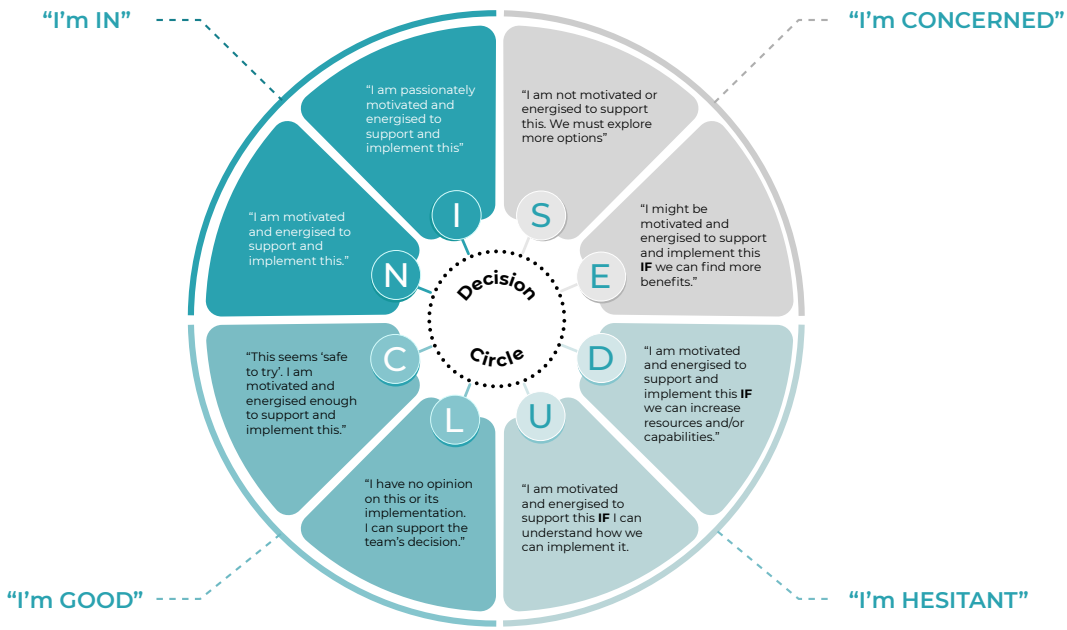
Introduction

1. Challenges in Decision-Making

Teams often encounter decision-making challenges that can impede progress and collaboration.

- A common problem is the misalignment of goals and priorities, causing team members to lack a shared vision, which results in conflicting approaches.
- Insufficient communication regarding a decision can lead to misunderstandings, leave certain concerns unaddressed, and hinder effective collaboration during implementation.
- Additionally, different levels of engagement and commitment within the team can lead to a lack of engagement, creating friction when implementing the decision.
- Unexpressed reservations or concealed concerns may also persist, undermining trust and clarity.
- Importantly, two phrases in the framework relate to this:
    - **Motivated [to support]:** Signifies the proposal provides intrinsic or extrinsic benefits for us and/or the organisation. e.g. business growth, more resources etc.
    - **Energised [to implement]:** Signifies that we have the capability, confidence and resources to implement the proposal. E.g. Experience, knowledge, headcount, etc.

The Solution Focus Decision Circle Framework explained



1. The Four Quadrants – Levels of Support

The Solution Focus Decision Circle framework[1], (Decision Circle) consists of four primary quadrants arranged in a circle. This circular arrangement avoids the "up" and "down" metaphor, which can imply "good" and "bad." Each quadrant reflects different levels of motivation and energy, "buy-in," toward a proposal:

"I'm IN" (Supportive & Motivated)

People in this quadrant are strongly to passionately motivated and energised to implement the proposal. Still, elicit the value in it and how they might enhance it.

- If the proposal or concept affects everyone or requires their support, the team must ultimately determine whether it is IN or GOOD. Strong support does not imply complete understanding. The team should establish the reasons for I & N's support and elicit how they might strengthen the proposal and its implementation.

"I'm GOOD" (Neutral, but Supportive)

These individuals either believe the change is "safe to try" or that it has no impact or benefit for them. Although their support is not enthusiastic, it does not pose an obstacle.

- Teams should ensure neutral individuals understand the concept and its impact, so they do not later resist changes unforeseen to them.

"I'm HESITANT" (Sceptical & Uncertain)

Individuals here are either unmotivated or unsure about the impact of the change. They might support it **if** it satisfies specific conditions (e.g., increased resources, better understanding).

- Teams should address misunderstandings and explore ways to enhance the explanation of the proposal to ensure a broader understanding.

