INFLUENCER
AN OUTLOOK ON LEADERSHIP & CHANGE

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The Science of BETTER DECISIONS

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PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The Choices That Shape Our Day



It is only 10 a.m., but your inbox is filling up. A colleague needs an answer, your to-do list keeps growing, and an unexpected request has landed on your desk. You have not started your most important task, yet you already feel mentally drained. Sound familiar?

Our workdays are filled with decisions, from choosing which email to answer first to managing competing priorities. Repeated decision-making can add to our mental demands.

This brings us to decision fatigue, a concept associated with changes in decision-making after sustained decision demands. [1] As demands accumulate, we may struggle to weigh options, prioritise tasks, or make decisions carefully.

RECOGNISE BEFORE YOU REACT

Decision fatigue can be difficult to recognise during a busy workday. You might postpone decisions, choose the easiest solution, or struggle to weigh options after a demanding stretch of work.



Rather than judging yourself for being unproductive, consider what might be contributing to the feeling. Heavy workloads, stress, and constant interruptions can also affect concentration. Recognising these patterns allows us to pause and respond intentionally.

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MAKE SPACE FOR WHAT MATTERS



Being effective does not mean giving every decision equal attention. It means knowing which decisions deserve your energy.

Start by identifying two or three priorities each morning. Establish routines for recurring tasks, use templates where appropriate, and set specific times to check emails. Whenever possible, schedule tasks requiring deeper thinking during the hours when you feel most alert.

When your mind feels overwhelmed, take a short break to regain perspective before returning to the task.

Pause



Reflect



Choose



TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT:



- Which everyday decisions consume unnecessary time and energy?
- Which decisions deserve my attention most today?
- What is one choice I can simplify this week?

We cannot eliminate every decision, but we can approach them intentionally. By simplifying routine choices and focusing on what matters, we can bring greater clarity, focus, and purpose to our work.

-Personal effectiveness is not about doing everything at once; it is about making thoughtful choices about what matters most.-

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TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

The Decision Trap Smart Teams Fall Into



Have you ever been in a meeting where everyone agrees, the decision gets made, and yet something tells you that the team hasn't really explored all the possibilities?

It happens more often than we realise. In teams, we often value collaboration, alignment, and the ability to move quickly. But sometimes, in our effort to maintain harmony, we stop asking the questions that could lead to better decisions. This is where groupthink creeps in.



Imagine a leadership team preparing to launch a new initiative. The leader is confident about the proposed approach, and one by one, team members agree. A few have reservations, but nobody wants to slow things down or appear unsupportive. The team moves forward, only to discover later that some obvious risks were never discussed. The problem wasn't a lack of expertise. It was the absence of healthy challenge.

In my view, one of the biggest misconceptions about effective teams is that they must always be aligned. True alignment doesn't mean everyone thinks alike; it means people have had the opportunity to think differently before committing to a decision.



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A Manager's Playbook: Make Disagreement Work for You

So, how can managers encourage better decisions without turning every discussion into a lengthy debate?



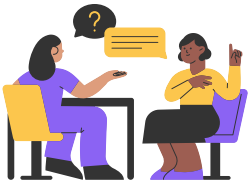


Invite different perspectives early.

Give people a moment to form their own opinions before opening the discussion, especially when senior leaders are involved.

Ask better questions.

Instead of "Does everyone agree?", try "What might we be missing?" or "What could go wrong with this approach?"





Normalise constructive disagreement.

Make it clear that challenging an idea is not the same as challenging a person.

Know when to move forward.

Not every decision needs extensive debate. Match the depth of discussion to the potential impact and reversibility of the decision.



As managers, our role isn't to create rooms where everyone agrees. It's to create environments where people feel comfortable speaking up, challenging assumptions, and contributing perspectives that might otherwise go unheard. Because sometimes, the most valuable contribution in a meeting isn't another person saying yes. It's the person brave enough to ask, ***"Have we looked at this differently?"***



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ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The Friction Audit

Why does a decision that should take an hour sometimes take a week? Often, no single policy is to blame. A senior leader holds onto a decision that could be delegated. A manager responds to one mistake by adding another checkpoint. A team keeps seeking consensus because no one wants to make an unpopular call.



Each response may seem cautious or responsible. But when these behaviours become routine, their effects multiply. Decisions slow down, accountability becomes unclear, and employees spend more energy navigating the organization than moving work forward. Customers eventually feel the impact through delayed responses, inconsistent service and missed opportunities. What began as individual behaviour becomes a system-level problem.

