Course Description

This course focuses on both the substance of policy (policy realms) and the process of policy making. Realms such as “inequality”, “welfare”, male violence, social exploitation, control of smoking products, self-harming behavior, are among ones students may choose as subject matter for the course. Certain focal topics, such as the viability of a “parents” license, will serve to explore elements of the policy process. On the process of policy side, the “5-P” system will be a template for the policy process. Attention will also be paid to policy history, policy systems, and policy makers. The influence of policy level (personal, organizational, community, society, macrosociety (Eurodollars, for example) will be considered as well. Emphasis is on analysis and comprehension of policy ideas and processes, not on skill development.

Course Process

This course will thus have dual focii. One portion will focus on the "analysis" and comprehension of the policy process. Here we will focus on the policy cycle, the issues that develop at each state of that cycle, and seek to understand how policy thinkers have portrayed the cycle, and critique that approach, looking always for improvements in conceptualization.

The second focus, sometimes broken out and sometimes interwoven, addresses the "other" interest many of us have in social policy - interests in specific policy problems. For this reason, a parallel theme of the course will be on looking at policy-in-context. Several kinds of policy problems have been selected which provide both interest and the opportunity to look at course content "in action." The discussion might be broadranging.
Students have the option of adding other areas of interest to themselves, and we will discuss these recommendations and editions during the initial portions of class.

**Assignments**

There are two types of Assignments.

**The Paper**

Students need to pick a topic which focuses on a consideration of some element of the policy process. One might seek to improve the analytic template, for example, or look at value or role conflict within policy making. Alternatively, one might wish to look at the role of leadership, or lack of leadership, as an element in the policy process. We will focus on the selection of topics and the ongoing discussion of them throughout the course. A final paper/report is due at the end of the term. Students are encouraged to select a journal to submit the paper to. If the submission is accompanied by a letter of submission to the selected journal, I will bump your grade up one notch. Several students have successfully published a paper in this way, so it is well worth the effort.

An initial proposal memo is due Feb 12th, Session 5; a presentation of the paper is due at the end of the term, along with the paper itself.

**The Comparative Perspective**

In the readings, two pairs of books from 50 years ago are listed. The first pair, *The Lonely Crowd* and *Industrial Society and Social Welfare*, were each important, groundbreaking societal analyses of their time. Pick one of those volumes, read it, and prepare a 3-5 page memo on its relevance, or lack thereof, for today, including assessing in what ways new information and discovery validates or disputes their conclusion.

Due Session 7 – Feb 19th

In the second pair, we have two discussions of policy analysis and policy action. *TVA and the Grass Roots* discusses one of the largest (if not the largest) domestic intervention by the Federal Government ever made. ([http://www.tva.gov/](http://www.tva.gov/)) It still exists and has been, by most accounts, quite successful in accomplishing its multiple agendas. Consider why (or if) that is so, and why it has never been replicated. Such a vehicle, for example, might have been very useful in the wake of Katrina.

Community Planning for Human Services is a study of social service use in St, Paul, MN in the 1950s. Consider how relevant that analysis might be for today, and what progress has been made on concerns raised there since then.

Due in Due Session 10, March 12th
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<tr>
<td>Initial Memo</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Feb 7th</td>
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<td>Book Analysis 1</td>
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<td>Feb 14th</td>
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<td>Book Analysis 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>PROBLEMATIZING/ PONDERING - Policy Overview</td>
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<td>2:</td>
<td>1/15</td>
<td>PERCEIVING - Perspectives from/of Social Science and SW on Policy (Social Policy, etc) Discuss Lonely Crowd &amp; Industrial Society and Social Welfare</td>
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<td>3:</td>
<td>1/22</td>
<td>PRECEDING- The power (or not) of Precedents PRECEDING The Power of Values</td>
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<td>4:</td>
<td>1/29</td>
<td>No Class….Prepare Project Materials</td>
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<td>5:</td>
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<td>CLASS BEGINS AT 10:30 (I am Speaking at Zingtrain) Present Project ideas for discussion PROSPECTING: Discovering the Policy Problem</td>
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<td>6:</td>
<td>2/12</td>
<td>PRUNING: The Policy Agenda… How is it Constructed? Guest: President Emeritus Duderstadt</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>2/19</td>
<td>No Class – work on Papers</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>3/12</td>
<td>Picking- The Policy Decision</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>3/26</td>
<td>Planning/Practicing/Programming</td>
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<td>Policing- Policy Oversight</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>Reports Policy/Process/Product/Program Assessment</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>4/16</td>
<td>Reports People-izing</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4/22</td>
<td>No Class Revise Paper</td>
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Books Recommended:


