

## - DECISION DRIVING, a systemic management and coaching micro competency

*The decision-driving micro competency and its pertinence in all our personal and professional environments.*

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This text presents a very practical systemic approach to develop individual, team and organizational capacity to decide, or align together in order to proceed towards a shared desired outcome. As a micro competency, decision-driving stands among at least four others presented in other articles on this website.

- **Caution:** Obviously, different people, teams and organizations are more or less capable to display each of these collaborative, achievement-oriented skills, including that of shared or collective decision-making.

Consequently, the intensive and very practical behavioral approach proposed below may be quite redundant for some people, partners and teams which are already quite proficient in their capacity to make collective decisions.

[To answer a questionnaire that evaluates active personal skills and those that need to be developed:](#)

### **THE MICRO COMPETENCY**

No matter your official position or role, imagine you are sitting in on a team meeting, or participating in a discussion or dialogue with one or more people. And suppose that the conversation's object is to cover one or more important subjects. As you attend the reunion, take out a piece of paper and pen, and just clearly state what you intend to do:

- "I suggest that I write down the decisions we will make as we proceed with our discussion."

Then, as soon as the dialogue begins, jump on the first opportunity to ask a question that conveys your intent to help your partners immediately focus on decision making:

#### **Examples:**

- Just so I know, what type of decisions do we want to make in the course of this meeting?
- If we immediately made a list of the decisions we need to make, how do you suggest we formulate them?
- Intuitively, what are the decisions we already know we need to make, before we start our discussion?
- Etc.

In the same fashion, throughout the discussion, continuously fish for decisions, pen in hand, ready to write any suggested formulation:

#### **Examples:**

- What you just said could be a decision proposal. Should I write it down?
- Are we ready to decide on this point?
- What decision do you suggest, just to move on?
- How could we move forward now, with a few decisions?
- I understand that we disagree on this point, so what can we decide to get unstuck?
- That sounds like a good idea. Can we transform it into a decision?
- What decision would you suggest?
- To what kind of decision could we all agree?
- Etc

This may seem relatively simple, but proceed with care. This apparently practical, routinely exercise can provoke resistance. It may reveal a number of limiting beliefs and conservative habits concerning decision-making. Consequently, you need to respect a number of simple operating procedures:

- First experiment your new role within meetings where you are not the official decision maker, nor the facilitator, but just another peer,

partner or participant.

- Do not make long presentations or speeches to describe what you intend to do. A simple announcement is enough.
- Proceed with discretion, a low position, a soft voice. The less you attract attention and provoke resistance the better.
- Do not get involved in the content of the decisions.

Your goal is not to push for the decisions you would prefer. Your role is simply to provoke decision-making.

- As soon as a decision is suggested, write it down as it is formulated. Then read it out loud for confirmation or adjustment.
- Do not wait for a discussion or arguments to end to ask for decisions. Do it all through the dialogue, judiciously interrupting to refocus everyone on their debate conclusion.
- Proceed lightly, but take the means to be heard. Sometimes raising a finger or hand will help attract attention as you speak.
- Do not add stress in your voice. Keep it neutral. Indeed, you don't want to push or pull your partners or team, but just to put yourself at their service, to be productive together.
- Smile! Have fun playing your role! It is not a chore! You are just helping flow and progression.
  
- Your objective is to accumulate as many decisions as possible in the shortest given time.
- Do not get defensive when resistant comments are made. Observe them as normal occurrences that emerge when someone implements a change of habits.
- Speak clearly to be heard by all. Do not just address one person but the whole group, team or assistance.
- Stretch yourself. Do a little more rather than a little less.
- Subtly seize all opportunities to interrupt the flow when the discussion becomes heavy, monopolized by few, when the content is predictable or routinely repetitious.
- Do not become central at the expense of the quality of the dialogue between all participants.
- Do not *only* push decisions. Occasionally support another's idea, offer content-related comments, or propose your own decision in order to help everyone move forward.
- When other participants suggest content adjustments, accept these readily or ask for reactions from others. Do not get into content-related arguments.
  
