HOW IGNORING YOUR GUT WILL PUT YOU IN POLE POSITION

You make thousands of decisions every day. Some are seemingly insignificant, while others can have a seismic impact on your life. 'Go with your gut' is advice that we have all received when tackling a big life decision, yet according to Harvard University Professor Dr. Minson, that's exactly what you *shouldn't* do!

INFINITI is working with Dr. Julia Minson to undertake new research in the area of decision science. The research will focus on decision-making in the high-pressure world of Formula 1™, using the INFINITI Engineering Academy, a global search for the next generation of leading engineers, as the test bed.

But can this ground-breaking research be applied in everyday life, to help us all make better decisions? Dr. Minson certainly believes so: "People are generally not methodical enough, but by adding processes and checklists simple mistakes can be avoided. This becomes particularly important when working under time pressure. Reverting to gut instinct or making snap decisions is rarely beneficial for anyone; sticking to the process and working systematically reaps rewards".

This is something that Bob Bell, Chief Technical Officer at Renault Sport Formula One™ Team, knows all too well. "We plan our race strategy for each Grand Prix methodically, but of course, sometimes factors outside of the Team's control impact the race and we need to be prepared for that", he said. "This could be an incident on track or the weather intervening. It is here that we need to rely on our processes to see us through to still deliver the result on-track".

"We tend to value our intuition or gut feelings and believe that this instinct leads us to good decisions" added Dr. Minson. "Sadly, the research tells us that this is not the case. When questioned, most people prefer to trust their gut and have a strong belief that their instinctive decisions are often correct. However, the same people do not want others to be allowed to make gut decisions; they would rather others followed processes when they make their decisions.

"This is a prime example of our inherent overconfidence - you probably trust your own gut every day in your job, but would you want your doctor doing so during your operation? Or would you prefer that they followed the tried and tested procedure?".

Having defined processes in place is of paramount importance in Formula 1™. "As simulation and modeling tools have improved, we have refined how we can predict and plan for different scenarios playing out during a race", said Bob Bell. "Thanks to the historical data we can input, our race simulation models are usefully accurate. Using past data, we can predict our performance and the likelihood of things like an incident leading to a safety car intervention, enabling us to plan our strategy accordingly".

How often do you take the time to evaluate the outcome of your decisions, rationally assess how successful the outcome was and learn from it? "We are very good at remembering our successful decisions, particularly the ones we made based on a gut feeling", said Dr. Minson. "However, we could learn a lot more from analysing the outcomes of our poor decisions, arming ourselves with the ability to make better ones in future. Keeping a 'decision diary' is one way to add process and analysis to our decision making. However, as most people prefer not to be reminded when they were wrong, very few people do!".

Analysing decisions is something that Andy Todd, one of INFINITI's Directors of Engineering is extremely familiar with: "To make the forward-thinking decisions on innovative new technologies such as our Variable Compression Engine, we employ the Deming Cycle: Plan-Do-Check-Adjust. In the planning phase, we use calculation, simulation and sample testing to generate data. We then make decisions that are logical, repeatable, traceable and focused on creating value for our customers".

Another area where decision-making outcomes are particularly poor, is when we work together in a group. "There's a certain safety in numbers that helps us feel assured in our group decisions", added Dr. Minson. "Everyone has had the chance to question the decision. If all of us agree, it must be a good one, right? Well perhaps not. In any group, there will be certain social dynamics and levels of status. As it turns out, group decisions are regularly mere illusions of collaboration, where we simply appease our superiors".
One effective solution is to remove status from the equation. Dr. Minson cites an example of a leading New York bank that has everyone submit their investment opportunities anonymously before a meeting. This allows an effective decision to be taken by the group on the best opportunities to pursue, without status or interpersonal relationships affecting decision-making within the group.

In 2017, over 12,000 young engineers from across the world applied for the INFINITI Engineering Academy, which rewards winners with a year living in the UK, working with INFINITI and Renault Sport Formula One™ Team. With just seven Academy places available again in 2018, Dr. Minson will be helping INFINITI to select the very best talent at each of the seven global finals with complex decision-making tasks, designed to analyse how the candidates process information and arrive at appropriate conclusions. The pressure is on.

"Whilst trusting your gut feels very natural, it rarely delivers the positive results that we associate with this kind of decision-making. If you want to make the right decision, take a step back, remove the emotion from the situation and work with the proven data at hand to help you make informed, rational decisions," concluded Dr. Minson.

How will you make your next decision under pressure? Will you trust the data or your gut? Bob Bell and Dr. Minson will be watching closely during the Academy Finals and maybe they can help you to make better decisions too:

If you want to challenge your decision-making ability, try Dr. Minson's Decision-Making Test here:

https://academy.infiniti.com/social-quiz/CRTTest