

Full Transcript:

Decision Scoping: 'Choosing the Holiday of a Lifetime'

This case study demonstrates the AI-augmented **Decision Scoping** phase for the 'Choosing the Holiday of a Lifetime' decision, as detailed in Chapter 5 of Mike Baxter's *AI-Augmented Decisions* book. The process was conducted in a dedicated conversation thread with Google Gemini. The full transcript of that conversation is given below.

AI platform: <https://gemini.google.com> (version 2.5 Pro)

Date of chat: 23 June 2025

Document uploaded:

- Decision Scoping Super-prompt

Prompt: I have just uploaded the Decision Scoping Super-Prompt. I would like you to work through the process specified in this document. The specific decision I'd like you to apply this process to is simply 'Choosing the holiday of a lifetime'.

Response: I have received the "Decision Scoping Super-Prompt" document. I also understand that the specific decision we will be applying this process to is "Choosing the holiday of a lifetime."

I'm comfortable with the description of the specific decision.

By way of introduction, this is the first of five phases of AI-human collaboration designed to augment your decision-making process for "Choosing the holiday of a lifetime". This initial phase, Decision Scoping, will result in a "Decision Brief". We will undertake this in two steps: first, divergent thinking to broaden the scope of your decision, and then convergent thinking to narrow it down to a tightly specified but broadly explored "Decision Brief".

We'll now begin with Activity #1 - Defining the decision.

My initial attempt to define the decision, "Choosing the holiday of a lifetime," is:

To select a single, extraordinary vacation experience that will create lasting memories and be considered the pinnacle of personal travel experiences.

At this stage, we are aiming to expand our thinking and achieve as broad a definition as possible. How would you like to revise this definition? In particular, how could it be expanded?

Prompt: I'm happy with that definition, for now. Let's continue.

Response: Okay, great! Since you're happy with the current definition, we'll now move on to the next step of divergent thinking about the Decision Brief: Activity #2 - Identifying work to be done.

This activity explores what types of work will be needed to prepare for, and make, an acceptable decision for your "holiday of a lifetime." Remember, we're just scoping the work here, not actually doing it.

Here are some initial suggestions for the work that might need to be done:

- **Analysis of the challenge necessitating the decision:** What specific aspects make choosing *the* holiday of a lifetime a challenge? Is it the sheer number of options, the desire for uniqueness, budget constraints, coordinating with others, or ensuring it meets high expectations?
- **Analysis of the context surrounding the decision:** Who will be involved in researching and deciding this holiday (just you, family, friends)? What's the timeline for making this decision and for the holiday itself? Are there any specific life events or circumstances influencing this timing?
- **Analysis of the benefits expected to accrue from making the decision:** What are the ultimate aspirations for this holiday? Is it relaxation, adventure, cultural immersion, personal growth, or strengthening relationships? What would be the impact if no decision were made, or if a less-than-ideal choice was made?
- **An outline timetable for the decision-making process and an indication of the type of people who will need to be involved:** Should we allocate time for research, discussion, and booking? Who else, beyond primary travellers, might need to be consulted (e.g. travel agents, experienced friends, experts on specific destinations)?

We're trying to broaden our understanding here, so we're looking for a wide range of potential work. What are your initial thoughts on these suggestions? Do you have any other types of work in mind that would be needed to prepare for and make this decision?

Prompt: Yes, your suggestion on work are good but we need to add the main work, which is going to be exploring and evaluating the options.

Response: That's an excellent point and absolutely crucial for this decision! Thank you for adding it.

I've updated the "Work to be done" section to include "exploring and evaluating options":

- **Analysis of the challenge necessitating the decision:** What specific aspects make choosing *the* holiday of a lifetime a challenge? Is it the sheer number of options, the desire for uniqueness, budget constraints, coordinating with others, or ensuring it meets high expectations?
- **Analysis of the context surrounding the decision:** Who will be involved in researching and deciding this holiday (just you, family, friends)? What's the timeline for making this decision and for the holiday itself? Are there any specific life events or circumstances influencing this timing?
- **Analysis of the benefits expected to accrue from making the decision:** What are the ultimate aspirations for this holiday? Is it relaxation, adventure, cultural immersion, personal growth, or strengthening relationships? What would be the impact if no decision were made, or if a less-than-ideal choice was made?
- **Exploring and evaluating options:** This is the core work of identifying potential holiday destinations and experiences, gathering detailed information about each, and systematically comparing them against various criteria.
- **An outline timetable for the decision-making process and an indication of the type of people who will need to be involved:** Should we allocate time for research, discussion, and booking? Who else, beyond primary travelers, might need to be consulted (e.g. travel agents, experienced friends, experts on specific destinations)?

