

Serious decisions have serious consequences

Supporting teams to make
decisions in high pressured
environments: Helping to
mitigate biases

Louise Wheeler, Leadership and
OD consultant

14/05/2024

Whilst you are settling in
please log onto [Slido.com](https://www.slido.com)
with code [#DoOD24](https://www.slido.com/join/DoOD24) and answer

*what affects our confidence and
capability in senior decision-making?*

Session Focus



1. What affects our confidence and capability when making serious decisions in teams?
2. How can we as OD practitioners **increase awareness of bias** in decision making (and understand our own!)
3. To learn from the **experience of us as OD specialists** and peers in the room

“the role of leadership and teams in our space to navigate multifaceted issues, where in decision-making there can be a multitude of plausible outcomes”

Louise Wheeler
Organisational
psychologist specialism in
leadership development
for system-level
transformation and
resilience

Please log onto
[Slido.com](https://www.slido.com)

Use code
[#DoOD24](#)

slido



Serious decisions 1: What affects our confidence and capability in senior decision-making? (What?)

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

slido



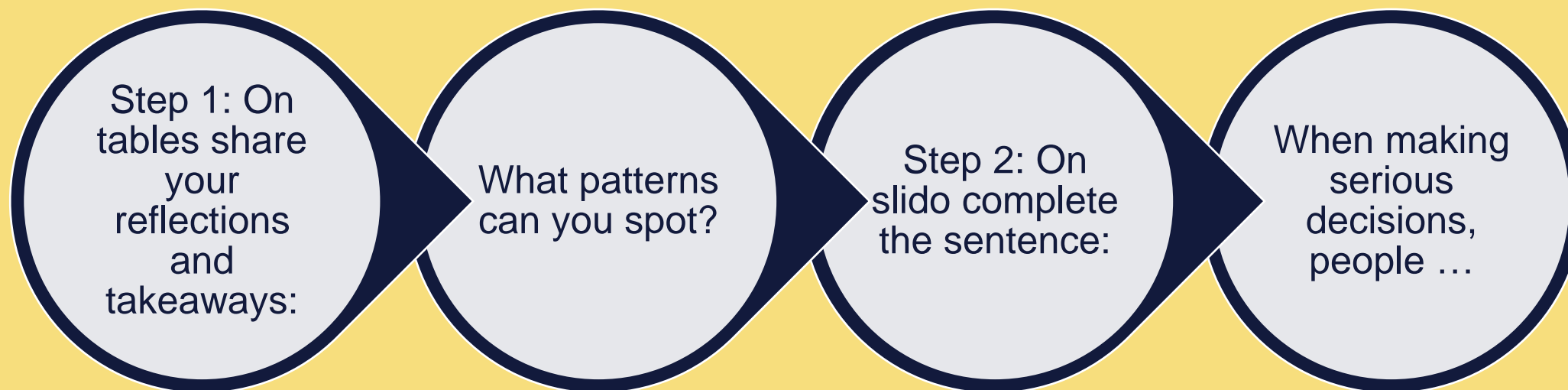
Serious decisions 2: Why is important to be aware of these confidence and capability factors when we are making decisions? (So what?)

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Noticing patterns in team / group level decision-making



