

 <https://medium.com/the-post-grad-survival-guide/an-8-step-process-to-making-well-inform...>

 Jeremy Erdman

 6 min read

An 8-step process to making well-informed decisions and opinions



I've seen a remarkable increase in political engagement over the past two years. People seem to care much more about political and global affairs. For all of you getting involved, that's fantastic, and I want to give you exposure to another tool to analyze the problems facing our world.

I learned this tool in graduate school, and it's called Policy Analysis. Now, I am going to do all I can to not make this topic dry or boring, because you can apply this process to solving many different types of problems — policy, business, or personal.

Eugene Bardach wrote this eightfold path for more effective problem-solving, and I will walk you through how to apply it to some sort of political issue that fuels your fire.

First and foremost, as Bardach points out, this path of problem solving is more of an art than a science. So, while the process may feel overwhelming or rigid initially, he designed it as a guideline with enough flexibility for you to add personal style or flair.

Moreover, this process is iterative. Information gathered later in the process may result in the need to go back to a previous step. We often approach personal problems in this way, where

we learn information that requires us to question our basic assumptions, options, or path to solve the problem.

Now, to the steps.

1. Define the problem

This step frames your purpose. What do you want to investigate? What is going on, and what conditions cause the problems you want to alleviate?

For example, if we went back to the end of 2015 when the Syrian refugee crisis flew into the world's political discussion, how might you define the problem?

One example could be:

” Syrian refugees are fleeing to western nations at a rate faster than these countries' immigration system can handle, the US included.

Of course, the problem can be framed in many different ways, based on your values. Someone else may have framed the problem by looking at ISIS. If you forgot, many Americans feared that ISIS would use the refugee crisis to enter the United States in large numbers.

2. Assemble some evidence

This step is pretty straightforward. Find data and information that can help you analyze the problem. You will find articles and documents the easiest to acquire, but data sets and interviews will greatly help if you can access them.

In the Syrian refugee scenario, I may start with statements the [White House issued](#) on this topic along with immigration figures from organizations like the World Bank, the International Rescue Committee, and the International Office of Migration.

3. Construct the alternatives

Here, you construct the possible courses of action available to solve the problem. Be broad in your alternatives, and you can whittle this list down as time goes on.

With the Syrian Refugees, I could generate alternatives like the ones below:

1. Accept 10,000 refugees based on the White House's statement.
2. Accept 50,000 refugees and place within the United States proportional to population.
3. Accept the number of refugees based on the proportion of United States population compared to all countries facing an influx of Syrian refugees.
4. Accept no refugees.

4. Select the criteria

You infuse your values at this point. On what basis will you make your decision? What indicators and factors matter? No matter what kind of decision we make, we always have a set of criteria that we use to determine a course of action.

In respect to the Syrian Refugee scenario, I could generate these four criteria to assess the outcomes from those four alternatives

1. Fairness to states
2. Political feasibility
3. Cost
4. Fairness to international community

5. Project the outcomes

Here you determine the future outcomes of different alternatives. If you choose alternative A, what may happen? Same with B or C? This step can be difficult and requires some data or evidence to determine both the direction of an outcome, but the magnitude and size as well.

In regards to the Syrian Refugees, I would need to project or understand the potential costs of bringing in these refugees, understand the response and willingness of different groups within the US (political parties, states, the public) along with expectations of other countries.

6. Confront the trade-offs

Here you apply the outcomes of different alternatives against the criteria. How did each alternative perform? Some alternatives' outcomes may perform well on certain criteria and poorly on others. When that occurs, which criteria holds the most importance. These trade-offs are important to understand.

Here, I would score how the outcomes determined in the previous step performs regarding the criteria set out. How does increasing Syrian refugees entering the US impact different political opinions and costs? How does all this impact political feasibility?

Moreover, which of these criteria matters the most? Am I willing to sacrifice performance on political opinions in the US if it improves standing in the international community?

7. Decide!

This step serves as a check on your work or analysis. If you don't feel comfortable making a decision or identifying the best outcome, you may not have clarified your trade-offs as thoroughly as you wish, or you may be nervous about implementation.

If that is the case, reassess and make sure your analysis convinces yourself of the correct outcome.

Here is where I would decide which alternative for accepting Syrian Refugees I think would work best for the US, based on those criteria.

8. Tell your story

If you need to convince someone besides yourself of your decision and analysis, this part is very important — especially in regards to a political belief or decision. You need to become confident enough with your decision and its background information so you can articulate it well.

While always important, the ability to articulate our decisions and the background informing that decision has become lost in today's discourse. We speak with people who agree with us in increasing frequency. We hide or block people whose opinions we disagree with from our newsfeeds.

When we do this, we begin to forget the underlying values behind our decision-making and beliefs.

This process can help you reclaim that understanding.

Generated with Reader Mode