

BEP 253 - Decision-Making Meetings (Part 1)

Hello and welcome back to Business English Pod. My name's Edwin, and I'll be your host for today's lesson on decision-making meetings.



Success in business depends on making good decisions. But making good decisions is not just an *individual* skill. It's a *group* skill. Several people come together to discuss an issue, explore options, and decide which path to follow. With good information, a good decision-making process, and good meeting skills, the participants should be able to make the best decision possible.

So what kind of skills might be useful in decision-making meetings? Today we'll explore techniques such as framing a decision, inviting discussion, and referencing criteria. We'll also cover raising concerns and requesting more information.

In the dialog, we'll hear a group of people at an engineering firm trying to decide on a tech support company to hire. Scott, as senior partner, is leading the meeting, while Anne and David and Kelly are participating. The group discusses their options in order to figure out the best company to hire.

As you listen to the dialog, try to answer the following questions:

1. What does Scott say is the basic question they have to answer?
2. What consideration does Kelly bring up in the discussion?
3. What piece of information about City Tech does David want to know?

Vocabulary

To go with someone: if you "go with" someone or something, you choose or select it; "I considered several different cars, but finally decided to go with the Audi."

Behind: in the background of; "There was a desire for greater stability behind the strategic plan."

Shortlist: a list of several choices made from a longer list; "I've researched all the laptops in our price range and come up with a shortlist of four machines."

To start off: to begin something in a certain way; if you "start" a group off, then you begin a discussion; "Jerry's funny story really started off the meeting on a positive note."

To open it up: to start a discussion by being the first to speak; also, to open a presentation or discussion up to questions and comments from everyone; "We're looking at ways to cut costs today, and does anyone want to open it up for us?"

Concern: something thought to be important; "For an investor whose primary concern is stable returns, I'd advise against new tech stocks."

To come in: we can say that a quote, estimate, or cost "comes in" at a certain price or number; "I was happy to see that the contractor's invoice came in at less than what he quoted us originally."

To point out: to mention or tell someone something; "I'd like to just point out that leasing space in the Winfield Mall would be cheaper than renting downtown."

Consideration: something important that you must think about when making a decision; "One of our most important considerations when designing an ad campaign should be the target market."

"True enough": we can say "true enough" to agree that someone has made a good point; "A: These meetings go on way too long. B: True enough. Maybe we need a different facilitator."

With someone on something: if you are "with" someone "on" something, you agree with them on an opinion; "Thanks Joe, and I'm with you on the idea that we need to control costs."

To cut corners: to do things the fastest, easiest, and cheapest way; "Looks like the previous building owners really cut corners on maintenance and repair. The place is in bad shape."

To learn one's lesson: to have a bad experience or make a mistake that teaches you something; "Let's avoid finding a hotel in the entertainment district. I learned my lesson at last year's conference."

To look something up: to look for a specific piece of information in a book, a listing, or online; "Joni, could you please go on the government's website and look up the deadline for the development application."

Dialog

Scott: All right, looks like everyone's here now, so let's get started. Our job today is to decide on who we're going to **go with** for tech support. And I think the big thing **behind** all of this, I mean the big question, is who is going to give us the best support. Not just now but in the future as we grow. Sound good?

Anne: Yes, I'm glad you mention the future and growth. I think that's important.

David: Yeah, I agree. Sounds great Scott.

Scott: Super. So, everyone's gone through all the info on the **shortlist**, right? We've got Drayton, City Tech, Brightstar and Alamo. Okay? Anyone want to **start us off** here? Thoughts on these options?

Kelly: Mind if I **open it up** Scott?

Scott: No, go ahead Kelly.

Kelly: Well, I know that one of our **concerns** is cost, right? Because I'm looking here at the different bids and it appears that Drayton **comes in** quite a bit cheaper than the other three. Just thought I'd **point that out** ... Something to think about.

Anne: For sure... that's one of our **considerations**. But I think we have to be a bit careful about emphasizing cost too much. I mean, I see a bit of a problem here with their experience. They're pretty new, right? And none of their experience is specifically in the engineering field.

Kelly: **True enough.**

David: Yeah, I'm **with you on** that. I don't think we should **cut** too many **corners** on this. We **learned our lesson** with the last guys, right?

