

The Art of Critical Decision Making

Professor Michael A. Roberto, Bryant University

NEW RELEASE!

The ability to make wise, educated decisions is essential to living a successful and fulfilled life.

- When is the right time for your company to change its business model?
- Is moving across the country for a new job the best option for you and your family?
- At what point do you roll out a new product or service currently being tested?
- Should you sell your house now, or wait until the housing market improves?

Whether simple or complex, private or public, decisions are an essential part of your life. Not only do decisions affect your own life for good or ill, they can also affect the lives of your friends, your family, and your community.

But making a good decision and avoiding a horrible one is not a chance act. It's a skill—one that can be learned, honed, and perfected. Mastering the art of critical decision making is the key to improving your life at home, at work, or in your community. When you understand the necessary components of a smart decision, you can examine mistakes you might have made in the past and sidestep potential mistakes in the future. And when you know the underlying psychological, social, and emotional components that influence decision making—whether they are your own decisions or the decisions of others—you can make sounder choices that produce better results.

Now you can learn to approach the critical decisions in your life with a more seasoned, educated eye with **The Art of Critical Decision Making**, a fascinating 24-lecture course that explores how individuals, groups, and organizations make effective decisions and offers you tips and techniques to enhance the effectiveness of your own decision making. Taught by award-winning Professor Michael A. Roberto of Bryant University—a scholar of leadership, managerial decision making, and business strategy—this dynamic



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course is an engaging and practical guide to one of the most fundamental activities in your life.

Three Levels of Decision Making

The heart of this accessible course is a thorough examination of decision making at three key levels.

The individual level: Studying how individuals make decisions reveals a wealth of insights into how—and why—they make particular choices. Most individuals do not examine every possible alternative but instead draw on experience and rules of thumb. Most of us, it turns out, are susceptible to what psychologists call cognitive biases: decision traps that can cause us to make certain systematic mistakes when making choices. You also learn how intuition, surprisingly, is more than just a gut instinct and represents instead a powerful pattern recognition capability.

The group level: Because you don't always make choices on your own, it's important to understand decision making at the level of group or team. Here, you try to answer the question of whether groups

are "smarter" and more capable of making critical decisions than individuals. The lectures show you problems that typically arise in group decision-making scenarios, including groupthink (the notorious tendency for groups to be pressured into conforming to a particular view) and a lack of synergy between team members. You also learn how groups can overcome these and other problems to make better decisions.

The organizational level: Studying decision making on the organizational level requires you to grasp how the structure, systems, and culture of a particular organization shape the behavior of its individual teams and members. Professor Roberto shows you how history's wrong decisions usually cannot be attributed to one wrong decision or poor leader. He also demonstrates how some organizations have encouraged and reliably performed vigilant decision making in the face of risky scenarios.

The Key to Effective Decision Making

The Art of Critical Decision Making reveals that bad decisions are usually made because of a poorly thought-out decision-making process. If decision makers put more emphasis on how to make a decision, ensure that they remove personal biases, collect information beforehand, glean the diverse perspectives of others, and perform a number of other constructive activities, they can vastly improve the strength and success of the process.

Professor Roberto employs the case method used by America's most prestigious business schools, including Harvard University. Designed to expose students to a breadth and depth of real-world examples and scenarios, the case method allows you to compare and contrast various situations as a way to recognize patterns. In doing so, you refine your ability to distinguish between smart and poor decision making.

Among the many compelling case studies you engage in throughout the course are these:

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- **IDEO's appropriate use of expertise:** You study the decision-making practices of this California-based design consultancy. One of the key lessons you learn is that IDEO uses experts and their knowledge in an appropriate manner—recognizing that sometimes expertise as defined by past successes is not always ideal in a quickly changing environment.
- **Improving patient care in hospitals:** Professor Roberto's independent study of hospital staff demonstrated how experienced nurses can positively influence patient care through intuition. By relying on an understanding of warning signs and using the Socratic method of asking questions, veteran nurses were able to prevent patients from experiencing life-threatening problems and reduced the rates for heart attacks and mortality.
- **General Motors' financial woes:** In 1972, General Motors was the nation's most profitable company, but in late 2008 the carmaker's profitability sank drastically. According to Professor Roberto, the management team's assumptions during the 1970s—including the persistence of energy sources and the internal promotion of managers—were proved false in the near and long term and only perpetuated outdated ways of thinking in the company.

Compelling historical and contemporary examples provide a captivating window through which to see the process of decision making at work. In taking key principles that great scholars and leaders have studied from history, business, and the modern world, Professor Roberto helps you understand exactly how the successful and unsuccessful decisions involved in these and other events are relevant to your own life.

