

From the Tatami to the Classroom

The B.R.I.C.K. Method as a pedagogical framework
for high-stakes economic decision-making.

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CHAIR · MARISA CAMERON, POMONA COLLEGE



— THE GAP

Problems with answers. Problems without.

Our exams are full of the first. Our graduates face the second.

Well-structured: parameters given, one method applies, the answer converges. Efficient to teach, easy to grade.

Ill-structured: parameters missing, several methods could apply, and you commit to a recommendation you cannot verify in advance.

The vocabulary transfers from our classroom. The structure does not.

Jonassen 1997



— THIRTY YEARS OF SURVEY EVIDENCE

70.4%

of a typical class period spent
lecturing, on average, in
introductory economics.

ASARTA, AHLSTROM & HARTER 2026 · N=1,336

Becker and Watts began the national quinquennial survey in 1995 and found lecture dominant. Five years later they titled the follow-up *still chalk-and-talk*. The seventh wave, published this January, finds the pattern intact.

93%

median use of
traditional lecture,
usually or always

0%

median use of
experiments, games,
simulations



— ORIGIN

Where the framework came from.

A kumite match is a sequence of decisions made in seconds, against an opponent whose strategy is revealed only in play.

You study the opponent beforehand. You accept the plan will not survive contact. You find your advantage against this specific opponent. You hold composure when the score is close.

Coaching Econ Games teams, I watched students face the **same sequence** in a different uniform.

They were not short on economics. They had no procedure for organizing a decision when the data were messy and the clock was visible. Patel, Al-Bahrani & Hoyt 2024



— THE FRAMEWORK

Four steps build the decision. The fifth protects it.

B

Benchmark

Map the landscape before committing.

R

Recognize Uncertainty

Sort the known, the estimable, and the unknowable.

I

Identify

Locate comparative advantage and gaps.

C

Construct

Build a strategy from incomplete evidence.

K

Keep Calm and Execute

Hold the first four together under pressure.



— B · BENCHMARK

Orient **before** you act.

Map the context. Establish the baseline. Scan what comparable actors do well and where they stop.

On the mat, that is studying the opponent. In policy work, it is the comparative scan of how other jurisdictions handled the same problem. The cognitive move is identical.

KNIGHT 1921 · JONASSEN 1997



— R · RECOGNIZE UNCERTAINTY

Knight drew the line that still organizes the field.

KNOWN

Facts in hand. Use them.

UNKNOWN, ESTIMABLE

Risk. Measurable probabilities. Spend effort here.

UNKNOWABLE

Uncertainty. Not susceptible to measurement. Judgment substitutes for data.

Problem sets present risk almost exclusively, because risk is gradeable.

Students learn to treat every unknown as an expected-value problem.

Knight 1921 · Gilboa & Schmeidler 1989



— I · IDENTIFY C · CONSTRUCT

Identify

Comparative advantage applied to people. Pair a newcomer with a veteran; each specializes where their relative cost is lowest.

This is **team production**, not a cooperative game in the formal sense. There is no characteristic function, just joint output exceeding the sum of the parts. Alchian & Demsetz 1972

Construct

Build a coherent strategy from partial evidence. Scenario-plan. Run a pre-mortem: assume the plan has already failed, then explain why.

The step conventional problem sets skip. They supply the structure rather than asking students to build it. Klein 2007 · Sweller 1988



— K · KEEP CALM AND EXECUTE

Pressure harms the **strongest** students first.

On a timed math task, only individuals high in working-memory capacity were harmed by performance pressure, and only on the problems most demanding of it. Pressure consumes the resource strong performers depend on. Beilock & Carr 2005 · Arnsten 2009

STRESS INOCULATION

Graded rehearsal under rising pressure, paired with coping skills, until the sequence is automatic. Meichenbaum 1985

COMMITMENT DECLARATION

State the plan aloud to a peer. If-then intentions survive cognitive load; accountability raises reasoning quality. Gollwitzer 1999 · Lerner & Tetlock 1999



— PRECEDENT

Not the first decision cycle.

Boyd's OODA loop and the DECIDE models long predate this framework. Osinga 2007

Two distinguishing features

An explicit Knightian sort

Most cycles treat information as merely incomplete. This one separates the estimable from the unknowable.

Execution as a designed step

Named mechanisms from the stress literature, not an assumption that execution follows from tempo.



— APPLICATION

One scaffold, three depths.

PRINCIPLES

A single case discussion on a one-page worksheet. Benchmark and Recognize carry the instructional weight.

INTERMEDIATE

A multi-session project. Pair by comparative advantage, require a written pre-mortem, add a timed presentation.

CAPSTONE

The team's operating procedure for competition. Where the framework was first used.



— STATING THE LIMITATION

Used **once**.
Measured **never**.

One 90-minute workshop. No outcome data. I am not reporting that this works.

The contribution is a framework specified precisely enough to test, and a design for testing it. Most of what follows is that design.



— WHAT ONE INSTRUCTOR CAN RUN

A staged design, with its limits stated.

STAGE 1

Build the instrument

Pilot tasks and rubric in one section. Establish reliability. No efficacy claim.

STAGE 2

Compare two sections

Nonequivalent comparison group, posttest conditional on pretest, treatment rotated across terms. Shadish et al. 2002

STAGE 3

Transfer & durability

Unpracticed task type, delayed retest, second instructor elsewhere. Barnett & Ceci 2002

With 15 to 40 students per section there is no power for conventional significance testing. Report effect sizes with confidence intervals. Pre-register the rubric, score blind, let a colleague rate a subset.



MEASUREMENT

Score the reasoning, not the answer.

The framework claims to improve the structure of a decision, so a correct final figure cannot be the outcome variable.

The AAC&U Problem Solving VALUE rubric takes the same position: it measures the quality of a process, which means the scored artifact must show the student's thinking.

SCORE	WHAT THE RATIONALE SHOWS
0	Proceeds directly to an answer. No structure.
1	Names the situation and little else.
2	Real structure, with a material gap.
3	Sorts risk from uncertainty and holds under pressure.

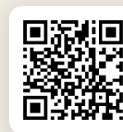
**Benchmark the problem.
Recognize what we **do not**
know.**

**Construct a plan to find
out.**

What the framework asks of a student under pressure is what I am asking of its own evidence. Until the data arrive, it is a specification precise enough to test, or to refute.

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