

How To Train Your Intuition To Make Bulletproof Decisions—By A Psychologist

A “gut feeling” emerges when information and experience work together with efficiency and accuracy. Here’s how you can sharpen your intuition for better decision-making.

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Risk is inherent in making high-stakes decisions. Even with a wealth of data and analytics available, seasoned and experienced professionals frequently rely on gut instinct to navigate complex decisions, especially under pressure.

Laura Huang, associate professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, [writes](#) in *Harvard Business Review*, “In several studies I’ve conducted over the past eight years looking at high-stakes decisions, such as surgeons making life-or-death emergency room decisions, or early-stage investors deciding how to allocate millions of dollars in startup capital, I found that the role of gut feel is often to inspire a leader to make a call, particularly when the decision is risky.”

What’s Intuition And Where Does It Come From?

Intuition is a “sense of feeling of pattern or relationships” and involves holistic thinking, immediate insight and rapid access to knowledge chunks crystallized from previous experiences. It appears as an instant understanding or awareness without explicit reasoning. Key aspects of intuition include:

- **Unconscious processing.** Intuition involves unconscious cognitive processes that allow individuals to make rapid judgments and decisions. These processes draw on past experiences, patterns and knowledge stored in the subconscious mind.
- **Pattern recognition.** Dr. Gary Klein, a renowned psychologist and author of *The Power of Intuition*, has extensively studied how experts make decisions in high-pressure situations. Klein's research indicates that intuition is a critical component of expertise. He argues that intuitive decision-making is grounded in pattern recognition, where the brain quickly identifies similarities between the current situation and past experiences, enabling rapid and effective responses.
- **Heuristics.** Intuition is often grounded on heuristics, which are mental shortcuts or rules of thumb that simplify decision-making. While heuristics can lead to quick and efficient decisions, they are also susceptible to biases and errors.

- **Affective basis.** Emotional responses often accompany intuitive judgments. Emotions play a critical role in shaping intuitive feelings and can provide important signals about the right course of action. They may also [help avoid information overload](#).
- **Expertise and experience.** Intuition is typically more accurate and reliable in individuals with significant expertise and experience in a particular domain. [Studies](#) show that intuitive decision-making becomes more prevalent as we move to higher levels of domain expertise. Experts have a vast repository of knowledge and patterns that they can draw upon intuitively.
- **Non-analytical.** Unlike analytical thinking, which involves systematic and logical reasoning, intuition operates non-analytically. It bypasses the step-by-step process of deliberation, leading to immediate insights when the situation demands it.

Balancing Your Perspective— Intuitive Versus Rational Decision Making

A 2020 [study](#) suggests that decision-making in complex systems benefits from a balanced approach that integrates both intuitive and rational processes, leveraging expertise, confidence and heuristics to navigate

challenges, and make accurate and effective decisions.

The researchers explain, “Intuition should not be viewed as being necessarily irrational. The experienced person or expert acquires a huge number of “if-then” premises over time and uses these to take intuitive steps in reasoning at a fast pace.”

Intuition is advantageous for its speed and ability to handle complexity without extensive data analysis. However, it can be prone to biases if not checked against rational processes. Conversely, rational decision-making is thorough but may be slower and less adaptable to rapid changes.

Sound decisions require a blend of intuition and rational analysis. Before relying on your intuition, it’s essential to gather and analyze all available data. When information is insufficient, or variables are too numerous to account for in a limited time, your intuitive skills become crucial.

In such critical situations, experienced leaders leverage all available data and

analytics, but they also recognize when to trust their gut feelings. This balance between empirical evidence and seasoned judgment can lead to robust decision-making, enabling individuals to guide their respective undertakings toward success even amidst uncertainty.

Harnessing Your Intuitive Prowess

When making a crucial decision, here's how you can harness your intuition to ensure bulletproof results:

- **Become mindful.** When you are making a vital decision, start by taking a few deep breaths to ground yourself. By being present and attuned to your internal cues, you can better discern genuine intuitive signals from noise or anxious ruminative thoughts.
- **Reflect on past experiences.** This enhances pattern recognition, which is vital for effective intuition. Trust your feelings as they guide decisions through the subconscious processing of these patterns. By identifying patterns and learning from past successes and mistakes, you build a mental library that informs your intuition, enabling quicker, more effective decisions. It can help you [mitigate intuition bias](#) (over-relying on gut feelings) and heuristic biases (like overconfidence) by identifying patterns and learning from successes and mistakes.

- **Balance your approach.** Understand which approach is most beneficial for a given scenario and tailor your decision-making strategy accordingly. Balance emotions with logic for well-rounded decisions. By identifying patterns and learning from past successes and mistakes, you build a mental library that informs your intuition, enabling quicker, more effective decisions.

Do you rely more on rational or intuitive decision-making? Discover your decision making style with this test: [Intuitive Decision Style Scale](#)