Building Decision-Making Excellence

A Bevington Group Webinar



Source: Midjourney

Prompt: A cohesive 3D icon business evaluation and preparation for decisioning through dashboards and graphs



PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES DELIVERED

August 2025



Contents

- 1. Decision-making challenges
- 2. Features of good decision-making
- 3. Five traits that enable decisive leadership
- 4. How to build your skills
- 5. Embedding decision-making excellence in the Operating Model



The context facing many organisation



- In today's context, decisions must be made with a backdrop of complexity and uncertainty
- This context makes decision-making increasingly difficult
- Organisations can quickly fall behind competitors by making poor decisions or responding too slowly
- The ability to decide and act quickly based on new information or changing conditions has never been more important

Organisations face a broad range of decision-making challenges



Delay (or even "decision paralysis")

Delaying or avoiding decisions often results in **missed opportunities** and **wasted time** on unimportant activities



Sub-Optimal Choices

Making poor decisions set organisations back or introduce existential threats



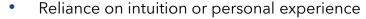
Cultural and Morale Effects ("learned helplessness")

Persistent decision-making issues can create an **unhealthy organisational culture**, lowering morale and agency - what Seligman has described as "learned helplessness"

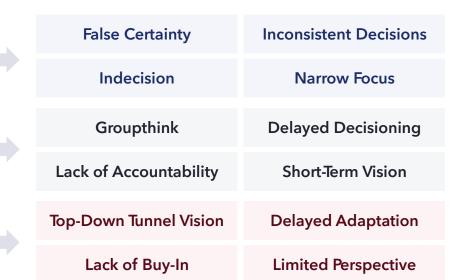
There are many drivers - a confluence of organisational traits, prior experiences, and organisational culture (examples below)



Individual & Personal



Mimicking competitors or other organisations without analysis



Data Misinterpretation

Paralysis by Analysis



Overly Collaborative & Informal

- Decisioning driven by informal collective input or "groupthink"
- Collaboration Olympics



Hierarchical & Authoritative

- Centralised control or unspoken delegation
- Often used in more structured or traditional organisations



Over-reliance on Data

 Decisions made based on available data or reports, sometimes without sufficient critical thinking or contextual analysis



Ignoring Qualitative

Insights

Overconfidence

Features of good decisionmaking

2

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Core features of effective decision-making (1/2)

Feature:	Description:	In practice:
Clarity	Clear decisions define the problem, scope, options, and criteria. They eliminate ambiguity about what is being decided and why	Ford CEO Alan Mulally reframed the bailout debate from a yes / no decision into "what course of action maximises long-term company value," opening broader strategic options
Timeliness	Good decisions are made at the right moment - not delayed until certainty, nor rushed without basis. Timeliness preserves opportunities and avoids lost momentum	Amazon uses the 70% rule - make the call with most (not all) of the information, and correct course as needed
Accountability	Clear ownership ensures decisions move forward. A named decision-maker(s) drives the process and outcome, preventing diffusion of responsibility	Apple's Directly Responsible Individual (DRI) model means every major initiative or decision has one named owner accountable, ensuring progress and clarity
Actionability	Effective decisions translate into concrete actions and resource commitments. They are specific enough to implement immediately	Research shows companies linking decisions directly to execution outperform peers, decisions must have a "who does what by when."

Bryant, A. (2009, February 4). Alan Mulally's Flight Plan at Ford. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/08/business/08corner.html
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Rogers, P., Blenko, M., & Moulton, L. (2010). Decide & Deliver: 5 Steps to Breakthrough Performance in Your Organization. Harvard Business Review Press.



Core features of effective decision-making (2/2)

