

# Table of Contents

<b>How to we Overcome Win / Lose Type Thinking to Open and Organization to Learning? .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Premise .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Meta Data .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>V1 .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>V2 .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Learning Outcomes .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Prerequisite Knowledge .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Information for Program Team .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Bad Decision?</i> .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Decision vs Result?</i> .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Biases Effecting Decisions</i> .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Skill vs Luck?</i> .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b><i>Thinking in Bets</i> .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b><i>What Are We Going to Do Tomorrow?</i> .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Materials .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b><i>Biases Effecting Decisions</i> .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b><i>Experiment Template</i> .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>My Notes .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Useful Quotes .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Track Information .....</b>	<b>13</b>



# How to we Overcome Win / Lose Type Thinking to Open and Organization to Learning?

## Premise

Preparation for Agile Submission based on work I have in place.

## Meta Data

- Title: How to we Overcome Win / Lose Type Thinking to Open and Organization to Learning?
- Co-Presenter: None
- Featured Participants: None
- Track: Leadership
- Session Type: Workshop
- Audience Level: Practicing
- Room Setup: Rounds
- Maximum Desired Attendees: 125?
- Duration: 75mins
- Keywords: Leadership Win Lose Betting Truth

## Abstract

### V1

Once decision is made need to move away from win / lose if something gets changed. What exercise helps this. How do we get people to jointly collaborate, work to improve, hold accountable.

How do we encourage seeking of truth instead of posturing.

And related to this, how do we become more disciplined in our experiments and move away from “let’s experiment” just means “we can do whatever we want”

Of course in many ways this is all a lead up. In the final analysis we want people to retrospect regularly, discover problems and learn new things, and figure out ways to get better. This thinking should also support that and, if we have scheduled retrospectives, will help us be crisper about what we are seeing when we review the results of the experiment at the next retrospective.

## V2

When we work a transformation we see a number of leadership behaviors. One is that we see that leadership learn how to use the new language to work in old ways. For example we see the idea that if we say “this is an experiment” it gives us a license to do whatever we want.

We also see people get stuck on positions and the feeling is that they don’t want to be seen to be losing if it doesn’t go their way. We need to get the conversation more precise in dealing with ambiguity by becoming more explicit on working with probabilities and less about absolute positions.

By thinking more in terms of bets, and setting up real experiments, the thinking is that:

- Help us deal with motivated reasoning bias (our drive to create a positive self-narrative)
- Help us deal with self-serving bias (also our drive to create a positive self-narrative)
  - If I win it is because of my skill; if I lose it is because of bad luck
  - If you win it’s because you were lucky; not because of skill
- Working through need to be seen to competitive human nature win (my decision, my skill) vs lose for decisions
- Allow us to develop new habits
- Allow more people to contribute (more collaborative) as it is no longer just me vs you
- Get us away from “let’s run an experiment” meaning “I’ll do whatever I want to do” by putting a little precision behind things

Of course in many ways this is all a lead up. In the final analysis we want people to retrospect regularly, discover problems and learn new things, and figure out ways to get better. This thinking should also support that and, if we have scheduled retrospectives, will help us be crisper about what we are seeing when we review the results of the experiment at the next retrospective.

## Learning Outcomes

- Improve our ability to make decisions (so we are able to leverage everyone’s input, and I don’t have to be right (win) at the expense of everyone else (lose)) - Establish a learning culture by more formally tracking decisions (so “it’s an experiment” doesn’t just mean “we do whatever we want”) - Work experiments into retrospective process so we become more intentional about our learning

Other ideas. What is the learning model for leadership and how is this part of that? We want new behaviors for leadership. Is there a learning model we can pull together?

## Prerequisite Knowledge

Expectation is that people have have come across the issue of leadership not really leaning in to the

transformation, that they are pretty much behaving as they normally have.

## Information for Program Team

This is an outline for the session. After the introductions, scene setting, we will run through the following steps:

### Bad Decision?

Exercise:

- Ask “What was the best and worst business decision you made in the last year and why was this the best / worst decision?”
- Brain write - 5 minutes.
- Share at table, be ready to share with group - 5 minutes

Debrief:

- Ask “Let’s hear about a best and a worse decision you have made why” - 5 mins
- Expecting most people to conflate decision with outcome. “Was it the decision that was bad / good, or the result, the outcome that was bad / good?”
- Idea is that we think of things as a bad decision when in fact the decision might have been good and the result was bad

### Decision vs Result?

Exercise:

- Ask “Why is it bad to conflate the decision and the result? Let’s capture some ideas”
- Discuss at table - 5 mins

Debrief:

- Ask “Let’s hear some reasons you came up with” - 5 mins
- If we confuse the two, how do we get better at making decisions
- We need to be clear about what part of the result was “skill” and what part was the result of “luck”, so we can improve our focus on “skill”

### Biases Effecting Decisions

Exercise

- Hand out biases sheet (see below)
- Say “At each table there is a sheet with some common biases that effect our decision making. At your table quickly (5 mins) come up with definitions of these biases. You can use your phones.”

