



The Six Modes of Decision-Making

By Richard Barrett

The process of decision-making

There are four stages involved in decision-making—data gathering, information processing, meaning-making, and decision-making, and 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 1, together with six modes of decision-making.

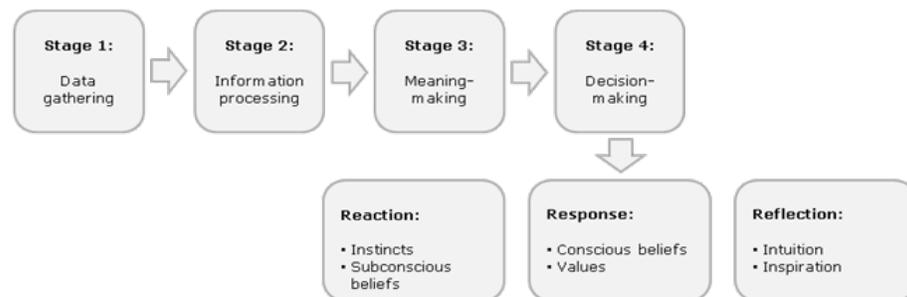


Figure 1 The four stages of decision-making three responses and six modes of decision-making

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, etc. These multiple streams of data in the form of energy quanta are sent to the brain for processing.

Stage 2: Information processing

The brain assembles and synthesizes the data from the five senses into information patterns that can be recognized by the mind. What we see, hear, smell, taste, or feel is not the data that is pouring in through our senses, nor the information patterns produced by the brain, but the mind's abstraction of this information. The mind gives form to the information patterns.

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 (body, ego or soul memory) that contains a similar pattern. When a similar pattern is found, meaning is ascribed to the situation, and a reaction, response, or guidance leading to reflection is initiated.

If there are no matching memories then the mind carries out a “fuzzy” search in the ego mind to find a pattern that has similar characteristics (but not precisely the same) as the one currently being experienced. When a pattern is found, we use logic (links to other patterns that we hold in our mind) to assign a meaning to the situation.

Since the sense organs are directly linked to the brain, which itself is part of the body, the information packages are first responded to by the body-mind—action precedes thought; then by the ego-mind—action precedes or follows thought; and, then by the soul-mind—action follows thought, as shown in Figure 2.

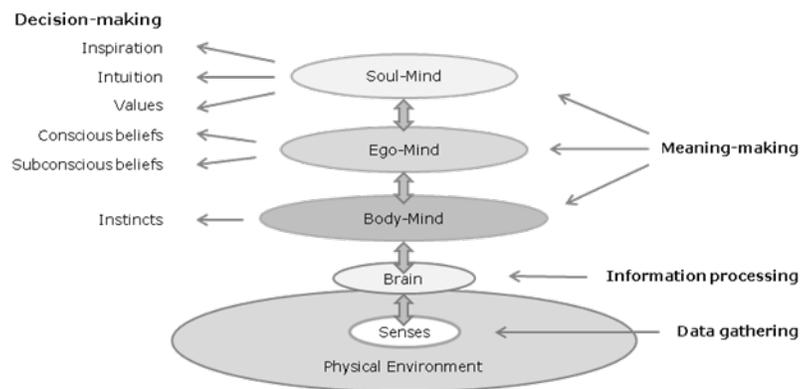


Figure 2 Progression in meaning-making

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, and 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 a 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 1.

Levels of Consciousness		Ego-mind	Soul-mind
7	Service		Inspiration Intuition Values
6	Making a difference		
5	Internal cohesion		
4	Transformation	Conscious beliefs Subconscious beliefs	
3	Self-esteem		
2	Relationships		
1	Survival		
Body-mind¹		Instincts	

Table 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.

In adult life, instinct-based decision-making kicks in to help us 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 the save the life of another. Instincts are the principal mode of decision-making found in all creatures.

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, and decision-making.

¹ 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.

- 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.
- We are not consciously in control of our words, actions and behaviours. They are in control of us.

