



Higher National Unit specification

General information for centres

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

Unit code: F8KA 38

Unit purpose: This Unit is designed to enable candidates to critically analyse decision making in an organisation and, on the basis of this analysis, make proposals to enhance decision making in the organisation.

On completion of the Unit the candidate should be able to:

- 1 Critically analyse decision making in an organisation.
- 2 Propose actions to enhance decision making in an organisation.

Credit points and level: 2 HN credits at SCQF level 11: (16 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 11*)

**SCQF credit points are used to allocate credit to qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Each qualification in the Framework is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at an SCQF level. There are 12 SCQF levels, ranging from Access 1 to Doctorates.*

Recommended prior knowledge and skills: Candidates should normally be experienced managers with a detailed knowledge and understanding of contemporary organisation processes and procedures. They should be fully aware of how these apply to organisations with which they are familiar and of the challenges which these organisations face. Candidates should also possess well-developed research, communication and analytical skills and be able to demonstrate prior achievement at SCQF level 10 or equivalent.

Core Skills: There are opportunities in this Unit to develop all components of the Core Skills of *Communication* and *Problem Solving* at SCQF level 6. There is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skills components.

Context for delivery: If this Unit is delivered as part of a Group Award, it is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within the subject area of the Group Award to which it contributes.

The Unit is one of two Units which make up the *Professional Development Award in Organisational Ethics and Decision Making* at SCQF level 11. It is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within this Group Award.

Assessment: This Unit can be assessed holistically by means of a report based on the candidate's own experience in an organisation. Candidates can be given a brief for the report which should be presented in a recognised format.

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

Unit code: F8KA 38

The sections of the Unit stating the Outcomes, Knowledge and/or Skills, and Evidence Requirements are mandatory.

Outcome 1

Critically analyse decision making in an organisation

Knowledge and/or Skills

- ◆ Theories, concepts and models of decision making
- ◆ Research on decision making
- ◆ Intended and actual outcomes of decision making
- ◆ Organisational, socio-political and cultural factors

Outcome 2

Propose actions to enhance decision making in an organisation

Knowledge and/or Skills

- ◆ Organisational objectives and constraints
- ◆ Organisational culture, values and belief systems
- ◆ Efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE UNIT

Candidates must provide evidence which covers all Knowledge and Skills items from both Outcomes to show that they can critically analyse the decision making in an organisation and propose actions which will enhance decision making in the organisation. The decision making must be ones which relate to significant decisions which managers are required to make in a specified organisation.

In carrying out the critical analysis, candidates must show that they can:

- ◆ select and critically engage with relevant and valid theories, concepts and models relating to decision making and apply these in a meaningful way
- ◆ identify and conceptualise the main components of decision making and indicate the inter-relationships between these components
- ◆ provide a rationale to justify their choice of theories, concepts and models of decision making
- ◆ compare and contrast the intended outcomes of decision making with the actual outcomes and provide a reasoned justification for any discrepancies
- ◆ critically take into account relevant organisational and current socio-political and cultural factors which may have an impact on decision making
- ◆ draw conclusions from their critical analysis which are directly linked to the components of the analysis outlined in the preceding five bullet points

Higher National Unit specification: statement of standards (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

Candidates must also demonstrate that they can propose valid and realistic actions which could enhance decision making in the organisation. In making their proposals, candidates must show that they can:

- ◆ make proposals which can be justified by the conclusions of their critical analysis
- ◆ make proposals which are consistent with the objectives of the organisation and take account of any constraints faced by the organisation
- ◆ make a judgement on the likely success of their proposals with reference to the likely effect of the proposals on the efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity of decision making in the organisation
- ◆ support their analysis and proposals with valid references to research on decision making in organisations

Candidates must also show some originality and creativity in the way in which they carry out their critical analysis or in the proposals that they make.

ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES FOR THE UNIT

For this Unit, candidates could be asked to submit a theory informed report on decision making within an organisation. The organisation on which the report is based should be one which is known to the candidate and may well be the organisation where the candidate is employed.

The report should adopt a critical perspective and be presented in a suitable format and referenced using a recognised system. It is likely to be in the region of 3,500 words long excluding sections such as summary, appendices and bibliography. The report could be supplemented by oral questions and/or combined with a presentation by the candidate to ensure all aspects of the Evidence Requirements are fully met.