- Model an open adaptable attitude.
- When driving decisions, be sure to be focused on the process, not the content.

Consequently, whenever you are making a content-related comment, make sure that you do not immediately or simultaneously drive it as a decision.

- When someone reacts to your process in a negative way, just say that is just a new process you would like to experiment and suggest that you all discuss it after the meeting is over.
- Attentively observe individual and group or team reactions to the decision-driving process you are embodying. These reactions are not to be taken personally. They are to be perceived as inherently addressing the process change you are experimenting.

**EVALUATION:** At the end of the meeting, ask other participants how they react, or how they feel, or what they think about your decision-driving function.

- If the first speaker's voice resistance or discomfort with your role, do not answer to argue. Just listen and register their opinions.
- Then ask all the others to express their perceptions and let a dialogue take place on the benefits of the role.

Then offer a few specific questions to deepen the conversations:

- Do you perceive a difference in our shared effectiveness, compared to our usual meetings?
- Have we made good decisions?
- Do you have the perception that more of us have participated in this meeting than in the past?
- Have we made more decisions than usually?
- Do you perceive our meeting as shorter than usual?
- Is this experience useful?
  
- Should we repeat it in our future meetings?

Also offer some elements of measure, concluding your phrases with questions:

- According to my notes, we have made ten decisions, some of which are rather detailed. What can this reveal about our usual meeting process?
- It seems more people than usually have offered to formulate decisions. Do you consider this to be positive?
- Etc.

Repeat the experience when you meet again with the same people, in the same contexts until you perceive that everyone is getting familiar with the process. Hopefully others will also support you or start modeling on the decision-driving role. They will then have integrated that whenever you meet, it is also to decide how you want to progress together in your shared future.

For your own benefit, also repeat your experience for at least four weeks in all other meetings with anyone, whether face-to-face, in groups or teams, in your family, at work or with friends, in official, professional or informal contexts. Your goal is to take every opportunity to increase your personal experience with this decision-driving micro competency. To really imbed this micro competency, and make it a new natural skill, it takes at least a month.

[To access another systemic micro-competency on modesty and vulnerability:](#)

## DECISION DRIVING AS A SYSTEMIC MICRO COMPETENCY



Provoking decisions or the decision-driving function is a systemic management and coaching skill. Of course, it is quite instrumental in all personal and professional development fields. Whenever participating in projects, face-to-face dialogues and conversations, relationships, meetings, alone or with others, with friends, at home and with partners, it consists in constantly provoking oneself and others to focus on the need to decide in order to shape our possible futures.

This article presents the systemic benefits that can be achieved through a constant practice of this micro competency as a means to increase personal and collective effectiveness and results.

- **Caution:** This systemic micro competency is not a concept but a skill.

It yields individual and collective results only when it has become an engrained behavioral habit to the point of becoming a natural reflex. Once you apply the micro competency everywhere, no matter the context, you can consider it acquired. In the same way as for other systemic micro competencies presented on this website, it needs to be repeatedly experimented, all day, in the course of all our short and longer relational and professional sequences.

This systematic repetition gradually transforms an occasional experiment into an ongoing personal and collective habit.

- **Caution:** Indeed, by offering such a modeling example, the decision driving micro competency spreads, almost in a viral fashion, to affect much larger environments, all the systems to which we belong.

Consequently, this micro competency can have a measurable systemic effect on a much larger scale, to the point of transforming network, team and organizational effectiveness. The reason for this larger-scale effect is rapidly obvious:

- As soon as anyone gives it an earnest try, this relatively simple, almost simplistic micro competency brings on immediately perceived if not precisely measurable added value.

But that is not the only observable result! As it is regularly practiced, its positive effects will be perceived and become measurable in much larger and unexpected dimensions. Indeed, the more it is naturally implemented in relatively short relational sequences, on a micro level as such, the more it will gradually remodel behaviors in much larger ensembles: networks, teams, organizations.

- Repeated practice by one person will obviously bring on important changes in one's individual frame of reference.
- Repeated practice first by one person naturally spreads by modeling to two, then four, then eight, etc. This viral effect can rapidly help transform collective frames of reference.