Debrief:

- Each definition - just quick

Exercise:

- Ask “Remembering these biases, what do you notice about the outcomes that didn't turn out the way you wanted?”

Debrief:

- Note: Our biases get in the way of improving
- This is one reason why we need to isolate the decision from the outcome
- Note: Actually we are credulous (we believe what we hear) unless it flies in the face of what we “know” to be true (our beliefs drive the bets we make)

## Skill vs Luck?

Story: “I think back on some of the decisions I make and with this information I notice some things. So I've been on the corporate ladder for much of my life and this was good while things were going my way. So every time I got a promotion, I thought 'that was because they've recognized my skills - I am wonderful!' Contra-wise every time someone was promoted into a position I thought I should have I thought wow 'I am so unlucky' and then 'that person is such a brown-nose' and 'that manager clearly doesn't recognize quality when he sees it'. Notice I am either blaming the other for lack of skill. Also notice that this is a zero sum game - I win / you lose; you win / I lose. Also notice the result is that I am unable to improve my process.”

State: “Surprisingly, being smart can actually make bias worse. Let me give you a different intuitive frame: the smarter you are, the better you are at constructing a narrative that supports your beliefs, rationalizing and framing the data to fit your argument or point of view. After all, people in the “spin room” in a political setting are generally pretty smart for a reason. Corollary: the better you are with numbers, the more you can 'explain' your story.”

Exercise

- Ask “I want you to go back to your worst decision and reflect, based on what you know now, whether the decision (versus the outcome) was actually good or bad, whether you learned anything as a result.” (5 mins)

Debrief

- What did you see?
- State: “Truthseeking” or “Learning”, the desire to know the truth regardless of whether the truth

aligns with the beliefs we currently hold, is not naturally supported by the way we process information. We might think of ourselves as open-minded and capable of updating our beliefs based on new information, but the research conclusively shows otherwise. Instead of altering our beliefs to fit new information, we do the opposite, altering our interpretation of that information to fit our beliefs

- State: Exactly two things that determine how our lives turn out: the quality of our decisions and luck. Luck is just another way of saying there is uncertainty and this uncertainty could lead to good or bad outcome. And when we do this it is a more accurate representation of the world and, when we accept that we can't be sure, we are less likely to fall into the trap of black-and-white thinking.

## Thinking in Bets

State: Learning to recognize the difference between the two is what thinking in bets is all about. And this comes back to "experiments". We have a tendency to say "lets experiment" which is good, but we don't really take the time to go back and work the experiment to see what we actually learned from this, and the decision making process.

State: We are less likely to succumb to motivated reasoning since it feels better to make small adjustments in degrees of certainty instead of having to grossly downgrade from "right" to "wrong." When confronted with new evidence, it is a very different narrative to say, "I was 58% but now I'm 46%." That doesn't feel nearly as bad as "I thought I was right but now I'm wrong." Our narrative of being a knowledgeable, educated, intelligent person who holds quality opinions isn't compromised when we use new information to calibrate our beliefs, compared with having to make a full-on reversal. This shifts us away from treating information that disagrees with us as a threat, as something we have to defend against, making us better able to learn.

### Exercise

- Ask "On your table, you have a template for 'experiments'. This not the final version, just an idea on what it could look like but is mainly about the fields that we should capture. I've also supplied a sample experiment I've run. I want you to think about a decision you are in the process of making right now. Let's set up a real experiment about this decision. Be prepared to present experiment." (10 mins)

### Debrief:

- What do people think about the estimates of probabilities?
- Now that you have seen this, do you think it will help? If so, how?

State "In summary, benefits of this approach include:"

## What Are We Going to Do Tomorrow?

Three ideas:

- Agree to create, document, and evaluate experiments
- Develop learning groups, with charter to counter biases
- Use natural ceremonies, such as retrospectives to operationalize (eg review results, natural time box)

Ideas include forming learning groups where the focus is on thinking in bets means modifying the usual social contract. It means agreeing to be open-minded to those who disagree with us, giving credit where it's due, and taking responsibility where it's appropriate, even (and especially) when it makes us uncomfortable. As long as there are three people in the group (two to disagree and one to referee\*), the learning group can be stable and productive.

