



# THE DECISION MAKING FRAMEWORK - DMF

Habits free up energy to allow you to engage with the rest of your life more efficiently. Developing the habit of using a structured analytical **D**ecision **M**aking **F**ramework to assess problems and develop constructive approaches for resolution leads to better decisions, with less stress. This is one example of a framework, and you will have your own views about what is effective for you. Be specific and analytical in developing the habit; break the process down into smaller steps, and adjust your environment to make it easier for you to adopt the new behavior. Remind yourself to run through each step to assure you've considered the whole situation before acting.

## Part One: Opening Up the Problem

1. What are the issues?
  - Can you articulate or identify the real problem? The potential consequences?
  - What is at stake? How urgent or critical is the situation?
2. What rules or regulations apply?
  - Which institutional policies, regulations, unspoken rules, or laws apply?
  - Is there an applicable code of ethics?
  - What are the familial or community expectations?
3. What questions do you have; what data do you need?
  - What is the context? What information do you have and what do you need to make a good decision?
  - What data would shed more light on this issue? Where are they?
  - Who else has an interest in the situation? How might they interpret what has happened?
  - What if your judgment is wrong?

## Part Two: Moving Towards Action

4. Who, and what, are the resources you have available to you?
  - What were you taught? What does your internal compass say?
  - Are there university resources, offices, or staff who could assist you in this situation?
  - Do you have a reliable confidant or mentor with whom you can consult?
5. What are your options?
  - Who is affected by each option?
  - What are the likely consequences of each option, for each party?
  - Are there any preventative measures you can take to address predictable negative consequences?
6. What will you do? What will you say? How (exactly) will you say it?
  - What is your goal? Do you have a plan of action and timeline for execution?
  - What is the option that best serves a fair and just outcome?
  - What is your personal script, the words you will use, to convey your decision?

## Building Habits

Is the **DMF**, or a similar consistent analytical approach to problems, a habit of yours? Habits are behaviors that we repeat so often they become second nature; you don't have to think each time about what you will do or how you will approach a situation. Habits reduce cognitive load by putting basic items into your "auto-pilot" systems; they help us focus so we can make important choices more effectively. Analytical decision-making can strengthen your choices and help to assure that their consequences are ones you have chosen, thoughtfully, consciously and purposefully. Engage both your rational and the emotional resources and build strong habits for making decisions.



Let's apply the **DMF** to an example scenario.

As School Chair, you have recently been advised by several students and several trusted faculty members that an assistant professor who is coming to the end of her first contract has been giving significantly higher grades to students who assist her in a variety of matters unrelated to her classes (i.e., doing errands, buying groceries, house sitting, etc.). The assistant professor denies these allegations. What should you do now?

Begin by *identifying the issues* at hand.

- Questions of academic integrity; possible capricious grading
- Confidentiality for the assistant professor and her future
- Protection for the student(s) that have been affected, and any others possibly affected over time
- Damage to the reputation of the department/institution depending on subsequent actions taken

What *rules or regulations* apply?

- Ethical rules of conduct, fair play
- Institution-specific regulations or rules

What *questions* do you need to ask?

- Are the allegations true? How reliable/credible are the student allegations? How you can assess accurately?
- How can you protect those involved, whether the professor (if allegations are untrue), students (if true), etc?
- Can you simply avoid problems by not reappointing the professor?
- What pertinent documentation or evidence might exist?
- Have other students have come forward with similar allegations?
- How many classes have the students coming forward taken with this assistant professor?
- Who might have more information on the matter?
- Where can you find all the institutional policies that might apply in this situation and how to follow them?
- Who can you turn to for confidential advice that conforms to institutional policies and standards?

What *resources* can assist you in navigating this situation?

- Appropriate institutional offices: possibilities include dean's office, provost's office, HR, etc.
- Potential institutional staff who manage compliance-related HR issues
- Departmental faculty or staff who have experience with sensitive faculty/student matters
- Executive, advisory, or personnel committees in department, college, or campus
- Assistant professor's former or current mentors for advice, insight on her interactions with students over time
- Data on the grade distributions for the assistant professor's past classes

What *options* do you have?

- Making a decision on your own
- Asking others to investigate and recommend a course of action
- Arrange for examination of the grades with the possibility of changing them

*What will you do?*

Consider carefully how each of these options will affect the people involved in this situation. The assistant professor, her students, the department, the institution ... all will be affected by your choices. Addressing this matter in a systematic way can help you avoid assumptions or getting ahead of yourself before you have full information. It can help you to consider more options and make a more informed decision in the final step. It can also allow you to envision, with greater clarity, the consequences that might flow from any of your actions for various parties involved, and act with thoughtful deliberation.

