DECISION-MAKING IN THE FULL MESS OF BUSINESS

Helmut Leitner

Founder and Partner HELIBLICK

Danielle IJkema

Partner HELIBLICK

About the Authors:

***Helmut Leitner** is a supply chain practitioner and IBP expert with over 20 years of leadership experience across FMCG, medical devices, and pharmaceuticals. Since founding HELIBLICK GmbH in 2019, he has developed a practical decision-making framework and supports organizations through complex, business-critical transformations. **Danielle IJkema** is a global supply chain leader with more than two decades of experience in biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and food. She has held senior executive roles overseeing operations, strategy, and major transformation programs, helping organizations build agile, resilient, and compliant supply chains.*

Twenty years ago, making decisions felt easier. Today it's a different challenge.

With more than 20 years in large corporations, we've seen a clear shift in how decisions get made. What once depended on deep technical expertise and well-defined processes now requires new approaches, faster responses, and broader collaboration. We see two main reasons for this change. Early in our careers, we worked in junior expert roles where mastering a set of challenging yet stable problems—such as optimizing production, setting reorder points, or tuning forecasting models—was enough. These issues were largely predictable and could be handled through specialized knowledge. At the same time, the world and business environment have become far more uncertain. Shifting geopolitics, climate change, AI advances, and rapid digitalization all contribute to this complexity. Market dynamics can change overnight based on social sentiment; global supply chains face disruptions from raw-material shortages to port congestion; and decisions now involve difficult trade-offs across service, cost, and cash flow. Solving these challenges often requires input from several experts or departments rather than one individual. This reality points to an important insight: organizations benefit from moving beyond reliance on individual expertise or top-down directives. Instead, they can design decision systems that combine rule-based stability for routine work with flexible, collaborative forums for complex or high-impact issues. That means clearer responsibilities, faster information sharing, scenario planning, and empowered teams making informed trade-offs quickly. We view this shift—from individual execution to orchestrated governance—as essential for organizations striving to stay agile, resilient, and competitive in a rapidly changing environment.

Decision-Making in a Dynamic, Uncertain Environment

Organizations operate in different contexts, each behaving differently under varying levels of predictability and uncertainty (Figure 1). Simple contexts, with stable conditions and clear cause-and-effect, align with informal, common-sense decision-making, where intuitive judgment guides quick, routine choices. Complicated contexts require expert analysis and defined processes, making standardized, rule-based decisions the most effective. As uncertainty increases in complex contexts, outcomes become less predictable, and solutions must emerge through learning. Here, cross-functional forums enable diverse functional leads to explore options, share insights, and adapt as new information unfolds. In chaotic contexts, where immediate threats demand rapid action, organizations rely on leader-driven decisions to restore stability before more deliberate planning can resume.