Assessment for this Unit can be undertaken independently or combined with *Organisational Ethics* (SCQF level 11).

Administrative Information

Unit code: F8KA 38
Unit title: Organisational Decision Making
Superclass category: AF
Original date of publication: August 2009
Version: 01

History of changes:

Version	Description of change	Date

Source: SQA

© Scottish Qualifications Authority 2009

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part for educational purposes provided that no profit is derived from reproduction and that, if reproduced in part, the source is acknowledged.

SQA acknowledges the valuable contribution that Scotland's colleges have made to the development of Higher National qualifications.

Additional copies of this Unit specification can be purchased from the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Please contact the Customer Contact Centre for further details, telephone 0845 279 1000.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

This part of the Unit specification is offered as guidance. The support notes are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this Unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 80 hours.

Guidance on the content and context for this Unit

This Unit is intended for individuals who are in a position to influence the strategic direction of an organisation or a significant part of an organisation. Candidates will probably, therefore, be in a senior management position or have realistic expectations of taking up such a post in the very near future. Candidates should be managers who are seeking to enhance and develop their skills at a level commensurate with their position within the organisation.

This Unit can be delivered on a stand-alone basis. However it is one of two Units which make up the *Professional Development Award in Organisational Ethics and Decision Making* at SCQF level 11. The other is Organisational Ethics which concentrates on analysing ethical dilemmas and evaluating possible responses to them. The focus of this Unit is analysing decision making in an organisation and making proposals which will enhance the way in which the organisation makes decisions which are of significance to it. This enhancement can be seen in terms of better outcomes from decision making as well as the efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity of decision making, including the processes by which decisions are made. In many respects the two are closely related. Many key decisions in organisations are influenced by ethical dilemmas and these ethical issues may persist after a decision has been made. Many publicly funded organisations, for example, may have to make decisions which could impact on civil liberties or personal privacy. One example could be storage and transfer of confidential personal information.

Both Units emphasise critical analysis and evaluation. However, they are both applied Units in that candidates are expected to make use of their own experience as managers while undertaking the analysis and evaluation. Both Units, therefore, involve the synthesis of theoretical ideas with specific organisational contexts. In addition, candidates will be expected to reflect on how the analysis and evaluation can guide and inform their work as managers.

Where the Unit is delivered separately, candidates who focus on ethical decisions may require some background in ethical practices.

Candidates undertaking this Unit will be expected to work autonomously and to undertake a detailed and analytical investigation into current thinking and research within the field of study. Candidates will be expected to adopt a critical approach to current thinking and research.

Decision making in organisations can be complex. The situation is often further complicated by the existence of organisational procedures (eg for taking what are considered to be routine decisions) but which may not always apply to all situations. In addition, the Outcome of decisions may well be affected by unanticipated factors while organisations and/or individual decision makers may be required to justify actions after the event. Decisions may be taken on the basis of previous experience although it may no longer be applicable to the situation in question. At this level, the emphasis is about the material which candidates use to help them carry out a critical analysis of decision making and propose ways in which decision making can be enhanced. The emphasis is predominantly on the quality of the analysis and the validity of any proposals.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

For Outcome 1, candidates will be expected to explore decision making and identify the factors which are involved in them. They should also recognise the ways in which these factors are related and interconnected. They will also be expected to have a good grasp of the theories, principles and concepts of decision making. This should include a grasp of decision making techniques such as decision trees. This understanding can best be thought of as a bank of ideas on which candidates can engage with to enable them to analyse and evaluate. They will also need to be aware of current research in decision making particularly that which covers the type of organisation within which they work. Recent work based on behavioural economics, for example, may provide some useful insights on the extent to which decision making can be seen as rational. Again, candidates will be expected to select from available research those findings which are particularly relevant to the decision making processes with which they are familiar.

Publications such as the *Harvard Business Review* and *MIT Sloan Management Review* often contain articles which summarise current research on decision making and/or which give examples of decisions made by organisations and the outcomes of them. They can be useful sources for candidates and may lead them towards more specialised journals. There are also several accessible books by experts in this field which could be a source of ideas and point candidates towards suitable research work.

