

Red Herrings and other Hurdles to Decision Making

A logical fallacy is an incorrect argument in logic and rhetoric that contains a fatal flaw which undermines its soundness, thereby leading to an erroneous, and potentially damaging, conclusion.

How can logical fallacies harm your decision-making process? In myriad ways, but for the sake of brevity we'll examine seven examples of logical fallacies that should be avoided.

1. Hasty Generalization: In short, a hasty generalization is when you neglect to perform your due diligence. It's making a decision without all the facts having first been gathered and understood in context of the decision you're making. Don't decide until you have a deep, rich pool of information. Reporting tools and surveys can help you collect the necessary data to avoid hasty generalizations.
2. Ad Hominem: When the listener attacks the person who is advancing the argument and ignores what they're actually saying. There are going to be team members who you personally don't connect with, even though they excel at their job. If this person is arguing, say, why a project must be aware of a certain risk, and you dismiss them because they're always complaining, you're making a logical fallacy. It's okay not to like somebody but give their argument its due.
3. Appeal to Ignorance: Appealing to ignorance is used more often than you'd think. Be on the lookout for it. But that doesn't mean we throw up our hands and give up. It means we do the research and learn before making a decision. Plus, being innovative requires taking risks and being aggressive.
4. Argument from Authority: It's important to only trust a person in authority if they've earned that trust because they're knowledgeable, experienced and skilled. But even in such cases it never hurts to run their argument through the ringer to make sure everything makes sense before you agree.
5. Appeal to Tradition: This, like all logical fallacies, is when we get lazy and turn off our minds. Only, things change, and if you're not flexible you're going to end up broken. Often an adherence to tradition means a reluctance to try new things. That means a retreat from innovation, which is bad business.
6. Red Herring: A red herring is something irrelevant that is raised to deflect attention. It's used all the time in lazy filmmaking to mislead the audience, and it's often found in an argument to distract one from making a good decision.
7. Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc: In other words, one action following another does not mean there is a causal link. Correlation can offer insight, but without running controlled experiments, it doesn't prove causation. Relying totally on correlation, without establishing causation, is a logical fallacy that can harm your business.

Diving Deeper into Red Herrings

English foxhunters once dragged a red herring in front of their hounds to distract them from the scent of the little furry guy. In time, this practice produced the metaphorical "red herring," which is an attempt to win an argument by diverting attention from the real issue.

Below are three common decision "red herring" statements often purported in meetings that can simply be tactics to delay decision making. Address these stinky fish in an effective way with keen eyes, ears, sense of smell and courage.

1. "We Need More Data (or More Information)"
 - o Indicates: Analysis paralysis

- What You Can Do: Some more than others consistently ask for more data. Track the requests that do or don't make sense over time and then let those people know how they rate in terms of the quality of their data requests.
 - Innovate the Daily Grind Opportunity: Track data requests made in meetings and create an objective way to capture whether their request for data will be met and by whom.
2. "We Need Another Meeting to Include Persons X, Y, and Z"
- Indicates: A cultural lack of empowerment or poor communication mechanisms to engage people virtually outside of specific meetings.
 - What You Can Do: Ensure that your company has a communication method and process for getting answers such that people who are not present can respond at later times or at any time of day.
 - Innovate the Daily Grind Opportunity: Find a way (process and tool) to have 24/7 inclusive communications and decision making.
3. "I Don't Have the Resources"
- Indicates: Resource allocation decisions that are emotional and not logical.
 - What You Can Do: You should bring a bring a clear understanding and representation of your resource bandwidth, roles, and effectiveness and be able to produce this for decision-making purposes.
 - Innovate the Daily Grind Opportunity: Find a way (process and tool) to have 24/7 communications and decision making related to resources.

The Bottom Line:

Stoke your fire and cook up those meeting red herrings so that the smell doesn't distract everyone from making real progress. You need to innovate the daily grind to solve these annoying meeting habits and make decisions FASTER!

On a Personal Note

Introducing a red herring in a negotiation can be a handy defensive tactic but sometimes we use personal red herrings, which is essentially when we lie to ourselves. If you can't be true to yourself, you can't be true to your dream.

One of my mentors taught me how to face a "go—no go" decision by asking this question: "Do you have a fighting chance or just a chance to fight?"

1. Have you conducted enough due diligence to find out if your plan has a chance of success? Just telling yourself things will work out is a red herring.
2. Is your activity resulting in ANY success? If nothing is working, convincing yourself that you just need to work harder may be masking reality.
3. Are your assumptions performing? If you're only consuming resources without creating opportunity, you must ask yourself: Am I on the wrong trail, or the wrong journey?

Small business owners need all the facts they can get their hands on. And they need the truth from all parties — especially from themselves.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jimblasingame/2015/11/13/beware-of-the-personal-red-herring/#41c205e55144>

<https://amykelling.com/the-business-of-throwing-decision-red-herrings/>

<https://www.projectmanager.com/blog/logical-fallacies>