



Cartesian Logic

A self-help tool

Introduction

Any decision to do X entails a decision not to do Y. For instance, if you decide to go for a long run on Saturday morning you will have miss the leisurely breakfast which you might otherwise have enjoyed. This is the so called 'opportunity cost'. Similarly, deciding not to do something has consequences in the same way that a decision to actively do something has consequences. So, when you're weighing up the impact of a decision you should consider both the cost of action and inaction.

Cartesian logic, also known as Cartesian Doubt, is a line of questioning that leads one to consider different perspectives to determine the most logical course of action to take for a given problem. The Cartesian thinker asks four simple questions:

- **What would happen if I did?**
- **What wouldn't happen if I did?**
- **What would happen if I didn't?**
- **What wouldn't happen if I didn't?**



This tool is designed to...

- Help you consider the hidden consequences of an action.
- Help you consider the hidden consequences of inaction.
- Help you examine the implications of a decision thoroughly.

Consider using this tool if you...

- Want or need to examine a choice more thoroughly.
- Suspect that there may be hidden consequences of choice which you need to weigh.
- Want to examine what will happen if you don't act.



How to use this tool

Complete the boxes in this table, applying them to the problem, choice, or decision you are working on.

Once you have completed it, reflect on your findings.

- What consequences did you not expect to see?
- Which consequences look most impactful?
- Where does the balance of consequences leave your decision?

What would happen if you make this change?

What would happen if you don't make this change?

What wouldn't happen if you do make this change?

What wouldn't happen if you don't make this change?

Remember!

Because everyone is different, no one solution on its own is a magic bullet. Please also look at our other self-help tools to find the ones that you feel most comfortable using.



If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our self-help tools with your students, we'd love to hear from you and share good practice. We'd ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy and acknowledge the other sources we've used. Thank you.