Learn to Make Smarter Decisions

Whether you're the head of a Fortune 500 company, a government agency, or an everyday household, you constantly make decisions important to you and those immediately around you. **The Art of Critical Decision Making** offers you a toolbox of practical knowledge and skills that you can apply to various decisions—whether large or small—in your everyday life and work.

Professor Roberto's lively lectures are packed with useful anecdotes, tools, and advice designed to improve your own ability to make informed decisions. Among the many insights you gain from these lectures are that

- a large part of making a good decision is not just solving a problem but accurately defining it;

- framing a decision in terms of what may be lost usually causes us to take greater risks than if a problem is framed in terms of potential gains; and
- hidden problems, not visible ones, are the true enemies of effective critical decision making.

Become a Better Critical Thinker

While a thorough exploration of decision making can be a complex endeavor, it takes a professor as knowledgeable and comprehensible as Professor Roberto to expose just how easy to grasp this science is. Warm, engaging, and vibrant, Professor Roberto possesses a passion for his field that is undeniably contagious.



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You quickly discover why this former professor at Harvard Business School and former visiting associate professor at New York University's Stern School of Business has won numerous coveted teaching awards. These include Bryant University's Outstanding MBA Teaching Award and, on two occasions, Harvard University's Allyn A. Young Prize for Teaching Economics.

Professor Roberto has also consulted at and taught in the leadership development programs of a number of America's most prestigious firms, including Apple, Morgan Stanley, Coca-Cola, and Walmart. This breadth of real-world experience shines through in each one of these 24 captivating lectures, as concepts and theories that might seem complex and confusing are instead made practical and accessible to everyone.

As you explore the intriguing process of making a good decision, you strengthen your grip on individual theories of decision making and the situations—both well known and relatively obscure—that illustrate them.

Most important, by the end of **The Art of Critical Decision Making**, you'll become a better critical thinker. You'll possess a stronger ability to learn from your mistakes, be able to approach and weigh

individual choices more effectively, and make more smart decisions.

The Course Curriculum

1. Making High-Stakes Decisions

Examine the myth that bad decisions are most often made by bad leaders. Professor Roberto uses the examples of the Challenger disaster, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and Daimler's acquisition of Chrysler to uncover why good leaders can make bad decisions if the decision-making process they use is flawed.

2. Cognitive Biases

Using the story of the tragedies on Mount Everest in 1996, Professor Roberto introduces you to three cognitive biases that play a role in bad decision making: sunk-cost effect, overconfidence bias, and recency effect.

3. Avoiding Decision-Making Traps

Explore more decision-making traps you can fall into if you're not aware of them, such as confirmatory bias, anchoring bias, attribution error, illusory correlation, hindsight bias, and egocentrism. Darwin avoided confirmatory bias by keeping a separate record of observations that contradicted his theory of evolution.

4. Framing—Risk or Opportunity?

The way you or others frame a problem or decision can have a significant impact on the choices you make. Understand why framing a decision in terms of what you have to lose causes you to take more risks.

5. Intuition—Recognizing Patterns

Discover how to use intuition as a powerful tool in decision making when combined with rational analysis and acknowledge the cognitive processes that are part of our intuition. Professor Roberto recounts case studies from firefighting, health care, and the video game industry to explain the potential and pitfalls of intuition.

6. Reasoning by Analogy

Learn how the Korean War differed from the threat of Adolf Hitler. Professor Roberto explains reasoning by analogy and how you can use analogies to make sense of a complex problem. At the same time, we must avoid the common tendency to overstate the similarities of one situation to another and overlook key differences.

7. Making Sense of Ambiguous Situations

We might like to think that we carefully examine our choices before we make a decision. However, we often do the reverse—make a decision and then figure out why, and base future decisions on how we made sense of other decisions. This process, called sense-making by Karl Weick, constantly influences our behavior.

8. The Wisdom of Crowds?

This lecture includes examples from game shows such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and from the business world



About Your Professor

Dr. Michael A. Roberto teaches leadership, managerial decision making, and business strategy as the Trustee Professor of Management at Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island. He joined the faculty at Bryant University after teaching at Harvard Business School for six years. Previously, Professor Roberto was a Visiting Associate Professor at New York University's Stern School of Business.

Professor Roberto earned an M.B.A. with High Distinction and a D.B.A. from Harvard Business School. He brings real-world business skills to the classroom from his years of consulting at and teaching in the leadership development programs of a number of firms, including Apple, Walmart, Morgan Stanley, Coca-Cola, Federal Express, and Johnson & Johnson.

