Decision Coaching Using AI

🤖 What Is Decision Coaching with AI?

Generative AI (like ChatGPT) can do more than answer questions: it can act as a decision coach, helping you clarify choices, reflect on tradeoffs, and make better decisions. You're still the decision maker. AI is a thinking partner, not a decider.

Two examples of AI products for decision coaching are Decision Insights VIII and Norma. Decision Insights VIII is a custom GPT developed by Eric Horvitz, Chief Scientific Officer at Microsoft and trained decision analyst. Norma (www.drivetoDQ.com) is an AI vehicle to help you 'drive to Decision Quality' and was developed by Carl Spetzler, a pioneer in decision analysis and one of the world's leading figures in advancing decision quality. As described below, you can also use regular ChatGPT (or similar) for the same purpose with the right prompts.

These approaches are most helpful for important, complex, or high-consequence decisions. For small decisions, AI can still be useful—just keep it light, or use them to practice.

🧩 How to Use AI as a Decision Coach

*See page 2 for an example prompt that you can use

💬 Talk it Out: Use "live" voice mode or long prompts to brain-dump your thoughts.

🧠 Ask it to act like a decision coach: "Coach me like a professional decision analyst would."

📄 Use your favorite framework: If you like a specific structured decision making framework (e.g., PrOACT[1,2] or Decision Quality[3]), ask the AI to guide you through it step-by-step.

🌍 Seek diverse perspectives: Ask the AI to explore opposing views or critique your thinking.

✅ Check for Decision Quality[3]: "Does this decision have a clear frame, clear values and trade-offs, good alternatives, relevant info, sound logic, and commitment to action?". The overall quality of a decision cannot exceed its weakest element.

⚠️ Guardrails to Keep in Mind

🔐 Protect your privacy: Don't input highly sensitive or confidential information. Rule of thumb: If you'd email it to yourself, it's probably OK in a paid version of generative AI.

👻 If you are using regular ChatGPT, use 'temporary mode' if you don't want it to remember.

🔍 Fact-check when it matters: AI can be wrong. Double-check anything high-stakes.

🌍 AI can have a negative environmental impact. Use it mindfully for tasks that are worth it to you!

🕹️ You're still in control: AI is a tool. Use it with intention. Trust your judgment.

---

[1] Hammond JS, Keeney RL, Raiffa H. 1998. Smart Choices: A Practical Guide to Making Better Decisions. Harvard Business School Press, Boston.

[2] Runge et al. 2016. Introduction to Structured Decision Making. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Conservation Training Center, West Virginia, USA.

[3] Spetzler C, Winter H, Meyer J. 2016. Decision Quality: Value Creation from Better Business Decisions. John Wiley & Sons Inc, New Jersey.

Questions or feedback? Please reach out to Laura at Laura@peopleandplanet.consulting.

I would love to hear about if this resonates with you and how you may adapt it for your unique needs. When sharing or adapting this guide and prompt, please credit: Keating-Elske, L. and D. Nelson-Elske. 2026. Decision coaching with AI. People & Planet Consulting.

Example Prompt (using a rapid prototyping version of the PrOACT framework)

Instructions: Copy and paste the following text into your Gen AI before you begin. Note: This prompt was originally built to support a 'learn by doing' rapid prototyping workshop. It is one example only and there are many other tools and processes available in decision analysis that might also be useful to incorporate depending on the decision. Tip: If your AI starts to stray from the instructions in this prompt, you may need to gently remind it to stay on track!

"Hi, **I'd like your help filling out a *Decision Dashboard* using the PrOACT framework.** Please walk me through it step-by-step like a decision professional. Act as an experienced decision analyst, not as someone trying to solve the problem for me. Be curious before being persuasive. Ask only the minimum number of questions needed to materially improve the decision. Challenge my thinking respectfully, including identifying possible cognitive biases, hidden assumptions, framing effects, and overlooked objectives or alternatives. Don't optimize prematurely; keep the process divergent before converging. At the end, summarize everything in a clean dashboard format. Here's the structure I'd like to follow:

1. **Problem Frame (Pr)** - Help me clearly define the decision, including: who the decision maker is (i.e. has the authority to allocate resources once the decision is made), what they are trying to decide on, what they are ultimately trying to achieve, when the decision needs to be made, the spatial scope that it applies to (if relevant), any future decisions that may be linked to this one, and any other constraints (e.g. legal, financial). Also ask who the decision affects (e.g. other people, nature), and who has the expertise to inform it. Help me clarify what decisions have already been made, which ones will I focus on, and which ones can be left for later (i.e. a decision heirarchy). For the focus decision(s), help me avoid narrow framing. Help me craft a precise decision statement that includes all of this information.
2. **Objectives (O)** - Help me identify what truly matters within the context of this decision. Please distinguish between: fundamental objectives (what I ultimately care about), and means objectives (how I might achieve those). Once the fundamentals are clear, don't keep probing for means. For each fundamental objective, help me define how to assess or measure it (even qualitatively). Include both my fundamental objectives and potential fundamental objectives of other affected parties. Do not ask me to rank or prioritize my objectives yet as this should not happen until after the consequences step, when we are considering trade-offs.
3. **Alternatives (A)** - Help me list the real, viable options I'm considering. If there are multiple focus decisions, help me think through it using a strategy table by listing options for each focus decision and then 'stringing strategies' by selecting items from each column to form a strategy alternative. For each focus decision, offer suggestions to clarify or expand the list so that we have a broad and creative set of alternatives, and for each suggestion tell me what assumptions you are making. Please ensure one strategy alternative represents the status quo or doing nothing.
4. At this point, ask me if I have clarity on the best path forward based on what we have done so far. If the answer is yes, move to do the Decision Quality Assessment (step 8 in this prompt). If not, then continue on to the consequences step (step 5 in this prompt).
5. **Consequences (C)** - For each alternative, help me explore likely outcomes across all fundamental objectives. Please build a consequences table with alternatives as columns and the fundamental objectives as rows. Add a column for each fundamental objective's performance measure and preferred direction (e.g. more is better). If quantitative data is available, include it and cite sources. If quantitative data is not available, evaluate each of the alternatives qualitatively against the status quo (0), as either a little bit better (+1), a lot better (+2), a little bit worse (-1), or a lot worse (-2) (i.e. a Pugh Matrix). Use ranges in brackets to capture uncertainty, and also provide a best guess. Add colored dots based on the best guess to make it easier to see trends across each row, with dark blue for the maximum value for a given objective, red for the minimum value for a given objective, and the others in between as lighter shades of red and blue. Double check that you have assigned a 0 (and a blue dot) to all objectives for the status quo option and if not, fix it. For each objective, identify uncertainties/questions that make it hard to forecast the consequences and help me think about the value of information by asking me if knowing the answer would change my decision if it was based only on the affected objective, and if it is feasible to reduce the uncertainty within the decision timeframe. Help me clarify which uncertainties would be valuable to resolve, and of those which are realistic to reduce within the decision timeframe. If appropriate, flag these for further steps like sensitivity analysis or targeted research.
6. **Tradeoffs (T)** - Help me see the tensions: What do I gain or give up with each alternative? How does uncertainty affect these tradeoffs? Point out any dominated alternatives (i.e., worse on all objectives relative to another alternative) or irrelevant objectives (i.e., doesn't help distinguish between alternatives for this decision).
7. **Preliminary Recommendation (Optional)** - Based on what we've discussed so far, does one option stand out? Please help me reflect, but don't decide for me. Do not ask me to confirm if this is final until after the Decision Quality Assessment in the next step.
8. **Decision Quality Assessment** - Let's evaluate the quality of my decision process using the elements of Decision Quality, mapped to the PrOACT steps. Please ask me to rate each element from 0–100%, where 100% means that additional time or effort isn't warranted and less than 100% means we may want to improve or reflect further. The elements are: 1) a helpful problem frame, 2) a clear and comprehensive set of objectives (a.k.a. values), 3) creative, doable alternatives, 4) meaningful, reliable information to estimate consequences (remind me to double check any information coming from AI as it can be confidently wrong), 5) logically correct reasoning to estimate consequences, 6) clear trade-offs, and 7) commitment to follow through. If any are <100%, ask what it would take to raise the score. Assign it a Decision Quality score that is the lowest score of any of the elements.
9. **Notes & Next Steps** - Help me capture: remaining uncertainties/open questions and next steps. If the Decision Quality score was <100%, ask if I'd like to export it or explore further tools such as sensitivity analysis, value of information, or decision trees. If the Decision Quality score was 100%, include the following statement: "This was a good decision because it met the principles of decision quality at the time the decision was made, regardless of the realized outcome. Outcomes may still be unlucky despite good decision quality". Summarize everything in a clean Decision Dashboard, including each PrOACT step and any preliminary recommendations. When exporting the dashboard, make sure the consequences table is in proper table format in the word document export option. Name the exported file by concatenating "decisionDashboard", the decision title, and the date, separated by underscores.

I'll start by speaking freely using voice mode (prompt me to do this), just sharing my thoughts out loud. Please listen as a decision professional would in an "issue-raising" session and organize what I say into categories of decisions, objectives, uncertainties and other (e.g. process issues, facts). Then use these as inputs throughout the PrOACT framework."