Noticing patterns in team / group level decision-making



slido



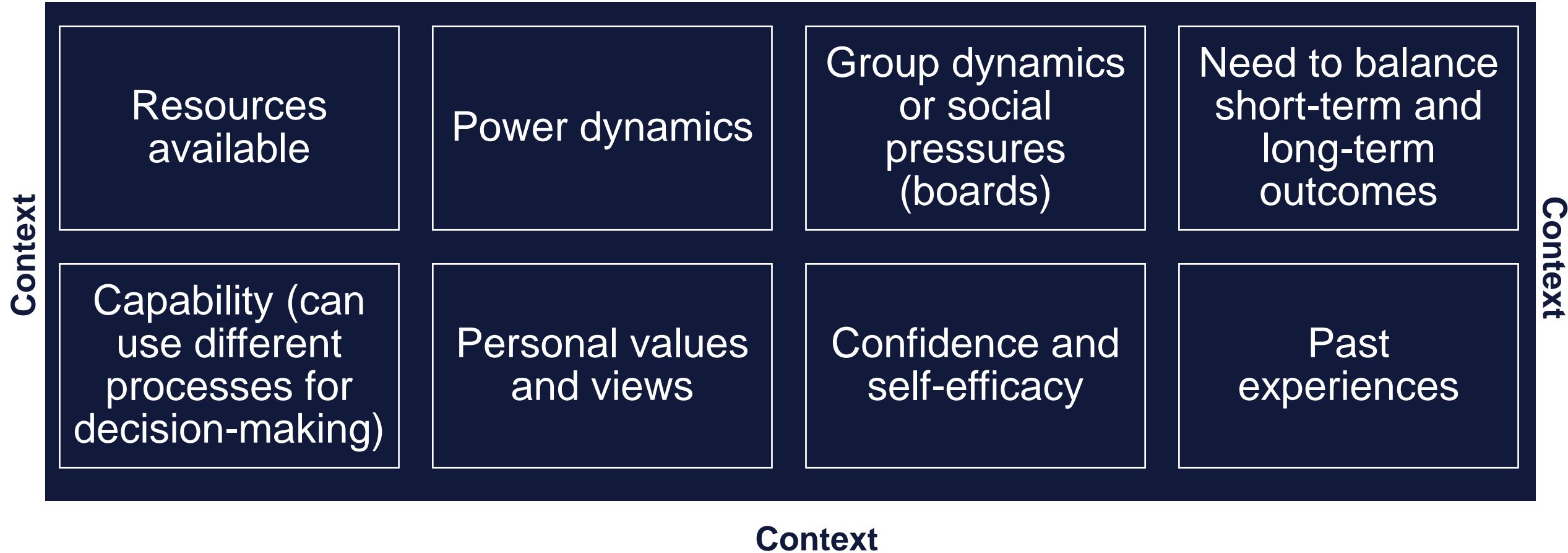
Serious decisions 3:

When making serious decisions,
people ...

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Making serious decisions ... our top observed patterns

What affects how we make serious decisions in teams?



So what? How biases show up ...

Resources available

- Scarcity bias - bias impulse frequently kicks in when we are told that something is in short supply and we might miss a great deal unless we book/pay now! *Same applies with tied-funding.*

Power dynamics

- Individuals vigilantly scan their work environment for cues and signals, checking to see who is present and watching how others are treated.

Group dynamics or social pressures (boards)

- Groupthink - people to desire harmony or conformity within a group. In many cases, people will set aside their own personal beliefs to adopt the opinion of the rest of the group

Need to balance short-term and long-term outcomes

- Present bias can lead people to make irrational decisions that favor short-term gains, often at the expense of long-term gains. Tendency to settle for a smaller present reward rather than wait for a larger future reward, in a trade-off situation.

Capability ad expert labelling

- Expert bias - the entrenched beliefs that someone knows what works and doesn't work in their own industry, has a tendency to stall innovation

Personal values and views

- Experience bias occurs when we fail to remember that fact. We assume our view of a given problem or situation constitutes the whole truth.

Confidence and self-efficacy

- Overconfidence bias - the tendency for a person to overestimate their abilities. It may lead a person to think they're a better-than-average driver or an expert investor or policy maker.

Past experiences

- Past bias - we view the past through numerous filters that distort our perceptions. As a result, our interpretations of experience are biased, and the judgments and decisions we base on those interpretations can be misguided (HBR)