	Feature:	Description:	In practice:
\$ \\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\\	Adaptability	Decisions must remain flexible to revision as conditions change, or new information is made available. Building adaptability into the process allows organisations to pivot without fear of failure	Netflix pivoted from DVDs to streaming by recognising a changing environment and adjusting decisively, or Amazon's practice of Type 1 and Type 2 decisions (discussed in further detail later)
	Bias Awareness	Effective leaders recognise and mitigate cognitive biases (e.g., confirmation bias, groupthink). This involves diverse input, structured analysis, and bias checks	Leaders make use of Daniel Kahneman's checklist against biased thinking (written for HBR), or Amazon's use of written "6 pager" memos to reduce the influence of charismatic presentations and anchoring
	Risk Awareness	Strong decisions incorporate a clear understanding of risks, trade-offs, and downside scenarios. Leaders explicitly consider "what could go wrong," risk appetite, and contingency plans	Airbus integrates Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) with key management processes across the organisation, balancing innovation with safety and cost considerations and enabling effective operational decision-making
	Post-decision Learning	Strong decision cultures review outcomes systematically, learning from both successes and failures. This builds continuous improvement	Bridgewater Associates (a leader in institutional portfolio management) use "post-decision reviews" to dissect investment decisions, flag unexpected outcomes, and log lessons

C -

Kahneman, D., Lovallo, D., & Sibony, O. (2011, June). Before you make that big decision: Bias thinking checklist. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2011/06/the-big-idea-before-you-make-that-big-decision
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Bridgewater Associates. (n.d.). From battlefield to boardroom: Decision-making principles. The Bridgewater Principles. https://www.tbgbp.com/p/from-battlefield-to-boardroom-the



We categorise events as Certainties, Risks, and Uncertainties to guide decision-making

Certainties

Known

- Known outcomes with 100% certainty
- Governed by wellunderstood laws or conditions

For example, a pen will fall by the force of gravity

Risks

Knowable

- May or may not occur, but probabilities are known
- Often derived from historical data or statistical models

For example, casino games, slot machines, lottery

Uncertainties

Unknown and Unknowable

- May or may not occur, but probabilities or outcomes are unknowable and unquantifiable
- Arise from complexity, novelty, or a lack of data

For example, pandemics before the first outbreak, black swan events

In navigating decisions, understanding where an event falls on this spectrum helps refine strategies

ources.

Gigerenzer, G. (2014). Risk savvy: How to make good decisions. New York: Viking. Knight, F. (1921). Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit Taleb, N. (2007). The Black Swan Kay, J. & King, M. (2020). Radical Uncertainty



Good decision-making isn't just about being "right"



Good decisions are not just "good outcomes"

- Good decisions are not judged solely by whether outcomes were correct in hindsight
- Howard Marks believes that it is impossible to confirm decision quality based on outcomes
- An outcome might be due to chance, not good/bad decisioning



There are multiple aspects of decision quality

- Research shows decision excellence blends quality, speed, execution, and effort
- A perfect analysis that takes too long or fails to execute has little value
- High-performing organisations integrate analysis with swift, decisive action



The approach can be matched to uncertainty

- Certainty: optimise outcomes using full information (although this is often not feasible to do)
- Risk: apply scenario modelling and probabilities to guide action
- Uncertainty: decide with incomplete data, rely on judgment, and build in flexibility



There can be a balanced use of data

- Avoid analysis-paralysis
- Leaders set decision timeframes, use "good enough" data, and commit to action
- Once a decision is made, execution should follow immediately to realise benefits
- Use of heuristics



Foundations of Decision Analysis - Howard, R., Abbas, A. Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgment - Kahneman, D., Sibony, O., & Sunstein, C. Making Fast Strategic Decisions in High-Velocity Environments - Eisenhardt, K. M.



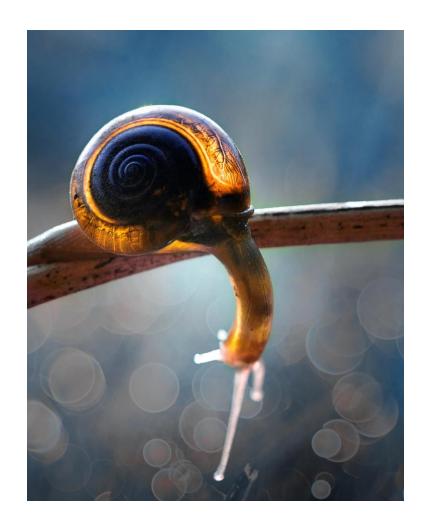
Being clear on the components and process of good decision-making improves the value and consistency of outcomes

Clear objectives & frame Relevant information Sound reasoning Commitment to action Define the right problem, • Use reliable data, focus on Apply logic, weigh trade- Secure resources, align scope, and what success insights that truly matter offs, and check stakeholders, and move looks like assumptions decisively Creative alternatives Roles & accountability Defined criteria & values Assign a clear decision Avoid narrow yes/no Establish decision criteria owner and contributors choices; generate multiple aligned to strategy and risk (e.g. RACI) options appetite



