

Chapter - 2

Conceptual Framework

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The basic function of research is to provide a framework of concept and understanding, within which people build comprehension of the concept/content. Conceptual framework is the structure of the content that the researcher is researching. It implies the researcher's understanding of the concept, the relevant information and other aspects of the content accumulated and created by the researcher for providing lucid content clarity. The researcher has narrowed down the scope of his study to two of the ten life skills provided by WHO. They are Decision Making and Problem Solving.

The researcher has the following reasons to select the two Life Skills.

- Everyone faces Problems in one's life and one needs to address them squarely.
- Every problem has a plethora of contributing factors. One needs to find the most valid reasons responsible for each contributing factor.
- Well informed persons can take right decisions while addressing those problems.
- Good decisions lead to better problem solving capacity
- Practice leads to practical and comprehensive judgement.
- Wrong decisions can create problems.

2.2 Concept of Decision Making

An individual in his/her life time is called upon to take innumerable decisions in different situations. Further, the pre-requisite to the decision making process is a problem/situation that offers at least two alternatives. Taking no decision is also a decision. Pondering over some of the definitions may enable one comprehend the concept of decision making.

World Health Organization (1997) defined it as “a mental activity in which out of all the available alternatives, the most appropriate alternative is selected as a decision.” In the words of Moshal (2009), “Decision-making is a process of judging various

options and narrowing down choices to a suitable one.” Shull, Delberg and Cummings have defined decision making as “a conscious and human process involving both individuals and social phenomena based on factual and value premises which conclude with a choice of one behavioral activity from among one or more alternatives with the intention of moving towards a desired state of affairs”

For Kreitner, decision making “is a process of identifying and choosing an alternative course of action in a manner appropriate to the demand of the situation.”

Jeff (2005) stated that decisions may be good or bad and listed out some of the characteristics mentioned below.

- **Good Decisions** offer realistic expectations, allow for flexibility and modification, are consistent with your goals and values and relate directly to the problem.
- **Bad decisions** are often made when an individual doesn’t analyze all the necessary information, feels rushed into making a decision, makes a decision for somebody else, doesn’t have control over the process and is not clear about why he/she needs to make that decision.

2.3 Types of Decisions

Although people take decisions, their significance and nature differ. Some decisions are made by them to solve repetitive problems; others only occasionally to solve non-repetitive problems. Similarly, sometimes they make decisions at the individual level and in some situations in a group. Tripathi and Reddy (1995) classified decisions as below:

1) Programmed And Non-Programmed Decisions

Programmed decisions are routine and repetitive in nature. They are made on a regular basis. They refer to decisions to solve problems or tackle those situations that require the application of a predetermined set of procedures, techniques and rules, such as for hiring employees, purchase of raw material, payment of bills etc. They are made with regard to routine and recurring problems.

Non-programmed decisions are made with respect to problems that are unique, non-repetitive and about which the required information is not available. Such decisions are made under new and unfamiliar circumstances and it demands experience, creativity, innovativeness and use of judgment to make such decisions. Examples of non-programmed decisions in organization may be related to opening a new branch, introduction of a new product or service etc.

2) **Strategic and Operational Decisions**

strategic decisions normally do have long-range implications because they are tenable for longer period. Such decisions require more resources, judgment and skills. The main characteristic of strategic decisions is that once they are taken, it is neither desirable nor necessary to withdraw from them. For example, an organization has to select a product, or has to switch to a new technology, select a new location. Strategic decisions possess some of the characteristics of non-programmed decisions. These decisions are made under the conditions of 'risk'. The decision maker may not be sure of the outcome of their decisions.

Operational decisions are concerned with routine and repetitive matters arising again and again. They do not require much judgment and skill because they are related to the implementation of strategic decisions. Operational decisions are more specific, functional and have short-term implications. Since they are of routine in nature, certain established guidelines, procedures and rules may be followed to make such decisions. For example, in organizations strategic decisions of selecting products and process have to be implemented by making many other operational decisions such as production planning, quality control, cost control etc.

3) **Individual and Group Decisions**

Decisions that are made by an individual by using skill and judgment, set procedures, techniques and rules, are known as **individual decisions**. To make such decisions they require relevant information. However, the ultimate responsibility and authority for making decision lies on the individual.

Group decisions are those that are made by two or more person jointly. In order to make such decisions, persons come together and deliberate over the problem. They express their viewpoint on different aspects of the problem and

finally, by using their collective wisdom, they solve it. For example, the decision of product selection may be arrived at by joint efforts of the productions manager, marketing manager and manager of the research and development department. In a group decisions, the final authority to take decisions is vested in the group itself rather than in an individual. Group decisions help in implementation and seeking more co-operation and acceptance from subordinates.

Advantages of Group Decisions

- Group members mostly accept decision made by the group, and help implement those decisions more readily.
- Decisions made by a group reduce the amount of coordination necessary to implement the decision.
- Because many individuals are involved, more data and more information can be brought to bear on the decision and there are lesser chances of lopsided decision.
- Participation of subordinates or other members in decision-making serves as a motivation for them because they get involved in the problem. If the problem is solved the need for self-fulfillment is satisfied.
- Group decision making represents the cooperative nature. It is considered more important to create team spirit among the group members and define their role and get maximum contribution from them.

