

## IDEAS INTO ACTION

(From Judgement at work: Making better choices, Andrew Likierman Profile Books 2025)

### KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

- Review your judgements on a regular basis for what went wrong *and* right (and why) with those you trust.
- Use appraisals and performance reviews to identify, and then take steps to fill, gaps in knowledge and experience.
- Actively seek to widen your experience and that of colleagues, for example through secondments and exposure to other corporate cultures.
- Consider training, mentoring or coaching to supplement learning from colleagues to fill gaps in your knowledge and experience.
- Ensure that the information you have is appropriate for the judgement you have to make.
- Use analogies, proxies and generalisations in context, not to justify an existing or preconceived viewpoint.
- Use comparisons to question hypotheses and highlight differences, not draw immediate conclusions. Beware emotional parallels, particularly with previous business cycles or military campaigns.

### AWARENESS

- Understand your own ability to be aware, and particularly your observation skills. In doing so:
  - ◊ Ask whether you can get more feedback from colleagues, by observing yourself and in learning from your track record.
  - ◊ Improve your own through training in observation techniques, interview training, performance reviews, 360-degree feedback or through coaches or mentors.
  - ◊ Consider body language, but take care about drawing conclusions, especially from initial impressions and with people from other cultures.
  - ◊ Check your perceptions, especially about people, with others.
- In using your observation skills, consider:
  - ◊ Whether what you are seeing, hearing and reading is consistent with previous years, past experience and what else is going on.
  - ◊ In groups, whether you are aware of the dynamics of the group.
  - ◊ Your ability to form perceptions of others (social perception).
  - ◊ If you are getting more than one side of the argument and if you are

willing to listen to people or read material that you might disagree with.

- Practice active listening, including demonstrating to the speaker that you are listening, picking up on what's *not* said, and not interrupting (including through body language) or closing things down too quickly. Check your understanding, especially when listening.
- With information:
  - ◇ Probe whether there are gaps or discrepancies in what is being said or written and if so, why.
  - ◇ Check why any missing evidence essential to making a judgement is not available. Is it really not available, has nobody asked or has there been no time to collect it?
  - ◇ Be aware of your own filters, including biases, defensiveness, aggression, perceptions of risk and relying only on what you know.
- Check your interpretations of cultures, environments or organisations with which you are unfamiliar. Be sensitive to the differences.

## TRUST

- Be clear if you can trust yourself to be honest with yourself.
- Choose colleagues to have around you who are not afraid to stand up to you and tell you the truth.
- If in doubt about whether you can trust somebody, press for substantive answers to your questions, look at their track record (for example on forecasts) and, if possible, test the advice, including by cross-checking with independent sources.
- If possible, identify trusted advisers before you need them. In doing so, check your record in picking trustworthy people and consider:
  - ◇ Why you trust them and whether you understand the basis of their feelings and beliefs, including their values.
  - ◇ Whether they really understand the issue and whether they know what they do not know.
  - ◇ Their track record and reputation, verifying these, if possible, with independent sources.
  - ◇ Whether you understand their reason for giving you this advice and whether they have your interests at heart.
  - ◇ Whether you are asking their advice because they will tell you what you want to hear
- Consider the same factors related to data. Ensure you know the source sufficiently well before trusting it, including whether the collection process

is robust and how quality is validated.

If necessary seek corroboration from other trusted sources, including techniques designed to identify manipulation or lies.

- To avoid misunderstandings or your trust being abused, take appropriate steps, such as avoiding undue reliance on a single person. Provide clear guidance for those to whom you delegate.

## FEELINGS AND BELIEFS

- Identify your biases, and those of the people you work and deal with, so you can manage them, for example by identifying them in appraisals or performance reviews or acknowledging them openly in discussion.
- Be aware of what might trigger reactions based on your emotions. Use training or coaching to become more aware of them and other aspects of your feelings and beliefs.
- Identify the feelings and beliefs in the room in making collective judgements, especially biases such as groupthink. Take specific steps to counter them where they could jeopardise good judgement, for example through a devil's advocate technique.
- In providing a safe space for dissent on feelings and beliefs, ensure that status does not inhibit free expression.
- Where necessary, use rules or provide procedures to counter the risks of bias, to ensure that relevant options are considered and to increase personal accountability.
- Even if you believe you are aware of your own biases, ensure that you get feedback on them from those you trust and who are not afraid to tell you the truth.
- If you consider yourself unbiased, check, if the facts and circumstances change, whether your views reflect that.
- Be clear about your values so that you can ensure they are part of the judgement process.
- Look for motivated reasoning in people and information presented to you, separating commitment from bias.
- Identify and make clear risk tolerance or appetite, especially their implications in a group.

