

Why We Struggle with Tough Decisions

Overcoming Doubts and Dilemmas



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Course Objectives

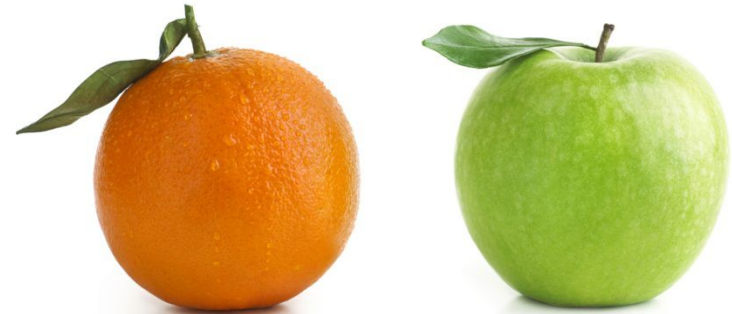
After you've completed this course, you'll be able to:

- Understand the role that emotions play in decision-making.
- Describe how to make a decision effectively, recognizing key steps to take before, during, and after the decision-making process.
- Identify your values in order to guide your actions, behaviors, and decisions.
- Put into practice various methods for collecting and evaluating information.
- Recognize—and avoid—the most common traps that complicate tough decisions.
- Develop strategies to overcome your concerns about making and implementing tough decisions.

Introduction

According to Dr. Sheena Iyengar, author of *The Art of Choosing* and one of the world's experts on choice, a person makes an average of 70 choices per day.¹ Many of these decisions are easy and don't require any deep thought. But others are difficult, and we struggle with the decision-making process, wondering whether we've made the right choice and worrying about the cost of the wrong choice.

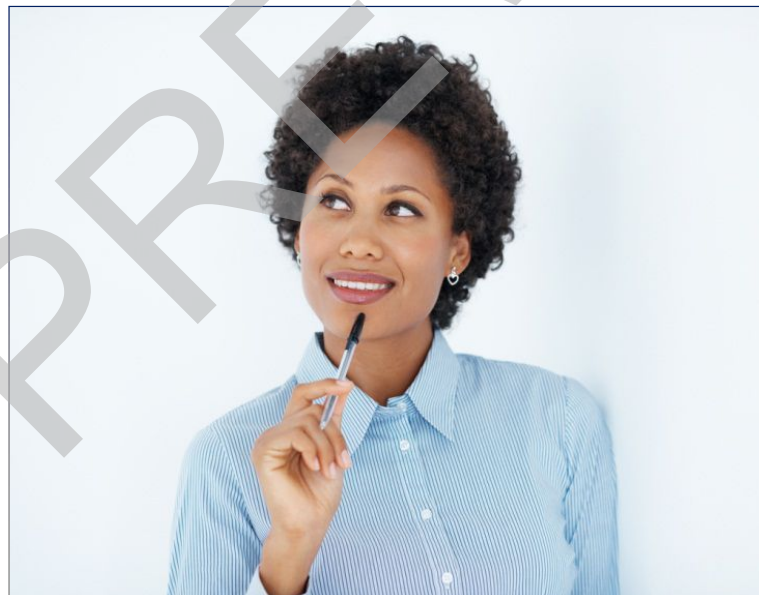
In the workplace, some people get stuck overanalyzing all of their choices—they want a spreadsheet packed with data before proceeding with any decision. Others swear by their intuition and have no data to back up how they arrived at a particular decision.



¹ Refer to the "References" slide for all citations.