Recognized for his research, writing, and teaching, Professor Roberto has earned several coveted teaching awards, including the Outstanding MBA Teaching Award from Bryant University and Harvard University's Allyn A. Young Prize for Teaching in Economics. *Why Great Leaders Don't Take Yes for an Answer*, his book about cultivating constructive debate to help leaders make better decisions, was named one of the top 10 business books of 2005 by The Globe and Mail. His most recent book is *Know What You Don't Know: How Great Leaders Prevent Problems Before They Happen*.

that demonstrate the usefulness of decision making by groups and the potential problems if group members are not fully engaged.

9. **Groupthink—Thinking or Conforming?**

Discover why even diverse groups can make bad decisions if members are not able to express divergent opinions. This lecture focuses on how groupthink led to the Bay of Pigs invasion.

10. **Deciding How to Decide**

After the Bay of Pigs failure, President Kennedy and his advisors reflected on their mistakes and created a new process for group discussion and decision making to prevent future groupthink and promote diverse perspectives. Here, Professor Roberto introduces the concept of developing a decision-making process.

11. **Stimulating Conflict and Debate**

Learn how constructive conflict can lead to new insights and stronger decisions. Discover four methods to stimulate useful debate: role plays, mental simulation techniques, creating a point-counterpoint dynamic, and applying diverse conceptual models and frameworks.

12. **Keeping Conflict Constructive**

Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for conflict to become unproductive. Understand how to look for and eliminate dysfunctional conflict to cultivate effective teams. This lecture includes cases on Sid Caesar's comedy writing team, health care, and the nonprofit sector.

13. **Creativity and Brainstorming**

IDEO is one of the world's leading product design firms, expert in developing creative and innovative products for many industries. What makes their process so effective? To help you understand their

formula at work, Professor Roberto describes an experiment in which IDEO staff worked to design a new product in just one week.

14. **The Curious Inability to Decide**

Often as individuals or in groups we become paralyzed by indecision—unable to commit to one path or another. This lecture examines three modes of indecision in groups: “the culture of yes, the culture of no, and the culture of maybe.”

15. **Procedural Justice**

Using case studies about Daimler Chrysler and an aerospace and defense firm, Professor Roberto explains the challenge of building consensus among team members once a decision has been made so everyone will work together to implement it.

16. **Achieving Closure through Small Wins**

To move forward through the brainstorming and decision-making processes, groups must find intermediate moments of agreement that Karl Weick calls “small wins.” This lecture looks at how teams achieve closure through small wins, using cases about D-Day, Social Security, and the CEO of Corning.

17. **Normal Accident Theory**

Discover how organizational culture and structure affect decision making by individuals and groups. Learn about the Three Mile Island accident to understand what went wrong in that system, and understand how catastrophes more often stem from a domino chain of bad decisions rather than one wrong choice.

18. **Normalizing Deviance**

The tragic explosion of the Challenger space shuttle was likely the result of a flawed culture at NASA. The repeated and

increased tolerance of questionable data and decisions ultimately led to a large-scale failure. How can leaders reform such cultures?

19. **Allison's Model—Three Lenses**

Learn Graham Allison's approach to examine decision making through three lenses. Use Allison's model to explore the Cuban Missile Crisis from the individual and cognitive perspective, the group dynamics view, and the vantage point of organizational politics and bargaining.

20. **Practical Drift**

Uncover why organizations make decisions that contradict their own rules and regulations. The concept of practical drift explains this phenomenon, as you see by studying a military friendly-fire case from 1994.

21. **Ambiguous Threats and the Recovery Window**

When a threat is ambiguous, organizations are likely to minimize the possible risks. Look again at NASA but this time at the Columbia space shuttle accident, 17 years after the Challenger explosion, to understand how conditions changed or stayed the same in that culture.

22. **Connecting the Dots**

Often in large organizations, no one individual can see or understand all the elements at the same time. Great organizations integrate various pieces to see the big picture. Discover how failure to connect the dots led to an inability to recognize the extent of the threat of a terrorist attack on American soil and therefore a lack of appropriate action before September 11.

23. **Seeking Out Problems**

Explore how complex, high-risk organizations succeed by focusing on the possibility of failure. Leaders at these organizations proactively look for problems rather than ignore red flags. Also, learn how Toyota's application of these principles has contributed to its success.

24. **Asking the Right Questions**

Examine the trend of leaders moving from making decisions themselves to focusing on how decisions are made by everyone in their organizations. Smart leaders, as you discover, ask the right questions to glean the collective wisdom of their colleagues and staffs.

Should I Buy Audio or Video?

While this course works well in all formats, the DVD version features more than 250 visual elements to enhance your learning experience, including photos, animated maps, charts, and historical footage of featured case studies.