A stratified approach to decision-making is worth considering, with speed dependent on the nature of the context and decision

- Organisations that adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to decisionmaking are susceptible to pitfalls
 - Higher risk of poor decisions
 - Trade-off between decision quality and speed
 - Many settle for speed, leading to slow, inefficient processes that stifle progress and innovation
- A stratified decision-making approach
 - Optimises for both quality and speed
 - Adopts different models based on decision factors:
 - Speed
 - Cost
 - Quality
 - Innovation
 - Managing risk
 - Or a combination of factors
- Organisations need a framework to identify and categorise decisions for the right approach



Five traits that enable decisive leadership, Tuckett, MIT Sloan Review, 2025

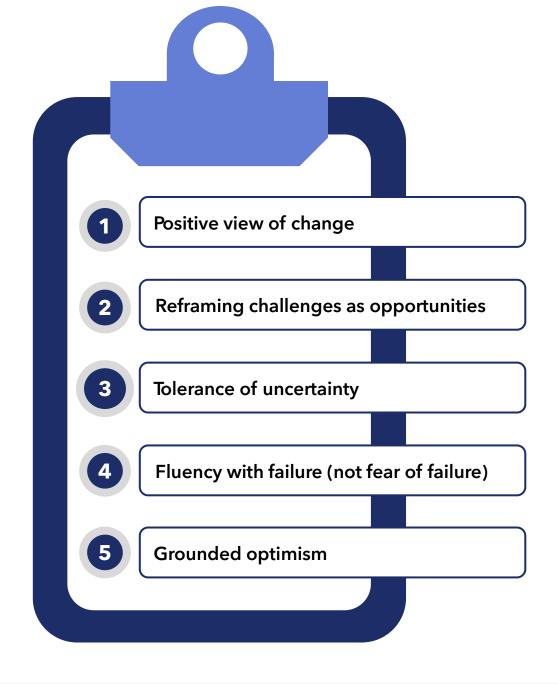
Conducted with HSBC: 17,555 respondents across 12 global markets, including >3,000 business professionals (from SMEs to multinational executives).

Aim: Identify traits that enable effective decision-making in uncertainty.

3



The five traits that enable decisive leadership



Trait 1 - Positive view of change

3.1

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70% of leaders claim to view change positively, yet 60% actually see it as a challenge to manage or avoid

70%

Of business leaders claimed to generally **view change positively**

47%

Admitted that they see unexpected changes purely as something to **be managed or coped with**



Said that they prefer to **avoid change** altogether

No challenge, no growth. No change, no survival.



This requires an awareness of our own attitudes to change and a reframing





Business Challenge

- LEGO's performance flattened after years of rapid growth (2004-2015, ~17% annual revenue growth).
- In 2017, the newly appointed leadership recognised: "What got us here, won't get us into the future."
- They needed both a new business strategy and a new leadership culture to support it.

Cultural Reset

Leadership Playground Idea



Be Brave

Encouraged leaders to take bold, strategic choices



Be Curious

Promoted a mindset of exploration



Be Focused

Reinforced clarity about strategy and trade-offs

Outcome

As the model took hold, LEGO experienced consistent revenue growth of approximately 10% per year over five years

Source: Sull, D., & Sull, C. (2025, January 10). How the Lego Group built culture change: From the ground up. MIT Sloan Management Review. https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/how-lego-group-built-culture-change-ground-up



Trait 2 - Reframing challenges

3.2

Reframe challenges as opportunities

74%

Say uncertainty brings opportunity

7%

Strongly disagree with the idea that uncertainty holds opportunity



Embrace risk even when it doesn't pay off

Resilient leaders don't just react, they **reframe**. They see **surprise as possibility**, not threat. They often consciously put themselves in positions where they face the unexpected, i.e. "the stoic adventure"



Ask "What opportunity is hiding in this disruption?"





Successful leaders view change as opportunity

Business Challenge

Societal and market shift:

Increase in online car reviews, customers became overwhelmed by unfiltered feedback.

Opportunity:

 A demand for curated insights aligned with broader adoption of Al-driven content.