***"I'm CONCERNED"* (Unmotivated & Reluctant)**

These individuals may be strong dissenters. If key implementers are in this quadrant, it could cause the decision to stall. When people are in this quadrant, it indicates the need for adjustments or further discussion before proceeding.

- Teams should elicit concerns, explore more benefits and co-create alternatives to gain buy-in.

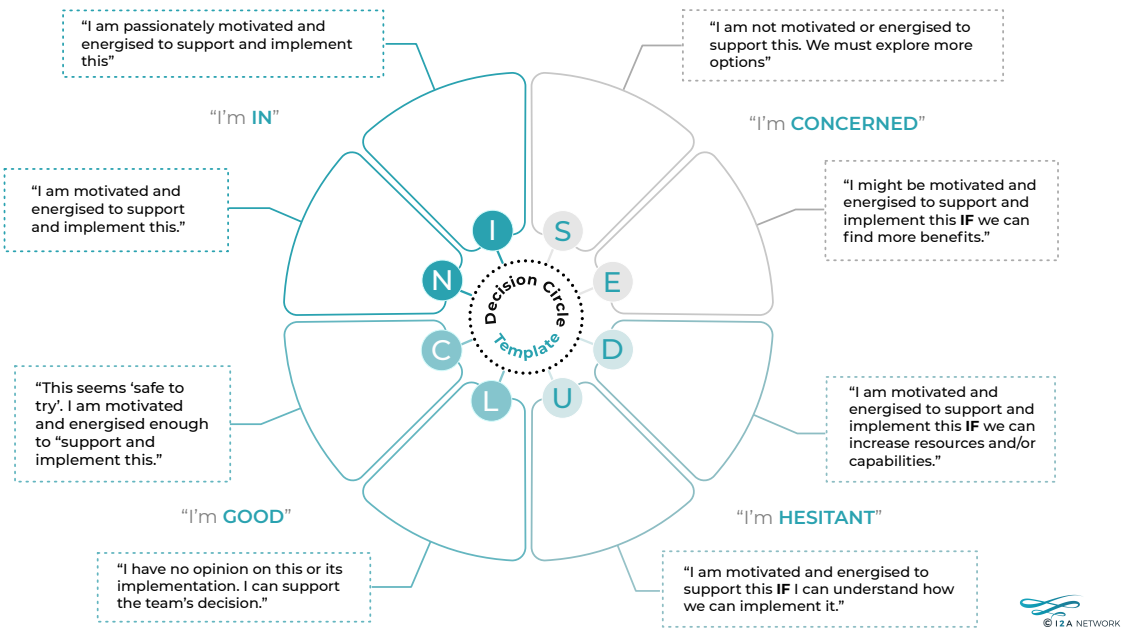
[1] John Brooker, Ania Smolka and Annie Bordeleau of the I2A Network, along with Jeff Parker, John Teager and Sonali Kumarakulasinghe, designed the Decision Circle. The spark for its design, was 'The Gradient of Agreement', shown in "The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making" by Kaner.

2. The Eight Stepping Stones – a starting point for conversation

The Stepping Stone metaphor aims to facilitate progress around the Circle as the team shares information and builds understanding. This sense of movement is essential. It conveys to participants that their starting point is not fixed; it is a valuable first step toward making a better decision and creating a sustainable change.

The Stepping Stones extend the typical decision response from three positions, "Yes, "No", or "Maybe", to eight positions, enabling the team to get a broader understanding of different viewpoints.

- Each stone symbolises a distinct position or perspective on the topic of conversation.
- The descriptions of each Stepping Stone encourage participants to clarify and express their starting positions in a Quadrant, thereby increasing engagement in dialogue.
- By surfacing these perspectives early, teams can prioritise the most impactful discussions, such as clarifying information, addressing resource gaps, or exploring additional benefits and alternatives.
    - The word 'INCLUDES' encompasses the Stepping Stones and indicates that all opinions and diverse perspectives are acknowledged, signifying an inclusive decision-making process.
    - Using letters, not numbers, implies no hierarchy; each stone is an equal and valid choice for considering the change's feasibility.



Using the Decision Circle Framework

1. Present the Proposal or Idea

Clearly outline the proposal's or idea's purpose, scope, and expected outcomes.

- Ensure everyone understands the who, what, why, where, when, and how of the proposal, along with its benefits, etc.

2. Conduct an Initial Poll: Choose Your Segment

Invite everyone to express their response to the idea or proposal by choosing an initial position on a Decision Circle Stepping Stone.