Analytic Books


Policy Analyses


NOTE.. AS OF 1/02.14 THESE BOOKS WERE AVAILABLE AT AMAZON.COM FOR THE FOLLOWING PRICES: $.01 FOR Buell, $.14 for WILENSKY AND LEBEAUX, $3.33 FOR SELZNICK, and $5.00 FOR REISMAN.

Resource Volumes


Course Schedule

1  1/8  PROBLEMATIZING/ PONDERING - Policy Overview

This session explores a perspective on the policy process and lays out a template for analysis.


Problemagizing, Pondering, Perceiving, Preceding, Puzzling, Prospecting, Pruning, Proposing, Picking Planning, Practicing, Programming, Policing, People-ing

The Problem

• Problematizing (the policy problem)
• Pondering (thinking about the policy problem)
• Perceiving (what IS the policy problem?)
• Preceding (what are the policy precedents)
• Puzzling (the Paradoxes)

Policy Options
• Prospecting (developing policy options)
• Pruning (shaving the policy options down to 3-5)
• Proposing (offering 1 or 5 policy options)

The Policy Decision
• Picking (the policy decision)

Planning
• Planning (planning implementation)
• Practicing (a policy pilot perhaps)

Policy Implementation
• Programming (doing the policy)
• Policing (overseeing the policy)
• People-ing (staff, stakeholders, analysts, advocates, managers)

Policy Evaluation
• Process/Product Assessment

(a) ANALYTIC CASE:
  a. The wealth Tax or the Wealth Entitlement
     i. How much credit should the wealthy enjoy?
     ii. How much credit should non-profits enjoy
     iii. What kinds of modifications of “entitlements” are ok
         1. Social Security
            a. Further raise age?
            b. Reduce COLA
            c. Other?

The Grade Tax

2 1/15 PERCEIVING - Perspectives from/of Social Science and Social Work on Social Policy

What does social science do for social policy anyway? Is there, really, a difference between “understanding” and “explaining” and “acting”? What do the words “understanding” and “explaining” mean? What is the perspective of “social work”? 

Sheldon Danziger “Fighting Poverty Revisited”
Gary Burtless “What Have We learned About Poverty and Inequality? Evidence From Cross National Analysis”

Discussion: Lonely Crowd & Industrial Society and Social Welfare

3 1/22
PRECEDING- The power (or not) of precedents: Social History and Social Policy:

Chapter 1: A History of Social Welfare and Social Work in Garvin and Tropman

In what sense is the past prologue?
Discussion TVA
Discussion of Community Planning for Human Services

ANALYTIC CASE: Powerful Pressures…. the needs/wants gap and the social exploitation solution

Tropman, The Catholic Ethic in American Society

4 1/29
NO CLASS – Prepare Project Materials

5 2/5
PROSPECTING: Discovering the Policy Problem

Preliminary Proposals Due

ANALYTIC CASE: (a) Male/Female Wage Gap…..
(b) ANALYTIC CASE: Male Violence…Macro/Micro; Pan-cultural, Pan-historical…how can we explain it?

The Millennium Project: Executive Summary and Report
Timothy M. Smeeding, “Poorer By Comparison: The US Still has much poverty, far more, than comparable countries like the UK. Why??

6 2/12  PRUNING: The Policy Agenda… How is it Constructed?

Westman, J. (1994). Licensing Parents [Insight

Sayles and Chandler (1971) provide a useful list:

➤ giving problems their proper weight and context
➤ taking problems at the right time
➤ taking problems in the right sequence
➤ establishing and shifting decision criteria
➤ acting as the coxswain (beating out the pace of decision action)

Charles Murray” Poverty and Marriage, Inequality and Brains.”

ANALYTIC CASE: The Parent’s License

7 2/19 NO CLASS – WORK ON PAPERS

8 2/26 PROPOSING: Policy Analysis and Policy Options

The policy process is about translating data into information into options, and then, of course, options into decisions. It is about looking at the problem, then the evidence, and arguing about what the evidence proves. The kinds of ways that we evaluate evidence become crucial, perhaps, to what conclusions we draw and what recommendations we make.

