

Decision Cycle Tools

A guide to the tools that accompany LIFE: Our Uncertain Experiment

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The main tool in LIFE: Our Uncertain Experiment is the Decision Cycle, described in Chapters 14 to 16. The tools listed here support it. They are not alternatives to it. Turn to a tool when a particular step gives you trouble, or when a decision is significant enough that you want to be sure you have covered everything it deserves. None are compulsory, and Chapter 17 of the book explains when each could help.

Each tool can be downloaded as a PDF from uncertaindecisions.com, printed, and used offline. The table below lists them all. A short description of each follows.

#	Tool	Where it is used	Pages	Licence
1	Decision-Making Patterns and Hesitation	Before you start	7	CC BY
2	Risk Tolerance Questionnaire	Before you start; also Step 5	6	CC BY
3	Individual Decision Support Guide	Before you start	3	CC BY
4	Framing Your Decision	Step 1: Frame the Decision	3	CC BY
5	Stakeholder Discovery Worksheet	Step 1: Frame the Decision	2	CC BY
6	Outcome Mapping Tool	Steps 1 and 4	7	CC BY
7	Gathering Information Well	Step 2: Explore the Evidence	3	CC BY
8	Using AI in the Decision Cycle	All steps	4	CC BY
9	Pre-Mortem Template	Step 3: Challenge Your Thinking	3	CC BY
10	Second-Order Effects Worksheet	Step 3: Challenge Your Thinking	3	CC BY
11	Generating Options	Step 4: Weigh the Options	3	CC BY
12	Options Comparison Worksheet	Step 4: Weigh the Options	2	CC BY
13	Risk Classification Tool	Step 5: Assess the Risks	6	CC BY
14	Values Clarification Guide	Step 6: Test Your Values	4	CC BY
15	Regret Minimisation Framework	Step 6: Test Your Values	4	CC BY
16	Decision Communication Planner	Step 7: Decide and Commit	3	CC BY
17	Decision-to-Action Planner	Steps 7 and 8	3	CC BY
18	Implementation Progress Check	Step 8: Do and Deliver	2	CC BY
19	Learning Log and After-Action Review	Step 9: Reflect and Learn	4	CC BY
20	Getting the Lesson Right	Step 9: Reflect and Learn	4	CC BY
21	Deciding Under Pressure	Steps 1 to 9	14	Reserved
22	Deciding Under Pressure: For the Person Helping	Steps 1 to 9	15	Reserved
23	Evaluating Trust	Step 2, and wherever you rely on a source	6	CC BY
24	Bias Awareness Checklist	Step 3, and whenever you need it	6	CC BY
25	Risk vs Uncertainty Matrix	Steps 2 and 3	4	CC BY
26	Finding the Root Cause	Steps 1, 5 and 9	3	CC BY

Before you start

Some tools are about you rather than the decision, so they come before you start the Decision Cycle.

1 Decision-Making Patterns and Hesitation

Before you start · 7 pages · CC BY 4.0 · [Decision_Making_Patterns_and_Hesitation_PV1_20261008.pdf](#)

Two self-checks in one document. Part A helps you identify which of the eight decision-making patterns described in Chapter 12 you bring to decisions in general - Perfectionist, Avoider, Pleaser, Worrier, Ruminator, Impulsive, Overconfident or Fatalist - with the strength and cost of each and what helps. Part B is a diagnostic for when one particular decision has stalled and you are not sure why: it identifies the kind of hesitation you face and where to re-enter the Decision Cycle. It also covers self-trust.

2 Risk Tolerance Questionnaire

Before you start; also Step 5 · 6 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Risk_Tolerance_Questionnaire_PV1_20261008.pdf

Helps you work out how much risk you are willing to carry, before a particular decision distorts the answer. Eight scenarios, a set of statements about how you see yourself, and a look at how your tolerance varies across areas of your life produce a risk profile, with a key question for each profile. Complete it before you start, and return to it at Step 5 when you set your threshold for a decision.

3 Individual Decision Support Guide

Before you start · 3 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Individual_Decision_Support_Guide_PV1_20261008.pdf

A short self-check to take stock before you begin. It first asks whether you face a decision at all, or a problem whose cause is not yet understood, then works through your emotional starting point, your situation, your assumptions, biases, doubts and anxieties, and the cost of not deciding. The aim is to see what is already influencing your thinking, so you can take it into account.

Working through the steps

These tools support particular steps, in the order of the Decision Cycle.

