
LESSON 4. CRISIS DECISION MAKING

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Lesson 4. Crisis Decision Making

Lesson Objective

At the end of this lesson, the participants will be able to:

- Identify impediments to effective decision making in a crisis.
 - Describe strategies for enhancing crisis decision making.
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Scope

- Introduction
 - Decision-Making Requirements
 - Impediments to Crisis Decision Making
 - Using the Problem-Solving Model
 - Case Study Activity: Fort Rice
 - Summary and Transition
-

Methodology

The instructors will describe requirements for making decisions during a crisis as well as impediments to decision making, including time pressure and stress. The instructors will then explain how the problem-solving model introduced earlier in the course has proven effective in a crisis.

Participants will apply the problem-solving model to the Fort Rice case study introduced earlier in the course.

Materials

- PowerPoint visuals 4.1 – 4.14 and a computer display system
 - Instructor Guide
 - Student Manual
 - Job Aid: Analytical Approach Problem-Solving Model
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Lesson 4. Crisis Decision Making

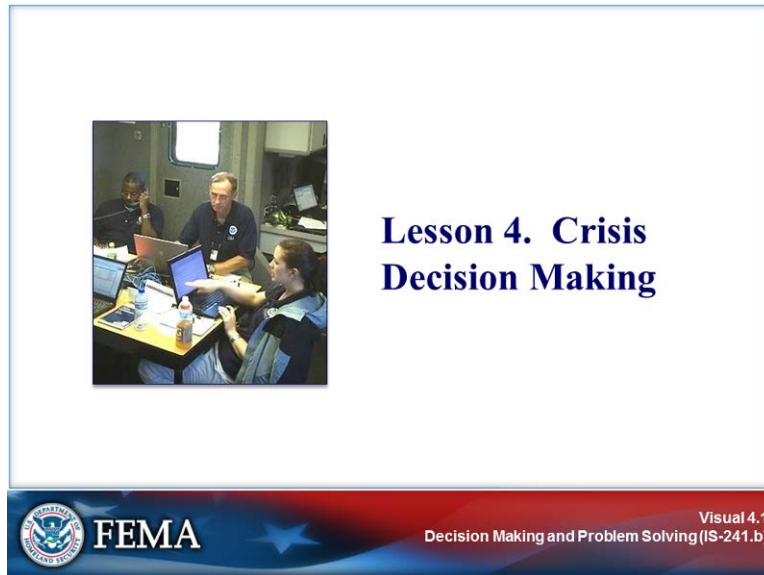
Time Plan

A suggested time plan for this unit is shown below. More or less time may be required, based on the experience level of the group.

Topic	Time
Introduction	2 minutes
Decision-Making Requirements	3 minutes
Impediments to Crisis Decision Making	3 minutes
Using the Problem-Solving Model	15 minutes
Case Study Activity: Fort Rice	20 minutes
Summary and Transition	2 minutes
Total Time	45 minutes

INTRODUCTION

Visual 4.1



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

In this lesson, you will examine the effects of time pressure and stress on decision making and apply the problem-solving model to a case study.

INTRODUCTION

Visual 4.2

Lesson 4 Objectives

- Identify impediments to effective decision making in a crisis.
- Describe strategies for enhancing crisis decision making.



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Visual 4.2
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

At the end of this lesson, the participants will be able to:

- Identify impediments to effective decision making in a crisis.
- Describe strategies for enhancing crisis decision making.

DECISION-MAKING REQUIREMENTS

Visual 4.3

Incident Decision Making

- Made quickly and efficiently.
- Based on comprehensive view.
- Taking into account:
 - Past practices and lessons learned.
 - Present operating picture.
 - Future contingencies and needs.



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Visual 4.3
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Decision making in a crisis situation must take place quickly and efficiently and be based on a comprehensive view of the situation.

Effective crisis decisions take into account:

- **Past:** Standard practices, existing plans and protocols, and lessons learned. Good decisions made in planning and preparation will lay the groundwork for incident decision making.
- **Present:** Situational awareness and a common operating picture.
- **Future:** Contingencies and anticipated needs.

