

PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: ***The Secret Life of Decisions***

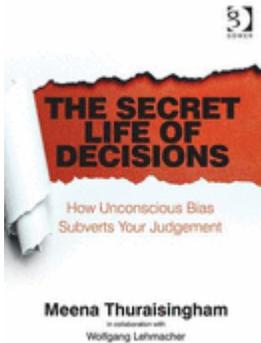
Author: **Meena Thuraisingham in collaboration with Wolfgang Lehmacher**

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Introduction to the Book

Leaders often have to make decisions which impact the success of their organization and projects. This book raises awareness on how imprecise the decision making process is and how often organizational leaders make these decisions in irrational ways based on emotions, thinking habits, personal filters and bias. It also provides guidance on how to alter the decision making process by identifying ways to evolve towards more successful strategies.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book is broken down into 3 sections:

1. The cost of biased judgment and bad decisions: This section focuses on the physiology and psychology of decision making process and reveals the root of biased thinking.
2. Defying the myths, revealing the secrets and choosing wisely: A review of five decisions every leader has to make and the eight myths which they need to be aware of. For each of these myths, two case studies are shared along with recommended corrective actions to address the biases.
3. Delivering best practice decision behavior: Ideas on how to incorporate best approaches in your daily decision making process and evolving towards next generation of futuristic thinking.

Highlights: What's New in this Book

I learned a great deal about how our perceptual systems work after reading this book. It is very interesting to understand how we all use intuitive (automatic) and deductive (analytical) thinking every day. An example of intuitive thinking is turning on a light when you enter a dark room without much thought. Our deductive thinking is based on pure association and covers most of our thought process. One of the highlights for me was a better understanding of how using intuitive thinking without sufficient analysis often ends up in costly decisions.

Another highlight was the understanding that every decision we make is broken down into four parts: comprehension, retrieval, judgment and response. At each layer, we add our own interpretation and subjective thinking based on intuition. This results in uncontrolled decision making. The book advocates moving away from intuitive based thinking and identifies ways to balance this with more analytical thinking to improve end results.

Highlights: What I liked!

The insight into the common myths and actions to take to avoid these situations is the best part of the book. The example cases of bad decisions made by famous leaders demonstrate each myth. The impact on organizational goals was not only insightful but comical. The lessons associated with each of these myths can be applied not only to work but everyday personal decisions. Here is a summary below:

- The Memory Myth: An accurate memory of past events is a reliable input into our decisions. The reality is our memories often deceive us based on study results shared.
- The Experience Myth: The more experience we have, the better our decisions. The reality is our experiences often trap us into thinking we have to do things the same way as done before.
- The Optimism Myth: The more confident we feel about the outcome, the better our decisions. The reality is optimism often clouds our judgment and we should base the outcome on more measurable success criteria.
- The Fear Myth: The more we have to lose, the better our decisions. The reality is fear can do more harm than expected and can block progress.
- The Ambitious Myth: The stronger our personal ambition, the better our decisions. The reality is ambition often blindside us.
- The Attachment Myth: The more emotions we have vested in ideas of people, the better our decisions. The reality is this can often lead us astray.
- The Values Myth: The stronger the corporate culture or belief system, the better our decisions. Values can also blindside.
- The Power Myth: The more control or influence we have, the better our decisions. We hear may too often how power has corrupted some.

We have the ability to evolve our decision making process by we recognize some of the red flag indicators earlier in the cycle and de-biasing our actions to rethink the approach to better decisions. The case studies demonstrate this well.

Shortfalls: What was Missing?

Reading this book won't guarantee you will make the best decisions every time based on other's hindsight. Every effective leader needs to incorporate hindsight, insight and foresight into their vision. However, the book does try to build awareness of factors which will help you manage your biases and incorporate best practices to improve your decisions.

Another point which was raised in the book is often organizations are over dependent on numbers seen from their analysis which was sighted as a failure point; however, many organization are impacted negatively for not collecting sufficient "relevant" data to formulate best decisions based on market demands. How to find the right balance to accomplish this wasn't fully covered in the book.

Who might benefit from the Book?

This book is beneficial to both leaders making decisions in an organization or project as well as aid an individual on their personal decision making process. Understanding the impact of intuitive or biased thinking is the first step to improving the process of making wiser decisions and evolving to better leaders.

Conclusion

The book was worth reading because it shared valuable lessons learned from past leader's experiences and how to avoid pitfalls of uncontrolled thinking process. After reading over a dozen case studies, I am now able to see what decision making lenses leaders often wear and better approach alternative game-changing desired outcomes. The red flag indicators and success strategies to neutralize biases are good reference material as well as the section on best decision making practices.

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Editor's note: This book review was the result of cooperation between the publisher, PM World and the Dallas Chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI Dallas Chapter –

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About the Reviewer



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Nazanin Mehrooz is a certified project manager and scrum master. Nazanin started her career as a software developer and transitioned to leading mid-size teams as both a functional manager and (most currently) a senior project manager in technology services at BNSF. Her background includes managing a portfolio of up to 30 projects with budgets exceeding 15 Million USD. Nazanin is an active volunteer for the PMI Dallas and Fort Worth Chapters. Email: nazi_mehrooz@yahoo.com