

1. Introduction

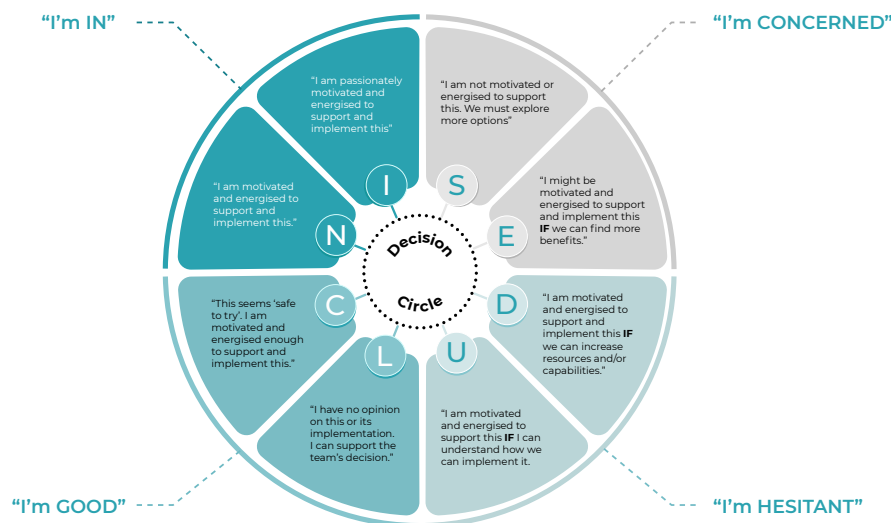
2. Challenges in Decision-Making

Teams often encounter decision-making challenges that can impede progress and collaboration.

- A common problem is the misalignment of goals and priorities, causing team members to lack a shared vision, which results in conflicting approaches.
- Insufficient communication regarding a decision can lead to misunderstandings, leave certain concerns unaddressed, and hinder effective collaboration during implementation.
- Additionally, different levels of engagement and commitment within the team can lead to a lack of engagement, creating friction when implementing the decision.
- Unexpressed reservations or concealed concerns may also persist, undermining trust and clarity.

3. The Decision Circle Framework

The Decision Circle Framework utilises a collaborative Solutions Focus Approach, promoting more inclusive and effective decision-making. It encourages every participant to share their thoughts and insights through engaging conversations. These conversations clarify individual viewpoints and foster collaboration, thereby paving the way for more effective proposals.



2. How the Decision Circle Framework Works

1. The Four Quadrants – Levels of Support

The framework consists of four primary quadrants arranged in a circle. This circular arrangement avoids the “up” and “down” metaphor, which can imply “good” and “bad.” Each quadrant reflects different levels of motivation and energy, “buy-in,” toward a proposal:

“I’m IN” (Supportive & Motivated)

People in this quadrant are strongly to passionately motivated and energised to implement the proposal. Still, elicit the value in it and how they might enhance it.

- If the proposal or concept affects everyone or requires their support, the team must ultimately determine whether it is IN or GOOD. Strong support does not imply complete understanding. The team should establish the reasons for I & N’s support and elicit how they might strengthen the proposal and its implementation.

“I’m GOOD” (Neutral, but Supportive)

These individuals either believe the change is “safe to try” or that it has no impact or benefit for them. Although their support is not enthusiastic, it does not pose an obstacle.

- Teams should ensure neutral individuals understand the concept and its impact, so they do not later resist changes unforeseen to them.

“I’m HESITANT” (Sceptical & Uncertain)

Individuals here are either unmotivated or unsure about the impact of the change. They might support it if it satisfies specific conditions (e.g., increased resources, better understanding).

- Teams should address misunderstandings and explore ways to enhance the explanation of the proposal to ensure a broader understanding.

“I’m CONCERNED” (Unmotivated & Reluctant)

These individuals may be strong dissenters. If key implementers are in this quadrant, it could cause the decision to stall. When people are in this quadrant, it indicates the need for adjustments or further discussion before proceeding.

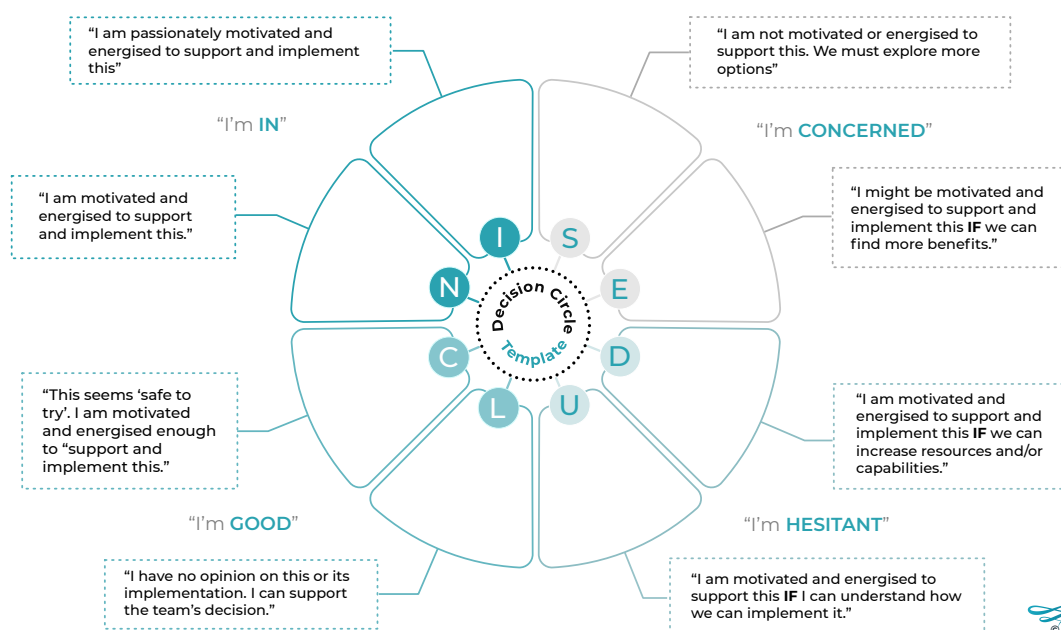
- Teams should elicit concerns, explore more benefits and co-create alternatives to gain buy-in.

