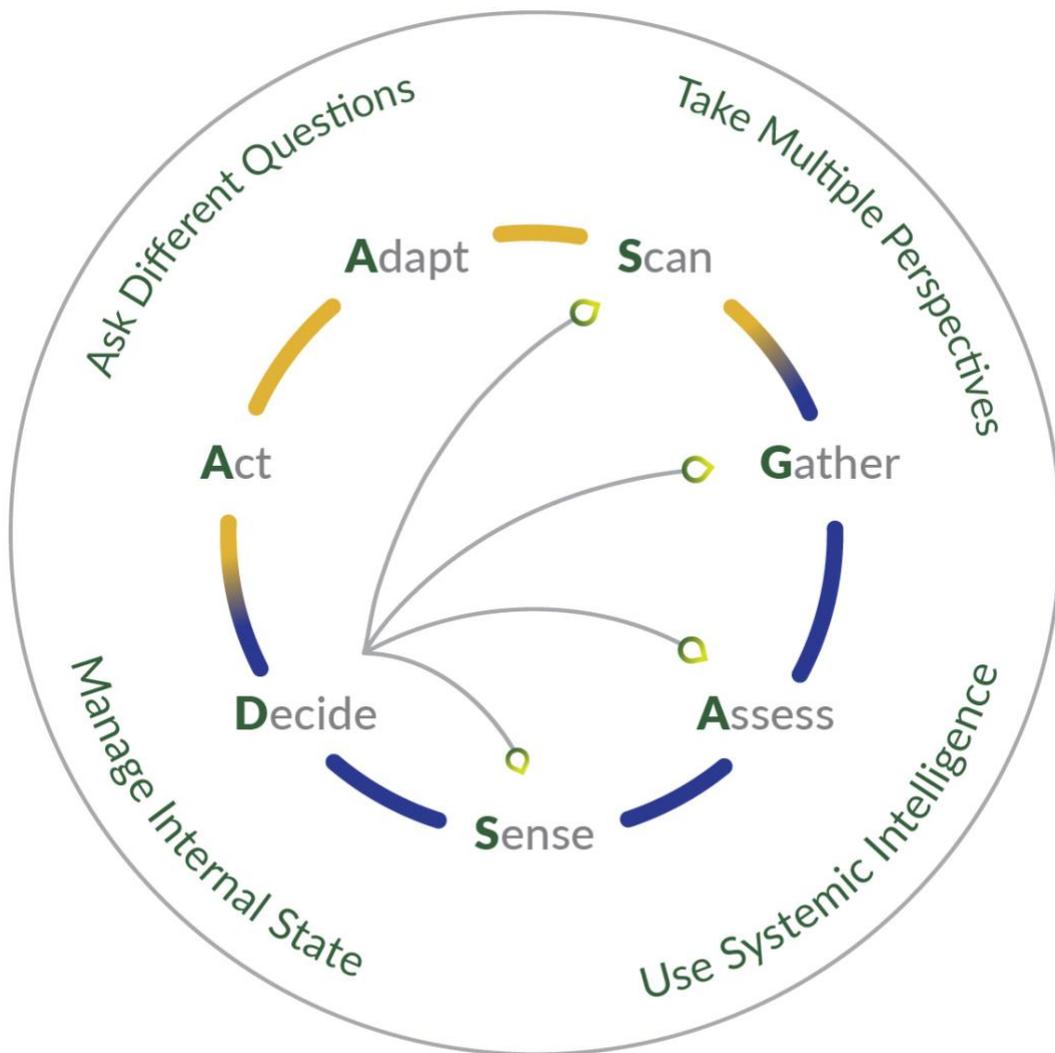


Decision Making Guide for Complex Times



John Sautelle 2020

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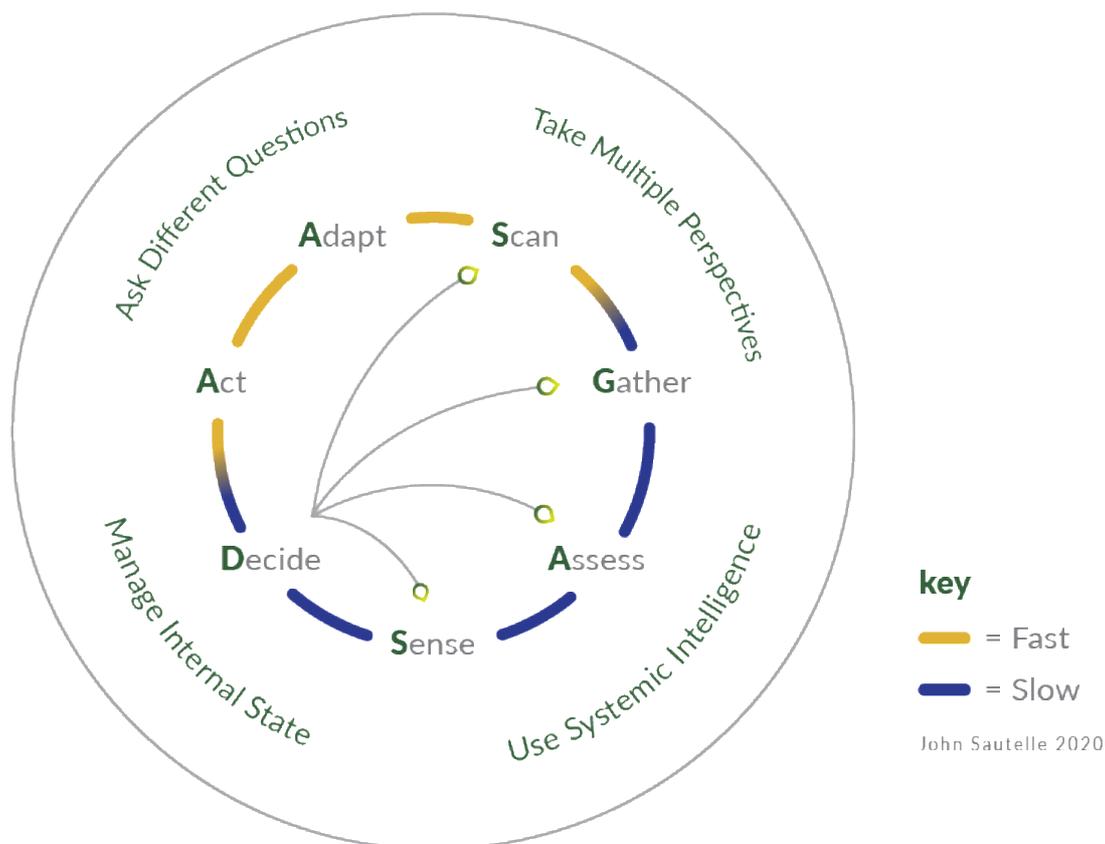
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PART 1: DECISION MAKING FRAMEWORK



Introduction

As our world reels from global health, political, economic and social shockwaves, more than ever we need leaders equipped to make wise decisions. Our fast-moving, complex, Covid-19 driven world is stretching, testing, and reshaping the ways we approach decision making, with many of our 'go-to' frameworks proving insufficient.

Hence this practical and flexible framework, which incorporates key elements in the decision making process – *Scan*, *Gather*, *Assess*, *Sense*, *Decide*, *Act*, and *Adapt*. Whilst these are depicted in a way that may look somewhat static and linear, the innermost section is intended to reflect the continual dynamic and fluid interplay that occurs between them.

The framework also includes four wider practices: *Use Systemic Intelligence*, *Manage Internal State*, *Ask Different Questions* and *Take Multiple Perspectives*. Together with the idea of moving fast and slow, they support all aspects of decision-making.

And, of course, no decision is made in isolation. Every decision you make, whether minor or monumental, is situational and needs to be tested against your purpose, the direction you want to move in, or the specific outcome you want to achieve. This is easy to lose sight of, especially in a crisis, or in really complex situations, when our automatic survival reflexes

activate in unhelpful ways. And that is where this guide can make a big difference. You can see how this is brought to life in [Decision Making in Crises - From Bushfires to Coronavirus](#).

Whether you lead a country, a global business, a not-for-profit organisation, a community organisation, a team, your family or just yourself, this guide is intended to provide you with practical, accessible skills to enhance the quality of your decisions. Part One describes in depth the elements and enabling practices in the framework, and Part Two provides a compilation of helpful questions you can use for any decision you need to make.

Enabling Practices

Use Systemic Intelligence

Individual Systemic Intelligence

Mind