Instinct based-decision is a faculty of the body-mind. The body-mind is where we keep the “institutionalised” DNA memories that keep our physical body safe and secure.

Subconscious belief-based decision-making

In *subconscious belief-based decision-making* we also react to what is happening in our world without reflection, but on the basis of personal memories rather than the institutionalised memories of our cellular (DNA). In this mode of decision-making action also precedes thought. The action is often accompanied by the release of an emotional charge.

You know when subconscious fear-based beliefs are dominating your decision-making if you feel impatient, frustrated, upset or angry. Whenever you experience such feelings, you are dealing with some unmet ego deficiency needs that have never 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 needs met.

When you experience positively charged emotions such as joy, and happiness, you are remembering moments from your past which 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 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 our personal memory.
- We are not in control of our actions and behaviours. In this mode of decision-making the only way we can get back into conscious control of your actions is either to release or bottle-up your emotions. Releasing helps us to return to rationality. Bottling-up builds up pressure.

- It is very personal. Others are not consulted to help us enhance our meaning-making and give support in our decision-making.

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

Conscious belief-based decision-making

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

The main features of conscious belief-based decision-making are:

- Thought precedes action—we insert a pause between an event and our response to it so we can use logic and get advice in order to determine the best way of meeting our 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. We make decisions based on what we believe we know.
- We are in control of our action and behaviours.
- We can consult with others to support and enhance our 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) to make decisions about the future. Because of this, the future we create 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. We have to individuate (establish ourselves at the transformation level of consciousness), and develop a self-authoring mind before we can make this leap: we need to become viable and independent in our framework of existence before values-based decision-making is fully and naturally available to us.

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—and most of these beliefs have to do with our personal and cultural upbringing. The process of individuation involves examining these beliefs

and letting go of the ones that don't serve us. As we let go of these beliefs, we develop a new guidance system based on our deeply held values. Values are the universal guidance system of the soul. When you shift to values-based decision-making, you can effectively throw away your rule books. Every decision you make is sourced by what is deeply meaningful to you.

Values-based decision-making allows us to create a future that resonates deeply with who we 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 and rational thinking. There is. However, all the critical decisions we need to make should pass the values test.

The main features of values-based decision-making are:

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

We make values-based decisions so that we consciously create the future we want to experience. For example, if we value trust, then we should make decisions that allow us to display trust. If we value accountability, then we make decisions that allow us to display accountability.

Intuition-based decision-making

The shift from values-based decision-making to intuition-based decision-making develops overtime once the centre of gravity of your consciousness has shifted from your ego to your soul. Intuition arises from the deepening of your connection to your soul. This is one of the attributes of a self-transforming mind. We reach this level of consciousness after we have completed our own internal cohesion, and have become a self-actualized individual. Intuition allows us to access our 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 our 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 are in alignment 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*.²

Inspiration-based decision-making

Inspiration is the way we receive soul-based promptings into our 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.

Inspiration is different to intuition. Intuition is non-directive. 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, usually in the form of melancholy or depression.

Depression arises 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 of time, 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

² Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers, *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*,: The Society for Organisational Learning, Cambridge, 2004.

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

You will recall 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 flow. Ideas and insights just kept flooding my mind. Whenever I got 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 24 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 of time when I could not stop the flow. Words just kept coming without thought or need for editing.

Conclusions

These 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, the ego, and the soul. Each mode of decision-making is naturally tailored to enable us to handle increasing levels of complexity in the world around us 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 non-family 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, non-family peers, and bosses (Level 4 consciousness).

As *mature adults* we rely on the values and conscious beliefs of our self-authoring mind to *self-actualize* and become fully who we really are—a very complex life with our own family, parents, siblings, extended family, non-family peers, bosses, and subordinates (also 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, and extended family, non-family 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 with our own family, parents, siblings, extended family, non-family 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 tap into our intuition, and finally we learn how to follow our inspiration. Inspiration is the mode of decision-making that enables us to fulfil our destiny. The soul infused personality operates from values, utilizes intuition, and is guided by inspiration.