

Chapter 6

Understanding Decision-making

Before we explore in detail the four components of an evolutionary leadership development programme, I want to discuss the critical topic of decision-making. Ultimately, our individual and collective ability to succeed depends on making decisions that support us in our quest for maintaining and enhancing our personal internal stability and external equilibrium and the internal stability and external equilibrium of the group structures we affiliate with (organisation, community, and nation). At the personal level, this means being able to make decisions that satisfy the needs of your ego and the needs of your soul.

This is why understanding the process of how we make decisions is so vitally important. Your personal evolutionary growth depends on it. The growth of your team depends on it. The growth of your organisation depends on it. And the growth of your community or nation depends on it.

The Three Minds

We all make hundreds of conscious decisions every day. We also make hundreds of subconscious decisions. In addition, our bodies (cells and organs) are constantly making decisions every second as they regulate our breathing, heart rate, digestion, and body temperature so we can remain in a state of homeostasis throughout the day. When you examine your day in this manner, you realise there are three forces at play in your decision-making: your ego-mind, your soul-mind, and your body-mind. They may all have different needs. Sometimes, the needs of these three minds will compete. How you balance your life so all these entities can get their needs met (maintaining internal stability of the body, ego, and soul) is about defining priorities and making decisions.

From an evolutionary perspective, the body-mind was the first to develop. All creatures and animals have a body-mind that regulates

their internal functioning and reacts and responds to changes in their external environment. Next to develop was the ego-mind that began to appear with the hominoids and reached its pinnacle in *Homo sapiens* a few thousand years ago.

Gradually now, over the last few millennia, we are beginning to witness the growth and development of the soul-mind as *Homo sapiens* shifts towards the manifestation of the concept of humanity. This is not to say that we don't have examples from the past of people living from soul consciousness. We do. However, what was once a very isolated phenomena is much more current today. In 1902, Richard Maurice Bucke wrote the following words:

Just as long ago, self consciousness appeared in the best specimens of our ancestral race in the prime of life, and gradually became more and more universal and appeared in the individual at an earlier and earlier age ... so will cosmic consciousness⁷⁰ become more and more universal and appear earlier and earlier in the individual life until the race at large will possess this faculty.⁷¹

Body-mind

The human body-mind is the body's natural response system for maintaining homeostasis (internal stability) and protecting itself from external threats (external equilibrium) such as the healing of wounds and combating infections, thereby meeting our physiological needs. It also comes to our assistance in managing bodily functions and dealing with life-threatening situations. It regulates the working of our bodies and will cause us to act with urgency when the survival of our body is compromised.

When the body-mind makes a decision, it normally takes precedence over satisfying the needs of the ego and the soul. You cannot resist satisfying the body's need for liquid, food, defecating, urinating, and breathing for long periods, no matter what else is happening in your life. If you do, you will feel very uncomfortable and eventually compromise the ability of your body to sustain life. The body-mind is trained to protect your life. When threats arise, your

⁷⁰ Cosmic consciousness refers to the higher states of consciousness found at levels 5, 6, and 7 of the seven levels of consciousness model.

⁷¹ Richard Maurice Bucke *Cosmic Consciousness* (New York: E. P. Dutton), 1969.

body will immediately prepare you for a fight-or-flight response by putting you in a state of internal stress.

Ego-mind

The human ego-mind is the personality's natural response system for protecting its image and beliefs about itself (internal stability) and protecting the physical body (the ego's vehicle) from external threats (external equilibrium). Unlike the body-mind, which focuses on fight-or-flight, the ego-mind has found an alternative way of responding known as the general adaptive syndrome. This way of responding can leave you in a semi-permanent state of anxiety, which can eventually cause stress.

The ego-mind comes to your assistance in dealing with matters that concern your deficiency needs, including your physical survival needs, your emotional safety needs, and your emotional self-esteem needs. We gain no sense of lasting satisfaction by satisfying our deficiency needs, but we feel a sense of anxiety, driven by the ego's fears, when we believe these needs are not being met. We are happy when we get our ego needs met, but the happiness is often transient. When the ego-mind makes a decision, it usually takes precedence over the needs of the soul.

Soul-mind

The human soul-mind represents the true essence of who you are and who you could be if you follow your passion and eliminate the fears of the ego from your life. The soul comes to your assistance in dealing with matters that concern your growth needs: living authentically and using your talents and gifts to make a difference and be of service to the world. When your soul or growth needs are fulfilled, they do not go away. They engender deeper and deeper levels of motivation and commitment to the soul's purpose. We feel a sense of joy when we are able to meet our soul's needs. When the elation of joy dissipates, we are left with a feeling of well-being. This feeling of joy and well-being motivates us to want more.

