



Emotions and Decisions, Emotional Intelligence, and Neurolinguistic Programming

**Reading
and
questionnaire**

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Decisions and Emotion

When it comes to making decisions, the traditional attitude to any role that emotions might play in that is wonderfully summarised by Dr Dylan Evans¹ (Computing, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences at the University of the West of England) when he says:

There's a whole tradition in the west, going back to Plato; two and a half thousand years of thinking, in which philosophers and later psychologists have regarded emotions as, at best, harmless luxuries and at worst outright obstacles to intelligent action – they get in the way of making intelligent decisions. To use Jon Elster's evocative phrase they're sand in the machinery of action, they just grit things up. And I think one of the most interesting things about the way psychologists and philosophers and neuroscientists are changing their views about emotion over the last, just the last ten years, is that they're realising that this negative view of emotion is fundamentally wrong, and that emotions do sometimes cause us to do things we regret, of course. But if we didn't have them we wouldn't be more rational than we are today, we'd actually be less rational. We need these sort of gut feelings to guide our rationality.

It's only in the last 10 to 20 years that emotions, and the role they play in rational decision making, have begun to receive serious attention. Evans says:

Though it's true to say, I think, that we're only beginning now to uncover the neural mechanisms of emotion, we have made an amazing amount of progress in the last ten years compared to what we knew about the neural basis of emotion before. You know, we've just, in the last ten years we've learned more about the neural basis of emotion than we did in the previous 2,000 years. So although it's only beginning we are actually really now making very fast progress, and that's one of the most exciting areas of neuroscience, to look at the emotional mechanisms in the brain that influence emotion. And the chemicals that do that, too.

What is becoming clearer is that emotions have a real role to play in making decisions. With respect to this, Evans says:

The emotional brain provides a very fundamental foundation on which the rational thinking could evolve because the emotional system in humans, one of its functions seems to be to limit the amount of options that we will consider before making a decision. And we can see this very clearly in the case of people who have some damage to a part of their brain which was serving some emotional function. And so when they lose that emotional capacity, suddenly their rationality doesn't seem to function as good as it used to. So they spend, for example, hours considering all the criteria and all the possible considerations that might be relevant to an otherwise insignificant decision like, when should we go and see the doctor, today or tomorrow? We shouldn't spend too long making a decision like that because we've got other things to do – and yet without the emotional system to constrain the possibilities and without the emotional system that maybe would make us get bored with spending too long considering such a trivial thing – that people with brain damage to their emotional areas of their brain can spend hours making such a tiny decision. They get trapped or locked into what I've called analysis paralysis, they become in a sense a bit like Hamlet considering for days and days a decision which they should be able to make quickly. And they would be able to make quickly if they had some gut feelings that just produced a decision that worked through intuition.

The following pages and questions have been prepared to assist you in discovering how emotions may have played a role when you have made various types of decisions.

¹ All in the Mind 2005, radio program, ABC Radio National, 26 Nov, transcript accessed 30 Nov 2005, < <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/science/mind/stories/s1514225.htm>>.

Decisions and their Effects

Why do we make decisions?

When you start to notice how often you make decisions, you might be surprised just how many you make in any one day. Much of the time, the small, day-to-day decisions are of minimal importance. It would be rare that it would really matter much whether you decide to have a cup of coffee now or in five minutes' time.

However, each of us is occasionally required to make decisions that have a major effect on our work or on our life outside work. Most likely, you have made some important decisions that you have been very pleased with, and some others that you have not been so happy with.

Some general questions for you think about between now and the workshop are the following.

- 1 Under what sort of conditions do you become aware of making decisions?
- 2 What sort of decisions do you make which are ones which have little consequence? How frequently do you make these types of decisions?
- 3 Are you aware of taking any steps to prepare yourself for making important decisions?

Making the 'right' decision

It's possible to think of decisions on a scale ranging from 'bad' through 'neutral' to 'good', based on how you perceive the effects of having made the decision.

Of course, there are indicators that let us know how we would classify a decision once it has been made and the effects of it have been experienced.

| | 'Bad' decisions | 'Neutral' decisions | 'Good' decisions |
|---|---|--|--|
| Things you might say | <i>I knew it wasn't going to work. I knew that [unwanted consequence] would happen! How could I have done that!</i> | <i>Mmm ... ok. It wasn't all that important. It didn't matter all that much.</i> | <i>I knew all along it was the right decision. There was no doubt that it was the right decision. I just had a feeling it was the right thing.</i> |
| Evaluative 'feelings' you might have | Regret, disappointment, anger, embarrassment | Indifference, mild satisfaction, neutral, mild confidence | Satisfaction, elation, pride, strong confidence |

What is of particular interest is the **post-decision recognition** of anticipation of either desired or undesired consequences of the decision. Have you heard yourself, or someone else, say something like the following?

I knew it wasn't going to work.

or, conversely

There was no good reason for it [the decision], but I just had a feeling that it was the right thing to do. (And proved to be the case.)

The proposition here is that there are often 'signals' which we have while making a decision that let us know whether we are making the best decision we can at the time or whether we are forcing, through 'rationality', a decision which we will later regret.

A set of questions follows which is designed to help you start investigating, in more detail, the following general questions.

- 1 What emotions were assisting you in making your decisions?
- 2 What body and thought signals were present during the decision making which, before now, you might not have noticed?
- 3 What awareness you can bring to future decision making which will assist you in making more decisions that you will be satisfied with?

Please **remember**: there is no 'right' way to answer these questions. They are intended to prompt your thinking and your investigation into your own decision processes. It is not necessary to have a 'clear' answer for each question. However, it will greatly assist you in getting value from the morning workshop if you take some quality time to think about each question.