Scott: Good point. So, let's leave Drayton out of this. What about City Tech? They've got some experience, right?

David: Yeah, some. But are they even in Dallas? I thought I saw a Houston address or something. I think we need to figure that out before anything else.

Kelly: Okay, let me just go **look that up**. Be right back.

Debrief

Now let's go through the dialog again and look at the language and techniques used in this decision-making discussion.

Scott: All right, looks like everyone's here now, so let's get started. Our job today is to decide on who we're going to **go with** for tech support. And I think the big thing **behind** all of this, I mean the big question, is who is going to give us the best support. Not just now but in the future as we grow. Sound good?

The group has come together to make a decision, and Scott wants to start things off by making sure everyone is clear about what that decision is. He states that they need to decide who to "go with", or choose, for tech support. And he frames that decision as an issue of who will give them the best support now *and* in the future. By framing the decision in this way, he gives a mission to the participants.

Let's practice some more ways of framing a decision at the start of a meeting:

- Okay, so what we need to decide here is a product name that will connect with our customers.
- The issue we're looking at is which of the three locations is best for our new office.
- So, everyone here's our goal for today: we need to decide where to cut costs without impacting customer service.
- Here's the question: which of these vendors is the best fit for our company?

Now let's get back to the meeting.

Anne: Yes, I'm glad you mention the future and growth. I think that's important.

David: Yeah, I agree. Sounds great Scott.

Scott: Super. So, everyone's gone through all the info on the **shortlist**, right? We've got Drayton, City Tech, Brightstar and Alamo. Okay? Anyone want to **start us off** here? Thoughts on these options?

Once the participants have shown they understand the purpose of the meeting, Scott talks about the "shortlist" of tech support companies. Of course, this isn't the first time the group has talked about the issue. They've examined proposals, done research, and narrowed their options down to four companies. Everyone is expected to have reviewed the information about the ~~four~~ companies on the shortlist so they are ready for a discussion. And it's a discussion Scott wants when he asks someone to "start off" and invites people's "thoughts" on the options.

What are some other ways we can invite discussion? Let's run through a few more examples:

- So, anyone have any opinions on this issue?
- At this point, let's just throw out any ideas we have about the options.
- I'd like to just open it up for comments and opinions.
- Anyone want to give us their thoughts on these three candidates?

So, who starts the discussion off?

Kelly: Mind if I **open it up** Scott?

Scott: No, go ahead Kelly.

Kelly: Well, I know that one of our **concerns** is cost, right?

Kelly wants to “open it up”, or start off the discussion by talking about cost. She calls this one of their “concerns”, but she could also call it one of several “criteria”. Criteria are the points we consider when evaluating different options. And when we discuss a decision, it’s important to reference these criteria to make sure we make the best decision possible.

Let’s try some other ways of referencing criteria:

- Well, I think the first place is a good location, but it’s not as new as we’d like.
- Abbot has a great portfolio, and that’s certainly one of the things we wanted to look at.
- Let’s consider experience, since that is one of our biggest concerns in choosing a suitable vendor.
- So, the first developer is cheaper, but what about design capabilities?

Now listen as Kelly continues her discussion of the different proposals.

Kelly: Because I’m looking here at the different bids and it appears that Drayton **comes in** quite a bit cheaper than the other three. Just thought I’d **point that out** ... Something to think about.

Kelly “points out”, or mentions, that Drayton is cheaper than the other three companies. She’s not necessarily pushing this as the best choice, but simply introducing her concerns about cost.

How do the others respond?

Anne: For sure... that’s one of our **considerations**. But I think we have to be a bit careful about emphasizing cost too much. I mean, I see a bit of a problem here with their experience. They’re pretty new, right? And none of their experience is specifically in the engineering field.

Anne begins by agreeing that cost is a consideration. But she follows this with a “but” statement, warning that they should be “a bit careful” about emphasizing cost. This is a way of introducing her concern about Drayton, which is that they lack experience. Or, as Anne says it, she sees “a bit of a problem with their experience.” To emphasize her concern, she uses the question “They’re pretty new, right?” Asking questions like this helps invite discussion. Rather than asserting a strong opinion, Anne is raising concerns for the entire group to discuss.