Consequently, both in time and in space, repeated practice of this micro competency can have major repercussions on one's personal life and career on the one hand, and in much larger collective environments, on the other.

Much as with other micro competencies presented on this website, the decision-driving function can be instrumental in modifying team and organizational cultures in a totally operational way, indirectly helping to achieve totally unexpected measurable results.

The systemic principle underlying micro competencies such as the capacity to relentlessly drive decisions in short relational sequences and relatively restrained environments is easy to understand for systemic coaches and managers:

- **Important:** When one wants to achieve global change, or change in large systems, the only real, practical way to do that is to regularly implement minute local actions.

According to this systemic principle, it is relatively useless to directly aim to transform large ensembles. It is impossible to stop global warming, global pollution, global warfare, etc. Such ambitions are too often approached with idealistic stances that promote general programs and require overwhelming means to achieve very few measurable effects.

To change the world, or any large complex system such as a country, a city, an organization, one must imperatively proceed with local actions, first undertaken by individuals in their direct environments. These successful changes require smaller means, achieve more rapid measurable results. They then spread to effect immediate neighbors, other local environments, to gradually have a global effect. This viral spread takes place by modeling, mimetic example. More on this viral process is explained below, and elsewhere on this website.

## DEALING WITH RESISTANCE TO DECISION DRIVING

To be sure, when anyone attempts to provoke decisions early in a discussion, in dialogues, meetings etc. many partners resist. That resistance needs to be considered a rather natural reaction. These partners may feel that more discussion is necessary, that it is too early in the relationship, that more analysis is required, that more trust must be built, that more informational input is vital, that an inventory of means must come first, etc. Of course, the main effect of such prerequisites is to postpone formulating possible decisions.

In the case individuals offer such postponing comments or strategies to resist rapid decision-making, it is useful to practice how to by pass them with relational agility.

- I am not looking for a firm or final decision, but just a beginning formulation of what we could aim to do.
- I'm just thinking that an early formulation of a desired decision could help us clarify the perimeter of what we really want to achieve.
- Of course, we first need to discuss, but if we already had a very general idea of what we actually want to do, how could we formulate it as an optional decision?
- Formulating an immediate decision is just a creative strategy. Suppose we all agree on what we want to decide, how could that decision be simply formulated?
- If we were a month down the road, after three meetings on the subject, what are the decisions that we will have finally made?
- Personally, I'm OK with any decision. What can you suggest right away that would satisfy your needs?
- If we were intuitive and voiced what we all know we need to decide, what would we say?
- Etc.

The rationale for early decisions is simple. The real issues and real debates will only begin surfacing once active decisions are formulated, not before. When analysis can last forever, when more information can always be found, decisions immediately provoke people, responsibilities, means and action plans. Decisions need to come first to accelerate commitment. Then action plans can be designed, responsibilities distributed, means allocated, time-lines defined, action implemented, etc. Even if they may often require later emerging discussions and adjustments, early decisions always clarify and speed everything up.

Consequently when implementing the decision-driving micro competency in different local environments, it is useful not to focus on the decision content. It is counterproductive to attempt to push one specific decision or another. It is much more useful to formulate open proposals and questions while carefully observing the interactive decision-making process as it emerges between the participating partners:

- What are individual reactions when one formulates decisions?
- What are predictable oppositions and coalitions between people?
- Who systematically speaks after whom?
- Who's just coasting along? Who is creative? Who is slowing everything down? Who is supportive?
- Etc.

It often becomes obvious that many discussions essentially serve to postpone decisions and the actions that could follow. One could almost perceive that corporate meetings on any given subjects essentially serves to voice disagreements in order to make sure nothing ever gets decided. This is probably the reason for the comment that nobody should never miss meetings, in order to make sure nothing escapes their control and that no decisions will be made that can reduce their comfort zone.

- Partners in meeting often start with the frame of reference that decisions will be very difficult to make, and that long discussions and arguments must take place before these can ever emerge.

The opposite can be true if discussions are immediately focused on formulating the needed decisions, before ever embarking on analyzing the complexity or refreshing the long history of the issue it is intended to solve.

