisions to binary choices.

Imagine that you are selecting a new car and there are five models you like. Choosing between five options can be difficult. Reduce the choice to a simple two. Pick one model and a second. Compare just those two and select the one you like best. Set the loser aside. Now compare the winner with the next of the remaining five. Repeat the decision process until you have one left over and 4 set aside.

Making decisions between two things is much easier for most of us than making decisions with many options. It is a very simple tactic that we can use personally, we can teach it to our peers and personnel, and we can make decision throughout the business more effective.

One place where this tactic is extraordinarily successful is in surveys or when gathering Voice of the Customer (VOC) information. When we present several options to potential customers and ask for opinions, our resulting data can be scattered all over, with little obvious direction to be gleaned. However, when we present potential customers with a series of binary choices we can get much better direction out of the results.

To risk a tangent, the statistical mathematics of binary responses is much easier to analyze than ordinal (multiple-choice) responses. So, not only do surveys produce more meaningful answers from binary choices, they are easier to analyze

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mathematically.

For those situations where we cannot rely on a single person, such as customer data or satisfaction surveys, there is a handy tool that aids us in designing a series of binary choices from multiple options and in determining the prevalent direction from diverse responses. That tool is called, Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP).

If you do an Internet search on the subject you will find several papers on the subject or ready-made tools. It is easy enough to make your own tool with a spreadsheet if you get the mathematical formulas from a source on the subject. It requires some matrix mathematics using dot-product formulas, but spreadsheets can handle it easier than we can.

There is one more helpful piece of knowledge that aids in decision-making. It is this:

Decisions are always emotional/intuitive; there is no such thing as a logical decision.

Let me explain. Rationale, logic, and statistical or mathematical data are very excellent ways of making the better choice more apparent, but in the end, we make decisions based on what we feel most comfortable doing. It's worth repeating. We make decisions based on what we feel. The rationale only makes us feel better about our decision.

So, when faced with a difficult decision, for which the best choice is not readily apparent, instead of breaking out a myriad of complicated formulas or seeking out the advice of everyone on your contact list, simply ask the following question.

“What information would make me feel better about making this decision?”

When we can determine what we don't know that bothers us, and we can quickly fill that gap, making the decision becomes easier to do. If we can directly fill the critical gap in our information, we avoid a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty, and we can get to a comfortable answer quickly.

Therefore, since decisions are ultimately a result of what we feel most comfortable is right, we should recognize that our intuition is a very powerful decision-making tool. Do not discount the power or importance of your intuition, or that of your experts or peers.

Our intuition is a survival-focused element of our mind and it has a way of developing patterns of outcomes based on experience while we are not aware it is doing so. As a result our intuition often knows the best answer long before we have completed our research, executed our logical tools, or performed our mathematical analysis. What's more, that intuitive response the rational one often agrees, once the rational analysis is finished.

So, if you feel that you need to make a decision before you can get the information that would make you more comfortable, go with your gut feel. As much as you

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might have difficulty explaining the reasons for your decision, you stand a good chance of being right, or right enough.

Alternatively, if one of your experts, someone who knows the circumstances or system better than you, expresses a different opinion about the right thing to do, give his or her concerns some substantial weight in your decision. Even if they can't clearly explain why they think a different solution is better, their experience with the problem or system may be speaking to them intuitively, and that intuition might be right.

Don't allow indecision to waste time and energy in your organization, creating rework, defective output, unnecessary work, or wasted opportunity waiting for direction. Simplify who has authority to make decisions wherever possible. Propagate a habit of reducing decisions to binary choices to make multiple-choice decisions easier and quicker, and learn to accept the intuitive input.

Stay wise, friends.

*If you like what you just read, find more of Alan's thoughts at [www.bizwizwithin.com](http://www.bizwizwithin.com). [1]*

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