Does this comprehensive list of "work to be done" feel broad enough for now, or would you like to explore other types of work that might be needed?

Prompt: That work to be done is fine for now.

Response: Great! Since you're happy with the "work to be done," we'll now move on to Activity #3 - Specifying acceptance criteria.

Acceptance criteria are the standards we'll use to assess whether the decision you eventually make—"Choosing the holiday of a lifetime"—is a good one. Deciding these upfront is crucial for ensuring the quality of the decision-making process and helps guard against cognitive biases.

Here are a few initial suggestions for acceptance criteria for your "holiday of a lifetime":

- The chosen holiday must align with the primary traveler's vision of an "extraordinary" experience.
- The total cost of the holiday, including travel, accommodation, and planned activities, must remain within a predefined budget.
- The holiday must be feasible to book and execute within a specified timeframe.
- All primary participants in the holiday must express genuine enthusiasm and satisfaction with the chosen option.

- The holiday must offer a unique combination of experiences not easily replicated by a typical vacation.

These are just a starting point. Remember, we're looking for a wide range of potential criteria at this stage. What are your thoughts on these suggestions, and do you have any other acceptance criteria in mind that would help evaluate whether the chosen holiday is truly a "holiday of a lifetime"?

Prompt: Here are a few of my first thoughts on acceptance criteria: 1: The final decision must be one that promises a stimulating and thought-provoking experience in the moment and will be memorable in retrospect. 2: The itinerary must be predominantly focused on nature and wildlife and must contain tangible elements of both adventure and discovery. 3: The chosen holiday concept must be genuinely exciting and appealing to both me and my wife, Cathy. 4: The entire trip, including all travel, must be comfortably achievable within a two-to-three-week timeframe. How does that sound?

Response: Those are excellent and very specific acceptance criteria! They provide valuable guidance for what constitutes a successful "holiday of a lifetime" for you.

Let's integrate your suggestions with my initial thoughts. Here's our expanded list of potential acceptance criteria:

- The final decision must be one that promises a stimulating and thought-provoking experience in the moment and will be memorable in retrospect.
- The itinerary must be predominantly focused on nature and wildlife and must contain tangible elements of both adventure and discovery.
- The chosen holiday concept must be genuinely exciting and appealing to both me and Cathy.
- The entire trip, including all travel, must be comfortably achievable within a two-to-three-week timeframe.
- The chosen holiday must align with the primary traveller's vision of an "extraordinary" experience. (This is similar to your point 1, but still good to keep broad for now).
- The total cost of the holiday, including travel, accommodation, and planned activities, must remain within a predefined budget.
- The holiday must be feasible to book and execute within a specified timeframe. (This aligns well with your point 4).
- All primary participants in the holiday must express genuine enthusiasm and satisfaction with the chosen option. (Similar to your point 3, focusing on broader satisfaction).
- The holiday must offer a unique combination of experiences not easily replicated by a typical vacation.

We're still in the divergent thinking phase, so the goal is to cast a wide net. Do these acceptance criteria capture everything you consider important, or would you like to add more ideas or refine any of the existing ones at this stage?

Prompt: Yes, that's good for thinking broadly about acceptance criteria. Let's move on.

Response: Excellent! Since we've broadly explored the acceptance criteria, we're now moving into Activity #4 - Producing a 'draft' Decision Brief.

This activity involves compiling all the elements we've discussed so far into a first draft. Remember, this is a draft, and its purpose is to cast the net wide, ensuring the decision definition is broad, the work to be done is extensive, and the acceptance criteria are wide-ranging. We'll refine it in the next activity through convergent thinking.

Here is your initial draft of the Decision Brief for "Choosing the holiday of a lifetime":

Draft Decision Brief: Choosing the Holiday of a Lifetime

I. Definition of the Decision:

To select a single, extraordinary vacation experience that will create lasting memories and be considered the pinnacle of personal travel experiences, offering a stimulating and thought-provoking journey.