Our mind is really important in all aspects of decision-making, whether it be consciously taking balcony perspectives when scanning the situation we are in, gathering and assessing information, or informing how we set up experiments to move in the desired direction when there is no known way forward. There are many well-known analytical frameworks to help us with all of these steps.

At the same time, our quest to predict and control the future can easily drive us to over-rely on mind and will-power and act on simple stories which assume the future will mirror the past. Accessing all of our intelligence, without over-privileging our mind, helps us avoid that trap.

We know from science that our intelligence is not restricted to our mind. Even single celled organisms possess an inbuilt intelligence. Interacting with their environment, they seek nutrients, avoid threats, work together on projects, and, surprisingly, are even capable of decision making. ¹

As humans we are much more complex systems than single celled protozoa. Made up of more than 37 trillion cells, it should come as no surprise that our intelligence is distributed throughout our bodies. We now have a growing body of evidence that paying attention to our heart, our body, the energetic fields within us, and the fields that connect us, can yield rich sources of information which we may otherwise miss.

Heart, Brain, Body and Emotions

For centuries the heart has been considered the source of emotion, courage and wisdom. Science is now validating those claims. As Amanda Blake points out in her book, *Your Body is Your Brain*:

*"Your heart is one of the essential organs of your distributed brain. It has its own intrinsic nervous system: Small clusters of nerve cells known as neural ganglia monitor blood chemistry and heart rate, sending nine messages to the brain for every one sent the other direction. In other words, your heart is constantly talking to your brain in addition to taking its cues from the surrounding world, oftentimes your brain takes cues about safety and danger directly from the pace of your heart."*ⁱⁱ

Our heart's intrinsic nervous system enables it to act independently of our brain to learn, remember, make decisions and even feel and sense.ⁱⁱⁱ Our heart is the most powerful source of electromagnetic energy in the human body. The magnetic field produced by the heart is more than 100 times greater in strength than the field generated by the brain and can be detected up to 3 feet away from the body, in all directions.^{iv}