It may be necessary to be flexible in determining what counts as current research. As a general rule current can be taken to mean articles published within the last 5 years or so but the exact period may well depend on factors such as the issue involved, the scope and depth of the research and so on. Many approaches to decision making have been in existence for some time and it may be that an approach which is seen as critical by a particular candidate does not feature prominently in very recent research. Much current research on decision making, for example, uses experiments on reactions to price or refers to situations where price is important such as the stock market (eg Shiller's work on irrational exuberance). This may not be directly relevant to candidates from some publicly funded organisations, although it may provide insights which candidates can develop. In cases like this, however, candidates may have to make use of use of older publications.

Outcome 2 is about making proposals to enhance decision making in an organisation. Candidates are expected to apply the principles and concepts from the first Outcome to inform their evaluation, including using current research. They are expected also to take into account factors from the wider organisational environment. In this Outcome, candidates should also take account of the consequences of a decision. It is possible, for example, that the decision making process may be appropriate but the decision made may turn out to be unsuitable. This, incidentally, is also something which should form part of the critical analysis in Outcome 1.

The proposals that candidates make to enhance decision making could centre on decision making processes. This is because the outcome of any decision may be affected by unanticipated developments. Because the future is unpredictable, proposals may consist of suggestions to adapt decision making processes in a way which might reduce the chances of unanticipated outcomes.

Candidates should ensure that any proposals they make are consistent with the objectives of the organisation and take account of any constraints. An obvious constraint may be financial — decisions may be affected by available resources and what could be seen as the best decision may, in fact, not be possible. Candidates should also recognise that decision making and the outcomes of it can be judged in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, economy and equity. Different organisations may mean that nature of the judgement may emphasise some characteristics of successful decision making rather than others.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

Guidance on the delivery and assessment of this Unit

This Unit is part of the *Professional Development Award in Organisational Ethics and Decision Making* at SCQF level 11 and is likely, therefore, to be delivered as part of this award.

The Unit is intended to help candidates develop a robust approach to making decisions of the type that they will be required to make as managers in modern organisations. The underlying principle of the Unit is that candidates have to work out for themselves an approach to making suitable decisions within an organisation. This approach must be consistent with recognised models of decision making and take into account the various techniques available to improve the quality of decisions. This approach should reflect the candidate's own background and experience as well as being compatible with the relevant organisational environment.

At SCQF level 11, candidates will also be expected to take significant responsibility for their own learning. Delivery of this Unit will, as a result, probably consist of providing guidance and support to candidates to enable them to organise their own learning experience. Candidates can be expected to have some background in the theories, models and approaches to decision making but are likely to benefit from guidance on suitable texts, journal articles and other references. Some candidates may also be aware of some current research on decision making in organisations, particularly in operational activities with which they are familiar. There are occasions also when decisions by organisations gain widespread publicity. These are often where the decision is considered by some to have adverse consequences and they are often also ones which highlight an ethical dilemma. One example may be the decisions to make drug treatments available to sufferers in less well off countries at lower prices than those charged to users in richer countries.

The delivery process may be able to introduce candidates to a wider range of contemporary research and help candidates to draw comparisons and contrasts between their own organisational situation and what happens in other organisational contexts. In order to gather information about their own and other organisations, candidates will have to undertake some investigation and may also carry out some research. Candidates who have limited experience of this kind of investigative work may benefit from some introductory work on methods of investigation and basic research skills.

Candidates can be encouraged to share experiences and to discuss relevant theoretical ideas and current research. In the early stages of the Unit, for example, discussion seminars may be useful. Candidates can take it in turn to give an opening presentation to the seminar, for example. As the Unit progresses the emphasis of these seminars can shift towards the specific investigation which candidates are undertaking. Candidates may find it beneficial to share their findings and initial conclusions with others. Again, this can be structured around a presentation by a candidate on the work s/he is doing within their chosen organisation.

Another way of helping candidates develop a broader approach is to make use of case studies. Candidates can be given short case studies or examples of problems involving decisions (including ones that look at processes and at outcomes) and asked to work out the models which might have been used and the various components of the decision making processes. They could then consider ways by which decision making could be enhanced.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

The Unit is very closely linked to the other Unit in the Group Award, *Organisational Ethics* at SCQF level 11. Any approach to decision making, for example, must be built on a sound ethical foundation. The two may be delivered together. If this approach is adopted, candidates can be encouraged to draw connections between the two Units. This combined approach has benefits in terms of the most efficient use of delivery resources.

