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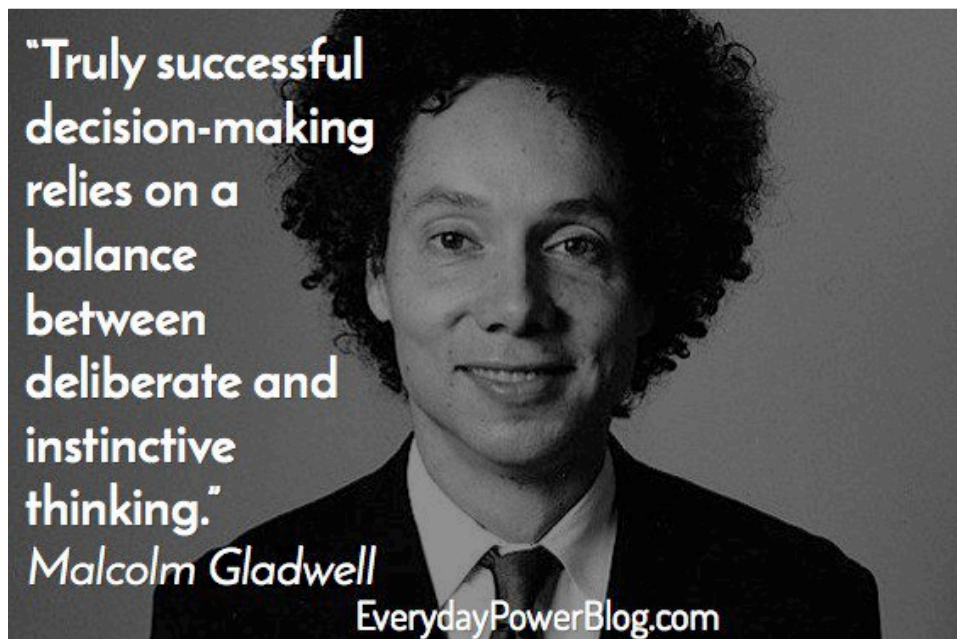
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“There can be as much value in the **blink** of an eye as in months of rational analysis.”
-Malcolm Gladwell
Blink

A Summary in Brief:



Malcolm Gladwell's, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* explores the notion that we as humans make unconscious decisions in only the blink of an eye. Gladwell analyses human decision making skills and the way the world interprets the world around them. Gladwell describes these sudden “all knowing” moments when we just “know” as critical snap judgment calls.

Gladwell identifies the part of our brain that rapidly “leaps to conclusions” and defines it as the adaptive unconscious. Not only does *Blink* investigate the triumphs that come from snap judgment but he also studies many failures that come from them as well. From the power of thin slicing to the rational behind our internal computers, Gladwell probes the idea of being in control of our unconscious and not falling prey to what comes to you in a blink of an eye.



Malcolm Gladwell is a Canadian author, speaker and journalist who was originally born in Hampshire, United Kingdom. Gladwell who studied in Toronto at Trinity College has authored five award-winning books: *The Tipping Point* (2000), *Blink* (2005), *Outliers* (2008), *What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures* (2009) and *David and Goliath* (2013).

Authors Aims and Perspectives



Gladwell illustrates that the inner workings of humans rely heavily on the part of our brain that makes rapid snap judgments, the adaptive unconscious. He confirms that as a human species, we could not have survived without utilizing this part of our brain but we also need to be aware of our "giant internal computer" that we use thousands of times a day to make quick decisions based on limited information. Gladwell aims to enlighten readers on the scientific and psychological background of this part of our brain

but also highlight how it works to influence our instincts on a regular basis. Gladwell specifically acknowledges that decisions can be made just as well in a blink of an eye than over a long period of time.

The second aim of *Blink*, is to investigate when "our instincts betray us". By illustrating how our experiences can sometimes way our decisions, Gladwell hopes to illuminate when we should trust our instincts and when we should question them.

The last aim of *Blink*, is to investigate and defend the concept that we as a human species should be attentive to our unconscious snap judgments and ultimately be aware that we have the power to control them. Although many might argue that they are instinctive, by educating yourself on your adaptive unconscious you are able to more easily recognize when rapid judgment calls based on emotion and experience are not valid.