Research also shows that when heart rhythms are in a state of balance and harmony, i.e. in coherence, messages are sent to the brain which helps create clarity of mind. This increases creativity and improves decision making, as well as influencing positive states of emotion, which in turn improve overall health.^v

In addition to our heart, the nervous system in our gut is like a mini-brain in itself, sending many more signals to brain than it receives. And it is the only known part of our nervous system that can override messages from the brain. Indeed, as science now shows, our intelligence is distributed throughout our body.^{vi}

From our current understanding of the elaborate feedback networks between the brain, heart, mental and emotional systems, it becomes clear that the age-old struggle between intellect and emotion will not be resolved by the mind trying to win out, but rather by increasing the harmonious balance between our mental and emotional systems – a synthesis that provides greater access to our full range of intelligence.^{vii}

How can we access our systemic intelligence to enhance decision-making?

Before making an important decision in, sit comfortably and focus your attention inward to find a still, quiet and centred place – the place of inner wisdom. As thoughts come to mind, which they inevitably will, notice them, and let them drift away. Bring your attention to the decision you are about to make. Pay attention to sensations and feelings.

If you feel unsettled, if questions are being raised by your gut, or some other part of your body is creating an embodied sense of niggling doubt, it might be wise to hold off making the decision. You may need more information, better assessment, or for some reason the timing might not be right. If, on the other hand, there is a sense of "knowing" which feels calm and clear, you can grow to rely on that.

Collective Systemic Intelligence

Energy Fields

Energy is the life force of living organisms - all cells must have energy to function and all cells release energy. All systems in the human being, from the atomic to the molecular level, are constantly in motion creating energetic resonance which subtly directs and maintains health and wellness.^{viii}

The idea that energy is the carrier of the processes of life and connects everything to everything else is not new. Since antiquity, life energy has been recognised with almost every culture having a name for this energy.^{ix}

We know that our energy field is not limited to our bodies - it can be measured and seen as it expands and contracts into surrounding areas.^x It is also clear that our energy field impacts those around us. For example, researchers have found that consciously directing positive emotional states towards another person has psychological and physiological impacts on that person.^{xi}

Through a process we don't yet fully understand, there is growing evidence we can access information from the energetic fields that connect us.^{xii} Whilst this idea may seem esoteric, and challenging to our logical minds, it is likely you have directly experienced this phenomenon – for example sensing when someone is observing you before you see them; simultaneously having the same thought, or sharing the same emotion as someone else; or if you are a parent, having a “sixth sense” that something has happened to your child before finding out that is indeed the case. Many of these experiences have been validated by research.^{xiii}

People Systems

Organisations are comprised of many interconnected people systems – leadership teams, work teams, business groups, departments or divisions and functional areas are common examples of these. Energy flows through all of these systems, manifesting in patterns of behaviour we give labels to, like *team dynamics* or *team and organisational norms*.

In the well-established field of family systems work, there is a wealth of phenomenological evidence to support the idea of guiding principles which govern the healthy flow of energy within each family system. Increasingly, some of these principles are informing new ways of mapping and improving organisational systems.^{xiv}

How can we access our collective systemic intelligence to enhance decision-making?

We can gain insights into the relationship dynamics in a group, or organisation, through a mapping process whereby important parts of the system, and their relationship with each other, are spatially represented. This mapping process, often referred to as a “constellation”, draws on the metaphor of how constellations of stars, planets, moons and other celestial bodies interact with each other.

After mapping the existing relationships, we can then experiment with different configurations to get a sense of what will help the system move forward in a healthy direction.

This mapping process has been used effectively to help inform intervention decisions for complex organisational challenges, including those related to culture, structure, individual and team performance, morale and conflict patterns that are “stuck”. The process is increasingly being used to support decision-making about future actions, for example whether to keep an existing product brand and testing possibilities for new brands.^{xv}

Manage Internal State

Whilst it is helpful to understand the importance of achieving a harmonious balance between our mental and emotional systems to help our decision-making, in situations where our survival instincts are strongly activated it can be really difficult to keep calm and centred. How then, can we get better at interrupting our survival responses before they take over?

Re-routing automatic responses

How to help stabilise your internal state when a threat response sets in.



John Sautelle 2010

Sensation

Pay attention to the subtle, early warning sensations in your body which signal that strong emotions are starting to engage.

Breathe

Start box breathing - breathe in for a count of four, hold for a count of four, breath out for a count of four, rest for a count of four. This technique is widely used by the Special Forces, public speakers and surgeons, to name a few. A few cycles of box breathing calms and regulates the autonomic nervous system. You might need to experiment to find a rhythm that works for you. As you calm yourself, spend a few moments just being with the discomfort, noticing what that is like.

Name

Quickly give a name to the emotion you are feeling, without going back into the emotion itself. This helps re-activate the “thinking” circuits in your prefrontal cortex.^{xvi}

Observe

Imagine you are observing yourself in the situation and get curious about what is causing your reaction. This helps bring your prefrontal cortex circuits fully back online.

Respond

Choose your response.

The good news is we can practise this process using past experiences, utilising a quirk of our embodied experience of time. Vividly imagining a past experience activates the same neuro-biological processes as if the experience is happening in real time. Recalling past experiences, where mild threat activation occurred, gives you the opportunity to apply the process. Over time, with repeated practise, you will find yourself using automatically calming yourself without having to think about it.

