

Annalisa and the Little Mermaid

She had been a little frightened, she had to admit. After all, it was a hospital and you didn't come here for fun and games. There were going to be lots of tests to find out why she was feeling the way she did... and then some treatment when they got the results. She tried not to show her anxiety and though she had made it clear to everyone that it wasn't really appropriate for a 14 year old, the video with H C Duck as the patient's friend and guide had actually been a great help. She had learned a lot about what would be happening in the next day or two... who she would meet, and where she would go, and what would be happening to her. Better still, after seeing the video it struck her that the doctors *did* look a bit like owls, especially when the main one looked down over his spectacles... he was definitely old and probably wise. And the nurses *did* look a bit like hens running around looking after their chickens, even though their patients weren't going anywhere. It didn't matter that the x-ray machine didn't really look much like a giraffe to her. She would think of it as a giraffe when they took her along to it tomorrow.

Yes, turning people and machines into friendly animals always worked for her and she now felt able to relax and take in her room. There were lots of books on the table beside the bed and pictures on the walls. Clearly they were all from the fairy stories of Hans Christian Andersen, not surprising since the hospital in this 'fairy tale city' was named after him. There was the Ugly Duckling, and there was Thumbelina, and there was the Emperor striding proudly down the street naked ...no, as usual in pictures of him in his new clothes they weren't actually invisible... pity... And there was the Little Mermaid, her personal favourite and a story she had known almost by heart, but hadn't read for many few years. It had all started on the Little Mermaid's fifteenth birthday hadn't it, when she was able to come to the surface for the first time?

She realised her own fifteenth birthday was coming up in a week's time and after that she too would be able to do things she wasn't able to do now. And would have to *decide* whether to do them or not. At the moment her parents were really making all the important decisions for her... except, of course, here in hospital where presumably the doctors would make the decisions. On reflection, that was the one strange thing about her experience so far today. There had been no mention of decisions that might have to be made as a result of the tests... and if there were pros and cons about different treatments how these would be discussed and who with.

That was exactly the sort of thing her father kept talking about. He was always drawing diagrams that looked like trees with boxes and numbers and using strange words like 'optimise' and 'compensatory' and 'linear'. Whenever visitors asked what he did he would eventually admit he was a 'decision analyst' for EasyBest... at which the visitors would nod politely, but look blank and move on to gossiping about old friends and how stupid some of their decisions had been. Not their own decisions, of course. Her father had even developed a very simple and colourful piece of software to help make decisions and he had called it after her. Or had he, she suddenly wondered? Maybe he named me after his program. That wasn't such a nice thought. Either way, he had been great at reading bedtime stories.

Maybe HC Duck should get hold of the Annalisa program and show how she would be used when decisions had to be made with patients... Maybe...she would leave it to her father to pursue that. It was more comforting just now to turn the clock back a few years and think of him reading the Little Mermaid...

During a storm on her first visit to the surface on turning fifteen he sea-princess had rescued a handsome young prince from drowning and instantly fallen in love with him. But the prince didn't know it was she who had rescued him and that became important later. From that day on the Little Mermaid yearned to return permanently to the land above, become human and marry the prince. But there seemed to be no way of achieving this, so eventually, in desperation, she eventually turned to the Sea Witch for help.

She picked up the book and read on...

"I know what you want," said the sea witch; "it is very stupid of you, but you shall have your way, and it will bring you to sorrow, my pretty princess. You want to get rid of your fish's tail, and to have two supports instead of it, like human beings on earth, so that the young prince may fall in love with you, and that you may have an immortal soul... You are but just in time," said the witch; "for after sunrise to-morrow I should not be able to help you till the end of another year. I will prepare a draught for you, with which you must swim to land tomorrow before sunrise, and sit down on the shore and drink it. Your tail will then disappear, and shrink up into what mankind calls legs, and you will feel great pain, as if a sword were passing through you. But all who see you will say that you are the prettiest little human being they ever saw. You will still have the same floating gracefulness of movement, and no dancer will ever tread so lightly; but at every step you take it will feel as if you were treading upon sharp knives, and that the blood must flow. If you will bear all this, I will help you."

"Yes, I will," said the little princess in a trembling voice, as she thought of the prince and the immortal soul.

"But think again," said the witch; "for when once your shape has become like a human being, you can no more be a mermaid. You will never return through the water to your sisters, or to your father's palace again; and if you do not win the love of the prince, so that he is willing to forget his father and mother for your sake, and to love you with his whole soul, and allow the priest to join your hands that you may be man and wife, then you will never have an immortal soul. The first morning after he marries another your heart will break, and you will become foam on the crest of the waves."

"I will do it," said the little mermaid, and she became pale as death.

"But I must be paid also," said the witch, "and it is not a trifle that I ask. You have the sweetest voice of any who dwell here in the depths of the sea, and you believe that you will be able to charm the prince with it also, but this voice you must give to me; the best thing you possess will I have for the price of my draught. My own blood must be mixed with it, that it may be as sharp as a two-edged sword."

"But if you take away my voice," said the little mermaid, "what is left for me?"

"Your beautiful form, your graceful walk, and your expressive eyes; surely with these you can enchain a man's heart. Well, have you lost your courage? Put out your little tongue that I may cut it off as my payment; then you shall have the powerful draught."

"It shall be," said the little mermaid.

It was too hard to keep her eyes open any longer and Annalisa drifted off into a deep sleep... and dreams of herself in a few years time...

‘Hold your tongue, little mermaid. Sorry, that came out very rudely. I meant, please hold on a minute or two before committing yourself. You really should think twice – or actually think *once* before deciding.’

‘And who might you be?’

‘My name is Annalisa from EasyBest Denmark and I’m here to offer advice about how to identify the best option when someone is uncertain.’

‘But I’m not uncertain. I’ve made up my mind, in fact my heart has made up my mind.’

‘That’s why I’ve been sent. Hearts have vital functions but they are not a great way to make up your mind.’

‘You think my heart shouldn’t overrule my head?’

