

Welcome to the “Decision Exploration System”, a method of thinking through decisions, foreseeing potential consequences, and working through that loop repeatedly, inspired by wargaming methods.

To use these sheets print them out digitally or physically and follow the instructions.. A guide can be found on <https://www.pathdependence.co.uk/resources/decisionexploration/> . Be mindful of where you keep filled-in sheets, so you know you can be honest to yourself on them.

You can find a worked through example on that URL, but that’s not a template. This system is a thinking tool, use it to help you think, not as a way to put off making a decision. This is currently experimental, and will be refined as research and feedback continues. Preferred questions for feedback are in the email this PDF was attached to.

Why does this exist?

- We can get stuck in mental loops, this method will help you unstuck yourself.
- Many decision making practices only focus on the self – you will achieve your aim based solely if you “manifest” hard enough, your business strategy is based solely on your organisation’s choices, whereas you are part of complex systems you must react to.
- It takes one of the elementary benefits of wargames, getting into the mindset of others involved in your situation. By having to write down six responses for four other actors or entities in your scenario, you’ll quickly consider 1296 future options.
- It can be used with other more complex decision making methodologies, from Smart Decisions to Wardley Mapping to Cynefin, this format is used so it’s relatively quick to understand, and to use.
- As with many more complex wargames, it is not designed to be predictive, it is designed to be exploratory. By using a random method to generate the reaction of the four entities the die will give you material to work with to build the capabilities to manage whatever happens.

More detail on the potential actions from each of the “entities” in the subsequent pages:

- 1 – Horrified/Counterattack: the entity sees your decision as horrifying, and will react appropriately to either protect themselves from your decision and/or remove any genuine or implied connection with you. A more adversarial entity sees your decisions as a threat to their wellbeing or business, and will take active steps to fully protect themselves, or will retaliate.
- 2 – Underwhelmed/Guarded: the entity is underwhelmed, and thinks you’ve made a poor decision, which means they now mistrust you and/or your judgement. A more adversarial or allied entity sees your decision as threatening, and expects more aggressive decisions from you in future.
- 3 – Indifferent: the entity does not care about or care for your decision, and mainly ignores it, for reasons you may or may not know about.
- 4- Intrigued but no more: the entity is intrigued and/or surprised, and will only take a small action to see where your decision making takes you next.
- 5 – Excited/Impressed: the entity will provide support and/or encouragement, or if appropriate investment of resources into your decision.
- 6 – Amazed/Adoring: the entity is “all in” on what you’re doing, will be actively following your decisions in future, and is willing to take on considerable risk to do so.

Path Dependence Decision Exploration System

Starting page – outlining the scenario:

Describe the initial scenario you are facing:

Write down your current situation in this lined box, keep the description short enough to fit inside these lines, but if you've filled less than half the box, pause, then write some more.

<i>My handwriting is very poor, so I've filled in these fields using italics.</i>
<i>It's a bit "meta", but my scenario is sending this experimental idea out to people I know. It's exactly the kind of thing I'd encourage friends and colleagues to do, but I found it difficult.</i>
<i>What if people find it obvious, or too simple? But my business coach likes it enough to think that I should send it out, so I should try it – and that scenario is a good decision to explore.</i>
<i>And maybe I'm afraid of too much success, I've so many different ideas, if one of them really lands with people I won't have time for all of the others.</i>

The four most significant entities:

Name and describe the four most significant "entities" (usually people or organisations), who have the strongest influence on, and are most dramatically affected by, your decisions in this scenario.

<i>The first "entity" are the "recipients", the people I'm going to email about this. So I'm trusting them to be kind and thoughtful, any criticisms to be incisive; and at "worst" they'll just politely ignore the emails, or will actually be too busy.</i>	<i>The second entity are "second degree connections", people who don't know me, but maybe a recipient passed on an email because they particularly like or dislike the idea and want to share it.</i>
<i>The third entity are "outdated recipients", by that I mean people I haven't spoken in too long but I value their opinion, and this idea is a good "excuse" to just get in touch and see how they are. But will they be annoyed/offended?</i>	<i>The fourth and final entity are "existing customers", I don't have many but I have some good relationships in professional wargame design – what will they think of this detour?</i>

The Decision Loop, page ONE:

What decision do you make to progress the scenario? Remember that you're exploring the scenario, so write down a single decision, and describe any additional significant factors or effects.

<i>I send out a PDF, that's clearly a work in progress, to fifteen or so people whose opinions I respect. I give them a couple of weeks to respond, which means if they're too busy this isn't an imposition. Acknowledging that my understanding of friendships can sometimes be atypical, I include some people I haven't spoken to for months or even years in the distribution.</i>

Using the criteria for the die roll for each entity, describe how they would react:

(1 – Horrified/Counterattack; 2 – Underwhelmed/Guarded; 3 – indifferent; 4- intrigued but no more; 5 – Excited/Impressed; 6 – Amazed/Adoring)

1 Recipients send angry replies, work for free?!	1 General online derision on LinkedIn
2 I get a few replies, it needs a lot more work	2 I get underwhelmed feedback indirectly
3 I barely get any feedback, not sure why	3 "I sent it to X, they never replied" x 10
4 Some reply asking to know when it's complete	4 "I sent it to X, tell us when it's done"
5 Lots of interested and encouraging replies	5 2 nd degree contact me directly, want more
6 Replies asking about franchise/subscriptions	6 Direct contacts, asking about subs price
1 Angry replies after so long, work for free?!	1 They start questioning my existing skillset
2 Not angry just disappointed	2 They wonder why I'm doing a solo project
3 I don't hear back from any of them in any way	3 They're simply not interested
4 Not really interested, but want to catch up	4 Maybe a call about a facilitated version?
5 Want to know more, reply enthusiastically	5 Offer to help or co-brand
6 Reply immediately, ask about other versions	6 Start discussing courses or online versions

Roll the die four times, once for each entity – and expand on the outcome above for each one.

<i>Rolled 2 – so I get a few replies, and it's good to hear from people, but their main feedback is there's no enough to this yet. But do I want to spend more time on it?</i>	<i>Rolled 3 – some recipients kindly passed the emails on to friends in relevant areas, but didn't get much response. Is two weeks too short, or the system is too simple or unhelpful?</i>
<i>Rolled 4 – I'm disappointed that they're not enthused, but it's just nice to catch up with people, and you never know where those conversations might lead.</i>	<i>Rolled 6 – not intended recipients originally, I only included them here to fill the sheet, but they see this as a great introduction to wargaming practice, and want to help and be involved.</i>

The loop continues – take an appropriate amount of time, then write your next decision on page ____