Building our capacity to respond over time

There are many somatic, mindfulness and meditative practices which directly and indirectly help us strengthen our ability to calm ourselves in the moment and build resilience. In writing on this topic, Carolyn Coughlin shares practical insights into how we might do this.^{xvii} And if you want to understand more about our survival circuits and how to work on the unconscious, overprotective stories which activate them, this is the focus of John Sautelle’s book, *Choose Your Stories, Change Your Life*.^{xviii}

Ask Different Questions

In their ground-breaking book, *Simple Habits for Complex Times*, Jennifer Garvey Berger and Keith Johnston explore three powerful enabling practices for leaders dealing with complexity.^{xix}

Asking different questions is one of these practices, and it is essential for effective decision-making, especially when the way forward is unpredictable. As they point out, left to our own devices we limit ourselves to the questions our brain already knows the answers to:

What those who study a variety of topics (e.g., neuroscience, decision making, leadership, medicine) are all learning is that the questions we naturally ask tend to lead us down a path we feel most comfortable about, a path whose destination is already familiar to us. In fact, most of us ask questions to confirm our hypotheses, not out of any deep curiosity or doubt. (p.14).

There is another problematic aspect to this. Because we are hard-wired for survival to focus on threats, the path we automatically tend to head down is often populated with questions that are tightly bound to what we don't want – for example “*how do I reduce turnover of staff*”. Breaking this connection with a different question like “*how do I increase retention*” opens new possibilities for action.

And when we are dealing with complex, unpredictable situations, it is essential to be aware of, and disrupt, the pattern Jennifer and Keith describe. Here are some questions that help do this:

- *What do I know? How do I know that?*
- *What assumptions am I making?*
- *How could I be wrong?*
- *What don't I know? What do I need to know?*

Take Multiple Perspectives

Taking multiple perspectives is another important leadership practice covered in Jennifer and Keith's book. Some earlier references to this idea include the 1960s work of John Grinder, professor of linguistics at Harvard. Over a number of years Grinder and colleagues, looking for common patterns of therapeutic behaviours, examined the practice of several world leading therapists and discovered they used their questioning skills to help clients shift between the perspectives of self, other people and observer of themselves in the situation. Grinder described these perspectives as 1st, 2nd and 3rd position, the latter often described as “getting on the balcony” or “taking a helicopter perspective”.^{xx}

Learning the skill of becoming an observer of yourself is crucial for self-awareness, which is an important ingredient of effective decision-making. In an insightful series exploring the idea that “distance might hold promise in a post-Covid-19 world”, Zafer Achi highlights the value of this:

“If I step up on the balcony of my inner life (examining my motives and beliefs from a distance), I will expand my range of behavioral options in the moment of action. I will be less predictable, and less dependable. I will be harder to condition from the outside. I will experience myself as having agency over my conduct. I will have more range to respond effectively. I might actually be able to thrive.”^{xxi}

In the balance of his blog series, Zafer illustrates the value of taking perspectives at different levels of the systems we find ourselves in – interpersonal, organisational and institutional.^{xxii}

Whether it be gathering information from diverse sources and assessing the weight you give that information, putting yourself in the shoes of those providing the information, getting on the balcony to see yourself in the situation, or getting on a higher balcony to see more of the forces at play, taking multiple perspectives is an essential decision-making skill.

Here are some helpful questions for this:

- *What am I experiencing?*
- *What might others be experiencing?*
- *How would a wise observer describe what is going on?*
- *Whose perspectives have I arbitrarily dismissed or overlooked?*