4 Framing Your Decision

Step 1: Frame the Decision · 3 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Framing_Your_Decision_PV1_20261008.pdf

A guide to Step 1 and to writing a clear decision statement. It explains why the question as first presented is usually not the right frame, and gives six techniques for testing it: broaden, narrow, restate as an opportunity, shift perspective, remove a constraint, and work backwards from the outcome you need. It ends with signs that a frame is working, examples of clear decision statements, a check on assumptions, and common framing mistakes.

5 Stakeholder Discovery Worksheet

Step 1: Frame the Decision · 2 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Stakeholder_Discovery_Worksheet_PV1_20261008.pdf

A worksheet for identifying who is affected by your decision and who must be told. You record each person or group, their interest, how much they can influence the decision and how much it will affect them, then consider who owns the decision, whose view you might be overlooking, and how it looks from their side. Use it before the Stakeholders and Timing questions in Step 1.

6 Outcome Mapping Tool

Steps 1 and 4 · 7 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Outcome_Mapping_Tool_PV2_20261010.pdf

Helps you separate what you are choosing to do from the outcomes you need. Part 1 sets out the objective and the outcomes that matter, for you and for others. Part 2 maps each alternative forward through its intended and unintended consequences, immediate and delayed, with what could boost a good result, and asks whether it delivers the outcomes you need or only the objective.

7 Gathering Information Well

Step 2: Explore the Evidence · 3 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Gathering_Information_Well_PV1_20261008.pdf

A guide to Step 2 on where to look and when to stop. It covers mapping what you know against what you do not, deciding which gaps matter, five types of information source with the strength and caution for each, judging the quality of what you find, how confirmation bias affects the search itself, and recognising when you have enough to move on.

8 Using AI in the Decision Cycle

All steps · 4 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Using_AI_in_the_Decision_Cycle_PV1_20261008.pdf

A practical guide to using AI as a thinking partner rather than a decision-maker. It explains what tools such as ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini can and cannot do, where they can help at each step of the Decision Cycle, five principles for prompting them well, and what to be cautious about, including their habit of agreeing with you. The decision and its consequences stay with you.

9 Pre-Mortem Template

Step 3: Challenge Your Thinking · 3 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Pre_Mortem_Template_PV1_20261008.pdf

Imagine your decision has been made and has failed, then ask why. Based on Gary Klein's pre-mortem, this template helps you identify the single most probable cause of failure and the warning signs you could observe early enough to act, so you can design against it before committing. Step 5 then covers the full range of risks.

10 Second-Order Effects Worksheet

Step 3: Challenge Your Thinking · 3 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Second_Order_Effects_Worksheet_PV1_20261008.pdf

Most thinking about consequences stops at what happens first. This worksheet traces what happens next, and what follows from that, for the direction you are considering and for doing nothing, including the effects on the people and conditions that made the decision possible. It ends with an assessment of which effects matter and whether they change your thinking.

11 Generating Options

Step 4: Weigh the Options · 3 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Generating_Options_PV1_20261008.pdf

A guide to widening the field past the obvious two. It sets out three rules for generating options and seven techniques, from a simple brainstorm and its reverse to hybrid options and asking what you would do if your favourite were unavailable. It also covers the common reasons option generation falls short, and a check that each option is well defined before you compare them.

12 Options Comparison Worksheet

Step 4: Weigh the Options · 2 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Options_Comparison_Worksheet_PV1_20261008.pdf

A worksheet for comparing up to four options against your own success criteria, carried forward from Step 1. You mark the must-haves, weight the other criteria, score each option and identify a front-runner, then test it by asking what would make it wrong and what would make you switch to the strongest alternative.

13 Risk Classification Tool

Step 5: Assess the Risks · 6 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Risk_Classification_Tool_PV1_20261008.pdf

A single tool that works through the whole of Step 5: a first take on the risk and your threshold, what could go wrong, the realistic range of outcomes, a register of key risks with their causes and preventive actions, reversibility and resilience, a response for each significant risk, residual risk, warning signs and contingency, and a risk verdict of Pass, Mitigate, Accept or Return.

14 Values Clarification Guide

Step 6: Test Your Values · 4 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Values_Clarification_Guide_PV1_20261008.pdf

A guide to identifying and ranking what matters to you, then applying it to the decision in front of you. Part 1 is a values inventory that helps you choose and define your core values. Part 2 tests your options against them, as constraints that rule options out and as a tiebreaker between options that are otherwise close, and ends with a values verdict.

15 Regret Minimisation Framework

Step 6: Test Your Values · 4 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Regret_Minimisation_Framework_PV1_20261008.pdf

A framework for testing a significant decision against your future self. It draws on research showing that, over the long term, people more often regret what they did not do than what they did. It looks at the decision from the end of your life, checks the time horizons in between, helps you identify the kind of regret you fear, and ends with a values verdict.