DECISION-MAKING REQUIREMENTS

Visual 4.4

Common Operating Picture

- Full and up-to-date situational awareness
- Provides all parties the same critical information:
 - Current status and evolving situation
 - Availability and location of resources
 - Needed resources



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Visual 4.4
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

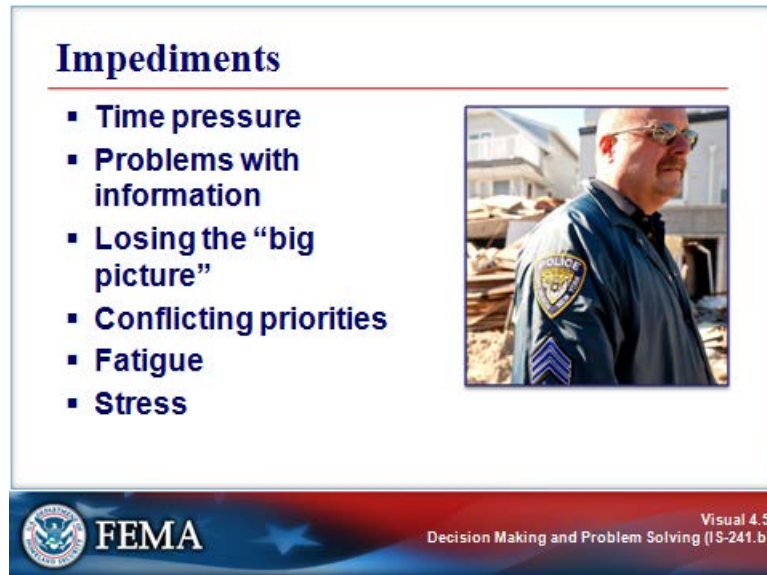
Decisions made at all levels must be based on a common operating picture that is achieved through full and up-to-date situational awareness.

A common operating picture supports crisis decision making and provides all appropriate parties the same critical information about the incident, including:

- Current status and evolving situation.
- Availability and location of resources.
- Needed resources.

IMPEDIMENTS TO CRISIS DECISION MAKING

Visual 4.5



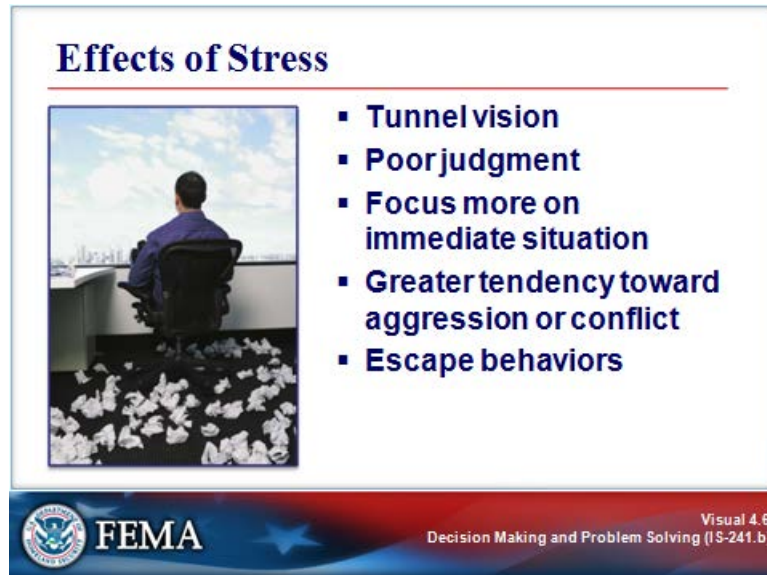
Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Several factors can impede decision making in an incident, including:

- **Time pressure:** Crises by their nature are dynamic and fast-moving situations. However, making a decision without taking even limited time for analysis can have negative consequences.
- **Problems with information:** Problems may include a lack of information, too much information, or inaccurate or conflicting information.
- **Losing the “Big Picture”:** Focusing on insignificant details or tactical objectives may cause emergency management personnel to lose their ability to maintain an awareness of the evolving situation and their ability to make sound decisions.
- **Fatigue:** Sleep deprivation and the resulting fatigue can lead to selective perception, where a person focuses on the most immediate physical setting or needs. A decision maker may miss important factors or ignore discrepancies as his or her ability to take in new information decreases. Fatigue is often combined with high or low blood sugar and overuse of caffeine, which can further impede effective decision making.
- **Conflicting priorities:** When key personnel have conflicting priorities, it can create uncertainty and cause delays in decision making and action planning.
- **Stress:** Stress is a natural response to crisis situations that is heightened by many of the factors already described. Other sources of stress include:
 - Uncertainty.
 - High expectations.
 - Information insufficiency or overload.
 - Conflict.
 - Decision consequences.
 - Traumatic experiences.

IMPEDIMENTS TO CRISIS DECISION MAKING

Visual 4.6



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Stress can be one of the biggest impediments to crisis decision making. Under stress, decision makers are more likely to:

- Get tunnel vision—selective perception due to sensory overload.
- Exhibit poor judgment, such as making hasty decisions or choosing risky alternatives.
- Consider only the immediate situation to the exclusion of long-range considerations.
- Have a greater tendency toward aggression or conflict with other key players.
- Engage in escape behaviors such as under- or overeating, overuse of alcohol, reckless behavior, or self-isolation.