Philip Tetlock and Jennifer Lerner, leaders in the science of group interaction, described the two kinds of group reasoning styles in an influential 2002 paper: "Whereas confirmatory thought involves a one-sided attempt to rationalize a particular point of view, exploratory thought involves even-handed consideration of alternative points of view."

Learning charter:

- A focus on accuracy (over confirmation), which includes rewarding learning, objectivity, and open-mindedness within the group; - Accountability, for which members have advance notice; and - Openness to a diversity of ideas.

And finally use the natural agile ceremonies to operationalize learning with experiments as an input into that.

# Materials

## Biases Effecting Decisions

Print

Biases Effecting Our Decision Making:

- Blind-spot bias: - Motivated reasoning (or confirmation bias): - Hindsight bias:

Special bonus bias

- Loss aversion:

Answer Sheet

- Blind-spot bias: an irrationality where people are better at recognizing biased reasoning in others but are blind to bias in themselves (part of positive self narrative) - Motivated reasoning (or confirmation bias): form / cling to beliefs despite overwhelming evidence. Seek out information that confirms what they believe. (Part of positive self narrative) - Hindsight bias: Thinking that, after an outcome is known, to



see the outcome as having been inevitable. (Part of need to have certainty) - Loss aversion: Refers to people's tendency to avoiding losses to acquiring equivalent gains: it is better to not lose 5 than to find 5. It is thought that the pain of losing is psychologically twice as powerful as the please of gaining.

## Experiment Template

Experiment Template

See "snippet:experiment"

Idea: Brief description of the experiment

- Expectation:

1. I think this will happen, but I am a 6(say, of of 10, so 60% chance) on that

- How will we know:

1. Data: what will we track
2. Tracked by: who with track it
3. Timebox: when will we come back and review this

- Result:

1. TBD - to be filled in while experiment is running

- Next:

1. TBD - to be filled in on completion of experiment

## My Notes

Perhaps we go with better approach to win / lose and set up real experiment. Say probability, and we are seeking to improve.

Definition: Why use a bet? A bet is a decision when you have an uncertain future.

Why bets: Treating decisions as bets helps avoid common decision traps, learn from results in a more rational way, and keep emotions out of the process as much as possible.

The challenge is not to change the way our brains operate but to figure out how to work within the limitations of the brains we already have.

Thinking in bets starts with recognizing that there are exactly two things that determine how our lives turn out: the quality of our decisions and luck. Learning to recognize the difference between the two is

what thinking in bets is all about.

Start with “tell me about a bad decision you made” - get to decision vs result confusion

Hindsight bias is the tendency, after an outcome is known, to see the outcome as having been inevitable.

What makes a decision great is not that it has a great outcome. A great decision is the result of a good process, and that process must include an attempt to accurately represent our own state of knowledge. That state of knowledge, in turn, is some variation of “I’m not sure.”

There are many reasons why wrapping our arms around uncertainty and giving it a big hug will help us become better decision-makers. Here are two of them. First, “I’m not sure” is simply a more accurate representation of the world. Second, and related, when we accept that we can’t be sure, we are less likely to fall into the trap of black-and-white thinking.

When we think in advance about the chances of alternative outcomes and make a decision based on those chances, it doesn’t automatically make us wrong when things don’t work out. It just means that one event in a set of possible futures occurred.

Any prediction that is not 0% or 100% can’t be wrong solely because the most likely future doesn’t unfold.

When I speak at professional conferences, I will occasionally bring up the subject of belief formation by asking the audience a question: “Who here knows how you can predict if a man will go bald?” People will raise their hands, I’ll call on someone, and they’ll say, “You look at the maternal grandfather.” Everyone nods in agreement. I’ll follow up by asking, “Does anyone know how you calculate a dog’s age in human years?” I can practically see audience members mouthing, “Multiply by seven.” Both of these widely held beliefs aren’t actually accurate. If you search online for “common misconceptions,” the baldness myth is at the top of most lists. As Medical Daily explained in 2015, “a key gene for baldness is on the X chromosome, which you get from your mother” but “it is not the only genetic factor in play since men with bald fathers have an increased chance of going bald when compared to men whose fathers have a full set of hair. . . . [S]cientists say baldness anywhere in your family may be a sign of your own impending fate.” Tells you we are not as logical as we think - listen, truth, perhaps change Then “you are wrong!” Bias or is there a better way to do this? Learning loop



Question: we as coaches use idea that “let’s experiment” as a way of progressing a new idea. When is it appropriate to do this without disciplined follow up of the experiment?