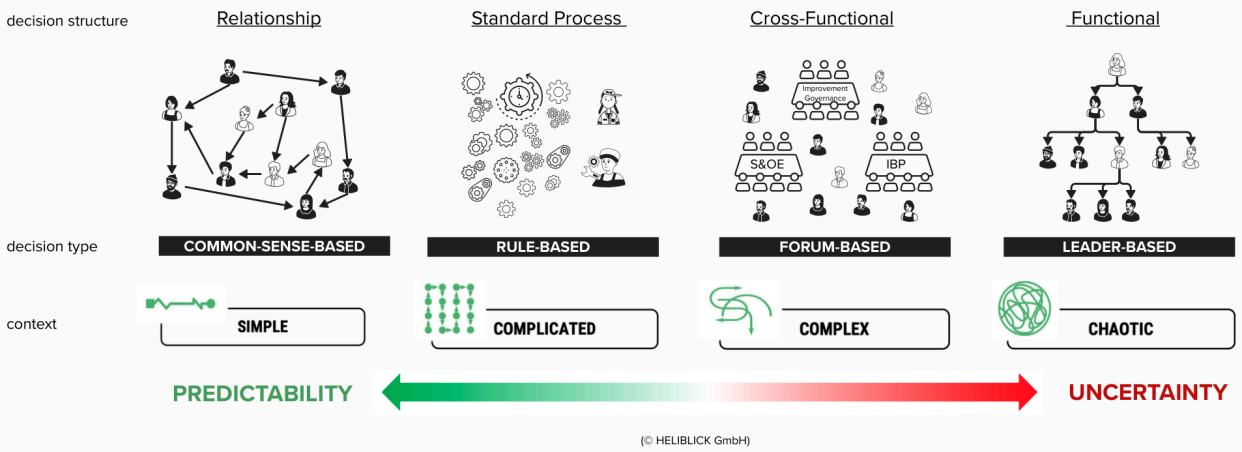

Figure 1 : Decision-making structures in different contexts

While most organizations operate across all four contexts, decision-making is often concentrated in the complicated and complex areas. To remain efficient, organizations depend on predictable processes and rule-based decision-making for complicated work. Yet today's environment brings far more uncertainty, pushing more decisions into the complex space where expertise alone is not enough. Success requires the ability to respond, adapt, and innovate—through collaborative, cross-functional decision-making where each role contributes to the broader picture. Navigating this uncertainty requires the ability to lead in complex contexts. While organizations are used to solving complicated problems with established processes and deep expertise, many remain less mature at handling complex challenges, where uncertainty is high, and collaboration is essential. Strengthening capabilities in this area is critical to making better decisions and building greater resilience.

Building Effective Decision-Making Capabilities with the HELIBLICK Framework

To support this shift from traditional, expertise-driven approaches toward more forum-based, role-aligned decision-making, the HELIBLICK Framework was developed. It provides a structured way to build the collaborative capabilities required for effective, integrated decision-making (Figure 2). The framework is centered on four interconnected team capabilities: Helicopter View, Intrapreneurship, Partnership, and Mentorship. These four capabilities provide a solid foundation for teams to effectively identify challenges, weigh their options, and make decisions confidently —whether addressing routine disruptions or systemic shocks.

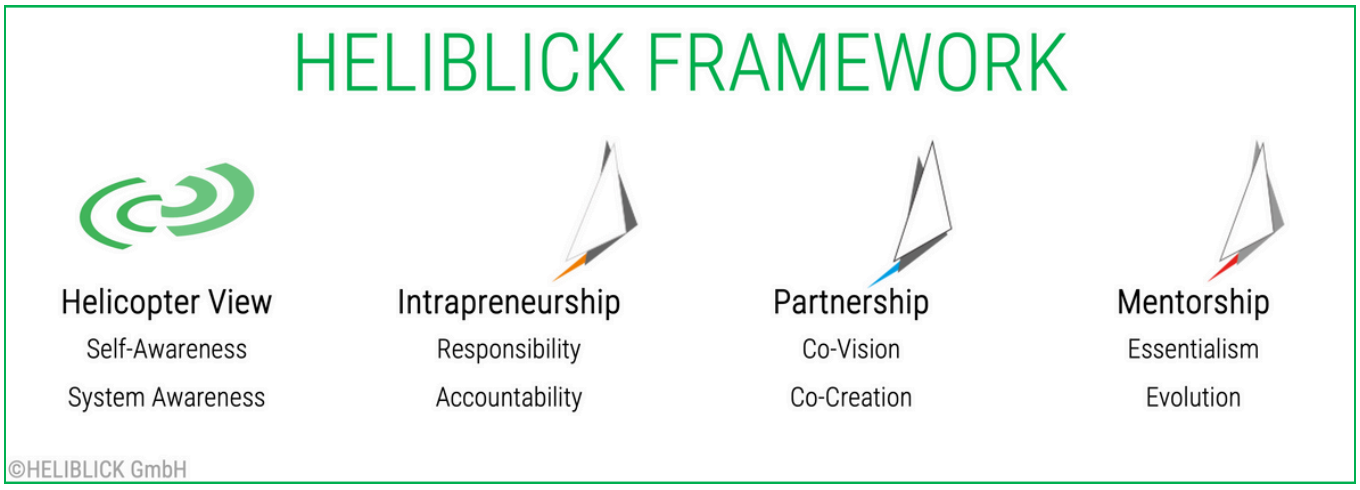

Figure 2: HELIBLICK Framework – a Guide to Improve Team Decision-Making Capabilities

As the first element of the HELIBLICK Framework, **Helicopter View** is a capability that helps forum participants step back from their functional perspective and build both **self-awareness** and **system awareness**.

Self-awareness means understanding your own emotions, assumptions, and motivations—especially in discussions where perspectives clash. In an Integrated Business Planning meeting, for example, a sales planner may present an optimistic forecast to meet sales targets. At the same time, the procurement lead stresses risks related to lead times and supplier delays. The sales planner's enthusiasm may be seen by others as unrealistic, leading to scepticism. At the same time, the procurement lead's caution may be interpreted as resistance to change, frustrating colleagues who push for growth. These tensions can trigger defensive reactions, slow decision-making, or prevent alignment. Self-awareness allows individuals to recognize how their own motivations influence their stance and to appreciate that others are shaped by their own concerns. This reduces misunderstandings, supports open communication, and enables the team to work toward solutions that reflect multiple viewpoints.