ANALYTIC CASE: The Sin Tax

Robert Frank, “ The Pragmatic Case for Reducing Income Inequality”
9 3/12  PICKING: Policy Decision

Coming to closure is essential in the policy process

Rotten Decisions
Decision Rules

Tropman, “Decision Making” Attached

10 3/26  PLANNING/PRACTICING /PROGRAMMING – Policy Implementation

Good ideas and good decisions are not enough. We need to put policy into practice.

ANALYTIC CASE: Self Hazardous Behavior

Free Riders, Social Loafers

11 4/2  Policing – Issues in Policy Oversight

12 4/9  Policy Process/Products Assessment

Assessing Policy results is crucial. Sometimes “assessment” occurs “first”

a] Policy Evaluation

Project Reports

12 4/16  REPORTS

People-ing - Staff, Stakeholders The Partisan, The Analyst, The Zealot,
People have, it appears, personalities, issues and agendas.

Believing is seeing; the mind tells the eyes. (For some; for others, the eyes tell the mind!) However, there are conflicts in what we believe. It is not clear-cut. Another way of looking at this issue is that there are two “selves” within us... a here-and-now self, and a then-and-there self, a doer and a planner.

**The Policy Analyst**

The Policy Analyst deals with squishy "poorly structured problems" (McCaskey, 1982)

*Problem Finding* - (A) combination of judgement, intuition and logic that enables a manager to key in the right problem.

*Map-Building* - (The) ability to generate one or more ways of conceptualizing a problem.

*Janusian Thinking* - Shorthand for comfort with acknowledging and constructively using seemingly contradictory beliefs.

*Controlling and Not Controlling* - (A) posture of assertively going with the flow... when to Captain the ship and when to ride the river (or when to hold'em and when to fold'em: JET)

*Problem Bracketing* - The ability to set aside a fundamental issues that cannot be immediately settled.

*Channel Switching* - the ability to shift attention from one problem to another rapidly and completely. (McCaskey, 1982, pp. 171-172)

Harold Richman, “The White House as a Field Placement”


Michels, Robert, 1915 Political parties; a sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy, tr. by Eden & Cedar Paul. New York, Hearst’s international library,

Hoffer, Eric. 1951 The true believer; thoughts on the nature of mass movements.[1st ed.].New York : Harper
DECISION MAKING

I • A Brief Definition of Decision Making

Decision making is a phrase made up of two words, each with a different referent. The "decision" piece refers to coming to a conclusion, achieving closure, a settlement, a judgment. It comes from the Latin, dicidere (to cut down, to bring to a conclusion, settle, reach settlement, agree on, come to terms). The "making" part refers to the process through which, or by which, a person, a group, an organization comes to such a conclusion, judgment, settlement. For purposes here, decision making can be thought to be a process, (with a decision the act) which allocate goods and values in the system. The "system" can be one's own time and assets, family or organizational wherewithal, or community and national resources. For purposes here, the focus is on the business organization, and the manager or executive as a decision maker.

II • History of the Term/Concept

Decision making has a long history, as a concept, stemming, as it does, from the Latin. Choices, among alternatives, have always been a part of life. It has been more recently, however, that sustained research attention to business decision making has developed. Braybrook and Lindblom (1961) give a good summary of early philosophical thinking and the work of economists in this century. More recently much attention has been paid to this field. The graduate library at the University of Michigan lists 2693 entries under the phrase "decision making." Contemporary advances in the field include progress in areas such as the problem context, the processes of legitimation, problem finding and problem solving, as well as procedural and technical aids (Kleindorfer, Kunreuther and Schoemaker, 1993, p.9). All businesspersons recognize "the painful necessity of choice." Further, this choice must be timely, because, as the popular office poster says, "NOT TO DECIDE IS TO DECIDE!" Ultimately, the driver of business success is the quality of decisions (and their implementation, to be mentioned in a moment). Good decisions mean good business.

III • Substantive Explanation

The five elements mentioned by Kleindorfer, Kunreuther and Schoemaker. (1993, p. 9) provide a useful start for more detailed thinking about one needs to consider in thinking about "decision making."