## THE DECISION SHEET

Obviously, in order to make this micro competency more effective, it is necessary to immediately write any decision proposal, and this almost before it is totally formulated.

- This means that the first attempt at formulating a decision should be put in writing, before debates modify or distil it towards its final version.

The reason to immediately start writing is simple: In meetings, it is generally admitted that nothing is written before everyone agrees on exact formulations. Then when the writing begins, debates starts all over again on the choice of every word.

- It is much more useful to immediately start writing and include all the concerned partners in what is being written.

Even during one-on-one discussions, pull out a piece of paper or pad and start writing all agreements as each decision is pushed. This scribe function can also be used to solicit decisions:

- What should I write down?
- I don't know what to write, can you please tell me?
- Is it time to write down our decision?
- Etc.

This is almost an assistants role. But do not underestimate it: simply asking what to write down is how assistants actually run meetings in many companies, and this in spite of territorial power games and big egos. Asking what to write clearly indicate to the meeting or discussion partners that you are serious about arriving at clearly stated shared conclusions.

- For clear confirmation when each decision is written, repeat the dictated phrases that you have jotted down.

Announce that you will share this sheet with everyone concerned and present at the meeting. Do not hesitate to enlarge the distribution to other significant recipients, maybe even a much larger public.

This decision sheet with pilots and deadlines for each decision could be considered as a list of commitments, an almost contractual base for future actions and responsibility. This stresses the importance of clearly formulated phrases, precise actions, clear deadlines, etc. Absent recipients, indirect collaborators, distant support systems, the larger environment etc. all could be informed, and need to understand the decision at one read.

- **Note:** The more a decision sheet is distributed to a large number of recipients, the more this general public becomes a witness to your engagements, the more they can support your actions, and the more they can recognize your achievements when you reach your results.

Make the distribution of decision sheets a habit, with everyone, everywhere.

### Examples:

- Following a meeting with managers or a leader, send them a mail restating all the points upon which you have agreed, all your shared decisions, without forgetting to mention who does what, for when.
- Following a telephone conversation, confirm in writing all the agreed decisions by mail or text message.
- If your partners respond by suggesting a modifications or corrections, send back the whole list after integrating the changes, and then ask for a final confirmation
- Following any team or network meeting, announce that you will send everyone the decision sheet, and do it within the next hour. That is if it is not done online at the very end of the meeting. In some informal cases, just a picture of the decision sheet can be immediate and more than enough.
- Etc.

## RESISTANCE TO DECISIONS

As you systematically experiment this micro-competency in individuals and systems, you and they will become conscious of a number of personal and collective postponing strategies. These may often appear to be focused on the content of a discussion but they are especially effective at slowing down the process, no matter the content. Their main result is to push back all decisions and all calls for action. Basically, the new less decisions are made, the more everyone can continue enjoying the comfort of routinely running their business as usual.

In a rather short period of time, the practice of the decision-driving micro competency in all relationships, projects, networks and teams will allow a growing awareness of all the postponing strategies we have invented to ensure non-decision making. Here is a first short list of these strategies, and up to you to find out how to work around them.

**CRITICISM:** A widely used strategy is to criticize everything, every step of the way, without ever suggesting any alternative option.

### Examples:

- What do you think of a week from now in terms of deadlines?
- Oh no! That is much too short!
  
- A dedicated team could be appointed to run this project.
- Impossible! The cost is not budgeted and that would negatively affect our short-term results!
  
- We could find partners to support our development.
- That is much too risky. That would give them access all to our know-how, and they could just copy us. And we could lose our independence.

Within some collective systems, this strategy to disqualify all proposals strategy is so widespread and engrained in the company culture that it is applied to the most insignificant decisions:

- I suggest we take a 20 minute break..
- Oh that is much too short!

The observable result in such systems is that nobody ever dares to offer a possible option or decision. All have learned that if they do not want to be immediately put down, they better just wait for someone else to take the lead. They will then be in a good position to be the one to put someone else down with a host of very convincing arguments, never proposing another alternative.

