



Decision Making

Contents

01. Our philosophy

02. Decision making in context

03. How can decision making be made more effective?

04. Our service offering

- Individual Coaching
- Facilitated Workshops
- Bespoke Materials

Our philosophy

You can be confident that our recommendations will always be based upon the findings of published academic research, tailored to meet the needs of your organisation.

At Anima & Atman we specialise in helping individuals and organisations make the behavioural changes that will unlock improved performance. Our clients are typically professional services organisations, who are trusted for their expertise, commitment to ongoing professional development and high ethical standards. Our approach seeks to reflect this, meaning you can be confident that our recommendations will always be based upon the findings of published academic research, tailored to meet the needs of your organisation.

Decision making in context

No matter how well educated and thoughtful we aspire to be we are all prone to a variety of unconscious psychological biases and errors. Knowledge workers, whose *raison d'être* is to make good decisions are just as vulnerable to this as the rest of us, although the implications of poor decision-making can be magnified.

Psychologists have been aware of the significant strengths and potential pitfalls of human decision-making for decades, despite this much of this knowledge has only recently begun to filter into the corporate domain, where its application can really make a difference.

Raising awareness and understanding of the potential problems cognitive bias can cause is an important and necessary first step to bringing about behavioural change but it needs to be accompanied by systemic interventions designed to improve the decision-making process through enhanced openness and scrutiny, while drawing on a diverse range of opinion.

“All decisions are based on beliefs and values and are therefore vulnerable to human bias... Understanding human behaviour and systematically applying it to real-life decisions can help explain what is likely to go wrong and how these biases can be minimised.”

British Psychological Society (2016)

There is already widespread recognition amongst professional service firms that certain routine tasks can now be performed more accurately and efficiently by computers that use complex algorithms in order to work out what to do in a given situation. Alongside this, the value of the skills required to perform such tasks is being undermined, meaning firms that are committed to preserving their profitability need to increase their investment in developing those skills which cannot easily be replaced by computers. High-end judgement-based skills are a prime example of this.

How can decision making be made more effective?

The ability to make effective decisions is central to most knowledge workers sense of identity. Requesting individuals to undertake behavioural change in this domain can therefore be met with anger and resistance. Our coaches and facilitators have extensive experience working with knowledge-intensive organisations, which helps them quickly build rapport with clients and offer insight into the challenges they are facing.

The case study approach

There are a number of different approaches to coaching and development, at Anima & Atman we take what is known as a *relational approach*. This means we recognize the client as an individual but pay particular attention to the ways in which they interact with the world around them. In a work context this could mean how they relate to clients, colleagues and the organisation as a whole.

The *working alliance* between client and consultant is fundamental to everything we do. Recent research strongly suggests that the quality of this relationship is the most important 'active ingredient' in predicting the effectiveness of developmental interventions. Our relational approach sets us apart from many other consultancies and is why we advocate the use of facilitated case studies. This approach gives individuals an active role in their learning, and encourages the development of self-awareness, while also ensuring activities remain focused.

We have found that this approach resonates strongly with clients and reflects our own experience of working in professional services organisations, where relationships with both clients and colleagues, play a central role in driving organisational performance; and where informal learning and supervision tends to be the norm.

Our coaches and facilitators have extensive experience working with knowledge-intensive organisations.

Our service offering



While everyone benefits from improving their ability to make effective decisions, we recognise there is sometimes a need to support specific individuals or teams within an organisation. We therefore offer a range of different services that can be used to accommodate the numbers involved. A summary of these services is set out below.

Individual Coaching

Exec-level decision makers are increasingly familiar with the concept of coaching; many enjoy the flexibility and confidentiality it offers, particularly when seeking to develop their self-awareness or experiment with new behaviours. As with any individual coaching assignment, this approach allows the client to set the parameters for the discussion and focus on the aspects of decision making that are most relevant to the context within which they work. Through selective questioning the coach can help the client better understand their current approach to decision making, identifying blind spots and sources of potential bias. The use of carefully chosen materials and techniques can then allow the client to experiment with new ways of approaching decision making.

Facilitated Workshops

Where the development need is less sensitive or large numbers prohibit individual coaching, facilitated workshops offer a sensible and cost-effective option. Action learning sets of 6-10 people, where the consultant assumes the role of facilitator, can be a particularly powerful way to bring

individuals together, in order to discuss issues and learn from one another's experiences. This approach also provides a safe environment for individuals to develop and practice new skills that they can use when working alongside both colleagues and clients. Workshops also provide an ideal setting for the use of decision making case studies. They allow individuals to witness different decision making styles and experience the dynamics of group decision making, where certain sources of bias and errors more frequent arise.

Bespoke Materials

In addition to the above we are also able to help clients through the development of bespoke materials to meet particular needs. This includes:

- Organisation-specific case studies that model common decision making scenarios
- Tools that can help identify decision making ability for use in development centres.
- Bespoke presentations and exercises for use at executive away-days and conferences that offer an abridged introduction to the subject of decision making.

“Identical cases should be treated similarly, if not identically. The problem is that humans are unreliable decision makers...We call the chance variability of judgments noise. It is an invisible tax on the bottom line of many companies.”

Daniel Kahneman (2017)

To find out more about how we can help your knowledge workers make more effective decisions, contact us using the details below.

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