Welcome Friends to UPSC Mantra!!!

Decision making is an important aspect in civil services career. Being a civil servant you are expected to take practical and prompt decisions taking into account resources at hand and different situations. In new pattern of Civil Services examination UPSC has included decision making and problem solving in Paper II. Through this UPSC is checking the decision making and problem solving ability of a candidate.

At UPSC Mantra we have included approach and analysis of decision making and problem solving ability. This will give a student complete coverage of decision making section. Also we have designed practice questions which will give practice and approach to solve the questions related to decision making.

Finally at UPSC Mantra we have designed different sectional tests on decision making and problem solving ability section by which a student can check his preparedness. This newsletter gives you a glimpse of our decision making module.

Best wishes,
UPSC Mantra Team

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Decision Making and Problem Solving

Decision making and problem solving are critically important skills for administrators in various fields such as planning, emergency management, etc. For example, as an administrator, your ability to identify current and potential problems and to make sound, timely decisions before and during an emergency can literally affect the lives and well-being of the local citizenry. Your decisions can impact the ability of response agencies to do their jobs and can make the difference in how quickly the community is able to recover from an event.

**Problem** is a situation or condition of people or the organization that will exist in the future, and that is considered undesirable by members of the organization.

**Decision** A conscious choice among alternative courses of action, to tackle the problem and to create a desirable future.

Simple Steps

Being involved in administrative positions will expose you to problems and opportunities that arise every day. It is of extreme importance to be able to make decisions that are good for all within a reasonable
amount of time. There are a few steps that can be followed to help facilitate the decision making process. The goal of decision making is to select the best alternative that is appropriate for the situation and make sure that it is used successfully.

Identify the Problem

The first step is to adequately identify the problem. This is sometimes the hardest part. Here is an example to illustrate: You find that your employees are quitting soon after they start. The problem behind this could be such things as the fact that you do not pay them well, the working conditions are bad, or that competition is offering better jobs. It is important to look at the whole picture and possibilities to determine the problem at hand.

Problems can be identified and brought to light in various ways. Usually administrators do various forms of planning and goal setting. When plans and goals are not reached, this can signify a problem. A problem is a situation or condition of people or the organization that will exist in the future, and that is considered undesirable by members of the organization.

Administration may have a problem brought to them. It is common for a lower level staff person to bring a problem to an administrator that has the authority to deal with it. Keep in mind that many problems can be hidden and may be employees do not want them to come to light. Problems can be brought into light anonymously or by a group of concerned individuals. Some problems are routine and are likely to come up. These problems are surely easier to solve than complex problems, which have multiple pieces and ramifications.

Generate Alternative Solutions

Once a problem or opportunity is brought out into the open, it is time to generate some alternative solutions. This process is typically referred to as brainstorming. Brainstorming is used in various daily activities and allows free thought to spiral and rebound off of itself. Brainstorming can also be done within the group setting, which can be explained by the phrase, “two heads are better than one”. Come up with ideas that are more rational and standard, as well as ideas that are innovative and bizarre. There are many amazing developments that have occurred that at one time were unreasonable. Consider things such as space travel and people who dreamed of becoming professional sports players. These all started as possible courses of action. Humans have the tendency to focus on ideas that are easy for them to come up with. More common ideas tend to come out first. Brainstorming is just the tip of the iceberg!

Evaluate Alternatives

After all of your ideas are out, then it is time to analyze and tear them apart. At this point you want to make sure that the ideas are feasible. All decisions should be safe, legal, and abide by reasonable guidelines. The project must not take too many resources such as time, people, or money. Be able to evaluate your thoughts without bias. It is a good idea to get feedback on ideas from additional people because nobody wants to admit that their ideas are not good. The solution that you select should be the best solution
possible. In any given situation there are many ideas that could work, but ultimately one solution should address all of the factors with less risk. Keep in mind long-term effects as well as the short-term effects. You do not want to have to resolve the same problem a year later. How will your solution affect others? Is it moral, ethical, and reasonably fair? Do technological, governmental, or political factors have an effect on your decision?

Choose and Implement the Best Solution

Go ahead and implement and evaluate a solution. This is where the rubber hits the road. At step four it is possible to realize that your solution is not useful and go with another plan. Implementation has challenges. There are situations that you won’t know the outcome until you try to solve the problem. For instance, will farmers really agitate if you do not give them more compensation for the land acquired, or are they just threatening? Some solutions will also trigger another problem. Many people resist change as a whole because it is out of the ordinary. Some people are creatures of habit and prefer to do the same old things. Many problems have risk involved and the amount of risk that is willing to be taken on can vary in different situations.