Stanford professors Robert Sutton, an organizational psychologist, and Huggy Rao, an organizational sociologist, call this "addition sickness."[1] It is closely related to addition bias, our tendency to solve problems by adding rules, approvals or requirements before considering what could be removed. Drawing on her work with more than 300 leaders over two decades, executive coach Muriel Wilkins also identified hidden beliefs such as "I need to be involved" or "I cannot make a mistake" that can reinforce friction. [2]



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TO SPOT THIS EARLY, PAUSE AND ASK FOUR SIMPLE QUESTIONS:

Where are we getting stuck?

Look for delays, repeated approvals and reopened decisions.

Why are we getting stuck?

Consider fear, low trust, perfectionism or difficulty delegating.

Is the friction worth it?

Does it manage real risk, or mainly add effort?

What should we try next?

Delegate, remove, clarify or invite concerns earlier.

Often, the most useful place to begin is simpler than we think, start with ourselves. Choose one recurring decision and ask: Where, Why, Worth and What next? Each unnecessary step removed and each habitual response reconsidered creates more room for people to contribute, take ownership and move good work forward. Small improvements can build the momentum for wider organizational change.





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WELLNESS CORNER

Your Brain Needs White Space



We live in a world overflowing with information. Constant emails, notifications, meetings, and digital demands endlessly compete for our attention. While we rush to keep up with the pace of technology, do we stop to ask: Are we giving ourselves enough space to think?

Information overload, frequent interruptions, and continuous task-switching gradually drain our mental energy. Each time we switch tasks, part of our attention remains on the previous activity, making it harder to concentrate fully on what comes next. Over time, this mental overload can increase stress, reduce efficiency, and affect the quality of our work. [1] We may find ourselves busier, but yet struggling to think clearly or creatively.

CREATING SPACE TO THINK

Mental downtime isn't a waste of time. Letting our minds wander while taking breaks with easy tasks helps us replenish our scarce cognitive resources and creates opportunities for clearer thinking. [1] Albert Einstein put it this way: "I take time to go for long walks on the beach so that I can listen to what is going on inside my head. If my work isn't going well, I lie down in the middle of a workday and gaze at the ceiling while I listen and visualize what goes on in my imagination." [2]

Small Pauses, Meaningful Benefits



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Here are some small, practical habits you can start with:



Protect Focus Time

Set aside notification-free periods for tasks requiring deeper thinking.



Take Micro-Recovery Walks

Step away from your screen for a short, phone-free walk to refresh your perspective. [3]



Create Breathing Space

Leave a 5-minute buffer between back-to-back commitments to mentally reset before your next task.

LEADERSHIP'S ROLE

Leaders also play an important role in creating a culture where rest is valued. Encouraging realistic workloads, protecting uninterrupted focus time, and respecting digital boundaries help teams work sustainably.



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LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

The Leadership Blind Spots We All Have

Modern leaders navigate an overwhelming volume of choices. Executive calendars tell the story. Leaders spend nearly 40% of their time making decisions and inefficient decision-making processes cost organizations hundreds of millions of dollars annually. [1]

In our work with leadership teams, executives rarely fall into cognitive traps because they lack intelligence. More often, poor decisions stem from something far more human: emotional self-preservation and decision fatigue.

Research highlights four blind spots that consistently derail outcomes:

CONFIRMATION BIAS:



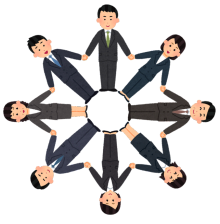
We have all been there, hunting for one green metric in a sea of red data to prove our hunch is right. Confirmation bias leads leaders to overweight evidence that supports existing belief while discounting contradictory information. [2] This results in distorted judgment and missed risks.



SUNK COST FALLACY:

Executives often struggle to abandon initiatives because of past investments or the belief that additional efforts will eventually generate success. This reluctance can divert resources away from higher-value opportunities. [3]

THE HIPPO EFFECT & GROUP CONFORMITY:



Imagine a CEO opens a strategy session with, "I think we should go all-in on X". Instantly, the dynamics shift. Subordinates instinctively suppress dissenting perspectives, allowing the Highest Paid Person's Opinion to dominate, and reducing the quality of collective judgment.



DECISION FATIGUE:

After back-to-back meetings and crisis responses, our brains run on fumes. Under pressure, leaders regress to intuition-driven defaults. They mistake speed for competence and confuse the feeling of decisiveness with objective correctness.

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The Path Forward

Exceptional leaders are not immune to bias. What sets them apart is their commitment to challenge their own assumptions. By fostering self-awareness and adopting deliberate processes, such as seeking independent viewpoints and conducting pre-mortems, leaders will make more balanced decisions and reduce costly errors.

Questions for Reflection

On motives, when I make a quick decision, am I acting on objective evidence, or protecting my desire to appear decisive?

On culture, have I created genuine psychological safety, or does my status pressure my team to conform?

On processes, what can we introduce in our meetings to identify blind spots, such as appointing a designated devil's advocate?

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