‘There’s no question of that happening. Your decision is made in your head. I take it what you mean is your feelings and emotions are the only things affecting your thinking at the moment... As a result I don’t think you have been either absorbed the information you have been given by Sea Witch or asked her some key questions... Surely, if you were totally honest with yourself, you would admit to being uncertain.’

‘About what?’

‘Especially about whether the prince will actually marry you, as opposed to marrying someone else. While the prince remaining unmarried to anyone seems to be ruled out, unless it is you he marries you end up as foam at the dawn following his wedding night.’

‘But I truly believe he will fall in love with me and marry me.’

‘Is there no chance that he won’t marry *you*, even a small chance? Remember, he will experience you as beautiful, but dumb, and you will be under the strain of having to suppress and disguise intense physical pain at every movement. However much he becomes attached to you, might he not get tired of being with someone who cannot speak or sing - and choose to marry someone else? Or, consider the possibility that he might confuse you with someone else as being the person who rescued him and marry *her* for that reason. He doesn’t know it was you who rescued him, does he?’

‘Well, I suppose there is some chance he won’t marry me, but I don’t really want to think about that possibility.’

‘That’s precisely why I’m here. I’d like to push you on the meaning of ‘some chance’, because it might be crucial. Think of all the *possible* reasons he might end up not marrying you.’

‘That’s a horrible thing to ask me to do.’

‘I know... But I sense that it’s a horrible task because deep down you know there *are* several possible reasons. What you need to do is to put a probability on *any one* of these happening. Would your probability be as high as 50%, in other words, on reflection, would you regard it as a ‘toss-up’ whether he will marry you?’

‘Oh no, nowhere near 50%.’

‘So near what?’

‘Maybe 5%.’

‘That sounds very optimistic, I wouldn’t go for more than a 50-50 chance myself.’

‘... you talked of my probability and, like an obedient little mermaid, I came up with one... even though inside I still think there’s no chance of him not marrying me... Shouldn’t it be the probability we’re looking for if we are looking for one at all?’

‘Do you mean the actual frequency for handsome young human princes marrying or not marrying sea-princesses who have been turned into human beings? Well, even if there was such a frequency from the past it could only be the basis of someone’s degree of belief. Past frequencies will neither be available nor meaningful for the unique events involved in most decisions. For example, this particular potion you are being offered by Sea Witch here. Have you searched for evidence about its effectiveness?’

‘No. But in my reading of fairy stories the potions of witches seem to work most of the time. Isn’t that a frequency?’

‘OK, I concede it is, but you can only use it as the *basis* of your degree of belief in this present decision... *your* probability... not as *the* probability’.

‘Seems a very subtle point to me.’

‘Subtle, but vital. Anyway, at this point, if I were you, I’d demand more information from Madam Sea Witch. Particularly more information about whether your transformation into a human is truly irreversible, as she asserts. If, for instance, you find after some time that it is obvious the prince is not going to marry you, is there really no way to accept this and return to being a mermaid? Since she has the power to achieve one way transformation from mermaid to human, why not the reversal?’

‘Well, Sea Witch, is there any such possibility?’

SW: You shouldn’t be listening to this person, Princess. She’s always drawing diagrams and talking numerical mumbo-jumbo under the guise of helping people make better decisions She may call herself Annalisa Which but she’s really Annalisa Witch.

‘I haven’t seen any mumbo-jumbo yet.’

SW: You will, just wait and see.

‘But it seems a fair question to me, now I’ve heard it asked.’

SW: OK. There is a way to go back, but I warn you that it would involve a high price for your family and above all it would require you to do something you would find impossible I think.

‘What is it?’

SW: To kill the prince on his wedding night.

‘Oh no! What do you say to that Annalisa? I couldn’t possibly contemplate doing that.’

‘Even if the alternative was your own death?’

‘Even if the alternative was my own death ...Well, I’d like to think so, though it would be fairer to say I don’t want to believe I would be able to murder him when it came to the actual moment. I’d like to think I’d rather die myself than kill another person, especially him, even if he was marrying someone else.’

‘Marrying over your dead body, as we might say... The way you’re speaking suggests to me you are a little uncertain about how you would actually react. .. and that’s enough to mean it needs to be considered as an option. But it’s time we moved on to what this decision is all

about... your goals... the outcomes you want to achieve and the ones you would prefer not to happen.'

'I have two goals – I want to marry the prince and I want to gain an immortal soul.'

'If I heard Sea Witch here correctly this is actually one goal, because you can only gain an immortal soul if the prince marries you. You can't have one without the other. And it's all or nothing. You can't gain half a prince or a half immortal soul ... or half an immortal soul, if that's different from a half immortal soul. But it may not make any difference so we'll analyse your choice treating them as separate goals.

'Analyse my choice' ... I don't know what that means.'

SW: I fear you're going to learn, princess. And watch out. These Which Doctors are widely known for their scepticism and cynicism about all things spiritual and mysterious and magical. It's clear from what she just said that she doesn't believe there are such things as souls.

'I'm going to build a simple decision model for your choice. Now while you seem to have just two options ... to either accept or reject the Sea Witch's deal, we've just established...'

HCA: Undskyld mig - De oedelaegger min historie.

'Who is that?'

SW: Oh, it's Poet Esquire himself - Hans Christian Andersen to you.

'Speaking Danish I assume. What was he saying?'

SW: He was saying "Excuse me. You are ruining my story." And I'd have to agree.

'You'd have to agree because he created you and gave you such a key role in the story. I'm merely trying to ensure the story doesn't depend on a poor decision by our little friend here.'

HCA: But, my dear Annalisa, most stories depend on what you might call poor decisions by someone... that's what makes them so human and interesting... and morally educational. Without those decisions there wouldn't be a story.

'You may be right, but that seems a poor justification to me.'

HCA: Well, I suppose I can't do much to stop you – but I'll be keeping a close eye on what you're doing. I'm appalled by what Disney did with my story. And yet I'm very envious of how much more successful it has been ... to the point where people now think it is actually the same story I wrote.'