Leadership-Led Pilot Project

CarMax: Al-Powered **Customer Review Summaries**



Al Use Case

Use of Azure OpenAI to automatically summarise hundreds of thousands of customer reviews.



Pilot Scope

Summaries published on research pages, reviewed by humans for quality control.

Leadership Role

CIO and executive team approved lowrisk but high-value use cases targeting customer decision support.

Outcome

They generated massive impact: tens of thousands of review summaries published in hours, lifting engagement and trust.

Source: MIT Sloan Management Review. (2025, April). Practical AI implementation: Success stories from MIT Sloan Management Review. Retrieved from



Trait 3 – Tolerance of uncertainty

3.3

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Training to be tolerant of uncertainty

68%

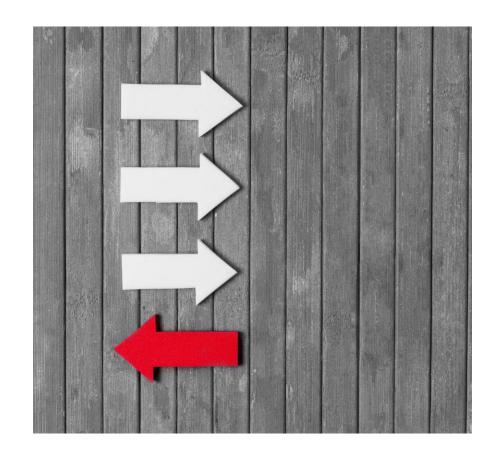
Said it is characteristic of them to find that "unforeseen events upset [them] greatly."

Said it *is* characteristic of them to feel upset when things go wrong or change without warning.



Admitted to avoiding decisions altogether because the uncertainty made them uncomfortable.

Accept not being certain. Most of life is uncertain. Much of what you do differently will be somewhat experimental



Treat high risk decisions as "experiments' - to help leaders overcome inaction

Jeff Bezos's decision-making framework - helps with "uncertainty anxiety" and with "fear of failure"

Example amazon

Discussed in Amazon's shareholder letter, 2016







One-Way Door Decisions

Some decisions are consequential and irreversible or nearly irreversible – one-way doors – and these decisions must be made methodically, carefully, slowly, with great deliberation and consultation.

Carefully debate these - they are hard to reverse

Two-Way Door Decisions

Most decisions are not like that - they are changeable, reversible - they are two-way doors. These decisions can and should be made quickly by high-judgment individuals or small groups

Empower teams deep in the organisation to decide swiftly

The 70 % Information Rule

Most decisions should probably be made with somewhere around 70 % of the information you wish you had. If you wait for 90 %, in most cases, you are probably being slow.

Balance speed with sufficient data to maintain momentum



Stress-reduction via action: Stress primarily comes from not taking action on something that you can have some control over (The best cure for anxiety and stress is...action) (Second best is "reframing" - "there is nothing good nor bad but thinking makes it so")

Source: Amazon. (2016). 2016 Letter to shareholders. Amazon.com. https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/company-news/2016-letter-to-shareholders