What are some other ways we can do this? Let’s try a few more examples:

- I'm not so sure the printer from Canon will give us the best print quality.
- I agree a new outlet is exciting, but I think it might be too soon for expansion.
- What about maintenance costs? The first option is going to be more expensive in that respect.
- Wait a second. Is a full audit really necessary at this point?

Does everyone agree with Anne that Drayton's lack of experience is a concern?

Kelly: True enough.

David: Yeah, I'm **with you on** that. I don't think we should **cut** too many **corners** on this. We **learned our lesson** with the last guys, right?

Scott: Good point. So, let's leave Drayton out of this. What about City Tech? They've got some experience, right?

Yes, everyone seems to agree that Anne has made a good point about Drayton's lack of experience. David reinforces the idea by saying they shouldn't "cut corners", or try to save money by choosing cheap and easy options. For these reasons, Scott says they should leave Drayton out. He then raises City Tech for discussion, making sure to point out that they have some experience.

What does David think about this option?

David: Yeah, some. But are they even in Dallas? I thought I saw a Houston address or something. I think we need to figure that out before anything else.

David agrees they have some experience, but he doesn't know if the company is even located in Dallas, which is where *their* company is. David wants to figure this out before moving on. He feels they can't really consider this option without more information. And he wants to be polite in how he requests it, so he follows his question by explaining that he thought he saw a Houston address. And he softens his request by saying "I think we need to" figure it out. It's common in decision-making meetings to request more information so that you can make the best decision.

Let's practice some more ways we can do this politely and gently:

- Before we go on, we should probably know more about tax law in each state.
- Can we get some more details about HWC's past projects?
- I think we'll need to see that price broken down in greater detail before deciding.
- What would really help in this discussion is the safety specs for each machine.

Now do we find out where City Tech is located?

Kelly: Okay, let me just go **look that up**. Be right back.

It looks like we'll have to wait until next time to find out if City Tech is close enough to be an option, as Kelly finishes the dialog by saying she'll go "look up", or find out, their location.

Now let's practice some of the language we learned in today's lesson. Imagine you are part of a meeting that has been called to decide between three possible locations for a new store. The possible locations are Seattle, Chicago, and Boston.

To start off with, you'll play the role of the meeting leader and then switch to one of the participants. Then you'll switch back to being the leader for the last step. I'll give you a cue telling you what you need to talk about. Then you'll hear a prompt. Use the words in the prompt to make an effective statement during the meeting. We'll guide you through each step in the practice and play an example answer for each response.

Ready? Let's give it a go.

Start off by framing the decision as a choice of the best location for the new store.

Prompt: what / best / location / store

Answer: _____

Next, invite discussion about the three possible locations.

Prompt: what / think / locations

Answer: _____

Now as a participant, reference the criteria of city size to support the idea of locating in Chicago.

Prompt: Chicago / biggest / need / think about

Answer: _____

Next, imagine you're a different participant and you want to raise concerns that Chicago is too expensive.

Prompt: wait / Chicago / expensive

Answer: _____

Finally, as the leader, request more information about the exact costs of doing business in each city.

Prompt: to know / cost / business / city

Answer: _____

Answer 1: Okay, what we need to do is choose the best location for this new store.

Answer 2: So, what does everyone think about the three locations?

Answer 3: Chicago is the biggest city, and that's one thing we need to think about.

Answer 4: Wait a minute, isn't Chicago much too expensive for us?

Answer 5: What we really need to know before deciding is the exact cost of doing business in each city.

Now let's practice some of the vocabulary and collocations we've covered in this lesson. In a moment, you'll hear a series of sentences with a word replaced with a *beep*. Repeat each sentence, *including* the missing word.

For example, if you hear:

Example Cue: I'd just like to point **<beep>** that we need to make a decision today.

You can say:

Example Answer: I'd just like to point **out** that we need to make a decision today.

After each response, we'll play the correct answer. Let's begin.

Cue 1: After three bad product launches, I really hope we've learned our **<beep>**.

Answer: _____

Cue 2: We've reduced our options to a **<beep>** of just three companies.

Answer: _____

Cue 3: Sales went down when we started cutting **<beep>** on customer service.