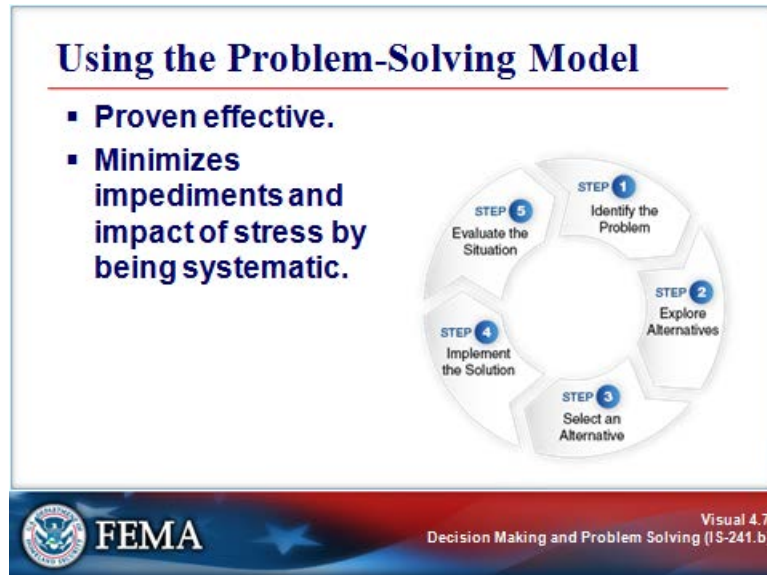
Decision makers under stress also tend to:

- Be less tolerant of ambiguity and thus perhaps make premature decisions.
- Experience a decreased ability to handle difficult tasks and work productively.

An important key to effective decision making in a crisis is being systematic. A good way to be systematic is to use the problem-solving model.

USING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

Visual 4.7



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

One of the best ways to minimize the impediments to decision making and the impact of stress is to be systematic. Having a problem-solving model, such as the one introduced earlier, has proven effective in emergency situations.

Let's take a closer look at how this model can be applied in a crisis.

USING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

Visual 4.8

Step 1: Identify the Problem



- **Size up the situation.**
- **Determine:**
 - What is happening (and not happening).
 - Who is involved.
 - What the stakes are.

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Visual 4.8
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Determine the situation or condition that will exist in the future and is considered undesirable by members of the organization. In order to identify the problem, you need to size up the situation to make sure that you have the full picture. Size-up involves analyzing the current situation to determine:

- What is happening (and not happening).
- Who is involved.
- What the stakes are.

This information will enable you to identify the problem more accurately.

The questions on the following page will help you to size up the situation.

USING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

Visual 4.8 (Continued)

Size-Up Questions

What has happened?

- What initially happened to create the emergency?
- How long has it been since the initial event?
- What may have caused the emergency?
- Do you suspect criminal activity?

What is happening now?

- Are there injuries or safety concerns?
- Is immediate intervention needed to save lives?
- What are the risks to emergency responders?
- Are crowds and bystanders at risk?
- Are there routes to gain access to the incident scene?

What is likely to happen next?

- Is the situation stable or getting worse?
- Is there a possibility that secondary incidents could occur?
- Are there continuing threats or hazards?
- Can these and any other safety considerations be handled with resources on scene or en route?

What factors affect the response?

- Is the weather or wind affecting the response?
- Is the time of day a factor? Is it getting dark?
- Are responders familiar with the incident scene or building layout?
- Are there hazardous materials or other dangers near the incident scene?
- Are there security concerns?
- Does evidence need to be preserved?

What resources are needed and available?

- What resources will be required?
- Are those resources immediately available or will they be delayed?
- How should the available resources be best deployed now?

USING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

Visual 4.9

Step 2: Explore Alternatives

In a crisis, exploring alternatives involves:

- Identifying contingencies.
- Determining objectives.
- Identifying needed resources.



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Visual 4.9
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

In a crisis, exploring alternatives involves:

- **Identifying contingencies.** Consider the future and think about all of the things that can get in the way of solving the problem you are facing.
- **Determining objectives.** Develop objectives that clearly state what you need to do to be successful. The objectives will drive the alternative solutions and, ultimately, the solution selected. They should also allow you to monitor progress and help you prioritize how time and resources are allocated.
- **Identifying needed resources.** Identify the people, information (data), and things needed to resolve the problem.