'I agree it's a total perversion and we can talk more about that later - after we have helped our friend here make her choice.'

'I don't feel I have a choice... any choice of rejecting the deal, given the way I feel.'

'Just think about it. If you were to reject it, you would, without any uncertainty, live for a very long time underwater with your family and friends, making occasional visits to the surface to see the humans at work and play. How old are you now? You have been moping around for about a year since your fifteenth birthday, so I take it that you are now 16. Your grandmother has told you that sea-people live about 300 years, so that means you have 284 years left. Would living underwater with them and the sea community represent the worst imaginable quality of life for you?'

'No, that would be a horrible thing to say to my family and friends. I love them dearly.'

'Good, remember that. Now after a while the handsome young prince will get married – either to you or someone else. One thing we need to work out is how long you will have together, *if* he were to marry you. When did you write this tale, Hans? Hans! Is he dead, Sea Witch? He doesn't look at all well.

SW: He's not dead, but, because of his appearance, he has rightly always been worried about people thinking he is dead and burying him alive. So, if you reach into his pocket you will find a note reading 'I only seem dead.' Ah, he's back with us. Annalisa was asking when you wrote this story.

HCA: It was published in 1836... the same year as my friend Charles Dickens published his Pickwick Papers. I was 31 years old and just returned from extensive travels.

'And according to what I read, you were in an emotional turmoil over your unrequited love for a woman... or was it a man ... or both, perhaps?'

HCA: I think of myself as half feminine...

'Which may explain why you identify so closely with our sea-princess here? By the way, my father once told me that you had dramatised Agnete and the Merman, an old folk tale in which a human girl is transformed into a mermaid... the reverse story.'

'What happened to her? I'd love to know.'

HCA: That's another story... in all sorts of ways. Let's get on with what you're doing Which Doctor, since it is already beginning to bore me. There is nothing more boring than trying to get An Answer and I fear that it is exactly what you are seeking.

'I think there is almost certainly something more boring than trying to getting an answer to the question 'What should I do?'. Would you prefer to be bored for one hour a day or dead for 24 hours a day? Being dead would be dead boring, I suggest. That's why I'm seeking to help sea-princess here get the *best* answer ... for her. OK, I'm online to the Human Mortality Database and it tells me that the life expectancy for a 17 year old Danish male in 1836 was 41 years, while that for a 16 year old female was 44 years. So it means that you can expect to live until aged 60 if you become a human being.'

'Don't royal people live longer than average, Annalisa?'

'Good point. There is invariably a social gradient in health and longevity. And since you yourself will be sort of royal, I think we should add the same number of years to you both. Let's increase his life expectancy from 41 to 46 years and yours from 44 to 49 years. So you can now expect to live to 65.'

'What a horribly unromantic way to think about the future. Will he still love me when I'm 64?'

'Indeed it is and no, he won't, except posthumously since the expectation is that he will be dead three years before you.'

'I will be sad and lonely but I will have lots of happy memories.'

'To keep it simple we will lump all these periods before, during and after your marriage and call them Living with the Prince. Now we have to look at the other considerations which should enter your decision. If you accept the deal, first, you will lose your voice, second, you will experience perpetual pain whenever you use your legs, third, you will lose all contact

with your family and sea community ... and, fourth, you will bring permanent distress and grief to them from their losing you to humanity.. rejecting them as a species.

'You are suggesting I should include the loss they feel as an aspect of my decision?'

'If you care about their feelings at all, yes.'

'I do care, of course ...'

'Well, that is easy to say and we will need to find out how much you care about them shortly. Remember these four sorts of loss are certain to happen, at least for some time, in any 'Accept' scenario. So they also apply in the ones we now turn to, the ones where the prince marries someone else, not you.'

'I'd rather not contemplate these.'

'I understand and sympathise, because you either kill the one you love - and are able to return to life as a mermaid - or become foam on the sea, forever.'

'So if, hypothetically, I killed the Prince because he married another, I would go back and spend about 280 years underwater as a mermaid, with a voice... but doubtless feeling guilty and depressed, even if the human law couldn't reach and punish me.'

'On the other hand you would be living among your loving family... and, above all... or rather below all ... you wouldn't be dead! Being foam forever is surely the worst outcome you can imagine?'

'I suppose so... yes.'

'OK, I suggest you actually have three options, not two. To reject the deal is one. To accept the deal and kill the Prince if he marries someone else is a second. And to accept the deal, but not kill the Prince if he marries someone else is the third.'

'I don't think of the killing possibility as a real option, but you have brought in so many considerations that I should be taking into account that I am getting lost. Just get on with it and show me this analysis that you promised.'

SW: *'I bet the analysis will say that you should reject my deal.'*

'Well, you said yourself that what I wanted was stupid.'

SW: *'I still think you're crazy, but I really fancy having your voice, so I do want you to accept my deal.'*

'There's actually even one more strategy to consider. Sea Witch said that she could provide you with the potion in the future if you don't take it now, but only after a year's delay. So, in principle, you have the chance to reflect on things for a year and test whether your beliefs or values change sufficiently during that time to alter your decision.'

'But I would be taking the risk that the Prince would marry during that time and everything I am hoping would be gone forever. There would be no point becoming a human if he had already married.'

*'That's logical. We could still put the delay option, in the model which would involve seeking your probability that he would marry someone else within one year from now, given that he had never met you during that time. But I'm fairly confident that this would turn out to be a *dominated* option, in the sense that no change in any of your beliefs or values could make it a better option than either 'reject' or 'accept'. So, let's leave it out... I'm now going to put all the things we've talked about into a simple diagram.'*

HCA: A diagram? Sorry, I must protest most vigorously. There are never diagrams in fairy stories. It's ridiculous. How do you deal with a diagram when you come to it when reading the story to children?

'Maybe that's part of the problem with fairy stories... no diagrams. Anyway there's always a first time.'