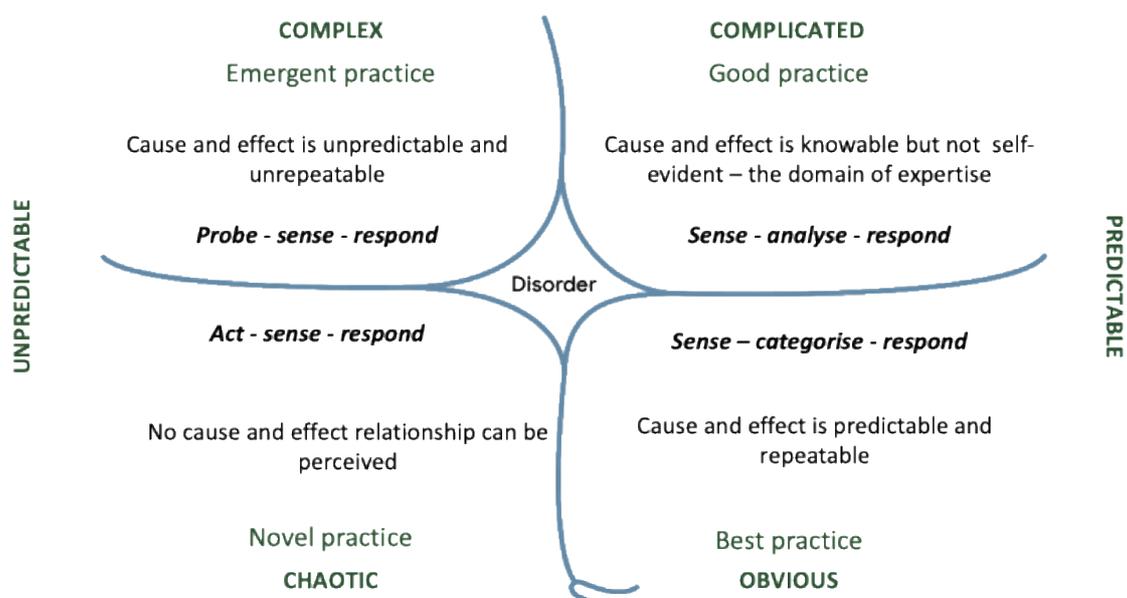
Decision Making Elements

Scan

In *Simple Habits for Complex Times*, Jennifer and Keith articulate a third practice for leaders that is really important in decision-making:

"Seeing the system allows us to step back from our patterns and habits about thinking about the world We have patterns of beliefs about the world that our brains naturally go to, and trying to see the complexity of the situation is a little like brain yoga – unnatural, sometimes painful, and great for increasing our flexibility and reach." P 39

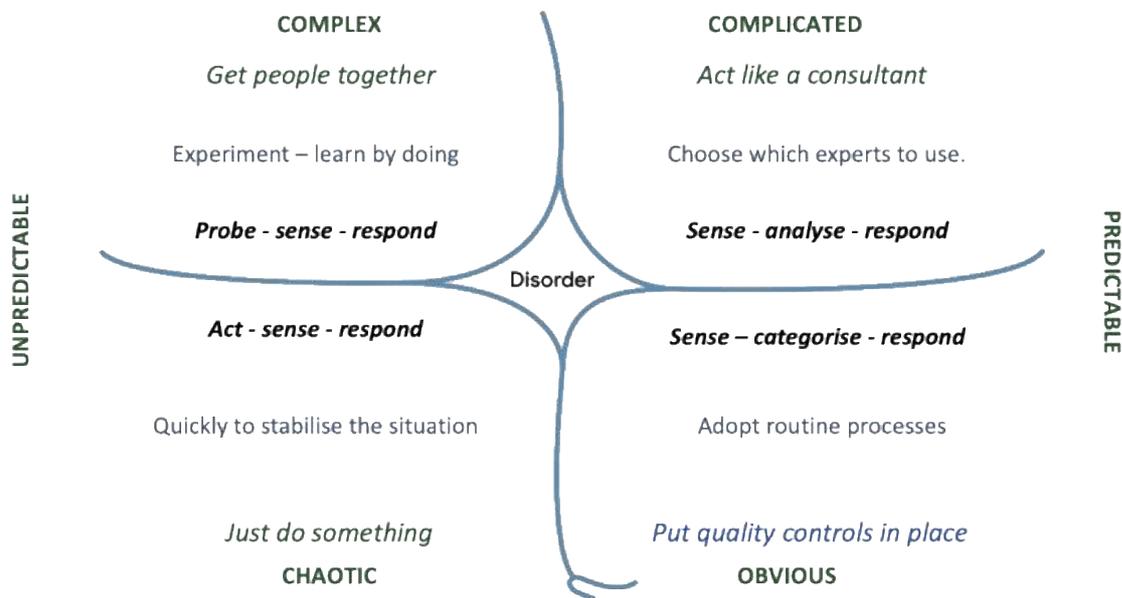
When important decisions are called for, one way of "seeing the system" is through Snowden's Cynefin^{xxiii} sense-making framework, which draws the crucial distinction between situations where the future is predictable and those where it is not. The framework maps out four decision-making domains (*obvious, complicated, complex and chaotic*) and includes disorder, the place we are often in when we aren't sure which domain we are dealing with. The framework is depicted below:



Used and adapted with permission from Cognitive Edge

With any decision, an initial scan using the Cynefin framework is really helpful. Significantly different responses are called for depending on the extent to which the challenge before you exists in the predictable or unpredictable world.

The adapted diagram below summarises some key response approaches which help guide decisions in each of the four domains.



For example, if the challenge involves choosing and implementing a new online human resource system which includes remuneration, all four domains are likely to be involved at different points in the decision-making process. In the complicated domain, it makes sense to engage expert consultants to advise on which system will serve your organisation best. Be wary, however, in assuming there are experts who can tell you exactly how to implement the chosen system. As soon as we get into the realm of behaviour change, we are in the complex domain as we butt up against strong cultural norms that might support or hinder successful implementation – and these will be unique to each organisation.

Implementation requires rapid experimentation to see which approaches support the new system and which undermine it. Whilst there may be patterns from past experiences which inform these experiments, many implementation initiatives founder on the rock of assumed certainty that the past can accurately predict the future. And if implementation fails, resulting, for example, in people not getting their pay, chaos can quickly ensue.

Only when implementation has been successfully achieved can we safely move routine processes to manage the system into the obvious domain.

Cynefin can also help us quickly identify what we are dealing with in crises – where we are likely to be bouncing between the complex and chaotic domains. In those situations, a fast environmental scan, keeping one eye on threats and the other on resources you will need, and at the same time stepping back to notice helpful and unhelpful patterns in how you and those around you are responding, can make a big difference. This is illustrated in the author’s article: Decision Making in Crises – From Bushfires to Coronavirus.^{xxiv}

Helpful questions, based on Cynefin, are included in Part 2.