II. Work to be Done to Prepare for and Make the Decision:

- **Analysis of the challenge necessitating the decision:**
 - Quantify the sheer number of holiday options.
 - Identify specific desires for uniqueness and extraordinary experiences.
 - Characterize budget considerations and constraints.
 - Outline challenges in coordinating with others (e.g. Cathy).
 - Detail methods for managing high expectations.
- **Analysis of the context surrounding the decision:**
 - Identify all individuals involved in researching and deciding this holiday (you, Cathy, potentially others).
 - Establish the target timeline for making this decision and for the holiday itself.
 - Determine any specific life events or circumstances influencing the holiday timing.

- **Analysis of the benefits expected to accrue from making the decision:**
 - Articulate the ultimate aspirations for the holiday (e.g. relaxation, adventure, cultural immersion, personal growth, strengthening relationships).
 - Assess the potential impact if no decision were made or if a less-than-ideal choice was made.
- **Exploring and evaluating options:**
 - Identify a diverse range of potential holiday destinations and experiences.
 - Gather detailed information (itineraries, costs, logistics, activities, safety) for each option.
 - Systematically compare options against the acceptance criteria.
- **An outline timetable for the decision-making process and an indication of the type of people who will need to be involved:**
 - Allocate dedicated time for research, discussion, and booking phases.
 - Identify all stakeholders to be consulted (e.g. travel agents, experienced friends, experts on specific destinations/activities).

III. Acceptance Criteria to Evaluate Success:

- The final decision must be one that promises a stimulating and thought-provoking experience in the moment and will be memorable in retrospect.
- The itinerary must be predominantly focused on nature and wildlife and must contain tangible elements of both adventure and discovery.
- The chosen holiday concept must be genuinely exciting and appealing to both me and Cathy.
- The entire trip, including all travel, must be comfortably achievable within a two-to-three-week timeframe.
- The chosen holiday must align with the primary traveler's vision of an "extraordinary" experience.
- The total cost of the holiday, including travel, accommodation, and planned activities, must remain within a predefined budget.
- The holiday must be feasible to book and execute within a specified timeframe.
- All primary participants in the holiday must express genuine enthusiasm and satisfaction with the chosen option.
- The holiday must offer a unique combination of experiences not easily replicated by a typical vacation.

How does this initial draft of the Decision Brief look to you? Would you like to change it in any way, edit any of the specific wording, or are you happy with the current draft before we move on to finalization?

Prompt: This seems quite a lot in there - are we going to narrow this down in the next step?

Response: Yes, you're absolutely right! That's precisely the purpose of the next step.

This current "draft" Decision Brief (Activity #4) was intentionally broad, encompassing a wide range of possibilities for the definition, work, and acceptance criteria.

In Activity #5 - Producing a final Decision Brief, we will engage in **convergent thinking** to "tighten" or "narrow" this draft. This will involve refining the decision definition, making the work to be done more specific, and establishing a more focused set of acceptance criteria. The aim is to combine and synthesize the best ideas from this broad exploration into a clear, concise, and effective final brief.

So, yes, we will definitely be narrowing it down in the next step.

Prompt: Okay, let's continue.

Response: Okay, let's continue! We are now moving into Activity #5 - Producing a final Decision Brief by applying convergent thinking to refine the draft.

The goal here is to "tighten" or "narrow" the current draft to ensure clarity and effectiveness. This isn't just about deleting items; it's about creatively combining, hybridizing, or synthesizing multiple ideas into a more focused and powerful brief.

Here are some initial suggestions on how we could focus the draft Decision Brief:

For the Definition of the Decision:

- We could merge the ideas of "extraordinary," "lasting memories," "pinnacle of personal travel," and "stimulating and thought-provoking journey" into a more concise, impactful statement. For example, "To identify and commit to a singularly exceptional, nature and wildlife focused adventure that promises profound real-time engagement and enduring personal memories for both you and Cathy."

For the Work to be Done:

- We can streamline the bullet points. For instance, instead of listing "quantify number of options," we could combine it with "identify diverse range of potential holiday destinations" under a broader "Option Identification & Initial Vetting" category.
- We could group related analysis points. For example, "Analysis of the challenge" and "Analysis of the context" could be condensed into a single "Situational Analysis" section, focusing on key constraints, desires, and involved parties.

- The "Exploring and evaluating options" section is already quite good, but we might specify *how* we'll systematically compare them (e.g. using a scoring matrix based on acceptance criteria).

For the Acceptance Criteria:

- We have some overlap (e.g. your point 1 and my "extraordinary experience" point, your point 3 and my "enthusiasm and satisfaction" point). We can combine these to avoid redundancy.
- We can prioritize the criteria you provided, as they are highly specific to your vision for this holiday. We might elevate these as primary criteria and potentially integrate or remove the more general ones I suggested if they are fully covered. For example, we could combine "comfortably achievable within a two-to-three-week timeframe" with "holiday must be feasible to book and execute within a specified timeframe."