HCA: And a last... If you don't mind me saying so Annalisa, it seems to me that you think the plot is the most important part of my stories and that that is why they are so popular all over the world. But most insightful critics suggest it is my artistry with language which is at the heart of their appeal.

'Don't get me wrong, I admire your stories tremendously as literature, especially in the way they open up new ideas and possibilities for the reader and listener. I am simply concerned that our friend here has all the help she needs in making a life-changing, and indeed life-threatening, decision.... So, sea-princess, here is how we do the Annalisa analysis for your decision. On this little machine I call a computer.

First of all I key in as title 'Should the Little Mermaid accept the Sea Witch deal?' Then I enter the three Options in the bottom panel of the screen

- REJECT the deal
- ACCEPT the deal and KILL the Prince if he marries someone else
- ACCEPT the deal and NOT KILL the Prince if he marries someone else.

Now we enter the considerations that matter to you - called Attributes or Criteria or, in this case, Outcomes. In our conversation I've noted the following eight outcomes. Alongside are the shorthand terms I will use for them in the diagram

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| • Living with the Prince (for 40-50 years) | PRINCE |
| • Being alive to age 65 | LIFeto65 |
| • Being alive from 66 to 300 | 66-300 |
| • Having a voice for the rest of life | VOICE |
| • Not in perpetual pain when moving for rest of life | PAINFREE |
| • Being in happy family for rest of life | FAMILY |
| • No guilt from murder for rest of life | GUILTFREE |
| • Having an immortal soul | SOUL |

'Anything else?'

'No. that's quite enough, thank you very much... I couldn't possibly sort all this out in my head. It really needs a diagram.'

HCA: That's just what she wanted you to say Little Mermaid. But you should trust me. I know what's best for you and I'm in charge of what happens to you...

'So here is our starting diagram with those labels added.'

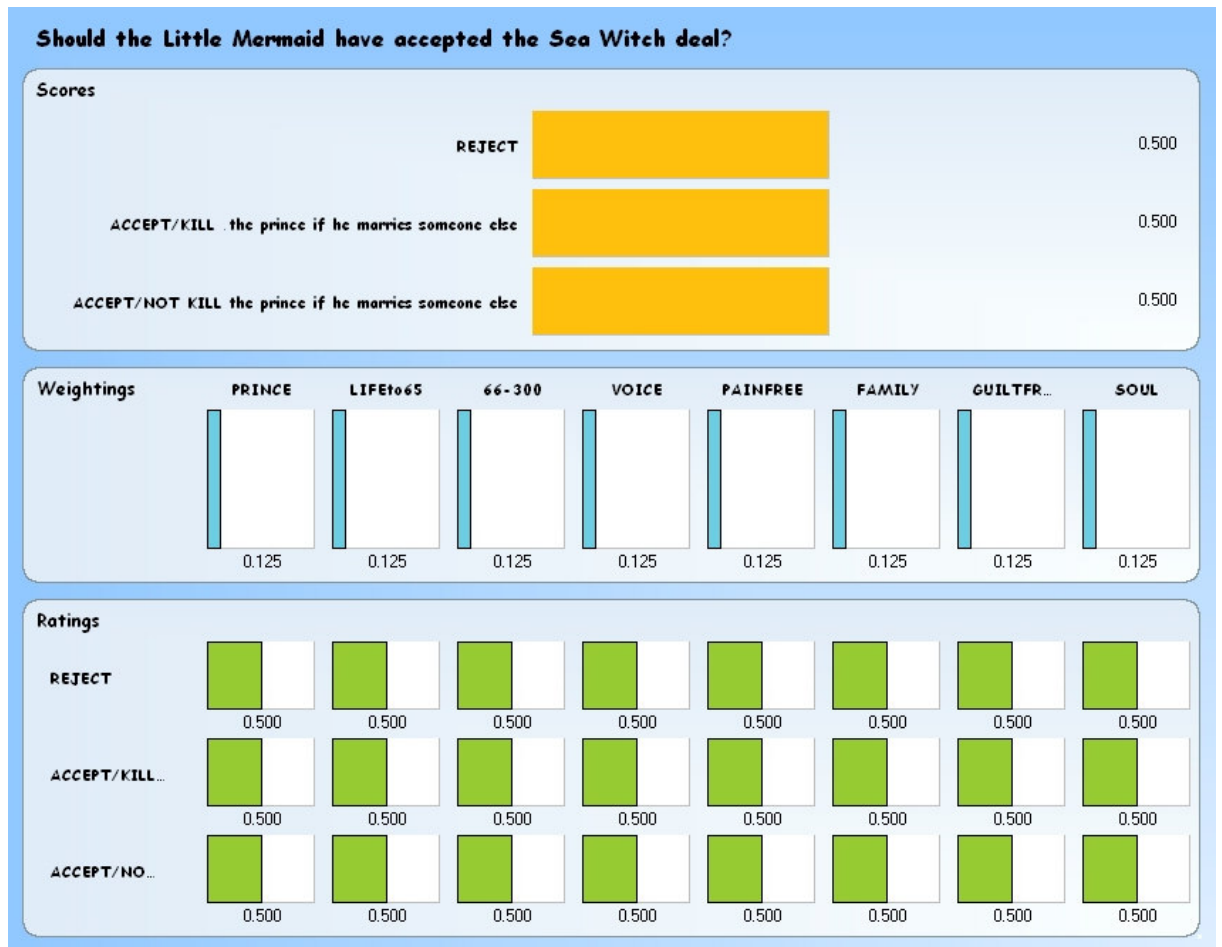


Figure 1

‘Well that’s not very useful. The score bars for the options at the top are all the same length... that’s no help at all!’

‘Relax, all the rating and weighting bars are still at their default settings for any decision... the same 50% ratings for all options on all attributes in the bottom panel and equal weightings to all attributes in the middle panel... which means that all the options will come up with equal scores. We now need to change these ratings and weightings for your decision.’