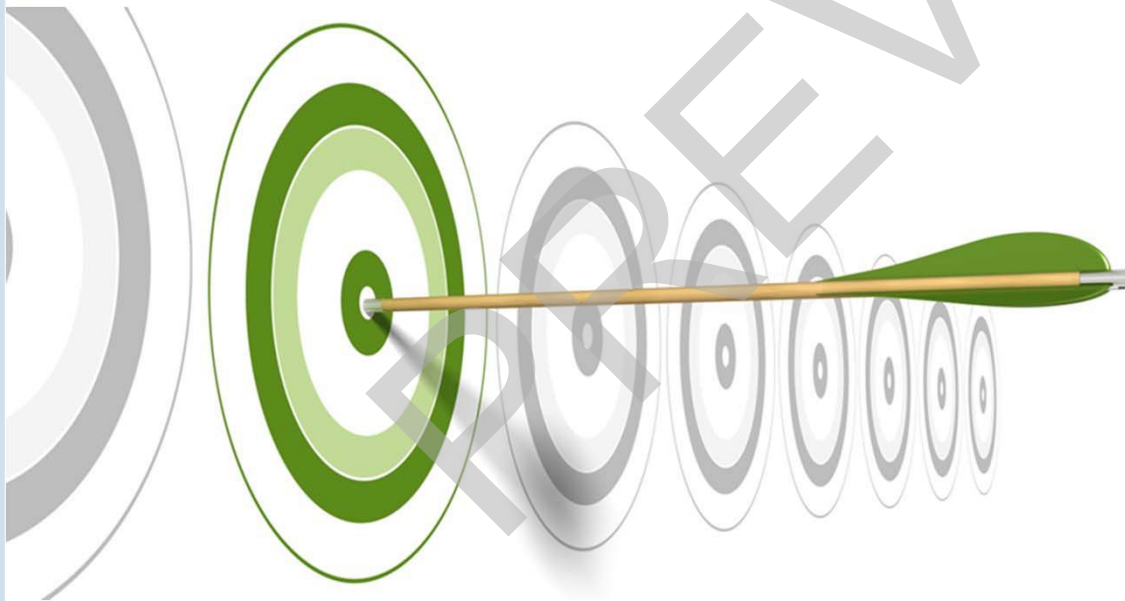
Introduction (cont.)

So how can you make a high-impact decision that is effective, practical, and successful? By having a clear objective, gathering and evaluating information in a structured way, avoiding common decision traps, and by using your intuition to confirm or question your decision. This course will enhance your confidence and skill at making—and implementing—tough decisions, allowing you to increase your value to your organization and actively contribute to its success.



What Is a Good Decision?

Take a moment to think about how you would define a “good” decision. Once you’ve come up with a brief description, compare it to the course’s definition: A good decision is one that **achieves a clear objective and makes the decision-maker feel satisfied and committed to its implementation.**



Why We Struggle with Tough Decisions

Module 1: The Neuroscience of Making Decisions

How Emotions Affect Decision-Making (cont.)

A famous study conducted in 1982 by neuroscientist [Antonio Damasio](#) was based on his observations of a patient named Elliot.⁵ Elliot had a small tumor removed from his cortex near the frontal lobe of his brain.

Before the surgery, the patient's brain function was completely normal. After the surgery, the patient no longer showed any emotion AND he couldn't make a decision, no matter how big or small.

Damasio studied other patients with similar brain damage. He pinpointed the orbitofrontal cortical lobe (OFC) as the part of the brain responsible for integrating visceral emotions into the decision-making process.

He concluded that when this part of the brain is damaged, we lose access to the wealth of experience and information that we rely on to make decisions.



A Radical New View of Emotions

The Damasio study fundamentally reversed previous thinking about making decisions—up until this point, the prevailing theory was that rational thinking produced the best decisions. Damasio's finding and subsequent studies have shown that **making decisions well requires the involvement of emotions.**



Key Steps of Making a Tough Decision

When you have to make a tough decision, it can be helpful to think of it in three parts: before, during, and after the decision-making process.

Before: Determine Values and Objective

- Identify your values, since tough decisions by their nature often involve conflicting values.
- Define your objective. What result do you want your decision to achieve?

During: Collect and Analyze Information

- Choose an approach for collecting information.
- Select a method for analyzing information.

After: Gut Check

- Check the decision based on rational analysis against your instinct.
- If your gut raises a red flag, see whether you've overlooked anything that your subconscious recognized.



What Are Your Top Values?

To identify your values, complete the exercises on the [What Are Your Top Values? Worksheet](#), located in the HRDQ folder that was created when you installed this course. On the worksheet, you will:

- Rate how important certain values are to you.
- Narrow the list down to your top five values.
- Determine whether any of your top five values might conflict with one another.
- Choose one of your top values and describe why it is important to you and how it influences your decisions.

