



Book Review

Decisive: How to make better
choices in life and work

By Elena Skalovskaia



Intro

Authors: Chip Heath & Dan Heath (2013)

Economists like to talk about people as rational beings who weigh the costs and benefits of decisions. Psychologists know we're not the rational beings economists believe we are. Research shows - our decisions are disrupted by an array of biases and irrationalities:

We are overconfident

We seek out information that supports us and downplay information that doesn't, we confirm rather than challenge biases

We get distracted by short-term emotions and we overvalue short-term benefits

We fail to see other options and we jump in headfirst

Background

Being decisive isn't about making the perfect decision every time. That isn't possible. Rather, it's about being confident that we've considered the right things, that we've used a smart process.

The authors met a lot of people who told them they agonized endlessly about their decisions. They got stuck in a cycle where they just kept spinning their wheels.

To escape that cycle, people often need a shift in perspective.

How can people do better at decision-making?

The book describes four key “villains” of decision-making, the common traps and biases that psychologists have identified. The authors introduce a 4-step process designed to counteract these traps and biases.

4 villains of decision-making

1. You encounter a choice. But narrow framing makes you miss options
What to do: Reject the narrow frame: yes or no. Widen your options. Replace OR with AND
2. You analyze your options. But the confirmation bias lead you to seek self-serving info
What to do: Seek advice
3. You make a choice. But the short term emotions will often tempt you to make a wrong one
What to do: Neutralize your short-term emotions
4. The you live with it. But you'll often be overconfident about how the future will unfold
What to do: Avoid overconfidence

Authors show that the same decision process can be applied to many domains, but doesn't a decision "process" take way too much time?

Not necessarily: we're not interested in complex decision models or elaborate decision trees.

Best advice is the simplest - "sleep on it."

It helps to quiet short-term emotion that can disrupt our choices. But it still takes 8 hours, and it doesn't always resolve our dilemmas.

Many other decision aids require only a simple shift in attention.

Doctors leaning toward a diagnosis are taught to check themselves by asking, "What else could this be?"

Colleagues making a difficult group decision can ask, "What would convince us, six months down the road, to change our minds about this?"

Things from the book

- When people have the opportunity to collect information from the world, they are more likely to select information that supports their preexisting attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Political partisans seek out media outlets that support their side but will rarely challenge their beliefs by seeking out the other side's perspective.
- Those who are acquainted with Lord Shelburne encourage me to accept his proposal; but most of those who know the world in general, but not Lord Shelburne in particular, dissuade me from it.
- Teens are prone to narrow thinking. They see only a small sliver of the spectrum of options available to them. And, as it turns out, when it comes to making decisions, organizations are a lot like teenagers.

Personal opinion

The book won't necessarily make you more decisive, but it will make you more confident in making your decisions.

The book gives the tools to not get so stressed out about whether one is making the right choice or not.

Pro/con lists are not the only way to make decisions, or the best way to make decisions, there is more to it, and the 4 villains can help identify when you are stuck.

Practical info

In each chapter, the authors summarize the relevant research clearly and present strong examples illustrating the principles they describe.



Thank You

Q & A