‘I presume that we have to do things with these green and blue coloured bars in the bottom and middle panels... make them longer or shorter I suppose .. and that as we change them the yellow score bars above will change, right? Where do we start? Of course I’ve made up my min, but this looks as if it may be sort of fun and a way to confirm my intuition ‘analytically’ as you put it.’

‘That’s not the purpose of analysis... more to provide an alternative opinion to your intuition. Start anywhere you like.’

SW and HCA: Don’t let him bamboozle you and misrepresent what you feel. We both know that eventually the analysis will suggest you reject what we have planned for you.

‘Let’s start by putting in that the prince is certain to marry me and that I’m therefore certain to get an immortal soul. That’s 100% ratings for those two.

*‘... and if you’re certain about those that means you’re also certain to live to 65 and certain to be guiltfree... In fact if there is certainty that the prince will marry you we could eliminate the KILL and NOT KILL subdivision ... But I prefer to leave it in for reasons you will see later... Now for the things you will *lose* for certain by Accepting and get for certain by Rejecting: VOICE, PAINFREE, FAMILY and GUILTFREE. Their bars will all be...*

‘As long as possible under Rejecting... at 100%... because I will keep them. But all will be at 0% under Accepting because I will lose them completely. Hey, I’m getting the hang of this. The final two are easy too – if I reject the deal there no chance of life with the Prince, so that’s a zero too... and it follows there’s no chance of an immortal soul... another zero.’

‘Exactly. So here’s the picture updated with all these ratings in the bottom panel.’



Figure 2

‘Now it says Reject. Why?’

‘It’s because those weighting bars in the middle are set to equal. We’re only half way through. You now have to say how important each of these 8 outcomes is to you... relative to each other.’

'What do you mean?'

. Put it simply, you have 100 points to allocate amongst them. Or in our diagram make the bars proportional to the importance you attach to them. You will see that as you change one all the others change so as to keep them adding up to 100%.'

'This is asking me to put numbers on the immeasurable... in advance of any experience of what any of them will be like...'

'No apologies for asking in advance... life is lived forwards if understood backwards (as a famous Danish philosopher once said) and decisions often must be taken without knowing whether our experienced satisfaction will be at all similar to our anticipated satisfaction.'

'That sounds a pretentious way of saying I may be either disappointed or pleasantly surprised by how I feel...But I do want to see the answer so let's get on with it... You want me to change the lengths of these eight bars to indicate how important each is to me. Oh, how can I say how much more important being alive is relative to having a voice ...or relative to being married to the prince and gaining an immortal soul. It's impossible!'

'It's obviously not impossible, because when I arrived you were about to make a decision which implied some weights to these things. I'm just giving you a last chance to reconsider them... or actually consider them seriously for the first time.'

'Well my instant reaction is: 50% weight to PRINCE and 50% weight to SOUL.'

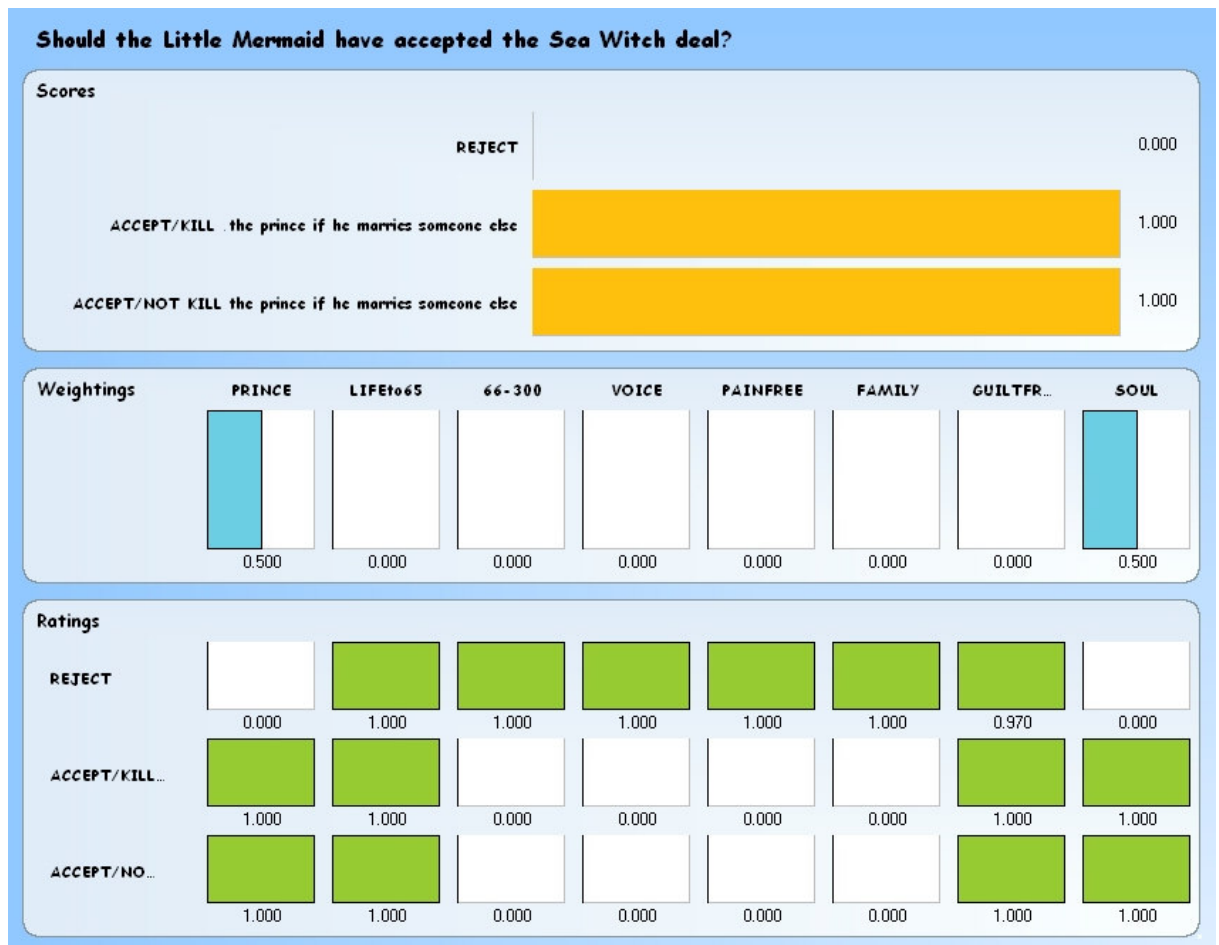


Figure 3

‘Yes, Accept, that’s better!’