Context

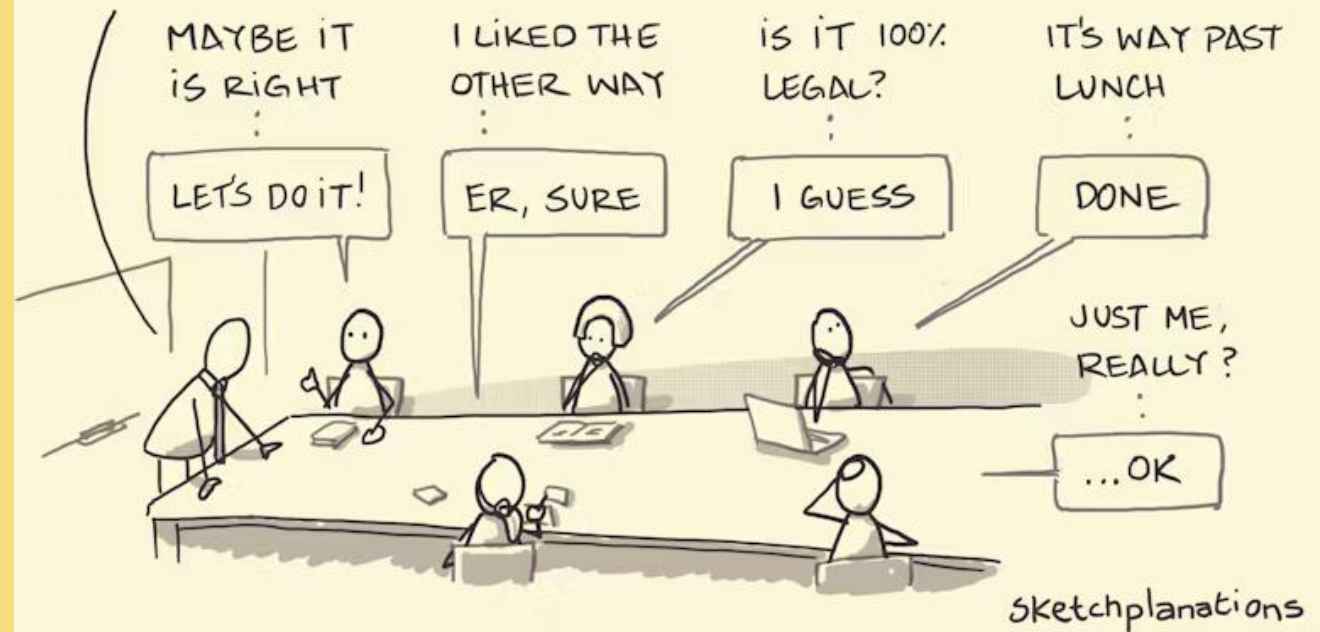
Context

Groupthink happens when a group of well-intentioned people makes irrational or flawed decisions because they want to conform or believe challenge is impossible

GROUPTHINK

THE TENDENCY FOR GROUPS TO THINK IN HARMONY

SO, WE ALL AGREE
IT'S THE ONLY WAY



Where do we see groupthink? ... everywhere

The former Chief Medical Officer for England, Professor Dame Sally Davies, linked the presence of groupthink and exceptionalism in her evidence within the Covid-19 inquiry:

“Quite simply, we were in groupthink. Our infectious disease experts really did not believe that SARS, or another SARS, would get from Asia to us. It is a form of British exceptionalism.”



Groupthink signs

- Groups who promote their group's identity over others may be more likely to fall victim to groupthink. (*Look out for “us versus them” mentality*)
- **Groups where challenge** is discouraged are likely to engage in groupthink when making decisions. (*Lookout for charismatic leaders / quiet teams*)

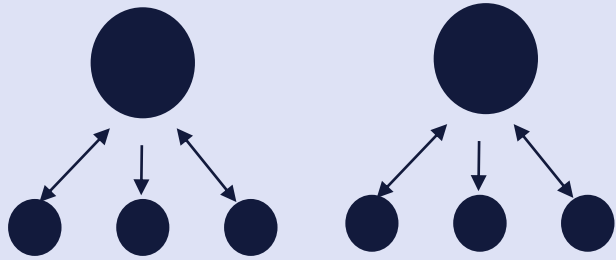
Groupthink situations

- Time pressure that demands a fast decision (*Look out for wanting a quick consensus*)
- High stress situations (*Look out for no-one asking risk or ‘what-if’ questions*)