To identify needed resources, determine:

- What resources are needed?
- Where will I get them?
- How long will it take?
- What can others offer?
- Are there any special requirements?

USING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

Visual 4.10

Step 3: Select an Alternative

- Carefully consider implementation.
- Ensure plan identifies:
 - Who . . .
 - Will do what (and with whom) . . .
 - By when, where, and how.
- Communicate plans to all involved.



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Visual 4.10
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

There may be repercussions to any solution selected. Carefully consider how the solution will be implemented before selecting an alternative.

In a crisis, selecting an alternative involves building a plan that states:

- Who
- Will do what (and with whom)
- By when
- Where
- How

Plans need to be communicated to all parties involved.

USING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

Visual 4.11

Steps 4 & 5: Implement and Evaluate

- **Implement the solution.**
- **Evaluate the situation:**
 - Has the situation changed?
 - Are more (or fewer) resources required?
 - Is a different solution required?



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Visual 4.11
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Take action to implement the selected solution.

During evaluation, identify if the situation has changed, more or fewer resources are required, or a different alternative solution is required.

Monitoring the success of a solution is an ongoing process that is critical to fine-tuning a course of action.

CASE STUDY ACTIVITY: FORT RICE

Visual 4.12

Case Study Activity: Fort Rice

Instructions:

1. Using the Student Manual:
 - a. Review the case study.
 - b. Refer to the Analytical Approach Problem-Solving Model job aid.
2. Working in groups, answer the questions following the case study.
3. Be prepared to report back to the large group in 15 minutes.

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Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Instructions: Working in groups, follow the steps below to complete this activity:

1. Review the details of the case study in the previous lesson of your Student Manual.
2. Refer to the Analytical Approach Problem-Solving Model job aid introduced in Lesson 2, as needed.
3. Select a spokesperson and be prepared to share your answers in 15 minutes.

Don't worry if you are not providing all of the details of the full process. The point of this activity is for you to consider how you would use the process in a crisis situation.

Instructor Debrief:

1. Select a volunteer to report his/her group's answer to question 1. Ask other groups to share their answer if it was different.
2. Get a different group's spokesperson to share their answer to question 2. Again, ask other groups to share any answers that differ.
3. Continuing in this manner, get the groups to share their answers to the remaining questions.

Note: If desired, you may use another case study that more accurately reflects the composition of the class.

CASE STUDY ACTIVITY: FORT RICE

Visual 4.13

Case Study Questions

Questions:

1. What is the situation?
2. What are your objectives?
3. Who is involved and how will you communicate the alternative selected?
4. What resources are potentially available to you to implement the solution?
5. How will you monitor and evaluate the situation?

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Visual 4.13
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

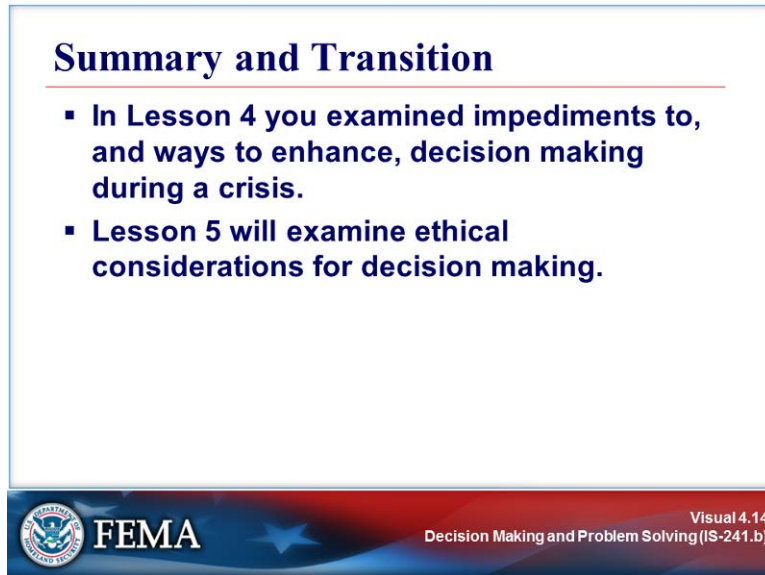
Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Working in assigned groups, respond to the following questions about the case study.

1. What is the situation?	
2. What are your objectives?	
3. Who is involved and how will you communicate the alternative selected?	
4. What resources are potentially available to you to implement the solution?	
5. How will you monitor and evaluate the situation?	

SUMMARY AND TRANSITION

Visual 4.14



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

In Lesson 4 you examined impediments to, and ways to enhance, decision making during a crisis.

Lesson 5 will examine ethical considerations for decision making.

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