Trait 4 – Comfort with failure

3.4



Confident decision-makers don't fear failure - they speak the language

83%

Said past mistakes made them better decision-makers

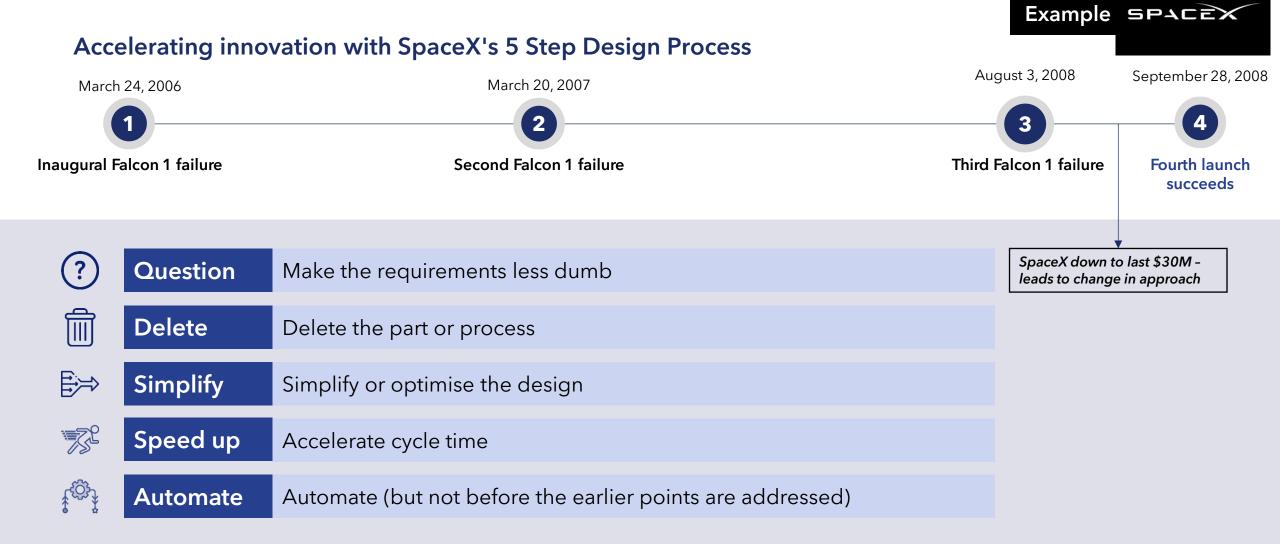
Create a culture of courage

- Normalise failure as a learning platform, not a performance flaw
- Encourage teams to share regrets and grow from mistakes
- Mistakes are valuable data, they show you where to adjust, how to improve, and what to do differently next time

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work," - attributed to Thomas Edison



No failure = no innovation



Measure success by **rate of innovation**, not just profit or market share, continuous learning is the ultimate competitive edge.



Trait 5 – Grounded optimism

3.5

Effective decision-makers lead with calm conviction, not because they know the outcome, but because they trust they'll adapt to it ("this is hard, but we can cope")

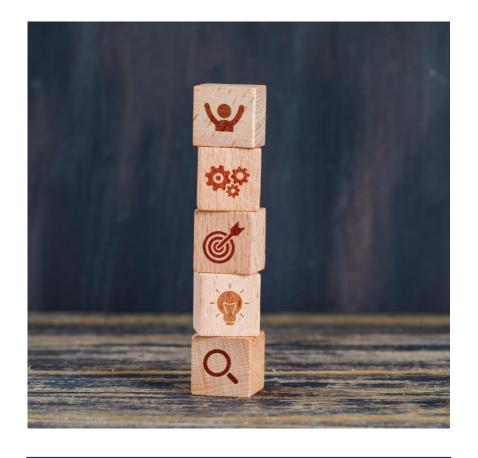


Is the **most critical trait** for navigating uncertainty, according to the study

70%

Said their mindset helped them make the most of their opportunities

In high-pressure environments, **attitude is strategy**. Focus on what you can control, i.e. your own actions.



When things are uncertain lead with "this is hard, but we can do this". Believe in the ability to adapt.



Leading in crisis with optimism

The case of the **lowa hospital system** is used to demonstrate how deliberate, research-backed optimism can enhance well-being, performance, and resilience at scale.

Business Challenge

- High employee burnout
- Low staff morale
- Pressure from budget constraints and public health uncertainty (pre- and during COVID-19)
- A tense organisational culture due to sustained overwork

The Intervention



Daily Recognition

Staff were encouraged to express gratitude and recognise positive contributions from peers



Optimistic Leadership Modelling

Leaders practiced and demonstrated resilient optimism, acknowledging difficulty but emphasising what was in their control



Positive Communication Habits

Leadership and team huddles shifted from problem-dumping to solutionseeking dialogue

Outcome

6 Weeks Post-Intervention

- Staff reporting being "very expressive of optimism at work" rose from 23% to 40%
- Feelings of being connected at work rose from 68% to 85%

12 Months Post-Intervention

- \$2 million operating loss to an \$8 million operating profit
- Revenue increasing by 8.7% while expenses only rose 1.1%
- Patient experience scores nearly doubled



Source: Achor, S., & Gielan, M. (2020, June). What leading with optimism really looks like. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2020/06/what-leading-with-optimism-really-looks-like