- Physically, they can achieve this by standing or sitting on a Stepping Stone. We recommend avoiding the use of a desk, as it can create a barrier between people. However, if a desk is necessary, they may utilise a marker, such as a touchstone. Virtually, they can place a marker on a graphic representation of the Stepping Stones.
- Starting with an anonymous or named poll on Slido/Menti can be a great starting point as it removes bias and minimises groupthink and power dynamics. The results are hidden until everyone has voted, Once everyone has voted the poll is revealed and people move to their point on the Circle.

3. Explore and Appreciate

Each person states what they **value**, even slightly, about the proposal.

- This step emphasises solution-focused thinking by highlighting positive or promising elements.
- Continue recording these points until the team understands **everything** people find helpful or potentially beneficial in the proposal.

4. Explore Enhancements

Each person shares any modifications, conditions, or resources that would **enhance** this proposal for them, even slightly.

- Focus on practical ideas that could address concerns or increase motivation.
- Continue documenting these points until you have collected all possible enhancements.

5. Synthesise & Modify

1. Select enhancements to add

As a team, decide which suggestions to incorporate.

- This may involve combining multiple ideas into one cohesive plan.

2. **Revise the proposal**

Adjust the original proposal to reflect the agreed enhancements.

- If more time is needed, consider **pausing** here to do further research, find alternatives or consult before finalising the proposition.

6. Re-Poll & Decide

1. **Present the revised proposal**

Restate the updated proposal, highlighting the changes made and the reasons behind them.

2. **Poll for agreement**

Invite everyone to share their (possibly new) position on the Circle.

3. **Verify that there is sufficient support to move forward.**

- If Still Not Enough Support:

4. **Refine the proposal or Pause**

- Continue to refine the proposal based on additional input - OR
  Pause/Shelve: Clarify next steps If the team decides to collect more information, take longer to revise the proposal or set the proposal aside.

7. Final Reflection: Learning for the Future

After making a final decision (to proceed, pause, or shelve), take time as a team to reflect on the **decision-making process** itself.

1. **Individually, rate the process:**

Use a scale of 1-10, where '10' means the process was flawless.

2. **Document Lessons Learned:**

Recognise what went well in the process (e.g., open communication, and emphasis on strengths) and what people would notice if the team were one step along the scale towards "10", e.g., more information would be available in the meeting.

3. **Apply** these insights **to future decisions**

Keep them accessible so they can inform and streamline future decision-making efforts.

How might teams use the Decision Circle?

The **Decision Circle** offers leaders and teams a structured, nuanced way to explore and improve decision-making—especially when facing complex, collaborative choices. Here's how it can be used in practice:

1. Make Team Decisions More Transparent

- Leaders can **surface underlying attitudes** beyond "Yes" or "No."
- Team members can express support, hesitations, or concerns **without blocking progress**.
- Helps reveal who is *motivated to support* and who feels *energised to implement*—or neither.

2. Design Better Proposals Through Iteration

- Teams can co-create or adjust proposals based on input from all positions on the Circle.
- Suggestions from less enthusiastic segments can **strengthen the proposal**.
- Builds a sense of ownership by **integrating feedback** before committing.

3. Avoid False Consensus or Unspoken Resistance

- Encourages a **psychologically safe space** for diverse opinions.
- Reduces the risk of "grudging compliance" or quiet sabotage after decisions are made.
- Clarifies who is **committed** versus who is simply **not objecting**.

4. Prioritise Action Where Energy Is Highest

- Leaders can quickly identify who is **ready to act** and can start momentum.
- Teams can **allocate roles** and resources according to motivation and energy.
- Avoids delays caused by waiting for total buy-in—while still honouring dissent.

5. Reflect on and Improve Group Process

After an initiative, teams can reflect:

- *"Where were we each on the Circle at the start? Did our position shift? Why?"*
- Useful in retrospectives or after-action reviews to **learn from how decisions evolved**.

Common Use Cases

- **Strategy sessions**: Testing support for new directions.
- **Change initiatives**: Gauging readiness and resistance.
- **Team agreements**: Co-creating shared ways of working.
- **Workshops or offsites**: Exploring ideas before moving to action.

How might individuals use the Decision Circle.

The **Decision Circle** isn't just for groups—it's also a powerful self-reflection tool for **individuals** making decisions or preparing to influence others. Here's how it can be used personally:

1. Clarify Your Own Position on a Decision

- Use the Circle to ask yourself:
  - "Am I truly motivated to support this?"
  - "Am I energised to implement it?"
- Helps identify if you're **enthusiastic**, **reluctant**, **unsure**, or just **not engaged**, and why.

2. Prepare for a Meeting or Workshop

- Before a discussion, reflect:
  - "Where am I on this proposal?"
  - "What would move me one step closer to support or action?"
- Helps make your contributions more thoughtful and constructive.

