

31 May 2023

Greetings HITSA Members from a cold and rainy Cape Town!

A vet I know often describes the pressure of 15-minute consultations, and the need to make decisions including a diagnosis and treatment plan - all day, every day. I frequently think of clinical anaesthesia as a day of decisions – “do I accept this blood pressure, decide to treat, how to treat, and is the response adequate?” Going through our heads all the time are decisions. Often the correct decision may be the decision NOT to respond, even if seemingly engrossed on a device, or in conversation.

The job of a leader running operating rooms necessitates not only clinical decisions related to direct patient care, but also layers of decisions above these (and most of us still have clinical roles occurring in the theatre during a normal working day). Some of these more managerial decisions include **operational decisions** related to lists available and how to staff them for the next week, further **strategic decisions** required around consumables or equipment planning, and management of leave etc. At the same time, the organisation may want help with more **tactical decisions** related to future service design, future renovation of facility expansions, or making the organisation more competitive.

Most leaders are unaware of the vast number of decisions they are making during a given day, sometimes multiple at the same time. When I am asked to sign a purchase order for 600 disposable items for our Functional Business Unit, I have to consider our usage, the supply chain effort to source them, our capacity to store the items, and the shelf-life of the items. Operational managers of operating rooms across the country are doing this daily. I guess we should ask ourselves some pertinent questions - can we make it easier to make decisions, make better decisions, and how do we (or those we appoint into leadership positions) know we are making good decisions?

On *Tuesday, 6 June 2023*, our Townhall speaker, *Professor Wayne Borchardt*, will introduce us to *The Science of Decisions* ([click here](#) to register). Wayne has 2 decades of experience advising business leaders and guiding them on how to improve their decision-making skills, reflect and be critical of decisions they have made, and be open to reconsidering paths they may have previously discarded. He has recently completed his PhD through UCT Business School, on decision-making. My understanding is that one can evaluate decisions as being well made either on the **process** that was applied, or on the **outcome** from the decision. His article in Business Day ([click here](#)) is a taste of how decisions can be considered, and reviewed.

In the article, Wayne postulates that the Woolworths board should have asked the following four questions of the executive team:

- What other growth strategies have you considered beside the David Jones acquisition?
- What uncertainties have you considered about the strategy you are promoting?
- How did you model these uncertainties?
- How robust is your strategy against those uncertainties?

Reading those 4 points, I immediately thought of Gavin Mooney, the late and legendary health economist, who was also dedicated to the art and science of decision making. In this paper following Mooney's tragic death ([click here](#) to read) Stephen Jan highlights Gavin's brand of proceduralism, especially the novel work where communities were included in "citizens juries" ([click here](#)). Proceduralism is related to the creation of a fair process. Gavin was determined that fairness in the decision-making process could overcome what is often a zero-sum outcome, especially in a fixed-budget, state sector health system. His thinking recognised that the process of decision-making may be more important than the outcome. I know that Wayne will be unpacking some of the thinking behind these different ways of assessing the utility and quality of decisions; and, knowing Wayne, he will explain it in ways that will make all of us ponder our own approaches, probably relating back to recent decisions we have been party to.

Wayne will be joining us virtually from his base in Portugal. When I was telling a surgical colleague about this Townhall, his response was, "pretty relevant to surgical decision-making". I would urge all our members to advertise this session widely with your surgical, management and other colleagues in the healthcare space. This is a chance to share the benefits of HITSA, and it would be awesome to get more of our surgical contemporaries interested, so please share widely with colleagues. The whole Townhall session will focus on this presentation, with time for questions after. *Please do expect this Townhall to run slightly longer than our traditional one hour.* 😊

In conclusion, I am excited to announce that the *Theatre of Errors* will be hosted in *Gauteng* on *Saturday, 18 November 2023*. We have secured a venue and finalised the faculty, with registrations expected to open within the next month. Please do pencil this date in to avoid disappointment. We will forward the programme and registration forms as soon as they are ready.

Keep warm and see you on Tuesday!

Warm regards,

Dr Anthony Reed
HITSA Chairperson