

For those too busy:

The latest research, thinking
& news on growth pace and delivery
from around the world

Harnessing uncertainty to make faster, better decisions

As a leader your time is squeezed – it is not easy to make room for better decisions

The problem is familiar. Rapid shifts in the environment, increased unpredictability and slowdowns mean big decisions need to be made quickly and their outcomes matter more. Yet at these moments, your time as a leader is so squeezed that it is not easy to find time to make decisions properly.

How much does this matter? Can you turn this problem around and use the period of uncertainty to quickly and permanently improve the way your team makes decisions? We can learn from a range of recent research how to make better and faster decisions as a team. They show that:

- Speed and quality of decision-making is one of the primary characteristics of high performing organisations (those that keep up the pace and delivery in a sustained way).
- The more important the decision, the more destructive a poor decision-making process is. Good leaders invest regularly in reviewing the quality of decisions.
- Among high performing organisations, there is a move away from annual strategic planning towards continuous strategic decision making, focused on three or four key issues.

The two parts to fast and effective decision-making: decisions and execution

There are a few pointers - practical approaches that can be learned and adopted by any leadership team to produce improvements within weeks:

1. *The right decision at the right time*

- a.** Before meetings: ensure a clear strategic direction, share specific inputs in good time, and involve the right stakeholders
- b.** In the room: include only the right people (and no more), manage the decision through distinct stages (the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee is a well-documented example), and spend the meeting focusing on a few key issues only. Decision making is not an act - it is a process with three stages:
 - analysing and understanding data
 - considering options and choosing one
 - agreeing how to execute, and measure success.
- c.** Make sure decisions are decisions: not just discussions, not reviews of other people's decisions, and with concrete, viable, options that are robustly debated with a clear structure for complex problems.

2. *A decision is not a decision without execution*

- a.** Action plan: agree actions and deadlines before leaving the room, embed accountability, plan for weak links, follow through, and ensure feedback on progress. For example, the failure of Unilever's Path to Growth, was not in the strategy, it was in the weak links, follow-through and accountability. Also frequently missing is direct feedback: success measures being monitored and fed directly back to the leadership team that made the decision.
- b.** Buy-in: create a sense of urgency, mobilise, and above all else, role-model from the top. Unless leaders visibly champion excellent execution and delivery, the organisation will not. Leadership role models champion a sense of urgency, accountability (their own, and others') and follow-through.