

Make Better Decisions with Universal Intelligence

So imagine these scenarios. A group of Bankers are sat in an office and they are wondering how to extract more money from the public so they can all claim bigger bonuses. So they come up with what they believe is an ingenious solution. They wrap up some dodgy debts into some triple 'A' packaging. The rest is history, the effects of which are still reverberating around the world today.

Let's take another meeting. A group of corporate leaders thinly disguised as politicians say to themselves:

"Let's start a war in the Middle East, using a recent terrorist attack to unite public opinion, because we're bound to win quickly and we'll get all the contracts to rebuild the place and make gazillions."

We all know how that's still playing out.

Or how about the meeting the leaders of all the major food companies had.

The chief scientist had called the meeting to warn the food manufacturers that the western world faced an obesity problem. This problem was directly linked to their business practices; i.e. wrapping up vast quantities of highly addictive substances such as sugar, salt and fats and getting people hooked on junk food.

They decided to ignore the scientists warning in order to reap the huge profits their dodgy business practices accumulated. They've killed more people than died in the Second World War since then and continue the practice today.

Paradigm Blindness & Paradigm Inertia

To say that humans are rubbish at making decisions is an understatement. For one thing, we suffer from what I call paradigm blindness and paradigm inertia.

You may have played the 'counting cars' game as a child. To overcome the boredom of the long journey you've counted the number, for example, red cars you've passed by. All the red cars would have shined out at you. When questioned at the end how many red cars you saw, you would have given a

fairly accurate account. However; if you'd been asked how many cars of another colour had passed by, you wouldn't have had a clue. Even though the answer was right in front of you as you travelled. Because you were not looking, you didn't see the answer.

I call that paradigm blindness.

Now fold your arms. Now unfold them and try to fold your arms the other way, be it left over right or right over left. It's usually difficult at first and feels unnatural. That's paradigm inertia. As conscious thinking is hard work and uses up to a fifth of our calorie intake, we turn everything into a habit, including decision making and we get stuck into a neural groove.

I call that paradigm inertia.

This habit of thinking in a certain way which leads to more of the same thinking leads us to support the present paradigm even if that isn't the best decision. Our biases in thinking cause this. Let's look at the SWOT analysis and see how what is a really useful tool fails when used in the normal way.

The SWOT Analysis

Most leaders and entrepreneurs have heard of and probably used at some time the SWOT Analysis. The idea being that it gives an overview of a business situation. SWOT represents:

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats

However there is a problem with this excellent tool.

Everybody has a personality which experts say has formed by around 7 years old. These personality traits have strengths in different areas, and they act as

filters with the way we see the world. These filters or biases, mean that we favour some viewpoints over others.

If we leave the neurotic group, a fairly recent addition to personality profiling, out of the equation and just look at the Jungian four traits of extrovert, introvert, thinking and feeling. It leaves us with four basic 'types' I call these groups: Driver, Developer, Facilitator and Champion.



A brief description goes something like this:

The Driver is a thinking extrovert who likes to get the job done. They are fast paced, like to be in control and competitive. They are confident they can succeed when they set their mind to a task.

Developers are introverted thinkers who like to do the job correctly using the tried and tested. They are usually hard workers who prefer to work alone.

Facilitators, the introverted feeling types, are the glue that hold the group together. They are caring and have a natural ability to get people to open up and share their inner most thoughts. They make excellent counsellors as they are empathic by nature.

Champions are extroverted feeling types who are usually excellent communicators. They prefer novelty and creativity and are usually the last ones to leave a party for fear of missing out on anything.

If we take the SWOT analysis and have a Driver use the tool, then we'll notice how the tool becomes compromised just like our decision making.

As Drivers are confident they will take the first question

“What are our strengths?” and like the car game list the many strengths that they are aware of. The list will probably be quite long especially if they are an entrepreneur who wants to go in a particular direction. If you were to ask them the opposite of the strengths question and ask them to list all of the threats involved in taking a particular path. They probably wouldn't list very many and the ones they did list, they would dismiss as not important.

The Driver's personal bias towards confidence mean that any decision derived from the SWOT analysis would probably be very biased towards confidence.

Sometimes being overly confident is a good thing. Entrepreneurs sometimes have to defy the odds to get a project off the ground. However; mostly the built in bias will warp the Driver's ability to achieve a true reflection of the situation.

However all is not lost.

Developing a Universal Perspective

Effective leaders are able to overcome their biases by first being aware of the existence of biases and then using tools which enable them to overcome their own in-built biases to achieve a more balanced perspective.

The good news about personality is that we can temporarily liberate ourselves from our own personality and act 'as if' we're another personality.

Taking the SWOT analysis again.

First one has to find and differentiate the differing personalities within ourselves. We contain elements of all of them within us, we just choose not to use them all and rightly so. We should not try to be all things to all people. That would turn us into quadraphonic Schizophrenics!

However; all those personality strengths are there just in case we need to use them. An empathic Facilitator who normally thinks about others first in decision making, will suddenly turn into their opposite Driver personality if they have to escape a burning building. They are able to put their own survival needs above

hurting other's feelings if the situations demands it. Think about the warning issued on planes telling parents to don their own oxygen mask first, before helping their children, in the case of an emergency.

So with the new enhanced SWOT analysis.

Everybody thinks and acts 'as if' they are a Driver personality and focusses on the strengths of the situation.

Then we move to Weaknesses and everybody acts and thinks like a Developer personality, being highly critical.

Then everybody acts as if they are a Champion, engaging in blue sky, creative thinking to come up with all the opportunities present.

And lastly, everybody takes on the introverted facilitator and proposes what threats are present.

I call this the ability to shift viewpoints at will, a universal perspective. With practice leaders and teams can bring more of the information which is present to light and it also allows for the introverted feeling types to have more of an influence on decision making. If more time was given to thinking about the threats to a situation and how it would impact the world, we'd be in a vastly different place and probably for the better. Become more aware of your biases and those of your team members and understand how this influences your decision making.