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Context to the nugget conversation

Ayelet speaks about the link between our approach to optimizing or satisficing in a certain domain and our identity. She goes on to say that our identity often helps us prioritize across different choices and the extent to which we push ourselves in a certain domain.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving forward Ayelet, you talk about goals and you say that we often compromise or prioritize based on what our actions tell us or the world tells us something about our identity. What is the phenomenon here, how is our identity linked to whether we prioritize or compromise?

Ayelet Fishbach (AF): So you move to multiple goals and how we navigate multiple goals and we always have multiple goals. And we should always decide whether we want to prioritize or compromise. And I encourage people to just write down what are the main goals that they are pursuing in your life at the moment, what you are doing to be healthy, to succeed professionally, to take care of your finance, of your family, what are the main goals that you are pursuing, and how much you want to focus on all of them versus set priorities. To give you an example, if we take career and family, which are two goals that many people have, you can seek the compromise to think about how you are going to pursue a career and a family, or you can think about prioritizing. Maybe you will postpone having a family because you really want to focus on your career, maybe you will put your career on hold because you want to prioritize your family at this time. Once you know what you are trying to achieve, then you can have a better way of organizing your goals. Now you mentioned identity, often when we think about our actions as telling us something about your identity, we are more likely to prioritize, that is we are more likely to say, well, my identity leads me to prioritize one goal over the other. I might, for example, prioritize environmental actions over just doing what feels good at the moment, or I prioritize financial responsibility over seeking the right balance between saving and spending. In practice what that means, when people prioritize, then they pursue the same goal across several actions. I might choose the cheaper option in the morning when I make approaches and then also in the afternoon. When people compromise, they jump between two goals. Maybe I will choose the healthy breakfast but the unhealthy lunch in which case I am compromising between health and taste.

DJ: Hmm. That is fascinating, you are saying it is a function of how rooted we are to one particular identity or multiple identities and that could have an impact on how we think about goals, whether we compromise or prioritize.

AF: So one variable that informs us whether to prioritize or compromise is how much we see that the action is part of our identity. And you can think of any trade-off. Let us take the trade-off between being financially responsible and buying organic food, organic food tends to be more expensive. Now if you just think about these two goals, many people decide to sometimes buy organic or for some products to buy organic, for some products or some other times to go for the non-organic, so they find the balance between organic and not too expensive. But if we emphasize that this choice has to do with their identity, if we ask people, are you the person that cares about your health, that cares about eating organic food, do you feel close to nature, then they start prioritizing. So they might decide to, let us say, go all organic, and compromise their saving also that they can feel good about really focusing on organic food.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love the connection that Ayelet makes between identity and whether we satisfice or optimize. I hadn't thought about the link between these two quite explicitly. If I extend that to the discussions we have around work-life harmony, the biggest barrier often is the fact that we all have our identities very tightly linked to what we do on the work front. The more we see ourselves as complete human beings, as a child, as a parent, as a sibling, as a friend, as a citizen and so on, greater are the odds of us living a full life and having harmony across various domains of life.

End of nugget transcription

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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