Gather

Your context, and a *Cynefin* scan, will help inform the type of information you gather, and the speed with which you do that.

In a crisis, when things are chaotic, quickly gathering all the information you can to assess major risks, and inform next steps, is critical. When dealing with complex challenges not requiring urgent, immediate actions, taking time to cast your information gathering net far and wide is important.

Assess

Whilst moving fast to scan and gather information is important in a crisis, slowing down as much as possible when assessing that information is equally important. Here are some important things to consider in the assessment phase: *Situational risks; Key Polarities; Cognitive Biases, Mindtraps and Quality of Information.*

Situational Risks

In a crisis, it is really important to re-evaluate risks. As your context changes, so do the consequential risks.

What new risks do we need to consider?

Which low-consequence risks are now of high-consequence?

How do we mitigate the risks?

Key Polarities

Through his book, *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems*, Barry Johnson identifies many polarities we wrestle with in our personal and organisational lives. We can think of polarities as paradoxes, or interdependent pairs, we live in. For example, activity and rest is a polarity. If we want to stay healthy, we need to balance how active we are with how much rest we get. Over time, if we over focus on the activity pole, we suffer fatigue or injury, forcing us to rest whether we like it or not. And vice versa.

Another polarity, central to human existence, is reflected in our survival need to be simultaneously autonomous and connected to others. If we are too connected, we feel anxious. If we are too separate, we feel anxious. Dancing along this anxiety continuum is one of the most challenging aspects of relationship management, a challenge amplified for leaders who need to balance their own dance whilst paying attention to the uniquely individual dances of those they lead.

In complex or chaotic situations, a number of other key polarities come into sharp focus, including:

*Slow **and** Fast*
*Time spent planning **and** Acting*
*Expertise **and** Experimentation*
*Information quality **and** quantity*
*Stability **and** Innovation*
*Short-term **and** Long-term*
*Customer **and** Organisational needs*
*Information sharing **and** information security*
*Product / service quality **and** cost*
*Task **and** Relationship*
*Individual **and** collective wellbeing*
*Directed **and** Self-directed*
*Compliance **and** Choice*
*Centralised **and** Decentralised functions*
*Reliance on authorities **and** Exercising independent judgment*

Paying attention to polarities not only gives us ideas about what we need address to have balance in our decision-making, noticing which polarities are at play is another helpful way of “seeing the system”, as a core out of balance polarity can heavily influence the direction an organisation is moving in.

For example, in most manufacturing and service industries, if quality is the only focus, financial viability may be compromised. On the other hand, if bottom line profit is the driving force, customer satisfaction suffers and the ability to expand market share will be compromised. In both cases the business will suffer.

When important decisions are made with the aim of getting the best of both quality and profits, the organisation moves towards sustainable growth. In contrast, if either of these poles is seriously out of balance, the organisation will move towards contraction, and at worst, extinction.

Whilst they sometimes show up in different ways, it is important to note are just as important in the public and not-for-profit sectors.

Awareness of polarities at play, and where we are in that balance, gives us choice. There may be reasons to decide to learn more heavily into one side than the other for a period of time – for example with the impact of Covid-19, in the short term, at least, both airlines and regulators need to focus on financial viability as much as possible, whilst maintaining essential safety standards.

Cognitive Biases

In his best-selling book, *Thinking Fast and Thinking Slow*, renowned psychologist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, Daniel Kahneman, describes two internal systems we use to process information.^{xxv} He calls them System 1 - fast, automatic, associative, effortless, unconscious and System 2 - slow, controlled, deductive, effortful and conscious.

When we default to System 1 processing, we are unaware of the cognitive biases identified by Kahneman, and many more identified since by researchers around the world, that impact our decision making. Awareness of these biases increases how much choice we have. Here are some important ones to be aware of, and guard against, when making decisions:

Anchoring bias

Anchoring is the tendency to rely too heavily, or "anchor", on one trait or piece of information when making decisions - usually the first piece of information that we acquire on that subject.

Confirmation bias

The tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms our preconceptions.

Herding Instinct

The tendency to adopt the opinions, and follow the behaviours, of the majority to feel safer and avoid conflict.

Negativity Bias

The phenomena by which we give more psychological weight to bad experiences than good ones. Some research suggests that negative emotions have 3X stronger impact than positive emotions.

Normalcy Bias

The tendency to 'normalize' unusual situations and carry on everyday routines even when urged to take immediate precautions. Nick Petrie provides an interesting take this in his blog, Normalcy Bias – Why people aren't changing behaviors during Coronavirus.^{xxvi}

Outcome bias

The tendency to judge a decision by its eventual outcome instead of based on the quality of the decision at the time it was made.

Recency bias

The tendency to weigh recent events more heavily than earlier events.

Status quo bias

Being swayed by comfort with what already exists, preferring to hang on to what you have or be over-cautious when dealing with risk.

Zero-risk bias

The preference for reducing a small risk to zero over a smaller reduction in a larger risk.

We can mitigate the effect of these by asking:

Which biases might I be subject to?

To what extent will those biases help or hinder me?

Which biases might others be subject to that are unhelpful?