Limitations of Group Decision Making

- Group takes longer than individuals to make decisions.
- It encourages indecisiveness and compromise on the problem.
- Inordinate delay in decision-making is also marked in group decision. Because of long discussion, it ultimately reduces the effectiveness of the decision making process.

If advantages are utilized and disadvantages avoided, groups are better decision-making units. Further, some more types that can be included in the

list encompass long-term decision, immediate decisions, short-term decisions and so on.

2.4 Decision Making Process

Before moving towards the rigorous process of decision making, it is essential that decisions are to be taken for betterment of individual. Anderson et. al. (2008) prescribed several steps that one may implement in the process of making decisions. They involve the following steps.

(1) Identify and define the problem.

The process of decision-making begins by discovering the problem. Identification of that problem situation represents the need to locate the problem on which a decision is to be taken. After identification of the problem, attempts are made to define the problem as clearly as possible. It is generally believed that a well-defined problem is half solved.

(2) Determine the set of alternative solutions.

The next step is to develop alternative solutions related to the situation. Here alternatives are developed by using previous knowledge, experience, expertise, creative thinking and innovativeness.

(3) Determine the criterion.

The next step in the process of decision-making involves determine the criterion that will be used to evaluate alternatives. It may be single-criterion decision problems or multi-criteria decision problems.

(4) Evaluate the alternatives.

After determining the criterion, it is mandatory that precaution with reference to the selection of an alternative is conducted. The present step involves evaluation of each alternative thoroughly evaluated in detail.

(5) Choose an alternative.

This stage calls for making the final choice by selecting a suitable alternative. This is done by narrowing down the choice to a few alternatives.

To conclude, one can state that decision making refers to the selection of a probable or rather suitable substitute among the available substitutes. One major aspect is the awareness of the different situations, concepts, issues etc.

2.5 Concept of Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving is a term that is widely applied in science as the process of moving towards a goal when the path to that goal is uncertain. The ability to solve problems is a basic life skill essential to understand the realities of life and overcome them in a lucid and effective manner. Basically, problem solving is the process of reasoning to solution using more than simple application of previously learned procedure. When problem solving is creative, idea or products produced during the problem solving are original and appropriate.

Problem solving process is not linear and does not strictly follow any particular rule. Structured approaches often miss the whole point of creative problem solving. Because of how human mind works to create new ideas, pupils need to apply, thinking that is critical, systematic, analytic and vertical as well as one that is creative, intuitive, divergent and lateral in their problem solving.

One should learn to view ‘problems’ as opportunities for growth and development. Overcoming difficulties strengthens the character while developing new coping skills. If one is not moving, interacting or encountering problems, one is not progressing. Progress is born out of creative conflict. Problem solving is a skill that can be learned by most people. If it is not part of their natural make up, it can be acquired by training and practice. This may take effort on their part and a readjustment in the way they perceive life and things around them. However, it will open the door to more opportunities and solutions and hence a successful career. Good problem solvers usually have self-esteem, competence and a responsible attitude of decision making.

Problem solving, in the words of Kendra Cherry, “is a mental process that involves discovering, analyzing and solving problems. The ultimate goal of problem-solving is to overcome obstacles and find a solution that best resolves the issue.” Steps that can be observed in Problem solving as given by Kendra Cherry are as follows.

- 1) **Identifying the Problem:** The first step in the process of problem solving is that of identifying the problem that an individual has encountered. Proper and scientific identification of the problem make the problems solver aware of possible solutions and the symptoms of the problem.

- 2) **Defining the Problem:** After the problem has been identified, it is important to fully define the problem so that it can be solved.
- 3) **Forming a Strategy:** Once the full understanding of the problem is acquired, the next step in problem solving is to develop a strategy to solve the problem.
- 4) **Organizing Information:** Before coming up with a solution, there is need to organize the available information. What is known about the problem, what is not? More information prepares an individual to come up with an accurate solution.
- 5) **Allocating Resources:** Before beginning to solve a problem, it is mandatory to determine its priority. If it is an important problem, it is worth allocating more resources to solve and if it is a fairly unimportant problem, spending too much of resources into coming up with a solution is of no use.
- 6) **Monitoring Progress:** Effective problem-solvers tend to monitor their progress as they work towards a solution. If they are not making good progress toward reaching their goal, they reevaluate their approach or look for new strategies.
- 7) **Evaluating the Results:** After a solution has been reached, it is important to evaluate the results to determine if it is the best possible solution to the problem. This evaluation might be immediate, such as checking the results of a math problem to ensure the answer is correct, or it can be delayed, such as evaluating the success of a therapy program after several months of treatment.

2.6 Conclusion

To conclude, the investigator would like to state that both the skills i.e. decision making and problem solving are of great importance in life. The development of these essential skills is accompanied by development of other life skills including critical/analytical/creative/reflective thinking and stimulating individuals to attain higher order thinking skills may lead to the development of individuals and thereby a mature society.