3. Navigate Ambivalence

- When you're torn or hesitant, the Circle helps you:
  - Explore the **benefits you see** (even small ones),
  - Acknowledge your **concerns or lack of energy**, and
  - Identify what might **shift your thinking**.

4. Influence Others More Effectively

- Use it to anticipate how others might respond:
  - "Who is likely to support this but not feel energised?"
  - "Who might need reassurance or a better proposal?"
- Helps you tailor your communication, adjust your proposal and build alignment.

5. Reflect on Past Decisions

- After a decision or project:
  - "Where was I at the start? Did I shift?"
  - "What helped or hindered my engagement?"
- Strengthens your self-awareness and **decision-making patterns**.

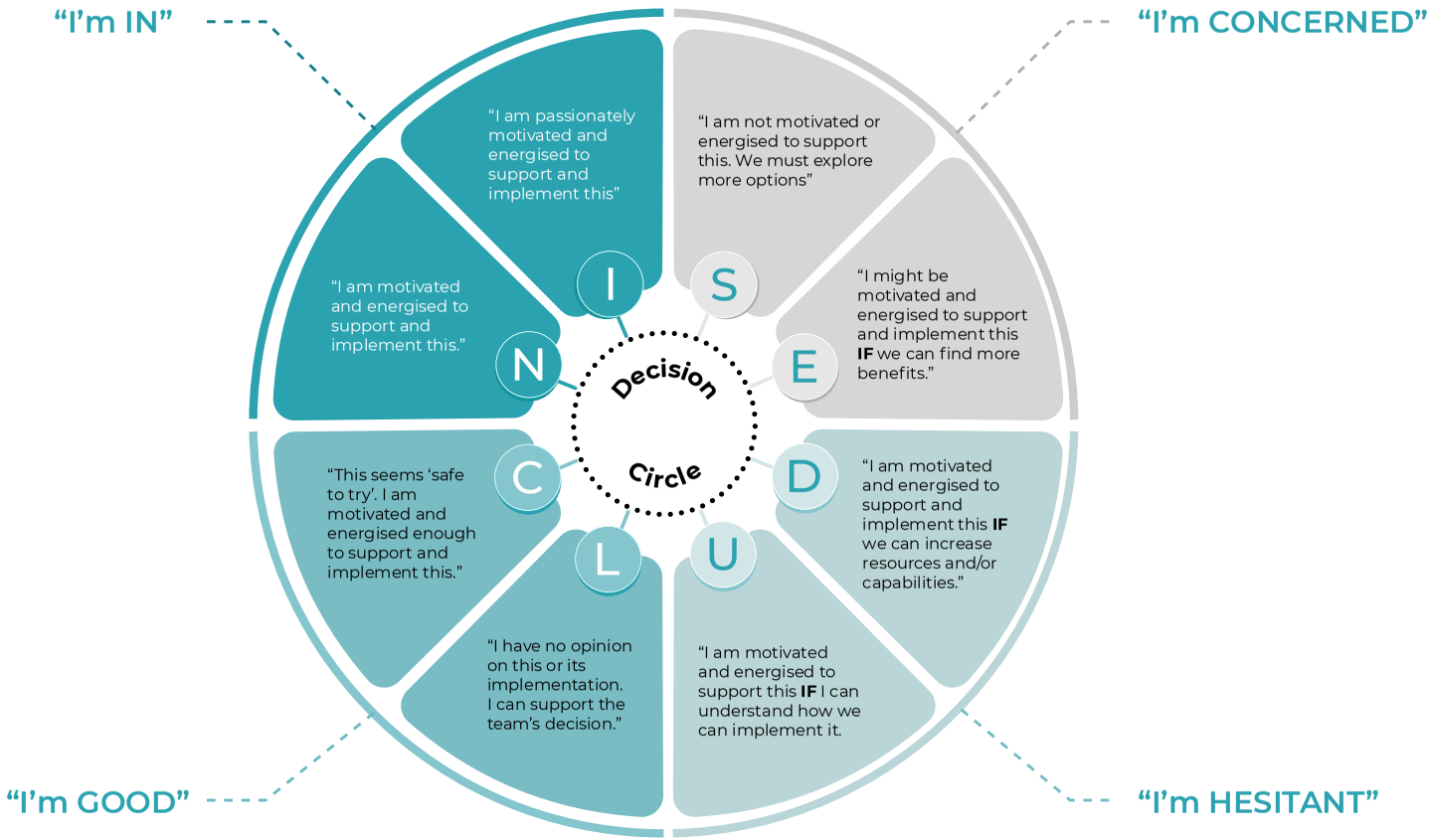
Common Use Cases

- Decide whether to say yes to a new role or project.
- Reflect on how engaged you are with organisational change.
- Prepare for a difficult conversation or proposal.
- Review a decision that didn't go well and learn from it.