The obvious immediate antidote to this type of process is to naturally accept the rebuttal and negative argument, and immediately ask for a counter proposal.

- OK. What do you propose instead?
- You are right. Can you formulate another possible option?
- I understand your argument. What would be a satisfactory alternative for you?

**PRINCIPLES:** Decision proposals may concern lofty crowd-pleasing principles rather than precise action plans that can achieve measurable results. These superficial decisions may be readily adopted, but do not really engage those who formulate them.

### Examples:

- From now on, we will work in a respectful and effective manner.
- We will establish a participative management process company-wide before this year's-end.
- We will transform company culture to liberate every employee's potential.

Truly this type of statement presents laudable goals. They merit a more practical formulation in terms of measurable goals, precise responsibilities, concrete action plans, observable results, etc.

- In some organizations principle-focused decisions mainly serve to avoid engagements on precise measurable results. This process is often played out in annual conventions on very general goals and themes, on collective visions and missions. Their main goal is to please and entertain, with a purpose to motivate.

Decisions thus formulated as general principles coupled with vague goals may serve as useful decision titles or meeting subjects. To be considered real decisions, they need to be accompanied by more precise and practical details on how they will be implemented to respect precise deadlines.

Once such decisions are written, resistance strategies become much more apparent when later attempts are made to translate the announced principles into concrete action plans. Consequently, whenever imprecise, conceptual or principle-oriented decisions are proposed, several questions

should immediately follow to define how, under who's responsibility, by when, etc.

- **Caution:** Decisions that are not clearly formulated accompanied by action plans, deadlines, and pilots, can be considered just wishful thinking.

**PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Along with focus on general principles in lieu of decisions, one way to avoid action plans is to focus all attention on communication. Marketing-focused individuals and teams believe that a well-conceived, seductive communication campaign with speeches, posters, movie shorts, etc on any change will suffice to make that change. As a result, hours can be spent to work out the wording of a mission statement, and days can be allocated to its communication company-wide, and then the work is considered done.

**Caution:** One of the paradoxes of excessive communication is that the more people talk about their projects, the more they get recognition for the project before having done any work on it, the less they may actually implement the project.

Indeed, getting recognition before having achieved any action plan gets most of the steam out of the motivation to actually implement what was presented. Consequently, should anyone, any group or any team really want to get an important project achieved, it is suggested not to focus excessively on seductively presenting the project to everyone in the larger environment. It is much more advised to be humble in any communication, and to underline the necessary work, the consecutive steps, the action plans and deadlines, and probable difficulties in the steps to achieve the ambition.

**SEARCH FOR PERFECTION:** Improving decisions and attempting to make them perfect before finalizing anything is another excellent way to postpone any decision making. An imperfect decision has the advantage to permit immediate action. This action will rapidly provide information, a feedback loop that will help adjust the original decision. If the second adjustment is just as reactive, it will also allow another feedback loop, and allow another decision adjustment. This is how a series of adjustments of an originally imperfect decision allows for agile improvement and rapidly implemented operational success.

- **Caution:** the negative alternative to agile decision-making is to intellectually improve a decision proposal until it is considered perfect.

During this whole intellectual process, everyone, even clients are patiently wait for the brainchild decision. Holding back any action until we are satisfied with a perfect plan is actually one of the best strategies to end with failure.

**DEADLINES:** ASAP is the usual formula when people want to avoid commit to precise deadlines. ASAP is used in the Western hemisphere as an equivalent of "God willing" in other regions of the world.

Another postponing strategy when making decisions is to allow oneself ample time to forget by giving proposing distant deadlines.

**PILOTS:** A decision without a pilot who will assume the responsibility to follow up allows everyone to feel the decision is not owned. Consequently, whenever implementing decisions is a shared responsibility, several people are involved, naming a follow-up pilot can ensure that any collective decision is regularly put back on the partners' agenda.

## **IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF THE DECISION-DRIVING MICRO COMPETENCY:**

As you regularly, and subtly practice this micro competency day in and day out in all your personal and professional environments, you will probably rapidly observe a number of rapid results. All in all, your meetings with others, in networks and teams will become much more efficient and effective, they will be better managed, get to the point much more rapidly. Digressions will be shortened, decisions will be more numerous, much clearer, probably better followed-up.