Assessment for this Unit is likely to involve candidates writing a report on decision making in an organisation. The organisation should be one known to the candidate. This is likely to be the one with which the candidate is currently employed but this does not have to be the case. Some candidates for example may be relatively new to their current organisation but have retained good contacts with ones where they have worked previously. On the other hand, candidates who are new to an organisation may bring fresh insight and may welcome the opportunity to work on issues which may lead to positive developments in their new environment. Candidates who work for large diverse organisations may prefer to focus their research on one aspect of the organisation's activities. Candidates who have recently been transferred within such an organisation may wish to carry out their research in the area from which they have come. Other candidates may be closely connected with voluntary organisations and feel there is greater scope for meaningful research within their voluntary work.

As already noted, some candidates may benefit from help and guidance on how to gather relevant and suitable information for the investigation which they have to undertake. Candidates could be given guidance, for example, on setting clear boundaries on the type of information they require, the organisational sources which they consult and the methods they could use to gather information.

They should, however, recognise any bias in the information that they obtain and take account of this in any conclusions that they draw. Candidates may find it helpful to explore more than one decision. This may enable them to compare and contrast different situations. This, in turn, may help to prevent their critical analysis becoming too restrictive and enable them to make more appropriate proposals since it may draw attention to the complexity and unpredictability of organisational decision making.

Candidates may benefit from guidance on how to decide on the kind of decisions which are likely to lead to strong analysis and form the basis of sound proposals. These may vary between organisations but candidates should avoid trivial decisions, although what is unimportant in one context may be very significant in another.

Candidates must critically analyse the components of decision making and the relationships between them. In doing so they must take into account relevant theoretical ideas in decision making, current research as well as setting their work in a relevant organisational context. They must also explore the connections between the intended outcome of a decision and the actual outcome. The skill required of candidates is that of selecting suitable material from the wide range available. For example, they should choose those theories and/or concepts which in their view enable them to shed light on decision making in the most effective way. In order to choose wisely candidates will require a good command of relevant theoretical and other material.

Similarly, candidates should make a careful selection of theoretical and research material to support their proposals for ways in which decision making can be enhanced. It is not necessary that these proposals be implemented although they should be capable of implementation if this is desired. In addition, within the time frame of the Unit, it is unlikely that there will be any opportunities to gather evidence on whether the proposals actually do improve decision making. The proposals that candidates make, therefore, should be judged on how likely they are to enhance decision making.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

In order to meet the requirements of SCQF level 11, candidates should show some originality and creativity in the way they carry out their critical analysis and in the proposals they make about decision making. This is not always easy to judge but one way is to consider the extent to which a candidate moves away from familiar and established patterns of behaviour. Possible criteria which could be used as evidence of this include:

- ◆ choice of theories, concepts and models (eg candidates make efforts to consider more specialised ideas which they have identified for themselves; candidates make original choices from material which they have been given; candidates apply models, theories in a different but valid manner; candidates use models developed for a quite different organisational context)
- ◆ choice of information and evidence to support analysis and evaluation (eg candidates choose particularly apposite pieces of evidence from their chosen organisation; candidates consider more specialised published research; candidates apply research originally undertaken in a different context)
- ◆ sources used (eg candidates gather information to support their analysis from a wide range of organisational sources; candidates consult non-routine publications for research findings)
- ◆ research methodology (eg candidates use innovative methods to gain information to support their critical analysis).

Candidates could present their findings in a report. There is no specified format for this although candidates should adopt a recognised format — perhaps that used by the organisation for which they work. The report should include a bibliography and make use of a standard referencing system.

The length of the report can be determined by the candidate but it is likely that all the Evidence Requirements can be covered in around 3,500 words excluding appendices, summary and bibliography.

Assessment can be combined with *Organisational Ethics* at SCQF level 11. Where a combined assessment is used for both Units, candidates will be expected to satisfy the Evidence Requirements of both Units holistically. A combined assessment will be longer and is likely to be in the region of 7,000 words excluding supporting appendices etc.

Opportunities for developing Core Skills

There are opportunities to develop the following Core Skills components in this Unit.