My story - horse race betting in Hong Kong

Definition of “motivated reasoning” - form / cling to beliefs despite overwhelming evidence. Seek out information that confirms what they believe.

Our beliefs drive the bets we make: which brands of cars better retain their value, whether critics knew what they were talking about when they panned a movie we are thinking about seeing, how our employees will behave if we let them work from home.

This is how we think we form abstract beliefs:

- We hear something; - We think about it and vet it, determining whether it is true or false; - only after that we form our belief.

It turns out, though, that we actually form abstract beliefs this way:

- We hear something; - We believe it to be true; - Only sometimes, later, if we have the time or the inclination, we think about it and vet it, determining whether it is, in fact, true or false.

In other words, people are credulous.

Flaws in forming and updating beliefs have the potential to snowball. Once a belief is lodged, it becomes difficult to dislodge.

This irrational, circular information-processing pattern is called motivated reasoning. The way we process new information is driven by the beliefs we hold, strengthening them. Those strengthened beliefs then drive how we process further information, and so on.

Disinformation is different than fake news in that the story has some true elements, embellished to spin a particular narrative. Fake news works because people who already hold beliefs consistent with the story generally won't question the evidence. Disinformation is even more powerful because the confirmable facts in the story make it feel like the information has been vetted, adding to the power of the narrative being pushed.

Fake news isn't meant to change minds. As we know, beliefs are hard to change. The potency of fake news is that it entrenches beliefs its intended audience already has, and then amplifies them.

Surprisingly, being smart can actually make bias worse. Let me give you a different intuitive frame: the smarter you are, the better you are at constructing a narrative that supports your beliefs, rationalizing and framing the data to fit your argument or point of view. After all, people in the "spin room" in a political setting are generally pretty smart for a reason.

It turns out the better you are with numbers, the better you are at spinning those numbers to conform to and support your beliefs

Blind-spot bias—an irrationality where people are better at recognizing biased reasoning in others but are blind to bias in themselves

Giving that up is not the easiest choice. Doing bets is not easiest choice. We tell ourselves stories and we might find that those stories are not real.

A good decision group is a grown-up version of the buddy system. Role of leadership team in holding each other accountable?

Learning charter:

- A focus on accuracy (over confirmation), which includes rewarding learning, objectivity, and open-mindedness within the group; - Accountability, for which members have advance notice; and - Openness to a diversity of ideas.

Powerful questions for learning groups:

- Why might my belief not be true? - What other evidence might be out there bearing on my belief? - Are there similar areas I can look toward to gauge whether similar beliefs to mine are true? - What sources of information could I have missed or minimized on the way to reaching my belief? - What are the reasons someone else could have a different belief, what's their support, and why might they be right instead of me? - What other perspectives are there as to why things turned out the way they did?

## Useful Quotes

"No sober person thinks getting home safely after driving drunk reflects a good decision or good driving ability" – Annie Duke "Thinking in Bets".

"The quality of our lives is the sum of decision quality plus luck." – Annie Duke "Thinking in Bets".

"In most of our decisions, we are not betting against another person. Rather, we are betting against all the future versions of ourselves that we are not choosing" – Annie Duke "Thinking in Bets".

"The benefits of recognizing just a few extra learning opportunities compound over time." – Annie Duke "Thinking in Bets".

"To change a habit, you must keep the old cue, and deliver the old reward, but insert a new routine." – Unknown

"Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him." – Aldous Huxley

"Whereas confirmatory thought involves a one-sided attempt to rationalize a particular point of view, exploratory thought involves even-handed consideration of alternative points of view." – Philip Tetlock and Jennifer Lerner

## References

References:

- Book Thinking in Bets. To work through concept of bets, and setting up truth-seeking culture - Book Math with Bad Drawings. To understand impact of independent events vs cascading events.

# Track Information

Originally submitted to “Leadership” track. Track purpose is:

“Organizations today are working hard to reinvent the workplace – and they need leaders at all levels to help lead them into the future. This raises many questions regarding execution:

- What does leadership at all levels look like in practice?
- How do we grow the next generation of leaders?
- What does leadership look like in autonomous, self-organizing teams?
- What does this focus on leadership mean for people who currently hold the title of manager?
- How do I influence people if leadership is not in my job title?

The aim of this track is to answer these and many more questions on the role of the Agile Leader. When you attend a session in this track, you will find practical, real world examples of leadership in Agile teams and organizations. Not only will you have the chance to connect with other leaders, you will also learn ideas and techniques to enhance your leadership capabilities.”

[Conference](#), [Submission](#), [FAQ](#), [Leadership](#), [WinLose](#), [Bets](#)

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