OODA Loop

The OODA Loop is a decision cycle with four steps: observe, orient, decide and act. It was developed by John Boyd, a United States Air Force fighter pilot and military strategist. Boyd argued that whoever moves through this cycle faster and more accurately can stay ahead of a changing situation. Today the loop is used in business, emergency services and sports, wherever conditions change quickly. The key idea is that the loop never runs only once, because every action brings new information.

1. Observe

The first step is to gather information about what is really happening. This includes facts, numbers, feedback and changes around us. Good observation looks for the unexpected, not only for what we hope to see. It also continues all the time, because the situation keeps moving.

Example: Before driving to work, a commuter observes the traffic app and sees a long red line on the usual road. This short observation changes the whole morning.

At work: Ghadeer, a customer support lead, observes a sudden wave of complaints after an app update. She reads the first messages and checks the numbers: most problems are about logging in.

2. Orient

The second step is to make sense of what we observed. Boyd saw orientation as the most important step, because it shapes everything that follows. Our experience, culture, training and assumptions act like a lens on the facts. Good orientation compares new information with what we know and asks whether our old picture still fits.

Example: The commuter orients by remembering that this road often has roadworks on Mondays. The red line means a long delay, not a short one.

At work: Ghadeer orients by comparing the complaints with earlier updates. She notices that only users with older phones are affected, so the problem is not the whole app.

3. Decide

The third step is to choose a course of action from the options that our orientation shows. In the OODA Loop, a decision is a best guess, not a final truth. It should be clear enough to act on and simple enough to change. When time is short, a good decision now is often better than a perfect decision too late.

Example: The commuter decides to take the train instead of the car today. The choice is quick, and it can change again tomorrow.

This document is a property of Asaseeyat Academy - © Copy Right Protected.

At work: Ghadeer decides on two steps: a short message with a workaround for users with older phones, and an urgent request to the developers. She chooses speed over a perfect plan.

4. Act

The fourth step is to carry out the decision. Action is also a test, because it shows whether our orientation was right. Every action changes the situation and creates new information to observe. This is why the four steps form a loop and not a straight line.

Example: Acting on the decision, the commuter takes the train and arrives on time. Next Monday, the loop starts again with a look at the app.

At work: Ghadeer acts: she sends the message, and the developers release a fix the next day. Then she observes again, and the complaints fall quickly.

5. Speed Up the Loop

Boyd also showed that the loop does not always need a long decision step. When a team is well trained and shares the same picture, orientation can lead straight to action, which Boyd called implicit guidance and control. Clear goals, simple rules and trust let people act quickly without waiting for approval. In a competition, the side with the faster loop can act before the other side understands what has changed.

Example: An experienced driver who sees a ball roll onto the street brakes at once. Speeding up the loop, the driver acts straight from orientation, without a long decision.

At work: After the incident, Ghadeer speeds up the loop for the future. Her team agrees on a simple rule: for login problems, the workaround message goes out within one hour, without waiting for approval.

Conclusion

In summary, the OODA Loop has four steps: observe, orient, decide and act. Orientation sits at the heart of the loop, because the way we understand the facts shapes every choice. The loop works best when it is repeated quickly and when we stay ready to update our picture. When things change, two questions keep the loop moving: what do we see now, and what does it mean?

Sources

- Boyd, J. R. (1995). The Essence of Winning and Losing (briefing; the full OODA Loop diagram with orientation and implicit guidance and control).
- Coram, R. (2002). Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War. Little, Brown.
- Wikipedia: OODA loop – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OODA_loop
- Wikipedia: John Boyd (military strategist) – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Boyd_(military_strategist)

This document is a property of Asaseeyat Academy - © Copy Right Protected.