‘So you don’t care about your family and community at all? Isn’t a little selfish to be concerned solely about your life and your soul?’

‘Well, what happens is we give equal weight to PRICE+SOUL on the one hand and FAMILY and all the other things on the other?’

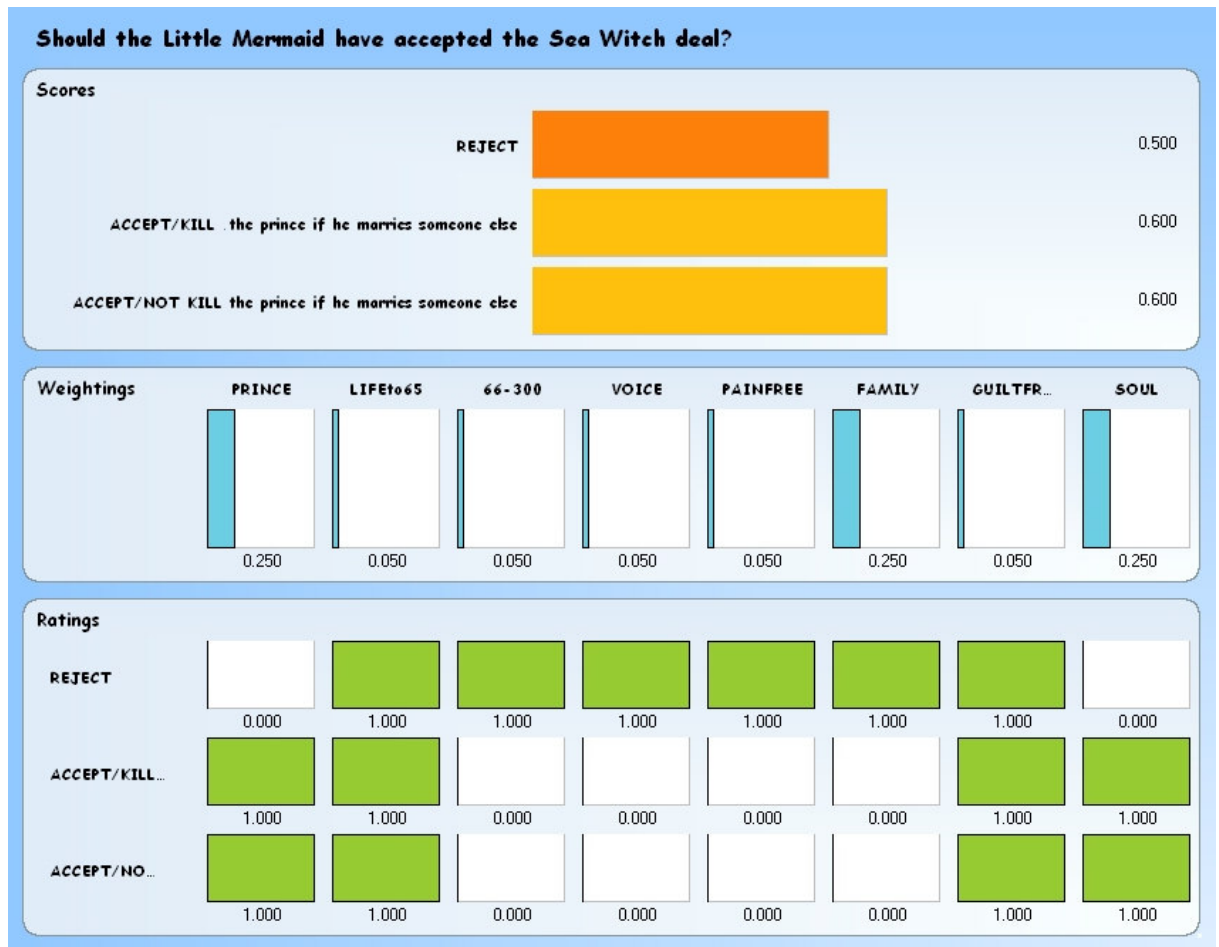


Figure 4

‘See its still Accept even when I give 25% to FAMILY and 5% to the other 4 things. Do you concede defeat?’

‘It’s not a question of winning or losing... I’m just making sure you are clear about the basis of the decision...’

SW and HCA: Don’t you believe her, Princess.

‘... and the last thing I think we must do is to look again at the fundamental uncertainty. Lets see what happens if I give you a 50% chance of marrying the Prince