The Problem Context

All decisions are about problems and problem shape a context. The MACROCONTEXT draws attention to the global issues (exchange rates, for example), national concerns (cultural orientations, as between Japan, and the Euro-American orientations toward decision processes (Benedict, 1946, Nakane, 1970, Morita, 1986, Thurow, 1986)), and within nations, provincial and state laws and cultures (Quebec "v" British Columbia in Canada; Main "v" California in the United States.).

The MESOCONTEXT attends to organizational cultures and structure. How does Ben and Jerry's approach decisions, as opposed to the Federal Reserve Board, for
example? How are Universities different from governments and how are these in turn different from Fortune 500 companies?

The MICROCONTEXT addresses the immediate decision environment - your employees, your Board, your office. Within any of the companies above, decision processes differ. But at least these three levels of context need to be taken into consideration when a decision episode begins. Information from each of these levels is needed; however, economical ways to achieve this information is essential to business, or the costs of preparing for decision would be prohibitive.

Problem Finding (and Agenda Setting.)

To be a problem, an issue must be identified as problematic, and "of consequence." One of the important difficulties in decision making is failure to act until one is too close to the decision point, and thus loses information and options. Most of the time, organizations work in a "reactive" mode. Problems are "found" when there is a "whack on the side of the organizational head." However, processes of environmental scanning and strategic planning are designed (though often don not work well) to perform a sort of "problem reconnaissance" and alert the businessperson to elements which will, in due course, need attention. Even if the process of "problem finding" works, a subsequent procedure, "agenda setting" is needed. Less is known about how "potential problems" get "on the action agenda" in companies and firms. Too frequently, potential areas of difficulty are noticed, and even mentioned (recall the O-ring information prior to the Challenger disaster) but are not taken seriously, attended to, are set aside, etc.

Proactivity can be a great strength in the decision field, allowing less fateful experiments, prototypes, research, and so on. However, proactivity requires decision intelligence processes that are missing from many organizations.

As a problem is identified, information about the problem and potential actions to be taken is needed. One kind of information is purely factual - what is the problem, what has happened, etc. A problem, of course, is that the processes and procedures of gathering and packaging information - editing - often leaves business executives at the mercy of the editors. March and Simon (1958, p.165) point to one important aspect of the editing process, one they call "uncertainty absorption." They suggest that since uncertain information may imply the "editors" (other staff in the organization) are inept, there is a tendency to edit out the uncertainty and present information to the top that is more certain than it really "is."

Another kind of data reflects the array and priority of solution preferences. These are the values in the famous "fact and value in decision making" idea (Simon, 1958, Chapter III.). Here, organization and national culture - meso and macro context) can come into play. "We here at J & J always look for victory (or win-win, or whatever)."

A third area of information is the possible scope, and impact, that the problem, and its consequent decision, might have. Knowledge about impact may alter the decision preferences. Knowledge about scope dictates, to some extent, who will need to be involved in the decision process.

Problem Solving (Decision Making)

A third area is problem solving, although problem managing might be a better term. Solving sounds too pat, too complete. With that caveat, one can divide problem solving into two parts. One part deals with the process of problem solving. What system does the organization actually have for making decisions about problems. Most readers will
give a chuckle at this point, thinking "We have no system; what happens, happens!"
And those readers would be pretty much correct, at least as far as many organizations
are concerned. Second, of course, and in need of special mention, is what might be
called "the decision, or "the choice" or "the pick." It is the moment when selection is
made: someone gets the job, others don't; someone gets promoted; others don't; etc.
This "point" is often elusive, even to all who are in the same room at the same time!

