

What politicians need to know about decision making

Published: January 12, 2026, 10:03 pm

I have published this video this morning. In it, I note that you would think politicians should be good at decision-making, but they aren't. Of all the options available to them, they usually choose prevarication when there are usually five other alternatives they could use. As a result, our politicians are paralysing our political processes.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7XYjNe_Kuc?si=Ku0mD_RPhks0XKPI

The audio version of this video is here:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=4e6sh-16af966-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

The transcript is:

It seems to me that most politicians have an enormous problem with decision-making, and yet that is their entire job.

If you are a politician, you want to make a decision about the future of your government, your department, your town, your village, or whatever it might be that you are responsible for. And the vast majority of politicians don't seem to have a clue about what decision-making involves.

So let me be clear, as far as I am concerned when faced with any situation where a

decision is required, and we all do that every day, day in day out - and therefore, what I'm going to say now is applicable in vast numbers of situations and not just to politicians - there are six potential responses that we can offer to any situation that arises.

The first and most obvious one is we can accept the situation that we are faced with. So, for example, if we are offered a 2 percent pay rise, we can accept it. That is literally what we are able to do whenever we are faced with such a decision. We can say, that's fine.

We can also, and let's look at the polar opposite, reject it. We can say, no, that won't do, because we wanted a 4 per cent pay rise and, therefore, we'll do something about it. We might strike, we might leave, we might say, it's time to look for a different career, whatever. We can reject a decision. So, acceptance and rejection are two of the situations that we can face.

So, acceptance and rejection are two of the options that we have when faced with a decision that we have to make.

Another choice that we have is to simply ignore the event that has happened: to pretend it has not occurred. And this is quite commonplace in life. All sorts of things happen around us which could require us to make a decision, but we decide to pretend nothing is required of us, it hasn't happened, we don't want to be concerned about it, and therefore we ignore it.

And that is what most people do with the whole world of politics, of course. They pretend that whatever it is that politics is about, they don't want to know about it, and therefore they ignore it. And that's a coping mechanism that many of us have to adopt much of the time with regard to many of the decisions that we face because we simply don't have time to deal with everything on which we could have an opinion.

Is that an option available to politicians? I suspect not, if the issue of significance, but it's very commonplace. What's a recent example? Well, politicians haven't noticed the anger in communities in the UK, and therefore, we have seen it well up. Their ignoring that issue has had a high price.

There are other options available in addition to these.

We can reframe the situation. In other words, somebody can tell us that we've got to make a decision about something, and we can actually say, no, that's not really what we're looking at here.

For example, we have to make a decision about whether to actually address issues of poverty. We could say, therefore, we've got to increase wages. We could also reframe the question and say, Is the distribution of income within our society correct? And is

that an alternative way of dealing with this? In other words, we look for other potential answers to the problem that we can identify. So reframing is important because it explores other options that are always available to us.

And then there is the choice, and it's a real one, to change the situation. What we can do is, in response to a situation where we've been presented with somebody else's decision, is present them with a decision in response. So changing the situation is to open a negotiation. It's not a rejection. It's not an acceptance. It's a statement that the world is not as the person who's made a decision would like it to be because you have the freedom to change things. This isn't reframing: changing involves a precise counteroffer. And that is, of course, very commonplace.

And finally, there's the sixth option, which is beloved of every politician of recent years, which is to prevaricate.

Prevarication means that we'll appoint a committee to review this situation, we'll have a Royal Commission, we'll look at all the consequences that have arisen, we will assemble the great and good to prepare a report. This is prevarication. It always delays things.

A perfect example is in the way the Labour Party dealt with disciplinary processes within it prior to the election with regard to, for example, Diane Abbott. There was an inquiry into the abuse that she supposedly undertook. They took over a year to consider the matter, and at the last moment, they decided, in a rush, to let her stand for Parliament again. They prevaricated until the last moment. And this is too often the politician's choice.

We do have all those six options, therefore.

- * Accept
- * Reject
- * Ignore
- * Reframe
- * Change, and
- *

But what worries me most of all is that of all of those, it is prevarication that appears to appeal most to UK politicians, and as a consequence, nothing happens, and that, to me, is the surest indication that we have people in charge as politicians in the UK who don't really know what they're doing, and that deeply worries me.