Discussion Questions for Readers

- 1.) Have you ever had a moment personally or professionally when your instincts betrayed you? Did you self-reflect after?
- 2.) Snap-judgment decisions are being blamed currently for many police brutality incidents, how do you think *Blink* could be used to enlighten officer in the field?
- 3.) The "power of knowing" is used to define rapid judgment calls. What incidents can you think where you use "the power of knowing"?
- 4.) When should you ignore your adaptive unconscious and use a different decision making approach?
- 5.) How can leaders use "thin slicing" when working in groups to make decisions?

SUCCESS IS NOT A RANDOM ACT. IT ARISES OUT OF A PREDICTABLE AND POWERFUL SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND OPPORTUNITIES. —Malcolm Gladwell



We learn by example
and by direct
experience because
there are real limits to
the adequacy of
verbal instruction.

Malcolm Gladwell

+ Key Models and Messages

What can we learn from *Blink*?

The Theory of Thin Slicing:

In the first chapter of *Blink*, Gladwell discusses the idea of 'thin slicing' through the perspective of psychologist John Gottman who operated a Love Lab and performed tests to determine if a married couple would last. Gladwell defines 'thin slicing' as "the ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behaviour based on very narrow slices of experience" (13). By use of facial expressions, tones and how couples interact when tested, Gottman was able to identify with 90% accuracy whether a couple would last. Therefore, 'thin-slicing' is at the center of our intuition and snap judgment core.

Snap Decision Making:

Contrary to the first chapter where Gottman is able to accurately predict why certain couples are will last (based on scientific underpinnings), Gladwell's second chapter is much more illusive. Gladwell discusses the idea of snap judgment or decisions and states that sometimes, there is no explanation of why we feel a "gut instinct" to do or not do something. Gladwell uses the act of speed dating to describe why humans can clearly identify what they are looking for in a life partner but when actually deciding, they often choose people who do not fit their wants. Gladwell then goes on to cite Vic Braden, a world known tennis coach, who is able to predict when an athlete will fault. For unknown reasons, Braden can identify when and if an athlete will fault but is unable to explain why.

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"We thin-slice because we have to, and we come to rely on that ability because there are lots of hidden fists out there, lots of situations where careful attention to the details of a very thin-slice, even for no more than a second or two, can tell us an awful lot"

(continued)

Priming:

According to Gladwell, “Priming refers to when subtle triggers influence our behaviour without our awareness of such changes.” For example, we see something visually, and that in turn will sway our decision-making processes.

Unfortunately, Gladwell explains that priming and then acting on snap judgment can often lead to stereotypical decision making. It leaves room for racist, gendered and ablest prejudices, yet still all the while being completely unconscious. In the last chapter of the Gladwell’s work, he cites the example of Amadou Diallo, who was shot in the Bronx in 1999 after four New York City Police officers made snap judgments based on his race, area of residence and gender. Diallo who fit the description of a criminal wanted in the Bronx was asked to show his hands while standing on his steps near his house. When Diallo fled back into his apartment, officers shot at Diallo after one officer said he had seen a gun. Diallo had no gun on him and unfortunately died at the scene.



“The key to good decision-making is not knowledge. It is understanding. We are swimming in the former. We are desperately lacking in the latter.”

Controlling our Snap Judgments and First Impressions:

Although Gladwell does not leave us with a specific model to follow when being aware of our snap judgements, priming and thin-slicing, he does recognize the importance of acknowledging and controlling our unconscious. Gladwell states that it is possible to control our snap judgments through education and awareness. Gladwell states that if we “take charge of our first two seconds” we are more apt to make the right decision (254).

There can be as much value
in the blink of an eye as in
months of rational analysis.

Malcolm Gladwell

(continued)

No one-not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses-ever makes it alone.

Malcolm Gladwell

“Our world requires that decisions be sourced and footnotes, and if we say how we feel, we must also be prepared to elaborate on why we feel that way,, We need to respect the fact that it is possible to know without knowing why we know and accept that- sometimes- we’re better off that way”

