

Individual Decision Support Guide

A self-check for use alongside the Decision Cycle

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It’s not necessary, but often helpful. This page helps you take stock before you begin. Work through each section briefly. You do not need to fill every row. The goal is to bring out what is already influencing your thinking, so you can take it into account rather than be driven by it without knowing.

PART 1 Is this a decision, or a problem?

Start here. The Decision Cycle begins once a situation is understood well enough to identify a decision; it is not a diagnostic tool. Treating a problem as a decision means choosing between options before the cause is understood, so the option you pick may only address a symptom. Treating a decision as a problem sends you looking for a right answer that does not exist, which is a common cause of analysis paralysis.

You are still in problem-solving mode if...	You are ready to decide if...
☐ Something is clearly wrong but you are not yet sure what is causing it	☐ The situation is understood well enough to list the options
☐ The options available depend on a diagnosis you have not yet made	☐ You have two or more real paths and must choose between them
☐ Success means the problem disappears - there is a definable fix	☐ Success means committing to a direction, not eliminating uncertainty
☐ You are asking: what is going wrong, and why?	☐ You are asking: which of these paths should I take?
☐ Root cause analysis feels like the right next step	☐ The Decision Cycle feels like the right next step

If most of your answers sit in the left-hand column, use the Finding the Root Cause before going further. Step 1 of the Decision Cycle does check that you have identified the right decision rather than the obvious one, but that is confirming the question, not diagnosing a problem. Chapter 12 of LIFE: Our Uncertain Experiment explains the difference (Simon, 1978; Campitelli and Gobet, 2010).

PART 2 Your emotional starting point

Notice the emotions you are carrying into this decision. They shape which information you notice, how you weigh risk, and which options feel possible.

Before you go further, work through the Your Emotional Inventory section at the start of the Bias Awareness Checklist and tick what applies. Bring your reflection back here before moving on. See also: Bias Awareness Checklist (Bias 21 - Affect Heuristic).

PART 3 Your situation

Consider the factors that are helpful and harmful to the decision you are facing, from both an internal and external perspective.

Helpful in achieving your goals		Possibly harmful to achieving your goals
Internal	Your strengths <i>e.g. relevant skills, knowledge, experience, networks, resources, authority, or other advantages</i>	Your weaknesses <i>e.g. gaps in skills, knowledge, experience, resources, or authority that could affect this decision</i>
External	Your opportunities <i>e.g. what this decision could open up - new possibilities, improvements, or developments worth pursuing</i>	Your threats <i>e.g. what could work against you - risks, barriers, competing demands, or external pressures</i>

PART 4 Your assumptions and consequences

What are you taking for granted, and what do you think the direct effects of this decision will be?

Your assumptions	Consequences
things you expect to remain true while this decision plays out <i>e.g. What context, constraints, or relationships are you assuming will hold?</i>	the direct effects of this decision on you and others <i>e.g. What do you think will change - for you and for those around you?</i>

PART 5 Your biases and expectations

What might be tilting your thinking - and what indirect results are you expecting beyond the obvious ones?

Your biases	Your expectations
beliefs, background, or relationships that may be tilting you toward a particular option <i>e.g. ego, overoptimism, culture, ideology, loyalty, past experience, sunk cost</i>	indirect, secondary results you believe will follow from this decision <i>e.g. what unspoken results do you hope or fear will follow, beyond the direct consequences?</i>

For a full bias inventory, use the Bias Awareness Checklist (Step 3 - Challenge Your Thinking).

PART 6 Your doubts and anxieties

What specific uncertainties and concerns are present for you? Writing them down does not resolve them, but it prevents them from operating unexamined.

Your doubts	Your anxieties
specific uncertainties or misgivings about this decision or the options available <i>e.g. wrong path, wrong time, skill gap, wrong company, distrust, uncertainty about...</i>	what makes you uneasy or apprehensive, even if you cannot fully justify it <i>e.g. uneasiness, nervousness, or apprehension about particular aspects of this decision</i>

If doubts or anxieties are significant, see also: Decision-Making Patterns and Hesitation (Part B), and Deciding Under Pressure, the guide for decisions that feel difficult.

PART 7 Your decision and the cost of not deciding

The decision I am facing

State it in one sentence, specific enough to generate options.

Consequences of making no decision

If I delay or avoid deciding, the probable outcome is...

See also: Framing Your Decision (Step 1 - Frame the Decision), Bias Awareness Checklist (Step 3 - Challenge Your Thinking), Decision-Making Patterns and Hesitation (Part B).

Sources

Campitelli, G., & Gobet, F. (2010). Herbert Simon's decision-making approach: Investigation of cognitive processes in experts. *Review of General Psychology*, 14(4), 354-364.

Simon, H. A. (1978). Rational decision-making in business organizations [Nobel Memorial Lecture, 8 December 1978]. Nobel Foundation.