System awareness involves understanding how different parts of the business—demand, production, inventory, finance, suppliers—are interconnected. It means seeing how a change in one area can affect service levels, cash flow, lead times, and overall performance. For instance, during planning, the team may realize that a promotional campaign combined with a supplier delay could lead to stockouts and financial strain. Rather than addressing each issue in isolation, system (context)-aware teams develop coordinated responses: rescheduling the promotion, reallocating inventory, finding temporary supply options, and adjusting financial forecasts. Recognizing these interdependencies helps teams address root causes and minimize negative impacts across the supply chain.

Together, self-awareness and system awareness enable participants to see beyond their functional boundaries and contribute to better, more aligned decision-making.

Intrapreneurship is the mindset and skillset of approaching internal challenges with curiosity, systems thinking, and a drive for impact. Intrapreneurs look beyond their functional role, spot patterns and opportunities, and collaborate across teams to move the system forward. They combine **responsibility**—doing the analysis, testing solutions, coordinating actions—with **accountability** for learning, reducing uncertainty, and enabling progress, rather than relying on a single "right" answer. For example, a demand planner acting as an intrapreneur notices repeated stockouts of Product X. She starts by asking why the issue keeps happening, runs a quick root-cause analysis, tests a small forecast adjustment, and aligns actions with sales and supply. She then monitors service levels and adapts as new information emerges. If the fix works, she shares the learning; if not, she leads the next iteration, coordinating further experiments and bringing in diverse perspectives.In this way, intrapreneurs help organizations tackle complex, cross-functional problems through collaboration, experimentation, and a commitment to shared success.

Partnership strengthens cross-functional decision-making through two principles: **co-vision** and **co-creation**. Co-vision means creating a shared story of purpose, values, and goals—not just targets—so everyone understands the direction and how decisions should be made. Co-creation is the ongoing work of bringing different perspectives together, testing ideas quickly, and resolving conflicts using facts and standard criteria. For example, suppose a company wants to improve sustainability without harming sales or increasing costs. In that case, the forum first aligns on a shared vision—such as reducing emissions while maintaining customer satisfaction. Then, sales, operations, procurement, and finance jointly develop options like greener suppliers, redesigned packaging, or optimized delivery routes. They run quick scenario checks, compare impacts on cost, service, and emissions, and agree on the best plan. Roles and metrics are clearly assigned so each function knows its contribution. Using co-vision and co-creation helps teams make faster, better decisions that everyone understands and supports.

Mentorship plays a vital role in strengthening decision-making across an organization by supporting continuous learning and adaptation. It is built on two core capabilities: **essentialism** and **evolution**.

Essentialism is a disciplined, focused approach to prioritization. It requires teams to identify which activities—operational tasks or improvement initiatives—are most important at a given moment and commit resources accordingly. This mindset encourages deliberate choices about what is truly essential now, while deferring non-essential work. By concentrating effort where it matters most, organizations avoid spreading resources too thin and accept that some non-critical tasks may receive less attention. Essentialism aligns closely with setting target conditions: small, manageable steps that maintain forward progress toward a broader vision. It involves confidently saying no to low-value activities and ensuring energy is directed toward work that delivers the greatest impact. The result is clearer decision-making, better resource allocation, and more meaningful progress.

Evolution refers to continuous learning and adaptation. It involves regularly reflecting on what works, adjusting when needed, and improving decision-making. Mentors play an important role in enabling this process. They help shape the system, guide the organization's story and culture, and keep long-term goals in view. Mentors can lead lessons-learned sessions, helping teams celebrate successes, identify areas for improvement, and turn disagreements into learning opportunities. They can also provide structured feedback to strengthen individual thinking and decision-making skills.

By combining mentorship with essentialism and a commitment to ongoing learning, organizations become more adaptive, innovative, and effective in dynamic environments.

From Mess to Method: A Practical Pathway to Improve Team Decision-Making Capabilities

Organizations operate in different decision-making contexts—simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic—and each requires a different approach. While most teams are skilled in complicated contexts, where expert-driven, rule-based decisions work well, complex contexts demand cross-functional, forum-based decision-making. This capability is still less mature in many organizations. To succeed in today's uncertain environment, teams must intentionally build these skills. The HELIBLICK Framework provides a practical pathway: develop a **Helicopter View** to understand biases and see the broader system; foster **Intrapreneurship** so individuals take ownership and drive action; build **Partnership** through shared purpose and collaborative sense-making; and strengthen **Mentorship** to support essentialism, reflection, and continuous evolution. Embedding these capabilities into everyday routines—scenario testing, lessons learned, clear roles, and open dialogue—creates a cycle of ongoing improvement. When leaders champion this shift, teams become more resilient, responsive, and equipped to make smarter decisions in any context.

HELIBLICK GMBH | www.heliblick.com | Email: heli@heliblick.com