What are your thoughts on these approaches to start refining the brief? Which areas would you like to focus on first, or do you have other ideas for how we can make this more concise and powerful? Remember, the aim is for you to be happy that:

1. The final decision definition is an effective one. Does it include the decisions you think ought to be considered and exclude those that you don't think should be considered?
2. The final description of the work-to-be-done is effective. Is anything missing? Could you envisage any of this work not being useful in informing your eventual decision?
3. The final acceptance criteria are effective. Will meeting all of these criteria mean that the decision you eventually make will be a good decision? Can you imagine meeting all of these criteria and still having made a bad decision?

Prompt: For the definition, I'd prefer: 'To decide upon a two- to three-week adventurous journey of discovery into some of the world's most spectacular nature and wildlife.' For work to be done, I like situational analysis and I also like option identification and evaluation. We maybe need to add something like 'Practical implications of the more preferred options'. As far as acceptance criteria are concerned, I feel the following appear systematic: Experience Criteria: The final decision must be one that promises a stimulating and thought-provoking experience in the moment and will be memorable in retrospect. Content Criteria: The itinerary must be predominantly focused on nature and wildlife and must contain tangible elements of both adventure and discovery. Stakeholder Criteria: The chosen holiday concept must be genuinely exciting and appealing to both travellers, Mike and Cathy. Feasibility Criteria: The entire trip, including all travel, must be comfortably achievable within a two-to-three-week timeframe.

Response: Excellent! Thank you for that clear and concise direction. This is exactly what we need for convergent thinking.

Based on your input, here is the refined, final Decision Brief for "Choosing the holiday of a lifetime":

Final Decision Brief: Choosing the Holiday of a Lifetime

I. Definition of the Decision:

To decide upon a two- to three-week adventurous journey of discovery into some of the world's most spectacular nature and wildlife.

II. Work to be Done to Prepare for and Make the Decision:

- **Situational Analysis:** Understand the key challenges, opportunities, and context surrounding this decision, including budget, timelines, and who will be involved.
- **Option Identification and Evaluation:** Identify and thoroughly research a diverse range of potential holiday destinations and experiences, systematically comparing them against established criteria.
- **Practical Implications of Preferred Options:** Analyze the logistical, financial, and personal implications of the most promising holiday options to ensure feasibility and alignment with expectations.

III. Acceptance Criteria to Evaluate Success:

- **Experience Criteria:** The final decision must be one that promises a stimulating and thought-provoking experience in the moment and will be memorable in retrospect.
- **Content Criteria:** The itinerary must be predominantly focused on nature and wildlife and must contain tangible elements of both adventure and discovery.
- **Stakeholder Criteria:** The chosen holiday concept must be genuinely exciting and appealing to both travellers, Mike and Cathy.
- **Feasibility Criteria:** The entire trip, including all travel, must be comfortably achievable within a two-to-three-week timeframe.

Now, let's review this "final" Decision Brief. Are you happy that:

1. The final decision definition is an effective one? Does it include the decisions you think ought to be considered and exclude those that you don't think should be considered?

2. The final description of the work-to-be-done is effective? Is anything missing? Could you envisage any of this work not being useful in informing your eventual decision?
3. The final acceptance criteria are effective? Will meeting all of these criteria mean that the decision you eventually make will be a good decision? Can you imagine meeting all of these criteria and still having made a bad decision?

Please let me know if you would like any further refinements, or if you are happy with this final version.

Prompt: That final decision brief looks great.

Response: That's fantastic! I'm glad you're happy with the final Decision Brief.

Above, I have presented the final Decision Brief for "Choosing the Holiday of a Lifetime" in a format suitable for downloading or copying and saving. Please keep a copy of this brief, as you will need it for the next phase of the decision-making process.

Remember that while this brief is considered 'final' for this phase, the overall decision process allows for controlled revisions later if subsequent phases reveal fundamental shifts in understanding, ensuring changes are tracked and justified.

Decision Scoping is now complete, and you are ready to move on to Phase 2 - Decision Preparation. To do so, you will need to upload the "Decision Preparation Super-prompt" and this completed "Decision Brief" to your AI platform of choice, as explained in Chapter 6 of Mike Baxter's AI-Augmented Decisions book.