As you might expect, it is going to be more instructive to think about decisions that fall at the ends of the 'scale'—that is, 'bad' decisions and 'good' decisions—which are usually the ones where more is at stake.

'Bad' decision investigation

Think of a decision about which you have had *regret* (or some other 'negative' emotion).

For the initial inquiry, it will probably be better to think of a personal decision (e.g. a choice of holiday, a career move based purely on personal motivation, something said to someone, etc.)

Please think about and make notes in response to the following questions:

1. As well as you can remember, what events were occurring at the time of the decision which could have affected, or did affect, the way you made the decision?
2. As well as you can remember, what emotional range did you go through when making the decision?
3. As well as you can recall, what emotion was, or could have been, present at the moment of making the decision? For example:
settled, agitated, calm, distracted, angry, annoyed, frustrated, indifferent, in a 'good' mood, recklessly confident, wildly happy, etc.
4. To the extent that you are able to detect, how did you feel when making the decision? That is, what specific body sensations can you recall that would identify that state? For example, did you notice sensations such as:
stillness around the diaphragm and stomach, or through the body; muscles more relaxed than tense; movement in various parts of the body (e.g. especially around the stomach or diaphragm); unable to keep still; tense muscles; perception of a change of body temperature; etc.
5. At what stage did you recognise that the decision had unwanted consequences? Was it some specific event that brought this to your attention, or was it some 'internal' recognition (something you thought or felt), or was it both?
6. Did you take time to review your decision making process so that you could improve it next time?
7. Were you able to come to a state of accepting the consequences of your decision, and 'moving on'? How did you do that?

'Good' decision investigation

Now think of a decision which you were very *pleased* with.

For the initial inquiry, it will probably be better to think of a personal decision (e.g. a choice of holiday, a career move based purely on personal motivation, something said to someone, etc.)

Please think about and make notes in response to the following questions:

1. As well as you can remember, what events were occurring at the time of the decision which could have affected, or did affect, the way you made the decision?
2. As well as you can recall, did you apply much 'logic' when making the decision? Was there a 'gut feeling' at the time, which you took as an indication of the decision being the right one?
3. As well as you can remember, what emotional range did you go through when making the decision?
4. As well as you can recall, what emotion was, or could have been, present at the moment of making the decision? For example:
settled, calm, distracted, angry, annoyed, frustrated, indifferent, in a 'good' mood, recklessly confident, wildly happy, etc.
5. To the extent that you are able to detect, how did you feel when making the decision? That is, what specific body sensations can you recall that would identify that state? For example, did you notice sensations such as:
stillness around the diaphragm and stomach, or through the body; muscles more relaxed than tense; movement in various parts of the body (e.g. especially around the stomach or diaphragm); unable to keep still; tense muscles; sensations of 'lightness' or 'heaviness'; perception of change of body temperature; etc.
6. At what stage did you recognise that the decision really was a good one? Was it some specific event that brought this to your attention, or was it some 'internal' recognition (something you thought or felt), or was it both?
7. Did you take time to review your decision making process so that you could recognise how you made the decision so that you could use a similar process in the future?
8. Did you celebrate your success in decision making?
9. Did you consider ways of using the process that produced this good decision for different types of decisions in the future?

'Rational' decision investigation

Now think of a decision which you consider was a very logical and rational decision. This could be a decision which you were either pleased or not pleased with.

For this example, either a personal decision (e.g. a choice of holiday, a career move based purely on personal motivation, something said to someone, etc.) or a work-related decision will serve equally as well.

Please think about and make notes in response to the following questions:

1. As well as you can remember, what events were occurring at the time of the decision which could have affected, or did affect, the way you made the decision?
2. As well as you can recall, how much information gathering did you do?
3. What processes did you use to examine and to think about the information you gathered?
4. To what extent did you feel that the gathering and sorting of information helped with the decision (assuming information was gathered and sorted)?
5. Were you able to make the decision on a 'purely' logical basis, or did you find that you were also guided by a 'gut feeling', 'intuition', or by some emotional component?
6. To the extent that you can recall, what emotional range did you go through when making the decision?
7. Regardless of whether it was a good decision or not, do you think there might have been some guiding signals which you were not fully aware of at the time?
8. Did you take time to review your decision making process so that you could recognise how you made the decision so that you could learn from it?

General rating on making decisions

The table below lists a number of different type of decisions.

Please rate yourself according to how well you feel you make each type of decision by placing an X in the appropriate column. Use the following scale as your guide.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|--|--------------|---|-----------|
| Definitely need new skills in this area | Inconsistent: but still need more skills | Generally ok | Generally good, but could use more skills for greater consistency | Very good |

| Decision type | Rating | | | | |
|--|--------|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Personal finance | | | | | |
| Business finance involving your own money | | | | | |
| Business finance involving other people's/organisations' money | | | | | |
| Personal investment | | | | | |
| Career moves | | | | | |
| Relating to people socially | | | | | |
| Relating to people close to you (family, partners, close friends) | | | | | |
| How to engage in entertainment (movies, beach, restaurant, etc.) | | | | | |
| Choosing meals in restaurants | | | | | |
| Small day-to-day decisions | | | | | |
| Time-related decisions (when to stop one task and start another, when to leave for an appointment, judging how long a particular task will take) | | | | | |
| Whether to promise to do something or not | | | | | |
| Personal commitments (e.g. to relax or exercise more, rewarding oneself after pleasing achievements) | | | | | |
| Buying clothes for yourself | | | | | |
| Buying gifts for others | | | | | |
| Where to go for holidays | | | | | |
| What to do on holidays | | | | | |
| How to spend Christmas/Festive Season | | | | | |