**Decision Making**

Decision making is an important process that allows individuals to navigate their personal and professional lives. Decision making can range from trivial day choices onto more complex decisions, that can be influenced by personal beliefs, cultural norms, cultural expectations, the social and political environment; as well as the particular circumstances that are present when the choice is made. Decision making is usually the prelude to taking action and therefore affects personal and social interactions.

**Definition:**

The simplest definition for decision-making is that it refers to the “The thought process of selecting a logical choice from the available options”. In essence, it reflects the reality that in our everyday lives there are numerous options available to us in order to achieve smaller or bigger goals. Therefore, one must make decisions regarding the best course of action, that are often based on complex cognitive and social factors.

In more detail, the term decision making also reflects -from a scientific standpoint- the notion that people should a. gather relevant information b. process and analyze that information c. apply reasoning and rational thinking d. make a decision based on facts and data.

Overall, the most complete definition of decision-making is one that combines the two views described above and takes into account both the rational / scientific approach to making choices, as well as, the reality that people often make decisions incorporating non-measurable elements such as trial and error, prior experience, intuition and imaginative thinking.

**Theory of Reference:**

In relation to the above, there are two main categories of decision-making theories. One is heavily reliant on science, statistics, mathematical models and rational reasoning and is called Normative Theories of decision-making (an umbrella term covering multiple theories from various disciplines) and the other one is called Descriptive Theories of decision-making, and the term covers theories that deal primarily with the actual process of decision-making as it is taking place in complex environments. In sum, Normative theories described decision-making as it should be (a rational process) while Descriptive Theories describe decision-making as it actually happens (a complex process with rational and irrational elements present).

For the purpose of this project, a Descriptive Theory of decision-making will be the theory of reference: Prospect Theory. This is a cognitive psychology theory that describes the way people choose between alternatives that involve risk, where the probabilities of outcomes are mostly uncertain. Prospect theory states that people make decisions based on the potential value of losses and gains rather than the final outcome, and that people evaluate these losses and gains using various experiential and cognitive functions.

**Model**

The theory describes the decision processes in two stages: During an initial phase termed editing, outcomes of a decision are ordered according to a certain mental framework. In the second evaluation phase, people behave as if they would compute a value of utility, based on the potential outcomes and their respective probabilities, and then they ultimately make the choice that demonstrates the higher utility.

Prospect theory can be used to explore decision making skills in a variety of settings, with an emphasis on real-life choices and actions rather than the ideal, normative framework that cannot be achieved or observed in day to day professional and social interactions.

**Set of Decision-Making Skills:**

There are numerous Decision-Making skills, some general and some situation specific. For the purpose of this project, the following skills have been identified as key competencies that Youth workers should cultivate and develop:

* **The ability to gather information:** one of the most crucial steps in decision making is being able to gather *accurate and relevant* information regarding the task at hand.

**Observed behaviour:**

* The ability to identify suitable sources of information whether scientific and/or practical.
* The ability to assess data and information in terms of accuracy and validity.
* The ability to assess the source of information in terms of relevancy to the task at hand and correlate multiple pieces of data and information.
* **The ability to identify possible options and solutions:** once all information has been gathered and processed as above, then multiple courses of action and various solution options, will become apparent. This step is important as it allows the individual to consider multiple potential choices and choose the best option for the specified context and group.

**Observed behaviour:**

* The ability to think creatively in identifying multiple options and solutions.
* The ability to synthesize information effectively so that numerous options become available.
* **Analytical Skills:** once multiple options have been identified, each one should be assessed and analyzed in terms of its attributes. This becomes possible through *problem solving skills, management skills, interpersonal skills, analytical tools (Swot, Brainstorming).*

**Observed behaviour:**

* Problem Solving: The ability to solve problems using the available methods and tools.
* Use of Management Tools: The ability to apply management tools and methods.
* Adequate and efficient interpersonal skills: the ability to communicate effectively, individually or in a group setting.
* Use of Analytical tools: the ability to check if there are activities linked with this point.
* The ability to use brainstorming
* **Selecting the best option:** once all the available options have been identified and analyzed, the choice must be made, one which one is the most efficient for the task at hand. Multiple factors may affect that decision which should be made with consideration and careful intent.

**Observed behaviour:**

* The ability to weigh different option,
* The ability to estimate and anticipate future outcomes
* The ability to take into account multiple external and internal factors that may include social, political, historical, cultural and personal frameworks.
* **Evaluation & Review:** the skill necessary in order to assess progress in each step, evaluate and take remedial actions when needed.

**Observed behaviour:**

* The ability to apply formal or informal evaluation and review frameworks to decisions made.
* the ability to offer alternative courses of action
* the ability to consider changes and adaptations in order to maximize efficiency in decision-making.
* **Creativity & Imagination:** the skills necessary in order to come up with innovative, out-of-the-box solutions to problems and situations; as well as the ability to imagine and anticipate potential outcomes and future developments.

**Observed behaviour:**

* The ability to apply creative ways for solving problems.
* the ability to proceed with creative solutions that may be innovative and not used before and are relevant to the individual or the group.
* the ability to use imagination effectively in order to assess options, anticipate outcomes and ultimately selecting the best option available
* The ability to brainstorm