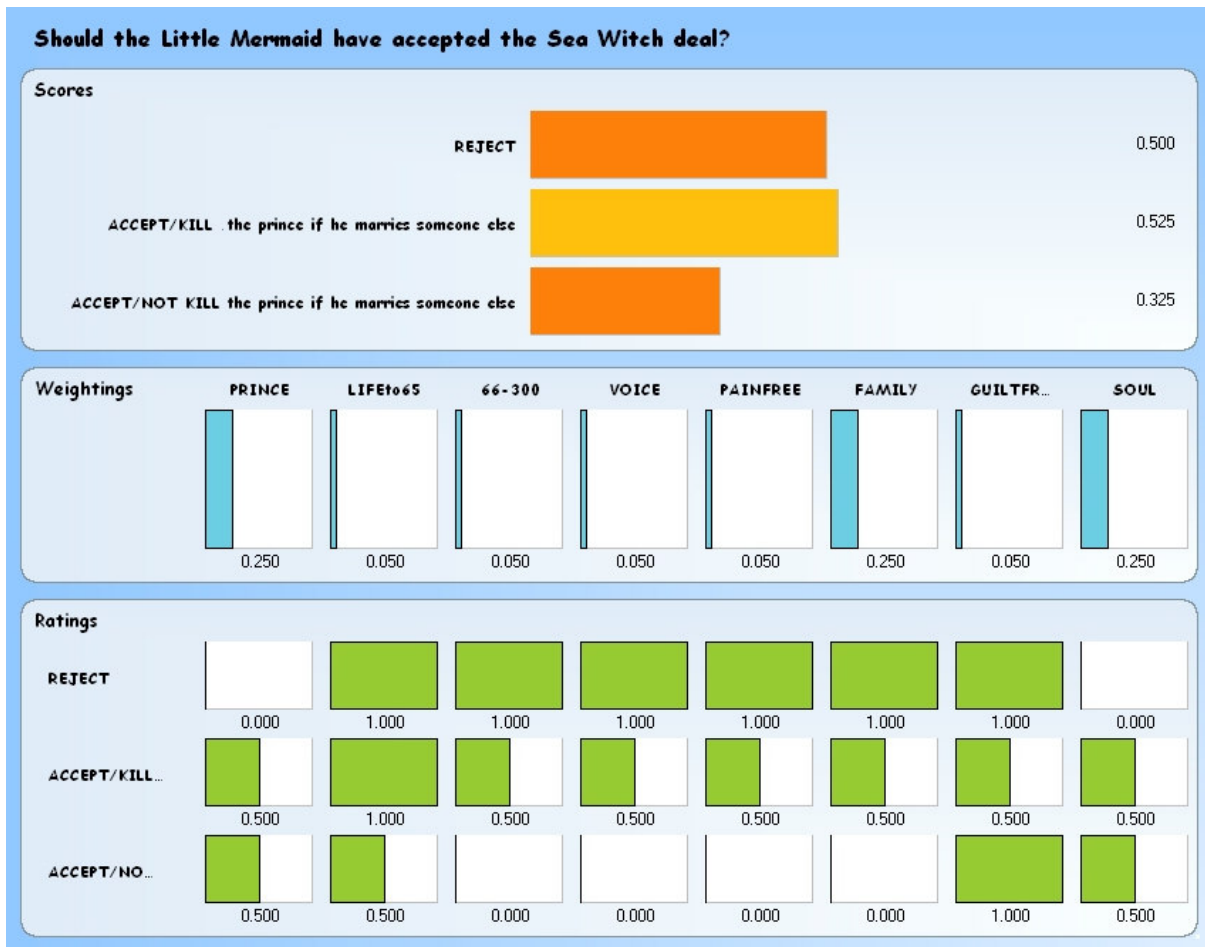


Figure 5

‘Wow! It’s not Reject now, but Accept-Kill by a little way. How did that come about? I wondered why you kept it as an option since it always seemed to produce the same result as Accept-Not Kill;

‘It comes about because you have half a chance of everything but a 100% chance of living until you are 65... though it will be as a human if the Prince marries you or as a rehabilitated mermaid if he doesn’t and you are able to kill him.’

But there’s no way I could kill him and anyway I will never believe it’s only 50-50 that he will marry me!’

I’ve done my job in pointing out the implications of each option. It’s your decision!

HCA: Could I remind you – and her - that her immortal soul must outweigh all mundane earthly considerations. I notice you excluded the afterlife from the definition of ‘the rest of your life’.

‘I did do that and I agree that IF one option offers something infinitely valuable and offers it forever then any finite chance of achieving it may be worth taking. But a finite chance is more than a zero chance... the zero chance which you might have had in mind for the Little Mermaid marrying the Prince when you wrote the story... But I mustn’t spoil the story for the Little Mermaid here.

'This is all very interesting... I've learned that the best option depends on the ratings and your weightings and that these are very different things. So, thanks Annalisa, but I'm going ahead with my bet. Can I have the glass with the potion now Sea Witch, please?'

JZ: Don't bet on the Prince!

'It seems we have another visitor Hello, I'm Annalisa. This is Sea Witch and this is Hans Christian Andersen. And of course this is the Little Mermaid. Would you mind introducing yourself...?'

JZ: I do know everyone here quite well except you Annalisa because I'm Jack Zipes... author of many studies concerning fairy stories and their functions in the socialisation of children ...influencing how they conceive the world and their places in it even before they can read ... shaping their tastes, mores, values and habits for a culture which is invariably male-dominated.'

'So what do you have to say to our small friend here?'

JZ: In these stories females are either poor girls or beautiful princesses, who will only be rewarded if they demonstrate passivity, obedience, submissiveness, and self denial while being nurturing and caring in all personal situations and relationships.

'And what do you think I'm doing here.'

JZ: I've been trying to puzzle that out. Feminist writers, and others, would see you as introducing typically male abstract and rational principles ... cold, calculating baggage... under the impression – or guise - that this will be of help to a female. But, to them, you are simply undermining the true intuitive strengths of the female voice.

'Not true. I'm trying to balance the virtues of intuition and analysis in what I do. So what is *their* answer?'

JZ: The proper way to counteract the disastrous effect of traditional fairy stories is to develop alternative ones that don't glorify passivity, dependence and self-sacrifice as the cardinal virtues of the female.

'Or the feminine half, since I see Hans is still listening. And these alternative stories ensure that the female is portrayed as proactive and not just waiting for her prince to come ... presumably to replace her father?'

JZ: Exactly. And there are now hundreds of such feminist fairy tales out there, including ones about mermaids rejecting princes.

'And how many are being read to or by young girls... and, more to the point, perhaps young boys?'

JZ: Not a lot I'm afraid.

'So it might be worth considering another diagnosis and another therapy?'

JZ: It sounds like you have one.

