
Research Digest

How to Think Just Right

Acting impulsively can get negotiators into trouble. On the other hand, obsessive analysis can lead to paralysis. In a recent article, Dan Ariely and Mike Norton consider how striking a healthy balance between thinking too little and thinking too much depends on both the specific context and an individual's particular makeup.

The authors review existing decision-making literature to uncover the different type of decision errors that arise from thinking too little or too much. These include perpetuating bad or meaningless habits (too little thinking) or considering too many attributes or options (too much thinking). So what is "just right" thinking?

They conclude that individuals should ask themselves whether they are facing a "thinking too much" or a "thinking too little" problem when making a decision and adjust accordingly. The research illustrates the negative results of too much or too little thinking and that being aware of the perils (and, in some instances, benefits) of both can help make your decision making just right.

Source: Ariely, D. and M. Norton. 2011. From thinking too little to thinking too much: A continuum of decision making. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 2(1): 39–46.

A Thinking Model

At a conference several years ago, a prominent mediator said, "When parties get stuck, I reach into my bag of tricks and pull out something to break impasse." He then admitted, "But I don't know how it is I know the parties are stuck or why I use one technique or another."

Now, thanks to Kenneth Kressel and Howard Gadlin's article, "Mediating among Scientists: A Mental Model of Expert Practice," we are getting a better look at how such mediators make intuitive decisions. Kressel and Gadlin examined eighteen cases through the Office of the Ombudsman at the National Institute of Health (NIH) to craft a model of how ombudsmen think.

Their model consists of two strongly contrasting intervention scripts: a "deep" problem-solving script focusing on interpersonal issues and a "tactical" script focusing on the issues presented by the parties. Both scripts begin with an intense diagnostic phase during which decision rules are applied and a script selection is made. The broader applications of this project are limited because the ombudsmen are part of everyday life at the NIH, so they are more aware of organizational dysfunction and recognizing latent sources of conflict than most mediators would be.

Source: Kressel, K. and H. Gadlin. 2009. Mediating among scientists: A mental model of expert practice. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 2(4): 308-343.

Channeling Group Anger for Greater Good

Some theorists and practitioners are uncomfortable with any display of emotion in negotiation, especially anger. However, a pair of recent studies conducted by researchers in Israel and the United States suggests that anger can actually be constructive, so long as it is not linked to hatred.

The studies were conducted within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, focusing on Israeli levels of anger toward Palestinians before the Annapolis summit. The studies showed how inducing anger toward Palestinians before the summit increased the desire for compromise in the negotiations, but only when respondents reported a low level of hatred. Among those with high levels of hatred, the desire for compromise was either decreased or unchanged.

Reducing long-term hatred is one of the most challenging missions in conflict resolution, but these results illustrate how making an effort to reduce levels of long-term hatred can shift an “anger of despair” to an “anger of hope.” The study concludes by suggesting a further look at the malleability of groups as a way to reduce hatred.

Source: Halperin, E., A. Russell, C. Dweck, and J. Gross. 2011. Anger, hatred, and the quest for peace: Anger can be constructive in the absence of hatred. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55(2): 274-291.

The Three Rs of Forgiveness

Will you forgive me? According to the results of a quartet of studies by researchers in the United States and Singapore, the answer depends on how I explain my transgression and how my apology is interpreted.

Researchers conducted four experiments to investigate the implications of “substantive” responses for the repair of trust. They looked at two forms of substantive responses, penance and regulation, which represented different categories of trust-repair attempts and found both responses can effectively rebuild trust, depending on how it is done. Perceived repentance (regret, reform, resolve) is the key for repairing trust, while perceived prevention had little influence on the outcome.

The authors note the limitations of their research, including the fact that subjects had no prior contact or history. This limitation, however, suggests a direction for additional research, including research on how to repair trust in groups or organizations.

Source: Dirks, K., P. Kim, D. Ferrin, and C. Cooper. 2011. Understanding the effects of substantive responses on trust following a transgression. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 114(2): 87–103.

The Home Field Advantage

Folk wisdom says that it is always better to negotiate on our own turf. There are important exceptions, of course, as in the case when paying a visit is a gesture of goodwill (or a way to learn more about the other party).

Recent experiments by Graham Brown and Markus Baer suggest that in most instances home court does confer an advantage, either by boosting our confidence or by lessening the other side's self-assurance. They found that residents of the office hosting the negotiation had a considerable advantage over the "visiting team." Theirs is one of the first studies to conclude there is a home field advantage in negotiation. However, one of their studies also demonstrated that artificially elevating the confidence of the "visiting team" just prior to negotiations can eliminate that advantage. But in the end, it is to your benefit if you can lure the other party to your lair — or at least level the playing field by meeting on neutral ground.

Source: Brown, G. and M. Baer. 2011. Location in negotiation: Is there a home field advantage? *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 114(2):190–200.