The Process of Decision-making

Four stages are involved in decision-making (data gathering, information processing, meaning-making, and decision-making). There are three possible outcomes (a reaction, a response, or guidance

that leads us into a process of reflection). The four stages and three responses are shown diagrammatically in Figure 6.1, together with six modes of decision-making.

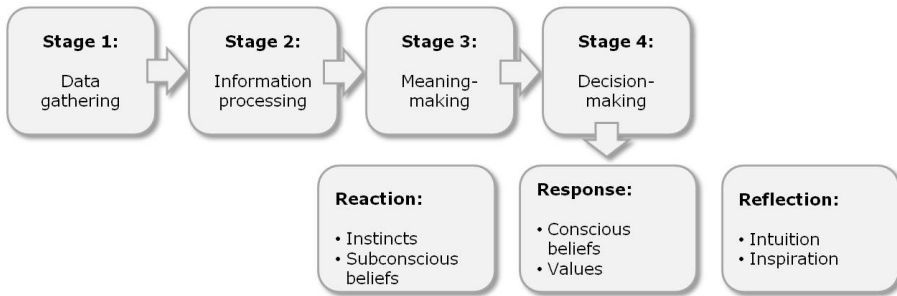


Figure 6.1. The four stages of decision-making, three responses, and six modes of decision-making.

Stage 1: Data Gathering

We gather data from our external environment through our senses: our eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling). The information we gather comes from our physical environment and arrives at the sense organs of our physical bodies as electromagnetic waves of information. Our eyes don't see colours. They sense different frequencies of light vibration. Our ears don't hear sounds. They sense different frequencies of sound vibration and so forth. These multiple streams of data in the form of energy quanta are sent to the brain for processing.

Stage 2: Information Processing

As far as our perception is concerned, the brain is simply an information processor. It assembles the data from the five senses into a complex information pattern that the mind can recognise. What we see, hear, smell, or taste is not the data that is pouring in through our senses, but the synthesized percept (the object of our perception) in the form of an information pattern.

Stage 3: Meaning-making

The information pattern produced by the brain is used by the body-mind, ego-mind, and soul-mind to search for a memory, belief, or concept (stored in the body, ego, or soul memory) that contains a similar information pattern. When a similar pattern is found, meaning

is ascribed to the situation by relating the percept (the objects of our perception) to the concepts (beliefs) held in memory. As soon as this link is made, meaning is attributed to the percept. A reaction, response, or guidance leading to reflection is initiated.

If there are no matching patterns of information, then the mind carries out a fuzzy search to find a concept or belief that contains similar characteristics to the object of our perception. When a match is found, we use logic (links to concepts and beliefs we hold in our mind) to assign meaning to a situation.

Because the sense organs are directly linked to the brain, which itself is part of the body-mind, the precepts are initially filtered through:

- The body-mind to relate to concepts that regulate physical homeostasis
- The ego-mind to relate to concepts that regulate emotional homeostasis
- The soul-mind to relate to concepts that regulate energetic homeostasis, as shown in Figure 6.2.

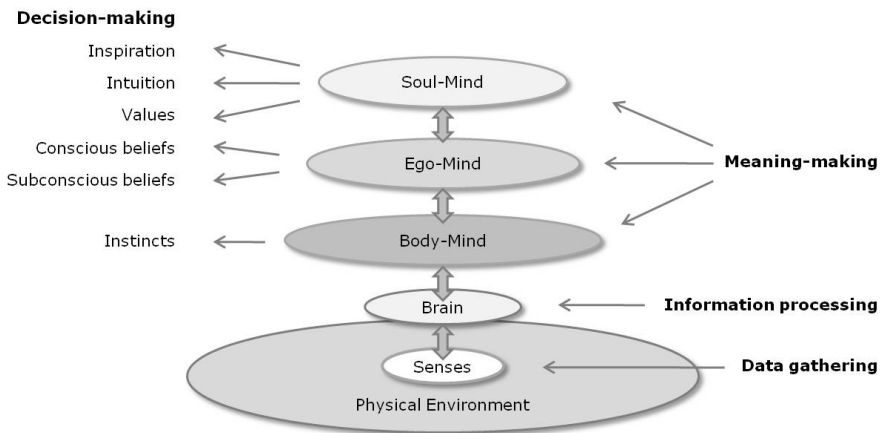


Figure 6.2. Progression in meaning-making

Stage 4: Decision-making

Once meaning-making has been done, the body-mind will react to a situation based on instincts. The ego-mind will react or respond to a situation based on subconscious beliefs or conscious beliefs. The soul-

mind will reflect on the intuitive or inspirational guidance it is receiving and then affirm or reorient its position.

