

A **risk environment** lacks complete information but offers “probabilities” of the likely outcomes for possible action alternatives.

Risk Environment

A basic fact of managerial decision making is that many, if not most, management problems emerge in **risk environments** where facts and information on action alternatives and their consequences are incomplete. Decision making in risk environments requires the use of *probabilities* to estimate the likelihood that a particular outcome will occur (e.g., 4 chances out of 10). Because probabilities are only possibilities, people vary in how they act under risk conditions. Some of us are risk takers and some are risk avoiders; some of us gain from taking risks and others lose.

Domino’s Pizza CEO J. Patrick Doyle is a risk taker. When deciding to change the firm’s pizza recipe, he ran a television ad admitting that customers really disliked the old one because it was “totally devoid of flavor” and had a crust “like cardboard.” Whereas some executives might want to hide or downplay such customer reviews, Doyle used them to help launch the new recipe. He says it was a “calculated risk” and that “we’re proving to our customers that we are listening to them by brutally accepting the criticism that’s out there.”²³

General Motors’ former Vice Chairman of Global Product Development, Bob Lutz, wasn’t a risk taker. He once said: “GM had the technology to do hybrids back when Toyota was launching the first Prius, but we opted not to ask the board to approve a product program that’d be destined to lose hundreds of millions of dollars.”²⁴ He and other GM executives either miscalculated the probabilities of positive payoffs from hybrid vehicles or didn’t believe the probabilities were high enough to justify the financial risk. Their Japanese competitors, facing the same risk environment, decided differently and gained the early mover advantage.

An **uncertain environment** lacks so much information that it is difficult to assign probabilities to the likely outcomes of alternatives.

Uncertain Environment

When facts are few and information is so poor that managers are unable to even assign probabilities to the likely outcomes of alternatives, an **uncertain environment** exists. This is the most difficult decision-making condition. The high level of uncertainty forces managers to rely heavily on intuition, judgment, informed guessing, and hunches—all of which leave considerable room for error. Perhaps there is no better example of the challenges of uncertainty than the situation faced by government and business leaders as they struggle to deal with global economic turmoil. Even as they struggle to find the right paths forward, great political, social, and economic uncertainties make their tasks difficult and the outcomes of their decisions hard to predict.

Learning Check 2

TAKEAWAY QUESTION 2 How do managers address problems and make decisions?

BE SURE YOU CAN • describe how IT influences the four functions of management • define *problem solving* and *decision making* • explain systematic and intuitive thinking • list four cognitive styles in decision making • differentiate programmed and nonprogrammed decisions • describe the challenges of crisis decision making • explain decision making in certain, risk, and uncertain environments

The Decision-Making Process

TAKEAWAY 3 What are the steps in the decision-making process?

LEARN MORE ABOUT

Identify and define the problem • Generate and evaluate alternative courses of action
Choose a preferred course of action • Implement the decision
Evaluate results • At all steps—check ethical reasoning

All of those case studies, experiential exercises, class discussions, and even essay exam questions in your courses are intended to get students to experience some of the complexities involved in managerial decision making, the potential problems and pitfalls, and even the pressures of crisis situations. From the classroom forward, however, it’s all up to you. Only you can determine whether you step up and make the best out of very difficult problems, or collapse under pressure.

Figure 7.4 describes five steps in the **decision-making process**: (1) Identify and define the problem, (2) generate and evaluate alternative solutions, (3) choose a preferred course of

The **decision-making process** begins with identification of a problem and ends with evaluation of results.