Mindtraps

In her book *Unlocking Leadership Mindtraps*, Jennifer Garvey Berger discerns five pervasive “mind traps” we can fall into - simple stories, rightness, agreement, control and ego.^{xxvii} Depicted below is a summary of these, including some questions that help us mitigate their impact.



SIMPLE STORIES

Our problem-solving nature looks for narrative and shortcuts at the expense of seeing things accurately.



How is this person a hero?

Carry three different stories about this person.



RIGHTNESS

Our sense of being right closes off perspective taking and results in us ignoring contrary evidence.



What do I believe and how could I be wrong?

Listen to learn rather than to win or fix.



AGREEMENT

Agreement satisfies our desire for belonging and can lead to unhelpful compromise or polarisation.



How could this conflict serve to deepen a relationship?

Disagree to expand options.



CONTROL

We want to predict and control to feel safe. We often convince ourselves we have control when we don't.



What can I help influence or enable?

Experiment at the edges.



EGO

Shackled by our ego, to who we are now, we can't reach for who we will be next.



Who do I want to be next?

Pay attention to the adult development map.

We are particularly susceptible to these when our system 1 processing is engaged (see section on cognitive biases above), and all five of these can play unhelpfully into our decision making. Without detracting from the others, the mindtrap of control is particularly problematic, especially when dealing with complexity. As Jennifer explains in her blog [Escaping Corona Mindtraps to Thrive in this New World](#):

“Control. The third mindtrap that seems most threatening during these Covid times has its roots in the delightful experience of being able to control our own destinies. Humans love the feeling of being in control of things, of putting our hands on something to steer it into a better tomorrow. ... The problem is that as we try to control a complex situation, we tend to create perverse consequences that lead us in exactly the wrong direction....The way to escape our control mindtrap is first to notice what sorts of things we have

control over Secondly, we need to understand what is not inside our control and lean into experimenting and learning from the emerging situation.

Quality of Information

A critical aspect of assessment is the preparedness to challenge the quality of all the information you intend relying on. The questions you ask will be informed, in large part, by the situation you are dealing with and the type of decision to be made. Some general questions that will help:

What is the integrity of this data / information? How reliable is it?

What unquestioned assumptions sit under this information?

What is the internal state of the person giving this information?

What biases might they be subject to?

Sense

Before locking in important decisions, accessing your systemic intelligence, is a useful step – see section above.

Decide

With straightforward decisions, the way forward is often clear after the relevant information is gathered and assessed.

In more complex situations, it may become clear that the decision required is to do another situational scan, or gather additional information, or re-assess the information you have.

When dealing with significant complexity, where there is no way of predicting what will or won't work to find a way forward, traditional tools like outcome-based project management are of little help and experimentation becomes the order of the day. As complex systems highly sensitive to small interventions, experiments are chosen to “nudge the system”, and monitored to see if this helps move the system in the desired direction.

This technique is very familiar in the field of behavioural economics. In the United Kingdom, the Behavioural Insights Team, also known as the Nudge Unit, a social purpose company that is jointly owned by the UK Cabinet Office, innovation charity Nesta and the Team's employees, has been engaged in designing and running experiments to improve people's lives and communities for many years. Now global, the team partners with governments, local authorities, businesses and charities, often using simple changes to tackle major policy problems.^{xxviii}

In one of their early initiatives the team looked at police recruitment in the United Kingdom, and how to get a wider ethnic mix into the police force. After trying many different approaches, they discovered something that made a big difference. Just before applicants undertook an online recruitment test, in an email sending the link, a line was

added saying "before you do this, take a moment to think about why joining the police is important to you and your community". Whilst this had no impact on white applicants, the pass rate for black and minority ethnic applicants moved from 40 to 60 per cent.

The following graphic summarises some key guidelines to inform experimentation decisions.



- If it starts to feel like a project...
- If you need a lot of planning...
- If you need permission...
- If you're saying, "I just don't have time to do an extra thing..."
- *...it's probably not an experiment!*

And here are some guiding questions:

- *What is our desired direction?*
- *How will we know we are moving towards, or away from, that direction?*
- *What boundaries do we need to set to ensure any negative impacts are manageable?*
- *What experiments can we run at the lowest cost and within the fastest time?*
- *What experiments can we design to fail and learn from?*
- *How will we monitor the impact of the experiments?*
- *If an experiment is moving us in the desired direction, how do we amplify it?*
- *If an experiment is moving us in the wrong direction, how will we dampen it or shut it down?*

Act and Adapt

Whilst the context and type of decision made will determine which implementation actions are taken, common to all decisions is the need for clarity when it comes to monitoring success - likewise the need to be clear about what will signal the need to adapt.

Two more questions follow from this:

- *How will we know our actions are successful?*
- *What will tell us we need to adapt and make another decision?*

PART 2: DECISION MAKING QUESTIONS

You can apply these questions to any decisions you need to make. They are particularly useful when you are dealing with complex situations characterised by high levels of uncertainty, ambiguity and unpredictability.

General

What is our purpose / direction? What do we want to achieve?

What do I know? How do I know that?

What assumptions am I making?

How could I be wrong?

What don't I know? What do I need to know?

Use Systemic Intelligence

What is my body telling me?

When I calm and centre myself, what does my inner wisdom reveal?