With respect to the process, several approaches have been offered. One is the so
called "optimizing" approach, in which all decisions are possibilities are listed, explored,
and prioritized. Here the rational decision maker proceeds, perhaps one-item-at-a-time,
through the list until the "best" solution is found. (It is also called the "rational-individual
approach. (Daft, 1992, p.347) On the other hand, one can decide on something which is
"good enough" for the matter at hand, though less than optimal. These approaches
reflect the famous the distinction made a number of years ago by March and Simon
(1958, pp. 141-142) between optimizing and "satisficing" in the seeking of solutions for
day-to-day problems in organizations. In their example they talk about the difference
between finding the sharpest needle in the haystack and finding one sharp enough to
sew with. If one were a welfare economist, one would list preferences, and similarly
work one's way through the list. This perspective focuses somewhat on system
optimality, and questions might be raised about whether individual optimality should be
replaced by system optimality (does the hidden hand really work?) Braybrook and
Lindblom (1961) present a good discussion of these problems. They also introduce a
new approach, disjointed incrementalism, something which Lindblom has also called
"muddling through". Here decisions are made "at the margin". Another way of looking at
this process is that decisions are built, element by element (with an element being the
smallest irreducible part of the decision matrix) until the overall decision has been
assembled. In this approach what we often call "decisions" might better be called a
"decision mosaic," a construction made of decisions on the elements.

Timing and order can be crucial in the "D-I" approach. To be effective decisions
must be taken in a timely manner, such that the overall "construction project" can
proceed. One way to think about this approach is as a sort of sort of "just in time" for
processes to proceed (but JIT should not be construed as "at the last possible moment;
rather at the appropriate moment). Sequence is also important. Dominant elements,
those which influence later one's, need to be complete first. While it is clear in
construction that one does the basement first, then adds the other floors, such clarity is
not always observable in decision processes.

Sometimes events take over, in what Daft calls "nonprogrammed" decisions. Here a
process of constraints and tradeoffs dominate, often with lots of simultaneity occurring
(Daft, 1992, p.350)

This part of the decision process points to the "rationales" used. Another component
addresses the settings which are typical. In most cases, business decisions are made in
collective settings called "meetings." Meetings, committees, taskforces have a bad
press. Most "meeting humor" tend to express the ineptitude of the meeting, as in "A
camel is a horse constructed in a meeting", or "A meeting as a group which takes
minutes to waste hours!". Meetings can be improved, and made into effective
information processing systems, which have decisions as their outcome. There has
been a good bit of work done in developing more effective meetings. Antony Jay's
famous piece, (1976) "How to Run A Meeting" became, essentially, the script for the
well known meeting improvement video staring John Cleese, "Meetings, Bloody
Meetings (Video Arts). My work Entrepreneurial Systems for the 1990s (1989) also
deals with the issues of executive group decision making. Meetings can be thought of
as places where "coalitions" crystallize and ebb. (Daft, 1992. p. 335) coalitions are
important in business organizations because of the myth, really, of the individual
decision maker. We already leaned that "editors" in the organization assemble
information, making subdecisions along the way. Then too, different perspectives are
needed. The final "decision mosaic" is a construction of many hands, as often "blessed"
as "made" by the "decision maker." Our individualistic culture retains a fiction that
individuals "decide"; more often they are components in a decision process.

Finally, there needs to be attention to levels and scope. Problems of large scope
need to be dealt with by top levels of the organization. Similarly, problems of smaller
scope can be handled by lower levels of the organization. Getting the right problems to
the right decision groups is an area where most organizations could improve. Typically,
top level groups spend much too much time deciding low level, low impact problems,
while, at the same time, avoiding problems of high importance and organizational
impact.

Whatever the process, there also needs to be an outcome. Many times, there is
great uncertainty in business meetings about what, actually, has happened. In exit
interviews I have conducted of decision making meetings, participants were unclear
about what happened, and in a considerable number of instances, different participants
thought different results had been achieved, resolutions to the problem at hand which
were mutually contradictory. Stepping away from, or failing to "nail down" a decision is a
non-result which occurs for many reasons. One cause has to do with stalling; opposing
interest neutralize each other. But there are other explanations. Decision making tears
at the fabric of group cohesion, something groups are loath do, especially when the
same individuals defeated today are one's colleagues tomorrow. Too, there is sometime
honest confusion about what IS up for decision, and, IF something is up for decision, is
this group, (or person), the one to make it. A key point here is that the decision moment
is something else that requires careful attention, management, and follow through.

One should be careful not to confuse "results" with "decisions." Keep the following
equation in mind: R = D+I. RESULTS equals DECISION plus IMPLEMENTATION.
Great decisions can be foiled by lousy implementation; great implementation can "save"
awful decisions. Decisions do not equal "results"; there is another step, or, more likely,
a set of steps. (There is a story about the researcher who asked members of a multi-
level organization: If technology permitted, at what level could this place become
automated? Respondents from all 12 levels of the organization gave the same answer:
Below ME!)"