Thus, as human beings, we have three minds making decisions about getting our needs met. We have two sets of body needs (internal stability and external equilibrium), seven levels of ego/soul needs (internal stability of the ego and soul mind), and six ways in which we make decisions. See Table 6.1.

| Levels of Consciousness | | Ego-mind | Soul-mind |
|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| 7 | Service | | Inspiration |
| 6 | Making a difference | | Intuition |
| 5 | Internal cohesion | | Values |
| 4 | Transformation | Conscious beliefs | |
| 3 | Self-esteem | Subconscious beliefs | |
| 2 | Relationships | | |
| 1 | Survival | | |
| Body-mind ⁷² | | Instincts | |

Table 6.1. Modes of decision-making and levels of consciousness.

Six Modes of Decision-making

The six modes of decision-making are described in detail in the following paragraphs.

Instinct-based Decision-making

Instinct-based decision-making takes place at the atomic/cellular level because the actions that arise are based on learned DNA responses, principally associated with issues of survival. For example, babies instinctively know how to suckle, how to cry when their needs are not being met, and how to smile so they can get the attention they need. No one taught them how to do this. It is encoded in their DNA.

⁷² In this table, I have specifically separated out the physiological needs of the body from the seven levels of consciousness model. In the original derivation of the model, I included these needs at the survival level of consciousness. See Annex 3.

In adult life, instinct-based decision-making kicks in to help you survive and avoid dangerous situations. It is also at the root of the fight-or-flight response common to all animals. In certain situations, our instincts may cause us to put our life at risk in order to save the life of another. Instinct is the principal mode of decision-making by which all creatures operate. (In higher order creatures, such as mammals, we also find subconscious and conscious beliefs making decision-making.) The main features of instinct-based decision-making are:

- Actions always precede thought. There is no pause for reflection between making meaning of a situation (relating a precept to a concept) and decision-making.
- The decisions that are made are always based on past experiences, what our species history has taught us about how to survive and keep safe. These instructions are encoded in the cellular memory of our DNA.
- You are not consciously in control of your words, actions, and behaviours. They are in control of you.

Instinct-based decision-making is a faculty of the body-mind. The body-mind is where you keep the institutionalised DNA memories that keep your physical body safe and secure.

Subconscious Belief-based Decision-making

In subconscious belief-based decision-making, you also react to what is happening in your world without reflection, but on the basis of personal memories rather than the institutionalised memories of your DNA. In this mode of decision-making, action also precedes thought. The release of an emotional charge often accompanies the action.

You know when subconscious fear-based beliefs are dominating your decision-making if you feel resistance, impatience, frustration, upset, or anger. Whenever you experience such feelings, you are dealing with an unmet ego deficiency need that has not been resolved. Your reactions and emotions are being triggered by a present moment situation that is making you recall a memory about an unresolved situation from the past when you failed to get your emotional needs met.

When your positively charged emotions are triggered, such as joy and happiness, you are subconsciously recalling memories from your

past that supported you in meeting your deficiency needs. For example, a picture of someone you have not seen in a long while or the sound of their voice may unleash tears of joy and happiness. Your reactions and emotions are being triggered by a present moment situation that is making you recall a positive memory with emotional content from the past. The main features of subconscious belief-based decision-making are:

- Actions always precede thought. There is no gap for reflection between making meaning out of the situation and the decision-making that precipitates an action.
- The decisions that are made are always based on past experiences, what your personal history has taught you about maintaining internal stability and external equilibrium in the framework of existence of your childhood. This history is stored in your personal memory.
- You are not in control of your actions and behaviours. In this mode of decision-making, the only way you can get back into conscious control of your actions is either to release or bottle up your emotions. Releasing helps you to return to rationality; bottling up builds up pressure.
- It is very personal. Others are not consulted to help you enhance your meaning-making and give support in your decision-making.

Subconscious fear-based decision-making occurs at the first three levels of personal consciousness and is always about attempting to meet your ego's perceived deficiency needs.