16 Decision Communication Planner

Step 7: Decide and Commit · 3 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Decision_Communication_Planner_PV1_20261008.pdf

A planner for telling others about your decision: who needs to know, what they need to hear, when, how, and who tells them. It helps you draft the core message, think through reactions in advance, decide who should hear first and who should not be told yet, and check you are ready before you begin.

17 Decision-to-Action Planner

Steps 7 and 8 · 3 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Decision_to_Action_Planner_PV1_20261008.pdf

Turns a decision into action. It helps you set your first three actions with dates, define what acting on the decision will look like, plan for obstacles in advance, record what you are promising others, identify who could help, and set signals that show whether it is working.

18 Implementation Progress Check

Step 8: Do and Deliver · 2 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Implementation_Progress_Check_PV1_20261008.pdf

A brief, repeatable check on whether a decision is progressing, used daily, weekly or monthly as suits the decision. It compares what you said you would do with what happened, records friction and delay, sets the next concrete actions with dates, and checks progress against your success criteria and signals.

19 Learning Log and After-Action Review

Step 9: Reflect and Learn · 4 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Learning_Log_and_After_Action_Review_PV2_20261010.pdf

A log for capturing what happened while it is still fresh. Based on the after-action review, it compares what you intended with what happened, analyses why, records your key lessons and any biases you noticed, and carries them forward to your next decision.

20 Getting the Lesson Right

Step 9: Reflect and Learn · 4 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Getting_the_Lesson_Right_PV1_20261008.pdf

A guide to separating a good outcome from a good decision. It asks whether the result came from a mistake in your process or from factors you could not have known or controlled, looks for the less obvious lesson about how you think, checks that lesson against other decisions, and ends with what you will do differently.

When a decision feels difficult

A guide for making a decision under anxiety or emotional pressure, in a version for you and a version for someone helping you.

21 Deciding Under Pressure

Steps 1 to 9 · 14 pages · All rights reserved · Deciding_Under_Pressure_PV1_20261008.pdf

For times when a decision feels bigger or harder than it should, and anxiety or emotional pressure is getting in the way. It goes through the nine steps with guidance on what difficulty might feel like at each one and how to move on, offers two short settling exercises, and helps with four difficult moments. It is not a therapy tool, and it is used alongside the Decision Cycle questions, not instead of them.

22 Deciding Under Pressure: For the Person Helping

Steps 1 to 9 · 15 pages · All rights reserved · Deciding_Under_Pressure_Helper_PV1_20261008.pdf

A companion for someone who has been asked to help a person through a difficult decision. Step by step, it explains how to help - asking rather than telling, noticing when they are looping rather than deliberating, and staying present without taking over - what to avoid, how to handle six difficult moments, and how to look after yourself.

Reference material

Consult these as needed, at any step.

23 Evaluating Trust

Step 2, and wherever you rely on a source · 6 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Evaluating_Trust_PV1_20261008.pdf

A structured, qualitative check on how far to trust a source before relying on it: a person, an organisation, a machine, something you read or were sent, or your own judgement. It covers competence, motive, track record and independence, with further sections for machines, for material that reaches you, for the pattern of where your information comes from, and for trusting yourself. It is not a score.

24 Bias Awareness Checklist

Step 3, and whenever you need it · 6 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Bias_Awareness_Checklist_PV1_20261008.pdf

A reference guide to twenty-one cognitive biases, grouped under the five headings used in Chapter 9, each with a practical self-check question. It starts with an emotional inventory, helps you identify which biases are most active in your current thinking, and ends with eight core biases for a quick check during the Decision Cycle.

25 Risk vs Uncertainty Matrix

Steps 2 and 3 · 4 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Risk_vs_Uncertainty_Matrix_PV1_20261008.pdf

A way of telling risk from uncertainty, which changes what you can do about it. Building on Frank Knight's distinction, it places your unknowns in one of four zones - risk, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity - with a strategy and key questions for each, and a worksheet for finding your zone and choosing your response.

26 Finding the Root Cause

Steps 1, 5 and 9 · 3 pages · CC BY 4.0 · Finding_the_Root_Cause_PV1_20261008.pdf

A guide to separating a problem from its underlying cause, useful before a decision is framed and again when an outcome needs explaining. It explains why the presenting problem is rarely the root cause, sets out the 5 Whys with a worked example, and covers common mistakes, such as stopping at the first plausible cause.

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