## CHOICE

- Make sure you are in the right frame of mind to make a decision. Exhaustion, illness, stress and strong emotions (such as anger or fear) increase the risk of

poor judgement.

- Check the way the choice has been framed for mistakes, biases or omissions. In checking, identify what there has not been time to collect and consider the risks of waiting.
- Consider a critical choice approach to marshalling and evaluating evidence with a sceptical mindset.
- In getting information for the choice:
  - ◊ Be aware of how information has been presented and how that might affect the choice.
  - ◊ Ask for what you need in the form that is useful for you, for example a clear summary for long papers and a focus on the key issues.
- Check on whether the right number of options has been presented, particularly if there are new, highly uncertain or risky choices:
  - ◊ Where only one (or only one acceptable) option has been presented, check how other choices have been eliminated.
  - ◊ See whether more options should be included, even as a pilot or trial.
- Identify the key assumptions, weights given to variables in models (including 'black box' AI programs) and samples used to derive conclusions.
- Establish the trade-offs involved in the choices available.
- In terms of consultation, find out whether 'relevant others' – colleagues and organisations – have been consulted.
- In taking account of risk:
  - ◊ Ensure that risk analysis is integrated in the choice process, especially for major or first-time activities, processes or projects.
  - ◊ Clarify to yourself your own tolerance or appetite for risk and consider the balance of your team on their appetite for risk.
- Check assumptions (including contingencies) and the quality of evidence, being aware that predictions and forecasts are estimates with probabilities. Push to clarify the basis of probabilities, confidence levels and ambiguous words such as 'possible' and 'likely'.
- Check the relevance of any comparators provided. If there aren't any comparators, check why and if they could be important, push for them.
- Look for ways to improve discussion of options, such as:
  - ◊ Pre-meetings to clarify issues.
  - ◊ Considering who intervenes when.
  - ◊ finding the best way to probe the analysis.
  - ◊ Encouraging people to speak up and not letting louder voices dominate.
  - ◊ Being open about personal agendas.
  - ◊ Allowing space for diverse – even sometimes radical – opinions.
- Acknowledge the role of (and possible reliance on) luck.
- Recognise that:
  - ◊ The risk of using gut feel and intuition increases, the less the relevant

experience.

- ◊ Speed is taking risk in a context – fast and slow are not necessarily good or bad in themselves.
- If pressured to make a choice, establish whether the constraint (such as a deadline) is artificial.
- Document processes if a record is needed (e.g. for regulators or to guide colleagues in future), especially if the choice is controversial.
- Test the 'feel' of a choice by:
  - ◊ How you would feel if the opposite was decided.
  - ◊ Asking yourself the question: 'Would I be prepared to defend the choice to colleagues/senior management or in public?'

## DELIVERY

- Be clear about the realism of the delivery assumptions, including the availability of key people and finance, the track record and experience of those involved and the understanding of feasibility and risk.
- Be aware of the dangers of magical thinking – deciding to do something without the resources to carry it through.
- Identify the nature of any personal, institutional or legal opposition to delivery and be clear about how you will overcome it.
- If, in the light of delivery practicalities, earlier assumptions need to be questioned, use a feedback loop to review them.
- Take special care with first-time, one-off projects, where delivery is notoriously difficult. In particular, avoid hoping to resolve substantive delivery issues after the project has started.
- Co-opt colleagues and, where relevant, other stakeholders, to commit to delivery.
- Where necessary, mitigate delivery risk, for example through one of the '5 Ps' – pausing to reflect, partial implementation, piloting, a probationary period or a pre-mortem.
- Check the evidence and implications, including risk, of the proposed speed of action in delivery, whether it is of the essence or whether a pause for more facts or reflection would be wise. Be explicit about any trade-off in delivery between speed and cost.
- Since it is unlikely that everything will go to plan, anticipate what's necessary to react or follow through. Consider adding flexibility to the schedule and/or a fallback position.