How to build your skills

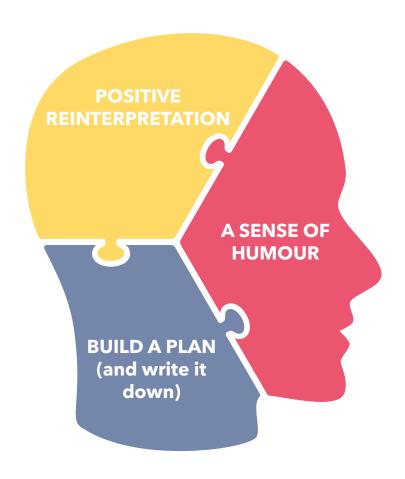
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These traits are not innate - they are built deliberately, often painfully, and usually in environments that reward comfort over challenge

Trait to build	Why	How
Embrace change	 This engages our brain's pattern-seeking wiring, and increasing buy-in and retention CEOs in uncertainty-rich sectors (e.g. Amazon, Alibaba) often run "narrative-driven planning", where the strategy is built as a storyline first before numbers 	View change as opportunity, not threat. Cultivate curiosity, bravery, and clarity
Reframe challenges	 Survival often requires abandoning familiar patterns for adaptive thinking E.g., firefighters are trained to drop their tools to survive - a dramatic shift in mental framing under pressure 	Use decision logging and heuristics to see disruptions as springboards. Ask "what opportunity is hiding in this?"
Tolerate uncertainty	 The brain treats uncertainty like physical pain Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and research on decision fatigue show that we can build tolerance through repeated, low-stakes exposure 	Treat decisions as experiments. Or, apply Bezos's 70% rule: act with limited info, adapt fast
Fluency in failure	 People perform better when failure is viewed as feedback rather than identity E.g., NASA trains failure like it's a routine simulation 	Pre-mortems and post-mortems to normalise failures . Use mistakes as data, like NASA. Accelerate innovation by acting fast, like SpaceX
Lead with grounded optimism	 Often at odds with risk-averse cultures In experiments, leaders who maintain emotional equilibrium during crisis are rated more competent, regardless of the outcome 	Attitude is strategy. Model grounded optimism and "focus on what you can control"

If the pressure is on, and you find tension limiting your ability to think. Refer to the following

As a student in psychology, I was taught the first three practical lessons in stress management





Re-framing

Positive reinterpretation allows you to put the challenge in context

- If the worst happens, can I respond or cope with it?
- Can I find a way to make a positive of the situation?



A Sense of humour

A sense of humour, laughing at the situation, gives you perspective

This is a "muscle" you can build



Build a plan

Your brain responds incredibly well to the knowledge that you have a plan

- So, build a plan
- Write it down
- Put it somewhere safe you can refer to



Other methods for injecting decision-making speed without compromising on quality. Useful when you feel "stuck"

SATISFICING

- Aim to reach an adequate outcome with limited effort, rather than searching for the ideal decision
- Seek the optimal value-toeffort ratio
- Invest the minimum effort required to meet the basic requirements to progress with a decision
- Useful when quality is not an up-front criterion
- Integrate with a continuous improvement mindset

VECTORING

- Especially helpful in simplifying highly complex scenarios
- Rather than assessing options against all possible criteria, choose the two or three criteria (vectors) that matter most, and then decide which options gives you the best mix against those criteria

POSTURING

Decide your decision posture, i.e. whether you are

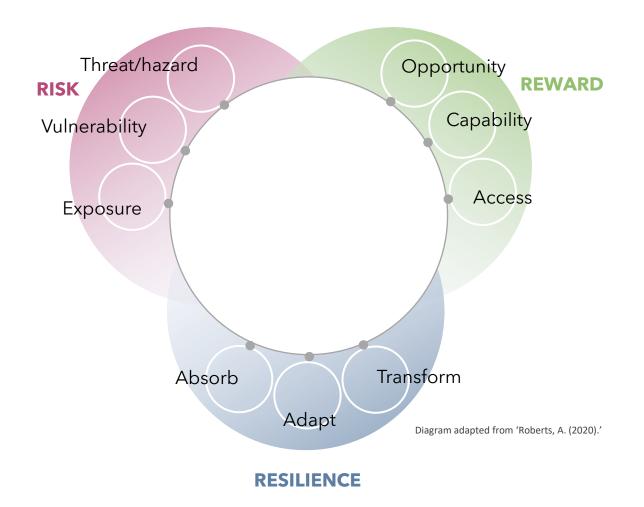
- Optimising balancing risk and benefit (Warning: failing to separate the two is a common mistake)
- Minimax-ing minimise the probability of the worst-case outcome
- Maximin-ing maximise the minimum gain