Legitimation Processes

Once made, or while in the process of being made, decisions need to be legitimated.
Legitimation means that decisions are accepted as "ok" by the losers, even if they do
not like the outcome. An excellent slant on decision legitimacy has been provided by
Quinn, Rohrbaugh, and McGrath (1985). They speak of four "perspectives" or
"orientations" to decision making in organizations — consensual, empirical, rational,
and political. Relationships are displayed in the Figure 1.
Figure 1
Four Perspectives on Decision Making and Their Central Concerns, Bases, and Results

<table>
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<th>Empirical</th>
<th>Rational</th>
<th>Political</th>
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<td>Supportability</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Legitimacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation Base</td>
<td>Data Base</td>
<td>Goal Base</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good Feelings</td>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>Add Up</td>
<td>is Flawless</td>
<td>needs met</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Readers will doubtless recognize their own "styles" here, and may also sense that their business may approach different kinds of decisions with different perspectives. There may also be conflict over which perspective is appropriate.

Another approach to decision legitimacy is to look at decision rules. Decision rules are defined as "extra-group norms which make decisions ok". There are several decision rules, and they conflict, each with the other (an outcome determined by any one of them would have a different distribution of winners and losers). So far, five rules seem prominent: the extensive rule (one person one vote); the intensive rule (what do people who care or feel deeply about the issue want); the involvement rule (what to those who might have to implement any decision prefer); the expert rule (what do the "lawyers" [and other experts] think); and the power rule (what does the boss want). It appears these rules are brought into decision settings from the culture at large. Since they conflict decisions tend to be sought which will address as many as possible. Three or more seems like the minimum number for a "go." In other words, managers who can frame decision options which can be seen to address at least three of these five at any one time are more likely to make decision progress than managers who can't (Tropman, 1991).

Procedural and Technical Aids
In recent years, a number of procedural and technical aids have been developed. One set deals with effective group decision making in meetings. Another deals with the use of computers and computer based decision aids. n "chauffeur driven" systems individuals respond over a set of keypads to questions. Overall preferences can be displayed anonymously without regard to race, gender, power, and other social elements. Decision assistance software, called groupware, is helpful. Groupware is a term used for computer based decision support systems, group writing programs, group spreadsheet programs, program which can tally preferences, and so on, that can aid the business team in making high quality decisions. (Johansen, 1988).

The Quality of Decisions and Decision Making Patterns
Managers, executives and business people attending to each of these areas, however, still have more elements to take into consideration. One of them is the quality of the decision. In the press for action, groups not only avoid decisions, they make premature decisions (and exhibit other problems to be mentioned in a moment.)

Decisions are a product ... and decision makers need to look at them to ask if they are any good, if they are of high quality. (Daft mentions high quality alternatives too.
One method is to sample the group's decisions (or your own, for that matter) and give them a grade: A B C D F. An A decision is one in which all stakeholders come out ahead, though they do not need to come out equally ahead. The B decisions involve winners and losers, but the final result is that the organization is better off. The C decision, a very common one, occurs when there is a shift in the winner/looser mix, but the organization is no better off than it was. The D is the opposite of the B; now there are some losses which mean that the organization is worse off. Finally there is the "nuclear war" decision, the F. In this decision, everyone winds up worse off than before.

This method relies on judgment, as a small group looks at each decision in the sample and gives it a grade. It certainly has no claim to superiority over other methods the business person might develop. The important thing about decision analysis, however, is that SOME system be used so that a review can occur.

What happens after the "grading?" The executive can sit down with a staff group or an operations group and review the results, seeking to find out, in the spirit of constant improvement, what about problem finding, problem context, decision legitimation, or problem solving could be improved. This sort of "decision audit" can be helpful in point to specific problematic areas, and in calling attention to the whole area of decision making in general. Care must be taken to avoid blame and shooting the messenger in these situations.