**Different types
of problems
require different
approaches to
leadership and
decision-making**

Complicated problems



Difficult
to solve

Time
required

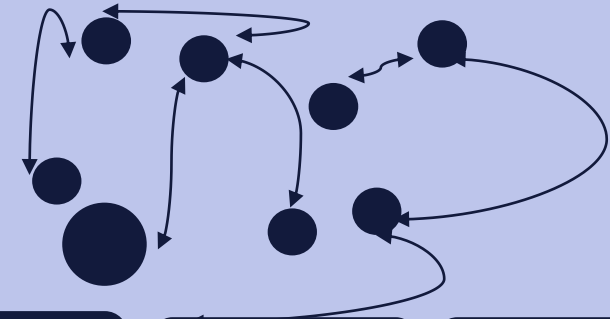
Needs
expertise

Can break down issues into
component parts to solve

Problem solving (foreseeable)
through knowledge, rules and
processes

Leadership focus in decision-
making: creating clarity,
transparency, checkpoints

Complex problems



Not always
difficult

Messy

Needs
inquiry

Need to see people + organisations as
relational things


We understand issues / implications
retrospectively, problem solving is
pattern based + perspective dependent

Leadership focus in decision-making:
prioritise inquiry / promote challenge
(why?), surface and hold feeling of
anxiety (due to **uncertainty**)

Take away! Understanding and normalising how we naturally respond to uncertainty is key here!

A few points about context and uncertainty

1. Certainty is an emotional state, not an intellectual one. To feel certain, the brain must filter out more information than it processes.
2. Confirmation bias, mental focus, and external influences (ie social media) can fuel certainty and preclude people from considering complexity.
3. Understanding our assumptions and considering evidence against our opinions can illuminate blind spots and help us escape the trap of certainty thinking



So what can we do as OD leaders when working in complexity?

Modern leadership decision-making capability is to:

Acknowledge normal responses to uncertainty / ambiguity and lack of control

Recognise that uncertainty also depends on personal perspective (which includes our values)

Be aware of that can show up in culture – *i.e. looking to close down decision making without really surfacing assumptions*

Understand your most prominent biases + don't slip into heroic leadership

Hold the space for the quieter voices / service users and protect against overconfident decision making (for example group think)

Keep learning and keep channels of inquiry open (don't be afraid to revisit)



OD leader group conversations

- How have yours (and other people's) values and approach to uncertainty affected decision-making processes? (what?)
- What have you learnt about yourselves and taken away? (so what?)
- What practices or approaches can you share that may support others to mitigate biases within team level decisions? (now what?)
- What's a great takeaway question you can ask yourself when making a challenging decision in the future?

Key OD and leadership takeaways:



Different structures and problems require different leadership approaches and decision-making processes



Recognise that uncertainty also depends on personal perspective (which includes our values)



Be aware of how responses to uncertainty can show up in culture – *i.e. looking to close down decision making without really surfacing assumptions*



Support decision-making by normalising the use of decision-making processes such as 'red-teaming' – learning techniques such as retrospectives - facilitative processes such as liberating structures



Make the time to focus on the quality of your thinking as an OD leader, as your starting assumptions can radically change your client's leadership actions and decision-making

*“The lesson is to **learn as much as you can** about the uncertainties our complex world. Reflect **honestly on the unpredictability** of the future. Make the best **probability estimates** you can, and use them to inform the most accurate expected value calculations.*

*You **will never know for certain that they are right**, and you will always wish you had more information so as to reduce your uncertainty.*

*But if you keep track and keep score, **you can improve your calibration** and get better with time”*

slido



Serious decisions 4: Given today's session, your conversations and self-reflection...

What's a key question you will ask of yourself as an OD practitioner when supporting teams to make challenging decisions?

(Now what?) (Self as instrument)

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

<Footer>

Serious decisions have serious consequences



Supporting teams to make decisions in high pressured environments: Helping to mitigate biases

Thank you

Get in touch:

louise.wheeler@nhsconfed.org

LinkedIn: Louise Wheeler