The Eight Stepping Stones – a starting point for conversation

The Stepping Stone metaphor aims to facilitate progress around the Circle as the team shares information and builds understanding. This sense of movement is essential. It conveys to participants that their starting point is not fixed; it is a valuable first step toward making a better decision and creating a sustainable change.

The Stepping Stones extend the typical decision response from three positions, “Yes”, “No”, or “Maybe”, to eight positions, enabling the team to get a broader understanding of different viewpoints.

- Each stone symbolises a distinct position or perspective on the topic of conversation.
- The descriptions of each Stepping Stone encourage participants to clarify and express their starting positions in a Quadrant, thereby increasing engagement in dialogue.
- By surfacing these perspectives early, teams can prioritise the most impactful discussions, such as clarifying information, addressing resource gaps, or exploring additional benefits and alternatives.
- The word ‘INCLUDES’ encompasses the Stepping Stones and indicates that all opinions and diverse perspectives are acknowledged, signifying an inclusive decision-making process.
- Using letters, not numbers, implies no hierarchy; each stone is an equal and valid choice for considering the change's feasibility.



2. Using the Decision Circle Framework

1. Present the Proposal or Idea

Clearly outline the proposal's or idea's purpose, scope, and expected outcomes.

- Ensure everyone understands the who, what, why, where, when, and how of the proposal, along with its benefits, etc.

2. Conduct an Initial Poll: Choose Your Segment

Invite everyone to express their response to the idea or proposal by choosing an initial position on a Decision Circle Stepping Stone.

- Physically, they can achieve this by standing or sitting on a Stepping Stone. We recommend avoiding the use of a desk, as it can create a barrier between people. However, if a desk is necessary, they may utilise a marker, such as a touchstone. Virtually, they can place a marker on a graphic representation of the Stepping Stones.

3. Explore and Appreciate

Each person states what they **value**, even slightly, about the proposal.

- This step emphasises solution-focused thinking by highlighting positive or promising elements.
- Continue recording these points until the team understands **everything** people find helpful or potentially beneficial in the proposal.

4. Explore Enhancements

Each person shares any modifications, conditions, or resources that would **enhance** this proposal for them, even slightly.

- Focus on practical ideas that could address concerns or increase motivation.
- Continue documenting these points until you have collected all possible enhancements.

5. Synthesise & Modify

1. Select enhancements to add

As a team, decide which suggestions to incorporate.

- This may involve combining multiple ideas into one cohesive plan.

2. Revise the proposal

Adjust the original proposal to reflect the agreed enhancements.

- If more time is needed, consider **pausing** here to do further research, find alternatives or consult before finalising the proposition.

6. Re-Poll & Decide

1. Present the revised proposal

Restate the updated proposal, highlighting the changes made and the reasons behind them.

2. Poll for agreement

Invite everyone to share their (possibly new) position on the Circle.

3. Verify that there is sufficient support to move forward.

- If Still Not Enough Support:

4. Refine the proposal or Pause

- Continue to refine the proposal based on additional input - OR
- Pause/Shelve:
 - If the team decides to collect more information, to take longer to revise the proposal or to set the proposal aside, clarify next steps.

4. Final Reflection: Learning for the Future

After making a final decision (to proceed, pause, or shelve), take time as a team to reflect on the **decision-making process** itself.

1. Individually, rate the process:

Use a scale of 1-10, where '10' means the process was flawless.

2. Document Lessons Learned:

Recognise what went well in the process (e.g., open communication, and emphasis on strengths) and what people would notice if the team were one step along the scale towards "10", e.g., more information would be available in the meeting.

3. Apply these insights to future decisions

Keep them accessible so they can inform and streamline future decision-making efforts.

5. What Makes the Decision Circle Framework Effective?

- **Known starting position:** Identifying each person's position on the stepping stones offers valuable insights that are challenging to ascertain from a simple "Yes," "No," or "Maybe" response.
- **Solution-Focused Approach:** By first identifying what individuals value, you build upon existing strengths and direct attention away from problems. Next, you constructively address the areas that could be improved, focusing on what people want.
- **Collaboration and Engagement:** Every step encourages all stakeholders to participate, creating a shared sense of ownership over the final decision.
- **Flexible and Iterative:** The team can continuously cycle through polling, discussing, and modifying as often as necessary until they achieve sufficient alignment.
- **Clarity and Transparency:** The positions, reasoning, and proposed changes are clear to everyone, which minimises potential misunderstandings and resistance.

Overleaf is a larger-scale image for printing.

