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A lack of experience often causes new leaders to hold back, intimidated by the fear of making mistakes. (Shutterstock)

Struggling to make decisions at work? Learn how to build confidence

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One of the most daunting tasks for new leaders is making decisions that impact others. Although the average person makes thousands of conscious decisions each day — some estimates suggest as many as 35,000 — when it comes to making decisions in the workplace, many hesitate.

A lack of experience often causes new leaders to hold back, intimidated by the fear of making mistakes. The stakes can feel high, as their choices can have far-reaching consequences, not only for themselves but also for the organization and its employees.

New leaders might face decisions such as delegating responsibilities among team members, prioritizing projects with limited resources or managing conflicts between employees.

With time and practice, leaders learn to develop decisiveness — the ability to listen to their intuition for making effective, quick decisions. Decisiveness is not about being rash, but about having the confidence to act based on evidence and experience.

Effective decision-makers balance competing priorities and options while staying deeply aware of the needs of their stakeholders, from employees and colleagues to customers and investors. Once they reach a decision, they follow through with firm, resolute action.

A bar above the rest

What sets effective leaders apart is their ability to consistently make decisions that drive organizational success. These leaders understand the difference between operational and strategic decisions, and how each serves a different purpose.

Operational decisions deal with immediate concerns, focusing on day-to-day activities that require quick responses to keep the business running smoothly. For example, an operational decision might involve addressing a staffing shortage, resolving a technical issue or adjusting a production schedule.

Strategic decisions, on the other hand, are more complex, involve higher risks and require a broader perspective. They focus on the future direction of the organization and may involve a careful assessment of external factors, such as launching a new product or restructuring a department.

Building decision-making skills

But how do emerging leaders develop the skill to confidently make decisions, especially when there are many possible options? To build a strong foundation for decisive leadership, consider these three practical strategies:

1. Clarify your values

Understanding your core values is crucial for effective and ethical decision-making. When you and your staff are clear on what matters most to you, decision-making becomes easier.

For example, if you believe in transparency, you will communicate the decision-making process and outcomes to your team. They will trust that even if they don't all agree with your decision, they'll be informed promptly and consistently.

To gain clarity about your values, reflect on past decisions, consider what felt right or wrong, and identify common themes that guided your actions. You can also use one of the many free assessments available online.

Video available at <https://youtu.be/cTIUiN6inIQ>

'How to make faster decisions' from TED's the Way We Work video series.

2. Use a decision-making framework

There are several tools to help guide confident decision-making, especially early in your career. One simple and effective option is the 5 Ws Framework.

The framework helps leaders think through these essential questions: Who will be affected? What are the available options? When does the decision need to be made? Why is this decision necessary? And how will the decision be executed?

Using this framework helps emerging leaders quickly assess all angles of a situation and make thoughtful decisions that ensure no critical factors are missed.

3. Learn from your network

One of the most effective ways to develop leadership skills is by learning from others. Observe how your peers and more experienced leaders make decisions, ask them insightful questions and seek their feedback on your own decisions.

Reflecting on your interactions with them can help you refine your decision-making style and identify areas for growth. It can also help you become more comfortable with ambiguity, risk and uncertainty. The support from your network will boost your confidence and provide much-needed encouragement in times of doubt.

Other things to keep in mind

Leaders in AI-integrated workplaces will need not only strong decision-making skills but also the ability to apply a critical ethical lens.

Artificial intelligence offers many opportunities to accelerate decision-making and improve efficiency. However, the interconnectedness of algorithms, people and data also brings with it complex ethical and sustainability problems.

To avoid the unintended consequences of AI such as algorithmic bias or privacy violations, leaders across all sectors must carefully evaluate the ethical implications of all decisions and ensure they align with principles of fairness and long-term sustainability.

Video *What is AI Ethics?* by IBM Technology
available at <https://youtu.be/aGwYtUzMQUk>

An explanation of AI ethics from IBM Technology.

In technology-dependent workplaces, emotional intelligence becomes a crucial asset. Leaders who are self-aware and in tune with their emotions can pause to make thoughtful, deliberate decisions, instead of reacting impulsively.

Mindfulness practices, such as deep breathing and meditation, can help maintain focus and clarity, particularly in situations of high pressure. A clear and centred mind allows leaders to make decisions that align with ethical standards and the long-term interests of people, the planet and profit.

As you continue to develop your leadership skills, be patient with yourself and remember that leader development is a life-long journey of growth. To help you stay sharp and avoid decision fatigue, prioritize self-care taking time to rest, recharge and reflect.

By practicing these strategies, staying true to your values, and leaning on your network, you'll build the confidence you need to tackle any challenge that comes your way. Embrace the process, take care of yourself and trust that each decision you make brings you closer to becoming the decisive leader you aspire to be.