Thinking about When?

A common question about projects is
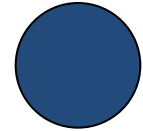"When will this be done?" OR "How long will this take?"

The Problem (a.k.a. HeadScratcher):
Answering "when" or "how long" is a prediction of the future. You cannot know the future, but you can use Critical Thinking to assist in providing a high confidence answer to When?
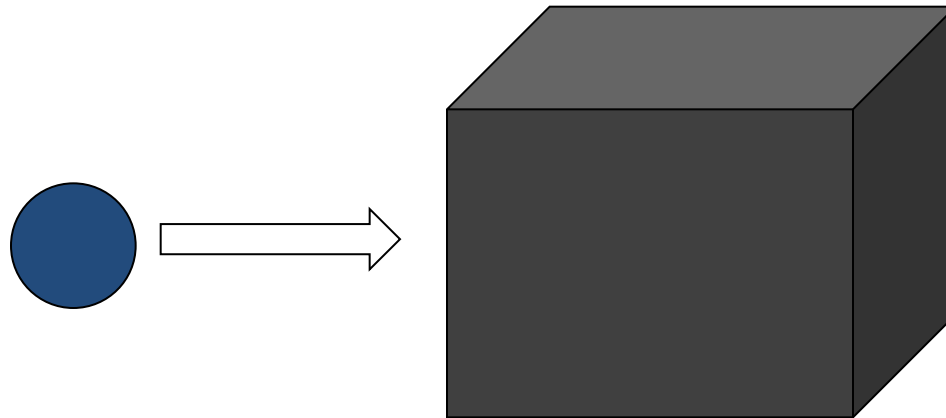
Here is one approach.

How long will this take?

Suppose this Blue Dot represents the exact and accurate answer to "How long will this take?"

Since you can't know the future, you can't actually see the blue dot (the exact answer). It's hidden inside a black box.

If you can't see the blue dot (the answer), how can you provide a high confidence response to "How long will this take?

How long will this take?

One way is by using Triangular Thinking. You vector in on the answer, using mutually exclusive perspectives to look at the problem. For example:
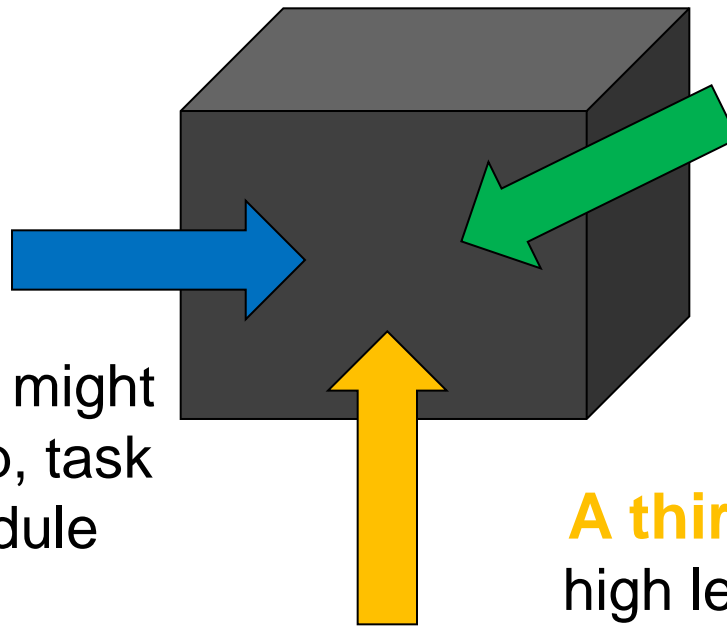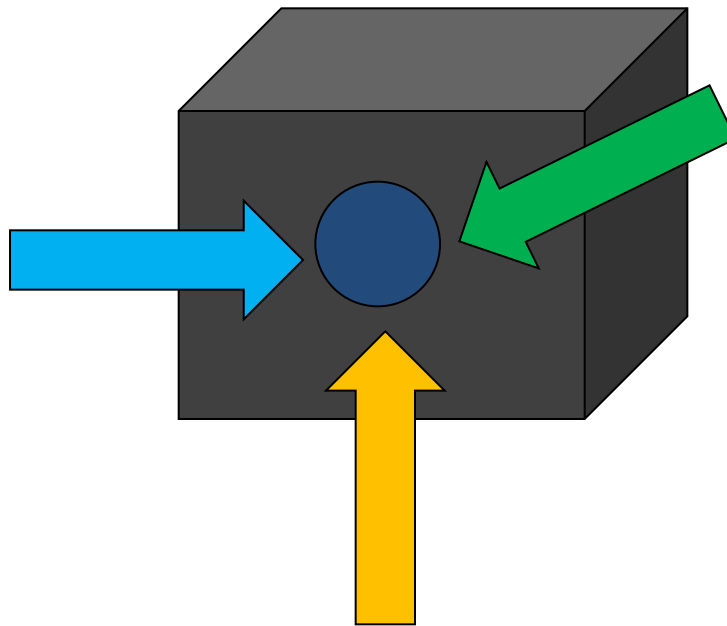
Another might be a comparison between this project and others you have worked on