Reframe challenges with Roberts' (2020) Risk, Reward, and Resilience Framework

Risk, Reward, and Resilience

- Some frameworks for assessing and managing risk adopt a narrow scope that fails to account for the full range of impacts a decision can have
- The RRR framework is a general model to assist informed decision-making by navigating complex trade-offs between risk, reward, and resilience
- It helps leaders reframe challenges and adapt decisions in the face of uncertainty and change



Source: Roberts, A. (2020). The RRR framework: A new approach to understanding risk, resilience, and responsibility. [Journal of International Economic Law]. [https://doi.org/10.1093/jiel/jgad009]



Embedding decision-making excellence in the Operating Model

5



Categorising Decisions

- Have a system in place for categorising decision as Type 1 or Type 2
- Define clear processes for each type of decision
- Define clear decision-rights
- Different decision processes may be optimised differently, e.g., for
 - Speed
 - Risk
 - Innovation
 - etc.
- Standardise assessment / categorisation dimensions to improve consistent assessment
- Ensure feedback loops are in place to test outcomes of decisions and facilitate continuous improvement of the decisionmaking processes

Organisations should have a system in place to identify and categorise decisions that arise



One-way Doors

("Type 1" Decisions)

- Do your research
- Explore different options and scenario-model accordingly
- Evaluate and quantify risk and uncertainty
- Decide rationally and carefully
- Involve others to help mitigate biases



Two-way Doors

("Type 2" Decisions)

- Decide and execute quickly
- Have a bias for action
- Leverage experience
- Delegate where appropriate
- Monitor the outcome
- Pivot if required



Adopting mission directed leadership

Mission Statement

- Should provide the reason for the organisation's existence
- Should act as an overarching guiding star
- Should encapsulate customer service and other strategic imperatives

Command and Control

Rules:

- Black and white
- Should be used sparingly

Objective Command

- Simple process
- Safety
- Risk
- Compliance

Mission Directed Leadership

Guidelines:

- Less rigid than rules
- Should be used liberally to empower staff

Subjective Empowerment

- Complex process
- Provides flexibility and autonomy
- Can be tailored to the scenario

Implications for leadership and the broader operating model

Mission and strategic direction

Employees must understand and buy-in to the "mission"

Accountabilities and authorities

Employees must have appropriate authorities to decide and act

Decision making framework

Employees must know what processes to follow and must have the tools they need

Capabilities and culture

The environment / conditions to support effective distributed decision-making must be created



Creating an environment (ways of working) and culture that fosters effective distributed decision-making

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

- Make leaders' decision processes transparent
- Demonstrate accountability and ownership
- Model constructive, open conversations
- Demonstrate vulnerability and curiosity

ENSURE CLARITY

- Establish clear decision-making roles
- Clarify decision rights and accountabilities
- Clarify decision-making processes
- Provide guidance and tools to help

ENCOURAGE ACCOUNTABILITY

- Foster a sense of ownership
- Focus on outcomes
- Empower employees within guardrails



PROMOTE OPENNESS AND COLLABORATION

- Encourage two-way feedback
- Share information openly
- Establish cross-functional teams working together on a common goal

REINFORCE A LEARNING AND GROWTH MINDSET

- Embed retrospectives and learning cycles
- Protect psychological safety
- Encourage iteration and agility
- Reframe mistakes as growth opportunities

ALIGN INCENTIVES AND RECOGNITION

- Recognise and reward good decision-making
- Balance feedback with positive reinforcement
- Encourage constructive risk-taking and courageous behaviours



And, of course, we are here to help if you need it...

If you have any additional questions or require further information, please contact

webinar@bevingtongroup.com

This presentation and related articles will be available for viewing at www.bevingtongroup.com

We look forward to seeing you at our next webinar



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Contact details and disclaimer

Bevington Group is a specialist consultancy with six core practices:



Operating Model Design and Restructuring



Process Reengineering and Automation



Automation, Data, and Al



Accelerated Implementation



Change Management



Risk Intelligence

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