A large part of implementing is making sure that the solution is successful and ongoing. Enough people need to have sufficient knowledge, resources, and authority to test the solution on a regular basis. The solution that is being put to use may not always be successful or may not have been implemented correctly. A common misconception is that problem solving is a one-time event. Problem solving is a continuous process of action as new problems arise every day. However, keeping a few steps in mind about problem solving can provide a good framework for making responsible decisions.

It can be summarized as follows:

Identify the problem
This step includes delineating the problem parameters such as:
- a. What is happening (and not happening).
- b. Who is involved.
- c. What is at stake.

Explore alternatives
This step includes two parts:
- a. Generating alternatives through brainstorming, surveys, or discussion groups.
- b. Evaluating alternatives.

Select an alternative

Implement the solution
This step includes five parts:
- a. Develop an action plan.
- b. Determine objectives.
- c. Identify needed resources.
- d. Build a plan.
- e. Implement the plan.

Evaluate the situation
This step includes two parts:
- b. Evaluating the results.

At UPSC Mantra you will get detailed analysis of decision making and problem solving section as shown above. Join UPSC Mantra to avail this!!!
Decision Making and Problem Solving (Examples)

Following are some examples on decision making and problem solving from UPSC Mantra. Test your preparation right now!!

1. “When faced with a big decision, it's usually a waste of time and money to seek out too many different opinions and viewpoints from all the groups -- shareholders, employees, etc -- that might be affected by it.”
   (a) I agree
   (b) I disagree
   (c) It depends on the situation
   (d) I don't know

2. In a particular case your superior is not following procedures properly and he also expects you should bypass procedures as well. What will you do?
   (a) oppose him
   (b) do whatever he says
   (c) convey the information to his and your superior
   (d) neglect him

3. When making decisions do you try to remain objective and consider the facts or do you allow your feelings and the effect of the decision of others to influence your decision?
   (a) I remain objective.
   (b) I consider the effect on others but it doesn't affect my decision.
   (c) I don't like to consider too much of anything when I'm making a decision.
   (d) I allow my feelings and the effect of this decision on others shape my decision.

4. You are on mobile patrol when you receive the report of a robbery at a bank. A handgun has been used to threaten staff and large quantity of cash stolen. You are in the next street and respond immediately. As you enter the street you see two masked men leaving the post office running towards a getaway car. What do you do?
   (a) Attempt to arrest the robbers. After all, a serious offence has been committed.
   (b) Put the police car across their path and prevent their escape. If they get away from the scene they may never be arrested.
   (c) Stop the police car immediately and observe the robbers.
   (d) Start firing at the robbers

5. Goal setting is necessary –
   (a) For an individual
   (b) For a group of employees
   (c) On a organization level
   (d) All of the above

6. Consider the following statements.
   1. Employee evaluations in general are unproductive in ultimately leading to improved performance.
   2. Giving people incentives is much more effective.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?
   (a) 1 only
   (b) 2 only
   (c) Both 1 and 2
   (d) Neither 1 nor 2

7. Which of the following behaviors will likely lead to misinterpretation?
   i. You assume that you have similarities with everyone
ii. You assume that speaking the same language removes all language barriers
iii. You interpret direct eye contact as a sign of openness and honesty

(a) i only
(b) i and ii only
(c) i and iii only
(d) i, ii and iii

8. You have recently taken over as the administrative head in a government department. You have a team of 10 who report directly to you. Ajay and Ritwik are two employees with degrees from coveted institutes and with an experience of 8 and 10 years respectively. Both of them are known to be committed and non-political workers. Others have less than 5 years of experience and are average performers.

You called all the members for the meeting on fourth day of your joining and discussed what your plans are for meeting ever increasing efficiency targets. Meeting seemed to have gone well with you having defined action plan and time lines.

You start noticing after a few days that while all other members have improved in performance; Ajay and Ritwik seem to be listless and uninterested. They seem to have lost interest in the work.

What do you think could be the reason?
(a) Ajay and Ritwik didn’t accept you as a Boss
(b) The action plan drafted by you had some problem and they didn’t like it well
(c) They might have attitude issue
(d) Ajay and Ritwik are competent workers and don’t require detailed directions.

Like this at UPSC Mantra you will get real time questions on decision making ability which will help you to judge yourself.

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We hope information in this newsletter has given you panoramic view of UPSCMantra.

For registration contact our helpdesk on 020-26819617 to 20 or log on to www.upscmantra.com

See you next week...