One measure might be a bottoms up, task by task, schedule

A third might be a high level look from someone else
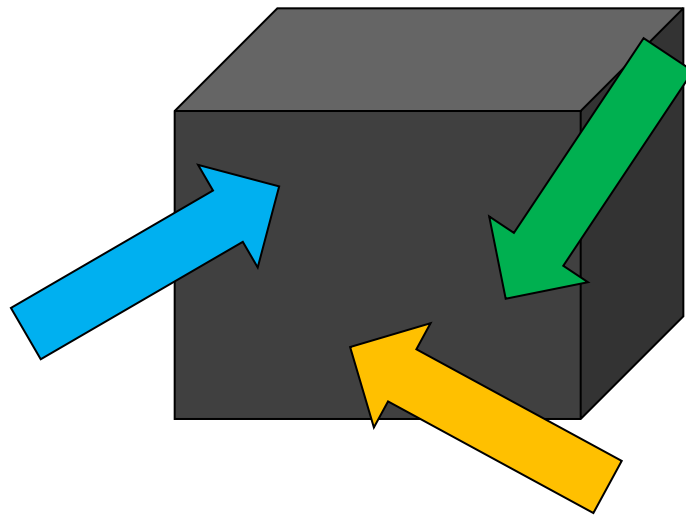
How long will this take?

If these different perspectives yield nearly the same answer then you have found your blue dot, i.e. a good answer.

**BUT ....**

How long will this take?

What if these perspectives result in different answers?

Then you have not found the blue dot! You have to ask "why" the results are different. For Example, why is the bottoms up schedule so different than when you compare this project to others from the past. What is different?

The Takeaway

You can't always be absolutely sure about a situation. When faced with the need to decide, try Triangular Thinking by looking at the problem from multiple independent perspectives.
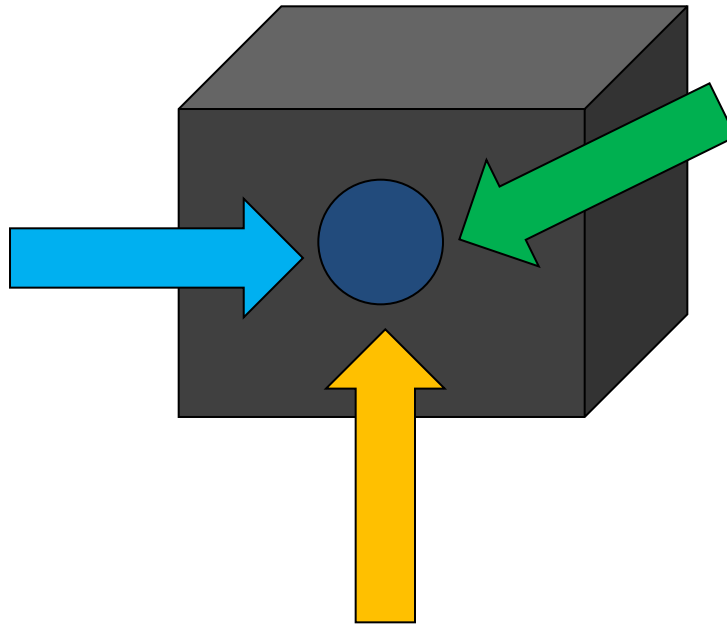
If multiple perspectives yield a similar result, then that's your choice. If not, understand why they have different results to provide you with insights that will help you choose.

Critical Thinking Workshops for Problem Solving, Decision Making and Creativity.

Our Mission; To help people become better HeadScratchers! We teach critical thinking techniques to managers, leaders and individuals resulting in the improved performance of an individual and organization.