

# What Does It Mean?

Our fourth question seeks to further define the objectives. While data can be used to measure progress toward an objective, data cannot define the meaning of that objective.

What does it mean to be profitable? What does *sustainable* mean? In a business sense, profit is nothing more than the return on a business undertaking after all operating expenses are met. And in the business sense, to sustain is nothing more than to keep in existence, to maintain, to supply with necessities, to provide for.

You can measure profit. But can profit mean something more? Profit can also be an advantageous gain, a benefit. *Sustenance* is the act of sustaining, the condition of being sustained. Is sustenance profitable? Which would you rather have, momentary profitability or sustained profitability?

Business is an intellectual sport. It is the ultimate game played by human beings. And as such, business is much more than hard facts that can be measured with numbers. Business as a human endeavor also engages in valuation—the sense that something is good or bad.

Contrary to what most managers believe, decisions are emotional. Any manager who claims only to make decisions based on the numbers is still making those decisions using the fundamental human emotion of certainty. Without the numbers they are unable to make a decision, and lacking certainty they will search for more numbers, more analysis—until they reach an adequate level of certainty for the decision. But what drives that need for certainty? Another human emotional need, that of significance to others. Without certainty, the manager runs the risk of making a mistake that could alter the emotional significance he or she has established with other people.



A decision is a significant emotional moment. Note that I am not saying “dramatic emotional moment,” because significant emotional moments can be calm. In fact, the best decisions are made when that significant moment is

calmest. The best decisions come from certainty, variety, and connection with an eye on growth and contribution.

The process of analyzing the emotions that drive objectives creates trust, openness, and transparency. This critical thinking answers the question “What Does It Mean?” and leads to the next question, “Why Do It?”