'Women have been misled *by men* into believing that holistic, non-reductionist intuitive thinking is their great and unique strength and consequently into adopting a hostile attitude to *analysis*, which is labelled 'reductionist' and all sort of other nasty things. 'Reflective practice' has been one way in which this fundamentally anti-analytical message has been sold in the 'people nurturing and caring professions' ...nurses, midwives, social workers... which are overwhelmingly female in composition, you will notice (Benner, 1984). Even some of the most radical feminists have been co-opted into perpetuating this fallacy, thereby directing women away from using the most effective weapon they have to resist and attack male domination.'

JZ: That most effective weapon being?

‘Analysis - which is no more inherently sexist than intuition, even if has been gendered that way by women subject to male hegemony. A small evolution-based average difference in cognitive structure and functioning has been blown up into a stereotyped dimorphism. Worse still, it has been fallaciously inferred that this (real but small) difference has some relevance to life in complex modern societies as opposed to the African plains of 10,000 years ago.’

JZ: You can’t seriously be suggesting that decision analysis is the answer to the subordination of women!

‘Yes, I am indeed suggesting that decision analysis which involves the balancing of the virtues of intuition and analysis is the best hope for the vulnerable, the oppressed, the disadvantaged...indeed the powerless, or less powerful, everywhere. It is their best, if not only, hope. *They have nothing to use but their brains.* Or nothing effective to use, given that the powerful control all other resources.

JZ: But often ‘the powerful’, as you call them, seem to be heavily promoting the education of the disadvantaged. Doesn’t that contradict your theory?

They are too clever to allow these capacities to be developed in ways relevant to *decision making* - as opposed to the safe and unthreatening activities of *knowledge creation* and *aesthetic development* (the sciences, the social sciences, the arts and humanities). This ensures that they, the powerful, can keep control of decision making through their preferred decision technology, TIABIM (Taking Into Account and Bearing In Mind).

JZ: But nowadays there is much commitment to being ‘accountable’.

‘Indeed, but note that it is only by way of documenting *the procedure* that was followed... who was sitting round the table... what was discussed ... perhaps, though rarely, how many and who voted for what ... voting is not liked in TIABIM because it actually involves counting. There is no transparency concerning the *analytical relationships* between the knowledge and value inputs and the decision taken.

JZ: Still, the disadvantaged can fight to be better represented in what you call TIABIM processes and I would call the ‘normal politics of *representative* democracy’. Women have been making great strides in the last 150 years and are well represented in many bodies, certainly in the West. What the Americans call GOBSATT (Good Old Boys Sitting Around Talking Turkey) is less prevalent than it was.

‘Agreed, when pushed, the powerful will usually concede stakeholders ‘a seat at the table’ and claim that they are willing to ‘listen to all voices in an inclusive and participatory dialogue’ or whatever the current rhetoric is. But this is because they can continue to dominate. TIABIM is insufficiently analytical to expose what is happening in decision making – which is that the *Chairman’s* ‘intuition’ will eventually determine the decision outcome in most cases.’

JZ: Insufficiently analytical? In many committees there is plenty of highly analytic material. Lots of boring tables and analyses are usually provided for the ones I sit on.

‘TIABIM can appear to be highly analytic because it gives heavy emphasis to taking into account highly analytic *knowledge inputs* from ‘scientists’. It is the *decision making* that I am suggesting is not sufficiently analytic.’

JZ: Ah, I see the difference. So exactly how can decision analysis help the oppressed?

‘In the context of *deliberative* democracy it can lead to the exposure of the beliefs and values of all those involved and of the *analytical* process by which these inputs were

processed and synthesised into a decision. The Chair can't simply say "we took women's views into account and bore them in mind", we will be able to see more precisely what weight was given to women's views.'

JZ: Because everyone's beliefs and values are on public display in the analysis ... in the sort of model diagram you have produced above. But surely that's the downside for the oppressed ... in order to force the powerful to expose theirs they have to expose their own.

'That is indeed the price of obtaining 'a level playing field'. They will also have to develop or access the relevant decision analytic capacities and attitudes.'

JZ: It's not exactly rocket science from your example.

'I'm glad you think so, but it requires a change in mindset and this is usually much more difficult than acquiring the basics of the technique. I hope you have been taking all this in, Little Mermaid... Where is she?'

SW: Oh she's long gone. You didn't notice because you were so absorbed in riding your hobby-horse. I think 'holistic, non-reductionist intuition' was the final straw for her... Notice my nice new voice?

'That's sad. I wanted to wish her the best of luck.'

HCA: She doesn't need it. I can tell you how it all turns out – in the true version, not the Disney per-version. The prince does marry someone else and our heroine is unable to bring herself to kill him when the moment arrives. But the air spirits, who have observed her dedicated devotion and suffering, rescue her from her foamy fate and promise her an immortal soul in 300 years time. By the way, Sea Witch here didn't know about this, so she couldn't have told you, even if you had asked.

'So truly informed consent was ruled out all the time!'

HCA: The more literate would see it for what it is... as in so many of my stories there is an incredibly daring twist at the end of the tale... in this case shifting it seamlessly from the tragic to the uplifting.

JZ: I told you...even though it's different from the Disney version it's the usual ending in which little girls who act as role models for the feminine virtues eventually get their reward ... While in the true story the reward is not the prince, it is something even more important for our friend Hans *Christian*... an immortal soul is clearly his priority.

'I'm not betting on the possibility of having an immortal soul myself... or on my prince coming some day. Anyway, I've just had word that some called Humpty Dumpty is about to do something that requires my presence. See you later. '

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Mette Kjer Kaltoft for pointing out that Humpty Dumpty (Dowie 1999) would not be well known to Danish public health students and that, 2005 being the bicentennial of his birth, one of the stories of Hans Christian Andersen would be a very appropriate basis for a new and highly simplified introduction to decision analysis. I am also delighted that Jack Zipes of the University of Minnesota (Zipes 1987) generously agreed to be used as a participant. All opinions expressed are, of course, my own. I have provided only minimal referencing, in the spirit of the piece. The Annalisa program is obtainable from

<http://www.annalisa.org.uk> and the Little Mermaid file can be downloaded from
<http://www.cafeannalisa.org.uk>

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