Connection to Leadership Theory

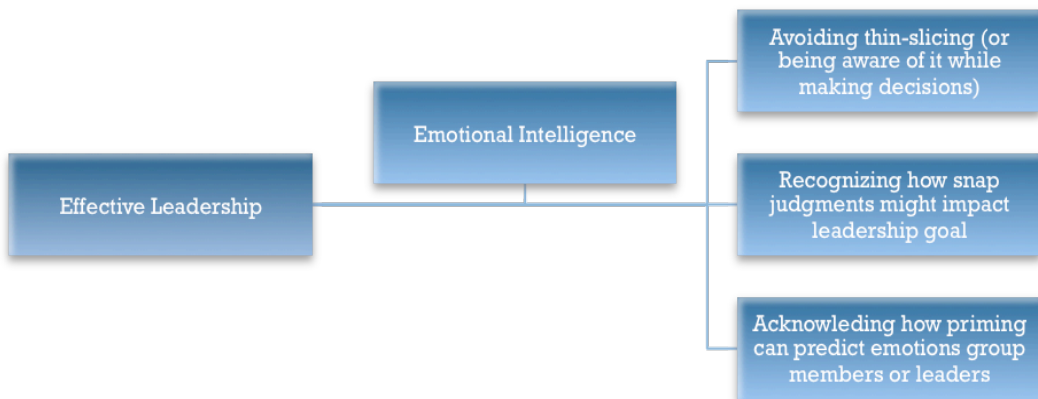


Although Gladwell’s *Blink*, does not strictly focus on the theme of leadership, it does lend to many leadership scenarios, case studies and theories. The biggest learning lesson Gladwell wanted readers to take away from the book was that although we thin-slice and we use prior experience to make snap judgment calls, in hindsight it can be controlled. As a leader, one is constantly asked to make decisions based on “gut instinct” or in a short amount of time. Many of these decisions are made by leaders in-group situations and require thin-slicing and acting on impulse. Therefore, *Blink* is a far-reaching book that can be used to alter the way leaders make decisions.

Emotional Intelligence and *Blink*

Blink discusses the ability to manage your unconscious and act not only out of impulse or through the process of priming, but also awareness. By controlling the way you make decisions, you are more apt to make a better one. Leadership is no different and often asks leaders to utilize their emotional intelligence to make decisions. Emotional intelligence is the “ability to understand and manage your own emotions, and those of the people around you”. An effective leader would thus manage their emotions as well as their unconscious, which makes the rapid decisions. Conclusively, these processes will work hand in hand in a leadership dominated setting.

In all leadership settings, leaders are asked to make quick and rapid decisions. Leaders thus base these on thin slicing (their experience and prior knowledge) and act accordingly. Consequently, not all decisions will be thought of as the right ones and therefore if leaders were to read *Blink* they would be introduced to the concept of rethinking ones unconscious and taking control of it before making decisions.



Critical Analysis

In the blink of an eye, we make rapid decisions everyday. Whether this is how we choose a television show to watch or how we take our coffee in the morning, we are constantly asked to make decisions based on experience and prior knowledge. As leaders this is no different. Although we might not be physically asked to make decisions, we are expected to give input and help guide decision-making processes. Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink* does an exceptional job at blending leadership and decision-making skills together unknowingly. Although Gladwell does not directly cite many leadership theories or its importance to leadership, he uses many different case studies that draw on this theme.

By utilizing countless case studies, readers are able to effectively gain an understanding of his main messages. Through a case study approach, *Blink* is an easily read and understood book for all audiences. By balancing just the right amount of theory with personalized stories, readers remain captivated from start to finish. Gladwell also includes a wide variety of time periods, professions and diversity within his case studies, which sets his book apart from many.

Although when reading this book leadership came to mind, for many I am sure it would not. Gladwell does not make any direct links to leadership theory but rather skims the surface. Although he draws on many case studies where leadership is at the forefront, a more solid and tangible link would make his writing more effective. Secondly, I think that Gladwell's use of case studies is important but found myself mid-way getting them confused. I would suggest perhaps a case study that ran throughout each chapter as well as select few case studies per chapter.

Gladwell's *Blink* is an exceptional piece of work that challenges everything you were taught growing up. From being told that you should always "trust your gut" to now being aware of that "all knowing feeling" and controlling it, Gladwell presents his work brilliantly.

Recommendations



- 1.) How We Decide - Jonah Lehrer
- 2.) Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)- Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson
- 3.) Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants- Malcolm Gladwell
- 4.) Revisionist History Podcast- Malcolm Gladwell
- 5.) Malcolm Gladwell Ted Talk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGBVgvisbI8>

References:

Gladwell, Malcolm. *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*. New York: Little, Brown and, 2005.

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