What unhelpful behaviours keep repeating?

What remains stuck?

Scan the System

What is predictable?

What is unpredictable?

What can I control?

What can't I control?

What can I influence?

In the Complex Domain

General

What is our desired direction?

What helpful patterns of activity/behaviour do we see?

What factors support these helpful patterns?

How do we nudge and amplify these factors?

What unhelpful patterns do we see?

What factors support these unhelpful patterns?

How might we dampen these factors?

Experimenting

What boundaries do we need to set to ensure any negative impacts are manageable?

What experiments can we run at the lowest cost and within the fastest time?

What experiments can we design to fail and learn from?

How will we monitor the impact of the experiments?

*If an experiment is moving us in the desired direction, how do we amplify it?
If an experiment is moving us in the wrong direction, how will we dampen it or shut it down?*

Take Multiple Perspectives

*What am I experiencing?
What might others be experiencing?
How would a wise observer describe what is going on?
Whose perspectives have I arbitrarily dismissed or overlooked?*

Assessing Situational Risks

*What threats do we need to focus on?
What new risks do I need to consider?
Which low-consequence risks are now of high-consequence?
How do we mitigate the risks?
How do we keep necessary "business as usual" activities going?
What might be coming that we need to plan for?
What resources might we need? What resources do we have?*

Assessing Polarities

*Which timeframes are most relevant to focus on now?
How and when might I need to adjust those?
What will tell me I am overthinking this? What will tell me I am acting too quickly?
What risks are the experts and authorities trying to manage?
To what extent do those risks apply to our situation?*

Assessing Cognitive Biases

*Which biases might I be subject to?
To what extent will those biases help or hinder me?
Which biases might others be subject to that are unhelpful?*

Assessing Mindtraps

*What simple stories am I creating?
What do I believe, and how could I be wrong?
How could this conflict serve to deepen our relationships?
How might my need for control be limiting me?
Who do I want to be next?
How might ego be trapping me?*

Assessing Quality and Integrity of Information

*What is the integrity of this data / information? How reliable is it?
What assumptions is this information based on?
What might be the internal state of the person giving this information?
What biases might they be subject to?*

Endnotes

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- ii Amanda Blake, [Your Body is Your Brain, p.75](#)
- iii Armour, J.A., *Anatomy and function of the intrathoracic neurons regulating the mammalian heart, in Reflex Control of the Circulation*, I.H. Zucker and J.p. Gilmore, Editors. 1991, CRC Press: Boca Raton. p. 1-37
- iv Source: <https://www.heartmath.org/research/science-of-the-heart/>
- v McCraty, R., Atkinson, M., and Tomasino, D. (2001). [Science of the Heart: Exploring the role of the heart in human performance](#)
- vi Your Body is Your Brain, pp. 48-51.
- vii Source: <https://www.heartmath.org/research/science-of-the-heart/>
- viii Source: Dr Christina Ross, biophysicist, *Energy Medicine: Current Status and Future Perspectives*, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6396053/>
- ix For a comprehensive list see: Hans Andeweg, [Connect. Everything is Energy, Everything is One, Everything is Possible](#)
- x Source: Dr Konstantin Korotov, Professor of Computer Science and Biophysics, *General principles of electrophotonic analysis. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference, Measuring Energy Fields*, Kamnik, Tunjice, 2007, pp. 87-92.
- xi Tiller, W. and Dibble, W. (2009). *What is information entanglement and why is it so important to psychoenergetic science?* Published Computer Science. [Published in Computer Science](#)
- xii See Sheldrake, R., *The Presence of the Past*. London., Collins.1988, Chapter 6 and Rupert Sheldrake. *Dogs That Know When Their Owners are Coming Home*, New York, Three Rivers Press, Random House 1999.
- xiii See Korotov, above.
- xiv See, for example, John Whittingdon's book: [Systemic Coaching & Constellations](#)
- xv See Whittington, above. Also: Jan Jacob Stam's book: *Fields of Connection*.
- xvi Lieberman and others. "Putting feelings into words: Affect labelling disrupts amygdale activity in response to affective stimuli." *Psychological Science* 18, no. 5 (2007): 421-28.
- xvii Carolyn Coughlin, [Love, Loss, Grief, Complexity, and Resilience](#)
- xviii John Sautelle, [Choose Your Stories, Change Your Life](#)
- xix Jennifer Garvey Berger and Keith Johnston, [Simple Habits for Complex Times](#)

xx See John Grinder and Judith de Lozier’s book, [Turtles All The Way Down: Prerequisites to Personal Genius](#)

xxi Zafer Achi, [In Praise of the Winding Road – Part 1](#)

xxii Zafer Achi, [In Praise of the Winding Road: Part 2](#), [Part 3](#) and [Part 4](#)

xxiii See [The Origins of Cynefin - Cognitive Edge](#)

xxiv John Sautelle, [Decision Making in Crises – From Bushfires to Coronavirus](#)

xxv Daniel Kahneman, [Thinking Fast and Slow](#)

xxvi Nick Petrie, [Normalcy Bias - Why people aren’t changing behaviors during Coronavirus.](#)

xxvii Jennifer Garvey Berger, [Unlocking Leadership Mindtraps](#)

xxviii See [The Behavioural Insights Team](#)
