

# Thin slicing essay



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“Thinking without thinking” (Gladwell, 2005) is the subconscious mind at work rapidly disseminating information and honing in on patterns that really matter to formulate a quick decision or opinion. This decision making approach is recognized as, thin-slicing where small sound bites or snippets of information is quickly assimilated and then based on, experience and expertise the sub consciousness or unconsciousness is lead to formulate opinions or draw conclusions.

This is contrary to the often recommended and traditional decision making approach which uses more of a linear process involving analyzing and conceptualizing information prior to making a decision. Thin slicing is a nonlinear approach that flexes our intuition often focusing on nonverbal cues. This paper will discuss how both non-linear and linear thinking can evolve into “thin slicing” and aid in the decision-making process.

Linear thinking, a traditional method of thinking, is a mainstay of analytical, rational decision-making (Gingrich, 1998, p. 72). Linear thinking looks for a relationship between an incident and a set of variables (Gingrich, 1998, p. 70), which helps in identifying a problem, possible solutions and evaluating the solutions. With linear thinking, it's assumed a degree of change in an input results in the same degree of change in the output (Gingrich, 1998, pp. 72-73), which also leads to the theory of “...the whole is equal to the sum of its parts” (Gingrich, 1998, p. 74).

Another aspect of linear thinking is the assumption a rule applies to all situations that have certain similarities or a certain type (Gingrich, 1998, p. 75). In that aspect, linear thinking is often more about solving puzzles than mysteries (Gladwell, 2007). Using linear thinking for rational decision-making leads a person to build a mental database, which is used to influence future decisions under similar conditions and allows the use of thin-slicing (Gladwell, 2005, p. 22) to make quick decisions. A person's mental database of past decisions and experiences allows for pattern recognition and matching (Gingrich, 1995, p. 25).

A person can use thin-slicing to make a decision by subconsciously going through a database of past experiences after identifying limited data or a specific set of variables as defined in linear thinking, toss out extraneous, unnecessary data, identify the important items, and make a decision (Gladwell, 2005, pp. 33-34). While using linear thinking allows a person to build a database to use thin-slicing, it may eventually limit the need for extensive analytical decision-making under similar situations because of the mental database.

Unlike linear thinking, non-linear thinking is never tied to a pattern based upon prior experiences; however, non-linear thinking strengthens are experience and expertise the sub consciousness or unconsciousness uses during the thin-slicing process. Non-linear thinking often relates to uncertainty and the ability to have multiple outcomes. The non-linear framework accepts uncertainty and complexity as natural elements. The characteristics of a non-linear system can be describes as interdependent and non-proportional (Gingrich, 1998, pp. 72-73).

With today's fast moving pace there are many challenges we face that demands more non-linear system thinking instead of cause and effect linear thinking. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge stated, " system thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes," rather than reacting to a specific part or event. System thinking involves shifting from the linear to non-linear thinking and/or the rational to the intuitive or thin-slicing type decisions. System thinking is based on interdependencies and feedback loops.

Each relevant component and sub-component is best understood in relationships with each other, rather than as one unit in isolation. System thinking allows one to see how to change systems or processes more effectively. How the system behaves depends on its parts and structure. This is because its parts and structures are constantly changing, feedback loops are present, non-linear relationships exist, which depend on the eye of the beholder. Non-proportional relationships exist in “white spaces” and therefore one’s framework and the choice to look at some things and not others changes the nature of the system (Gingrich, 1998, p. 73).

The system is self-organizing and adaptive, which allows possible desired outcomes to be more probable. Lastly, these non-proportional relationships provide the foundation for key pieces of unrelated concepts used to understand the changes in the nature of the system based on various parts and structure. Linear and non-linear thinking are both capable of evolving into thin-slicing. Gladwell described thin-slicing as an automated and accelerated version of thinking vice using equations and videotapes.

The premise is that thin-slicing is based on a method that better decisions can be made with less, rather than more, information. However, thin-slicing is accomplished only after developing a knack to visualize an identifiable pattern like the DNA of a marriage (Gladwell, 2005, pp. 26). Therefore linear thinking allows a person to build a database of knowledge or experience evolving into the ability to thin-slice. The person using the equations and video tapes was using linear thinking, which Gladwell developed into thin-slicing (Gladwell, 2005, pp. 23).

The only difference in non-linear thinking is that a person is not looking for a pattern but utilizing key pieces of unrelated concepts to make a decision.

The classic example is forming an opinion of a person only two minutes after meeting them using unrelated pieces of info such as how they dress, the pitch of their voice or their grooming standards. A nonlinear thinker evolves to a point that this key information is processed automatically to the level of thin-slicing. Thin-slicing evolves from linear and/or nonlinear thinking situations that help us accomplish decision making unconsciously.