Answer: _____

Cue 4: I think one of our biggest **<beep>** in this decision is how much this will cost.

Answer: _____

Answer 1: After three bad product launches, I really hope we've learned our **lesson**.

Answer 2: We've reduced our options to a **shortlist** of just three companies.

Answer 3: Sales went down when we started cutting **corners** on customer service.

Answer 4: I think one of our biggest **considerations** in this decision is how much this will cost.

We've reached the end of this lesson, the first in our series on decision-making meetings. We've learned how to frame a decision, invite discussion, and reference criteria. We've also learned how to raise concerns and request more information.

Thanks for listening and see you again soon!

Language Review

A. Review Quiz

For each question, you must choose the example that best fulfills the given language function or purpose.

1. Which of the following demonstrates framing a decision?
 - A. What we need to do here today is select a marketing company that can bring our vision to life.
 - B. One of our most important considerations in this decision is each company's experience in similar marketing campaigns.
 - C. So, we're looking at four different companies here.

2. How might you invite discussion during a decision-making meeting?
 - A. Tony, let's get your opinions on this.
 - B. I'd like to just open it up to anyone who wants to share their ideas.
 - C. So, what exactly does everyone think we need to discuss here?

3. How can you reference criteria when discussing a decision?
 - A. I'd like to just say that we need to find points of comparison between these two pieces of software.
 - B. The ProjectMap software is the most user-friendly, which we decided was one of the important considerations.
 - C. What about the Think Project software? Don't you think that might be a good option as well?

4. How might you raise concerns during a decision-making meeting?
 - A. A radio ad would certainly be a fairly inexpensive option.
 - B. Well, I guess we could do a radio ad, if we thought that was the best way to go.
 - C. Sorry guys, but I'm not so sure that a radio ad would reach many potential customers.

5. Which of the following could you say to request more information?
 - A. I really think we need to know the warranty terms on each option first.
 - B. If you look in your information package, you'll see a comparison of the different warranty terms.
 - C. One thing we need to think about here is the different warranties available.

B. Vocabulary and Idioms

Fill in the blanks with words from the box below. Be sure to put any verbs in the right tense.

shortlist point	concern cut	come learn
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1. I'm afraid that if we _____ corners on the design, it will look cheap or amateurish.
2. The contractor quoted us \$2,000 but the final invoice _____ in at \$1,800.
3. No more trade shows for us. We _____ our lesson at that terrible event in Boston.
4. Marjorie has looked at all the different options and prepared a _____ of five for us to discuss.
5. I understand that location is one of our _____, but I think we need think a lot about cost as well.
6. I think your idea sounds good, but I'd just like to _____ out that we tried it last year and it didn't work.

Study Strategy

When we make important decisions, we normally establish a clear set of criteria for the decision. For example, if we were considering which truck to buy, we might consider cost, reliability, fuel economy, and warranty terms. These criteria help guide our decision.

Think of a decision that you have to make in your work or that you have made recently. What are or were the criteria used in the decision? Write out the decision in clearly framed terms. Then draw up a list of criteria that are or were important to consider in making that decision. Next, write down your shortlist of options for the decision. Now you're going to discuss the options using the criteria you've established.

With a colleague or friend, practice discussing the options. You can discuss the options one by one, talking about all the criteria for that option. Or you can discuss the criteria one by one, talking about each option as it relates to that criteria.

Answers

Listening Questions

1. Scott says the basic question is which company will give them the best tech support.
2. Kelly brings up the consideration of cost.
3. David wants to know where City Tech is located.

A. Review Quiz

1. a; 2. b; 3. b; 4. c; 5. a

B. Vocabulary and Idioms

1. I'm afraid that if we **cut** corners on the design, it will look cheap or amateurish.
2. The contractor quoted us \$2,000 but the final invoice **came** in at \$1,800.
3. No more trade shows for us. We **learned** our lesson at that terrible event in Boston.
4. Marjorie has looked at all the different options and prepared a **shortlist** of five for us to discuss.
5. I understand that location is one of our **concerns** but I think we need think a lot about cost as well.
6. I think your idea sounds good, but I'd just like to **point** out that we tried it last year and it didn't work.

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

Launch Quiz