**What Are Your Top Values?
Worksheet**

Instructions: Rate each value on the list below according to how important it is to you. Use the following scale: 1 = unimportant, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = extremely important. When you have finished rating the items, continue the activity on the next page.

Values		
Accountability	Fast pace	Optimism
Achievement	Financial gain	Physical challenge
Adventure	Flexibility	Pleasure
Aesthetics	Friendship	Power/authority
Belonging	Fun	Precision
Challenge	Growth	Privacy
Close relationships	Happiness	Public service
Commitment	Hard work	Recognition
Community	Harmony	Respect
Competition	Helping others	Responsibility
Control	Honesty	Security
Cooperation	Independence	Stability
Creativity	Influence on others	Status
Decisiveness	Integrity	Supervision
Dependability	Job satisfaction	Taking risks
Education	Knowledge	Team orientation
Excellence	Learning	Travel
Excitement	Leisure time	Wisdom
Fairness	Loyalty	Working under pressure

If a strong value of yours is not included, list it here:

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Define Your Objective

The next step in making a tough decision is to define your objective, which is the **result you want to achieve from your decision**—the “end.” Many people skip this step and go straight to identifying their options, which are the ways you can achieve your objective—the “means.”

A helpful technique to define your objective is to ask: **“What is the best way to...?”** For example, instead of asking, “Should we expand our business overseas?” ask, “What is the best way to increase the value of our company?” The question should reflect what is important to you and your company.



Weighted Criteria (cont.)

- For each alternative, assign a value to each factor to indicate how much that factor is fulfilled. Usually, a range of 0 to 5 will work (0 being “doesn’t fulfill at all” and 5 being “fulfills completely”).
- Some factors may be more important than others. Indicate this by assigning a different “weighted importance” number to each criterion.
- Multiply the value you assigned to each factor by the weighted importance of that factor.
- For each alternative, add the numbers from each factor, then compare totals. The alternative with the highest total is your best choice.

	Alternative (City to Live in)	Factors				TOTAL
		Nice Climate (20)	Low Crime Rate (10)	Appealing Culture (15)	Job Availability (5)	
4	Austin, TX	2 (40)	3 (30)	5 (75)	5 (25)	170
3	Boulder, CO	5 (100)	4 (40)	5 (75)	4 (20)	235
5	Des Moines, IA	3 (60)	5 (50)	3 (45)	5 (25)	180

Why We Struggle with Tough Decisions Test Your Knowledge

Read the question, then click on the answer.

You work for an interior decorating magazine and writers have pitched eight stories to feature in an upcoming issue. They're all good ideas but you have room for only three stories. Which tool for gathering and evaluating information would be most useful in this situation?

a. Internal reflection.

b. Weighted criteria.

c. Decision tree.

d. None; simply trust your intuition.



Why Are You Concerned?

This module explores the three main reasons that people are concerned or anxious about following through on tough decisions.

- **Upsetting others:** This can range from one particular person to a much broader group.
- **Failure:** Even when there is a strong possibility for success, people tend to fear the consequences of falling short.
- **Change:** People are often comfortable with the current situation and feel apprehensive about the unknown.



Case Study

Read the case study and answer the questions that follow in order to put your critical thinking skills into practice.

Organization: KAV Architects, Inc., an architectural firm specializing in healthcare facilities.

People: Kevin, the owner of the architecture firm, and Sarita, VP of Development of All Seasons Residences.

Situation: Kevin's architectural firm specializes in healthcare facilities, and his industry is very sensitive to changes in the economy. Kevin has struggled to turn a profit since he started the company ten years ago. He employs five people and feels responsible for their welfare.



Questions to Consider

1. What is the objective of Kevin's decision? Did he clearly articulate it?
2. What values, if any, are in conflict with one another?
3. Did Kevin fall into any decision traps? If so, which one(s)?
4. Would a structured method of gathering and evaluating information be beneficial in this situation? If so, which one?



Review the ideas and suggestions provided on the following slides.

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