Your active and useful process-management role will help you gain time. After a first surprise, others will better manage their interventions to conclude more efficiently. More people will find room to participate, and input will be richer.

As often as possible, if you ask your partners how they have appreciated your functional role, you will get options for improvement. Ask for these from many different people and wait to have accumulated sufficient feedback from many people to start adjusting your decision driving inputs.

As you experiment the micro competency observe the differences and whatever seems to occur on a regular basis. Observe, for example, what each other person contributes that is supportive, that is reactive, that is resisting. When you repeat your decision-driving role in similar contexts, with the same people, networks or teams, notice what behaviors and processes may be repetitious:

What kind of interactive forms seem to characterize them. Question yourself as to how you can adapt your input in order to help these contexts evolve in time and become even more effective. Then search for even more participative areas, such as projects, teams, circles, networks, etc. within which you can experiment the decision-driving process and role.

### **ON THE LONGER TERM**

You will gradually observe a number of emerging recurrent phenomena, such as very similar strategies and processes that appear in very different

contexts.

You will discover that very different people and groups express decision-making and decision avoiding processes that are quite characteristic of whom they are and of the type of results they achieve.

When you practice your decision-driving role with regularity in any one context, you may also observe that in an almost viral fashion, without any formal agreement to do so, the shared decision-making process will begin to change. The time of latency for a decision to emerge and be formulated will be measurably reduced. You will collectively become more reactive, maybe even pro-active. You will notice that the systems in which you actively input have less need for detailed analysis before considering action, that they take more measured risks, that the trust level is enhanced, that emerging options and solutions are more effective, that they are more pragmatic.

The reason for these results is rather simple: Lighter, speedier and more regular decision-making is much more creative. It affects the future in a much more interactive way.

When we postpone decisions, we are keeping all options open. All are possible futures remain theoretically available. But if we make no choices, nothing moves forward. We stay in the same reality much longer.

- When we choose one option among a thousand others, we choose a specific future and that eliminates all other possibilities. (Theory of multiple worlds).

To make a choice at any given time could seem to be the equivalent of eliminating thousands of other options, closing a thousand other doors. In fact all doors are close until we choose to open one.

- Of course, beyond the door we choose to open, we enter into another room that also has many doors, one of which we will again have to choose.

Decision-making can in fact be compared to the act of walking. If one doesn't decide to take a step forward, one stays in the same place while the rest of the world proceeds. As soon as one decides to step up, another decision appears, concerning the next immediate step. Consequently, when we learn to make out daily decisions naturally, without hesitation, we move forward much more rapidly and learn to adjust our progress to achieve our destination.

## **SYSTEMIC CONSCIENCE**

Within larger or more complex systems such as teams, networks, families, organizations, etc. all the elements of the system or all the individuals share relatively similar behavioral processes. These rest on shared history, beliefs, habits, etc. that make up the collective frame of reference. This is what is called the active culture of the system.

In systems that have developed a habit of postponing decision making, this process can be observed on all levels that constitute the system. The result is that nobody dares take any initiative without first having made sure that their backs are covered, that they are not putting themselves in harm's way. The whole has progressively become paralyzed.

- It is extremely difficult to transform large coherent ensembles such as organizations by simply dictating, explaining, promoting or imposing the need to change through collective change-management programs.

It is much more judicious for each responsible individual to act within their immediate environments by initiating micro changes in each of their local environments. These micro changes can concern each person, each relationship, each partnership, each team and each network. This where micro competencies such as the decision-driving skill presented here can begin to become a vital function..

With this type of active local behavioral skill, it is possible to proceed by active modeling, by a minute, almost insignificant changes that affect shared effectiveness and results. These small acts add up and are reproduced by mimetic reproduction, by viral modeling and slow emerging capillarity. These local acts make little noise but end up having consequential global effects.

To achieve these results, you can start right away, in your next meeting, and then continue practicing again and again in all your interactive micro sequences. And do this for at least the next three months.

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