Conscious Belief-based Decision-making

If you want to make rational decisions, you have to leave behind subconscious belief-based decision-making and shift to conscious belief-based decision-making. You have to insert a pause between the event and your response to it. The pause allows you time for reflection so you can use logic to understand what is happening and then make a choice about how to respond. By inserting a pause, you also have time to discuss the situation with others and get advice about the best way to meet your needs. The main features of conscious belief-based decision-making are:

- Thought precedes action. You insert a pause between an event and your response to it so you can use logic and get advice in order to determine the best way of meeting your needs.
- The decisions that are made are based on past experiences and what your personal history has taught you about maintaining internal stability and external equilibrium in your childhood and adulthood. You make decisions based on what you believe you know.
- You are in control of your actions and behaviours.
- You can consult with others to support and enhance your decision-making.

Conscious belief-based decision-making has one thing in common with subconscious belief-based decision-making. It uses information from the past (beliefs about what we think we know or assumptions we hold to be true) to make decisions about the future. Because you are using beliefs or assumptions, the future you create through your decision-making is usually only an incremental improvement on the past.

Values-based Decision-making

The shift from conscious-belief based decision-making to values-based decision-making is not easy. You have to individuate (establish yourself at the transformation level of consciousness) and develop a self-authoring mind before you can make this leap. You need to become viable and independent (physically and emotionally) in your framework of existence before values-based decision-making is fully and naturally available to you.

The reason why the shift from belief-based decision-making to values-based decision-making requires individuation is because, prior to individuation, we make meaning of our world through our beliefs. Most of these beliefs are associated with our personal and cultural upbringing. The process of individuation involves examining these beliefs and letting go of the ones that don't serve you. In the process of reflecting on these beliefs, you develop a new guidance system based on your deeply held values. Values are the universal guidance system of the soul, whereas beliefs are the context-related guidance system of

the ego. When you shift to values-based decision-making, you can effectively throw away your rulebooks. Every decision you make is sourced by what is deeply meaningful to you.

Values-based decision-making allows you to create a future that resonates deeply with who you really are. It creates the conditions that allow authenticity and integrity to flourish. That is not to say there is no place for conscious belief-based decision-making based on logic or rational thinking. There is. However, all the critical decisions you need to make should be able to pass the values test. The main features of values-based decision-making are:

- Thought precedes action. You reflect on the values that you believe will allow you to get your needs met and make decisions accordingly.
- The decisions that are made are not based on past experiences. They are based on the future you want to create.
- You are in control of your actions and behaviours.
- You can consult with others to support and enhance your decision-making.

You make values-based decisions so you can consciously create the future you want to experience. For example, if you value trust, then you make decisions that allow you to display trust. If you value accountability, then you make decisions that allow you to display accountability.

Intuition-based Decision-making

The shift from values-based decision-making to intuition-based decision-making develops over time as the centre of gravity of your consciousness shifts from your ego to your soul. Although intuition is present in all decision-making (the way you link a precept to a concept to assist meaning-making), it is not until you deepen the connection to your soul that it is fully activated. At this level of being, you are able to tap into the collective wisdom of other souls.

Intuition is one of the principal attributes of a self-transforming mind. You reach this level of consciousness after you have made progress on your internal cohesion and you have become a self-actualized individual. Intuition allows you to access your own deeper intelligence

and the collective intelligence of a wider group. The principal characteristics of intuition-based decision-making are as follows:

- Awareness is expanded through a shift in your sense of identity/consciousness.
- Judgment is suspended. No meaning-making takes place, either subconsciously or consciously.
- The mind is empty. Thoughts, beliefs, and agendas are suspended.
- The mind is free to make a deep dive into the mind-space of the collective unconscious and emerge with a deep sense of knowing.
- The thoughts that arise reflect wisdom and align with your most deeply held values.

In intuition-based decision-making, there is no conscious or subconscious attempt at making meaning, and there is no focus on the past or the future. You accept what is without judgment. The intuitive decision arises out of your presence in the current moment.

Beliefs lead to decisions based on past experiences. Values lead us to decisions based on the positive feelings we want to experience now and in the future. When we are totally present to a situation without judgment, we create the conditions that allow our minds to tap into the collective mind-space, and our intuition informs us of what wants or needs to emerge. This is the basis of the U-Theory used for collective decision-making, described by Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers in *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*.⁷³

Inspiration-based Decision-making

Inspiration is the way you receive soul-based promptings into your mind. Inspiration is always very personal and directive. It is about what you need to do. It is a persistent thought that will not go away, or it is the next step you have to take in a soul-centred activity. It will keep prompting you to take action until you do something about it. The purpose of inspiration is to support you in fulfilling your soul purpose.

⁷³ Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers, *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* (Cambridge: The Society for Organisational Learning, 2004).