There is a further step one can take, however. It is the decision autopsy. Here, one takes an A and an F decision, and take them apart. One seeks to find out what went right, and continue it; and find out what went wrong, and stop it. The insight here is that, for most companies, these are not the same things. Because most organizations are doing some things right and some things wrong at the same time (after all we all have lots of processes going on) they tend to assume that if they are doing things right then they are not doing things wrong. This error is a common one, because wrong things and right things are generally in different business behavioral repertoires. Consider the following Figure. It assumes that an organization has a mix of success decisions and failure decisions. Depending upon the mix or ratio of these, the organization can be in any quadrant. True excellence requires that one do lots right, and little wrong (the upper left quadrant). Executives should seek to have a decision pattern that can fit there. Doing lots right and lots wrong at the same time can lead to a shooting star organization, one that can "drop dead" at any moment. (upper right quadrant.) Many organizations don't make many right decisions, or many wrong one... they don't do much at all. These organizations are "lingering", and may move into "organizational death (from the lower right to the lower left quadrant.)
Why Do Decisions Go Wrong?

Given the great desire to do the right thing, decisionwise, one might wonder why things seem to go wrong, so badly, so often. The reason is that there are important limitations in each of the five areas mentioned above. Especially important are limitations in the decision process. The following list suggest some of the more common limitations: limited organizational capacity; limited information; the costliness of analysis; interdependencies between fact and value; the openness of the system(s) to be analyzed; the diversity of forms on which business decisions actually arise (adapted from Braybrook and Lindblom, 1963, p.113) Problems of time insufficiency, distraction, low level of decision making skill, conflict over goals (and no way to resolve the conflict) are also important. (Janis and Mann, 1977). While these cannot be completely controlled, executives can be alert for them. They result in some common problems, problems we all recognize.

Major Pitfalls In Business and (other) Decision Making

One important pitfall is "Decision Avoidance Psychosis". It occurs when organizations put off making decisions that need to be made until the very last minute, or even after the last minute. One form of this illness is the "non-decision". It may appear a decision has been made, but it really has not been. Things go along very much as they have. Over time this pattern of nondecision can lead to the boiled frog phenomenon. As described by Tichy and Devanna (1986) this phenomenon takes its name from the experiment in which one puts a frog in a petri dish filled with water, and slowly heats the water over a burner. The frog boils to death. Why does it not leave? The answer seems to be that the just noticeable difference in the temperature is never enough to cause action. This just noticeable difference phenomenon is an important source of nondecision in organizations. Members see things pretty much as they were, and thus there is no need to act.

A second problem is decision randomness. This process was outlines in the famous paper called "A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice" by Cohen, March and Olsen (1971). They argue that organizations have four roles or vectors within them: problem knowers (people who know the difficulties the organization faces); solution providers (people who can provide solutions but do not know the problems); resources controllers (people who don't know problems and don't have solutions but control the allocation of people and money in the organization) and a group of "decision makers
looking for work" (or decision opportunities.) They argue that for effective decision making, all these elements must be in the same room at the same time. In reality, most organizations combine them at random, as if tossing them into a garbage can. No wonder bad decisions result.

**Decision Drift, or The Abilene Paradox** is another famous "bad decision" case. (Harvey, 1974) Here, as the story goes, a group of people were outside of this Texas town, with nothing to do. It was hot. Somehow they wound up going into town (many miles, dusty drive, no air condition) to have a very bad meal. On the way back, the "search for guilty parties" begins. The Abilene Paradox has come to refer to group actions where there never really was a decision to take that action. It is, as readers will recognize, very common.

**Decision Coercion**, also known as **Groupthink**, is another very well known decision problem. (Janis, 1983) In groupthink, decisions are actually coerced. It is a false agreement in the face of power. One kind of power is group cohesion. In very cohesive groups, there is a coming together, not "agreement on issues," but rather a strong wish to maintain the cohesion of the group. This commitment to the group sometimes means that alternatives are not really explored and options considered, because such processes might cause differences within the group, potentially harming cohesion. Decisions are thus made too quickly. A second kind of power involves a powerful boss. When such a boss says "Were all agreed then", most at the table say "Aye." Only later, in the hallway, when the real discussion occurs, do the problems surface.

There are others. One is "defensive routines, where certain issues are undiscussable and their undiscussability is undiscussable. Then there is Zeno’s Paradox, where one keeps getting ever closer to the decision, but never gets there. Consider Barbara Tuchman’s “folly”, in which rotten decisions are made, there were choices, and a group was involved (it was not the act of a madman.) Then false certainty, driven by the problem of uncertainty absorption.
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