To end

We wish the Decision Circle to be shared and used, to this end we ask:

- *Please use the two templates overleaf for printing.*
- *Please acknowledge the developers and I2A Network when using this material.*
- *Please do not change the material without agreement of the developers at yesandjohn@gmail.com. We are very willing to consider new ideas as long as they maintain the Solution Focus principles and questions and adhere to the spirit of the Decision Circle.*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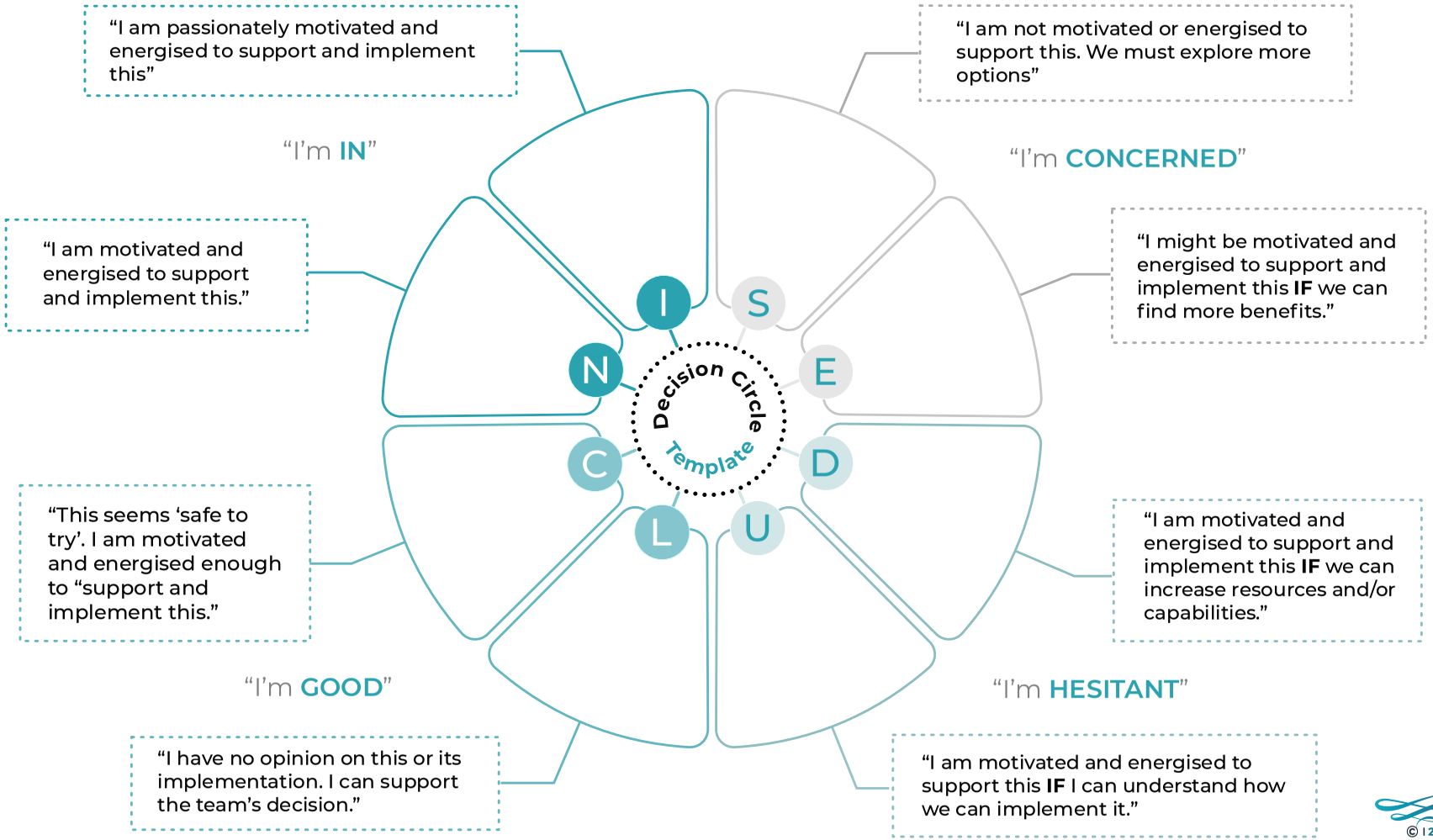
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