Inspiration is different to intuition. Intuition is nondirective. Intuition is an idea or insight that apparently arises from nowhere at any specific moment that provides a solution to a problem. Intuition can best be described as a eureka moment, whereas inspiration is best described as guidance for staying in a state of flow.

When you keep receiving a soul-driven persistent thought about an action or direction you need to take and you do not follow this directive, there will eventually be emotional consequences. For example, some forms of depression arise from a lack of alignment of your ego motivations with your soul motivations. When the needs of the ego are given precedence of the needs of the soul over a long period, you will begin to feel the symptoms of melancholy and then depression. The principal characteristics of inspiration-based decision-making are as follows:

- The thought appears to arise from nowhere.
- The thought is persistent.
- The thought is linked to actions that you need to take.
- There are consequences for not following your inspiration.

In the preface of this book, I spoke about my calling to write a book on leadership. That was inspiration in action. When I began to write the book, I often found myself in a state of flow. Ideas and insights just kept flooding my mind. Whenever I was stuck with my writing, I would ask my soul for guidance. I would say to my soul, “I need help.” If I felt really stuck, I would say in demanding voice-thought, “Hey, soul, get off your backside and help me.” Always within twenty-four hours, another perfect insight would pop into mind. I would be back in the flow.

I feel that this book pretty much wrote itself. I just allowed my life to blend with my work and stay open to inspiration. I can recall periods when I could not stop the flow. Words just kept coming without thought or need for editing.

Conclusions

The six modes of human decision-making or, more precisely, ways of making-meaning and getting to a decision are all evolutionary support systems that have evolved to protect the integrity of the body, ego, and soul. Each mode of decision-making parallels our personal evolution

and is naturally tailored to enable us to handle increasing levels of complexity and enhance our ability to respond. As we move through these six stages of decision-making and seven levels of consciousness, our mode of operation shifts from a socialized mind (young child to adult) to a self-authoring mind (adult to mature adult) to a self-transforming mind (soul-infused adult to elder).

As babies, we rely on the instincts of our body-mind to help us survive—a simple life with parents (level 1 consciousness). As young children, we rely on the subconscious beliefs of our socialized mind to help us stay safe by learning how to conform—a relatively simple life with parents, siblings, and extended family (level 2 consciousness). As older children, we rely on the subconscious and conscious beliefs of our socialized mind to navigate the world we live in and differentiate ourselves from others—a more complex life with parents, siblings, extended family members, and nonfamily peers (level 3 consciousness). As adults, we rely on the conscious beliefs and values of our self-authoring mind to individuate and begin to step into our authentic self—a significantly more complex life with family members, nonfamily peers, and bosses (level 4 consciousness). As mature adults, we rely on the values of our self-transforming mind to self-actualize and become fully who we really are—a very complex life with our own family, parents, siblings, extended family, nonfamily peers, bosses, and subordinates (level 5 consciousness). As soul-infused adults, we rely on the values and intuition of our self-transforming mind to integrate with others who share similar values and a common vision—an even more complex life with our own family, parents, siblings, extended family, nonfamily peers, bosses, subordinates, and partner groups (level 6 consciousness). As elders, we rely on the intuition and inspiration of our self-transforming mind to serve humanity. This is as complex as it gets since at this level we have to take into consideration our own family, parents, siblings, extended family, nonfamily peers, bosses, subordinates, partner groups, humanity, and the planet, as well as future generations (level 7 consciousness).

Instincts support us from the moment we are born. We rely on them to navigate the first two years of lives until we learn to talk.

Subconscious beliefs support us in staying safe and surviving during childhood once we have developed the ability to talk and before we have developed the full cognitive abilities of our mind. Conscious beliefs then take over as our principal mode of decision-making. When

we begin to individuate, we need a new guidance system for making decisions that is not based on the parentally and culturally conditioned beliefs we learned during our formative years. This is when the values of the soul come into play. Values are the survival system of the soul. The soul uses values to protect its integrity.

As we grow and develop in soul consciousness, we first learn how to use values to support our decision-making. Then we learn to develop our intuition. We finally learn how to follow our inspiration. Inspiration is the mode of decision-making that guides us in fulfilling our destiny. The soul-infused personality operates from values, utilizes intuition, and is guided by inspiration.

There are times when we receive messages from our souls even though we may not have advanced far in our individuation. These messages are either callings or insights that relate to our future. We ignore them at our peril. A personality that does not listen to their soul callings will not lead a fulfilling life. A personality that does listen to their soul callings and acts on them will find fulfilment beyond measure.