Communication: Written Communication (Reading) at SCQF level 6

Candidates will be expected to refer to theories, principles and concepts of decision making and to current research in this subject area. This will require them to read complex material containing sophisticated argument. They will be expected to evaluate this material and extract from it information suitable for their own situation. This will require them also to pull together and synthesise material from a range of different sources and perspectives.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

Communication: Written Communication (Writing) at SCQF level 6

In order to complete the Unit, candidates will have to gather information and will be expected to present their findings in suitable manner such as a report. For this, they will also be expected to adopt a recognised format. This report will analyse decision making and make proposals and will have to be structured and laid out in an appropriate manner. The nature of the subject matter is such that the report will include complex language and specialist vocabulary, especially as candidates are expected to refer to current research in decision making.

Communication: Written Communication (Oral Communication) at SCQF level 6

Candidates may be asked to give a presentation in connection with the work they have undertaken. If this is the case, they will be expected to convey essential information and ideas on decision making to a number of other people. These ideas are complex and require candidates to use appropriate language but to do so in a manner which is tailored to the needs of the audience. Candidates could make use of presentational software which would allow them to integrate formal language and other forms of transmitting information.

Problem Solving: Critical Thinking at SCQF level 6

Candidates are expected to critically analyse decision making in an organisation. The variables involved will be complex and may be inter-related in unpredictable ways. Candidates will be expected to disentangle the various factors and assess their relative importance in the light of theoretical principles and current research. They are expected also to use their analysis to propose ways in which decision making can be enhanced.

Problem Solving: Planning and Organising at SCQF level 6

In order to successfully carry out the work needed to complete the assessment for this Unit, candidates will have to develop a plan for their work, identify and obtain suitable resources and carry out the plan. At SCQF level 11, they will be expected to exercise substantial autonomy and initiative in carrying out this task.

Problem Solving: Reviewing and Evaluating at SCQF level 6

The assessment requires candidates to propose ways in which decision making in an organisation can be enhanced. These proposals must be based on critical analysis and will require candidates to evaluate this analysis and use the results to inform their proposals. This, in turn, will require candidates to make some judgements on the effectiveness of the information that they have gathered on decision making in an organisation. Their conclusions may, therefore, be conditional on the information which they have used. The process of reviewing and evaluation (ie analysing a problem solving strategy, gathering suitable evidence, drawing conclusions and making recommendations) also underpins both Outcomes in this Unit.

Higher National Unit specification: support notes (cont)

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

Open learning

This Unit is particularly suitable for Open Learning as candidates should be able to acquire the relevant knowledge by working through the distance learning material which will be available for this Unit. Appropriate arrangements would need to be made for assessment and quality assurance.

Disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs

The additional support needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments, or considering whether any reasonable adjustments may be required. Further advice can be found on our website www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements

General information for candidates

Unit title: Organisational Decision Making

This Unit forms part of the *Professional Development Award in Organisational Ethics and Decision Making* at SCFQ level 11. It has been designed to offer developmental opportunities for strategic managers.

The Unit is about decision making of the type that you will be engaged in as a holder of a strategic management position in an organisation. Making decisions is regarded as a key managerial activity and this includes using suitable processes to make these decisions. This Unit will enable you to analyse in a critical manner decision making in an organisation that you know well. You will be expected to base your analysis on relevant theories, concepts and models of decision making, including appropriate decision making techniques, and to take into account current research in this area. You will be expected to draw out the main components of decision making and to examine the relationships and inter-connections between them.

Decision making reflects wider aspects of the organisational and societal environments and you will be expected to take these into account in your analysis. One significant factor affecting decision making is that, by definition, decisions relate to what will happen in the future. The actual outcome of a decision may, therefore, turn out to be different from what was intended as unanticipated factors may intervene. This may be the case even when what appear to be sound decision making processes have been used. You will be expected to explore this type of difficulty as part of your analysis.

You will be required also to make proposals to enhance decision making. Your proposals should be based on the conclusions that you draw from your analysis and should be compatible with the organisation's objectives and take account of any constraints faced by the organisation. You will need to show your proposals will enhance decision making and you can do this with reference to the efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equity of the decision making.

You will be given support material to help you work on this Unit on your own. It will enable you to build on the knowledge and understanding you already have and help you review your own experience.

Assessment for this Unit requires you to plan and execute a research project on decision making in an organisation you know of. This will involve you in critically analysing decision making and proposing ways in which it can be enhanced. Successful completion of the assessment will enable you to achieve this Unit.