

The Source of Decisions vs. the Sequence of Decisions

There's a lot of debate about who should make decisions.

Should government decide what substances you're allowed to ingest, or you?

Should owners decide how many vacation days to offer employees, or should employees or other agencies force it on owners?

Should product designers decide what goes into a product, or should they ask customers what they want?

These debates mostly miss the point. In their quest to answer what *should* occur, they fail to understand what actually *does* occur, whether they like it or not.

In reality, only individuals can ever decide. Only individuals act. Individuals decide to listen to other individuals or ignore them. You can't change this. To say, "Let the experts/government/market decide" is just a less clear way of saying, "Let individuals decide". The thing that changes are the consequences and incentives for those individuals. What is really being debated is what happens *after* an individual decides.

The real thing on the table isn't who decides, but how decisions are responded to through time. It's not the source, but the sequence of decisions.

After an individual chooses to offer an item for sale, what should happen next? Should another individual with a warrant and a gun come and tell them to stop? Should other individuals be free to buy or badmouth or ignore it?

The sequence of decisions is crucial. Individuals will make good decisions and bad decisions. But most of the time you can't tell whether it's good or bad based on the decision in isolation. You've got to see the sequence that follows.

In business, it's not possible to defer decisions entirely to consumers. You can't wait for people to decide what you should do because the information is never complete. You have to decide what to make, how to price it, where to sell it, etc. This doesn't mean you dictate to consumers. Quite the opposite. After you decide, you see how they decide. You see the response or non-response, take in feedback, then decide the next step. It is a sequence of decisions through time that determine what's good or bad, working or not. It's not about who chooses once for all, but how choices unfold through time.

You can't escape individual choice and responsibility. Neither can you expect a single choice to be decisive. The best results come from an ongoing sequence of individuals

choices that inform, incentivize, and build off each other. It's not about who leads in the dance. It's about how the initiation-response process unfolds.