Analysis Of Blink: The Power Of Thinking Without Thinking By Malcolm Gladwell

The Power of Thinking Without Thinking (“Blink”), the author Malcolm Gladwell, looks at thought processes when making decisions and how one’s instinct, snap judgments and first impression can be more effective than analytical thought. Gladwell’s book is based on the process of rapid cognition, where he investigates what happens when one’s brain firsts perceives a situation. Rapid cognition consists of making assessments of other people and situations without complete information and how the brain transfers previous conduct and memories from preceding experiences into that present time. In certain circumstances, this can put the individual at an advantage, but at other times, not so much.

Blink tries to convey three concepts: fast and frugal and thin-slicing, snap-second judgments, and priming. Gladwell initiates his book with 'fast and frugal', which refers to the “ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behavior based on very narrow slices of experience.” Fast and frugal thinking is the tendency of human nature. It often works better than meticulously crafted reasoning. The human experience can be distorted but can be refined and improved upon. Gladwell then considers the idea of “thin-slicing” – the ability of humans collecting bites of data and arriving at conclusions from it by using a mixture of exposure and insight.

Thin-slicing is used routinely. Gladwell mentions an earlier lesson from fast and frugal thinking, where a minute amount of sensory input one uses to make these first impression determinations and how common these swift determinations are correct, irrespective of how hasty they are made. Daily, people engage in thin-slicing when one receives first sight of an object, person, or place. Thin-slicing allows us to make prompt decisions that are founded on little observations with brief thought that can be as valid as those made mindfully. This occurs as a result of the unconscious part of the brain that permits the assimilation of information and reaction pathways that would never equivocate to one’s conscious decision-making process. Thin-slicing can carry the negative consequences of wrong choices. Furthermore, Gladwell illustrates how experts can acquire more depth through thin-slicing compared to novices, but the unskilled can hone their thin-slicing through practice and concentrate their efforts to start to trust their instincts.

Malcolm Gladwell also focuses on snap judgments and how fast decidedly quick actions can often be more accurate than taking an extended time to go through the process of analyzing a situation and laboring over it, despite lack of previous experience with the issue. In snap judgments, the subconscious recalls paradigms and links before the brain can make those connections. It is uncanny how often one doesn't realize why they know something inherently. He emphasizes the capacity to arrive at speedy determinations that may have originated for survival. In life-challenging situations, people needed to rely on snap judgments derived from accessible patterns, connections, and concepts. In contrast, negative outcomes can result from snap decisions that are influenced by prejudice, bias and stereotypes. New scenarios can evoke incongruences between the norms and beliefs one subscribes to and those that may be suspect to stereotypes, bias and prejudice. Deliberate analysis may be optimal in straightforward examination because excess information can cloud or cause “verbal

overshadowing” or rationalization. This can hinder one's abilities to make proper decisions. For example, a portfolio manager or a trader must continuously make snap judgements on trades as the results could be thousands (or more) in profit or loss. Taking too long for a trade can be an unfortunate consequence in profit or loss. Facing complicated deliberations, one’s unconscious thought process may be the preferred method to problem resolution. An example of this would be in investment banking where complex situations are presented and careful thought and craft has to be considered when putting objects or information into slides or models. Gladwell illuminates the concept between thin-slicing and snap judgments being prior exposure and expertise are preconditions for effective thin-slicing.

Another aspect he introduces is the concept of priming. Priming occurs when one shifts their behavior and reaction due outward constructs such as cultures, words, and images. It can be likened to thin-slicing, as daily priming is subconscious in nature. An example would be when one comes into contact with others of different nationalities or races, stereotypes may come into play with perception, integration and reaction. It is important to “take control” of your priming and keep it in check to conform to societal norms. Retooling priming can help to focus drive and determination as illustrated in this example: if one visualizes about being a professional soccer player to make them a better soccer player, and their brain favors that type of personality, then they start behaving more like their intended outcome.

In summary, in his book, Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking, Malcolm Gladwell attempts to address when one should trust their instincts, and when one should calculate their decisions with deliberations. Although snap judgements are often more accurate than ones that are analyzed, these actions are susceptible to subconscious bias, stereotypes and prejudice. Individuals grapple with needing sufficient information to be confident in their analytical process, but often the extra information makes actions more prone to mistake. As vital as it is to trust one's intuition, it is also imperative that it be questioned.